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ARGOSY

NRA CODE

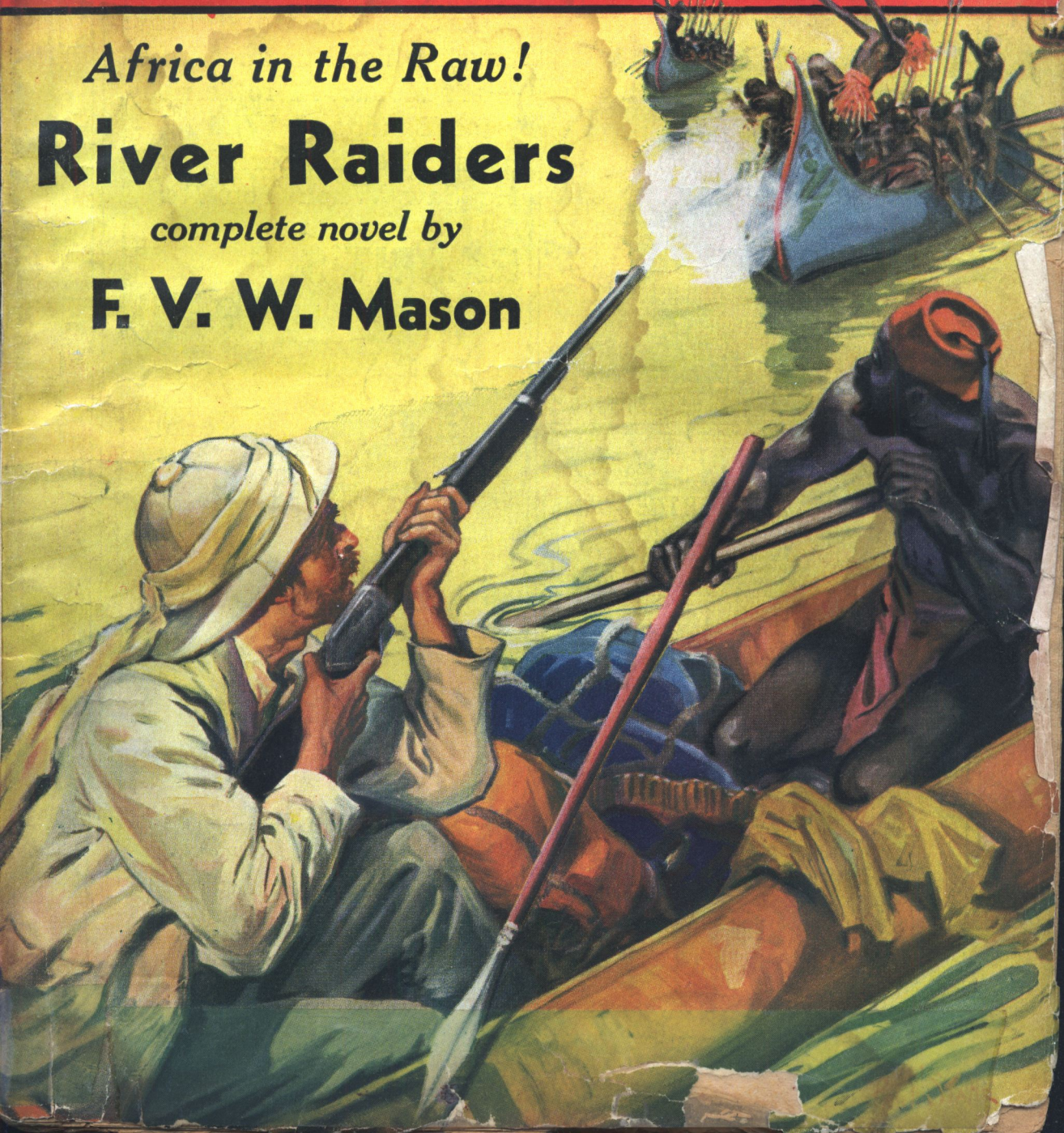
SEPT. 29 WEEKLY

Africa in the Raw!

River Raiders

complete novel by

F. V. W. Mason



ARGOSY

NRA CODE

Action Stories of Every Variety

Volume 250 CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 29, 1934 Number 2

NOVEL, NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

SERIALS

OTHER FEATURES

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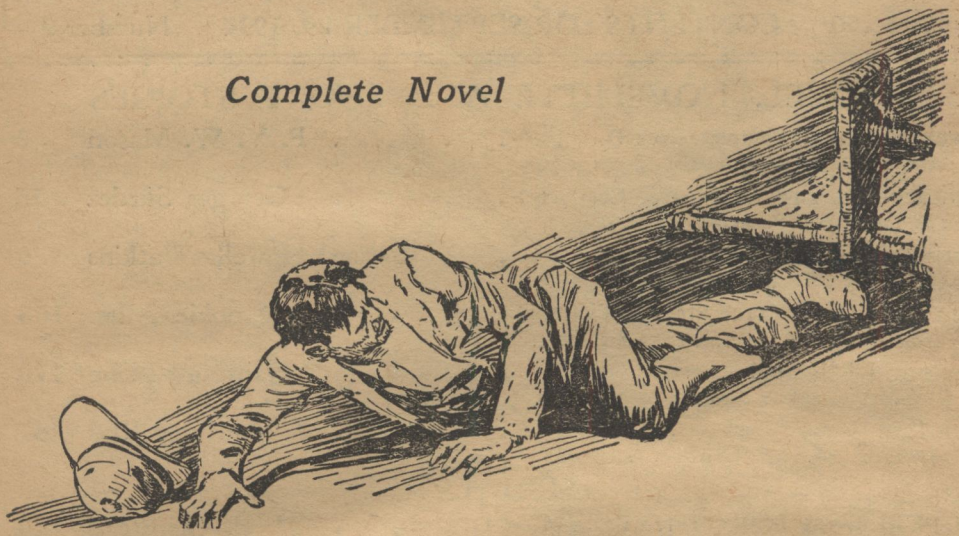
River Raiders

By F. V. W. MASON

Author of "Captain Redspurs" and "The Barbarian," etc.

What terrible fate awaited Duveen's palatial yacht when even his worst enemy warned him not to sail up that African river?

Complete Novel



CHAPTER I.

NO BULLETS TO SPARE.

WHEN another paddle boy shrieked piercingly, Dr. Aidan Cameron risked a swift glance over his shoulder and beheld his unfortunate follower pinned to the canoe's wooden side by a long Nupe spear. Still struggling feebly, the poor wretch suggested, for all the world, a gigantic black beetle secured to a collector's cork.

"Paddle harder — not much farther now!" yelled the river trader, but the dugout's speed fell off noticeably, and on the solitary white man's bronzed forehead certain despairing lines deepened. Reluctantly he abandoned the spoon-shaped paddle he had been plying and caught up a battered Winchester .30-30.

"Steady canoe—going to shoot," he called to a scarred Fulani giant who, seated at the steering paddle, was yelling mingled threats and encouragement at the gasping and sweat bathed paddle boys.

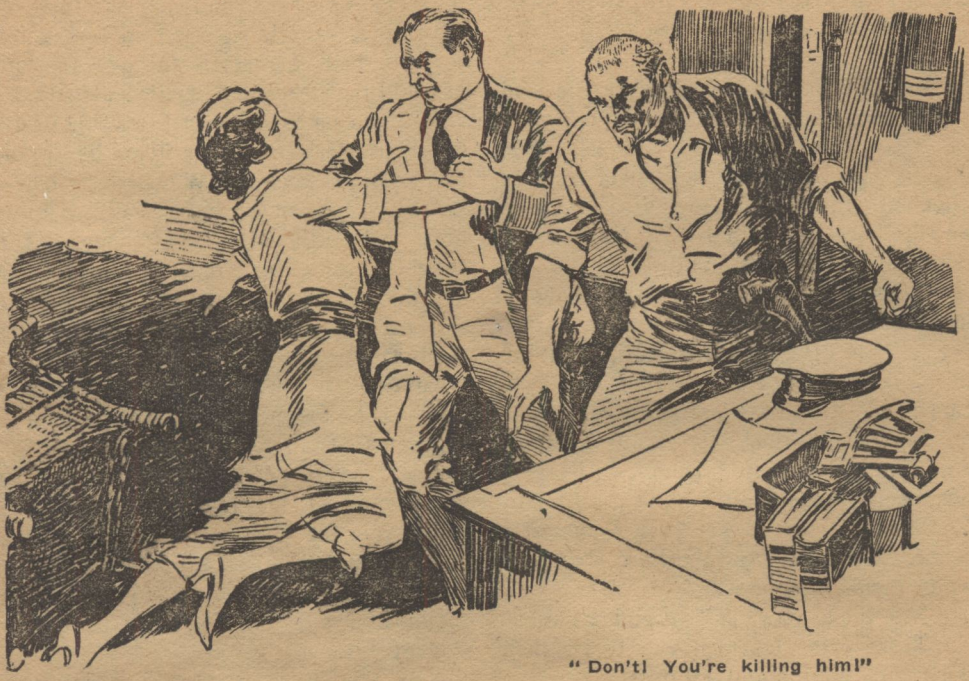
"But Cook Bwana, other belt lost—those last cartridges."

Aye, the sunburnt Cameron bitterly reflected, these were his last cartridges in more ways than one. He had long since lost his name, and now he bade fair to lose his life. Even if he ever reached Illo again, where would he ever find money to refill the bandolier now lying at his feet in an inch of muddy water?

What a fool he'd been to trust those lying Nupes—yet there had been no choice. Old Gezo and his sub chiefs had acted very surly when trader "Cook" had attempted to pass their domain without pausing to make trade palaver.

"How far to—bend?" he gasped while dashing a trickle of sweat from his eyes.

"Mebbe two hundred canoe lengths, Bwana. Mebbe more."



"Don't! You're killing him!"

Very loath to permit the escape of even this pitiful expedition, the pursuing savages, resplendent in bone necklaces, lion mane or monkey fur headdresses and leopard skin moochas, obeyed the quickened thumping of their steersmen on the gunwale and put on a burst of speed which sent the amber tinted waters of the Alibazi curling furiously from their canoe prows.

Lips pale and drawn into a nervous slash, the river trader estimated his chances and found nothing reassuring in the situation. Half a length behind the foremost Nupe canoe some eighty warriors manning two more dugouts churned the water with all the power of their splendidly muscled if evil smelling bodies.

"Ten shots won't even put a crimp in 'em." Bitterly Cameron mourned his other ammunition belt which had vanished earlier that day together with the profits of four months' hardship and toil beneath a withering West African sun.

"Um—still 'bout half a kilometer to the bend. Looks like they can't help catching us."

While his quivering fingers adjusted the Winchester's sights, Aidan Cameron threw a final glance over his six remaining paddle boys.

Game devils, but one couldn't deny they were weakening fast—those flecks of foam flying from their grimacing lips told the tragic truth. At the bow of the river trader's ungainly little craft, the back muscles of Gana, his Yoruba Number Two boy, were standing out in bunches and perfectly outlined as those of an anatomical specimen.

"Call again, Gana!"

Without interrupting his efforts, the bow man promptly threw back his shaven head to send a harsh despairing cry flying ahead over the hot oily expanse of water. Echoes were coming back out of vast mangrove and banyan tangles on either bank when another spear swished overhead. Half a minute later a dull booming arose from beyond gray-green trees masking a bend in the river.

"Yoruba village—eaters of Nupes," Awudu gasped in response to the river

trader's unspoken query. "Do come soon."

"Not soon enough— Look."

WITH inexorable certainty the leading Nupe canoe had forged up to within fifty yards of the fleeing dugout. Controlling hands aquiver from excitement, the trader levelled the .30-30 hastily, lined up two hideously painted paddlers on the port side and fired.

"Let's go! Paddle hard!" Cameron urged in their native language when, shrieking, a pair of Nupes collapsed. But his heart sank when, from the bottom of the canoe, two more warriors sprang up to fill quickly the positions left vacant by Cameron's marksmanship. Damn! His paddlers were weakening fast, and the friendly Yorubas had not as yet even launched a canoe. Grimmer grew the lines about the white man's mouth.

"No hope, Bwana," Awudu panted. "These eaters of men can throw their spears in a minute and not miss!"

Cameron made no answer, but was once more reaching for the old .30-30. Not for nothing had he noted how, when the two paddlers had fallen, the war canoe had veered perceptibly in the direction of the weakened side. The second canoe, crowded with garish plumes and cruel blue-gray spear points, was racing along less than ten yards behind, and perhaps twenty feet off the leader's port beam. Both craft were heavy and unwieldy and rushing along at top speed.

Crisis, in the form of a shower of razor-edged throwing spears, was upon the fugitives ere Cameron had time to fully formulate his strategy. An agonized yell described the fate of still another paddle boy.

Jaws set and bloodshot eyes narrowed, Cameron tilted his helmet onto the back of his head before he commenced shooting faster than he ever had in his life. The foremost paddler on the Nupe craft's port side had barely collapsed than the ejector clicked and a spent cartridge case went flying overside in a brazen arc. His second shot killed or disabled two more men in the prow—the nearer the front the quicker the canoe's course should change. Instinct, more than anything else, prompted the sweat-bathed marksman to aim aft and next kill the steersman. Quite suddenly the great war canoe commenced to swing to the left—but spears now were flying like wind-blown straws and the Winchester's barrel seemed to be growing hot in vain when his fifth and sixth shots went home. The shrieks of the dying Nupes all but drowned out the clamor of dense flocks of parrots and flamingos circling terror-stricken into the brazen sky.

Panting like a wounded animal, Cameron watched the foremost canoe veer so sharply to port that all at once it was heading across the course of its nearest fellow. He then crammed his remaining three cartridges into the Winchester's magazine and, in swift succession, shot down the helmsman of the second canoe, a gaudy witch doctor and a chief in a cape of howler monkey fur.

Now the confused clamor grew louder in the sultry air; warriors in the second Nupe craft were trying to avoid ramming the crazily circling lead canoe and dug deep in the tawny water, but their seventy foot war canoe's momentum was not to be so easily checked. A dull *crunch!* like the sound of an empty trunk dropped off a truck followed when, as Cameron had fervently hoped, the second canoe rammed its disabled fellow squarely amidships. Irresistibly, the former rode high over the latter's thwarts and instantly capsized it, spilling dead, wounded and terrified into the river—a fact observed with interest by dozens of enormous crocodiles which, until the shooting began, had been sunning themselves on a near-by sandbank.

The second canoe did not upset, but it apparently was so badly split open that half of its crew was forced to drop paddles and begin a hurried bailing with cocoanut shells. The last Nupe craft, Cameron was vastly pleased to observe, abandoned pursuit in order to pull yammering fellow tribesmen from the jaws of ravenous crocodiles, so when the decimated fugitives rounded the bend into Yoruba territory,

there was not a Nupe within a quarter of a mile.

CHAPTER II.

CAMERON'S PAST.

"HARD luck, old chap." Meldrum, assistant district commissioner of Sokoto province, wrung the hand of the man he had for three years known as Arthur Cook. "Wish the devil you'd let me put you up. You look two shades paler than a ghost."

"Oh, no, thanks," Cameron replied. "You've been awfully decent, but I—I couldn't accept any more help. I'll be all right, really I will."

"But what the devil *are* you going to do? You're stony, half sick, and you've no friends down river—or have you?"

"No—I guess not." He in the ragged slacks and sweat stained linen coat fingered a three days' growth of reddish beard. "Don't exactly know, Bill, but I'll make out. Just now I think I'll hang around Illo till the next Branch boat comes. I might work my way down to Lokoja. Maybe I can pick up a job there."

The Englishman's yellowish eyes—after three years in Bengue Province his liver was by no means what it should be—sought the Niger's beer-colored expanse and absently noted dense clouds of mallard and Egyptian geese rising above the dull green mangroves masking a bend half a mile downstream. If only the river's crushed marigold smell weren't so persistent, so all pervasive. Ugh! Would he ever forget the smell—like that of the stale water in a vase of flowers?

"Oh, rot, Arthur, you know damn' well you can't even get a job sweeping corners while the whole damned colony's in the grip of this beastly slump. Look here, old boy, why not use my bungalow until I get back from this blasted inspection tour?" He gazed at the man standing beside him on the Royal Nigeria Company's rickety dock and his brows gathered on reading the weariness in the American's bearing.

"Sorry, Bill, but I can't do it. You've done enough in staking me till I could sell my go-down and the other junk." The thin man uttered a harsh little laugh. "If it wasn't for your quinine I'd have been dead weeks ago. No, really, I'll board the Branch boat tomorrow."

"But where will you stay?"

The ragged one's gaze wandered beyond Illo's sunset tinted little public square. "In Awudu's hut over yonder. He's clean for a Fulani, and the beggar likes me. Besides, he owes me some consideration—not that he wouldn't do what he could anyway."

"Um. Yes, that appendectomy—" The Englishman sighed and absently fingered a pistol holster glossy with polish. "You're an odd duck, Arthur. Fact, I've wondered a lot about you ever since you did that trepanning job on old Dulac's skull last year. Dash neat job—" He broke off suddenly to address a red fezzed Haussa engaged in marshaling a column of bearers in front of a neat white go-down.

"*Kai Momo!* Column makee ready. *Berri Sainagaya Ma-ku!* Wass matta, fool—men no savvy right loads?"

Kai Momo saluted, and liberally employing his lathi, quickly rearranged the unsatisfactory head loads.

Meldrum, meanwhile, resumed his discourse. "Can't tell you how sorry I am you're leaving us— It'll be dashed lonely without our semi-monthly jaw fests. I know it's none of my business, but you're going away now, and—I—" he paused, red faced—"I've been wondering what could send a sound chap like you out to this South Coast of Hell? You *were* a doctor once, weren't you?"

The red-haired river trader tilted back a battered sun helmet, drew an insect bitten wrist across his forehead, then flicked away the sweat.

"YOU'VE been so decent, Meldrum, I—well, you've the right to know, since you're interested. As you know, I'm an American—hail from Charleston, South Carolina. Studied medicine,

and was headed for research in surgery when the mother of a close friend of mine—we'll call him Jerry—began dying of cancer. This was eight years ago. She was a dear old lady, and when her agonies became indescribable she begged me, implored me, to give her something to cut short the torture. All her family agreed to respect her wishes—"

The gaunt scarecrow beside Captain Meldrum fell abruptly silent and the harsh croak of a heron beating heavily up the river made the latter start. He observed, rather than inquired—"You gave—er—helped her?"

"Of course," came the calm reply. "I'd do it again."

"But I don't understand. Surely with everyone willing the matter could have been managed quietly?"

A bitter laugh burst from the American. "It could have been if my friend hadn't had a brother called Philip. He'd always hated my guts because—because—well, we both loved the same girl—and she accepted me."

In silence the A. D. C.'s helmet inclined and his neck cloth stirred a little in the sour smelling off-river breeze.

"I think I begin to understand. This Philip fellow gave the show away?"

"That's about the size of it. He talked to a newspaper man—it came out and the State haled me into court for malpractice. My career was ruined—finished. I was tried for manslaughter — convicted." The trader's sinewy throat closed convulsively. "They said I was lucky to get off with the five years they gave me."

"Filthy swine, that fellow. Wish I had him out here. But the girl—she believed in you?"

The river trader's wasted shoulders rose in a brief shrug, then he smacked half heartedly at a mangrove fly which had drawn a bright bead of blood on his bare ankle.

"She did at first, but the district attorney was infernally clever. With Philip's help he built up a strong case against me. I—I really couldn't blame her."

"You poor devil. First that and then this Nupe business— Couldn't you save any of your goods?"

"No. Just bad luck again, that's all. The treacherous brutes jumped us at dawn after we had had a grand peace-and-trade palaver with old Gezo the night before. I was lucky to get out alive—wouldn't have, in fact, except Awudu heard 'em coming."

"Great chap, that Fulani—wish I could get him in the Constabs. But he'll never leave you—and I think I understand why."

Again the A. D. C.'s eyes sought the river. Clouds of plover, snipe and egrets were still rising into the copper-hued sky above a faint smudge of smoke. From the waiting bearers arose a murmur of "Fire-boat."

"Must be a boat headin' up river," the Englishman commented. "Might be the *Koronga* ahead of schedule. Never can tell about those damn' Branch boats." He shrugged and adjusted the strap of his field glasses. "Or maybe it's Shaun O'Donnell—heard he was comin' in for supplies.

"Well," he held out his hand, "'the time has come—' as the walrus said. Any time you need help, call on me. Mean it, y'know."

The two shook hands, but the neat figure in khaki checked himself in turning away. "Haven't you any idea what you're going to do?"

The unshaven trader forced a smile. "Not an earthly idea, but I've got about two pounds left. That's more than I had at one time. They only give you five dollars when you leave prison."

"Good-by, old man. We won't forget you quickly around Illo—the natives least of all. You've been dashed decent to the poor blighters." The A. B. C. paused a second time in turning away, reached into his shooting coat pocket and brought out a flat brown bottle. "Oh, nearly forgot. Here's a pint of the best and biggest. Stirrup cup, y'know—might save it to tide over a low hour."

In grateful silence Cameron accepted the bottle. Queer, in three months he hadn't tasted liquor—excluding the villainous na-

tive beer. How characteristic of the shy and usually impassive Meldrum to try so tactfully to help him through the dark hours ahead.

"Thanks a lot, Bill," he murmured, slipping the flask into a gaping side pocket.

"Goodby, old man—and good luck." His mouth suddenly rigid, he stood to attention and smartly saluted the shabby figure slouching lazily among stacks of sacked palm kernels and heaps of malodorous hides.

"'Shun, Kai Moto. Forward! March!"

WHEN the bearers lifted a quavering safari song, a few half nude women and their wholly naked and pot-bellied offsprings appeared at hut doors and many mongrel dogs raised a mournful song of farewell.

"Please, Bwana, come rest and eat." A tall, badly scarred Fulani, in the remains of a khaki shooting coat, had come striding up with the lithe silence of a leopard. "Plenty good goat chop lib in hut—"

"No, Awudu, I—I'm not hungry. I'll stay here until the sun goes down. It's cooler."

The black started to object, but, knowing his master, made a small sucking noise with teeth once filed by thoughtful parents for the greater enjoyment of human flesh, and silently departed among purplish shadows cast by the freight.

Sinking onto the edge of the dock, Aidan Cameron remained to stare vacantly across the topaz hued river at a herd of hippos splashing and diving on the far shore. Too bad, he mused, these great comical beasts were becoming such a rarity. Why the devil should river travelers want to try their marksmanship on these friendly and unoffensive beasts? God! How inexpressibly weary he was.

Gradually his burning eyelids sagged shut and once more he saw his father's cool, many porched mansion on Lagare Street, saw the sweeping gray gonfalons of live oaks towering over his grandmother's stately plantation house on the Santee. Once more he walked along the Battery, pausing now and then to gaze out at the dim blue ruins of Fort Sumter.

A mosquito stabbed his cheek like a miniature bayonet, but he ignored it because before his mental eyes was a vision of Geneva Colbert indescribably lovely in white organdie as she waltzed beneath a glowing moon. What had become of her? Of course she had married Phil Duveen and therefore must be enjoying everything money could buy. Probably they were traveling—a lot. Phil had always had a roving disposition, and so had Geneva. It was the only thing the three of them had had in common. Well, he, too, had traveled. A good thing little Ginny couldn't see her ex-fiancé now; unshaven, unkempt—a tired, fever racked derelict waiting to drift out on life's ebb tide. How soon before black water fever or sleeping sickness would settle all his problems? Not long, he had a presentiment.

Somewhat refreshed by a cool breeze off the river, Dr. Aidan Cameron sank back against a pile of hides and felt something dig into his lean ribs. "Bill Meldrum's bottle."

Observing an instinctive aversion to drinking from a bottle in the presence of colored people, he retired further among heaps of malodorous freight awaiting the arrival of the next "swine"* boat from Dahomey. Squatting on a pile of fly encrusted hides, he uncorked Meldrum's gift and took several deep swallows.

"Sure lifts a veil of sorrow," he sighed when a glorious warmth quickened his sluggish blood stream. "Have a nip?" He waved a derisive invitation to a flock of flamingos which, like the other waterfowl, were flapping away from some disturbance downstream. "You'd sure do some fancy tail spins."

It is proverbial that liquor takes effect quickly upon an empty stomach, and since Dr. Aidan Cameron's stomach had not been satisfactorily filled in many a long hour, he

*The original boats operated by the Royal Nigeria Company were named after different species of swan. The natives corrupted this to "swine," and the English, who had no love for these awkward stern wheelers, clung to the nickname.

presently sighed and sank into a blessed oblivion which held neither loot hungry Nupes nor torturing memories.

CHAPTER III.

ABOARD THE "ASTARTE."

WHEN Aidan Cameron awoke once more, myriad stars were flaring as only they can in an African sky, and in the same violet black convexity a three-quarters moon was well started across her serene orbit. Near at hand all was still save for the whine of an inevitable insect host, the weary gurgle of water against the piles and the furtive rustle of some bandicoots scuffling among loose palm kernels.

To Cameron's amazement he had no headache, though the moon indicated the hour as nearing midnight. Until he found that he was lying in a sheltered hollow amid the freight he vaguely wondered why neither Awudu nor Gana, his late Number Two boy, had not sought him out. Odd, he now felt more comfortable than he had in days.

How clean, how peaceful were those stars up yonder; it would, he felt, be rather nice to be a star.

His meditations came abruptly to an end when a gruff voice began speaking. So close was it to the dew drenched dreamer that he could catch every inflection of the speaker's words.

"*Ja.* I know vot I talk about. Those ruins I haff seen with my own eyes. *Ja.* Great stone ruins with carvings all over."

"Um. They sound interesting. Where are they?" inquired someone with a distinctly American accent.

"Here—on the chart I haff it marked. Here on the Alibazi near the mouth of dot Bnay river—all we haff to do is to go up the Niger until, in French territory, it meets the Alibazi."

"Sure the Alibazi is navigable for a craft of this sort? She draws better than six feet, you know."

"*Gewiss, mein freund.* Easy fifteen feet iss the main channel all the way to those ruins."

"But, sir, please look at this joke of a chart." A third voice, agitated but subservient, broke in upon the conference. "There are absolutely no navigation aids indicated on it. What about snags, shoals, and rapids? Please don't risk it, sir. You'd be running a terrible risk if you take the *Astarte* down such a wild, uncharted river."

"That'll do, Captain Andrews. I'm confident that Mr. Wassermann here knows the river well, and knows what he's talking about."

"But, sir—"

Wassermann! Aidan Cameron's drowsiness fled at the name and he sat bolt upright.

"Shut up, Andrews. I hired you to navigate this yacht and not to make up my mind for me. If I want to go—er—to take

GENEVA COLBERT

a look at the Ruins of Kauri, it's none of your damned business. If you're afraid for your own precious skin I'll find someone else."

The man Andrews' voice was thick and trembling with wrath when he replied, "I'm not afraid. I'll take your yacht up the Alibazi, but if there's trouble don't blame me!"

"Don't be impertinent, Andrews," snapped the owner. "And don't go scaring the rest of the officers with your hot air.

You can go now. I want to talk with Mr. Wassermann."

For two excellent reasons Dr. Cameron began to crawl over the freight eager to miss no syllable of this curious conference between the steam yacht's owner and that hard bitten character whose name was cursed and dreaded the length of the Dahomey-Nigerian border.

Cautiously, Cameron thrust his head above the rampart of sacked palm kernels which had hidden him from view and caught his breath with a gasp. High overhead, tapering masts reached up into the gloom, for tied up to the grimy little wharf was a stately steam yacht, graceful as a première ballerina and white as river mist where the muddy current had not marred her paint. Her one funnel was painted buff and black, and her wide, carefully awninged decks were scrubbed as spotless as holystone and sinew could make them. *Astarte.* In tall gilt letters the name loomed at him from the end of a canvas guarded bridge.

THE sight of the yacht was to the river trader like a blow between the eyes. Her design was as typically American as Davenport, Iowa. By the dozens he had seen her counterparts plying the Atlantic coast; drowsing lazily in Miami harbor, or gathering like stately gulls along the Thames to watch the Harvard-Yale boat races.

Desperately ill at ease, Cameron resumed his eavesdropping. He'd probably get no thanks for butting in, but one just simply could not stand by and watch a fellow American get roped in by a swine like Wassermann. And Wassermann *was* a swine if one credited half the tales which had, more than once, drifted over from Dahomey. Certain it was that the big German was not above a bit of highly profitable slaving when the Legion or W. A. F. F. (West African Frontier Force), were occupied elsewhere.

"I haff seen the entrance to that treasure vault with mine own eyes, and that iss God's truth, Mr. Duveen."

Duveen! The name burned like thermit in Aidan Cameron's brain. Philip Duveen! From the start he had been vaguely puzzled, wondering whether there wasn't a familiar inflection to the domineering voice in the yacht's chart room. What inscrutable whim of the Fates had thus sent his enemy cruising up the Niger?

Ugly old ghosts crept out of hiding as Duveen went on talking. "If you're so sure there is a treasure there, why let me in on it? Why haven't you grabbed it yourself long ago?"

"It wass not possible— How could I get it oudt alone? Those Nupe niggers are my friends, but they are very superstitious about those ruins of Kauri. In a canoe I could neffer get oudt alive, but in this fine ship—*ach*, it would be so easy!"

"I see. But what if there's trouble with the natives?"

"You haff a machine gun aboard, *nein?*"

Duveen remained silent a long moment before replying. "I don't want to use it; it would cause trouble with the Colonial Government."

"Not if you shot—er—in self defense." Wassermann's voice sank until the breathless listener could barely distinguish his next words. "For a million iss it not worth maybe a little shootings?"

"Um. How'd you know there's a million?"

"I don't. Maybe more, maybe a little less, but it must be a great fortune. Man alife—that iss the old treasure of the Kebbi Emirs. For sixty years not a caravan, not a slave train has crossed upper Dahomey without paying tribute to the Emir."

"A million, eh? Since stocks have gone to hell it's worth a try."

"Worth a try? *Ja,* but we must get that loot oudt quickly. Those French *douaniers* would steal a third of it in duty, but with this boat we can run over the frontier at night."

Cameron, squatting on a greasy skin of palm oil, suddenly shook with inward hysteric laughter. The high Gods were indeed in a sardonic mood to-night—here was that fool Duveen actually heading for disaster—

death, more than likely, and they had given into Aidan Cameron's hands the power to save him. But would he? Memories of those soul searing years behind the State Penitentiary's gray walls returned to blast any possibility of such a move.

Let Philip Duveen be the one to suffer for a change!

The haggard wretch at once began to plan desperately. By God, wasn't this his last chance to recoup? And at Phil Duveen's expense. Rich! How simply immense! There was some justice in life after all. He's always played the game; what had it gotten him? Despair and a half dead body. Yes. It might be smart to let Wassermann do the dirty work, then he, Cameron, would swoop down unexpectedly and carry away the booty. Surely it could be done.

THE ragged man on the pier laughed silently, grimly. Wasn't Gana a Yoruba with his tribe inhabiting the upper Alibazi? Better still, Awudu was a fighting Fulani with a personal fame known in every steaming backwater of the Oil Rivers. Best of all, Philip Duveen was fair game. Oh, yes, very fair game, indeed.

Cameron listened intently. Wassermann's guttural voice was again rumbling on.

"*Ja.* This iss a matter for no hesitations. Delay means awkward questions and red tape. Only sixty kilometers up river iss Dahomey."

"Check. I'm all set, but what can I tell the French border guards?"

"*Sehr Klar.* You go after big game in those White Volta jungles. That wass what you were going to do before I met you, *nein?*"

"Yes."

"You haff men you can trust?"

"Only three whites. Andrews, the skipper, Buchanan, the engineer, and Parker."

"Who iss Parker?"

"First mate, and a handy boy with a machine gun, by the way. Wish my regular crew hadn't quit at Jebba, though—the cowardly swine. For a fact, Wassermann, I had one hell of a job to get a new crew together, and they're mostly half-castes."

"So it iss Parker who handles the machine gun?"

"Yes."

"Anybody else know how to work one?"

"Nobody except me. I was overseas a while—"

"You haff supplies for three weeks?"

"Ought to. Think we ought to stock up?"

"*Nein.* There is nothing to get in this stinking hole except malaria and trouble with the British Government. We are lucky the A. D. C. iss away."

While mechanically brushing away a horde of mosquitoes, Cameron was thinking rapidly. Sold far down the Alibazi the *Astarte's* fittings should bring a small fortune in trade. Native kings had a penchant for chairs, rugs, lamps, any sort of knick-knack, and would indulge said penchant with the ivory, gold and jewels which were always trickling into the savage hinterland. Yes, the yacht's loot should bring enough to make a good new start. After all, it was Duveen who had brought him here—let Duveen foot the bill for his regeneration.

Swiftly, Cameron's plan of campaign took shape; already he could visualize himself once more among his kind; well dressed, well fed, whole again in mind and body. After all, he was only thirty-three, and many of his best years lay ahead.

More glittering vistas loomed in his imagination—then Cameron's planning became coldly practical. Meldrum kept a key for his sporting rifle chest in that West Indian tobacco jar of his, and there should be plenty of ammunition. Probably Abu Hassan, the W. A. F. F. sergeant, could be persuaded to lend him half a dozen Enfields for a couple of weeks. After all, he hadn't done a bad job last fall in patching up said Abu Hassan's fractured leg.

Dr. Cameron started up and was about to glide silently off the dock toward clumps of dimly seen beehive huts which composed the greater part of Illo when, low pitched and rich as a gold coin dropped on a mar-

ble floor, a voice began to sing. It was a contralto, and it made Cameron's heart feel like a suddenly clinched fist. The rich melody of, "*Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix—*" stole out into the insect filled night and he instantly conjured up visions of a slim girl poised laughing against a background of flaming japonicas.

Great God! Philip Duveen *couldn't* have been so heartless, so utterly selfish as to drag Geneva into a country known all over Africa as the "South Coast of Hell!" Such a possibility had never even occurred to him.

IN mid-stride the river trader paused, his brain abruptly cleared of liquor fumes. That was Geneva singing in there! Geneva, whose soft laughter yet rang in his ears, Geneva of the lovely, tender eyes who haunted the twilight of his consciousness every night. Mad as it seemed, Geneva was actually on that yacht and *not sixty feet away!* Yet between them was reared a barrier insurmountable as Everest itself.

For several long moments Cameron remained as if paralyzed, one hand clutching a skin of warm palm oil, and so still that a bandicoot scuttled across his scuffed canvas shoes. On the *Astarte* a door suddenly slammed open, filling the night with light.

"For God's sake, Ginny, stop that infernal racket! Wassermann and I are trying to talk." Completely as a chalk mark erased by a wet sponge, the bright melody vanished from the night.

"And Phil would actually take her down the Alibazi—" Purposefully, Aidan Cameron turned, buttoned his sweaty shirt and then with his fingers made an effort to comb his shaggy red hair into some sort of order. Drawing himself erect, he picked his way across a stretch of rubbish littered, moonlit dock, and called:

"*Astarte,* ahoy!"

"*Gott verdamme,*" he heard Wassermann mutter. "Meldrum already iss back—that *verdamme* nigger must have lied!"

A ray of greenish light sprang out of the chart room as its door was opened once more, and the backs of Cameron's hands began to itch when bending above him he recognized a silhouette of Philip Duveen's thick set figure.

"Who is it?"

"I'm Arthur Cook, a river trader in town for a few days." Cameron fought to keep his voice steady—would Geneva's husband recognize it after eight years? "If you don't mind I thought I'd drop in for a chat—it's not often we see strangers."

"Um. Maybe you're just the man I want to see— Know this country well?"

"Ought to—I've traded along almost every river from Jebba to Say." Cameron tried to walk steadily, but found it hard work. If only his stomach weren't so damnably empty.

"Well, then, come aboard. The ladder's aft."

Wassermann, just behind the *Astarte's* owner, emitted an audible grunt of exasperation when the caller sauntered towards the indicated ladder.

"Cook? *Ja,* I haff heard of you—" he remarked when Cameron appeared on the bridge. "And how iss trading nowadays?"

"Not so good. The Nupes cleaned me out last month."

"*Ach,*" the big German's yellow bearded features contracted, "too bad on your clothes they didn't work a while, too."

Beneath his mask of grime, Cameron flushed but ignored the gibe.

"I'm just in from the bush," he explained to Duveen, who looked very cool and spruce in a white linen suit. "You'll have to excuse my appearance."

"Of course—" The *Astarte's* owner paused as if struck by a sudden thought, and peered closely at this shaggy, liquor-reeking specimen. Cameron had a bad moment, but felt better when Phil Duveen relaxed and turned aside.

"Come into the chart room, Mr. Cook, and we'll all have a whisky and soda. You look a—a little done in. Glad you happened along, because Wassermann and I were thinking about making a trip up—"

Promptly the German interrupted. "*Ja,* Mr. Duveen for elephants and lion wants

to try in the Volta country. Plenty there, eh, Cook?"

"Plenty—on the White Volta."

A VIVID contrast the three men presented when once they paused in the dim glow of green lights in the chart room—green lights do not attract insects as do white and yellow. Philip Duveen, Cameron decided, had put on weight and had lost hair, but the man who had sent him to prison was still a powerful, not unhandsome specimen, and would have looked distinguished had not the beginnings of pouches been evident beneath his bloodshot gray eyes.

Klaus Wassermann in a stained blue cotton shirt and khaki slacks, on the other hand, was easily the largest of the three; a short bearded blond bear of a man with scarcely a pound of fat upon his massive frame. His head, clipped short for coolness, was typically Prussian in shape—sloping sharply back from the forehead and coming to a point in line with the ears. Even in this quiet neighborhood the German wore a heavy revolver belted about his waist, and across his left cheek some edged weapon must years ago have plowed deep to leave behind such a dark red groove.

While he seated himself, Cameron seized the opportunity to take a good look at the map before Wassermann, his little eyes narrowed, swiftly rolled it up. Um. When he saw where the map had been carefully x-ed and marked "ruins," the caller engraved the junction of the Kauri and the Alibazi in his memory. No doubt now of the ivory smuggler's intentions. Kauri, far from boasting any ruins, was no more than one of the thousands of mud and wattle villages dotting Borgu Province.

Once a cat-footed Japanese steward had passed whiskey and soda tinkling with the first ice Cameron had seen in three months, the river trader again had a bad moment; Duveen was staring at him and fingering a plump double chin with perplexed fingers.

"It's odd, Mr. Cook, but you remind me of someone I used to know long ago—I guess I'm cockeyed, though. Well, here's to good hunting!"

"You'll get it in the Volta country," Cameron commented. Only the thought of Geneva made it possible for him to get out his next words. "Incidentally, it's much safer than along the Momoto or the Alibazi valleys."

"Eh? What's that?" Tenseness invaded the cabin as perceptibly as a sharp odor.

"Why do you say that?" Wassermann was looking like a blond thunder-cloud.

For a moment Cameron wavered in his determination. Why not let this boat load of fools and knaves work out their own salvation? After all, Geneva had made her choice—let her stand or fall by it.

"You're crazy," Wassermann snapped. "Dot country iss safe as Cape Town."

THE emaciated guest completely ignored Wassermann and only sat straighter in his chair. His dirty fingers closed tight about the highball glass when he addressed his host. "Lot of fever down there; and some of the tribes aren't even half pacified. I know—I was down there not two weeks ago. It's the last place in the world to take a big yacht like this—and a lady."

"Unsafe?"

"Yes. The Foreign Legion over there has only begun to stamp out slaving and cannibalism. Aren't enough of them. How they expect one platoon to pacify a whole province is beyond me."

"*Du Lieber Gott*—what lies! He must be sun-stroked."

Duveen leaned forward in his wicker armchair and little drops of perspiration began standing out on his bald forehead.

"Go on, mister, tell me more about this Alibazi valley."

"*Ach!* Pay no attention to him. Of it, this lying drunkard knows nothing."

Cameron cast the big man a withering glance. "You know damn well I do, Wassermann. I've traded down that river for two years off and on; I know what a poisonous hell hole it is."

The pink tip of Philip Duveen's tongue

appeared to moisten thickish lips. "Ever see or hear of any ruins down that way?"

"Ruins? Where?"

"At Kauri on the Alibazi."

"Who ever gave you such a crazy idea?" Cameron began to feel easier now. Perhaps Phil Duveen wasn't quite the stubborn and greedy fool he'd always thought him. At least the owner of the *Astarte* would now inquire further.

"I did!" Wasserman's chair crashed over backwards as he sprang up, little blue eyes a-glitter with rage.

"You know damned well there are no ruins there, Wassermann, and you've a stockade not five miles down-river."

"Are you calling me a liar?"

"Take it any way you like."

CHAPTER IV.

FAIR WARNING.

KLAUS WASSERMANN'S sunburnt hand started to his belt, whereupon Duveen promptly sprang between him and the dirty man with the clean blue eyes.

"Lay off that! Now then, you, what's this about the ruins?"

DR. AIDAN CAMERON

"There are no ruins on the Alibazi. I know—and so does Wassermann."

"*Ach,* Duveen," the German abruptly altered his manner, "you are right. Too easily I get angry with this poor drunk—what he says, he doesn't know, poor feller."

"Drunk?"

"*Ja.* You haff only to smell him. He lost his expedition last month because he wass drunk and insulted a Nupe chief. Now, *mein Gott* booze hound, get off Mr. Duveen's boat."

Cameron made no movement, but merely fixed Duveen with a questioning look. At length, quite unimpressed by Wassermann's dangerous aspect, he said, "If you believe this fellow, Mr. Duveen, it'll very likely cost you your boat and possibly your life. Ask anybody on the Oil rivers about Klaus Wassermann. Some will tell you he's a slave trader, others that he's a murderer, but they'll all agree he's an ivory smuggler."

"*Schweinhund!* I'll knock your lying teeth down your throat." Terrible of expression, Wassermann leaped forward, but again Duveen barred his way.

"Hold on. This is my boat, and if anybody's going to do any kicking off, I'll do it. Get back, Wassermann, and don't get so blasted previous. Now then, you, can you prove what you've just said?"

For the sake of her who had sung "*Mon Cœur*" Cameron was beginning to feel somewhat relieved. Yes, uneasiness if not suspicion was actually beginning to play in Duveen's pale brown eyes.

"He lies," Wassermann roared. "Don't believe this whisky sodden *schwein! So hilf mir Gott!* For this into shreds I'll tear him when we get ashore."

A door opened softly, but all three men were too thoroughly aroused to notice it. Duveen pushed the raging German aside, then demanded hotly, "What the hell d'you mean—Wassermann's a murderer?"

"Any native this side of Sokoto can tell you how your Boche friend, for the sake of a few canoe loads of trade goods, shot an English river trader named Howlett in the back. In German times they ran him out of the Cameroons on account of the way he killed off his servants. I'm warning you,

Mr. Duveen, this man is a dangerous murderer."

A huge orange fruit bat dashing itself wildly against the screen, remained completely unnoticed, though it fouled one of its fingers and squeaked like a rusty hinge before tearing itself away. Then, quite unexpectedly, a cool voice impinged upon the situation.

"The word 'murderer' sounds odd coming from your lips, Dr. Cameron."

"Cameron!" As if stabbed, Duveen started convulsively, spun about, his bruised-looking face suddenly drained of all color, then he leaped to a switch to quickly flood the chart room with strong white light. Wild eyed, he stared at the visitor beyond the chart table. "By God, it is! You are Cameron, aren't you?"

AIDAN CAMERON did not reply, because he was on his feet, swaying a little, and letting his burning eyes drink in the elixir of Geneva's camellia-like beauty. It was at once wonderful and agonizing to behold her again, to have her within reach, yet not to be able to take her into his arms and explain everything.

Wassermann's hand closing like a trap on his shoulder brought the river trader back to realities with a savage jerk.

"Now *mein freund*, let us see how good your word is. Who iss he, Duveen?"

"An ex-convict," snapped Geneva's husband, a cruel twist beginning to dominate his thickish lips. "I begin to see it all—to understand why he came aboard."

"Ginny! For God's sake don't look at me like that!"

"Sure—go ahead—take a good look at your hero, Ginny. Isn't he the sweet scented gentleman?"

"Oh-h, Aidan! Aidan! What has happened to you?" Eyes suddenly luminous with pity she in the blue linen dress pushed aside the rattan chair Duveen had occupied and started forward. "Oh, you poor, poor boy." Inexpressible emotions played in her great violet hued eyes which were filling the world for Cameron. "Why—you look sick. What's wrong?"

Duveen threw back his heavy head and laughed a snarling laugh. "Look at your ex-fiancé—look at Charleston's most promising young surgeon— Aren't you sorry you lost him?"

Utterly ignoring her husband's jeers, the girl suddenly uttered a little cry and pushed off the Wassermann's hand.

"Oh, Aidan, you are sick. Tell me, what's the matter?" For her it seemed there was no one in the cabin but him.

"He iss drunk," Wassermann promptly supplied. "Drunker than usual. Schmell, *mein Frau*, the jailbird stinks of cheap, rotten liquor."

Nevertheless she who had been Geneva Colbert remained peering up into the wasted features she had known and loved half the world away. Then she turned quickly aside.

"You're right," she cried in a voice suddenly cold as the tinkle of ice in a glass. "Oh, Aidan, why did you come aboard?" she wailed. "Why couldn't you have let me remember you as you were?"

"Please, Geneva," croaked the ex-convict. "For God's sake don't talk like that! I *had* to come. I just couldn't let you go trusting this devil Wassermann—God help you both, and especially you, if he gets you down on the Alibazi!"

Philip Duveen emitted a contemptuous laugh. "So damn' kind of you to come aboard and try to steer me away from the treasure. You were eavesdropping on the wharf, I suppose?"

"Geneva, I know it looks as Phil says, but I'm telling you the truth—there is *no* treasure." Cameron's eyes never shifted from the sweet face of the blue-clad girl. "On my honor—"

"On your *what?*" jeered Duveen. "A jailbird's honor! That's rich. Eh, Wassermann?"

"Maybe he iss right about the Kauri ruins, Duveen. Why don't you believe him now?" The German seized the opportunity to clinch his advantage. "Very ready you were to believe this *schweinhund* a minute ago. Maybe I'm a liar and all he says iss true."

"Sorry about that, Wassermann," Duveen flushed. "We all make mistakes."

AIDAN CAMERON'S threadbare shoulders rose in a little shrug of helplessness. "But I tell you, Wassermann stands in with Gezo, paramount chief of the Nupes—he's got a barracoon in their country. If you go down that river, Geneva, you'll end up as this Boche slaver's plaything. Your precious husband will undoubtedly be murdered and then eaten."

A half sob sounded as Geneva turned away; amazement, incredulity and disgust all were written large on her delicate features.

"You're right, Phil. Oh, dear, he must be drunk to say such impossible things."

"Geneva, for God's sake—" Cameron's despairing plea got no further, because Phil Duveen struck at him without warning. Instinctively the river trader covered up and, lashing weakly out in return, his fist drew blood from Duveen's mouth. This was the only blow he struck, because Wassermann from behind dealt him a savage kick on the back of the leg and sent him reeling off balance. In a murderous frenzy, the yacht owner battered at Cameron's spinning, falling figure until it slumped heavily against the chart room wall and sank to a sitting position very convenient for the application of Wassermann's ponderous *veldtschoon*. Again and again shattering kicks sent blinding waves of agony through Cameron's wasted body.

"Stop! You cowards! Stop it!" Geneva Duveen pulled frantically, but ineffectually, at her raging husband. "Don't! You're killing him!"

"Damned right we'll kill this lying louse!" Wassermann's panting bellow made the chart room resound like a beaten gong.

The vicious onslaught perforce ended when Geneva flung herself down to shield the prostrate and semi-conscious victim.

"You rotten cowards! Have you no decency left? If you haven't — then remember there's law even out here." Unflinchingly, she glared up into the faces red and furious above her.

"She's right," Duveen panted. "I suppose these damned English would make trouble."

"*Ja*—there iss a better way—come with me."

Hairy chest a-heave beneath its bleached blue cotton shirt, Wassermann jerked his head sidewise and stepped out on deck. Of the low-pitched conversation which followed between owner and smuggler, neither Geneva nor Aidan Cameron heard anything. He was too stunned, too agonized to hear; and she was too intent in murmuring breathless encouragements while stanching the flow of blood from a cut on the ex-convict's hairy and insect bitten cheek.

"Oh, Aidan, Aidan! Why did you come 'way out here to hide? Was it because you—you still love me?"

But the river trader could only lie still, panting like an animal run down on a road, and stare up at her in semi-conscious misery.

"Oh, Aidan," she sobbed softly, then asked in an undertone, "why did you make such a mess of your—no, our lives?"

Dazedly, he blinked at her. "Phil lied when—said I hadn't—his consent—" Cameron choked. Then, remembering the greater urge, said, "Ginny, don't let Phil—trust Wassermann. Make him take you back to Lokoja."

Somehow Cameron got to his feet, the chart room lights whirling about him like the moons around Saturn. Making a pathetic attempt at dignity, he bowed a little—as gentlemen bow to ladies on Legare Street.

"Goodby, Geneva, it's been nice to have seen you again."

"Oh—Aidan, what will become of you—you're so—so tired looking?"

At that moment Duveen came stamping in, beheld the tremulous smile on his wife's lips, and became stung to fresh fury. He caught the helpless trader by the collar.

"Get out of here! Your jail-bird stink makes me sick."

Characteristically, but unwisely, Cameron tried a final appeal.

"For Geneva's sake don't go down the Alibazi, it's—" Then his head snapped sidewise under a savage slap.

"Keep her name out of your filthy mouth!" Again Duveen struck his helpless prisoner.

"Oh, Phil, don't—you mustn't!"

"Shut up— Get back to your cabin!" snarled the owner of the *Astarte*. "I'll have something to give you while Wassermann's attending to your jail-bird friend."

By instinct, Cameron resisted, but he was promptly pitched off the deck and onto the wharf where Wassermann stood waiting like doom incarnate.

"Und now *mein* trouble making friend." A ham-like fist caught Cameron on the jaw with a pile driver impact which knocked him back among the freight. Flaring lights blazed before his eyes. More blows, more lights! Thank God, this was the end—the end of everything.

Just as the last vestiges of consciousness were deserting him, Cameron heard as from far away a voice, cold and precise as the snap of a trap, say, "And what do yez think yer about, you cowardly blackguard? Can't yez see the poor devil can't hit back?"

Before he could hear the ivory smuggler's retort bitter black waters drowned out those lights whirling so dizzily before Dr. Aidan Cameron's eyes.

CHAPTER V.

FORTUNATE RESCUE.

MANY plover were whistling, and somewhere across the Niger a bull crocodile was making the primrose pink dawn resound with his eerie bellows. Dr. Aidan Cameron dimly recognized these familiar sounds. What had happened? There was a canvas expanse above his head. Lord, how sore his body was when he stirred and tried to raise himself on one elbow in order to peer about the tent in which he found himself. He was too weak and sank back, a groan escaping his bruised lips.

"Faith, if yez don't look like Mother MacManus's hen the day she fell into the threshing machine." The speaker, who had been seated on a chop box, got up and, putting aside a cup of coffee, came over to stand above Cameron's cot.

"Shaun O'Donnell! How'd I get here?"

"On my back, me boy." The other's long, clean shaven face contracted. "You were out like a light. But tell me, whut had yez done to earn such a beating from Wassermann, that black dog?"

"Tell you about it in a minute." Again Cameron tried to get up and failed. He looked up apologetically. "Do you—have you—? I'm afraid I'll have to ask for—" But already Shaun O'Donnell was pouring brandy into the steaming cup of coffee which a black "boy" passed in through the tent flap.

"Sluice yer molars with that, me lad, and yez will maybe look a bit less like the guest of honor at a wake." He turned his head and roared like any lion. "Bariba! Lib chop heah fast."

"Ya, Bwana." A Yoruba boy with tribal scars showing up sharp in the growing dawn light, almost immediately appeared, bearing a bowl of goat's milk and mealies.

"No. Lie still, 'tis one great bruise yez are." O'Donnell pushed his guest back onto the cot when the latter for a third time attempted to rise. "Eat and I'll talk, for plenty 'tis I have to say."

Cameron deliberately kept his mind from conjecture on the *Astarte* and her people, and sank luxuriously back against O'Donnell's folded shooting coat and pneumatic pillow. He had not realized he was so ravenous until he began to apply his spoon to the cereal.

"'Tis the devil's own luck to find yez here, Arthur—you're the one man in the province I wanted to see. That's it, me boy, eat hearty, you'll be needing yer strength for our trip up-country."

"Up-country?"

"Shure now, I'm rushing the jumps. But I'm wanting a partner on the plantation—my cotton is growing grand and you are a man who understands the naygurs. I can

only watch a certain number o' the lazy rascals by meself alone."

"But, Shaun, I—"

The Irishman's narrow black head inclined quickly. "'Tis no need. I heard of what happened on the Alibazi and I know you've no money; but I'd rather have Arthur Cook without a tuppence than any other man in the province with a thousand pounds."

A warm tide commenced to flow through Cameron's arteries; such words meant a lot right now.

"I—I'm mighty grateful, Shaun. You don't know—"

"Say nothing, me boy. And sorry I am we must start today, but I've already finished me trading with Chunder Gun—bad cess to all such Bengali robbers!"

SILENCING his guest with a gesture the cotton planter hurried on. "We'll pull out in the cool of this afternoon and by to-morrow night we'll be on the sweetest cotton plantation on any o' the Oil rivers. What is ut?"

Cameron had raised himself suddenly on one elbow.

"Shaun—that yacht— Is she still there?"

"What's she to yez?" demanded O'Donnell curiously.

"Everything—has she gone?"

"Sure—about three hours ago."

"Did she head downstream?"

The Irishman stared a little at the intensity written in his guest's battered face. "No, upstream, and sparks were a-flyin' from her funnel like devils out of a church."

"Oh, God!" Avoiding all mention of Geneva Duveen, Cameron hurriedly outlined the ivory smuggler's plot.

Badly startling a scrawny hen which had wandered in to salvage mealie crumbs, O'Donnell leaped to his feet. "The scaly dog! I'll fix his little game."

"Hold on! You can't do anything," Cameron protested. "Meldrum's away, and the Waffs are busy on a Nupe raid down Yangbassa way. Besides, the yacht will have crossed into Dahomey."

O'Donnell shrugged. "Oh, well, the Foolkiller will be extra busy next week, that's all. And now, Arthur, me boy, let's see what yer needing in the way of clothes? What's wrong?"

Aidan Cameron had swung sidewise on the cot and sat there slowly shaking his head.

"Sorry, Shaun, I'd give my right hand to go with you—but I can't."

"Can't? What the devil! Are yez off yer head?"

"I wish I were."

"But good God, man, don't you understand? I'm giving yez a half interest in my plantation."

"Oh, Shaun, Shaun," the words were a groan, "I can never tell you how grateful I am, but—well, I can't accept."

"Is it that yacht has to do with it?"

"Yes. There's a girl I love aboard the *Astarte*," Cameron stated quietly. "She loves me, I know she does, and will until the end. You see why I can't go with you?"

The Irishman stared a moment, then got up to stand at the tent flap, looking out onto the misty river along the shallows of which stark naked and spindle-legged blacks were fishing with trident spears.

"But what can yez do?" he demanded without turning around. "You've no money, and you're half dead as it is. Damn it, man, I'd feel better if yez had a real plan."

"I've been thinking about that. I'll take Awudu, Gana and a few of my old trading boys. They'll follow me anywhere—even overland to the Alibazi."

"Overland!" O'Donnell spun about. "Why, yer crazy, clean crazy if yez think ye can pick a way through those swamps. 'Tis crawling, they are, with the Nupe cannibals. Don't be a fool, Arthur, you'd not get fifty miles before yer red head would be on its way to a fetish hut."

"Maybe, but my chances are better than that. Awudu's a great tracker, and Gana knows the country like the back of his hand."

Shaun O'Donnell, knowing his man,

merely commented, "You're a fool—but a grand one, and I wish I could go with yez because ye'll get some rare fighting on the way and I'm getting stale for a real shindy. Oh, God, how I'd like to go, but I can't. I've an ould mother back home. Her last shilling's invested in the plantation." He beat one bronzed hand against the other. "But if you do pull through, come up Ambrusa way. 'Tis high and healthy there."

Noon of that day saw two parties quitting Illo. One paddled swiftly off upriver while the other headed silently into the green and gold heart of a poisonous Equatorial jungle.

CHAPTER VI.

APPROACHING DANGER.

UP from the stagnant greenish water, warm as the pea soup it much resembled, Cameron led his party to a dry hummock and silently surveyed his six Fulani and Haussa followers. How pitiful was his equipment—only two battered chop boxes and a ragged tent presented by Chunder Gun. However, six good Enfield rifles and twelve bandoliers of ammunition attested the W. A. F. F. sergeant's gratitude to the man whose skill had made whole the leg he had feared to lose. Two of Meldrum's sporting rifles completed the inventory of firearms. Despite his confident bearing, the river trader's heart sank; certainly this was a pitiful handful with which to traverse still another thirty miles of swamp and jungle.

Pushing back his sun-helmet, he mopped his streaming features and peered about at the jungle all aglitter in the drenching sunlight of midday and was suddenly doubtful that he could reach the goal in time. But still, the *Astarte* did have a journey of nearly four hundred miles, replete with snags, shoals and sand banks.

Absently Cameron dabbed at a festering cut on one cheek before rising to resume the nightmarish march. Now submerged to his waist, now up to his armpits, he unerringly chose the line of least resistance while trying to forget the terrible screams of the boy Gléglé, whom a leopard had seized at dawn and, despite the shots of the half awakened encampment, had borne off into fern and orchid screened shadows. Not so harrowing had been the death of Jan-Kuni, who had merely stepped on a cobra which, sinking its fangs into his anterior tibial artery, had swiftly put an end to that stalwart Fulani's eternal quest for war, women, and a full belly.

Panting, eyes swollen with the sting of voracious insects, Aidan Cameron felt immeasurably relieved to feel once more firmer ground beneath his feet. Unless his calculations were hopelessly wrong, his little column should now be clear of the treacherous swamps and overflowed forest lands. He was lasting better than he had anticipated, and now at the end of the third day he steeled himself to face a new type of enemy. Not twenty minutes ago Awudu had come silently up alongside to whisper that he heard fetish drums sounding somewhere to the southward, but Cameron himself could distinguish no such warning noises.

Luck soon smiled, for they presently came upon an elephant track heading straight towards the river, and so obviated the exhausting *hack-hack* of machetes through rawhide tough vines and creepers.

Towards sundown the party chased a group of oribi deer from a glade so pretty and sheltered that the river trader decided to camp there. Yes, it was a lovely, peaceful spot, amid the turbulent cruelty of the jungle. Here enormous butterflies, brilliant as if their wings were studded with jewels, flapped lazily beneath towering bombax, camwood and baobab.

The river, Cameron was calculating as the bearers joyfully dropped their head loads, could not be over fifteen miles distant, yet that stretch was by far the most difficult and dangerous. They'd better all have at least one good night of rest in preparation. To help matters further, a light breeze which had risen as the sun dropped fanned his face and injected fresh energy into his weary body.

"No fires, Awudu; Nupes have noses like hyenas. Gana, you better—" From the far end of the glade rose the sound of maniacal laughter; hideous to the ears, it swelled in volume as more crazy voices joined in.

Used as he was to the cackling outcry of hyenas, a cold shiver coursed through Cameron's nervous system; the ugly brutes had sounded very close indeed.

"Close, eh—? What's wrong, Awudu?"

The giant Fulani had crouched like a setter on the point, his body tensed and his snub nose raised. Audibly he sniffed while the other "boys" stared at him in uneasy amazement. Just then the wind shifted and Cameron hurriedly clapped his hands to his nose, so putrid was the stench. The foul reek he recognized immediately—a person has only once to smell a decaying human body to remember forever that peculiar cloying smell. Beckoning Awudu and savagely signalling the others to remain motionless, the river trader cautiously sought the upper end of the glade. Ugh! the stench was so bad it was almost funny.

"Careful, Bwana, mebbe Nupes near—"

"They must be near, you fool, it's only a question of how near," the white man whispered, and then raised his head.

IT was in a prolongation of the glade in which Cameron had elected to spend the night that human hands had arranged a small clearing before a single thatched hutch. Around this area roamed perhaps a dozen hideous black maned hyenas; now one would sniff idly at one of the many human skulls which lay about like ghostly over-ripe fruit fallen to the ground, now another one would rear itself up on its hind legs to peer into the foliage of a towering bombax. Cameron choked when he discovered the object of these scavengers' interest. From a branch dangled the corpse of a man far gone in putrefaction and, secured by rattan thongs, sundry arms, legs and disjointed torsos swayed in the breeze, giving the effect of an arboreal butcher shop.

"God! A fetish grove—" Appalled at the bombax's ghastly fruit, Cameron shrank back, his stomach quaking.

"Get away quick, Bwana," Awudu urged and his yellowish eyes swiftly probed the surrounding bush. "Meat nearly ripe—Nupe come back—"

Agonized with the possibility of the *Astarte's* company being doomed to a similar fate, Cameron led a hurried but silent retreat down the glade. Damn! He halted, every nerve on edge. Was that thunder or a mutter of drums in the distance? Faintly, the ominous sound reverberated in the air which, thanks to a brief shower, had reached the consistency of vapor in a Turkish bath.

All at once a new fear struck the sickened river trader. Why had it never before occurred to him that Duveen, though keeping on up the Niger, might nevertheless have stuck to his original intent of shooting big game in the White Volta region? What an idiot he was not to have previously considered such a possibility. After all, Phil Duveen was no fool, and on second thought he might have heeded the pleas Geneva surely would make. Yes, Cameron reflected, it would be all of a piece with his egregious luck if he had thrown away O'Donnell's offer on a fool's errand.

As it was he now found himself faced with an ugly dilemma. It would soon be dark, and to stumble on through the forest would be to invite disaster from prowling beasts and vigilant Nupes alike. Perhaps the cannibals would not seek the fetish grove to-night? No, the risk was too great.

"Eat before more safari," Awudu advised. "Boys tired and stomachs flat."

"Guess we'll have to rest. Besides, there'll be a moon later—"

Accordingly, the seven members of the expedition disconsolately devoured cold mealies, plantains and strips of tough dried meat, and listened to the screech of nocturnal monkeys rise above the booming of crocodiles in some near-by backwater.

Quite untroubled by the charnel stench to windward, Fulanis and Yorubas tore at their food, then chattered and belched

among themselves when Cameron summoned Gana and Awudu into conference. How much they resembled great sable apes by the light of the great moon which was now beginning to drench the jungle with her honey-hued radiance and to evoke the coughing roar of prowling lions and leopards.

In guttural Haussa Cameron demanded, "Have either of you seen the *barracoon* (slave-pen or stockade) of Yellow Beard?" Such was Wassermann's native name.

"*Ya*, Bwana. An evil place on an island a little way up the Bnay branch of the Alibazi and an hour's paddle downstream from Kauri. Men say his go-down bursts with cow ivory—his hareem—"

"A harem?" Cameron looked up sharply.

"*Ya*, Bwana."

"Black or white?"

"Mostly black, Bwana. There are also two or three Portuguese women from the Rio Muni."

"What know you of Yellow Beard, Gana?"

The Yoruba ceased picking his teeth with the point of a leaf-shaped dagger.

"Yellow Beard through Gezo sells many slaves to the Emirs of Immang and Damerghu. Gezo is a great killer of my people," the Yoruba added, reflectively.

ERE the moon had risen much higher, and the wailing of many lemurs had reached their evening crescendo, Cameron had achieved a clearer idea of his problems. If, indeed, the *Astarte* had turned down the Alibazi, Wassermann would undoubtedly find a pretext to anchor off the mouth of the Bnay. How ridiculously simple it would be for his crew of Nupe slave raiders to come drifting silently down the latter river amid the dawn mist and with one fierce rush overwhelm the *Astarte* and her sleeping crew.

As unexpected as a clap of thunder on a snowy morning, a drum went *tang-tat-tat-tang!* not over a quarter of a mile away. As one, every man in the party snatched up his rifle and white-eyed stared into the crazy black and white pattern wrought by the moon in the jungle tangles.

Tunk-tunk-a-tunk! To the north and nearer to the river, another drum sent a hollow message of disaster. Still another drum spoke to the east, indicating that the expedition's presence was not only discovered, but perfectly oriented as well. Quietly at first, then louder, the fetish drums sobbed and throbbed, making the hot night echo. One by one the bearers commenced to whimper until silenced by Cameron's savage threats.

"At dawn, Bwana, the end will come," Awudu stated dispassionately, then, remembering his oft forgotten faith, added, "Bismillah!"

"They will come, but we shall kill many of them," Gana stated, and in the moonlight his pointed teeth glistened like a dog's fangs. "Yes, very many of them."

With the pungent body odors of the bearers and the nauseous stench from beyond the glade mingling in his nostrils, Cameron hastily appraised his position and ended by getting to his feet. Their only chance, he decided, was to somehow slip through the unseen ring which would certainly close in next morning. In dead silence he beckoned his followers, then, silent as any of the great cats roaming the bush, set off through the dew drenched jungle.

Gradually the location of the grumbling drums became identified, and to the anxious white man's surprise he presently noticed that there was no *drumming from the direction of the river!* Why?

Before long the terrain took a sharp upward direction and presently the moonlight revealed a long range of rocky hills rising sheer and forbidding. But what interested Cameron most was the fact that a gap opened ahead of the trail he was following. This range of hills, then, was a barrier dividing the Alibazi valley from the vast swamp region he had just traversed.

Damn that ceaseless drumming! It was hard on taut strung nerves. Nevertheless he soon thought to understand the Nupe strategy. They had cut off his retreat and were trying to force him through the line

of hills into the river valley where they could more deftly dispatch his handful.

In fifteen minutes more the pass loomed ahead like a great nick taken out of the rock ramparts.

"Wait here," he directed the terrified "boys," and, accompanied only by Awudu, strode on ahead.

The pass, he discovered, was narrow and steep sided—undoubtedly an eroded stratum in an ant-cline—and only two hundred yards long. What interested him most was to see it thickly grown with bamboo. Bamboo in a short, fifty-foot wide pass? Bright as a very flare bursting on a starless night, came an inspiration. Awudu's flat and shiny visage, too, was alight.

"Can do, Bwana," he chuckled as they turned and jogged back to rejoin the uneasy remainder of the party.

CHAPTER VII.

DRUMS OF DEATH.

FURIOUSLY, as men work to repair a threatened levee, Dr. Aidan Cameron and his six followers labored by moonlight among the bamboos bordering that narrow path through the defile and tried to forget the tireless drums which, sounding ever closer, throbbed like aching nerves.

"We'll kill — kill — kill you!" they seemed to growl. "We'll kill—kill—kill you!"

More by sense of touch than anything else, the trader toiled with his machete, splitting and trimming certain tough shoots and, as fast as Gana tossed aside plaited strings of esparto grass, he passed them on to Awudu. But the effort proved not to be without cost; one of the Fulanis, wandering too far down the pass, uttered a half strangled cry and there followed no sound save the crashing as of a heavy body retreating at speed through underbrush. Of the missing bearer they found only a fez, his rifle, and a pool of blood upon which voracious insects had begun to feed.

"We'll kill—kill—kill you!" roared the drums. "Kill—kill—kill you!"

Hour after hour the depleted party toiled in the bamboo, and before Cameron quite realized it, chimpanzees, lemurs, and hyenas had set up their pre-dawn clamor. He was, he suddenly realized, very near the end of his tether, and only his will power lent him strength to lead a retreat back to the glade where the party simulated an all night encampment.

While washing down his daily ration of quinine from a canteen of *akann*—vile native beer purchased three days back—the drumming suddenly ceased, leaving the gray forest devoid of sound. Cameron's tortured nerves nearly gave way; the quick cessation of that endless grumbling roar had the quality of a major shock. A moment later Awudu, huge and ghostly in the half light, unslung his Enfield and ran up, his scarred face alight with anticipation.

"Attack comes from South, Bwana—come plenty quick now."

"Think there'll be Nupes waiting at the far end of the pass?"

"*Ya*, Bwana. They not drum—they just wait."

So calm was the river trader's manner that no one would have guessed that he was visualizing Death's bony hands reaching, groping for him through the tangled forest. The next few minutes should decide some very vital questions.

With visions of the fetish grove undoubtedly looming large in their imaginations, Gana and the other "boys" sprang up and started for the pass.

"Stay here!" Cameron snapped, but the unseen menace in the jungle was too much for one of the Yorubas and he kept on, only to be knocked down by the river trader's rifle butt. The others snarled—and disaster would have ensued but for the white man's deadly eyes and ready rifle.

"Stay where you are," he cried in Fulani. "I'll kill anyone who disobeys. Our only chance is to wait until the Nupes are very close and then start out as if we expected nothing to happen. We mustn't start for the bamboo until we shoot up the Nupes a bit and get 'em excited."

Then ensued as nerve racking a half

hour as Cameron had ever spent; again and again his followers would start up when the telltale screech of red-tailed parrots and helmet birds betrayed the gradual tightening of the deadly semicircle. Awudu alone seemed to keep his nerve and sat unconcernedly sharpening his knife on the horny sole of his left foot. Poor devils, Cameron couldn't blame the others for being so anxious to be away; the situation called for such extraordinary finesse. Let the Nupes close in too many yards and retreat would become impossible—retreat too soon and they might spend the last day of their lives staked out in the Alibazi that their meat might become softer when roasted. On the other hand death might not come so easily, and Cameron dwelt briefly upon the merits of sudden death as against being impaled upon a palm stump—sans eyelids—to gaze upon the African sun. Then, too, the torture baskets of the pagan Emirs were nothing to jest at. And the prospect of their loathsome sunken pits was not comforting, to say the least.

"Bwana!" One of the outposts came wriggling through the tangle of lianas and creepers, clutching his fez in one hand and his Enfield in the other. "They come! They come!"

IMPOSING calm on nerves which jangled like badly keyed harp strings, Aidan Cameron got quickly and quietly to his feet.

"Fall in," he called in a voice which must have carried a good quarter of a mile through the dew dripping forest. "Careful with that head load, Ali! Gana, you carry the Martini-Henry!" Then in a lower voice: "Remember to stay together and don't run till I tell you. And remember the trail we cut last night is only a hundred feet in. When you're climbing try not to loosen any rocks."

As leisurely as if it was proceeding to nothing more exciting than a n'goma dance, the little column picked up the usual swinging stride of men on safari. They did not, however, fail to remark with lively apprehension the violent swaying of elephant grass clumps, or the furious shrieking of an outraged parrot.

"Slower." Cameron's fingers tightened on his rifle stock until he felt it must snap. Any second now—what if an arrow or a chance spear—? They were getting very close now. God, how that Yoruba's teeth were chattering.

Sweat had begun to pour down his face in acid torrents when the pass and its pale green growth of the bamboo became visible. The disturbance in the forest grew more noticeable and his nerve tension increased like pressure on a slowly drawn bow. Any instant now—life—death—

A heart-stilling howl preluded the appearance of as garish a human nightmare as Cameron had ever seen. The apparition, evidently a witch doctor, leaped boldly into the trail and stood there brandishing a spear trimmed with oribi tails as he began chanting something to the accompaniment of wild gestures and grimaces.

Quite calmly the river trader surveyed his enemy and noted the strips of orangutan fur dangling from his knees. Very effective, too, was that clattering kilt of human thigh bones, but not so fetching as a tastefully carved sliver of bone thrust through his nostrils. To further complete this barbaric regalia, a tall clump of flaming green and red feathers swayed from the Nupe's hair and, worn like bandoliers across his chest, were slung two long strings of dried human ears.

Deliberately Cameron dropped on one knee, leveled his rifle and expected to see the witch doctor bolt back into the bush. But the outlandish creature merely continued his antics.

To his amazement Cameron heard his own voice saying, "Fool nigger must think he's cooked up a bullet proof juju. Well, we've had enough of your act, my lad." Quite unemotionally, he squeezed the trigger, and with a deep sense of satisfaction, watched the sorcerer bound spasmodically into the air before falling forward, to lie with claw-like fingers digging spasmodically at the ground.

As if the witch doctor's fall had touched

a spring releasing a Pandora's box of devils, steel flashed and, amid a hideous clamor, gargoylesque faces appeared on three sides.

Steady and clear as a bugle call rang the river trader's, "Steady! Stand steady! Let 'em get into the open."

A SPEAR or two gleamed like fire in the sun's first rays, but fortunately they fell short, then a horn of some sort brayed and a sable wave materialized from the emerald tangles to come rushing forward. Dispassionately, Cameron cast a quick glance to right and left. Good! His three Fulanis were kneeling side by side, their fez tassels dipping over their Enfield stocks—the two Yorubas were yammering with excitement but sighting steadily nonetheless. He whipped up Meldrum's sporting rifle and yelled:

"Fire!"

In unison the six rifles crashed, but if their fire had any effect upon the screaming Nupes it was not noticeable. *Click-clock!* Another volley ripped out, but still the barbaric swarm pressed on, undeterred by the fact that, at this deadly range, one bullet was often doing double and even triple execution.

"Empty—magazines, then—run!"

At the fifth withering volley even the Nupes, fierce fighters as they were, faltered, and the sixth fusillade sent them screaming back to cover.

Coughing violently amid the bitter reek of burnt powder, Cameron stood up and surveyed the ghastly execution wrought by his handful. Damn! One of the Fulanis lay struggling and wrenching futilely at a brass wire trimmed spear which was plunged deep into the juncture of his neck and shoulder. After making sure the man was hurt beyond hope, he jerked a fresh clip of cartridges from his bandolier, then turned and ran as fast as his scarred legs would carry him toward the pale green haven of the bamboos.

Screaming with fury, the Nupes started in pursuit and regained the trail just in time to see Cameron's sun helmet vanish among clusters of pointed leaves. What they did not see was that some fifty feet in the river trader leaped far to the right and, leaving behind very little evidence of his changed course, went pounding down a narrow path which, cleared the night before, ended at the foot of one of the steep rock walls.

Screeching and howling like jays picked alive, the Nupes bounded along the old trail and were no doubt reassured to hear cries of fellow tribesmen waiting to receive the fugitives.

Quickly the disorderly torrent of pursuers formed a line across the gap and started a regular *battu* which had penetrated the bamboo perhaps fifty yards when a warrior uttered a piercing shriek. He had dropped his spear and was gazing with horrified eyes at his blood spouting right arm. It had been cut half through by the sharpened edge of a young bamboo which, split and tied back, had straightened with terrible effect when the grass cord securing its trigger was tripped. So headlong was the Nupe advance, and so thick was the foliage, that not even those nearest the stricken man understood the nature of his injury.

Quickly more howls arose as the bamboo man traps began to hack the bewildered blacks. Panic stricken at this attack from an inanimate and generally unseen enemy, the warriors blundered furiously about and so encountered more of the carefully concealed traps. One huge cannibal was nearly split in two by the sweeping blow of an extra powerful bamboo. Another shrieked terribly while with both hands seeking to keep his entrails in an abdomen slashed wide open. The Nupe chief, now minus some fifteen or twenty more of his followers, at last recovered his senses and, as Cameron had fondly hoped, recalled his men. After a long dispute, the advance was resumed, but this time very slowly, and the warriors took good care to spring traps as they went.

All of this delay was as much fine gold to Cameron who, screened by luxuriant foliage, had led his handful up a crevice in the right hand wall of the defile and was now hurrying off along the crest of the hills. He had gained, he estimated, per-

haps an hour's start of the relentless pursuit which was sure to follow.

CHAPTER VIII.

RELENTLESS PURSUIT.

"THIS should fool the Nupes a while," Cameron gasped when he doubled back onto the party's trail after having led his panting followers in a baffling series of circles, criss crosses and loops which would have done credit to any old buck along the Santee River bottoms. But there still remained the appalling knowledge that the Nupes were relentlessly sticking to the pursuit. Everywhere the threatening drums talked and muttered.

"We'll kill you, kill, kill, kill you!"

Twice the little expedition sank flat while a file of Nupes trotted by, sable nightmares in their war gear.

The river trader's woodcraft had gained his party half an hour's lead when at last the Alibazi could be seen, amber yellow beyond the trunks of some ebony trees. Thin chest a-heave, Cameron knew how Balboa felt when he beheld the Pacific.

Thanks, however, to the murderous agility of a crocodile lurking in papyrus bordering a little creek, the party had been forced to traverse, only Cameron, Awudu, Gana and two Yorubas remained of the ten men who had trotted out of Illo four days ago. And they were fugitives, beating back death with failing arms, dodging until the last minute like rats caught in a pit.

Their only hope, Cameron told them, was that night, not more than half an hour distant, would force the pursuit to slacken. Plastered from head to foot with malodorous swamp muck, slashed by thorns and lumpy with the stings of many insects, the party presented a piteous spectacle when once their feet crunched on hard yellow sand spewed up by the turgid current.

"Mouth of Bnay that way — not far downstream," Gana gasped in response to Cameron's query.

"Scatter—try to find a canoe, but come back inside of twenty minutes," Cameron directed, his hollow eyes studying the sunset lit expanse of the Alibazi. "Meantime I'll go up a tree and take a look."

Prompted by the braying of horns and a fresh, puzzling thunder of drums not far downstream, three of the boys hurried off as fast as their fatigue loosened legs would move.

"Bwana, let me go up tree and look-see," Awudu suggested. "You very tired—save strength."

Much as he regretted the necessity, Cameron yielded. Never in all his life had he been so near to a complete collapse—now, he guessed, was the time to finish up Bill Meldrum's whisky. He drank, hoping the last of smooth Scotch would bring him better luck than the first of it.

Damn! Those Nupes were getting closer— He could hear an angry yelping marking their attempt to solve the maze he had made of the trail. But there were other parties also roving the valley, and, worst of all, fishing canoes were heading home, and for the time being closing this last avenue of escape.

What to do? Night was falling, but also the Nupes were coming dangerously near. He forced himself to relax while watching Awudu clamber to the top of a towering banyan, and he lay so still that a flight of bullet swift cinnamon teal skimmed by not five feet overhead.

Bits of bark came raining down from the tree top. He no longer could see Awudu, and across the river a herd of wild elephants trumpeted, annoyed, perhaps, by the incessant uproar arising from what must be Wassermann's *barracoon*. Evidently an occasion of some sort was being celebrated down yonder. The probable cause of it sent chills down Cameron's legs. Had the *Astarte* already arrived? Was that din actually a feast of victory? He would have given anything to be sure he had convinced Geneva of her dire peril. What had Philip Duveen meant when he snarled at his wife, "I've got something for you—"?

"A lot of help I'll be if the main job's already been done," he thought, and, on summing up his resources, he emitted a

croaking laugh. Five rifles and about fifty rounds apiece stood such superb chances against Klaus Wassermann and the power of Gezo, paramount chief of the Nupe cannibals!

"What is it?" From the way Awudu came scrambling down, Cameron guessed he had sighted something of vital importance.

"*Jirgin-wuta,* Bwana! White fire boat swimming off Bnay river mouth!"

The fact he had been dreading, hoping not to hear, smote Aidan Cameron like a blow to the jaw. Great God, the *Astarte* was already there!

"See anything else?" Strange lights played in the river trader's eyes.

"Many, many Nupe people in Yellow Beard's *barracoon.* More camped on beach—chop and dance. Looks like big palaver, Bwana."

"Go on."

"Much running about in stockade. Warriors are—"

A fearful scream from far up river focussed Cameron's attentions on his immediate problems.

"Help! Bwana! They here! Oh-h-h—"

A few more cries redolent of anguish, then silence closed down again on the darkening river.

In fierce perplexity the river trader beat his forehead. What to do? He must think straight! No doubt now that Geneva needed his help—feeble as it was. Should he try to steal into Wassermann's *barracoon* and attempt a rescue? No. They'd never get away. He was too weak and Geneva certainly would not be able to travel far in the jungle.

His hopes faded when both the remaining searchers returned, declaring that there was no trace of a canoe in the vicinity.

"Then we'd better make a raft," Cameron decided. "We must get off this sand bank. They'll find us before long."

OF this, yells and blowing of horns in the darkening forest left no doubt. At any moment the hunted wretches must expect discovery and a resultant shower of spears. A sudden inspiration seized him, but chances of its success were so slim he remained silent.

Hastily hacking through tough vines and lianas, and collecting such driftwood logs as they might find without risk of observation, the four survivors worked like mad to contrive a raft capable of supporting them. It was further unnerving to observe great crocodiles floating out in the main stream and watching them with the eyes barely above water level. By the time, perhaps, a dozen logs had been somehow secured together, darkness had fallen and the usual sour smelling night mist was forming over the Alibazi like frost on a windowpane. It was high time to leave; not fifty yards back in the forest could be heard the crackle and snap of bushes being trampled and the shouts of the pursuers. They hastily flung rifles and bandoliers onto the driest section, then bent to their work.

"Push! All together now!" Swaying, desperately insecure, their primitive raft responded but sullenly to the frantic efforts of the four fugitives. When the weird craft at last floated free and began to respond to the sluggish current, they scrambled aboard and found the raft's surface slightly awash. Like a chill gray curtain the mist closed down—and barely in time.

"Pole, push for your lives!" Cameron cried when out upon the sand leaped half a dozen dim dark shapes. Clamor raised by the Nupes was hellish, and a few spears went swishing into the water, but the range was too great.

"Nupe carrion eaters!" Gana whipped up his Enfield and would have fired had not Cameron forbade it.

"No! No! It'll take those men some time to reach the *barracoon* and give the alarm. We must reach the white boat."

"—If the crocodiles don't pull us off this bundle of sticks," glumly pointed out the surviving Yoruba.

Poling far out into the glassy river, Cameron suddenly wondered if this were not all a fantastic dream? Life in reality could never be so tense, so furious as it had been for the past week. Feeling more than a

little encouraged from the effects of Meldrum's whisky, he peered about and was just able to make out the tops of the primeval forest above the swirling mist. Thus for a brief period he oriented himself, but soon the ghostly mist, reeking as of crushed marigolds, grew thicker, more sheltering, and bringing to Cameron a sudden fear that he might unseeing be swept by the *Astarte*.

At last the howls of the baffled Nupes faded away, and the only sounds were those of owls hooting dismally along the shore. Once, however, a hippopotamus breached and snorted only a few yards away—but was quite invisible in the fog.

"Mist will thin soon, Bwana," Awudu commented, "when cold night wind begins to blow."

"Quiet!" hissed the shivering river trader. "Sound carries far over water still as this."

So unearthly still and quiet was the night, so glassy was the water, it seemed to the exhausted survivors as if the raft was not moving at all, just floating in a dim gray world without limit and without reality.

THERE was just a chance, if he accomplished the imposible and seized the *Astarte* with his three followers, that he might release some of the crew and, by dint of the machine gun, wring some sort of understanding out of Wassermann. Perhaps not.

What state of affairs would he find aboard the steam yacht—granting it could be boarded? Presently Cameron's misgivings grew sharper. Damn! It looked as if they were going to drift past the *Astarte* after all. Why *wouldn't* this infernal mist lift?

"Moon soon," Gana breathed, and indeed the silvery mist was beginning to assume a golden tinge. Then, unexpectedly, there was a little *bump* and the progress of the raft was definitely checked.

Gone aground, was the river trader's natural assumption when he crawled forward to discover the nature of the obstacle. He barely suppressed a cry of amazement, for, fouling two of the longest logs composing the raft, was an anchor chain — undoubtedly belonging to the *S. Y. Astarte!*

CHAPTER IX.

ABOARD THE ASTARTE.

THERE was need for rapid action. The current was rotating the raft around the chain at a surprising speed, but fortunately the movement was away from the yacht, and so there would be no warning impact against the hull.

"Quick," Cameron whispered. "Grab the chain—get on board somehow."

Rifle slung across shoulder, Cameron hooked bare toes in the links and scrambled up the chain. He had hardly reached the hawse hole when a sharp tremor of the anchor chain warned him that the raft had freed itself and was continuing its leisurely cruise toward the distant Niger.

No lookout, thank God! But—did this argue that the yacht was already Wassermann's?

Dripping, shivering, but with every instinct alert, Cameron slid gently over the bow to sink promptly flat on the deck beneath the canvas cased machine gun. Presently another indistinct shape joined him, and then two more. During a long ten minutes the boarders lay as if dead, for the double purpose of recuperating and of locating the ship's company. Save for muffled voices drifting forward, little could be heard.

Deeply thankful that apparently no watch was being kept on the forward deck, the chilled river trader started aft, groping through an unearthly, honey colored mist which, thicker than ever, curled about his party like ghostly tentacles.

A thousand fresh doubts and misgivings suddenly assailed Cameron. Why did the yacht seem so deserted? Why were there no voices coming from the crews' quarters just beneath his bare feet? Had the captives already been taken ashore? Of only one thing was he sure at this most critical of all moments, and that was his love for Geneva. He *must* find her—save her—

Geneva meant more to him than ever. Geneva! Where was she?

He and his catlike black followers were just climbing the ladder to the bridge when, incongruous beyond words, a radio commenced to blare a dance tune. God! A dance tune with death crouching on the shore. How utterly grotesque—savage drums and the Savoy's orchestra vying on a forgotten river of the Ivory Coast.

On the bridge Cameron halted, uncertain of his course. Out from shore floated a sudden excited babble and, quite abruptly, the dance drums went silent, though fires flared higher than ever.

"Guess our friends have just pulled into camp. Come along." Motioning his savage companions to follow, Cameron softly opened a shiny mahogany door and was nearly blinded by the glare of electric lights. What a contrast to the horrors of the last four days was this beautifully panelled living saloon. Furnished in the delicate Directoire style, it boasted every improvement money could buy. How soft was the lovely old Aubusson carpet beneath his naked feet. His puzzlement grew. Everything seemed in order; certainly if violence had taken place, it had left no evidences here. *Illustrated London News, Vanity Fair.* From a near-by table half a dozen familiar covers met his eye.

Water, dripping from his rags, made a soft pattering sound when Dr. Aidan Cameron stepped inside with Enfield cocked and ready. Round eyed Awudu and the other two boys stared in awed amazement on this luxury. Not even the third-class quarters on the swine boats, which heretofore had been their conception of Nirvana, could approach the gay glitter of the rich glow of opulent furniture.

"Stay here, Akajai," he directed the second Yoruba. "Halt anyone who comes and keep him quiet. Don't make a noise or shoot unless you have to."

CAMERON posted the Yoruba, an infinitely barbaric figure which gleamed like wet onyx, at the head of a flight of stairs leading into the depths of the yacht, then, his heart thudding like a boxer's fists on a punching bag, he continued aft along a passage and toward the sound of voices. What the devil? The situation was not at all as he had anticipated. Catching his breath, Cameron reached for an elaborate brass doorknob and at the same time motioned his followers to level their Enfields. Gradually, silently, he pulled back the door until he was looking in upon a dining table all agleam with silver and crystal. He blinked—after his experiences of the day and night preceding, this contrast was overwhelming, incredible. A wave of regret for all he had lost these last eight years drew an acid smile to his lips, but at the same time he experienced a great glow of thanksgiving.

Infinitely sad of expression, but very lovely in a flounced evening gown of white, Geneva Duveen sat fingering a half filled wine glass at the far end of a candle-lit table, and looking blankly down at her evidently untasted food. Behind Cameron, Awudu and Gana stood tensed—he could even feel their breath on the back of his neck.

"We must go back," Geneva was pleading in a low quivering tone. "Really, Phil—I—I'm terrified."

"Nonsense!" Philip Duveen, red faced and sunburnt, sat with his back to the unseen listeners. "Everything's all right. Of course Wassermann's rough—no social light, I'll admit, but he's honest, and tomorrow we'll go up to Kauri— Stop that damn' whining, can't you? I can look out for myself and you, too."

"But, Phil, I don't see why Wassermann was so eager to take Captain Andrews and so many of the crew ashore before dinner. Really, wouldn't it have been better to have let them go a few at a time?"

"That's it, turn on the sob stuff. Great God! Why did I have to marry a snivelling coward? Haven't you any guts at all?"

Before her husband's angry glare Geneva recoiled and sat biting her lips as he went on.

"Why shouldn't the crew stretch their

legs? I tell you Wassermann explained everything to my satisfaction. He's got to palaver with the local chief for the labor we'll be needing." And at a single gulp he drained the rest of his whisky and soda.

"Have you noticed that awful drumming has stopped?" she inquired in a strained voice.

"What of it? Watch out or I'm going to get mad at you again, Ginny," he murmured in a dangerously silken voice, "and next time I might use something heavier than a rattan. So watch your step, my girl—it's time you remembered who's running this—"

"Oh-h—!"

The sentence was never completed, because Geneva Duveen had at last glimpsed the grim apparitions looming beyond her husband's shoulder. It would have been hard to decide which was the more terrifying, the emaciated white man with the wet hair swaying over his blazing eyes, or the enormous blacks, their yellowish eyes narrowed and their dog-like teeth aglint in the candle light.

In a motion surprisingly swift for a man of Duveen's bulk, the owner of the *Astarte* swung about and then his jaw dropped ludicrously wide.

"Cameron! Great God, how did you get here?"

"Keep quiet, you precious swine!" Seething with hate, Cameron thrust the Martini-Henry muzzle into Duveen's bloated face. "Get up! Stand over there! And if you make a noise I'll enjoy shooting you."

"Aidan! What's happened? What are you doing?"

"Trust me, Ginny dear. We've got to get the yacht out of here immediately. There's not a second to waste."

"Still peddling scares, are you?" sneered Duveen. "Or are you trying to pirate my yacht?"

Terrible of expression, Cameron snapped, "You stubborn, blind ass. You *would* come here in spite of everything, but whether you like it or not, I'm going to take Geneva out of Wassermann's reach."

"I'm sure she'll enjoy going with you and your nigger friends." Duveen waved derisively and a little drunkenly at the scowling nearly naked blacks.

"Who's aboard?"

"I'll see you in hell before I'll tell you."

Cameron retorted in a still voice which was somehow immensely effective. "Possibly, but I promise you'll be there to open the door for me."

"Look out, Ginny!" The words burst from Duveen's lips.

SUBCONSCIOUSLY, Cameron turned his head, whereupon Duveen made a quick grab for a carving knife, but the quicker reflexes of Awudu went into action. Like a sleek black leopard he sprang forward and brought his Enfield barrel crashing down on the top of Duveen's blond head.

Venting a tired little sigh, she who had been brought up among the polite circles of Charleston fainted dead away.

Ignoring his enemy's crashing fall, Cameron bent swiftly over Geneva and for the first time in eight long years gathered her slim, delicately perfumed form into his arms and carried her to a couch near by. He stood over her an instant, drinking in that pale beauty which for years had been but a memory. Gana shook him by the arm.

"Quick, Bwana, listen! Yellow Beard's *barracoon!*"

If before the little island at the mouth of the Bnay had reverberated to the thundering drums, now it had become a bedlam. Apparently the evil alliance ashore had just learned of Cameron's arrival on the scene.

"Tie this one up," the river trader snapped. Finger on trigger, he spun about; footsteps in the passageway preluded the appearance of a Japanese steward who hurried in, only to freeze into silent immobility when he found himself gazing down the bore of Cameron's Martini-Henry. Like darting swallows the little fellow's oblique eyes flitted from the two blacks busy over Duveen's lax form to his mistress lying pale as death on the couch.

"You are going to behave and be quiet?" Cameron demanded.

"Yessir. You Dr. Cameron?"

"Yes." The intruder was more than a little startled.

"Missie talk in sleep about you. This very small boating and I hear. Last few days she very afraid."

"What's your name?"

"Kogo, sir."

"You know why I'm here, Kogo?"

The Japanese gingerly lowered his hands and clasped them over his stomach while jerking a little bow.

"You come to assistance Missie, sir."

"Right. Who's left aboard, and what's happened?"

Succinctly, the steward described how the yacht had come to anchor late that afternoon; how Wassermann had insisted that the captain and a majority of the crew accompany him ashore to bring off supplies. Left on board were only the *S. Y. Astarte's* mate, the engineer, a cook, a French stewardess and a pair of half-caste Portuguese oilers."

"Fetch the mate at once— There's very little—" A renewed crashing of many drums made the night resound, but failed to drown out the series of screams which, eloquent of stark animal terror, came ringing out over the fog shrouded river. "For God's sake don't! Don't! Help! Duveen! They're—"

At once the *S. Y. Astarte* awoke to noisy alarm. Somewhere a deep voice was roaring.

"Damnation, I was right! Hear that, Parker? Those bloody natives have jumped Andrews!"

Then forward of the dining saloon a woman's shriller tones wailed, "*Bon Dieu! On les tue! Miséricorde!*"

"Beat it now, Kogo. Quick! Round up everybody—tell 'em to assemble here fast as they can."

RUTHLESSLY, the river trader lashed faltering body and weary brain to fresh exertions. For what reasons were the Nupes building such huge fires on the shore? He calculated hastily, and was appalled to find that the most he could count on were seven able-bodied men to defend a one hundred and twenty foot steam yacht. If Wassermann elected to fling the whole power of Gezo's Nupes in action at one time, seven men would have to stand off five or six hundred of the fiercest cannibals in equatorial Africa. Still, that machine gun *would* be a help!

"What the hell's happened?" Through the pantry door burst a small terrier-faced man who was fumbling at the buttons of an oil-spotted uniform coat.

"Wassermann's Nupes are massacring your captain and the others."

"Who're you?" the newcomer panted.

"My name's Cameron, and I came to warn you. Explain later—"

There next ran into the cabin three more of the threatened yacht's company. First was a shirtless, hard-looking specimen named Parker—the yacht's first officer he turned out to be. Then two half-caste Portuguese oilers very pale beneath their swarthy skins. The mate was at first suspicious and inclined to question Cameron's motives, but those fires and the menacing clamor ashore were potent arguments in the river trader's favor.

"Okay, Doc. Guess you know the answers—if any— What's to be done?"

"Our only chance is to pull out of here fast," Cameron snapped, and turned on the engineer. "How soon can you get up steam?"

"We're an oil burner, and our boilers are still fairly hot, so maybe I can get the screws turning in twenty minutes."

"Twenty minutes!"

"More likely twenty-five," the mate said, "and then Buchanan will be doing miracles."

"All right, get going."

"Come on, you misbegotten scrapings," the engineer yelled at the unhappy half-castes and, as he ran out, he cast one furious and contemptuous glance at the unconscious owner of the *Astarte*.

"Kogo, can you handle a rifle?"

"Yessir. I sergeant in Nippon army."

"Good. I understand there are rifles aboard—issue them all round—plenty of ammunition, too. Get a move on."

Cameron then turned on the mate, who with tattooed shoulders aglow in the dining saloon lights, was busily buckling a heavy pistol belt about his waist.

"Go up forward and get your machine gun ready. I'll join you in a minute. Gana, you go with this man and help him."

"No. By God, you'll stay here, Parker!" Philip Duveen must have long since recovered consciousness, so strong was his voice. "Arrest this pirate! Go on! Can't you understand English?"

"Sorry." The big mate evidently had small love for the *Astarte's* owner and kept on for the door.

"Come back and obey orders or, damn your ugly eyes, I'll see your master's ticket cancelled!"

"Skip it, you blasted souse, or I'll kick your face in." The mate spun about in the doorway, his blunt, bronzed features livid. "Ought to anyhow, on account of your getting us all in this mess."

Duveen struggled to a sitting position and shouted. "But there *is* no mess, you damned idiot. Wassermann's on the level, I tell you. They're just having a dance ashore."

"Oh, yeh? Guess you didn't hear those yells awhile back. Sounded more like a dinner dance."

Cameron hurried forward and almost pushed the scarlet-faced mate through the door. "Get a move on, Parker, every second counts."

"So you've taken up a new kind of crime? Congratulations on a nice bit of piracy, Cameron— This time I'll see you hanged higher than Haman. See what you done to my wife, you treacherous dog?"

ONLY by a terrific effort could Cameron keep from throttling the author of all his woes. "She's fainted. If you've got a single shred of decency you'll let her stay unconscious until this show is over. Listen, Duveen," he glared down on his prisoner, "sober up and face facts—Wassermann has killed Andrews and the rest, and in a few minutes we've got to fight for our lives. If Buchanan can't get up steam inside of twenty minutes we're in for a bad time. Will you forget our private quarrel long enough to help?"

Snarling curses, Duveen tried to get to his feet, but Awudu pushed him back with the butt of his Enfield.

"For Geneva's sake, then—"

"To hell with you and her, too—"

"God knows I've always thought you pretty low, Phil—but it seems my opinion wasn't half right. Awudu! Lock this brute in that pantry, then come on deck."

To Aidan Cameron, running forward, the dull roar of the fuel oil jets going wide open brought a ray of hope, and on the foredeck the haggard river trader encountered some comic relief in the form of Geneva's maid. She was hurrying about chiefly clad in a pair of truly Gallic pajamas which more revealed than concealed her undeniably attractive person. Over this the woman had flung a bathrobe and at the present moment was trying to adjust a cartridge belt about her waist. What was she doing here? *'Cré nom de Dieu,* 'Toinette Bergère had no intention of remaining tamely below. Monsieur must know that her savings were aboard, he must also know that madame had promised her a dowry of ten thousand francs on her return to France where Jean, the druggist's clerk, was waiting for her—and the dowry. Dowries like that did not grow on trees like cocoanuts. Antoinette, in short, was prepared to defend her dowry to the death.

Cameron fled, and presently stationed Awudu and Akajai on the bow. Gana he dispatched to the stern under command of Kogo, who was eventually to be reënforced by the two Portuguese. Thus the defenders would attempt to pour an enfilade fire—always very effective—into Wassermann's followers.

By the light of the roaring fires which now were flinging flames easily fifty feet in the air, Parker worked at his beloved gun, tried the action and grinned when its mech-

anism responded with an oily *click-cluck!*

"Well, Doc, the old girl's ready to talk turkey—and am I lookin' forward to this ruckus! I've always hankered to do a little direct fire. Now lend a hand and we'll lug up some ammo boxes. D'you reckon they'll be comin' soon?"

Cameron cast an appraising glance toward that island at the mouth of the Bnay and saw the beach black with hurrying figures.

"Ought to have about ten minutes leeway. Let's go!"

"No hope for old Andrews, is there, Doc?"

"Not a chance, poor devils. The lucky ones are already dead. Save all your worrying for ourselves."

"Shucks, Doc, it's a cinch! With that little typewriter up forward I can dust those shines off like a shelf. I only hope old Buck won't get up steam so quick as to not let me get a crack at 'em. Don't like the Nupes worth a thin damn—make too much noise." Parker opened the iron door of a storeroom located directly beneath the bridge. "There's the ammo." He pointed to a double row of thin, oblong boxes and the glow of the Nupe fires suddenly beating in through a port made his hard features gleam as though cast of copper. "We can each lug four boxes. Doc, here y'are." The big mate plucked up one of the gray painted boxes and simultaneously his grin vanished. He snatched up another and another, and then began to search his soul for curses.

Cameron made no sound, being far too busy digesting an appalling fact. Not one of the two dozen boxes held so much as a single round of machine gun ammunition!

CHAPTER X.

WASSERMANN'S TRICKERY.

"WASSERMANN, of course. I was wondering why he spent so damn' much time below."

Duveen's outraged roars and his maddened pounding on the pantry door was making the whole yacht resound, but Cameron said nothing, sickened as he was at the thought of Geneva lying helpless below. How really slim was the *Astarte's* chance of escaping downstream; God help her company if she blundered, as well she might, on any of the innumerable snags or sandbars which, only half visible by daylight, were wholly hidden at night.

Hollow cheeks a-quiver, Cameron turned to the mate who was still heaping pungent maledictions on the German's head.

"Sure there isn't ammunition somewhere else?"

Parker dealt his thigh a resounding slap. "Yes, by God. I've got one box in my cabin. Took it from the magazine the other afternoon—intended to use it for practice, but didn't get a chance."

"How much does such a box hold?"

"Only a couple of belts, Doc, and they won't last longer than a snowball on a hot shovel. Still, they might do to scare the niggers off."

At this point Kogo came running up, very anxious beneath his mask of imperturbability.

"Canoes pushing off, but no bullets in machinery shop. Where they? Quick!"

"The Springfield ammo *must* be in that yellow locker," Parker snapped as they all three started on deck. "Stowed it there myself."

"But Misser Parker," Kogo clutched at the mate's naked elbow, "must pleass lissen. No bullets there. We look and look, but no can find bullets anywhere."

In despair too acute for words, Cameron perceived the perfection of Wassermann's plotting. "That blasted squarehead did a thorough job all right," snarled the mate. "Now what?"

Aye, what to do? Precious instants were slipping away like quicksilver between the fingers.

"Listen, Parker, here's an idea. We brought along five or six bandoliers of Enfield cartridges—don't Enfields and Springfields take the same calibre?"

Parker's face lit. "Sure they do! That's the ticket."

" Kogo, run forward, tell Gana and my other boys to split up the cartridges. Beat it, Parker, and rout out your two belts while I see if I can't get the engineer to move off a little quicker."

Buchanan, summoned to the bridge speaking tube, was breathless.

" How're you coming—?"

" Pressure's coming up fast, Doc. Say, you sound all upset—what's wrong?"

In a few words Cameron told him. " The canoes are already shoving off, so hurry. I'll try to pilot—I know a little about this river, so whistle through this tube when you think we can move and we'll rout out the anchor."

" To hell with raising it! Slip the chain," Buchanan's resonant tones advised. " Won't give our move away so quick."

" All right."

" Is that Duveen I hear raising hell?"

" Yes, he's locked in the dining saloon pantry."

" Better watch out, then, there's liquor in there, and he's like to get crazy drunk—He's a hellion when he is."

On deck Cameron encountered the French maid armed with a small rifle and staring anxiously at those tiny black figures swarming on the fire lit beach.

" Please go below, 'Toinette. I'll promise to call you if things get tight—right now Mrs. Duveen needs you."

The fires by now had grown into enormous high soaring sheets of flame which not only bathed the yacht in an angry crimson glare, but also lit up the river even to its far banks. Nor was the only flame and smoke on shore. Around the lip of the *Astarte's* squat funnel yellow flames were licking brightly, lighting up the underside of the smoke which, in dense woolly streamers, was climbing to obliterate the stars.

WHEN Aidan Cameron gained the bridge and took his position at the wheel, dozens of canoes were still sliding down the bank, like enormous crocodiles taking to water.

Wassermann's big figure, recognizable because of its light clothes, was everywhere, vigorously marshalling on an attack more orderly and united than would otherwise have been organized.

" Hey, Doc, the damn' brutes are gettin' under way," Parker called out from his post on the foredeck. " Can't I touch them up a little? It'll maybe scare them off a while."

" No, they probably won't scare. Wassermann must have told 'em we haven't much ammunition, so for God's sake don't fire till I tell you. Meantime get ready to smash that anchor chain shackle."

There was something admirable about the unhurried manner in which Parker deserted his beloved Browning to seize a heavy maul and to stand above the chain.

Like figures of sable marble, Awudu and Akajai were kneeling behind the bow bulwarks with spare ammunition arranged beside them as they impassively surveyed that dark mass of canoes which, amid a deafening uproar, was beginning to gather speed.

Why the devil didn't Buchanan whistle? The foremost canoes were less than two hundred yards away. Trickles of cold sweat had begun rolling down Cameron's hollow cheeks when, in desperation, he whistled down the engine room speaking tube.

" Can't we get going? They're coming up fast."

" Yes. I can give you a bit of headway when you use the bridge telegraph."

Cupping his hands in order to make himself heard above the gale of noise, Cameron yelled " Cast off!" Sparks flew as Parker's maul swung at the shackle, a loud rattling followed, and Cameron, his eyes bright with anxiety, depressed the telegraph handle to " Full Speed Ahead." At the same time he hooked his bare toes in the wheel grating and ground the yacht's helm hard a-port.

Distant bells jangled, then, as an awakening sleeper stirs, the *Astarte* shuddered, and ever so slowly her pointed bow commenced to turn downstream. From the bow sprang brief jets of fire, revealing that

Akajai and Awudu had opened fire. Cameron would have given much for the chance of snatching up the rifle beside him in order to shoot at that big white clad figure in a leading canoe.

The Nupe onslaught presented an awesome panorama; flames were drawing ruddy flashes from hundreds of broad bladed spears, and the entire flotilla was garbed in the weirdest of regalia.

A terrific howl made the forests echo and reëcho when the Nupes became aware of the *Astarte's* attempted flight, but the yammering lessened when they bent to their paddles and sent showers of pinkish spray flying in all directions. Wassermann's taurine bellows, however, continued, and from the canoes there came a crackling of shots, one of which shattered a window of the wheel house and spattered Cameron with bits of glass.

WITH exasperating deliberation the yacht gathered speed and presently answered her helm more sharply. Critical instants. A dozen great canoes were racing to cut off the *Astarte's* retreat, but the yacht's twin screws were pushing her ahead at a rate which set the warm and inky waters to whispering along her steel sides.

Crouching low, Aidan Cameron steered for the center of the river; and at the same time became aware of rifles snapping on the yacht's stern.

One, two minutes dragged by, then, with a sense of savage enjoyment, the river trader shifted course a little, and so bore down upon an enormous war canoe. Half of its paddlers tried to back, while the remainder foolishly attempted to pull ahead—another canoe was just beyond it. There came a dull *crunch,* followed by screams. More crunching—then the *Astarte* was ploughing through the thick of the detachment which had tried to head her off. Several canoes upset, but others were bumping alongside, and the cannibals clawed frantically at those white sides slipping so smoothly by.

As a man sees a scene by the glare of a bolt of lightning, so Cameron caught a glimpse of Wassermann, his yellow beard golden in the throbbing glare of the fires as he raised a carbine and began firing furiously at the men on the bow. The *Astarte,* however, was now steaming along at a good twelve knots an hour, too fast to permit the cannibals to keep up. A few foolhardy warriors did manage to get a hold and haul themselves up onto the low afterdeck, but they were promptly blown back into the river by the busy rifles of Gana, Kogo, and the two Portuguese.

Gradually a realization reached Cameron's staggering brain; *the Astarte was going to escape!* Yes. When safely downstream he would reduce speed and feel for the channel until it was safe to anchor once more.

A few swimmers and the last shattered canoes were bobbing in the *Astarte's* moonlit wake, and the Nupes were howling like starved hyenas when, all at once, the yacht began perceptibly to lose speed.

"Not enough steam up yet," Cameron decided aloud. "Still, we're clear of 'em, so it'll be all right." He thrust his head out of the wheel house and saw, a quarter of a mile astern, a confused tangle of canoes milling in the center of the river—they looked rather like timber logs caught in a cross current. When the yacht continued to lose speed the river trader put his lips to the speaking tube. "We're not out of danger yet, Buchanan. Don't slow down so—"

Without warning the *S. Y. Astarte* began to shudder queerly and then with increasing violence.

"Buchanan! What's wrong?" As if in answer, the shuddering increased until the tortured hull trembled like a frightened horse, and then a tall plume of steam sprang screaming from the escape back of the funnel. Utterly dismayed, Cameron realized that the engines had stopped dead.

"What's happened? For God's sake tell me what's wrong?"

"Dammit, the engines simply won't turn over— Seems like we've burnt out our power shaft bearings—but that can't be—oiled 'em to-day myself."

"What chance of gettin' 'em going again?"

The other's groan answered his question. "I'll see if I can locate the trouble."

"Hope you can. The Nupes will be aboard us in two shakes."

This prophecy bade fair to be promptly fulfilled, and from the way Wassermann urged the sable paddlers on, Cameron guessed that the failure of the engines, too, was of his planning.

"It's a bad breakdown," he called down to Parker. "Get your gun ready."

"Just our damn' luck. Can you get the old girl in midstream?"

"I'll try—maybe we've enough headway—"

Husbanding the last traces of the *Astarte's* forward speed, Cameron did his best to coax the drifting yacht toward the safer depths of the Alibazi, but was appalled to see how quickly she lost way. Soon the million-dollar toy was quite as much at the mercy of the sluggish current as his improvised raft had been.

AIDAN CAMERON had thought to have already tasted the bitterest dregs of despair, but these were as honey compared to the black hopelessness which gripped him when the *Astarte* drifted, stern foremost, onto a hidden mud bank. There she lodged, but not firmly imprisoned; with just a few revolutions of her screws she certainly ought to come loose. But would those propellers ever turn again?

Tears of helpless rage scalded Cameron's eyes when he quitted the bridge ladder. It wasn't fair! It wasn't right! Damn it, he had stood up to Fate as a man should, and now this!

He encountered Buchanan in the act of appearing on deck, with a bad bruise swelling one side of his face.

"Bad news, Doc. As I thought, the trouble *was* in the propeller shafts," he announced grimly. "Looks like that swine Wassermann put emery in the shaft grease cups; as it is, the bearings are seized tighter than a duck's foot in the mud."

"Can you get us moving again?"

"Dunno. Port shaft doesn't look near so bad as the starboard. If you can hold those damn' brutes off till the steel cools, I might be able to take her off the casing and clean it."

"How long will that take?"

The engineer cast one glance at Wassermann's flotilla and shook his bald head.

"Too blamed long, I'm afraid— Well, I'll make a try at it. So long, Doc, and good luck!"

"Keep at it, Buchanan," Cameron called after him. "We've still got an ace in the hole."

"Damn tootin'!" Parker patted the machine gun's breech. "If we've gotta go ourselves, we'll sure bring a lot o' these devils shoutin' home to hell along with us."

It was perhaps as polyglot a group of people as one could find who assembled on the *Astarte's* bow in a final fight for their lives; a Japanese, three savage Africans, two half-castes and two Americans.

Just before the Nupes came in range, Cameron made a short speech. "Everybody to hold his fire till they're so close we can't miss. Wassermann doesn't yet know the machine gun'll work, so maybe we'll punish 'em so badly they'll haul off to wait for dawn and reënforcements. By that time maybe the engines will be working again."

"Where do you want me?" inquired a low voice behind the river trader. He spun about and found Geneva Duveen and her Amazonian maid standing at his elbow.

"Go back, Ginny! Go below quick!" Never had he seen anything quite so indescribable as her eyes—luminous, they seemed in the moonlight, as if her soul were right behind them.

She shook her head gently but firmly. "No. I'm not going back, Aidan. As you know, I've shot all my life, and I've some deer loads in my pockets." He saw it was a sixteen gauge repeating shotgun she carried under her arm.

"Please go below, Ginny," he pleaded hoarsely. "You—why, you're liable to get hurt out here."

Her eyes met his in serene determination

and she gathered a dark coat tighter about her lacy evening gown.

"Don't you understand? Can't you see I've just as much right to fight for your life as you have for mine? I'm starting late, dear, but I'm going to see this through with you."

The yells of the approaching Nupes were growing very loud, so he cast one last deep and searching look into her eyes. There was a strange glory in them which warned him of the uselessness of insistence.

"Very well then, my dear. Go up onto the bridge with 'Toinette and keep behind the steel guard. Don't fire until we do." He turned a little aside. "God bless you, Ginny, darling—I think you know that I've always loved you in spite of everything. If we die to-night I won't have any regrets."

"Goodby, Aidan," she cried in her deep rich tones. "Long ago I saw my mistake—even before you ever said anything. I have only partially paid for it. And now goodby, dearest." Her lips, faintly fragrant, brushed his cheek, then she was gone.

Deep in the *Astarte's* engine room could be heard the sound of hammering, mingled with Duveen's crazy singing of some drunken ballad. With bated breath, the *Astarte's* queerly assorted company watched the mass of canoes come sweeping down upon them like a black tide of death.

CHAPTER XI.

SHIP AFIRE.

SO replete with tension and weariness had been the last few days, that Aidan Cameron almost dispassionately watched the approach of the flotilla. The logical center of resistance, he had quickly seen, was on the bow, but fight as his handful might, the struggle would not be of long duration—unless Buchanan could get that port propeller revolving again.

He turned and saw Geneva looking down on him; how perfectly the moon's radiance outlined her small head and shoulders against the purple-black of the sky! Sight of her momentarily made Cameron wonder what had happened to her besotted husband. A few moments ago, during a lull in the shrill war cries, he had thought to hear Phil Duveen's voice still roaring in the depths of the stranded yacht. The wretched fellow was lucky in one way, though—he'd no idea that the sword of doom was swinging so near.

As if they anticipated the desperate resistance they would shortly face, the Nupes stilled their clamor and only the rhythmic *clunk-clunk* of wooden paddles against wooden thwarts marked their advance.

"Remember now," Cameron called in a low voice, "everyone fire together on the word. Parker, save your gun till they get in close, and then, above all else, try to kill Wassermann if you can. Everybody try to spot him."

In vain the shivering river trader tried to see Wassermann, but either the Prussian was far back among the savage horde, or else he had donned a dark garment, for nowhere was his big body to be noted. Now and then one of the defenders sighed nervously, or fiddled with his rifle sights when the canoes gathered speed. Parker, squatting behind the Browning, was spitting regularly and readjusting the traversing mechanism for the tenth time. How wickedly the moon glinted on that fat, metal water jacket.

Seventy-five—fifty yards off. Deliberately, Cameron lifted the dew wetted Martini-Henry stock to his cheek and found the chest of a gorgeous sub chief over his sights.

"Ready! Aim!"

AS one the seven rifles rose. The word "fire" was drowned out in a sudden squall of outcries from the Nupes, and then began as strange and as deadly a conflict as, perhaps, the honey-colored African moon had witnessed in a long time. The flat crackle of the rifles, the war chants of Awudu and the other black boys, Kogo's queer breathless shouts, and Parker's uninterrupted cursing formed a strange obbligato to the more terrible

noises emanating from stricken cannibals in the canoes. Six withering, devastating volleys the defenders delivered, but they barely had time to reload before the first Nupe canoes bumped alongside.

"How about it?" Parker yelled. "Look at 'em out there!"

"Go to it!" Cameron shouted, and promptly the Browning chattered, mowing down scores with its leaden hail. Encouraged by a sudden flinching on the part of the attackers, the men behind the iron bulwarks of the bow ignored a torrent of spears, rashly sprang up and commenced firing down into crowded canoes just beneath. The defenders paid promptly for their boldness; Akajai and one of the Portuguese were promptly pierced through and through by spears which came hissing up from below and Kogo was wounded.

"Down! For God's sake get down!" Cameron shouted, and his heart sank when two rifles clattered to the deck—forever useless.

Too late, the survivors obeyed and, by one of those imponderable freaks of battle, the effect of the machine gun's unexpected action was nullified by the sight of the defenders seemingly falling back behind the bulwarks.

"They die! *Ga shi! Ga shi!* They die!" howled the cannibals, whereupon canoes, which had begun to pull away, returned to the fight. Things were going badly. Of this Cameron was desperately sure. Great God! Both machine gun belts were empty, Wassermann was not dead, and the Nupes had not been driven off. A spear grazed his head as he crammed a fresh clip into the reeking breech of his Enfield.

Damn! Kogo's left arm now dangled useless and shed a cascade of blood down his white duck trousers; on the little oriental's flat features now was etched an expression of extreme despair. A row of nightmarish heads appeared over the rail and scarcely had they been driven back by the snarling rifles than more Nupes came clambering over the other rail. There were fives, tens, twenties of them—too many. It was the end this time. Gibbering faces and cruel glittering spears filled all the world.

"To the bridge!" Cameron began shouting. He'd always fought hard, so why not, until the last minute, deny Death his victory? Besides, he himself must assure Geneva's escape from the ultimate degradation Wassermann had in store for her.

In a deadly, yammering tide, the Nupes still poured over the rails, but there were only occasional shots now; rifle magazines were nearly empty. The other Portuguese was down screaming terribly because of the six-inch blade in his stomach. Awudu was fighting like a madman. Having dropped his useless rifle, he had snatched a spear from the deck and, familiar with its use from boyhood, was utilizing his enormous strength in a terrific final effort.

Before he knew it, Aidan Cameron's magazine was empty, and the bridge ladder still five yards away. A few feet to his right Parker was forming the nucleus of a knot of leaping, thrusting warriors who must now be trying to take their prisoners alive; otherwise neither Parker nor Awudu would ever have reached the bridge. As it was, they gained a respite because some curious savage wrenched open the living saloon door and for the first time beheld the glittering wonders within the *Astarte's* hull.

"A! Ga jirigin!" Child-like, the huge savages postponed their destruction of the survivors and, disdaining Wassermann's infuriated commands, commenced looting.

"Too bad we won't live—tell—papers 'bout this," Parker gasped after they had reached the bridge and were madly cramming cartridge clips into the rifle magazines. "Swell scrap—oughtta make headlines—"

"See—you can't see Wassermann. If—plug him—might stand—chance."

IT was then that occurred an incident at once absurd and tragic. Without warning, the forecastle companionway door burst open, and out on deck staggered a grotesque figure. In one hand Philip Duveen was brandishing a whisky bottle, and in the other waving a bit of what looked

like smoldering cloth. For an instant he paused, swaying in his tracks and staring stupidly at those twisted, blood oozing bodies sprawled on the foredeck of his yacht.

"Phil! Come up here! Oh, quick—quick! They'll kill you!"

The drunkard must have heard Geneva's anguished voice, for he gazed upwards, oblivious to the fact that half a dozen Nupes were bearing down on him with poised spears.

From somewhere in the gloom, Wassermann's deep voice roared. "*Na mu teffi!* Don't kill him! Take him prisoner!"

But the owner of the doomed yacht remained where he was, craning his neck up at the bridge. "You up there, Cameron?"

"Yes! Come up quick! We'll cover you."

"Come up? Hell, no! Ha! Ha! Ha! Thought you were smart — damn' smart, di'n you? Thought you'd steal my yacht and my wife, too." He shook an uncertain fist at the bridge. "Well, joke's on you—you won't get either her or the yacht. If I can't have 'em, by God you won't. Both of you goin' to die, instead— All of us goin' to die— Die! Die!"

"Fall flat!" Cameron yelled. "We'll fire—" Then he whipped up his rifle and joined in a devastating fusillade poured into the thick of the throng closing in upon Philip Duveen.

"Oh, Phil! They're stabbing Phil! Stop them!" Geneva gasped.

Ever intent on his search for Wassermann, Cameron promptly ceased firing and tried to locate the German by his voice. But it was next to impossible to judge the direction of a single voice in such a hurricane of sound as was sweeping the doomed yacht.

Of only one thing was the river trader sure, Wassermann was not aboard the *Astarte*.

"Come back, you blasted *dummkopfs*. Those people on the bridge you must kill! Come back, I tell you!"

It was then that Cameron glimpsed him, wearing a Nupe head-dress and a leopard skin *kaross*, but that blonde beard was not to be disguised.

"*Zurück kommen!* Kill those—"

The heavy Martini-Henry bullet caught Wassermann full in the face, and its terrific impact hurled him backwards out of his canoe and far out onto the troubled waters. When he sank like a stone, a dreadful wailing shout went up.

"Yellow Beard! Yellow Beard is killed!"

The outcry reached a crescendo, and the Nupes wavered; Cameron, sensing the psychological moment, groaned. Had the machine gun only been able to fire a few bursts, the attack might well have evaporated, but the deadly contrivance remained silent, a dead cannibal drooped across its action.

HAVING successfully weathered the loss of their leader, Gezo's followers returned to the attack more furiously than ever. They swarmed up the bridge ladders, they came running forward along the canvas awnings. Showers of spears sailed up, but fortunately the angle of their flight was too sharp to cause damage to those crouching low behind the steel guards. One missile, however, did put a period to Antoinette Bergère's hopes and fears, and with a puzzled sigh the Frenchwoman sank back, mercifully unaware that some six inches of razor sharp steel had transfixed her heart.

Hands began clawing out of the night, clutching, disembodied hands tipped with writhing fingers.

"Kill yourself, Geneva! Quick! They've got us!"

Gripping his Martini-Henry by its barrel, Aidan Cameron in last instinctive struggle for life, slashed furiously at those diabolical heads which kept bobbing up over the white-painted steel. Everything became a terrible, maddened blur. Swing, thrust, jab. No choice now but to blindly swing his clubbed rifle until the inevitable spear found its mark. Swing, thrust, jab.

Then, inexplicably, there were no more heads to strike at, no more clawing hands. Why? Into the scene whirling before Cam-

eron's eyes was creeping a bright glare. He blinked, dashed sweat from his eyes and stared. One of the stern awnings was flaming brightly. Then it suddenly dawned upon him that the *Astarte* was afire elsewhere—and badly! Tongues of flame were shooting out of ports amidships, and a thick column of gray smoke was crawling up out of the forecastle companion like an evil and colossal serpent.

Coughing, jabbering and bearing with them the weirdest selection of loot, the Nupes began to hurl their booty into the canoes, then returned for fresh armloads. At last they streamed back over the side, quite forgetful of their unexterminated victims on the bridge.

"Devil Duveen did—good job," Parker wheezed. "The old hooker's ablaze from stem to stern— Looks like we'll fry anyhow, but it'll be civilized fashion—ain't that a comfort?"

OF how Awudu and Parker got the yacht's motor tender overside, Dr. Aidan Cameron retained only vague impressions. Completely exhausted, he was forced to squat in whirling smoke and content himself by murmuring words of encouragement to Geneva, who seemed entirely dazed. Of their descent over the flaming side and of their departure amid the strangling but concealing smoke cloud erupting from the *Astarte,* he recalled little beyond whirling sparks and the purr of the tender's engine. Very skillfully Parker must have guided the speedy fifteen footer straight down the heart of the smoke cloud, because not a canoe was seen until a sudden burst of speed put them beyond danger of pursuit.

But of the dawn he remembered every detail. When he came to he was incredibly weak and lying on the tender's cushioned seat. Parker, his naked shoulders a mass of blisters and bruises, was at the wheel, just where he had been when Cameron had collapsed the night before. By craning his neck, the river trader could see Awudu, oblivious to a deep flesh wound in his shoulder, curled up on the floor like a huge black mastiff. Then a shadow fell across Cameron's face and he beheld, bending above him, that exquisite face which had encouraged him so often in the Valley of the Shadow.

"Ginny! You should be resting! Here, let me—"

"No, Aidan, you mustn't get up. Lie still, please, you're terribly weak."

"Hello, Doc," Parker turned a battered head. "So you're goin' to fool the crêpe hangers after all?"

"Bet your life!" Cameron managed a feeble smile.

"Well, maybe you'll be interested to know there's some kind of a power boat heading this way—"

"What color is she?" demanded the river trader, struggling up on one elbow.

"Gray. There's some kind of a flag at her stern, but I can't make her out."

"Um, gray, you say. Has she a gun mounted?"

"Looks like she's got a m.g. or a one-pounder on her bow."

"Then she's probably a French patrol boat; don't generally leave the Niger, but maybe O'Donnell tipped off the French."

"A good job she's showed up," Parker stated with a gold-toothed grin. "Our gas supply is about shot, and I'm sure craving to quit this neck o' the woods in a hurry. But, say, wasn't that scrap last night a *honey?*"

O'Donnell. The name, lingering in Cameron's mind, prompted him to gently pull Geneva down beside him.

"Well, there comes civilization again, Ginny," he murmured. "I—I've been wondering what you're going to do now that—well, so much has happened?"

"I don't know," the girl replied simply. "Father died a year ago, after he'd lost all his money. Mother, as you know, has been dead a long time. It's queer to be so alone in the world—especially for a Southern girl. So I—I don't really know what I'll do. I've got to find work of some kind, because I'll never touch a cent of—of—"

"I'd an idea you might feel that way," Cameron said. "So I've been thinking."

The lovely eyes widened a little, and into her cheeks crept a hint of color. "Thinking what, Aidan?"

"If you'll bend down I'll tell you just what I am thinking.

The gray patrol boat could be seen in detail, and the tricolor snapping at her jackstaff was clearly recognizable by the time Cameron had concluded his description of O'Donnell's offer.

"How perfectly splendid for you, Aidan. Oh, I'm *so* glad!"

"Yes, 'tis a bit of luck, since it's high up there in Sokoto—and healthy." His sunken eyes, inexpressibly hungry, sought hers. "I wondered—I was hoping, if you might consider going in for housekeeping on the South Coast of Hell?"

Her lips gave him joyful answer, but not a word was said.

THE END

The Death House

NEARLY half the States hang men or women convicted of murder. About an equal number use electrocution. The rest of the States don't execute, but imprison for life—namely, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Rhode Island and Wisconsin. Until recently Nevada was the only State using lethal gas, and so far as we know Utah is the only one where shooting is legal.

Hydrocyanic acid gas is used in Nevada—it smells a little like bitter almonds and is a quick, painless way to die. In some of the States where life imprisonment is the custom, hanging is resorted to if one lifer kills another. That's the case in Rhode Island. Where there is no such law a lifer can kill any one he chooses without further penalty except perhaps bread and water.

Hanging is supposed to be more severe than electrocution; in Kentucky, an electrocution State, men convicted of rape are hanged. Most hangings are humane, though. The rope is stretched for days with a weight equal to that of the condemned, with the result that, having no spring left, it instantly breaks his neck. Incidentally, the penalty for treason is not always death, but may be only five years' imprisonment or a $10,000 fine.

J. W. Holden.

The road from Hell to Paradise is a busy one, but it's a one-way track —unless you're a good fighter

The girl seized her two bags

The Kid from Hell

By J. E. GRINSTEAD

Author of "Ghost Town Feud," "Oklahoma Stampede," etc.

CHAPTER I.

HANDCUFFED.

THERE is no fence nor are there any markers on the line between Hell and Paradise. When a person grazes too near the line, he is likely to get over it, and that's all there is to it. Assuming peace and comfort, with a reasonable degree of what is called human happiness, to be Paradise on earth, it seems strange that men and women ever cross that line, even though it is invisible. But, doing strange things is a human frailty.

The traffic from Paradise to Hell is heavy, there are all sorts of vehicles, going at various speeds. Once, the horse predominated, but now, perhaps, the automobile takes the lead. Not that there are not plenty on foot, and even in wheel-chairs. The going is good, toward Hell, and there is not much turning out for persons coming back. So, when that hurrying mob meets a pilgrim slowly fighting his way back to Paradise, they don't give him much chance. He is making a hopeless fight, they think, so why worry about him.

Myra Blake and Dick Savage were both trying to stem that giddy flood, but on different parts of the broad trail; Myra was on a train, and Dick was, for the moment, in a pretty bad jam elsewhere.

Myra Blake had got into Hell through no fault of her own. She

"Unlock this cuff, if you want to live!"

was bred in Old Kentucky. Every fibre of her being was thoroughbred, but a thoroughbred, with no one to guide it, is a useless, and often dangerous piece of property. Myra had never been guided much. Tom Blake, her father, of the Kentucky Blakes, was thought by many to be the black sheep of a fine old family. Perhaps he was. Anyway, when the family went on the rocks, with a mountain of debts, Tom took a drink, whistled a tune, and bet his last dollar on the Derby. Not on the favorite, mind you. That was not taking a sporting chance. He bet on the underdog, a hundred-to-one shot—and won.

That was the flaming start of Tom Blake, as a turfman. He seemed unable to lose. He paid all the family debts, and left his relatives hanging onto the fringe of respectability by the shreds of genteel poverty, but owing no man. Tom's wife was also a member of a fine old family—who, unfortunately didn't go broke. She died when Myra was twelve. Her family said she died of humiliation. The doctors said, to one another, privately, that she died of eating too much, and not taking exercise.

Whatever the cause, she died, and Tom Blake went to the devil, for he loved her, as only a dead game sport can love a woman. Six years saw his fortune gone. They had been six hectic years. Years in which he kept his daughter by his side, except when she was in school. Years in which Myra learned all about horses, about gambling, and everything else that a girl should not know. Tom taught her to ride. He even put her up in a few private races, where he bet heavily on his own horse, and lost.

There came a day when Tom Blake, none too sober, mounted a colt that was not bridlewise. The colt reared and fell back. Tom's stable men carried him to the big house among the

poplars. The doctor told him that he had perhaps two hours to live. He sent for his lawyer, and made over everything on earth that he possessed to his creditors.

"But, my dear man," said the lawyer, "you are overlooking your daughter. You should make provisions—"

"No, I'm not overlooking her," said Tom Blake, weakly. "She is my daughter, and knows that spending money that belongs to somebody else is worse than stealing it, because it was got by their confidence. She has an even break with the rest of the world, and that is all that a Blake should ask."

An hour later, Tom Blake was dead. After he was buried, Myra waited a month there in the big house that she knew didn't belong to her, with her old black mammy. Neither Blake's people, in their respectable poverty, nor her mother's people, in their more or less respectable wealth, asked her to come to them. She knew the reason. She was Tom Blake's daughter. It was time for her to place her bet. She had a little money of her own, that had been in her purse when her world fell apart. True to her heritage, she was going to bet it on a long shot—Uncle Tony.

Mr. Anthony Blake was the baby son of Myra's grandfather Blake, and about the age of her own father. He had made a double play, in his youth, by going to the devil and going west at the same time. Myra had seen him but once. He had come back to the old home on a visit. He was a lean, tanned man, with a permanent squint in his eyes. She remembered seeing him bet a thousand dollars on a horse race, and lose. He had squinted his eyes a little more, bet another thousand on the next race, and won. Then he had put the money in his pocket, and said to her father:

"Tom, this game is too fast for me. I've got a weak heart."

MYRA didn't know Tony Blake's post office address, and she would not have written to him if she had. She was afraid he might tell her not to come. All she knew was that her father had once shipped two colts to Tony Blake, at Pink Hill. So, she packed a couple of bags, in one of which was a riding suit, and started to Pink Hill. Thanks to those six years on the racing circuit, Myra knew her way about. At Louisville she called for a ticket to Pink Hill. The agent spent ten minutes trying to locate the station. Then he said:

"Pink Hill is not on our road. I can sell you a ticket to Stroman. There is a branch line of some other road, from Stroman to Pink Hill. I don't know how far it is. The fare to Stroman is seventy-three eighty."

Without a word, Myra shoved some bills through the window, took the ticket and one twenty in change, and went to the train. She had placed her bet, and was going to back it.

A man doesn't need as much background as a woman does. Dick Savage's background was about the size of a postage stamp. He had been born of aristocratic parents, in the Delta country of Mississippi. In an unguarded moment his parents had christened him Sebastian Savage.

When the boy was ten he discovered that all the mules in Mississippi were named Sebastian and called "Sebe." He backed into a corner and swore he would kill anybody that ever called him anything but "Dick" from that time on. His parents died before he was twelve, and he went to live with

an uncle, who "had no patience with him." At eighteen Dick had shot one man, crippled the constable who came to arrest him, and left for Texas. He made a little ripple, and the waves of oblivion closed over his memory.

"He had two good traits," said the uncle. "He was honest, and he would not lie, no matter what else he might do."

THE long train storming westward across the desert could be seen farther than it could be heard, and looked like a bobtailed snake slipping through the sage. At a window of one Pullman a girl had been sitting for three days. Her brown eyes, with tiny gold flecks in them, were already beginning to narrow and squint from looking at the desert, and she could feel the fine, powdery dust in her coppery brown hair. After breakfast that morning the conductor had told her that they would reach Stroman before noon. So, she had taken her bag to the dressing room. When she came out again, she wore riding clothes, boots, and a smart Stetson. She went back to her seat, and went on staring at the desert.

"Stro-o-o-man!" called the brakeman. "Stroman, next stop."

Myra Blake didn't move. She was looking out the window for Stroman when the porter said:

"You'll have to hurry, miss. We just stops and stahts at this tank. Old Number Nine is fo' minutes late, and we starts climbin' them old mountains pretty soon."

A minute later Myra was standing in the sandy desert with her two suitcases, while the long train whipped by her. There was no town there. She turned and entered a little, sand-whipped station.

"One ticket to Pink Hill," she said at the window. Myra had no idea that the clothes she wore would attract more attention in that wild country than they would on the streets of a city. She brought the ticket agent out of his trance of staring with, "When does the next train leave?"

"Right now," said a burly conductor, who was standing with his orders in his hand. "We are waiting for you. This way, please."

The conductor picked up the two bags and led Myra through to the other side of the little station. A long string of empty cattle-cars stood on the track, with an engine puffing at the other end of it. One dinky coach, that appeared to have been hooked on at the rear as an afterthought, stood opposite the station. The conductor helped Myra up the rear steps, and set her bags on the platform. Then he disappeared. She entered that rear door, and then stopped—for excellent reasons.

There were two men in every seat in that car, except those that held three men. Full length of the aisle blanket-rolls lay on the floor. On each roll sat an Indian squaw, while little Indians swarmed about them. Two men sat in a rear seat, to Myra's left. The one next the aisle was a middle-aged man, with graying hair, and cold, unflinching gray eyes. He rose, stepped into the aisle, pointed to the seat he had just left, and said:

"Better sit down before this thing starts, or it'll throw you clean out the back door. I'll bring yo' grips in."

MYRA thanked him, and sidled into the seat, just as the train started with a rattling jerk and she sat down, fortunately without dislocating her spine. The gray-haired

man sat down on the arm of the opposite seat, and frankly stared at her. She didn't like that, so she turned toward the man in the seat with her, who had shrunk as far toward the window as he could.

He was a younger man, and not hard to look at. He had light brown hair, big blue eyes, when they were not squinted, a wide, generous mouth, was clean-shaved and wholesome to look at, which was more than could be said for most of the other men in the car. He wore the usual woolen overshirt, and his trousers were stuffed into the tops of fine, shop-made boots. The tag of a tobacco bag hung out of the pocket of his loose leather jacket.

Myra looked at him quite frankly. There was nothing but respect in his eyes. His coat lay over his left arm, completely hiding his left hand. She wondered if his hand was wounded. The coat began to slip down from the jarring of the car. The young man reached across with his right hand, and pulled it back in place, then held it there. It did not occur to Myra that she was on the way from Hell to Paradise. In fact, if she had been asked about it, she would have said that she had just about reached Hell, and was still going down. This was out West, where people talked to strangers. There were a lot of things that she wanted to know, so she said:

"Do you know any one in Pink Hill?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied the cowboy. "Know all of 'em, I reck'n. Ain't more than two hundred regular people there, besides the drifters."

"Do you know a man named Blake?"

"No'm. They used to be a Blake had a ranch out west of Pink Hill a ways, but—"

"Tony Blake?" asked Myra.

"Yes'm."

"Where—where did he go?"

"Why, he went into a gunfight, and come out dead," said the cowboy, unsuspecting that he was being brutally frank.

"Dead!" The word came from Myra's lips as if all the breath in her body were pushing it. "How long—when—when did it happen?"

"Why, about two year ago, ma'am. He—he weren't a special friend of yo'n, was he?"

"He was my uncle," said Myra, in a low, tremulous tone.

"I'm shore sorry, miss, that I didn't know that," said the cowboy. "I—I wouldn't said it that way."

"It would have been just as bad, no matter how you said it," replied Myra. "Did—did he have a family?"

"No, ma'am, he didn't. He was an old bachelor."

"What became of the ranch?"

"It's there yet," said the cowboy.

"I know, but who owns it?"

"Feller named Joe Venner. Seems that Tony Blake was about broke, and Joe he taken the ranch over after Tony died thataway."

Myra had lost her bet. She was making a rapid inventory of her effects, and didn't speak for a few minutes. She was clear out on the edge of the world, with no one to go to, and just twenty dollars left. Suddenly she turned to the young man and said:

"I have always heard that the men in the West were square-shooters. I know you are one. I can read it in your eyes. I—I'm in trouble, and I want—"

"Just a minute, lady," said the cowboy. "I may not be a plumb square-shooter, but I'm too square to mislead a woman." He pulled the coat away

with his right hand, and she saw that the left hand was handcuffed to the iron frame of the seat. "The sheriff left my right hand loose, so I could smoke."

THERE was horror in Myra's eyes for a moment. It was just a moment, and then she said:

"That doesn't make you guilty of a crime."

"No, ma'am, it don't, but it makes it pretty shore that I'm goin' to get railroaded for a crime that somebody else done. I'm charged with stealing cows, and they got plenty of good witnesses, who will swear to anything on earth, to protect the man that did steal 'em—if any was stole."

Myra glanced around at the sheriff. He was leaning forward, listening, but the rattling train kept him from catching what was being said.

"Is there any chance for a girl to get a job in Pink Hill?" asked Myra.

"Nowhere but at the dance hall, and—and you ain't—ain't that kind of a girl."

"But I've got to do something," said Myra.

"Couldn't you go back to your people?"

"No," said Myra. "I have no people." She knew she had kinfolks, but she refused to call them her people.

The train whistled for a little station and stopped. The sheriff got off to talk to some men. The cowboy dropped his voice and said:

"Listen, lady. I'm Dick Savage. I'm a cowboy, and I have done plenty of rough stuff, but I never stole anything in my life, and I never mistreated a woman. If I was free from this seat, I could take you to a place where you would be safe and all right until you can decide what to do, if—"

"If what?" asked Myra.

"If you would trust me to do it."

"I would," said Myra, frankly. "I don't believe you are guilty of any crime, or would commit one."

"Thank you, miss—"

"Just call me Myra. There is no reason why anybody should stand on ceremony with me. I've reached the bottom of the ladder."

"Then maybe you would just call me Dick. I'm pretty well down the slope myself. Looks to me like you and me both are just about in Hell, and what we do can't hurt much. I've got an idea. It may not work, but we'll be no worse off if it don't."

The sheriff came in a few minutes later, and saw his prisoner with his head pretty close to the young lady. Dick straightened up, and he and the girl talked very little for the next ten miles. The next stop was at Pink Hill. Dick Savage had left his horse in the livery stable at Pink Hill, and gone on a railroad trip to a larger town. The sheriff had followed him and taken him unawares. He would never have jumped Dick in the open. The county seat was thirty miles beyond Pink Hill, and the sheriff was taking Dick there to put him in jail. As the train slowed for Pink Hill, Myra rose and stepped into the aisle. The sheriff slipped past her to take the seat by the side of his prisoner. He felt a little tug at his holster, looked down, and his gun was gone. He looked toward Dick Savage, and that gun was in Dick's hand, as Dick said:

"Unlock this cuff from my wrist, if you want to live over ten seconds."

The sheriff knew the real thing when he saw it. He got the cuff unlocked, with a second or two to spare.

"Back into the aisle," snapped Dick. The sheriff obeyed. Dick slipped out

of the seat. "Sit down there, and put that cuff on your wrist. That's it. Now push it until it clicks. If you yell before I get off, I'll drill you, and I'm not going to get off until the train starts."

Myra had taken her two bags and was off the train. Dick had taken the belt and holster from the sheriff's waist, and coolly buckled it about his own. In fact, it was his own gun. The sheriff had put his gun in a handbag, and was wearing Dick's. As the train lurched for a start, Dick Savage sprang out the back door. Yelling and cursing, the sheriff looked out the window as the train got under way, and saw Dick and Myra crossing to the livery stable. They were on their way from Hell to Paradise. The sheriff could do nothing but rave and curse, for Dick had the key to the handcuffs.

CHAPTER II.

THE FLIGHT FROM HELL.

"WE ain't got time to stop here long," said Dick, "and we can't take these bags with us. We got to run out of this mess."

Within five minutes, Dick had saddled his own horse, and had bought a horse for Myra. He borrowed a saddle from the livery man for Myra, and they mounted and headed out of town. But the train had stopped and was backing up. The sheriff was not letting his prisoner get away so easily as that. A heavy hammer had smashed the cast-iron arm of the seat, and he was free, with a handcuff dangling at his left wrist.

As the train stopped at the station, the sheriff, now a raving madman, was the first man to spring to the ground. Dick and Myra could hear him cursing. Myra had heard men curse before, and Dick Savage only chuckled, as they sped away along the trail. Shoving Dick Savage into that desert was about like throwing a rabbit into a briar patch. No man living, not even the Indians, knew that desert better than he.

Sheriff Bill Deaver was in a bit of a jam himself. There was more to this than merely letting a prisoner get away. Bill knew that Dick Savage was no more guilty of stealing cattle than he was. He had laid a trap and caught Dick, because he had been told to do it, and told by a man who could give him orders, and make him like it. Bill was serving his first term. He would need all the votes he could get to be reëlected in the fall, and it was now April.

MYRA BLAKE

Joe Venner, of the Flying V, the old Blake Ranch, had told Bill to take Dick Savage, regardless. Bill didn't know why Joe Venner wanted Dick out of the way, and he didn't care. What he wanted was to stand in with Joe. The sheriff was afraid of Dick Savage, for he was known to be the

coolest and quickest gun-slinger in all that country, although he never started a quarrel with any one. Joe Venner must know something pretty bad on Dick, or he wouldn't be riding him like that. Anyway, Dick had to be retaken, and with him that girl who had so coolly and quietly snatched the sheriff's gun from its holster and passed it to Dick like a flash of light.

Bill Deaver came out of that dinky little coach a howling maniac of rage. He had got his gun out of the handbag and buckled it on, with that accursed handcuff dangling at his arm. He knew that he could get a posse of as tough gunners as the world knew, right there in Pink Hill. Men who had committed every crime in the books, and would be delighted to run with the hounds once in their lives. A string of horses stood in front of the Burnt Brand Saloon. Bill Deaver tore across to that pleasant place, and as he stormed into it Gee Nolen, the barkeep, greeted him with:

"Hi'ya, sheriff! Where'd you get the jewelry? What'll it be this time?"

"None of yo' damn business about the jewelry," snapped Bill Deaver. "I don't want anything to drink, but it will be— A lot of home-made hell, if a gang of you gunners don't go with me to take Dick Savage."

"Shore we'll go," chorused a dozen men. "Where is he at?"

"Out on the trail, and heading west," said Deaver. "Come on."

"You can take my bronc, Bill," said a leathery old puncher who was leaning against the bar. "I ain't been right well for a few days."

A MINUTE later Sheriff Bill Deaver and his posse were on the trail.

"Say you ain't been right well?" grinned Gee Nolen to the old puncher, who was calmly pouring a drink. "What's the trouble?"

"Got a little spell of the won'ts," growled the puncher, who was called Texas. "I know Dick Savage pretty well, and I've seen men that I wanted to take worse than I do him."

"What you reck'n Bill wants Dick for?" asked Nolen.

"Search me," said Tex. "Looks like Bill must have had him and let him get away. He had a handcuff on one arm. If Bill was dang fool enough to handcuff hisself to Dick Savage, anything could happen. I'd as soon be handcuffed to a he tiger. Dick is more than a gun-slinger. He can whip a bear with his fists. He—"

Tex stopped, as Bud Long, the livery man, came in, rubbing his hands in glee and grinning.

"Hi'ya, fellers," he greeted. "Looks like we are going to see some fun in and about old Pink Hill."

"Shore does," said Nolen. "What happened?"

"Dam'fino. Just as the train pulls out, Dick Savage and a girl comes tearing across to the stable. Dick yells for his mount, and buys the best horse I got for the girl. Next minute they was mounted and gone. Then the train backs in, and Bill Deaver comes out of it cussin' like a drunk sailor. He's wearin' a handcuff on his left arm, and—"

"Yes, we seen him, but who was the girl?"

"Dam'fino. I know all the girls at the dance hall, and she weren't one of them. She forks that old sun-fisher, and when he goes into the air she barbecues one ham with the quirt and half guts him with her spurs. When she sets him down he goes from there like a bob-cat was ridin' him."

"Huh," grunted Tex, as he poured another drink. "With a partner like that, Dick Savage is apt to be right nice company for them fellers when they catch up with him."

DICK and Myra were spurring away, on their trip from Hell to Paradise. They had met the throng that was going the other way, and instead of merely refusing to give them a bit of the road, that throng was bent on turning them back. On a little rise a mile from Pink Hill, Dick Savage looked back. He saw the sheriff and his posse start on his trail. A mile was a good start, but it all depended on the horses. He had no doubt the old rawboned sun-fisher that he rode—they didn't grow any better. But what about the horse that Myra rode? Could it stand the gaff for twenty miles? It was that far to any sort of chance to dodge that gang of killers.

Dick knew what sort of posse the sheriff would pick up in Pink Hill. Just a bunch of men who were on the dodge for one crime or another. Killers all, and men who would be glad to kill in the name of the law just for the novelty of the thing. If he had been alone, he would not have run at all, but this girl had set him free, after he had said that if he were free he could find a place where she would be safe until she could decide what to do. Dick Savage was wild as a wolf, but his word was good to any man, and to a woman it was doubly good. Now, he had to make good his promise to her, or die in the attempt. She was a queer specimen. He had never seen a woman like her.

"Hold your horse in a little, Myra," he said, as impersonally as if he had been speaking to a boy who was trying to learn to wrangle horses. "Let's don't get all they got in the first few miles. They are on our trail, and there's twenty miles of open desert before we have a chance to dodge 'em."

Myra looked back. Her eyes were unaccustomed to the glare of the desert, but at last she picked up that group of specks bobbing along the trail. Then she looked at Dick Savage. She had never seen a man just like him, either. His generous mouth was drawn in a hard line across his face, and his narrowed blue eyes were almost black.

Not another word was spoken for miles, as they sped on along the trail. Dick was setting a pace that he thought the horses could stand, and Myra was keeping it. They were fifteen miles from Pink Hill, and five miles from a possible place to hide and throw their pursuers off the track. The sun was far over to the west now, and striking fair in their faces. Dick was thinking that if it came to a showdown, the light would be to his back, and in the faces of his enemies. At the thought, he pulled the carbine from his saddle scabbard without breaking his speed, worked the mechanism, threw a cartridge into the firing chamber, and pushed the gun back into the scabbard.

They topped a sharp rise and looked back. Their pursuers had gained to within half a mile of them. Dick's face set hard, as he said:

"As soon as we get on level ground again we've got to take all these horses can give us. That gang of killers are riding real horses. If we can make it three miles farther, there's a place where we'll have a chance."

AS they galloped down the sharp slope ahead of them, Dick noticed something. Myra's horse was favoring its left foreleg. He cursed Bud Long under his breath for

a thief who had sold him a horse that had sweeny in its left shoulder. That horse was going to pieces, and it showed on him as he plunged down the slope. It would never go much farther at that speed. They reached the level, but the horse didn't pick up.

"Give him the spurs," called Dick. "It may kill him, but it had better be him than us. We'll never make it to the edge of the roughs, but there's a deep wash a mile farther on."

Dick brought his quirt down across the haunches of the crippled horse. It gave a little burst of speed, then lagged again.

"It can't go," said Myra. "Your horse is all right. You can get away. They won't bother me. I haven't done anything."

"No?" smiled Dick Savage. "The people out in this country have funny ideas. When somebody takes the sheriff's gun away from him and turns his prisoner loose, they think he has either done something, or is fixin' to do something. If Bill Deaver gets his hands on you he'll charge you with murder."

"Yes, but you. What will he do to you? I got you into this trouble. Please leave me, and make your escape."

"Sorry, lady," said Dick, "but I ain't built that way. When we get to that draw, spur that dead bronc down into it, and stay there."

Only a quarter of a mile separated them from the enemy now. They could hear Bill Deaver wildly shouting the men on. He had discovered that one of their horses had gone lame. A scant two hundred yards were between them when Myra spurred her lame horse down the steep bank into the deep wash. She had not thought just what was going to happen then, but she soon found out.

Up on the bank she heard the sharp bark of Dick's carbine, followed by a rapid stream of shots. She could see him, sitting as calmly in his saddle as if there were no one in sight. She could also hear something else. It was the shrill whine of bullets passing over her head, as Deaver and his killers opened on Dick. But Dick had checked them well out of six-shooter range, and was keeping them there. Presently, Dick jumped his horse down the bank, and ran back to the top of it. Myra could hear the thunder of hoofs out there on the hard ground. With his body under the bank, Dick's gun was going again. Then the thunder of hoofs died out in the distance. Dick raised up and looked out onto the desert.

"A lot of them gents are riding double," he said, "but they went off and left one good horse. Wonder if it's crippled."

Dick mounted and rode up out of the wash. Deaver and his men had pulled up three hundred yards away. Dick rode toward that horse, which was standing a hundred yards from the gulch, between him and the enemy. He wanted that horse, if it was sound. He was not going to steal it, but simply borrow it. Wild with rage, Bill Deaver, whose horse was so far untouched, drove in his spurs and started back.

"Here's where it happens," Dick grinned to himself. "Bill is asking for it, and he gets it."

DICK'S carbine snapped to his shoulder and he fired when the sheriff was more than a hundred yards away. Deaver's horse stumble a few steps and went down, spilling the sheriff on his face. Dick caught the wandering horse, which had not been

touched, and turned coolly back toward the wash. When he had it safe down the bank, he looked back out on the plain.

Bill Deaver had got to his feet, and was making his way back to the posse, groggily. Dick calmly counted the men. He was sure he had hit some of them, but none were down. He knew there had been thirteen in the mob, and he wondered if Bill Deaver had counted them before he started. Five horses lay dead out there in the desert, and he had one in the gulch. Of the seven that stood in a close group, five had two riders, and a sixth one would have as soon as Bill Deaver reached them. They couldn't make much speed that way. Dick didn't know what Deaver and his killers would do. He didn't care. He dismounted, changed Myra's saddle to the borrowed horse, and helped her to the saddle.

"Now," he said, "we are going out of here, and I don't think those fellows will follow us. If they do—"

Bill Deaver had reached his men, and stood cursing in impotent rage, while he wiped the blood from a skinned face and watched Dick Savage and the girl ride out of the gulch and take the trail at a leisurely gait.

"Dick," said Myra, "did—did you kill any of those men?"

"No," replied Dick, "but I did something pretty mean. I killed their horses, and one good horse is worth more than that whole pack of coyotes."

"Why—why didn't you kill any of the men?"

"Well," drawled Dick, "I ain't a killer, and besides that—I—I don't know. I just don't feel on the kill today."

Myra shot him an odd glance, and they rode. The sun went down, and the purple stillness of a desert night was upon them. Myra looked up at the stars, and it seemed that she could almost reach them. There was something about it all that held her speechless. She tried to think of what she had done. Tried to imagine what would be the outcome of this wild adventure. What Dick had said about the sheriff wanting her had made her understand that she was a wanted woman, riding with a wanted man—to where? She didn't try to answer the question. She had placed a bet on Tony Blake, and lost. Like old Tony at the race track, she had simply placed another bet on Dick Savage, and was

DICK SAVAGE

going to back it. She started violently when Dick said:

"Can you hold out another mile?"

"Yes," she replied. "I—I have to hold out, don't I?"

Dick didn't answer. There was no answer to that question. It was proof that the one asking it was not a quitter, and that was the main thing. A mile farther on they rode down a little slope and stopped in the edge of a water hole. The thirsty horses plunged their

muzzles into the water almost to their eyes. Dick and Myra were not thirsty. They each had a canteen, and had taken a drink since nightfall.

MYRA was looking at the reflection of the lowhung stars in the smooth, still water, when Dick said:

"We can stay here only long enough for the horses to drink. They have to have rest pretty soon, but—"

"Then why not let them rest here?" asked Myra, who was aching in every muscle by this time.

"Because I don't want to kill Bill Deaver," said Dick, slowly. "He don't need killin', yet, but—"

"What do you people out here mean when you say a man needs killing?" Myra asked.

"Oh, when he's bad."

"But that sheriff shot at you, and—"

"Yes, and I shot at him some, but that was a fight. Fellers that needs killin' are them that takes advantage, and kills a man cold, shoots him in the back or the like. Don't give the other man a chance. Them, and men that mistreats womenfolks. Bill ain't like that. He's a pretty good man. He'd make a good sheriff, if he didn't let somebody say gee and haw to him. He won't quit. He'll take one of the horses, and follow us, and he knows we'll stop at this water hole. If you can stand it just a little farther, I know a place where he can't find us, and can't capture us if he does. Can you make it a little farther?"

"I have to make it, if you say so," said Myra.

That was all. They pulled their horses away from the water, and rode on into the foothills. An hour later Dick led the way down a steep trail into a tiny, gorge-like valley. A little brook, fed by a spring, tinkled over the rocks. They dismounted. Dick unsaddled the two horses and lariated them on lush grass. He threw the saddles down near the spring. They drank, washed their dusty faces, and then Myra said:

"Don't you ever get hungry out in this wild country?"

"Sometimes," replied Dick, "but I et this morning."

"So did I," laughed Myra, "but I'm starving now."

Dick gathered up some dry sticks and made a little fire on the rocks. Myra sat on a great, flat stone, silently watching him. When the fire was going, Dick took a tin cup from one of his saddle-pockets and a package from another. He dipped up water in the cup, put coffee into it, and set it in the edge of the fire. Then he opened the package and said:

"Some folks don't think sardines are fitten to eat, but they go farther for their size than any fish in the world." He took a flat rock, dusted it off, covered it with crackers and propped it at an angle before the fire. A few minutes later he handed Myra a toasted cracker covered with sardines, and a cup of the best coffee that she had ever tasted. It tasted good, because for the first time in her life Myra had gone without food until anything would taste good.

"Why don't you eat?" she asked.

"Oh, I ain't much hungry."

"You are leaving it for me, and I won't eat unless you do," said Myra as she picked up a cracker, spread it with sardines and passed it to him. Dick took it and ate in silence. A moment later, with her mouth full of sardine and cracker, Myra said: "This coffee is good. Drink some of it."

"You drink that cup, and I'll make me another one," said Dick. "Half a cup of coffee wouldn't do you any good."

"Well, I'll drink half of yours, when you get it made, and then we'll have a full cup apiece. It looks as if we—we're partners on the trail from Hell to Paradise, and ought to share whatever we have."

Dick picked up the cup and drank. He didn't mean to drink half of her coffee, but he would at least show her that he meant to be friendly. Such was the first camp they made on that doubtful trail that leads from Hell to Paradise—if a fellow can only make the steep grades on it.

CHAPTER III.

STARS FOR WITNESSES.

THEY finished their frugal meal in silence. Dick made the other cup of coffee, and yet others. When the supper was finished he said:

"If you think you can sleep some, I'll spread the saddle blankets for you. I'll have to stay awake and watch."

"No," said Myra. "I—I don't think I could sleep. Anyway, I want to help you watch."

A silence followed, while Dick Savage smoked one cigarette after another, and Myra simply sat, thinking, thinking. What was this going to mean in her life? She had run away from what she thought was unbearable. What she had classed as simply hell on earth. No friends, no money, relatives who refused to own kinship with her in her hour of grief and need. But had she bettered her condition? She told herself that she hoped so. This great out-of-doors seemed to be clean, at least. Those beautiful stars up there were cold and distant, but no more cold and distant than her kinsmen, and those who should have been her friends, had been to her after her father's death. She had placed a bet on this strange man whom she had found in irons. She had watched him furtively. Not once had he looked at her as a man looks at a woman. His treatment of her, and his tone when he spoke to her, had shown only the deference of a born gentleman to a woman, or of an older person to a child. She was looking at him when he turned to her and said:

"I reck'n you wonder why I don't take you on to the place that I promised to take you."

"I have had so many things to wonder about," said Myra, "that I have been unable to dwell long on one thought. Why don't you?"

"Two reasons," said Dick Savage. "One is that it is ten mile farther, and I didn't think either you or the horses could make it without a rest. The other is that Bill Deaver will go there to look for us, and as I said, I don't believe I want to kill Bill Deaver."

"I don't think you want to kill any one," said Myra. "Did you ever kill a man?"

"Yes, I—I reck'n I have, in fights. I never killed a man that didn't have a gun in his hand, and was aiming to kill me. Then, there was so much smoking going on that nobody ever knew who done the killing. You see, when a man has a reputation of being pretty sudden with his gun, he gets let alone a whole lot out in this country. If they decide they want him took, they gang on him, like Bill Deaver and them did today."

"I—I don't think I can understand the strange ways of this country," said Myra, "but I suppose I'll learn."

"You will if you stay here," said Dick. "It's a queer country. You get so after a while that you don't notice the strange silence of it all. Gets so the country talks to you. I reck'n you wouldn't understand what I mean, but—"

"Yes," said Myra, "I think I do understand that. I have already noticed it. What does this country say to you?"

"I don't know if I can tell you," said Dick, slowly. "I don't speak just the same language that you do, and then when a fellow has been out here in the desert for a long time he gets to thinking crooked — or maybe straight—sometimes I wonder which it is.

"He gets so he finds out his size, and when he sees how little he is, he wonders if he isn't just plumb lost. Then if he ain't got nobody on earth that cares anything about him, he just —wonders if it makes any difference."

"You have those who care something about you, haven't you?" asked Myra.

"Well, that depends. If you mean a boss that knows I'm a good hand, and will stand hitched in a gunfight with rustlers, and would sorty hate to see me killed, like he'd hate to see a good horse go in a dog-hole and break its leg, I've got that. But—I don't know what it would be like to have—anybody that cared what went with me any other way. I can remember my parents. They were good to me, and spoiled me. Then they died, and nobody else wanted me. I reck'n I got bitter. Maybe you don't even know what it means to have nobody want you about."

"Yes," said Myra, with a tremulous note in her voice, "I know." Then she told him a little of her life, and how she came to hunt for her Uncle Tony.

"It took a lot of nerve to do that," said Dick. "More nerve than most men have, not to mention women."

"I don't think it was nerve," said Myra, "it was— I guess it was just getting to the jumping off place with me, and I had nowhere else to jump."

DICK rolled another smoke, and after another long silence he said:

"I reck'n I spoke too rough back there on that train when I said it looked to me like we was both just about in Hell, and we couldn't be much worse off, no matter what happened, but—it looked that way."

"Yes," said Myra, "it did, and I have heard rougher things said than that. It was at least true."

"Do you reck'n," said Dick, musingly, "that a feller that was in Hell, figurative like, could fight his way back to Paradise, also figurative like?"

"I don't know," said Myra. "It is so much easier to go down than it is to go up. And then, there would be no one else going the way he was going, and the crowd wouldn't give him the road. I have been going down the hill ever since I left Kentucky, and when you told me that the only job I could get would be in a dance hall, I thought I had reached Hell, but—you came along, and gave me a hand, and —I haven't gone there yet."

"That's what I was trying to say," said Dick. "One feller couldn't make the trip by himself, but if he had a hand at the rough places, he might make it. Lots of times, when I have been alone out under these old stars, I have wanted to go back. I have thought of what it would mean to be a human, and live like one. Sometimes

I'd swear I would do it, whether anybody cared or not. Then, maybe the next day, I'd think, oh, nobody cares a damn, and I'd go on like I was—or maybe a lot worse."

"I'd like to be your friend," said Myra, "just to pay back what you did for me when you took me away from Pink Hill."

"I'd admire to have a friend like you," said Dick, "but I didn't do anything for you. It was you that done something for me. You kept me right out of the middle of Hell, for I was thinking when you sat down in that seat by the side of me, that I would kill Bill Deaver, or make him kill me, before we got to Pink Hill."

"And you don't know what I was thinking, after you told me that my uncle was dead, and the only job in Pink Hill was a dance hall job. There is more than one road to Hell."

"Lady," said Dick, "queer things happen on this old trail of life. Maybe we both poked out a hand, just when the other was about to fall. A hundred times, out under these old stars alone, I have told myself that I was going back to the life of a human, and then the next day I would stumble. I'd—I'd like to make a—sorty trade with you, out here with the stars for witnesses. Seems to me if a fellow knew them old stars was shaming him if he broke the deal, he couldn't hardly stand it. Anyway, he couldn't break his word."

"It does look that way," said Myra. "What is the trade you want to make?"

"Well, according to what you say, we was both pretty close to Hell when we meets in that little old coach. We turned around, and made a run for Paradise. We ain't got far. Only to a little water hole, out here in the foothills, but it's a start. Trade I want to make is an agreement to keep plugging back on the trail, and give one another a hand when we have a chance. We may not see each other for a long time, after I get you to the place I aim to take you, but I'll agree to come any time you yell for help."

"And I'll agree to that, with those sober old stars for witnesses," said Myra.

DICK SAVAGE reached out and clasped her hand, and she returned the pressure. What that bargain, sealed by a handclasp under the stars might mean to them, no one could tell. The next moment Myra said:

"Dick, are you always serious like this?"

"Yes," said Dick, "I think I am, but it doesn't always show through."

"Show through what?"

"The cloak of a fool, I reck'n you'd call it," said Dick. "Most folks in this world don't like serious people. I found that out pretty early in the game. So I tried to make folks like me by being a clown, and I got so in the habit of it that I can't help it sometimes. If I ever turn fool when you are about, don't blame me. I'll be serious back of the false face."

Dick rose from the rock where he was sitting, and spread the saddle blankets on a smooth place.

"You are going to lie down now, and rest, whether you sleep or not," he said. "That's the first time I'm giving you a hand on the rough trail since we made our deal. There's just one way to get into this place, and that is where we came down the hill. I'm going to watch that passage. It's about ten mile to the place I'm taking you, and we'll ride before daylight. You'll

be all right here, but remember that I said I would always come if you'd yell for help."

Dick Savage walked away to the narrow pass into that valley, which was only a stone's throw from the camp.

Myra lay down on the blankets and looked up at the stars. She meant to wonder what manner of man this strange cowboy was, but only got started when she fell asleep.

"TIME to ride," said a low voice at her side, a minute after she fell asleep. That is, it seemed a minute to Myra. She had slept four hours. She sat up on the blankets and rubbed the sleep out of her eyes, then moved over and sat down on the big flat rock while Dick Savage saddled the horses.

"I reck'n I ought to have told you last night where I aim to take you," said Dick, "instead of telling you the things that I did tell you, but—"

"No," said Myra. "What you told me was more important than anything else you could have told me. I—I would like to know, though, where I am going."

"I'm goin' to take you to a sort of half-nester ranch, owned by Poke Wood and his wife, Deesy. They are ignorant, but they are real people. Square-shooters, folks that God made. You'll be safe with them until you decide what to do."

"Dick, you—you won't stumble again, will you?" asked Myra.

"I may," said Dick. "I thought of a lot of things while you was asleep. If I do stumble, I'll—reach for your hand. If I don't find it, I—I'll stumble on, I reck'n."

"You'll find it," said Myra, "if—if I'm not dead."

They mounted and Dick led the way out of the little valley. On they rode through the darkness. At last the stars began to fade, and the east turned from pale gray to pink.

Dick pulled up, and Myra stopped by his side.

"I guess we won't have much more chance to talk," said Dick, "and they's a few things that I want to tell you. I reck'n you know I'm a wanted man, and can't stay in this part of the country right now. It's bad enough to be wanted by the sheriff, but I'm wanted by somebody else, and don't know just who it is, or why. Main thing I want to tell you is this: Don't tell anybody your real name. Keep the Myra part of it. I like that name. But change the Blake to something else. Poke and Deesy will take you on my word. You don't have to tell them anything."

"You— You are going away, and leave me there? How long will it be before you come back?"

"I can't tell," said Dick, "but I'll be back, if—if I am alive and able to ride."

The sound of roosters crowing and a dog barking came to them faintly.

"That—that sounds like home," said Myra.

"It is your home, for a while," said Dick. "It is only half a mile to the house. Bill Deaver may be watching the house. We'll know pretty soon. Let's ride."

They rode on down the little valley and came to a homy looking place in a fold of the hills. There was a freshly plowed field, a modest house, barns and pens, all of humble construction but substantial Myra did not know what their danger was, but Dick was constantly on the alert for Bill Deaver. There was no doubt that the sheriff would come to that place. It was just

a question of which had arrived there first. Poke Wood was out at the pens.

"HI'YA, Dick," greeted Poke. "Good morning, sir—miss, I mean."

"Howdy, Poke," said Dick. "This is Miss Myra Bradley. We been riding some, and would like to eat."

"Shore," said Poke. "Git down and come on into the house."

They dismounted, and Dick said to Poke in a low tone:

"Get these horses into a stable where they can't be seen. Bill Deaver is on my trail."

"All right, Dick," said Wood. "You and the lady go on into the house. You'll find Deesy in the kitchen."

They found Deesy with both hands in the biscuit dough, and flour on her nose.

"Well, for the land of love!" she cried. "Why, Dick Savage, I ain't saw you for two year, and now you got a—"

"Friend," interrupted Dick. "This is Miss Myra Bradley, Deesy. She's had some trouble, and needs a place to stay and rest. I want you and Poke to board her for a while."

"Board her," said Deesy. "If she's a friend of yo'n, I reck'n Poke Wood ain't apt to call it boardin'. It'll be visitin'. Go in and find chairs. Poke will be in pretty soon. I'll have breakfast ready in a little while."

Poke came in. They ate breakfast. Not a question was asked by either the ranchman or his wife. They knew that Dick would tell what he wanted to tell, when he was ready, and beyond that they had no curiosity. After breakfast, Dick and Poke went out to the pens.

"Let's get up on this little rise," said Dick, "so we can see the trail. I look for Bill Deaver to be along pretty soon."

"Then why don't you ride?" asked Poke.

"My horse is tired, and needs feed," said Dick. "I want to talk to you some before I go, and besides that, I got to face Bill Deaver sooner or later, and I'd like to have it over with."

"Dick," said Wood, "I—I ain't what you'd call a plumb bosom friend of Bill Deaver, but I'd hate for the sheriff to be kilt at my place. You know I don't want trouble."

"I don't aim to kill him," said Dick. "I just want to talk to him some, but right now I want to talk to you. Can you remember five years back?"

"Shore can," said Poke.

"Do you remember one day when Tony Blake and another fellow stood back to back, with their guns ready, and defied the whole damn world to touch you?"

"I'll never forgit it," said Poke.

"Fine. I heard you tell Tony Blake, after the mess was over, that you didn't know who he was, but that anything you could do to pay him for what he done would be did. Tony said you didn't owe him anything, but if you ever saw a stranger in a tight like you was in, to pay it back to him."

"He shore said that, Dick, and I told him I would. That went for Tony, and it went for the other feller. I'll pay."

"All right," said Dick. "You got a chance now. That girl in the house is in a lot more trouble than you were in. I want you to give her a home, and take care of her. All the clothes she has with her are on her. I want you to take that horse and saddle back to Pink Hill. Put the saddle in a bag, and put it in your buckboard. Lead

the horse, and turn it loose ten mile this side of Pink Hill. If it follows you on in you can't help that. You won't have to sling any gun in this mess, but you may have to lie a little."

"I'll lie if I have to, to pay back what I owe to poor old Tony Blake and your— I mean that other fellow what was with him that day," said Poke.

"Good. Take the saddle to Bud Long, and tell him I sent it back by you, and told you to get the two grips that I left with him."

"Is that all?" asked Poke.

"That's all of that," said Dick. "Bill Deaver says I'm charged with rustling. Have you any idea who made the charge?"

"I shore ain't, Dick, but whoever made the charge is a damn liar."

"I know that much," said Dick, "and the man that made the charge knows it, too. What I don't understand is why he made it. It had to be a ranchman that made the charge, and there is only one that I can think of who would do it."

"You mean Joe Venner," said Poke. "I recollect that you and me wondered, and talked some about Joe jumping from foreman for old Tony Blake, to owner of the ranch, so soon after Tony was gone. I know we wondered where Joe got the money to loan Tony on all them notes that he produces after Tony is gone. We wondered, too, about that gunfight that Tony Blake was kilt in."

"Yes, and since this has come up, I have been wondering some more about it. Bill Deaver is goin' to tell me who made that charge ag'in' me."

"Why, Dick, you are fixin' to start more trouble than this old cow country ever seen. Joe Venner was a big man in this county when he was only but foreman for old man Tony. Then when Tony was gone, and Joe taken over the ranch and called it the Flying V, he grabbed the whole county by the neck. The only other real big outfit in the west part of the county is Val Doane's Box D. Val is square as a die, and I reck'n he's yo' friend, but —he wouldn't buck Joe Venner, in a showdown."

"Maybe he wouldn't," said Dick. "If I find out that Joe Venner charges me with rustling, I aim to ask Val what he's going to do about it. I— Stand by for a squall, Poke. Yonder comes Bill Deaver."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

"Somebody crack him on the head!"

Military Prisoner

By GEORGES SURDEZ

Author of "Another Man's Chevrons," "The Iron Adjutant," etc.

Novelette—Complete

"I'm bad when I drink," Legionnaire Nelsen told his companions, "very bad." So they tried him out

CHAPTER I.

TOUGH GUY.

DURING his years with the French Foreign Legion, which terms itself without false modesty or unfounded boastfulness "the finest infantry on earth," Sergeant Lanahan had encountered many odd types of men and had participated in a number of bizarre adventures seldom included in the official records of the Colonial Army.

But it remained for his old comrade Nelsen to involve him in a complicated scrape, during which he became guilty of sundry offenses against the codes, civil and military, and which culminated in an extravagant finale, a posthumous citation for valor being awarded to a living man. That happened when Lanahan was serving with the March Battalion of the Third Foreign Infantry in Northern Morocco, although his acquaintance with Nelsen dated back more than six years.

The two met at the Legion depot of Fort St. Jean, the old construction squatted over the Old Port's Basin. Nelsen, a Dane, happened to be the

only Scandinavian in the new batch of recruits, while Lanahan was the only American. Germans, Austrians, Swiss, Belgians, Russians, Frenchmen, consorted in small cliques, not as yet welded into a solid group by training and common danger. The two isolated men were forced together.

Nelsen was most likable. He was a large youngster, twenty-one years old, above medium height, with a big chest and superb shoulders. His manner was alert, confident, almost cocky. And if the word "beautiful" can be applied to a man, Nelsen deserved it. His face was striking, the features delicately chiseled, yet very masculine. His cheeks were delicately tinged, pink on white, his eyes were limpid blue, guileless as those of a small child. He spoke English well, French passably, could play the piano, had a good baritone voice.

But Lanahan soon sensed a tense anxiety, a mental anguish, in his new friend. Something pressed on Nelsen's mind, left him little peace. Perhaps it was remorse, or loneliness for the family he had left behind.

The American considered Nelsen somewhat like a pupil. He was several years older, had knocked about the world for a few years, had seen active service before with the United States Army. He stood two inches over six feet and weighed, even then, close to two hundred pounds. Although Nelsen certainly did not expect it, and without granting the matter definite thought, Lanahan assumed the rôle of adviser and protector.

When Nelsen grew depressed, which was often, he would cheer him up. "What of it, fellow—it's only five years—and it's all in a lifetime."

"I'm bad, very bad," Nelsen would say.

Lanahan refrained a smile then. He thought that Nelsen could not be bad. He had never seen a franker, more honest young man. Even the small theft, the unavoidable pilfering that was committed by others around him, was a shock. His disgust at many of the conversations he overheard was obvious. He had committed no serious crime himself, for his appearance would have made him easy to identify, and the police watched the Legion depots carefully when a criminal was at large.

IN due time, the batch of recruits reached Sidi bel Abbès. Nelsen swung into the military routine with surprising ease. He was quick to learn, and the instructors liked him because he was neat and granted them earnest, undivided, almost admiring attention. It was soon rumored that as soon as he had put in the required time he would become a corporal.

"Nelsen, keep on as you're going, and avoid drink," the major commanding the training battalion once told him, "and you'll go far. We like men like you in the Legion."

"I never drink, major."

That was the truth. Beyond the two cups of wine issued with the rations each day, Nelsen did not touch a drop. Even Lanahan, who liked to take a few drinks occasionally, considered his attitude an affectation. On the other hand, Nelsen adored pastry, and would stuff himself with tarts, éclairs and cream-puffs in any of the several pastry shops of the small city.

All went well until the new arrivals were paid the second instalment of their enlistment bonus. As was traditional, the old timers were determined that the money should be used to treat them, and each recruit found

himself surrounded with a dozen eager friends. Nelsen would have preferred a bag of cookies and a few hours spent over the text-book for corporals to the entertainment scheduled for the evening. But Lanahan urged him to celebrate.

"You'll get to moping, Oscar. And they'll call you stingy."

"They'll make me drink," Nelsen protested.

"Well, a little booze won't kill you. And it's pay night, so they won't punish anybody much."

"I get bad when I drink. Very bad."

Sarda, a swarthy, slender Legionnaire serving his third enlistment, was stretched on a nearby cot. He was all spirit, nerves and muscles. It was a pleasure to watch him at bayonet drill and at gymnastics. Aside from that, he was one of the famous drinkers of the regiment. Evidently, he understood English a bit, for he laughed.

"Don't worry, kid," he suggested in French, "there are plenty here who'll see that you don't get too bad. You're in the Legion, remember that, and village toughs are soon spanked by experts."

Nelsen shook his head slowly.

"I hurt people. I'm bad."

The word spread throughout the barrack room that the pink youth, Nelsen, was afraid of hurting some one if he got drunk. There was mock applause and derisive laughter.

The statement did seeme ridiculous. There were men present who had lived through the horrors of the Russian Revolution, who had survived wounds, starvation, plague and typhus. There was a German who had driven an armored car with steel blades fastened to the hubs through the riotous streets of Munich. There was an old Turk who had fought the Bulgarian Comitajis in Macedonia long before Nelsen was born. All had fearful scenes etched on their brains as if with a fiery point, and this lad, who admitted twenty-one and looked eighteen, was telling them how tough and hard he could be!

It became a point of pride to get Nelsen to the Negro village. Even when he suggested turning his money over to Lanahan, to treat his friends, they would not relent. At last, after saying that he would not drink, he agreed to go along.

AND he was one of a dozen Legionnaires who crowded into *La Lune Rousse,* The Tawny Moon, an establishment across the little bridge maintained for the entertainment of troopers. There was a bar, and there were long tables. There was music and there was singing. The music was provided by a mechanical piano and by volunteer performers, Legionnaires who played mouth-organs and accordions.

The Mauresque girls joined in the chorus of each song, and their high-pitched voices shrilled oddly in popular German and French ballads. The handsome Nelsen became their favorite immediately, and was called Pink-Baby before he had been in the place five minutes.

He ordered lemonade, and appeared to be having a good time. Then the girl nearest him insisted that he drink out of her glass. He refused at first, then he was gravely assured that his refusal was a deadly insult. He shrugged, hesitated, then took a swallow.

The drink was not strong, a little anisette mixed into much water and some grenadine syrup. But it acted on Nelsen like a lighted match held to an open gas jet. The young Dane's eyes

brightened, his face colored, grew redder, and he reached for the nearest tumbler of pure brandy. He downed it at a gulp.

"That's the stuff," Legionnaire Sarda approved, slapping his back. "Drink like that, and your whiskers will grow faster!" He winked at the others. "But stay nice, stay nice!"

Nelsen laughed.

"A bottle, a bottle!" He produced a handful of crumpled, grimy bills, waved them high. "As long as I'm drinking, a bottle!"

He did not need to pay. An eager comrade shoved a full bottle into his hand. It was enormous fun; Nelsen was drinking and would show them how bad he could be! And what a drinker he must be, making wry grimaces as the fiery stuff slid down his throat, scowling like a pettish child. When a third of the quart was gone, the bottle was still tilted, and Lanahan, sure of his authority, reached out to pull it away.

"That's enough—"

He and Nelsen had been firm friends until then, had never exchanged even angry words. So the American was not prepared for what followed.

The bottom of the bottle crushed his fingers against the top of the table, and he yelped in pain, shaking his hand violently. Then he felt of the digits separately, fearing that he had suffered a fracture. Fortunately, the bones were intact, although the flesh had been bruised.

"What's the idea?" he challenged, angrily.

"Keep your hands to yourself, you big American pig!"

"Why, you—" Lanahan started to rise, but his nearest companions held him in his chair, talking all at once.

"You've got no kick coming—you yanked it out of his mouth—Nelsen can drink if he likes— Come on, Nelsen, drink and get mad for us— Lanahan, you can't say he didn't warn you in advance—that's the kid, Nelsen!"

THE girl who had given Nelsen his first taste of liquor that evening now sought to show her influence over him. She was a very handsome Algerian, with thick, black hair, an impudent face and a hoarse voice. She bore tribal tattoos on cheeks and forehead. And she sought to take the bottle from Nelsen's hand.

The young Dane grasped her by the chin, lifted her bodily off the chair, and spun her, reeling and screaming, to thump against the nearest wall. He addressed her in Danish. While the words were unintelligible to most, their meaning was plain.

Sarda grew very quiet.

"If she cracks your head with a bottle," he said, "nobody can blame her. She was trying to be nice to you."

"I don't let anybody paw me," Nelsen declared.

Lanahan had never seen such a rapid change in any man. The mild, handsome face was marred by a menacing scowl. Nelsen was no longer a boy, his expression was ageless, furious, insane. The pupils of his eyes were dilated, staring.

"Thirsty," Nelsen mumbled, "I'm thirsty."

He drank from the bottles before him, mixing everything at random. Lanahan hesitated to interfere, for the crazy fellow might try to brain him. Sarda leaned close and whispered in his ear.

"Get him to drink enough and he'll pass out like a light. All of a sudden, you get me? Seen guys that booze got that way before."

The mechanical piano ground out "The Moonlight Waltz."

The girl, after wiping a bloody nose, for Nelsen's grip on her face had been far from gentle, had joined a group of Arabs at a corner table, shabby fellows in brownish cloaks and ragged turbans, typical hangers-on of the dives. One of them, a hawk-nosed, dark chap, was probably her particular friend and protector. He glared at the soldiers, and handled his *matraque,* the native club made of springy wood, meaningly.

"We better stick close to Nelsen on the way back," Sarda suggested to Lanahan.

"Think that guy has it in for him?"

"Well, he sure doesn't feel friendly!"

Nelsen had heard.

He replaced the bottle he held on the table carefully, turned to return the native's stare. Black eyes and blue eyes clashed across the room. Then, as if fascinated, Nelsen rose.

"There it starts," Sarda sighed wearily.

At a sign from him, like a well-coached athletic team, the Legionnaires left their tables and sought strategic positions. A couple went to bar the front door, with massive iron clamps, to keep the patrol out. Others leaned against the bar, to make sure that if the full bottles on the shelves behind it were need for missiles they would remain in Legion hands.

The rest scattered to watch the stairway leading to the upper floors and the rear door. The windows were barred with iron and too high for attempted exit.

This was done quickly, in the sudden silence following the crashing of the piano.

"Mabrouka," Sarda called to the old woman who managed the place, "tell the Arabs here that it's one man against one man, or everybody against everybody."

"All right," Mabrouka agreed glumly, "but if you guys get my place closed by the cops, no more credit for any of you when it reopens!" and she shouted shrilly in Arabic.

THE natives understood, and remained quiet. There were more than a score in the downstairs rooms, but there were twelve Legionnaires, and two against one did not make the odds nearly even. Particularly with a couple of hundred other men in khaki scattered within call in the neighborhood.

The girl and two of the Arabs at the table had risen and walked away very slowly, leaving the one man with his club resting across the table before him. His long, brown fingers clenched on the wood, and his glance held Nelsen's eyes.

"Stand up," the Legionnaire invited.

"*La, la,*" the native shook his head, with a faint smile on his thick lips: "No, no. I wait for you."

"If he uses that club, what do we do?" Lanahan wondered.

"Nothing. He has no chance without it, he can't fight with his fists. And remember he's said nothing, done nothing. Nelsen's picking this row."

"He'll be laid out."

"Wouldn't be surprised," Sarda conceded. "But the *képi* will save his skull. He's got to learn."

The Arab had taken his hands from the club, and rested them on the edge of the table. His nonchalance was belied by the corded muscles standing out beneath his scanty black beard. From scarlet, Nelsen had turned a greenish, waxen white.

"Scared," murmured some one.

"No. Wait and see," Sarda urged confidently.

Drunk and crazed though he was, the young Dane was crafty. The Arab pushed the table toward his legs, to trip him, and reached for the club. Nelsen dodged and attacked with the speed of a striking snake. The native had managed to grasp the haft of his club, but as he lifted his arm to deliver the blow, Nelsen held his wrist, wrenched it. The stick fell.

Then the Legionnaire set to work with indescribable fury. The thumping of his fists drove the Arab's lighter body toward the wall, and the poor fellow was probably unconscious after a first mighty smash on the jaw. But he literally had no chance to drop, for the punches held him erect against the plaster partition. Nelsen caught him by the throat, and pounded him with amazing brutality. The man's head was like a battered tomato in ten seconds, and the clanging of his skull against the wall was sickening.

"Stop him," Lanahan cried, moving forward.

"He'd kill him," Sarda agreed, "and it will be a mess!"

He darted forward, grasped Nelsen's shoulder. The lad turned, and his face was frightful, set and pale, flecked with flying blood from his opponent's cuts, his blue eyes glaring. He did not pause, slung his fist at Sarda.

"Don't touch me, you swine, don't touch me—"

Sarda's cheek was reddened, although he had dodged the blow, which merely grazed him. He grumbled a warning, just contrived to duck another punch, and broke ground to give himself room.

"You asked for it," he snapped.

And his right fist, superbly timed and aimed, with all his weight behind it, arched and struck Nelsen's chin. Sarda's confidence was his mistake, for he dropped his guard to watch the younger man drop.

Nelsen did not fall. His head bobbed back, sprung forward again as if he were sneezing. Then his flying fists found Sarda. Once more there was that sinister pattering of hard knuckles on flesh, the swift, scurrying slide across the floor to the wall. Sarda, bleeding and dazed, deliberately threw himself on the tiles, intending to roll aside. Nelsen kicked him in the flank, once, twice, three times.

LEGIONNAIRES and natives had forgotten their hostility. They were hard, rough men, all of them familiar with danger, bloodshed and killing. But a mysterious terror gripped them. Nelsen did not seem human, it was as if a wandering evil spirit, a demoniacal, Satanic manifestation, possessed his body.

Even Lanahan, who knew him best, felt the chill of fear. But he could not stand by and see a comrade kicked to death. He rushed forward and slid his right hand beneath the Dane's right arm, clamped it over the nape of his neck. Then an amazing thing occurred. Lanahan outweighed Nelsen many pounds, but his grip was broken instantly.

And Nelsen whirled with such speed that Lanahan could not avoid an overhand swing, that put a lump on his brow and gashed his cheek.

"Nelsen, Nelsen—"

But there was no Nelsen in the room. There was a savage beast, snarling and panting. Nelsen had been right, had not exaggerated, he was bad when drunk, very bad!

Luckily, Lanahan had long arms, and

he held the madman away, although the fists battered at his biceps painfully.

"Somebody crack him on the head," a voice shouted.

Unnoticed, Mabrouka had unbarred the door, and had screamed for the patrol. A sergeant entered, an Alsatian named Brulher, followed by six Legionnaires with bayoneted rifles.

"What's up? Attention in there! Attention!"

The Legionnaires stiffened, heels together, chins up, little fingers on the trousers' seams. With two exceptions, Lanahan who dared not drop his hands, and Nelsen who did not even hear.

"Lay off, you fool, here's the patrol!"

But Nelsen struggled to reach his former friend's body with his fists. Brulher crossed the room majestically, grumbling aloud as he strode.

"Eh, tough guy, eh? We'll see, we'll see. So we're not obeying orders tonight, my lads? We'll see!"

"Look out, sergeant," Lanahan begged. "He's mad."

"Too bad, too bad," Brulher spoke with irony. And he grasped Nelsen's shoulder: "You're under arrest, my truculent friend!"

There was no time for any one to interfere. The non-com, surprised by a swift attack, went down. But as Nelsen drew back his foot to kick, a gun-butt circled high, smacked him on the side of the head.

He dropped to his knees, rose and rushed the whole patrol. Hampered by the long rifles, hesitating to use bayonet or butt at random in such a mêlée, the armed Legionnaires scattered. Behind them, the street door was opened. Nelsen was through it in a flash. There were shouts and screams in the street, receding rapidly.

"Let him go," the corporal of the patrol said. "He'll be picked up elsewhere. I don't want the job." He hoisted Sergeant Brulher to a chair, wiped his face with a wet handkerchief. "Hurt, chief?"

Brulher grinned and panted.

"All right—wind knocked out—feel sawed in half! Say, you, the big fellow, what's that guy's name?"

"I can't tell you, sergeant."

"Meaning you won't." Brulher smiled. "But we'll find out."

Both Sarda and the Arab were hospital cases. The Legionnaire had several ribs broken. He had suffered internal injuries, for he retched blood. Nevertheless, as they were waiting for the stretchers, he frankly explained to Brulher, saying that it was his fault, that he had forced Nelsen to drink.

"Thought it was a joke," he concluded.

"All right. Maybe we can hush this up," the sergeant said.

"You mean you won't make charges, sergeant?"

"What's the use? I'm not hurt."

But Brulher's consideration proved useless. When they reached the center of town, they noticed a crowd before the Hôtel de Ville. Upon inquiring, a civilian enlightened them.

"Nothing much—just a Legionnaire who took a cop apart—"

Nelsen was in for serious trouble.

CHAPTER II.

CONVICTED.

AN elderly field-guard discovered Nelsen in the morning, asleep on the river bank, beyond the old rampart. The police had been looking for him, armed and ready for trouble. But he offered no resistance, followed his captor like a sheep.

The colonel contrived to obtain custody of the prisoner from the civilian authority, but under promise to produce him for a jury trial. Striking a uniformed official, anywhere on French territory, brings no smile. The police agent who had challenged him before the Town Hall would be in the hospital for weeks, with a dislocated shoulder, a fractured nose, and an eye injury.

There was a surge of sympathy among the Legionnaires who knew Nelsen. The man had done his best to keep from drinking, and he was to pay for their coaxing as much as for his own faults. The major, Sergeant Brulher, Lanahan, were active in trying to help him.

"It looks very bad for him," Brulher informed Lanahan. "I've been to see that cop, and he can't withdraw his complaint against Nelsen. Unless he states that he was injured while discharging his duty, his salary stops and his folks are in trouble."

Lanahan thought of cabling his family for money with which to pay the policeman. But he had been on his own for years, would not have asked the favor for himself, and felt no one in the States would understand just why he wished to pay for the mistakes of a man he had known a couple of months. But he saw the civilian lawyer who had agreed to defend Nelsen.

"I've three hundred francs, *monsieur*. If they would help—"

"No, Legionnaire. Too small an amount to compensate the victim, and I take no fees for this case. But there is one thing you might do: Your comrade refuses to tell me his real name, who he is, what he has done. He looks like a very decent chap, has had a good education. The local jurymen are too ready to believe that all Legionnaires are worthless tramps, good only for fighting and carousing. If I could show that Nelsen comes from good people, it might help a bit."

Nelsen had been placed in a cell, to serve a military sentence of thirty days for his offense against good order and discipline while on leave in town, as distinct from charges springing from his attack on a policeman. Lanahan obtained permission to see him.

The Dane, clean-shaven and handsome as ever in his light prison suit, winced as he saw the fresh scar on his friend's cheek.

"I'm sorry, Lanahan."

"Forget it. It was stitched and won't show more than a white streak when healed. Here's what the lawyer tells me—" and he explained.

"I can't call on my family," Nelsen shrugged. He stared into space, his hands locked together on his knees. The light from the barred window outlined his strong profile. "I got drunk at home, once."

"What did you do?"

"I went crazy." Nelsen covered his face with his hands and cried. "I was in the army, back home. Cadet, you understand, student officer. My father was—well, fairly well to do. I have brothers, two of them. And we all know that we're queer when it comes to drinking. I asked a—a military doctor once, and he said that was possible, that it might be with an exceptional individual in a race accustomed to drinking as it was with whole races. Talked about red Indians, Malays, and such people, who react to alcohol by going mad. Told me that among our Nordic people, a lot of violence could be explained that way. That I might be an extreme case. See, despite my father's warnings, I had tried drink, with some

friends, and I was dismissed from the service, from the school.

"Everybody knew it. I was hanging around home, and trying to live down the reputation I'd made for myself. I went to a barn to get a shotgun to hunt a little, one afternoon, and found a jug of liquor there. The hired man had hid it, because my father didn't want liquor around. I was sort of depressed, and tried a couple of drinks. The man came in, and laughed, saying that I didn't take after my dad.

"I started to lick him, and my mother heard him yell and came out. She wanted to stop me, and touched my shoulder. I swear that it was as if something inside of me made me act, when I knew it was wrong and didn't want to. I—I hit her. Hit her hard—and she broke her hip falling down—she was fifty-two, and I hit her—"

LANAHAN grasped his arm. "Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"Is it anything to tell any one?"

"No."

"I was ashamed. And the hired man made charges, so I went to prison for three months."

"Your mother forgave you, didn't she?"

"Yes. She tried to tell people she had slipped on the stairs. But there was the mark of my hand on her cheek, and the hired man had seen me. She wrote me to come home, while I was in jail, as soon as they let me out. But I didn't have the courage. I went away."

"Write to your people. Perhaps they can get you a medical certificate, pay the cop—"

"No. I can't do that."

He would not give his real name. The lawyer said that it was just as well not to mention the incident. It would simply show Nelsen to be one who fell back into criminal habits after being punished.

As usual, Legion officers sought to save their man. But the Algerian jury declared Nelsen guilty of assault and wounds on an officer of the law discharging his sworn duty. And the poor fellow was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. As a concession to the officers interested in the case, the judge ruled that this term could be served in a military penitentiary. This seeming favor was in reality an aggravation of the condemnation, for any one knew that the military prison camps were much harder on the inmates than the civil jails.

Nelsen was taken away. For a year, Lanahan received an occasional postal card. Then he was shifted to another garrison, lost touch. When he chanced to serve in Morocco, he always made inquiries, but could not locate his friend.

With the passage of years, he had almost forgotten him. Nelsen was only an occasional, flitting memory of an unlucky man who had made a poor start in the Corps. And when the Riff trouble started, he would have had to think twice to evoke a face, had any one mentioned the name of Nelsen before him.

CHAPTER III.

THE STRANGER.

THE Riff campaign did not turn out to be just another colonial expedition. It turned out to be a war. Had the Riffi possessed planes and decently handled artillery, the game might have gone against the French before they understood what was occurring and brought reinforce-

ments. And if Fez or Taza had fallen into the hands of Abd-el-Krim, the moral effect would have been overwhelming—uprisings would have occured throughout North Africa.

The March Battalion in which Lanahan served was a shock unit, shuttled from one point of the long front to another as emergencies required. When the mountain hordes seemed about to smash through in a certain zone, the battalion was rushed to the threatened spot and held the lines. When the enemy occupied a strong position needed by the French, the battalion was ordered to storm it.

This meant constant marching, broken only by fierce engagements at short intervals. In two months, the battalion left two-thirds of its numbers on various fields, dead and wounded. But it was kept up at full strength by replacements from Algeria. Despite the motley elements that enter its composition, the Legion contrives to turn out soldiers of the same quality, of a high standard tested and proved for a century on the fighting fronts of four continents.

The battalion had been in a rest camp behind the lines when news came that a violent attack of Jellaba tribesmen, supported by Riff regulars, was under way near Timdit. The four companies were marched thirty kilometers in less than seven hours, and hurled into the gap.

Moroccan and Senegalese infantry units had buckled under the impact, had retreated two miles along a front of four miles. The Legion storm-troopers launched a counter-attack in the center, forming the spearhead of the French forces. Here was no question of clever strategy and fine tactics, but a headlong charge with bayonets and grenades constantly in play.

The Riff clung to the ground they had won with heroic desperation. They had machine guns, very well placed, and these checked the Legion for a while. It was hard, sweaty, thirsty work to circle them and destroy them one by one.

But at nightfall, the lines had been brought back to the same positions as in the morning; the Legionnaires had saved the situation.

Thirty-odd had paid for the success with their lives, over ninety had been wounded.

Lanahan had come though with nothing worse than a few slivers of tin in his thighs, from the close explosion of a home-made grenade. The shallow scratches did not even entitle him to a mention on his record.

CAPTAIN CASTAIX, who commanded the company, detailed him with his section to guard the ammunition and supplies in the rear of the trenches. Lanahan posted his sentries and flankers, and dropped to the ground. Like all the others, he could have slept soundly on a picket fence by that time. And he needed rest, for another attack was planned the next morning, to drive the Riffi out of the region.

There were intermittent outbursts of firing on the lines. But Lanahan was not disturbed. However, when a Lebel rifle lashed out not a hundred yards from where he lay, he awoke instantly, and knew that one of his sentries had fired the shot.

He reached him at the same time as the corporal of the guard and his four privates.

"What's wrong?"

"There's something crawling out there in the dark. I challenged and got no answer. Bawl me out if you like,

sergeant, that's better than getting my throat cut."

"Try a rocket," Lanahan suggested to the corporal. When the bluish glare spread over the slopes, they saw that the sentry had been right. There was a man not far away, trying to hide in the bushes. The sentry swore and shouldered the gun again. Lanahan knocked it up: "We're back of the lines. That may be some one on our side. You, come here!"

The rocket went out. They heard the man running, and Lanahan ordered another rocket fired. The stranger then held up his hands, and approached. Two Legionnaires trotted out to hold him. The second rocket went out.

Missiles were humming around the small group, fired by snipers across the lines, whose attention had been attracted by the lights.

Lanahan led the way down the incline, to a dug-out which had served as a dressing-station late in the afternoon. There a lantern could be lighted without fear.

The sergeant identified his captive as a convict from a military prison camp, by his rough, brown garments and the number stenciled across the breast of the ill-fitting tunic. The man was bald, seemed over forty. He was emaciated, stooped, whitish stubble grew on his chin and cheeks. He peered at Lanahan with watery, frightened blue eyes, deeply set in wrinkled skin.

The sergeant shook him roughly.

"Where you from, mug?"

"Village back there. Don't know the name. Got there yesterday from camp, by motor truck, to do some cementing on the blockhouse they're building."

"And where do you think you're going?"

"I tried to set sail and beat it."

"Deserted, eh?"

"No, sergeant. Escaping, that's all." The convict laughed, and showed scattered teeth in his gums. Lanahan noticed that he had two fingers missing from his right hand. "Thought maybe I could make it across the lines."

"Going over to the enemy," Lanahan said scornfully. He addressed one of the Legionnaires: "Get me a mule chain and a padlock." When these implements were brought, he shackled the man's legs securely. "I don't want to get tough, fellow," he explained, "but I can't let you get away."

"Sure. It would lose your stripes."

"That's the idea. You can stay here until the military cops collect you in the morning. Hungry? Want a drink?"

"You bet. I got away early this morning, when the slobs attacked and they were shoving everybody back fast. Haven't had anything since."

LANAHAN handed him a loaf of bread, a length of smoked sausage and a half-bucket of wine. The prisoner munched contentedly, and grinned at him. He was evidently an old timer, philosophical about his recapture. Lanahan was touched with pity. He turned to the Legionnaires, ordered them back to their posts. Then he sat down on the dirt floor before his captive.

"How long have you been in the camps?"

"What's the year? Well, then, I've been in over five years."

"How long are you in for?"

"Thirteen years to go."

"Know all the camps, I suppose?"

"Almost. I was at Arbalou, which is the toughest."

"Ever meet a fellow called Nelsen, a Dane?"

"You fooled me, Lanahan." The

prisoner's face wrinkled comically. "I thought you didn't know me."

Lanahan scowled. "Say, I'm not asking for some one else. I knew Nelsen personally."

"Well, I'm Nelsen in person. How would I know your name?"

"The corporal calls me by my name. We were privates together." Lanahan looked at the other a moment, laughed: "Listen, Nelsen was twice your size, and would be only twenty-six or seven."

"That's my age," the prisoner stated. "I'm not naturally bald. If you look close, you'll see it's a scar. Burned by accident, you know." He rocked with silent, grim mirth. "A good joke. It was in a camp in the mountain, during the winter, snow on the ground. We rioted because we had no blankets. So the guards got the six who yelled loudest, and put them close to big fires, to keep warm. Well, they put me too close."

"That's a joke—" Lanahan grunted.

"Ask anybody who was at Arbalou. Say, you remember the good looking woman on the ship out of Marseilles, who flirted with you from the passenger deck? Remember she sent down a bottle of wine and a whole roast chicken?"

Lanahan had forgotten the episode for years.

"All right. What was the name of the sergeant you socked, and where did it happen?"

"Sergeant Brulher, The Tawny Moon at Sidi bel Abbès. You came to see me in cell and tried to get my real name for the lawyer. That was the day you had the stitches taken out of that cut I'd given you under the eye."

Lanahan nodded.

"That's it." He admitted that this was Nelsen, but it was not the Nelsen he had known. What should he do? He looked at the chain, grew ashamed and removed it.

"Say, you got seven years, you've served five, and you have thirteen left. How's that—"

"Prison camp arithmetic," Nelsen declared.

Lanahan stared at him. Before this wreck of a man, this caricature of "Handsome" Nelsen, a great pity swept him. There must be times when any man's fate is suspended on a hair; but for the urgings of his comrades, Nelsen would not have drunk—he might have become, by now, a sergeant like Lanahan—or even an officer. It was true that he might have been killed or maimed in action, but a clean death is better than some lives.

"Are they looking for you?" Lanahan asked.

"Perhaps not. You see, when the natives attacked at dawn, they raked the village with machine guns, and a couple of our fellows were killed. I saw my chance and dropped behind a wall. They may think I was killed too, until they miss my body." Nelsen held up the metal container of wine: "This stuff's great—"

LANAHAN handed him a cigarette. Like all men who have been forced to silence for long periods, Nelsen craved to talk.

"Want to know why I've still thirteen years coming? Two tries at escape, that's why. Once, I was already aboard a Norwegian ship in Casablanca, when the cops picked me up. Oh, man! Did I catch it that time!"

"I had the idea," Lanahan commented, "that the prison camps weren't so bad if a guy kept his mouth shut, took what was coming without resistance."

"That may be so—didn't have a chance to find out." Nelsen shrugged. "I am—I mean, I was, pretty good looking. You didn't know me, so I must have changed" — he laughed hoarsely—"and it couldn't be for the better! That's what made trouble for me at the start. There are regulations, and the guards aren't supposed to touch you without a trial, or when you're attacking them. But their word's believed, and yours isn't.

"The first camp I get to, the senior sergeant takes one look at me, and tells me he doesn't like the shape of my nose. Slow and calm, you understand, easily, to lure me on. I didn't know any better than to say that I didn't know how to change my nose. He called that an impertinent answer and I had to report after work at his quarters. There were three of them. The senior sergeant asked me if I had thought of a way of changing my face a bit. I said no. And he broke my nose for me.

"I should have held in, but I was green. I jumped on him. The three of them attacked me, and when they found they had trouble, they called in the Negro soldiers. My back was nearly broken with pick handles. Then, everywhere I went, it was on my record that I had rushed a guard—they sentenced me to two years for that. Every new camp, the head guard would take me aside and train me, as they like to call it.

"Some just ask you to tell them they're the boss. Others make you kneel and pray to them. One guy makes you lick his boots, if you have the reputation of being a hard guy."

This gruesome recital was made the more horrible because Nelsen had lost rancor, indignation, even hatred. He was outlining facts, in a monotonous voice. He had lost his amazement that such men should exist in the world. Lanahan listened, numb with grief.

"Now that I think of it, they must have changed the shape of my face pretty soon, for nobody made cracks about my pretty face after a few months! I had been in a year when I broke completely, lost my pride. I wrote home, told them where I was, what had happened to me, and begged them to get me out in some manner.

"My mother wrote back, said she was well, and that my father and brothers would try to free me through the Consulate. But the Consulate can't do a thing. You see, I enlisted in the Legion of my own free will, and I was legally tried, admittedly guilty and legally sentenced. The Embassy in Paris investigated my case, and the Penitential Administration showed them my record, which made me look like an incorrigible.

"My family wrote me to be patient, that a few years would pass. See, I just wrote that I was a convict, didn't mention how I was treated. For two reasons, the first not to make my mother worry too much, then because our mail is censored.

"I tried to escape after I had been in eighteen months. The native riders caught me, that time, and turned me in. I got two years for that, and such a bad licking that I was half-crazy for months. About a year ago, after my scalp had been burned, I cut off a couple of fingers, to get sent to a city for treatment and trial. I got another year, for self-mutilation. But I had planned well, and escaped from jail, found civilian clothing, and reached Casablanca. But a sergeant from the camps had seen me on the streets, and the police located me. Three years for that. The others are for offenses against camp rules, like possessing a

knife, and trying to get a letter smuggled out."

NELSEN laughed nervously. "I'm in for life, now! Because this is a third attempt, and it's eight years. That makes twenty-one to serve. I can't live that long. And when I missed out on a good chance such as this, I'll never escape. Want to do me a favor, for old times' sake? Give me a chance to run, and have one of your chaps shoot me!"

"Have another butt, Nelsen. Would your family take you in?"

"You bet. Even I know that whatever I've done is paid for."

"So you're all right if you can get away?"

"See," Nelsen explained rapidly, "I hoped to get across the lines and offer my services to the Riffs. They're taking in deserters from the French side, glad to have them. Then I'd fool around a while, until I had a chance to slip into the Tangier zone. Once off French territory, I could get a Danish Consul to communicate by cable with my folks, and get my fare home."

"The Riffs might kill you before you had a chance to talk."

"That's the chance I had to run. I know a lot of Arabic and Chleuh, though, and a lot of guys have managed to escape killing at capture. Abd-el-Krim's trying to show some humanity by taking prisoners alive, like a civilized power."

"Stick here a minute," Lanahan suggested. He went out and returned with his corporal, the burly German, Schussler. He indicated the prisoner. "This fellow's beat it from the pen. He's a friend of mine, and I want to give him a break. Can you fix it?"

Schussler scratched his head thoughtfully.

"Well, you can always fix anything, but it doesn't always work." He spoke sagely. "There's no trouble with our fellows; they'll play with you, Lanahan. But suppose some one else finds out? It's your ranking gone, a year in the jug, and your two years' enlistment to serve as a private when that's over. Me, I could always claim I knew nothing and obeyed your orders."

"He's my friend," Lanahan repeated.

"It's your funeral. What do you want me to do?"

"Can you get him a uniform and a rifle?"

"Easy. They didn't have time to take away the stiffs before night, and ours are all together, down the slope, to be buried after the attack tomorrow. They wouldn't notice one without clothes, because some of them were stripped in the dressing-station, and died under treatment. There's a stack of Lebels and equipment down the trail, too." Schussler looked Nelsen over carefully. "Give me your sizes, fellow. Be sure you have it right for the shoes; you're the one that'll walk in them."

NELSEN stood, trembling. He blew cigarette smoke between his puckered lips, looked at Lanahan.

"Be sure you want to risk it, old man," he said slowly. "I won't have the courage to refuse twice."

Lanahan grinned. "I'm sure."

"Thanks," Nelsen said, simply. He told Schussler his sizes, which the German noted methodically before leaving them.

"You can drop out at the end of our attack," Lanahan explained. "We'll rush farther than we mean to stay, to clear the positions. When we

withdraw, you hide behind and the natives will find you when they reoccupy the ground. Or you can go to them."

"Won't some officer spot me before that?"

"Not a chance," Lanahan assured him. "Too many new faces in the battalion. Some guys came only three days ago, and nobody knew them. Fresh recruits." He brought out a worn notebook. "Thought so. One of them was killed today; didn't last long, the poor devil. His bad luck is your chance. The casualties haven't been sent in yet, the report is held up until tomorrow night. So if any one asks you who you are, say that you're Legionnaire Haagen, Karl Haagen, and that you joined in the draft from Saida on the seventeenth."

"Karl Haagen," Nelson repeated; "came on the seventeenth."

Schussler returned fifteen minutes later, his arms full of clothing, equipment suspended from his shoulders. He tossed the lot to the floor and chatted as Nelsen changed.

"I had to use a flashlight to find the right sizes. The sentry placed there to keep away looters knew me, and said nothing. But who comes along but the captain. I explained that I needed shoes for one of my men, and as long as the poor guys didn't miss things, I was getting good clothing, too. He grumbled something about seeing that papers and money weren't touched and walked away.

"I go to the rifle dump, and there's a Senegalese on the job instead of a Legionnaire. He won't let me take one. I'm arguing with him when the captain shows up again. I tell him I need a rifle. He tells the Negro it's all right. Never saw a guy like the captain for prowling about all night, all alone."

"He can't sleep much," Lanahan agreed. "I was with him in Syria, and you could never be sure he wouldn't be around at any time. They tell me it's grief because his wife died when she was giving birth to her first baby. When the kid died, a week later, Castaix wanted to shoot himself. But the colonel made him promise he wouldn't. But they say he's trying to get himself killed. Because he can't sleep." He surveyed Nelsen, who had completed the change, with satisfaction. "I'll say it's an improvement."

Nelsen made a passable Legionnaire. Unconsciously, he had straightened as he buttoned the military tunic without a number, and for the first time, perhaps because of the *képi* covering the scarred skull, Lanahan recognized him.

"I feel better," Nelsen admitted.

"What's going on, a picnic?" a voice asked from the doorway.

THE three men in the dugout stiffened to attention, frozen with terror. This ended their scheme. For Castaix stood, lean and dark, six feet from them. Lanahan was swept with sickening dread, conscious of the heap of discarded prison clothing on the floor. And he saw that Nelsen, saluting, was showing his maimed hand plainly. A man with missing fingers on his right hand would not be accepted by the recruiting offices.

Castaix entered, removed the cigar from his mouth.

"Anything wrong, Lanahan?"

"No, captain. That is, this Legionnaire needed new clothing. He—he fell and got torn."

"And lost his rifle also."

"Yes, captain. He lost his rifle."

"Ah?" Castaix turned to Nelsen. "Where did this happen?"

"In the ravine, captain," Nelsen said

coolly. He was so accustomed to danger of discovery that he was by far the calmest of the three.

"What's your name, Legionnaire?"

"Haagen, Karl Haagen, captain. Joined on the seventeenth."

"Matriculation number?"

"Seven thousand five hundred and thirty-five, captain."

"Didn't I speak to you before, Haagen?"

"You did, captain."

"Thought so." Castaix puffed at his cigar, looked at the ash. "I'm not a martinet, you understand, but next time remember that it's regulation to apply to an officer for an order for new uniform and equipment. Lanahan!"

"Captain?" The sergeant grew very pale.

"You don't look well. Better take some quinine. Good night."

He turned and went out.

"I was betting he'd spot something wrong," Schussler said, wiping his face.

"Don't understand how he missed your hand, Nelsen, and your old clothes. Luck, that's all, luck."

"Maybe he did see something," Nelsen suggested, "and he'll send some one to arrest me."

"Castaix is not that kind," Lanahan gestured in angry protest. "If he had anything to say, you'd know it."

"Well, you forget there are gentlemen, where I come from," the Dane confessed.

CHAPTER IV.

OVER THE TOP.

AS Lanahan had predicted, no one paid the least attention to Nelsen the next morning. He was served with black coffee, rum and hardtack with the rest. Schussler had taken the men of the group into his confidence. They could be trusted. Not all of them entertained friendliness, devotion and admiration for Lanahan, who was often severe in the line of duty, but he was a Legionnaire, and Corps spirit guaranteed their silence.

As the khaki-clad troopers assembled in the shallow trench to await the order to charge up the slope, Lanahan rested his hand on Nelsen's shoulder.

"Listen—as soon as you drop out, take off the bolt of your rifle and bury it under some bush, with your cartridges. You get the idea?"

"Sure. You'd have to hand the slobs a good rifle and a couple of hundred rounds to use against the Legion. You have a convict's oath on that—" Nelsen laughed softly; "and you can trust that, too."

He did not appear nervous. Yet he was about to continue his extraordinary sequence of adventures. He would participate in a bayonet attack, risk massacre when the enemy found him, and chance escape from the Riff. The odds on his reaching Denmark would have read something like one to fifty.

Castaix stood with his torso showing above the trench crest, heedless of the bullets aimed at him. He glanced at his watch, and spoke in a quiet voice.

"We attack at six. It's five fifty-four."

"They know we're coming," said some one. "Think they have machine guns left?"

"I suppose you'll refuse to go if they have," another man grumbled. "What do you care what they've got? You've got to go anyway."

An observation plane droned overhead along the front, flitting through the morning mist. From the Riff positions, tiny flames darted upward. There

was small chance of hitting a machine flying so high, but the target was too tempting for the mountaineers to ignore.

"Wasting bullets," a Legionnaire grunted.

"So many the less for us, fellow."

"Only takes one, in the right place."

"Your old man must have been an undertaker!"

"Did any one ask you what your mother did for a living?"

"Five fifty-eight," Castaix said. He faced his men. "You're going to do good work, eh? This company has a good reputation." He relighted his cigar with a steady hand, and smiled faintly. "Nice day for it, too."

Three batteries of seventy-five millimeter field pieces, three thousand yards in the rear, crashed into action at one time. And for two minutes more, the Legionnaires craned their necks over the parapet, to watch the shells churning the earth and bushes before them. A couple of mountain cannon, captured from the Spaniards by the Riffi, tried to retaliate. But they were silenced instantly by a terrific bombardment from a brace of naval heavies, hauled by trucks within six miles of the lines.

The sections tensed to go over the top.

"Let's go," Castaix called. Then he added the ritual words: "*En avant, la Légion!*"

THE four companies plunged into the open, advancing in combat formation, each file tipped by an automatic rifle. Two or three machine guns opened on them, were reported to the artillery, and the shells forced them to shift constantly to avoid annihilation. The battalion rolled onward like a khaki-hued wave, weaving in and out of gullies, parting before masses of rock, flowing smoothly together again. The officers' whistles punctuated the march.

Lanahan was on the right flank of his section, abreast of the first rank, his eyes picking out covers already ascertained in advance on the map and controlled with field glasses before departure. At a gesture from him, an automatic's crew would halt, to splatter lead for a few seconds. More often than not, naked riflemen could be seen slipping away quickly, and the Lebels would crack out.

During the first minutes, the advance was almost unhampered. Gradually, the resistance stiffened as the Riffi settled down to the job at hand. A few bursts were not sufficient to dislodge them. Several times the entire battalion halted, to clear the path by intense fire.

The most stubborn defenders were grouped about the black cloaked regulars trained by Europeans in the Riff. As a rule, the Legion's reputation caused natives to avoid close fighting. But as on the preceding day, many of the warriors waited for the hand-to-hand fighting, fought desperately with their crudely manufactured grenades, rushed forward, rifles clubbed and knives gleaming.

When he saw their foam-flecked beards, the ferocity of their attack, Lanahan omened badly for Nelsen. If the man remained behind at their mercy, these chaps would never wait for him to speak. They were insane with fighting lust and no orders to spare captives would matter to them. Yet Nelsen must chance that, for if he remained with the company, his illegal presence would be discovered that evening. And Castaix would be certain that Lanahan had been his accomplice.

"By tonight," he thought philo-

sophically, "any one or all of us may be dead, so why fret?"

He did his share calmly, like a killing-machine. His job was not to distinguish himself by useless parading of courage, but to keep alive and fit to command others as long as possible. When the enemy closed in, he would not rush to the center of the mêlée, but wait outside of it, firing carefully with his heavy automatic pistol.

On the other hand, Nelsen, who was to ask the hospitality of the hillmen, fought like a fiend. The latent hatred he had stored up for years seemed to vent itself against these people. In fact, he had little choice, for he was lead rifleman and had to protect the automatic gunners when they worked. But he plied point and stock with enthusiastic vigor.

At times, his rush would carry him yards in advance of the others. Lanahan was reminded of his berserk rush across the floor, at The Tawny Moon, to batter his opponents against a wall.

"Good work, Haagen," Captain Castaix said, during a breathing pause under cover. "I'm watching you."

Nelsen crawled to Lanahan's side.

"Listen, he's wise to something. He called me 'Haagen' as if he were kidding."

"When you take your fall, make it look right."

Three men had been killed in the section, and one wounded. It would not be strange if a fifth fell. Lanahan could see that he was growing nervous, saw something resembling fear in his eyes.

"Let's go—"

THERE was a distance of one hundred and fifty yards to the crest. The Legionnaires covered it in thirty seconds, in a scrambling rush. The enemy had stayed in considerable numbers, and for two minutes there was a hard scrimmage. Lanahan caught a glimpse of Captain Castaix, coolly fending off a knife with a flick of his light stick, the only weapon in his hand.

Then the Riffi had enough and broke. They fled down the opposite slope, and the Legionnaires were after them. It was the best part of the engagement for them, the most enjoyable. Nothing is so intoxicating to men who have been in grave danger as the opportunity to strike without being struck.

It is not chivalrous, it is not heroic, but it is a fact.

The rallying whistles shrilled a metallic cadence: Retreat!

This was the time for Nelsen to drop. And he did, according to plan. Lanahan saw it, and it was superbly executed. The Dane tumbled like a blasted hare, landed face down and slipped sideways into a bush. Then he quivered painfully once or twice before being still.

Lanahan believed that the stunt had been somewhat overdone, unreal, melodramatic.

He was walking back slowly, facing the hillmen, when Captain Castaix crossed the field calmly and restrained him with an easy gesture.

"You're leaving a man behind, Lanahan," he observed. "There's time to bring him in."

"He's dead, captain—"

"Not at all sure. You and I should be enough," Castaix went on. "The rest can go back to cover." Without stooping, heedless of the lead humming by, the officer led the way to Nelsen. The Dane was sprawled, face down, arms hugging his head. "I'll pick him up, Lanahan. Then you slip your rifle

under him, and we'll carry him that way—"

Lanahan had to obey. He watched Nelsen's face, ready to wink, to signal that this could not be helped, that they must wait a better chance. Then the sergeant realized that the man he carried was unconscious, not faking. And he noticed that they were leaving a broad trail of blood in the dirt.

The trio reached the crest, slumped down beyond it, safe from direct firing.

"He's spurting like a fountain," the captain stated, slitting Nelsen's trousers with a penknife. "Just back of the knee, above the joint. Let's try a tourniquet." He worked deftly, with a first-aid bandage and the haft of a trench tool. "There. He'll be all right. Friend of yours, isn't he, Lanahan?"

"Yes, captain."

"You can stay with him. I'll see that your automatics are placed correctly. They're pretty fed up with this show, across the way, and their counter-attack won't be serious."

Castaix walked away.

SCHUSSLER arrived a few minutes later. He stared at Nelsen, shook his head. "Bad business. Would have been better all around if he had been killed. They'll dig up his record at the ambulance."

"Yes. I'm in for a mess," Lanahan agreed.

His excellent record in the Legion would help. But the least to expect was military degradation and a year in prison. Moreover, he had not saved Nelsen, who would be court-martialed as soon as cured, and go back to the camps.

The Dane stirred, opened his eyes. His hands sought the bulky swathing of bandages.

"Oh, yes, I'm hit."

"You'll be all right."

"Hard luck, Lanahan. Sorry."

"You said it. Thought you had faked that fall—"

"I did," Nelsen said. "I was hit after landing. Started to bleed like hell and I passed out. Well, it's all over."

The three formed a downcast group. The firing was resuming around them. The Riffi had launched a counter-attack, although they knew it was doomed to fail.

"Say," Schussler spoke hopefully, "nobody knew Haagen here. It would be bad luck if any one was at the ambulance or the hospital who knew him. They'll just tag Nelsen as Haagen, and who'll tell them differently?"

"That's so," Nelsen accepted hope greedily.

But Lanahan shook his head.

"Why kid ourselves? The doctors will spot that mutilated hand. Any African army surgeon knows where that sort of thing is done and why. They'll call in the police, and Nelsen will be identified in no time."

"Right," Nelsen conceded with a grim smile.

"I'll take the rap. Schussler, you obeyed orders."

"I can't help by getting in trouble myself. All right, sergeant."

"Cigarette, Nelsen?"

"Sure. Light it for me, eh?"

Lanahan leaned over the wounded man, holding the flaming match in the curve of his big palm. Nelsen inhaled deeply.

At the same time, the American felt a touch at his side. When he looked down, he saw that his pistol holster was empty. Nelsen held the gun in his left hand.

"Hold it, fellow," Lanahan caught

the wrist. He believed that the Dane wished to kill himself. He started to argue, half-heartedly: "While there's life, there's hope. Maybe—"

"I won't kill myself," Nelsen assured him.

And before Lanahan could prevent him, his right palm rested on the big muzzle of the automatic. There was a muffled detonation. Nelsen moaned, went limp. But he had achieved his purpose. The betraying mutilation was gone, replaced by a bleeding stump, a fresh, unsuspicious wound. A convict's greed for liberty knew no limit.

Lanahan bandaged the wound. As he was tying up the ends of the sodden roll, Castaix halted near him.

"Is the thumb left?"

"Yes, captain."

"Then he can use that stump almost as well as with those two fingers. No great loss."

"You had noticed, captain?"

"Think I'm blind?"

"I'll explain—"

"Nothing." The officer rose. "He's a game chap. See me tonight, after roll-call."

"Yes, captain."

"Meanwhile, you can escort him down the line. To the dressing station. The stretcher bearers are up now." The captain continued casually: "No one is likely to see Haagen, no one that matters. In a couple of hours, he'll be in an ambulance plane, bound for Meknes. I know the Hospital Louis—they're easy going there, won't delve far into records."

JUST before he was put under ether, the Dane recovered consciousness. He tried to smile. Lanahan touched his shoulder.

"Send me news care of regimental headquarters, soon as you can. Get it?" Nelsen's eyes fluttered in understanding. "Don't worry. The captain's wise and will help."

After the dressing, as the surgeon was washing his hands in a basin filled with pink water, waiting for the next case to be brought, Lanahan asked: "How about it, major?"

"He'll get through this—vigorous constitution, but emaciated. They must have worked you pretty hard, eh? He's through with the Legion, however—only thumb and little finger left on the right hand. Fifty per cent disability rating."

That night, Lanahan reported to the captain as instructed. Castaix handed him a yellowish army booklet, such as is carried by each man.

"That belongs to Haagen, Lanahan. You better send it to him, he may need it for official records." The captain lighted a cigar. "I took it out of a lot turned over to me last night as having belonged to the men killed. Not absolutely regular, of course, but I couldn't have a man reported dead one day and wounded the next. By the way, as a matter of business routine, I cited Karl Haagen posthumously, yesterday evening. I had promised him a citation during the afternoon action."

"So you knew it wasn't Haagen, last night?"

"I knew nothing, wish to know nothing. However, I have a circular from the military police, asking company commanders in this area to report the finding of the body of a military convict killed yesterday morning. From the name, I believe that the poor chap might have served in the Legion originially."

"Captain, you—I wish I could—" Lanahan faltered.

"How long have I known you, sergeant?"

"We met about three years ago, in Syria, captain."

"That's a long time in our trade. And I've heard of you. There are some men whose friendship vouches for the worth of another man. You're one of them. That's all—"

"The citation, captain—"

"Too late to stop it without attracting notice. The list was turned in last evening. Who knows but it may do your Haagen some good?"

It was six months later, in a small village of the Riff, that Lanahan received a letter from Denmark. He had received postal cards before, informing him that everything was progressing smoothly.

One or two paragraphs pleased him. Nelsen wrote:

> Naturally, I thought of the real Haagen's folks as soon as I got home. They live in a small village near Bremen. I'm turning over to them the small pension granted me by the French government for my wounds. I don't need the money, for I have a good position.
>
> My people are proud of me, queerly enough. Just why, I don't know, except that Haagen must have been a fine soldier. A general visited me in the Hospital at Meknes, and pinned the Military Medal on my chest. Of course, that entitles me to wear the Colonial Cross and the Moroccan Service Medal with silver clasp for the Riff, as well as a wound insigne. My family had not told any one just where I was, and every one believes I was in the Legion all this time, and one hell of a fighter!

Lanahan would have liked to show the letter to Captain Castaix.

But that was not possible. In reward for his charity. Heaven had been kind to the brave officer. A Mauser bullet between the eyes had sent him to join his wife and little baby in a prisonless world.

THE END

Feathered Lindberghs

PEOPLE who wanted to know how far birds can fly began several years ago to catch terns and gulls and put numbered bands around their legs. One bird thus banded in Labrador, a tern, was found dead four months later on the beach at Margate, in Natal, South Africa. This is believed to be the longest bird flight on record. In 1927 another tern banded in Labrador was found near La Rochelle, France, after a little more than two months.

A black-headed gull banded at Rossiten, Germany, was found seven months later near Vera Cruz, Mexico. Another was picked up at Newburyport, Mass., on mud flats. Stuffed, it reposes in the Boston Museum of Natural History.

The first U. S.-banded bird to make an ocean crossing was a common tern, set free in Maine in 1913. It was not picked up for four years—at the mouth of the Niger in Africa. The black-headed gull is not the usual seagull, but a variety only one-fourth as large. A large colony of them spend their summers in the Thames at London. In winter they roam the earth.

Delos White.

A stolen ruby—a man with a crushed skull—and a patrolman who wanted to be a detective

Harness Dick

By
RICHARD
HOWELLS
WATKINS

"His skull is caved in," muttered Tim

"ONE more crack about how you ought to be in the detective bureau an' so help me you'll be in the river," Patrolman Dave Scott rumbled. He glared formidably at the lean little driver of Radio Car 31. When workouts were scarce, arguments were plenty inside the green sedan. And tonight, though they had a slice containing riverfront, tenements, warehouses, theaters, and speakeasies, the big bad city wasn't big or bad enough to keep them peaceful.

Tim Lacey, heading west on 42nd Street through the dwindling post-midnight traffic, grinned at his partner's explosion and opened his mouth to retort. But headquarters interrupted, in a heavy official voice.

"All cars! The time is 1 A.M. Station W.P.E.G."

As Dave reached for his memo book

to record the time signal, Tim's agile mind skipped past the wrangle.

"Whenever I think it's getting near time to eat headquarters tells me it isn't," he complained. "A great invention, radio."

"You'd be flattening your feet on the sidewalk if it wasn't for radio," Dave Scott retorted. "Ye wouldn't rest till ye made—"

Tim Lacey, his thin, unhandsome face wrinkled in a squint toward the Ninth Avenue elevated structure ahead, put on the brake hard. "What's Blind Billy doing outside his newsstand dugout under the 'L' stairs?" he interrupted. "Look at him, Dave! Stamping around like mad!"

"Pull over!" muttered Dave. "There's been a couple of news dealers stuck up lately."

Tim brought the car to a stop within a couple of feet of the gesticulating old man. Blind Billy was mad and Dave, jumping out of the car, had to dodge swiftly to avoid an angry sweep of his stick.

"What's wrong, Billy?" Tim demanded.

The fat old dealer pivoted instantly toward the voice.

"That Tim Lacey?" he rasped. "I've been robbed! You cops is never around when—"

"Which way? How many? What did they look—" Tim's eager voice dwindled as he stared into the sightless, glaring eyes of Billy. Dave Scott ran out into Ninth Avenue to command four directions.

"How could I tell you what he looks like?" Billy yelled in a frenzy of irritation. "I heard the guy's voice—I can pick him out by his damn, jeering voice—out of a thousand I could pick—"

"Could you hear which way he ran?" Tim broke in. "How much did he get?"

"He got one o' my paper weights—a good heavy sash weight!" the blind newsdealer snapped. He pounded a pile of early editions with a dirty, wrinkled hand. "Right off them he took it!"

Tim Lacey grunted and beckoned to Dave Scott. "Just a paper weight? Nothing else?"

"He come down the 'L' stairs—a heavy stepping guy," old Billy said. "I heard him stop in front of the stand. 'Early morning paper, sir?' I asks him. 'I need this more than you do, buddy,' he says, and I hear the papers start fluttering. When I put out my hand to feel the paper weight was gone. You cops—"

Dave Scott looked at his partner. "He swiped just a paper weight?"

"You heard what I said, Dave Scott!" Billy snarled. "I suppose it takes a million dollar stick-up to make you move—and then you move the wrong way!"

"Maybe a poor unfortunate husband going home late with something to protect himself with," Tim Lacey suggested, grinning. "How about it, Dave? You know more about home life than I do."

"Blast you cops, I want my weight!" screamed Billy. "That's all you cops are good for—to make jokes—only you're bigger jokes yerself! You—"

The sonorous voice of the dispatcher at Police Headquarters broke in so unexpectedly that the blind man's yelling faded away:

"All cars! Signal twenty-nine. Car license RX 328543. Ford sedan last seen on Dyckman Street, eastbound. One-six A.M. Station W.P.E.G."

"Hear that, Billy?" said Tim, as

Dave Scott dived for his book. "That's the sort of stuff headquarters keeps us working on. Signal 29's a stolen car. We'll take a run up and down the avenue to see if we spot anybody, but if the patrol sergeant found us out of our sector looking for a sash weight—"

BUT Billy refused to be mollified. "Excuses—always excuses!" he snapped. "My papers can blow from here to Harlem an' you cops don't give—"

Patrol Car 31 rolled hastily out of hearing.

"Billy's a good guy but he likes to keep it a secret," Tim said.

"You might ha' convinced him better if that alarm hadn't been up in the sticks," Dave Scott replied, shutting his book. "That's one yelp out o' headquarters that we don't need to worry about."

But Tim wasn't worrying about the alarm. He was thinking. "A sash weight," he muttered.

"There's things a sash weight can be used for besides balancing a window," observed the big recorder.

"Balancing a grudge, maybe, Dave," Tim agreed. "Hey?"

"You'd rather suspect than eat, you harness dick!"

Five minutes later Dave Scott was saying with dignity: "You're talking to a man that's already 437th on the sergeant's promotion list."

"Well, right there's 436 reasons why you won't be made," Tim retorted. "And—"

"Car 31!" said headquarters. Tim's hands tightened on the steering wheel.

"Proceed to Schoonhoven's lunchroom, on Ninth Avenue at Forty—"

"Schoonhoven's!" Tim exclaimed, jazzing the car around in the width of the street.

"Shut up!" muttered Dave, staring up at the loudspeaker.

"Code No. Four-twelve," the announcer's voice went on. "Time one-eleven A.M. W.P.E.G."

"Four-twelve!" Dave gasped, fumbling with his book. "That means murder! Step on it, Tim!"

"Are you telling me?" retorted Tim. The car was already rocketing down the side street. Tim's hand leaped to set the siren shrilling to clear a way on the avenue. But he did not press the button. The car lunged on silently through the block of sleeping tenements.

Tim took the turn with his tires screeching in a broadside skid, dodged an elevated pillar and went storming down the avenue.

"Get your gun loose!" he warned Dave Scott. "This workout is red hot!"

There was no excitement, no crowd milling around in front of Schoonhoven's.

All they could see as the hard-pressed car squealed to a halt was a short, scrubby man in a dirty apron who came bolting toward them out of the lunch room.

Tim flung himself out one door before Dave Scott was off the running board.

"D'you report a murder?" he snapped. "Talk fast!"

"Yeah—yeah—" stammered the man. "I'm Nagle—the night man back o' the counter here. He's in there—the dead one. He's—"

"The killer, man!" Dave Scott cried. "Where did he go?"

The stocky counter man pointed up the avenue. "He run out an' hopped a taxi—northbound," he declared. "I couldn't get no number, so after I'd run after it a block I come back, looked

around for a cop an' then telephoned p'lice headquarters."

Rapidly Tim drained him of information about the cab. It was one of a fleet of six hundred—all of which looked alike. Tim gave vent to a groan of disappointment.

Dave Scott led the way into the lunch room. It was empty—except for a man sprawled on the floor between two of the high stools. Tim dropped beside him. The still figure was that of a tall, narrow-chested man.

"Dead, all right," Tim muttered. "Skull caved in! Lock that door, Dave, before some sightseers come crashing in."

When Dave stepped back from the door Tim's attention was focused minutely on something beside the body.

"Sash weight!" he said, jerking his head up to catch his partner's eyes.

"Yeah," said Nagle, fingering his apron. "That's what the other guy socked him with. An' it was plenty, too."

"Just as you said, Dave," Tim murmured. His hands slid over the pockets of the dead man. "There's things a sash weight can be used for besides balancing a window."

"Don't touch that body, Tim!" Dave Scott warned his partner sharply. "Control that detective complex o' yours. This is one for the homicide squad."

"The squad won't do loops just because I take a squint at a couple o' letters," Tim retorted.

"You know the orders!"

"By heart," Tim agreed. "All I want is his name."

HE had slipped an envelope out of the breast pocket of the corpse. He stared at it with widening eyes. "Addressed to John Radway. Great Pete! This envelope's got 'Parole Board' on it. Maybe this fellow Radway's a crook out on parole!"

"He looks like a hard one to me," muttered the counter man, planting his elbows on the oilcloth.

"Put that envelope back before you land yourself on the carpet, Tim!" Dave Scott urged. "We got to report! Tell us what happened, Nagle."

"I was alone in here, washin' up after some customers," the counter man said. "This guy that was murdered — Radway, hey? — Well, he came in an' called for coffee."

"Alone?"

"That's right. Then, maybe a minute later the other one—that done the killing—walks in. A tall young fellow with sandy hair. Sort of smooth pink complexion, like a girl, and a bright blue necktie. His right hand hung behind his back as he come in and he's lookin' hard at Radway. Radway's just sittin' on his stool, with his coffee."

"Never mind the coffee," Tim urged. "Step on it!"

"This tall, fair fellow walks up to Radway an' socks him over the head with that thing—that weight."

"It was the weight that he had behind his back?"

"That's right. Radway falls off the stool an' lands like he is now. This tall bird turns on me. 'Stand still,' he says, liftin' that chunk of iron at me. I don't move."

Nagle shook his head.

"Not me," he said. "I don't move. Well, this fellow bends over an' frisks this stiff. He does it like he knows what he's after. An' he pulls out o' Radway's coat pocket the biggest red stone I ever saw."

Tim Lacey stared with incredulous hostility at the counter man.

"He pulled out what?" Dave Scott demanded.

Nagle jerked his head back and forth in dogged affirmation. His small black eyes shifted from one patrolman to the other.

"A big—ruby—they call 'em," he said. "All glowin' an' glitterin'—enough to knock your eye out. I ain't kiddin' you."

"What is this, anyhow?" Tim Lacey exploded. "A talkie? Why would a guy like Radway be carrying rubies into a Ninth Avenue all night lunch? Where would he get it?"

"How do I know?" the counter man answered sullenly. "All I can tell you is this guy got the stone out of Radway's pocket."

"Then what?" demanded Dave Scott.

"This tall slugger drops the weight beside the body an' breezes with the stone. I run after him in time to see him hop the cab, but—I—I—I—"

Nagle's voice was breaking into hoarse, stammered syllables. His deep-set eyes, bulging suddenly, had switched from the policeman to the front of the lunch room.

Tim Lacey wheeled swiftly. The harsh white light of the room showed him the figure of a tall man with a brilliant blue necktie peering in through the plate glass window.

"Look!" he gasped, and bounded toward the door. The lock delayed him an instant; then he flung open the door and rushed out.

"That's him!" shrilled the counter man. "That's the one!"

The tall eavesdropper had whirled at the sight of the uniforms and started away at a rapid walk. He had not gone a dozen steps when Tim Lacey clapped a hand on his arm.

"Come inside!" the wiry little patrol car driver commanded and the clutch of his fingers halted the taller man instantly.

"I—let go!"

"Be sensible!" Tim Lacey warned him grimly. The hand by which he gripped the man was not his gun hand. That was free.

"Come inside, young fellow!" Dave Scott growled from the doorway. "We want to talk to you!"

The tall fair young man tried hard to wrench his arm free of Tim's grasp.

"Very well—but don't hold me!" he complained in a high voice, distinctly English in accent. "I've committed no crime, y'know, constable!"

"That's all we want to find out," Tim answered, and ushered him into the lunch room, past Dave's stalwart figure. The lock clicked again.

The lanky, well clad Englishman strode in angrily. Suddenly he recoiled. The starch went out of him. His ruddy face went ashen as his eyes took in the body on the floor.

"Good heavens!" he cried. "Is—is he dead?"

"They don't live long with their skulls caved in," Tim Lacey retorted grimly. "Remember that next time you swing a window weight."

"That's the guy that socked him, all right," Nagle said with certainty in his voice. "Blue tie an' everything—like I told you. An' he come back! You hit hard enough the first time, guy, unless you figured on getting me this trip."

THE prisoner turned from one stern face to the other; then writhed spasmodically as Dave Scott pinned his arms behind him.

"Frisk him, Tim," the patrolman said. "We don't want any more accidents around here."

"Hold still!" snapped Tim. "All correct, Dave. No gun." He searched on. "And no—other things," he added guardedly.

Dave Scott released the man. He staggered back against the wall.

"I protest!" he cried in a thin voice. "You have no right to—"

"Oh, calm down!" Tim commanded. "O' course we haven't got any right, English. If you want to make a statement, shoot. But remember we can use it."

"Most certainly I'll make a statement!" retorted the prisoner. He shrugged his shoulders and jerked his disarranged coat collar into proper position. "My name's Curtis—Llewellyn Curtis. I have a small part in a play now running—"

"That'll come later!" Tim broke in. "Our phone report's overdue." He stabbed downward at the still figure on the floor. "How about this?"

Curtis' eye avoided the body. "Tonight after the show I was in a night club on Forty-fourth Street," he said rapidly. "Not a very exclusive one."

"A speak," said big Dave succinctly.

"Yes—a speakeasy," Curtis agreed. "After a couple of short ones I showed to several friends a huge red stone that is one of the stage properties used in the play."

"You mean the stone's a fake?" Dave interrupted again. "It isn't a ruby?"

"Phony!" muttered the counter man.

"Of course it isn't a ruby," the actor said. "A ruby of that size would be worth thousands of pounds—a million dollars, perhaps."

Tim looked down at the dead man. "Not real, hey?" he muttered skeptically. "But real murder's been done for it. Keep talking!"

"I told my friends a dashed good yarn about a miserly old uncle of mine who'd hoarded gems. This ruby, I said, was my share—my inheritance. Pulling their legs, y' understand."

He made a quick, eloquent gesture toward the floor. "This poor devil was sitting at the next table. When I waited near the cloakroom to get my hat I noticed him in the crowd near me. He got his hat just before I did. As I went down the steps I happened to feel for the stone. It was gone. I was sure he had picked my pocket."

"Parole Board's interested in him, anyhow," muttered Dave. He had a nickel in his hand and his impatient gaze was fixed upon the telephone on the wall.

"I followed the man," the long, reedy actor said. "He knew I was following. He went up one stairway of the elevated and then dodged down the other. That convinced me that he had it."

"Why all that trouble about a fake ruby?" Tim's voice was cutting.

"You don't know our property man—and what a row he'd make about that bit of glass," Curtis retorted. "I had to get back that prop. I saw him enter this place. After making sure he had no gang here I came in, too. He was sitting at the counter. I approached him, with my right hand poking out my pocket, as if I held a pistol."

"Where was the sash weight?"

CURTIS glanced down at the long iron bar. "Didn't notice it at all," he asserted. "I made the fellow put up his hands and I searched him. He didn't resist but he grinned at me. Not at all like an honest man resenting unjust suspicion. But he didn't have the ruby on him."

He nodded emphatically. "He didn't have it on him," he repeated. "Well—I went out. But after walking about a bit I said, 'Dash it all! He must have it!' So I came back again and looked in the window. That's where you took a hand—and a rough one, I must say!"

Tim scowled. "Now we got it all straight," he grunted. "This Radway cracked his own skull for stealing a phony ruby."

"Nothing but lies," Nagle declared. "An' some o' the smoothest—"

"Shut up!" Dave commanded, moving toward the phone booth, with a sour eye on his dilatory partner. "We've got one too many detectives here right now."

"Well, this detective is leaving!" Tim Lacey flared. "An' this actor is coming with me—just for a walk."

"You're—you're arresting me?" Curtis gasped, as Tim herded him toward the door.

"It's against the law in this country to kill guys!" the counter man put in.

"You crazy?" Dave Scott demanded of Tim, moving after him. His broad face was wrinkled with apprehension at this latest vagary of his partner.

"Spend your nickel!" Tim retorted, gesturing toward the telephone. "By the time you've unloaded your face to headquarters we'll be back."

He pushed the hesitant actor out the door and followed him closely.

"Walk—don't run!" the wiry patrolman warned Curtis. "And remember—don't try any exits on me!"

DAVE SCOTT came to an abrupt halt as the door slammed in his face. Scowling, he turned toward the telephone, reported to the signal monitor at headquarters a murder and a suspect and got curt orders to stand by until the homicide men reached the scene.

"You got that bad actor on ice," the counter man assured the big cop as he hung up. "Maybe it is his stone, like he says, but he ain't got no right to cave in this dip's skull for pickin' his pocket. An' I seen him do it."

Patrolman Scott, staring anxiously out at the empty sidewalk, did not answer. He gave vent to a grunt of relief as his partner came into sight outside with Curtis.

"Where you been?" Dave demanded as they reëntered the lunch room.

"You know what an ear for voices Blind Billy has," Tim Lacey told him. "Well, Billy swears Curtis hasn't the voice that said, 'I need this more than you do, buddy,' as the sashweight was taken."

"Huh!" muttered Dave. "Outside of a bawling out for exceedin' our duty what does that add up to?"

"If Radway brought that stone in and Curtis didn't get it maybe it's still here," Tim suggested.

"I'm telling you Curtis had that hunk of iron when he come in an' he had the ruby when he went out!" Nagle insisted. He flung a generous hand around the small lunch room. "If you want to search the joint or me for that stone go ahead!" he proposed. "Why should I lie to cops?"

TIM LACEY put his arms on the counter and stared rapidly around the room. "That homicide gang will be on our necks any minute," he muttered with distinct uneasiness.

Abruptly he turned to the Englishman.

"Just what was Radway doing when you came in?"

"He wasn't doing anything," the actor replied. "He was sitting there motionless, with a cup of coffee in front of him."

"He wasn't drinking the coffee?"

"No."

"Full cup?"

Curtis hesitated. "I think it was," he said at last. "About as full as that cup over there by the—ah—that coffee machine there."

"That ain't Radway's cup," Nagle put in. "That's a cup I poured out for myself after I phoned for you cops. An' did I need it! After seein' that guy killed!"

"If you needed it why didn't you drink it?" asked Tim.

"You got here too quick."

Tim nodded his head. "We got here pretty quick, Nagle," he agreed. "And if there's a big red stone in the bottom of that cup of coffee then there's something phony about your story."

He stretched out a hand across the counter.

"Hand over that cup!" he commanded.

"Sure! Sure!" said Nagle. He took two steps toward the shining percolator, picked up the cup with his left hand and turned toward them. As he did so his right hand came out from under his dirty apron. It came so fast that all Dave Scott made out was a glint of blue-black steel.

But Tim Lacey moved as fast as the hand. With a foot planted on a stool he went flying over the counter and down on Nagle.

The room shook with the roar of a shot and a bullet burned the air past Dave Scott's neck. Then Nagle hit the floor with a thud, with Tim Lacey on top of him. Before Dave got over the counter Tim had a hand on the bellowing gun and the bullets were starring the mirror.

"Drop it or I'll twist your hand off your wrist!" Tim snapped. His wiry arms made a good start on the job.

Nagle quit. "All right, officer!" he gasped, staring up with frightened eyes as the wrathful Dave Scott loomed over him. "All right! I didn't mean to shoot—the gat just went off when you jumped me—I was just aimin' to ease out—the back—"

Llewellyn Curtis elaborately lit a cigarette in an earnest effort to steal the show. "I fancy you know now who killed this other johnnie," he said.

"I'm beginning to suspect," Tim retorted. He was still kneeling on top of the counter man. "Did the sash weight just go off, too, Nagle?"

"I'll cop the plea—on manslaughter!" Nagle blurted out. "I swear it wasn't no murder. Listen; this Radway come in an' slid that weight behind the counter under a towel where it was handy. I seen that in the mirror an' watched."

He jerked a hand toward the body on the other side of the counter. "*He* dropped that red stone in his cup o' coffee just before that damn actor come in. When Curtis went out after searchin' Radway I grabbed the cup. Radway got me by the throat an' we wrestled across the counter for the sash weight. I had to sock him or he'd ha' killed me."

"And then you called the cops as an out for you, figuring you could fool us on that cup o' coffee."

He glanced toward the now nonchalant actor. "We ain't that dumb," he added.

"You ought to be in the detective bureau," Dave Scott muttered.

THE END

STRANGER *than* FICTION

By JOHN S. STUART

SCOTCH THRIFT

IN Ruthwell Village, Dumfrieshire, Scotland, stands a humble cottage. This cottage is momentous in the history of banking, because it was here, in the year 1810, that the Rev. Henry Duncan established the first savings bank. It was called The Savings and Friendly Society, with the noble aim of abolishing pauperism, through industry and thrift.

BANANAS ONLY

REDUCING diets run in fads—the latest is composed entirely of skim milk. But stranger than fiction, there is one three-year-old boy in East Orange, New Jersey, who has lived for two years of his life on nothing but bananas! He eats about twenty-one a day, sometimes cooked, but for the most part raw. He has an abdominal inflammation which makes the one-fruit-diet necessary, and he has gained weight normally during his banana term.

DOG FIGHT

TWO dogs met in a street in Geziret Awlad Hamza, a village in Upper Egypt. They growled and attacked each other. The boys who owned them tried to separate them, and one boy hit the other. The second boy hit back; then two elder brothers joined in; then their respective fathers; then other members of the two families. A furious battle followed; clubs were used and shots were fired. The dogs went on fighting. When the police restored order, one of the rioters was dead, four were wounded, and nearly all were injured.

MILK FOR THE KING

IN Bunyoro, Uganda, until very recently, tradition prescribed the king's diet. He was permitted a modicum of sacramental meat on special occasions, but the rest of the time his only food was milk. A special herd of sacred cows supplied his milk, and all those serving him and attending the cows covered their faces, chests and arms with milk-white clay.

KITCHEN BOOK WORM

THE public library in Montreal was amazed recently when a big, husky fellow walked in and demanded a number of books on cooking. Day after day he returned, until he had studied all available cooking books from cover to cover. Then a month passed and he did not come in. But when at last he returned it was to announce that he had obtained a position as a cook in a leading hotel.

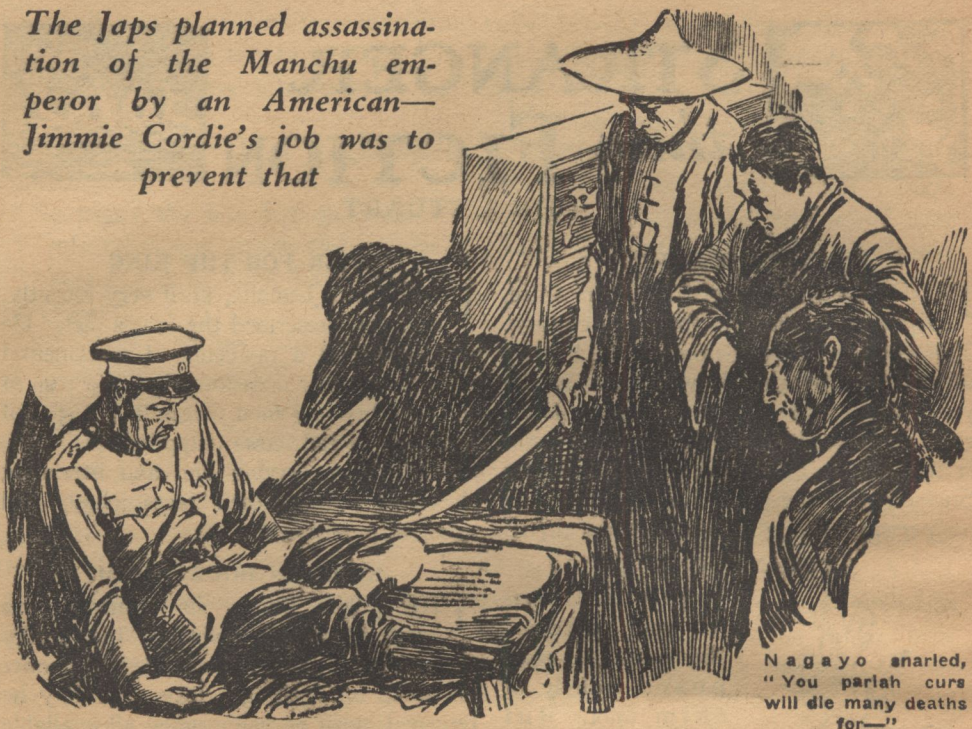
WANNA BUY A GOOSE?

IN Dayton, Washington, a goose on the Fred Gilbert farm arose from her nest proudly. There were four goslings — and such goslings! Three of them had two distinct sets of wings; while the fourth had four legs!

NEW YORK BY CANDLELIGHT

WHAT might be termed the first street lights in New York were established in 1697. A resolution was passed that "lights be hung out in the dark time of the moon, within this city, and for the use of its inhabitants; and that every seventh house do hang out a lantern with a candle in it."

The Japs planned assassination of the Manchu emperor by an American—Jimmie Cordie's job was to prevent that



Nagayo snarled, "You pariah curs will die many deaths for—"

The Assassin

By W. WIRT

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

LOUIS CHAPMAN, American gangster and killer, is hired by Colonel Takara, member of the Japanese Military Intelligence, to assassinate the Emperor of Manchukuo, popularly known as Henry Pu-Yi. Takara hopes by this murder to incite Japan to war with the United States. Chapman, addicted to drugs, does not realize that he is merely the tool of the Japanese. Chapman's wife, Betty Ann Shelby, who is searching in China for him, meets Jimmie Cordie and his comrades of fortune, and asks that they help to locate Chapman and warn him. Jimmie obtains the aid of Chang-lung Liang, leader of the rich and powerful House of Chi, and sets out to find Chapman.

Jimmie arranges by means of offering valuable treasure to the Khan of the Badakshans, a hill tribe, to have himself and his pals taken into make-believe capture, so that they may nearer approach the place where they believe Chapman is. Lieutenant-General Nagayo learns that Jimmie and his friends are held captive and wants to take them over from the Badakshans; but the Khan will not listen to his proposal. While a "prisoner," Jimmie bribes an old Chinese peddler, a member of the powerful secret society, the T'aip'ing, to find out where Chapman is to be found. He is informed that he is staying over the shop of T'ang Li, a Chinese spy for the Japs. Jimmie and Grigsby, disguised as Chinese peddlers, along with several T'aip'ing swordsmen, leave the Badakshan camp and force their way through T'ang Li's shop to meet Chapman. Meanwhile, T'ang Li's Chinese servant, a boy, sneaks out of the shop and by luck meets Colonel Takara and Major

This story began in the Argosy for September 15

Shiga, who go to the shop and surprise Jimmie and his party. Fire breaks out and there is much gun-play. Jimmie has to leave without Chapman, who is wounded in the ear by a shot. Next morning Major Shiga visits the Badakshan camp and is surprised to find that Jimmie and his friends are still prisoners. He cannot understand it, and realizes that Chapman cannot be depended upon for reliable information, since he is so filled with dope. Although Jimmie eluded Takara's grasp, it has not simplified the task of getting hold of Chapman, who has been taken away from T'ang Li's shop. The dangerous hunt for Chapman goes on.

CHAPTER XIII.

JIMMIE'S SECRET.

AT last, a break came for Jimmie Cordie. It did not look like one and it maybe should not be called one. A better way to put it would be that it started lifting the seeming impregnable fog.

A T'aip'ing reported to Jimmie and Fang Lu that an old Manchu woman told him that a day or so ago she had sold to a Japanese officer a drug that makes the person taking it like a child —an obedient little child.

"We have been hunting in the wrong fields, little brothers," Jimmie Cordie said. "Now we will hunt along the line of march to the Altar and around it. Find any and all places where a rifleman might be concealed whose rifle commands the Altar or the way to it. There are not many houses. Find out who lives in the house and what they do. Find out if any space has been rented and to whom. We will start searching for a place."

"It will not be hard to find, honorable elder brother. All that live along the road are Chinese. There is no house near the Altar itself."

"That makes it easier. Start from where Henry Pu-Yi leaves his palace. I go back now to the Badakshan camp and await you, Fang Lu. First, buy and bring to me some of the drug that makes one like a little child."

"As you order, mighty honorable elder brother of the resplendent Head."

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL NAGAYO was a pleasure loving gentleman and when not on duty gratified his desires as far as he could. The night before the Emperor, Henry Pu-Yi, was due to parade to the Altar and there make his peace with Heaven, Nagayo had indulged in a little stepping out. He did not want it known generally that he was doing it, so he had arranged matters so that he could slip into a place where wine, women, and song awaited him, without any of the Jap officers knowing about it, except a young captain of his staff. He had his good time and in the wee small hours left the place and sauntered along towards the place where the young captain was waiting for him. That he could be in any danger never occurred to him. He was about in the center of a Japanese division and there was no reason why he should not unbelt.

He passed a cart from which the horses had been taken. Just as he cleared it, something hit him on the head. If Nagayo had time to think of anything he must have thought the heavens had fallen in.

When he finally came back to life he was sitting propped up on a couch and there were three Chinese standing in front of him. He stared at them and finally said, "What does this mean? You pariah curs will die many deaths for—" Jimmie Cordie, still in disguise but with the coolie hat off, stepped up where Nagayo could see him.

"What's the matter, General?"

"You! You are responsible for this outrage? By all the Gods, Captain Cordie, you will pay for this. You dare—"

"Something seems to have got you all fussed up, General. When you were a lowly colonel you were much more calm and collected."

"You must be crazy, you Yankee mongrel. My absence will be noted and—"

"I'll send word to Headquarters that you are busy on Intelligence work, General. All right, Fang Lu."

A little later Jimmie said, "Well, that's that. Take care of him, little brother."

"LISTEN to me, Jimmie Cordie," Red commanded, firmly. "Ye have something up the sleeve ave ye, don't tell me different. Ye sit here wid a grin on the face ave ye, doin' nawthin and 'tis well ye know that tomorrow the Manchu scut goes to the Altar. Ye said so yeself last night. Ye have not found Chapman, ye have done nawthin and yet, ye sit and grin."

"Well, what the heck do you want me to do, run around crying? I've done the best I could, please sir. All I can think of now is what the Japs are going to do with us when old Mangali Boga gives us up."

"Go on, ye can't fool me, who has been wid ye for many the year. Ye are not the wan to sit grinnin', me bucko. Tell me, Jimmie, darlin'."

"Go ahead, redhead, smooch it out of him. He is holdin' out on us."

"Who asked ye to butt in, ye dish faced scut? Jimmie is not. He wouldn't do such a thing, would ye, Jimmie alanna?"

"Heck I wouldn't, ye big ape. You and the Yid and the Bean, a fine three to draw to. Who kidded the Japs when I said not to?"

"Again I am wrongfully associated with the lower classes," the Bean objected. "I did not kid the Japs, Jeems. Tell me. Remember that time when the Bat d'Af gang tried to clean up on us at Abibad? Who stood at your back and fought them offen you? While Red ran as fast as he could? None other but yours truly, John—"

"The while I ran? I never ran in me life, ye Bosting beaneater. If the hands ave me was untied, I'd cram that lie down the throat ave ye."

"Tell you vot," suggested the Yid. "Ve get it Red und de Bean untied und let dem go to it. It vill pass avay de time und—"

"Get yerself untied also, me bully. After I take the Codfisher apart I'll do the same for ye."

"Sic 'em, Red. I'm for you. I got ten dollars that says you can do it."

"Wait a minute," the Bean protested. "Can't you two nuts see that Jeems is sidetracking us? Are you going to tell us, Jeems?"

"No, I am not."

"Sorry the day. Sorry the day indeed that I live to hear Jimmie Cordie says he won't tell us somethin'. For years we have fought by the side ave him in the cold and in the hot. Wounded we have been and wounded he has been and always we have been—"

"Sure I will tell you anything I know, you big redheaded fool."

"Oh, ye will? That's different, ye black muzzled scut. I knew ye would all the time. Go ahead, Jimmie darlin'. What have ye up the sleeve ave ye?"

"I have my arm up my sleeve. Listen, we gave up hunting for Chapman and hunted instead for the place he is to be planted to get Henry Pu-Yi.

We found it and for Pete's sake don't ask me how, either. We know exactly where he is going to be placed, at what window and everything. We are going to try and stop him firing on Henry. We—"

"Who the hell is we?" interrupted Red.

"Me and the T'aip'ing," answered Jimmie with a grin.

"Oh, ye are? Ye and the T'aip'ing. And what are we supposed to do, sit here and suck the thumbs ave us?"

"My good man, how can you suck your thumbs when they are both tied behind your back?" asked the Bean, in a bored tone.

"Vot, don't you know, Beany? De red jackal is von of dem tvisters. You know, vot turns it demselves inside out?"

"You mean a turncoat? I thought that only the black Irish were turncoats?"

"Ye have gone too far, Beaneater," Red said, bitterly, "ye have gone too far. The Yid gibbon I pay no attention to, but ye—listen to me, ye—"

Red forgot all about pressing Jimmie for further elaboration of what Jimmie had up his sleeve besides his arm. And before he and the Yid, who joined in with Red against the Bean, and the Bean got through, Jimmie Cordie, George Grigsby and Carewe disappeared, one by one.

Red, when he tired of blackguarding the Bean, looked around. "What the hell! Where's Jimmie?"

"Und George und Carewe?"

The Bean laughed. "Evidently we are not included in what Jimmie had up his sleeve."

"The dirty ditchers! Come on, we'll get these ropes untied and go and—"

"Vate a minute, Red. If Jimmie vanted us along he vould have taken us. He vants us right here for some reason. Maybe if ve vent, it vould fog him up."

"Why didn't he tells us, then? 'Tis the first time he ever—"

"It may be well, me good man," the Bean interrupted mildly, "that we did not give him a chance. He started to tell us and you began sounding off as usual."

"Right ye are, Beany, for a wonder. 'Tis our own fault."

"Vy say it 'our,' Irish gonif? Dot's vot ve get, Codfisher, for beink friends mit a Irisher."

"You are quite correct, Mr. Cohen. From now on I am intirely offen all Irishers and redheaded ones in particular."

Red's answer consigned the Yid and the Bean to a place where no one wishes to go and also included a description of their ancestors.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FAKE DUEL.

SEVERAL Japanese non-commissioned officers were on their way to secure a good place to see the ceremony at the Altar. One of them was being kidded by the others. Army kidding is not at all delicate and the non-com on the receiving end was getting more and more angry. It seems that he had bought a watch from a Chinese peddler. The case was supposed to be gold and the Jap had paid a good price for it. Not only had the watch stopped running but the case had begun to turn green. Instead of keeping still about it, the young non-com had broadcasted his sorrow at being done in. As a result, he was made the butt of many more or less witty remarks that occurred to his buddies.

"Wait," he declared, "I will find that dog of a Chinese and make him not only give me my money back but also—"

"How will you know him when you see him?" asked a corporal. "You cannot even tell when a watch case is only washed with gold."

"I will make the first one of them I see repay me. He can collect from the one who—who—look, here comes some of them. Now I will show you whether I am a fool or not."

The Tartars have a saying, "Erein mor nigen bui," which in English is, "A man's path is only one." In other words, "Thy fate is written upon thy forehead and alter it thou canst not."

However true the above is fate, or what you will, placed the Japanese non-commissioned officers squarely in the path of Jimmie Cordie, Grigsby and Carewe, all made up as Chinese peddlers. With them were six of the T'aip'ing.

"Spread out a little," an older non-com commanded. "Let them think they are passing between us. Then Oama can—"

"I have a better plan," another interrupted. "We will take them all to Captain Saigo's machine gun company. He and the lieutenants are away and First Sergeant Taira is a friend of mine. We will claim that some one of them robbed a private of our regiment. Taira will hold them for us until after the ceremony. Then we will take them some other place and"—he grinned—"relieve them of their burdens."

"That is a fine plan. We will all share alike—after Oama collects for his watch. Here, officers might come along."

The Japanese spread out and the real and synthetic Chinese, heads down, started to scuttle through them. Suddenly a non-com drew his revolver and commanded, "Halt."

The peddlers halted, that was all they could do. There was absolutely no chance to make a break. Other Japanese were fairly close and all wore their side arms.

As they halted, the T'aip'ing got around the soldiers of fortune. "Will we cut the way for you, honorable elder brother?" the leader asked, softly.

"No," answered Jimmie, "it may be that—pretend to be afraid and do as they command until—"

The Japs formed a line and the one with the drawn revolver commanded, "Forward!"

A T'aip'ing began, "But why, mighty warrior? We have permission to—"

"Silence, pariah cur. Forward."

Other revolvers appeared in the hands of the non-coms in the line as the command was issued. Again there was nothing to do but obey, either that or die right there. The life of a Chinese was considered worth less than nothing and Jimmie Cordie and the others knew it. The soldiers would trump up some story of being attacked—afterwards.

They were marched to where a machine gun company was stationed. One of the units placed by the Japanese in strategical positions all around the city. The first sergeant came forward and after a moment's conversation, walked up to the peddlers and snarled, "Get over there near those boxes and stay there."

For the third time, a command was obeyed. Not all the company was with the machine guns. Quite a few had leave to see the ceremony but there were plenty left to stop any running away. The Jap non-coms laughed and

swaggered away, very sure that right after they saw Henry Pu-Yi go through the ceremony at the Altar they would be dividing the contents of nine trays of goods and also what money the peddlers had on them.

THE Japs of the company paid no attention to the group, more than a curious look or two. The first sergeant shouted, "Go on with your work." And as he was greatly feared by the men of the company, they obeyed.

"My word," Carewe said, "what a giddy old mess, what, what, what? I say, Jimmie, this will take some quick thinking."

"It will take more than thinking, Jonathan, old kid. The Nine Red Gods are playing against us. In less than an hour, Henry Pu-Yi starts for the Altar. If the Intelligence had caught us I wouldn't feel so darn washed out. But having a bunch of Jap non-coms pick us up for some unknown reason just at the wrong moment, gets my well known goat. If they had only taken one more drink of rice wine before they started for the parade, we would have been in the clear."

"That 'if' is a sad word, Jimmie," Grigsby said. "You can 'if' yourself all the way back to when the world was created. If this had not happened, that wouldn't. Let's see what we can do. If—there I go 'if-ing' myself. Anyway, if one of us could reach those houses, he could go through with it."

Jimmie turned a little and looked over at the rear of several Chinese shacks that were within two hundred feet. "That's right, George. But they might just as well be at the North Pole. Two hundred odd feet to go in the open with fifty or sixty Japs who would rather crack down on us than not."

"I say! If we could think of something that would attract their jolly old attention for a few seconds, one of us might make it."

Jimmie Cordie laughed, not a very happy laugh, either. He was seeing, in his mind's eye, Henry Pu-Yi go down under a bullet fired by an American and thinking of what would happen afterwards. He had been so cocksure that he was going to prevent it and now—he was sitting about in the middle of a Jap machine gun company and the minutes were ticking off. "Go ahead and think of something. Darned if I can."

One of the T'aip'ing who could understand and speak quite a little English, said, "We will charge the little mongrels, black eyed smiling one. There are six of us and we have our swords. In the confusion, you, our elder blothels, can lun."

"There are not any of them near enough to you. See how they are scattered out. Before you could reach them with your good swords, they would have drawn their guns, little brother. The guns would speak fast and—and—if we could bunch them in some way—little brother, you are ready always to die for the society?"

"Yes, mighty one honoled by the all powelful Head. Tluly, what better death could be found? To die, swold in hand, for the T'aip'ing, means that our lelations to the ninth delgee will be enliched and honoled. We seek always the chance."

"That I know—is true. Because in doing it I may save the lives of countless men and also the lives of women and gentle little ones—I, the honorable elder brother of the resplendent Head, send you to your death, little brothers."

"Give oldels."

"Four of you rise and begin to talk

very angrily, two against two. After the count of ten, one will strike another in the face with the hand. Then all four become calm and back away from each other a little ways. I mean two back away from the other two. Is that plain?"

"Yes, elder blother, it is plain."

"Then, one who remains seated jumps up and calls to the Nippon sergeant who stands there by the gun. When he comes up he will be told that the four wish to fight a sword duel. If he agrees, fight the duel. It may be that the men of Nippon will crowd around to see it. If they do, they will push us, who remain here out of their way. It may be that we can make the houses. If they see us trying, those that fight and the two who watch will close with them and—take their attention for as long as possible. It will be to the death, little brother, unless we make it to the houses without being seen. If we do, stop the duel after you have fought long enough to make it look real. The little men of Nippon will think that three of the peddlers have escaped through no fault of yours. Are you ready?"

"Yes, honolable elder blother, as soon as I tell those who cannot undelstand English."

The Jap non-com looked over as four of the Chinese jumped up and began an excited, shrill argument. He made no move to come over, probably thinking it just a squabble between peddlers. But when one of those who remained seated rose and called to him, he sauntered over.

"What is it?" he rasped.

He was told that the four who argued wanted to fight a duel. "What with? Those pocket knives in that tray?"

"No, they have swords, General."

"Oh, they have, have they? Chinese with swords concealed under their robes. It is against orders and—" the sergeant stopped talking for a moment. He was angry because he could not see the ceremony and also very much bored. Let the Chinese fight and afterwards he could find out from the survivors why swords were being carried. The fact that he had promised to hold them for the other non-coms didn't make any difference to him. Let them guard their own prisoners if they wanted to keep them.

"All right," he went on, "let them fight." Then he thought he would let the men of the company in on it and afterwards make them pay him for the show. He shouted, "A duel is to be fought! Come and see it!"

AS he shouted, the T'aip'ing drew their swords from under their blouses and began circling each other, two against two. The Japanese soldiers, nothing loath, ran in from all sides. What Jimmie hoped for, came true. He, Grigsby, Carewe and the two remaining T'aip'ing were pushed, kicked and rolled out of the way and the Japs formed a circle around the contestants.

"Let's go, Jimmie," Grigsby said, as he picked himself up.

"I'm on my way," Jimmie answered, with a grin, as he got on his feet. "All right, Carewe?"

"Right, Jimmie."

They started, the two T'aip'ing with them. And right after they did, a little Jap who had been pushed out of the circle, saw them. He yelled something and two or three others who were also on the outside, turned and looked. They all reached for their revolvers. The two T'aip'ing turned and, drawing their swords, charged straight at the

Japs. It was their last charge and they knew it. The Japs opened fire, naturally not at the three running figures but at the two men who were coming sword in hand. Some of the Japs missed and some hit. But two T'aip'ing got to them. One Jap went down, then another. A third reeled back, his right arm hanging by a shred. A fourth went down and then down went the T'aip'ing. They had gained for their relations to the ninth degree much honor and riches.

THE four duelists, as the shots rang out, stopped fighting each other, came into a line, and charged the Japanese making the circle. It was six or seven men deep where the T'aip'ing hit it, about on a line with where the shots came from. They were swordsmen all and all, now that the chance had come to die for the society, absolutely berserk. The front row Japs fought back as much as they could and no one could blame them for doing it. Their revolvers were in the holsters and a sword charge is not a pleasant thing to face barehanded. In fact there are few worse things to face, as anyone knows who has ever faced one.

The Japs around the circle in other places could not fire for fear of hitting their own men. The T'aip'ing cut their way almost through the circle before they went down and in doing it, gave the Japs plenty to think about besides three fleeing peddlers. The Japs on the outside who had seen the three forgot all about them as they, the Japs, tried to get in to help their comrades down what appeared to be four madmen with swords.

Jimmie Cordie, Grigsby and Carewe made it to the back of one of the houses and crashed through a door into a kitchen. Sitting at a table were two Japanese officers, a bottle and glasses at their hands. They had dropped in to have a quiet drink before going to the ceremony. Jimmie Cordie very seldom cursed but as he saw them, this time he did. "Well! What the hell, now?"

The Japs, as the door came in, both rose and their hands went to their revolver butts. They had no way of knowing that what looked like one big Chinese and two smaller ones were three of the most famous Big Swords officers. They had heard the shots, but had thought that some tribesmen were celebrating the ceremony a little in advance.

If they had known they would have drawn and fired; as it was, they hesitated for a split second. The hesitation cost them promotion and also a few days in the hospital.

George Grigsby reached them first. He uppercutted the one on his right and the little Jap literally sailed through the air to hit the wall, out long before his head made contact. Jimmie Cordie sent a straight left for the other Jap's chin but it was ducked. The Jap started to draw but his revolver had not come more than an inch out of the holster before Grigsby got him. He was lifted up and slammed down on the floor so hard that the next thing he knew was that he was in a hospital bed.

There was an old Chinese in the kitchen who had been waiting on the Japs. He was crouching in a corner, fully expecting to be killed. Jimmie Cordie went over to him and jerked him to his feet. "Which way out?"

The old Chinese shook his head and whimpered like a badly scared child. "You might try Chinese, Jimmie," Grigsby said, calmly.

Jimmie Cordie laughed. "We'll try to find the way without his help." He let go the old man, who sank to the

floor, thankful that in some miraculous way his life had been spared. They ran through a door that opened into a hall, to find the hall did not lead anywhere except to other rooms. Back to the kitchen they went and out of it through another door. This time they got into a hall that led through the house to the front door. "Listen," Jimmie said, as he opened the door, "there goes the music — we are too late."

"We may not be, Jimmie. Walk out as if we had been visiting and now on our way to see the parade," Grigsby answered.

CHAPTER XV.

PARADE TO THE ALTAR.

THE Altar of Heaven, built at Shuntien, five miles from the capital, Hsinking, is about twenty-five feet wide at the base and fifteen at the top. The steps were covered with the Imperial Yellow and on the steps were red lacquered tables on which rested golden dragons.

The actual ceremony was screened from all eyes but those of eleven Manchus of the Blood. But the parade to the Altar could be seen by all that wished to see it. First, Japanese infantry, cavalry, and artillery. Then Manchu nobles who were for the Japanese. Then Henry Pu-Yi, "Emperor Kang Teh," marching alone. He wore a yellow robe embroidered in golden orchids and jade dragons. Then more Manchus and Japanese officials, staff officers, civilians, and so on. Other branches of the service.

Henry Pu-Yi was a shining mark for anyone who was at all a shot with a rifle. In a house along the line of march, on the second floor, there was a room whose window commanded a close view of the whole affair save what went on behind the screens at the Altar.

When the parade started, the room was empty. As Henry Pu-Yi got to within a thousand feet of the house, the door of the room opened. Colonel Takara entered with Chapman. In Chapman's right hand was a .30-.30 American rifle which Takara had procured in some way. The American's eyes and face were calm and untroubled looking. He was a killer, working at his trade, that was all. Takara had not found it necessary to give Chapman the drug that would make him like a child. The Japanese Intelligence officer found that all that was required was that Chapman be given enough cocaine.

"Go to the window," Takara commanded. "Keep out of sight as much as possible. He will have on a yellow robe and be walking alone. When he gets within—"

"Scram, punk. I know what to do. He's just the same as dead, right now."

"That is right, Mr. Chapman. After you—make him quite dead, leave the room and go into the hall. Go down the hall to the last door on your left. Open the door and go in. There will be a man there who will take care of your—what do you call it? Oh, yes, your getaway."

"All right. Beat it. I see him comin'. This is too easy."

Takara left the room as Chapman knelt by the window after cocking the rifle.

He heard the door close after Takara but he did not hear a section of the wall slip noiselessly back. Jimmie Cordie, Grigsby and Carewe had been in time.

George Grigsby entered the room in

his stocking feet. He eased up to Chapman as quietly as a leopard sneaks up on its prey. An arm went around Chapman's neck and tightened. Another arm went around Chapman's waist, lifting him up. It was as if Chapman was caught in the coils of a great boa-constrictor. He could not call out, neither could he move save for the threshing around of arms and legs.

GRIGSBY carried him to the opening made in the wall and through it. A moment later Jimmie Cordie came through the opening with Lieutenant-General Nagayo, who was as a little obedient child. He had been given the same kind of drug Takara thought it unnecessary to use on Chapman.

Jimmie Cordie carried a .30-.30 rifle. "Come to the window," he said. "Now, kneel down. See, here is a rifle. It is cocked, so be careful. Soon will come soldiers, then a man marching alone. He will have on a yellow robe on which are flowers. You will aim the rifle at this man and fire it. Be very sure to hit him with the bullet. He is a bad man and must be killed. Do you understand? You must fire at this man and kill him."

"Yes, I understand. He is a bad man and I must fire the rifle at him."

"That is right, little one. You will get candy and whatever you wish if you do it well. I am going out now but I will come back as soon as you kill the bad man."

"I will kill the bad man."

"That is a good boy."

Jimmie Cordie handed Nagayo the rifle, which was loaded with blanks and went back through the opening, leaving Lieutenant-General Nagayo kneeling where Chapman had knelt.

As he did, the Jap soldiers were passing the house. There were many Chinese and Japanese civilians, men, women, tribesmen, and nondescripts watching the parade as well as Jap soldiers. They were crowded against the houses on either side as there were no sidewalks.

In front of the house where Nagayo knelt at the window stood Major Shiga and the staff captain who had been waiting for Lieutenant-General Nagayo the night Nagayo had been hit on the head. He had been very discreetly looking for Nagayo and thinking that at last Nagayo had slipped up and got so drunk he had forgotten all about the ceremony.

"Let's go, Jimmie," Grigsby said, as Fang Lu put the section of wall back in place. Grigsby and Carewe were holding Chapman down on the floor. The killer had ceased to struggle and lay as if unconscious. In the floor of the room was a trap door.

"Go? With the curtain up for the last act? I should say not. Take your boy friend and go down the ladder if you don't want to stay."

Grigsby laughed. "I'll stick around. It won't be—listen to the shouts."

"He must be coming. Choke that rat down and come to a slit. It'll be worth seeing, George."

"Go ahead, George," Carewe said, "I'll see to it that this rotter keeps still. I think he is already choked down."

Jimmie Cordie and Grigsby, looking through two slits cut in the wall, saw Lieutenant-General Nagayo reach for the rifle, put it to his shoulder, aim and fire it.

It seemed to be a split second afterwards that Colonel Takara and Major Shiga crashed into the room. It was longer, of course, but to Jimmie Cordie and Grigsby the crack of the rifle and

the entrance of the two Jap officers almost came together. Right behind them came the staff captain and several other officers and Japanese officials.

As Takara and Shiga cleared the door, Nagayo was getting up on his feet, his back turned to them. They both had revolvers in their hands and they both emptied them into Nagayo's back.

"Here he is," shouted Takara, "we —oh!"

Nagayo had fallen against the window sill, then turned a little, before he crumpled to the floor. He was dead before he turned.

Every Japanese in the room stood as if paralyzed. Lieutenant-General Nagayo! Killed in an attempt to assassinate Henry Pu-Yi! It was unbelievable and yet—there lay his body.

"I—we—it is a—" Major Shiga stammered. "We thought he was—"

JUST then, Chapman yelled, "Help! Help! In here! I—" Carewe tried to shut him off. He threw Carewe off and in doing it, felt and got Carewe's gun. Jimmie Cordie and Grigsby turned from the slits as Chapman got on his feet, Carewe's Colt .45 in hand. The Jap officers had snapped out of it and were trying to break the wall down. Others had run out of the room and were hunting for the door leading into the room the yells had come from. By chance, more than anything else, the door was not on the hallway. The room opened into another which in turn opened into a third that was reached by a little independent hall branching out from the main hall. Chinese houses are oddly constructed from an Occidental standard.

"Now," Chapman snarled, "I'll show you punks some shooting."

Grigsby laughed, "Show it to me." As he turned from the slit, Grigsby had drawn his Colt .45.

Chapman, while speaking, was raising Carewe's gun. He should not have done that. Not when he was to shoot it out with one of the fastest and best shots in the Orient. George Grigsby put three bullets into Chapman while Chapman was pulling trigger. The bullet hit Grigsby in the shoulder. Grigsby's bullets tore through Chapman's heart, all three of them.

"Did he get you?" Jimmie asked, as the dead body of Chapman went to the floor.

"In the shoulder. Get going, Jimmie. I'll hold them until—"

"Behave. Fang Lu, get that body down the ladder. Give George a hand, Carewe. Make it snappy, gents. Old man Cordie's son, Jimmie, will play Horatius at the bridge."

"Come along, Jimmie—or Carewe and I stay."

"If that's the case, I will. No use of—here they come!"

Fang Lu had already disappeared with Chapman's body. Grigsby and Carewe were at the trap door, Grigsby on the ladder, when Japanese officers crowded into the room, or rather in the doorway. Jimmie Cordie fired at them. The front officers, two of them, went down and the others, behind, recoiled for a moment. There was a moment's confusion and delay among the Japanese. Jimmie Cordie got to the ladder and on it before two officers jumped over the two whom had fallen. They both fired at Jimmie and both missed. It may have been because Jimmie hit both of them as they jumped. Before two more could get in, Jimmie Cordie was far enough down the ladder to reach up and close, also lock with a heavy bar, the trap door.

The T'aip'ing had suddenly appeared

through a hole in the kitchen of the house early that morning. The house owner, in Takara's pay, needed only a sword flashed before his eyes and a rasped threat of T'aip'ing wrath, to make him forget all about Japanese officers. He had plenty of loved relations scattered all over China and knew what the T'aip'ing would do to them, to the ninth degree of kinship. He told of the sliding section of wall, which most Chinese houses have. The trap door was cut long before Takara appeared with Chapman from a cell-like little room on the ground floor. He had chosen the room because it was secluded from the rest of the house. It was so secluded that anyone in it could not hear what was going on in the rest of the house.

THE Japanese officers tried for a minute or two, to open the trap door but could not. Colonel Takara came in. "No use, gentlemen. They are well away by now. It is the Yankee mongrels who pose as prisoners of the Badakshan. They placed Lieutenant-General Nagayo there and—"

"That is right," a young officer interrupted. "We will take them from the Badakshan and make them tell—"

"Wait," commanded a high ranking officer. "How did Lieutenant-General Nagayo fall in their hands? There is something very strange about this matter, gentlemen. We cannot afford to have it made public. No matter what we make the Yankee dogs say under torture, the world will think that we planned to assassinate Henry Pu-Yi and in some way failed. We had much better report to Headquarters and let the Staff handle it."

"That—is true," Takara answered, slowly. "It must be hushed up—as far as the killing of Lieutenant-General Nagayo is concerned. But as far as the Big Swords are concerned, the time has come to wipe them out, once for all. We know that they are responsible for this."

"We will swear that we saw them—I have it. They were here to assassinate Henry Pu-Yi. Lieutenant-General Nagayo found it out and came to prevent them doing it. He was formerly of the Intelligence and so—his presence is explained. They killed him and—" The staff captain stopped talking as the ranking officer shook his head.

"How can we swear that on our honor? I for one, will not. No—let us tell the truth. The High Command will then do as they see fit. What we can do is to hide the body of Lieutenant-General Nagayo and leave officers here to see to it that none but us know who it was that was slain."

"Let us go, then," Takara answered. "I, for one, will not rest or eat until the Big Swords curs have paid in full for what they have done."

Headquarters, after hearing what had happened, promptly ordered every officer who knew anything about it to forget the entire matter. Nagayo's body was removed under cover of the darkness that night and the next day it was given out that he had died suddenly during the night.

And at the same time, orders were issued that the Big Swords prisoners were to be taken from the Badakshan, by force if necessary. No reasons were to be given. They were to be taken, that is all. Officers were detailed to go to Mangali Boga and demand the prisoners. Troops were moved up close and if he refused to give them up, the Badakshan were to be shot if they resisted, future relations with tribes or

no future relations. The Japs had more than they wanted from the soldiers of fortune who fought for the Big Swords and were going to make an end to it.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DUEL TO DEATH.

"SO," Mangali Boga said, "the trick is played."

"Yes," Jimmie Cordie answered, "it is played."

"Now what?"

"Soon the little men of Nippon will come and demand that you surrender us."

"Let them demand. Am I a child to be treated as such? Let them demand. I am Mangali Boga of the Badakshan."

"That's right. But even you cannot withstand the might of the little men. We escape, Mangali Boga. Horses are ready for us back of your lines. How we did it you do not know. All you do know is that—we are gone. It may be that we bribed some of the guards. If we did, you know nothing of it."

"I will handle the little men of Nippon. I am released?"

"Yes, you are released. Come to the treasure house of Chi whenever you please."

"It will be soon. I will be very angry at the little men of Nippon and withdraw to the hills, saying I will not fight for them. Once there, I will go to the treasure house of Chi."

"All right. We haven't much time. Good bye, Mangali Boga. You have kept your word and the House of Chi will do the same."

"I know that, blood brother of Sahet Khan. Good bye."

Jimmie Cordie ran to the tent, "Let's go."

"Where?" demanded Red. "So, ye sneaked out on us, did ye? And now ye come up and say, 'Let's go,' as if ye—go where and how?"

"On horses, Mr. Dolan. Where, to the Big Swords. How is your shoulder, George?"

"I can ride, Jimmie."

"Fine. We've got some to do."

"Where are the horses?" asked Red. "How long can these little scuts ave hill ponies hold us up? 'Tis big men we are and—"

"They are not ponies, Mr. Dolan, they are regular race horses donated to us by some friends of mine. Think of a few more questions to ask and your bamalam friends will be here to answer them for you. Come on."

As the Yid mounted, he said to the Bean, "I vunder how dey did it. Do you know, Codfisher?"

"How the hell and high water could I know? Get over a little."

Red rode up beside Jimmie. "Jimmie darlin', what came off? George and Carewe didn't tell us much."

"Well, we got Chapman, that's one thing. The Japs framed it to have him kill Henry Pu-Yi and—"

"I know that much."

"Yeah? Do some riding, then, and quit asking me questions."

"Tell me, Jimmie. I don't know nawthin."

"I thought you just said you did? We got hold of Lieutenant-General Nagayo and substituted him for Chapman. The Japs killed him, thinking he was Chapman. Now you know all about it."

"Mary Mother! Jimmie, did ye know he would be killed?"

"I did not. I thought they would come busting in, see him instead of Chapman and all run around in circles."

Red rode without saying anything

for a moment, then, "Would ye have put him there if ye knew he was going to get killed, Jimmie?"

"No one knows what he will do under given circumstances, Mr. Dolan."

"I guess that's right. How did ye find Chapman?"

"The T'aip'ing found him."

"I mean, how did ye find the place?"

"The T'aip'ing found that, too. Then they bought the house next door and tunneled over."

"How did ye make the scut ave a Nagayo come through for ye?"

"You probably know about the drug named Shenli which makes the person taking it like a good nine year old kid. The T'aip'ing got us some and we fed it to Nagayo. Then we hid him away until—here come your bamalams, Red. I thought it was about time. Right now we ride for it."

A troop of Japanese cavalry came out from behind a Chinese warehouse about five hundred yards to the left rear. Another troop, on the gallop, appeared to the right, coming from near the Badakshan camp.

"Oi," the Yid said, as he kicked his horse in the ribs. "Dey vill cut it us off at de ford. I vish I had it vings."

"You'll have some in a few minutes," the Bean answered. "That is, if you've led a good life, Mr. Cohen. There's another troop. They flatter us sending three—"

"Three? You mean it a regiment. Look over dare to—oi, Red goes it down!"

JAPANESE infantry came from a dry river bed and opened fire. Red's horse was hit and went down. So did Mr. Dolan, after sailing through the air. He lit on his head and if he had any less thick skull, he would not have been able to get up. As it was, he got up but stood, swaying back and forth.

The Yid and the Bean, as one man, turned their horses and rode for him. Jimmie Cordie beat them to Red. "Go on," he shouted. "Go on! I'll get him! Yid! Bean! Ride, you damn fools! I will—"

The Fighting Yid and the Boston Bean did not hear Jimmie. Or if they did, they paid no attention. When they reached Red, Jimmie was trying to get Red up behind him. Red was dazed and could not help at all. He weighed, as said before, some two hundred and thirty pounds and Jimmie, what with trying to hold in a plunging horse, could not handle him.

"Hold it my horse, Codfish," the Yid ordered, tossing the reins to the Bean, "I vill help Jimmie."

It was full time someone helped Jimmie Cordie. The Jap cavalry was getting close and the infantry seemed to be getting the range. The Yid, who was as strong as two average men, lifted Red up and Jimmie Cordie pulled. Together they got Red up on Jimmie's horse, behind Jimmie.

"Hang on, Red," Jimmie said, "Red! Snap out of it! Hang on to me."

Red had just about enough sense left to obey the order. He put one arm around Jimmie Cordie and took hold of the back of the saddle with a hand. The Yid remounted and they rode to where Carewe and Grigsby, instead of riding on, were waiting for them.

"We'll try the river," Jimmie said, calmly. "It's our only chance. Allons, mes enfants!"

It looked to be a more than slim chance. The river was wide and the current very fast. But it was, as Jimmie said, their only chance. The Japs

had them cut off from every other avenue of escape.

The irrepressible Yid, with Jap bullets singing the death song all around, yelled to the Bean, "Hi, Beany! Ten smackers say dot I am a better svimmer dan you."

The Boston Bean grinned but did not answer. He was riding as close as he could to George Grigsby. The Bean did not like the way Grigsby was bent over in the saddle. It looked as if Grigsby might any moment fall out of it.

They made it to the river and without a second's hesitation, jumped their horses off the steep bank into the ice cold, rushing water. They were all hardbitted men in whose hearts was no fear. And they needed to be in jumping a horse into the river Tien-Tasi.

JIMMIE CORDIE came to the surface on his horse, Red still hanging on like grim death. But the horse only stayed up a moment. It had been too much weight for him to carry. Down he went and Jimmie and Red began swimming. The cold water had revived Red quite a little and he was able to swim with the current. The Yid, the Bean, and Carewe all came up on their horses. Grigsby's horse came up without Grigsby.

"George is under!" Carewe shouted. "He is—"

"I see him," the Bean answered, slipping off his horse. Grigsby's head and shoulders had come up for an instant, then gone down.

"Und so do I see it him," the Fighting Yid announced, going off his horse like a polar bear goes off a rock into the water.

They both got hold of Grigsby under water and both came up with him. Grigsby was completely out, which was just as well. He was a big man and if he had struggled, the Yid and the Bean would have had a hard time with him. Grigsby was a swimmer himself and almost always calm and collected. But he had been wounded and there is no telling what he might have done.

"I got him," the Yid said. "Let go, Beany. I got it him."

"You have like heck. I'll keep his head up. Put his arm over my shoulder. His arm, you nitwit, not his leg," the Bean added after he came up. The Yid, in trying to do as ordered, had put the Bean under.

"Could I help it if his—oi!" Under went the Yid for a moment. But, under or not, they hung on to George Grigsby. Carewe's horse gave up and Carewe became as the rest, swimming for his life.

The Japanese lined the bank and shot at them as long as they were within sight, which was not very long.

The river widened out a mile or so below where the soldiers of fortune entered it and they made it to the opposite shore.

"Vell," said the Yid cheerfully, "here ve are," as he and the Bean carried Grigsby up the bank. "Vare do ve go from here, if de Captain please?"

"Anywhere you darn see fit," Jimmie answered, as he sat down. "The captain stays right here until the captain gets his wind. Holy cats, that water was cold."

"It was so, Jimmie. Wan thing, though, it cleared the head ave me. How come us in the river? Last I remember was sailin' over the head ave me horse."

"We thought you needed a bath, Mr. Dolan," the Bean answered. "And, having plenty of time, decided to—George is coming to."

Jimmie Cordie got up and went over to where Grigsby was trying to sit up.

"Easy does it, George. Take your time. Anyone got anything on their hip?"

"I got a little brandy," the Yid said. "Open it up."

A few minutes later, Grigsby got to his feet. "I'm all right, Jimmie."

"Let's go, then."

"Where?" demanded Red. "'Tis on foot we are and all wet wid nawthin to—"

"At last, Mr. Cohen, Mr. Dolan admits he is all wet. You heard him admit it, didn't you?"

"I did, Codfisher; from now on, ve vill not even speak it to him as ve pass by."

"You will pass on High darn quick if we don't move out of here pronto," Jimmie Cordie said, with a grin, "Misto Jap will be across looking for us any minute."

"Where will we go, Jimmie darlin'? These two scuts I pay no attention to at all."

"Back in the country a little ways and then up stream. Right now back in the country and hole up. At night, up stream. That's all I can think of for the present."

"Can we build a fire and dry the clothes ave us?"

"We cannot. Get mad at the Yid and the Bean. The heat will dry your clothes, Terrance Aloysius. Can you make 'er, George?"

"Yes."

"If ye can't, 'tis me that will pack ye, George darlin'."

"Thanks, Red. I reckon I can stick around for a little while."

As they started for a thickly wooded track of timber, Red began an oration concerning the ancestry of the Bean and the Yid, to which they both listened very politely—until he ran out of breath.

"I DO not know," Major Shiga said, despondently. "We planned and it looked as if the Gods were smiling upon us. And now—Lieutenant-General Nagayo lies in his grave, our plans have all failed and—and—what is it all about, Colonel? I mean this killing of men and—"

Colonel Takara, riding beside Major Shiga, a little behind the ranking officers of a cavalry regiment, laughed, "You—one of the S a m u r a i—ask that?"

"I know. But, ever since I looked upon the face of Lieutenant-General Nagayo, I have been thinking. It may be that after all there are other things besides war."

"You are downhearted, that is all. It is true our plans failed, but plans have failed since men were on the earth. We did not kill Lieutenant-General Nagayo. We killed what we thought was a worthless American mongrel."

"I wonder what happened to him?"

"Did I not tell you? His body was found in the rear of a house, a mile away from the place he was to have killed Henry Pu-Yi. There were three bullets in it that had passed through his heart."

Major Shiga rode for a few moments, then said, "They are all dead shots, aren't they?"

"Yes, Major. Especially Captain Cordie. But soon we will see if they can withstand torture as well as they can shoot. They cannot escape us now."

"I do not know. You said that before—that our plan could not fail, and yet—I remember the squadron and the look on Lieutenant-General Nagayo's

face as his life ebbed away because of our—"

"You must forget it," Takara commanded, curtly. "It is vital, Major. If it ever became known that you and I had anything to do with it, our careers would be ruined."

"That is so, Colonel. I will put it away from me. You say the Big Swords dogs cannot escape us this time?"

"Yes. I say it and I am sure of it. One of our planes picked them up yesterday. They have been joined by some two hundred odd men. The flyer said they looked to be Chinese. Evidently some of the T'aip'ing who helped Captain Cordie. If he—see, he is not so clever after all. If it had not been for the T'aip'ing, he could not have spoiled things for us. We have blocked them off from the west, the east and the south. There is only one way they can go and that is to the north. Now we ride to close that way from them."

Major Shiga looked back at the long files of troopers. "A regiment," he said, "a full regiment here and other regiments near. To take six soldiers of fortune and a few Chinese. I had rather that I met them with just as many men as they have. It would seem more in—"

"The regiments are not needed in the actual taking," Takara answered impatiently. "They were needed to properly cover the country, Major. It is like one of the hunts in the days of old.

"The game must be driven to the center and that takes many men." He was getting rather fed up with, as he termed Major Shiga, "this visionary young fool,"

"I hope they will fight. I want to kill the one called the Bean and also Captain Cordie who mocked me. If there is a charge, I will lead it."

"You mean you will if given permission. There are many officers here who rank you, Major. Remember you are of the Intelligence and they are of the Line in command of their regiments. In a matter of the Intelligence you could call upon them for help but now it is simply a matter of exterminating a few Big Swords."

"I have already been given permission," Major Shiga answered, curtly.

"That is different, Major. I will charge at your side when we—here comes one of the advance guard. It may be that the game is flushed."

It was. The advance guard officer reported that the Big Swords officers with the Chinese had dug themselves in on top of a little knoll in a valley. The scouts ahead of the advance guard had run on to them as they entered the valley. The scouts, all but one, had promptly been shot down.

"We will not wait for the other units to close up," the Japanese Colonel in command of the regiment said. "We will—there goes the Twelfth regiment through the pass! They probably know what we know. Forward! The honor must be ours. No parley with the dogs. We will ride them down."

AS the cavalry regiment got to the mouth of the valley, another regiment arrived, evidently with the same idea, that of riding down the Big Swords officers and the Chinese who could be plainly seen standing up behind the dirt thrown up from a hastily constructed star shaped trench. The two regiments started a race towards the knoll and just as they did, a third regiment came down the valley from the north end. Three thousand odd

Japanese cavalrymen rode to gain much honor for themselves. Just where the honor came in riding over a few men, only they knew.

"I bet it my money on de bob-tail nag. Who bet it on de bay?" sang the Yid. "My, look at dem come. Anyvon would think ve wos made it of diamonds de vay dey—"

Rapid fire and machine guns opened up on the Japanese from the hills and the timber on both sides of the valley. Big Swords regiments of cavalry appeared where the Japanese regiments had entered the valley. The firing ceased and the Big Swords charged. The Japanese, thrown in momentary confusion, rallied, turned and met the Big Swords charge by a counter-charge of great fury.

"Holy mackinaw!" shouted Red Dolan. "The Big Swords have the little bamalam midgets! 'Tis a — Jimmie Cordie, did ye know they was there?"

"I did not. I hoped that they might be, Terrance Aloysius. But it did not look much like it a minute ago."

"How did ye—"

"For Pete's sake! I want to watch it, you redheaded ape. Listen, I sent some of the T'aip'ing to Chang right after the doings at the Altar. I knew darn well the Japs would chase us, so I asked for a Big Swords column to meet us around here. They have, Mr. Dolan. Now for heaven's sake, shut up."

"I will. Look at—"

"Oi, vot a ambush! Too bad dot de—"

"An ambush, Mr. Cohen," corrected the Bean. "An ambush, not a ambush. Your language is very painful for me to hear."

"Vot de hell difference does it make? It is a ambush just de same. My, see dem fight. De bamalam midgets are dare, ain't dey, Jimmie? I vish I vos down dare. Now de Japs learn it vot a real ambush is."

"Go ahead down. You'd—look coming. His horse is running away, I guess."

"No, it isn't, Jeems," the Boston Bean said. "Look at him jabbing the spurs in."

"It's a one man charge, Jimmie," Grigsby added. "Some Jap officer has gone loco."

"Looks that way. Don't hurt him if he makes it up here. By gosh, it's Major Shiga. He's coming to get you, Codfish."

"Get it behind Poppa," the Yid said. "Poppa vill not let de bad little bamalam hurt it you."

"Yeah?" The Bean stepped two or three paces away from the rest, his .45 held down by his side. "Here is where a bad little bamalam becomes a good one."

Major Shiga rode up and jumped off his horse. He ignored everything else but Jimmie Cordie. His gun was in its holster at his belt. Walking up to Jimmie and not halting until he was within three feet, Major Shiga said, "I have come for you, Captain Cordie."

"For me? You mean the Boston Bean, do you not?"

"No. I mean you. I am going to kill you, knowing that the next instant I will die myself. I will avenge the death of—"

"Wait a minute, Major. You are overexcited. I have my gun in my hand and yours is still in the holster. You are more apt to die the instant before than you are the instant after. Calm down and let's argue this thing out."

"No. I die for the honor of Nippon. My name will go down as the one who removed from the earth Captain

Cordie of the Big Swords who flouted and tricked—"

"I'm afraid it won't, Major. It will go down as one who acted like a fool. Do you think you can draw and fire before I can pull trigger?"

"I know that I cannot. You are an officer. I challenge you to fight a duel. Service revolvers at ten paces, advance firing."

"I see. That is different. I accept your challenge, Major. And I will say this. If you kill me you may mount your horse and ride away. You gentlemen hear me? If Major Shiga kills me he is to mount his horse and ride away in full safety."

"We hear you, Jimmie," Grigsby answered, quietly.

BELOW in the valley a battle was raging, a battle to the death. Neither the Big Swords nor the Japanese asked for or gave quarter. Up on the knoll it was quiet, as the Japanese officer, ten paces away, faced the American soldier of fortune, in another battle to the death. Their revolvers were held, muzzles up as high as their heads, Major Shiga using his left hand.

Both of their faces were impassive as they waited Grigsby's word of command. Jimmie Cordie's eyes were impassive also. Major Shiga's eyes gleamed with a fanatical light.

Grigsby said, "Ready, gentlemen. One—two—three. Fire!"

Jimmie Cordie and Major Shiga dropped their gun muzzles and both walked forward. Bang—bang—bang-bang—bang—bang—Major Shiga spun around like a top, fell, raised himself to his knees, fired at Jimmie Cordie, who was falling, tried to get on his feet but could not make it. Jimmie Cordie fell face to the ground, rolled over, slowly got up on his feet, took two steps towards Shiga, who fired once more. Jimmie Cordie went back but as he did, put a bullet just above Shiga's heart.

"He's killed Jimmie," Red said, evenly. "That—little scut has killed Jimmie Cordie."

"He—has—like—heck. Carry me over to him—Red."

"Jimmie! Ye are not dead! Praise be—"

"Do as Jimmie says," Grigsby interrupted. "No talk, Red."

Major Shiga opened his eyes as Red knelt beside him, holding Jimmie Cordie in his arms.

"You—maintained the—honor of Nippon," Jimmie said, thickly through lips that seeped blood, "I—am—sorry—that you—that you—"

"I also am sorry," Major Shiga said, clearly. "It—we die, Captain Cordie. It may be that—that—war and—and—and—war is not the—best—" He died.

"Jimmie, are ye all right? Jimmie, answer me. Ye are scarin' the—George, is Jimmie dead?"

"No. His heart still beats. Put him down, Red."

"I will not, I will hold him in the arms ave me."

"You damn fool, do you want to make him die? He is all doubled up. Put him down on the ground. Be careful with him."

Two Big Swords officers rode up, "Where is Captain Cordie?"

"There on the ground."

"Dead?"

"No. Badly wounded."

"The Lord Chang-lung Liang's compliments. The little men of Nippon, those in the valley, are destroyed but more come. We draw back in the hills."

"GEORGE! Red! Jimmie has opened his eyes and is right sane! Oh, I'm so glad! Come in and see him!" Betty Ann turned and ran back into the hospital tent at Big Swords headquarters.

"I didn't get it an invite but I am goink too," the Yid announced.

"Me also," the Bean stated firmly.

"I also—not me also. My, but your language gives it me a pain in de ear."

"Score one on the shovel for you," the Bean said as they made for the tent.

Jimmie Cordie, two pillows under his head, grinned cheerfully as the four soldiers of fortune tiptoed up to the bed.

"Something tells me I've had quite a nap."

"A nap, is it? Ye have been goofy for a month, ye scut ave the world. What do ye mean by it, ye—it is not cryin' I am, it is the dust in me eyes. Jimmie—ye are well?"

"Yeah boy. I'm just foolin' around here because Betty Ann is my nurse. I guess I darn near hit the one way trail."

"You did, Jimmie. He got you four times."

"Yeah? Did I get him?"

"You did, Jeems, me good man. But you took a long time doing it. Why didn't you get him with the first shot. Very rotten shooting, I calls it."

"What? Ye stand there and tell Jimmie Cordie that—"

"That will do, Red. Go outside if you want to sound off."

"'Tis right ye are, George. Pay no attention to the long legged scut, Jimmie darlin'."

"I won't, Red. Where is Carewe?"

"Over wid Chang. Old Mangali Boga is there too. The old scut could barely walk out ave the treasure house, wan of the Manchu chiefs do be tellin' me.

"He's hangin' around to see how ye are. Sahet Khan sent him word that if he had allowed you to get killed it would be just too bad for all Badakshans the Uryankhes met up wid."

"Well, Misto Jap will have to frame something else to get Uncle in a fight. Betty Ann, after you get all through nursing me, what are you going to do, go back to Kaintuck?"

"No, Jimmie. I am going to stay right here with my men folks and be nurse and everything. That darlin' old Chang says that I can have charge of the hospital. I shall become head of the nurses there."

"Oi, vill I get it vounded right avay! My, I am feelink sick right now. Move over, Jimmie, und let it a sick man lay down mit."

They all laughed at that and then Betty Ann ordered, sternly, "Go right out of here, all of you. My gracious goodness, reckon Jimmie must have some rest."

In San-sing, Colonel Takara, who had been slightly wounded in the head during the battle in the valley, sat at his desk. He was staring at the wall. "I will ask," he said slowly, aloud, "that I be detailed to one thing only and that is—to get Captain Cordie. I shall devote my life to doing that."

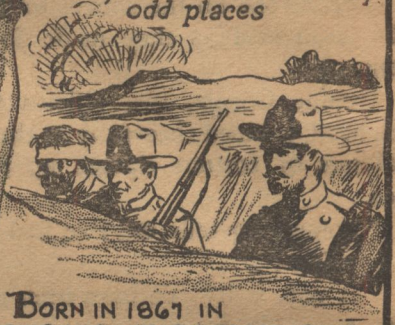
THE END

MEN of DARING

by Stookie Allen

A ROVING SOLDIER

A true son of the ancient profession of arms—on ships sailing the seven seas, and on land in many odd places

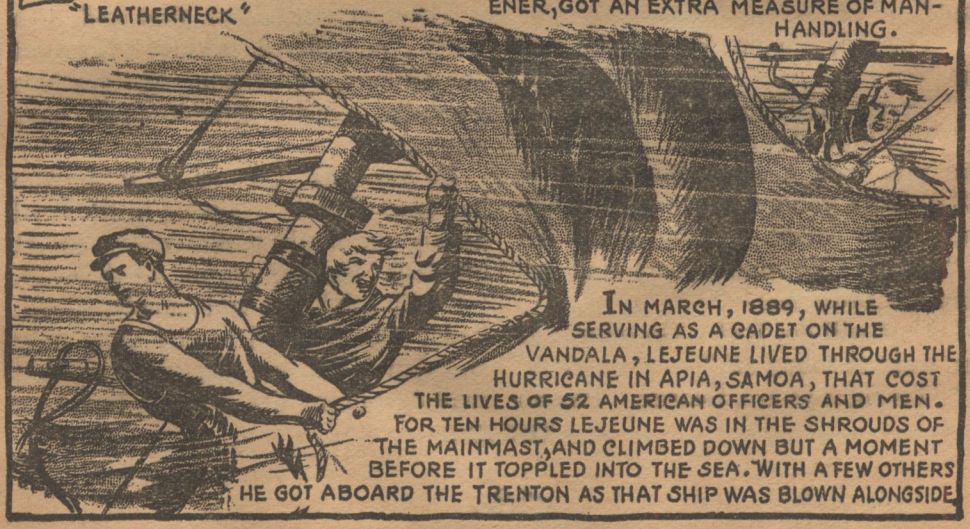


GENERAL

JOHN ARCHER LEJEUNE

"LEATHERNECK"

BORN IN 1867 IN LOUISIANA, HE IS A DESCENDANT OF ACADIAN EXILES FROM "THE LAND OF EVANGELINE". HIS FATHER, A COTTON PLANTER, SERVED AS AN OFFICER IN THE CONFEDERATE ARMY. YOUNG LEJEUNE ENTERED THE U.S. NAVAL ACADEMY IN 1886 AS A PLEBE. HAZING IN THOSE DAYS INVOLVED MORE THAN GENTLE RIDICULE, AND HE, A SOUTHERNER, GOT AN EXTRA MEASURE OF MANHANDLING.



IN MARCH, 1889, WHILE SERVING AS A CADET ON THE VANDALA, LEJEUNE LIVED THROUGH THE HURRICANE IN APIA, SAMOA, THAT COST THE LIVES OF 52 AMERICAN OFFICERS AND MEN. FOR TEN HOURS LEJEUNE WAS IN THE SHROUDS OF THE MAINMAST, AND CLIMBED DOWN BUT A MOMENT BEFORE IT TOPPLED INTO THE SEA. WITH A FEW OTHERS HE GOT ABOARD THE TRENTON AS THAT SHIP WAS BLOWN ALONGSIDE

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

Next Week: Dr. Marcus Whitman, Pioneer Oregon Missionary

"Open that safe and show me the bill o' sale!"

Mountain Minstrel

By HAPSBURG LIEBE

"My name's Jack Tupper and I sings fo' my supper," said the wanderer—but he had come to do more than sing

HE was young and gangling, with a wide and generous mouth, very blue eyes, and a thatch of cinnamon-brown hair. His clothing was that of a Southern mountain lumberjack—clay-colored corduroys and blue shirt, high laced boots and broad black hat. Over one shoulder he carried a blanket roll; over the other a battered guitar was slung on a faded ribbon.

Not so long before, he'd killed a man, and since then there had been for him no peace. So he wandered through the mountains, wandered . . .

Just at sundown he walked into the Dane & Odom lumber-camp on Big Poplar Creek, halted and sniffed the air like a hunting dog. Odors of frying bacon and boiling coffee drifted to him. Immediately he proceeded to the back porch of the rough-lumber boarding house, sat himself down there, unslung his guitar and began to sing and play. He had a clear, mellow voice that usually got for him anything he wanted. Always he knew just what to sing. Lumber-camp cooks, he'd found, liked most a blend of sentiment and tragedy.

"Oh, Ella Ree—
And how she war found!
Shot through the heart,
Lyin' cold on the ground!

Pore Ella Ree
In the lit-tul churchyard lies.
Her grave air bright wi' draps o' dew,
But bri-i-i-ighter war her eyes!

Then take me back to Tennessee
Whar the—"

The cook, Skillets Riffey, forty and thin and stooped, had come to the kitchen door. The magic of the rustic minstrel's music had him in its grip. The minstrel grinned engagingly as he broke off. He drawled:

"My name's Jack Tupper, and I sings fo' my supper. Right?"

"Hell, yes," profanely answered Riffey. "Keep on a-singin'!"

The newcomer's grin faded. "I don't mean Jack Tupper is my shore-enough name. Hit's my—er, my 'stage' name, y'might say."

He sang more of the ancient ballad, "Ella Ree." Lumberjacks arrived; his audience swelled fast. Bill Odom and Shackleford Dane—middle-aged, heavily-built, over-dressed shyster logging men, they were—came from their crude office and listened in, curious. Lastly there appeared the woods boss, Bush Greer, a huge brute of a man with thick and curling, short black beard. He peered over the heads of the others, then turned to his employers and growled:

"That tramp's atter a feed. Le's run him off."

Jack Tupper overheard. He switched to a more plaintive old backwoods heart-gripper. If he didn't get the crowd with him, he wouldn't eat.

"Go tell my lit-tul sister—she's the one
I long to see—
That I ne'er again will kiss her, ner hold
her on my knee,
Ner sing to her them joyful songs she
useter hear me sing.
Her brother now lays dyin' at the Bat-tul
of Mill Spring."

Three verses of that, then something even more plaintive:

"I sat alo-o-ne, at midnight hour,
And gazed on the starlit sky.
I thought I heard my mother say:
'I wisht my bo-oy-oy was nigh.'
Oh, mother dear, wipe away thy tears;
I'm a-comin', a-comin' ho-o-o-ome.
I never more will leave thy side;
And never mo-o-ore shall roam."

Most of his audience were misty-eyed now. Jack Tupper was a born showman. He topped off with a snatch from a rollicking old mountaineer classic:

"Did you ever see the devil!
With his pitchfork and ladle!
And his old iron shovel!
And his old gourd head!
Oh, I will go to supper!
Yes, I will go to supper!
Oh, I will go—"

The lumberjack crew got that, cheered, and swept him into the dining room. Dane and Odom and their woods boss glared at one another and said nothing. When Jack Tupper had eaten his fill, he played and sang until he was hoarse; then he followed the cook—greatest of these admirers—to a leanto bedroom just back of the kitchen.

"Anybody which can make music like you, he can have my bed," said Skillets Riffey. "Me, I'll bunk up on the floor yere."

Jack Tupper vetoed that, set his guitar in a corner and got ready to shake out his blanket roll. Very soberly, he muttered: "A old mountain man, name o' Zeb Henderson, lives in this section. You know him, Skillets?"

Riffey grinned. "Know Zeb Henderson? I sh'd say I do. Lives two miles dead east o' yere. Owns all o' that fine poplar timber up the valley. And—" Riffey whispered this, in a

burst of confidence—"as shore as green apples makes little bellies ache, Dane and Odom air a-fixin' to rob him o' that timber!"

The blue eyes of the minstrel narrowed, hardened. The cook whispered on: "Old Zeb had a awful wild, bad boy oncet—Jim war his name—who quar'led bitter wi' him and then runned away from home, and never did come back. Only child Zeb had, and all he had, and I reckon he ain't seed a happy minute sence. The pore old man air abouten half blind now."

"You say Dane and Odom air a-fixin' to rob him o' his timber?" Jack Tupper breathed. "How?"

Skillets Riffey shrugged. "I ain't figgered hit out. But their payrolls is allus slow, so they must be shawt o' money. And they located this yere camp smack at the lower edge o' the Henderson timber, so they means to log hit. They air crookeder'n a dawg's hind laig—"

A kitchen floor board had creaked. Two seconds later, the Goliath-like form of Bush Greer filled the doorway.

"You, Tupper," he barked, "we don't feed tramps yere. You git out, i-god, right now!"

"Say, hold on, Bush," Riffey pleaded—"don't do that!"

"Never mind, Skillets," said Jack Tupper, voice brittle. "I meant to leave anyhow, mebbe. Listen, Greer. This makes twicet you've called me a tramp. Thar ain't a man yere which can do as much loggin' as I can—ef I wanted to. Got that? Well, listen some more. I had a damn big reason never to do nothin' rash. All the same, I'll settle wi' you sometime, I promise you that faithful. So long, Skillets, and I air a heap obliged to you."

He slung his guitar and his blanket roll over his shoulders, opened the outer door and vanished in the thick mountain darkness.

THE gangling young man who called himself Jack Tupper slept under a friendly tree that night, which was by no means a new experience for him, and a little past sunup he had found the big, hewn-log house of Zeb Henderson. He walked up to the weatherbeaten veranda steps and hallooed. The gaunt, spade-bearded, half-blind old Henderson came out feeling his way with a cane.

"Howdy," he said. "Who air you?"

"Jack Tupper," was the instant response. "I got a guit-tar yere, and I plays and sings fo' people. Won't cost you nothin', but—but ef you got a bite o' breakfust to gimme, I reckon I could manage to eat hit."

Old Zeb felt his way to a sheepskin-lined veranda rocker and sank into it with a low, rheumatic groan. The minstrel sat down on the steps and raked fingertips caressingly across the strings of the guitar. Then he sang—and better than ever he knew what to sing.

"I seen a wayworn trav'ler,
In tattered gyarments clad,
Go toilin' up the pathway;
It seemed that he war sad.
His back war heavy laden,
His stren'th war almost gone.
But he shouted as he journeyed:
'Dee-liverunce will come!'

"Then palms of vic-to-ree—"

Skillets Riffey, the Dane & Odom camp cook, had appeared suddenly at the singer's elbow. Zeb Henderson said, very softly:

"That air my favoright song. I wunner how you knowed? I usened to hear my grandpappy sing hit. A hunnerd year old, that song air."

"Somepin' wrong?" Jack Tupper whispered into Riffey's ear.

Skillets whispered back swiftly: "Thought mebbe I'd find you yere." He indicated a purpling bruise on his left cheek. "See that? Bush Greer, i-god. This mawnin' at breakfust I got him told—abouten you, I mean. Fired me, Jack, o' course. But that ain't the big news. The big news, hit air this. They air a-startin' to log out old Zeb's poplar right now!"

Old Zeb sat with his bearded chin bent to his chest, unsuspecting, apparently dreaming. Jack Tupper addressed him sharply:

"Mr. Henderson, did you sell yore poplar?"

"What's that?" Henderson opened his half blind old eyes and sat up. "Sell my poplar? Yes. Sold hit yistiddy to Shack Dane. Bush Greer and Hamp Falway witnessed by signachure. That is, I sold Shack fifty trees, and got his check on the Johnsville bank fo' three hunnerd dollars; six dollars a tree. Who air that a-standin' thar aside o' you, stranger?"

"Tate Riffey," said Skillets. Quickly he went on: "Zeb, I'd bet my immartal soul ag'in a brass safety-pin that Shack Dane and Bill Odom air a-goin' atter a heap mo'n any fifty trees!"

"Did you read that bill o' sale afore you signed hit, Mr. Henderson?" asked the wanderer.

"Why—er, why—don't believe I did," Henderson said, haltingly. "Tuck their word fo' hit. I cain't hardly see to read. Shorely, they wouldn't—"

"I air a-bettin' they would," Jack Tupper cut in. "Looky yere. I want to leave my guit-tar and bed roll wi' you. Be back d'reckly."

"Yore breakfast—"

"Hit can wait," the wanderer said.

He put his blanket roll and guitar down on the veranda, turned and headed for the lumber-camp. Riffey followed him. He waved Riffey back.

TWENTY minutes later, Jack Tupper heard the crash of giant poplars falling near the creek above the camp. Soon there came to his ears the ringing of busy axes and cross-cut saws, and the yelling of teamsters at logging-mules. No person was anywhere in sight when he reached the camp clearing. He went straight to the rough-board office.

The heavily-built, over-dressed Shack Dane looked up from a scarred old rolltop desk. "Well," he said impatiently, "what is it?"

"I want to take a look at that thar bill o' sale you got from Zeb Henderson," announced Jack Tupper. "Ef everything air all square, I reckon you won't mind me a-seein' hit."

While he was speaking, his alert eyes had found a battered iron safe in the shadows just beyond the desk. Shack Dane's pudgy face lost some of its color, and by this the caller knew that his first small shot at the enemy had hit a bull's-eye. Dane glanced toward a revolver that lay in a desk pigeonhole.

"I'm ordering you off the premises, Tupper," said Dane. He spoke with a drawl, but it was that of a lowlander, not a mountain man. "And if you know what's good for you, you'll go. I'm not airing my business affairs to any tramp who happens along. Get out!"

"Tramp—!"

Jack Tupper choked on the word as he echoed it. To him that word was rank insult. His gaze flashed to the pigeonholed revolver. He forgot that

he had killed a man with just such a weapon; forgot, also, that from that black day on there had been for him no peace. Far off in the mountains of Kentucky, it had been. He'd entered a plea of self-defense, a just plea, and the court had cleared him promptly. And yet, for him there was no peace.

He sprang for the revolver, and he got it. The next second, Dane was staring wide-eyed into the cold steel muzzle.

"Open that safe," bit out Jack Tupper, blue eyes blazing, "and show me the bill o' sale. Ef you don't, I'll shoot a hole in you big enough fo' a rabbit to hide in. Git at it afore yore polecat pardner or that polecat woods boss happens in—I don't want to hafta kill three, i-god. Move!"

Shackleford Dane, yellow at the core, took him at his word, went to the safe and opened it and took out a folded sheet of foolscap paper that was almost covered with writing in longhand. Jack Tupper seized the instrument and spelled his way through it.

"'All o' my timber which lies in between the crests o' Big and Little Poplar Mountains,'" he read aloud from the middle of a paragraph. "Jest like I figgered. Anybody which would rob a old man nearly blind—"

He swore roundly. Still with the gun ready for instant use, he raked a match across a corduroyed hip and ignited it, and burned the paper before Dane's rage-filled eyes.

"I air a-promisin' you," he told Dane, "that you'll git yore money back, all you got rightly comin,' wi' the high sheriff actin' as judge in the matter. Now git yore men and mules out o' that timber. I'll go, and to make shore you don't shoot me in the back I'll pull this rattlesnake's teeth."

He drew the cartridges from the revolver, pocketed them, and tossed the empty weapon through a near-by window. Just as he turned for the doorway, Bill Odom and the Goliathlike Bush Greer walked in.

"This boob—" Shack Dane cried, jerking a thumb toward Jack Tupper— "he took that bill of sale from me at the point of a gun and burnt it! —He's spoiled everything!"

"I reckon we better see that he don't go off and tell," the giant woods boss rumbled venomously.

HE hurled himself at the gangling young stranger. Jack Tupper realized his position fully. These men meant to even the score with him by beating him half to death. Perhaps they'd go farther than that. Nobody else was in the camp.

Jack took a deceptive step backward from the onslaught of the big man, ducked sidewise, and with bewildering quickness brought a half-circle haymaker to the point of the big man's bearded chin. Greer stopped, mouth open in amazement—*bap!*—another piledriver blow caught him, this one full on the nose, and the crimson spurted—*bap!-bap!-bap!*—three more almost as fast as a riveting-hammer strikes, and Bush Greer went down.

"I told you I'd settle wi' you sometime, didn't I?" triumphantly barked Jack Tupper.

Then Dane and Odom were upon him. They gave him more in the way of a battle than Greer had given him, since they were able to attack from two different points. Still he fought gamely, desperately. At last he saw Bill Odom take a jack-knife from his pocket and open it. The wanderer caught up a chair and wore it down to a single post on their heads, and they sank to join Bush Greer on the floor.

"A fine bunch o' ring-tailed, striped polecats, ain't you?" sneered Jack Tupper. "Don't you fo'git what I said about takin' yore mules and men out o' that timber!"

He walked out. The three glared at one another. Not long afterward they heard Jack Tupper's voice—singing, even now; it had become a habit; he sang without being conscious of the fact, often—

"Sally had a dream last night,
Hit war a pow'ful droll one—
Dre'mpt she had a petticoat
Made o' her mammy's old one!"

Odom snarled, beatenly: "Ain't this hell, Bush? Who on earth *is* that jigger?"

"Shore is hell," enthusiastically agreed Bush Greer. "Well, I think I know who he is!"

On the weatherbeaten veranda at old Zeb Henderson's a spirited conversation was going on. Henderson's weak eyes shone through a mist. His heart was hammering out a joyous tattoo.

"I believe I can hear him a-comin' back now, Zeb," said Riffey. "A-singin'. Listen, Zeb!"

Through the laurel-filled woodland there came, in a clear, mellow drawl, lines from yet another ancient song:

"The sexton did not set me down
Away back by the door.
He'd seen that I war old and deef,
And knowed that I war pore."

Tate Riffey went down beyond the gate to meet him. Jack Tupper halted, silent, when he saw the light in Riffey's eyes.

"We knows who you air now, Jack. Me and Zeb figgered hit out whilst you war gone to the camp. You air Zeb's runaway boy. You air Jim Henderson!"

"I—"

"Yeuh, you!" smilingly said Riffey. "You jest had to come back, though you war a heap ashamed to, atter quar'lin' so bitter wi' yore pappy. He air ready and anxious to fo'give you."

The color drained from under the bronze of the other's lean face. He stood there as motionless as a stone.

"Go to yore pappy!" Riffey urged. "Ef you don't, he'll jest die. He air mighty old, cain't last long at the best. You mustn't cheat him out o' this one thing. Asides, you'll inherit all he's got, the timber, and all. Ef you didn't hit'd go to his kinfolks in Nawth Ca'liner."

There was pain in the eyes of the younger man. His lips moved slowly, stiffly.

"Hit'll go to his kinfolks in Nawth Ca'liner. Skillets, I think I knows a man to trust when I sees him. I think you air a man to trust. Ef ever hit turns out that you ain't, I'll shoot you—and you shore have got my word fo' that. Now listen—

"Skillets, I'll stay yere and work fo' Zeb, and sing to him, long as he lives, God A'mighty a-helpin' me. I owe hit to Zeb to play the part. You see, a wild young buck I had to kill in self-defense up in Kaintucky—his name war Jim Henderson."

THE END

"They ain't dogs! Keep 'em off me!"

Creep, Shadow!

By A. MERRITT

Terror spreads in a quiet New England hamlet as two masters of the supernatural begin their fiendish work

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

ONE after another, four men in New York committed suicide. In none of the cases was there any apparent reason. The last of the four was Dick Ralston, young and wealthy friend of Dr. Alan Caranac, brain specialist. When Alan returned to New York and learned of his friend's death, he determined, with the aid of Dr. William Bennett, also a brain expert, to unravel the mystery.

Being among the leading scientists of the country, they hesitated to admit the possibility of the supernatural, yet they were slowly forced to believe that they were dealing with modern witchcraft of a terrifying nature.

Dr. Rene de Keradel, European brain authority, and his beautiful daughter, the Demoiselle Dahut d'Ys de Keradel, claimed to have mastered the secret of the reincarnation of souls. In fact, she told Alan that she was the reincarnation of Dahut the White, the Witch of Ys, who lived in Brittany centuries ago; and that Alan was the reincarnation of her old lover, Alain Carnac. She admitted freely that she had sent "shadows" to cause the death of Dick Ralston, of whom she had tired.

Because of scientific interest, Dr. Austin Lowell was aiding the fight against the De Keradels. Because she loved Alan, Helen Bennett, Bill's sister, was aiding.

This story began in the Argosy for September 8

To show her power when Alan defied her, the Demoiselle sent a shadow to hound Bill Bennett. Only when Alan agreed to give in to her did she recall it. Alan is telling the story.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VANISHING PAUPERS.

WELL, I'd expected results, but not quite so soon nor so complete. It gave me a fresh and disconcerting realization of Dahut's powers—whether of remote control by suggestion, or witchcraft. Such control would in itself savor of witchcraft. But certainly something had happened as the result of my message; and by the relief Bill was showing I knew how much he had understated the burden of the shadow upon him.

He looked at me, suspiciously. He asked: "What did you do to me while I was asleep?"

"Not a thing," I said.

"What did you want with de Keradel's address?"

"Oh, just curiosity."

He said: "You're a liar, Alan. If I'd been myself, I'd have asked that before I gave it to you. You've been up to something. Now what was it?"

"Bill," I said, "you're goofy. We've both been goofy over this shadow stuff. You don't even know you—had one."

He said, grimly: "Oh, I don't?" And I saw his hands clench.

I said, glibly: "No, you don't. You've been thinking too much about Dick and de Keradel's ravings, and of what I told you of the Demoiselle's pretty little hypnotic experiment on me. Your imagination has gotten infected. Me—I've gone back to hard-headed, safe-and-sane, scientific incredulity. There ain't no shadow. The Demoiselle is one top-notch expert hypnotist and we've been letting her play us—that's all."

He studied me for a moment. "You never were good at lying, Alan," he said.

I laughed. I said: "Bill, I'll tell you the truth. While you were asleep I tried counter-suggestion. Sent you deeper and deeper down until I got to the shadow—and wiped it out. Convinced your subconsciousness you'd never see it again. And you won't."

He said, slowly: "You forget I tried that on Dick, and it didn't work."

"I don't give a damn about that," I said. "It worked on you."

I hoped he'd believe me. It would help build up his resistance if the Demoiselle tried any more of her tricks on him. Not that I was any too hopeful. Bill was a psychiatrist of sorts, knew far more about the quirks and aberrations of the human mind than I did, and if he hadn't been able to convince himself of the hallucinatory aspect of the shadows how could I expect to?

Bill sat quietly for a minute or two, then sighed and shook his head. "That's all you're going to tell me, Alan?"

"That's all I *can* tell you, Bill. It's all there is to tell."

He sighed again, then looked at his watch. "Good Lord, it's seven o'clock!"

I said: "How about staying here for dinner? Or are you busy tonight?"

Bill brightened. "I'm not. But I'll have to call up Lowell." He took up the telephone.

I said: "Wait a minute. Did you tell Lowell about my little party with the Demoiselle?"

He said: "Yes. You don't mind, do you? I thought it might help."

I said: "I'm glad you did. But did you tell Helen?"

He hesitated: "Well—not everything."

I said, cheerfully: "Fine. She knows what you left out. And it saves me the time. Go ahead and phone."

I went downstairs to order dinner. I thought both of us were entitled to something extra. When I came back to the room Bill was quite excited. He said:

"McCann is coming tonight to report. He's found out something. He'll be at Lowell's about nine o'clock."

I said: "We'll get dinner and go up. I want to meet McCann."

We had dinner. At nine o'clock we were at Lowell's. Helen wasn't there. She hadn't known I was coming, nor had Lowell told her about McCann. She had gone to the theater. I was glad of that, and sorry. A little after nine McCann came in.

I LIKED McCann from the start. He was a lanky, drawling Texan. He had been the underworld leader Ricori's trusted bodyguard and handy man; a former cowpuncher; loyal, resourceful and utterly without fear. I had heard much of him when Bill had recounted the story of that incredible adventure of Lowell and Ricori with Mme. Mandilip, the doll-maker, whose lover this de Keradel had been. I had the feeling that McCann took the same instant liking to me. Briggs brought in decanters and glasses. Lowell went over and locked the door. We sat at the table, the four of us. McCann said to Lowell:

"Well, Doc—I reckon we're headed for about the same kind of round-up we was last time. Only mebbe a mite worse. I wish the boss was around."

Lowell explained to me: "McCann means Ricori—he's in Italy. I think I told you."

I asked McCann: "How much do you know?"

Lowell answered: "Everything that I know. I have the utmost faith in him, Dr. Caranac."

I said: "Fine." McCann grinned at me. He said:

"But the boss ain't around, so I guess you'd better cable him you need some help, Doc. Ask him to cable these fellers"—he thrust a list of half a dozen names to Lowell—"an' tell 'em he wants 'em to report to me an' do what I say. An' ask him to take the next ship over."

Lowell asked, uncertainly: "You think that is justified, McCann?"

McCann said: "Yeah. I'd even go as far as to put in that cable that it's a matter of life an' death, an' that the hag who made dolls was just a nursery figure compared to the people we're up against. I'd send that cable right off, Doc. I'll put my name to it, too."

Lowell asked again, "You're sure, McCann?"

McCann said: "We're going to need the boss. I'm telling you, Doc."

Bill had been writing. He said: "How's this?" He passed the paper to McCann. "You can put in the names of the people you want Ricori to cable."

McCann read: "Ricori. Doll-maker menace renewed worse than before. Have urgent immediate need of you. Ask you return at once. In meantime cable (so-and-so) to report to McCann and follow implicitly his orders. Cable when can expect you."

"That's O.K.," McCann said. "I guess the boss'll read between the lines without the life and death part."

He filled in the missing names and handed it to Dr. Lowell. "I'd get it right off, Doc."

Lowell nodded and wrote an address

on it. Bill ran the message off on the typewriter. Lowell unlocked the door and ran for Briggs; he came, and the message to Ricori was on its way.

"I hope to God he gets it quick an' comes," said McCann, and poured himself a stiff drink. "An' now," he said, "I'll begin at the beginning. Let me tell the whole thing my own way an' if you got questions, ask them when I'm through."

HE said to Bill: "After you give me the layout, I head for Rhode Island. I got a sort of hunch, so I take along a big roll of bills. Most of 'em is phony, but imposing in the herd. An' I don't aim to dispose of the mavericks—just display 'em. I see by the road map there's a place called Beverly down that locality. It's the nearest place on the map to this de Keradel ranch. On beyond, it's empty country or big estates. So I head the car that way an' give her the spur. I get there about dark.

"It's a nice little village, old-fashioned, one street running down to the water, some stores, a movie. I see a shack with a sign 'Beverly House' an' figure to bed down there for the night. Far as I can see de Keradel an' his gal have got to ride through here to get to the ranch, an' mebbe they do some buying of their truck here. Anyway, I'm betting that there's talk going 'round, an' if so then the gent that runs this Beverly House knows all of it.

"So I go in an' there's an old galoot who looks like a cross between a goat an' a human question mark at the desk an' I tell him I'm looking for shelter for the night an' maybe a day or so longer. He asks if I'm a tourist, an' I say no, an' hesitate, an' then say I got a piece of business on my mind. He pricks up his ears at that, an' I say where I come from we put our stake on the table before we play, an' pull out the roll. He waggles his ears at that, an' after I've talked him down about two bits on the tariff he's not only plumb curious but got quite a respect for me.

"I go in an' have a darn good meal, and when I'm near through the old goat comes an' asks me how things is an' so on, an' I tell him fine an' to sit down. He does. We talk of this an' that, an' after awhile he gets probing what my business is, an' we have some darn good applejack. I get confidential an' tell him I been nursing cows for years down Texas way, an' they've left me sitting mighty pretty. Tell him my grandpap came from round these parts an' I've got a yearning to get back.

"He asks me grandpap's name an' I tell him Partington, an' what I'd hoped to do was buy back the old house, but I was too late learning it was on the market an' I'd found some Frenchman called de Keradel had bought it from the estate an' so I supposed that was out. But mebbe, I say, I could pick up a place near, or mebbe the Frenchman would sell me some of the land. Then I'd wait till mebbe this Frenchman got tired of it an' I could pick the old house up cheap."

BILL explained to me: "This place de Keradel bought had belonged to the Partington family for generations. The last one died about four years ago. I told McCann all that. Go on, McCann."

"He listened to this with a queer look on his face, half-scared," said McCann. "Then he opined my grandpap must have been Eben Partington who went west after the Civil War, an' I said I guessed so because pap's name was Eben, an' he seemed to hold quite

a grudge against the family an' never talked much about 'em, which was mainly what made me want to get hold of the old place. I said I thought buying it back an' living in it might rile the ghosts of them who kicked grandpap out.

"Well, that was a shot in the dark, but it hit the mark. The old goat gets more talkative. He said I was a grandson of Eben, all right, for the Partingtons never forgot a grudge. Then he said he didn't think there was a chance of me getting the old place back because the Frenchman had spent a lot of money on it, but there was a place right close he knew of that I could get an' if I'd put it in his hands he'd get me the lowest price for it. Also, he was sure I couldn't buy in on the Partington ranch, an' with that same queer look said he didn't think I'd like it there if I could. An' he kept staring at me as though he was trying to make up his mind about something.

"I said I'd set my mind on the old homestead, which I always understood was a pretty fairish size for the East, though mebbe not so sizeable out West. An' I asked what was the improvements the Frenchman had put in, anyway. Well, the old goat got a map an' showed me the layout. It's a big chunk of land sticking out into the sea. There's a narrow neck about a thousand feet across before the land spreads out. Outside that it spreads a fantail which I figure's got two or three thousand acres in it.

"He tells me the Frenchman's built a twenty-foot-high wall across that thousand-foot neck. There's a gate in the middle. But nobody gets through it. Anything that goes from the village, including the mail, is took in by the guards. Foreigners, he says; funny little dark men who always have the money ready an' say nothing no way. He says they take in a lot of supplies in their boat. Also, they got a truck farm an' live stock—cattle an' sheep an' such, an' hosses an' a pack of big dogs. He says: 'Nobody ain't seen the dogs, except one man, an' he—'

"Then he shuts up all of a sudden as though he's saying too much an' that funny, scared look comes on his face. So I file that for reference but don't press him none.

"I ask him if nobody ain't been inside an' knows what it looks like, an' he says: 'Nobody round here has been except the man who—' Then he shuts up again, so I figure he's referring to the man who seen the dogs, an' I get more curious about him.

"I say that with all that coast line I don't see why people can't slip in an' look around a bit without anybody knowing. But he tells me it's all rock, an' only three places where you can land a boat, an' that these three places are guarded like the gate. He looks at me suspicious an' I say: 'Oh, yes, now I remember pap told me about that.' An' I'm afraid to ask much more on that line.

"I ask casual what other improvements there are, and he says they made a big rockery. I ask what anybody wants making a rockery in a place where nature has been so prodigal with rocks. He takes another drink an' says, this is a different kind of rockery, an', he says, mebbe it ain't a rockery but a cemetery, an' that funny, scared look comes on his face plainer than ever.

"We have some more applejack an' he tell me that his name is Ephraim Hopkins, an' he goes on to say about a month after the Frenchman moves in there's a couple of fishermen coming home when their kicker goes bad right off the point where the house stands.

The Frenchman's yacht has just dropped her anchor an' she's lightering a lot of men to the house landing. The fishermen drift awhile an' while they're doing it, they figure more'n a hundred men must have been landed.

"Well, he says, about a month after that a Beverly man named Jim Taylor is driving along at night when his headlights pick up a feller staggering along the road. This man gives a yelp when he sees the lights, an' tries to run but he falls down. Taylor gets out an' sees he ain't got nothing on but his underclothes an' a pouch tied round his neck. He's fainted.

"Taylor picks him up an' totes him to this Beverly House. They pour liquor in him an' he comes to, but he's an Eyetalian who don't speak much English, an' he acts like he's scared half to death. All he wants is to get some clothes an' get away. An' he opens the pouch an' shows money. They get out of him that he's run off from this de Keradel place. Got to the water and swum till he figured he was past the wall, then come to land. He says he's a stone-cutter an' one of a big gang brought in on the boat. He says they're putting up a big rockery there, cutting out stones an' standing 'em up like giants' tombstones all in circles around a house they're building in the middle. Says these stones are twenty, thirty feet high—"

I FELT something like a cold hand pass through my hair. I said:

"Say that again, McCann!"

He said, patiently: "Better let me go on an' tell this in my own way, Doc."

Bill said: "I know what you're thinking, Alan. But let McCann go on."

McCann said: "The Eyetalian won't tell what scared him. Just jabbers, and shivers, an' keeps crossing himself. They get he's telling 'em the house in the middle of the stones is cursed. Tells 'em it's the Devil's house. They pour more liquor in him an' he says the Devil is taking his toll. Says out of more'n a hundred men that come with him, half have died by stones falling on 'em. Says nobody knows where their bodies went afterwards. Says the gang was recruited from distant cities an' nobody knew each other. Says about fifty more have since been brought in. Says only men without any families were hired.

"Then all of a sudden he gives a screech an' ducks an' covers his head with hands an' runs out the door an' disappears before anybody can foller. And two days after, says the old goat, they find him washed up on the shore about a mile away.

"He tells me they all figure the Eyetalian's drunk or crazy. But I don't believe him. He looks too agitated. It don't take any eagle eye to see there's something queer here. He says, though, that some of the lads cruise around in boats trying to get a look at this rockery. But they can't see nothing. That don't mean it ain't there, because the rocks are steep around the point an' where they ain't there's big trees growing.

"Anyway, they bury the Eyetalian an' pay their taxes to the poor farm with his money. I'm telling you about that poor farm later," said McCann.

"Well, it seems to me that by then the old goat gets the sudden idea what he's been telling me ain't selling talk for that place he's picked out for me. Anyway, he shuts up and waggles his beard and considers me. So I say that every word he's said only makes me more interested. Tell him there's nothing I like better than a good mystery,

an' the more I hear him the more I yearn to settle right down close to a real life one. We take another drink, an' I say if he can only dig up some more stuff like he's been telling me, I'm as good as sold. Also, I'm paying cash. Also, that tomorrow we'll go an' take a look at this ranch he's got in mind. I feel it's better to let all this sink in, so we have another drink an' I go to bed. I notice he's looking at me darned peculiar as I go."

McCANN went on: "The next day—that's Wednesday—he's up bright an' early, pert an' panting. We pile into his bus an' start out. After a bit he starts telling me about this feller that seen the dogs. 'Lias Barton, he calls him. He says 'Lias is more curious than ten old maids peeking out behind the curtains at a house with a bride just moved in. Says curiosity is like a disease with 'Lias. Says he'd pull out a plug in Hell for a look in, even if he knew it'd squirt in his face. Well, 'Lias gets brooding and brooding over this wall an' what's behind it. He's been all over the old Partington place dozens of times an' he knows darned well what it's like, but this wall's like his wife putting a veil over her face sudden. He'd know he'd seen the same old face but he'd have to lift it just the same. An' for the same reason 'Lias just has to look over that wall.

"He knows there ain't a chance by day, but he reconnoiters an' crawls around, an' at last he picks a place down near the water. Eph says there's breasts of rock at each end of the wall into which the wall is built an' you can't get over 'em from the water. 'Lias figures he can row down, slip to land and climb the wall. So he picks a night when it's full moon but clouds obscuring the moon frequent. He packs a light ladder an' sculls down cautious. He lands an' puts up his ladder an' when the moon's under a cloud he swarms up. An' there he is on top the wall. He draws up the ladder an' flattens out an' peers round. It's 'Lias's idea to drop the ladder on the other side an' prospect. He waits till the moon comes out again an' he sees it's an open meadow below him dotted with big bushes. He waits till another cloud comes an' he unslings the ladder an' starts down—

"An' when he gets to this point in his story, Eph shuts up an' heads the bus to the side of the road where we halt. I say: 'Yeah, an' what then?' Eph says: 'Then we pick him up next morning rowing 'round and 'round the harbor an' crying "keep 'em off me—keep 'em off me!" 'We take him in,' he says, 'an' get him calmed down some an' he tells us what I've told you.'

"An' then," said McCann, "an' then—" He poured himself a drink and gulped it. "An' then the old goat shows he's the best liar or the best actor I ever rode range with. For he says after that 'Lias goes like this—an' Eph's eyes roll an' his face twitches an' he sort of whimpers—'Hear the piping! Oh, hear the piping like birds! Oh, God—look at 'em running and hiding in the bushes! Hiding and piping! God—they look like men—but they ain't men. Look at 'em run an' hide! . . .

"'What's that? It sounds like a hoss . . . a big hoss . . . galloping . . . galloping!

"Look at her . . . with her hair streaming . . . look at the blue eyes an' white face of her . . . on the hoss . . . the big black hoss!

"'Look at 'em run . . . an' hear 'em pipe! Hear 'em pipe like birds! In the

bushes . . . running from bush to bush . . .

" ' Look at the dogs . . . they ain't dogs! Keep 'em off me! Keep 'em off me! The hounds of Hell . . . dear Jesus . . . keep 'em off me!' "

McCann said: " He made me crawl. I'm telling you I'm crawling now.

" Then he just started the bus an' went on. I managed to ask: ' Then what?' He says: ' That's all. That's all we can get out of him. Ain't never been the same since. Mebbe he just fell off the wall an' hit his head. Mebbe so—mebbe not. Anyway, 'Lias ain't curious no more. Goes round the village sort of wide-eyed an' lonesome. Get him started an' he'll do for you what I just did.' He cackled—' But better.'

" I said, still crawling: ' If what looked like men wasn't, an' the dogs that looked like dogs wasn't, then what the hell were they?'

" He says: ' You know as much as I do.'

" I say: ' Oh, yeah. Anyway, ain't you got any idea on who was the gal on the big black hoss?'

" He says: ' Oh, her, sure. That was the Frenchman's gal.' "

AGAIN the icy hand ruffled my hair, and my thoughts ran swiftly . . . Dahut on the black stallion . . . and hunting—what . . . and with—what? And the upright stones and the men who had died raising them . . . as they did of old . . . as of old in Carnac . . .

McCann's narrative was going smoothly on. He said: " We ride along quiet after that. I see the old goat is pretty agitated, an' chewing his whiskers. We come to the place he's been telling about. We look around. It's a nice place all right. If I was what I say I was, I'd buy it. Old stone house, lots of room—for the East. Furniture in it. We amble around an' after awhile we come in sight of this wall. It's all the old goat said it was. It'd take artillery or TNT to knock it down. Eph mutters not to pay attention to it, except casual. There's big gates across the road that look like steel to me. An' while I don't see nobody I get the idea we're being watched all the time. We stroll here an' stroll there, an' then back to the other place. An' then the old goat asks me anxious what I think of it, an' I say it's all right if the price is, an' what is the price. An' he gives me one that makes me blink. Not because it's high but because it's so low. It gives me the glimmer of another idea. Nursing that idea, I say I'd like to look at some other places. He shows me some, but half-hearted like, an' the idea grows.

" It's late when we get back to the village. On the way we run across a man who draws up to talk. He says to the old goat: ' Eph, there's four more gone from the poor farm.'

" The old goat sort of jitters an' asks when. The other man says last night. He says the superintendent's about ready to call in the police. Eph sort of calculates an' says that makes about fifty gone. The other man says, yeah, all of that. They shake their heads an' we go on. I ask what's this about the poor farm, an' Eph tells me that it's about ten miles off an' that in the last three months the paupers have been vanishing an' vanishing. He's got that same scared look back, an' starts talking about something else.

" Well, we get back to the Beverly House. Thar's quite a bunch of villagers in the front room, an' they treat me mighty respectful. I gather that Eph has told 'em who I'm supposed to

be, an' that this is a sort of committee of welcome.

"One man comes up an' says he's glad to see me but I've been too slow coming home. Also, they've all got the news about these vanishing paupers, an' it's plain they don't like it.

"I get my supper, an' come out an' there's more people there. They've got a sort of look of herding for comfort. An' that idea of mine gets stronger. It's that I've been wronging Eph in thinking all he wants is a profit from me. I get the flattering idea that they're all pretty plumb scared, an' what they think is that mebbe I'm the man who can help 'em out in whatever's scaring them. After all, I suppose the Partingtons in their time was big guns 'round here, an' here I am, one of 'em, an' coming back Providentially, as you might say, just at the right time. I sit an' listen, an' all the talk goes 'round the poor farm an' the Frenchman.

"It gets around nine o'clock an' a feller comes in. He says: 'They picked up two of them missing paupers.' Everybody sort of comes close, an' Eph says: 'Where?' An' this feller says: 'Bill Johnson's late getting in, an' he sees these two floaters off his bow. He hooks an' tows 'em. Old Si Jameson's at the wharf an' he takes a look. He says he knows 'em. They're Sam an' Mattie Whelan who's been at the poor farm for three years. They lay 'em out on the wharf. They must have drowned themselves an' been hitting up against a rock for Lord knows when,' says this feller.

"'What d'you mean hitting up against a rock?' asks Eph. An' the feller says they must have been because there ain't a whole bone in their chests. Says the ribs are all smashed, an' the way it looks to him they must have been pounding on a rock steady for days. Like as if they'd been tied to it. Even their hearts are all mashed up—"

I FELT sick, and abreast of sickness a bitter rage; and within me I heard a voice crying: "So it was done in the old days . . . so they slew your people . . . long ago—" Then I realized I was on my feet, and that Bill was holding my arms. McCann was on his feet, too, but there was little surprise on his face, and even then I wondered how much more he knew than he was telling us.

I said: "All right, Bill. Sorry, McCann," and poured myself a drink.

McCann said, mildly: "Okay, Doc, you've got your reasons. Well, just then into the room comes a gangling sort of feller with empty eyes an' a loose mouth. Nobody says a word, just watches him. He comes over to me an' stares at me. He starts to shake, an' he whispers to me: 'She's riding again. She's riding on the black horse. She rode last night with her hair streaming behind her an' her dogs around her—'

"Then he lets out the most God-awful screech an' starts bowing up an' down like a jumping-jack, an' he yells —'But they ain't dogs! They ain't dogs! Keep 'em off me! Dear Jesus . . . keep 'em off me!'

"At that there's a bunch around him saying 'Come along, 'Lias, now come along,' an' they take him out, still screeching. Them that's left don't say much. They look at me solemn, an' pour down a drink or two an' go. Me"—McCann hesitated—"me, I'm feeling a mite shaky. If I was the old goat I could give you an idea how 'Lias yelped. It was like a couple of devils had pincers on his soul an' was yanking it loose like a tooth. I drunk a big one an' started for bed. Old Eph stops me.

He's putty-white an' his beard is quivering. He trots out another jug an' says: 'Stay up awhile, Mr. Partington. We've an idea we'd like you to settle here with us. If that price don't suit you, name your own. We'll meet it.'

"By that time it don't take a mastermind to tell this is a pretty well-scared village. An' from what I know before an' what I've heard since I don't blame 'em. I say to Eph: 'Them paupers? You got an idea where they're going to? Who's taking them?'

"He looks around before he answers, then he whispers: 'De Keradel.'

"I says: 'What for?' An' he whispers: 'For his rockery.'

"Earlier I might have laughed at that. But somehow now I don't feel like it. So I tell him I'm interested, but I got to go back to New York tomorrow an' I'll think it over an' why don't they get the police to look into things. He says the village constable's as scared as any, an' there ain't no evidence to get out a search warrant, an' he's talked to a couple of country officers but they think he's crazy. So the next morning I check out, saying I'll be back in a day or two. There's quite a little delegation sees me off an' urges me to come back.

"I'm mighty curious to see that place behind the wall, an' especially what Eph calls the rockery. So I run down to Providence where I've got a friend with a hydroplane an' we fix it to ride over the de Keradel place that night. We go along the coast. It's a moonlight night, an' we raise it about ten o'clock. I get out the glasses as we come close. We're flying about five hundred feet up. It's clear, but there's a fog rising about this point as we get closer. A quick fog, too, that looks as if it's trying to beat us to it.

"There's a big boat lying off the point, too, in a sort of deep cove. They flash searchlights up at us, whether trying to blind us or to find out who we are I don't know. I give my friend the office and we duck the lights. I've got my glasses up an' I see a long rambling stone house half hid by a hill. Then I see something that sort of makes me feel creepy—like old Eph's wailing. I don't just know why. But it's a lot of big stones all doing ring-around-a-rosy around a bigger gray heap of stones in the middle. The fog's swirling all around like snakes, an' there's lights flickering here an' there . . . gray sort of lights . . . rotten . . ."

McCann stopped and lifted a drink with a none too steady hand: "Rotten sort of lights is right. Like they're . . . decaying. An' there appears to be something big an' black squatting on that big gray heap . . . without no shape to it . . . shadowy. An' it quivers an' wavers . . . an' the standing stones are like they're reaching up to pull us down to this squatting thing . . ."

He set the glass down with a hand even less steady. "Then we're over an' zooming away. I look back an' the fog's covered everything."

He said to Lowell: "I'm telling you, Doc, that never at no time with the Mandilip hag did I feel as slimy as when we flew over that place. The Mandilip hag had a line into Hell all right. But this is Hell itself—I'm telling you!"

CHAPTER XIII.

SUMMONS FROM DAHUT.

"WELL, that's all." McCann lighted a cigarette and looked at me. "But I got the idea what I've been telling makes a lot more

sense to Dr. Caranac than it does to me. Me—I know it's black poison. Mebbe he knows just how black. For instance, Doc, why'd you shy so when I made mention of them two paupers?"

I said: "Dr. Lowell, you won't mind if I have a little talk with Bill. McCann, I apologize to you in advance. Bill, come over here in the corner. I want to whisper to you."

I took Bill out of earshot, and asked: "Just how much does McCann know?"

Bill answered: "All that we know about Dick. He knows de Keradel's connection with the doll-maker. And that would be enough for him, if he knew nothing else."

"Anything about my experiences with the Demoiselle?"

"Certainly not," said Bill, stiffly. "Both Lowell and myself thought too much of the confidential element entered into them."

"That," I said, keeping solemn with an effort, "was true delicacy. But have you spoken to any one except me about the shadowy visitation your imagination drew upon you?"

Bill exclaimed: "Imagination hell! But no—I haven't."

"Not even to Helen?"

"No."

"Fine," I said. "Now I know where I stand." I went back to the table and apologized again to McCann. I said to Lowell:

"You remember de Keradel spoke to us of a certain experiment he contemplated? Its purpose the evocation of some god or demon worshipped long ago? Well, from McCann's story I would say that his experiment must be rather far advanced. He has set up the standing stones in the order prescribed by the ancient ritual, and he has built in their center the Great Cairn. The House of the Blackness, The Shrine of the Gatherer. The Alkar-Az—"

Lowell interrupted, eagerly: "You have identified that name? I recall that when first you spoke it, de Keradel showed consternation. You evaded his questions. Did you do that to mystify him?"

I said: "I did not. I still do not know how that name came into my mind. Perhaps from that of the Demoiselle—as other things may have come later. Or perhaps not; the Demoiselle, you will also recall, suggested to him that I had—remembered. Nevertheless, I know that what he has built in the heart of the monoliths is the Alkar-Az. And that, as McCann truly says, it is black poison."

McCANN asked: "But the two paupers, Doc?"

I said: "It may be that they were beaten by the waves against the rocks. But it is also true that at Carnac and at Stonehenge the Druid priests beat the breasts of the sacrifices with their mauls of oak and stone and bronze until their ribs were crushed and their hearts were pulp."

McCann said, softly: "Good Lord!"

I said: "The stone cutter who tried to escape told of men being crushed under the great stones, and of their bodies vanishing. Recently, when they were restoring Stonehenge, they found fragments of human skeletons buried at the base of many of the monoliths. They had been living men when the monoliths were raised. Under the standing stones of Carnac are similar fragments. In ancient times men and women and children were buried under and within the walls of the cities as those walls were built—sometimes slain before they were encased in the

mortar and stone, and sometimes encased while alive. The foundations of the temples rested upon such sacrifices. Men and women and children . . . their souls were fettered there forever . . . to guard. Such was the ancient belief. Even today there is the superstition that no bridge can stand unless at least one life is lost in its building. Dig around the monoliths of de Keradel's —rockery.

"I'll stake all I have that you'll discover where those vanished workmen went."

McCann said: "That poor farm's on the water. It wouldn't be hard to take them away by boat."

Lowell objected, sharply: "Nonsense, McCann. How could they be taken secretly? You're surely not suggesting that de Keradel could steam in, gather the paupers on his boat and sail away without any one being aware of it?"

McCann said, placatingly: "Well, now, Doc, there wouldn't be much of a trick in that. I've seen 'em snaked out of penitentiaries. Guards can always be fixed, you know."

I said: "There are other ways. They might slip away of their own volition. Who knows what de Keradel might promise them—if they slipped away to him?"

Lowell said: "But how could he get to them? How establish contact?"

Bill answered, quietly: "By the shadows of Dahut!"

Lowell thrust his chair back, violently. He said: "Preposterous! I acknowledge that such abnormal suggestion as we have been considering might have been effective in Ralston's case. But to assert that a collective hallucination could be induced which would draw away half a hundred inmates of—it is preposterous!"

"Well, anyway," drawled McCann, "they went."

I said: "De Keradel is an enthusiast, and thorough. Like Napoleon, he knows that you cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs; nor can you have meat without cattle; nor human sacrifices without humans. How did he get his workmen? He engaged an agent who collected men without family—and therefore with nobody to care whether they turned up again or did not. Also, they came from widely separated parts and they did not know each other. Why? Because that reduced to a minimum any chance of inquiry concerning them. What became of those who were left after they had finished his—rockery? Who knows—and who cares?

"Were any of them allowed to go after they had finished their work? I doubt it. Otherwise, why all these peculiar precautions? Again—who knows and who cares?"

Bill said: "You mean he used them for—"

I INTERJECTED: "For his experiment, of course. Or as McCann's old goat put it—for his rockery. They were laboratory subjects. Well, the supply runs short. He hasn't enough. For one reason or another he doesn't want to bring in any more that way. Still, he must have more subjects. For a show such as he proposes putting on, he may need quite a crowd. Where could he get them with the least risk? Not by stealing them from around the countryside. That would raise hell. Not from a prison—because even ten men vanishing from a prison would raise even more hell. Also, he needs women as well as men. What is the least missed person in the world? A pauper. And

here close at hand is a reservoir of them. And so—the paupers vanish."

McCann said: "It listens. But what about them dogs that ain't dogs that sent 'Lias loco?"

I thought: "*'Riding on her stallion black, at her feet her shadow pack—'* I answered: "Your guess about that is as good as mine, McCann. What are you going to do with these men of yours, if Ricori puts them under your command? What plan have you in mind?"

He settled himself in his chair.

"Well, it's this way. If the boss turns 'em over to me, it means he's going to come back. An' when the boss makes up his mind, he moves quick. Now these lads I named are hand picked an' none afraid of hell or its angels. Handy with the Tommy-guns an' what not, but they ain't a bad-looking or a bad behaved lot—ordinarily. Now what I'm figuring is that if this de Keradel's up to the tricks we've been talking of, something's likely to happen that'll give us the breaks on him. I got a hunch the floating off of them two paupers was a mistake. He don't want nothing that'll point a finger at him. All right, maybe he'll make another mistake. An' we'll be there.

"The Beverly people'll be damned glad to see me. I been a mite modest about how much they took to me. I go back with a couple of the lads an' tell Eph I'll try out for a bit that house he offered me. Then in a day or two the rest filter in. Just coming up to stay with McCann for the fishing an' the rest. We'll fish around all right, an' sort of ride an' tramp an' scout. By the time the boss gets here we'll have the lay of the land. Then, after you've shown him, he'll tell us what to do further."

Dr. Lowell said: "McCann, all of this will cost money. I cannot consent to it unless you permit me to defray expenses."

McCann grinned: "Don't worry about that, Doc. The house won't cost us nothing. Eph an' his friends'll see to that. As for the lads—well, I look after some things for the boss an' he's left me plenty funds. The boss'll pay for the party. An' should the party get rough, well"—there was a lawless glint in McCann's eyes—"from what you and Doc Bennett tell me there ought to be good pickings at the de Keradel joint."

Lowell exclaimed, shocked: "McCann!"

I LAUGHED; nevertheless I studied McCann. Suddenly I had an uneasy feeling that he might not be so disinterested after all. Straightforward enough he seemed, and his story supported our every suspicion—but wasn't it just a little too pat? He and Ricori had been gangsters and racketeers, operating ruthlessly outside the law.

I had no doubt that in the main his story was true; that he had found a village filled with fear and rumor. But this might be nothing more than the gossip of a small community whose curiosity and resentment had been aroused by being barred from a place to which they had enjoyed free ingress for generations. In many parts of rural New England it is a neighborhood affront to pull down the window shades at night. Families have been ostracized and preached against in the churches for doing it. Unless you are doing something wrong, why cover the windows so the neighbors can't look in? The same argument might be at the bottom of the Beverly unrest. Their imaginations painted what might be

going on behind the de Keradel wall. And tale after tale would grow stronger in the telling.

How easy for a quick-witted crook to take advantage of such a situation; bring in a gang and set up headquarters in this house between the village and the isolated de Keradel place. Then, on some manufactured evidence or without it, under pretense of ridding the villagers of their terror, with their rear protected by these superstitious allies, to storm the wall, raid the house and loot it. Its guards once overcome, there would be none to interfere. Perhaps McCann had information as to the extent of the "pickings" beyond Bill's surmises as to what had been secured from Ralston and the others.

Perhaps he had already apprised Ricori of the opportunity, and the cable he had induced Lowell to send was only a blind.

These thoughts ran through my mind in a fraction of the time it takes to tell them. I said:

"It sounds first rate. But what you need is somebody inside the place who will keep in touch with you."

McCann said, emphatically: "That's one thing can't be done."

I said: "Wrong. I know somebody who will do it."

He grinned: "Yeah? Who?"

I said: "I."

Lowell leaned forward, staring at me incredulously. Bill whitened, and little beads of sweat came out on his forehead. McCann's grin faded. He asked:

"How you going to get in?"

I said: "By the front door, McCann. I have, in fact, an invitation from the Demoiselle de Keradel. I've accepted it. I'm afraid I forgot to tell you that, Bill."

Bill said, grimly: "I'm afraid you did. So *that* was why you wanted de Keradel's address? And *that* was what you did while I was asleep . . . and *that* was why . . ."

I said, airily: "I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about, Bill. The Demoiselle, no matter what else she may be, is a damned interesting lady. I've been thinking over what you suggested a few days ago—about sitting in and so on. It just happened that the invitation came while you were asleep, and I immediately accepted. And that's all."

He said, slowly: "And immediately the—"

I said, hastily: "Nothing to that, Bill. Forget it. Now, as I see the situation—"

McCANN interrupted, his eyes narrowed and face hardened: "Seems to me you know this de Keradel gal better'n anybody told me, Dr. Caranac. Seems to me you know a hell of a lot you've not come clean with."

I said, cheerfully: "A hell of a lot is right, McCann. And that's the way it stays. Take me or leave me. You'll have your gang outside the wall. I'll be inside. If you want me to cooperate, fine. If you don't, I'd just as soon play a lone hand. What are you afraid of?"

He flushed, and his hands went down to his hips in a swift, stiff motion. He drawled: "I ain't afraid—but I like to know the brand of who I work for."

I laughed: "Take it from me, McCann, whatever it is, it's not the Double Cross. But you'll have to leave it at that."

Bill said, still sweating: "I can't let you do that, Alan."

I said: "Listen. Either de Keradel and the Demoiselle brought about the

suicide of Dick and the others—or they did not. If they did—they accomplished it by some dark knowledge they possess, or by hypnotic suggestion. In either case, no evidence could be brought against them that any court would consider. So that's out. But if de Keradel is actually carrying on that devilish experiment he hinted, and if he is luring, stealing or otherwise securing human sacrifices to complete that experiment, then he's leaving himself open to perfectly tangible evidence and a charge of murder. Therefore a drop with a noose around his neck. And so"—I winced at the thought—" is the Demoiselle.

" The only place to get that evidence is up there in Rhode Island. McCann's plan is good, but he's outside the wall, and he could not have the advantages that some one inside would have for observation. It happens that I am not only invited to go inside, but uniquely fitted for doing so"—I couldn't help giving Bill a sardonic grin at that. " Also, Bill, if there is danger, I have a real conviction that I run less risk by accepting the Demoiselle's invitation than I do by refusing it."

And that was true enough, I thought. If I obeyed Dahut's summons, I'd probably lose Helen forever. But if I didn't—well, I would just as probably lose her anyway. And I didn't like to think of what might happen to her and to Bill in the process. At that time incredulity and absolute conviction of the Demoiselle's unholy powers revolved in my mind like a two-sailed windmill. And sometimes so fast that I found myself both believing and disbelieving at the same time.

Bill said: " You were always a rotten bad liar, Alan."

McCann stuck out his hand: " Okay, Doc. I'm sorry I said it. You don't need tell me nothing more. What you want me to do?"

I was really moved by that. I took his hand and said: " I'm sorry, too, McCann."

McCann asked: " What for?"

" For something I'd been thinking. Come down to the Club with me and we'll map out some line. We won't talk here because from now on I want Dr. Bennett to keep out of this."

Bill said, hotly: " The hell I will. When McCann goes up there I go with him."

I said: " I know what I'm talking about. I'll play this game with McCann. And with Ricori—if he comes over. But you're out of it, Bill. I don't want you even to talk to Ricori. Let Dr. Lowell do all the explaining."

Bill said, stubbornly: " I go with McCann."

I said: " You poor boob, do you think it's you I'm considering? It's—Helen."

He dropped at that, and again I saw his face whiten and the little beads of sweat come out on his forehead. He said, slowly:

" So—*that's* it."

I said: " That's *exactly* it. Think it over and see how right I am. Nothing doing, Bill. You're out."

I turned to Dr. Lowell: " I have the best of reasons for what I am saying. I am hoping you will support me. I don't think there's much danger for you. But for Helen and Bill—a lot."

Lowell said, very gravely: " I understand you, Alan. I will not fail you."

I GOT up; I looked at Bill and laughed. I said: " You've the look of somebody who sees his best friend pacing from the condemned cell toward that Little Green Door from which none returneth. It's nothing of

the sort, Bill. I'm going to visit a charming lady and her perhaps insane but nevertheless brilliant father. I expect to have a most interesting time. And if papa gets too crazy I have McCann to fall back on. If I want you, I'll call on you. There are mails and telephone. Come on, McCann."

We went down, the four of us, to the hall.

I said: "Also, Bill, don't tell Helen anything about this until I give you the word."

And just then the door opened and Helen came in.

Her eyes widened, and she looked distressed and she said: "Hello, darling. Why didn't somebody tell me you were coming tonight? I'd not have gone out."

She put her arms around my neck and kissed me. Her lips were soft and warm, and there was a fragrance about her—not like some unknown sea-bloom but flowers blossoming on a breast of earth.

I said: "I didn't know it myself until after you'd gone, angel."

She said: "Well, you're coming right back. I've a lot to talk to you about."

I wanted to be with Helen, right enough—but someway, tonight, I didn't I didn't want to talk to her. I cast an involuntary glance of appeal at McCann.

McCann caught it. He said: "Sorry, Miss Helen, but we got to get right out."

Helen looked at him. "Hello, McCann. I didn't notice you. What are you going to do with this man of mine?"

"Anything you say, Miss Helen." McCann was grinning, but I had the idea he was speaking absolute truth, and that whatever Helen ordered he would certainly do his best to accomplish.

Bill said: "Alan has to go, Helen."

She took off her hat and smoothed the copper helmet of her hair. She asked, quietly: "The de Keradel affair, Alan?"

I nodded and she went a little white. I said: "It's nothing very important, but, honestly, I can't stay. Let's make a day of it tomorrow, Helen. Meet me at Marguens and take lunch. Then we'll ride around a bit and get supper and go to some show or other. I haven't been to a theater for three years."

She looked at me for a long minute or two, then rested her hands on my shoulders.

"All right, Alan. I'll meet you there—at two. But—be there."

AS I went out I swore to myself that come hell or high water, I'd be there. Summons from Dahut notwithstanding. If Bill had to entertain one of her shadows for a few hours—well, he'd have to stand it. Down at the Club, McCann and I had a few drinks and I told him a few more things. I said I thought both de Keradel and his daughter were a bit crazy, and the reason I'd been invited down was because she had a wild idea we'd been in love with each other a few thousand years ago. He listened, silently.

When I was done, he said: "Them shadders, Doc. You think they're real?"

I said: "I don't see how they can be. But certainly the people who see them think they are."

He nodded, absently. "Well, they got to be treated as if they're real. But how can you put the heat on a shadder? The people responsible for 'em

are real, though. An' you can always put the heat on them."

He said, shrewdly:

"This de Keradel gal, now. How do you feel about her? I hear she's mighty ornamental. Feel safe—going down there?"

I flushed at that; I said to him coldly:

"When I need a guardian, McCann, I'll let you know."

He answered as coldly: "I didn't mean it that way. Only—I ain't aiming to see Miss Helen get any crooked deal."

That stung me; I began, unthinkingly: "If it wasn't for Miss Helen—" then shut up. He leaned over toward me, his eyes less hard:

"I thought so. You're scared for Miss Helen. That's why you're going. But mebbe that ain't just the way to protect her."

I said: "All right, McCann, tell me a better."

He said: "Why not leave it to me an' the hands?"

"I know what I'm about, McCann," I told him.

He sighed and got up. "Well, soon's we hear from the boss, you an' me's got to get together on signals an' how to meet down there. There'll be boats fishing at the end of the walls, for one thing. When do you figure on visiting?"

"When I'm sent for."

He sighed again, shook my hand solemnly, and left. I went to bed, and slept soundly. The next morning at nine Bill called me up to say that Ricori had cabled the necessary instructions and that he was flying from Genoa to Paris that day to catch the Mauretania and would be in New York in a week. McCann phoned the same news, and we made an engagement for that midnight to go over details of our team work.

I SPENT a gorgeous day with Helen. I met her at Marguens and said: "This day is yours and mine, darling. We're not going to think about anything else. To hell with the de Keradels. This is the last mention of them."

She said, sweetly: "To hell with them suits me perfectly, darling."

It was, as I have said, a gorgeous day, and long before it was over I knew just how much I was in love with her; how utterly lovely and desirable she was. Every time the thought of the Demoiselle crept out of the far corner of my mind into which I had thrust her, I pushed her back with a pang of hatred like the sting of a wasp. At half past eleven I bade good-by to Helen at Lowell's door. I asked: "How about tomorrow?"

She said: "All right—if you can."

I asked: "Why the devil couldn't I?"

She said: "This day's over, Alan. You'll not be rid of Dahut so easily." I started to answer; she stopped me. "You don't know how much I love you. Promise me—if you need me . . . come to me . . . at any time . . . in any—shape!"

I caught her in my arms: "In any shape—what the devil do you mean by that?"

She drew my head down, pressed her lips to mine—savagely, tenderly, passionately all in one—for long. She thrust me from her and I saw that she was crying. She threw open the door, then turned for a moment.

"You *don't* know how much I love you!"

She closed the door. I went down to the waiting cab and rode to the Club,

cursing the Demoiselle more comprehensively than I had since ancient Ys—if and when that had been. McCann hadn't arrived, but a telegram had. It was from Dahut, and read:

> The yacht will be waiting for you at the Larchmont Club at noon to-morrow. Her name is Brittis. I will meet you. Sincerely hope you will come prepared for indefinite stay.

Well, that was that. I did not miss the nuance of the name, nor the mockery in that "indefinite stay." Helen was reality, and Dahut was shadow. But I knew that now shadow had become the true reality. With a sinking of the heart, with foreboding against which I raged, impotently, with sorrow for Helen as though I were bidding her farewell forever, with bitter hatred against this woman who was so half-contemptuously summoning me — I knew that I could do nothing but obey her.

CHAPTER XIV.

BEHIND DE KERADEL'S WALL.

I HAD one of my valises packed when McCann was announced. He squinted at it with surprise. "You ain't going away tonight, Doc?"

With sudden impulse toward frankness, I pushed over to him the Demoiselle's telegram. He read it stolidly; looked up. "This just come? Thought you told Doc Bennett you'd already had an invitation."

"This," I explained patiently, "is merely a confirmation of an engagement previously made, setting a definite time for one left indefinite before—as you will see if you read it over again carefully." I began to pack the other valise. McCann reread the telegram, watched me silently for a while, then said mildly:

"Doc Bennett had one of them shadders trailing him, didn't he?"

I turned to him sharply. "What makes you think that?"

He went on, as though he had not heard me: "An' he lost it down here with you, didn't he?"

"McCann," I said, "you're crazy. What gave you that idea?"

He sighed, and said: "When you an' him was arguing about you going down an' setting in with this de Keradel, I got a mite puzzled. But when I see this telegram, I ain't puzzled no more. I get the answer."

"Fine," I said, and resumed packing. "What is it?"

He said: "You traded something for Doc Bennett's shadder."

I looked at him and laughed. "You've grand ideas, McCann. What have I to trade, and with whom and for what?"

McCann sighed again, and put a finger on the Demoiselle's name. "With her—" He pointed to the "indefinite stay" and said: "An' you traded this for his shadder."

"McCann," I went over to him. "He did think a shadow was following him. But that may have been only because he has been thinking too much about this whole queer matter. And he has much the same idea as you about how he was relieved of the—obsession. I want you to promise me that you will say nothing of your own suspicions to him—and especially nothing to Miss Helen. If one or the other should speak to you about it, do your best to discourage the notion. I have good reasons for asking this—believe me I have. Will you promise?"

He asked: "Miss Helen don't know nothing about it yet?"

"Not unless Dr. Bennett has told her since we left," I answered. Uneasily I wondered whether he had, and cursed my stupidity for not getting his promise that he wouldn't.

He considered me for a time, then said: "Okay, Doc. But I've got to tell the boss when he comes."

I laughed, and said: "Okay, McCann. By that time the game may be all over—except the post-mortems."

He asked, sharply: "What do you mean by that?"

I answered: "Nothing." And went on with my packing. The truth was I didn't know myself what I had meant.

HE said: "You figure on getting there some time tomorrow evening. I'll be up at the old goat's with some of the lads long before dusk. Probably won't get to this house I been telling you of until next day. But nothing's likely to happen right off. You got any plans how we're going to get together?"

"I've been thinking about that." I stopped the packing, and sat on the bed. "I'm not so sure how much I'm going to be under surveillance, or what liberty I'll have. The situation is—well, unusual and complicated. Obviously, I can't trust to letters or telegrams. I might ride to the village, but that doesn't mean I could get in touch with you when I got there, because I don't think I'd be riding alone. Even if you happened to be there, it would be highly impolitic to recognize and talk to you. The de Keradels are no fools, McCann, and they would realize the situation perfectly. Until I've been on the other side of de Keradel's wall, I can suggest only one thing."

"You talk like you been sentenced an' bound for the Big House," he grinned.

"I believe in looking for the worst," I said. "Then you're never disappointed. That being so—put this down, McCann—a telegram to Dr. Bennett which reads, 'Feeling fine. Don't forget to forward all mail,' means that you're to get over that wall despite hell or high water as quick as you can and up to the house as quick as you can and damn the torpedoes. Get that, McCann?"

"Okay," he said. "But I got an idea or two likewise. First—nobody's going to keep you from writing after you get there. Okay again. You write an' you find some excuse to get to the village. You get out to this Beverly House I been telling you about an' go in. Don't matter who's with you, you'll find some way to drop that letter on the floor or somewhere. You don't have to give it to nobody. After you go they'll comb the place through to find it. An' I'll get it. That's one line.

"Next—they'll be a couple of lads fishing around the north side of that wall all the time—that's the left end of it coming from the house. There's a breast of rock there, an' I don't see why you can't climb up that to look at the surroundings, all by yourself. Hell, you're inside the wall an' why should they stop you? Then if you've writ another note an' put it in a little bottle an' casually throw some stones an' among 'em the bottle, the lads being on the look-out for just such stuff will just as casually rope it in."

"Fine," I said, and poured him a drink. "Now all you have to do is to tell Dr. Bennett to look out for that message and bring up your myrmidons."

"My what?" asked McCann.

"Your gifted lads with their Tommies and pineapples."

"That's a grand name," said Mc-

Cann. "The boys'll like it. Say it again."

I said it again, and added: "And for God's sake, don't forget to give that message straight to Dr. Bennett."

He said: "Then you ain't going to talk to him before you go?"

I said: "No. Nor to Miss Helen either."

HE thought over that for a bit, then asked: "How well you heeled, Doc?"

I showed him my .32 automatic. He shook his head: "This is better, Doc." He reached under his left armpit and unstrapped a holster. In it was an extraordinarily compact little gun, short-barreled, squat.

"It shoots a .38," he said. "Ain't nothing under armor plate stands up against that, Doc. Tote your others but stick this under your arm. Keep it there, asleep or awake. Keep it hid. There's a few extra clips in that pocket of the holster."

I said: "Thanks, Mac." And threw it on the bed.

He said: "No. Put it on an' get used to the feel of it."

"All right," I said. And did so.

He took another drink, leisurely; he said, gently: "Of course, there's one straight easy way out of all this, Doc. All you need do when you sit at the table with de Keradel an' his gal is to slip that little cannon loose an' let 'em have it. Me an' the lads'd cover you."

I said: "I'm not sure enough for that, Mac. Honestly—I'm not."

He sighed again, and arose. "You got too much curiosity, Doc. Well, play your hand your own way—"

At the door he turned. "Anyway, the boss'll like you. You got guts."

He went out. I felt as though I'd been given the accolade.

I dropped a brief note to Bill, simply saying that when one had made up one's mind to do something, there was no time like the present and that therefore I was making myself one of the de Keradel ménage on the morrow. I didn't say anything about the Demoiselle's telegram, leaving him to think I was on my way solely of my own volition. I told him McCann had a message that was damned important, and that if and when he received it from me to forward it quick, according to directions.

I wrote a little letter to Helen . . .

THE next morning I left the club early—before the letters could be delivered. I taxied leisurely to Larchmont; arrived at the Club shortly before noon and was told that a boat from the Brittis was awaiting me at the landing stage. I went down to the boat. There were three men on it—Bretons or Basques, I couldn't tell which, oddly enough. Rather queer looking—stolid faces, the pupils of their eyes unusually dilated, skins sallow. One turned his eyes up to me and asked, tonelessly, in French:

"The Sieur de Carnac?"

I answered, impatiently: "Dr. Caranac." And took my place in the stern.

He turned to the two: "The Sieur de Carnac. Go."

We shot through a school of small fry and headed for a slim gray yacht. I asked: "The Brittis?" The helmsman nodded. She was a sweet craft, about a hundred and fifty feet over all, schooner rigged and built for speed. I doubted McCann's estimate of her ocean-going capabilities.

The Demoiselle was standing at the head of the ladder. Considering the manner of my last parting from her, there were obvious elements of em-

barrassment in this meeting. I had given them considerable thought and had decided to ignore them, or pass them over lightly—if she would let me. It was no picture of a romantic hero I had made sliding down from her tower, and I was still somewhat sensitive as to its undignified aspects. I hoped her arts, infernal or otherwise, hadn't enabled her to reconstruct that spectacle. So when I had climbed the ladder, I simply said with cheerful idiocy:

"Hello, Dahut. You're looking—beautiful."

And so she was. Nothing at all like the Dahut of ancient Ys; nothing at all like a shadow queen; nothing at all like a witch. She had on a snappy white sport suit, and there was no aureole, evil or otherwise, about her pale gold hair. Instead there was a tricky little green knit hat. Her great violet eyes were clear and ingenuous with not a trace of the orchid hell sparks. In fact, to outward appearance only an extraordinarily beautiful woman with no more high explosive about her than any beautiful woman would naturally carry.

But I knew different, and something whispered to me to be doubly on my guard.

She laughed, and held out her hand: "Welcome, Alain."

She glanced at my two bags with a small enigmatic smile, and led me down to a luxurious little cabin. She said, matter-of-factly: "I'll wait for you on deck. Don't be long. Lunch is ready." And she was gone.

The yacht was already under way. I looked out of the port and was surprised to see how far we were from the Club. The Brittis was speedier than I had surmised. In a few minutes I went up on deck and joined the Demoiselle. She was talking to the captain, whom she introduced to me by the good old Breton name of Braz; and me to him as the "Sieur de Carnac." The captain was of stockier build than the others I had seen, but with the same stolid expression and the same abnormally dilated eyes. I saw the pupils of his eyes suddenly contract, like a cat's, and a curiously speculative gleam come into them . . . almost as though it were recognition.

I knew then that what I had taken for stolidity was not that at all. It was—withdrawal. This man's consciousness lived in a world of its own, his actions and responses to the outer world instinctive only. For some reason that consciousness had looked out from its inner world into this under the spur of the ancient name. From its own world . . . or from another's into which it had been sent?

And were the other men upon this boat under that same strange duress?

I said: "But, Captain Braz, I prefer to be called Dr. Caranac—not the Sieur de Carnac."

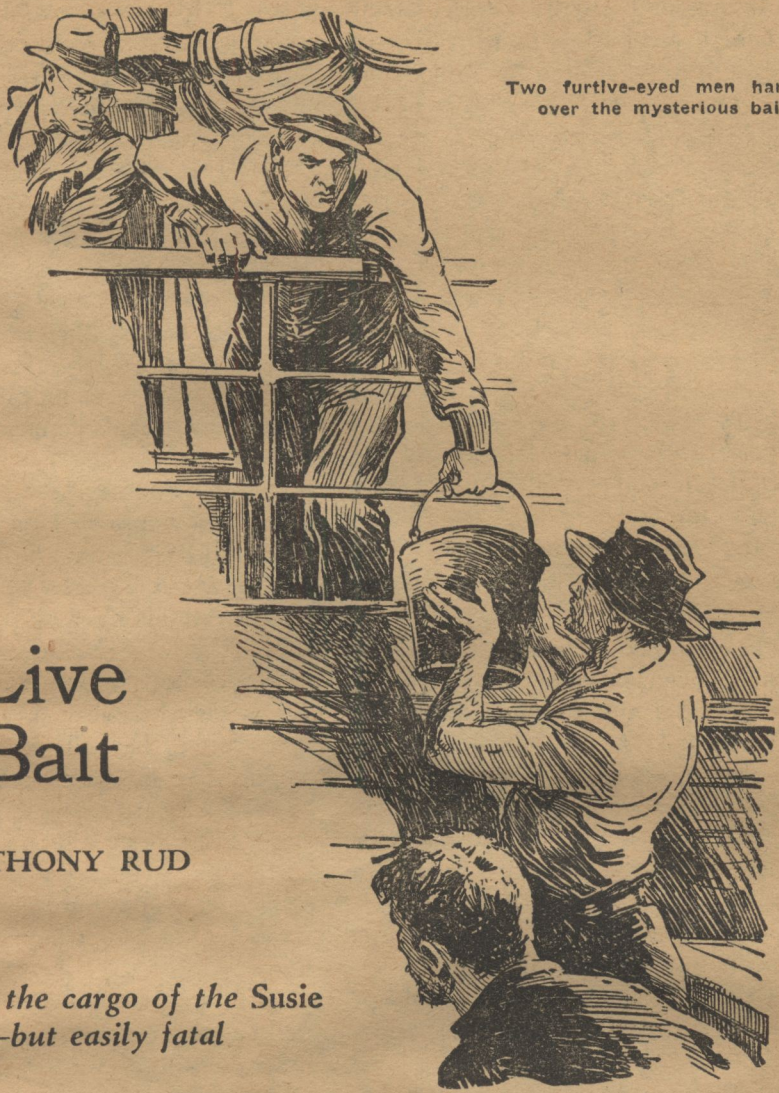
I watched him closely. He did not respond, his face impassive, his eyes wide and blank. It was as though he had not heard me.

The Demoiselle said: "The Lord of Carnac will make many voyages with us."

He bent and kissed my hand; he answered, tonelessly as had the boatman: "The Lord of Carnac does me great honor."

He bent to the Demoiselle and walked away. I watched him, and felt a creep along my spine. It was exactly as though an automaton had spoken; an automaton of flesh and blood who had seen me not as I was but as some one else had bidden him.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



Two furtive-eyed men handed over the mysterious bait

Live Bait

By ANTHONY RUD

Small was the cargo of the Susie B.*—but easily fatal*

FOUR fishermen came from New Orleans to Pass Christian, Mississippi, by train. Accoutered, eager, carrying their heavy tarpon rods and tackle, they came at once to McClintock's pier, where the forty-five-foot power schooner, Susie B., should have been waiting for them. Canvas covered, riding at anchor out in the harbor, the Susie B. seemed not to expect them.

Mutters among the four men. Then a violent outburst of profanity, when they discovered Captain Ian McClintock insensible under the pier—just above high-tide mark. Three empty bottles which had held Scots whisky, and a breath which cut through even the prevailing harbor odors of dead shrimp and drying trammel nets, seemed to explain, if not excuse, the captain's condition.

At the end of the pier a seedy individual in overalls, barefooted, hauled

in his second small speckled trout. This he detached from one of his hand lines. On another line he hauled up a crab, and shook it loose with a surly oath. He paid no attention to the acrimony and disgust of the four visitors coming toward him.

"Look here, you!" said a short, stocky man in cap, corduroys and brown fishing jacket, coming up behind the lazy-looking fisherman. "D'you know Captain McClintock, who owns that boat?" The stocky man jerked a thumb toward the Susie B.

The lazy fisherman looked up, grinning slowly and scratching his brown, stubbly chin.

"Reckon so-o," he drawled. "He gimme a drink las' night, afo' he got right ugly."

The city man scowled. He had an abrupt, nervous manner. He explained briefly that he and his companions were ready to make a trip, but that the captain was incapable.

Could this lounging fisherman run the schooner, if the four guests took the responsibility, and carried McClintock along with them? There would be ten dollars in it if the lounger wanted to go right away.

Another strike came on a hand line, and the overalled fisherman tended to landing the fish before he replied. Then he appeared to consider, and finally allowed he might do it if he could have half the sum mentioned to take to his old woman, along with the three fish.

The stocky man drew out a roll of bills and thumbed off one.

"Hurry, then!" he bade. "We'll be all ready for you."

"How about bait?" questioned the fisherman.

"We've arranged to get that out at Pass Mary Anne!" snapped the city man. "Go along now. How fast can you make it?" He glanced at his wrist watch and frowned again. "An extra five if you're back here in fifteen minutes!"

"Gee, my old woman—" began the lounger.

But then he evidently decided that the extra money was worth getting, for he actually strode fast and loose-jointedly toward the shore end of the pier, and the array of shacks facing the Gulf Coast Boulevard. He made it back in twelve minutes and a few seconds.

Fifteen minutes later, with Captain McClintock sprawled out and snoring upon a hatch cover, caring not at all for the buckets of sea water which his guests emptied over him from time to time, the Susie B. headed out under power, bound for the twin "passes" (channels of deep water) and the tarpon grounds beyond.

The man in overalls, who admitted he was known as Hoky, got along all right with the auxiliary engine. Since there was a following breeze, he had suggested getting up sail; but the four tarpon enthusiasts would have none of it.

Trailing the two skiffs, they were making six or seven knots; and the breeze was too light to give this much.

The four city guests had been out on other occasions with Captain McClintock, it developed. The stocky spokesman now worked on the owner of the Susie B., and managed to get a few hoarse, groggy sounds out of him. The moment stimulus lapsed, however, the captain groaned and subsided in sleep again.

"You'd think it was something worse than booze!" snarled the stocky man, confessing failure at last.

"Huh, three-fifths of a gallon ain't

bad for one night," smiled another, a lean fellow with a wolfish mouth and steel-rimmed spectacles. "Me, I brought one pint for the whole day!" And he held up a silver flask, shook it, then helped himself to a gurgling drink.

FROM his place at the tiller, the sprawling Hoky had remarked that all four of the men had suspicious bulges either in hip pockets or under their left arms. Well, that was all right. Hoky had a bulge in the hip of his overalls, too. At first glance he had known that he could not trust these casual employers very far.

It was an unusual way to get bait; but the four city men appeared to know the procedure. They directed Hoky to steer a half mile east of the opening of Pass Mary Anne. There ought to be an old hulk anchored out there. It always had live shrimp for bait.

Not exactly what one would expect to use for tarpon, though when those fish were striking they could be hooked on anything from mullet belly to a number eight spoon. Or even a piece of red flannel rubbed in pork grease.

Hoky did not think they would see any tarpon, so he offered no criticism about the live shrimp. When the battered hulk of the ex-houseboat came in sight—no doubt one of those affairs which had come down the Mississippi and been abandoned—he steered direct for it, and cut the motor. The Susie B. drifted up in silence.

They were expected. Two men, bearded, furtive-eyed, arose and held muttered converse with the four strangers. Then two large pails of bait were brought from the interior of the houseboat and handed over. The chunky spokesman took them and set them on deck back of the mainmast. There was no mention of payment or other business.

One of the houseboat men, with a frown back at Hoky, who was a stranger, passed across an oblong package covered with a newspaper. The chunky man took this too. Holding it carefully, he moved over to the hatch and sat down, placing it on the deck behind his feet.

Captain McClintock was making grumbling noises now. The spokesman of the quartet leaned over and talked earnestly with him for a few seconds. Then McClintock staggered up to his feet, eyes bloodshot. He glared back at Hoky in a mean sort of way.

"What the hell yuh doin' 'th my boat?" he bellowed, as Hoky started the motor again, sheering away from the houseboat. "Steal m' boat, will yuh?" He stumbled aft, his big hands opening and closing.

The Susie B. veered crazily as Hoky nimbly eluded Ian McClintock, sprinting to the bow. On the way he saw the two big galvanized pails, filled to overflowing with the crawling, smelly crustaceans. Why, if they used up all this bait tarpon fishing, they'd be out on the Gulf for a week!

There was to be no fishing at all. Captain McClintock announced that decidedly. He had been badly treated, his boat stolen, and a stranger given the running of it. He was going to put back for home, and if the city men didn't like that, they could jump overboard right now!

The chunky man from New Orleans made an immediate protest, but his companions merely sat on the rail and listened.

Captain McClintock was adamant. They were going back. He felt sick,

and wasn't going on any fishing trip this day. That was all there was to it.

For such dangerous-looking men the city quartet subsided meekly. Hoky grinned to himself. He was scanning the long, monotonous salt marshes. Ah, there it was!

OUT of an aisle of water suddenly came a long brown shape, a slim mahogany speedboat. It thundered toward them so swiftly that there was no chance to avoid it, or do much of anything. On the bow there was the sinister black muzzle of a machine gun, with a bullet screen, and a man crouching ready to fire, and another man out of sight holding a belt of cartridges.

Low, explosive curses burst from the four city men and Captain McClintock alike. Before the stocky man could do more than seize the newspaper-covered package which had been behind his heels, the speedboat swerved alongside, its wash making the Susie B. heel over.

Two stern-faced men with Tommy-guns, beside the machine gunner in the bow, covered the six on the Susie B. Growling, his face going an apoplectic shade of purple, Captain McClintock shut off the motor.

That was the moment when the chunky man endeavored to hide the newspaper package under his jacket, and sidle to the rail with the evident intention of dropping it overboard.

"*Stop right there!*" yelled one of the sub-machine gunners. "Carlin, get that bundle from him! Hand it over, you!"

As the two craft came together, one of the government men reached over and snatched away the newspaper-covered package. The two sub-machine gunners boarded, keeping the city fishermen and McClintock covered.

Hoky yelled. He had seen the chunky man do a peculiar thing—pull out an odd lever in the side of the newspaper package before passing it across! With a flying leap Hoky spanned the gap between the two boats. He pounced upon the suspicious package, and flung it far. It splashed and sank into the waters of the Gulf.

"Hey! Hey! That was the evidence!" yelled one of the government operatives.

The attention of even the sub-machine gunners was momentarily distracted, though they did not take swift vengeance on Hoky.

The chunky man saw his opportunity. With a yell he and the three city guests went for their pistols, swinging them first upon the two Tommy-gun men, who were caught in flatfooted surprise.

One of the latter dropped face foremost. The second spun and staggered, his weapon hurtling a seam of bullets up through the masts and cordage.

From the speedboat came a steady *crash-crash-crash!* of pistol fire. Hoky, standing there, face set and stern, looking very little like the lounging pier fisherman he had been, shot deliberately, but sent every bullet to its mark.

Before he could fire a fourth shot, however, a bullet struck his ribs and right elbow, driving him backward. The automatic fell from his numbed fingers.

Gamely he ducked and picked it up left-handed—firing once more at the sole remaining member of the four city guests, but missing.

From the side, however, the second Tommy-gun operative swerved and sent a stream of bullets into the suspected

smuggler. The latter dropped, dead before he struck the deck of the Susie B.

TWENTY yards beyond the government speedboat there came a churning and convulsion from the bed of the ocean. A geyser of foam, sand and water shot up twenty feet into the air!

"That's the—evidence—they wanted you—to keep!" said Hoky grimly, his face white and strained as he eased himself to the seat of the speedboat.

"That's what—happened to—George Ritter and—Hank Brett!" he added, as one of the stern men came to examine his wounds while another went hastily across to see the captives, if any still remained alive, and 'tend to the wounds of the Tommy-gun men.

Hoky mentioned an occurrence which had long been a puzzle. Ritter and Brett, with a boat belonging to the Narcotic Division, had disappeared. A few fragments of what probably had been the boat were found a month later. No sign of the men.

"They made a capture of these—dogs," said Hoky painfully. "Then that bomb did for 'em. Take a look. I think Captain McClintock ducked as soon as—the shooting started. He'll cave, if you work on him."

"We'll do that little thing!" was the grim response. "But if he keeps his trap shut?"

"Oh, take a look under the shrimp in those pails of live bait," said Hoky wearily. "They didn't go through—all this for a little five or ten pounds of coke, as might have been in that newspaper package. By the way those pails handled, there probably are fifty pounds, at least. Go see."

"Okay, chief," said the operative.

"Two heavy tins, one in each pail!" he came back to report five minutes later. "Two of the gang are dead, and the Scotch captain will turn State's evidence. That ends it, eh?"

But Inspector Whitehill, alias pier lounger Hoky, had fainted.

THE END

Chewing Drunks

THE traveler in the Andes, from northern Peru to Bolivia, would seek in vain for an Indian without a swollen jaw . . . the left one mostly. This swelling comes from the fact that the Indian is always chewing. Not gum, but coca, the dried leaves of the coca shrub, from which the drug cocaine is extracted.

The effect of the leaves is weaker than that of the concentrated poison, but it is strong enough to keep the chewers in a perpetual state of intoxication.

Though noted for his inherent disdain of danger due to the stimulating effect of the coca leaves, this dangerous alkaloid has been slowly destroying the Indio and his race for centuries.

Joseph Creamer.

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

ARGOSY pays $1 for each letter printed. Send your letter to "Argonotes" Editor, ARGOSY, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

LOOSEN YOUR BELT!

IT looks like a grand Autumn for reading! ARGOSY gives you, in the October 6th issue, a MacIsaac novelette and one by Ralph Perry; also the exciting new novel of river tunneling, "East River," by Borden Chase and Edward Doherty. We've told you about this before—it's one of the greatest yarns we're read in a long while, and it will soon be brought out in film form by Fox Films, starring Victor McLaglen and Edmund Lowe. Two big features appear in the October 13th issue: Judson P. Philips's rousing complete novel of modern football, "Pigskin Pirate" (take it from us, all you sports lovers—what a story!) and Karl Detzer's "Ladderman," an exciting novelette of fire fighting.—Max Brand comes back to you on October 20th with a new six-parter entitled "Scourge of the Rio Grande"; and in the same issue you'll find a novelette of high adventure by H. Bedford-Jones, and another novelette, a fantastic tale, by Ray Cummings.—October 27th brings George F. Worts's new three-parter, "The Mystery of the Five Bald Men," along with a thrilling novelette of circus life by John Wilstach, and one of the jungle by William Edward Hayes.—And for early November issues we have scheduled unusual stories by Carse, Eustace L. Adams, F. V. W. Mason, Dunn, Footner, Farley, and that amazing new ARGOSY favorite, Challis.—So loosen your belt for ARGOSY's harvest feast!

MORE stories by favorite ARGOSY authors which have recently been brought out in book form are "Montana Rides Again," by Evan Evans (Harper, New York); "The Trail of Danger," by William MacLeod Raine (Doubleday, Doran, New York); and "Dangerous Cargo," by Hulbert Footner (Harper, New York), which ARGOSY published under the title "The Hated Man." That brings the total number of books to 663; and if you were to pay the average price of $2 apiece for the whole lot, they would cost you exactly $1,326. ARGOSY, on the other hand, if one figures the cost at the present price of 10c an issue, has given you the same stories for as little as $66.30. Furthermore, there were six or eight *additional* stories in each magazine. Quite a difference! And it all goes to show that there's a tremendous saving in buying these stories when they first come out in serial form.

IF you read the article called "Fizz-Water" in John S. Stuart's "Stranger Than Fiction" page for June 16th, you may have been surprised to learn that soda water actually contains no soda whatever. Unfortunately, however, the item as published seems also to have given many readers the im-

pression that carbonated water is obtained by mixing marble dust with sulphuric acid. This is definitely misleading, for soda water has never contained either marble dust or sulphuric acid, although it is true that at one time a process was in use whereby the *chemical reaction* of the two substances released carbon dioxide gas, which under certain conditions is readily absorbed by ordinary water. But a chemical reaction of the kind described is quite a different thing from merely mixing two ingredients, and even that method of manufacture is totally obsolete. Several newer, more efficient and more healthful processes are now used by the carbonated beverage makers in its stead.

Mr. Stuart wishes us to correct the false impression which his item gave, and ARGOSY, as always, is most glad to do so.

A READER for many years writes:

Lately I have encountered in your magazine technical inaccuracies born out of the author's unfamiliarity with his subject, or out of the unfamiliarity of the editors with the subject treated by the author. None of the inaccuracies I have referred to were flagrant enough to be more than annoying, but the latest example of ignorance on the part of an author, and an equally unforgivable slip on the part of the editors, is contained on page 73 of the July 28th issue in the story, "Cap' Jack," by Gordon Young. If you will read, beginning with the third paragraph down, etc. . . .

AND the author answers:

I am quoting from your correspondent's complaint on my use of "port" for "porthole" in the story "Cap'n Jack": "In the first place," he writes, "there never has been, in the whole history of shipbuilding, a ship built with a 'port in a cabin.' A port is usually a doorway at the end of a corridor, employed exclusively for taking on or putting off passengers, baggage or stores when the main gangway or cargo hoists cannot be used. In short, 'ports' are doorways built into a ship's side—and because of their very nature could not be built into a cabin. If your author meant to use the word 'porthole,' then his knowledge of marine architecture is completely at fault."

Your correspondent evidently has the fixed conception that "port" necessarily means "cargo port." Any dictionary would have corrected that impression. His critical emphasis on my supposed misuse of "port" for "porthole" must also, I suppose, imply that Admiral Smyth had a skinny knowledge of marine architecture since, in his "Sailor's Word-Book" (London, 1867, p. 539) the listing is "Ports *or* Port-Holes." The glossary of Todd and Whall's "Practical Seamanship" (Sixth edition, p. 228) defines ports as "the openings in a ship's sides, for guns *or windows.*" So it seems likely that "in the whole history of shipbuilding" there *have* been a few ports built in cabins after all.

If anybody thinks that by "ports" I had in mind the little round glassware do-dads commonly used as portholes in small private yachts or the big liners, which your correspondent suggests I go to look at—then the objection to my *Captain Jack* crawling through is well enough taken. I see clearly now that I made a mistake in not dating the story. There isn't a word or inkling to indicate that it isn't a story of the present day, and I also find there isn't anything very definite to place it in the past. I have written many South Sea novels and stories during the past twenty years; never one dealing with a period later than the 188o's, and usually much earlier. There were no standard size of ports at that time. They were not even round, but shaped something like the old gun ports. The sides of island traders were often painted to resemble gun ports, and in the old days "Quaker" guns were stuck through the square ventilation ports to intimidate wild islanders, particularly such as had been shelled upon by a gunboat. The port lids to these were closed with hooks and ringbolts, then secured with bars.

The fact that *Captain Jack* needed a blanket to climb up the ship's side, and that the girl had to peer far from the port to see below the bends, would indicate that the port was not at the waterline. GORDON YOUNG.

LOW but distinct holler:

Roachdale, Ind.

Allow me to shout to the four winds that Allan Vaughan Elston's "The Prophet of Death" is the most stupendous and magnificent parcel of mystery that has had the good fortune to make its way to ARGOSY's pages in many a moon. It was great! Here's hoping Al puts out some more like it soon.

Now while I am not in the habit of knocking—always keeping Abe Lincoln's admonition "You can't please all the people all the time" firmly in mind—nevertheless I must holler, in a low voice, yet distinct. I don't like Max Brand's type of story. I have read ARGOSY nigh on to ten years and during that time I have failed to read but

two stories, "The Masterman" and "Brother of the Cheyennes"—both by Brand. I honestly tried to read them, but gave up in disgust, so to speak. I did struggle through "The White Indian," although it was a tough struggle. *James Cordie* et al. is also a pain.

Those fire novels are quite the real thing and I earnestly hope to see the fantastic boys on the job soon.

W. E. SILVEY.

FICTION filling stations:

Magic City, Tex.

In February, 1902, I was a tool dresser or a driller's helper on a wildcat oil well in Ohio. Reading matter was hard to get. One day I asked a pal what he was reading, and he handed me an ARGOSY, saying, "It's pretty good reading." I became a reader then. I have made most of the booms, and some of them in out-of-the-way places. I have missed a few copies; have found them in bunk houses, boarding houses and farm houses, or back in the jack oaks. I can't see what some of these hotel lobby drillers have to kick about.

You have probably drilled a few dry holes; maybe some of your farm bosses didn't know a trimo wrench from a forky handle, but you are still producing, and I believe you have more filling stations than any of your competitors.

Some of the stories I don't read for months, and then I get interested and decide they are O. K. I haven't any intention of flanging up on you. I can't see what more any one could expect for his dime.

W. L. BAKER.

LOST—the continent of South America!

La Grange, Ga.

Fred MacIsaac's story, "The Devil and the Deep," is a bell ringer. When Mr. MacIsaac said that a large percentage of high school graduates did not know that almost all of South America is east of New York, and that the Panama Canal is due south of the Atlantic seaboard, he was rather conservative. Just for curiosity I asked several men of my acquaintance where South America is, and every one of them thought that it was south of the United States. These men were all college graduates.

I wish H. Bedford-Jones would write another novel of old France, a story like "Bellegarde," or "Cyrano." George F. Worts and Theodore Roscoe are your best authors.

JAMES BODDIE.

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My amazing new Tea and Coffee Route Plans provide for your making immediate cash earnings. If you need money to help pay your bills, buy necessities and live well, then you are just the person I am looking for. Start right in your own locality, right near where you live. The work is pleasant, the hours are short—there is no red tape in getting started. You won't have to rent a store, buy fixtures, or invest a lot of money.

I FURNISH EVERYTHING

Just as soon as I can hear from you I will send you complete details of the inside workings of this nation-wide Tea and Coffee Route Plan that is pouring big profits into the pockets of both men and women. I will explain everything about the business. The plans I give you cost me thousands upon thousands of dollars and have taken years of time to prepare. They are time-tried and proven. They have brought quick money relief to hundreds and thousands—why not you.

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That's what Howard B. Ziegler, Pa., made. Hans Coordes, Nebr., made $27.95 in a day and $96.40 in a week. Albert Becker, Mich., made $40.00 in a day and as high as $100.00 in a week. If you have been working part time or for low wages, this is your opportunity to get more cash immediately. Ray Chapman, Mo., made $73.50 in a week. George W. Creed, Ohio, made $95.00 in a week. These exceptional earnings show the amazing possibilities of the offer I am making you now. Better send me your name today.

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I don't want your money—I need help. Rush me your name so I can lay all the facts before you, then you can decide for yourself. My plans are complete. I send them to you absolutely free. Don't expect me to wait indefinitely to hear from you. If you reply promptly it will be a strong thing in your favor with me. Write name on coupon or penny postcard. Costs nothing—act now.

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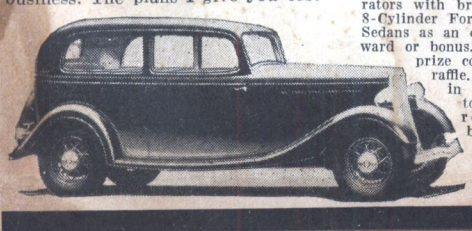

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ALBERT MILLS, Route Mgr.
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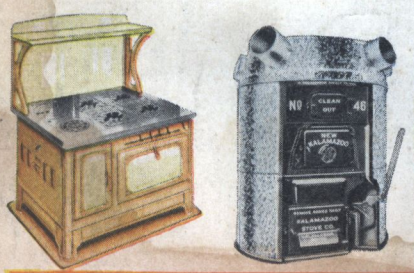

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