

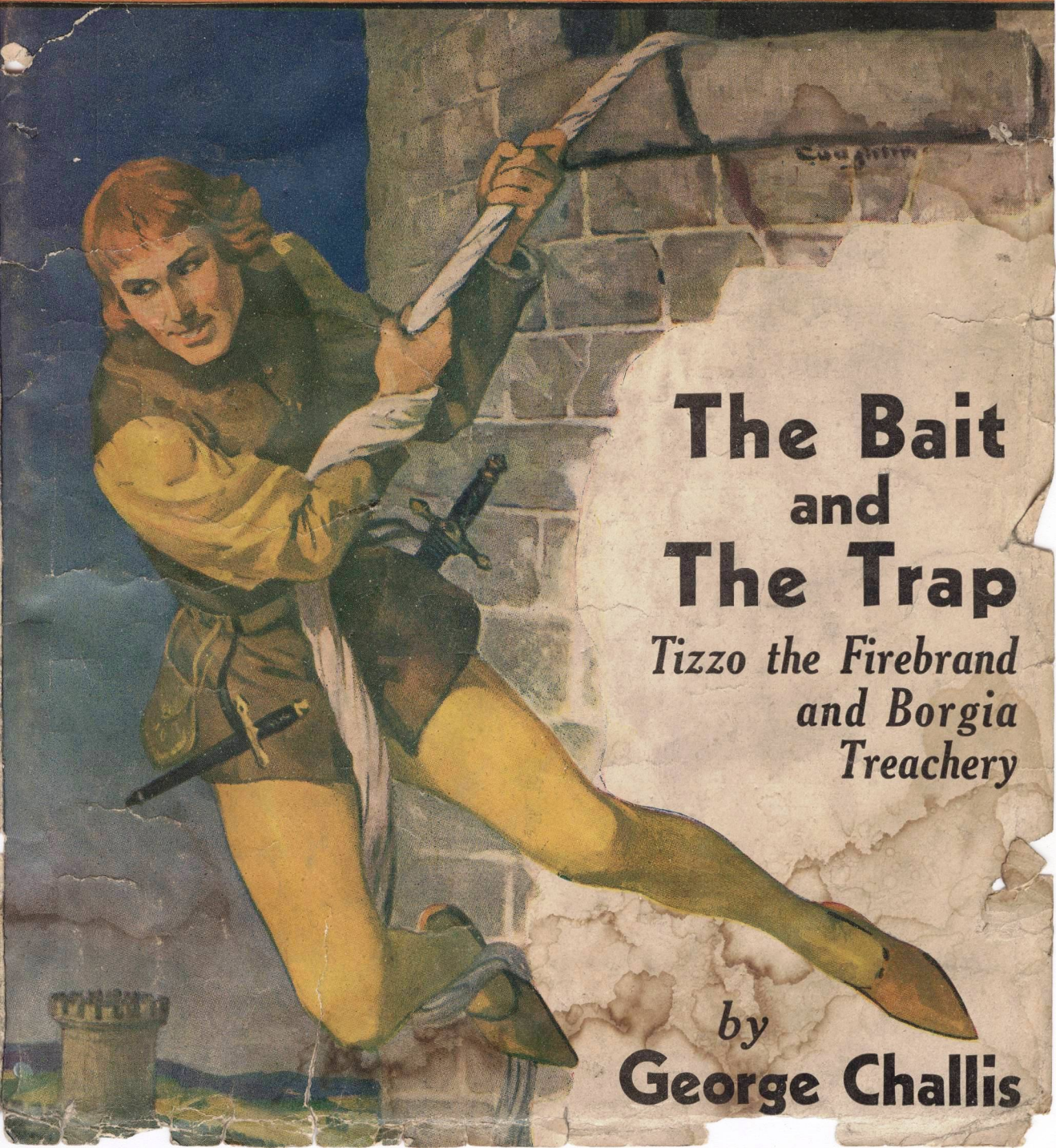
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"Lancers, Advance!" By F.V.W. MASON

ARGOSY

AUG. 3

WEEKLY



The Bait and The Trap

*Tizzo the Firebrand
and Borgia
Treachery*

by
George Challis

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The Bait and the Trap

By GEORGE CHALLIS

Author of "The Cat and the Perfume,"
"The Storm," etc.

*Tizzo, sworn to serve Cesare
Borgia, finds himself being
used as a cat's-paw*

CHAPTER I.

MISSION OF DANGER.

THE Borgia lay on his bed on his back, with a cloth soaked in cooling lotion covering his face down to the bearded chin and lips, because the upper portion was troubled by a

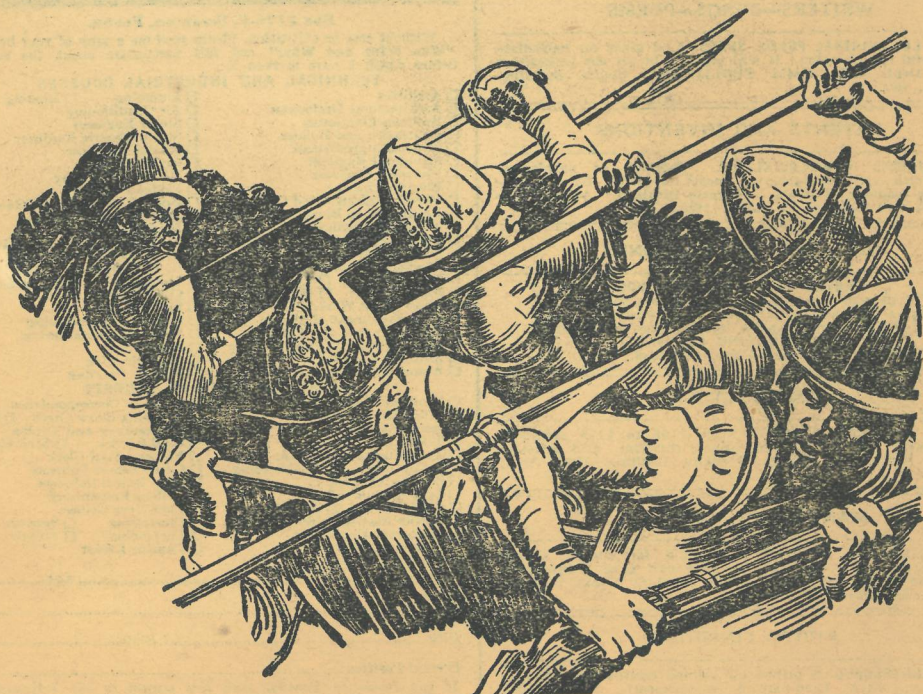
hot eruption. Now and then white-faced Alessandro Bonfadini, soft-stepping, thin-fingered, changed the cloth for a fresh one. Except during those moments when the change was made, the duke of the Romagna remained blinded.

He was saying: "Niccolò, look on the map that's spread out on the table and tell me what you see on it; tell me where my next step should take me."

The young Florentine, stepping to the table, looked at the big map which was spread on it.

"I see all your conquests are tinted red, my lord," said Machiavelli. "You want to know in what direction your next step should take you."

"Yes. In what direction should the red begin to flow now."



Long Novelette



Melrose was rallying
his men for a last
desperate stand

"Into some adjoining territory so that it will make a solid mass of territory under your rule."

"Well, name the direction."

"It should be into a territory where the people hate their present rulers," said Machiavelli, "and would be glad to turn to you. It should be a place where the least effort would have to be made. Above all, the present ruler should be induced to make the first hostile steps. If you make any further unprovoked attacks all of Italy will be up in arms against you."

"Think of Urbino," said Cesare Borgia. "It is vastly rich, furnished with a great stronghold on an impregnable rock, and the people hate their present duke with all their hearts."

"Urbino is impossible," answered Machiavelli. "The great stronghold you speak of is too strong to be stormed. And while the people hate their duke, they would be afraid to rise against him unless they were furnished with a good leader. Besides, Guidobaldo da Montefeltro is a coward and never would give you provocation to make war."

"All good reasons, but they could be undone by better ones. Duke Guidobaldo has a weakness for women, particularly for rich ones. Suppose that I make a rich woman fall into his hands."

"She would have to be both rich and desperate if she wasted herself on that spendthrift of a Montefeltro," said Machiavelli.

REMEMBER Caterina Sforza," said the Borgia.

"Ah?" said the Florentine.

"You have deprived her of Forli, here. You have turned her out of her inheritance. She is a prisoner in your hands, and your wise course is to send her to Rome."

"I have deprived her of Forli, but still she is rich in jewels and in other lands. I should send her to Rome, and in fact it will be on the way to Rome that my envoy in charge of her will stop at Urbino to pay my respects to Guidobaldo."

"You never will find an envoy foolhardy enough to enter Urbino, knowing how the duke hates you," declared Machiavelli.

"But suppose that I can do it. Suppose that I can find the right man.

What happens after the Countess Sforza finds herself inside the walls of Urbino?"

"Then," said Machiavelli, "she will use all her beauty, all her persuasion, all her wealth of promises to make Guidobaldo snatch her out of the hands of your envoy, and set her free."

"Naturally," said the Borgia, "and the moment that happens, you see that I shall have a good pretext for war?"

"It all would follow, perhaps," said Machiavelli, "and that would be guessed by any man. The envoy who guides the countess into Urbino knows instantly that his throat will be cut and the countess snatched from his hands within twenty-four hours."

"I tell you, however, that I know of such a man."

"A fool?"

"Very far from a fool. You know him yourself. A fellow who is all aflame, without fear, never still, and who fills his days with so much action that he'll hardly take time to sleep in between for fear of missing another adventure."

"This man you speak of—has he red hair?" asked the Florentine.

"Of course! It's Tizzo, the firebrand, the key that unlocked Forli for us, the wedge that burst into the citadel of the Rocca. Tizzo is the man."

"He may have the courage to do it, if you dare him to it," said the Florentine, "but he's not stupid enough to venture his neck in such a way."

"I shall give him a reason," said the Borgia. "Now that I think of the thing, I'm determined on it. Bonfadini, instantly send orders to the countess to prepare to travel; despatch a relay of riders toward Perugia together with a very secret message to Giovanpaolo Baglione to gather his

forces at once and let them drift a little toward the boundary of Urbino. Do these things, but first of all fetch me Tizzo, instantly."

BONFADINI left the room and went into the waiting chamber where a few halberdiers were waiting in the half-armor of the foot soldiery. Also, there were half a dozen men-at-arms completely protected in heavy steel plate. Bonfadini clapped his hands to draw attention.

He said: "Half a dozen of you go out to find Tizzo."

"Half a dozen are not enough," said one of the men-at-arms.

"There are not so many quarters of the town; and Tizzo is known to everyone," said Bonfadini.

"Not when he pulls a black wig over the red of his hair," said the soldier, "and he does that, usually. Who can tell where to look for him? He may be with a hawking party outside of Forli, or he may be following the greyhounds, or simply riding his white horse through the hills, or inside the walls he may be flirting with a girl, or at the studio of one of the painters, or watching that new sculptor at work, or teaching his company of peasant soldiers how to fence and shoot, or in a blacksmith shop learning the tricks of the trade, or drinking with a traveler in a wineshop, or learning a dance from one of the Gascons, or picking a fight with some huge Switzer. Or he may be running a race, or throwing dice, or sitting beside that scholar from Pisa reading out the Greek as gravely as any old man."

"If you know that he does all these things," said Bonfadini, "you ought to be the man to find him. But if I were you, I'd go toward the place where there's the most noise. Off

with you, and have him here quickly, or you'll hear of it."

They hurried out, and Bonfadini went at once to the rooms where Caterina Sforza was kept under guard. He found her seated with a grim face at a casement overlooking the town that once had belonged to her. When she saw Bonfadini she exclaimed in her strong, resonant voice: "Tell your master to send a different messenger to me. The look of your white face is like a poison to me."

"Madame," said Bonfadini, "I came by command. The duke asks that you prepare yourself to travel at once."

"Where?" said she.

"To Rome, madame."

"With what escort?"

"Tizzo of Melrose," said Bonfadini, and smiled.

"With him?" she cried. "Go under the escort of the very man who stole my city and gave it to the Borgia? It would stifle me. I would die of rage before I had ridden a mile."

"Madame," said the poisoner, "I hope that you'll die of something more than anger."

And he bowed himself from the room while she remained standing by her chair, having sprung up in a passion that flushed her handsome face.

ARMED men and their horses were gathered in the court; a mule litter and two horses were prepared for the countess and her maid; an hour or more had gone by and still there was no word of Tizzo. At last a messenger came with word. He was a halberdier with a pair of big dents in his helmet, a scared look in his eyes, and a heavy limp in one leg. Bonfadini brought him straight in to the duke and Machiavelli.

"If you saw Tizzo of Melrose, why didn't you bring him with you?" asked the duke.

"Highness," said the soldier, "when I saw him, he was fighting a huge Swiss who handled a five-foot sword as though it were a lath and a man stood with six ducats rattling in his hands; Tizzo had given the money as a wager that he could beat the swordsman and use nothing but a plain stick of wood in the fight. Highness, I thought it was murder and I ran in to stop the fight. Every moment I was sure that a sweep of that sword would murder Captain Tizzo and cut him in two the way a child cuts down a flower. But when I tried to interfere, the Swiss roared out that they would see the the battle to a finish; they beat me down and rushed me away. I came back to tell what I have seen, my lord; when you see Captain Tizzo again, he'll be a dead man."

The duke pressed the coolness of the wet cloth closer across his eyes.

"What do you say, Niccolò?" he asked. "Is Tizzo a dead man now?"

"A stick against the sweep of a Swiss sword in the hands of a picked man—"

"Why a picked man?" asked the duke.

"Because Tizzo would only fight against the best."

"Well, that's true," agreed the Borgia. "The devil that's in him will only show its teeth at giants...I suppose that we'll have to find another officer to ride with the countess."

But at this moment a knock at the door caused Bonfadini to open it a crack, and then fling it wide, letting in a small uproar from the waiting room. And over the threshold stepped Tizzo, looking as lithe and sleek as a greyhound. He twirled in his hand a

slender stick less than a yard in length, and rested a hand on this as he bowed to the Borgia.

"I hear that I'm called for."

The Borgia pulled the cloth from his face and suddenly stood, a lofty, massive figure, with a weight in the shoulders that made it possible to believe that he had decapitated a fighting bull with a single sword-stroke.

"I've searched the town for you, Tizzo," said the Borgia. "Where have you been?"

"I was wandering about enjoying the sights of the town," said Tizzo.

"Was one of the sights a butcher-shop?" asked the duke. "There's blood on that stick!"

"Ah, is there?" murmured Tizzo. He lifted the stick and examined it. "Why, so there is. Six ducats' worth of blood, in fact."

"If you had lost the wager, you would not be here alive, man."

"Ah, you've heard about it? The fact is that the Switzer kept me leaping about like a dancer. At last he made sure that he had me and swung himself off balance; so I managed to step in and flick him between the eyes with the tip of my stick. Afterwards I had to leave him the ducats to heal the wound."

"How long do you expect to live?" asked the duke, curiously.

"As long as there's a good dash of excitement in the air," said Tizzo.

"Let us be alone," said the Borgia. "Except for you, Niccolò."

The room, accordingly, was cleared at once.

"IT means mischief, Niccolò," Tizzo was saying to the Florentine. "It means mischief when you're here.

The eyes of Machiavelli narrowed a

little and gave him for the moment a look more like a cat than usual.

"Why does it mean mischief?" he asked.

"When two cats are together and both of 'em hungry," said Tizzo, "it usually means that there's an unlucky mouse somewhere at hand for dinner. Am I to be the meat for you both, my lord?"

He addressed the last words to the duke; and his air, half laughing and half indifferent, took the sting out of the frankness of his talk.

"Shall I tell you the truth, Tizzo?" asked the duke.

"No, my lord," said Tizzo, "the truth from so great a man would be more than I could stomach. Tell me only what you wish me to believe and I'll swallow as much of it as I can at one good, long draught."

The Borgia merely laughed.

"Tizzo, you're honest. And I have honest work to do. That's why I've sent for you."

"Honest work?" said Tizzo, lifting his eyebrows a little.

"I want the Countess Sforza-Riario taken to Rome."

"I'd be glad to ride anywhere with Caterina," said Tizzo.

"Do you call her by her name?" asked Machiavelli.

"She hates me so well that we've become intimates," said Tizzo.

The Florentine and the Borgia looked at one another and laughed a little.

"And on the way to Rome with the beautiful countess," said Borgia, "you will take the first step towards making peace between me and Guidobaldo da Montefeltro.

"You'll carry a letter from me to Urbino—and there—"

"Ah!" said Tizzo. "It's tomorrow

that I'm to be eaten, and not today. Go to Urbino—did you say go *into* Urbino?"

"I understand you perfectly," answered the Borgia. "You're afraid that the old enmity between Guidobaldo and me might make it a dangerous trip?"

"Afraid?" murmured Tizzo, thoughtfully, as though he did not like the taste of the word in his mouth. Then he broke out: "My lord, there's some damned dark bit of policy behind all this, I suppose. But I won't try to fathom it. I've sworn to serve you with mind and hand and heart for three months... Give me the countess and I'll take her as far toward Rome as God will let me... Give me the letter and I'll put it in the hands of Guidobaldo if I fall dead the next moment... I'll go now to prepare for the ride, and come back for your final orders."

He was gone from the room in another moment, as the duke waved his assent.

CESARE BORGIA went to the casement and leaned there, looking with troubled eyes over the roofs of the town.

"A sword against a walking stick—a five-foot Swiss two-handed manslayer, against a little trick of a cane," murmured Machiavelli.

"Tell me how this Tizzo has managed to live so long. He'll certainly die tomorrow."

The Borgia said nothing in answer to this comment, and Machiavelli began to look at him, studying him with a curious attention.

"You're troubled, my lord," he said at last.

"I am, Niccolò," said the duke. "I'm troubled."

"But everything goes according to your plan."

"Did you notice how he spoke?"

"With a fine, free swing to his words, my lord. A fellow like that would sooner use his sword than his brain."

"Do you think so? He has a quick wit, though. But there was something about his way of talking—something from the heart—a certain noble carelessness, Niccolò."

"Ah, is that what you are thinking of?"

"Yes—a certain air with which he spoke."

"Then perhaps I know what troubles my lord."

"Tell me, Niccolò."

"Is it shame, my lord?"

"Ah? Shame?" said the Borgia.

"I wonder!"

CHAPTER II.

AN UNDERSTANDING.

FROM Lady Beatrice Baglione to her brother, Giovanpaolo, lord of Perugia.

DEAR GIOVANPAOLO:

Tizzo is away again like a wild hawk—or like a wild duck that some hawk will plume and eat presently. The Borgia has sent him with a handful of men to Urbino with a letter to Guidobaldo da Montefeltro, the duke, and with Caterina Sforza. What is in the Borgia brain? I am sick and dizzy. I begged Tizzo on my knees to reconsider, but he has bound himself to be a slave to the Borgia for some months—eternities they will prove and end with his wretched death.

You cannot know what it means to me to be in love with such a wild-headed fellow. I try to tear the thought of him out of my heart. But the memory of his red hair burns in my mind. And all that he has done for you, for me, for our

house. He should be kept under lock and key and only allowed liberty when there is some great danger threatening. There is too much English blood in him to permit him to fathom or suspect the depths of the cunning people of our race.

Before you get this he will be in Urbino. Perhaps he will be dead and Caterina Sforza will be in the hands of the Duke of Urbino. What can you do to help him? Try to think. I know you will because you love him almost as much as I do. I have only one comfort. His father, Baron Melrose, has ridden with him.

And you know as I know that the two of them are a double-edged sword that cuts faster in all directions than sneaking traitors and murderers ever can suspect.

My sleep has gone from me. My heart is breaking. I wish to God that I were a man so that I could stay at the side of Tizzo wherever he rides.

Farewell.

BEATRICE.

Letter from Cesare, Duke of Valentino and Romagna, to Guidobaldo da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino.

MY DEAR LORD AND BROTHER:

I send this to you by the hand of Tizzo of Melrose, one of my most distinguished captains whose reputation will have come to your ears long before this. He is escorting on the way to Rome the Countess Sforza-Riario, whom you will be glad to receive and shelter for the night for my sake and her own.

I have asked Tizzo to open my heart to you. The purpose of his speech will be my heartfelt intent to enter into a lasting alliance with you. If I could join myself to your known greatness of mind and position, where would there be a limit to our ambitions?

Consider what I have suggested and which he will repeat more at large. There are many things that we could do together. These are times of stir and change.

My confidence in you I need not express. The coming of Tizzo and of the countess are eloquent of it.

Let me hear happy news from you soon.
Your affectionate friend, CESARE.

This letter the duke of Urbino read once and again, moving a candle closer so that he could be sure of some of the words. In the meantime he rubbed his nose, which, like that of his distinguished ancestor, Federigo, was so big that it seemed like the single handle of a cup.

THEN he looked up and across the room, toward the chair in which the Countess Sforza-Riario was sitting. It was a famous chair of carved wood, having as one support a horned stag and as the other an angry dragon with lifted wings. The countess lost so many years, by this dim light, that to her beauty was added the perfume of youth. The duke shaded his eyes and looked at her again, but the illusion persisted. He began to smile a little.

"This Tizzo," he said, "is a man high in the confidence of Cesare Borgia?"

"Yes," she said.

"And a friend to you?"

"So much a friend," she answered, "that he cut the Rocca of Forli out of my hand and gave it to the Borgia!"

"Ah?" said Guidobaldo, and fell into thought again, stroking that long, hooked nose.

He was not conscious of his ugliness. His position was so great that he did not have to think of his face.

Then he read the letter aloud. As he finished, he asked: "Did you know what was written here?"

"No," said the countess.

"Does it bring any thought into your mind?"

"One thought," she said.

"What is it?"

"That Cesare Borgia has gone mad. If he lets me come into your hands, what prevents you from making an

agreement with me by which you receive my claim to Forli and all the territory around it?"

"And by the same agreement I receive my freedom—and certain funds in ready cash, perhaps, or some pleasant, small estate in Urbino?"

"Yes," said the duke. "It would be a simple matter for us to come to this agreement... Tell me: Do you fear that this Tizzo will have you put out of the way long before Rome is reached?"

"No," she answered. "He is a man for battle, desperate chances, and he loves danger more than he ever can love a woman..."

"There is beautiful Beatrice Baglione, and yet he cannot find time between his wild undertakings to marry her... He is not an agent for murder, my lord."

"He is a man of great value to Cesare Borgia," murmured the duke, "and yet he, together with you, has been placed in my hands, and his father along with him. *Has* the Borgia lost his wits, or has he some deep scheme in view?"

"He is always deep, but what scheme can he have in mind now?" she asked.

"War?"

"You have the strongest castle in Italy. If he had an army of birds he still would hardly be able to scale your walls."

"True," murmured the duke. "Very true!... But I wish that I could look into that mind of his."

He began to walk the floor, pausing at last behind the chair of Caterina and leaning on it.

"You and I could come to an understanding, my dear, could we not?" asked the duke.

For answer, she reached up her

hand, quietly, and took soft hold on one of his.

CHAPTER III.

POISON.

FROM the casement of the room in which Tizzo was quartered with his father, the eyes skipped briefly over the crowded, tiled roofs of the town of Urbino and danced away over a ragged sea of mountains.

Tizzo's eyes skipped away in that fashion, watched the last green and gold of the sunset die out, and then he turned his glance down toward the town. The lights were beginning to shine along the streets.

"A town like this," he said, "who could take it with all the armies in the world?"

"All the armies in the world never could take it if it were honestly garrisoned," said the baron. "But where can you find an honest garrison in Italy?"

Tizzo leaned far out until he was flat on his stomach, peering down the steep of the great wall beneath. It seemed an incredible work, this heap on heap of masonry, like the work of an army continued through centuries. Somewhere in the dark tangle of the streets below he could hear a man's voice that was singing, lustily, a rare old song of the countryside:

*"Her hand is gone from the loom,
Her step no longer hurries toward me,
Her voice no more sings from the pasture,
She has left me the empty night."*

Tizzo waited, but when the next verse did not follow, he trolled it out with a ringing voice:

*"Search for her not so far as heaven;
Look up, but not to the stars;
The castle of my lord held many treasures;
Then why did he steal my happiness?"*

From the street below a voice began to shout; Tizzo, laughing, turned back into the room and began to tease a green and golden parrot which was climbing head down around the wire walls of its cage.

"How can you tell, Tizzo?" asked the baron. "It may be that it is treason to sing that song in the castle of Urbino."

"If a song can be treason, I'm glad to die for it," said Tizzo, and from a silver bowl of fruit he began to pick out the little white, dry, sugar-covered figs and eat them, together with morsels of bread which he broke from a loaf, cramming his mouth too full for talk.

His father watched him and smiled at him.

"I'll tell you one thing," he said. "A man can sing himself into more trouble than he can talk his way out of afterwards. When I was serving under Piccinino, there was a big Milanese who had a throat like a bull and a voice that could fill it, and one day he sang a serenade that had the name of Giulia in it. Well, it happened that Piccinino was fond of a girl with that name, and when he heard the song he didn't stop to ask questions. He sent down a pair of his men and they slipped a dagger under the fifth rib of the singer before he had finished emptying the song from his throat. When you're around these great people, it's best to speak in a small voice and not sing at all."

"Well," said Tizzo, "I need room for my elbows and a chance to make

a noise, now and then. Room—room to swing an ax, say, or a sword—”

HE washed down the bread and figs with a mouthful of red wine, and picked up that blue-headed steel ax which was dearer to him than all his possessions except Falcone, his white horse. Swinging the ax, he did an improvised dance about the room, striking swift blows to right and left, and making the edge of the ax whistle just past carved and gilded furniture, and then all around the head of a little marble faun that occupied a niche in the wall.

The baron began to laugh with pleasure, and here there was a knock at the door. When the baron called out, the door was pushed open by one page who allowed a second lad, all brilliant in sleek velvet, to enter carrying a beautiful silver charger that had on it a pair of goblets.

Rosy crystal composed the bowls of the cups, which were held in a net of gold and supported on pedestals of silver.

“His highness sends his compliments and his good wishes for an excellent night’s sleep to my lord and to Captain Tizzo,” said the page, and straightaway presented the cups to the two guests. After that, he backed out of the room and closed the door after him with a reverent softness.

The baron lifted the cover of his goblet, and sniffed.

“Good spiced wine,” he said. “This Guidobaldo has good manners even if he is a duke with a castle built in the middle of the sky. To your health, Tizzo!”

“Wait!” said Tizzo, who was inhaling the bouquet of the wine. “This is probably the best wine and the safest in the world—but I have been living

in the shadow of Cesare Borgia, remember, and I’ve been learning some new ways in the world. The parrot can be our tester.”

He dipped a bit of bread in his wine and carried it to the cage. The parrot rolled his eyes, put out his head, twisted it to the side, and nipped the bread neatly out of the fingers of Tizzo.

“You see?” said the baron. “There’s nothing wrong. A parrot’s too wise a bird to eat poison. It shows that you’ve been too long in the wrong company, Tizzo. How much longer do you have to serve the Borgia?”

“I’m sworn to him for another ten weeks,” said Tizzo.

“I’d feel safer if you were serving any other man in the world for ten years,” said the baron. “I drink to you, Tizzo!”

He was lifting the cup to his lips when they both heard a soft fall, and they saw that the parrot had fallen to the bottom of his cage, where he was stretching his wings and kicking out with his feet, and ruffing out the brilliant feathers about his neck. In a moment he was still. The wings remained half-spread, and the feathers of the ruff slowly collapsed.

The baron rubbed his lips dry.

“Tizzo,” he exclaimed, “did you taste the damnable stuff?”

“Not a drop,” said Tizzo, putting the cup slowly back on the table beside him. A quick, powerful shudder ran through him.

The two stared with blank eyes at one another.

“Why?” asked the baron.

“Either for hate or for gain,” said Tizzo. “And my lady the countess hates me since Forli. Perhaps—why, perhaps the gain would be in having me out of the way, and you out of the way, also, if the duke intends to keep

the countess here in the castle instead of sending her on to Rome."

HE ran to the door with silent-falling feet and leaned there, to listen.

Turning, he whispered as he tiptoed across the floor: "There are armed men waiting outside the door. I heard a sword stir in a sheath."

"Lock the door," said the baron. "They'll wait for a moment for us to drop dead, and then they will come in to look at the bodies and cart them away."

"If I turn the lock, they'll hear the bolt sliding and then they will know that something has gone wrong with the plan."

Tizzo reached for a jacket of mail. But his father raised a hand to stop him.

Hurrying to the casement, Melrose leaned out far and glanced down the face of the wall. The drop of it was sheer to the street, far below; even the first roof was a terrible fall beneath them. And for the first fifty feet there was no embrasure of any kind to break the smooth surface of the wall. To the left, perhaps two stories below and twenty feet away, there was a projecting roof-line.

"Take the sheets from the bed," directed Melrose. "So—"

He tore away the covers and with the edge of his dagger began to slash the sheets into long, thin strips. The edge of the knife was so razor-keen that the cloth divided almost without a sound.

"If they mean murder," said the baron, "at least we'll make them take a long step to catch us. The Borgia—the Borgia, Tizzo—was it part of his policy to send you into a murder trap?"

Tizzo, asking no questions, was imitating his father implicitly. When the sheets were cut, they began to twist the sections so as to make strong rope, and then the ends were tied together.

And Tizzo was saying: "If Cesare Borgia loves a friend, he never will betray him. But he loves few friends. I am merely a new acquaintance. I have a value to him, but he would give me up in a moment if he dreamed that he could get a handsome return for my life."

"Do you ever think of putting a knife into the hollow of his throat and so ending your bargain with him?" asked the baron.

"Between you and me," said Tizzo, "I rather like him. There is a devil in him, but that devil may do a great work for Italy. Sing, father. We'll need a little noise... And let them think that we're enjoying the first effect of the wine, before we have a second taste, of death."

As they talked, quietly, calmly, their hands moved rapidly, and a long rope of the white, twisted sheets was now prepared.

Tizzo ran to the window with it.

"The roof there on the left. Can you swing yourself onto it?" murmured the baron. And he began to sing one of the old marching songs.

TIZZO, having estimated the distance from the casement to the roof with a careful glance, measured out a length of the white rope and tied the rest of the rope around a couch which he dragged with the baron's help beneath the casement.

"You first!" he murmured to the baron.

But the older man, with a frown and a headshake, pointed toward the door and then toward his own throat as

though to indicate that his voice, which had begun the song, must be permitted to continue it. And Tizzo peered up into the older face for a long half-second, realizing perfectly the calm abnegation which underlay this gesture. But there was no time for argument. He was instantly through the window and slithered down to the end of the rope.

Running with his feet along the wall, he started the pendulous swing of the rope. When it had once begun, with the swing of his lithe body he made the rope sway out in wider and in wider arcs. Above him, dimly, he could hear his father's voice still singing the "Song of the Plough." The wall rushed back and forth beside him with greater and with greater speed.

Now his head rose so that he could look into a window that broke the surface of that projecting wall whose roof was his goal. A girl was inside it—a servant, perhaps, ogling herself in a hand mirror while she turned her head from side to side, and lifted or bent it in order to view herself from the most favorable angle. She was an ugly wench and the task was hard, but she kept at it with wonderful patience and seemed to enjoy the work.

The next swing of the rope brought him to the level of the roof, almost, but he saw that he was much too low on the rope, since it was bringing him in under the projecting eaves. He hauled himself up several arm-lengths and on the next return of the rope, with one hand he was able to reach out and grip the roof-gutter under the tiles.

His weight recoiled with a violent wrench that almost broke his grasp on the gutter; a moment later he was on the roof.

His father, older and heavier, never could succeed in that athletic effort, he

was sure. But the baron would be able to hand himself down the slant of the rope and so come to the roof. Yonder was a trap door set into the slant of the tiles. To one of the projecting beam-ends inside of which the door was set, Tizzo made the linen rope fast. Then he turned and waved.

At the dimly lighted casement he saw the head and shoulders of his father. A strong strain was put on the rope and set it trembling. A moment later the body of the baron dropped over the casement's edge and he began to swing himself along the downslant with long arm-hauls.

He came out of the lamplight into dimness, then closer and closer, until even by starlight Tizzo could see his face and the knotted effort in it.

Here a great shout struck across the night. At the casement to which the rope pointed like a long finger appeared a leaning figure; steel flashed bright; the rope was cut across.

CHAPTER IV.

TRAPPED.

THE baron dropped instantly on the loose rope. Tizzo heard and felt in his own flesh the shock of the impact as that heavy body struck the wall beneath the eaves.

Was he gone? No, the weight still strained down on the rope. Tizzo, groaning with hope and fear, reached back and fingered the haft of the ax which he had hung by its noose from about his neck.

Now a woman's voice began to screech just below. It was the servant girl, no doubt, who had been called to her window by the noise to see a dark figure struggling in the empty air above her casement.

Would the baron drop down and try to enter that window, or would he climb?

The answer was in the appearance of a hand that gripped the edge of the eaves. Another hand joined it. The big man heaved himself up with power, grunting. Tizzo caught the collar of his jacket and pulled with all his might to lighten the work.

Yonder at the lighted casement, two figures remained, yelling out the alarm. Other shadowy heads appeared at other windows. There was a dim but distinct sound of running feet along corridors.

"Are you hurt?" breathed Tizzo.

The baron stood up and pulled out the sheathed sword which he had stuffed inside his clothes.

"It was a bit of a slap—but it was nothing," he said. "Here, Tizzo. Do we run along the roof, or do we go down into the wolf-den?"

"Down into the den," said Tizzo. "They'll have twenty men on the roofs before a minute has gone. Here's the way!"

He found the lock of the trapdoor, smashed it with a blow of the ax-head, and lifted the door open. Beneath him he saw darkness which seemed to be churning like dusky water. But with hand and foot he found the ladder.

Down he went into the pitchy blackness with the weight of his father making the ladder creak as the baron followed after. The floor was quickly reached.

Rough boarding was underfoot. He reached a wall of unfinished stone and fumbled along it.

The tumult was redoubling through the castle. The pounding sound with the metal clash that accompanied was made by the armored feet of soldiers, of course. But the most terrible noise

was the dreadful screeching of the women.

To his left, he was aware, now, of a silver rectangle drawn on the wall, etched in with broken strokes. That must be the leakage of light round the edges of a door. And now, in fact, his hand was on the knob.

The lock had not been turned. He pushed the door open and looked out onto a long, narrow corridor.

AS he stepped out into the hallway, a whole bevy of the female servants not five paces from him threw up their arms and fled, screeching with terror.

They were crying for help, they were shouting that the two were there—there in the hall—murdering the women.

And the answering shouts of men came in quick response, from close at hand.

"Which way?" muttered the baron.

"The first way!" said Tizzo, and running round the first elbow turn of the hall, he leaped across a faintly lighted threshold the larger size of whose doorway seemed to indicate that it might be the entrance to another corridor.

And as he entered with his father behind him, he heard the armored uproar of the men-at-arms come pouring into the hallway which he had just left.

But it was not another hall. It was a narrow little room with a table across one end of it. On the table were piled old clothes and near it sat a crone bent over her work of patching with much care a pair of hose, frayed about the knees.

She did not look up, but pursed her lips tighter as she made the next stitch.

Tizzo and the baron backed into the

thick shadows of the corner and waited. The sword was unsheathed in the baron's hand, now. And Tizzo's ax was ready. It was the last fight, perhaps, but at least they could make it together.

"Deaf!" whispered the baron at Tizzo's ear. "She's deaf!"

The noise of the manhunt thundered in the hall. Two steel-clad figures lurched a step into the room, saw the seamstress, and recoiled again.

A false alarm drew the flood of searchers off to the left. To the right there were the babbling, squealing women, their voices growing dimmer as they retreated.

"Now?" asked Tizzo.

"Hush!" said his father.

The flight of figures down the hall seemed to have caught the eye of the old woman at last.

And as the thunder of the mailed feet surged back again, she left her chair and went to the threshold of the room, standing there with her hands on her hips, shaking her white old head at the mad confusion.

There seemed to be no fear in her.

A crowd of soldiery poured past her. Half a dozen times she was hailed: "Have you seen them?"

But she answered with the continued wagging of her head.

The manhunt left that portion of the palace and ebbed down to a lower level. Through the casement, Tizzo could hear more sounds of war rising from a court or open street. Voices were shouting commands.

And as the tumult grew less, the seamstress returned to her chair again.

SOME brazen-throated fellow was bawling out beneath the window: "Five hundred ducats—for the Englishman, Melrose! Five hundred

ducats for him and his son! A hundred for the baron; a hundred ducats for the baron! Four hundred for the red head of Captain Tizzo! Money and the duke's favor! Money and the duke's favor! Five hundred ducats!"

It was like the crowing of a rooster, a sound that cut through the increasing tumult. It was as though an auctioneer were asking for bids.

"Dead or alive, five hundred ducats! Five hundred ducats!"

The old woman went to the casement and seemed to be listening to that proclamation, but since she was deaf, no doubt she merely was watching the dimly lighted figures in the street or the court below.

She turned from the window and faced straight towards the corner in which the two fugitives remained, pressed close together. Did her old eyes pierce the shadows? Could she indeed see them?

"Five hundred ducats is a world of money," she said.

Tizzo shuddered.

After all, she had good ears. How had she failed, then, to hear them when they first bounded into the room.

"Four hundred ducats for a red-headed lad!"

She went to the door, and shut and locked it.

"Well," she said, turning, "I think I shooed the hawks away from a pair of helpless chickens that time. Come out here and let an old woman bless her eyes with the sight of two men saved from the grave."

They moved slowly forward, neither of them glancing at the other. The brain of Tizzo had stopped.

"Mother," he said, "except for you, our blood and brains would be smeared on the floor long ago."

"I hate a screaming fool of a girl,"

said the crone, "and so I learned to hold my tongue when I was a youngster . . . Five hundred ducats! . . . A great deal of money . . . a great purse of money . . . a farm, and a peaceful life."

"You shall have it, friend," said the baron, "if you can show us the way out of the palace—any secret stairs—any back, unregarded way—do you see this gold chain? A thousand ducats would never buy it. And you shall have it. Here it is in your hand, now."

She took the chain and weighed it, grinning.

"Suppose that I took it," she said. "For every bead of it how many times do you think they'd make me scream on the rack?"

SHE gave back the chain into the big hand of the baron and shook her head.

"Besides, what would I do with a farm and quiet?" she asked. "I've had the city and the palace all the days of my life. I've had the processions, and the smell of incense in the churches, and the music, and the pretty girls, and the slim lads, and the babies in silk and the old men in brocades, and the marriages and the murders, and the civil wars, and the stabbings in the dark, and the night-cries where some poor devil found his end in a dark alley . . . how could I change all of this for a farm, and the smell of the wet ground or the dust instead of the perfumes and the stench of the palace? No, no—I don't need five hundred ducats to end my days on. A prayer would be a greater help to me, my friend."

"You shall have our prayers, mother," said Tizzo.

She looked at him with a smile that made her withered old face more horrible than ever.

"The first lover I had in all my life, he had a head of red hair, like yours. When I saw the flash of that flaming head of yours, I thought for a moment that it was a ghost coming out of the past to me, and that I was a pretty young thing again; and the thought took the breath out of me and made me miss a stitch. That poor Adolfo—he was a beautiful lad, except that he talked all one side of his mouth. But he stole one of my lady's rings, and they cut his soft throat for him. That was a day I cried my eyes red! And my heart ached for a week. Ah well, I never see red hair that my heart doesn't jump up stairs like a wild ragamuffin. What shall I do with the pair of you?"

The noise of the search that had sunk away now boiled up higher inside the walls of the castle and flowed suddenly once more down the corridor beside them. And here a hand tried the door, then beat against it.

"Open!" called a voice.

"Ah?" murmured the woman.

"Five hundred ducats?"

She weighed the key in her hands, and in her eye she weighed the lives of the two. Then she opened the door.

CHAPTER V.

AGNES—ONCE EVE.

TIZZO, drawing his father by the arm, drew him down behind the table which was heaped high with clothes that needed repair. They were not perfectly concealed from the man who stood in the doorway, now. Tizzo, from beneath the table, could see the armored legs of the man as high as the hips. They made him think of the legs of a great beetle, such as those he had watched crawling when he was a lad

—sleek, glossy metal. He used to turn those beetles over and then watch them flopping helplessly on their backs, kicking their legs. He had an insane desire to try to steal out and trip up this splendid soldier.

And yet, behind the man and up and down the hallway, moved an armed number of other fighting men.

"Ah, mother," said the man-at-arms, "what are you doing up so late?"

"Mending your worn-out clothes," she answered.

"Have you seen a pair of men—one old, one young?"

"Certainly," she answered. "Look yonder, under the table."

Tizzo heard his father catch breath, and gripped his arm with a sudden pressure, to seek to restrain the sound.

The soldier broke into laughter.

"What's your name?"

"Agnes."

"Agnes, I don't suppose that the two we're hunting are here in the room with you. But I wondered—"

"Why don't you suppose so?" asked Agnes.

"Because they'd twist your old windpipe before they'd let you open the door. But I thought—"

"Not if they were real men. Real men don't murder old women," said the hag.

"Agnes, I wanted to know if you'd seen any glimpse of them. That's all."

"Certainly. I saw them come into my room and stand in the corner. When I went to the window, they sneaked under the table."

The soldier laughed again.

"You're an old one, and all the old ones are hard," he said. "Well, God be good to you."

"God give you better sense to understand women," said Agnes.

He laughed again, and walked from

the room. Agnes closed the door after him, and locked it again.

And down the stairs at the end of the corridor, Tizzo heard the noise of the manhunt passing, dwindling, descending. He stood up with the baron beside him.

"Well, you see what truth is worth in Urbino," said the hag, grinning at them.

She had only one tooth in the middle of her mouth, and when she grinned it showed as yellow as old ivory, and her eyes disappeared in nests of wrinkles.

"YOU could have pointed, instead of speaking," said the baron. "A motion of your hand would have started him, like a hunting dog. And he would have found us. You would have had your share in the ducats."

"I'd hate to show a man to a hunting dog," said Agnes. "But if I had, there would have been a pretty thing to see. Would that sword of yours have found a way through his armor? Would that ax of Captain Tizzo have cut through his helmet? Yes, I think it would. Red-headed men are better than all the rest. I remember when a red-headed man fought for me in the street, yonder. I was not what I am now. I had feet under me as quick as a cat. And I was as sleek as a fish, all over. Hand or eye could not touch me without pleasure. But now what am I to do with you?"

"You've given us a chance to draw breath and turned the hunt another way," said the baron. "We'll find our own way out, now."

"You talk like a fool," said Agnes. "Do you think that every inch of the castle won't be hunted over again, now? You don't know the noble duke. There's a patient man for you. There's

a fellow who'll wait longer than a fisherman or a cat at a rat-hole . . . Well, let me think a little."

She propped her chin on one hand and frowned. The frown swallowed her eyes in black shadows. At last she said: "Old clothes. I've nothing to work with but old clothes."

In fact, on shelves at either end of the room appeared big bundles.

"Those are for the hospitals. But why shouldn't they be carried to the hospital now?" muttered Agnes. "Listen to me, Captain Tizzo—are you the man who rode through Perugia at the side of the Baglioni and cut through the chains of the streets with your ax?"

"That's true," said Tizzo. "There's a gift in this ax. It laughs at all other steel."

"Red-headed men laugh at everything," said Agnes. "But who would see Tizzo of Perugia in the form of a porter carrying bundles of old clothes on the top of his shoulders . . . Wait! . . . Now see yourself!"

She pulled out a ragged mantle, which she threw over the shoulders of Tizzo.

Upon his head she drew down an even more ragged hat that covered his face to the eyes.

"Now, now!" she exclaimed, inviting the attention of the baron, "would you know your son, my lord?"

"Never!" said Melrose, smiling. "And then?"

"Then I take you down the little winding stairs at the back of the palace. I let you out at the small door. There will be guards, of course, but there is my tongue, also, and two simple, honest poor men carrying old clothes."

She began to outfit the baron and then to throw down from the shelves bundle after bundle of the old clothes

which had been cast off by members of the ducal household.

FROM beneath the window, the bawling voice of another crier began to sound out: "Five hundred ducats for the English baron and Captain Tizzo. Five hundred ducats, dead or alive!"

"Hai!" grunted Agnes. "Do they have to maunder on about ducats? I was tempted once by ducats and I'll never be tempted again. Five wretched years—five years—where did they fly to, Lord God? Five mortal years. They found me a girl and they left me a woman with age pointing my chin and misting my eyes . . . Oh, God, how quickly the pollen is shaken from the flower and the bloom wiped from the petal and the fragrance gone, gone, gone!"

"Well, I've been young. That's all there is to it. I've been young. I had the lightest pair of heels in Urbino and the prettiest pair of legs and I didn't care who knew it . . . Lord, Lord, the withered old shanks that carry me around today . . . But if a girl wants a lover she should find a man with red hair . . . You'll make some lass happy, Captain Tizzo, for a week or two—before you smell flowers of a new sort behind some high garden wall . . . Walls are made to be climbed; women are made to be hunted . . . To run away and laugh over their shoulders. And only the swiftest foot shall catch 'em. Oh, I know about it! Are you ready? . . . Look at my heels and never higher. Walk slowly. Trust the talking to me . . ."

She opened the door and they followed her into the hall, each of them bending under a clumsy, great bulk of clothing that loomed vast above their shoulders.

They passed down the upper corridor, and then they went down a stairway that wound constantly. The steps were so steep and so many that the knees of Tizzo grew a little weak.

They reached another hall beneath them, more filled with clamor of voices, trappings, loud commands, and always the clashing footfall of armored men. The Urbino palace was buzzing like a hive, and there were no drones—every human was armed with a sting. Halberd, sword, boar-spear, dagger, club were all about the two inclining figures of the baron and his son.

"Who's that, and what's here, and who the devil are these?" demanded a loud voice.

And old Agnes shrilled back in her wavering voice: "And who are you and what are you and who gave you power to ask? . . . If I'm tumbled out of my bed at this hour to pile charity on the backs of a couple of sinners from the hospital, who has the right to—"

"Ah, be still!" said the soldier. "I'd rather talk to a barking dog than to you, old Agnes."

"Aye, but the young Agnes was for your betters. I've seen the time when the lifting of my finger would sweep ten better heads than yours off the shoulders that wore them."

"Damn you and your better men and your better times, you hag," said the soldier. "Get out of my sight!"

She led on down more stairs and came to a dim passage that ended at a door guarded on either side by a man-at-arms.

ONE of these stood up and lowered his halberd to a striking position.

"Who's there?" he asked.

"Agnes," she replied.

"What's with you, Agnes?"

"A pair of weak-kneed beggars from the hospital," she answered.

"What are their names?"

"Beggars have no names."

"They can't pass at this time. Have you not heard the uproar? Captain Tizzo and the Englishman who arrived today are wanted for the hangman tonight."

"D'you mean that these two can't get out of the palace?"

"They cannot."

"All right," said Agnes. "If you care nothing for fleas—and for worse things—I'll turn this pair over to you."

"Turn them over to me? Damn the dirty rats, what would I do with them?"

"I don't care what you do with them," said Agnes. "They were sent to me to get the clothes for the hospital. I've given them the clothes. That's all I can do."

"I won't have 'em. Take them back to where you found them."

"And tell his highness that I was stopped at the door?"

"Well—I can't do this, and you know it very well."

"I know nothing about you. I don't want to know. Shall I leave these two with you and go back?"

"Wait a moment."

"Suppose it's Tizzo and his father. I half think that those are the right names," said Agnes.

The soldier chuckled.

"You have a sting in the end of your tongue," he said. "But now listen to me. Are you sure that the duke ordered these two to be allowed to carry away the old clothes for the hospital?"

"Yes," said Agnes, "because he re-

cruits from hospitals and old men as nigh as any."

"It *may* be true," decided the guard. "Well, shall we let them through?"

"Who are you, fellow?" asked the other guard. And he rapped Tizzo in the ribs with the butt of his halberd.

Tizzo grunted, half the breath driven from his body.

"God forgive your worship," he whined. "You've struck me on the place where the doctor cut me for stones, and I doubt you've opened the old wound. Oh, ah, I feel the heat of the blood running down my side—but God knows that I'll never cast blame on you. I'm one of the unfortunates of the world, and the quickest way out of it will be the greatest mercy for me."

The soldier broke in: "That's enough. That's the true hospital chatter, and I've heard it before. Get them out, and quickly. Otherwise, we'll be catching a thousand foul diseases from them. A sick man is worse than a sick dog. Did you hear the whine of him?"

The other man shrugged his shoulders, shoved the key into the lock, and pulled the door wide.

"Out with you! Out with you!" he commanded, and kicked the baron to help him more rapidly through the doorway.

"Farewell!" called Agnes after them. "Mind you that you get one of the beggars to say a prayer for Agnes. For *any* Agnes. There's not one in the world that needs praying for as much as I do!"

Then the door slammed with a metal jangling of the lock and key.

And Tizzo found himself in a narrow street that pitched sharply down the hill on one side and climbed steeply up it on the other.

"Which way, father?"

"Either way—I don't care which," muttered the Englishman. "A dog of a common soldier has put his foot to me. I'll have blood for it. By God, I'll have a river of blood!"

CHAPTER VI.

TIZZO'S RASHNESS.

THEY climbed the hill, and took the first way to the right, still bending under their loads.

A pair of young cavaliers, galloping past, scattered mud and water over them and laughed over their shoulders at the two weighted-down pedestrians.

A rabble of young drunkards streamed around a corner and suddenly beset them.

"Way for the Lazar House! Way for the hospital!" called Tizzo, in a dreary singsong.

The lads scattered with yells. If it were not actual disease to touch or speak with one from the hospital, it was bad luck of the worst sort, at the least.

And now they came out into a wider street and saw a cart with two men in half-armor riding behind it. To the tail of the cart was tied a man stripped to the waist, and after him strode a huge Negro who swung a whip and used it at every tenth step. And in the cart sat a fellow who bawled out:

"This is Luigi, the son of Elia the smith, for speaking ill of his glorious highness, the Duke of Urbino! This is Luigi, flogged through the streets of Urbino for a day and a night . . ."

A little crowd followed after the cart. They were curious, but they never came too near. They kept to either side of the street and not a sound, not a word came out of their throats. The only reason the flogging could be seen

so well was that a lantern was carried high from the cart at the end of a projecting pole, and this showed the entire picture—the carter half asleep behind his two mules, the crier of the punishment, the criminal, the Negro, the two soldiers who jogged behind the rest to see that the course of the law was undisturbed.

Tizzo paused and stared at the unhappy man.

"On, on!" said his father, shouldering past him.

"Aye," said Tizzo, "and yet I could drink hot blood when I see such a thing—"

"Come, come!" exclaimed the baron. "We can't right all the wrongs in the world—"

"But for speaking evil of the damned Guidobaldo, the poisoner and traitor, the destroyer of good knights, the dog-faced Duke of Urbino!" gasped Tizzo.

He kept on staring at the procession, unable to start on again. The face of the prisoner must have been young, the day before. It was old, now. It was old, and long drawn. The eyes were buried in holes.

The cart lurched over a bump in the way, the sudden pull on the cords jerked the poor Luigi forward on his face and he dragged in the mud. His back could be seen more clearly, now. The lantern light streamed down over it and showed it painted with stripes of red, as with crimson paint, sticky and wet, and in the middle of the back the stripes all gathered together in one huge, solid red patch on which the blood was flowing.

The Negro, laughing, called out: "Look, my masters! I'll put more speed in his feet."

He whirled his whip and brought it down with a loud crack that made the

blood fly; and Luigi was lifted to his feet by the agony.

"Christ . . . mercy . . ." he gasped.

AND Tizzo heard him. He hurled the bundle from his back and caught out of the rags he had been bearing the ax with the head of good, blue steel. The edge of it gleamed like silver.

"A rescue! A rescue!" shouted Tizzo. "All good men behind me!"

The two halves of the following crowd halted. The cart driver, amazed, pulled at the heads of his mules and brought them to a stand. The two soldiers, bewildered, halted their horses also. The nearest of them, seeing a man spring in at him with an ax, leveled his spear and took a shrewd thrust at the breast of Tizzo.

He might as well have thrust at a dancing flame. The spear head went wide of the mark and Tizzo, leaping up, planted one foot on the stirrup of the soldier and brought down his ax.

If he had used the edge, the man never would have spoken again. But he used only the hammer-head at the back of the ax; the blow hurled the man-at-arms out of the saddle and senseless into the mud.

"Treason!" shouted the other soldier. "All true men—"

But the crowd stood in frozen silence as Tizzo ducked under the belly of the first horse and leaped at the other soldier. He had one help, now. The baron, tossing aside his bundles in turn, had snatched out his sword from the mass of cloth and was running in with the weapon raised.

That sight was too much for the man of war. He put spurs to his horse and went plunging away, still screeching: "Treason! Rebellion! The people are up!"

And only then did the people who looked on suddenly give voice with such a sound as Tizzo never had heard before from men or from beasts, a low, groaning, mournful, growling noise; and the two halves of the crowd began to flow suddenly into the street.

"We're lost!" cried the baron. "To your heels, Tizzo!"

The Negro who carried the whip had turned and started to flee. One wing of the closing crowd met him. There was a scream, a sound of blows. It was the Negro who had yelled out.

But Tizzo, running forward, slashed the rope that tethered Luigi to the cart's tail. The carter, in the meantime, began to flog his mules; they broke into a gallop. And Tizzo found himself with one arm around the reeling body of Luigi, his other hand free to handle his ax.

His father came and stood beside him, the sword raised and ready at a balance for the first stroke.

"This is the end, Tizzo!" he exclaimed. "Poison from high hands would have been better than death from the mob. Guard my back truly as I'll guard yours, and still we'll make a fight of it."

"Wait!" exclaimed Tizzo. "I think that they mean no harm at all."

After the first growling noise, the crowd made no sound. But they came straight in. They were almost on Tizzo and his father before two or three of them muttered: "Friends! Friends! Put down your weapons. Every man here would die for you, brothers!"

"They mean it," muttered Tizzo over his shoulder. "Let them be!"

THE baron, undecided, nevertheless kept his sword raised and did not strike until he saw the many reaching hands go out to Luigi, take

him up, lift him shoulder-high, and begin to bear him away.

A tall old man, still strong and swift stepping, caught Tizzo and the baron by the arms.

"This is the first day of my life!" he said. "Now I am born. Now I have seen a common man lift hand against the duke's own officers. I thank God! I'm ready to die! Come with us, friends! There is no safety in Urbino for you, now, but you are safer with us than with any others!"

AND they went with the flow of the crowd, under the dim starlight, hurried along blindly as though the run of a river had picked them up and were carrying them along.

They entered alleys filled with a foul, sour savor. They twisted around dingy corners. And at last a door opened, and they poured into a dairy barn where the cows were tethered in rows, and a single dim lantern gave them a flickering light as unclean as the streets through which they had been passing.

Hay was piled in an empty manger and Luigi was laid on this bed, face down.

A young woman, big with child, haggard, came swiftly into the throng.

"His wife! The wife of Luigi!" said voices, and a way was made for her suddenly.

She climbed into the manger and took the head of her husband in her lap. And every now and then she would jerk up her head and look over the crowd with startled eyes, only to bow again, a moment later, and stare at the bleeding flesh of Luigi.

The old man who had taken the baron and Tizzo by the arms now officiated with an air of authority. At his direction warm water was brought,

With his own hands he washed the blood away, and then plastered over the back of Luigi a good layer of lard.

Said a voice near Tizzo: "There goes enough lard to give a savor to ten pounds of black bread."

And another answered: "Aye, but the bread he eats is pain! I won't grudge him the lard tonight!"

IT seemed to Tizzo that he had never seen such men before. He had had to do with foresters, on the place of his foster father, and here and there he had mingled briefly with the common people. But now it seemed to him that he was beholding them for the first time, and he was amazed.

They were in rags; they were dirty, ill-smelling; but now that he looked at them by the lanternlight, it seemed to him that he never had seen better brows, keener eyes, more resolute faces. Now and again his eye fell on some brutal face, but for the most part, in good clothes and with a bath between them and the past, they would have seemed as noble a lot as ever stood in a court.

And a great, strange thought burst in upon Tizzo—that perhaps men, after all, are very much alike. The born prince might have his royalty by accident rather than merit. And the cobbler, the peasant, the household drudge, the serf, perhaps were all of them as kingly as any who sat on thrones, except that their feet had been forced into lower ways.

It was a thought that discomfited Tizzo. He knew that it was a great blasphemy, and he put it away from him as quickly as possible. For, of course, kingship comes from God and from God only, and common people are born to serve their superiors. Nevertheless, he was so troubled that he be-

gan to breathe a little faster. There was a giddy lightness in his breast. He found that his teeth were hard-set.

At his shoulder he heard the voice of his father saying: "We had better be out of this. This is no place for people of our bearing, Tizzo. Quickly, lad—and come with me."

Tizzo pulled off his cloak and stepped forward.

"Here, friend," he said to Luigi's wife, "wrap your husband in this."

Her hand caught at the cloak and then dropped it. Her eyes remained staring aghast. She pointed with a trembling hand.

"Look! Look!" she cried.

And a sudden snarl came out of the throats of the crowd.

"One of the gentry! A spy! A spy! . . . Let me come at him! . . . Let me have my hands in his throat!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE TEST.

SUCH hands as Tizzo never had felt before gripped him. He saw the cloak and hat torn off his father at the same moment.

The baron, huge and weighty with trained muscle, struggled desperately. Knives gleamed.

And Tizzo shouted: "Father, we're helpless. Stand still and let the fools remember what we've done for Luigi!"

This sudden outcry stilled the fight for a moment. But the people had become animals, with burning eyes and flaring nostrils. They kept inching nearer and nearer to their prisoners. The tall old man who had been spreading the lard over Luigi's back began to exclaim: "What are you thinking of, friends? Do you forget that these are the men that knocked one soldier into

the mud and made the other run? If you wanted fighting, why didn't you use your hands when poor Luigi was being flogged at the tail of the cart? What reason have spies for fighting the duke's own men?"

A hunchback, deformed but not crippled by the great bunch behind his shoulders, thrust his long head still farther forward. He had a pale face, slit with a vast mouth, that formed itself strangely around the words he spoke.

"What reason?" he said. "A very good reason. To seem to strike a blow for a friend of the people, and so be brought in among them and see them, and count the faces of the men who hate the duke."

"Aye, aye!" muttered the rest. "That's the point of it."

Those newly opened eyes of Tizzo scanned the others again. To be sure, these ragamuffins could not afford plate armor and fight on horseback against the gentlemen, but the arquebus was becoming cheaper, more manageable year by year. Suppose that the mob ever were disciplined and armed with such weapons—what would their millions do to the scant thousands of the gentry? The tremendous picture rolled darkly across the eyes of Tizzo. He shuddered a little.

The old man—a blessing on him!—was continuing the argument.

"What fools the pair of them would be to disguise themselves in nothing but old hats and cloaks? Do you think that they're half-wits my friends?"

"All the gentry are more than half fools," said the hunchback.

There was an instant muttering of assent.

And the hunch-backed man went on, "Now that we have a pair of spies, let's close their eyes and ears for them forever."

"Luigi," said the old fellow, "here are the two men who saved you from the tail of the cart. Turn your head and see them. Speak a word for them."

THE head of Luigi was turned by the hands of his wife, but he looked with red-stained, senseless eyes at the faces around him. When his lips parted, a feverish, incoherent babbling issued, and nothing more. His wife began to weep softly, unwilling to obtrude her grief upon the attention of men.

"If they're not of the duke's gentry," said the hunchback, "let them say what they are. Let us hear what sort of common men they may be."

"There's no other way but to tell them," said the baron. "Shall I do it?"

"Speak out. It's as well to be hanged by the duke's hangman as to be stabbed in the back by these fellows," said Tizzo.

The baron looked calmly around him. His clothes had been pulled half off his back, but he bore himself always with a good deal of dignity, and yet there was a cheerfulness about his bulldog face and the wine-red of it that could not help appealing to ordinary men.

He said: "To be short—you've heard the duke's criers proclaiming a reward of five hundred ducats through the streets for the capture of Baron Melrose and Captain Tizzo. We are they!"

There was not a whisper in answer, for a moment. Through the silence, Tizzo heard the grinding of the fodder which the cows were consuming, tossing their heads from time to time to tear out long streamers of the hay and then lick it easily into their mouths. They observed this human scene with bland, indifferent eyes.

The hunchback was the first to speak, and he sneered: "The baron? I know little about him. But Captain Tizzo is the man who cut through the street chains in Perugia. Everybody in Italy knows that story. Now I ask you, all my masters, if this spindling fellow has the arms or the shoulders to strike such strokes? Could he sway the ax that might deal such blows? Answer me, any man who dares to say so?"

The growl was a convincing reply. They meant business, now, and quick business.

Tizzo said: "There are some of you who never saw a small cat scratch the nose of a big dog and make him run off, howling. I say that I am he who cut the chains at Perugia. And in my hand is the ax that dealt the strokes."

This statement made a very obvious impression. But the hunchback tore the ax suddenly from the grasp of Tizzo and held it high over his head. The lanternlight sent a blue flickering over the fine steel of the ax-head.

"You hear what he says?" declared the hunchback. "Now look with your own eyes on the ax that he carries! Are any of you fools enough to believe him? Why, here's an ax so light that it hardly fills half my hand!"

The old man put in: "Neighbor Berte, you still have the old Austrian helmet with the dents that the Swiss swords knocked into it; but none of their swords would carve through it. Bring it here and let the young man try the edge of his ax on it, if he thinks he can manage the trick."

Berte laughed and showed a mouth in which there was not a single tooth, though he was a young man. The bread he ate constantly lacerated his gums, and therefore his lips were continually edged with drying blood.

He said: "I'll bring the helmet in two minutes. Wait for me here!"

HE was gone at once. The hunchback, with a grin, leaned back against a stanchion and stared into the face of Tizzo.

"You have a couple of minutes to live, brother," he said. "Tie the hands of the fellow who calls himself Baron Melrose, some of you. We'll leave this lying captain the use of his hands until he's proved the lie with the ax in his grip . . . Here, stand back a little. Give me that club . . . I take my place behind this man who calls himself Tizzo of Perugia . . . When he deals the blow to the helmet, if his ax fails to cut a good gash in the steel, that moment I bring down my club on his head and see how far his brains will spatter. Is that a fair judgment?"

They laughed, all those wolfish men, and nodded at one another.

"A fairer judgment than Luigi had!" they said.

Tall Berte now returned and put on the stump of a post an old conical, open helmet of great weight and thickness of metal, no matter how old its workmanship might be.

"There!" said Berte, stepping back. "That old headpiece has saved lives in its day. It may be the losing of another life now that it's grown so old-fashioned. Step up, *signore!* Step up and try your luck! The five-foot Swiss swords could do no more than knock those dents into it. See if your ax can slash through it. What? Never hang back! Those were greater strokes than you claim to have struck in Perugia!"

Tizzo, freed, stepped forward with his ax and took the helmet in his hand.

It was even more massive to the touch than it was to the eye. The solid weight of it surprised him, and he saw

that the entire top of the headpiece was doubly reinforced.

He glanced up with a smile at the faces around him.

"This is a good, tough nut to crack," said Tizzo. "But give me elbow room, friends, and I'll try my hand at it. Keep out of the swing of my ax, though."

He weighted the ax first in his left hand and then his right, as though he intended to strike it with a single arm. But now he took the well-balanced weapon in a double grasp and swung it to the right and to the left in sweeping circles. Suddenly he reversed the sway. The ax swept up on high. His body, not more than middle height at the most, seemed to stretch whole inches taller. It curved backward with a swift and sudden tension and then, like a full-drawn bow when the string is released, all that accumulated tension of muscle and nerve released.

The ax flashed too swiftly for the eye to follow. It was a blue glint in the lanternlight. Right in the center of the helmet the blow struck with a clang, followed by a splintering noise.

Tizzo straightened slowly from that great effort. And a groan of profound wonder came from the men around him. The hunchback, grunting with awe that was almost terror, had fallen on his knees. He picked up one half of the cloven helmet. With the other hand he traced the crack which the ax had cut through the post beneath.

CHAPTER VIII.

"ANOTHER MAN'S POISON."

BY day Cesare Borgia preferred to sleep; by night he usually was up and about, but on this night he sat gloomily in front of his casement with

his chin dropped on his big hands. No one would have dared to keep him company or even speak to him at such a time, except that same young Florentine envoy, Niccolò Machiavelli.

He, with a soft step, paced up and down the room, speaking from time to time, sometimes humming a phrase of music, and paying no heed to the continual silence with which Cesare Borgia received his remarks. Here the door was opened a crack and the voice of the master poisoner, Bonfadini, murmured: "A letter from Captain Tizzo!"

"That is what I've been waiting for," said the Borgia, in a sudden, loud voice. "Bring it in. Read it, Alessandro! From what place does it come?"

"A place where men have red blood in them," said Bonfadini. "There's enough of that color on the letter. And the messenger dropped dead from his horse when he reached Forli."

"Ah? Ah?" muttered the duke. "How does it come that I can spend fortunes on men, and yet I never have people ready to die for me as they're ready to die for that penniless adventurer of a Tizzo?"

"Money only buys the time of men," said Machiavelli.

"What buys their hearts' blood, Niccolò?"

"Love," said the Florentine, and laughed a little.

"The letter! The letter!" said the Borgia. "I'm a new man before I hear even a word of it. Tizzo would never send a letter unless there were something worth while inside it."

Bonfadini, breaking open the writing, now read aloud, holding the page close to the small flame of the single lamp in the room. "'My dear lord: A parrot died for me the other day, and that's why I'm alive to write this letter.

"Duke Guidobaldo received me with every courtesy and listened like a scholar while I made my speech about your deep-seated affection for his excellency and your desire to join hands with him in public and in private war. Once I thought he was about to smile; but he swallowed it. He took the care of the countess out of my hands at once, and in such a way that I could not protest without doubting his intention to hold her as a safe prisoner at your disposal—"

"D'you see, Niccolò?" said the duke. "I told you how it would work. Guidobaldo took the countess into his own hands, and it will need fighting to get her away from him again... I have a perfect cause for war..."

"You will have more causes before that letter is ended," said Machiavelli.

BONFADINI read on: "Presently two cups of spiced wine were sent to our room in the night for sleeping draughts; and if we had drunk them we would still be asleep, my father and I, without ever a dream. But we gave a taste to a parrot in the room and he dropped asleep in time to warn us. The same sleep that we all come to at the end of living. There were soldiers at the door; we got out the window, onto the roof, and found an old crone who liked red hair and let us down to the street. There we fell in with a mob who wanted to knife us as members of the gentry, because the gutter-sweepings and riff-raff of this town seem to hold grudges against the blue-bloods and even feel that one man is as good as another.

"They were about to cut our throats when I managed to cut the Gordian knot, literally, with a stroke of my ax. And now we are accepted as good fellows—a title which seems

to be incomparably above that of kings or emperors in the opinion of these queer people. They swear to die rather than give us up to the duke, though he has raised the price on our heads from five hundred to a thousand ducats. His idea seems to be that we are to drop forever out of sight in Urbino, after which he will be able to send you word that your envoys got drunk and were killed in a stupid brawl, leaving the poor countess in his hands, and he remains your humble servant, as ever.

"We have tried to get out of the town, but every inch of the walls is watched; this letter coming to your hands will be proof that some one of my new friends in Urbino has risked his life to carry word to you.

"Now that you have read this far, sound the trumpets and orders horses, and away, because—"

HERE Cesare Borgia shouted suddenly, with a lion's roar: "Sound horns! Sound to horse! To horse!"

He added: "I'll take Tizzo at his word!"

A distant voice called out, faintly heard through the walls, and a moment later strong trumpets were blowing, followed by a rushing of feet through the court below.

Cesare Borgia began to laugh as he listened to the rest of the letter.

"... Because at the end of the fourth day from this writing, which is on Monday, I intend, if a single Romagnol spear shines in the passes about Urbino, to gather about me as many of the rabble as can bear arms of one sort or another and rush the Porta del Monte. If I can capture that one gate and let in a few companies of my lord's best fighting men,

trust me that they will be enough to stab Urbino to the heart. If I cannot capture and hold the gate until your troops are inside the walls, don't try the attack because the town is invulnerable, and there are plenty of good soldiers inside it.

"However, those good soldiers will only fight so long as they have the advantages. One and all, they hate everything about Duke Guidobaldo except his money. Once you can break into the town, they will run like rats; unless perhaps a garrison remains in the palace, which is a fort within a fort.

"My lord, everything depends on haste and speed.

"I see that I have been dropped as a bait into the mouth of the shark. I have managed to jump out of his mouth again, but his teeth are on all sides of me, sharper than swords.

"For these reasons, I cannot send you my affection, but I can send you my duty. My hair is not yet gray.—Tizzo."

The Borgia already was up and striding for the door.

"You've heard!" he called. "What do you say to this, Niccolò?"

"I say," said Machiavelli, "that either you will bruise and break your hands on those great walls and heights of Urbino, or else you will have a dukedom for the mere gesture of taking. With three more men like Tizzo, you would have half the towns of Italy in your hands inside a year."

"Aye!" cried the duke. "What a man for me and for the future! There is a sword that strikes a thousand blows and still the edge is never turned. What is the reason for that, my wise Niccolò?"

"Why, my lord," said Machiavelli, "the reason is that a man who loves

danger for its own sake sharpens his temper the more he is used. Another man's poison is his food."

CHAPTER IX.

THE EYES OF AGNES.

DUKE GUIDOBALDO, toward the close of the day, strolled on the top of the ramparts of the palace and looked far across the roofs of Urbino toward the northern mountains. Now he halted and pointed. The Countess Sforza-Riario at his side halted and squinted her eyes.

"There in the hollow," said the duke. "There's so much dust in the air that it looks blue and covers the picture a good deal. But you can make out the glitter of the spear-points like little candle-flames. Those are the lances of Giovanpaolo of the high and mighty Baglioni; he must have fifteen hundred good men with him. The fighters from Perugia always are good ones. The Duke of Valentino comes in from the eastern road. They are going to move toward Urbino from opposite sides and hope to take us by surprise."

"The fools!" said the countess. "Do they think that you'll invite them and their men into the city? And unless you invite them, they'll never get over the walls without wings."

The duke laughed. "We are as safe here, madam," said he, "as though we were sitting on top of a cloud in the blue of the sky. Now see the dust cloud raised by the Perugians; it looks like a bright mist flowing there between the hills."

The day had been very hot; Urbino still was steaming; people had come out from their houses and sat on doorsteps with haggard faces. The

children had been quiet all day. Now the pleasant hum of their voices rose up as far as the battlements of the castle.

"Where is the old woman you were speaking of?" asked the duke of one of the attendants who remained at a respectful distance.

"We have her at hand, highness," said the attendant.

"Bring her," said the duke.

She was brought at once before him, bowed of back, her head jutting forward with every step she took.

"What is your name?" asked Guidobaldo.

"Agnes, my lord," she answered, making her bow.

"How old are you?"

"I was ten years old when your mother was born, my lord."

"What is your place in the palace?"

"I do sewing and mending. I used to work with the fine silks and linens. But when my hands grew darker with needle-pricks and iron-burns, they looked unclean."

"So you were given coarser work?"

"Yes, my lord. I was given the dirty mending, putting together rents, and darning hose."

THE duke smiled at Caterina Sforza. "You have an honest face, Agnes," he said.

"Thank you, my lord. It is best to look honest if one cannot look happy."

"Are you not happy?"

"In my thoughts, yes."

"What are your thoughts?" went on the duke, who began to feel the philosopher.

"They stopped at the time I was twenty-eight," she answered.

"What happened then?"

"I began to grow thin. My chin got long and my eyes grew hollow."

"If you can remember things as long ago as that, do you remember what happened four nights ago?"

"That was the night the English baron and Captain Tizzo escaped from the castle."

"Where were you?"

"Sewing in the mending room."

"What did you do?"

"I kept on sewing, my lord."

"When all the other women were running and screaming?"

"I knew no matter how fast I ran, I could not catch the five hundred ducats."

The duke started to laugh but ended with a smile. His courtiers saw that they were free to chuckle, and did so.

"I hear," said the duke, "that on that night you brought down two men loaded with old clothes to take to the hospital?"

"Yes, my lord."

"They never arrived at the hospital," said Duke Guidobaldo.

"Were they thieves?" asked Agnes.

"You are not surprised?"

"I am too old to be surprised by men, my lord."

"What if those two were the men who were escaping?"

"That would have been lucky for them."

"What was their appearance?"

"One was older than the other. He was larger, also."

"What was the color of their hair?"

"I could not tell, my lord. They came and asked for the clothes. I gave them the bundles. There was a great deal of noise and trampling in the palace. They were afraid to go down until I showed them the little winding stairway, and I took them down it."

"She tells the thing straight enough," remarked the duke to Caterina Sforza.

She held out her hand.

"What is the stone in this ring, Agnes?"

"A ruby, madame."

"She's the guilty witch who let them out of the castle," said the countess instantly. "She could not tell the color of her hair, she is so old? Well, she could tell the color of this stone. One lie, and all lies!"

THE courtiers started, murmured not altogether with admiration.

But the duke was greatly impressed.

"Agnes," he said, "you have heard the countess. What do you say now?"

"Rubies are bright enough to shine by their own light, my lord."

"This old woman talks too well. She is lying," said the countess.

"I think she is," agreed the duke. "Here, Roberto. Take the old hag and give her a few strokes of the whip. Loosen her tongue for her."

"Instantly, my lord."

"Why not drop her into one of the bird-cages?" asked the countess. "Here's one beside us."

It was an iron cage affixed to the edge of the parapet, with a door at the top. The bars were painted to keep them from rusting. They enclosed a space so small that a man could neither sit nor stand nor lie full length. They were an invention of Cardinal Balue of France, and his master, Louis XI, liked the invention so well that he finally put the inventor in one of them. Men were said to have existed for months in those frightful machines of torment.

"Why not?" asked the duke. "Yes, pop Agnes into that cage at once."

"Good," said Agnes. "I'll have a better view of the street than I ever had before."

The countess broke out laughing.

"Let her be!" she said. "The old witch has so much courage that she deserves to live."

"If she is a traitor," said the duke, "I'll have her flayed alive. But take her to the dungeon and let her cool her quick old brain there for a while. Off with her. I'll attend to her tomorrow . . . They're coming out from the valley and straight toward the city," he added, pointing toward the advancing little army.

"Now they scatter to pitch camp. My lord, you have no doubt about them being enemies. Why not sound the trumpets and pour out at them with horse and pike and arquebusiers?"

"Would you do that, Caterina?"

"Instantly!" she said. "Aye, and lead the spearmen myself."

"You would," nodded the duke, smiling. "I know that you would, because I've heard of other things you've done. But I prefer to sit in the clouds and let the silly little people go their own way down there beneath me. When I can take them off guard, then I'll strike them into a rout. I've done it many times. But those Perugians are a hardy lot of fighters."

"So much the more glory in beating them," said the countess.

"So much the more blood shed in doing it. And my soldiers cost me money, you know. We'll go in, if it pleases you—or we can dine on the loggia; you see the moon is up and we'll have the light of it to show us the hills. . . . But still there's a wish that's burning in me."

"Shall I name it to you, my lord?"

"Can you?"

"You would give half your army for the sake of seeing that quick-footed, bold-eyed, red-headed Tizzo—seeing him in chains."

"I shall have him in chains," said the duke. "Or is he yonder? Has he escaped to the Borgia? Is it because of him that Cesare has marched south to pay me this visit?"

"Wherever he is," said she, "you'll find him before long. He's like a spark in the hand. It soon will burn you!"

CHAPTER X.

THE ATTACK.

THE moon was as strong as the sunset light when Tizzo made a speech. He stood in a manger of that same dairy stable where he had cloven the helmet with an ax. And now he said: "I'm going from this stable with my ax hidden under my cloak. I'm going straight for the Porta del Monte. Those who will go with me, lift the right hand."

There was a whispering answer. The sound came from the upswinging of every right arm. Three hundred men were packed around the cows as thick as they could stand. Others skulked in the yard outside. The forest of arms dropped.

"Show what you have to fill your hands," commanded Tizzo.

Up went the same right hands. Tizzo saw hatchets, axes, mere knives of all sorts, straightened sickles fixed on short wooden handles so as to make a stabbing spear of incredible ugliness; and then there were straightened scythe-blades which looked like clumsy swords. They would cut like a sword and an ax combined. In addition, there were the clubs of all sorts and sizes, and old spear-heads which had been ground razor sharp and mounted on short truncheons.

Well-armored men could laugh at

the attack of such motley weapons, and the men-at-arms who secured the guard of the gates of Urbino were armed cap-apie, every one. And yet Tizzo smiled as he looked around him at the silent flourish and saw the hard, grim faces of the crowd.

"Brothers," he said, "we are going to Porta del Monte. When I get there, I am going to strike with my ax one of the soldiers on guard. Raise your hands, those who are going to strike with me."

A third of the audience lifted hands.

"Those who rush at the same time towards the left tower beside the gate and try to master it, give me a sign."

The hunchback, who was to lead that attempt, hoisted himself up on a stanchion and grinned as a third of the arms were lifted again.

"And who are going to follow my father to the capture of the right-hand tower and the magazines of arms?" demanded Tizzo.

"If all goes well at the gate," said Tizzo, "my father remains there in command. And who are those who will follow me back through the streets of Urbino?"

Half of the men lifted their arms.

"What is the shout we will raise?" repeated Tizzo.

The answer was a murmur that swelled throats and died behind clenched teeth: "Duca! Duca!"

The teeth of Tizzo himself set hard as he heard this stern muttering.

THE gates of Urbino were closed not at sunset but at dark. There was still green light rimming the western mountains when a number of ragged fellows went towards the Porta del Monte. Some of them came down the main street. Others issued suddenly from alleys. Nearly all of them

were muffled in old, torn, ragged cloaks in spite of the great warmth of the evening. But then, all men knew that the damp night air is mortally dangerous. These were probably countrymen who had remained in Urbino until the last moment. It was only a little odd that so many of them should be flocking out at the Porta del Monte. Or were they going to have traffic with the army of the Perugians that lay in the hollow beneath?

The captain of the gate pulled out the beautifully shining length of his sword and held it at the breast of the first of the crowd, a slender fellow of not more than middle height, with a tuft of red hair sticking out through a gap in his cloak's hood.

"Where are the lot of you going, fellow?" demanded the captain.

"Out of Urbino to get some cool air," said Tizzo.

"Out of Urbino to talk to the Perugians, you mean," said the captain. "What's to keep me from knowing or thinking that you're a pack of damned traitors?"

"This, highness, ought to convince you," said Tizzo, and shifting away from the sword with a sudden side-step, he jerked the blue-headed ax from under his cloak and struck.

The blow clanged on the steel and at the same instant cut through it with a dull, chopping sound. That ruined helmet never would be worn again. And the captain of the gate fell on his face, dead.

There were a dozen soldiers on guard, three times the usual number, because the Perugians were in sight down there in the hollow, their tents showing like a pale blue mist under the increasing moonlight. Those dozen guards were mastered and slain instantly, in the moment of bewilder-

ment which gripped them after they saw the captain fall. A few of them cried out in terror or in the death agony, but the mob of three score and more assailants never uttered a sound.

That was the special horror of the moment, the silence with which the crowd showed the flash of weapons and rushed to work, part of them to destroy the guard at the gate, part of them through the doors at the bottom of the towers to the right and left of the gate. The hunchback with his club sprang like a horrible spider up the winding stairs of the left tower. The sword of the baron led the way more slowly on the right.

The three strokes went home almost at the same moment. The gate was hardly won before the great, husky, roaring voice of the hunchback began to sound from the top of the left gate; and a man-at-arms, like a signal of victory, was hurled out of the topmost casement. The poor fellow dropped, spinning head over heels, screaming, and struck the pavement below, crushed to death.

Tizzo, rushing with part of his men to the more serious work of the attack on the right tower and the little armory beside it, was not halfway up the stairs before he heard the shouting that announced the victory.

He went on with the peasants and found a score of his men already in the armory, snatching up steel caps to put on their heads, seizing swords, targets, battle-axes, poniards sharp as a cat's tooth.

THERE was hardly a wound to count. The success was complete and perfect. And Tizzo was once more on the ground level of the gate with the baron panting beside him before he heard the alarm bells begin to

crash from all parts of Urbino. It had required all that time, so sudden was the stroke, for the news to reach from the Porta del Monte to the rest of the city.

He left more than a hundred men with his father, a third part of that number in the left and right-hand towers.

"If you had half a dozen men who understood firearms," said Tizzo, "you could make sure of the gate."

"I can be sure of it anyway," said Melrose. "Why don't the Perugians come swarming up to take this advantage?"

"I never knew Giovanpaolo to be so slow," said Tizzo. "Do you hear? I go with the rest of the men straight back through the city and try to rouse the mob. Every one of my fellows is carrying extra weapons from the armory. I'm heading for the Porta S. Bartolo. The Borgians are out there on the Pesaro Road. And if I have luck, I'll carry that gate and open it to our friends."

"Good lad," said the baron. "Be confident of me. All will go well, here. See how the gutter rats come swarming to take part in the victory!"

For already men were scampering towards the Porta del Monte, shouting the battle cry which was gathering force every moment: "Duca! Duca!"

Tizzo gripped the hand of his father and left the knight arming himself rapidly with complete steel plate which he had found in the armory. For his own part, he was content, as usual, with a mere breastplate and steel cap; but he had a sword by his side to help out the ax which was his favorite.

He started to cross the city with all his selected men swarming behind him.

They were like a column of marching ants. Some of them ran ahead

into houses and tumbled the inhabitants out into the street. Others stood over the people who already were gathered along the way and made them join the chorus of "Duca! Duca!"

Hundreds and hundreds were joining the wild-headed throng behind Tizzo. He walked in the lead, most of the time with the steel cap removed so that the flame red of his hair could be seen. And the cry was increasingly: "Duca! Duca! Tizzo! Tizzo! Tizzo! Who has five hundred ducats to pay for a red-head?"

So, laughing, yelling, they thronged up the streets.

A MURMUR, a dim shouting, an echo out of the distant horizon first climbed to the open loggia where Duke Guidobaldo sat at supper with Countess Caterina. And then, suddenly, they heard the first crashing of the alarm-bells, harsh, fierce, rapid, senseless language of fear.

Guidobaldo leaped to his feet. The countess sat perfectly composed. And onto the terrace ran one of those silken courtiers now white with fear and trembling.

"The Porta del Monte! The Porta del Monte!" was all he could gasp.

"What about the Porta del Monte?" asked the stern countess. "Have the Perugians captured it? If they have, Guidobaldo—they'll gut your city in an hour. I know Giovanpaolo and the ways of his men."

Duke Guidobaldo shouted: "*What* has happened at the Porta del Monte, you fools?"

"The mob! The mob is up, shouting for the 'Duca! Duca!' and leading the mob is the English baron and his son. Tizzo is there. They have murdered the guard. They are holding the gate—"

"Are they?" snarled the duke. "I'll smash them against the walls with a single sweep of the men-at-arms! Wait here for me, Caterina. I'll finish this little work in a few minutes, wash my hands, and come back to you."

He was gone, instantly. And in his room below pages hustled him into his gilded armor while he called out orders that caused his throng of chosen men-at-arms, his household bodyguard, to pour out into the court beneath. There they waited, all mounted and ready for action, three score chosen lances; and a hundred arquebusiers formed up behind them.

The duke, clambering heavily into the saddle—he never was a warrior—called to his men: "Down to the Porta del Monte, all of you, and cut down the ragamuffins there. There's a good bright moon to show you your way, and just enough work to warm you. But unless we close the gate, the Perugians will be in on us, and then the devil to pay. Forward! Arquebusiers, come on as fast as you may!"

Everywhere in the city the trumpets were sounding as the garrison gathered at the endangered points; and from the north and south towers of the Porta del Monte the small cannon were booming more as a signal to the Perugians to hurry than to inflict harm.

This was the situation when Duke Guidobaldo arrived with his cavalry. If there had been mailed men-at-arms to oppose him, he would have remained behind to watch his soldiers clear the way for him. But since there were only a score or two of ragged fellows, half-armed, in the open throat of the gate, he rushed in valiantly and swept the rabble out of his path.

It was over in ten seconds. Half the citizens were down, dead or dying, and the rest had fled, screaming with

fear or with the pain of wounds. And as the duke drew rein, he heard the pounding of hoofs that approached from the hollow and saw the gleam of the moonlight on the horsemen of Giovanpaolo, not a furlong away!

It was a near thing, a very near thing. His flesh crawled at the nearness of it. But well before the Perugians arrived, the heavy gates had been swung shut, and the men-at-arms, furious with the first easy taste of blood, were swarming up the stairs of the south tower and the north. The south gate tower they took at the first rush. But to the north they encountered strangely unexpected resistance. For there was Baron Henry of Melrose, now armored from head to foot, and rallying his men for a last, desperate stand. Again and again the men-at-arms charged up the stairs and recoiled from the blows of the knight and the savage thrusts of his followers.

In the meantime, helpless before the gates and the lofty walls, Giovanpaolo and his knights shook their spears vainly and cursed their bad luck. They had come five seconds too late to gain one of the richest prizes in Italy.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SINGED FISH.

TWO thousand men, a flowing river, half armed or not armed at all, followed Tizzo to the Bartolo Gate on the Pesaro Road. But the uproarious shouting of "Duca! Duca! Tizzo! Tizzo! Tizzo!" had outlined their whole course as though with fire, and the troops within Urbino were gathering rapidly in squadrons of horse and companies of pikes and arquebusiers.

So, when Tizzo and the head of his column reached the open square near the gate, he was not at all surprised to see the gates closed, the walls and towers thronged with soldiers, and a hundred arquebusiers drawn up in good order to contest the way. A hundred arquebusiers with lighted matches, and levelled, heavy guns, all ready to blast the rebels from the surface of the pavement. And off to either side appeared in the moonlight the glimmering heads of small bodies of horse.

There was hope, but it was far removed. That hope was in the distantly echoing cry of "Duca! Duca!" which resounded beyond the walls. There, he could be sure, were the Borgians, horse, foot—the fiery Gascons, the tall Swiss with their terrible pikes, and not least of all, the companies of Romagnol peasants so well drilled and armed. His own company was among them. How willingly he would have exchanged all this mob for that single company of trained fighting men!

But behind him he had merely a torrent of men. The strength of its rush was all that he could strike with.

He caught two burly fellows by the shoulder and lifted himself up until he was head above all the rest. And he shouted: "On the run, friends! Half of us must die, but the other half will butcher those arquebusiers! On the run! Follow me!"

And swinging himself down to the ground, he ran forward rapidly into the lead, until the moonlight gleamed on him well before all the rest. The eager Italian temperament could not hold back behind such a leader. There was a yell of wildest enthusiasm. Men who had been faltering at the sight of the terrible guns now rushed blindly forward.

The arquebusiers were commanded

by a gentleman of culture who had accepted a company of foot in order to show his good nature and his willingness to learn the game of war from the bottom. He now stood splendid in complete gilded armor, leaning on his naked sword, and calling his commands with casual precision. He called out cheerfully: "We will blow the heads of the ragamuffins down their own throats. Aim carefully, my lads—and now—fire! . . . Ah, well done! Well done! Draw sword and cut them down before they can run. . . ."

The blast of fire from the arquebuses had ripped the front of the rebels to pieces. But Tizzo, unharmed, ran straight on, and behind him streamed a thin wedge of his followers.

He himself picked out the noble captain who had expected so confidently that the rabble would be dispersed by that volley. The sword stroke of the noble was flicked aside by the flourish of the ax; and the next blow split the helmet of the soldier as though it had been kindling wood instead of fine steel.

THE arquebusiers were taken by amazement. Their volley would have been enough to have halted a charge delivered by the bravest of knights. But here were half armed and wholly untrained people of the street who came running in lightly with half their friends laid dead before their eyes. The arquebusiers, having no time to load again, drew their swords, but they gave only a few feeble strokes. They felt that the devil was abroad. Their commander was dead, and now they took to their heels and left their heavy weapons behind them.

That was how Tizzo won through to the gate, and burst it open.

Hot work followed.

As the huge panels of the gate swayed wide, Tizzo could see down the moon-whitened strip of the Pesaro Road the glitter of a column of cavalry which now rushed towards the open gate. And as they rode, the men-at-arms were shouting: "Duca! Duca!" at the top of their lungs.

Against the thunder of their hooves, another uproar of galloping horses and rattling of mailed riders rushed at Tizzo from behind. The cavalry posted around the gate, when the arquebusiers were swept away, now poured out to ride down the rabble. Half the townsmen they swept aside, butchering them, trampling them underfoot. But right in the center of the gateway they met Tizzo, the hunchback, and a few desperately determined men. These were borne back by the shock of the attack, but they still were fighting when the men of the Borgia rushed into the battle.

The impact of their charge was decisive. Cesare Borgia himself headed the cavalry rush. Behind him his best men were striking with spear or with lance. They slashed straight through the cavalry of Duke Guidobaldo's forces.

Cesare himself saw a saddle near him emptied by a bullet or an arrow. An instant later a man rose as from the ground and sat in the saddle and shouted: "My lord, give me men to take to the Porta del Monte."

"Take whatever you please," said Borgia. "Tizzo, you have burned down the gates of Troy for us—and now the city is ours! Take what you want. If I had a bucket of diamonds, I'd pour them over you . . . Halloo! Halloo! . . . Tomaso! Innocente! Follow Captain Tizzo! If he wants to take you to hell, give my compliments to the devil . . ."

That was why Tizzo led a compact

body of a hundred men rushing through the town of Urbino toward the Porta del Monte, shouting "Duca! Duca!" all the way.

As he came near the gate, he saw a whirl of armored horsemen galloping furiously away. His own task was to break into the north tower. And when he reached the armory he found there his father, three times wounded, surrounded by dead and wounded men, but with his helmet off and a leathern bottle of wine in his hand.

"Hai, Tizzo!" he said. "I thought you were gone and would never come again. Here, taste this wine with me. I drink to you, my lad. I drink to all true companions and the devil take traitors . . . Help me to my feet. I've had such a good bit of fighting that I don't care whether or not I get a penny of the loot of the town."

DUKE GUIDOBALDO had fled from the Porta del Monte the instant that he heard the shouting of "Duca!" as Tizzo led his cavalry across the city. With him he had taken the greater part of his jewels. The rest of Urbino fell intact into the hands of the Borgia.

But it was not money that he regarded. It was power that he wanted. And the winning of Urbino made him one of the leading princes of all Italy. That was why he cried out to Tizzo, as they sat late that night in the rooms of the vanished Guidobaldo: "Tizzo, we have made Guidobaldo run like a coward; the people are all cheering you and me in the street; the Countess Sforza is captured again as she was trying to slip out of the town; and there is nothing my heart can desire except to reward you, Tizzo. What will you have? Name ten requests!"

"I have only one," said Tizzo. "Let

an old woman called Agnes be found. Dress her in the finest clothes that can be found, and let her sit at your right-hand during supper tonight."

THEY found old Agnes. They dressed her in crimson satin and brocade of gold. They placed her at the right hand of the duke himself. And Tizzo sat beside her. She was very gay, and laughed continually.

"Red-headed men," she said, "are always unfaithful rascals. But women cannot help loving them. Thank God that I thought at first that you were a sacred ghost. If I had screeched like a fool you would be a dead man, and I would not be sitting beside the Duke Valentino."

It was a wild, gay party in the palace of Urbino, that night.

But not a man at the table was as light-hearted as Tizzo, because he had old Agnes beside him and, across the table, the long, terrible, wounded face of the hunchback.

Through the casements stormed the unwearying shout of the people as they roared "Duca! Duca!"

"If I had known that they wanted me so badly," said the Borgia, "I would have come here long ago! Tell

me, Niccolò, what the least shadow there can be on this happy occasion?"

"How did you win Urbino?" asked Machiavelli.

"Through Tizzo. You know how it happened."

"Is he worth more than the city he captured?"

"I think he is," said the Borgia.

"Ask him this moment what he is thinking about."

"Tizzo," called the Borgia, "what are you thinking of this moment?"

"I was thinking," said Tizzo, "about a poor fool of a fellow who was used as a living bait in order to catch some big fish."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the duke.

"I mean only that a fish that once has been singed always hates the frying pan."

And Machiavelli murmured: "Do you see? You have won Urbino, but you have lost Tizzo. Was the exchange worth while? He never will serve you again."

The Borgia sank his chin on the palm of his hand and shrugged his shoulders. He made no answer. Machiavelli began to smile at him with bright, cold eyes, like the eyes of a cat.

THE END

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"Lancers, Advance!"

By F. V. W. MASON

Author of "Lysander of Chios," "The Enemy's Goal," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAD.

IN a long column of twos, the lancer detachment rode out from the shelter of the ridge which had heretofore protected it, and, descending a narrow cart track, started across a little valley. Dust spurned by the hoofs of some forty sweat caked horses rose in lazy golden clouds to redden the eyes and blanch the beards

*Deadly cobras, man-eating tigers and treacherous
Afghan tribes are only a few of the dangers that
beset the Royal Durpal Lancers*



of those stalwart, dark faced *sowars** who, with their blue and white pennons gayly fluttering, rode behind Captain Lawrence Roark.

Shaded by his sun helmet's brim, the commanding officer's shrewdly pleasant gray eyes once more flickered over towards that yellow brown fringe of bamboo and elephant grass marking the base of a sharp, rocky slope rising to the little column's left.

"You are right, *Hazzoor*," muttered Jaffar Khan, Rissaldar-major of the Twenty-fifth Punjab Lancers, and

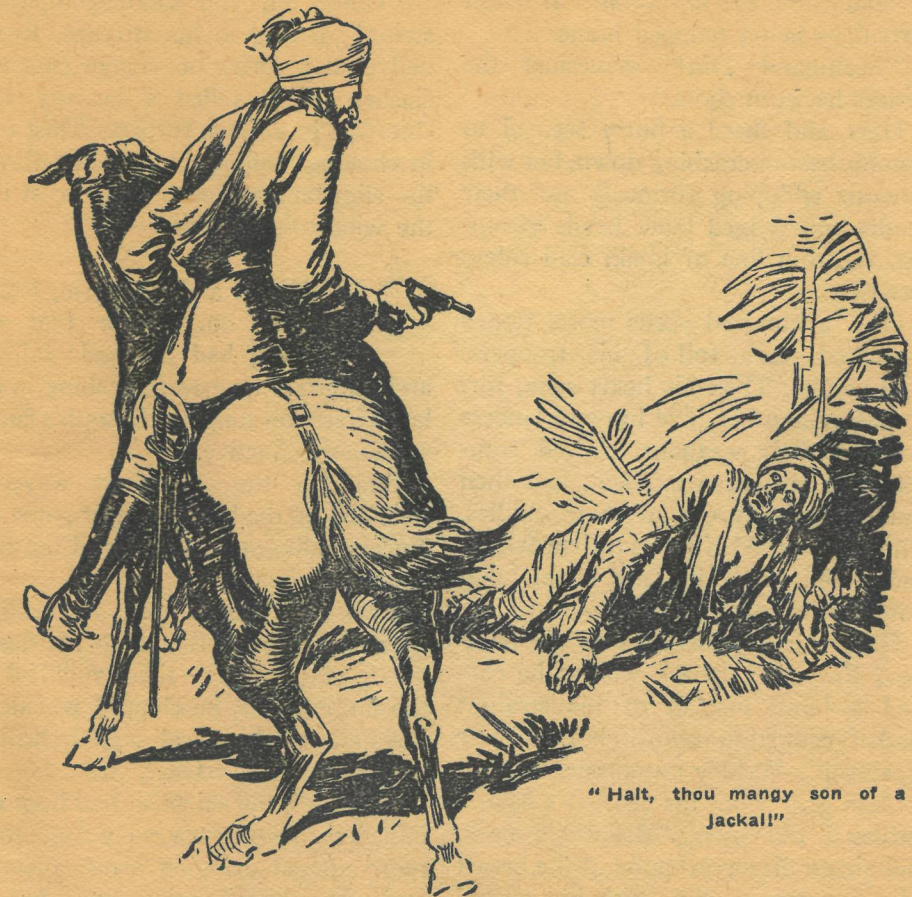
his jet eyes kindled. "What now?"

The long bodied, bronze featured captain made no reply other than to put a whistle to his lips and blow a single short blast. At the same time he raised his arm on high and crooked it sharply to the left over his head.

"Twos left! Lances down!" And half a dozen deep voices relayed the commands.

A second later Roark wheeled his mare and shouted "Cha-a-rge!"

In a twinkling the column of apparently somnolent lancers swung into line, unslung their bamboo shafted lances,



"Halt, thou mangy son of a Jackal!"

* Sowar—native trooper.

and, raising a startling yell, spurred headlong at that sun-blasted strip of jungle which had attracted Roark's attention.

So suddenly, so smoothly was the maneuver executed that only a ragged and none-too-effective volley cracked from among the bamboos.

"*Yah-il-il Allahu Akbar!*" screamed the lancers. Hunched well forward on the necks of their wiry Baluch horses, the troopers joyously settled themselves behind their nine-foot lances and selected targets from among a dark swarm of riflemen which materialized at the jungle's edge.

Louder sounded the rattling clatter of shots and the *click-cluck* of fresh cartridges being pumped home.

"Mohmand Din!" screeched the raiders between shots.

Here and there a horse seemed to stumble before crashing down, but with pennons whipping furiously and their deadly four edged lance heads gleaming, the thin line of khaki clad riders raced on.

Only a hundred yards more, Roark estimated, ears full of his troopers' wild shouts. Then his heart sank, for, one after another, five brawny lancers dropped their weapons, clawed frantically at the air a moment, and then slumped heavily out of their saddles. One red bearded Khalil's turban fell off and rolled away, its long khaki lungi slowly unwinding.

Only thirty yards now to the bamboo! Fervently Roark wished he carried a lance instead of his straight bladed campaign sword, but, after freeing his Webley automatic, he took a fresh grip about his charger's barrel, flattened out along Masheen's neck, and aimed his sword point at the breast of a Durpalese who, with his ragged black beard flecked with saliva, was

deliberately taking aim at the guidon bearer.

A rifle banged almost in his face, but Masheen's stride lengthened to an extended gallop and all the world ceased to exist save for a blue-gray sword point and that brown, half naked chest. Yelling joyously, as at a football game, Roark lunged and his shoulder was jarred by a sudden impact; there followed the familiar sensation of steel penetrating yielding flesh.

Promptly the lancer captain twisted his sword sidewise to free it, for the mare's impetus had been expended and a mob of yammering tribesmen were leaping in.

"Come on, you saddle-complected swine!" Rising in his stirrups, Roark delivered a series of savage cuts and slashes which felled a brawny subchieftain in a green turban. Dust rose in choking, baffling clouds, but always the slim lances dipped and thrust like the wind-tossed reeds.

GRINNING a deadly grin, Roark spurred on, aware that the shooting had lessened; tulwars and scimitars now were flashing in the late afternoon sun, but the 25th's lances were more effective.

Suddenly the ambushers wavered, then fled up the hillside—fair game for lancers riding as if boars and not men were their quarry.

Two shots Roark fired, and both of them went astray, thanks to Masheen's outraged plunging—then, mindful of the larger issue, he clapped whistle to lips and sent his recall signal shrilling through hot and lifeless air.

All in all, the skirmish had been satisfactory. Two troopers lay dead, three more nursed dripping arms, and several others bore lesser wounds, but fifteen or twenty raiders lay among the

bamboos looking like bundles of grimy rags. Lawrence Roark, however, experienced no exultation.

"And they expect us to protect fifty miles of frontier with half a battalion!"

Once corpses of the fallen had been secured to their horses, the column resumed its slow progress through the stifling heat and only vented a few sullen curses when a couple of rifles cracked in spiteful valediction.

"Those Durpalese sons of swine have passed yonder," suddenly grunted the 25th adjutant, and pointed to clouds of vultures and kites sailing down beyond a distant row of tree tops.

The prediction was speedily fulfilled, for, within twenty minutes, the dusty column came upon the smoldering ruins of a once pretty hamlet. Lazily, carrion birds flapped up by the dozens, very reluctant to desert their grisly banquet. Save for a few gaunt pariah dogs, the raided community seemed utterly devoid of life. Their severed throats redly agape, corpses of all ages and both sexes were scattered about, with vacant eyes fixedly regarding the brazen skies.

"A treacherous attack, *Hazzoor*," remarked Jaffar Khan; "one sees very few spent cartridges."

Humorous lines sketched about Roark's mouth faded when he replied, "Mohmand Din seems devilishly eager to prove his Afghan blood."

"Aye, *Hazzoor*," agreed the Rissal-dar-major, reining aside from the disemboweled corpse of a small boy. "It was an evil hour for Durpal* and the Frontier when Allah summoned the noble Rao Singh to Nirvana. *Wagh!* There was a man!"

"A damned fine old fellow and a wise one," slowly returned the lancer captain. "Though I can't see why he named Mohmand Din heir apparent. He's always been up to mischief."

"By Allah, look! Here is some one left alive!"

From a patch of sugar cane was creeping a beggar so desperately filthy that, when he cringed before Masheen, the mare shied away.

Hurriedly a big bearded sergeant unslung his automatic and leveled it at the verminous wretch; for not three days back a fanatic had murdered the 25th's senior major by a similar subterfuge.

"Halt, thou mangy son of a jackal! Fall back or die!"

Whining in terror, the beggar flung himself flat on the road. "Live a thousand years, O noblest of *sahibs*; beat me not for a bearer of ill tidings!"

BREATH checked in his throat, Roark called, "Speak up; don't lie there yammering."

"Know, then, Magnificence, three other villages have been burnt. Like a mad wolf, Naim Shah, the new *Nawab's* general, rages the length of the border!"

"Isn't that a help!" Roark muttered.

So Naim Shah, that tigerish Afghan outlaw, had joined the revolt; Roark felt his heart contract as if squeezed in a wire snare, but all he said was, "It is nothing. Go remind all you meet that the arm of the British *Raj* is as strong as ever and that its eyes are many as the stars."

"But, *Sahib*," whined the wretch in the dust, "every one in Janabstan knows that British troops are scattered and very, very few. Allah smite me if I lie, but terror stalks the market

* For obvious reasons Durpal and Janabstan are imaginary states, though typical of many petty frontier kingdoms.

places, and many young men are eager to serve Mohmand Din. Spies stir them to madness!"

A whiff of smoke bearing with it a stench very similar to scorched beef made Roark's nostrils wrinkle as he said, "The British *Raj* will continue to protect its subjects, so advise those hot young men to think twice before they trust in Mohmand Din."

While making a pretense of adjusting a stirrup leather, Roark bent lower towards the beggar and in an undertone added, "You look neater than usual, Desaulles."

"Thanks, Larry, you look a bit sweated up yourself." Then in an urgent undertone, "Naim Shah's raiding column is headed northeast. Might see if you can sting him, though you have to give long odds."

"We'll start on his trail at once. How's the situation in general?"

"With only a single lancer regiment we haven't a chance of defending Duralp," mumbled the spy, "and Mohmand Din knows it. He's concentrating his hill tribes in a hurry and will move inside of forty-eight hours."

"Any orders?"

"Yes. The colonel says you're to chase Naim Shah only as far as the Border, then report back to Field Headquarters instantly."

"What if I can corner him over the line?" Eagerness crept into the young captain's voice. "I'd give an eye-tooth to bag a famous raider like Naim Shah."

"Makes no difference. Colonel Bullitt wants you to report back in a hurry, and 'orders is orders,' as they say at Sand'urst."

"Which way is Naim Shah riding?"

"Towards Amalyeh."

"Amalyeh!" All in an instant Roark had aged ten years.

"Yes. But if you hurry, the Afghan will probably head back for the Border via the ruins of Es Shab—it's shorter that way."

"Thanks, old chap." Then, as a couple of Indian N. C. O.'s rode closer, Desaulles whined, "Live a thousand years, Protector of the Poor! Can you spare this wretch a few annas?"

"Here." Reluctantly, Roark slid aside his holstered Webley to fumble in a side pocket.

"Quiller got across the Border last night," Desaulles whispered. "Gave me this just before he was killed. I can't make head or tail of it."

EVEN as he flung a coin to his "loathsome" brother officer,

Roark felt a hard, round object thrust into his hand. For the moment, however, he gave it no attention and rode on, leaving the spy to scream thanks in flawless Urdu accents.

So Amalyeh was in danger, and lovely, dark haired Andrea Lennox was there! Roark's hands tightened on the reins. A vision of the American girl's quaintly appealing face materialized in the heart of a dust devil whirling down the road. Why couldn't the two of them stop bickering long enough to get married? Headstrong, that's what Andrea was, and he too young and too deeply in love to handle her.

What a row they'd had the last time they'd met!

"I tell you there is great danger," he had said. "Amalyeh was safe enough when Rao Singh was on the throne, but Mohmand Din's another story."

How those little sparkles of devilishness had played in her eyes when she retorted, "In twenty years there's been no trouble along this part of the

frontier, Larry. I can't understand why Mohmand Din's got everybody so upset; after all, his kingdom of Durpal isn't very big."

"Perhaps, but the Durpalese are tough fighters, and he has many friends. For example, over two thousand hill riflemen joined him last week."

Absently the tired young captain's hand crept to his breast pocket.

"Enjoying Amalyeh," Andrea's last note had said. "Better come and try for the famous white tiger—I want to paint him."

The column had covered perhaps half a mile in its pursuit of the fleet Afghan outlaw before Roark pulled the spy's gift from his gauntlet, and to his amazement beheld nothing more exciting than an ordinary English walnut. After shaking the nut with no result, he then twisted it sideways, and, lo, it came apart, revealing the spring device which had held its halves together.

"Ah, it'd take Desaulles to ask me riddles at a time like this." A puzzled twist came to the sunburned captain's generously wide mouth when he noted a number of unfamiliar native characters scratched on the shell's interior.

"Can you read this?" He passed it over to Jaffar Khan.

That worthy, after perplexedly fingering his red dyed beard, nodded gravely. "Where did you get this, Hazzoor?"

"Why do you ask?" Roark evaded—one could not be too careful.

"Because one has only to look. The message is scratched with a needle and brought out with blood." His taut brown features gilded by the sunset light, the 25th's officer squinted into one of the walnut shells.

"It is written in Baluch. *Wagh!*"

Jaffar Khan started as if stung by a scorpion and his jaw dropped. Then he looked wildly at Roark. "Could this be true?"

"Could what be true?" Roark gave vent to a rare impatience. "Give me the message, man, and don't sit there gibbering."

"Of course it is impossible, Roark Sahib, but this message seems to have been written by Rao Singh, and it was dated but *three days ago!*"

"That is absurd!" cried the adjutant. "Every one knows Rao Singh's been dead over a month."

WHAT could the late *Nawab* of Durpal's name have to do with this enigmatic message? The lancer captain recalled the old ruler's sudden death and remembered seeing Mohmand Din shedding crocodile tears behind his predecessor's gem encrusted catafalque. He had even seen the corpse of Rao Singh lying with hands clasped over the hilt of his scimitar.

His collar ornaments dully gleaming, the Indian officer shook his turbaned head. "Not if what this says is true. Of course it is a lie—here is a rough translation:

*To Colonel Bullitt Sahib:
August 10.*

Was drugged, not dead. Mohmand holds me prisoner beneath peacock room. Torturing me until I reveal private treasure. Come quickly or all is lost. Let Roark advise.

Rao Singh.

"And there is what purports to be his signature."

There ensued a silence so complete that the *clip-clop* of hoofs and the whine of a million voracious flies sounded maddeningly loud.

"Beware, *Sahib!*" warned the adju-

tant. "This is a very clever snare. Captain Roark Sahib, you should feel complimented."

"Don't be spoiling my testimonial," Roark laughed. "I wonder if it is a trap?"

"A clever snare and nothing else, *Sahib*," insisted Jaffar Khan. "Why else would your name be mentioned? All Durpal knows you have forgotten more concerning this frontier than all the rest of us will ever suspect."

"Does the job look convincing?" Roark shot his Rissaldar-major a keen glance.

"Who can be sure, *Sahib*?" Reluctantly Jaffar Khan picked up the shells again. "The signature is clever enough to look genuine, and there are even certain mistakes in spelling peculiar to Rao Singh. Allah knows I have translated many of the *Nawab's* dispatches."

"So have many other persons here and in Shab," darkly pointed out the adjutant. "Indeed, Roark Sahib, this can only be a clever ruse to put you out of the way."

"Possibly, but I'm wondering if our only real chance of saving Janabstan doesn't lie here?" Frowning, he fingered the walnut shells. "After all, Leftenant Quiller brought them out of Shab."

"Allah alone knows who gave them to Quiller Sahib."

"Who knows, indeed?" The sunburned captain grinned and brushed a fly from Masheen's dusty neck. "It's questions like that which make life interesting. But just suppose, Jaffar Khan, that Rao Singh could be proven to be alive? What then?"

"Mohmand Din's feudal lords would throw his carcass to the dogs! All Durpal worshiped the old man."

"They would," agreed the adjutant,

and gloomily eyed the setting sun. "But even so, Roark Sahib, the orders are to remain this side of the Border, and an attempt to reach the prisoner would be suicide."

"If Rao was able to send out the walnut, it stands to reason one of his jailers is sympathetic. And remember another important point; Shab lies only a few miles from the Border. However, as you say, orders are orders." Roark drew a deep breath and glanced down the long double line of swaying lances.

"It's getting cooler; I think the horses can stand a little trot."

"We must ride harder," grumbled Jaffar Khan, "if we are to come up with Naim Shah."

"—And force him away from Amal-yeh," Roark surprised himself by adding. "Trot, ho!"

REFRESHED by chill air pouring down from the mountains, the dark faced troopers munched chupatties from the haversacks, smoked, and hazarded guesses on the impending battle as they trotted along a cart path which led ever farther into a wild tangle of jungle.

"It is well that we have some light later on." Jaffar Khan indicated the moon rising above the tree tops.

Despite the weary column's best speed, it was nearly midnight before a wavering smoky glare on the horizon showed where Mohmand Din's Naim Shah had last pounced. Then came a faint sound as of hickory coals crackling in the distance, and many a nodding turbaned head snapped up.

"That'll be another village gone." Briskly Roark tapped the ashes from his pipe.

"That's good; maybe we'll catch them heavy with loot."

"Can we not ride faster?" Jaffar Khan's dark features lit.

Though Roark's every instinct reminded him of Andrea Lennox's pressing peril and prompted a headlong gallop to hurry Naim Shah's retreat, he replied calmly, "Patience, old friend; we must reserve some strength in the horses for the enemy."

All at once the distant shots died into silence and a shrill yell, infinitely barbaric, arose beyond a tamarisk and babul forest concealing the doomed village.

Presently a scout came galloping back and saluted.

"We must ride faster, *Hazzoor*. Those sons of swine have winded us and begin to drop loot as they spur towards the ruins of Es Shab!"

"Es Shab?" Ever pessimistic, the adjutant cast his captain an unhappy look. "Such a ruin is a very dangerous place for cavalry, Captain Sahib."

A grin of savage pleasure on his shadowy features, Roark nodded briskly. "Splendid! Makes the prospect of a shindy all the more interesting."

CHAPTER II.

BEYOND THE SWINGING STONE.

THE fact that Naim Shah's retreat was in the general direction of Shab, his master's capital, was by no means lost upon Lawrence Roark. Despite his twenty hours of hard riding, the young captain was pleased to find his brain still functioning clearly.

The Durpalese capital, he knew, lay just across the nearly impassable Dahan range, now looming tall and dark in the moonlight. A scant mile or two as the crow flies separated

Shab from the ruins of its older namesake, yet those few miles were barred by precipitous cliffs.

"If it were only possible to come up with Naim Shah before he reaches the ruins," Jaffar Khan muttered, and glanced uneasily at the moonlit jungle. "Devils, cobras and the white tiger rule Es Shab, *Hazzoor*."

"Nonsense," chuckled Roark. "The white man-eater hasn't been seen in two years; he cleared out just a week before I could get my outfit together."

"Doubtless ghost foxes warned him, Captain Sahib," quite seriously ventured the adjutant. "It is well the white tiger went away. In a single year he ate a hundred and ten of his people. He is said to measure fourteen feet from muzzle to tip."

"I doubt it, but I'd like to have had a chance at him. Never did have much luck with tigers, though."

Ever more thickly the invaders' trail became dotted by an amazing miscellany of loot; here lay a copper kettle, there a bundle of clothes, yonder a sewing machine, and now and then more pitiful jettison in the body of a child who, originally abducted for slavery or ransom, had become too heavy for a tiring Durpalese pony.

The raiders, Roark learned from a youth who had been abandoned for dead, were quietly dropping out of the column and hiding one by one, but there was a nucleus of some fifty-five or sixty still riding at Naim Shah's nimble heels.

"Among the ruins, Naim Shah plans a trap for you, my lord," warned the dying boy. "Beware of them."

It seemed as if those hunting trips which had led him into the ruined city after sambur and leopards might prove unexpectedly useful. He drew a mental ground plan of the deserted capital,

now all but smothered beneath kareela, wild grape and a hundred other sinewy vines, and found it not overly complicated because Es Shab's humbler homes had long since crumbled into the dust from which they had risen. And in desolate, lonely splendor were the royal palace, the treasury, and the exquisite temples of Siva, Hanuman, and Krishna. In fact, Es Shab was now little longer than a quarter of a mile on its widest side.

In Es Shab baboons frolicked over the laps of great, placid faced idols, kites nested atop those same lofty ramparts on which the *Nawab's* armored sentries had kept their vigils, and jackals and leopards reared their cubs in frescoed halls where small golden belled feet had danced for the *Nawab's* pleasure.

Once the ruins were sighted Roark sent detachments galloping off to cover the flank—an almost sheer cliff would take care of the rear—while he himself remained before the ruins. By all the rules he *should* have the deadly Afghan adventurer neatly cornered.

Yet why should so wily a raider as Naim Shah permit himself to be driven into a *cul de sac* like Es Shab? The thing wasn't quite logical. Jaffar Khan, when asked, suggested that the pursuit had been so vigorous and unexpected as to leave the Afghan no time to think; the adjutant offered the more practical explanation that this was a cleverly conceived ambushade. Still another grizzled veteran of half a hundred Border wars tightened a sodden bandage about his left forearm while suggesting that Mohmand Din's astute lieutenant had given Es Shab as a rendezvous to which pursuing British columns might be lured, only to be in turn cornered among converging parties of raiders.

"Dismount and check equipment," ordered the lancer captain. "We'll take a look-see and attack at dawn."

SOMEWHAT stiffly the lancers dismounted, eased girths, wiped out the nostrils of their weary Baluchis, and then fell to rubbing their legs. Only then did they pause to snatch a drink from their water bottles.

"Where has that Afghan jackal gone to ground, *Hazzoor?*?" Jaffar Khan queried.

"There, I think." Roark indicated the bold, moonlit outlines of the ancient treasury. "It's easy to defend and hard to attack."

Quite distinctly he could hear his flanking columns crashing their way through the jungle; now sounded the startled squawk of a peacock routed from its roost, and again came the furious chatter of nocturnal monkeys.

"Listening for the white tiger's roar?" he grinned when Jaffar Khan cupped a hand over his ear.

"This was his home, *Hazzoor*. And I have heard he is not truly dead."

"Well, we'd better forget him, and post pickets. It wouldn't be funny if another raiding column came up and pinned us between it and Naim Shah.

"How soon to dawn?" he presently demanded. "It's time we got those machine rifles posted."

"Not above an hour, Captain Sahib. I heard a jungle cock crow."

"Good. Send runners to say my bugler will sound a charge in the early dawn. Carbines and knives will be used, and the attack will consist of a united rush on foot and from three sides."

Presently he passed the word to advance, and, pistol in hand, he set off among underbrush which showered dew in chilly cascades.

On the whole, the first stages were covered in silence, though surprised jackals snarled and scuttled off into vine shrouded crevices, and showers of stones followed by grunts described the fall of some trooper who had trusted his weight to a decayed section of battlement.

Faintly limned by the paling moon, great stone faces set in terrible expressions peered down on these turbaned men in khaki, hundreds of vine draped stone cobras expanded their hoods and seemed poised to strike, but still the lancers toiled on, eager to add a fresh chapter to the 25th's already grimly distinguished history.

Past a marble pool once the delight of *peris* and pale handed concubines, but now broken and green with stagnant water, Roark crept, his eyes straining in the half light. What! Somewhere on the right a rifle banged suddenly, and the summit of the treasury sparkled with a series of brief, orange-red flashes.

"Sound off!" Roark flung at a bugler struggling along in his wake, and at once two quick, imperative blasts rang out, whereupon the dim ruins rang to the bloodthirsty clamor of charging troopers.

RIFLES spat almost in their faces, and a few of the attackers crumpled kicking, but the rest swarmed over a line of broken battlements to promptly scramble down towards what had once been a level courtyard. In the center of it a squarish outline marked the ancient royal treasury, and near its base milled a number of ghostly figures which paused every now and then to kneel and fire, all the while yelling like a pack of jackals on the hunt. First one and then the other machine gun com-

menced to chatter in staccato bursts and to drive back from the parapets a swarm of overbold tribesmen.

"*Aie-e-e!*" A lancer to Roark's left squatted suddenly, clutching at his leg while a companion used his carbine butt to crush to earth an enormous cobra upon which the luckless Khalil had stepped.

"Come on! Remember Amalyeh!" Leaving the stricken *sowar* to slash his wound and to adjust a tourniquet, Lawrence Roark headed a furious charge at the treasury, though Jaffar Khan shouted, "Don't expose yourself so, *Hazzoor.*"

Bullets hissed and moaned through the sour-smelling half light, terrific gods poised thunderbolts of stone, and reports banged on all sides, and Roark felt a familiar but indescribable exhilaration.

"*Ai-e-e! Qua hai! Allah, I am hit!*" More than once such cries predicted another vacancy on the 25th's muster rolls.

Near the treasury's low vaulted entrance a group of fifteen or twenty tribesmen made a determined stand; so, straddling a fallen column, Roark paused to level his Webley and by a quick succession of shots drove them indoors. The Durpalese promptly began firing from above, but, as Roark had astutely expected they would, they almost invariably overshot on account of the elevation.

Was Naim Shah almost within his grasp? Fiercely eager to find out, Roark yielded to his Celtic impetuosity and headed a storming party of berserk Khalils. These abandoned their carbines and uttered grunts of satisfaction on drawing the terrible leaf shaped knives they favored for close quarters.

Just inside the door an enormous

ghazi out of eastern Afghanistan, his greasy hair streaming wild, roared, "Yi hai!" and lunged at Roark with his tulwar; a split second earlier, however, the raging white man had seen him, and that diabolic, dark face magically disintegrated before the Webley's discharge.

Knives flashed, hands tipped by writhing fingers clawed at Lawrence Roark, and more than once a foul breath fanned his face, but the struggle raged on with the raiders snarling and fighting like cornered wolves.

In short order all defenders of the ground floor had been annihilated—simply overwhelmed by a force obviously greater than they had expected.

Then commenced a determined struggle for a broad stair leading up into the treasury itself, and, during ten or fifteen minutes more, the mossy old building resounded to shots, yells and dreadful whimpering noises. All at once the victors found themselves standing amid the breaking dawn on the treasury's topmost platform and viewing, far below, that same corpse littered courtyard across which they had charged.

"At last the work is done, Captain Sahib," panted a tall, white toothed *sowar*.

"Not yet," Roark corrected. "Naim Shah or his corpse must be found. Scatter! Find him! Rout him out!"

A determined search through roofless galleries, up broken stairs, and in dozens of moldering rooms brought to light only two or three wretched skulkers, and, in an underground vault of the temple of Hanuman, an abandoned prisoner who seemed quite incredulous of finding himself still alive. Near him the eager lancers discovered a mound of valuable loot, but of Naim

Shah and several of his officers no trace could be found, even after Roark had personally superintended a second search.

Sick with disappointment, Roark had paused for a pull at his water bottle, when Jaffar Khan came up.

"*Hazzoor*, what shall be done with this pig of an Afridi?" With his still dripping *kukri* he indicated the rescued prisoner. "I mistrust his looks."

"Mercy! Have mercy, Cherisher of the Oppressed!" The wretch fell on his face, all the while calling down the blessings of Allah upon his deliverers in general and Roark Sahib in particular.

"And by your leave I will speak—"

SOMETHING about the lean, trembling, and wretchedly dressed fellow's manner attracted Roark's attention. Obviously the Afridi wished to speak, but seemed reluctant to do so before the assembled officers. Employing, therefore, that tact which had made him beloved of all ranks, Roark quickly dismissed all his subordinates save Jaffar Khan by detailing them to various duties.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"I am called Kushal, O Protector of the Poor, once steward of the furs in the palace at Shah."

"Until how recently?"

"Until Mohmand Din—may Shaitan's vultures rend his liver a thousand ages!—became *Nawab* and cast me out."

"You have something to tell me?"

"Yes, Prince among Warriors."

"See that thou speak truth," rasped Jaffar Khan, and fingered his *kukri*.

The wretched fellow cringed and groveled nearer to Roark's boots.

"You have not yet found Naim Shah and his officers?"

"No." Roark frowned and fixed the speaker with closer attention.

"Perhaps I can tell you where to find him—"

"Speak up, then, and if it's money you want, you shall have a hundred rupees the instant we return to Churani."

Wringing his lean, thong secured hands, the Afridi burst into a tearful torrent of protestations. He was, he confessed, a worm of no importance; yet he was grateful for his life and he greatly wished to see Mohmand Din humbled to the dust. Yes, he thought he knew whither Naim Shah had gone, because he had crawled behind a ruined cistern and had seen the strange thing happen. In the depths of the temple of Hanuman, Naim Shah, it seemed, had pressed on a piece of carved stone, and lo—a door had appeared in the temple's wall of solid rock.

"He lies in his teeth," grunted Jaffar Khan, quite unimpressed. "Let us begone— Remember, *Hazzoor*, we have orders to return to Churani with all speed."

"Wait a minute." Roark held up a detaining hand. "Where has Naim Shah gone?"

The ragged Afridi hesitated a moment, obviously terrified of the Rissaldar-major's forbidding expression, but at length he quavered, "To Shab, Your Honor."

"Thou lying jackal! How dare you waste the time of the Captain Sahib?" And Jaffar Khan's muscular hands shook the Afridi as a north wind shakes a pine. "To Shab, indeed!"

"Let him be! The poor devil's either delirious or crazy."

Whereupon Jaffar Khan reluctantly dropped his lean and wiry victim, who promptly collapsed and lay peering up from piteously terrified eyes.

On second thought Roark lingered, though in the act of turning away.

"Answer me, you rascal! How could Naim Shah go to Shab? Has he wings to fly over this mountain? Or has he the feet of a spider that can climb sheer walls?"

"I cannot explain, O Protector of the Poor, but, before Allah, I twice heard him say he was going to Shab and at once—"

"Better not believe him, *Hazzoor*," earnestly pleaded the hawk faced Rissaldar-major. "All Afridis are liars and the sons of liars. And besides, how did he get to Amalyeh?"

"THREE days ago I sought refuge here with such remnants of my possessions as the new *Nawab's* officers thought too worthless to seize," sobbed the pitiable creature. "My wives, my children were seized for the profit of Mohmand Din. Aye, because I was a humble steward to Rao Singh—may Allah cherish his soul—I was beaten and driven forth from the Alabaster Pavilion—as were all the old *Nawab's* servants. Under the protection of the *Raj*, my lord, I was hoping to live honorably and at peace." Tears coursed down Kushal's lean brown cheeks. "Have mercy on me, and, though I am not a brave man, let me help Your Honor."

Seated on a fallen stone rich with bas-relief, Roark thoughtfully regarded the rescued Afridi. A likely tale? Well, yes, and no—but it was interesting to learn that Mohmand Din had made a clean sweep of the old palace servants.

"I will believe you if you can tell me how Naim Shah can reach Shab."

"Am I a *saddhu* or a fakir to know how it is possible?" wept the steward. "Nevertheless, Your Honor,

I saw the mountain swallow up Naim Shah, his officers, and the choicest loot. Perhaps they still hide beyond the swinging stone."

"Aye," Jaffar Khan growled, "ready to murder us, no doubt."

In tramped the adjutant, his thin legs splashed with blood and his *kukri* still secured to his wrist by a thong.

"The sun is showing, Captain Sahib, the column is formed, and it is far to Churani."

"Very well. Tell Rukan, my orderly, to report here with the folding candle lanterns from my saddle bag. The rest of you start back to Churani by the river road. Jaffar Khan and I will soon overtake you."

"Surely, *Hazzoor*," burst out the Rissaldar-major in angry Pushtu, "you do not believe this Afridi swine?"

"I'm not forgetting that Naim Shah's disappearance hasn't been explained and that his capture is damnably important."

CHAPTER III.

IN THE PASSAGE OF DEATH.

THE central shrine of Hanuman's temple must, at no distant date, have served as the lair of jackals, so strong was the disgusting stench of the beasts and the carrion on which they lived. Well gnawed bones and rubble crackled loud beneath the boots of Lawrence Roark and his three companions when, holding the folding candle lanterns on high, they descended into Kushal's late prison. The feeble lights soon revealed the countless figures in an elaborate and beautifully executed frieze depicting a legendary war between men and monkeys.

In support of Kushal's story, the

searchers noted a spent Enfield cartridge case, a half smoked cheroot, and the fresh rind of an orange. Twice, enormous hamadryad cobras slipped smoothly from sight, and once a big and loathsome bandicoot scuttled by.

"What a jolly little spot," commented Roark, "splendid place for a murder. Think those witnesses would give us away?" And he pointed upwards where thousands of vampires, looking just now very like outlandish plums, dangled head down from the intricate stonework of the ceiling. The sour reek of their droppings grew almost choking when, with Kushal a step or two in advance—a precaution insisted on by the Rissaldar-major—the party passed between a long double rank of monkey headed figures and, descending a flight of battered steps, found itself in a huge dim shrine, the size of which could only be guessed at by the candles' inadequate light.

"Yonder, my lord, lies the wall which swallowed up the accursed Afghan and his leaders."

"Shades of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," Roark thought. Had Kushal indeed learned the open sesame?

"Pig-headed shame of your mother," snarled Jaffar Khan, "there is no door. Yonder wall is carved from the mountainside itself!" And the angry Indian officer's square-cut beard bristled so fiercely that Kushal gasped and stepped quickly to interpose Roark.

"*Aie-e-e!* Have patience. The swinging stone is to the right!"

"How is it operated?"

"From where I lay last night, Your Honor, I could not be sure, but I think Naim Shah touched the head of a monkey prince."

Tremblingly Kushal's small hand indicated an immensely intricate relief to the altar's left.

In four long strides Roark was confronting it, but before making any attempt to locate the proper head he followed his orderly's suggestion and drew his pistol. Holding his lantern close to the stone, he then examined every inch of the carved surface, but so elaborate was the relief and so deep were the joints in the stonework that he could distinguish nothing.

"Hold the lantern, Jaffar Khan. I shall have to use both hands."

"Have a care, *Hazzoor!*" warned the grizzled veteran and, stepping back, he leveled his revolver at Kushal's stomach.

"If this is a trick, thou unwashed descendant of black pariah dogs, thou shalt die screaming with a bullet in thy belly. Later thy body will be wrapped in a sow's hide and flung to the vultures."

For all his preoccupation, Roark did not miss the hatred blazing in the Afridi's yellowish eyes when he cringed before the Khalil, whose tribe was an age-old foe of his.

One after the other, Roark pushed and pulled at cold, dung flecked ape heads grinning fixedly into the wavering candle beams. Ere long he was both hot and anxious—there must have been nearly a hundred simian heads, all fashioned from soft coral limestone.

He was cursing himself for a gullible fool when, on bracing himself to reach the highest row of heads, his knee came in contact with something which seemed to give a little. On glancing down he noted the outstretched paws of a monkey warrior protruding slowly from among the vine leaf designs surrounding them. Something like an electric shock seized him when he gripped the movable paws and thrust them as far into the bas-relief's background as they would go.

"Look out, Rukan! Stand ready, Jaffar!"

ALMOST simultaneously a soft rushing noise as of water forced through a leaky valve filled the shrine, preluding a gentle rumbling sound. Immediately dozens of bats abandoned their sleeping positions and commenced to shriek and flutter about, beating at Roark's turbaned head with leathery, verminous wings.

"*Allah Akbar!*" The lantern wavered sharply as Jaffar Khan sprang back.

"*Sede wror me?*"* yelled the orderly. "Look out, my lord!"

Smoothly an irregular vertical crack was materializing in the design and gradually widened before Roark's startled eyes until an opening big enough to permit the passage of a horse yawned black before the breathless group.

Apparently motivated by hydraulic power of some kind, the stone door, which was not nearly so thick as the lancer captain had anticipated, swung back until a strong rush of damp, cold air beat in Roark's perspiration bathed face.

"As Your Honor sees," cried Kushal, grinning at Jaffar Khan's patent dismay, "I did not lie!"

No shots came ringing out of the blank velvet blackness, and when Jaffar Khan's hoarse tones called a peremptory command to surrender, only a muffled echo answered him.

"Wedge that door with a stone, Rukan," directed Roark, well aware of the ticklish problem this discovery presented. "Now let's see what's what."

A careful reconnoitering of the entrance, however, revealed only an apparently endless flight of downward

* What is this?

steps interrupted here and there by small landings and vacant doorways opening off of them. With the exception of occasional bits of masonry, the whole affair had been cut from solid rock.

"There is nothing down there," Jaffar Khan breathlessly announced, "saving snakes, evil spirits, and perhaps the ghost of the white tiger. Do you not hear his distant roaring, *Haz-zoor?*?"

"You seem to forget that Naim Shah is down there somewhere—and as for that roaring, it's probably nothing but an underground stream."

"Where does Your Honor think it could lead?" Kushal demanded.

"To some hole in the bush," dourly suggested Jaffar Khan. "By this time Naim Shah—may all the *djinns* of Eblis fly away with him!—is probably miles away. Come, Captain Sahib, we have wasted much time and shall have to ride hard to come up with the troops."

But, torn by savagely conflicting emotions, Lawrence Roark lingered, frowning and fingering his automatic. At length he turned on the Afridi, who looked as if he did not know what to think of the prospects.

"You are sure you heard Naim Shah mention going to Shab?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Your pardon, Captain Sahib." Jaffar Khan drew himself up very straight; "this is an evil place, and our horses wait us. They are tired, and the troops are in the command of Ram Dass—a good man, but inexperienced."

THEREIN lay the crux of Roark's uncertainty. Somewhere down that passage had disappeared a man second only to Mohmand Din in

his inflexible hatred of the British *Raj*. But Kushal himself was not sure where this dark passage led. To Shab, possibly, but more likely to death in the dark—a more terrible form of extinction than any other. Pitfalls, traps—the old kings had been very clever about guarding their wealth—cobras, scorpions, and who knew what ferocious beasts might not be using this forgotten gallery as a lair?

Into his mind crept an impression of the walnut shells. Rao Singh? Was he still breathing? Colonel Bullitt thought not—and the Army Council seldom made commanding officers of officers who guessed wrong. Suppose that, by some strange combination of circumstances, he could reach that dungeon below the peacock room in the Alabaster Pavilion? Stranger things had happened in India's amazing history.

Of course the commanding officer had issued direct orders for his prompt return, and every deeply ingrained soldierly instinct within him rebelled at the thought of deliberate disobedience. Worse still, there was no doubt that his frontier experience was needed by the defenders of Janabstan—aye, badly needed. Yet deep within him he knew that all his advice and experience could not restrain an avalanche. A successful defense was impossible without those many, many reinforcements which would not be forthcoming.

He stared unseeingly at the frieze of grinning stone monkeys. To disobey meant being cashiered, probably imprisonment and a public disgrace which would shatter the last years of a fine old couple in far-away Devonshire. How much he owed them! Yet, was there not a greater duty? Two million brown skinned people had

surrendered their arms, trusting to the *Raj* which, for a fatal week, would fail them. Was he not committed to that duty higher than blind obedience to orders?

Lawrence Roark drew a long breath and by the candlelight fixed his subordinates with an intent, deeply searching look.

"What you say is very true, Jaffar Khan, but I must do what I feel is right. And that is to pursue Naim Shah."

Purposely he made no mention of the message in the walnut.

Deeply agitated, the Rissaldar-major cast a murderous glance at Kushal and then saluted as if on parade.

"As your oldest fellow officer, *Hazzoor*, I beg you not to thus throw away your career! For the honor of the regiment, the Colonel Sahib's orders must be obeyed! A thousand times you yourself have told this to the young *sowars*—a hundred times you have punished those who disobeyed in even the smallest matter."

"True," Roark admitted heavily, and raised a quivering hand to his cheek. "Yet a man must also obey his brain. Don't worry, I am not going to ask you and Rukan to disobey. Take this Afridi and rejoin the troop."

"Please, my lord!" pleaded the Afridi. "Let me have yonder abandoned lance and keep me by you—it is death to send me away with these Khalils." His expression grew surprisingly savage. "Believe me, I will be useful. I swear it!"

In the candlelight Jaffar Khan's well polished buttons and regimental insignia gleamed when he marched a few steps forward—dark eyes tragic. "You shall not go alone, Roark Sahib—too many times we have heard the Dark Angel's wings together. Rukan

and I will stay by you, *Hazzoor*; but in here"—he touched a row of faded campaign ribbons on his tunic breast—"I feel it is not wise." His deep voice was graver than Roark had heard it during ten long years. "Down this passage lies death."

CHAPTER IV.

THE WHITE TIGER.

THERE were two hundred and thirty-five chipped and battered steps in the long downward flight leading from the door of the balanced stone. The series of portals opening off the little landings proved to be small, rock-hewn chambers fitted with crumbling shelves of limestone which must once have supported bars and chests of silver and gold. There were many of these, but the tight jawed lancer captain thought it wise to investigate each one. Snakes of different sorts became uncomfortably numerous, but as a rule slid quickly out of sight.

"No point in having our retreat cut off," he explained.

"Water has risen here, it seems," Rukan pointed out ere they had descended halfway, and, following his gesture, Roark beheld what certainly appeared to be a muddy mark along the walls of the tunnel. Puzzled, he made a closer examination and was vaguely troubled to recognize river silt unmistakably deposited in certain joints of the masonry.

"Probably has something to do with the *Nawab's* private trout stream down there." Roark grinned and pointed down the tunnel. Below the rushing noise first remarked upon by Jaffar Khan was sounding louder and more distinctive. "I fancy the old kings had

some way of flooding these treasure chambers in times of danger. It shouldn't be too difficult a job, since the whole Dahad range is full of waterfalls and streams."

Rukan's eyes whitened a little and, clutching his lance more tightly, he glanced anxiously over his shoulder. "Allah forbid that water should be turned into this tunnel! *Wagh!* We would all drown in the dark, like mongooses in flood time! And not have as much of a chance as they would."

Near the foot of the long stair Jaffar Khan sprang back uttering a hoarse shout of dismay, and Roark remained in frozen horror watching a seven-foot cobra capella come sliding leisurely towards him across the passage's rubble littered floor. The deadly creature paused, reared itself upright and expanded its hood; ruby eyes glittering, it hissed defiance; then, losing interest in those four immobile figures, it vanished through a huge crack in the wall.

"Splendid spot for a delirium tremens ward," Roark remarked over the increased thunder of the invisible waters, and he wiped a chilly film of perspiration from his forehead. "Wonder where this gallery leads?"

"To Jehannum," growled the Risaldar-major, and, veteran though he was, the hand clutching his lance grip was quivering.

Kushal, being barefooted, kept his whole attention on the snakes.

"Feel that fresh air?" While their boots rang dismally in the shadowy tunnel, Roark tried to encourage his companions.

"Means there must be ventilating shafts somewhere above us. I suppose that's how the snakes and animals get in and out."

"No doubt, Your Honor," Kushal

agreed, but kept his eyes on the glowering Khalils.

AT the foot of the stairs the tunnel swerved sharp right and at once the roar of water became all but deafening. Here, Roark felt, would be an ideal place for an ambushade. No figures leaped out at him, however, and no shots raked the misty darkness; but when the lancer captain, heart in mouth, rounded the corner he stood in rigid amazement.

Tumbling out of abysmal blackness a sizable waterfall was crashing down to create a mad whirlpool that swirled but a scant two feet below the ledge along which the party was advancing. Deeply impressed, the group paused by tacit consent, refreshed by the cool mist clinging to their taut and sweaty features.

A rainbow-colored nimbus quickly gathered about the candle lanterns, adding to the unreal effect.

"What devil's work is that?" cried Jaffar Khan.

He was pointing towards a great iron chain which, soaring upwards into a narrow shaft, speedily became lost beyond the feeble candles' beams. Below it was arranged a number of primitive gears manipulated by ponderous iron bars and a crude windlass.

"I've got it!" Roark shouted above the thunderous roar of water. "We're standing on a sort of sluice gate. If it were closed it would dam this river until water filled this tunnel and the treasure rooms upstairs. I suppose there must be a valve mechanism hidden somewhere up on the mountain-side. Um, let's see—"

He crossed to the chain shaft and, on peering up it, to his amazement beheld far, far above a tiny patch of daylight.

"Have we not gone far enough, *Hazzoor*, or shall we hunt for ghost tigers in the bowels of the mountain?" Jaffar Khan, like most brave men in a tight place, had apparently resigned himself and was even smiling, though his somber eyes clung to Kushal, who was certainly exhibiting a very convincing uneasiness.

"Come on—Naim Shah can't be very far ahead."

Drenched with mist, Roark hurried across a small stone bridge and eagerly directed his lantern at the first stretch of comparatively dry stone, and there, to his mounting excitement, he discerned the footprints of five men and that of a barefooted boy or woman.

"*Wagh!*" burst out Rukan. "Look! Look! They have indeed gone this way!"

"Give me a weapon of some kind," begged Kushal. "They may be just ahead."

"None but a fool would give fangs to a krait!"* snapped Jaffar Khan. "When the danger comes, it is time enough."

How far ahead the fugitive might be, Roark could not tell. It all depended upon how promptly Mohmand Din's lieutenant had descended into the passage after reaching the ruins. At the most, he would have a three-hours' start.

"We go on, my lord?" Rukan demanded in a voice which shook with dread.

"Of course," came the quiet answer. "Look, the made gallery has ended. Um, this looks like a natural passage—probably an old river bed." And the farther the party advanced, the surer Roark became of his surmise; water smoothed boulders and

pebbles lined a tortuous path which led on into the depths of the Dahad range.

SO absorbed by speculations was Roark that he yelled when Jaffar Khan suddenly seized him and hauled him violently backwards. Bisecting the old river bed and yawning at his very feet was a chasm perhaps thirty feet across! With the backs of his hands prickling like mad, the lancer captain selected a pebble and tossed it into the stygian abyss.

The test was not reassuring; all of seven seconds dragged by before a very faint impact came to the listeners' ears.

"An earthquake crevasse," Roark explained, more to himself than to his companion. "Must be some way around it, since the passage continues on the other side."

By shining his feeble light across the gap, Roark had been barely able to discern a continuance of this river bed.

"My lord, there is no way around," quavered the orderly after a gingerly inspection of the crevasse edge.

"That's nonsense! We know Naim Shah and the rest aren't back of us, and they certainly couldn't have jumped across. Of course there's some way to get over."

"Perhaps steps have been cut down the side, *Hazzoor*." Forthwith the Risaldar-major lay flat, swung a lantern onto his lance point, and held the weapon far out into the velvety blackness. "By Allah! Neither are there any steps!" Then hopefully, "Mayhap Naim Shah and his accursed followers fell to destruction."

"Ah! Look, Roark Sahib!" Kushal was excitedly indicating the extreme right of the chasm edge. Yonder the end of a heavy chain was just visible among the crowding shadows.

* Krait—a very poisonous snake.

Quite mystified, Roark hurried over to it, but presently announced, "I think I understand. The chain is fastened above—by grabbing the end and giving a good kick a man could swing himself across. See? It's still swinging a little; the others must have crossed not so long ago."

"It is a very old chain, *Hazzoor*. And see, this link is almost rusted through," was Jaffar Khan's doubtful comment. "Naim Shah crossed in safety because he is probably lighter than you by thirty pounds."

The orderly quickly found another objection. "Even if one reached the other side, how is one to get back?"

"There's probably another chain over there; anyhow, we'll have to risk it. You go first, Jaffar Khan, then Rukan, then Kushal. I'll go last of all because I'm the heaviest."

Only an instant did the Rissaldar-major hesitate, then hurled his lance across to the other side—shoe foremost, lest its point be injured. Next he strapped one of the lanterns to his belt and seized the chain end.

It was a weird scene, and to his last hour Lawrence Roark could recall every detail of it: the funereal blackness of the chasm, Jaffar Khan retreating as far as he could before running out and taking off in a wide arc. Like twin comets of silver, the Indian officer's spurs flashed through the air, the lantern glimmered wildly as a crashing fall sounded, to be presently followed by a breathless grunt of satisfaction. A second later the chain came rattling and clanking back, and Jaffar Khan got to his feet.

Shaking but game, Rukan successfully followed his uncle's maneuver, and even Kushal in this pinch displayed fortitude unusual in a mere household servant.

Much heavier than any of the other three, Roark had reason to gaze with apprehension at the seriously corroded length of chain between his hands and, as he recalled the pebble's long fall, felt his mouth grow dry. Nevertheless he fought down his unreasoning terror, and sped far out over the abyss. Damn! The chain must have become twisted during Kushal's trip; for, at the very moment he was preparing to loose his grip and jump for the general direction of Jaffar Khan's lantern, the lancer captain was suddenly spun about until he could no longer see his landing place.

What was that? A minor shock as of a link spreading set the hair to writhing on the nape of his neck, and his throat closed spasmodically on realizing that he must for a second time swing out over that awful chasm.

Stars soared before his eyes and he all but lost his grip when he was dashed against the side from which he had originally departed; nevertheless, he managed to brace his feet and get a fresh start.

Once more the single yellow eye of Jaffar Khan's lantern appeared to swoop up at him. Far below it seemed he caught a glimpse of Rukan's extended arms, but he let go to sprawl flat among his followers, skinning one knee and smashing his candle lantern into atoms.

"*Aie-e-e!*" wailed Kushal, and rubbed his bruised kneecaps. "Now we have only one light."

"Be quiet, you fool," snarled the orderly. "Naim Shah may be near."

WITH Rukan's help Roark separated the more or less crushed candle from the lantern's tin and mica wreckage and was inspecting his skinned knee when Jaffar Khan

gave a low cry like that of a hunter calling for silence.

"What is it?" breathed Roark.

But still the Rissaldar-major remained as he had been—in the act of picking up his lance.

"I thought I heard something," he whispered, and his eyes were simply enormous. "A cry like—like that of *shere khan*."

In a breathless tension the four men waited a long ten seconds; then Roark discovered he still had things to learn about fear. From somewhere not far ahead could be distinctly heard a purring snarl ending in a querulous wail. Again the cry came echoing down the old river bed, and Rukan's lance slipped crashing to the rock floor from fingers paralyzed with fear.

"*Shere!* My lord, this is indeed the realm of the ghost tigers! Mayhap that of the White Tiger himself," quavered Jaffar Khan. "*Aie-e-e!* We are lost!"

"Nonsense!" Roark spoke sharply. "That's a tiger on the prowl all right, but it's a real one, and we've got guns and lances."

"Listen—that was a female's cry!" Kushal went to pieces and ran gibbering back to the precipice. "The beasts will tear us," he wailed. "Oh, where is the chain?"

"Go," snapped Jaffar Khan, with a grating laugh. "Go, thou cowardly spawn of Jehannum!"

SOBGING out his terror, the Afridi searched furiously at the chasm's brink, then halted and gave a dreadful cry of desperation.

"We cannot go back! There is no chain on this side—the beasts will rend us. We are trapped, trapped!"

Even leaner than usual were Roark's bony cheeks as he said in a perfectly

normal tone, "In that case, my lad, you may as well dry your tears and stay. Steady now—lancers, advance! Rukan to my left, Jaffar Khan over here!"

Very inadequate indeed was the single lantern's light, but it revealed sconce rings set into the walls and the smoke smudges of torches which might have burned half a thousand years before. To Roark's deeper anxiety, those heart chilling wails suddenly died away; and now a stench of carrion was so strong in the air as to make Jaffar Khan pause and sniff like a dog.

"Somewhere very near the tiger has its lair—see, the passage divides three ways ahead!" And thus the situation became even more perilous.

"These must be ghost tigers," Kushal moaned through teeth chattering like dice in a box. "We are miles from the sun and air."

"One of these branches could very easily lead to a valley in the Dahads," Roark said promptly, having no intention of letting panic get a foothold.

On tramped the three lancers, with the Afridi skulking behind and holding the remaining lantern on high.

"What the devil was that?" Roark suddenly stumbled and on peering downwards felt a current of glacial water supplant the blood in his arteries. Leering blankly up at him were the eye sockets of a human skull; and the marks of powerful teeth were plainly visible on its cranium!

Again that infernal yowling began and this time it was much closer. Invisible fingers seemed to close about the lancer captain's throat and he swallowed so hard that his topee's chin strap cut into his jaws. Every stride made the dreadful truth more inescapable; here was a hank of tangled

black hair, yonder some smoldering rags of printed calico, and now and then a bangle of tarnished silver gleamed amid the gruesome débris.

He cocked his Webley and bade the two Khalils lower their steel tipped weapons to the "on guard" position.

"What was that?" From the blackness *behind* had sounded a dull rustling of disturbed bones, and, whimpering like a beaten cur, Kushal drew nearer.

"Nothing. A bat, perhaps." Roark felt a temptation to whistle.

A few yards farther along he felt Jaffar Khan's hand on his wrist.

"Shine your light backwards, thou Afridi dog," breathed the Rissaldar-major, though a tiger's coughing snarl sounded in the gloom ahead.

"Allah save us!" gasped Rukan, and Kushal uttered a bleating cry like that of a hurt sheep. As for Roark, he stood fighting down an insensate fear; for, not sixty feet behind Kushal, a pair of apparently disembodied eyes shone greenish-red. Once, twice they blinked, lambent and unspeakably menacing.

"Hold the light higher—" Roark breathed and then indeed his blood froze in his veins.

Before him crouched the most tremendous tiger he had ever seen, and its coat was of an ivory white faintly barred with pale brown stripes!

"Allah in heaven!" shrieked Kushal. "It is the white man-eater!"

And he dropped the lantern.

CHAPTER V.

MAN-EATER.

BY the time Roark had retrieved the fallen lantern the vast brute had slunk from sight into one of the innumerable holes which now lined

the old river bed, but its angry yowls made the whole stalactite-hung area resound.

In immobile horror the four men remained for some moments listening to the stealthy padding of enormous feet and the click of disturbed bones. So tense was the silence that the patter of water dripping from the river bed's roof sounded loud as the clapping of hands.

"There's a tigress, too," Roark said. "I saw it just now beyond those stalagmites to the left—normal colored."

"There are at least three of their lordships," Jaffar Khan presently announced with the air of one who knows the end is not far away. "What is to be done, *Hazzoor?*"

It was as grim a moment as Roark had ever experienced in the course of his often turbulent career. Had Naim Shah and the others passed by using another passage? Or had they fallen prey to the evil brutes all about? Again, the white tiger and his cubs might have just returned to their subterranean domain.

"Fire your pistol, Captain Sahib," chattered Rukan. "Drive the ghost tiger away—"

"No," replied the white man; "if we keep on moving they may not spring."

But he knew that a man-eater stalking a victim seldom abandons the chase.

Nothing ever was harder for Lawrence Roark than to take that first step towards the eyes gleaming ahead. He felt his boot sole step on something soft and yielding, but did not lower his eyes.

Lance lowered, Jaffar Khan stepped sturdily up beside him.

"Often I have hunted *shere khan*, *Hazzoor*," said he with a strained

laugh, "but never a white one and in darkness far from light and air. *Wagh!* What a tale to tell at mess!"

"They'll call us plain and fancy liars, but we'll never be forgotten. Come on, Rukan—Faugh! I'm afraid the big fellow's a bit mangy, but he'll make a nice trophy for my bungalow."

"To think the old rascal went up into the mountains when he heard of your coming, Roark Sahib!"

"Damned unsporting of him, I must say."

"Too bad we haven't a sporting rifle, *Hazzoora*—a pistol will merely insult his lordship."

"O uncle, how dare you mock his lordship, the white tiger?" whimpered Rukan. "Neither our lances nor our pistols can hurt him."

"Nonsense! He's no different from any other tiger—save he's albino, like that white crow the fortune teller keeps in the bazaar at Churani."

And so the two continued their idiotic, gallant attempt at conversation, though always lambent eyes peered at them from among the fantastic stalagmite formations.

Suddenly the white tiger, an unusually evil expressed beast with a ruff so wide as to make his head look larger than a barrel end, barred the path, bared its huge fangs and refused to stir.

Step by step the three lancers and the wretched Kushal drew near, whereat the white tiger's tail commenced to switch violently and its quarters to contract under it.

"Back up! You ugly brute! Back!" Roark suddenly shouted and, to his surprise, the pale furred beast snarled and retreated a few feet towards the tigress and a young male which crouched a few yards further back.

For perhaps fifty yards the weird procession had advanced when Kushal uttered a low cry.

"A door is ahead! An iron door to the right!"

Quickly shifting his gaze from the white tiger's eyes, Roark could distinguish a massive door of iron grille work. Was it locked or bolted or unlatched?

So preoccupied had Roark been with trying to force the man-eater back, he had failed to notice how the stalactite-hung river-bed had suddenly become transformed into a man-fashioned vault like that beneath the treasury.

"We try for the door?" Jaffar Khan demanded. "The candle is nearly burnt out."

"At once. That young tiger's getting ugly—" And indeed the young male was holding his ground for the first time. "Kushal, have you any idea where we are?"

"If this is the place I think, it lies near Shab beneath the Fortress of—Black Stallion. Hurry! Hurry! *Aie!*—candle—"

AND now the white man-eater would retreat not a yard beyond the iron door; instead it gathered itself to spring. In the meantime the heavy old tigress circled; gained the party's rear and came creeping up, tail lashing and mouth drooling.

"Steady—the white one's going to spring—try to catch him on your lances. I'll take care of the other brutes. Kushal, see that you don't drop the lamp—our lives depend on it."

Automatic drawn and cocked, Lawrence Roark drew a deep breath and advanced with the lance points of his companions glinting to either side.

"Back!" he yelled. "Get back, you infernal brutes!"

The white tiger's lips writhed back from sabre-like yellow fangs, his haunches quivered and he emitted a scream loud as that of an express train's whistle. Promptly it was answered by the tigress and Roark wheeled, drawing a steady bead between the flattened ears of that evilly barred head. Without warning the light wavered and almost went out.

"The spare candle!" yelled Kushal. "Quick! This one's wick has fallen over."

Up swept the two lances and the Khalils braced butts hard against the floor when the white tiger, emitting a deafening roar, soared into a magnificent leap. Nightmarish seconds followed and Roark fired a split second before the lance points converged towards the man-eater's chest.

Roark's bullet, though failing to kill the tigress, turned her half over in mid-spring, but she managed to land some yards short of her mark, snarling and apparently dazed by the bullet which had not been heavy enough to pierce her enormously thick skull.

"*Aie-e-e!*" Some one screamed.

The light wavered again, but Roark had a disjointed impression of flailing, claw-tipped forelegs, of snapping jaws and of spurting blood. Then he recognized the familiar crackle of a breaking lance shaft. The young male made a terrific leap so sudden and swift that Roark's second bullet struck it in the shoulder just as the light went out.

"Help! Help! *Sahib*—Oh-h-h." In the darkness something bumped Roark's leg and another terrible ear-piercing scream made the tunnel resound. Apparently the white tiger, though mortally wounded, was tearing a victim.

"Door this way! Quick!" It was Kushal's voice which rang out in a frenzy of entreaty. "I—hold—open—quick!"

IN that dark and fetid hell Roark's sanity wavered, but he lunged blindly in the direction of Kushal's incessant cries.

The white tiger was clawing about, and the wounded tigress continued to roar in her pained fury. When something grazed Roark's shoulder he staggered back, completely disoriented. In an effort to regain his sense of direction, the lancer captain fired a third time and by his weapon's brief flash glimpsed a khaki-clad figure struggling beneath the white tiger which, though two bloodied lance points were projecting a good foot out beyond its shoulders, was delivering a series of murderous short slashes. Then the maddening blackness closed down again.

Directly behind him Kushal's voice was yelling, "This way! This way!" So he ran heavily until his groping hands encountered cold iron. Which way? Because stealthy feet were closing in, he let his automatic dangle from its lanyard and with both hands tested the grille work until someone jerked him violently backwards.

"Shut!" The iron door clanged and a squalling roar sounded almost in his face, then a powerful body thudded several times against the bars.

A near thing. For some moments all Roark could do was to crouch in the dark and pant like some animal run down in a road.

"Jaffar Khan?"

"Here, *Hazzoor!*" came the familiar deep voice. "But my nephew—"

"We must get him in!"

"No. He is beyond help."

"He may still be alive—we must

try." Roark staggered to his feet and somehow got the damaged candle alight. This he thrust through the bars to instantly recoil; just outside the wounded tigers were crouched and making horrible noises while they tore at the luckless orderly. As for the white man-eater, it was lying flat on

its belly, twitching feebly and draining great quantities of blood across the rock floor.

Jaffar Khan pulled back his horrified superior, gasping, "It is no use, *Sahib*, the boy is dead. And Allah knows whether Rukan is not the luckiest of us after all."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

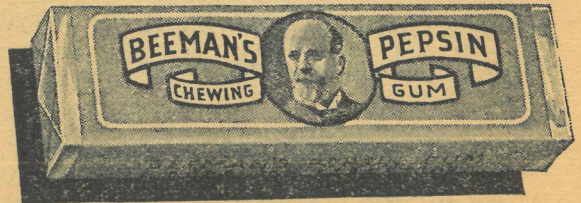
Is Man a Television Machine?

A SHOPKEEPER in New York was wrapping a package. Suddenly he felt compelled to lay his head on the counter and fall asleep. Several moments later he opened his eyes and solemnly told the waiting customer he had seen his father on his deathbed in a small Belgian town. In a few weeks, the shopkeeper received word of his father's death. Similar reports often appear in the news. Those interested in such matters say the dying father, by thinking intently about his son, had tuned himself to his son's frequency and communicated with him.

Science is interested in these matters and, before many Italian scientists and doctors gathered in a laboratory of the Royal University of Rome, Professor Giuseppe Calligaris recently demonstrated his theory that man is a television machine. Dr. Calligaris pressed certain points of a subject's body and the subject responded with minute descriptions of other persons and objects on the opposite side of a wall. When certain areas on the skin were agitated, Dr. Calligaris announced, the subject received supersensorial impressions which enabled him to see objects he could not otherwise perceive. In order to enable his subject to see objects on the other side of a wall, Calligaris pressed on a spot on the right of the thorax for fifteen minutes.

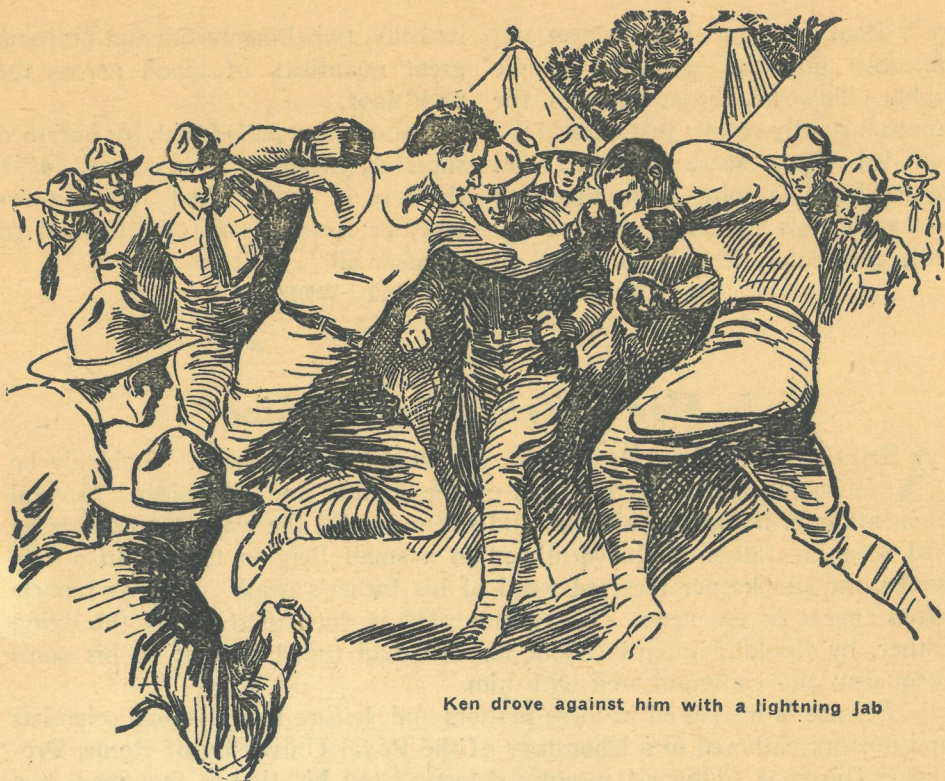
—J. Schreibman.

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Ken drove against him with a lightning Jab

“Front and Center!”

By CAPT. R. E. DUPUY

Novelette—Complete

They said Ken Woodward of the Plattsburg C.M.T.C. was yellow—and at a crucial moment he had full opportunity to show his true colors

CHAPTER I.

A BASIC STUDENT.

NOT until the masked bandit had smacked his automatic over the skull of the old cashier did Ken Woodward come to his senses. Up

to that moment it had all been one excited blur—the inrush of armed men in the bank, the menacing pistols, the harsh commands, the strap about his wrists. The noise of that cold steel impacting on a human head now etched everything plainly. It was exactly the noise made by an egg dropping on a wooden floor. And old Mr. Stanley’s “Ooooooh!” following that horrid smack, sent cold shivers dancing up Ken Woodward’s spine.

What followed seemed like slow-motion pictures. The gentle old man toppled towards the masked bandit, his outstretched arms scrabbling. One hand twitched the mask askew. A little

purplish patch on the exposed right cheekbone of the man with the gun danced for an instant before Ken Woodward's eyes. Then the automatic spoke twice—two reverberating crashes in the low-ceilinged, artificially marbled country bank.

Ken Woodward, straining against his bonds, saw old Mr. Stanley collapse on the floor, a tumbled heap of clothing; saw him twitch, watched something dark and oily spread in a trickly pool, smelled the reek of smokeless powder and another insidious smell—a smell that set the hackles of Ken Woodward's neck quivering—the smell of human blood.

Out of the yawning vault door came piling the other two bandits, stuffing clumps of banknotes into the big bags they carried. The leader, who had almost immediately slipped his mask into place over that purple patch, motioned them out. He stepped over beside Ken Woodward, from under the eyelets in the cloth the killer's eyes staring in calculating gaze. The automatic came up.

From outside sounded a shrill whistle, a shout, the rattle of a machine-gun. The man beside Ken Woodward, changing his mind, leaped for the door. A high-powered motor whined into a roar, to die in the distance. When the town marshal poked his head around the bank partition some two minutes later, he saw on the floor a crumpled form and over it the twisted figure of the seventeen-year-old bank clerk still jerking aimlessly at his bonds while the scalding tears of a boy's rage mingled with the blood of the murdered cashier. The holdup of the Bartonville National Bank was completed.

Ken Woodward, when he returned to a normal frame of mind, had time to

ponder on the fact that to be champion amateur boxer in the local high school and later at the Y. M. C. A. still left something lacking when pitted against a man with a gun.

A man with a gun. Something clicked in Ken Woodward's mind. What was that headline he had read in this very morning's newspaper?

ADDITIONAL QUOTA AUTHORIZED FOR C.M.T.C.

Citizens' Military Training Camps. Of course Ken had heard about them in a general way. Camps established by the War Department where young men were taught something of the rudiments of military training and at the same time got a month of open air vacation at Government expense. Rotogravure pictures of youths in khaki—youths handling arms returned to Ken's memory.

A man with a gun. Maybe, now . . .

SLOWLY the long train jolted to a stop. The stuffy day coaches disgorged their burden—streams of youths laden with bags and bundles—with musical instruments, cameras, tennis rackets, canvas golf bags, clattering their arms. The streams amalgamated into a swirling pool of humanity along the high grassy banks. Ken Woodward, stumbling down the car steps into the hot July sun, moving with the tide, reached the heights, peered through the shouting, singing mob. Before him stretched long rows of trimly aligned brown pyramidal tents; beyond them neat rows of low frame shacks with smoke simmering from the stove pipes above them. A fringe of trees framed the picture—trees beyond whose shade came the silver glitter of Lake Champlain.

Above all the Stars and Stripes, topping a tall white flagstaff, crowned the distant roofs of a cluster of red brick, blue-slatted houses. Plattsburg Barracks—birthplace of the Citizens' Military Training Camps.

Voices of bellowing authority cut the clamor. A handful of smartly uniformed soldiers under the direction of several officers were cutting the mob as cowboys split a herd of milling steers. Ken, gaping, saw them pulling boys out here and there; boys who in turn began to herd groups of other boys. These groups now slowly streamed towards the camp in long files.

"Here you, a Red, are you? Gather up a squad of Basics!" Thus a sergeant—Ken at least knew what three stripes meant—to another youth, a heavy-set boy of Ken's own height, who at once began to grab at the nearest men. His hand fell none too lightly on Ken's shoulder.

"Come on! Get going, greenhorn!"

The words were offensive, the manner more so. Ken, flushing, choked down a retort and took a step. The other, not satisfied with his speed, gave him a shove which nearly knocked him over. Dropping his bag, Ken swung to his annoyer, to meet an angry flushed face.

"Don't talk back! Get going!"

"Try and make me!"

Face to face the pair glared—two tall, high-spirited youngsters fairly evenly matched in stature. Ken measured his annoyer's pugnacious countenance, heavy, crowned with a thatch of heavy black hair; the grim jaw of a fighter, the poise of a youth sure of his ground, familiar with his environment. The other in turn gazed on a boy perhaps a year less than his own age; blond, curly-haired, with twinkling blue eyes, whose expression—carrying,

though it did, the diffidence of one treading upon uncertain terrain—still held firmness.

A quiet, efficient figure in olive-drab now shoved in between them—the sergeant who had first spoken.

"Here! You know better than that, if you're a Red. Take these men along quietly without any bullying. And you"—to Ken—"young fellow, no harm meant. This boy is a second year man, a Red student. He'll take you Basics to the processing room. Just do what he says."

Obediently Ken picked up his bag again, and fell in with a half-dozen others behind the big Red man. Someone blurted, "Yea, General! Bring on your war!"

The now infuriated Red glared back. "Come on, you!" He started them, then dropped beside Ken. "Fresh guy, eh? I'll smack you down right, later on!"

"Whenever you want," retorted Ken. There was no time for further exchange. Ken's group moved on in single file, several other groups paralleling it. Other soldiers beckoned, other boys—evidently third and fourth year men, from their authoritative voices—were already taking charge, and the horde was streaming upon its objective, under control. The C.M.T.C. machinery was grinding.

IN less than no time Ken found himself turning over his duffle, reporting his name, receiving a check in return. Then came all the business of a thorough physical examination. Out at last, into his underwear, turning in civilian clothing which would be stored, and into another long line to receive shoes, uniform, and equipment. Into the open now, the horde transformed in olive-drab. Pick-up of bags

and other personal impedimenta, calling off into companies, and the final hike, loaded down under the bloated barrack bag, into a company street, the older students and regular soldiers still supervising, until he was shunted to a tent on the flap of which was a list of names, "Kenneth Woodward" among them. In the tent, his name loomed again on a bunk already made up.

Ken tumbled his belongings beside him and relaxed on the stiff, scratchy army blanket. His eyes fell on the four other men now streaming in to take their places. Five of them then to a tent. The last man, a grinning second year man, dumped his stuff, but stood.

"Here, you new fellows—my name's Howard. I'm the Red in charge of this tent. You Basics take orders from me. I take orders from a third year man—a White—who's our section chief, and he takes 'em from a Blue—a fourth year man who's in charge of the platoon. There's a Regular officer—or perhaps a Reserve man, I don't know yet, who has the company. That's the layout; understand? Right? Well, snap into it now and get your things straightened out."

"Aw, have a heart, feller!" This from one of the other cots. "Give us a chance to rest!"

"Rest, nothing! We get our tent in order. The whistle will blow in ten minutes and we'll all be turned out for the first company formation. They'll march us out to the parade ground, we'll get the oath, and then it'll be time for dinner. After that—chance to swim, chance to do bunk fatigue, anything you want. But now—snap into it!"

It seemed to Ken that a split second only elapsed before a whistle shrilled. To the hoarse "Everybody out!" Ken

with the others came scrambling from the tent. Under the direction of the older students, the company formed awkwardly. Squad leaders read off their rolls, reported. A soldierly boy with a blue band on his arm, who stood in charge, turned. A quiet, slim young officer stepped in front of the company.

Behind Ken whispers ran down the line—tips from the wisecracks. "Gee! We're lucky. We got a reg'lar—lucky, hell!—he'll work the tar out of you! Never mind—he knows what's what—none of your Reserve officers who have to look in the book . . ." So the whispers ran; Ken's first lesson in Army hierarchy.

"Silence in the ranks!" A murmured report, the Blue student fell back into the line, and the officer took over.

You're in the Army now!

ON the greensward of the parade ground several hundred boys in olive-drab were gathered in little groups, each about a wooden box on which was affixed a strip of wood with roughly exaggerated rifle fore and hind sights attached. Sighting and aiming drill, the men at each sighting instrument taking turns.

Ken Woodward, his three sights finished, stood up. The marker handed the paper he had pencil-pointed to the Regular Army non-commissioned officer in charge of the group. The soldier whistled.

"That's the stuff," he called. "Look here, you men—" as he connected up the three points with lines to make a triangle almost equiangular. "That's grouping your shots. The smaller the triangle the better the group."

Ken flushed with pride; a pride that changed to chagrin as someone in the next group—men of another company

—sneered. He knew who it was without looking. As the sergeant moved away a voice drifted over.

"Your marker must be a good friend of yours. Wait till you get on the range; there'll be no one to move your shots into the bull's-eye there!"

The heavy-faced second year student who had clashed with Ken on their arrival was, fortunately for Ken's peace of mind, in another company. However, they were in the same battalion. The Red—Edwards was his name—was now taking the opportunity to goad him again—a hazing that to Ken seemed puerile.

"Why don't you take a poke at him anyhow?" demanded one of his tent-mates, little Billy Jones. "He'll lick you—they say he was heavyweight champion of the camp last year—but he'll lay off you afterwards."

Ken had never boasted of the fact that boxing was his forte. He shook his head now. "Got other things to think of," he answered.

"That's all right, feller, but the gang'll think you're scared of him. Remember when Edwards led the Reds who tossed you in the blanket the other night? A bunch of the fellows asked me afterwards if he had your number."

"Maybe he has," grinned Ken. But the other persisted. "Aw, gee, Ken! We know he hasn't. 'A' Company is with you." The whistle for assembly broke the conversation. Sighting and aiming drill was over.

THAT afternoon, when the C.M.T.C. fell in for sports prior to swimming, the groups were served out with boxing gloves.

Ken found himself matched against a perspiring youth who began to make wild haymaker swings. Blocking the drives for an instant, Ken backed a

step or two, to suddenly flick in a lightning jab to the face, following with a rapid tattoo against ribs and wind.

"Here, young fellow!" The boxing instructor tapped Ken's shoulder. Two other boys took the gloves. But Ken, following the officer to another group, where an officer stood, put on the gloves again against another chap of approximately his size. This opponent had some skill. They boxed for perhaps a half-minute when the officer separated them.

"That's all. Give me your name," he asked Ken. "All right," as he scribbled it down. But when Ken had returned to his own group the boxing instructor and the other officer compared notes.

"Put Woodward down. That boy knows his onions. He'll get in the semi-finals. When he does we'll match him against last year's heavyweight champ, Edwards."

Sergeant Green of the regular infantry garrison, smoking his pipe as he sat on the steps of his barracks that evening after supper, watched Ken Woodward's approach from the C.M.T. camp with mixed feelings. The regular's many years of service, attested to by the hashmarks that ran from his cuff to his chevrons, had included rubbing up against many types of young men. In Ken he recognized a type infrequently seen, but usually definite.

"Here comes the kid now," Green remarked to the burly supply sergeant sitting beside him. "Boy's got something on his mind; wish I knew what it was." The other spat carefully into the flowerbed.

"Got the kid complex for new stuff," he grumbled; "an' you, you damned soft-hearted lummux, jes'

makin' a pet outer him. I know the type—recruit always botherin' people. If I wasn't a lunk-head myself I'd 'a' told yuh to go chase yerself instead of sittin' here waiting to please a kid!"

"You're wrong, Dick. He's got some definite reason for wanting to learn all about small-arms. An' he's such an eager kid I promised him if he made good at sighting and aiming today I'd show him."

GREEN introduced the boy to the supply sergeant who, grudgingly grunting, led the way into the barracks and down stairs to the supply room, where an automatic pistol was produced.

Slipping the magazine out of the pistol, Sergeant Green explained its mechanism to Ken. He watched with some interest the caressing fingers of the boy manipulating it as he told him, the eager eyes centered on the firearm. What was behind this boy's very evident desire to master the weapon?

"You got the hang of aiming this morning," the sergeant told him. "The principle's the same with all weapons. Squeeze—don't pull, the trigger. When you get out on the range with the rifle you'll forget that first, and you'll be grippin' the gun like you wanted to make dents in it. But shake that idea off—a loose grip—but firm, and—the squeeze. Same thing here. Don't stiffen every muscle hangin' on it."

"Like a baseball bat, I suppose," ventured Ken. "Hold it tight enough only so it won't make your hands tingle, and keep the muscles supple."

"That's it exactly."

For some fifteen minutes they worked with the pistol, the sergeant showing Ken the tricks of the trade. He tied a string to the hammer—to

cock the gun with the left hand—the marksman's trick to keep in practice so that an empty pistol can be snapped continuously as though it had been recoiled by the recoil in firing. The boy lapped it all up.

"Enough for today," said the sergeant at last. "You'll get the hang of it. Too bad the Basics don't get pistol practice. You'll not get that until you're a White."

"If he has the guts to come back again," mumbled the supply sergeant; and aloud—" 'bout time yuh two nuts quit an' let a man take his rest."

"Don't mind him, Woodward," returned Sergeant Green. "His bark's worse than his bite. Actually he enjoys seeing a soldier in the making."

The old supply sergeant himself grinned.

"Since you're so keen on making this boy a pistol expert in one lesson, why don't yuh go the whole hog? Show him how to stop a guy comin' at him with one of 'em."

Ken's eyes sparkled.

"That's an idea!" replied Green. "See here, youngster—" and carefully explained to Ken, all ears and eyes, how, with the Army .45, if the barrel be pressed back while the weapon is at full cock, the trigger cannot be pulled; with result that an excited man, armed with a pistol, can be rendered helpless by the mere expedient of a quick jamming of the palm of the hand against the muzzle as he points it. Once the barrel and slide have been jammed back that way on the receiver, the man holding the gun, as Sergeant Green explained, can keep squeezing the trigger all day long. The pistol cannot be fired.

"Except—" went on the sergeant, "if he has sense enough to jerk the gun back from your pressure, release

the pull of his trigger finger and then squeeze again," and suiting the action to the word, this time the hammer snapped down. "Yuh see, you can't fool a cool old hand—but—an excited guy—he'll just keep his trigger finger frozen on the trigger, and it's natural for a man to keep shoving forward with the gun. Then—he's your meat. But remember—you're gambling your hand that you're just a mite quicker than he is. Don't use it, unless your life is at stake."

It was a happy Ken who went whistling back through the quiet July night to his own camp. He was learning things here—things that in this day and age would not harm a young bank clerk to know. An involuntary shudder passed up his spine as the train of thought conjured a vivid red memory in his mind. If only he had known some of this stuff a month ago!

CHAPTER II.

THE MAIN BOUT.

BEGINNING of the fourth week in camp. Preparation for the finals in military and sports events, ending of the overnight camp and the hikes, and the sham battle which had keyed youthful enthusiasm during the third week. Bronzed boys, their square shoulders cracked out from the restricting cocoon of civilian life, lay out on the rifle ranges engaged in record practice. Staccato bursts of machine-gun fire and the deeper bay of the pistol echoed later to the ears of Basics and Reds at citizenship lectures—betokening the final work of their envied elders—the Whites and Blues. Evening parades began to have the snap and precision of real soldierly efforts.

"A" Company, returning from breakfast, one morning, broke ranks to gather as usual about the bulletin board in front of the first sergeant's tent near the head of the company street. Ken, pushing his way through the crowd, heard his own name being called by those nearest the board.

"You're it, Ken!" Billy Jones, grabbing Ken's arm, danced around him. "You're it! Matched to fight Edwards in the finals for the heavyweight championship of camp!" A swift beat of exultation flowed through Ken's heart. Pushing his excited tent-mate off, he read for himself the list on the bulletin board. It was true. He would be matched against Edwards tomorrow night in the boxing finals, to be held in the big open-air ring, with the entire C.M.T.C. as witnesses.

"A" Company handed a deal of good-natured bantering to its representative. While the majority of the students, whose interest in other sports had prevented their seeing Ken's progress during those afternoons when each man was engaged in his own particular athletic activity, backed him simply from the fact that he was an "A" Company man, others who had seen him in action approved. But in the swimming pool, where most of the camp gathered afterwards, the husky physique of Edwards overshadowed Ken's more wiry build. And everyone knew that Edwards had punched his way to the championship last year. Hence Edwards would be the favorite so far as the camp in general was concerned.

THAT evening over at the barracks, where Ken had gone for his almost nightly lesson in pistol marksmanship, the grizzled supply sergeant and his mentor, Sergeant Green,

looked him over with renewed interest.

"Quick on yer feet, young feller, ain't ye?" rumbled the supply sergeant; "an' got some gristle there, too," poking at the boy much as one would appraise a prize animal in the show ring. "You'll do, I guess, even if you'll be givin' some pounds away." He nodded sagely at Sergeant Green. "Too bad payday ain't for a couple days yet. There'd be pickin's, I don't doubt." He sighed. "Well, mebbe there'll be some guys holdin', at that. An' jawbone from those whose credit is good."

Ken gazed on him with some puzzlement.

"Holding?" he asked. "Jawbone?"

Sergeant Green enlightened him. "This old buzzard means he's going to bet on you tomorrow night. And he hopes there'll be plenty of soldiers with some money to put up. He'll get odds, probably. Soldiers like boxing, you know; and they like to bet too, just as civilians do. The regular garrison always turns out for the boxing, and Edwards will probably be the favorite."

"Oh." That there would be money wagered on the fight had not really occurred to Ken until now. It worried him a bit to realize that. Perhaps in the C.M.T.C. too there would be betting—very much on the quiet, of course, but there are always boys willing to bet.

When Ken had left for camp the old supply sergeant stared at Sergeant Green. One eyelid dropped craftily. "Thought you was just makin' a fool of yourself with a smart-alec of a recruit, first off." He patted his breeches pocket. "Sorta glad you brought that kid around, now."

"Well, I didn't bring him around just so you could make money," re-

sponded Green. "But that might pay you for the time you've given up, after all."

"Got the heart, all right, has he? Ain't gonna lay down?"

"The kid's all right. Between you an' me"—and Green winked—"I've got next month's pay up with Sergeant Bowers over in Edwards' company."

Around the squared circle erected on the grassy parade, the C.M.T.C. boys were gathered, more than a thousand of them, a shouting, cheering mob of youngsters. Officers and families of the garrison, soldiers, civilians from town, swelled the crowd. The finals of the boxing championships—always a gala night at the C.M.T.C. The boys cheered their favorites, as company razzed company in the merits of their respective representatives. Between bouts the youngsters sang songs. And above the boxing ring the great cluster of electric lights, surrounded by buzzing insects, spread radiance, emphasizing the darkness outside its limited area.

Two trim athletic youngsters—middleweights—were putting on a fast-moving battle—the semi-finals for the night. Between rounds an officer explained to a party of visiting friends.

"You're going to see an even better fight next—the cream of the night's performance," he told them. "The heavyweights: a big battler from New York City, who won the championship last year, and a boy from the Hudson Valley, who is very clever with his fists. Pretty evenly matched. And they say"—he smiled—"that the champion, who is a Red, has been bearing down on the other boy, a first-year man—Basics we call 'em. So it may be a grudge bout. I understand from the grapevine telegraph that the sol-

diers have quite a bit of money up. Of course we don't allow open betting, but soldiers will bet on anything from a horse-race to a centipede fight."

"Well, I think it's brutal," announced the young woman beside him. "Letting these boys fight, particularly if there is bad blood between them."

"DON'T be silly, Lucy. There are only three rounds of one minute each per bout, the boys have passed a medical examination, the gloves are the heaviest and softest obtainable. And two boys who are sore at one another can certainly find worse ways of deciding it than by pounding each other in a fair fight. Look!" pointing to the ring. "Could anything be prettier than that?" The two middleweights, who had been sparring for an instant, suddenly broke into action—a shower of rights and lefts. The woman the officer had called Lucy stared. One man apparently overwhelmed his opponent, driving him into the ropes.

"Ooooh!" cried Lucy, grasping the officer's arm. "It's—it's—oh! He's killing him!"

But rebounding like a mass of steel springs to block the blows, the beleaguered youngster side-stepped in a really pretty bit of footwork from which his right lashed savagely into the other's midriff.

Again the girl squealed—"He's out! He's getting away! He's beating the other fellow, now. Oh, hit him! Hit him!" She jumped up and down.

The pair danced around the ring, the dodging referee was hard put to keep out of their way. The clanging bell brought both fighters up, all standing, as the arbiter waved them to their corners. The watching girl stared, unconscious of the fact that she was hold-

ing her companion's arm with both hands in a terrific grip.

"For a person who dislikes brutal exhibitions, Lucy," remarked the officer dryly, "I must say you show strange reactions."

Lucy subsided with a giggle.

"Maybe it—it isn't so brutal. It was splendid to watch," she agreed.

"Well, here comes the final."

The judges, standing, gave their decision; the referee held up the winner's hands; the C.M.T.C. boys cheered the victor. The ring cleared, the announcer brought his megaphone to his lips.

"Next bout—finals for the heavy-weight championship of camp!" The crowd roared. "Edwards, 'D' Company, against Woodward, 'A' Company!" Another burst of cheering.

The officer nudged his companion.

"Here comes Edwards."

Through the ropes the husky Edwards swung himself, tossing aside the overcoat which had covered him. The announcer seized his arm and dragged him into the center of the ring.

"Red student Edwards!" he shouted. "Holder of last year's championship." Slapping him on the back and shoving him to his corner, the announcer turned.

"And in this corner—" He peered. The referee, too, peered. The other corner was bare.

"Woodward! Woodward, of 'A' Company, front and center!"

The announcer's voice blared over the assemblage. Silence for an instant, then a hundred voices took up the call.

"Woodward! Woodward!"

But no Woodward appeared.

Again the announcer called. This time a boy stood up. Little Billy Jones, of "A" Company.

"He—he must be here! He was here a moment ago! Right beside me!"

STUDENTS began to come to their feet, craning their necks, shouting Woodward's name. Someone blared a Bronx cheer; a chorus followed.

"Boo! Boo! We want Woodward! Slacker Woodward!"

In a second the atmosphere had changed. An assemblage of laughing boys had been transformed by the flash of that electric mob spirit that flies on wings of the wind into an angry crowd.

A third time the announcer, overriding the clamor with his megaphone, called Woodward's name. The referee leaned over the ropes for a hasty conference with the judges. They hesitated, then slowly nodded. The referee walked over to Edwards' corner, grasped his right hand and dragging the reluctant boy to the center of the ring, held his hand aloft. The pandemonium subsided when a bugler from the band blew "Attention."

"Student Woodward not having entered the ring at the appointed time, the judges award the title to Student Edwards by default!" The voice of the announcer. And then he, an inexperienced young officer, added just the worst possible remark he could have made under the circumstances; a statement that was to the assembled camp like an open flame to a mine gallery filled with firedamp.

"I regret to state that this is the first time in the history of Plattsburg C.M.T.C. that any student has deliberately failed to come to scratch in an athletic event!"

The camp commander bounded from his ringside seat at the booming response to the announcer's injudicious words.

"That tears it! Get that band going, there, to get their minds off this!" And quietly to his adjutant—"Captain, all company commanders will rally their respective units and march them back to camp." The band broke into a lively air. Under the quick, incisive orders of the camp commander officers drifted to the outskirts of the crowd. Then the band ceased. A bugle blew "Assembly." Whistles shrilled; officers and Blue student non-coms gathered their companies. Two minutes later the C.M.T.C. regiment was marching, at ease, back to its quarters, singing to the strains of "The Old Grey Mare, She Ain't What She Used to Be!"

The camp commander, chewing a cigar as he watched with seeming nonchalance from the point of vantage of the ring, turned again to his adjutant with a sigh of relief.

"Have Woodward found and make sure that he is kept away from his company tonight. I don't mean to put him under arrest. Just put the boy up somewhere. Tomorrow will be another day. They'll probably ostracize him when he does get back. But we can't let them get him tonight—they might do something silly and dangerous. Pass that word on to company commanders; all officers will remain with their companies tonight. Frequent inspections of the company streets."

CHAPTER III.

SILENCED.

KEN WOODWARD, wearing his uniform over the bathing trunks in which he intended to fight, had been sitting, as his tent-mate, Billy Jones, had said, beside him as the fight

wound to a climax, enjoying every moment of it. The quick thud of the gloves, the lithe movements of the boxers, always entranced Ken. On his own bout he wasted but little thought—not that he was overconfident, but because Ken had the happy faculty of not worrying. Further, it was not his first time in a boxing match. He would go into the ring in a few moments, would have an opportunity of really exchanging blows with the man who had been picking on him for the last three weeks. Well and good. It would be a stiff fight. Ken determined to do his best.

Thus musing, Ken's eyes drifted, in an interval between rounds of the semi-final fight, to the people about him. He and Billy Jones were sitting on an aisle, well back. Into one of those momentary lulls that sometimes come in the clatter and chatter of a fight crowd popped a voice in Ken's ears—a vibrant voice that tickled his subconscious mind. Ken looked behind him.

And Ken Woodward's eyes almost popped from his head.

Standing not ten feet from him, at the outer edge of the gathering, was one of a group of civilians, on the left side of whose face the lights flared. A hard face; a face Ken Woodward felt he had last seen as he strained at his bonds while his father's old friend had been murdered before his eyes. But was it?

Were Ken Woodward's eyes resting on the man who had left the holdup of the Bartonville National Bank? There was one way to tell. Could he see the right side of this man's face, Ken felt, he could make sure. The presence or absence of the small purplish blotch he had glimpsed on that horrifying occasion would tell the tale.

All thought of his present surroundings, all thought of the contest he was to engage in fled from Ken Woodward's mind. A shivery tingling ran up Ken Woodward's back, a toneless growling rose in Ken Woodward's throat. He craned his neck to stare.

The man moved out of the glare, with two companions sauntered into the darkness. And Ken Woodward with the spring of a tiger cat was in the aisle and had melted into the night behind his quarry before Billy Jones realized he had left.

Ken's eyes caught a shadowy glimpse of the three retreating figures some hundred or more feet away, walking in the direction of the post gates. Ken hurried after them, his sneaker-clad feet making no sound. He must get up beside that man—get where he could see the right side of his face.

Now a boy in the formative stage cannot go through an experience such as Ken Woodward had, the day of the bank holdup, without its having some lasting effect upon him. In any event, a later encounter with the individual responsible for this shock must inevitably produce a violent reaction. And the higher the type, the more sensitive the man, the keener the effect. So at that instant Ken Woodward's mind was momentarily wiped clean of all consideration of the present. He was reliving the holdup, the brutal murder of the cashier, the mad rage he had then undergone, as he tugged at the leather strap holding him. But now he was not restrained by any bonds.

JUST what he was going to do, were he positive in his identification, Ken had not figured out. Now, as he hurried after the three shadowy fig-

ures, the crowded arena far behind them, the post gates still some distance away, he began to recover some of his power of reasoning. Suppose that these three men, to whom murder was but an incident, should turn upon him?

The muscles in Ken Woodward's neck stiffened at the thought. For a month his dreams of a boyish revenge had included a hand to hand grip with the wanton killer. Perhaps now—A slight curve in the street as they neared the post gate momentarily cut his quarry from his view. He quickened his step, to come within eyeshot of the main entrance. The three men he had been following had just reached it, were just passing out of his sight into the city streets.

Where were they bound? How could he find them? Should he seek a Plattsburg policeman and start a hue and cry? All these things rushed through Ken's mind as he hurried to the gate.

"Hey! What's the big idea?" Ken stopped short. The sentinel on the gate, a not unkindly grin on his face, barred the way with rifle at the port.

"You know it's against orders to go without complete uniform; where's your hat?"

Ken stuttered in his eagerness. His hat? Involuntarily his hand sought his bare head.

"All right, son. Go back an' get your hat, an' you can go out. It ain't too late. An' say, how about the fights? They ain't over yet, are they?"

The fights? For the first time since he had rushed from the arena, Ken's mind returned to the present. For perhaps ten seconds he stood goggling at the sentinel, without a word, then turning, started running back up the road down which he had come, at the top of his speed.

What time was it? How long had he been absent? The middleweight bout—it was half over when he had left. It must be over now—over. Over. And the heavyweight bout, that would come immediately after? His bout. A cold chill hand seemed to grip at Ken Woodward's heart. Edwards would be in the ring. "A" Company waiting to cheer; the "A" Company he—Ken Woodward—was representing. They would be calling his name. The fellows would be wondering . . . wondering . . . Why, they'd think he was afraid to fight! Afraid . . . a coward!

The distant blare of a band came to Ken's ears as he ran. Before Ken's straining eyes were moving columns, moving toward the C.M.T.C. quarters. And a sprinkling of people coming towards him now; people coming away from the arena. Away from the arena. Away—from—the arena. That meant but one thing.

THE head of the chattering throng of soldiers and civilians moving down the road was almost on Ken now as he raced. And under a street-light two familiar figures in olive-drab. To them Ken bounded.

"Sergeant! Sergeant Green! It isn't over, is it? It—it—isn't . . ."

Sergeant Green halted. His cold blue eyes took in the disheveled bare-headed figure before him. Sergeant Green's hard-bitten face froze ten degrees. Sergeant Green's voice rasped as he deliberately spat out of the corner of his thin lips. "Seems as if there's something smells bad around here. Polecat, maybe. Let's get away."

And Sergeant Green, ignoring the now completely nerve-racked boy, pushed on. The old supply sergeant,

taking his arm, remonstrated with him, each word a slap in Ken's face.

"Now I wouldn't be misnamin' a polecat, Green. A polecat'll fight, you know. It's a louse yuh mean."

So that was what they thought of him! And the other passers, none of whom recognized him, watched with some slight wonder as Ken's bare-headed figure suddenly dodged into the shadow of the tree-bordered parade ground and disappeared towards the C.M.T.C. tents. Like a frightened puppy streaking for shelter, so was Ken Woodward as blindly rushing for his tent. Surely the fellows would understand, would listen to his explanation.

Four gloomy-faced boys had just come into Ken Woodward's tent; four boys who, as they slowly peeled off their uniforms, conversed in disgusted tones.

"I wouldn't have believed it," said Howard, the Red in charge. "Me too," responded Davis, ungrammatically. "But—but there must have been some reason, fellows," this from little Billy Jones as he squatted on his bunk.

"Aw, don't be dumb!" Harry Jacobs slammed the shoe he had just taken off down on the tent flooring. "You said he'd been sitting beside you just before the other fight ended, didn't you?" he demanded of Billy Jones. "Here one minute, gone the next. Took a run-out powder, that's what. An' smeared the reputation of the whole company; of the whole C.M.T.C. camp, as far as that goes! An' I had five dollars on him, too!"

"I suppose you're right," sighed Billy Jones. "It isn't the money, though. I had two bucks on him, too, but I'd give it a hundred times rather than have to feel that a guy I liked was a coward. That's what hurts."

At that moment Ken Woodward, bending low, slipped hurriedly under the tent flap, to straighten up before his comrades.

"Gee, I'm sorry, gang! Listen . . . I want to explain. I . . ." his voice drifted off as his glance flitted from one to the other in the dim light of the single globe overhead. Four boys busied themselves with their undressing, without a word.

"But, fellows! Billy! Billy Jones, Howard! I can explain, I tell you!"

Billy Jones gazed at him with some pity. He seemed about to speak when Howard stopped him.

"Remember what 'A' Company decided on the way in, Billy," he warned. And then, to Ken—

"Woodward, there's no use trying to speak to any 'A' Company man. I'm telling you this as the senior in this tent. 'A' Company decided to silence you. There isn't a man who'll answer you on any provocation. So you might as well not try—you'll only waste your breath."

"But, gosh! You haven't even given me a chance to explain! To tell my side!"

Howard, ignoring him, began to thumb over an old magazine. Davis and Jacobs ostentatiously began a conversation between themselves. Only little Billy Jones, after one glance at Ken Woodward's stricken countenance, flung himself down on his bunk, burying his own face in the pillow.

Ken Woodward, clenching his fists till the nails dug deep in his palms, brought himself slowly under control.

"All right," he half-whispered at last. "All right. And if that's the way you feel about it, if that's your idea of justice, then to hell with you all. To hell with the C.M.T.C. I'm sorry I ever saw it. I'm sorry I ever joined it,

and . . . and I never want to go near it again! I wouldn't give you the satisfaction of an explanation now!"

Steps scraped on the gravel outside. Lieutenant Preston, commanding "A" Company, poked his head into the tent.

"Woodward," ordered the officer, "come with me."

And Ken Woodward, turning, followed.

CHAPTER IV.

CALL TO ARMS.

THE summer morning sun was shining into the office of the camp commander, who, leaning back in his chair, was gazing at Ken Woodward.

"Sit down, Woodward," said the camp commander. "I want to talk things over with you." Mutely Ken took the indicated chair.

The camp commander knew men. For nearly thirty years he had had the handling of them. The boy before him, clean-cut, upstanding, high-strung, did not have the appearance of a coward. Yet—one could never tell. There were some things sure, however; this boy had passed an uncomfortable night, was in a state of tense, repressed nervousness; was, beyond doubt, at present sullen, defiant. Just what might be expected under the circumstances, the camp commander reflected. He was glad that he had instructed Lieutenant Preston last night to take the boy to his own bachelor quarters, where he might be away from the rough handling to be expected from the merciless law of the pack.

"Woodward"—and the camp commander toyed with a ruler on his desk—"last night you did a most unexpected thing. Naturally, the men in the

C.M.T.C. feel badly over it. It's human nature to jump at conclusions. But I have found that when men do the unexpected it's because they have some reason. And in this man's army we try to be fair. Suppose you tell me, Woodward, just what happened."

"I have no desire to make any explanations, sir."

"Let me put it another way, Woodward. At the end of his stay in camp each boy gets a certificate. Those who have played the game are recommended for the next higher course. Those who don't measure up to our standards are marked for no further training. It isn't fair to yourself, and it isn't fair to me to put me in a position wherein, without full knowledge of the case, I must make a decision. And as matters now stand I would have to rate you for no further training. We can't condone the refusal of a man to meet his obligations—you understand that. All I know now is that you failed to enter a contest; failed to play your part. There may be some perfectly cogent reason why you could not do so."

"In other words, I'm a coward unless I prove the contrary. Well, colonel, I'm not a coward. And I did have a reason for not entering the ring; a reason which to me was sound. And last night I was ready to make explanation. But my tent-mates refused to hear me. They had condemned me without giving me a chance to tell my side. So I'm through. If that's the kind of an outfit the C.M.T.C. is, I want to go home."

The colonel smiled sadly. The boy was deeply wounded.

"But, don't you see, Woodward, that you're blaming the C.M.T.C. for human nature? We have a code of honor here, the code of the military—duty, honor, country. And we have

regulations. The military man must live up to the regulations, must live up to the code, which insists that he play the game. When he seemingly violates that code he at once places himself on the defensive and must give a logical explanation to clear himself in the eyes of his comrades."

UNDER normal circumstances the kindly words of the keen-eyed older man would have opened the way. Even now Ken's heart yearned for a confidant—for someone to whom he could tell his story. But the shock of the previous night had been too great. Ken had warmed to his tent-mates in the three weeks; had warmed to the sergeant who had so obligingly taken him under his wing. And these people, these pals, had found him wanting; had dismissed him from their circle—without a hearing. Could he expect that this man, practically a stranger, would listen, would accept such a cock-and-bull story he had to offer? Of course not. And the chill of youthful despair and hurt pride froze in an impenetrable bulwark between Ken Woodward and the colonel.

"I'm through, sir; all washed up. I want to go home."

"Very well, Woodward. But understand that by so doing you're proving those young hotheads in camp to be right. They feel you cannot take it; your departure will be sure proof of that to them. And, of course, it ends your future in the C.M.T.C."

The colonel pressed a button. Lieutenant Preston stepped in.

"Lieutenant," said the camp commander, "Basic student Woodward desires to leave camp at once. You will prepare his papers and send him to the Finance officer for his transportation. Under the circumstances, of course, he

cannot be recommended for further training."

Up the main road leading into the city of Plattsburg from the south an Army car was rolling. This car, painted the usual unpretentious olive-drab of the service, carried on its front and rear plates the twin stars of a Major-General, marks lifting it out of the ruck in so far as Army men were concerned, yet on the other hand diverting attention from any other identification, such, for instance, as the fact that it lacked the usual stenciled marks on the hood. Major-Generals, like the winds, go whither they list, where sentinels are concerned. As for this car, it needed only the removal of the metal stars and substitution of a set of license plates to return it to a civilian status; a distinct asset to its present occupants, who had spent some time in preparing it for its present use. These occupants, four in number, were, except for the driver, in civilian clothes. Three of them were now listening intently to the words of the fourth.

"Nobody opens his trap but me, see," said this man, on whose right cheek appeared a slight purplish blotch. "No Tommies out of the car—we use rods. You, Snitch"—to an individual who was twirling a blue bandanna handkerchief in his hands—"lay off that. No masks. If anyone looked in while we were at work and saw masks it'd be just too bad. Now—we've all been over the ground, we all know what to do." He gathered his companions with his hard eyes.

"You, Stubby," he addressed the driver. "What do you do?"

"Swing in the main gate, don't pay no attention to the sentinel, drive past the Finance office, swing at the next corner and come back pointin' out.

Stop at the Finance and keep the motor runnin' till you come out."

"Yeah; an' don't stir outta that seat. If some of those soldier clucks get a good look at your uniform—they'd begin to wonder what general was usin' a scarecrow for a chauffeur." And in fact the driver's badly-fitted uniform was no creditable illustration of what the well-dressed soldier was wearing.

"They's just one thing I don't get, Jake." The third man speaking now. "We saw a whalin' lot of guys in uniform around this place while we were sizing it up, yet you say they ain't nothing to worry about—no soldiers much."

THE leader sighed in disgust. "Do I have to go over all this again?" he demanded. "It's dumb clucks like you that make things difficult. Lissen: Most of the garrison here—the real soldiers—are out miles away on this big sham battle the Army's holdin'. There's a handful of real soldiers left to run the place. Those other guys—the kids—are C.M.T.C.'s—kids playin' tin soldier. Get me? They get guns to drill with, but they get no ammunition."

"Yeah, but you said they'd bring this money in under guard."

"They do. An' when the dough's locked up the guards go away. They only have a sentinel over the Finance office after office hours. The paymaster has a rod, his two clerks have rods. An' that's all. Down at the guard house they have a handful of men with guns. Each man has five rounds of ammunition. An' except for the men actually walking post they take those cartridges out of their guns. Not another soldier in camp probably has a single cartridge on hand."

The speaker licked his lips, then continued:

"It's because of this sham battle that it's worth our while to crash this place. There's fifty thousand men in that sham battle—regulars and militia. An' this paymaster here pays 'em. Tomorrow's the last day of the month—payday. Today the Finance man gets all this dough for those guys out in the field, as well as what's left of the regular garrison. An' because he's got to pay off these C.M.T.C. kids two days later he draws that money too. He gets it from a local bank this mornin' in banking hours. He fixes it all up ready to pay out and puts it in the old iron safe. An' tomorrow he's goin' out to pay. He thinks he is.

"We clean out the place and we're away before those soldiers at the guard house wake up. We'd get away anyhow, for they'd turn out with their guns unloaded. Wouldn't load 'em without orders. An' what our choppers could do to that guard when our wagon here comes through 'em—well, it'd be just too bad. Unless—we pull such a boner they know what we're comin' for when the beans are first spilled. That's why we walk into the office with no masks an' no Tommies outside the bus."

The car slowed up in the middle of Plattsburg town, moving more sedately towards the post.

Ken Woodward, in civilian clothes, moved slowly towards the Finance office, in his hand the papers the lieutenant had made out for him—his discharge papers, on which he would draw the mileage money to take him home. His uniform and equipment he had turned in. For Ken Woodward the C.M.T.C. was a thing of the past. Even without that red rubber stamp lettering across the back of his discharge—

"Not recommended for further training"—there would never be a C.M.T.C. again for Ken.

To his satisfaction the boy met no one on the street who knew him. The C.M.T.C. regiment was out at drill. He hoped that he would finish his business with the paymaster and be off the post before recall; for up this street and past the Finance office whose steps he was now climbing the companies would be streaming very shortly, on the way home from morning drill.

The interior of the Finance office consisted of one long room, with a grilled partition on the right, like that of a bank. This partition ran to the end then turning, included the back of the office. Directly at the rear was a door giving to the space inside the partition. On the right as one entered the office was another door, leading to the Finance officer's sanctum. From this inner office one could also step inside the railed-off section of the main office.

AS Ken now entered he could see the head of a man at a desk behind the grille—one of the Finance clerks. The door to the inner office was open, and through it Ken could catch a glimpse of the Finance officer, and another clerk.

"No pay this morning, young fellow," announced the clerk behind the wicket as Ken stood in front of him. Ken pushed the papers through, on top of them a penciled note. The clerk read it, shrugged, then pointed to the inner office. "Come through that," he said and himself turning, entered the sanctum of the Finance officer.

"A C.M.T.C. man for transportation, sir," Ken heard him say. "Special case, with a note from the C.O." And then the door was opened to Ken. Inside the private office the Finance officer

and the other clerk were at a flat-topped desk sorting out paper money, behind them the doors of a huge safe partly open; an old-fashioned safe built into the wall, so large that it was almost a vault. A man could have stood upright inside its door. The man who had admitted Ken returned outside.

"Sit down by the window, young man," announced the busy Finance officer after glancing at the paper presented. "I'll attend to your case in a moment."

Ken, from his seat, watched an official car, a car marked with the twin stars of a Major-General, come up from the direction of the post gates, turn above the office, come sliding back to halt.

"Some general officer, sir," prompted the watchful pay clerk beside the officer. Ken, idly staring from the window, saw three men in civilian clothing issue from the car, and move without apparent haste towards the entrance. The right side of the leader's face was plainly visible to Ken as he walked. And on that face—slight purplish patch above the cheekbone!

"Oh, gosh," sighed the paymaster, "coming in here? Always something turning up to interfere with a man's work." He stood up. "Bring him in, I can't leave this money."

As the pay clerk obediently hurried into the outer office the officer took a few steps to follow him, as if to receive the visitor, then, remembering the C.M.T.C. boy by the window, turned.

"You'll have to go outside, young—" his voice died. The chair Ken had occupied a second before was empty. "Where the devil—" He was interrupted by the sound of a quick voice outside, a thud, and almost simultaneously a man entered the room. The

Finance officer, whirling, faced the muzzle of an automatic pistol held by a hard-faced man—a man on whose high right cheekbone lay a peculiar slight purplish blotch.

"Hoist 'em high!"

For a split second that seemed an eternity the Finance officer froze in place. Another thud from the outer office. A second intruder, gun in hand, entered. "All asleep outside," he announced; "an' the door locked."

"Good; this one goes bye-bye, too," and the speaker smashed his gun muzzle across the Finance Officer's temple. His victim slumped. "Get this stuff here into your sack, Jake, while Snitch cleans the outer office. I'll clean the safe. The big part of the dough must be in there." The man addressed as Jake calmly pulled an empty sack from his coat and began to stuff it with the greenbacks on the table. The leader, the blotch-faced man, assisted him to clear the table, then pushed him for the door.

"Lay it in the outer office," he ordered. "Then right back. I'll need help."

GUN dangling in his right hand, the blotch-faced man approached the safe, tugging wide one of the double doors with his left. And Ken Woodward, from the interior, with the impetus of an uncoiled spring, drove his left fist, backed by one hundred and fifty pounds of healthy young flesh and blood, crashing into the bandit's face.

Just why he had ducked into the open safe instead of yelping an alarm Ken could never definitely understand. Some subconscious motivation, some primal instinct, perhaps.

Now, as his fist crashed in the face of the man he hated, Ken's charge carried him plunging past the over-

balanced bandit. Even as he saw the blotch-faced man falling, saw the automatic fly from his grip, Ken's mind galvanized into a clear-cut plan of operation. He had heard the man named Jake remark that the outer door was locked. If now he could slam shut the inner door, leaving the other bandits outside, he could raise an alarm before they could make their getaway.

A bound carried Ken across the small room, in a whirlwind rush that brought the door into his hands even as the man Jake outside, hearing the rumpus, dropped his sack and turned. The door slammed shut, Jake's thudding counter-rush came just too late. Ken's fingers found the latch even as the man outside, throwing caution to the winds, sent two bullets ripping through the panels.

Ken's eager hands sent a chair whirling through the nearest window-pane with startling crash. Ken's eyes caught the movement of the man he had downed, as the blotch-faced one scrambled for the automatic on the floor. Both reached it at the same time. Stalemate. The bandit, whirling, spitting like a cornered rat, darted his open hand, first two fingers forked, in the deadly underworld stab for Ken's eyes. The riposte for that is, of course, the short, quick edgewise slash of the defender's hand, sliding across his own cheek and in front of his nose to split the attacker's fingers. Ken, with no knowledge of fighting, was nevertheless, as a boxer, able partly to cope with it. The bandit's forefingernail scraped across Ken's cheek, cutting through the skin. To Ken it seemed as though a white-hot iron had seared his face—the exquisite pain of it sufficient to drive him berserk.

Ken's fists thudded on his opponent's face and midriff. The drug-frozen

pupils of the bandit's eyes, staring with the lidless snaky gaze of the addict, never flinched at the punishment. Snarling, biting, gouging, he closed with the raging Ken. His uplifted knee in the boy's stomach brought Ken to an instant's grunting halt. With a heave the bandit overturned the table, catching Ken off balance, and as he staggered backward the blotch-faced one hurled himself through the smashed window-casing to the outer porch. Ken, recovering with rubber-ball resiliency, came hurtling after.

IT so happened that "A" Company, leading the C.M.T.C. regiment home from drill, turned from the parade-ground path into the road opposite the Finance Office just as two figures came bounding, one after the other, through the window. The leading squads had just caught sight of two other men running from the office a second previous—two men who jumped into an official-looking car which went roaring down the road towards the main gate. How the main guard, alarmed by someone in an office upstairs, had slammed the iron gates and how it trapped the fleeing bandits is another story. What the men of the C.M.T.C. regiment now saw was in itself an epic.

Somewhere a bugle was blowing a nerve-tingling, eerie call unfamiliar to the C.M.T.C. boys—a call which sent soldiers flying out from barracks, the-unforgettable, screaming "Call to Arms." Somewhere—that was at the main gate—a flickering burst of small arms fire rose, then ceased; fitting background to the battle on the road-way.

The leading one of the two figures who came flying from that window leaped the porch rail to stand for an

instant staring for the now nonexistent car. The second individual shot over behind the first just in time to make a flying tackle which brought them rolling over and over on the hot concrete pavement. Two scarecrow figures they were by now as they staggered to their feet.

It was little Billy Jones, whose sharp eyes recognized something familiar in that bloody-faced boy whose pit-bull rushes gave no respite to the heavier opponent now fighting with the desperation of a cornered jaguar. It was little Billy Jones' shrill voice that electrified "A" Company as the C.M.T.C. regiment, all discipline forgotten at the sight, stood goggling.

"It's Woodward! It's Woodward! It's Ken Woodward!"

The whole affair in the street could not have consumed more than thirty seconds as twelve hundred C.M.T.C. men watched. A whirling haymaker from the bandit brought Ken up all standing for a second, shaking his head to clear his vision of the mirage he felt he saw—the blurred uniforms and faces of the boys from whom he had cut loose, the boys who had refused to listen to him, the boys who had dubbed him coward—a shifting visionary background against which rose that evil face.

It was like a draft of potent liquor to Ken's nerves. He fell again on the opponent who represented to him everything loathful—who was the murderer of his old friend and benefactor. And as he leaped Ken Woodward realized that the cornered blotch-faced man, given just sufficient breathing space, had clawed an automatic from a shoulder-holster, was levelling its yawning muzzle not two feet from his face!

To Ken time moved in a majestic

sweep, each second an eternity. Once again he was in the grip of a slow-motion visualization. From that muzzle would come the spurt of flame that meant the end of everything. The movement of his left hand and arm reacting to the teachings of Sergeant Green seemed to him to be a hopeless task, with all the weight of countless tons opposed to puny strength. The touch of his palm against the muzzle seemed feather-light, impotent; the up-swing of his right fist to the saliva-smear'd jaw of the blotch-faced man a caress.

Actually Ken Woodward's left palm impacted against the muzzle of the Colt just one split second before the bandit's trigger finger jerked, forcing the slide back just that tiny fraction of an inch which locked the mechanism. Actually Ken Woodward's right hook to the jaw, traveling less than a foot, followed so close as almost to be one motion. The blotch-faced man, lifted clean off his feet by the blow, swayed backward to crash to the pavement.

Presentation day at Plattsburg. The day before the C.M.T.C. breaks camp;

the day of the last parade, when the long brown lines are formed and the prizewinners are marched front and center to receive trophies won in ranks, on the range, in field and track, in citizenship. The camp commander, standing with his staff behind him, by the presentation table, with leather shining, with accoutrements gleaming. The adjutant, prize-winning list in gloved hand, reading the rewards; each man in turn whose name is called marching forward, saluting, receiving his medal, tramping proudly back to his place in ranks before all his fellows standing there.

"Best Basic student in camp." The adjutant's voice booms out across the parade-ground, over the heat-waves from the streaming greensward. "Awarded to that student who so proved himself by his presence of mind, personal bravery and gallant conduct in the performance of an act of courage and self-sacrifice above and beyond the call of duty: to wit, the foiling of a holdup upon the reservation and the capture, single-handed, of the leader of the bandits. Student Kenneth Woodward, front and center!"

THE END

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MEN OF DARE

PROTECTOR OF PRESIDENTS

COL. EDWARD STARLING IS THE ONE MAN IN ALL THE U.S. WHOM THE PRESIDENT IS OBLIGED TO OBEY. AS CHIEF OF THE SECRET SERVICE IN THE WHITE HOUSE HIS FIRST RESPONSIBILITY IS THE SAFETY OF THE NATION'S FIRST CITIZEN AND HIS FAMILY. FIVE PRESIDENTS HAVE HAD THE COLONEL'S EFFICIENT GUARDIANSHIP AND HIS GENIAL FELLOWSHIP.



COL. E.W. STARLING

HE WAS BORN IN HOPKINSVILLE, KENTUCKY 58 YEARS AGO. HORSES AND GUNS INTERESTED HIM AS A LAD AND HE BECAME A SKILLED HORSEMAN AND A CRACK SHOT. AT 18, JUST OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL, THE GANGLING YOUTH WAS MADE A DEPUTY SHERIFF, DISPLAYING MARKED PROFICIENCY IN TAMING BAD MEN.

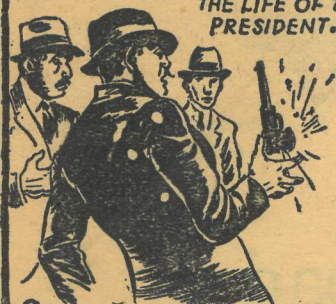
ONCE THE YOUNG LAW OFFICER FOLLOWED A NOTORIOUS OUTLAW INTO THE KENTUCKY HILLS, WHERE HE CAPTURED HIM WITHOUT A FIGHT. LATER, AS CHIEF SPECIAL AGENT FOR CERTAIN SOUTHERN RAILROAD LINES, HE GAINED PROMINENCE BY HIS QUIET, EFFECTIVE WORK IN ROUNDING UP FREIGHT THIEVES AND TRAIN ROBBERS.



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SOON AFTER WOODROW WILSON BECAME PRESIDENT, STARLING'S WORK CAME TO THE NOTICE OF SECRET SERVICE CHIEF W. H. MORAN, WHO HAD HIM APPOINTED TO THE EXECUTIVE MANSION DETAIL OF "S" MEN. THUS THE LIKEABLE, SELF-EFFACING SOUTHERNER CAME TO HAVE THE DELICATE JOB OF HANDLING CRANKS, FANATICS AND OTHERS WHO MIGHT MENACE OR EVEN THREATEN THE LIFE OF THE PRESIDENT.



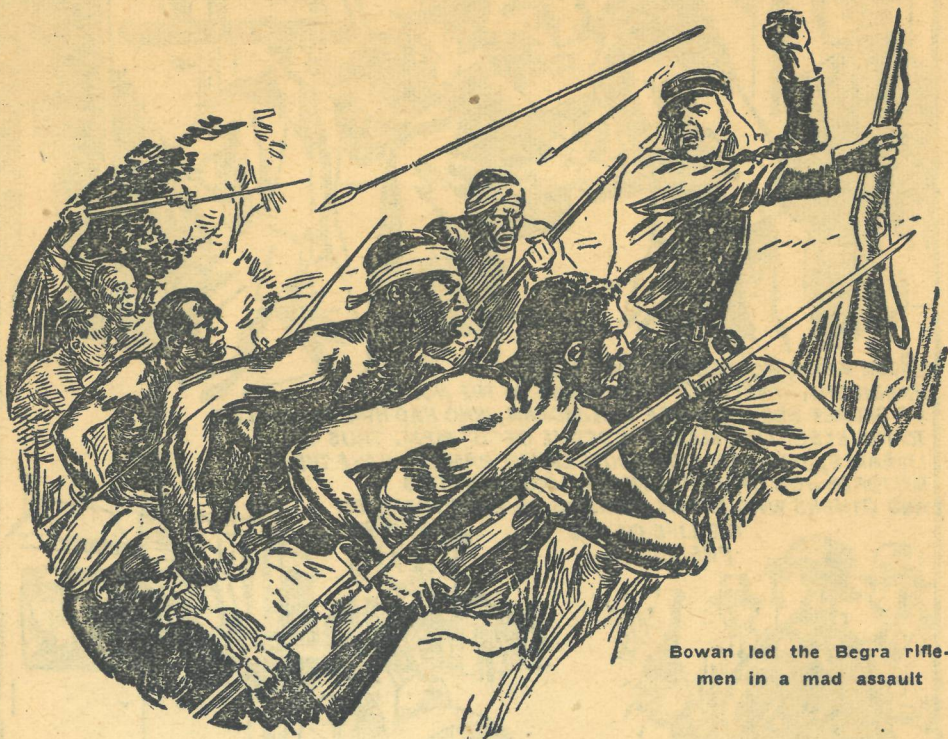
SINCE THEN HE HAS SEEN 22 YEARS IN THAT SERVICE. UNDER HIS WATCHFUL EYE FIVE PRESIDENTS HAVE BEEN KEPT CLEAR OF HARM. DURING THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE IN 1919 STARLING WAS ON GUARD IN A CAR CONVEYING PRESIDENT WILSON. IN AN AUTOMOBILE JUST AHEAD RODE PREMIER CLEMENCEAU, OF FRANCE. SUDDENLY A WOULD-BE ASSASSIN IN THE CROWD POINTED A GUN AT THE PREMIER. A SHOT RANG OUT, BUT IT WAS FROM STARLING'S GUN. HIS BULLET PIERCED THE ASSASSIN'S GUN HAND AND SAVED THE PREMIER'S LIFE!



HE IS AN ACE AT SHOOTING CLAY PIGEONS AND HE HITS BULL'S EYES WITH A SIX-SHOOTER WITH EASE. FOR YEARS HE HAS BEEN ADVANCE MAN FOR PRESIDENTIAL TRIPS, AND HE SEES TO IT THAT THE NATION'S CHIEFS ARE PROTECTED AGAINST OVERWORK AND WORRY. OFTEN HE HAS DIPLOMATICALLY SAVED A PRESIDENT FROM HIMSELF. MAKING A FISHERMAN OUT OF CALVIN COOLIDGE WAS A TYPICAL INSTANCE. THE JOB OF CHIEF WHITE HOUSE "SHADOW MAN" WENT TO STARLING LAST MARCH WHEN RICHARD JERVIS RETURNED TO FIELD WORK.

Next Week: Temahi, Pearl Diver, Soldier

All Central Africa would go to hell if King Luabala got away with his plans—and only the Legion could stop him



Bowan led the Begra riflemen in a mad assault

Glory Road

By ROBERT CARSE

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

IT was in the Sudan area of the Sahara, near a water-hole at a dune below the cliffs of El Hank, that a raiding party of a desert tribe engaged in battle a detachment of Foreign Legion troops. Despite the gallant leadership of Lieutenant Bowan, who was serving France though he had Scotch blood in his veins—and of Luabala, a native African of the Begra tribe, who had received his education and military training at St. Cyr, the Legion party is nearly wiped out by the razzou raid.

fellow-tribesmen, who had come to the rescue of the few survivors, Luabala, since they have no means of returning safely to their Legion post, decides to return to Begra—whose territory lies in the heart of darkest Africa. Both Bowan and Luabala make the journey in a dugout boat, and on the way, they formulate plans for waging an attack on the Begra's traditional enemy, the Simogay tribe.

On arriving at Begra, Bowan trains the native youths in the rudiments of warfare, and under the guidance of Luabala, they advance on the principal village of the

Finding himself again in the midst of

This story began in the Argosy for July 27

Simogay. To aid his stratagem, Luabala sets fire to the grass near the Simogay stockade. And the Begra men wait to make the final attack.

CHAPTER VI.

TORCHES IN THE SKY.

"**T**HEY are going," Roddo said behind Bowan. "My cousin's men are goin' to the attack now, and still he has given us no sign to move forward!"

"Don't be stupid," Bowan said flatly, but looking forward also, where the van of the Begra men were leaping bare-heeled right behind the rolling, smoking wall of flame through the grass. "Your cousin is coming here, right to us, now."

Luabala came running lithely, his immense *assegai* carried high. An arrow wound in an early night skirmish had laid one of his cheeks open to the bone, and now he spoke with some little difficulty. "You will stay here?" he asked of Bowan. "Keep hidden here until I give the call for you? I am not entirely satisfied, with this burning of the grass. It masks our attack, but it also masks the Simogay defense. And I am not so sure of those men and how they will be armed today; men who will trap slaves for Arabs might be shrewd enough to demand high-power repeating rifles in return and trade.

"But it is up to you to make the direct assault, right at the stockade, and on in, after us. It is understood? Good. I thank you again . . ."

He held out his hand to Bowan, held it out again to Roddo. "Good luck, eh?" he said, smiling at them both, then turned, running with great, flashing strides, and was gone, off into the

smoke and embers where his warriors were already gone.

Bowan wore an old wrist-watch which still ran in some fashion. For minutes, he gave to Roddo and the men about him there the impression that he did nothing but study its dial. But then from ahead, through the pillared wall of flames and smoke which separated them from Luabala and his men and also from sight of the Simogay stockade, they heard the first yells of warrior meeting warrior hand-to-hand, then the cries of Simogay and Begra bowmen, and a coughed rattling of rifle fire.

"It is as he feared," Bowan said simply to Roddo. But the youth was no longer in his position behind him. He had broken from it, and gone leaping forward, was striking with his fist or his Lebel stock at the other youths of the Begra in the deployed skirmishers' line to right and left. He yelled as he struck, his voice a fierce lash of sound. Bowan stood then, cursing, and yelled also in the few Begra phrases he knew.

The wings of his command and the far flanks had broken; the youths had gone, doubled over and sprinting, bay-ing with hoarse, coughing little calls of battle hysteria, forward into the smoke and flame wall, over the scorched stubble of the grass. "Valor," muttered Bowan, his palm hard against the wooden butt plates of his Colt, "and discipline. Luabala himself has taken them on the glory road, and five days, five years, of discipline would not have been enough," He swung his glance and voice to Roddo and the men closely about him. "Go!" he said. "Go ahead! Push on! Follow them, follow me!"

They ran through the burned stubble, then through the smoke-clouded

flame and the burning grass itself. A hundred yards or so from where they had taken off, they went leaping over the first bodies; they were those of Begra men, and, from the signs, they had been killed by Simogay bowmen who had ventured suicidally right out into the flaming savannah. But those bodies were scattered. It was at the foot of one of the stunted, gnarled *boma* trees where the Simogay had found their first bitter satisfaction: a score or more of Begra bodies was strewn there, through the stubble and around the tree itself. And propped against the tree, an *assegai* broadly through his breast, but his empty cartridge bandoleer still about his waist, was a Simogay warrior.

Bowan scooped up as he passed one of the empty cartridges that that man had used in his deadly sniper's work. It was of European manufacture and was to be used for a high-power repeating rifle, probably for a Skoda .30-30 arm. Bowan slid the rawhide lanyard of his pistol about his wrist, made it fast. Bending again as he ran, he whipped from the stubble a Lebel and a cartridge belt, flung away by one of the Begra youths who had broken in that first rush from him and Roddo. He looked across at Roddo, spurting a few rods away from him to his left. "Sing out!" he yelled at him. "Tell them that if you see another man drop his gun, you'll shoot him. But keep them coming on!"

They found Luabala and the rest of the initial attacking wave right before the frontal wall of the stockade. They were sprawled there, flatly down, a good part of them in death. Time and again, Bowan saw, they had tried to storm the stockade, smash through the gate or swarm the wall. And they had been driven back and slaughtered, man

by man. Lining the walls, wild with laughter and the gayety of easy victory, the Simogay stood along the footwalk inside the stockade. *Assegais*, light throwing spears, poisoned arrows, then a flail of bullets met him and his men as they swung into the open out of the furthest smouldering of the grass where a muddy ditch had stopped the flames. A bullet whipped his *kepi* from his head and grooved his scalp. A spear drummed the air between his legs.

He whirled around and tumbled down, back into the ditch. He raised his arm and his voice in a signal to Roddo. But Roddo was on his hands and knees. An *assegai* was through his chest and protruding from his back. He was coughing bright gouts of blood and dying as he tried to nod his head in answer.

Bowan cursed quite softly, seeing some of the others about Roddo understand anyhow, and slide back, into the ditch, near him. He took the Lebel in one hand, reached out and scooped his rent *kepi* back to him. He carefully jammed it down, twitching the visor over to keep the sunlight from his eyes. He changed his position to one of full comfort in the slime of the ditch, and slid down, then tightened the buckles of the Lebel sling-strap, took out and put before him on the ditch lip a handful of cartridge clips.

He fired from right to left, then left to right, all along the stockade. He counted eighteen Simogay, all men armed with rifles, that fell away before his fire, and then he moved from there, leaving behind him twenty-two or three of the Lebel-armed youths in the ditch. He circled the entire stockade slowly; he sniped the walls, and the snipers he met crawling out to meet him and the Begra. He emptied the

cartridge pouches and his Colt before he went back to the frontal wall.

He smiled bleakly as he slid back into the ditch again. Luabala and all the other Begra had retreated to it. They lay sullenly and in silence in the mud, although the rifle fire was only sporadic and feeble now from the walls. Behind, men crawled from the rear of the ditch and off through the stubble. They returned separately and in little groups, bringing with them the Lebels and Mannlichers and Winchester the youths had slung aside. Bowan twisted along to where Luabala bent, trying to free a jammed Mannlicher action. "You're going to charge?" he asked, whispering gently.

Luabala's lips drew from his teeth, his lids hooded down over his blinking, hot eyes. "Yes," he said in a rasping, choked sort of voice. "Later . . . But, first, we are going to retreat. Back across the savannah to the edge of the jungle. Then, when they come out of here, into the open, after us—we will charge."

"I see," said Bowan, "that you can still remember St. Cyr and the drill manuals."

"I shall be the last one here to forget," Luabala said, levelly staring. "Thank you . . . You will stay with us, in the rest of the action?"

"I came here with the express promise," Bowan said, "to help you win this war. It's not won now. And," he shrugged a shoulder briefly over towards the stiff contortion of Roddo's body, "I got quite a bit of liking for that boy, in the little time I knew him. He had the makings of a real soldier and an officer. But, when do you go?"

"Now," Luabala said, and turned and slid back out of the ditch as he spoke.

The Simogay followed them first with a ranging rifle and arrow fire and a great burst of yipping jeers. But then, as the Begra came fully to their feet and began to trot for the jungle edge, the gate of the stockade was slowly opened and warriors and old men and women came out.

"It is working," Luabala grunted, where he trotted with Bowan among the silent, stumbling warriors. "They will be after us soon. It will be no victory for them, if once we can get into the forest and on the back trails or the river. What you and your riflemen did there has made this all pretty even, so far. Look! They are beginning to run after us—to attack!"

The Simogay came in a mass, their bow and *assegai* men in the center, their last riflemen on the flanks. Bowan did not fire a shot until they were within fifty yards of the jungle rim, and Luabala did not call his men up and out from the underbrush until they had received the first volley of spears.

The two forces met and shocked nearly in the first trampled greenness of the jungle. Luabala led again the men who had remained to him from that other and disastrous attack right after dawn; he broke his force into two halves, and sent them upon the flanks, leaping, panting in their eagerness.

Bowan fell upon the center of the Simogay force. He led the survivors of what had been his strange marching company, less than forty-five youths, some of them wounded, all of them wearied and dazed, still clumsy-motioned with the long-bayoneted Lebels, but with a fixity of purpose which lifted through them like flame.

They chopped, hacked and split apart the center of the Simogay, broke

it back from them. They reformed in fours upon the other side, staring through bloodied eyes for Bowan's hand signals, and followed him in again. But the Simogay did not stand this time; they dropped aside, flinging down their big, bright shields, and started to break, out across the savannah, and towards the open gate of the stockade.

The Begra youths caught them with the cruel, thin points of the French bayonets, they chased and stuck them like pigs, knelt down and shot them in the backs as they ran from bayonet reach.

Then Luabala's great voice boomed across the clearing. He called to the youths and to his own warriors. He brought them swirling in a solid group about him and Bowan. He lifted up and out the Mannlicher he held in one hand and pointed to the stockade. Flame from the grass roofs of the Simogay huts torched towards the sky; walls fell crashing, ballooning bright swarms of sparks, as they stood in silence and watched. Women and children and old men were scrambling from the gates, carrying food, dragging babies and chickens and pigs after them. "We will not go back there," Luabala said strongly to the Begra. "There is no reason now. Those are only the old and the women and children. When and if we want them, we can come and take them as slaves. The rest, their warriors," with the barrel of the gun he described a rough semi-circle about the savannah before him, "are all gone. Not one of them is alive, or left. This, for us, has been victory."

He stopped his voice and looked at Bowan, as though that man would speak. But Bowan only shook his sweat-streaked head at him, and Lua-

bala nodded. "Pick up their arms," he ordered the Begra. "Those that we want and can use. It is my wish that we return home, and soon. Be quick!"

THEY sat, the three, before Luabala's house in the village of the Begra. In front of them, what was left of an immense cooking fire that had been a part of the celebration of victory, was dulled to its final coals and sheathed in ash. Over the stockade wall, towards the river where the dawn mists began to sag up in silver, the moon was a faded chrome shadow against a sky already softening with the gray of the coming daylight.

The three had been silent for many minutes, since the last of the maidens and the warriors and the drummers had staggered to their huts. It was Oualal who spoke now, looking to Luabala as he phrased the words, then afterwards at Bowan, who sat as if quietly, his hands dropped between his spread knees. The witch-doctor's words were in the tribal dialect, pronounced swiftly, and Bowan did not understand them, nor Luabala's rasped answer. Then Luabala spoke to him; he translated literally question and answer into French:

"Oualal has just asked me, 'What is the white warrior going to do now?' I have answered him and said, 'That is only for that man himself to say.' You might, though, if you wish, tell me, so that I may tell him; much longer than the span of my lifetime, Oualal has either been the chief counsellor of the tribe, or its regent. He has continued that rôle of adviser with me."

"But why," asked Bowan dimly, "does the man put so much interest in my actions? I am again only your guest here, in this time of peace . . ."

One of Luabala's long, powerfully shaped hands came out from his chair arm, in a jerking and almost impatient motion. "Because those are words that mean little or nothing here—'in time of peace.' The Begra are never for long in a time of peace."

"You are thinking of further war, then," Bowan said. "Or he has been talking to you about it?"

"Both." Luabala was staring fully at him, leaning forward in the elephant tusk chair. "But it is not just he and I; all the tribe want war. They say that now is the time; there are other tribes, beyond the territory of the Simogay, who have always been allies of that people, and have fought against us from time to time. The tribal leaders here have long pondered about subduing all those peoples—placing them in subjection beneath Begra rule. It is the great dream again—a confederated, consolidated nation of the blacks, like the ancient Songhai.

"And I would rule that nation; I would be its emperor. I would have half of Central Equatorial Africa at my feet. And it is very possible, that dream. No other tribe here around the rivers has modern guns and ammunition such as we have here. With that, we can conquer them one by one, or all together."

"The major part of that stuff," said Bowan in his flat and slow voice, "belongs to the French government. The only stuff which your tribe can rightfully claim is the Mannlichers and Winchester taken from the 'R Guebait. The rest should be turned back into French hands."

LUABALA inclined his head a little bit, his eyes unmoving. "I have been wanting to speak to you about that," he said.

"Speak now," Bowan told him.

Luabala stood from his chair. He took half a dozen paces over the packed earth before he stopped before Bowan and answered him:

"The Begra will never see those guns go back to the French, or to anybody else. They think of them as their own now; they believe that through the fighting of the Begra warriors there at El Hank they have won perpetual right to their ownership. They would refuse to give those guns up; in truth, I am certain that they would fight to retain them. They give the tribe power, and a chance for expansion and glory which it has never had before in its history."

"And for," said Bowan, nearly whispering the words, "a senior lieutenant of *tirailleurs*, who so far has always been glad to accept all the honors offered you by France—what do you think about this tribe keeping such a supply of government arms? What do you think about your own future in the French service, or mine, if you or I were to countenance such an action?"

Luabala lifted his head and let forth pealing, light laughter. "The question is easy for me; I have already decided it. I am never going back to a *tirailleur* regiment again. I will never serve any more for the French, and under the tricolor. Those days for Luabala are ended. I have served years for them, and at least two of their generals when they decorated me told me I had served them well. But now I have another and far greater and older allegiance and purpose, that to my own people and of my own ambition as their leader and king. You admit you were born a fighting man, John Bowan. You are also a man not of French blood who has served the French flag

a long time. You, too, are a man of imagination. Can't you see the empire you and I, side by side, can carve here in the heart of Africa for ourselves and for the black tribes? Doesn't it stir you, such an idea, such an ambition and future? No more years in barracks, towns and building road and wall in the desert; no more almost endless paper work and waiting for another man to die or be retired for old age, before you can sew on another stripe and go on one more slow step up the ladder. Here—here—"

"THE glory road," said Bowan. In the faint glancing of the fire-light, his knuckles showed white-ly, pressed by the force of his muscular rigor closely against the skin. "You are forgetting a lot of things, Luabala—and all for that. But, you have asked me a question, a lot of questions. And that guy—" he jerked a bent thumb over toward Oualal's sidewise twisted head and body—"wants to know about me, too. I've been meaning to tell you, anyhow; I decided it, when we were marching in from back in the Simogay country. I'm going down river, right away, tomorrow, with you, or without you, with those French Army guns, or without them.

"I serve France; I have given her my oath as an officer. That means something to me; just how much I can't tell you, or even tell myself, but, anyway, a lot more than anything else I can name right now. I can also tell you this: you are making a mistake in keeping those guns and ammunition rounds here. And if you bring into execution any of your plans of empire as you have just outlined them to me here—you will be strictly violating every rule and understanding of the

French mandate throughout this entire area. You will be held guilty and punishable for that. I," his lips formed the expression of a smile, "as a French colonial military officer, can assure you of that."

Gravely, calmly, Luabala nodded to him, and in a soft voice, said, "Thank you. You will be leaving here tomorrow then, Lieutenant?"

"Tomorrow," Bowan said; they stood directly facing each other now, and no more than two or three feet apart. "Rather, this morning, as soon as it is light."

Again, Luabala nodded. "I will see," he said, "that you get a dugout boat and boatmen who will take you down the river here to the Congo. They will take you as far as the first mission post on the Congo. When the priests there have heard what you will have to say, they will arrange to get you to the coast as soon as possible. Is there any other way I can help you, anything more I can offer you now, beyond an expression of my thanks, and of my great regret that you can't see your way to be with that of mine—along what you have called the glory road?"

Bowan lifted one eyebrow a bit, and a corner of his mouth. "Only one thing," he said. "Tell your friend, here, the chief adviser and soothsayer, that this gat I'm carrying can shoot faster than any man can throw a knife, and that I am a very light sleeper. I mean, tell him that I'm going over in your hut for some sleep now, until you get the dugout boat and the crew ready for me, and I'll shoot any man except yourself who comes to the door."

Luabala's hands clenched and unclenched, his eyes brightened, blinked once. "You—" he began, but then his voice broke, and when he spoke again,

it was Oualal, and the little old man cackled back at him in a furious rush of words, turned, never looking at Bowan, and shuffled rapidly away across the compound. Then Luabala brought forth his right arm and hand and placed his fingertips lightly upon Bowan's shoulder.

"I shall swear to you now," he said, "as the man you have called your friend and who has fought beside you, that no harm will come to you from me or any of my tribe. There will be—peace—between us until you have reached that French mission post on the Congo. And I hope that always it will be peace between us."

"And if," asked Bowan harshly, "I return here?"

"Then," said Luabala; he was smiling, and in that instant erect and quite calm, "knowing you, I will know that it is war."

They laughed then, both of them, as their hands met in a close gripping, but their eyes were hard and careful, and it was clear between them as though one or both of them had spoken it aloud: they faced each other as friends now, but with the subconscious foreknowledge, the anticipation of enemies, of men who would and must fight each other to the end.

CHAPTER VII.

THE THIRD STRIPE.

THE Governor's stiffly starched white uniform cracked as he pushed from his desk and got to his feet. The heels of his faultlessly pipe-clayed shoes smacked hard over the tiles of the floor as he walked to the window in the front of his office. Then, cursing in a muttering voice, he turned and stared at Bowan, still

seated awkwardly in a stiff chair at a corner of his desk. But, after that initial outburst, his voice was calm:

"There is only one thing for it, Lieutenant; one thing only—a punitive expedition up in there, and a military occupation of the territory until this renegade fellow and the chaps fighting for him give up, run out, or are killed. All of Central Africa would go to hell in a very dainty handbasket if this man Luabala got away with one fifth of what he outlined to you. All our holdings here would be jeopardized, and a lot of the Belgian and the English holdings, too. But, he's operating in our mandated territory; he's a commissioned deserter from one of our best-known black regiments, and he is in possession of a store of French arms and ammunition which he refused to release in your hands . . ."

The Governor walked to his desk and opened an inlaid cigarette box; he offered a cigarette to Bowan, took one himself, then stared at Bowan over the lighter flame. "The man has very big ideas, from what you tell me, and a fair chance of putting a few of them over. Didn't he ever, during that show with the Simogay, or just after it, ask you to join up in his fun with him?"

Bowan turned his cigarette over in his fingers, coughing a little at its unaccustomed fumes. "Yes, sir," he said. "He did."

"And?" the Governor asked, standing before him, his feet spread.

Bowan gestured downward, at the stained, torn and faded uniform he had not yet had opportunity to change. "I belong to the Legion, *M'sieur le Gouverneur*," he said simply. "I've always served that flag out there. In the Legion is the only place I've ever found happiness."

"But you are not," said the Gov-

ernor softly, as if bemused yet by a question he did not understand, "a man of true French blood; your name is not even French."

"In the Legion," he said, "those things don't count. One is a Legionnaire, and that is all..."

"Some men speak of glory," the Governor said strangely. "But, if the Legion has nothing else, it has tradition... But, I want to see you in clean clothes, and dressed and shaved and all the rest; you're coming here for dinner at seven sharp, you know. First, though, we must finish this other business. I have talked with my staff here; I have of course been in touch by radio with Dakar and Agadir, and I have talked with all your Moroccan big-wigs at Rabat, and a few more in Paris. Which, too, is a funny thing. You must have an excellent record in the Legion, *mon lieutenant*. Because all along the line, after they had pondered the situation, I was told to decide the thing myself, or adopt any suggestions you saw fit to make."

"You flatter me, sir," Bowan said; he was smiling wryly. "But my own diagnosis of what you have just said would be that very few men here, or along this coast or at Rabat or Paris know much about that back country I've just come from."

THE Governor smiled with him, swinging his chair around and seating himself again. "Precisely," he said. "And far too few. In fact, to my knowledge, you are the only white man alive who has been through the Simogay and Begra country and come out to tell about it. In what they said, and didn't say, Rabat and Paris admitted as much. But, your recommendations for that situation back in there?"

Bowan rubbed out in the mahogany ash bowl his cigarette stub. He looked for several seconds also out at the foam-tarnished rollers of the ocean horizon. He said then: "It's a tough job. A job for the Legion. When I left Luabala up there, he all but told me that he already knew that his glory road wouldn't run just one way..."

The Governor tapped his desk edge with a little, rippling, nervous sound. "You wouldn't recommend sending black, local troops in there then?"

"No, sir." Bowan's answer was immediate, flat. "That's a job for white men, for the Legion. I can tell you that, right now."

"You can tell me why?" the Governor said.

Bowan reached over and helped himself to another cigarette. "I've never phrased it aloud before" he said, "but I began to put all the parts of the reasons together after the final battle in there, when the Begra at last kicked the stuffing out of the Simogay. But that's quite a long story, sir."

"Tell it!" the Governor snapped. "Who else is going to?"

The Governor sat far back in his chair for a while when Bowan was through. He glanced at his desk top and at the first of the lilac and silver shadows spraddling out from the corners of the white-walled room.

He said in a slow voice, "Not many men have an opportunity to see and appraise such things, and live to talk about them afterwards. You're right about the Legion. There's only a company I can lay my hands on, though, from here to Agadir. Even for a job like this. They're all scattered about now, at various jobs, and they'll be a composite gang at best, when they're brought together. Will they be enough for the job?"

Bowan moved his hand. "If you get the right kind of officer to take them in there."

The Governor cocked his chair back and laughed aloud. He pointed a finger out, all but jabbing Bowan in the shoulder. He said, "Don't worry about that. Don't think about it at all. You're the man who will take that outfit in. It's wholly logical that you should; no other man knows the country or the job. But what the blue hell is the matter with you, man? What are you shaking your head for, and muttering at?"

Bowan's face was a brick red, and small beads of sweat had appeared along his forehead. "Any other man, sir," he said. "You seem to forget. Luabala used to be a friend of mine. I was at St. Cyr with him. We belonged to the same tennis club. In a number of senses, he saved my life after that show at El Hank. And, if he wanted to, it would have been no act of importance to his conscience to have me killed right there in the Begra country, directly after I'd declared myself and said I wanted to come out.

"Perhaps I've confused you a bit, in my picture of the man. He's not the usual deserter, the usual dissident type. Circumstance just played him as many queer tricks as it played me. By right of inheritance, he's the head of that tribe. The man was born the son of kings, and, leaving the surrounding circumstances out, he now has just returned to his people and his country. He is the rightful king of the Begra tribe."

THE Governor let the front legs of his chair down with a bang.

He placed both hands upon the desk edge. For a long moment of silence he stared fully into Bowan's eyes.

"I grant you those things," he said then. "I understand all of them, and can see how you feel about them, and how Luabala does. But you forget the French commission and French oath of loyalty and duty Luabala left unexpired and flatly discarded. You forget the supply of French guns and rifles he has less right to than an 'R Guebait razzou.

"Also, you fail to remember what you have even impressed upon me in a few moments' conversation—just what Luabala and his tribe plan to do, perhaps have already begun to do, with those guns. You have told me that you serve the Legion, and that flag out there on the staff. Now, there can be no real confusion in your own mind. He, Luabala, has chosen a new road, but you are following an old one, the only one you admit to ever having followed and loved. That, I think, is all I can tell you, *mon lieutenant*."

Bowan sat with his eyes half-closed, his hands clenched before him. Outside, in the dusk, the flag was being taken from the staff, and in the town somewhere, at the barracks, a bugle sounded in the old and lovely, quavering call. "Yes, sir," he said, through the faint, sweet beat of the bugle notes. "And thank you." He stood in the position of attention, his heels met, his hands at his sides. "Is that all?"

"No." The Governor smiled, getting up from his chair. "Not quite . . . When you go up in there to the Begra country with that company, you'll be wearing another stripe, and drawing captain's pay."

Bowan's long, browned jaw thrust out, his gray eyes steadied in a low, searching glance upon the Governor's. "Look here, sir, truly—that show at El Hank was all pretty much a sorry flop. And anything I did in that cam-

paign against the Simogay with Lua-bala, or any information I've brought you out here, isn't worth—"

"Enough!" the Governor cut in on him. "Who's said a word about merit, or past performance? Do you think any other self-respecting lieutenants, or any hard-headed members of a picked marching company of the Legion are going to follow way into the back country a commanding officer who's nothing but a two-striper and a lieutenant? Wait until you've come out, and then we'll see if you can hold that other stripe. Get out of here now! Take my car and my chauffeur, and get over there to the barracks and see if you can borrow a razor and a tub and a uniform that fits you. *Madame*, my wife, has been complaining for years that her dinner parties here are lacking completely in anything approaching real military swank on the part of her guests. If you do not show at least a fair amount, *Madame* will be angry with you, and I assure you that she can be a very difficult person—even for a Legionnaire. *Au revoir!*"

"*Au revoir, M'sieur,*" Bowan muttered, and turned grinning toward the door.

BOWAN wore his third stripe, that thin strip of gold upon each cuff of his new tunic, the first time he met and passed in inspection the men who have been brought to form the marching company under his command for that almost unbelievable trip up the Congo. He was quite nervous when he met them first, and found that they were so, the senior and sub-lieutenant and the senior sergeant who came forth to meet him before the company, and the rank and file as he passed them by in the close, hard scrutiny of company inspection.

But then that feeling passed from him, and, he knew, passed from them also. They had eyed and inspected each other, he, and they also, out of their salty, cynically shrewd knowledge of years of soldiering and campaigning.

The men, brought from various inland and scattered *postes* as far north as the Grand Sahara, wore new uniforms and equipment, khaki that was shiny and stiff yet from the tailor's shop, and the conical white sun helmets Paris had once decided was a fitting headpiece for even a Legionnaire serving in the sun. But the senior lieutenant, a Georgian Russian named Dashka, who had served the last Czar in a crack Cossack regiment, then in the White Army under Deniken and in the Legion ever since, in every capacity from second class private to his present rank, spoke softly of that as he and Bowan turned to move along past the first squad.

"They won't need those dam' wash-basins in the bush, and a man can't even cook soup in them. Don't worry, Captain; every man has got his *kepi* stuck down in a corner of his knapsack; Pillar and I saw to that . . ."

Pillar, the young Polish sub-lieutenant, who all across one cheek carried a saber slash gained in some cavalry duel, smiled where he strode behind them, and whispered, "The lieutenant and I have been together out against the Black Flags in the Tonkin, *mon Capitaine*; we know each other . . ."

"*Bon!*" Abruptly, Bowan stopped before the right guide of the front rank. "You know some of these men personally, Dashka? And you are acquainted with all their service records? Tell them to me, then, as we move along. I just got this third stripe, and I won't keep it unless I know a lot more

about this gang than I do now. Who's this first guy?"

DASHKA'S square, seamed face was illumined by a grin from ear to battered ear. "Viaseppi, Captain? He says he never saw a gun before he came into the Legion, but I've personally got a pretty good idea he used to wear boots and belts over in the Egyptian Camel Corps. He got that little red and blue bit, the Colonial Medal, up in the Jebel Medawer, last year. The guy next to him's a German, and all the four next men are krauts; children who cut their first teeth on that Hindenburg Line. Two of them were out in the Tonkin with me: the rest have seen a good dose of the bush fighting in Madagascar. But, you want to know their names, Captain?"

"I want to know every man," repeated Bowan. "And every man to know me. This is going to be no pleasure cruise in Algeria or Tunisia . . ."

He made no notes of their names and records as Dashka, helped by Pillar and Hansek, the senior sergeant, cited them to him. But when he had returned to his position before the company, he called off certain men by name.

He detailed them to certain specific tasks: machine-riflemen, purveyors, grenadiers, signalmen, runners and orderlies. He had the sergeant, Hansek, list those names and duties, then read them off to him again. "Now I want volunteers," he said, pausing and staring at them. "Guys to handle and tote and nurse the guns and gear of a Stokes mortar section. And, as maybe you can guess, you won't have any mules, and nothing but your backs and solid brush to carry through, after we leave the river."

A 4—3

It was the Governor's idea, and Bowan concurred with him in it: the company marched off, from the barracks and through the town to the river, with full colors and a band which played the March of the Legion. Every other unit in the post was drawn up about the square before the barracks as they passed, and the sharp commands of the unit commanders cut through the stirring, sweeping notes of the March, swords flashed out, then up, and bayoneted rifles smacked to present arms. At least, Bowan thought grimly, they were being sent away in style—into a country no man of the Legion, except himself, had seen before.

CHAPTER VIII.

"YOURS IS THE GLORY!"

THEY were weeks going up the river and weeks in the jungle afterwards, before that night when the big, almost naked warrior stepped silently out of the bush, yards inside the nearest sentry, and slid forward toward the little, shielded campfire where Bowan sat with Dashka and Pillar. Dashka swung with his automatic pistol in his hand, and Pillar went rolling over toward one of the uncanvassed and loaded machine-rifles. But Bowan called out quietly to each of them; and rose gravely to meet the warrior.

He knew the man by sight; he was one of the senior warriors who had survived that mad attack upon the walls of the Simogay barricade, wore now a reddish scar from an *assegai* upon one shoulder. Bowan spoke to him in the few phrases of Begra he knew, but the warrior answered him only by drawing from inside his breechclout a small, tightly wrapped

piece of paper. Bowan went to the fire to read it, and was not at all surprised at the sentences he found there. It was signed by Luabala—"Luabala, King of the Begra and Simogay tribes." It said, in clear, well-written French:

You cannot come in peace, and therefore only in war. If you pass beyond where my messenger has come upon you, I must meet you with war. Beyond here, you cross the road of my glory. You, I know, will understand me.

Luabala, King of the Begra and Simogay tribes.

Bowan folded the note carefully; he put it in an upper pocket of his tunic, buttoned the pocket flap. He walked slowly back to the erect and motionless Begra warrior. He brought up into his hand his Colt automatic, slid a cartridge out from it and put it into the hand of the Begra. "For Luabala," he said. "Tell him he will understand me—it is war."

Expressionless, wordless, the Begra turned, walked through the firelight and through the shadow, and then the jungle had him and he was gone. By the fire, Dashka and Pillar stared at Bowan and he looked grimly smiling down upon them. "It looks," he said, "as though we will have to double our sentries from now on. But he—Luabala—let us get into his actual territory before he sent us that little *billet-doux*. His main village is only about eighty kilometres from here."

"And perhaps six months by ambush and bayonet work," said Dashka slowly.

"No." Bowan swung his head and indicated the machine-rifle Pillar had grasped when the Begra had stepped so startlingly out of the dark.

"The only man of all that force to have ever faced one of those is Luabala himself. And one of those can do an awful lot of efficient chopping, even in bush like this. If we do our job right, we'll be in front of that village within a week."

Dashka pulled at his scrubby, grayed mustache. "Five hundred francs, on that?" he asked.

"Taken!" Bowan said sharply. "Now, double all sentries! Quickly!"

Bowan won that bet, if only by three hours and some minutes. But his winning of it was as much in Dashka's and Pillar's, and the whole company's hands, as in his own. Because it was Dashka's idea, from years of jungle fighting in Indo-China, that the best method of advance now was not through the jungle thickness, but up the river itself.

The village, he argued, from Bowan's description of it, was situated right above the river, and was thereby vulnerable from a water attack.

"With the little, cute ones, the Stokes mortars," Dashka said, "your former pal can't have any idea we've got such pieces with us, that possibly we could have dragged them with us here. And he can't have anything heavier than a service rifle to blast us from the river with. So, if we build a big raft, right here, and fortify it, all we've got to go is to cut some logs, instead of cutting a lot of jungle and stubborn throats. I'm right?"

"You're right," Bowan told him. "And get going!"

THEY were two days and nights building that raft. Half the company worked at it, and the other half protected them. They were sniped at by men they never saw during all

that time, and lost six men, cleanly killed. "Your old allies can shoot," Pillar admitted, standing knee-deep in the river beside Bowan at the raft foundation where naked Legionnaires toiled at building little, solid-walled block-houses fore and aft for the machine-rifle and Stokes gun crews.

"I taught a few myself," grunted Bowan, heaving on a wet, green and heavy log with him, "and Luabala seems to have taught the rest. But, tomorrow morning, we'll be getting out of here aboard this damned warship of ours, and we'll have a little target practice ourselves, from midstream."

They were four days and nights traveling that eighty kilometres up the river to the Begra village. They used every bit of strength and marksmanship they possessed, poling the hulking craft from behind the barricaded deck-walls or, during the nights, dragging it by long ropes made of lianas from tree to tree along the bank.

They lost another neat half dozen men in that passage, but the machine-rifles flailed the banks during the day, and the gunners could count a score or more of the Begra they had sent to join the dead of the Legion. "You see," muttered Dashka, shoving on a pole with a brace of Legionnaires and Bowan, "we're a little bit ahead so far, and we'll be a lot ahead when we bring this hulk to anchor off his village. But, I'm pretty certain now I'm helping myself to lose my own bet, Captain."

"I'll get you so drunk with that five hundred francs," promised Bowan, "that you won't know yourself for a week."

It was near dawn when, with infinite slowness, they rounded the last curve of the river and saw above them, stark and black on the high bluff, the stock-

ade wall of the Begra village. Drums beat there, warriors, women and children yelled, then torches flared and were flung down, a tattoo of rifle bullets, spears and poisoned arrows clashed along the raft.

"It's the man's pride; the man's idea of glory," whispered Bowan. He lay at the forward end of the raft, had just seen the rude rock and log anchor dropped overside and take hold. Beside him now, in the rough, log-walled little bow shelter, Hansek and a crew he had picked were setting up a Stokes gun. "You want to set up shop right away, *mon Capitaine*?" Hansek asked him. "We didn't do a bad job on this garbage barge, but it's no submarine, and the topside wall is badly missing when those boys start dumping all their stuff down."

Bowan lay silent for a moment, his night binoculars at his eyes. A vision, a series of images, was flashing through his brain: of the interior of that village, as he had first seen it. That place had been built for permanence.

Luabala's people, all the Begra, had always lived there; it had been their home unbrokenly for centuries. Never, not even now, had the thought entered to them that it might be taken from them.

"Range a couple of shots," he ordered Hansek. "Put a bracket up over that big cottonwood tree—just to show them. Can you figure your own range and elevation?"

"I was born with one of these in my hip pocket, Captain," muttered Hansek. "Let 'er go?"

"Let it go!"

SOFTLY, the Stokes gun made its coughing *gung-ing* report of delivery, and the squat shell lifted swaying up, a blue steel flash in the

torch glimmer above. Hansek never watched its flight; he was whipping up another shell, feeding it into the stove-pipe-like barrel of the gun. "Twice!" he said. "I don't like your rotten river anyhow, folks."

In a violent, flashing cascade of colors, the first shell broke a yard or two over the crown of the great old cottonwood tree, still splashing the dawn with its fluorescence when the bracketing projectile joined it. The jungle boomed as though it were an immense drum struck by two slapped blows of a gigantic hand. "You think those two messengers will improve their logic, Captain?" Hansek whispered.

"Pipe down!" Bowan husked. "I'll know, in a minute."

But he was made aware at once. Bawled and gay jeers, great shouts of laughing rage came from inside the stockade. Warriors sprang up recklessly into open sight along the wall top, hurling down rapid bursts of rifle fire, arrows, spears and crude bombs made from old defective cartridge powder.

A bullet whimpered at Bowan's ear and he reached up to find the upper belt of his Sam Browne neatly cut away right below the shoulderstrap. The whole raft shuddered, shocked beneath the fusillade; he heard two men cry out as they were hit. "All right," he said to Hansek; he was propping his Colt pistol up for a snap shot at some of those torch-outlined warriors, "let it go; fire at will, until ordered otherwise."

He moved down along the launch; he dragged the wounded men back into the midships shelter, sent the company medical man out to handle a rifle and to tell Dashka and Pillar to open up with everything aboard including hand grenades. "Tell the lieutenants I want

everybody out of that town before dawn, and ourselves in it. I'll be on deck myself as soon as I've taken care of these guys. Tell Lieutenant Dashka to get his landing party in line; we'll be going ashore in fifteen minutes by my watch; now three-forty one, exact. Beat it!"

He went out on deck three minutes later. The village on the bluff leaped and rocked with flame. Hansek and the other Stokes gunners were pouring an almost steady stream of shells into the place, lobbing in looping, precise flight. The vast cottonwood tree has crashed and gone down; immense chunks of the stockade wall facing the river were gone. Huts flamed inside, or rose blackly jagged in fragments into the red-gouted air.

Through these gaps the machine-rifle gunners and the grenadiers and the contentedly sprawled riflemen crested an awful barrage. Bowan lifted his whistle on its chain and blew the general call for "cease firing."

DASHKA came toward him, scrambling on his hands and knees over the splintered logs, Pillar at his back. "My lads are all ready," the Georgian told him. "Do we go?"

"You go," said Bowan. "And I'll be with you, right away. I guess that proud, stiff-necked fool has got all the women and children out of there and well away. But they'll fight you, too; the women will tear your heart out if they get near you. Tell your guys to watch themselves, going up. But, that first bracket of shells should have warned—" He broke his voice off and cursed.

Dashka's hand slid out and gripped his wrist for an instant. "That's war, *mon vieux*," he said. "I've seen it and

been forced to wage it in my country, and a lot of others since. But, I think all the women and kids did get out; Pillar told me about five minutes ago Viaseppi reported a lot of motion in the bush, off there, at the foot of the hill. And no gang of warriors, waiting for us to come ashore, would make that. Am I right?"

"You're right," said Bowan hoarsely. "All right; let's go . . . Pillar, stick here until we're up the bank and you hear my whistle. Then bring the other guys in and head straight for the stockade; that's our objective right now and nothing else. Understood?"

"Understood, Captain."

"All right, so long, then. We'll be seeing you up there." He nodded to Pillar and to Hansek, took the trench knife and a bag full of hand grenades the sergeant handed to him, slid down over the side of the raft into the shallows where Dashka and his men were already splashing ashore, their guns held high over their heads.

A group of warriors, perhaps a hundred men, met them on the bank, and then on the trail up the bluff to the village. But Bowan did not meet or see Luabala among them, and was somehow glad. For that was all but a slaughter there, even in the darkness. The Legion kept place and formation. And, after the Legion's first smashing charge up the bank, the Begra fought man by man, singly lunging in, hacking with the *assegais* and short spears, only a dozen or less of them retaining the bayoneted Lebel rifles he, Bowan, had left here.

The Legion machine-rifle gunners caught the Begra breast-high with shocking, quick bursts fired from the hip as they strode steadily forward in closed formation. The men on each side and behind smashed the rest clear

away with the evil little hand grenades or the long and thin point of the bayonet which was as fast and more deadly than any Begra *assegai*.

One by one, the Begra fell aside and were gone, killed, or fled into the jungle. At Dashka's shoulder, remembering very clearly how he had entered once at Luabala's, Bowan came striding without firing a shot through the gate of the stockade.

THE village was a smoldering shambles. Nobody moved there, and only the dead remained. Bowan gripped his whistle firmly between his teeth and blew a blast upon it, for Pillar and the men who so far had remained upon the raft to cover their rear and their means of retreat. "This is ours," he said then to Dashka. "I want this wall fixed at once, and all of those huts that deserve it. For permanent occupation."

"We're going to stay here?" Dashka asked him, blinking his powder-inflamed eyes.

"That's it; some day, some guy in Paris might even name this post of the Legion after you. How would that be as a cute trick?"

"But listen, *mon Capitaine*," Dashka's voice was harsh, quick. "We've only nailed down about a hundred and fifty of them, counting all the stiffes around this place, and what we knocked off getting up in here. The main bunch, and probably Luabala himself, got out from under, and with their guns and ammunition and women and children. This just about begins the job, doesn't it?"

"This just about ends it," said Bowan sharply. "Because Luabala has to come back, and bring his warriors back. There's nothing else, according to his code, or their code, for him to do. This

is their village, and has always been. They'll die, to the last man, before they'll let us keep it. And all we've got to do now is to sit here, and fix it up, and wait for them to come and try to take it back . . ."

Bowan paused, to look off toward the gate, where the first of Pillar's detachment, laden under double packs and cases of ammunition, grenades and food, were coming through the gate. Then he glanced down, at his watch dial, and back at Dashka. "But that isn't for you to worry about now; your only concern is, how and when are you going to pay me with that five hundred francs? You grant me the winner?"

"I grant you the winner," grunted Dashka, "in that, and in a lot of other things . . ."

Bowan and his company of the Legion waited there for almost two solid months before Luabala and the Begra came back. Bowan's own and his company's supply of stubborn patience was nearly exhausted by then. For weeks, they had not seen another man but themselves, and had been able to go openly down to the river for water, and to the open space below for firewood and maize and yams from the Begra women's patches.

Then, late one afternoon, a wood detail under a young Austrian corporal was cut off and killed by men they never saw and who fired upon them with poisoned arrows from the deep jungle, and the water detail at the river scampered back with their buckets empty and carrying two severely wounded men.

"They've written discipline on the Legion flag for a country," Bowan said. He stood on a watch-tower platform beside the gate with Dashka and

Pillar, his binoculars at his eyes as he counted the khaki-clad forms of his dead in the open below. "But to keep any man's vigilance on the alert, day in and day out, in the face of an invisible enemy, is impossible. But, I'm telling you nothing new . . . Right now, what is news is that Luabala and his gang are back, and want nothing else but this town."

"HOW can you be sure of that, Captain?" asked Pillar softly.

"Listen!" commanded Bowan. "Listen to the drums, off there in the bush . . . Does that sound like a surprise attack, or waiting to pick off our work details one by one? Like hell! I've just taken the biggest gamble of my life—we all have—and we've won. I hoped for this; I bet on it. I saw Luabala at El Hank, and I saw him leading his tribe against the Simogay. He will charge wide-open right down the middle of his glory road . . . Well, gentlemen, post your double sentries, and send your machine-rifle crews up here. I'm practically certain this will all be paid off tonight. If it isn't, Luabala will think he will never be able to lift his head fully again anywhere in the jungle, or anywhere in the world. That's strange, isn't it?"

Young, blond Pillar was staring off into the jungle, little nerves twitching at the corners of his jaws and his eyes as the thudding waves of the drumming pounded in at him. "No," he said, "it isn't. Not in this country . . ."

THE Begra came to the attack of the village first in small, scattered waves. They brought retaliatory fire from the walls and from the machine-rifle gunners on the watch-tower platforms, then instantly and shrewdly

raked those positions. Then, about an hour after midnight, Hansek, in command of the gate, let forth a hoarse shout and sent a runner spinning around and back to Bowan, at his post in the center of the place.

Bowan got there, at the gate, just as Hansek opened it part way and flung himself down behind a machine-rifle. Absolutely naked black men, more than half a dozen of them, were racing up the trail. They lurched carrying a big and clumsy kind of package or box in their arms. "The pigs have got some sort of a powder or dynamite bomb they've worked up," Hansek growled at Bowan, then opened with the machine-rifle.

He knocked three of the warriors sprawling in death. But the other three came right on, bent low, swift and very certain. "Get back!" yelled Bowan. "Get back!" He hauled Hansek by the neck and arm, hurled him and the machine-rifle back.

Then he slid the grenade from his side pocket, pulled the pin, and rolled it like a cricket ball, bouncing slowly, right down the path at those running, laden men. It exploded right before them or under them.

It smashed into rocking explosion the bomb they had carried to wreck the gate and wall. And then out of the darkness beyond came the main body of the Begra, taking that crash and vomiting of flame as their signal.

Bowan let them come right into the stockade, where no man of the Legion remained upon the ground, and all stood upon the stockade footwalks, their weapons ready, their traverse fire angles already arranged.

The Begra raced into a clashing, chopping cross-sea of death. Their dead blocked the gateway waist-high, and were scattered all across the com-

pound and half way up the ladders to the footwalks. Bowan saw Luabala then; he was dragging, shoving, hammering what was left to him of his force out of that cruel and ghastly trap.

He waited behind them, though he was the last through the gate; and kneeling there, swung his bayoneted Lebel rifle around and fired five shots, one that caught Hansek in the throat, flung him around and down in death, and four more at Bowan, that kicked whining past him, the last, in ricochet, plowing through his shoulder.

"All right!" Bowan yelled. His voice was like a bugle call. "Go and get them now! Get them all!"

THEY caught up with the Begra in the maize and yam patches of their women. The Begra stood there, reformed and fought, solidly and closely, almost as solidly as the Legion.

The Legion came in a running line, yelling strangely in the silence of the Begra. Then the Begra also sprang, and white and black man met, locked.

Bowan had killed four men at the bayonet point before he came upon Luabala. Luabala was also seeking him, but he came staggering, and one arm, slicked with blood, sagged at his side, his eyes were great, wide pools of color in his grayed face and the Lebel rifle he carried bumped the ground before him. "Luabala!" Bowan cried. "Luabala Give it up! I've got you!"

Luabala smiled, as though at some superbly ironic joke. He fumbled the rifle in his good hand, he swept it up and swung reeling, stumbling at Bowan, his lips bared from his gleaming teeth.

Bowan took the bayonet thrust upon his own rifle guard; he brought his butt

plate up and in through the arc of a smashing, terrible blow. The rifle bumped from Luabala's hand. He went to his knees, to his face in the crushed and tangled maize. He rolled over once, twice, trying to rear up, trying to see Bowan.

Bowan knelt right before him, put his hands upon his shoulders. "Luabala," he said, "you can see me, hear me? It's all over; you're licked, you're through! There isn't a dozen of your men left, and they're being killed now. Give them a chance. Let them—"

Death was coming cold and heavy

through Luabala; Bowan could feel it up through his own hands from the other man's body. Then, as though from an uncounted distance, he heard Luabala's voice. "I want nothing now, Legionnaire. They want nothing . . . They just followed me. They sought the thing, the thing you've found, the—the glory. Yours is the glory!"

His body fell away from under Bowan's hands. He dropped back, and to his face, half way over, then lifted up, in the last deep breath of living. Staring at him, Bowan saw that the other was smiling now at death.

THE END

Tricks Played by the Mind

A TEACHER of languages, age 58, found one morning to his surprise that he could not read the French exercises given him by a pupil to correct. He then tried to read a book and found he did not understand a single word.

Taken to the eye infirmary, it was observed that he could see the letters plainly, but could not tell what they were, as letters. He tried guessing, but made absurd mistakes. He did not recover and died suddenly nine years later. An autopsy revealed a softening of the brain.

Another case deals with a French physician who received permission from the Minister of Justice, in Paris, to experiment on a criminal condemned to death.

"To spare your family the humiliation of having you mount the scaffold and expose yourself to the public," the physician told the prisoner, "the judge authorizes your being bled to death; your dissolution will be gradual and free from pain."

The criminal accepted his fate. He was led to the appointed room, where every preparation had been made. His eyes bandaged, he was strapped to a table and at a signal, four of his veins were gently pricked with a needle. At each corner of the table was a small fountain of water, so arranged as to flow gently into basins placed to receive them.

The patient believing it was his blood he heard flowing, gradually became weaker; and the conversation of the doctors carried on in an undertone confirmed his fears.

The stillness which reigned in the room broken only by the dripping fountains, the sound of which was gradually lowered, so affected the brain of the criminal that he fainted and died without having lost a drop of blood.

—J. Schreibman.

Wonders of the World

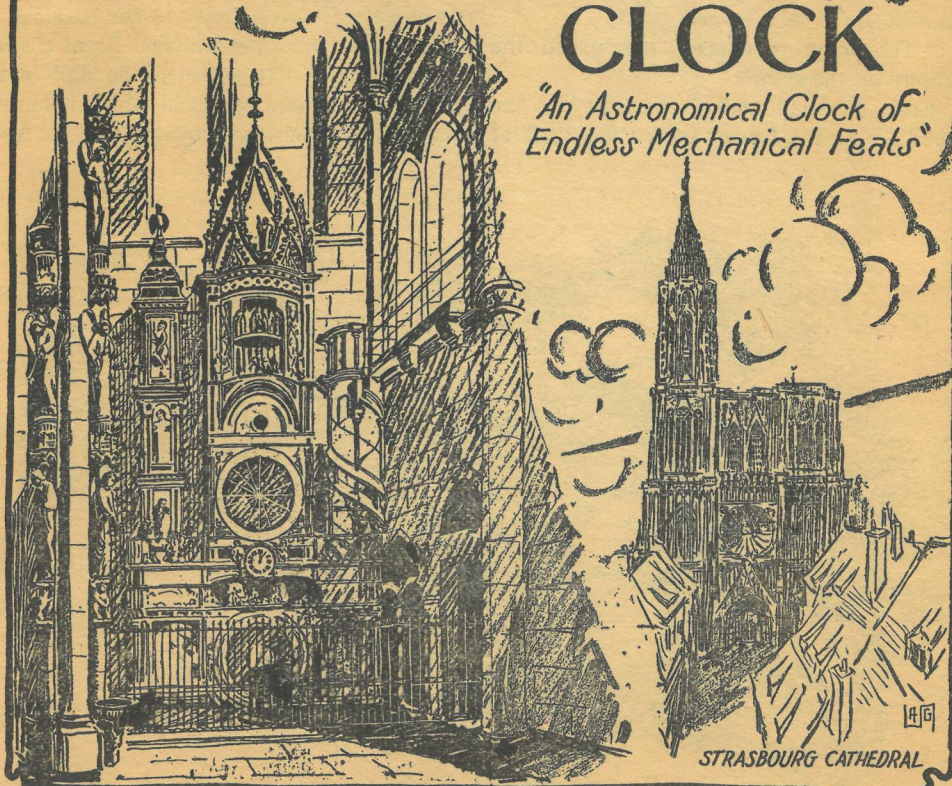
THE famous astronomical clock which stands in the Strasbourg Cathedral, in Strasbourg, France, was completed in 1574, after three years of arduous labor, by Conradus Dasypodius, a professor of mathematics. Its mechanisms are so ingenious that crowds gather most every day to watch its intricate performances.

Various devices of the clock are revealed with the passing of the minutes and hours, and even of the days and seasons. Typical of these is a globe of the heavens which reveals the daily motion of the earth as a miniature sun and moon run their courses. The passing of the days is also shown by a horse-drawn chariot, while other quaint figures mark the quarters and the minutes. A host of characters of all ages—from children to old men—revolve in endless ingenuity for special feasts and festivities.

Although the clock has been struck by lightning several times, it has been running steadily since 1852, a marvel to all who behold its novel and remarkable mechanical feats.

The STRASBOURG CLOCK

*"An Astronomical Clock of
Endless Mechanical Feats"*



STRASBOURG CATHEDRAL

Doubles Partner

By JAMES W. EGAN

For the good of the Davis Cup team, Craig Kimball was asked to sacrifice his personal ambitions in an important tournament

THE four flannel-clad figures on the green tennis court engaged in a brief, exciting rally. To and fro across the net, the ball spanged off busy rackets, until a final whistling shot eluded one of the quartet for a well-earned point.

"The score is deuce," announced the umpire on the stand.

Craig Kimball and his partner had the service. As the former poised just back of

the baseline, three balls gripped in the left hand, he saw Doug Brent's stocky form swivel at the net, his lips moved soundlessly.

Kimball understood clearly as though Brent spoke aloud.

"Get your first serve in!" was gist of the telepathic message.

Kimball's own lips tightened. His lean young body stretched to the limit of its six feet and two inches. Racket streaked downward.

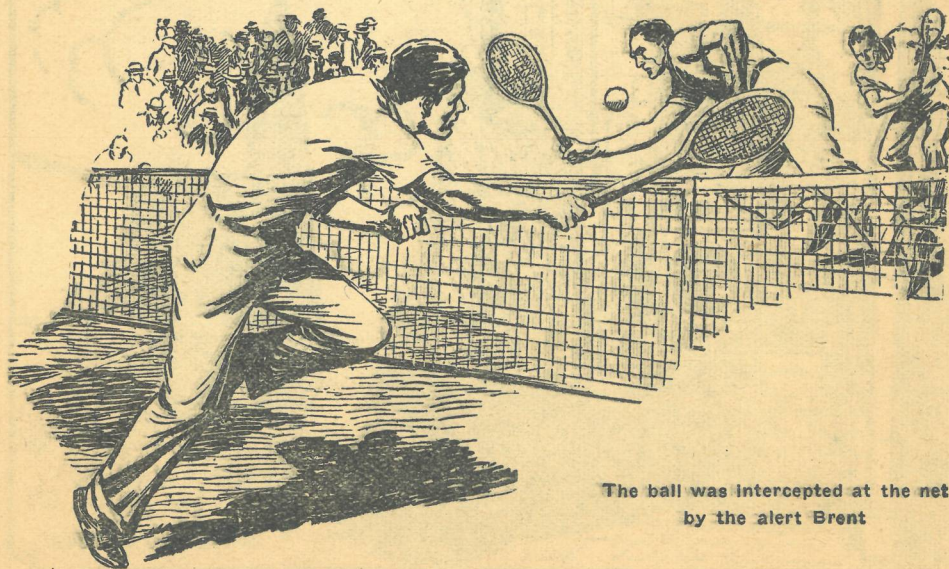
The sphere, powerfully hit, struck the net cord. It caromed off, falling outside the confines of the service court.

"Fault!" clipped the umpire. Doug Brent's shoulders shrugged almost imperceptibly.

Lips still a thin line, Craig Kimball eased up on the second serve. The ball bounded high on the receiver's backhand. The return was a lob—a nicely placed, deep lob.

Kimball started forward, stopped. Brent was speeding back. The lob was in his territory, perhaps halfway to the baseline.

The lean youngster watched Brent check himself, turn. He smashed the ball in a perfectly executed overhead which boomed between their net-storming opponents. Ap-



The ball was intercepted at the net by the alert Brent

plause rippled from the stands; this was masterly playing of a most difficult stroke.

Unmindful of the applause, Doug Brent addressed his partner in a gruff tone. "Our ad', kid! Slap that first one by Mac now and end it."

Kimball assumed position for what might prove the deciding service. The score stood at a set apiece; Brent and he led five games to four in the third and last set of their quarter-final match.

His long right arm swung in a swift arc. The felted sphere blazed down the center line, missing the corner tape and a clean ace by mere inches.

Kimball gritted his teeth. Instead of softening the second service, he smote even harder. Yet he realized immediately his aim was inaccurate. The ball carried out of court.

"Double fault!" the umpire called. "Score is deuce!"

Doug Brent changed sides without a word. It seemed to Kimball, however, there was reproach in the curve of his sweat-soaked back.

Aware his error had prolonged the contest, he slugged the next service savagely. The ball was rifled back, intercepted at the net by the alert Brent. A crisp display of volleying at short range terminated when the latter angled the sphere out of reach. Once again the Brent-Kimball team held advantage.

The young giant got his initial service in for McColley. It was lofted weakly, an insufficient lob made to order for a net man's "kill." And Doug Brent killed it. The final point was achieved, set and match won.

The formality of handshaking over, the victorious team started toward the showers.

"Was I terrible to-day?" grumbled Craig Kimball.

"Forget it," said his stocky companion. "We're in the semi-finals and I don't think Rosenberg and Murio will bother us much tomorrow. We should beat them in straight sets."

"Provided I put my first serve in. And provided I keep my lobs deep, and provided

I don't get sucked out of position—and thirty or forty other items."

KIMBALL'S remarks revealed bitterness.

"That first serve of yours is dynamite, Craig." Brent tucked his three rackets more firmly under his arm. "No use blasting your second ball, though, until you can control it. They always told me one fault was a misdemeanor, but a double fault was a major crime."

"I never had trouble with my service in singles," sulkily.

"Singles is a different game. You're on your own, and your mistakes don't affect your partner," in cool rejoinder. "You either work together in doubles or you're lost. It takes time to develop smoothness. Davis Cup combines aren't made in a week, Craig."

"Maybe I'm not good enough for the Davis Cup squad." The bitterness was again evident.

"That's what the Cup committee is trying to determine." Brent was blunt. "America needs a new doubles combination. Whether we are going to be it remains to be seen."

"I hope I'm not just another burnt offering on the altar of patriotism," resentfully.

Craig Kimball's resentment lingered after the pair had bathed and dressed and gone their separate ways. He could not deny a large share of this resentment was directed at his stocky partner.

Doug Brent and the tall, lean youngster were in their second week of playing together by request.

The request they team up had come from Burton Prince, chairman of America's Davis Cup committee.

Kimball, twenty-two years old and a star on the Pacific Coast, had arrived from Los Angeles a fortnight ago to test his luck in Eastern tournaments. It wasn't his first jaunt to the Atlantic seaboard; he had campaigned on grass the previous year with indifferent success.

During the winter and early spring, how-

ever, he had scored triumphs on the hard courts of his native California. Trophies in singles and doubles had been added to his collection. A blistering service, strong overhead and net game—to say nothing of his attributes of height and reach—fitted him peculiarly for the four-handed pastime.

Kimball liked doubles. He also liked singles, and on occasion was very hard to beat. His chief weakness was a tendency to be erratic off the ground, causing him to drop decisions to inferior but steadier competitors.

The wire from Burton Prince, received at Seahaven, was a surprise. He knew, of course, the United States had been striving to find a suitable Davis Cup doubles combine following the desertion of the great team of Lord and Stevens to professional ranks.

Douglas Brent, recipient of a similar wire, got in contact with the California giant at Seahaven.

"The Davis Cup bosses have a notion we might combine to recover the bric-a-brac for Uncle Samuel," he drawled. "I had intended to play with Tommy Hunt through to the national doubles, but I'll be patriotic. How about you?"

Kimball knew the other mainly by repute. At twenty-eight the stocky Brent was a veteran of the courts. He had competed in major tennis events at home and abroad for ten years. He was rated one of the world's leading doubles players; some critics labelled him the "perfect player." In the last decade he had garnered laurels for half a dozen racket wielders who had teamed with him.

"I'll enjoy playing with you, Brent!" The response of the younger man was enthusiastic.

A measure of Kimball's enthusiasm had ebbed after their first tournament. It was continuing to ebb here at Rye, where the opposition was stiffer.

THE experienced Brent had assumed leadership of the new combine. He was quick to pick flaws in the game which had bowled over Pacific Coast com-

petition. He insisted Kimball practice lobbing, improve the accuracy of his powerful service. He lectured on court tactics and finesse. He even demanded that his junior partner indulge sparingly in social delights and be in bed before midnight.

Craig conceded much of Brent's counsel was sound. Only he didn't like the manner in which it was given. Not that the stocky veteran was unduly harsh or caustic; indeed, he was quite dispassionate. Possibly it was the air of finality to his pronouncements that irked the lean youngster most.

"No parties, no late hours, no fun!" he muttered rebelliously. "It's not a game playing with Doug—it's a grind!"

Twenty-four hours later Kimball was in a pleasanter frame of mind. His stocky partner and he had literally smeared Rosenberg and Murio in the semi-final, 6-2, 6-1, 6-0. Never had Craig hit the ball better. He served, smashed and volleyed in a fashion to draw the hearty tribute of the gallery.

"Guess I was a little hotter today, Doug." He grinned.

"Not bad," dryly. "I figured we should win in straight sets. Tomorrow we'll have a real battle when we tangle with Prusoff and Sabin. They'll be plenty tough, judging from the way they have burned up the turf all week. You know them, don't you?"

"Know them? I've trimmed both of them in singles out on the Coast, Doug. I'm not fretting," confidently.

"You'll not be playing singles." Brent's voice was level. "So I suggest you stay hot until tomorrow afternoon."

"Maybe I ought to sleep beside a furnace tonight," with sarcasm.

"I'm not underrating Prusoff and Sabin," in the same level accents.

At the end of the third set next afternoon it was apparent to everyone witnessing the doubles' final that Brent and Kimball must rise to superhuman heights in order to avert defeat. Prusoff and Sabin, two sturdy youngsters from the Pacific Northwest, had slammed their way to a one-set lead at the intermission.

Sheer wallop had placed them in front.

Prusoff and partner treated the services of their antagonists with scant respect. They pounded back the tricky twists of Doug Brent and smacked the speedy delivery of Kimball with glee. Their hard, consistent driving was a treat to the customers, if not their opponents.

"What got into those babies?" Craig sputtered en route to the clubhouse for the fifteen-minute period of rest.

"They're at peak form today." Brent shook his head. "We been playing good tennis, Craig—our best tennis of the week. But it hasn't been good enough. They simply won't miss."

"Think we're licked, do you?" the lean youngster demanded.

"Certainly not!" Brent snapped. "They still have one set to win. They can't keep up their pace forever. What we got to do is play each point to the limit, force them into errors. If we can make them crack, we'll grab the next two sets. We won't quit fighting!"

Kimball and his partner returned for the fourth set grim of aspect. It proved a long drawn out, fiercely waged overtime struggle, marked by thrilling rallies and sparkling shotmaking. Eventually it ended, 11-9, in favor of Brent and Kimball. The match was squared.

Prusoff and Sabin hadn't cracked, however. They continued their battering, slashing game in the fifth set. Despite the dogged and often heroic resistance of Craig and the veteran, they emerged victorious, six games to four.

FAGGED and glum, Kimball regarded his partner in the dressing room.

"Well," dully, "I guess this means the ashcan for a couple of aspiring Davis Cuppers. When Mr. Prince hears what happened, he'll probably ring up the garbage department."

"Why?" Brent discarded a final damp garment. "It's the first match we've lost. Prusoff and Sabin might have taken any doubles team in the world this afternoon. They played marvelous tennis. One such setback won't sway Mr. Prince. He real-

izes Cup teams require seasoning, of all kinds. You learn by losing, as well as winning. He expects us to stick it out together until the national. Of course, if you feel otherwise, that's up to you."

Kimball believed he detected a slight sneer in the words.

"Don't get me wrong, Brent!" His lean body grew rigid. "I'm no quitter, please understand!"

"Okay." Doug Brent snatched a clean towel. "Prusoff and his pal will be at Newport next week. So will we. Perhaps we can get revenge. It was really valuable experience you gained today—the sort of experience good doubles combines need."

The stocky form vanished into the nearest shower.

"Yeah!" Kimball mocked, unheard.

"Thank you so much, my dear professor!"

At dinner—a meal Doug Brent did not eat with him—Craig scanned the entries listed at Newport in a Manhattan daily. He was still in a sour mood.

Suddenly a name posted in the singles caught his eye. He read it again: "Malcolm Reid, Hollywood."

"That weevil!" Kimball's thin features twisted.

Possibly in the whole length and breadth of the United States there was nobody he disliked as intensely as Mal Reid. The latter, son of a motion picture director and a few months older than himself, had been a classmate at the University of Southern California. From the outset they had been tennis rivals, nor was it amicable rivalry. In Craig's opinion young Reid was an overbearing, egotistical ass, albeit a high-ranking player on the Pacific Coast.

He recalled vividly their last encounter on the courts several months ago. Reid and he had met in the finals for the Southern California championship at Los Angeles. Kimball had won after five strenuous sets.

An unfortunate incident in the fourth set had done naught to increase the cordiality between the pair. Reid had protested heatedly a linesman's decision on a drive by Kimball. It was a crucial point.

Calling it out would have given Mal the game, set and match. But the decision stood.

Kimball finally took the game, ran out the set and thereafter was invincible.

Craig was positive the disputed shot had been good. A majority of spectators agreed with the official verdict. Yet that did not matter to Reid. He later asserted he was robbed of the title, and while he hadn't many supporters, the charge nettled Kimball.

He felt his rival had deliberately placed him in an unsporting light. Desire had been with him since to prove his superiority beyond cavil.

"Coming East to dazzle the big time, huh?" He crumpled the paper. "Maybe I'll play singles at Newport, too!"

His activities at Rye had been confined to men's doubles. He hadn't planned to enter any other event in the famous Rhode Island tournament. But the presence of Mal Reid made a difference.

WITHOUT informing Brent he wired Newport officials. Whereupon the stocky veteran found his junior partner seeded in the lower bracket of the singles' draw the ensuing Monday.

"Figure to play singles here?" He appeared surprised.

"And how!" came brittle answer. "I'm laying for a lug named Mal Reid—my old pal from sunny Cal. He's in the upper half, worse luck! There's one buzzard I crave to knock off! Hope nobody puts him out before I get to him!"

"Playing both singles and doubles will tax your energy." Brent frowned. "Of course, it's your privilege. Only bear in mind that the competition this week is about tops. And we have a tough draw. Rankin and Beldon are in it, and Prusoff and Sabin. Then there's Johnny Rhyne and Wilbur Ellison topping the other half. I fancy Mr. Prince would like to see us scrap it out with them in the finals."

Craig Kimball was familiar with the record of Rhyne and Ellison. Former national and Davis Cup champions, they

were veterans who had written bright pages of tennis history. Perhaps a trifle past their prime now, yet redoubtable opposition for any combination in the world. A victory over them would stamp Brent and his new partner as first-line Cup material.

None the less, the lean youngster was harsh in response.

"I'd sooner hand Mal Reid a good licking than win a Davis Cup match, Doug."

"Would you?" Brent's tone was oddly gentle. He said nothing further.

It wasn't until after the second round of singles, through which both had swept easily, that the California rivals crossed paths.

Kimball encountered the darkly handsome Reid on the clubhouse porch. Neither attempted to shake hands.

"Hello, Lucky!" greeted the Hollywood player. "I was enjoying this tournament, and then I heard they had let you in it."

"I can understand it causing you concern." Kimball strove to control his temper. "However, the draw gives you a break. They failed to stick you in my bracket. I'm afraid you may not last long enough for me to have the pleasure of eliminating you."

The other's olive visage wreathed in a scowl. "You won't, Kimball—unless you still carry your own linesmen!"

"Just can't take it, can you?" Craig flashed back. "If you don't win, you whine."

"I'll make you eat those remarks, you big chiseler!" snarled Reid.

The appearance of Doug Brent prevented possible blows. He dragged his tall partner away.

"Want to create a public scene, you idiot?" he scolded. "Calm down! In a few minutes you have a doubles match to play."

The young Californians remained frigidly aloof from one another the next several days. Apparently each was venting his inner spleen on court opponents. Craig Kimball performed spectacularly in both singles and doubles—particularly the for-

mer. Mal Reid, not entered in the four-handed event, kept pace in the singles.

THE pair astonished most of the net experts by gaining the semi-finals in their respective brackets. And in these matches they further astounded. Kimball provided a major upset by defeating Sid Ward, a Davis Cup regular, in four sets. Even more unexpected was the triumph of Reid over guileful Wilbur Ellison in a five-set tussle.

"Mal Reid and me in the finals, huh?" Kimball was with Brent in the dressing room. "I'll beat that weevil tomorrow if I have to break a leg!"

"It should be a nice match!" ironically. The veteran examined a freshly restrung racket with critical care. "Right at the moment, though, we might concentrate on this afternoon's doubles. It's our old friends, Prusoff and Sabin, and they're still hot. How you feel? Sid Ward tire you much?"

"No; I'm okay, Doug. After what we did to Rankin and Belden yesterday, I guess we should handle Prusoff and company."

"You been socking them pretty well, kid." From Brent this was lavish praise. "But they took us last week."

"We'll reverse that today."

And the first two sets seemed to bear out the contention. Battling desperately, Prusoff and Sabin succumbed, 8-6, 8-6.

In the third set the drives of the trailing team commenced to lose fire. They were out-maneuvered, forced into frequent errors. Presently the score was 5-3 for Brent and partner. A single game would clinch victory, and it was Kimball's serve. He hadn't dropped a service since the start of the match.

Blazing the first ball in, and aided by the smart net play of stocky Doug, Kimball ran the count to forty-love. The end loomed for Prusoff and Sabin. They exchanged wearied, despairing glances.

Craig delivered a scorcher to Sabin's backhand. The latter lifted it in a short lob over Brent's head.

Back a few steps scuttled the veteran. Pivoting, a foot slipped on the grassy surface. Unable to retain his balance, he went sprawling to the turf.

Kimball had halted in mid-court, awaiting his partner's kill. Now, as the ball hit the green and bounded, he contorted his giant frame in a belated effort to reach it.

The sudden, sharp veer had disastrous consequences. He felt his left ankle twist under him, send swift pain darting up the leg. He stumbled sideways with a half-grunt, half-gasp. The ball trickled to the base line, untouched. The score had become 40-15.

Brent, unharmed by his fall, scrambled erect. He hurried to his partner.

"Hurt yourself, Craig?" anxiously.

"Wrenched my ankle," through gritted teeth. "Never mind; let's finish the set."

Doug Brent hesitated, shaking his head. His features were grave as he returned to the net. Kimball hobbled to the service position.

Thrusting weight on the injured member resulted in agonizing twinges. But, lips locked, Craig served with full power. The ball zipped down the center court line, past Prusoff's lunging racket for a clean ace. Game, set and match!

Brent assisted his limping partner to the clubhouse. Lines of concern remained carved in his exertion-reddened visage.

"We got to attend to that ankle, Kim. All my clumsy fault!"

"Skip it!" the young giant growled. "I jerked around too fast. Maybe it isn't serious. By tomorrow it'll probably be okay. Heck, it's gotta be!"

"I hope so," dubiously. "Meanwhile, you must keep off it, give it rest. I saw Dr. Crowley in the gallery. I know Doc well; I'll have him give your ankle the once-over."

THE physician's diagnosis was less unfavorable than Brent had anticipated.

"H'm!" Dr. Crowley frowned professionally. "It's strained, my boy. Don't know whether you can play on it tomorrow or not. It is swelling a little.

I advise you alternate hot and cold packs on it tonight. That and absolute rest should help a lot."

Brent engaged a cab and accompanied his partner to Craig's hotel. The veteran did not stop there. He was a guest at a private home along with Tommy Hunt, his partner prior to the summons of the Davis Cup chairman.

An hour or two after dinner Brent called on Kimball. He found the lean Californian conscientiously following the treatment prescribed by the medical man.

"How's the pin doing?" Brent dropped into a chair.

"Feels better, Doug! I've reduced the swelling. I'm sure I can play tomorrow."

His partner twiddled a straw hat in his fingers.

"I talked with Doc Crowley a few minutes ago, Craig. He believes it would be unwise for you to try to play both the singles and doubles tomorrow. I agree with him."

"Nuts!" snapped the giant. "I gotta play! I'll battle Mal Reid in the finals even if I have to hop around on one leg!"

"And what of the doubles?" quietly. "You know it's Rhyne and Ellison we're due to face. I hear Mr. Prince is flying here to witness the match—if there is a match. He feels it that important."

"Nothing is more important to me than whipping Mal Reid!" A hardening of the lean jaw.

"I have an idea Mr. Prince wouldn't like to hear that." The veteran leaned forward. "Recovery of the Davis Cup is America's biggest tennis objective. Compared to it, the personal issue between Reid and you is a minor thing. Neither of us is supposed to be interested in self. I doubt that you can play singles with your ankle and be in shape for doubles. And that means there must be a default in one or the other event. I'm sorry, Craig."

"You'd ask me to default—and to Mal Reid?" explosively.

"Under the circumstances, I see no other course." Brent's eyes were bleak. "I realize it entails a personal sacrifice.

Playing for the Cup usually does. My own wishes this summer—well, no matter! Your ankle is bound to handicap you tomorrow. But it can stand doubles better than singles. Favor it much as you can, and I'll help you to the limit, Craig."

"To hell with the Davis Cup!" Kimball was pale from anger. "The last man in the world I'd default to is Malcolm Reid! Besides, what will tournament officials say if I spoil the singles final? No, I won't do it, Brent! I'll play singles if I play!"

"Your mind is definitely made up?" Doug Brent rose.

"Yes!" The younger man was emphatic.

Brent's features froze into a cold mask.

"I haven't any more to say, Kimball. After tomorrow, when I have seen Mr. Prince, perhaps I shall."

The door closed behind his stocky form. Craig still trembled with wrath. The nerve of his partner! Expecting him to default to the sneering, egotistical Reid, of all persons! Mal Reid, who would dub him quitter, who would gloat and strut and proclaim this was vindication of his scurrilous charges last spring. Unthinkable!

Moreover, wasn't it actually the fault of Doug Brent he had strained his ankle? His partner's spill today was responsible for the injury. That was something he appeared to have forgotten!

A tap on the door cut short these tempestuous reflections.

"Come in!" Kimball croaked.

A TALL, blond chap wearing evening clothes entered. Not without mild surprise, Craig identified Tommy Hunt, whose place as Doug Brent's doubles' mate he had usurped. Hunt was five or six years older than Brent, popular in tennis and social circles.

"Hope you will pardon my intrusion, Kimball," in pleasant deprecation, "I won't bother you very long, I promise."

"That's quite all right. Have a seat, Mr. Hunt."

Craig regarded his visitor with mixed

curiosity and suspicion. The latter pulled up a chair.

"Rotten luck, you jamming up your ankle, Kimball. Understand you're going to try to play in tomorrow's finals, though."

"In one match, at least," grimly. "You aren't looking for Doug, are you? He left about five minutes ago."

"I know; met him in the lobby. No, that isn't why I am here." A wry smile. "Possibly I shouldn't—yet fools rush in, they say."

"Afraid I don't get you, Mr. Hunt."

"I fancy I'm broaching a tender subject, Kimball. I spoke briefly with Doug below. He's rather sore. I can appreciate his feeling; yet, at the same time, I wonder if he might not be a bit unfair to you."

"You mean about my playing singles?"

"We'll have to go back a couple of weeks to have you really understand." Hunt hesitated. "The first sore spot developed when Burton Prince requested Doug to team with you for Davis Cup purposes. He almost wired flat refusal."

"So?" flaring. "Well, I certainly didn't ask him to—"

"Wait, please!" broke in the caller.

"He was peeved solely on my account. Doug and I are old, close friends; but we've never played together in the national doubles. Either I was tied up, or the tennis barons had other plans for him. I've always had an ambition to win the national crown, and felt the best chance I had to do so was with Brent for a partner. I play far better with him than anybody else. That's natural, I imagine. No one plays better doubles than Doug."

"This year I decided must be the last I would devote to an active tennis campaign. I'm growing no younger, and the demands of business are such—to chop it short, I told Doug. He said he would play with me this summer, straight through the national. We started out and were clicking in fair shape when Prince telegraphed. Doug immediately declared he wouldn't leave me in the lurch, Cup or no Cup."

"Then how is it—" Kimball stopped, scowling. "Surely the Davis Cup officials haven't forced him to play with me?"

"Of course not! No, I persuaded him he must drop me, and accept the assignment. Don't think it was easy to give up my own plans." Hunt's face shadowed. "But I realized winning back the Cup is more important than a puff of personal glory. You see, my father used to be on the Cup committee. It's a quite precious emblem in the eyes of our family."

"However, let's get on. Doug did join you, Kimball. And Mr. Prince had a swell hunch. You two have the makings of one of the strongest doubles combines America's ever had. It will be a great pity if you don't stick together."

"Yeah, the way Doug feels toward me!" bitterly. "I can see now why he's disliked me from the first."

"He resented throwing me down, as he phrased it." A shake of the blond head. "Perhaps that has unconsciously influenced his attitude toward you. Even so, you two have played good doubles. Once he takes over a job, Doug Brent gives it all he has."

"I gather you don't think I should play singles tomorrow, either?" in hoarse accents.

"THAT isn't my affair, Kimball." Tommy Hunt's tall form lifted. "I would like to see you and Doug representing America on the Davis Cup squad. When you really know him, Doug is a swell chap. He's made a lot of personal sacrifices for the good of the game. Burt Prince and others can testify to that. Well, I'll run along. Hope the ankle is better tomorrow, so you can bring home the bacon, whether it's singles or doubles you play. Good night, Kimball."

For many minutes after his departure the lamed youngster sat staring blankly at the papered wall, the drawn expression of his lean features revealing his inner stress.

It was nearly noon next day when Brent visited his room.

"How's the ankle coming?" He did not seat himself.

"Much improved. The doctor was in; he says I can play this afternoon with a tight brace on it." Kimball looked him in the eye. "I guess I'll be okay—for doubles, at least."

"What about your singles?" Brent's mouth quirked.

"I have already entered a default," steadily. "Telephoned the tournament manager this morning. Naturally he was disappointed, but agreed it might be wiser to center on the doubles."

Doug Brent was silent for an interval.

"What the devil did Tommy tell you last night?" at length, sharply.

"A number of things I probably needed to know," with a painful grin.

The veteran took a rapid turn up and down the room. "I was a bit nasty last night. I owe you an apology. And maybe I ought not let you withdraw from the singles. That match with Reid means a lot to you. In addition, I'm to blame for your injury."

"But I have defaulted, Doug. I'm going to forget the singles and concentrate on the doubles. It goes against the grain to yield the honors to Mal Reid without a struggle." Kimball grimaced. "And still, beating him doesn't seem half as important as it did yesterday. In fact, I'm not so absolutely cocksure I would beat him in my present shape. I'm not even sure I'll be so hot against Rhyne and Ellison. I'll do my best, though."

Brent's response was swift, wordless. He reached forth to grip the hand of his junior partner.

More pleasant was recollection of the warm handclasp of Burton Prince, the Davis Cup chairman.

"Best of luck, my boy. I'm taking into account you're playing under a severe handicap today."

Kimball's ankle, bandaged and braced, troubled him to some degree; but he could get around on it. His appearance with Brent for the preliminary rallying was greeted with applause. Gallery customers had gotten over grumbling in regard to the singles' final default.

"Save yourself all you can, Kim," whispered his partner. "Let me go after the tough shots."

And from the second the umpire started play, stocky Doug put on a breath-taking exhibition of tennis. He volleyed, half-volleyed, smashed and drove with a brilliance that had the spectators on the edge of their chairs. He was everywhere, covering court.

NOTWITHSTANDING his gallant efforts, they lost two of the first three sets. Johnny Rhyne and Wilbur Ellison functioned like a well-oiled machine. Their teamwork was flawless, result of years of campaigning together.

Kimball was miserably aware he was playing the poorest tennis of the quartet. His bad ankle hampered him, especially in service. He lacked full power, and he needed every whit of it today. His ground strokes were uncertain, his lobs frequently too short.

Despite his errors, Brent uttered no syllable of reproach. When Craig voiced his disgust during the intermission period, his partner strove to buck him up.

"We'll fight like hell to the final point, Kim. I know you can't do yourself justice. Maybe they'll lick us. What of it? We'll go after them again in the national at Longwood next week. Right?"

"Right, Doug!" Kimball squared his shoulders.

"And don't forget Johnny and Wilbur have hit a very fast pace for three sets. Those old legs might weaken."

They returned for the fourth set. Brent continued to be in the thick of the play, his stroking accurate and deadly. His service suddenly became a highly effective weapon. He varied tantalizing twists with unexpected "cannonballs." His speed deliveries scored several timely aces. Kimball and he snatched the set away from Rhyne and Ellison, 6-3.

The fifth and last set was a ding-dong duel for seven games. Rhyne and partner led, 4-3, but plainly had tired. They faced Brent's service. If they broke through,

the gallery conceded they would likely produce sufficient steam to insure victory.

But the hard-pressed veterans failed to break through on Brent. They came close. With the score at deuce, Doug unleashed two amazing aces that knotted the set score at four-all.

"Let's get this one, Kim," the stocky wizard husked, crouching in the left-hand court. "It's the one we want."

Wilbur Ellison was serving. He had plenty of stuff. Kimball waited, tense. The ball boomed to his backhand. He drove hard, high and beyond the baseline.

A screaming forehand by Brent regained the lost point. Ellison slammed another to Kimball's backhand. This time he lobbed the ball, lofty and deep. Johnny Rhyne essayed to lob a return, only to furnish Brent a smashing kill.

Rhyne and Ellison managed to even the score at 30-all. Then Kimball contributed a lob again. He was short. Too anxious, Ellison banged it into the net. The score was 30-40.

Ellison's initial serve to Brent was out. The second Doug drove deep. A thrilling rally followed, with Brent alternating clever "dink" shots and slashing drives, keeping the foe on the run. Kimball got into the fray with a sizzling cross-court forehand that evaded Rhyne's racket.

Game and five-four for Brent and partner.

Kimball had the service. Heedless of his bad ankle, he blasted the first serve in, to neatly ace Rhyne. He repeated on Ellison, amid the plaudits of the onlookers.

His lips were white from the strenuous effort. Brent dashed back.

"Not too hard, Kim!" he pleaded. "Careful of that bum pin!"

"To hell with it!" was the clipped response. "I got two aces left in my system, Doug—I hope!"

PLAY resumed. Kimball rocketed the sphere down the center line to Rhyne's backhand. The latter hit feebly into the net. Forty-love!

Ellison moved a few feet rearward, nervously gripping his racket.

Craig's long arm swished. But instead of a devastating cannonball, the serve was a soft slice. It loafed across the net.

Caught off guard, Ellison sprang forward. He swung viciously. His drive sailed over Brent's head and struck a ball-boy yards behind the baseline. It was all over.

A score of spectators crowded down to pump the hands of the winners. Kimball espied a familiar olive visage shoving through. Mal Reid, however, wasn't in a congratulatory mood.

"I see you were able to play doubles, if not singles." Reid's lip curled. "I hate to accept a title by default I know I could win on the courts. While I have won officially, I'm not satisfied. Tomorrow is an open date for both of us. I hereby challenge you to meet me in a private engagement. I just want to prove I don't require a default from you."

"Sorry I can't oblige you." Kimball's jaw stiffened. "I must play doubles at Longwood next week, and my ankle—"

"Yes, your ankle!" sneering. "You're the guy who doesn't like alibis or whiners. That ankle was all right to win a doubles match this afternoon. I think you're stalling, and—"

Someone pushed Craig aside. It was stocky Doug Brent. His eyes were dangerously cold.

"You're being very obnoxious, Reid. Suppose you scamper along now? If you are so eager for a private engagement, I'd be tickled to accommodate you. I suggest a nice, quiet alley somewhere. Never mind bringing your rackets. You have two good legs and two fists—that's enough. Is my meaning quite clear?"

A bystander chuckled. Mal Reid flushed darkly crimson. Abruptly he wheeled and slunk back into the throng.

"How much better the air smells!" commented Doug Brent. "Excuse my butting in, partner. But I never could abide two-legged insects."

*David Falloner
learns that one can
pay a heavy price
for befriending
South Sea un-
fortunates*

By DENNIS LAWTON

The Blackbirds Sing

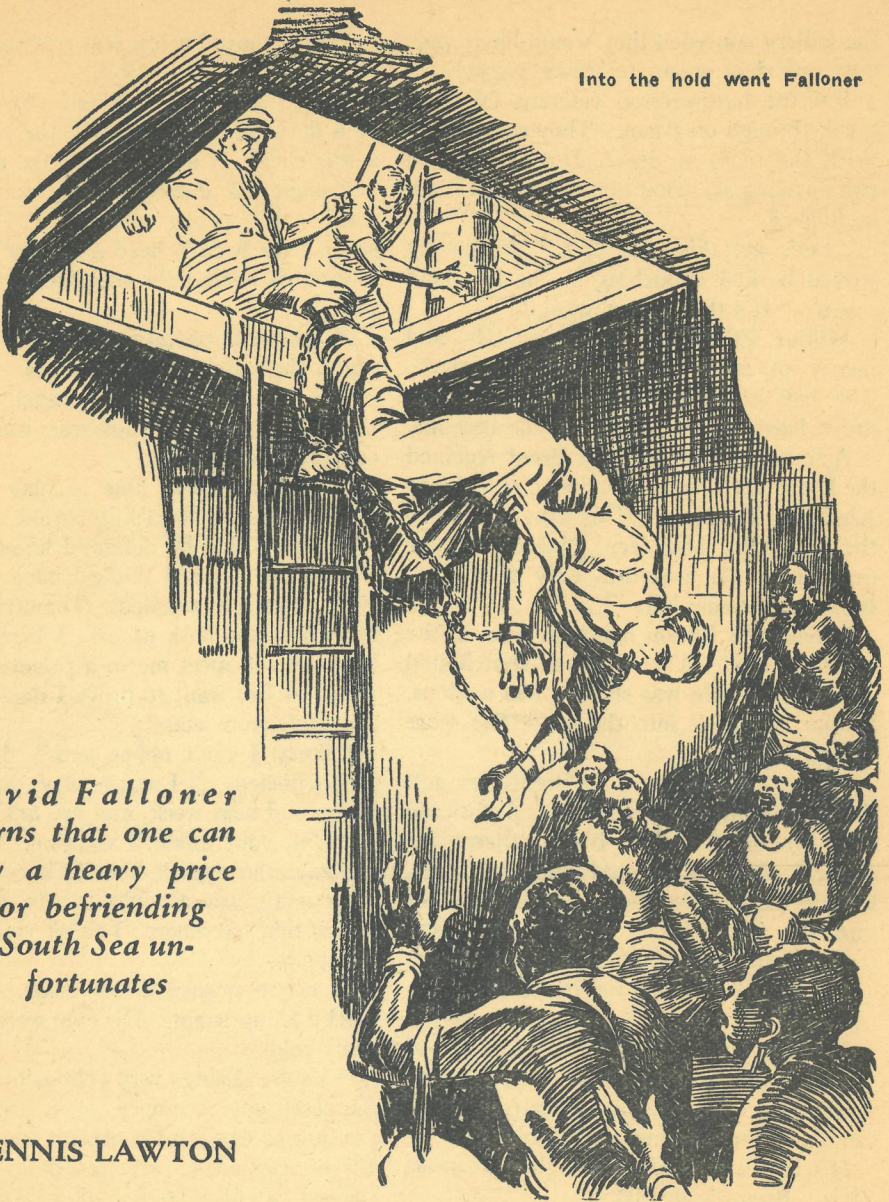
LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

IT was because he thought he had killed a man on the Western plains that David Falloner went to San Francisco late in the nineteenth century, and it was there that he was shanghaied aboard the

clipper ship *Inverarry*, Captain Tenby commanding.

Long before the *Inverarry* reached the South Seas, Falloner learned that Captain Tenby was bent on a "blackbirding" or

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slave raiding expedition. Falloner learned to hate Tenby, and Jimmy Birch the mate. Arriving at the island of Taholu, Falloner deserted the ship and swam ashore.

He became a hero with the simple islanders when he killed two of their enemies. Lavia Laia, the beautiful daughter of the king, naïvely asked him to marry her. Falloner interceded with old King Kopana in Tenby's behalf, gaining permission for him to careen the Inverarry on the beach and repair a hole in her hull.

When that was done, Tenby invited two hundred of the young natives aboard, including the king's two sons, Sahi and Nito; lured them below decks and sailed away with them. Falloner, who was also aboard, managed to draw the attention of the officers of a French frigate to the "blackbirds" aboard the Inverarry, and Tenby was placed under arrest.

Meanwhile, on Taholu, King Kopana decreed the death of Angus Campbell, white trader who had been living on the island, because white men had kidnaped the king's sons. Campbell told his daughter, Penelope, to be brave.

CHAPTER XII.

A FRENCH SCHEME.

LAVIA LAIA—Heavenly Face—dressed herself as if for a festival. That is, she wrapped a scarf of crimson silk about her so that she was clothed from the hips almost halfway to the knees; she put on the necklace of pearls which Penelope Campbell admired so much—for sometimes the fishing nets brought up oyster shells that had big white stones in them, pebbles that kept shining as though they were always wet—she twisted a wreath of radiant flowers about her head, and put on anklets and bracelets of flowers, also. Then she stood in front of Kopana's greatest treasure, a round mirror, laughed at the beauty she saw in it, and ran off to Campbell's house to tell the great news to Penelope.

To her amazement, the tidings made Penelope neither laugh nor sing. But she sat gravely for a moment, holding the hands of the island girl and looking past her into an emptiness of thought.

"Thirty days?" she murmured. "Only thirty days? Ah, Lavia Laia!"

"But the wizard will bring Nito and Sahi back by that time," said Heavenly Face, cheerfully. "Why are you sad?"

"I am not sad. I am only thinking."

And thinking aloud, she murmured, "If I could get to Tahiti—if I could go there, the Company might do something."

"They might even persuade the French to send out a gunboat to hunt for Captain Tenby and the Inverarry. . . . Heavenly Face, tell me, how can I get to Tahiti?"

"In an outrigger canoe, of course," said Lavia Laia. "The wind at this season would take you there like a flying fish, always jumping through the waves."

"My servants are only houseboys—they're not sailors," said Penelope.

"Could you catch the sailing ship if you went to Tahiti?" asked Heavenly Face.

"We might! We might!" And again she added to herself, "They might send back a gunboat to Taholu to set my father free. . . ."

"Then I'll take one of the biggest outriggers and put the best men on the island aboard her," said Lavia Laia.

She added, "If I could find Nito and Sahi, then Imai Deapa would be with them, or close to them!"

"Who is Imai Deapa?" asked Penelope. "Who is the Long Hand?"

"He's the man that I love," said Lavia Laia. "It's he who killed Toto-no, the chief. It's he that saved me from the Haggari when I tripped and fell. Ai! Ai! The long runners of the vines jumped up and caught me by the legs like green snakes. The ground knocked the breath out of me, it hit me so hard. I felt the edge of the spear driving into my back. I felt the Haggari war-club smashing in my head. But then I looked and saw Imai Deapa strike the chief with the knife which I had dropped. From a distance, he struck Toto-no. That is why he is the Long Hand. Imai Deapa! I see him throw himself at the knees of the man with the club. They fight. Imai Deapa is terrible. He takes the spear from the hand of the warrior and drives it through his side. Toto-no dies of the knife in his body. They both fall down. They both are dead—"

The trader's daughter interrupted.

"And you run away, like a bad girl," said Penelope, "and leave poor David Falloner wandering alone in the woods."

"I was afraid," said the girl, nodding. "I hid in the bush, and he looked too great and terrible and like a mighty man, with the blood on his hands and his forehead frowning. I lay still and made myself small till he had gone past."

"Then I took the heads of the Haggari and showed my people what a great man Imai Deapa is!"

Penelope shuddered a little. But she had only half listened to the words of Lavia Laia. She was weighing again, in her mind, the risks of the voyage to Tahiti. But it was true that she was taboo, and if she had with her a chief's daughter—Lavia Laia herself— She began to feel the idea

grow in her; it turned into a living thing.

FALLONER, walking the deck of the steam frigate *Arethuse*, searched the horizon impatiently for the first appearance of the smoke of Taholu's volcanoes rising on the horizon like the first dark hand of a storm lifting.

He could see nothing. He looked up to the cordage, furred with the black of soot from the smokestack. He glanced from the soiled deck of the frigate to where the *Inverarry*, a crystal cloud of canvas, leaned with the wind and kept her bow wave white. She was a queen of the sea, the little *Inverarry*. The *Arethuse* was an iron beast in comparison.

Down the deck to him now came that sallow-faced Commissioner of the South Seas, that Monsieur Henri Delisle whom he could not help distrusting with an instinctive Nordic dislike of all that is Latin.

Monsieur Delisle had a paper in his hand, a short piece of typewriting, and he said, "This is your deposition, Mr. Falloner. I'll read it over to you, and then you will sign it, if you please."

He read aloud:

"I, David Falloner, a citizen of the United States, declare that I was on board the three-masted ship *Inverarry*, trading in the South Seas, when she was driven by a storm into the port of Taholu. The ship was injured in crossing the coral reef off the mouth of the harbor.

"In the bay, she was beached, and the damage to her hull repaired. Afterwards, while a number of the natives were on board, she floated off the beach at high tide and sailed for the open sea. Three days later she was hailed by the French ship *Arethuse*, Captain

Émile Poupardin commanding, who boarded the Inverarry, and, discovering the natives on board, compelled the Inverarry to turn about, and accompanied her to Taholu to see the natives returned safely to their own land. Signed—”

The commissioner pointed to the place and held out an indelible pencil. “You can sign here, Mr. Falloner,” he said.

“There are just a few things I’d like to add to that,” said Falloner.

“Ah?” said the commissioner. “And what, of any import, pray?”

“It was a lot of import to me,” said Falloner, “that I was drugged in San Francisco and kidnaped on board the Inverarry. I was ‘worked-up’ like a dog by Captain Tenby on the voyage south. When we got into the harbor of Taholu during the storm, he started to work me up again, and to get away from him I dived into the water and rubbed elbows with the sharks.

“It’s important to me that when I got on shore I was nearly killed by a pair of Haggari hillmen; and that when I managed to slaughter the pair of them, the Taholans were on the verge of eating me. It’s important to me that when the Taholans discovered I had accounted for a pair of their natural enemies, they made quite a fuss over me; because on account of that fuss, I was able to persuade them to let the Inverarry be beached for repairs. Otherwise, she never would have been able to careen, with the natives helping to do the work.

“It’s damned important to me, because afterwards Tenby, like a scoundrel, inveigled two hundred Taholans, including the two sons of the king, into the hold of the Inverarry, and then clapped on the hatches and sailed for the open sea.

“These things may make no difference to you, Mr. Delisle, but to me they make the whole story, almost. The statement you’ve written down there would hardly hurt Tenby in a law court. The statement that I *can* write will send him to prison as a blackbirder for the rest of his life.”

“Ah, I see that you are bitter about him,” said the commissioner. “And yet he’s a very good-natured fellow, that Captain Tenby. You surprise me, Mr. Falloner. But I’ll make some alterations in this text, gladly.”

“Thanks,” said Falloner. “Make a lot of alterations. Make all the alterations that I suggested—and then I’ll sign.”

His big, stern-featured face grew dark as he stared after Delisle; for he could sense something in the wind that was not quite fair-weather.

THE commissioner, returning to his cabin, slammed the door heavily behind him and slumped into a chair opposite that where sat Captain Tenby, late of the good ship Inverarry. The captain wore a pair of heavy handcuffs which did not prevent him from enjoying the cognac which he was sipping.

“No luck with that fellow Falloner,” said the commissioner. “None whatever. He made trouble at once, and wants the whole story put in. It’s a black story, Captain Tenby. It would either hang you or else put you in prison for life!”

“It would,” agreed Captain Tenby mildly. “But perhaps we can find ways of dodging the danger from Mr. Falloner.”

“Perhaps,” said the sour-faced commissioner. “I’m going to call the captain now and see what can be done with him.”

The commissioner left the cabin, and returned in a moment with round-faced, cat-whiskered Captain Poupardin.

The captain looked with curiosity and distaste towards Tenby, but Commissioner Delisle instantly entered on the explanation.

"Captain Tenby," said Delisle, "admits everything that we could wish. He gives me a full and frank statement which can be used against him—enough to hang him, practically. In the meantime, however, he suggests something else. Tell me, Poupardin, would you like to add the island of Taholu to the domains of our own France?"

Poupardin's cheeks grew red and his eyes grew pale with light.

Delisle continued, rapidly, "We're a practical race, captain. Nothing makes the impression in Paris that's contained by a concrete bit of work. Adding a magnificent island to the territory the French flag waves over—a very handsome thing to put in the record of any commander of a frigate."

Poupardin said, briefly, "How could it be done? There's such a thing as international law."

"We are far away from critical eyes," said the commissioner. "Besides, exact niceties of behavior are not expected in the South Seas. Captain Tenby very strongly points out that we have in our hands the two princes who are the sons of the famous king, Kopana. They are the heirs to the throne of Taholu, captain! And they are in French hands!"

"They are in our hands," he agreed, nodding. "But what—but how—"

"The French," said Tenby, "have several advantages over other people in the world. They have Paris and French wine, to name two of the advantages. Papeete is only a small slice of France, but it may be a rich food for a pair of Taholu islanders. A few days of fine clothes, wine, music, and a bit of dancing around in Papeete ought to make the two princes understand that there is only one thing in the world worth while—and that is a good time after the French fashion.

"Then let them go back to Taholu. They will have to take the French with them. A trading post established—there's only one American trader allowed there now—and you will have your foothold. But the fat old king is sure to die, before long. When that happens, the princes are still in your hands. If you talk to them enough about Paris, they'll be glad to take a small pension and give France their rights to the island. And if France can't see its way clear to take possession of the whole of Taholu after that, I'll be surprised."

"But how can I give my countenance with a government ship to such a thing?" asked poor Captain Poupardin, in a sweat.

"You don't need to," said the commissioner. "Simply give orders for the two ships to put about and run for Tahiti. Once in Papeete harbor, the rest is easy. Honest Captain Tenby, here, will undertake the entire business in return for freedom and a certain cash reward.

"The Inverarry's crew can be doubled in numbers. Some cannon can be added to her armament. In the meantime, the natives on board her will be royally well treated; and the princes in

CAPTAIN POUPARDIN'S eyes became more round than ever, and his whiskers bristled. The greatness of the thought made him breathe hard.

particular will be taught that France is the word that means happiness. Is that clear to you? Afterwards, Captain Tenby sails back to the island of Taholu. France herself has not shown her hand at all. What could be neater or easier?"

"And this arrest I have made on the high seas?" said Poupardin. "Is *that* nothing?"

"Nothing at all," said the commissioner.

And here Tenby leaned a little forward to hear the next, important words.

"The point is," said Delisle, grinning till there were furrows in his sal-low cheeks, "that you arrested the honest captain and held him in chains on board the frigate until, by dint of close questioning, you discovered that Tenby was perfectly innocent."

"Perfectly innocent!" shouted Captain Poupardin.

"Exactly," said Delisle. "It simply happened that when the ship was freed from the beach by the rising of the tide, there were so many drunken, rioting natives on board that he did not know what to do with them. Therefore he took the first means at hand, clapped the covers onto the hatches, and put off to sea, always intending to send the poor Taholans home again when time permitted."

Captain Poupardin suddenly smiled. The smile caused the fat of his cheeks to roll up and close his eyes.

"I understand," he said.

Then a new thought struck him sober.

"But the man who caused us to discover, in the first place, that the Inverarry was a blackbirder—that man Fallon—what will be done to silence him?"

"I think," said the commissioner,

dryly, "that when Captain Tenby and his crew return to the Inverarry they will be able to take care of that."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN IRONS.

THE signals flown at the masthead of the frigate caught the eye of Fallon first; and then he saw the Inverarry coming about and retracing her way, while the Arethuse came about also and stood for the sailing ship.

But the significance of all this was not clear to him until the crew of Captain Tenby, and the worthy captain himself, came up on the deck of the French man-of-war, and all with free hands.

They looked on Fallon with sour eyes, and Tenby paused near him to say, "Luck comes to me, after all, Fallon. The honest commissioner sees that I am a perfectly innocent man. And therefore he is returning me to my own ship together with my crew. You remember, Fallon, that you were one of my crew?"

Fallon, sick with disgust and fear, tried to get to either the commissioner or to Captain Poupardin to inquire into the truth of this.

But he could not find the men of importance until two longboats had been lowered and the thirty men of the Tenby crew had been put into them together with a few French sailors.

The Inverarry was now close enough to hail, and the shouted order went to the prize crew on the clipper to prepare to return at once to the Arethuse.

It was now that Fallon was told briefly by a boatswain to tumble into one of the longboats. He was about to protest, when he saw the sour face of

the commissioner looking down on him from the bridge with a sardonic smile. Then Falloner understood.

He raised his head and looked for a long, silent moment at Henri Delisle. Then he turned and went down to the waiting boat.

Jimmy Birch was in the boat that received him. And all the way to the Inverarry the mate's muscular face was faintly touched by a smile and his eyes never left the eyes of Falloner.

And Falloner, looking across the blue flash of the water, wondered if it would not be the wisest choice for him to throw himself into the sea and have done with it; for something worse than murder was sure to wait for him on the Inverarry.

The sailors near him cursed him steadily, richly, as a damned traitor who had tried to do them all in. "As though," said one of them, "a couple hundred lousy blackbirds was worth sending thirty sailors to jail for life! By God, we're gunna do for you, Falloner!"

He made no answer. There was such trouble in his mind that the white flash and loveliness of the Inverarry was dim before his mind.

That he should be returned in this manner to the Inverarry with the consent of the French on the Arethuse was incredible. Captain Poupardin and the commissioner certainly knew what sort of a fate would be in store for him at the hands of Tenby and the rest.

But the incredible thing had been done. Here he was going up the side of the Inverarry. Here he was again on her holystoned deck.

THE French, in the meantime, were rowing back to the Arethuse and giving the Inverarry a farewell cheer, while Captain Tenby put

himself, again, on the poop of his clipper and commenced to give commands. But the first command that he gave had a meaning for Falloner.

"Mister!" sang out Tenby.

"Aye, aye, sir!" called the mate.

"Clap that murdering mutineer of a Falloner into irons and throw him down among the blackbirds. He loves the black devils; and if they pick the flesh off his bones it may teach him something. Down with him, mister!"

And the whole crew of the Inverarry shouted, savagely, "Aye, aye, sir!"

That was how Falloner was rushed to the hatch, with irons on his hands and feet, and every man of the Inverarry getting in a curse and a blow before Falloner was hurled like a stone into the hold.

He was bleeding about the head as he lay more than half stunned in the dimness of the hold. Through that dimness the islanders came about him with a rush, like wolves, whining on a high note of perfect rage. But that slender, golden flash of a lad, Sahi, the younger son of Kopana, pushed the rest away and crouched on his heels beside the white man. He kept one hand on the breast of Falloner and made a little speech in which one phrase appeared over and over again, "Imai Deapa—Imai Deapa."

And the Taholans began to answer in a chorus at every pause. Only the oldest son of Kopana, Nito, took no share in the singing. He, standing apart from the rest, kept looking on Falloner with an eye half cruel, half indifferent. But the rest were filled with an increasing enthusiasm. Sahi, it appeared, was telling a story in which Falloner found himself the hero, and even recognized the part when Sahi in a mimic

struggle appeared to overcome two enemies.

So the islanders, worked up to a high pitch, were presently shouting out, at every pause in the story, "Imai Deapa! Imai Deapa!" Some of them were laughing with a happy excitement. Here and there a man would be overcome with enthusiasm and leap to his feet, to fling himself through a few bounding steps of a dance.

ONE thing was importantly clear: the Taholans on the blackbirder had accepted Falloner as one of them, in spite of the color of his skin. But it was the young prince, Sahi, who was his particular friend. It was Sahi who washed the wound in his head, and Sahi who brought him food from the porridge buckets which were carried down into the hold twice a day. On those occasions three men carried food, and six armed guards watched over them, but the Taholans never made an attempt to mob the white men.

Falloner recovered very gradually, for the shock of the fall seemed to have bruised him inwardly. And it was Sahi who kept time from being dull. It was from Sahi that he learned long lists of words and committed them painfully, carefully to memory; but once memorized, the language was not hard to speak. Word order did not matter a great deal, and the constant babble of voices kept the flow of the language in the ear of Falloner.

Strength had come back to Falloner before the ships reached a harbor. The Taholans had been treated progressively better as the voyage continued, more and more of them being allowed on deck, and their rations improved.

Only Falloner, in manacles hand and foot, was kept below constantly,

and it was a party returning from the deck that informed him that a land was in view, a land of great, shaggy, green mountains with a pleasant harbor immediately in front, and a white, semicircular beach.

Tahiti—and the port was that of Papeete. Some of the Taholans had been there before on their occasional voyages.

The anchor fell. The cable ran with a grinding hum. Trampings sounded on the deck. Orders were given in voices that echoed dimly into the ears of Falloner.

Some one called down through the hatchway, and in answer to that voice a great tumult of delight broke out among the Taholans.

They were to be returned in a very few days to their distant home. All was to be well with them.

But Falloner?

The hold was empty of natives, who were all capering on the deck, when Jimmy Birch came down below with a pair of strong-shouldered sailors and leaned over the prisoner.

"You got so damn much whiskers on your face that I wouldn't know you, Falloner," he said. "But I can recognize you, anyway. I come down here to fetch you, son. You ain't gunna die at sea, after all. You're gunna be hanged by the French law, and you're gunna be buried in Tahiti."

CHAPTER XIV.

"BY THE NECK!"

IT was impossible to tell whether or no Hendrik Clauson was either Dutch or American. He himself would have been hard put to it to decide. He was as round and short-legged and plump as a Dutchman, and yet he

had the alert, humorous eye of an American.

Nationality, in fact, did not bother him a great deal. What he wanted was his share of brandy punch, a hearty lass of Tahiti for a wife, the shade of the palm trees to sit in during the heat of the day, and plenty of chance to meditate on the life that was drifting softly past him as he looked across Papeete and towards the sea. A rapid step was something he rarely heard and never liked.

He was disturbed now as he heard such a step coming up the path of his garden. The native, who knew his prejudice, quickened the strokes of the big fan with which Hendrik Clauson was cooled all through the middle of the day. Then Clauson was amazed to see before him a white girl whom he had not noted formerly in Papeete. And yet her arrival surely would be announced by the sounding of trumpets.

Her skin, he thought, was five shades darker than that of most white women. She was distinguished from them, also, by her step, easy and free as a man's, and by something of pride without arrogance in her carriage. She smiled a little, coming to Clauson.

He pushed himself out of his chair, made a futile gesture towards his brandy punch, and then stared at her helplessly. She made him feel old, soggy, unclean. The evil of his degenerate life choked the throat of Clauson for a moment.

"Are you Hendrik Clauson?" she asked. "Of Wayne and Farquhar's Trading Company?"

"I am, and at your service. Will you sit down?"

"I can't sit down," she answered. "Not while the Inverarry is lying there in the harbor! Do you know that there

are two hundred natives from Taholu on board? Do people here in Papeete know that she is a blackbirder?"

"It's only an excursion boat," answered Hendrik Clauson. He winked to invite her to share the joke, and afterwards felt that winking was not quite the thing.

"It's got a couple of hundred Taholans on board. But they were carried away from Taholu—by mistake. And now they're being fed fat, and they're going to be returned to the island. Just a little mistake made by Captain Tenby. He's made the same sort of mistake before, but the end hasn't always been the same. The Arethuse, yonder—she had something to do with Tenby finding out that he'd made a mistake, is what I hear. Sit down, please, Miss—"

"I'm Penelope Campbell," said the girl. "My father is Angus Campbell, at Taholu. You've forwarded shipments to him."

"Angus Campbell? God bless me, yes!" said Hendrik Clauson. "And you're his girl? I came to the South Seas with Angus long before he made himself a hermit. How is he now?"

"He's held by King Kopana of Taholu for thirty days—and ten of those days have gone already. At the end of thirty days he'll be murdered unless Kopana's two sons are returned to him. And they're on the Inverarry, Mr. Clauson. Will you help me to see the governor? Will he do anything to save my father in time?"

Clauson rubbed the sweat from his forehead.

"I've never heard of Governor de la Richerie doing anything to *help* anybody," said the trader. "But—he's at court now, seeing a man condemned to hang."

"May I go there?" she asked. "So

that I can see him the moment the trial is finished?"

"Anybody can go," said the trader. "And—wait till I have my hat. We'll go together."

HE hurried into the house to huddle a white linen coat over the sticky fat of his shoulders. He put on a necktie and a white hat, and came panting back to the girl. They went together down to the street.

"But how did you come here from Taholu?" asked the trader. He looked down at the harbor. A pair of whaling boats, distinguished by blunt bows and by stumpy masts, lay at anchor close together; but they were not recent arrivals. And this girl was fire-new on Tahiti. She could not have been on the island for a single day without having the wind of rumor bear the news of her presence headlong through Papeete.

"I'll tell you how I came—I'll tell you everything as soon as I've managed to see the governor," she answered, dodging a pair of naked boys who were wrestling and rolling in the dust of the street. "But I don't understand anything. If Captain Tenby was arrested as a blackbirder—what's happening now?"

"What's happening is that he's as thick as thieves with the commissioner and the governor and Captain Poupardin of the steam frigate."

A carriage, splendid in blue and red paint, spun around the next corner on two wheels. It was drawn by four horses. Behind it uprolled a cloud of dust, and through that mist she saw a dark-skinned, handsome lad in a uniform that shone with lace, a plumed hat on his head, a sword in his hand that he waved in the sunlight. And his shouted laughter blew back to the ears

of Penelope Campbell. The sound of that laughter and a ringing word of Taholan that it contained stopped the girl like a hand.

"It's Nito!" she cried. "It's the eldest son of Kopana—do you see, Mr. Clauson? If even he alone can be taken back to Taholu my father will be safe! Is there any influence you can use? And *will* you use it?"

"I'll do everything that a man *can* do," he told her. "But the French want him for something. They've not been dressing him up and making a fool of him for nothing. I've seen him drunk to a stagger with Captain Tenby holding him up on one side and Commissioner Delisle holding him on the other. He's been at the house of the governor and broken half the dishes at the table when he got drunk there. They're fattening him for a feast; and they're the ones who will pick his bones."

"What can they do with him?" she asked.

"I don't know. Who can tell?" answered Clauson. "Every Frenchman is part Napoleon—at least, this far away from Paris."

"Where is Nito's brother? Where's Sahi?"

"The younger one? They say that the French can't do anything with him because they took away from him a shipmate. I don't know all the story. But he won't drink their champagne; he'll hardly even touch the food they give him."

"Where is he?"

"He? In the governor's palace yonder. And here's the court."

THE building sat back behind tall trees. In fact, all of Papeete was half lost behind trees, only the higher roofs showing here and there.

Through a dawdling crowd Clauson led the girl down a corridor and so into a long, dim room. At one end of it, on a raised dais behind a great desk, sat two men, one in robes.

"There's the judge and the governor," said Clauson. "We can sit here at the back. You notice how many natives there are? They always turn out when a white man is being tried."

The girl, looking over them, thought them a far grade below the Taholans. The women in loose wrappers looked fat and the men seemed bloated; a dinginess sat on them, as though civilization had made them unclean.

"The man who's not in the robes—is he the governor?" asked the girl.

"Aye. The one who looks like a fat Napoleon and keeps on smiling a little. That's de la Richerie. He's here because he loves blood. The sailor is going to die, and the governor wants to be in at the decision. He can sit with the judge when he chooses. At any rate, he does."

"But where is the jury?" asked the girl.

"Jury? Do you think this is England or the United States?" asked Clauson. "Listen to the attorney for the state. He's warming up to his work now."

". . . not murder in the ordinary sense of the word, not the taking of life by an equal, but the foul destruction of an ignorant native by an intelligent white man, the murder moreover of a new and faithful ally of France; the foul murder, I say, of an innocent Taholan, one of a people newly joined to us in ties of friendship which may grow into a closer union. I ask you to look on the prisoner. A grim, formidable face. A huge body to match the face. The face, I say, of a savage. He has refused to testify after

his first incoherent outbursts. He sits now in a murderer's sullen silence. A murderer so detestably low and base that he carried away with him the horrible fruit of his crime. That is the final testimony of the state in closing its case. It offers to your eyes the propriety of the prisoner."

Here the lawyer suddenly turned to a table near by and snatched off a cloth covering, revealing a human head, darkened and preserved by smoking, and still wearing the death-smile.

CLAUSON turned suddenly to the girl. "We'll get out of here," he said.

But she was far from fainting. Instead, she was drawing herself slowly up from her chair. She was pale, but in her pallor her face seemed to shine.

"Stand up!" commanded the judge.

The big man at the end of the room rose. Iron manacles clanked on his wrists. His great shoulders were well outlined against the square of a window's light. He carried his head high, his face obscured by a shaggy two-weeks' growth of beard.

"Have you anything to say why judgment should not be pronounced upon you?" asked the judge.

There was a breath of silence.

"Let me speak for him!" cried out Clauson's companion.

He reached out to detain her, but she was already halfway down the aisle. The prisoner, as he heard her voice, plainly was staggered. He made such a movement that a pair of police grappled him by the arms and held him fast.

"You?" the judge was saying. "Have you been hired to—"

Here, as the girl came closer, the judge fell silent.

She was standing now in that brighter light which filled the lower end of the room.

"I've come from Taholu," she said. "It's true that he killed this man and another. But they were two Haggari head-hunters from the hills. And every Taholan honors him for what he did."

Here the governor sprang up from his chair and beat his fist noisily on the desk.

"Let the court be cleared! Gendarmes! Hustle that gabbering street-walker out of the court!" cried de la Richerie. "Let the sentence be pronounced!"

Clauson, paralyzed, stayed trembling in his chair and saw the girl rushed back up the aisle by two gendarmes; and the judge in a loud voice was bawling out:

"To be hanged tomorrow at sunrise, hanged by the neck till you are dead—"

CHAPTER XV.

THE FILE.

A FAINT swell traveled from time to time through the harbor of Papeete and put out the stars for a moment with its wake; but again they would be shining in the still water. And up from the beach trailing voices of song wandered vaguely through the air as fishermen came in from the shore.

To Lavia Laia and Penelope there was no beauty in that scene; and the heavy sweets from the shrubs in the governor's garden made a deadly fragrance, it seemed to them. A monotone of unmelodious noise, a rhythm rather than audible music, came from a hut not far away where men were singing one of the interminable

himnes which the missionaries had introduced. But nothing mattered to the two girls except the glimmer of lights from the long building.

"Over there, walking up and down, is one of the chiefs of the white men," said Penelope. "You can tell by the shining stuff on his shoulders, Lavia. If I could give him money, perhaps he would let me into the palace to see Imai Deapa."

"Ah, but you could not pick him up in your arms and run away with him. There is iron on his hands and feet, you say."

"I could give him this file, and with it he might be able to cut through the iron."

"What can we give the chief to make him let us into the house?" asked Lavia Laia.

"You have the pearls around your neck, Lavia."

"Ah, but those are taboo."

"Then Imai Deapa will die before the sun is hot tomorrow."

"Ai! Ai! Awai!" mourned the Taholu girl softly. "Here—take them. Let me come with you."

"If you are seen, what may happen, Lavia? Stay here, quietly, and watch. If I can go inside the house, wait where you are. Be sure that I'll come back."

The lieutenant found it a wearisome task to walk up and down, up and down under the great trees, listening to the little distant touches of music, sweet and sad as youth itself. The white clothes of Penelope dawned on his eyes like a charming ghost. When she spoke, her voice was as calm as her smiling.

"There is a prisoner in the governor's own jail, in the wing of the palace. His name is David Falloner," she said. "May I see him?"

"See him? The murderer? Why—" said the lieutenant, and then paused a little, staring at her.

SHE held out a hand with something glimmering in the palm of it. The erotic excitement died instantly from the blood of the Frenchman as he saw that faint gleaming.

"Take them," she said.

He held them up so that the light from the nearest windows might strike into the pearls.

And they were big; they seemed flawless.

He had not been in the South Seas for nothing, however, and now he tried them one by one, delicately, against the edge of his teeth, and felt the little overlapping, invisible edges of the outer layers of pearl.

Suddenly he forgot the South Seas. He was again in Normandy.

His farm climbed the side of a rolling hill. The green shining of his fields rejoiced his heart. Low-traveling white clouds passed through a sky of pale blue.

That was what these jewels could bring him to.

"For just this many pearls more—" he said. "I'll take a terrible risk and bring you to the American."

"Afterwards," said the girl. "You shall have them afterwards."

Sleek-sided cows, soft-eyed, moist of nose, would feed in his pastures. He could count them now along the hill-side. He was still counting when he took the girl through the door and up the narrow windings of the back stairway. They came out into a corridor on each side of which there were steel doors, with a shuttered metal grille let into the middle of them all.

The lieutenant unlocked one of these shutters and pushed it up. A fence of strong bars remained, and through that fence she could see, by the light which struck in from a hall lamp, the changed, dark, shaggy face of Fallonier.

"Now, there he is—be quick!" said the lieutenant.

Fallonier leaped to his feet. His irons rang like harsh bells.

"I must speak to him without being overheard," said the girl with an entreating look.

"Ah, well—ah, well!" said the lieutenant. "But remember that I'm watching every move you make. Be careful, or you might find yourself in one of those cells, and once in, they're hard to open. Only the governor holds the keys."

He moved back a few steps as he spoke, but she could feel the keenness of his scrutiny every moment. David Fallonier was staring at her with wild, incredulous eyes from inside the grille. She thrust her hands in between the bars as though with a sudden impulse of gladness.

Inside the left hand was the file, the point of it caught within the hollow of her fingers.

Fallonier had it in his own hand instantly.

"Don't speak!" she whispered. "There is only a moment. If you can escape, I shall be outside of the town, on the left side of the creek as you go up it.—Good-by!"

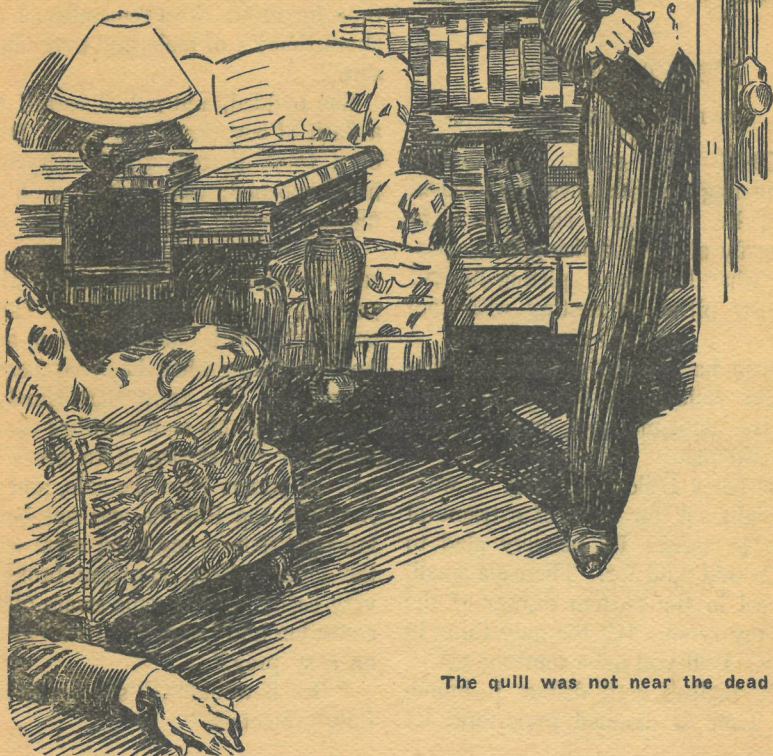
"How—" he asked.

But she had turned away. And, as she reached the head of the stairs with the lieutenant, she poured into the hand of the man another little shower of pearls—no, acres of that rich Norman soil!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK,

Riley Dillon, Masquerader

By H. BEDFORD-JONES



The quill was not near the dead man

*Riley Dillon, master thief,
forsakes his own pursuits to
go after more dangerous game*

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

RILEY DILLON was suave, polished, a man of the world and a gentleman, but when he paused, one day, and took stock of himself, he got a shock. "I'm a thief, a common thief," he decided. Although well to do, he had a passion for jewels, and for acquiring them by

the deftness of his fingers rather than by paying for them.

It was his interest in certain rare jewels that took him to San Francisco—that and a desire to meet his dying brother, Robert Dillon, who had just returned from the Orient. Robert died in his hotel room, and Riley immediately found himself involved in several curious intrigues, due to the fact that he was mistaken for Robert.

Robert, quite innocently, had brought into the country a small box for a man named Montague. Riley found the box to contain a valuable collection of jade which had been taken by the man who recently murdered a rich Japanese.

Another Japanese, Mr. Takashi, sought Riley's help, thinking him to be Robert, in securing a

This story began in the Argosy for July 13

small turquoise Buddha which contained secrets valuable to Takashi's honor. This image was in the possession of Jane Hartly, a beautiful girl who also had a rare collection of jewels. Meeting her, Riley learned that her unscrupulous ex-husband, Alec Hartly, was trying to blackmail her. Riley Dillon took up her battle for her, and partly succeeded in drawing Hartly's fangs.

Meanwhile, Riley got the Buddha and turned it over to Takashi, who flew into a rage and threatened vengeance when he learned that the image had been broken and a message concealed within it had disappeared. After an evening out with Jane Hartly, Riley returned to her home with her to find her servant murdered.

CHAPTER IX.

TWISTING TRAILS.

DILLON'S brain raced. As though some magic had this evening touched him, he was once again back to normal, keenly alert, visualizing every possibility of what lay ahead, pitting himself against every pitfall of destiny with cool assurance.

Once again he reached out for the telephone. He called the St. Francis and asked for the night manager, and presently got that gentleman.

"This is Riley Dillon speaking. I wonder if I might ask for a bit of extramural service, so to speak; I'll be very glad to see that it's well paid for. There's a small, heavy parcel in the bottom drawer of the dresser in my room. It's the only thing in the drawer. Will you have someone get it, hop into a taxicab, and deliver it immediately? Time is damned important, let me say."

"Why certainly, Mr. Dillon! I'll have a bellman do it at once. The address?"

Dillon gave it. "And will you make sure of speed? It's devilish important!"

"I'll rush it, sir."

Dillon hung up. For a moment he stared at the telephone, frowning. He was taking a risk here; for once, he was compelled to take chances. Yet he could visualize this risk very clearly. It was a good gamble; the odds were a thousand to one in his favor. With a nod of decision, he left the telephone and rejoined Jane Hartly. She looked up, tears on her cheeks.

"Did you get the police?"

"Not yet. I'll have to talk this over with you first," he said gravely.

"Can't I see Ming? Isn't there anything—"

"Nothing, my dear. And I advise you not to go in there."

"You didn't call the police, you say?"

"No." He held her eyes intently, and drew up a chair. "I need your help, Lady Jane, your advice. Buck up, now! It's no time for grief. You remember, I told you about that kit of tools, and that chap Harrison?"

She nodded, and pulled herself together, a flash of surprise in her face. Dillon had been frank in telling her everything that had happened; what it had to do with this matter, she did not see, and said as much.

"I'll show you, quick enough," Dillon said grimly. "Let me sketch what happened. No doubt our friend Hartly was acquainted with Shark Harrison, or at least knew of him, when he lived here in San Francisco. We know that Hartly, Roger Vincent and this man are lined up together. Harrison was employed to break in here, get the papers from the safe, and steal the Buddha; the Buddha was not here, so he later got it from my hotel room while after the jades. Now, Harrison broke in here very easily. He became aware of the jewel collection and knew that it would offer him an easy prey."

"But it wouldn't!" she broke in. "It's fully protected?"

DILLON smiled. "My dear, even with my limited knowledge of such things, I'd guarantee to lift that entire collection in a couple of hours or so. Harrison took only the rubies. He came here on his own hook this time."

"If so, why didn't he take them when he was here before?"

"He was on a hired job then. Also it would take time and special equipment to get into those cabinets, to find and kill the electric connections, and so on. Yes, he came back tonight. He looted the rubies, and might have gone on to the other cabi-

nets, had not Ming Yen come in and caught him at work. He killed Ming; he did not mean to hit so hard, but was excited."

"Why do you say that?"

"Harrison is too smart to be a murderer, deliberately. He used a slungshot, it seems. He probably meant to knock Ming out, and hit too hard. Finding Ming dead, he skipped out; but he's a sharp rogue. I doubt if so much as a fingerprint will be found to show his guilt."

"But you'll tell the police who it was!" she exclaimed.

Dillon nodded and for a moment met her gaze in silence. Under his look, her dark eyes slowly dilated. Comprehension came to her.

"Oh! If you tell them, they'll want to know how you know—"

"Precisely. These police are inquisitive gentry. They'd not be put off with a lie. There'd be nothing against me, of course, but I if go into the whole thing with them quite frankly—well, you see what it means. I'd be a marked man. And I can't afford to be a marked man, my dear."

"No, that's right," she broke out. "Then keep quiet! Tell them nothing. Perhaps they'll discover for themselves that Harrison did it."

Dillon shook his head. "D'you believe for one minute that I'd let a faithful fellow like Ming Yen be murdered, and not grab the blackguard who did it? Merely to save myself a little unpleasantness?"

"But you can't, you can't!" she exclaimed. "Why, if you told them everything it would mean—"

"Faith, I intend to tell nothing," and Riley Dillon leaned back with a short laugh. "Leave that to me. Would you mind putting on the porch light? I've a messenger coming in a few minutes. Then I'll explain everything."

She rose, with a nod, and left the room.

RILEY DILLON went back to the library, glancing about the floor.

Ming Yen was dead; unless that quill were still here, where it might have fallen when the turquoise Buddha broke—but,

with a sigh, Dillon gave up hope. The quill was not here; there was nothing to conceal it. He did find something else, however.

"Here's one of the rubies, dropped by Harrison in his haste," he said, and held out a small stone. "It's a ghastly joke on Mr. Harrison, by the way. You must tell the police that the rubies in that case were not real, but imitations. I'm sure of it now. This stone proves it."

She was startled. "Imitations? But that's impossible, incredible!"

Dillon shrugged. "Replicas, made exactly like the real stones, and put in their place by someone who had access to the collection, or who knew the library intimately."

"But who could—oh!" Her face changed suddenly. For a moment, a blaze of anger leaped in her eyes, then was gone. "I see," she murmured. "You mean Alec. He might have done it while we were married, yes. We both lived in this house. Later on he came back here frequently, while the settlement was in progress. Even afterward, when father and I were away in Japan. Alec might have come while the house was shut up, and done this—oh, but it seems so incredible, so fantastic!"

Dillon gestured. "I'm not saying he did it, my dear. I'm voicing a wild conjecture, no more. I'm warning you, however, to tell the police that the rubies were not real; don't lie to the police about it. Later, we can look over the other stones and see whether they've been tampered with or not."

A peal of the doorbell interrupted. Dillon responded. A bellman from the hotel was at the door, a taxicab awaiting him in the street; with a smiling word of recognition, the bellman handed him the package he desired. Dillon slipped a bill into the boy's hand and rejoined Jane Hartly.

"Go ahead and call the police," he told her, tearing open the wrapping. "I'll just plant this—it's the tool kit I mentioned to you. It'll be a sure clue to the murderer, once they find that Harrison is the owner. Remember, we've just come in and dis-

covered the murder. Don't be cool about it. Be agitated. Go ahead!"

With a nod of comprehension, she rose to obey.

By this time, Jane Hartly was steeled for the ordeal that lay ahead, and well that she was. A radio patrol car was followed swiftly by an ambulance, by two men from the homicide squad, by a stream of reporters and cameramen. Riley Dillon, so far as possible, took charge.

The only thing he had touched in the library was the electric switch, and the imitation ruby on the floor; of this he made no secret. The blood, not yet dried, on the switch indicated that the murderer had turned it off before leaving. Ming Yen had been struck twice across the head with a blackjack, presumably.

Excitement broke out among the officers when one of them found the leather tool-kit outside the broken window, open, blood-stained, obviously dropped by the thief in his hurried flight. Riley Dillon watched grimly. If Potiphar had located the owner of this kit within a few hours, the police should do it in even less time.

AT last the throng ebbed, the excitement died. Ming Yen's body was removed, the reporters skipped out with their story—a whale of a story, as one of them remarked, with that kickback about the stones being imitations. Too late for the morning papers, it would not get on the streets until the noon editions.

"Get some rest." Riley Dillon patted Jane Hartly's shoulder, looked into her eyes, smiled cheerfully. "The worst's over. Whenever you feel like seeing me, give me a ring."

"You'll keep your promise?" she inquired. "I may need you now, really."

"I'll keep it, never fear," he said, and so departed.

Mental telepathy is a queer thing, and strikes in strange ways. Riley Dillon turned in and slept soundly until noon. Then he wakened, all of a sudden, a whole train of thought in his mind.

Potiphar! That man would know the

truth about the tool-kit; the only person who would know the truth, or suspect it. Dillon came wide awake with the thought. His mind must have been working at it subconsciously. The hotel people, the bellman, would suspect nothing, for the package had been wrapped. They might or might not become aware of the discrepancy in time, for presumably Dillon and Jane Hartly had come home a good half hour later, after the package had been delivered. That was a risk he had chosen to take. A slight one. But Potiphar—

There was a knock at his door. It was Potiphar.

Dillon slipped into a dressing-gown, ordered up a bite of lunch-breakfast, then turned to the chubby little man behind the black-rimmed spectacles.

"Well?"

"You mean, the purpose of my visit?" said Potiphar. "I've read the papers. Are you aware of what's happened this morning?"

"I? Why, no. I instructed the management to disturb me for no one. Well, what?"

"Shark Harrison's apartment was raided about 5 A.M.," said Potiphar, producing a noon edition. "He resisted arrest—and got away. The police found the stuff stolen from Mrs. Hartly's home. The drag-net's out for Shark Harrison on a murder warrant. What I came for, however, was to ask you a question."

Dillon had been glancing at the headlines of the paper. He laid it aside.

"Yes," he said. "I thought you would. About that tool-kit."

Potiphar waved his hand blandly.

"No. It is distinctly not my business to display curiosity toward a client. What I must ask you at once, is whether I'm to regard you as a client. In other words, is your business with me finished, or am I to consider myself retained in your employ?"

"Faith," Dillon exclaimed, regarding the other shrewdly, "damned if I know whether you're blackmailing me for a permanent job or asking the question for some highly ethical motive! I incline to the

latter belief, singular as it may appear; in short, I think you're on the level."

"Thank you," rejoined Potiphar a trifle stiffly. "That is not answering my query."

Dillon clapped him on the shoulder. "You're retained, me lad. I'm a client; I have a hunch that I'd better be a client, and I never go back on a hunch."

"Wise man," said Potiphar, with a sigh of relief. "I'll use your phone, if I may, while you glance at the paper. I'm rushed."

"Go ahead."

WHEN Potiphar called his number, Dillon's eyes lifted sharply, incredulously, from the newsprint. Potiphar, over the instrument, winked solemnly at him, then spoke.

"Oh, hello! Is this Mr. Takashi? This is Mr. Potiphar of the Potiphar Agency. Sorry if I was a trifle delayed in answering your call—an urgent matter of business. I regret very much, Mr. Takashi, that I must refuse your retainer. A matter of professional ethics; it happens that Mr. Dillon is a client of the agency. Therefore it would be impossible—oh, not at all! Thank you."

He hung up and turned. Dillon regarded him with twinkling eyes.

"So that was it!"

"Exactly," said Potiphar. "He'll have no trouble getting someone else to take the job. Know anything about him?"

"Too much," replied Dillon. "Will you have a bite to eat?"

"Thanks, no." Potiphar rose, as the waiter entered. "I'll leave you the paper. And you'd better take this card; it has my house phone number, in case you need to reach me out of office hours. The name is Smith, you know."

"And more power to you," said Dillon, shaking hands.

Over his meal, he settled down to digest the newspaper story. When at length he lighted a cigar, he sat in thought. So Takashi was looking him up, eh? That was bad. Such a man was capable of anything. Might it not be best to write Takashi exactly what had happened, make him read if he would not listen?

Dillon shook his head; the suggestion nettled his pride. The quill was gone now, gone with Ming Yen forever. To the devil with Takashi! Suddenly remembering that the hotel was blocking any calls for him, he took up the telephone and called Jane Hartly. She responded at once, in person.

"I've called you twice, Riley Dillon!"

"Sorry; the hotel was putting through no calls for me. How are you?"

"About as one might expect. And you?"

"Fresh as a daisy. You'd better leave home and have a change of scene."

"I know. I've been busy all morning, terribly busy. But I want to see you. There are those other stones in the collection to think about—the electric alarm's ruined; and after what you said, I'm in doubt whether to replace the protective system or not."

"Don't," said Dillon promptly. "Put all the valuable pieces into a grip and chuck it away in your closet. We'll go over them tomorrow, when I can have sunlight for the job; this afternoon, I'm getting ready to repel invaders, and I'll be infernally busy. Are you coming downtown?"

"Yes, to the shop. I was just leaving."

"Fine. Suppose I pick you up there about five? Then we can take a long drive somewhere, get dinner, and you'll have the cobwebs blown out of your system. Good?"

"Very good!" she returned joyously.

Dillon dressed, found the day bright and cheerful, and taking his hat and stick, left the hotel. He walked briskly across the plaza, located a luggage shop, and found a small steamer trunk that was to his taste; he arranged to have this delivered to his room immediately.

HE was already missing the endless walking which is so large a part of New York life. A half-hour of climbing about the lower hills of San Francisco's streets, and he came back to the St. Francis feeling fresh and fit. In the lobby, he found that the trunk had arrived and gone to his room. He asked for mail at the desk, got a batch of letters, stuffed them into his pocket, and went on to his room.

There, he fell to work. He emptied his old trunk, whose locks guaranteed it against all chance intrusion, and put back into it all books, papers, instruments and other material which might prove in the least degree incriminating, or which might cause unwelcome questions to be asked. In the new trunk went his personal effects.

This took time. Riley Dillon was alarmed into making a clean sweep; he had no idea what might break at any moment, and this California law of arrest on suspicion was a disturbing element. He had attempted to put Hartly and other things out of his mind, but repeatedly he found himself dwelling on Jane's expression when he told her of the supposed rubies being imitation.

Was it possible that Hartly had looted the collection? It was unlikely, so far as Dillon could see; only a person whose business lay with jewels could have carried off that coup successfully. Still, he knew nothing about the man. Yet Hartly, as Jane's husband, might have had access to the collection. Jane had, in fact, said as much. Her thought had gone to him the first thing.

Other unfinished business, too; things had not cleared up as he had anticipated. The death of Robert Dillon had, after all, left much in the air. Montague, and his presumed connection with Roger Vincent, remained an ominous cloud over the horizon. The links among all these men, the definite feeling that he was dealing with a gang rather than with separate individuals, made a most disturbing reflection.

"Something we don't know, me lad," he told himself, as he presently finished his labors. "But it'll turn up. Now put your mind on business.

The fragments of the Buddha, carefully rescued by the floor maid, reposed on the dresser. Dillon examined them minutely, even smashed the larger pieces, and finding nothing of the least interest, he chucked them into the wastebasket. The turquoise Buddha, at least, was finished and done with.

The episode of the Yoritomo jades, also, was definitely closed. The receipt of

Takashi had ended this matter—except for the activity of Montague.

"Everything in," Dillon decided. "Ah! One thing more."

He produced the ring of Cardinal Acquaviva and looked at it. Reason bade him put it safely into the trunk with the other things he dared not have discovered here; but Riley Dillon did not always regard the promptings of reason.

He was glad that Jane Hartly had preferred the jade to this ring. Not that it left the ring to him, but because of a more subtle reaction. After all, the thing was stolen; there was no blinking the fact. He might call it borrowed, his apologetic reasoning might satisfy his own conscience, he might regard this as one of his neatest and most daring coups. And yet—and yet—

"Devil take it, that girl has worked a change in me somehow," he muttered, with a frown. "Or is the ring? Ugly, she called it; and to be honest, the thing has lost its charm for me. I've half a notion to send it back to that poor devil of a curator."

Half a notion; no more. It was too much of a wrench. He could not make up his mind to it.

He hesitated, turned to the trunk, then thrust the ring into his pocket. Next moment he had closed the trunk and was calling the porter's desk.

"Send it to me at the Waldorf, New York, by express," he gave directions when the men arrived.

The trunk was taken out; Riley Dillon drew a deep breath of relief.

"Now, begad, let 'em search all they please! Hello; the afternoon's nearly gone, eh? Well, it's work well spent. Ah, the mail! More bills to pay, me lad."

HE looked over the batch of letters he had brought upstairs. Bills from New York, yes. No personal letters. Riley Dillon had many acquaintances but few friends, of his own deliberate choosing. He refused to make friends, he stood ever aloof, sought after but not seeking; the prime reason being that with friends one made ties, and he could not steal from

friends or use them to further his own ambitions.

Then he paused at the last letter. It was addressed simply to "R. Dillon" at the St. Francis—"R. Dillon, Esq." Odd! He looked again; a Chinese stamp and postmark. The letter was from Shanghai, but bore no return address. English handwriting.

"Hello! For Robert, eh? I wonder—"

Hesitating for an instant, he tore it open. An engraved letterhead of the Chinese Customs Statistical Department; that was all. No name signed, except the nickname. Riley Dillon spread it out, and next moment was intent upon it.

DEAR BOB:

Hope you reached the States safely and did not stop over too long in Japan. Bad liquor there, old chap.

Everything as usual here. I'm writing to let you know something I just picked up about that beggar Vincent, the chap who sold you out a while back. It might interest you if you're in Los Angeles; I understand the place is a suburb of San Francisco or something of the sort.

This blighter is in business there. He's in partnership with some chap by the name of Hartly, a jewel broker. They've been importing malachite, jades and no end of that sort of gem stones through the Hang Far Low people. Your old No. 1 boy is with these people now and tipped me off. The address is 5628 Carleton Lane. Apparently there's mickle siller in the firm; what price Judas silver, eh? I'd jolly well like to hear that you'd given the mucker a good thrashing, at least.

Drop us a line one of these days. As ever,
NEED.

"Talk about dead men's shoes!" murmured Riley Dillon. "This certainly dropped into my hands like manna from heaven. No way of knowing who wrote it, either. But here's the clue; here's the thing we didn't know, the missing link that's eluded us! So Hartly's a jewel broker, eh? And has money. And Vincent's in partnership with him. There's where the rubies have gone, Lady Jane—into Hartly's fist! And he's evidently in need of funds now, or he'd not have made that desperate play to get back the forged

checks and blackmail Jane to boot. Faith, we've learned something at last!"

He glanced at his watch; time enough, and to spare. Visiting the lobby, he got the afternoon papers, and secured a small box and some wrapping paper from the porter's desk. An urge was upon him, a foolish and unreasoning constraint; he could not himself understand it, but Riley Dillon never fought against this sixth sense which had never played him false.

HE wrapped up the Cellini ring and addressed the package to the curator of the park museum, slapped a couple of stamps on it, and viewed it with a whimsical smile.

"It's a fool you are, Riley me lad!" he observed. "You've wanted this thing for years; and now you have it, there's no joy in it for you. So off it goes and good riddance to. When the luck of a man starts to break, when there's any rift that can let in unpleasant light upon him, he'd better watch the chinks closely; fool or no fool, never take chances! As long as there's no starting back for New York, this bit of art would be a damning evidence if it were found. Better luck next time, me lad!"

He turned to the papers, which had played up the story of Ming's murder heavily, with the follow-up of Shark Harrison's escape from the arresting officers. Harrison had wounded two of the police and broken clear, and nothing more was known of him. Riley Dillon occupied but a small place in the story, having no more than a mention, and with this he was well satisfied.

Promptly at five o'clock he walked into the Book Shop. It was empty save for Jane Hartly, who came to meet him with a glad smile. Dillon stopped short.

"Something's wrong," he said abruptly. "I can see it in your face, Lady Jane."

She nodded. "I—I'm afraid so. I hate to tell you, but I must. A man from the district attorney's office was just here, questioning me about you, Riley Dillon. Your name was in the paper, you know. It seems

that there's something about the ring stolen from the museum; it was reported to them, and the fact that you were there."

"Oh!" said Dillon. "And of course that episode about the Yoritomo jades, too, was in their minds. No doubt they thought it devilish funny that I figured in all three happenings, eh? Praise be for hunches!"

"The point was, this man thought you might be connected with the real rubies that were gone. I admitted they were gone, you know, before I thought. He saw in the paper about Harrison having stolen imitation rubies, and—"

"So they're on to me, eh?" said Riley Dillon, and whistled softly.

CHAPTER X.

ATTEMPT AT MURDER.

THEN, at the girl's anxious expression, a cherubic smile crept into his lean features, and his gray eyes warmed upon her. He thought of the package mailbox at the corner, where he had five minutes previously deposited the Cellini ring, and a chuckle broke from him.

"Faith, it's a gay world after all, my dear!" he exclaimed gayly. "I've sent back that ring; whether it was you or a change of heart—well, it's gone back to 'em. And I've cleared everything out of my room that might cause trouble.

"And now, you and I have the evening before us, and if your car's handy we'll just go away and devil take black care! What do you say?"

"Yes!" she cried, and laughed up at him. "Oh, you just seem to banish everything, Riley Dillon, and sweep all the clouds away—you and your fine air of perfect assurance. Don't you ever worry over anything?"

"Oh, sure!" said he quickly. "I've been worrying my head off over what you said to me last night."

"What's that?"

"That you'd never fall in love with me. And me neglecting my important business in New York and maybe getting into prison

and all, just for the joy of being with you—"

"Get out of here with your blarney, Riley Dillon! Let's lock up and go."

Laughing together, they departed.

Darkness found them nearly forty miles down the peninsula, ensconced at the window of a roadhouse overlooking the waters of Halfmoon Bay. The moon, being nearly at the full, promised an early rising. They were almost alone in the place, not more than three or four cars being racked outside; and across the candle-lit table Jane Hartly beamed happily. Dillon had done most of the talking on the way here. Now she was roused, was coming out of her somber mood, was wakening to life.

"This is nice," she observed contentedly. "The city far away and the world shut out! I take the car and go places, sometimes for days, just to get away. Oh, I can't get over how lucky it was that you had that hunch about the ring this afternoon!"

"My guardian angel was on the job, eh?" and Dillon laughed lightly.

"Exactly. And you sent back the ring. Do you regret it?"

"Of course."

"Good!" Her dark eyes brimmed with laughter, yet held a question in their depths. "I was afraid that you had—well, shall I say reformed?"

"Reformation means repentance, Lady Jane; I've nothing to repent. I'm playing safe, not sorry," Dillon said quietly. "It's not that I'd change the past; but myself, and the future. Everything that I've found so absorbing has dwindled in importance. Jewels, polished bits of stone with fiery hearts, the incredible artistry of their making—all this has become little and less. As you grow large, other things decrease."

"That's too serious for blarney," she observed.

"Blarney be hanged!" Dillon's gray eyes were intent. "You have provided me with a new standard of values, and a very lovely one. In the past, I've stuck to my own code; I've nothing to regret or repent. But that code—well, with you on the hori-

zon, it may have to be altered. Hello! There's Fiorito's orchestra on the radio! Banish dull care; come along, step out on the floor before a crowd has gathered—"

AS they danced, she looked up at him, smiling.

"Just as I'm about to complain that you're too earnest, off you go on some new tack! All the same, you're quite a charming gentleman."

"A rogue, my dear; a rogue past reformation."

"Oh, glamorous rogue! I understand and admire your viewpoint. So you'd change the future because of me? If I asked for the diamonds glittering on the ample bosom of the mayor's wife, would you steal them for me?"

"Devil a bit. I'm a man of principles, my dear. Besides, I don't like diamonds. Diamonds and jade—I've little use for either. Hard, cold, like the evil eye of a highborn matron. No, give me a stone and a heart of warmth!"

"Can't give you what I haven't, Riley Dillon."

"Liar!" he breathed, his gray eyes aglow in the soft light. "Adorable liar! Faith, we'd better get back to the table or I'll be forgetting myself and making love to you. And I'm hungry. And—oh, the devil!"

"What is it?" She stepped back as he came to an abrupt halt.

"Forgot something I had to show you. A letter. Never mind it now—wait till we get home."

"You don't want to spoil our evening?"

"Exactly. It's nothing bad, however."

When they left, the moon was high, flooding the bay with pellucid radiance. As they approached the car, a gawky boy who acted as caretaker held open the door. Dillon handed him a coin.

"Thanks," he rejoined. "Hope the car got fixed up all right."

"Eh?" said Dillon. "There's nothing wrong with the car."

"A feller was working on it, wasn't he? I thought it was this one. Said you'd

wanted it put in shape—he had to get underneath it."

Dillon laughed and climbed in. "I fancy you have the wrong party, me lad." And as the engine roared, he swung the car out from among the others. "Or more like you had a drop too much," he added under his breath. Jane Hartly laughed.

"Perhaps he was just trying to deserve your tip. He doesn't get many, I imagine."

"Hm! Maybe," Dillon rejoined, wondering a little. Then he forgot the incident.

They had reached the sharp turn coming into Princeton when the blinding headlights of a car ahead, on the wrong side of the road, swept around the bend. Dillon, luckily, stepped on the brake, and stepped hard. He wrenched over the wheel, and the other car thrummed past. There was a sharp *clang* of breaking metal.

With a wild lurch, the roadster went into the ditch.

THE crash, the jarring shock, flung them together against the windshield.

The roadster had halted there, nose down, with not enough impetus to carry it farther.

"Hurt?" exclaimed Dillon, pulling the girl back to the seat.

"No; it—it shook me up, that's all. What happened?"

"Something broke. Have you a flashlight?"

"In the pocket on your side."

Dillon found the light and climbed out. He held up his hand.

"Come along. You can halt a passing car while I see what went smash."

"Why, you're hurt!" she exclaimed sharply, as he aided her to firm ground. "That's blood on your face—"

"Nothing but a scratch," he rejoined gayly. "Into the road with you now! I'll have a look underneath. Steering knuckle broke, I imagine."

"It shouldn't, on a car like this."

A moment later he clambered out and joined her in the road, waving with the flashlight to signal an approaching car.

"Did it break?"

"Yes. Filed half in two," he said grimly, his face lean and hard, his gray eyes cold.

"That's what the chap was doing," he went on, "working on the car. No use going back there now; that gawky lout would never be able to describe him. Let it pass for the moment; here's a lift."

In Princeton, Jane phoned her garage in the city, telling them to send for the roadster; by the time she was finished, Dillon had engaged a driver and car to take them home. They sat together in the back seat.

"This seems rather terrible," she said in a low voice. "It makes me feel shaky. Suppose I'd been driving that car in traffic. Or if you'd not chanced to slow down just then. That was a lucky coincidence!"

"No such thing," said Dillon. His voice was harsh. "It was aimed to break at any quick swerve, at a turn in the road. It did; no coincidence about that."

"You needn't sound so savage about it," and she laughed shakily. "Have you any idea who could have done it?"

"Plenty." He leaned forward and spoke to the driver. "Cut into the city over the Twin Peaks road, and let me off at the corner of Grant and California. Then take the lady on home."

Dropping back on the seat, he turned to Jane Hartly.

"I've an errand to do, if you don't mind going on alone. I'll follow in twenty minutes or so, if I may."

"Do, by all means. I'll have some hot coffee ready. Poor old Sui Toy is all broken up over—over last night. He's getting me a new house man in the morning; I'm going to Ming's funeral then, too. He was a mission boy, you know."

Dillon said nothing. After a little he produced cigarettes, held the light, then put into her hand the folded letter he had received that afternoon.

"This came for my brother; I opened it. Read it when you get home. It'll help explain things; we can discuss it when I get there."

"I wish you'd tell me what you're going to do."

"Nothing at all."

HIS voice was curt, choking back any further questions. He had glossed over the misunderstanding with Takashi in telling her all that had happened; but he was certain that Takashi was behind this damnable action. The man was used to swift and desperate things, no doubt.

Getting a detective agency after him—and now striking at him through Jane! Dillon went hot and cold with fury as he thought of it.

"I'm going away in a day or two," she said abruptly, as they were heading up the looping, climbing Twin Peaks grade. "Next Thursday, on the 12th, I must be in Los Angeles to close a big deal; some of father's property there is being sold. I'm going to take the car and spend several days on the way, loafing and getting rid of all my worries. And you're going with me."

"Eh?" Dillon was startled. "I'm—what?"

"Going with me," and she broke into a little laugh. "I want company."

"Hm! The two of us traipsing around the country—why, it wouldn't do. Dash it, can't you see for yourself?"

"Tut, tut, Mr. Grundy! The poppies are in bloom along the coast route and we'd have a lovely time. I need someone blithesome to keep me buoyed up. We'd drift along like butterflies from poppy to poppy and it would be wonderful. Wouldn't it?"

"Begad and it would, my dear! But—"

"But, my dear Riley Dillon, we're not living a generation ago. This is today. We can take a trip together and as long as you'll promise not to make love to me even once, it'll be quite all right. Promise?"

"No," said Dillon. "Damned if I will. I never make a promise I can't keep. And who could help loving you?"

"Oh, love all you like, but keep it to yourself," and she laughed merrily. "Yes or no?"

"Well, yes; but I don't like it. I don't like the looks of it."

"Are you such a prude, then?"

"Where you're concerned, I am that."

"And you don't like the idea?"

"Oh, devil take it, the idea's wonderful, only—" Dillon paused abruptly. They had reached the summit. There was not a hint of fog this night, and upon them burst the breath-taking spectacle of the city lights below, the flickering beacons up the bay, the cities glittering across along the farther shore. Dillon drew a long breath.

"What a lovely thing it is, all of it, with you sitting here!" he said softly. "Yes, we'll have a gorgeous time, and devil take what may come. When do we start?"

"As soon as I get the roadster repaired. You're a perfect driver."

"Then I'll get a whipcord uniform and—"

"You will not!" she flashed. "You're just devil enough to do it and pose as my chauffeur, aren't you? Well, you'd better not, or I'll scandalize the whole coast by dining and dancing with the chauffeur and—"

She clutched at his arm abruptly as the car went down the steep pitch toward the park beyond. Dillon said nothing; he realized, of a sudden, that her nerves must have received a frightful jolt, back there when the roadster went out of the road. She was talking desperately, in a false gaiety.

"Perhaps you'd rather I let you go home alone and didn't come?"

"No, honestly. I'd say so in that case. Come."

AT the corner designated, Dillon swung out of the car, and it bore her on.

He turned to the dingy sign of the Suki-yaki parlor. When he had ascended the stairs to the corridor above, the same dummy little Japanese woman whom he had first seen here received him with a polite greeting.

"I want to see Mr. Takashi."

"Ver' sorry," she murmured blankly. "Not here. Gone Sac'mento."

From the booths to the right came the voices of tourists. Dillon put the little woman aside with one hand and strode past her, to the left. She emitted a thin, shrill singsong, a quick warning cry.

The corridor ended in a slatternly kitchen. Dillon walked in and found his way blocked by four Japanese.

"Where's Takashi?" he demanded.

"You get out!" came the quick response. "Get out!"

One of the brown men advanced with upheld carving knife. Dillon's fist sent him smashing over a table. There was an outburst of cries, of shrill yells. The other three men rushed. Dillon slipped around a table, shoved it at them, and headed for a door at the end of the kitchen.

Suddenly two of the men produced pistols, with a shout of warning at him. Dillon halted. They meant business.

"Get out!" cried one of the men. "You get arrested; I shoot."

The door at the end of the kitchen opened. Silence fell. In the doorway stood Mr. Takashi, regarding the scene calmly.

"Good evening, Mr. Dillon," he said. "Do you want me?"

"Yes," snapped Dillon. "And you know damned well what I want with you, too. Your man did his work all right, but the outcome wasn't what you expected. Let me tell you something, Takashi. One more attempt such as you made tonight, and I'll kill you. Understand? And nothing will keep me from it, either."

Mr. Takashi met the blazing gray eyes impassively.

"I do not know what you mean, Mr. Dillon."

"Don't lie," shot out Dillon. "You had us followed, and your man filed the steering knuckle on Mrs. Hartly's car. Luckily, nothing much happened. If it had, I wouldn't be wasting my time in talk. But now I'm warning you; hands off! One more such attempt and you're a dead man. By the saints, I'll kill you if I swing for it!"

Dillon meant his words. His cold rush of anger dominated the whole place; he

stood poised, intent, as though ready to leap. Takashi straightened up a trifle.

"You do not flatter me, Mr. Dillon. Was this matter of which you speak some attempt upon the life of this lady?"

"It was, as you very well know."

Takashi waved his hand, in a gentle gesture of negation.

"On the contrary. It would be rather silly of me to try and kill anyone, especially a lady whom I do not know. Your brother, I am sure, would have been far less clumsy in his mental processes." His low, cold voice held a certain earnestness that was impressive. "I give you my word of honor, Mr. Dillon, that I am entirely ignorant of this affair."

Staggered, Dillon stared at the man.

"Begad, I'm tempted to believe you!" he said bluntly. "Your word of honor—"

"As a gentleman." The cold voice carried finality.

"Accepted." Dillon exclaimed impulsively. The anger was chilled out of him. "Yes. And if you'd believe what I have to say about that quill—"

Takashi changed. As the Orientals phrase it, he retired within himself; a thing indescribable to one who does not know the yellow race.

"You have come here with insults before my servants, Mr. Dillon," he said icily. "You will oblige me by leaving at once."

Turning, he was gone; the door slammed after him.

RILEY DILLON made his way out of the place. From the moment he had posed as his brother, in Takashi's eyes all he said and did was false. Some men share this feminine trait.

"Devil and all, I didn't accomplish much there," Dillon muttered ruefully, as he searched for a taxicab. "But I believe him; he told the truth, and that lets him out. What infernal scoundrel was behind the job, then?"

Twenty minutes later he walked into the dining room with Jane Hartly, who had coffee percolating on the table. When

she had poured the coffee, she regarded him coolly, curiously.

"Well, tell me all about it."

"About what?"

"How your errand came out. There was no use trying to persuade you out of it, so I didn't try; but I could guess it. Did you learn who played us that trick?"

"No." Dillon smiled ruefully. "I pulled a boner, I'm afraid; I was off the track. I'll have to tell you about what's behind it, though, so here goes."

He told his reasons for suspecting Takashi, and what had passed between them just now.

"So I came off second best," he concluded. "He hates me. And all for that little lost quill. What it means to him or why he wants it, I don't know; but there's everything for your mental digestion. And I really believe he had nothing to do with our accident. Who had, then? Who'd be so bitterly diabolic? A sneaking, underhand bit of work, yet done cleverly."

She shook her head. Then she laid down the letter.

"Well, I read this; as you say, it explains a good many things. Of course I knew that Alec had a fair knowledge of precious stones and dealt in them to some extent, but I've never thought him a thief. It's quite possible that having easy access to the collection, he replaced the real rubies with replicas."

"Being a thief," and Riley Dillon's face darkened a trifle. "I figure that's what he'd do. I should know."

"Oh! I didn't mean to shoot at you," she said, contritely. Dillon was startled by her ready acceptance of the word. She caught the look in his eyes, and shrugged slightly. "As to you, Riley Dillon, I can quite understand your attitude, your viewpoint; I don't blame you a trifle as regards your chosen past—"

"But?" he prompted, as she paused. She gestured helplessly.

"But why evade it, why pretend? After all, you've acted outside the law."

"And you don't like it?"

"Did you expect me to like it? Some more coffee; do. That's right. Well, I like you, which is the main thing. Anything else is no concern of mine, is it?"

Dillon bit his lip. This swift change in her attitude was baffling. She was not the same woman with whom he had laughed and danced away the past hour.

"What if I were to throw my past, my old viewpoint, overboard?" he hazarded.

"Wouldn't it be better and more practical to use it as a stepping-stone?" Then she broke into a laugh. "Mercy! You'll have me entering into a serious and righteous sermon in a minute! Let's get back to our muttons. I know what I'll do, as soon as you learn just how many of those stones, besides the rubies, are fakes. Why can't you do it tonight?"

DILLON shook his head, partly in negation, partly at his own inability to comprehend her shifting moods.

"We must be certain, and only sunlight makes certain. I'll come up here tomorrow afternoon with my dichoscope, if that suits you."

"Excellently. What is it that you'll bring? What's the thing?"

"A simple apparatus for testing stones. It saves no end of time."

"Very well. The funeral's in the morning. I'll go from there to the shop; suppose you pick me up about two? Then, as soon as we know where we stand in regard to the stones, I'll get started after Alec Hartly. And when I get started, I'll go, too!"

"Without proof?" Dillon's brows lifted. "You've not a shred of evidence yet."

"Bah! It can be obtained. I'll do it myself; we'll do it, Riley Dillon! This gives us an additional reason for our trip south. Splendid!" Her face lit up quickly, and her dark eyes were like stars. "Agreed?"

"You're monkeying with dynamite, my dear. Vindictiveness is beyond you."

"Vindictiveness nothing!" she blazed out. "Do you know this collection was worth a quarter of a million dollars? It

was. Now let me tell you something, Riley Dillon." She leaned forward, earnestly. "I've not a particle of vindictiveness in me; I don't hold grudges. That man is beneath even contempt, especially now that you've pulled his teeth. But—never try to put anything over on a woman. That's the one thing she resents, detests, despises and will fight like hell about! I won't let anyone put anything over on me and get away with it. That's final!"

"More power to you!" Dillon cried in delighted admiration. "By the same token, I feel like that myself. Still, what'll you do when we reach Los Angeles? Walk in and ask for evidence that'll jail him?"

"We'll see when the time comes. Besides, I intend to make use of you."

Dillon threw back his head with a burst of amused laughter.

"Upon my word, I like you better every minute, Lady Jane! You're a woman after my own heart."

"Indeed? And just who do you blame now for the accident tonight?"

"I don't know, and that's the truth."

"Perhaps this man Vincent?"

Dillon shook his head. "No reason there. I think that chap wanted the Buddha so he could sell it to Takashi; but did he know about the jades? He sent Harrison after 'em. Well, that remains to be seen. Let it all drop. Takashi and the rest know that I'm not Robert Dillon."

IT was long past one in the morning when Dillon walked into the St. Francis and went to his room. He had not been there two minutes when his phone rang.

"Well?" he responded.

"A Mr. Vincent is here, Mr. Dillon. He's been waiting quite a long time."

"Vincent! Oh—ask him to come up."

"Certainly. And I have a call here; will you take it?"

"Put it on," said Dillon, blinking. Vincent, at this hour of the night! Then he started, recognizing the voice of Montague on the wire.

"Hello, Dillon? Well, I'm on to you

and your brother both, you damned rat! Thought you were smart giving me that empty box, didn't you?"

"I was," said Dillon, with a chuckle.

"Then, blast you, I hope you enjoyed your ride tonight! I'm after you and I'll get you yet. That's all."

The line went blank. Dillon hung up, with a low whistle.

"So it was Montague! Glory be, I'd forgot the blackguard completely. Jane may yet pay dear for that jade hydra. And how the devil did he learn everything about me?"

The answer came with a knock at the door, and Roger Vincent entered.

The smiling face did not deceive Dillon.

"You're a late caller, me lad," he said cheerfully. "I just had a phone call from your friend Montague. What do you know about his activities, I wonder?"

"Too much, I fear," said Vincent. "A wily rascal, Montague; I've only just succeeded in getting in touch with him. I've been trying all evening to reach you and warn you against him, Mr. Dillon."

"Indeed?" said Dillon whimsically. "From sheer kindness, no doubt?"

Vincent shook his head slowly, his unsmiling gaze intent upon Dillon.

"Suppose we come straight to the point," he said quietly. "I know that you are not Robert Dillon. You fooled me that day we met; very well done, too. This

fellow Montague—well, he's rough, unscrupulous, a thorough scoundrel. But I can manage him, and I'll answer for him."

"Thank you," murmured Dillon. He was no means certain how to take this man. Now, as before, he was conscious of a certain startling dominance in Vincent. "May I ask just why you sent Harrison here to get hold of those jades?"

"Why? To get them away from Montague, of course," Vincent said coolly. "Rather, to get them before he could get them; you'll appreciate the endeavor."

"A double cross, as it's technically known," Dillon commented.

"As you like. Now, about their return—"

"That's attended to, me lad," said Dillon briskly. "So you're in cahoots with that murdering rascal, eh? The whole gang of you. As I thought. Well, the jades have gone back to their owners."

Vincent looked at him sharply, fixedly.

"Surely," he said in a pleasant voice, "you don't consider the matter closed?"

Dillon lost his temper.

"Closed and be damned to you, you blackguard. Is that sufficient?"

Vincent made no response whatever. His gaze encountered that of Dillon for a moment; then, with a gesture that might mean anything, he turned, went to the door and walked out of the room. The door closed softly after him.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

WHAT is your idea of the best story (of any length, from short story to serial) published in ARGOSY since January 1, 1935? For the twelve post cards or letters from readers which, in the opinion of the editors, give the best reasons why this or that story stands out above all others, the magazine will reward the letter-writers with twelve full, yearly subscriptions. We don't want mere praise; we are interested in finding out exactly what stories you like best. Nor do we care about your literary style or skill. If there is some story that you liked so much that it stands out in your memory above all others, that is the story we want you to tell us about. It isn't necessary for you to read every story published in ARGOSY. You will have just as good a chance to win one of those twelve subscriptions if you read six of the stories published as you would if you read them all. But we must know *why* you liked the story you choose as best.

Letters selected by the editors will be published from week to week, *but not all letters published will receive subscriptions.*

Make your comments as long or as short as you wish, for mere length will not be considered. Put down all your reasons, however. Then address your letter to The Editor, ARGOSY Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City, so that it will reach us not later than August 1st, 1935.



Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint



DEATH for Susan, demands

MRS. M. M. WALTER:

I think "Goblin Trail," by J. Allan Dunn—which is fine both in imagination and fact details—and "Free Lance Spy," by Bedford-Jones, the two most interesting stories you have published this year. Ared White's spy stories are also immensely interesting.

Bedford-Jones is a great favorite of mine. His spy stories are always possible; indeed I am sure he must have drawn upon facts a great deal in his spy stories. His period fiction, whether French or English, always has the real atmosphere, and he never puts in those false touches that spoil it. Mason, for example, must know a great deal about the period of Alexander the Great, but he ruins the atmosphere for me when he makes his characters use such modern slangy expressions as "pulling down good money" and "burning up the road."

Tuttle's *Hashknife Hartley* and *Henry* stories are always good reading, although in the latter I think there is too much of the Swede.

I have a little protest to make about some of the heroines. MacIsaac's bankers' daughters and millionairesses act and talk like a combination of a chorus girl and a newsboy. Robert Carse's

"aristocratic" ladies do the same, and Theodore Roscoe's girls are almost as tough. MacIsaac seems to have a gift for plot, but not for character. Theodore Roscoe has more talent than the other two, and some of his writing is very good indeed; but often his things are written with such extreme exaggeration that he produces no effect whatever.

His characters never speak, they yell, howl, roar, scream, bawl—His Haitian story about the zombies was an example of this loud speaker writing. I have visited in Haiti, and it was extraordinary to me how completely that story lacked any faintest suggestion of Haitian atmosphere. Much of his writing reminds me of the old cowboy movies when horses went faster than automobiles.

Then there is that dreadful *Susan* in *Peter the Brazen*. I always start almost any story about China and the Far East, but I think in *Susan* the author has created one of the most irritating concoctions—for she is not a character—of fiction. I was so glad when she was, as we thought, killed, and so annoyed when we found out that she wasn't dead after all! Won't you please ask the author of the *Peter the Brazen* stories to kill off *Susan* permanently, and fit *Peter* out with a more plausible mate?

New York City.

VOTES FOR 1935 ARGOSY COVERS

DO you want an original black and white drawing, an illustration like those which appear on the inside pages of the magazine? Save ten consecutive coupons like the one attached, fill them in with the date (or description) of the Argosy cover which you have liked best, and mail the coupons to The EDITOR, ARGOSY Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City. The artist will present you with a drawing. You may divide your votes among several covers, in any way you choose, or even cast all ten votes for a single cover.—But the ten coupons must be consecutive.

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A STORY everyone should read, says

MURRAY FOULTS:

The many times I had to be shooed out of the "Y" tent at the sound of tattoo 'way back in '08 when I was so absorbed in the ARGOSY that it took a shaking to bring me out of it, proved to me I had found something to tie to through the troubles of life. I am more pleased with that decision after each new issue.

Now to try and tell you "why" a certain story out of the many was best, that's some job. But there was a short story, "The Lavender Lamp," by Allan Vaughan Elston, published March 30, 1935, which had that unforgettable quality a great story possesses, living drama set out by sharp contrasts. This story gives you all that strong appeal of the Old West with its legendary background, against the garish ruthlessness of the modern racketeer. How the old sheriff was somewhat dubious about the outcome, yet he went right into action with that sublime courage which was the heritage of the West. Then that native simplicity of mind where he would risk his life for an old forgotten lamp which he had found and valued beyond price because it was to be a wedding present.

Look at the way this writer shows you how the old hero's keen shrewdness tracks down the killers, his straight shooting six guns against their automatics, and that final "winning out" by

the use of his wits and the voice of a parrot.

That situation of an old man and an old parrot, shooting it out with three young crooks armed with automatics and a "Tommy" gun appeals to me as about the most dramatic contrast one could imagine. It should be read by every American as it shows what we owe to those old pioneers.

Detroit, Mich.

PRAISE for H. H. Matteson by

M. I. ELLIS:

I'm a member of the long lines department of the Bell Telephone Company, and we birds have always kept ARGOSY in a prominent place in our employees' library. We enjoy mostly the stories of W. C. Tuttle and H. Bedford-Jones, but for years we have been much fascinated by H. H. Matteson's yarns in the *Munsey Publications*.

Imagine our pleasure, in reading the "Argonotes" letters in ARGOSY for May 25, to see that this man Wilson, a druggist out in Idaho, gives a deserving hand to Matteson's "Hind Hide," in the April 6th number. Mighty fine of Wilson to give us a description of the setting for these yarns. We'd like to live in a Pacific Ocean side cabin!

We buy ARGOSY for the fine stories we always know are sure to be there, but I've heard more than one man make the crack that he didn't buy ARGOSY for the cover pictures—but in spite of them!

Omaha, Neb.



THE SACRED VALLEY

You have been waiting a long while for this new book-length novel which begins in the next issue. It is the third story in that popular and well remembered series which has for its hero *Rusty Sabin*, known as the White Indian. When a white man—especially a red-headed white man—grows up among a primitive tribe, he is sure to experience strange complications and difficulties. Don't fail to begin this new six-part serial by Max Brand.

THE MORRISON MONUMENT

A story of science and the future—of a "time machine" which is able to take pictures of the future, and which thereby places the characters in the story in a strange and most dangerous position. Thrilling novelette by Murray Leinster.

DEVIL A DARE

A short story of automobile racing by a man who has made a name for himself by writing that type of fiction, Richard Howells Watkins.

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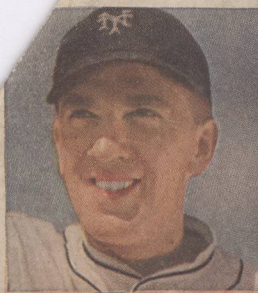
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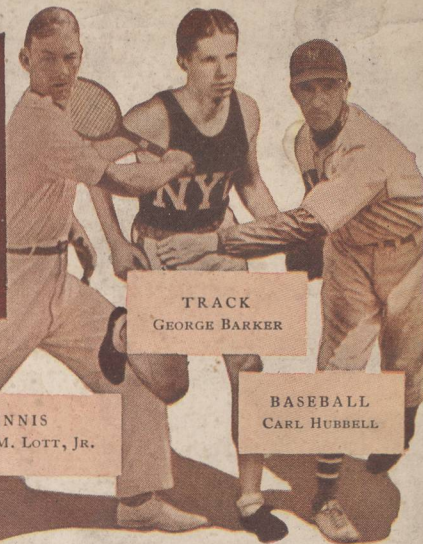
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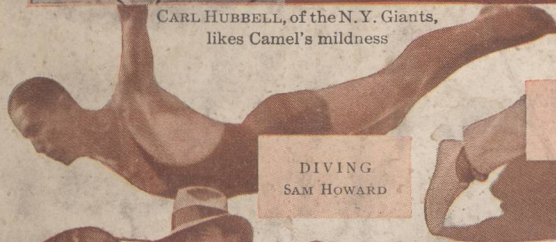


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