

ARGOSY



10¢

Canada
12¢

WEEKLY

OCT. 26

Murray R. Montgomery's
The
SCARLET BLADE
*Great New Story of
Swashbuckling Adventure*

Danger in the Everglades under a
MIDNIGHT MOON

Novelet by Wm. Du Bois

GAMBLER TAKE ALL

*Colorful Story of Old San Francisco
by C.K. Shaw*

Frank Pierce

Walt Coburn

Borden Chase

THOUSANDS OF TECHNICALLY TRAINED MEN

WANTED NOW

WE TRAIN YOU
AT HOME
In Preparation for a
JOB
IN ANY OF THESE
SEVEN INDUSTRIES

NOW you can get started in preparation for a JOB in any of these seven great industries . . . WITHOUT LEAVING HOME!

ONLY 25c a Lesson including all EXAMINATIONS

Never before has such an amazing opportunity been extended to men of all ages to better themselves—to get started in the technical trades! You start when you want to; you study and learn as fast as you want to; you can take your examinations as quickly as you feel qualified—and if you feel that the course you have chosen is not suited to you, you can stop at any time and change to any other course! **No big down payments! No contracts to sign! . . . No obligation on your part to continue UNLESS YOU ARE SATISFIED WITH YOUR OWN PROGRESS!**

CHOOSE THE INDUSTRY IN WHICH YOU WANT TO GET A JOB!

Pick the Industry you feel is best suited to you. Start studying the Industrial Training way—AT HOME—in spare time. **There are no educational requirements necessary!** Each course in our curriculum starts out in easy, simple stages and carries you step by step, through all the theory of your chosen field of training. All courses have been prepared by our staff under the direction of experts who are recognized authorities in their professions. The Industrial Training Institute Method gives you easy to understand facts complete with workable examples. In this way you get practical instruction that gives you a head start in qualifying for the job you want.

NOW! PRACTICAL HOME TRAINING THAT ANYONE CAN AFFORD!

All Industrial Training Institute Courses are complete, authentic, unabridged comprising from 52 to 60 lessons depending upon the subject. Each lesson contains definite facts and data written in simple language and so well explained that you learn quickly and easily. Each four lessons are followed by an examination which you are expected to pass. These examinations are corrected and graded by our instructors and returned to you so that you can watch your own progress. If you find you are NOT suited to the course of study you select, you can change at any time or stop entirely!

Thousands of men WANT Technical training but CANNOT AFFORD to pay the high tuition fees that other schools ask. We fill this demand by bringing you authentic courses prepared by experts which give you the BASIC FACTS—in preparation for a job in any of seven fields—and at the spectacularly low cost to you of **only 25c per lesson including examinations, correcting, grading, etc.**

HERE IS HOW WE CAN AFFORD TO GIVE YOU THIS AMAZING OFFER!

Henry Ford brought mass production methods to the automobile industry; other men have brought mass production to other industries, and NOW—Industrial Training Institute brings Home Technical Training to everyone at amazingly low cost. **This is no stunt; no scheme; no magazine subscription plan; no promotion! This is not a series of weekly lectures! REMEMBER, each one of our courses is a bona fide, complete Home Study course designed to meet the requirements of men who want to prepare for technical jobs NOW!**

Our sensational low price of 25c a lesson is based upon the assumption that you will co-operate with us in bringing this training to you. Your co-operation will aid us to simplify our bookkeeping and to **reduce handling and mailing costs**, as well as to avoid needless delay in your training which might be incurred by sending only one lesson at a time, therefore, we send you **FOUR** lessons at a time with examinations which you return to us for correcting and grading by our instructors.

ENROLL NOW! Simply check box in coupon the field of work in which you want to get a job, and mail same with ONE DOLLAR. We will **immediately** send your first **FOUR** lessons by return mail together with your first examination. These first four lessons will demonstrate the value of the Industrial Training Institute Method and **permit you to actually see your own progress!**

REMEMBER there are no other extra charges of any kind at any time—25c a lesson covers everything—this is the entire Industrial Training Institute plan in a nutshell. Take advantage of this generous offer and **ENROLL TODAY!**

ONLY 25¢ A LESSON

AVIATION

Course covers the entire field of Aviation, Meteorology, Navigation, Theory of Flight and Mechanics of Aviation, including: fabric, woodwork, metal work, rigging, maintenance, etc.

WELDING

The course comprises both Ox-acetylene and Electric (Arc) Welding. Covers all the Chemistry, Metallurgy, Safety Rules, Equipment, Applications to various industries, etc.

BLUE PRINT READING

Course covers elementary drawings, theory, procedure and special applications in Architecture, Pipe Systems, Structural Work, Welding, Shop Practice, Patent Work, Electrical Work, Map Drawings, General Applications, etc.

RADIO AND TELEVISION

The course starts with simple circuits to new, modern radio circuits. Other subjects covered are vacuum tubes, measuring instruments, public address, frequency modulation, television, radio as a career, etc.

DIESEL PRACTICE

The course covers Theory of Diesel Engine, Commercial, Industrial, Marine, Automotive and Utility Applications, Study of Oil, Cooling Systems, etc. Complete, practical, authentic!

ELECTRICITY

The course starts with elementary electricity and proceeds progressively through more intricate circuits. Many illustrations and applications are given which touch upon Radio, Aviation, Automotive, Welding, Wiring, etc.

AIR CONDITIONING AND REFRIGERATION

The Course covers the study of Air, effects of air conditioning, measuring instruments, insulation, power courses, heating systems, cooling systems, ventilation, commercial, industrial and domestic applications, etc.

MAIL COUPON TODAY

INDUSTRIAL TRAINING INSTITUTE
INDUSTRIAL BUILDING
NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

Dept. MG-11

Kindly enroll me in the course I have checked below:

- ☐ Aviation ☐ Diesel Practice ☐ Electricity
☐ Blue Print Reading ☐ Radio & Television
☐ Welding ☐ Air Condition & Refrigeration

I enclose one dollar (\$1.00) for the first 4 lessons in this course together with my first examination. You agree to correct and grade these lessons so that I may see the progress I am making. I further understand that I am not obligated in any way to complete the course unless I wish to. It is also agreed that I am at liberty to stop at any time or change to any other course if I desire.

Name.....Age.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

MECHANICAL ENGINEERING

— A FIELD WITH A FUTURE

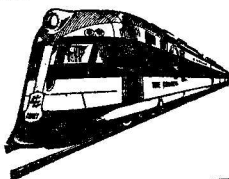


This course has meant advancement to hundreds of ambitious men, mechanics, draftsmen, blacksmiths, foundrymen, patternmakers, apprentices, and mechanical engineers — men who wanted to get ahead and to earn more money. You, too, will find that enrolling for an I. C. S. Course is a real investment.



RADIO with Experimental Television

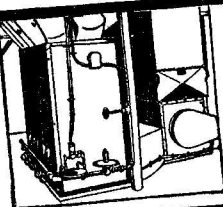
holds great rewards for trained men. Radio is already an industrial giant, and still growing. Television will present endless opportunities when it "breaks." The I. C. S. Radio Course with Experimental Television, prepared by leading authorities, will help prepare you for success in this lucrative field. FREE booklet on request.



DIESEL POWER

A COMING AMERICAN INDUSTRY

The internal-combustion engine represents man's supreme triumph of machine power. Diesel engineers are in great demand. Many are acquiring necessary knowledge through spare-time study of this modern I. C. S. Course on Diesel engines. Send for free booklet!



AIR CONDITIONING

THE NEXT BIG INDUSTRY

Plumbing and heating engineers must know Air Conditioning — the field in its broader aspects invites ambitious men. Write for information on the new Air Conditioning Course offered by the International Correspondence Schools.

ADVERTISING

Would you like to become an advertising man? Would you like to know if you possess the necessary qualifications? Then here's your chance! Send the coupon — today!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 2223-F, SCRANTON, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X:

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Air Brake | <input type="checkbox"/> Cotton Manufacturing | <input type="checkbox"/> Marine Engines | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Signalmen's | <input type="checkbox"/> Refrigeration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Air Conditioning | <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Diesel Engines | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Sanitary Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet Metal Work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Technician | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Electric | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engines |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Engine Tune-up | <input type="checkbox"/> Aviation | <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Lighting | <input type="checkbox"/> Mine Foreman | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Fitting | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Drafting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Technician | <input type="checkbox"/> Boilermaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Fire Bosses | <input type="checkbox"/> Navigation | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Building Estimating | <input type="checkbox"/> Fruit Growing | <input type="checkbox"/> Patternmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegraph Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Textile Designing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry | <input type="checkbox"/> Coal Mining | <input type="checkbox"/> Heat Treatment of Metals | <input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacy | <input type="checkbox"/> Toolmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Welding, Electric and Gas |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Highway Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Poultry Farming | <input type="checkbox"/> Woolen Manufacturing | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contracting and Building | <input type="checkbox"/> Cotton Manufacturing | <input type="checkbox"/> House Planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Practical Telephony | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Diesel Engines | <input type="checkbox"/> Locomotive Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Works Engineering | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Machinist | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio, General | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Lighting | <input type="checkbox"/> Management of Inventions | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Operating | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Fire Bosses | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing Men at Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Servicing | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Fruit Growing | <input type="checkbox"/> Manufacture of Pulp Paper | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Section Foreman | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Heat Treatment of Metals | | | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Highway Engineering | | | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> House Planning | | | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Locomotive Engineer | | | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Machinist | | | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Management of Inventions | | | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing Men at Work | | | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Manufacture of Pulp Paper | | | | |

BUSINESS COURSES

- | | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service | <input type="checkbox"/> First Year College | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Postal Clerk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence | <input type="checkbox"/> College Preparatory | <input type="checkbox"/> Foremanship | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial | <input type="checkbox"/> French | <input type="checkbox"/> Service Station Salesmanship |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Cost Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> High School | <input type="checkbox"/> Sign Lettering |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> C. P. Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> Illustrating | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Lettering Show Cards | <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management |

DOMESTIC SCIENCE COURSES

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Dressmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Home Dressmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Tea Room and Cafeteria |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foods and Cookery | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Dressmaking and Designing | <input type="checkbox"/> Management, Catering |

Name..... Age..... Address.....

City..... State..... Present Position.....

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada
British residents send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingsway, London, W. C. 2, England

ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 303 CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER 26, 1940 Number 1

- The Scarlet Blade—*First of three parts*....Murray R. Montgomery 6
*The Cardinal's men are riding; and in the speed of their mounts and
the cunning of their swords, lies the safety of France*
- Gambler Take All—*Novelet*.....C. K. Shaw 27
*The Judahs had a code; and all Old Frisco watched to see how young
Coe Judah would avenge his father's death, and unmask an enemy who
knew the code better than he*
- Midnight Moon—*Novelet*.....William Du Bois 46
*Contraband guns in the foreground, the Everglades at your back door
—what a place for comedy!*
- The Divine Right—*Short Story*.....Eustace Cockrell 65
*In this corner—Refugee Smith, weight one fifty-five, wearing the
armor of righteousness*
- Crooked Caribbean Cross—*Fourth of seven parts*....Borden Chase 71
*Fly low, Smooth; and then chart your course by the swastikas so
plainly marked down there*
- At Four—*Short Short Story*.....Robert Arthur 94
An Argosy Oddity
- Black Fire—*Conclusion*.....Walt Coburn 98
"Ashes to ashes an' dust to dust, white man. Us is even"
- Argonotes 112
- Looking Ahead! 97

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

Present conditions in the paper market have made it expedient for the publishers of this magazine to reduce the number of its pages. However, by using a slightly smaller type, not one word of the fiction contents of the book has been sacrificed. In many issues we have found the wordage to be higher than formerly. ARGOSY still gives you more words and better stories for your dime.

A RED STAR Magazine

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 Broadway, NEW YORK, N. Y.
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President & Treasurer WILLIAM T. DEWART, JR., Secretary

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE, 111 Rue Réaumur
LONDON: THE CONTINENTAL PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS, LTD., 3 La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C. 4
Copyright, 1940, by Frank A. Munsey Company. Published weekly. Single copies 10c; Canada 12c. By the year \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; Canada, \$6.00. Other countries, \$7.00. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Entered as second class matter November 22, 1896 at the post office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright and must not be reprinted without the publisher's permission. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office. Copyrighted in Great Britain. Printed in U. S. A. Manuscripts submitted to this magazine should be accompanied by sufficient postage for their return if found unavailable. The publisher can accept no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

Other RED STAR Magazines

FANTASTIC NOVELS • RED STAR MYSTERY • FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES • RED STAR ADVENTURES
• CRACK-SHOT WESTERN • DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY • RED STAR DETECTIVE • CONFESSION NOVEL
OF THE MONTH • SILVER BUCK WESTERN • RED STAR LOVE REVELATIONS • FOREIGN LEGION ADVENTURES •
RED STAR SECRET CONFESSIONS • DOUBLE DETECTIVE • ALL STORY-LOVE • BIG CHIEF WESTERN
• LOVE NOVEL OF THE MONTH • CAVALIER CLASSICS • RAILROAD MAGAZINE • FIFTH COLUMN STORIES
• SEA NOVEL MAGAZINE

Make me Prove

THAT I CAN TRAIN YOU

AT HOME FOR A

Good Job in Radio



**I TRAINED
THESE MEN**

**\$10 TO \$20 A WEEK
IN SPARE TIME**

I repaired some Radio sets when I was on my tenth lesson. I really don't see how you can give so much for such a small amount of money. I made \$600 in a year and a half, and I have made an average of \$10 to \$20 a week—just spare time. **JOHN JERRY**, 1529 Arapahoe St., Room 17, Denver, Colorado.



**WORKS FOR STATE
OF ILLINOIS**

If I had not taken your Course I might still be doing odd jobs or digging ditches. I am working for the State of Illinois operating the 1,000 watt transmitter. If anyone wants to write me about your Course, I shall be glad to answer. **R. S. LEWIS**, 1901 E. Pasfield, Springfield, Ill.



**\$200 TO \$300 A MONTH
IN OWN BUSINESS**

For the last two years I have been in business for myself making between \$200 to \$300 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N. R. J. to thank for my start in this field. **ARLIE J. FROEHNER**, 301 W. Texas Ave., Goose Creek, Texas.



Clip the coupon and mail it. I'm certain I can train you at home in your spare time to be a Radio Technician. I will send you a sample lesson free. Examine it, read it, see how clear and easy it is to understand. See how my course is planned to help you get a good job in Radio, a young growing field with a future. You needn't give up your present job or spend a lot of money to become a Radio Technician. I train you at home nights in your spare time.

**Why Many Radio Technicians
Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week**

Radio Broadcasting stations employ Radio Technicians as operators, maintenance men, etc. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers and dealers employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio; loudspeaker systems, electronic devices, are other fields offering opportunities for which N. R. J. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

**Many Make \$5 to \$10 a Week
Extra In Spare Time
While Learning**

The day you enroll, in addition to my regular Course, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets—start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your Course I send plans and directions which have helped many make \$5 to \$10 a week in spare time while



learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. **YOU ALSO GET A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT** to help you make more money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

**Find Out What Radio, Television
Offer You**

Act today. Mail the coupon for Sample Lesson and my 64-page Book "Rich Rewards in Radio." They point out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tell about my Course in Radio and Television; show more than 100 letters from men I trained telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. Find out what Radio and Television offer you. **MAIL COUPON** in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

**J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. OKK
Washington, D. C.**

**GOOD FOR BOTH 64 PAGE BOOK
SAMPLE LESSON FREE**

**J. E. Smith, President, Dept. OKK,
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.**

Mail me **FREE** without obligation. Sample Lesson and 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio" which tells about Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and how I can train at home for them. (No salesman will call. Write Plainly.)

Age.....

Name

Address

City State 2FR



**THIS
FREE BOOK
Has Helped Hundreds of
Men Make More Money**

Learn this Profitable Profession



in 90 Days at Home

Hundreds of men and women of all ages 18-50 make \$10.00 to \$20.00 in a single day giving scientific Swedish Massage and Hydro-Therapy treatments. There is a big demand from Hospitals, Sanitariums, Clubs, Doctors and private patients as well as opportunities for establishing your own office.

Learn this interesting money-making profession in your own home by mail through our home study course. Same instructors as in our NATIONALLY KNOWN resident school.

A diploma is awarded upon completion of the course. Course can be completed in 3 to 4 months. High School training is not necessary. Many earn big money while learning.



Anatomy Charts & Booklet FREE

Enroll now and we will include uniform coat, medical dictionary, patented reducing roller and Hydro-Therapy supplies without extra cost. The reducing course alone may be worth many times the modest tuition fee.

Send coupon now for Anatomy Charts and booklet containing photographs and letters from successful graduates. These will all be sent postpaid—FREE.

THE College of Swedish Massage
(Successor to National College of Massage)
Dept. 287—30 E. Adams St., Chicago.

You may send me FREE and postpaid, Anatomy Charts, booklet containing photographs and letters from graduates, and complete details of your offer.

Name
Address
City State

U Champion

SEND FOR FREE BOOKLET



MODEL 822 \$21²⁵

8 SHOT
.22 Target

Single Action Revolver

More bull's-eyes! — Unbeatable value. Weight 28 oz.; length 10³/₄ inches. Sport Model. Perfect balance; extremely accurate; hard hitting; full target adjustable sights; excellent trigger pull; nicely fitting stock; adjustable finger rest. Send for Free Booklet A20.

IVER JOHNSON'S ARMS & CYCLE WORKS
63 RIVER STREET, FITCHBURG, MASS.
New York: 85 Chambers Street

FREE 5x7 PHOTO ENLARGEMENT ANY SUBJECT OR GROUP

Send any clear snapshot, photo, bust, full length, groups, scenes, baby, mother, dad, sweetheart, etc. We will enlarge to 5x7 on salon quality photographic paper FREE. Just send print or negative. We will also include information about hand coloring by expert artists who specialize in reproducing life-like likenesses and FREE FRAME. Your original returned with your FREE enlargement. Send now and kindly enclose 10c for return mailing.

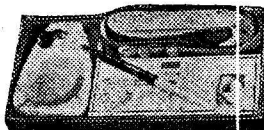


IDEAL PORTRAIT CO.

P. O. Box 748A.H., Church St. Annex, New York

PANTS MATCHED TO ANY SUIT

Wear your coat and vest twice as long with trousers matched expertly from over 100,000 patterns. Pants are hand-tailored to your measure. Guaranteed to fit. Send a piece of cloth or vest TODAY for FREE SAMPLE of the best match obtainable. Write to AMERICAN MATCH PANTS COMPANY 20 W. JACKSON BLVD., DEPT. 133, CHICAGO, ILL.



The GIFT SUPREME
for Men. Combination Desk Pen Set and Belt—Finest Writing Pen—belt made of cowhide.

SPECIAL SALE PRICE \$1
(Regular Price \$4.00)
Include 20 cents in stamps for mailing. Send cash or M.O. with order.

We sell Nationally Advertised Merchandise for home, car and personal use—at wholesale prices. What do you need? We sell it. Write for this month's circular. **MONARCH SALES CO., Dept. R-S-2, 17 E. 45th St., New York City**

TOMBSTONE

Genuine Granite & Marble. At Low Prices. Lettered. Guaranteed. Durable. Write for FREE Catalog and samples. Order Direct and save. NOW. Don't Wait.

\$9 up
FREIGHT PAID



U. S. MARBLE & GRANITE CO.
ONECO, A-45, FLORIDA

OLD LEG TROUBLE

Easy to use Viscose Home Method heals many old leg sores caused by leg congestion, varicose veins, swollen legs and injuries or no cost for trial if it fails to show results in 10 days. Describe the cause of your trouble and get a FREE BOOK.



M. S. VISCOSE METHOD COMPANY
140 N. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois

632 Page Book—FREE! "HEAVEN AND HELL"

With a Sketch of Swedenborg's Life
Send 5c for Postage!

One of the most interesting of the writings of **EMANUEL SWEDENBORG**, theologian, philosopher and scientist, treating of the Life after Death.

Write for complete list of publications
SWEDENBORG FOUNDATION, Inc.
1644 51 East 42nd St., New York

Name
Address

ACCOUNTING

the profession that pays—

Accountants command good income. Thousands needed. About 20,000 Certified Public Accountants in U. S. Many earn \$2,000 to \$10,000. We train you thoroughly at home in your spare-time for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous bookkeeping knowledge unnecessary—we prepare you from ground up. Our training is personally given by staff of experienced C. P. A.'s. Low cost—easy terms. Write now for valuable 48-page book free, "Accounting, the Profession That Pays."

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY
A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION

Dept. 1058-H, Chicago



RUPTURED?

Get Relief This Proven Way

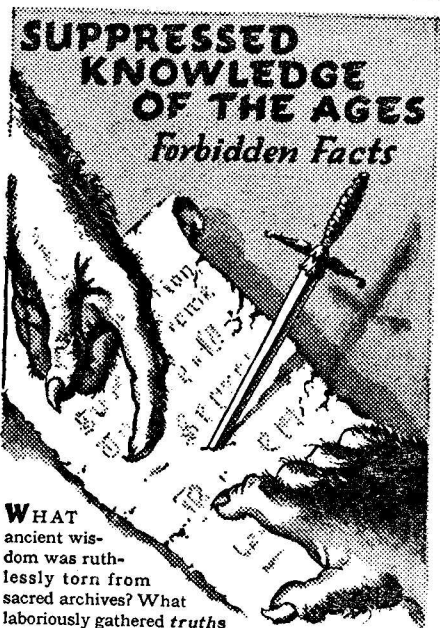
Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening—fail to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belt. Automatic adjustable pad holds at real opening—follows every body movement with instant increased support in ease of strain. Cannot slip whether at work or play. Light. Waterproof. Can be worn in bath. Send for amazing FREE book, "Advice To Ruptured" and details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also endorsements from grateful users in your neighborhood. Write: CLUTHE SONS, Dept. 28, Bloomfield, New Jersey.



W-1-STANDARD AUTOMATIC .22 caliber Model "22" for long rifle cartridges. Model "C" for .22 short cartridges. 4 1/2" or 6 3/4" barrel. Choice\$17.95
S. & R. "922" .22 caliber 6" barrel shot target revolver.....\$9.45
Gov't Cartridges, 30/06 Boattail, \$3.50 per 100. Send stamp for each list—Ammunition surplus, etc.—Used Rifles—Used Shotguns (\$2 Deposit on C. O. D's)
HUDSON SPORTING GOODS CO.
10-52 WARREN ST. (New—FREE Catalog) NEW YORK

HAVE YOU READ FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

the magazine of stories you couldn't imagine?
Now on sale 15¢ per copy.



WHAT
ancient wisdom was ruthlessly torn from sacred archives? What laboriously gathered truths of nature lie buried beneath crumbling temple walls—where power-mad tyrants cast them?

Sought and condemned—but never lost—this knowledge that makes men free and points the way to PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT has been preserved for centuries by secret brotherhoods of learning.

ACCEPT THIS GIFT BOOK

The Rosicrucians, one of these age-old brotherhoods, has extended these teachings to all who sincerely sought them. Write today for the free "Sealed Book" and learn how you may receive them to attain the fullness of life. Address Scribe R.Q.E.

The Rosicrucians

(AMORC)
SAN JOSE CALIFORNIA
(NOT a religious organization)

Sensational Offer LOVELIGHT and LOVEBOND



1/2 KARAT (approx.)
IMITATION
Diamond Rings
MOUNTINGS IN 1-30 14
KARAT YELLOW GOLD or
STERLING SILVER

SEND NO MONEY. Pay postman \$1.00 ONLY if for one or \$1.69 if for both, plus small postage charge, or enclose money with order and we will pay postage. State if Gold or Silver, giving size! RINGS are of the finest craftsmanship. Every jewel Hand set and imported and U. S. Gov't duty has been paid. These are America's greatest imitations.

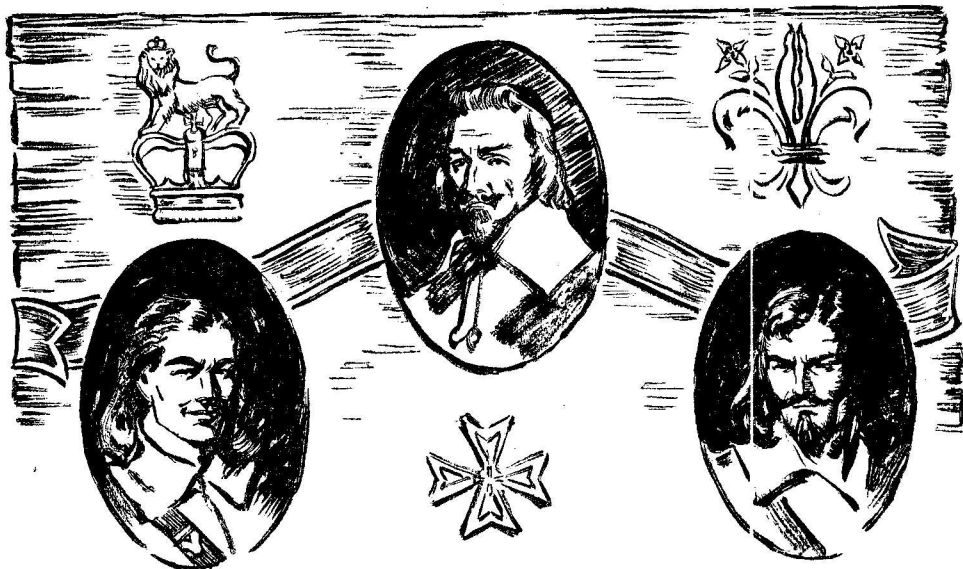
10-DAY FREE TRIAL
Wear ring 13 days, if for any reason you are dissatisfied, return rings and your money will be refunded by return mail. Greatest sale in our history. RUSH ORDER. Limited quantity. MAIL COUPON NOW!

THE DIAM.-O.-GEM CO., N. Y. CITY
303 5th Ave., Dept. "B-10," N. Y. CITY

Kindly send the following Ring (or Rings)

☐ LOVELIGHT ☐ LOVEBOND
☐ Gold ☐ Silver ☐ Size

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY STATE



The Scarlet Blade

If Richelieu saves France from war, it will cost him his own peace of mind; for Cleve and d'Entreville, rakehellies of the Cardinal's Guard, are in the saddle again. And many a Spaniard will fall before their swords are sheathed

By MURRAY R. MONTGOMERY

Author of "Seal of Treason," "Rakehellly Ride," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE KING IS VEXED

AS THE Paris clock tolled three, neither Richelieu nor Don Diego realized that their struggle had begun. Richelieu, sitting opposite the King in the Louvre, stared at the unsigned treaty between them; while a mile away, Don Diego de Isla paced before his followers and pondered ways to get it.

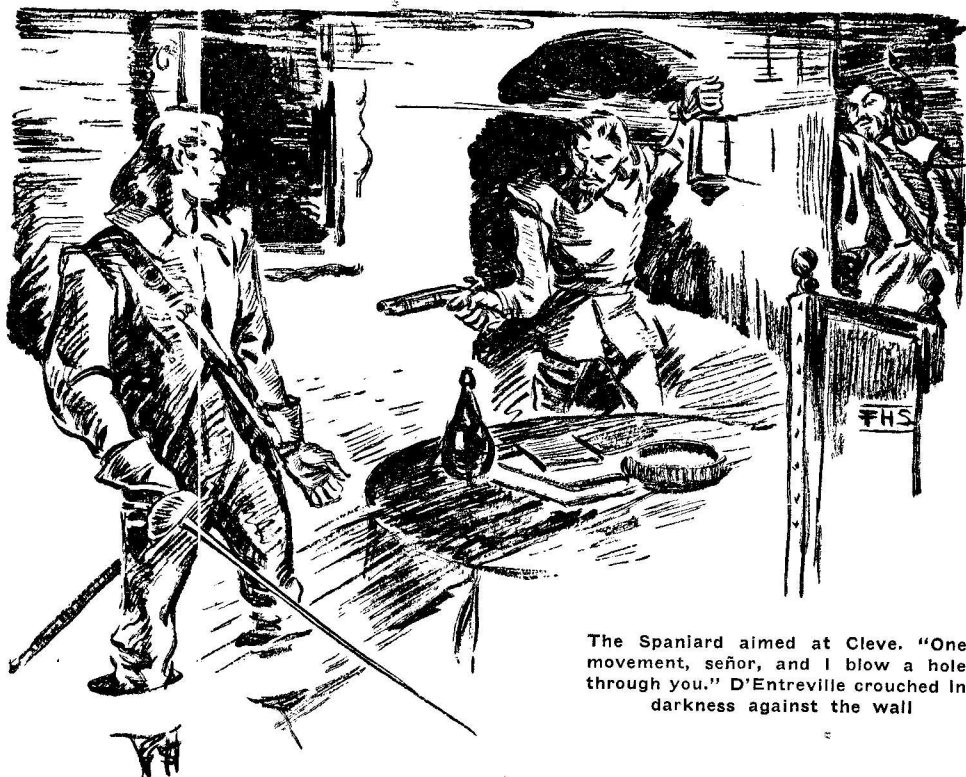
Of the two, Don Diego was the more perturbed. He knew of the treaty's existence, but that was all. Its content and character remained a mystery: a tantalizing mystery which threatened his temper. And Don Diego's temper had never been particularly noted for its elasticity.

As his hulking figure stomped heavily back and forth, Pizon, Castro and DuBrille cautiously held their tongues. The velvet stillness of the large room was broken by the ponderous cadence of the Don's tread and faint noises from the Rue St. Denis outside.

But finally, the Spanish ambassador turned. He fixed DuBrille with hard eyes; eyes angry in the conviction that Richelieu's secret treaty was beyond reach, and erupted:

"*Por Dios!* Of what use is your information, *señor*? Can Spain act against France without proof? *Diablo!* Of course not! I *must* have proof!"

Jacques DuBrille shrugged. Contrasted to the speaker he appeared almost child-



The Spaniard aimed at Cleve. "One movement, señor, and I blow a hole through you." D'Entreville crouched in darkness against the wall

like. But there was nothing childlike about the expression of his face—a cunning, weasel-shaped face, with flinty eyes and twisted lips.

He countered smoothly: "I understand that, *monsieur*, and I have come to make an offer. Procuring documents is a hobby of mine. How much is it worth for me to steal a copy of this treaty?"

Don Diego stared. And then his rich voice boomed in a short, but completely unamused laugh. He knew DuBrille for a petty court leech—a cheap informer; and stealing from so brilliant a man as Cardinal Richelieu was beyond his capability.

"You pick a rotten time to jest, DuBrille," he said.

The informer flushed. He had ferreted his information about the treaty from Will Beck, personal valet to the English ambassador; and having spent an evening, as well as many livres, in getting

the English lackey drunk and talkative, he meant to profit by the investment.

"I'm not jesting, *monsieur*."

Don Diego sat down. The afternoon sun cascaded through the latticed window beside him and bathed his blubbery face in warm yellow. He regarded DuBrille pityingly; and then said with exaggerated patience: "Have you ever heard of Cleve and d'Entreville, *senor*?"

DuBrille nodded: "*Oui*. They serve in Richelieu's Guard."

"And you persist in your presumption to steal this rumored treaty?"

"But of course."

DIEGO sighed. "Then you are a fool! Before you take the treaty, you must first take those two fire-brands. And that is a task which even experts shun."

He leaned forward. "Mark this! Cleve and d'Entreville have thwarted every attempt my men have ever made to crack

Richelieu's secret archives. They laugh at bribery. They have duped cleverer men than you; and as long as they are in the Cardinal's Guard, his secrets are safe."

DuBrille shrugged. "I know that, *monsieur*," he said calmly. "Consequently, I have made plans to take care of them before I even start."

Don Diego laughed. "*Si*. I have tried that too. Only last month I set Pizon and Castro here out after them with muskets." The smile on his lips died as he beckoned the shorter of his two aides forward. "Pedro, tell what happened."

Pedro Pizon, his swarthy cheeks flaming with humiliation, appeared beside the desk. "We missed," he said in a choked voice.

But Diego was not the type to ride easily on men who had betrayed him with failure. "Tell all of it, you bungler!"

Pizon licked his lips and spat the rest out as if loathing the taste of the words. "Well, after our musket-balls went wide, Cleve and d'Entreville seized us; laughingly spanked us with their swords; and then made us eat our musket powder, complete with ball."

Diego turned to the Frenchman, silken irony in his tone: "Juan and Pedro were, quite ill."

But DuBrille was not impressed. Nor was he sympathetic. "A poor plan," he said. "They are fortunate to live. Now in my place I allow no possibility of mischance."

This crass display of confidence had its effect. Diego relaxed, fingering the gold medallion on his chest thoughtfully. After all, Spain had sent him to France strictly in the form of an *agent provocateur*—a creator of incidents. If DuBrille could conceivably offer a plan to dispose of Cleve and d'Entreville, he was willing to listen.

"All right, DuBrille. Get on with it."

The little adventurer produced a leather pouch from the folds of his sash. "This will eliminate failure," he said displaying it. "Tobacco, *monsieur*, ground to

a very fine dust. Should it accidentally get into one's eye a painful and momentary blindness will ensue."

He repaced the pouch and gave his wisped mustache a confident tweak. "Outside are two bravos—professional swordsmen, *monsieur*—who will begin a search for Cleve and d'Entreville the moment I give the word. When they find them—Cleve and d'Entreville die very quickly."

Don Diego sat up scowling. "*Car-ramba!*" he exploded "Is *that* your plan? *Dios!* You are not dealing with amateurs, *señor*. Cleve is a bad man with a blade; but Guy d'Entreville is terrific!"

DuBrille laughed. He patted the place where the tobacco lay hidden. "But the best are poor when blind, *monsieur*," he said and paused. "Understand?"

And then Don Diego saw it. He leaned forward; watched his two enemies groping defenselessly, blinded by the dust DuBrille had cast. He enjoyed the picture. His thick lips quivered, curved and then split apart. Cruel, rich laughter rang throughout the room. He slapped his portly thigh.

"*Bueno!*" he exclaimed. "*Bueno*, DuBrille! 'Tis a good plan indeed. Get on with it immediately. And here, take Pizon to add another blade . . ."

AND in the Louvre, Richelieu thoughtfully slid the treaty paper to one side and relaxed against the plush of his chair. A squad of Royal Guards swung by outside in the corridor. He bit gently on his lower lip and frowned across the table at Louis XIII.

The light from the high Gothic window delicately tinted the Cardinal's fine pallor. It lent his sharply chiseled features a thoughtful, profound, almost ethereal appearance.

The rhythmic tread of the Guard faded and Louis XIII looked up.

"I tell you," he said, tapping the thick document by way of emphasis "I tell you, the risk is too great. Should Spain learn of this, she'll pour rivers of steel into France. We can ill afford a war now."

Richelieu nodded. There was no craven or shallow logic behind the other's statement. Louis XIII might be a monarch of indifferent capabilities, but he knew the state of his realm.

France was just beginning to recover from a century of sporadic civil wars. Her powerful nobles were jealous of the Crown, and internal dissension remained—although Richelieu was slowly trying to throttle it. A war of with powerful, avaricious Spain would set history back a hundred years. And yet it had to be prepared for.

"Spain sits on the crest of the Pyrenees, Sire. She eyes our rich lands in Gascony and Foix like hungry eagle. She awaits a pretext to seize them."

The Cardinal's eyes grew hard. "Some day she'll provoke a war. But when it comes, we *must* win! The future greatness of the French nation depends on it!"

Louis frowned. Usually he trusted his brilliant advisor to the utmost. In this instance, however, the ice seemed perilously thin.

"*Monseigneur*, you must show me a way that this treaty may be signed without the slightest outside suspicion of its very existence. Otherwise, we tear it up. I'll not prepare for a war with Spain by inviting one."

The Cardinal sighed. He steeped his tapering fingers and regarded the tips thoughtfully. He cursed Louis' shortsightedness even as his keen brain began a rapid dissection of the problem.

This treaty with England was vital. It guaranteed the use of the English fleet in case of Spanish aggression. It was supposed to be secret.

Yet he realized that the moment Lord Stafford appeared in the Louvre to sign it, rumors would spread that something was afoot. And now the over-cautious Louis wanted him to stifle even them. Suddenly Richelieu smiled.

"You are giving a reception to Don Diego, the Spanish ambassador tonight, Sire," he said looking up.

The King nodded. Richelieu leaned forward, dark eyes glittering. "And among

the guests will be several foreign emissaries, including Lord Stafford. *Ma foi!*" His voice softened. "Who would believe we dared? Who'd believe we had the audacity to sign a pact with England—during a reception for Spain?"

THE King's eyes glistened. He struck the table with the force of pride, as if the thought had been his own. "No one, *Monseigneur!* Least of all Spain!"

"Then you consent?"

The King laughed. "Consent? Of course I consent. We shall sign it tonight beneath Don Diego's very nose!"

Richelieu stood up. He felt relieved. "We'll use this room for the signing," he decided. "I'll have two of my best men standing guard all evening."

Louis considered that inadequate. The treaty merited a regiment.

"Too many guards will arouse suspicion," the Cardinal replied. "Besides, Cleve and d'Entreville have proven worth a regiment in several instances."

"Eh? Did you say Cleve and d'Entreville, *Monseigneur?*"

Richelieu nodded. "I did."

Louis looked thoughtful. "Hmm I have heard of those two, *Monseigneur*. In fact, I am constantly hearing of them." He eyed Richelieu accusingly. "Le Duc d'Autun is found shivering in the hall in his underpants. Who placed him there?—Cleve and d'Entreville! Last week my regiment of Musketeers marched all the way to Fontainebleau under forged orders. And who forged them? *Corbac!* Cleve and d'Entreville!"

Richelieu's features darkened. For the hundredth time he angrily considered the two rakehellies who seemed to delight in placing him in the compromising position of being protector to their roguery.

First, Comte Guy d'Entreville: satirist, poet and swordsman. He had been a gnat in the Cardinal's dignity until forced by the prelate into shifting alliance. Richelieu wondered now whether that had been a wise move. In emergencies d'Entreville was invaluable; but it was questionable

at times whether that virtue outweighed his nuisance value.

Then that crazy Englishman, Lord Cleve! Cleve the curious; the tactless. The man who had been exiled from England for speaking the truth at the wrong time; especially since it concerned the King's favorite and a missing ten thousand pounds in tax-money.

Richard Cleve: brilliance of mind and wit, exceeded by its penchant for getting him into trouble. Mere consideration caused Richelieu to frown—and then to smile.

Combine Cleve's talents with d'Entreville's sensitivity and fire, and you had a Satanic pair. A partnership that argued violently with itself when not engaged in scalding others. Small wonder the King had heard of them.

"And these are the men whom you propose to use as guards, *Monseigneur*?" Louis inquired.

Richelieu withdrew from his musings. Cleve and Guy were utter rascals, but they were the most resourceful men in his service. "They are, Your Majesty," he replied.

Louis smoothed his mustache with the tip of his finger. "Well, I presume you know what you are doing," he said after a pause. Then his lips tightened. "But I must warn you that another occurrence like that of yesterday and I shall personally see that they are lodged in La Bastille. A gentleman of my bed-chamber laughed at a poem that this d'Entreville had written. Today he nurses a pierced shoulder."

The Cardinal sighed. Many times he had wished that d'Entreville would cease writing poetry. It caused too much trouble. But it was a habit which the French rakehell had spent too long forming to be broken quickly.

Richelieu sighed again, picked up the treaty and rolled it carefully into its cylinder.

"It shan't happen again," he said. "This morning I forced both of these firebrands to promise on their honor not

to draw steel unless engaged in my service. Believe me, Sire, though they be reckless rakehellies, their word is their bond."

And he formed the words with the confidence of experience.

CHAPTER II

JOIN OUR RIOT?

BUT meanwhile, in the far corner of the tavern known as Les Trois Chiens, Lord Richard Cleve raised a tankard of ale to his thirsty lips and stared over its rim at the quartet of King's Pikemen sitting in the center of the crowded room.

The Pikemen were drunk—ugly drunk. As Cleve watched, one of them struck Little Jean, the spindly houseboy, savagely across the mouth. The small servant crashed to the floor, blood trickling from a small cut. Cleve put down his tankard.

His clean-shaven face did not change, although his nose, with its impudent tilt, wrinkled slightly as if suddenly itchy. He pinched it. Then he cuffed his wide-brimmed hat to the back of his head and hitched his basket-tilt rapier closer to his side.

Guy d'Entreville observed these adjustments apprehensively. When Cleve pinched his nose, fondled his sword—something was going to happen. And suddenly!

The Englishman smiled. The smile was typical: a genial, eisurely smile, personable and disarming—but, to those who knew, dangerous. There were many who believed the chestnut-haired Cleve quite mad because of this laughing prelude to peril. Perhaps he was—but merrily.

He said to nobody in particular: "I wonder if Hogsnoot ever there slaps grown men as well as serving lads?"

Guy d'Entreville's dark eyes took on a definite sheen of determination. He had been writing, but now he put down his quill and picked up an ink-pot. He said softly: "Relax!"

The Englishman's eyes widened. He was perfectly aware that his close friendship with Guy had taught the Frenchman to read him like a book, but he preferred to

ignore the fact by maintaining an air of injured surprise.

"But why?"

D'Entreville grinned. "You know as well as I, *mon ami*. No sword-play. You gave your word. Now relax and conduct yourself peacefully or—" He weighed the ink-pot significantly. He meant it.

In the background, Little Jean had scrambled to his feet while the Pikeman who had struck him was now engaged in a heated discussion with one of his neighbors. The episode seemed forgotten. Cleve eyed the ink-pot thoughtfully, sighed and fell back against the wall. There wasn't much sense in risking an inking for a lost cause.

"Well," he said, "'tis a bad promise that makes a man condone men like Hog-snoot."

D'Entreville replaced the inkpot and picked up a quill. "Remember this, you hare-brained rake. Without blades we are helpless. No brawling. Understand?"

"Spoken like a little martinet." Cleve smiled. "Words of wisdom. And come to think of it, where was that wisdom this morning?"

GUY shifted uncomfortably and hunched over his manuscript. He knew what was coming. The outstanding paradox of his friendship with Cleve was the degree to which they bickered. Many at the Palace wondered how the two of them could remain so completely compatible, and at the same time carry on like a pair of ill-tempered fishwives. But they did—constantly and consistently.

In this present instance, d'Entreville's desire to escape prison had led him to promise social pacifism for them both. Cleve had agreed out of loyalty, but that didn't prevent his complaining.

"Faith, all you had to do was to remain quiet," he said. "But, not you. Ah no!" He took a draught of ale and sighed. His tone mimicked the manner Guy had used on Richelieu that morning: "I know chastising a gentleman of the King's bed-chamber is bad business, *Monseigneur*. But

he laughed, *Monseigneur*. An insult, *Monseigneur* . . ."

Guy's neck grew red. "*Sangodemi*, Cleve! Quiet!"

The Englishman's voice trailed. He drank some more ale. "Well, you didn't have to drag me into it," he concluded.

"Mordi! It was either that, or land in the Bastille."

"Just you, m'lad. I didn't prick that courtier"

"Well, His Eminence demanded that we both promise not to draw steel."

"Yes. And in a moment of weakness I agreed. Now we can't use swords unless in Richelieu's service. Excellent of you, Guy. Just wait until the word spreads. Consider the number of people who don't like us. Damme! Life's going to become one long foot-race. . ."

D'Entreville fingered the ink-pot for a moment, and then thought better of it. He gave his companion a silent glare and bent again to work.

Cleve grinned impishly and lifted his tankard once more. It was dismally empty. He set it down and regarded it accusingly. "Hola Jean! More ale here."

His eyes swept the low-ceilinged room; probed through the murk caused by the lateness of the day and the smoky hearth, and paused at the squat door through which four men had just entered. Four hard-faced, purposeful men, carrying blades high at their sides, loose-sheathed and ready.

They stared at him, then moved apart—casually. Too casually to be natural. The English cavalier's eyes turned sharply watchful. He had seen enough danger not to recognize its coming. Those men were tensed for trouble. He inspected each carefully.

One was small, foppish, wasplike. Two were definitely professional hirelings. But it was the fourth who crystallized his intuitive suspicion and dispersed all doubt. The fourth was Pedro Pizon, the squat dark-visaged Spaniard who had attempted his life a month before.

He whistled softly. "By Gad, we're in

for it." And to d'Entreville he added, "Put aside your toys, m'lad. We have visitors."

Guy scowled. He was engrossed in rhyming sigh with goodbye, and only half heard the warning. He didn't bother looking up to see the quartet making its separate way toward the corner, intent upon his death. All were holding their hands lightly on sword-hilts with the exception of the smallest who appeared to be fondling a purse. A leather bag.

CLEVE drew his booted legs under him. Noting the way the assassins had spread themselves, he cursed. His fingers tightened on the handle of the empty tankard.

"Faith, Guy. What are we going to do about this?"

The Frenchman scowled, and continued to gnaw his quill. Cleve pulled the tankard into his lap. He alone seemed to sense the deadly purpose of the newcomers, and he dared not show it lest he precipitate the crisis too soon. He needed time to think out a plan.

In other instances he wouldn't have been so uncertain. But the sick realization that he was honor-bound not to draw steel put an alien chill into the pit of his stomach. He grew tense.

"Damme, Kitten! Pay attention!"

Guy looked up, anger in his eyes. The nickname, Cardinal's Kitten, had been pinned on him several months before by Prince Conde, who considered him extremely young for his ability to claw adversaries first with verse and then with his sword. To the sensitive Frenchman it sounded faintly derisive, and he hated it for that reason.

"Sapristi! Don't call me Kit—"

His voice trailed off as his eyes caught the wary, premonitory look on Cleve's tense face. He froze.

Cleve acted. He sent his heavy pewter tankard spinning end-over-end directly at the back of Hogsnoot, the pikeman. Nearby two of the approaching bravos froze. The tankard struck its target squarely and caromed sharply into the

open face of the drunk sitting opposite.

"*Sacre nom d'un cochon!* Who threw that? I'll tear him limb from limb. I'll skewer him."

Cleve stood up. He was quite certain that no one had seen him launch the tankard. He pointed at one of the bravos standing to the right and a trifle behind the pikeman.

"There is your man, *monsieur!*" he cried.

Hogsnoot swung around, his red wine-soaked eyes credulous and angry. Behind him, his companions rose to a man. They had all been spoiling for a brawl and now the moment seemed to have arrived. Hands fell on hilts. Furtive patrons began to inch downward.

"*Sandiou!*" muttered d'Entreville in a startled whisper. "What in the name of a name are you trying to do, Cleve?"

The Englishman grinned, but he hadn't take his eyes from the scene. He said softly: "I'm attempting to save our necks, laddie. At the same time, I'm settling the score with Hogsnoot for clouting Jean."

"You crazy fool, do you want to—"

"Quiet!" commanded the Englishman.

THINGS were beginning to happen. The pikeman had remained in an angry stupor, and now he lurched forward and slapped the astonished bravo a vicious cut across the lips. It drew blood and the bravo responded with alacrity. He drew and lunged almost in the same motion.

The pikeman countered by lifting a chair and the thrust rasped off the rungs. It licked a small wound in the cheek of a nearby companion.

Roaring with the trifling pain, this fellow pounced into the battle with his blade singing. Somebody turned over a table. It landed athwart Pedro Pizon's toes and automatically made him a belligerent. Cleve chuckled.

"They're off!"

The grog-room suddenly churned into a seething, tumultuous riot. Laughingly the Englishman folded his arms. Little devils of delight were dancing in his eyes.

"Interesting show, isn't it, Guy?" he said.

D'Entreville glowered. He was only partially aware of Cleve's reason for starting this mix-up, but he was more concerned in trying to save his precious verse from mutilation. War holds no brief for art. A gurgling wine-bottle crashed across the table and sprinkled the manuscript with reddish-brown liquor. Rage roared to a flame in his eyes.

"*Corbac!* If I ever discover who threw that, I'll—"

"Well aimed," Cleve grinned. "Twas probably mush, anyway." He inclined his head toward the battle-locked mob. "Now there, m'lad, is something to describe. But of course it takes an excellent poet and you're—"

D'Entreville straightened. He met the challenge before it was fully completed. "Three to one I'm good enough to do it," he said.

"Taken!"

The Frenchman stood up. He was a good two inches taller than Cleve, more raw-boned and angular. He had a trimly pointed beard; and his clipped black mustache was surrounded by a high-bridged aristocratic nose which lent a slight hawkishness to his features.

His hair was dark, like rippled pitch, and lean maroon-clad body with its belted rapier and swirling cape stood in rakish contrast to the turmoil as he thoughtfully took in the scene.

Composing in rapid, staccato burst of verse, he began to recite:

*The Brazel is on!
The clash of steel.
The brazelers parry, thrust and reel,
One man is down!
Ah no! He stands.
And now, he's hurling pots and pans!
Mon Dieu! And here
Heads up, you lout:
There goes a bottle at your snout!
Too late. Oh well,
Though I must say,
Your nose was too sharp anyway . . .*

The speaker paused and shot a glance at the door. Crowding through came the

white-crossed surcoats of the Cardinal's Guard, followed discreetly by the beard and paunch of Capitaine Cordeau.

Guy swore prodigiously—under his breath. Cordeau was a pompous martinet; an unimaginative stuffed shirt.

"Well Kitten,"—Cleve laughed—"stuck?"

D'Entreville burned him with a glare, then megaphoned his hands and finished his impromptu composition in a roar that resounded above all else:

*But that is all!
Messieurs, adieu!
Here comes the GUARD!
For most of you!"*

Cleve looked startled, but no more than did the others who heard the words. Fighting ceased on all fronts. There was a concerted rush for doors and windows, both open and shut. In what seemed no time at all, the grog-room was deserted, except for a few unconscious ones—and Cleve and d'Entreville.

"Well, *messieurs!*"

It was Cordeau stepping heavily over the debris of battle. He stopped before them, scowling, arms akimbo.

"Quite well, *mon Capitaine.*" Cleve nodded pleasantly, stepped aside and offered his chair. "Won't you join us, *monsieur.*"

Cordeau's muddy eyes hardened. Not understanding the Englishman's whimsy, he didn't like it. "Very comical," he snapped crisply. "You two are under arrest!"

Complete surprise blanked d'Entreville's face. He had expected anything but that. "*Sangodemi!* What for?"

Cordeau pursed his lips. He made a sweeping gesture with his gauntleted hand. "Inciting a riot. Wrecking a tavern. Impertinence to your commanding officer."

Cleve swore hotly.

"But this wreckage is none of our doing," Guy protested.

Cordeau smirked. Then he beckoned his men forward. "I know what my eyes see, *monsieur.* Fall in!"

CHAPTER III

CAVALIER'S FALL

AT RICHELIEU'S palace they stood in the company of eight Guardmen and heard their crimes triumphantly reported.

"Cordeau is a rat," muttered Cleve as the portly *capitaine* waxed eloquent and venomous.

D'Entreville nodded. He kept his dark eyes leveled on the ornate *candalabrum* sitting on the edge of Richelieu's desk. "Crass understatement," he murmured. "Pole-cat."

Cleve licked his lips. He was growing tired of standing at stiff attention in the heavy confines of the Cardinal's library. He eased the hilt of his sword away from his side.

"Pole-rat! And that combines the foulness of both in one. A tattle-tale, too."

Richelieu heard them and glanced up. "It isn't necessary to whisper your side of this business," he said.

Cleve smiled; a look of utter deviltry twinkled in his eyes as he composed an answer. Guy caught it and shuddered. He knew that indiscretion was about to pop, and feared the worse.

"Truth *always* whispers, *Monseigneur*."

Capitaine Cordeau grew crimson. He whirled to the Cardinal, one thick finger stabbing accusation at the two cavaliers. "Insolence, *Monseigneur*! There you have it. It is the sort of thing I am constantly faced with."

Richelieu regarded him enigmatically. "You have presented your report, *monsieur le Capitaine*. I feel certain that no personal animosity tinged it. However, being a fair man, I must listen to Messieurs Cleve and d'Entreville before I pass judgment. Withdraw your men, and I shall listen to what they have to—er"—He smiled slightly without humor—"whisper."

Cordeau bowed. Instinctively he felt that he was being duped, but Richelieu's tone left him no alternative. With the false grace of a politician he murmured: "Ever at your service, *Monseigneur*," collected his men, and withdrew.

The Cardinal did not watch his exit. He fell back against the plush of his chair and eyed his charges over the top of his steepled fingers.

D'Entreville stood tense and apprehensive, his broad shoulders back and his chin high. He expected the worst. He was ready for it.

But, Cleve . . . Richelieu shifted to the Englishman and sighed. Cleve was relaxed as usual, and laughing with his eyes. The man seemed impervious to the threats of the future; perhaps because the uncertainty of his career had taught him the futility to worry.

The silence grew in weight and length until finally the Cardinal shrugged. How to make a reprimand stick to these irrepressible rakehellies was a poser. They were both born for trouble, and verbal punishment had lost potency through over-use.

"MESSIEURS," he said musingly, "has it ever occurred to you that I can grow sick of being constantly hung on the horns of dilemma? It seems I am habitually alternating between the decision to hang you, and the decision to honor you."

"Now in regard to this latest escapade. First: did you provoke this brawl? Second: did you break your pledge?"

Cleve shifted. "Well, yes and no, *Monseigneur*."

A thread of danger intertwined Richelieu's tone. "Now that is a definite answer, m'lord. Precisely what do you mean by it?"

"Yes to the first question, *Monseigneur*. No to the second."

The Cardinal eyed him severely, but offered no comment. He fell back into his chair and trailed a thoughtful finger along the side of his cheek.

"The fact that the both of you refrained from drawing steel may temper my punishment. But make no mistake, you shall be punished." He pursed his lips. "Punished with a terrible responsibility, *messieurs*!"

The two cavaliers exchanged glances.

The Cardinal was building up to something, and they knew from past experience that it would be dangerous. Of the two, d'Entreville was the less apprehensive. He would face almost any peril rather than lose his precious liberty. Cleve was not so sure.

Richelieu got to his feet. He made a slim, dynamic figure in his trailing red robe, seeming taller because of it. He fell to pacing, hands interlocked firmly behind his back; and finally he turned.

"Yes," he continued softly, "a terrible responsibility." He frowned. "You are both rogues, *messieurs*! Reckless knaves! And yet, you possess a quality of resource and courage which I deem worth the salvage. Candidly, it is the only reason I tolerate your repeated impertinences.

"In previous instances I have tried to cleanse you of your rakehellly bent by corporal punishments. Well, *messieurs*, that has failed; therefore, a moral force seems to be demanded. We shall see whether responsibility can sweat that streak of wildness out of you, and make you true servants of France."

Cleve frowned. The Cardinal's continual reference to a heavy responsibility was beginning to irk. "You'll pardon me, *Monseigneur*," he said carefully, "but just what is this responsibility?"

The Cardinal regarded him steadily and explained about the treaty: its necessity and its danger. Spain was seeking a pretext to involve France in war. The treaty with England would do that, if it ever fell into unfriendly hands.

"And it must not fall into unfriendly hands, *messieurs*," he concluded crisply. "It will be your duty to see that it doesn't. When you stand before the door to that little room in the Louvre tonight, you will not be guarding a mere document of State. You will be guarding the future of French security; the lives of thousands!"

The Cardinal's slim hands folded.

Cleve smiled faintly. "A nice thought," he said. "Frankly, *Monseigneur*, if you had given us an alternative I should have preferred the Bastille."

AND that night he paced irresolutely before the innocent-looking door to the treaty room and cursed. He and Guy were in a deserted second-floor corridor of the Louvre; but even so, the gay noise of the glittering assemblage down-stairs could be heard. The Spanish reception was in full swing, and non-participation made the English cavalier feel itchy.

He paused before a full-length mirror. There was a gay restlessness in his eye. The black doublet he wore was slashed with silver; his short military cape was faced with *fleurs de lis*, and his black thigh-high boots fitted without a crease.

"*Sangodemi*," grunted d'Entreville from his chair. "You are very pretty, *mon ami*. But relax. You're not going anywhere."

Cleve sighed; eyed his companion. Guy was sitting easily asprawl with his hands locket comfortably behind his head. He was garbed in military court dress—white and gold, with brass buckles on his gray boots and a lane of diamonds running the length of his sword-sheath.

"A fine fop you make, Kitten," the Englishman said. "Mind you don't fall asleep."

D'Entreville sat up. "*Corbac!* Don't call me Kitten! I've fought duels for less."

Cleve didn't comment. He walked over to a chair and sat down with a frown. They had been on duty for thirty minutes. It was beginning to rag his nerves. The sweet strains of music and laughter lifted from below.

"Wish I had a drink," he said.

Guy shook his head. "No. We're on duty. A soldier's responsibility is not to be taken lightly. Remember it."

Cleve shrugged and polished his nails on the shoulder of his doublet. "Consider it this way, Kitten. Our orders state that we're not to appear to be guarding that room. Faith! A bottle will only strengthen the illusion. It is almost a duty!"

An expression of longing surfaced the Frenchman's hawkish features; but his sense of decorum doused it. "*Corbac!* No! And stop foisting illogical logic on me!"

"By Gad! What's illogical about it?"

"You have me there! It just doesn't ring true."

"Now there's reasoning! It doesn't ring true; therefore it isn't—"

He broke off. Coming up the corridor was a man. A man who strode at a leisure pace with his hand negligently on the hilt of a long rapier. He was tall, olive-skinned, dressed foppishly in green; he wore a half-spade beard after the Spanish fashion.

CLEVE scowled. The corridor had two staircases, one at either end, but he had supposed the end from which the stranger was coming, closed.

"Your pardon, *messieurs*," said the man arrogantly. "Who occupies that room?" He jerked his thumb at the door of the treaty chamber.

D'Entreville looked up. He wasn't used to being addressed as if he was a lackey. He didn't like the newcomer's manner.

"I do," he said deliberately. "Why?"

The stranger eyed him coldly. "Why? Now here's a rude question. And rudely put, I think!"

Guy straightened. He made no attempt to get up. There was something about this fellow that rubbed the prickles of dislike into his throat.

"Candidly, *monsieur*, I don't particularly care whether it's rude or not. But, since you have inquired about my room—"

"I doubt that it is your room, *monsieur*!"

Guy stood up slowly. "You do, eh?" he said softly.

The tautness of his tone warned Cleve that now was the time to intercede. He stood up too. "It is his room, true enough," he told the man. Then he caught the jutting line of Guy's jaw and added hurriedly: "I believe it would be to everyone's interest if you take your leave, *monsieur*."

The stranger offered him a twisted smile. His fingers were now tight on the hilt of his rapier; white-capped and strained.

"I appreciate your efforts, *monsieur*. But it would hardly befit a man of my stature to turn tail from a"—he toyed with the word—"Kitten!"

And that did it! Guy would take that from Cleve but from no one else. His arm licked out. Hard fingers whipped into the stranger's mouth. The soggy smack of them under-emphasized the force of the blow.

"*Dieu!*"

The stranger recoiled. His face was a white mask and the marks of Guy's fingers stood in scarlet contrast to the pallor. He put tracing fingers to them and bowed.

"There is a garden outside, *monsieur*. I'll be waiting!"

When he had gone, Cleve stared at his companion. "Neatly done, Kitten. Now what are you going to do?"

"*Corbac!* Make a pin-cushion of him!"

"Yes. I presume that would be in order.

Of course, we both know that a—er—soldier's responsibility is not to be taken lightly, and that we have a room to protect. But that applies only to me, doesn't it? Me and wine."

Guy hitched up his rapier. The full fire of his blood had been aroused. Reason melted beneath it. But even so, Cleve's irony was beginning to raise his innate sense of duty—and he didn't want it, now.

"I shan't take long!" he snapped.

"Ah now, I'm not so sure. Duelling with a man without drawing steel will take a bit of doing. You promised to use your blade only in Richelieu's service. Remember?"

Guy felt his hot resolves crumbling inside of him and he fought against it with the stubbornness of pride. "You're a fine one to preach, Cleve! *Sangodemi!* Who are you to—"

Cleve chuckled. "Temper, Kitten!"

Sheer recklessness leaped into d'Entreville's eyes. "All right," he said gently. "I promise you I'll not draw my blade. But, I must keep my appointment. This is a question of honor. I'll find a way to satisfy it."

"That'll be a neat trick if you can—Hey! Wait, Guy! What are you going to do?"

But d'Entreville was half-way down the corridor, walking doggedly. He didn't turn his head; merely tossed the words ahead

and let them drift back. Quickly he said: "You'll find out later. No man can insult me and—"

But that was all. . . .

Cleve heard a faint step from behind and started to turn. A heavy hand clogged his mouth; a sickening blow thundered against his head. For a brief flashing instant he saw the dizzying sweep of the floor rushing up to meet him and he knew that he was falling.

Then a cloak of sable seemed to drop over everything to blot out vision. It closed in, tighter, tighter. Faintly he heard a chuckle. A voice said:

"'Tis done, DuBrill!"

And he knew no more.

CHAPTER IV

MARCH, KITTEN!

HOW long he remained senseless Cleve never knew. He seemed to be struggling on hands and knees in a cramped world stuffed with feathery blackness. He heard faint voices and groped mentally toward them.

The voices grew louder; more distinct. He opened his eyes and light cascaded through, clearing the foot that had been encrusting everything.

"How do you feel, m'Lord?"

He struggled to a sitting posture. He felt weak and faintly nauseated, but that was leaving. He was on a divan in the corridor and there were people all around. Bending near was Lord Stafford, a glistening wet goblet in his hand. Cleve remembered him from childhood.

"Are you all right, Cleve?"

"Yes."

Stafford straightened. He put the goblet on a nearby table and frowned. He was a slim, long-faced man with gray eyes and thin lips. "This is bad business," he said. "What happened?"

Cleve put his hand to his head. It was wet from the water Stafford had used to arouse him. It was beginning to ache in thick, bulging throbs.

"I don't know precisely. I heard a

noise. Turned. And—and, that was all. Silly of me. I should have been prepared."

Some of the men who had ringed him turned away.

"The treaty's gone," Stafford said.

That didn't mean much at first. Cleve sat there on the divan and fought against the urge to lie down again. "Gone?" he said blankly. The significance suddenly struck like a cudgel, but all he said was: "Not very good, is it?"

"No. It isn't."

Then Stafford sat down beside him. He seemed nervous and he kept jerking at the little goatee on his chin. He added: "Somebody has talked."

Cleve smiled wanly. He was beginning to feel better; more like himself. "Obviously."

"But who? Damme, there's the question. Never was there a more astonished man than I when I arrived with His Eminence, found you asprawl and the door wrenched open. Count d'Entreville was just coming up the hall."

"D'Entreville!"

Cleve stood up. It seemed the wrong thing to do at first, for an intense wave of dizzying sensations rocked him. Then it passed and he felt better.

"I fear the Count is in some difficulty," Stafford volunteered.

ALACKEY offered Cleve a glass of brandy. He accepted it and stood sipping slowly. "About the treaty," he said. "Who is suspected? The Spanish, of course."

Stafford shrugged and shook his head. "No. Not exactly. Don Diego and his retinue have been under close surveillance all evening. Not one of them left the ballroom. As a matter of fact, they appeared eager to be watched."

Cleve finished his liquor and set the empty glass down. "Really," he said. His mind, with its almost feline curiosity, was beginning to play with a lot of questions. "Tell me, m'Lord, did you notice a gentleman in green near Don Diego at any time?"

Before Stafford could reply, Richelieu

stepped through the press of courtiers and Royal Guards. The Cardinal's face was a waxen mask. His dark eyes were snapping. He jabbed Cleve with a glance and said to the English ambassador: "Does Cleve throw any light on this, Stafford?"

"No, M'Lord. Cleve was struck from behind."

The Cardinal frowned. "So. From behind, eh? Then, if le comte d'Entreville had been with him it never could have happened." He regarded Cleve without much harshness. "Apparently, *monsieur*, this is not your blame. You have not eyes in the rear of your head. No, there is only one culprit . . ."

He turned deliberately. Cleve hadn't noticed before, but d'Entreville was standing beside the door, pale-faced; strained. The Cardinal's chill gaze swept him and returned to the Englishman.

"Monsieur le comte d'Entreville is under arrest for treasonable neglect of duty," he said quietly. "It will please me if you take his sword, *monsieur*. Confine him to his quarters. He is your prisoner."

D'Entreville's sword came out slowly, reluctantly. And when he spoke, his tones were imbued with the deep sincerity of the friendship which had been born of action and forged in the fires of mutual peril.

"Rather you, Cleve, than any living man!"

There was drama here; but as Cleve accepted the blade, his feelings for burlesque crept to the surface. That impish perversity which had so often dropped him into hot water suddenly became manifest.

"Kitten," he said slowly and with a faintly traced grin that belied paternalism, "Kitten, you are a *bad, bad* boy!"

. . . And a block below the Louvre, a man entered a dingy, half-lit room. He was tall, olive-skinned, and dressed in green. The side of his face was streaked with two painful-looking red welts. His sword-sheath dangled limply without its sword. He looked tired, disheveled. But his eyes were snapping curses.

Another man, deep in the shadows, looked up. "What happened?"

The olive-skinned individual slumped into a chair and poured himself a drink. "Dieu! What didn't happen? 'Tis only by the grace of fate and a madman's whim that I am alive!"

"Then you picked the quarrel?"

The man in green took a gulp of liquor and nodded. His companion stared for a moment, then comme iced to laugh.

"*Pecaire!* You look badly mauled, *mon ami*. Badly mauled!"

The other cursed. "Mauled by a crazy mad kitten," he erupted savagely. "Do you know what that man d'Entreville did?"

"No, of course not."

"He didn't take his blade from its sheath! He attacked with the scabbard and all! *Mordi!* God save me from ever again fighting that sort of a madman!"

GUY D'ENTREVILLE paced the floor of his quarters and fought the curse of an over-vivid imagination. With each step his mood grew darker: He was disgraced! Blackened! Unredeemable!

He visualized France wracked and smoking as the blood-smeared armies of Spain marched and counter-marched over her prostrate body. And it was his fault—his fault alone!

"I think it was a mistake to give you back your sword, Kitten. You look nigh ready to use it—on yourself."

Cleve spoke from his comfortable position atop the bed. He chuckled and untied the cords holding the portieres near his head.

"I fear you're not to be trusted with ropes either."

Guy didn't answer. A candle guttered uncertainly from its bottle-based position on the table. It sent weirdly dancing shadows along the walls. Somewhere outside a clock tolled twelve. A distant dog barked.

The Englishman threw his legs over the side of the bed and sat up. He had been trying vainly to arrive at some solution to the treaty's disappearance. There was a tantalizing fact dancing in the dim borderlands of memory, but it had eluded him. He gave it up.

"Damme Kitten, do we turn in? Or, are you prepared to brood 'til dawn?"

D'Entreville cast him a searching glance. There were times when Cleve's apparent inability to accept serious things seriously baffled him. The Englishman had once said: "Never do anything about anything until it happens—and then, do plenty!"

Guy frowned. *Corbac!* Something had happened all right!

He walked over to the wall; unhooked a pistol from its peg and rammed it into his sash; then jerked on his gauntlets and reached for his plumed hat. Polite interest glimmered in Cleve's eyes.

"Going somewhere?"

Guy paused. He was under arrest and the thought put a defiant jut to his chin. "That's right," he said.

Cleve arose leisurely. He grinned. "You forget one thing, Kitten. You're my prisoner."

"Well?"

The Englishman shrugged. He reached for his hat. "Damme, do you think I allow my prisoners to run willy nilly where they choose? Don't forget, *monsieur*, a soldier's responsibility is not to be taken lightly."

"*Corbac!* I've heard about enough of that phrase."

"You coined it, m'l'ad."

"That's beside the point. What do you intend doing about this arrest business?"

"Why, to accompany you, of course." Cleve tipped his hat at a rakish angle and placed gloved hands on his hips.

"Faith, whose prisoner are you anyway? If you venture out alone, then you are escaping. Breaking arrest. Really, Kitten, don't you think you've enough counts against you without asking more."

"Now, they'll hang you only once. Escape, and they'll probably hang you twice. Two hangings in one day is rather hard on the neck. No. I'll go with you."

D'Entreville grinned. *Sandjou!* What could one do with a man like Cleve? Besides, although it was against his principles to admit it, the irrepressible Englishman was as necessary to him as his right arm.

"Very well," he shrugged. "You win. But, 'tis on your own initiative, remember."

The other nodded. "That's better," he said.

THEY stole furtively down the hall and into the rear courtyard. The night was silver-touched by a moon that drenched the earth with brilliance, made the street-cobbles resemble great deep-set sapphires.

A Guard challenged them sleepily. Cleve drew his blade and grasped Guy firmly by the arm.

"Taking the prisoner for an airing," he said crisply.

"Pass," replied the Guard.

Outside in the street, they walked smartly toward le Quai de l'Ecole. The city was still in the translucence of blue that filled the night, and its stillness made their footsteps ring where they should have clacked faintly. Ahead the waters of the Seine moved, silent and white through the shadows.

"Where away, Kitten?" Cleve asked.

D'Entreville's lips were thinned; determined. He had soaked his mind in the facts of the case, hoping against hope to uncover a thread—a single lead on which to proceed. There was none.

Of course, he realized now that the man in green had been purposely sent to distract him. But no one had seen the man in green. He had disappeared as suddenly and as unexpectedly as he had appeared. As for the rest . . . an open door; Cleve sprawled unconscious on the floor; the treaty gone.

* But through the misery of his own conscience, one fact had been looming in size and substance; and it was upon this that the cavalier had decided to act. Only one man in Paris would benefit appreciably by the seizure of the Treaty.

"I believe a visit to Don Diego seems in order," he said.

"Perhaps." Cleve nodded.

They continued their way for a brief moment. Cleve stared thoughtfully into the night, once again probing for something . . . And suddenly that dancing secret at the

back of his memory grew unwary and stepped into his trap.

"Who is DuBrille?" he asked quietly.

D'Entreville came to a sudden stop and eyed Cleve piercingly. From the past he had learned the deductive powers of the Englishman. Whatever Cleve's seeming recklessness, there was a razor-sharp intelligence inside.

On more than one occasion that intelligence had sliced through the dark cloak of mystery; and although Cleve rarely used it—because as he often said: "thinking deprives a man of so many senseless pleasures"—it was there. Guy was grateful for it.

"DuBrille's a petty informer, a black-mailer," he said. "What of him?"

"Nothing. But I'll wager ten to one that he knows more concerning the treaty's disappearance than does Don Diego. Furthermore, I'll double the stakes on the possibility of his having it in his possession now."

"*Pecaire!* But why?"

"Because I have a bump on my head," said Cleve and chuckled. "DuBrille's name was the last thing I heard before losing consciousness. Faith! We've been so engrossed about Spain in this affair that we've completely forgotten that some ambitious adventurer might have lifted the treaty to sell it on an open mart."

D'Entreville snapped his fingers. "Sangodemi! Why didn't you speak of this in the first place, you lout?"

Cleve chuckled through the shadows. "Perchance because I didn't think of it in the first place," he said; and took Guy by the elbow. "Come on."

CHAPTER V

DEAD MAN'S INN

DUBRILLE lived in a ramshackle hostelry that traced its beginnings back to the days of the eighth Charles. Located in an obscure alley near the foot of le Pont Neuf, it combined the fine assets of being both unknown and unnoticeable. A wretched, weed-grown, inner court guarded

its front entrance, and the waters of the Seine its rear.

As d'Entreville led the way up to it, Cleve noticed that except for the lawful night-light, the building was to all intents and purposes deserted.

"Fine burrow for a rat," he remarked softly.

Guy chuckled. "And when you've said that, you've said all. DuBrille is a rat if ever there was one. The only reason I know of his whereabouts is that he sold Richelieu some information a year ago, and I acted as emissary."

A light twinkled in Cleve's eyes. "Sort of a cat and mouse arrangement, eh?"

The shaft bit deep. D'Entreville stopped in mid-stride and glared. "*Sangodemi*, Cleve! You've gone too far! I'll tolerate your calling me Kitten, but when you commence concocting rancid puns, I'll take no more. Come on! Draw!"

Tears appeared as the English rakehellily sought to restrain his laughter. "I—I can't," he finally gasped. "And don't roar so loud. You'll have the house down on us."

"*Pecaire!* I'll have more than that down on you," growled the Frenchman. "*Peste!* You're crazy anyway. Come along."

The knocker made a hollow sound against the ancient oak of the door. Almost immediately a night-capped head poked itself from a side window. A peevish challenge: "What do you want?"

"To get in, of course," Cleve said. "Open up!"

The head disappeared and they could hear the pad of slippers approaching. Then the door swung inward and they were staring down at a night-shirted midget with the face of a patriarch gone to seed. He held a candle high and squinted at them. "Well?"

Cleve cast an amused glance at Guy. "Did you ever say that good things come in small packages?" he asked.

D'Entreville shook his head impatiently. "No." Then he looked at the midget. "We desire to see DuBrille."

"Monsieur DuBrille," the little man cor-

rected harshly. "*Mordi!* They all want to see Monsieur DuBrille. Foreigners! Bah!"

Cleve's eyebrow arched. "Foreigners, *mon petit?*"

"*Sangodemi!* Don't refer to my size! Yes, foreigners. Cursed Spaniards, and an English sot."

Guy looked at Cleve and drew his blade. The little innkeeper darted back.

"No violence! No violence!"

"Silence, squirt! Take us to DuBrille and quietly!"

"Murderers! Help! Help!"

With a sweep Cleve bent down and picked up the midget. He clamped a gloved hand over the writhing mouth and nodded to Guy.

"Damme. Let's get inside before this town crier raises the Watch."

THE tavern's interior was no great improvement over its outside. The walls were cracked and smoke-stained and great rolls of dirt clotted the corners. Cleve deposited the innkeeper on the floor.

"And now, laddie, where is DuBrille?"

The inn-keeper glowered and said nothing. D'Entreville cursec.

"Well," Cleve said, "we'll have to find him ourselves."

He tucked the midget under one arm and mounted the rickety stair-case. Guy brought up the rear, sword gleaming in the wavering light of the candle.

They paced along a narrow corridor, dingy, with warped doors lining either side. The sound of their feet reverberated hollowly on the bare boards of the floor. Then, turning the corner, they were confronted by a veritable cascade of yellow light. DuBrille's door was open, hanging on its hinges.

Cleve shifted the now passive midget and drew his sword. Guy's pistol came out silently. Thus prepared, they trooped into the well-lit room.

There was a tarnished candelabrum on the mantle with seven candles burning, the fire in the hearth glowed dully, the blinds had been drawn tightly across the sole window—but Cleve noticed none of these

things. His halt was so sudden and horrified that Guy bumped into him from behind.

"Good Heavens!"

There was DuBrille—or rather, what was left of DuBrille. He had been stripped and spread-eagled on the table, a thick gag rammed into his mouth. Sickening burns told what had been happening: torture, silent and cruel.

The room was a turmoil. Cleve sheathed his blade with a snap and set the inn-keeper down.

"Faith, there's one rat who's been well trapped," he said, indicating the corpse.

The inn-keeper began to snivel. He swore he knew nothing; he had been asleep. Guy brushed past him and walked to the table. A finely wrought stiletto was buried to the hilt in DuBrille's throat. He drew it forth and stared at it.

"They must have been in a hurry to leave so valuable a weapon," he said.

Cleve nodded. He eyed the wrecked room; the ripped bedding, the gutted cabinet-drawers, the gaping closet. A huge coffin-like chest in the corner attracted his attention. It was closed; and that was an anomaly in such fiercely searched quarters.

D'Entreville said: "Spanish steel."

Cleve shrugged. "What did you expect? Of course it's Spanish. The whole story is written so plainly that it's well nigh audible. Mark the confusion of this room. Apparently DuBrille possessed something that he refused to give up. Undoubtedly the treaty. His greed for gold probably overcame his prudence.

"Those Spanish gentlemen, of whom our host spoke so highly, came to collect it. DuBrille tried to bargain. They searched the room, and failed." His eyes grew grim. "And then they went to work on him, with full success."

"What makes you think that?" asked Guy.

Cleve indicated the stiletto he held. "They used that, didn't they?" he said. "If they hadn't known DuBrille's secret they wouldn't have killed him."

Guy stared moodily at the figure on the bed and nodded.

D'ENTREVILLE frowned and lifted a torn blanket and threw it over the body. "Doesn't the fact that the Spanish knew that he had the treaty preclude that he was working for them?" he said. "Why should they kill their own man?"

"Ah me," Cleve sighed, shook his head and regarded the other tolerantly. "Faith, Kitten, you said yourself that DuBrille was a rat. Once he had his fingers on the treaty he probably sought to cross the men who had hired him originally."

Cleve bit thoughtfully on his lower lip. "But it isn't the obvious I'm interested in now, Guy. DuBrille stole the treaty, true enough, but—"

He looked up. "Damme! How did he find out about it in the first place? It was supposed to be a secret. Only the King, Lord Stafford, Richelieu and ourselves knew of it."

Guy shrugged. Causes weren't his immediate worry—consequences were. "*Pecaire!* What difference? The deed's been done." He stared at the Spanish stiletto. "The important fact remains that Don Diego now has the treaty. No one else would be interested enough to torture and kill DuBrille and ransack his room this thoroughly. *Bien!* Let's go after Diego. We waste time loitering here."

Cleve walked over to the chest that had originally piqued his curiosity. His fingers curled under the lid's edge; it lifted easily and fell back with a crash against the wall. He bent over its contents, and straightened abruptly.

"Damme!" he muttered. "Is this a tavern or a morgue?"

Inside the chest was a body: a corpse garbed in the livery of a house-lackey, blue and silver. Its face was round with a lumpish red nose, and a brace of blue eyes that looked merry even in death. Beneath the chubby chin was a small round hole—the sort caused by a rapier blade. The sour odor of stale ale wafted out of the impromptu coffin.

"*Dieu*, they are thorough!"

"Well," said Cleve, "he died drunk. He'd have liked that."

D'Entreville bent over his shoulder. "*Corbac!* You know him?"

"Yes. Name was Will Beck. He was the personal valet to Lord Stafford. Been in the family for years." Cleve let the lid fall into position again gently. He had liked Will Beck in the old days.

Now he frowned. "And that," he concluded, "solves DuBrille's source of information. Beck taked a lot when besotted. He was close enough to Stafford to hear much. The ambassador probably let something slip, unconsciously of course, and Beck spilled it to DuBrille after getting drunk."

"Then Beck was the English sot that our host mentioned. I was beginning to wonder."

"Speaking of our host," Cleve said looking up, "just where is he?"

D'Entreville looked quickly toward the door, where the little man had been standing. It was deserted, gaping; the midget gone.

Cleve blew out all of the candles in the candlelabrum and plunged the room into a brooding gloom; then stepped to the window and parted the thick drapes.

"I'd have liked to ask that little imp a few questions," he murmured. Then he stiffened. "Damme! We've got to leave this place, Kitten."

D'Entreville moved up beside him. Below in the moon-drenched courtyard was the missing inn-keeper. The little man was headed hurriedly toward the street, casting nervous glances back over his shoulder and acting generally terrified. Even as they stared, he broke into a shrill, bleating yell.

"Ho the Watch! Murder! Murder!"

Guy took a deep breath. He had been carrying his blade bared, but now he snapped it into its sheath to get it out of the way. The Watch! *Sandiou!* All he needed was to be arrested on the scene of a double murder and the headsman's block would become a certainty.

He darted for the door.

"*Pecaire!* Cleve!" he exclaimed. "If we're leaving—what are we just standing here for?"

CHAPTER VI

THE NIMBLE SPANIARD

CLOUDS were beginning to clot the moon as they walked up to Don Diego's residence on the Rue St. Denis. They paused in the blue black shadows to inspect the place.

The house stared back ominously, its windows like great dead eyes. Brooding silence prevailed. The place seemed asleep.

Guy didn't like it. Don Diego's position demanded an armed retinue. It was certain that there were guards somewhere inside that silent edifice, but whether asleep or alert was a question.

The Frenchman allowed his fingers to caress the reassuring coolness of his rapier hilt. No longer did he feel honor bound not to draw. If nothing else, this was the Cardinal's business! He tapped Cleve on the shoulder.

"Watch yourself, *mon ami*."

The Englishman nodded. He tugged his hat more firmly on the side of his head. Then, like gliding waiths, they slipped across the street.

Naturally, the steel-banded door was closed. Guy tested the small casement beside it, and surprisingly the window gave easily under his hand. Cleve chuckled.

"Amazing efficiency, eh?"

He waited while D'Entreville hitched up his blade and disappeared silently into the black rectangle; then followed.

They were in a small foyer with dark stairs leading into the blackness above.

The very air felt as if it had been steeped in heavy, brooding, silence.

Guy, standing tense and listening, let his eyes become accustomed to the murk; then motioned Cleve forward. He heard the sibilant slither of the Englishman's blade leaving its sheath.

The archway to a large room gaped to their right. The room was heavily carpeted, had a sunken floor and a high ceiling. At one end Guy could make out the vague lines of a huge desk.

"This was first," he breathed. "That desk pleads to be searched. And move quietly, Cleve. No noise!"

The Englishman nodded. But his incongruous fancy was beginning to grow restless. It rebelled against the tenseness of the situation, demanding action or some form of relief.

At that moment his toe discovered a heavy foot-stool. It caught and pitched him headlong, with a startled yell and a crash. The flimsy end-table that was in his line of fall toppled aside, the candle-holder and vase atop it clattering.

Then came a thick silence; the tense breathless silence that inevitably seems to post-script bedlam.

"My nose," muttered Cleve.

"Quiet!"

There was movement from above, and a voice sent a challenge ringing down the staircase. A Spanish voice.

"Who goes?"

Guy muttered a curse. He froze, teeth clamped on his lower lip.

Tired Kidneys Often Bring Sleepless Nights

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. When they get tired and don't work right in the daytime, many people have to get up nights. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder. Don't neglect this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep.

When disorder of kidney function permits

poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may also cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(ADV.)

"*Por Dios!* Who is there?"

The voice was insistent, demanding of an answer. D'Entreville took a deep breath, flexed his sword-arm. He lifted his voice in delicate modulation.

"*Meeeoow!*" he said.

IT WAS perfectly executed, but therein lay its flaw. Cleve couldn't take it—not from the man known as the Kitten. From his position on the floor his mad humor bubbled over and he giggled.

The voice from above lost some of the alarm which had charged it. "Felipe? Here puss, puss, puss . . ."

"*Meeeoow!*" said Guy.

He kicked Cleve in the vain hope that the pain would sober him. But the English rakehell was beyond pain. Silent throbs of laughter convulsed him. Guy's kick, abetted by the second *meeeooww*, only added fire to the flame. It cracked restraint into audibility. Cleve rolled on the floor and roared.

"*Dios y Diablo!*" exclaimed the voice from above. "Who is down there!"

The challenge restored Cleve's sense of reality, but not for long. The game was over. "Who?" he roared back. "Damme! Nobody but us Kittens."

Guy threw up his hands. "*Sacre nom!*" he sighed. "That caps it!"

Feet thumped their way down the staircase. D'Entreville faded as the saffron of a lantern filled the foyer. Cleve stood up. He was still chuckling softly, but his eyes were alert. He held his blade slanted across his boots.

A slim silhouette stepped into the arch.

The man held a large lantern in one hand and a pistol in the other. It was aimed at Cleve. Unnoticed, Guy stood against the wall near the arch.

"One movement, *señor*, and I blow a hole through you."

Cleve allowed his rapier to drop. It clattered loudly against the shattered end-table. "I shan't move," he promised.

"*Por Dios!* I don't think you will either."

He stepped down into the room, past Guy's motionless figure. "Bent on private

business, eh *señor*," he said to Cleve and placed the lantern on the desk.

The Englishman shrugged. "Something like that," he admitted. In the background he saw Guy slowly draw his pistol. Apparently the Spaniard was alone. "Business concerning Don Diego," he finished. "I have come to see him."

The Spaniard's mocking smile built itself into a jarring, sarcastic giggle. "Really, *señor!* Ha! Even if I believed you, that would be impossible. The Don has left Paris."

Cleve bit his lip. "Sudden wasn't it? When did he leave?"

The Spaniard was still smiling. The pistol he held came to a focus on the Englishman's heart. For the first time Cleve noticed that while the speaker's lips were smiling, the beady black eyes glittered with the chill sheen of a killer.

"That, *señor*, is none of your affair. Besides, I shall not waste time. The fact that you have stolen furtively into this room proves you a spy."

The trigger-finger tightened. Cleve's stomach tried to escape via his back-bone. "You see, *señor*, we Spanish do not trifle with spies. Ah no, *señor*. We shoot them!"

Guy broke the tension. He had crept on cat-feet up behind the speaker. He placed his pistol coldly on the man's neck, just under the ear.

"You won't live that long, *monsieur*. Drop that weapon. Be quick!"

THE Spaniard stiffened. His pistol jackknifed from his fingers and landed with a dull bump atop Cleve's toe.

"Damme!" the Englishman yelled. "Not that quick!" He retrieved his rapier and arose eyeing Guy ruefully. "Faith, next time a man thinks to invest lead in me, don't diddle about in the background so cursed along."

D'Entreville chuckled. "Had I obeyed my impulse, I'd have let him shoot. Remember, he arrived down here only at your insistence." He nudged the captive gently. "Sit in that chair over there."

The Spaniard obeyed and they bound

him quickly, silently, with the drape-cords from the windows. He made no comment, submitting to the action sullenly.

"Post yourself by the archway, Cleve," d'Entreville said. "If Don Diego has left Paris, I desire to know where. When my friend here commences to tell, I don't want to be disturbed."

The Spaniard's lips curled. "You'll learn nothing from me," he said.

D'Entreville shrugged. "I'm not trifling. There is too much at stake. You say Don Diego has left the city. Very well. It couldn't have been more than an hour ago. We have just come from DuBrille."

The other smiled enigmatically and stared straight ahead. Guy looked over to where Cleve had been standing. He was a trifle nonplussed at first. Cleve was missing. And then he heard the sound of the Englishman's boots softly climbing the stairs.

With that he returned hotly to the adamant prisoner. Somehow he must make the man talk. The mere fact that Diego had fled so unexpectedly proved that he possessed the treaty. Time was valuable.

"I'll give you one more opportunity, *monsieur*," he snapped. "Where is your master?"

The Spaniard smiled again, insolently. Guy pursed his lips. There was an ornate green flask on the table. He picked it up thoughtfully; shattered it on the edge. Then he approached his prisoner.

The jagged glass presaged horror. The transparent teeth were cruel, hungry. Instinctively the Spaniard linched. He had a fair face and an imagination.

"When did Diego leave Paris?"

Sweat began to bead in globules on the captive's forehead. The broken glass was only scant inches from his eyes—too close for human flesh to stand. The words seemed to wrench themselves involuntarily from his lips. "An hour past," he gasped.

D'Entreville pressed forward. He had made a breach in the man's silence. He meant to widen it. Questions beat in sharp staccato.

"Was he on horseback, or in a coach?"

"A coach."

"Describe it. Speak out, curse you!"

"His official coach. The green one."

"How many horses?"

"Six."

"How many men?"

"Ten."

"Has he the treaty?"

"I don't know what you speak of."

"*Sandieu!* Yes you do. Shall I give you this glass? Now tell me: has Diego got the treaty?"

"Si."

"That's better. Now, where is he going? What road? Tell me his destination."

"I—I . . . *Por el amor del cielo, señor!* Take it away. I shall speak no more. Cut my face to ribbons; gouge out my eyes; my voice is still."

GUY stepped back. He was beaten. No matter how much the end justified it, an innate decency prevented him from using the glass. With a sobbed curse, he threw it away.

He looked up to see Cleve casually stroll back into the room. The Englishman's blade was in its sheath, his tongue in his cheek, a small black vial in his gloved hand.

"How's the party going?" he inquired.

Frustration lent fire to d'Entreville's words. "*Corbac*, Cleve! Where have you been?"

Cleve nodded toward the archway. "Exploring," he said easily. "Nobody home except our friend here."

The prisoner cursed. Cleve regarded him cheerfully. Then he walked over and handed d'Entreville the small vial he'd been fondling.

"Candidly, Kitten, I felt that we would waste too much time in making our friend here talkative. So I wandered. And now I know where Don Diego has gone."

Guy had started to inspect the vial, but at the words he looked up. "Where? *Sapristi!* If this is a prank . . ."

"I don't think so, except possibly a prank of Fate. At any rate, ask our friend whether the Don hasn't left for a sea voyage."

The Spaniard exploded. "*Diablo!* How did you find out? There is no one left to tell, except myself and—"

"Trifle inaccurate," Cleve corrected. He plucked the vial from Guy's fingers and held it up. "Found this upstairs. It had evidently been lost during the rush of departure. But, if one has an intelligent eye, it tells quite a bit concerning the worthy Don."

He chuckled and read the white label affixed to the vial: *Prescribed for Don Diego de Isla. One tablet after meals. A positive remedy for sea-sickness. Compounded by the learned Doctor and Alchemist, Jean Calapso.*

He looked up with a smile. "The fact that a man does not order tablets for sea-sickness unless he intends to take a sea voyage, abetted by the informative reaction of our guest, seems to prove my point, don't you think?"

D'Entreville nodded wisely. "Perfectly, *mon ami*," he said.

"Well, what are we waiting for?"

They left the Spaniard howling curses and repaired to the stables behind the house. Fortunately, Don Diego had been in too much haste to dispose of his fine collection of blooded horses. They selected two of the best and swung quickly into the saddles.

"Now mark this, Guy," Cleve said, reining in his mount. "We can only hazard as to which port Don Diego is headed for."

D'Entreville nodded. He was perfectly aware of the nebulous quality of their information. "The fact that he is going by sea precludes the possibility of his heading for the border," he said. "In fact, it seems to establish in my mind that he seeks to shake French soil from his heels as quickly as possible. One does not have to cross water to reach the Spanish border, and the roads are good."

Cleve pulled his plumed hat more firmly over one eye. "I reason the same way," he admitted. "Diego is devious. Mark the way he stole the treaty. If you were he, where would you go?"

"Le Havre. It is the closest port, a route hardly to be suspected in event of an alarm. It lies northwest while the Spanish Border is due south. And as you say, Diego is devious."

The Englishman nodded. "Then it's Le Havre." He shot his companion a meaning glance. "Faith, Guy! We're gambling as if we were gods. If we're wrong about Le Havre . . ." He let his voice trail.

And then the whirl of wings attracted them, and a trio of white dove-shapes burst from the garret window.

"*Mordi!*" Guy exploded. "The Spaniard has freed himself."

"And three carrier pigeons. Damme, Kitten, look! They are heading northwest. Let's away. Those birds are being sent to warn Diego, and if we're right concerning Le Havre—there'll be trouble!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

USE SPEEDWAY BLADES DE LUXE

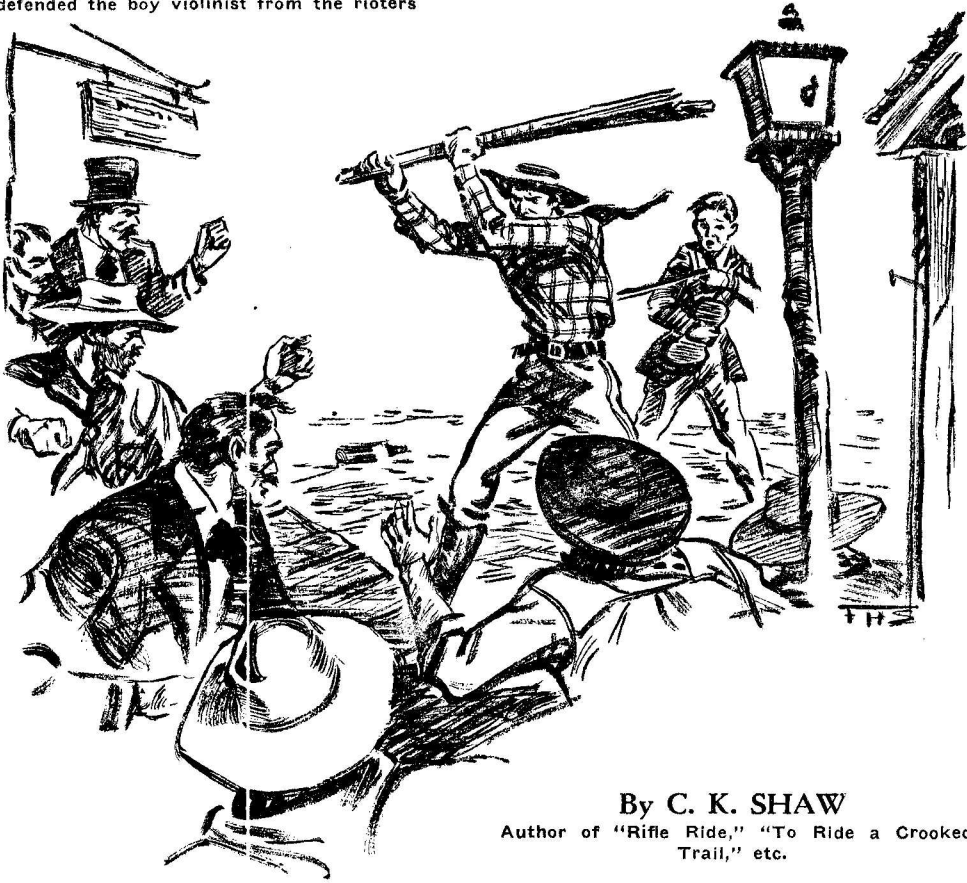
FOR FAST, SMOOTH, ECONOMICAL SHAVES

4 FOR 10¢

TRADE MARK **SPEEDWAY** REG. U.S. PAT. OFF. THIN STEEL MADE IN U.S.A.
INTERNATIONAL SAFETY RAZOR CORP. BLOOMFIELD, N. J.

SPEEDWAY MADE IN U.S.A.

Swinging the two-by-four, Coe Judah defended the boy violinist from the rioters



By C. K. SHAW

Author of "Rifle Ride," "To Ride a Crooked Trail," etc.

Gambler Take All

The Judah code hits a snag when the youngest and last of the line starts dealing the cards from his sleeve—only to find that a cheater cheats himself most of all.

A hard-hitting novelet of old San Francisco

I

ON THE steamer heading toward San Francisco, Coe Judah played cards with a mining man, a politician and a wealthy Easterner. The three men were impressed when they learned their somber companion was the son of Ramsey Judah, of the Judah House, famous gambling spot.

The Easterner was a side-burned man of intense curiosity. "Did the law get back much of the money for which your father was killed?" he asked.

Coe Judah's lips barely moved as he replied: "The law hanged the murderer. No trace of the money was found."

The other two men tightened. They had heard such rumors. They knew young men

of Coe's type, so they left the questioning to the Easterner.

"Did he bury it?"

"The murderer claimed he was not connected with the robbery. I believed him." Coe's falling tones closed the conversation.

That evening Coe avoided the trio. He drew back to shadow when he saw them looking for him. They paused near where he stood.

"He's keeping to cover," the Easterner said.

"Doesn't want to talk," the politician observed. "Peculiar business connected with his father's death. Clark Guthrie, manager of the Judah House, was questioned about the two looted vaults. The court decided Ramsey Judah had opened the safes himself, under the killer's gun, but Coe Judah sat silent through the murder trial, refusing to speak with his father's old manager. Guthrie had managed the Judah House for years and was considered as honest as Ramsey himself. Still—"

"Still what?" prompted the Easterner.

"Guthrie has opened up on a mighty grand scale in San Francisco. There is a fight on between Guthrie and Horace Kingsley of the Double Eagle. Guthrie's years with Ramsey give him prestige. Still—"

"Still what?" snapped the Easterner.

"Still, there's lots of people remember that Coe Judah sat with a face as hard as granite during that trial."

"It'll be bloody business if young Judah opens up a place in San Francisco," put in the mining man. "I don't look for that though. He'll have to pioneer in a gold camp for a start; he's broke, they say."

"He paid up all the outstanding debts of the Judah House to the last thin dime," rumbled the politician. "Many of them not collectable according to law. Money put in the vault by patrons for safety, but guaranteed only by the word of Ramsey Judah."

Coe Judah shrank closer to his shelter. He had been a fool to bleed himself for those debts, but it had seemed part of his

father's burial. He had upheld the policy his father had spent his life to establish. From now on he was treating the world as it had asked to be treated.

COE believed that the Texan who had killed his father had been convinced of the crookedness of the Judah House by its manager, Clark Guthrie. He believed that the instant Ramsey Judah had died, Guthrie had been ready to loot the vaults. It was logical for the law to place the robbery at the door of the killer. Coe had only a hunch to back his belief.

Clark Guthrie had been with the Judah House for many years. The utter trust Ramsey Judah placed in his manager made it easy for Clark Guthrie to manipulate his scoop.

"Young Judah may be broke," the Easterner was saying, "but with his shrewdness, there'll be money waiting to back him."

"If he'll just let sleeping dogs lie, and not jump into this fight against Clark Guthrie." The politician paused to make the proper spacing for an important announcement. "They say the girl has joined her uncle in San Francisco."

The trio passed on. Coe walked to the rail and leaned into the night. He was surprised that Jewel Manse had joined Clark Guthrie. He had heard she was to marry a Kansas City lawyer. Guthrie had brought his widowed sister to his home sixteen years before and with her a daughter of three. Jewel and Coe had grown up together. The serious brown eyes of the girl had enslaved him. He had always done her bidding. Her rich auburn curls falling about her white neck had been more beautiful to him than the coat of his favorite pony.

Jewel accepted the devotion of her uncle with few words. She accepted the wholehearted loyalty of Coe Judah in like manner. Later, when he brought her his love, her lips were coolly smiling. He was filled with happiness that she received his gift. He treasured her cool nods as others lovers treasured warm assuring words.

Jewel's mother was dead when the fall of the Judah House came. Jewel stayed close beside her uncle during the trying days. When she heard the law would grill Clark Guthrie regarding the stolen money, she asked Coe to intercede that her uncle might be spared the hard hours. A slight frost came to her eyes when Coe refused.

When Coe Judah sat wooden-faced during the trial, not lending the support of his friendship to Clark Guthrie, Jewel returned his ring.

During those days, Coe Judah's face had grown lean, and an intense sharpness had come into his eyes. He voiced no charge against Clark Guthrie for no tangible proof could be produced. He walked his solitary way, convinced that the Texan who had killed his father had been a tool in the hands of the real criminal. Bitterness began to color his thinking. Ramsey Judah had been honest all his life and what had it brought him? Death was a mighty slim pay-off on a policy a man had upheld all his life.

II

COE JUDAH milled with the crowd outside the hall where the funeral of the gambler, Mitch Kibby, was being held. Coe had known Kibby. A man swift of finger and shifty of eye. He had been thrown out of the Judah House for dealing crooked cards.

A man beside Coe started talking. "Mitch Kibby has been dealin' for Horace Kingsley of the Double Eagle for three months." The fellow was pleased when Coe gave him a listening ear. "Fine feller, Mitch. Not that I ain't lost to his dealin', but he alus slapped me on the back and wished me better luck next time. Some say he palmed an ace now and then, but all gamblers and gamblin' houses are crooked. A feller's a sap to toss 'em their money. But Mitch was friendly."

The man jabbed Coe in the ribs with his elbow. "See that mob across the street? Them's Clark Guthrie's toughs. Guthrie is hot under the collar over Kingsley throwin' this fancy funeral for Mitch.

Guthrie wanted him chucked under the sod at the dark of the moon and nothin' said." He winked. "Yo' see, Guthrie's boys got Mitch."

"Mitch Kibby got his deserts!" snapped a listener.

Others joined in, some for Guthrie, more for Kingsley. All agreed it was a killing due to the trade war between the two gambling houses. Horace Kingsley of the Double Eagle, was angry over the way Clark Guthrie was swinging business. Guthrie had traded on his years of association with the honest Ramsey Judah, and hinted that the Double Eagle was shady in its dealings. Kingsley circulated stories which he said Mitch Kibby had told him, stories of the under-handed methods Guthrie had used while with the Judah House. That was why, so Kingsley claimed, Guthrie had had Mitch Kibby killed.

"Guthrie claims Kingsley hired Mitch to spread them lies," a man said to Coe.

"If they were lies," Coe said, "Guthrie would not have feared Mitch, and would not have bothered to have had him killed."

"By thunder, I never looked at it that way! I just figured the high and mighty Clark Guthrie wouldn't stand to have his name tossed around. By thunder, maybe he *was* afraid of Mitch. Maybe Guthrie ain't all he seems. There's them that says bad blood stands 'tween him and young Judah. By thunder!"

Coe watched him hurry off to spread this new angle. It was against such men that a gambling house must always fight. Their tongues were more deadly than six-guns.

The toughs across the street began to cat-call, and a rock sailed over. Gambling houses always had their mob followings. Ramsey Judah had had a powerful gang back of him, and had not hesitated to use it. He would have been drummed from the town by rivals, but for such an arm of strength. A gambling house could not sit back and expect the law to keep its doors open. The law was lax regarding even the most honest houses.

Coe smiled to see that Clark Guthrie was well represented.

THE coffin was carried from the crowded hall by bare-headed men, walking slowly. Following came a slim boy, light hair fanned by the breeze, a violin tucked under his chin. He was playing. The crowd sucked in a breath. Horace Kingsley was doing things up with a flourish. Jests died as the tones of the violin strengthened. The youth threw off his timidity and his music gathered breath.

Death had touched the boy with sadness, and it crept into his music. That it was the coffin of the gambler he saw, made no difference. The violin whispered of a life that had been snapped off. The crowd, too, lost thought of the gambler's body in the long slim box; other forms were resting there, forms that had once been dear to them.

Coe's jaws corded. The lad had caught everything in his music. He was dragging up memories Coe wanted buried in a quiet grave. But they were sacred memories, and without realizing, he reached to remove his hat.

The crowd across the street let out a cat-call. "Smash that music box!" someone shouted. "Mitch Kibby was a cheat!"

The crowd by the hearse remained fixed, leaving the music to its silencing path. The Guthrie mob was stirred to great wrath. Coe watched the slim boy leaning his cheek against his violin. The lad was swinging the crowd's sympathy Kingsley's way with his head.

Coe shoved forward when he saw Guthrie's mob start their rush. He shouldered to the boy and turned him back toward the hall and safety.

"Bust that fiddle!" went up a shout, and then the two mobs met.

The boy had not known of this danger. He drew back for a second from Coe's directing hand. Then he heard the shouts.

"Bust the fiddle!"

The boy gathered the violin to his frail body. He pushed close to Coe, crying out as rough hands reached toward him.

"Don't let them get my violin!"

Coe Judah swept up a plank that had been part of a walk and lunged at the mob. He sent the plank, knee-high, against the advance, and there were howls of rage as falling men tangled. Then Coe mowed down the standing with wicked slashes. He fought a path for the boy into the hall, but the furious mob had marked the man that had cheated them of their victory. They swarmed at him.

Blocks of wood whistled through the air. Coe brought up his knee and drove out. A yell ground from a throat, and other men approached more cautiously. But Coe knew he was going down. He would be beaten to a pulp before the police could get there. He knew the fury of mob vengeance. He kept slashing and kicking, and as he went to the earth, he grabbed a pair of knees and hurled their owner backward. Then he was completely down.

Dimly he had heard the curses of a man leaping from the hearse. Then that man was straddling his body and wielding a two-by-four with savage efficiency. The charging men fell back from the weapon. The note of a police whistle cut through the shouts and curses.

Coe had no broken bones, but a moment of paralysis had overtaken him. His arms and legs were numb. He looked up at the big man fighting desperately against the mob. The fellow was doing an admirable job, he was going to hold out. The police whistles were now drawing closer. The mob made a last attack and began to fade away.

THE big man dropped the two-by-four and wiped blood from his face. He was dressed in black clothes that had been elegant before he leaped from the hearse to join the fight. He was a big gun and Coe was surprised that he had joined in street fighting. Now he was shouting at the crowd to follow the hearse. He also ordered a hack to be brought immediately.

Coe felt the tingle of returning action to his limbs. A twist or blow on the

spine had deprived him of strength, but he was not badly hurt. He managed to sit up. The hack arrived, and the big man motioned for Coe to get in. He was not bothering with the other wounded. He called to the police to look after things. He climbed into the back seat of the hack with Coe and told the livery stable driver to find a doctor.

"Not for me," Coe said. "Drop me near the Wright Hotel."

The big man changed the driver's orders, telling him to enter by the alley. "You'd feel better not passing the desk," he said to Coe, appraising his dusty and torn suit. "I saw the way you pitched into that fight to save that kid and his violin. It was white of you, Judah."

Coe looked into the broad face, noting the shrewd, cold eyes and the fighting jaw. "You know me, eh?"

The man laughed. "I knew Ramsey Judah for years. Have seen you about the place but we never spoke. Horace Kingsley is my name, Kingsley of the Double Eagle. Come over and have a talk after your head clears."

The hack had stopped at the back door of the hotel. Coe Judah climbed over the wheel. He looked up and nodded in acknowledgment to the invitation. Kingsley had been clever. He had leaped into a street fight to place in his debt the son of Ramsey Judah. It was a particularly nice piece of work since that son was reported to be enemies with Clark Guthrie.

"I'll expect you," Kingsley said.

"I'll come," Coe replied. "I couldn't well refuse after the way you pitched into that fight and saved me a beating."

Kingsley's eyes hardened, but they did not shift. "I'll be expecting you," he repeated.

For a moment, their eyes locked.

The hack rattled away and Coe went to his room. There, bathing his aching head, he cast about for a way to turn this visit to Kingsley into profit for himself. Gratitude did not matter. Every man was out to grind his own ax, and so was Coe Judah.

COE had dinner in the gambling section of the town. He had not yet called at the Double Eagle. When a hand was laid on his shoulder, he looked up half-expecting to meet the shrewd eyes of Horace Kingsley. He kicked back his chair and grasped the hand of a solemn-lipped man in his late sixties.

"Ed Carson!"

Carson's smile was tempered with seriousness, his glance was appraising. "You've put back some of the beef you lost at the trial," the man said. "But your lips ain't loosened none—none at all."

They sat down at the secluded table.

Coe's pleasure faded, for there had been rebuke in the voice of the old man as he mentioned the trial. Ed Carson had been trouble man for the Judah House for twenty years. Coe had been five when Carson had dropped reins before the then modest establishment and told Ramsey Judah he had heard a man got a square deal at his house. Ed had worn two pistols in those days and his knuckles had not been knotty, but even twenty years ago he had not looked young. Ten years in jail had whitened his temples. He had asked Ramsey Judah if he wanted to take a chance on a jailbird.

Now Ed wore no guns and his movements were slow. The frost still rested in his eyes, however, and authority still dwelt in his voice. In those twenty years he had not put aside his impenetrable mask.

A sudden thought came to Coe, and he leaned swiftly toward Carson. "Are you working for Clark Guthrie?"

Carson's face went blank. "Nothing was proved against Guthrie. You threw a lot of feelin' against him by the way you acted at the trial."

"And now you're pitching your strength to him."

"Wipe that nasty smile off your lips, Coe. Your dad could trot out a fleerin' of the lips like that, too. Keep that snarl for one of the gents you intend to skin alive."

"Maybe you're one of them, you and Guthrie."

Carson's clinched fist struck the table.

"So you're here for revenge! Revenge for a crime ol' Clark didn't commit!"

"Guthrie has opened up the swankiest place in San Francisco."

"Meanin' he opened it up on the money he stole from you?" Carson put the query savagely.

"Why didn't you open up a place? As trouble man, you were paid high at the Judah House."

"I wasn't one to save like Guthrie, though I have plenty."

"Ed, you know there's unanswered questions about my father's death."

Carson's voice held anger. "Coe, you're hell-bent on ridin' a hunch! That Texan killed your dad and robbed the vaults. Why wouldn't he rob 'em, he claimed he'd been crooked by Ramsey? Still you hold to his story when he said he shot Ramsey and rode away empty-handed. Coe, you're a pig-headed jasper, and if anybody else called you that you'd blow them to Kingdom Come with the draw I learned you."

"We've gone into that before, Ed. I had a last talk with the man that killed my dad the day he was hanged. He believed to the bottom of his soul that Ramsey Judah had beaten him out of his herd money, and he believed it because a set of books had been left for him to find."

"He was the only one that ever seen them books, Coe."

Coe nodded. "They were destroyed after they had served their purpose, after they'd convinced the Texan he had been crooked. Those books had been written by the real murderer; they were destroyed by him after he had robbed the vaults. Ed, that Texan wasn't a cheap killer, and he wasn't lying to me about those books."

Carson's thin mouth twitched. "You're ridin' that hunch as hard as ever. It's dead wrong, Coe, to put ol' Clark Guthrie on the rack 'cause of one of your damn hunches!"

"Are you trouble man for Guthrie now, Ed?"

"Yes," the older man said quietly. "You wouldn't let the law show you that Texan was guilty all the way through, nor you wouldn't listen to me." He paused. "You

wouldn't even listen to Jewel Manse."

"We'll leave her name out," Coe said evenly. "Since you are troubleshooter for Guthrie, I'm warnin' you to sign on some swift help; you're going to need it. I'm on my way now for an appointment with Horace Kingsley."

ED CARSON rose from the table, his eyes blank and remote. "So you're hookin' up with Kingsley."

"He kept me from getting my head busted open today when I tried to save a kid's violin from Guthrie's mob."

"It was you put up that fool fight, huh?"

"I suppose those were some of your choice angels lambasted me."

"You busted some heads yourself, Coe. Went in to save a kid's fiddle." Carson laughed. "Sounds more like a jackass play of ol' Ramsey's than it does like the son that's startin' out to bleed the world."

"I'm not manhandling kids. Ed, you cut that mob loose on the boy. You didn't learn a play like that at the Judah House." He turned to leave the table.

Ed Carson put out a hand to hold him a few moments longer. "Wait a shake, Coe, I got one last thing to say. I never played no favorites 'tween you and Jewel. I took this job with Guthrie 'cause Jewel asked me to. Only just had it a few days. Coe, do you know what Kingsley is sayin' about the death of that crooked gambler, Mitch Kibby?"

Coe felt tension back of the query. He didn't intend to place his cards face-up for Carson to read, for despite the age in his muscles, and the absence of a weapon from his hip, Ed Carson was still dangerous.

"Kingsley is saying Guthrie had Mitch killed because he was too loose with his tongue," Coe answered.

"Uh-huh, that he was tolled to a certain spot by a note. Has Horace Kingsley told you about that note?"

Coe hated to lie to his old friend, but there was dynamite in the question. "He mentioned it," was his guarded reply.

Carson's eyes had sharpened to steel.

"Since you know about the note," he said, "there's nothin' more for us to talk about. Only this. That advice you give me about flankin' myself with swift men wasn't needed. I know plenty about the war tactics of Horace Kingsley and I won't be caught nappin'. Havin' you in his camp tightens things."

Coe breathed deeply to loosen the tension in his throat. He dared not weaken his position with a question regarding the note. "I'm sorry to be lined up against you, Ed," he said. "The years of drilling you gave me are going to be a boomerang."

"We'll see," was all Ed Carson said.

Coe, who had been restless to end the talk, now lingered. Carson pulled his hat tight over his forehead and walked away. Coe left the restaurant and headed for the Double Eagle.

Carson had not stated things straight when he said he played no favorites between Coe and Jewel. The red-headed girl had always been his special interest. But his respect for Coe had increased with the years, and he'd come to talk over the Judah House problems with him man to man. Jewel Manse had always remained the pale-checked, auburn-curved little girl. In this fight that now loomed he would not turn the power of his cool reasoning upon her as he would upon Coe.

III

THE spacious front room of the Double Eagle was mirrored, and hauntingly shadowed. Coe recognized the sleek atmosphere. In one corner was a small intimate bar, backed with gleaming glasses. Games of chance were mostly idle at this hour. It was all familiar, yet it was very different. The Judah House had been infused with the personality of its owner. Coe glanced at the cold splendor of this room and wondered if the guests sensed the lack of spirit.

His name gained him instant respect. "Coe Judah to see Horace Kingsley," he told the spotless bartender.

The man started, then extended his hand. "Mind shaking, Mr. Judah? My brother

had four hundred dollars in your safe when your father was robbed and killed. He lost the receipt Ramsey Judah had given him, but it was on the books so you paid it. I'd like the pleasure of shaking hands with you."

"Is Kingsley in?"

The bartender blinked. Coe had touched his hand briefly, without warmth. "Yes sir," he said. "Alec, tell Mr. Kingsley Mr. Coe Judah is here to see him."

Coe walked into the richly furnished office. Kingsley said he was glad to see him showing no signs of his rough handling of the day.

"But for you, I'd probably still be blinking back stars," Coe replied evenly.

Kingsley made a fine show of bluff geniality. He swept aside any idea of gratitude. His cheeks crinkled in a grin. Coe was forced to admire his cleverness, the man seemed almost genuine.

"I wouldn't have barged into that fight to help a common tough," he admitted. "I saw you trying to angle that kid to safety inside the hall, and it was like seeing old Ramsey taking a hand. Ramsey was always for the under dog, and his word was as good as his bond."

Coe wondered how far he would have to travel before men would not know of Ramsey Judah. "Helping the under dog never got him any place," he said.

Kingsley frowned. He looked hard into Coe's face. The frown grew as he studied Coe's frozen jaw line. He leaned across his desk.

"Listen, Judah, shake that bitterness out of your system!" Then he suddenly laughed, a clipped sound without mirth. "I suppose with your father dead, your vaults empty and everybody out to use you, that advice sounds pretty weak."

He spread his powerful hands. "Here I am planning to cash in on your name. When I saw you pitch into that fight today, my first thought was how I could use you against Clark Guthrie—I admit it." He paused. "It's men trying to do things like that to you that's burned that bitterness into you. I don't like to see it there, Judah.

I'm ashamed that I was getting set to collect off you."

Coe knew gamblers; he had watched the cleverest men that had ever split a deck. He believed Kingsley was gambling now. Seeing that his play of the afternoon had been tagged, he was now working from a different approach.

"We may as well talk a little, Kingsley," Coe said. "I won't be of much value in your fight against Guthrie, I have nothing against him. I have a hunch, and I'm riding it to a finish—but it's only a hunch."

Kingsley nodded. "I was certain you had no proof, or you'd have clamped down. I don't believe Mitch Kibby was lying when he told me about the heavy losses Clark Guthrie suffered at gambling. He and another man were working through Mitch. I think Mitch tried blackmail, and when it failed, came to me for a pay-off. We were coming to an agreement when he was bumped off.

"I was going to pay for information that would establish that Clark Guthrie gambled heavily and *lost* while he was with the Judah House. I was then going to use that proof to make Guthrie sell his place to me cheap." Kingsley shook his head. "Not the way your father did business, but every man works according to his own methods."

"Your way suits me well enough." Coe paused and said quietly: "There was a note to Mitch Kibby."

"How did you know that?"

"There was a note, wasn't there?"

"Yes, signed by Jewel Manse."

COE JUDAH had been seated but now he rose and placing his hands on the desk, leaned close to Horace Kingsley. "Go on."

Kingsley continued. "Mitch Kibby was in love with Jewel Manse, but so was every other young fellow that saw her. Jewel had refused to see Kibby. Then was when Mitch came to me with this talk about Guthrie being crooked.

"He asked me where Guthrie got the money to open his swell place when he'd been so hard run for cash while with the

Judah House. Mitch was cautious after that talk, I think he was afraid. When he got the note, he brought it to me. He said he didn't think Jewel wrote it, still he wanted to hope. He left the note with me, saying so long as it was in my hands they would not dare kill him, for it would be proof they had tolled him out. Mitch wasn't a fool."

Kingsley took a deep breath. "But he didn't realize how desperate Guthrie was. Mitch was ambushed when he went to keep that appointment. His pockets were turned inside out—looking for the note. When I got word of Mitch's death, I sent for Guthrie. He came and I showed him the note."

Kingsley waved his hand to a wall safe to the left of the desk. "I took it out of there and replaced it. I worked the combination with Guthrie at my shoulder. I was like Mitch, I didn't figure Guthrie so desperate. The next morning Ed Carson, the old trouble-man for Judah House, came and asked to see the note. I went to the safe and it was gone. Stolen.

"Carson had just taken over his job with Guthrie and it was my first encounter with him. He claimed the story of the note was a lie I had thought up to make it look like Guthrie had ordered Mitch Kibby killed."

"But you had showed that note to Clark Guthrie."

"Yes. He and Carson now claim the note never existed. Guthrie says I threatened him with it, and Ed Carson says when he came for a talk, I awakened and claimed it had been stolen."

"You threw this fancy funeral for Kibby to center attention on the murder of your gambler. What kind of a man did you figure Mitch was?"

Kingsley shrugged. "Crooked as a dog's hind leg. Everything he said about Clark Guthrie could have been a lie."

"Only they were not lies," Coe Judah said emphatically. "Guthrie wouldn't have bumped him off if there hadn't been fire back of the smoke. When Kibby got scared and kept to cover, the note was used for a bait." Coe looked straight at Kingsley.

"You understand Jewel Manse had nothing to do with that note."

"I never thought she had. I told Kibby so the evening he gave me the note and went to keep the appointment."

After that, Coe let Kingsley do the talking. An hour passed. He rose to leave. A thin smile was at his lips. "The word of a crooked gambler and a hunch are weak toe-holds for a fight," he said.

"We have a lot more than that, Judah. There's the old adage: Murder will out."

"There's another that says honesty is the best policy. I don't take stock in those old saws."

THE following evening, Coe followed Ed Carson to a large stone house, vine-covered and surrounded by a carefully tended lawn. Carson had not been hard to trail for seemingly he did not consider his movements of interest. Coe worked in among the vines at the window as Carson entered a large living room, hat held awkwardly, runover boots shifting nervously. Ed had always been uneasy in the presence of finery, and this room was richly furnished.

Clark Guthrie entered, white hair combed in a thin part. He had aged. Worry was etched deeper now than at the trial. "Conscience," thought Coe, "is a funny thing. I'm glad I haven't any."

The window was open several inches and the words of the two carried. Ed Carson told Guthrie he had been unable to get a lead on young Judah's business in San Francisco.

"Except," he finished dryly, "that he still hangs to the belief, Guthrie, that you ribbed the fellow that killed his father."

Clark Guthrie's voice crept higher. "Coe Judah and Horace Kingsley combined will ruin me! Are you going to let that happen, Carson? I lost face through that talk circulated by Mitch Kibby; then Kingsley staged that disgusting funeral. You must protect me against such things, Carson. Put on as big a force of men as you need."

"Gun battles sometimes hurt more than they help. Ramsey Judah used to say, 'Let

your enemies howl their lungs out, they'll trip themselves in the long run.'"

"Ed, this is not the Judah House! Horace Kingsley is a dangerous enemy, he must be met with fire. And Coe Judah, what do you plan to do about him?"

"Let him get a bellyful of Kingsley, then have another talk with him."

Guthrie's voice cracked. "Just planning to *talk* with him?"

Carson's reply came dryly. "Maybe you got a better suggestion."

"I pay you to act, not talk!"

"Maybe you figure I'm too old for this fight, Guthrie."

"If you quit now, the town would say Coe Judah had drawn you over to his side."

"I could be called out of San Francisco." Ed Carson's voice held a note that Coe recognized as dangerous.

"I can't risk it," Guthrie snapped. "Besides I need your level head in this mess."

A new voice cut in coolly, and the sound of it made the breath catch in Coe Judah's throat. Jewel Manse was speaking with affectionate severity.

"Ed Carson, sit down in that chair. Uncle Clark, your nerves are getting jumpy, I'm ashamed of talk like this. Of course we three are going to work together."

COE dared to lift his head until he could see the girl. Her fingers were brushing Carson's sleeve, her pale face calm. Her presence in the room was like a cooling breeze. Ed Carson sat down and dropped his hat to the floor beside him.

"I won't leave this room until you two are behaving sensibly," Jewel Manse told them.

Guthrie said wearily, "Coe Judah has come to town and he's hitched up with Kingsley."

The girl's back was to Coe, but he saw her start. When she spoke, however, her voice was unruffled. "I expected he would follow you, Uncle Clark. Don't worry, he's already done his worst."

Ed Carson cut in abruptly. "Which shows you don't know Coe Judah."

Jewel looked at him intently. "Perhaps I know him better than any one alive. Ed, I want you to find Coe and tell him I wish to talk with him. Since he's had time to see what his stupid mistrust has done to us all, he might—" Her hands fell to her side and her voice drifted. She stood in a path of light that brought her hair to a rich beauty. "Ed, find Coe immediately for me."

"That's a good idea," Guthrie snapped. "He's a surly pup, but Jewel is mighty persuasive."

"I ain't in favor of it," Carson said bluntly.

Jewel placed a hand on his shoulder. "If I could shake Coe from this stubborn prejudice, and bring him over to our side of this fight. Horace Kingsley would have to close his door. With Coe's support, we could establish another Judah House!"

Carson shook his head. "It would only be a ghost house. Jewel, you only knew Coe Judah the kid; he is a man now."

"Is he so much changed?" she asked quickly. "Did he ask about me?"

"When I mentioned you, he said we'd talk of other things. He's thinner, but it ain't from wastin' away through love, Jewel. It's the thinness that comes with iron muscles. He's a man a heap like his father was, and for all ol' Ramsey's easy ways, he was a tough gent in a fight. You won't be able to handle him like you think. He'll look at you with them gray eyes of his, and see right through you. Coe Judah is a man to be reckoned with in this coming fight."

The girl had been stroking his arm, but her fingers became still. "You are a fighting man, Ed, and you judge everyone that way. Despite all Coe's stubbornness, he loves me. I want you to bring him here to see me."

Carson rose so suddenly he shook her fingers from his arm. "It ain't no use for me to try to match words with you, Jewel. I'll fetch Coe—if he'll come."

"He'll come," Guthrie said with assurance. "Through him, Jewel may be able to find out what deviltry Kingsley is up to

next." Guthrie's face was coldly smug.

Ed Carson cast him a grim smile. "I hope the scheme works."

IV

THE next morning Ed Carson stopped Coe as he came from an office building. Their greeting was brief. Coe listened quietly to Ed's message.

"Why does Jewel wish to see me?"

Carson's anger flared. "Maybe she still loves you."

"I hardly think so."

"Then you're wrong! Jewel's had plenty of chances to take up with rich men since she come to San Francisco, but she's held off, waitin' for you to wake up. Will you go up to the house at eleven?"

"No, nor at any other hour."

Carson sighed as for a job over and finished. "Have you and Kingsley come to any agreement?"

"We understand each other."

"Are you workin' in Kingsley's pay, or just ridin' that damn hunch of yours?"

"I'm working toward the end that will most help Coe Judah. You can't expect me to discuss my plans with you, Ed. So long."

Coe walked away; he hadn't wanted to face Carson any longer. Despite the fact that he had refused any support to Horace Kingsley, he knew he was in this fight between the two big gambling houses. Kingsley might be a square-shooter, after a fashion. Or he might be an out and out crook. Clark Guthrie might be as honest as Ramsey Judah had always thought him. There was no actual proof that the old manager had worked through that Texan to have Ramsey killed.

Coe had gone only a half block when Jewel Manse stepped from a store doorway into his path.

"I saw you talking to Ed," she said. "I could see he didn't succeed."

She spoke calmly, but her fingers were tightly entwined. She was standing very close, her brown eyes searching his face. It seemed to Coe his heart ceased to beat.

"You refused to call at the house and

talk with me," she charged in her rich, cool tones.

He nodded. "I refused," he said, glad that his voice did not betray him. "I thought that would be the easiest way for both of us."

"You are thinner," she said. "Coe, you have suffered, too, haven't you?" She touched his arm with two tapering fingers. "Won't you come home with me and talk this terrible thing over? Coe, your prejudice is ruining our lives—and yours."

He was able to meet her eyes, even to smile. "It is more than a prejudice, Jewel. When that man that shot my father was hanged, the death of Ramsey Judah was only partly avenged."

Her color drained away. "Coe," she whispered, "I can't believe you have completely changed. I haven't changed. I still love you."

Coe felt the strength draining from his body. If her fingers should tighten on his arm, he would follow her. Her whisper had held more warmth than he had ever heard in her voice. Her eyes had lost their old easy assurance; they were pleading with him. But in the next instant Jewel Manse threw away her victory with a few words.

"Join with me and Uncle Clark and Ed, Coe. We can build together!"

The thin smile returned to his lips. Her talk of love had been to hide this last. "No," he said, and removed her fingers from his arm.

A FEW evenings later, Coe was struck with the high play the Double Eagle was getting at its gambling tables. Gold was flowing in a wide belt across the glistening counters. Some players grew tense over their losses, others shrugged. At midnight five roughly clad miners entered by the front door and asked to see Horace Kingsley. They slid heavy packs to the floor and waited in a compact group.

A man drinking at the bar lifted his glass to them. "Here's a mile up the crick, boys. Join me."

The five shook their heads. A messenger said Kingsley would see them in his office.

They heaved up the heavy packs and followed to the back. All play ceased, a gust of excitement swept the room.

"A strike!" ran in a fascinated whisper.

When the five men trailed back, their packs no longer sagged. They refused all offers to celebrate. Their tired, unshaven faces told the room nothing. They left for a hotel and bed.

Later, Kingsley drifted through his gambling house. He brushed aside talk of the five men, laughing at the suggestion the packs had contained gold.

"Just friends of mine," was his explanation.

Coe watched the crowd's mounting excitement. Funny thing, a gambling crowd. Tonight this one was wilder than usual. Coe wondered if Kingsley sensed it. The Double Eagle was making a killing, but there was danger here.

Kingsley drifted to the bar where Coe stood. "Thanks for drinking with me, Judah. I'd about decided you were going to play a lone hand."

"I am playing a lone hand, Kingsley. Nice evening you're having."

Kingsley glanced nervously about and Coe knew he sensed the hair-trigger quality of his crowd. "Damn those five miners, why couldn't they have Injuned in the back way? Banks were built to store gold, not the vaults of gambling houses. Couldn't refuse, though. It looked like rich stuff, and the good turn I do those five tonight might mean a lot later. But I don't like the way the room keeps buzzing about it."

"Nor I," Coe said dryly.

Kingsley snapped his fingers for the bartender to serve him some straight whisky. "How about you staying around tonight, Judah? I'd feel better if you kept a watch with me; together we could outguess this crowd."

Coe gave him the thin smile. "I can't convince you I'm not working with you, can I, Kingsley? Or that I'm not to be trusted?"

Kingsley grinned. "Judah, if you were really crooked, you'd be hugging the information tight, waiting for a chance to

cash in." He kept the grin, but his eyes were nervous. "I had to store that gold, but I don't like such heavy responsibilities. How about you sticking around tonight?"

"No," Coe answered and walked away.

COE left the gambling room and circled to the alley. He had a hunch something was going to happen, and he had grown up with men that regarded a hunch as sacred. Even his father had had superstitions. If a one-eyed man ever bucked his games, Ramsey Judah immediately set up drinks to the room to break the evil spell.

San Francisco was the great city of the west, a town of unquenchable activity. Its population ranged from respectable business men to professional killers. Law had been able to put down the first wave of crime that had ridden on the heels of the great gold strike, but a man's death could still be bought for a song. San Francisco had its quiet, home avenues, and its planked muddy streets; its churches, and its gambling houses.

Coe wondered who the Double Eagle's protective man was, and how thoroughly he was organized. He recalled nights when he had sat in a back room of the Judah House with a rifle across his knees, and how the cat-like tread of Ed Carson had been heard until daylight. It had been hard to catch Ed napping.

There had been the night Ramsey was murdered and the House robbed. The murderer had been a substantial Texas cowman and Ed had not feared Ramsey's ability to convince the Texan that the play of the evening had been on the square. Ed had not known that the Texan had seen records of shady deals. Ed had not gone to the office to see how Ramsey Judah was coming along until two hours later. Then Ramsey was dead and the vaults robbed.

Ed had caught the killer and then spent all his time trying to force the man to reveal the hiding place of the gold. On the day of his death, Coe had gone to him for a quiet talk. The Texan had shown his first sign of weakening as he looked into Coe Judah's eyes.

"I don't like tearing down a son's trust in his father, but Ramsey Judah crooked me out of eight thousand dollars. I saw a record of the pay-off to the middleman."

The fellow revealed details that convinced Coe he had seen the records he claimed. Coe roused now from his bitter contemplations. He was never able to keep his mind free of these thoughts for long. His father's death had not been avenged with the hanging of the Texan. There yet remained the man who had planned it all.

The alley was quiet, and the play in the gambling house was rapidly falling away. Coe entered by a side door and kept to a shadowed corner. As he had left the alley, he had noted a light in Kingsley's office; now he saw the owner of the Double Eagle was not about. Carefully he went over the faces of the straggling patrons. He saw several pockets with sagging bulges and two men with waist guns. They might be part of the Double Eagle protection. There was nothing definite here, but Coe's hunch was burning higher.

He slid from the gambling house and walked to his hotel. He nodded goodnight to the clerk. In his room he slid from his light shirt, selected a dark flannel and strapped on his big gun. He took his father's rifle and left the hotel by the back way. He stepped into a black alley and walked swiftly toward the Double Eagle.

His caution increased as he approached his goal. The vaults of the gambling house were crammed with gold, and to be caught skulking in the rear alley would not be healthy. He had no clear plan of action. He was not here to help Horace Kingsley save his gold. He wasn't sure Kingsley wouldn't plan a robbery to beat those five men out of the fortune they had stored with him. He was here because of a hunch. There was no time to analyze further, for a shadow was moving along the wall of the Double Eagle.

COE crouched and waited. It was a protection man trying the two back windows. This would probably be done every half-hour now until daylight. The fellow

walked toward another window, shadows swallowed him, but Coe could hear his tread. Then came a sudden, sickening thud. Coe cocked his gun soundlessly.

Dead silence continued.

Two protection men came from the back door into the alley, and one spoke softly: "Marsh?" They were checking on their companion. Darker shadows received them—and then followed a swift burst of action. A shout was muted by the swish of a club. A loose board in the alley rattled as a body collapsed. The action died and only short, heavy breathing continued. Four men walked to the back door that had been left open. Three entered the gambling house, one ran soundlessly down the alley.

"So far, so good," Coe thought. It seemed rather a simple thing to steal gold.

The fourth man returned with two horses. The thieves must be counting on moving the gold out of town. Steps awoke inside the gambling house. The heaviness of the tread hinted of a weighty load. The three men came and they whispered as they fell to loading their loot onto one of the horses. They had found a guard by the vault as they expected. He had been forced to open up. One cursed under his breath as he told of getting Horace Kingsley in his office.

Coe clubbed his rifle and straightened. Four to one was large odds, but the horses would act as a shield, and his enemies would think there were others. The horses were swung around.

"Lay low till we get you word. If anybody sees you leave the alley, we'll take care of them!"

Swiftly Coe Judah drew the rifle back. It struck squarely, for the man reaching for a stirrup went down like a log. Coe leaped under the horse's belly and started working his short gun. He dodged under cover of stunned surprise to the protection of the other animal. That was the horse carrying a fortune in gold; he had to keep track of him.

One of the trio staggered under Coe's fire and a high scream cut from his lips. The other two had their guns out and

crashing. Sound shuddered against the buildings, swept out over the sleeping street. Coe ceased firing and struggled to keep a hold on the rearing pack horse. The animal's body saved him from bullets.

"The Double Eagle!" rose a shout in the street. "The alley!"

The two thieves made a last attempt to recover the gold, but the desperate need of haste made their aim wild. Coe snapped two return shots, but they were guess work because of the plunging of the pack horse. The robbers turned and thundered down the alley.

Coe centered his attention on quieting the horse. He managed to draw the animal into a narrow space between two buildings as men burst into the alley back of the Double Eagle. It was a small leaderless mob, and their ardor for the chase was dampened by finding two fallen men on the recent battle scene. Coe patted the horse's nose and walked him deeper into the thick blackness of the narrow passageway. He could not return to the alley at his rear, and the street ahead might any second burst to life. He must not be caught with that load of gold.

HE CAME to a blocking of the way. A pile of garbage left him barely room to get by on foot. Police whistles were shrilling now. Coe pulled out his knife and cut at the strings holding the gold. One by one the heavy sacks fell to the ground. He buried them in the pile of rubbish. He led the horse back toward the alley, tied his reins over his neck and whacked him with his gun. The animal crashed away at a gallop.

Coe slid from the narrow passage between the buildings and flattened into a doorway. Men came running to pursue the horse, and Coe fell in among them. He finished reloading his gun and walked back toward the back door of the Double Eagle.

A big policeman was in charge; other lawmen were scouring the alley. The thief Coe had struck with the rifle was coming to, but the other man was dead.

"Is it a fight between alley toughs or an

attempted robbery?" Coe asked the policeman.

The man was dragging the wounded thief to a sitting position, shooting questions at him. He turned at Coe's cool voice, squinting through the dim light offered by the lamp from the hall of the Double Eagle.

"That looks like a bullet mark across your cheek, and where's your hat?"

It was because of the hat that Coe had taken the chance on returning. That Stetson had his name stamped in the band and it had been knocked off during the fight. "That is a bullet mark, I tried to stop a couple of men a few moments back. I think the second shot removed my hat."

"That's a thin story."

Coe nodded sorrowfully. "I agree with you, but you might speak to Horace Kingsley about me. I'm Coe Judah and he asked me to stick around the Double Eagle until morning. I went to my hotel, got armored up, and was returning when I met two men in a big hurry."

The policeman grinned. "I heard you was in town, Judah."

"Now, will you tell me if this was just a fight or—"

"Robbery! Safes cleaned, Kingsley slugged!"

Another officer came back to say they'd caught one of the fleeing pair. He looked searchingly at Coe. "Aren't you Coe Judah?"

Coe nodded. "If I'd arrived a few moments earlier, I might have done Kingsley some good. Wonder if I could see him?"

"They took him to the hospital."

Coe began moving about the ground, and the law made no move to hamper his private investigation. He was looking for the rifle he had dropped after downing the first robber. It had evidently been found and held. He didn't think they'd be able to trace it. His hat was found and carried to him.

Coe smiled dryly as he returned to his hotel. He hadn't done so well, he had left his hat and gun at the scene of the robbery. Maybe stealing gold wasn't so simple after all. The fact that he had been forced to

use his name to recover the hat didn't please him. He didn't mind pulling a crooked deal, but he hated to use the name of Judah as a cover.

Coe returned by the back door to his room. A chilly rain had begun to fall and he shivered as he puled off his muddy boots. The rain and the milling mob would obliterate tracks of the pack horse he had led into the space between the buildings. The dampness would hide any sign of disturbance of the garbage pile. The gold was safe.

Coe tried to sleep, but his eyes were dry and open as daylight came. He rose and looked over drab chimneys. He felt no elation over the fact that only he knew where a fortune lay hidden. He hadn't stolen Kingsley's gold, he wouldn't go into any man's vaults and rob them. He had been fortunate enough to recover the gold from the real thieves. Kingsley hadn't been killed, only slugged. He might have planned the entire deal himself to clean out the five miners that had stored their stuff with him. It would be a rare joke on him if that were true. Kingsley would have had to be slugged to make the thing look real.

There was another angle that kept returning to Coe. Horace Kingsley would possibly not recover from this financial blow; then the Double Eagle would go to the highest bidder. That bidder might be Clark Guthrie.

V

COE ate breakfast without relish. He felt curiously apathetic. Ed Carson came into the restaurant before he had finished, and he wore the old holster that he had laid aside these last few years. Uninvited, he sat down. Something of the tigerishness of his younger years seemed to be about him. His eyes were remote as they fixed on Coe.

"The Double Eagle was robbed in the early hours. Kingsley was near killed."

"Yes?"

"He's completely ruined. There was a fortune in his vaults."

"I suppose you and Guthrie are able to bear up under this calamity."

"I'm never glad to hear of a gamblin' house bein' cleaned out. It establishes the wrong ideas."

"I suppose such things do make your job tougher."

Carson's hands on the table were white-knuckled. "You beir' a friend of Kingsley's, I thought to find you in a lather. And once havin' your own safes tapped, I reckoned you'd feel bad for another feller in the same spot."

"I know how Kingsley feels this mornin'." Coe's lips tightened. "Has the law any clues?"

"The wounded thief claims he was workin' under Tom Rand, Guthrie's head protection man until I come. But that don't mean Clark Guthrie ordered the deal. Rand is a wild one, he might have figured to clean up on his own."

"I'd expect you to uphold Guthrie. Did they find the gold, or Rand?"

"The wounded man says it was high-jacked by another crowd, and there's sign to back up that story. Tom Rand escaped. The law is questioning Clark Guthrie; he says he knew nothin' of the job. And that's possible, Coe."

"Ed, if you stick to that stand, you'll be beating a lonesome drum."

"It's better to beat a lone drum than charge a crime against an innocent man. Don't talk against Guthrie, Coe, till we know more."

"There is nothing I could say against him, never has been."

Ed Carson rose wearily and walked from the restaurant. Coe sat drawing marks on the table with his spoon. Kingsley was ruined. Clark Guthrie was being questioned, he would stick rigidly to the story that Rand had worked without his knowledge. Rand would never be found. The law again had nothing on Guthrie.

Coe met Jewel Manse as he was leaving the restaurant.

"Uncle Clark wants to talk with you," she said. "The law has finished questioning him." Her face was strained and deathly white.

"I can do him no good, Jewel," Coe said

gently. He looked away rather than into her eyes.

"You can not refuse this," she replied.

"You would be a coward to do so. Uncle Clark is not guilty. You can't refuse, Coe."

"I can't refuse if you insist, Jewel. I will go."

"Now?"

"Now."

HE WALKED rapidly toward a cab. He half-expected she would follow, but she did not. He found Clark Guthrie in the big, cool house waiting for him. There was an indestructible quality about the man. As soon as they were seated he spoke with sureness and swiftness.

"Coe, I had nothing to do with this robbery, no more than I did with the looting of the vaults of the Judah House. This wounded thief says Tom Rand, my protection man, planned the thing. I can't blame the law for questioning me. Rand was my man, and I was at war with Horace Kingsley."

"There is no proof against you so far, and Rand is probably on his way to Mexico by now."

"I do not fear Rand; he would be the one man that could clear me completely of this charge. But I know you do not believe that. Coe, I sent for you because I am going to tell you things I should have told you at your father's death."

"I had been gambling and keeping the fact from Ramsey. I lost heavily. I was saved through an investment in a gold mine in California. It was on this mining money that I opened up in San Francisco. Mitch Kibby handled my gambling for me, and he followed me here and tried to blackmail me. Mitch handled bets for two of the old Judah House men, and he knew we had both lost heavily. He thought I had robbed your father in order to open up this San Francisco place, and figured I'd be easy blood money. But I have papers to prove how well my mine paid."

Coe fought against the power of Clark Guthrie's eyes. He labored to keep his thoughts cool. He tried not to be swayed

by the thin, driving tones of his father's old manager. There was a terrible strain in the man's eyes, but back of that tension there was a steadily burning light.

"Go on," was all Coe said to him.

"Mitch Kibby went to Kingsley with his story of my gambling and my losses. Kingsley, too, thought I had greater guilt than gambling on my shoulders, and worked with Kibby. There was a note." He paused to wet his lips. "Signed by Jewel, but you must know—"

"I know Jewel had nothing to do with any of this!"

He nodded, relieved. "Kingsley showed that note to me, and I told Carson about it. Then when it was stolen, I lied and said it had never existed. Ed thought it would be better that way."

"If you had papers to prove this California gold, why did you fear Mitch Kibby enough to have him killed?"

"I didn't have him killed. And I don't think Kingsley did it just to frame me, because Kibby would have been more valuable to him alive."

Coe met his glittering eyes. Sweat was streaming from the man's white forehead. "That's why I sent for you, Coe." His lips were constantly dry now. "I don't expect you to believe me, you quit believing me long ago. I thought you were dead wrong to claim there had been a plot behind your father's death. Now I am not so sure."

"Go on, Guthrie."

"That second man that gambled with me, that other old Judah House man, he lost as I did. Everything. We were both ruined. Now lately I have proof he has again been gambling—and lost a fortune. I know how cruel a thing circumstantial evidence can be, but I ask, Coe, where did he get this second fortune?"

"Who was the man?"

"Ed Carson."

COE wanted to reach for the tense throat. "Guthrie," he said, "you almost had me believing you. You shouldn't have selected for your victim a man like Ed Carson."

Guthrie was suddenly weary. "Mitch Kibby knew Ed gambled with me, and lost. But Mitch is dead now, and Ed is safe, but for me. I don't say he killed Mitch, I don't know. But he lost a second fortune."

"And he might have had money invested in a California gold mine," Coe said dryly.

Guthrie was not angered. "That gold mine is the only part of my words I can prove." He talked doggedly on against the stone wall of Coe's face. "Carson could have sent the note and signed Jewel's name. After Mitch Kibby had talked, he stayed to cover, the note brought him out. Then these miners deposited their gold. Thieves saw a way of enriching themselves and leaving a trail pointing to me. Their plans were thwarted, but the dim trail still led to me."

"Have you gone to the police with this—story?"

"No, Mitch is dead. There is only my word that Ed Carson lost a fortune at gambling."

"But this second loss, you can prove it?"

"No, not satisfactorily for a jury."

Coe rose. "Then your words have nothing more substantial behind them than blue sky. Are you finished this talk, Guthrie?"

"I was finished before I began. Jewel insisted I give you this chance to right the wrong you have done us."

There was no parting word. Coe walked stiffly to the door and let himself out. Clark Guthrie watched him go, silent and unbeaten.

Coe kept to himself during the day, straining to think clearly. It could be as Guthrie said. It could be! That Texan who had killed Ramsey Judah could have been brought to the murder point by Ed Carson. The old gunman would have known better than Guthrie how to handle men like the Texan. And this last deal—Carson could be back of Tom Rand.

But Clark Guthrie was clever at telling a story; it had been his life's job to gain men's confidences. He hadn't blustered as he talked.

Hours of thought left Coe cold and uncertain. Some moments he believed it was

a great wall of lies Guthrie had erected, then the steady, thin voice of the old man would din in his ears, and he would lose his sureness. He went to his room by the back door of the hotel as evening came. He sat down by the window to wait for complete darkness. One thing Guthrie's words had proved: the innocence of Horace Kingsley in any of the plotting.

Coe was waiting for night that he might return the stolen gold. He was ashamed that he had allowed his instinct to sweep him into hiding it. Under the pressing moments in the blood-stained alley, he had had no second to deliberate. He had acted without reasoning, and ever since he had cursed himself for that.

He was sitting quietly in the darkening room when a tap fell on the door. When he did not answer, the knob was turned. A shadowy figure entered.

"Coe," Ed Carson said grimly, "I want to talk with you."

VI

"**WE** BETTER have a light," Carson said and struck a match. After lighting the lamp, he lowered the blind. His face was lined and set with decision. His eyes were utterly cold as he said slowly:

"Where is the Kingsley gold?"

His hand went to his holster, with something like his once-great speed.

"I know you have it," Carson continued. "Your father's rifle was at the scene, you went back for your hat. I've waited all day for you to send for me, I kept thinkin' you'd weaken on the deal. Horace Kingsley sent for me to come to the hospital; he wanted me to try and round down his gold. I took the job."

"We will call the law," Coe said. He had no thought of denying the charge. This was a new Ed Carson, one he had glimpsed in the old days when the protection man for the House of Judah had stepped into action. There was no mercy in him.

Brittle moments ticked away. Carson began with slow words to break the silence. "You ain't askin' me to spare you?"

You ain't suggestin' some story that'll serve as whitewash?"

"No. I felt Kingsley might be in the plot when I took his gold. I have since found out he wasn't, so I am waiting here for night—to return it." He laughed. "I'll admit it's a slim story."

"How'd you find out Kingsley wasn't in the plot?"

There was a lot of steel in the question. In a flash Coe harked back to the thin tones of Clark Guthrie, the charges he had made. He could not explain why he lied to Ed Carson. "I talked with the wounded thief. He said Kingsley wasn't to be in on the split."

Carson accepted the words. "So you want the law? Damn it, Coe, I've spent the day, hour by hour, buildin' up the belief that you're a crook. But settin' here talkin' to you, I know better. You ain't no more a thief than ol' Ramsey was." He got hastily to his feet. "Where is that gold? I'll take it to Kingsley with some story that'll puff me up as a trailer."

Relief surged over Coe. It could be done. And he was not a thief, he had been going to return the gold. The name of Judah would be saved. Carson seemed suddenly in a hurry and Coe moved hastily to buckle on his gun for the trip. They were in the hall moving quietly for the back door before Coe again recalled the charge Guthrie had made against this old gunman.

The alley was still, the night air cool. Their feet whispered along almost soundlessly. Coe stopped short.

"We are being followed!"

Carson laughed softly. "Your nerves are jumpy."

"There was a stir by that building to our left."

Carson moved over a step or two. "A cat," he said.

Coe had seen no cat, but he moved on down the alley beside Ed Carson. His nerves were keyed high, perhaps he was hearing things. He said no more to his companion, for he felt strangely ill at ease. He was sensing the sinister power of as

great a gunman as the West had ever known.

COE came to the opening that led between the two buildings. Here was where he had buried the gold. The town was in the lull that preceded its burst to night life. The backs of both buildings were dark, but from the front of one came sound.

"What we stoppin' here for?" Carson asked sharply.

It came to Coe then that old gunman was expecting to be led to the outskirts of the city. To handle that stolen gold with the town awake was dangerous, but it was too late now to back down.

"Here's where I hid it," Coe whispered.

Carson swore. "No wonder the law couldn't find it. Where is it?"

Coe led him into the alley. They both paused at the rubbish heap. Carson suddenly stiffened and his breath tightened. He understood.

"Dig!" he ordered. In that single word, his iron control slipped.

Coe stood motionless, his nerves cool now under the press of a moment. "Ed," he whispered, "there is a man at the mouth of this opening."

"Dig!" repeated Carson, and this time it was a command. He gave no attention to Coe's warning. That was not like the Carson, Coe knew, the man who moved cautiously to a climax.

For another second neither of the men moved. Coe's mind cleared for action. It was more than a hunch that told him he was in the company of death. The greed in Carson's voice was a warning of peril. Carson aimed to have the gold for himself!

"Dig it up yourself," Coe snapped. "You and your accomplice!"

His hand was dropping for his gun as he spoke, but Ed Carson had been guarding against such a move. He swung his weight against Coe's right arm, sending a low call for assistance. From the mouth of the narrow space, a second man leaped at Coe. This pair did not want gun fire. Coe

twisted his wrist and pressed trigger once before the weapon was wrested from him. The explosion was not loud, because a human body muted the sound. A groan answered, but both men still bore in.

Coe's foot slipped on the rubbish and he swayed. The strength against him slammed him to earth. He felt the blow of a clubbed gun slide off his shoulder. He wrapped his arms around a pair of knees and toppled a man down beside him. His fingers touched an iron bar in the rubbish and he swung it for a club. The man over him relaxed and fell back.

"We got him!" Coe panted up at the man left. His breathing was too strained for his voice to be recognized. The fellow towering over Coe dropped down on the rubbish, cursing a bullet wound in his thigh. Coe swung the iron bar and the man folded quietly.

Coe ran to the front of the building from which sound was issuing. Four men crowded about him. His face and clothes were bloody. One ran for the law and the other three followed him to the rubbish heap. A lantern was brought, and as its light flickered over the narrow space, Ed Carson sat up. He whipped his gun and climbed to his feet.

"I'll kill the first man that moves!"

Coe's gun was somewhere in the rubbish. It would be death to walk into Carson's weapon. But the law had been swift to respond. From the alley, toward which Carson was backing, came a command for him to drop his gun.

Ed Carson swung into that certain death with a burst of profanity. His gun roared twice, and he fired a final shot as he sank to the ground. Coe walked to him, taking the lantern.

"I underrated you," Carson said hoarsely. "Your hunch was right, the Texan was only a tool. I couldn't stomach bumpin' you off cold, Coe—though I shoulda. You was too dangerous."

A moment later he was dead.

The law turned from the dead to the living. The prisoner just rousing to life was Tom Rand. He said Ed Carson was

the man who had planned the robbery of the Double Eagle. Coe walked to the rubbish pile and began to dig. He brought out the sacks of gold and nodded for the law to take charge.

When the officer holding the lantern learned that this was the stolen gold, he leaned close.

"How come you knew where this was hid?"

Coe looked at him very steadily, sure of his ground now, certain of what he must say.

"I'll tell you the whole story, you and Horace Kingsley." Coe's lips twisted to a thin smile. "The night the gold was deposited in the Double Eagle vaults, Kingsley asked me to help guard it."

COE told the story to Kingsley and an officer. Horace Kingsley nodded rapidly as he talked. "Sure, I asked Judah to keep an eye on the gold," Kingsley told the puzzled lawman.

"But it looks to me like Judah forgot to mention taking it away from the thieves."

Kingsley laughed. "Judah told me he'd play a lone hand. He was in San Francisco to get the man responsible for his father's murder. He was just—holding—my gold till this man showed his hand. Wipe that frown off your face, McCoy. Judah's an honest man."

The law was relieved. The robbery was cleared up. . . . The next day, Coe walked up the path to the Guthrie home. Clark Guthrie opened the door. He was pale, but his eyes were rested. He held out his hand.

"Coe, if I'd told you the truth at first, it would have saved all of us pain. Your hunch was right, and but for the stubborn way you hung on to it, Ramsey's death would have gone unpunished."

"My stubbornness blinded me," Coe said quietly. "I wouldn't listen to you or Jewel."

"My blindness was much greater than yours. I never suspected Ed Carson, even though I knew he had been ruined through gambling."

But the step from robbery to murder is not a great one. And Carson had taken it.

They talked until Jewel came into the room. Her face was marked with the past hours. Tears were close, and Clark Guthrie did not linger as Coe stepped forward to take her outstretched hand.

"Can you forgive me, Jewel?"

She nodded, the tears coming freely. He kissed her and she clung tightly to him.

"I have nothing to forgive," she said. "I tried to weaken you by using our love, but you would not be shaken from the work you had to do. I love you more for that, Coe."

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You too may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 7, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 7, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

Midnight Moon

In your script, Mr. Playwright, guns are fired on cue, the tropical setting is painted canvas, and the cast never speaks out of turn. But come South, Mr. Playwright; dodge unrehearsed bullets through the real Everglades—and leave the curtain line to the alligators. Complete No. 1

By WILLIAM DU BOIS

Author of "Death Under Water", "The Devil's Diary", etc.

I

THE Orange Blossom Limited snored to a reluctant stop, and three men got down to the cinders of the siding deep in the Florida scrub. Three strange figures against the pitiless glare of the sun-weary day.

The first was an ash-blond giant in spotless white linen who carried his weight of bone and muscle easily. Each move betrayed the ex-halfback who has kept the silk of his body intact; the sportsman of thirty, who has hunted through the jungles of this world and found the hunting good.

The second man paused for a moment in the shade of the sleek Pullman. If he seemed slight now, it was only by comparison to the colossus who had preceded him. Oddly military in his gabardine, this individual had the air of a scholar, far removed from the strife of mankind. His fine, gray eyes, deep-set in a head fit to be stamped on a medal, were generally calm and appraising, a part of their owner's reserve; they could also sum up people—or events—in a lightning flash.

The last of the trio was by far the strangest. A powerful dark otter of a man, whose face was a copper mask under an incongruous, snap-brim Stetson. Here was a supreme example of the race that has been allowed to wither away on this continent: a pure-blooded Seminole, indomitable and eternally proud.

The Indian stooped now to toss a traveling trunk on his shoulder in one easy gesture, as the Orange Blossom roared away

into the heat mirage of afternoon. The luggage gave the group its *cachet*: rod-and-gun cases, book-bags, pigskin carryalls plastered with hotel labels from California to Cape Town.

The three men approached the box-car station in a compact group. So far, nothing had stirred. The lone hound-dog slept again beneath the baggage-truck; the half-dozen crackers, loafing in the shade, were motionless too, watching the strangers with empty and vaguely hostile eyes.

"Southern hospitality with a vengeance, Kit," murmured the ash-blond giant. "Where's that damned realtor with the car?"

The scholar in gabardine nodded toward the oyster road that wound away through the sweep of pine barrens. "The car is coming now. Mike. That's real service, this far from Broadway. As for our welcoming committee—"

He broke off as the boy charged out of the box-car with his hair wild and his blue eyes blazing, a stream-lined dynamo in faded cowboy jeans. Christopher Ames saw that the newcomer and his friend stood eye-to-eye: saw too that they had shoulders and fists to match. Ames fell back a step, for reasons far removed from cowardice. He knew there was nothing Michael liked better than a first-class brawl.

"Are you the Yankees who bought Land's End?"

"Suppose we are, son?"

"Don't call me names," said the boy—and lashed out with a left jab that snapped Mike's head back like the crack of a whip.



The instant the floodlight swept the dock,
Mike slugged Derring

THE otter-brown man dropped the trunk, and came up with both arms low—a wrestler about to spring. Christopher Ames held him back firmly.

"Sorry, Willy—not this time."

"Right," said Michael, without turning, "he's all mine."

The rest happened with the speed of a delayed thunderbolt. The ash-blond giant teased his opponent with a left to the face, deceptively light. When the boy rushed in, Mike side-stepped, and spun him neatly with a one-two above the heart. The cowboy whirled again—to meet a roundhouse punch that sent him crashing into the baggage truck, an inert mass.

The crackers loafing in the shade of the box-car had just had time to sit up sleepily. One of them now heaved to his feet and ambled down the tracks to scoop water from a slough.

Mike Towne knelt beside the boy, and wiggled his jaw between surprisingly gentle palms.

"Out for the duration," he said. "Been drinking, too—you can see that now. Smells like a backwoods still in May. Guess I should have stopped to realize—" He stood aside while the native sloshed water over the prostrate form. The boy shook his head feebly, without opening his eyes.

"Better be on your way, mister. We'll bring the rascal 'round."

"Who is he, anyway? And why this?"

"I wouldn't rightly know. Name's Jeff Pearce. A wild one. Comes from Mandarin, over on the Gulf."

Mike let out his breath in a low whistle. "Mandarine, eh? That's where *we're* bound."

But Christopher Ames had already come up briskly. "The car's here, Michael. Didn't I say you'd enjoy Florida?"

IT HAD begun a week ago, in Christopher Ames' penthouse, the day he decided to write a comedy for the fall season.

To dismiss Ames as a popular dramatist would be less than just; at this time, it will serve as a label. Playwriting provided the income that enabled him to lead a life of well traveled luxury; it also provided the reason for those long absences from his workshop (a year in Borneo, another in the depths of Chinese Turkestan) when the world of Broadway could only guess at his occupation—and the character of his next hit.

Ames and Michael Towne had met eight years ago on the deck of a tramp steamer on the Black Sea. The former was just out of Odessa, after six months in Moscow. Michael had come aboard at Constanza, fresh from a summer of climbing in the Carpathians. It would be equally unfair to dismiss Mike Towne as a high-pressure playboy, whose millions gave him a facile excuse for seeking trouble across the seven seas. Until he met Ames, his boundless energy had merely lacked focus.

The two had joined forces from that moment, quite naturally. Thanks to Ames' advice, Mike had consolidated two inherited fortunes in the production of airplane motors, a venture which had prospered from the start. About this time, Towne Productions, Inc. had also appeared on the horizon: another of Mike's corporate aliases, the principal function of which should be obvious.

It was Towne Productions that occupied the attention of the two friends that spring morning, as they sat over an early lunch on Ames' penthouse terrace thirty stories above the roar of Manhattan.

Ames laced his coffee with a dash of black Jamaica rum, and sipped thoughtfully. "But every playwright had his quirks, Michael. I can write tragedy or melodrama anywhere. Farce goes best for me in Atlantic City hotels, with meals passed through the transom. Comedy is something else again. You'll remember that all my best comedies were composed in a *sad* setting. Can you imagine a better spot than this Florida ghost-town, years after the boom has passed it by? That's why I've bought a house there."

"Why didn't you just rent it?"

"Because Mandarin is controlled by a concern that has outlasted famine, depression, and war. Land's End was the only property available, on any terms. Call it a whim, if you like. Thanks to you, I can afford to indulge them. Think of it, Michael. Grass-grown boulevards—termite-ridden villas that have been untenanted for years—"

"I see you've investigated thoroughly."

"Quite. Mandarin is on the Gulf Coast of the peninsula, some distance south of Tampa. An anglers' heaven, minus the anglers. Everglades at the back door. I'm sure Willy can describe the sort of hunting you'll find there."

"Are you suggesting I could do with a vacation?"

"Worse. I'm suggesting I may need you."

The two men exchanged a long look. As Michael Towne read its meaning, he leaned back with a happy smile.

"To scare off the haunts in ghost-town?"

"Would you find that too dull?"

The answer was quite in character. "I've already phoned for reservations on the Orange Blossom, Kit. You and Willy and I are going South tomorrow."

II

THE car raced down the white oyster road toward the Gulf. Michael Towne threw back his head to breathe deeply of the clean salt air.

"And how's it feel, Willy—being this close to home?"

The Seminole grinned. Now that he had removed his Stetson to let the breeze whip his straight black hair, Willy Emathla seemed much more indigenous. Even his studied English blended perfectly.

"This country is eternal, sir. It is a living example of the triumph of nature over man."

Then he relapsed into a tranquil silence. The others were silent, too, watching the car click off the miles of pine-barrens. The

scrub had already begun to merge with a long, fire-blackened savannah; this opened in turn to apparently endless marsh, fringed with dog-fennel, tufted with melancholy cypress hammocks.

The skirts of the Everglades, thought Ames, the ancestral home of the Seminole nation; or, as Willy had just put in, the triumph of nature over man. Well, it was an appropriate background for the business at hand—a job he still had not the remotest idea how to begin.

He leaned forward, with the thought of cautioning their driver against too much speed, and back again, as the wind whipped his words away. After all, the man was obviously competent: the car, an open phaeton that had seen better days, was steady on the road. Christopher Ames settled back comfortably between Willy and Mike. Perhaps he would be wiser to enjoy the fresh air while he could.

Mike spoke abruptly. "Isn't it time you began to make a little sense, Kit?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"You're between friends. That pellagraridden fellow at the wheel can't hear us in this wind. Isn't it time you told us what you're after, and why?"

"I don't think I understand—"

"Back in New York, you explained that you had bought this house from a Miss Mary Pearce, straight out of an ad in the *Times*, sight unseen. Fair enough, for you; I've known you to do screwier things in your time. But that was a Pearce who took a poke at me on the station platform. This driver was born without a tongue, when it comes to talking about Mandarin. So, I repeat, if *you* refuse to make sense, too . . ."

Ames spoke evenly. "I have come South this spring to write a comedy for Towne Productions, Inc. At least, I hope my play will have a happy ending—"

The rest was lost in a scream of brakebands, as a front tire blew. The car went into one of those long, sickening skids that infest every driver's nightmares. Michael Towne flung himself across the tonneau in

a vain effort to snatch control from the sallow-faced driver—just as the car slithered from road to shoulder, and turned turtle neatly on the swamp's edge.

Mike was thrown free, somersaulting into the sandy loam by the roadside. When he struggled to his feet, the four up-ended wheels had almost stopped spinning, and tongues of flame had begun to lick out of the engine, toward the broken feed line.

CALHOUN J. NOBLE, realtor, leaned back in his creaking swivel chair and smiled at the giant who stood framed in his doorway, a classic silhouette of rage.

"All of you are alive and well, young man. At this moment, your companions are comfortably installed at Land's End—quite content, save for a few minor bruises. Why must you stand there shouting at me?"

"You sent that car to meet us, Noble. The driver was in your employ."

"Surely you aren't blaming Frank for the blowout?"

"I blame him for kiting away from a smashup, without even trying to help. Believe me, if I hadn't found that dead pine-branch in a hurry—rolled up a palmetto log for a fulcrum—" Mike Towne did not complete the sentence.

"It's a miracle that both men were only stunned."

"Not such a miracle. Willy taught us that trick of going limp, when we see a crash coming."

Noble was beaming now. "By the way, where did you pick up your Indian?"

"I won him in a dice-game," said Michael. "Any more questions?"

"Surely you'll permit a lonely old man a little curiosity. After all, you've thrown enough questions at me."

"I'll ask you one more. Why did that blowout occur on a blind curve, within a mile of this office? Why was it preceded by a gunshot from the scrub?"

"Are you sure you're quite well, Mr. Towne?"

"Quite," said Michael. "No thanks to you." Then he turned on his heel and stalked out of the office.

The realtor's den occupied a corner of the Hotel Mandarin—a pile of sun-rotted stucco boarded to the eaves, choked on all sides by formal gardens that had gone back to jungle long ago. Michael strode down a path rank with weeds and came out to a boulevard that was weed-studded, too, and empty as the moon. He followed it to the sea, feeling the quiet press in upon him like a visible presence.

The street ended at the edge of a small, land-locked harbor, where a concrete pier marched out sturdily into blue water. Michael turned to the right, following the curve of beach to a point perhaps a quarter mile beyond, thrust deep into the Gulf itself to form a kind of natural breakwater for the bay.

This was Land's End, the property which Kit had purchased cash-in-hand, from a paid advertisement in the *New York Times*. It commanded a fine view of the town in all its naked emptiness. Seen at this distance, Mandarin looked forlorn as a movie set that has been left out too long in the rain. Michael turned his back on it firmly, and stepped up to the cottage veranda.

Land's End, at least, did not look abandoned; paint and screens were both shining new; even the sun-yellowed lawn had been mowed, after a fashion. As he followed the porch to the ocean side, Michael could hear Willy making a contented clatter in the kitchen.

Ames sat facing the water, watching the sun drop down into the Gulf. Coffee, and a squat bottle of Jamaica rum, stood unnoticed at his elbow.

"Well, Michael? Feel better, now you've let off steam?"

Mike sat down gloomily on the veranda step. "You seem remarkably fit, for a man who just escaped death by seconds."

"So you're still suspicious of our white-haired land shark?"

"That was no blow-out, Kit, and you know it as well as I. Someone shot out that front tire from the scrub—"

"Relax, my friend," said Ames. "Can't you see we have a visitor?"

TOWNE scrambled to his feet as the girl appeared in the cottage doorway. She was small, cinnamon-blond, and utterly at ease in khaki shorts and a sun-faded polo shirt. Even in that instant of surprise, Michael felt there was something reminiscent about those level blue eyes.

"Miss Mary Pearce, former owner of these premises," said Ames easily. "She's been kind enough to stop by and make sure we're comfortable."

The girl spoke quietly; Michael noted that her voice had only the faintest flavor of the South. "My brother and I have moved to Saltaire now—five miles down the shore road. The fact is, Mr. Towne, I was curious to see what kind of people would come all the way from New York to sample *this*." Her gesture took in blue bay, ruined town, and the ever-encroaching scrub. "I do hope you aren't disappointed?"

"On the contrary."

"Michael is a born sportsman," said Ames. "Like Willy, he loves nature for its own sake."

"I'd almost forgotten that kind of Seminole existed," said Mary Pearce. "Where did you acquire him—may I ask?"

"At a jook-joint in Miami, five years ago."

"Tell Miss Pearce how you won him," put in Ames.

Michael colored. "Willy's real name is Hospetarkee Emathla. He happens to be a descendant of Coacoochee, the Wild Cat, last great leader in the Seminole Wars. When our paths crossed, Emathla was sweeping out this night club for a living, and going slowly mad for the wilderness he'd starved in.

"I cornered the rascal who kept him there, bet five hundred dollars against a roll of the dice, and won him, hands down. Then I shortened his name to Willy, for no good reason; I also did what I could to put him on his feet again, for excellent reasons of my own. This included four years at Carlisle, where he learned to speak the language of his oppressors." Michael paused abruptly. That had been a long speech, for Michael Towne.

The girl studied him for a second, before her face relaxed in a smile. "Now I'm glad," she said.

"Glad, Miss Pearce?"

"Glad that I didn't listen to my brother. He's very proud, for a young man. Especially, when it comes to taking money from Yankees." She smiled again, as she shook hands with both Michael and Ames. Then she started across the lawn without so much as a backward glance.

Michael found his voice, just before she took the path to the beach. "May I escort you? I'm afraid we haven't had time to order a car—"

"Mine is parked just across the point. Sit down, please. I know you've had a hard day."

Then she vanished among the trees at the foot of the lawn—quickly, like a druid melting into her native woodland.

III

CALHOUN J. NCBLE, realtor, parked his car on the corduroy road and walked through the palmettoes to the beach—gingerly, with the sure instinct of a homing cat. The dusk had already begun to settle on the water when he shoved the skiff out of its hiding place in a mangrove thicket; it was quite dark when he sculled out from shore, resting frequently on his oars with a middle-aged wheeze. Only a faint phosphorus wake marked his progress through the tranquil Gulf waters; behind him, the shore was a dark, incoherent mass, save for the light that glowed cheerily from the open french windows of Land's End.

When he had roved a half-mile from shore, Noble stopped to breathe in earnest. Even in the utter loneliness of that pitch-black moment, he paused to glance about before he lowered a flashlight to the gunwale on the water side, and winked it twice.

Two winks from the blackness beyond answered the signal. A launch swam up out of the night, its engine throttled to an almost inaudible purr. The launch matched the moment: midnight blue without trim,

and innocent of riding lights. All the ports of the cockpit were shut tightly; the black buck at the wheel was part of the darkness.

"*Que tal, hombre?*"

A cold voice from the cockpit cut in impatiently. "Shut up, Mozo. Can't you see he's alone?"

Noble rowed a little nearer, as the launch's motor died. "Shall I come aboard?"

"Not if you're wise. Was the job done as I ordered?"

"I'm sorry, Der—"

"Don't speak that name aloud, you fool! Why are you sorry? Did someone bungle?"

"Certainly not. It was a perfect blow-out, just as we'd planned it. They were lucky, that's all. One of them jumped clear. So there was nothing for Frank to do but run. The others climbed out of the wreck with a few scratches."

There was a long pause before the cold voice continued. "I'd call that bungled—badly. Now we must wait till tomorrow for the tide."

"I'm sorry, but—"

"You said that once. Now I must take charge myself. Is everyone standing by?"

"Of course."

"In the harbor—along the point?"

"Everywhere you said—"

"Good. Tell them to move in promptly, when I signal from the lawn. You're sure that Pearce and his sister have gone on to Saltaire?"

"I followed them myself this afternoon."

"That's enough. Get back to shore, and keep out of sight till morning. Better yet, drive over to the junction and get drunk with those cow-hands. Just remember to return tomorrow, as though nothing had happened. No snooping at Land's End for a day or so; I don't want the sheriff to hear from you before Monday. That will give us all the time we need."

"We've been over that before, haven't we?"

"I repeat because you are stupid, Noble. Now get back to your business."

"Good luck," said Noble, faintly.

The engine throbbed in the black hull, as the cold voice answered him across the widening strip of water. "Have I needed luck, so far?"

IV

AMES and Michael Towne lounged in deck-chairs on the seaward-facing veranda of Land's End. "Tell me about her, Kit. You've got to—"

"I give you my word, Michael, the young lady is a stranger to me."

"For the last time—will you explain this setup, from the beginning?"

Christopher Ames was watching the fire-fly glow of a light far out on the black water. "For the last time—yes."

"You swear that you never saw Mary Pearce or her brother before?"

"On a stack of Bibles. After checking on them both so thoroughly, I feel that I've known them for years." Ames smiled in the darkness. "When I told you that I'd bought this house to use as a dramatist's workshop—were you taken in completely?"

"Come off it, Kit. Remember, we've banged around the world together for a long time."

"It wasn't such a deception, really. The fact is, I *do* plan to work a while on a rather bitter tragedy. If possible, I shall even try to work in a happy ending." Ames switched his tone abruptly. "Maybe this will be news to a rich rotter like you, but the world's in a bad state today. Tragedy is the order, not comedy."

"Thanks," said Mike dryly. "I read my morning paper."

"Including the news of these United States?"

"Including us."

Ames stared meditatively out into the Gulf. "Of course, there are rats in every basement. That's to be expected, in any social order. However . . . when the rats are equipped with T.N.T., when they're working in shifts to blow the house to bits—it's high time to hunt them out, with no poisons barred." He struck a match to his cigarette, killed the light abruptly. "Never

mind figures of speech, Mike. Some time ago I joined the rat-hunt."

"As a government agent?"

"My investigations, so far, have been quite unofficial. Naturally, I've friends in Washington on whom I may call, in an emergency—"

"Won't I do, too?"

"Why d'you suppose I've brought you this far, you hard-skulled battering ram? Have you ever heard of the Derring gang?"

"Why don't you ask me if I've heard of Captain Kidd and Capone?"

"Exactly what d'you remember?"

"Only that Cuba, prohibition, and old Paul Derring were synonyms, once."

"Exactly. It was rum-running at its peak—wide open as a gangster movie, and much more deadly. The sort of racket that died a normal death in '33. I believe the old man went straight to Paris to enjoy his millions. I'm sure he died there a year or so ago, wallowing in a Louis Quinze bed, and still unrepentant. Did you know that the business has been revived by his son?"

"There's no money in bootlegging."

"Other things can be bootlegged besides liquor. I'm told that Paul junior has opened up all his father's connections: launch flotilla, muscle-men of every breed, all the sheriffs and county judges who can be bribed—"

Michael Towne leaned forward eagerly. "You mean he's planning to move in here?"

"Unfortunately, there's no direct proof, to date. It's known in responsible quarters that young Derring turned up in the West Indies a year or so ago, with unlimited capital behind him. Since then, he's vanished from the face of the earth. I still believe that he's financed from abroad, for purposes we hardly need to name. I think he has smuggled everything from arms to enemy aliens into the United States, using Cuba or some adjacent island as a base."

"Ever see him in the flesh?"

"Not so far. That's where he is supremely agile. Every move has been accomplished through indirect channels: dummy corporations, and so on. Derring himself spends most of his time at sea—

receiving reports, and directing operations. For example: We've yet to prove that he's connected with the Mandarin Development Company; that he's so much as set foot in Florida—"

AMES drew a deep breath, and started over. "Understand, he's no amateur in the art of corruption. He was raised abroad in style by that old pirate of a father: five languages from as many tutors, boxing at the Ecole, a degree—with a saber practice—at Heidelberg. He's a two-fisted thirty now, with the world at his fingertips. A worthy opponent, Michael, if we overlook his origin."

"When do we tangle horns?"

"Sooner than we expect, perhaps. I've a hunch that success has made him bold, and I'm playing it to the hilt. Look at that harbor. It's the rarest thing in Florida—a natural, land-locked anchorage. A perfect contraband dump, no matter what language the contraband may be speaking."

"Do I gather that Derring and the Mandarin Development Company are one and the same?"

"Let's look at the history of that ill-starred concern. It was established near the end of the Coolidge era, long after the original Florida land-boom had collapsed. It built that stucco monstrosity of a hotel—a rich man's heaven that attracted no angels."

"After it rotted seven years in sun and mildew, the company changed owners. That's where the catch appears. The present company took over an obvious white elephant two years ago, without making the slightest effort to improve the property. On the contrary, you might almost say they've created this ghost-town, deliberately."

"Until we spoiled the record."

"It took time, of course—boarding up that hotel for keeps—buying up stores and winter homes—freezing out the old settlers who'd been here all along. Apparently, they've done a perfect job—with the exception of Land's End, the home of Miss Mary Pearce and her brother Jeff."

"As I say, I've checked on all these facts with the greatest care. Including the Pearces' background. She is a school-teacher in Saltaire. Naturally, it'd be simpler for her to live there in a rented bungalow, near her classes; nothing but family pride could have induced her to hang on to this house these many years. Jeff, her brother, is some kind of foreman at the cattle depot down the line. Honest young people, riding the ragged edge of poverty while they nursed a white elephant all their own. I believe there was a mortgage of some kind, held by a Tampa bank. Forgive all these details, Mike, but you said you were interested."

"Keep right on."

"I happen to know that the Mandarin Development Company has moved heaven and earth to acquire that mortgage, just as they've worked hard on Miss Pearce to induce her to sell to them direct. I was still wondering how I could step in, without exciting suspicion, when the young lady advertised her property in the New York papers."

"I paid the asking price, by telegraph; the deal was handled by her bank in Tampa, before the Mandarin Development Company could get wind of it. Just an innocent dramatist, Michael, blundering in where angels fear to tread. The next day, my press agent announced that I was coming here at once to write a new comedy."

"Are you trying to tell me that Miss Pearce is hooked up with Derring in some way?"

"Not at this moment."

"How d'you explain her brother taking a poke at me?"

"I don't."

"Check. You must have some views on that pre-arranged blowout."

"Let's dismiss it as a serious hint we aren't wanted here."

"Talk about classic understatements!"

Christopher Ames took a deliberate turn of the veranda, pausing at the rail to stare out once more into the thick tropic darkness. "Very well. Perhaps Derring knows all about me, and my passion for writing

plays in odd corners of the globe. Perhaps he took a long chance to get rid of us, before we could even set foot here."

"Then that realtor *did* have a hand in the business. What say I go down to his hole-in-the corner and beat him up?"

"I think that would be a rather futile proceeding, Michael." Ames dropped down to his deck-chair again. "Besides, I took the liberty of sending Willy down to watch him, just before dark."

"Have it your way. Just explain why you put off telling me this."

"I had to think out a plan of action. It would have been fatal to show our hand, you know—especially, if we are really suspected. Above all, we mustn't let them see we are afraid." Christopher Ames drew in a deep puff of smoke. "That's why I'm sitting here, quite unmoved . . . though a man is watching us from that oleander thicket. To say nothing of three others, whom I can distinctly observe among the sago palms at the west end of the lawn. . . . No, Michael—please stay put. It's too late to do battle, for the present."

"Much too late," murmured a cold voice from the dark end of the veranda.

V

MICHAEL TOWNE roared to his feet, one hand going into the holster under his coat as someone tackled him out of the dark with bone-crushing violence. Another pair of arms had already fastened on his neck in a strangling half-nelson, holding him rigid while still another enemy knocked the gun to the floor, a flash of impotent blue steel. Mike saw that Christopher Ames was being manhandled with similar skill.

The cool, measured voice came again, "Take their guns, Lafe. All right, boys; let them go."

Mike surged forward, with both fists curling; Ames had already risen unhurt from the scramble, and was perched coolly on the veranda rail. A half-dozen men stood grouped on the steps now, watching them intently; from the corner of his eye,

Mike saw one of them slip Kit's gun, and his own, inside the sagging bosom of his shirt. So that was Lafe, the tow-headed behemoth who had just tackled him so efficiently. Mike made a mental note on Lafe, for future reference. Then he turned toward the owner of that cold voice, who now stepped forward into the penumbra of light that fell through the french windows of the living room.

A safe distance, thought Michael grimly. What's more, he handles that .45 as though he'd been weaned on it. Guess I'll take a cue from Kit, and sit down again.

"May I introduce myself, gentlemen? I am the Mandarin Development Company."

Ames spoke pleasantly. "Good evening, Mr. Derring."

Kit's in good form tonight, thought Michael. I couldn't get out two words without trying to hang one on the fellow. A dead ringer for a storm-trooper, in that light, right up to the shaved skull. Doesn't look brutal, though. Funny—he reminds me more of John Gilbert, in the Merry Widow—and John Gilbert's been dead a long time, too.

"You've a strange sort of memory, Mr. Ames," said the stranger. His voice was pitched just above a whisper now.

"Not at all. Even in that bad light, you resemble your father. I knew him well, once. In fact, we used to take our coffee at the same café on the Prado."

"So you know Havana, Mr. Ames. Were you writing a play in Cuba that winter?"

"A melodrama, Mr. Derring."

"*Don't speak that name aloud!*"

"Why not? Surely you're a son of whom any father could be proud."

Paul Derring laughed, not pleasantly. A laugh that ran like spring water down a listener's spine. "I accept the compliment. What do your guesses in the dark mean to me, after all?"

He raised a whistle at his wrist, and blew three piping blasts. In a fraction, the lawn was swarming with figures in dungarees. Mike noted that most of these men were sallow natives though a few were ob-

viously of Latin origin, and at least three were strapping West Indian Negroes.

Mike counted thirty-five heads before facing back to the leader; by that time, the short hairs had begun to prickle at the base of his scalp. Black, white, or swarthy, the faces in that crowd were too alike . . . too pitiless. They were death-masks that waited—for what?

AMES spoke softly. "Quite a reception, for two inoffensive sportsmen." He looked quite calm and he was smiling a little.

"I think we may drop politeness," said Derring. "Let me explain that I have not eavesdropped on your conversation; my dossier on your activities is already quite complete. In fact, this little meeting was arranged purely for my own diversion, though I hope my remarks may prove useful for my—my assistants.

"All that you suspect about me is reasonably true, Ames. With one important exception. So far, I'm not financed from abroad. Nor am I a Fifth Columnist, a fascist, or even an *agent provocateur*. I'm just a good American businessman, operating well outside the law, for my own profit. Common enough in my aims, I'm afraid; unique only in my methods.

"As for the Mandarine Development Company—may I congratulate you on another bull's-eye? I *do* intend using this harbor as a focal point and ammunition dump; naturally, there is no room for outsiders, even innocent ones. Which brings us up against the painful problem of your liquidation.

"Let's not dwell on that bungled smashup this afternoon; I can see now that it was a job much too important to trust to amateurs. That's why I've come ashore, for the first time in months, to smash you in my own way."

He paused briefly to pocket his gun. "You see, the job can't be done with firearms, or with any weapon that might leave marks of human violence. An efficient sheriff still protects this county, even to the lives of visiting Yankees. Sheriff Perry must

therefore believe that you met death accidentally, quite through your own ignorance."

Again he paused, and stretched out his hand. One of the Negroes stepped forward, and handed up an object that resembled a broken black-snake whip. Derring glanced at it casually before he continued.

"A short lecture on natural history is now in order. As you must know, the swamps back of Mandarine are alive with 'gators. Especially a considerable lake—or tarn—perhaps a half-mile off the main road. Several of my men have hunted through these swamps from boyhood. They know the tarn thoroughly, every inch of it, down to the last cave under its banks. You see, Mr. Towne, the alligators live in caves just under the water level, when they are not hunting on their own.

"Are you beginning to visualize my scheme? If necessary, my men will be prepared to swear that they showed you the way to that swamp when you expressed a strong desire to go hunting by moonlight.

"Here, on the veranda rail beside me, is the tail of a *stuffed* 'gator. The reptile's principal weapon when attacked. First, he stuns his victim with a sledge-hammer blow of this flexible, but deadly object. Next, he drags him to his cave, where said victim drowns—gradually, to be sure, but thoroughly.

"Forgive me for speaking so boringly. But I felt it only just to make my plan quite clear. Of course, old Noble will pay a duty call here at Land's End, in a day or so. When he discovers that you are missing, he will spread a general alarm, telephone the sheriff, and—"

Derring broke that sentence in the middle, for an excellent reason. Ames had just catapulted from the rail, to dig ten fingers into his windpipe.

THE struggle that followed was brief.

Making no attempt to dislodge Ames' grip, Derring dropped both arms to his side. Michael saw one hand press deep into an armpit, while the other shot unerringly to the sensory area at the base of the brain.

Ames' hold loosened, and he crashed nervelessly back into a deck-chair.

Derring turned coolly on his heel. "Jiu-jitsu, Mr. Ames. An essential part of every fighter's equipment. . . . Remember, men—no marks."

He vaulted into darkness, as Mike charged over to the rail. Ames had already staggered groggily to his feet. From all sides of the lawn, the half-moon of faces had begun to converge on the veranda.

A split-second of calm, it was yet enough for Michael Towne to rumble into action, once he had made sure that Lafe still stood on the top step of the porch with both thumbs hooked in his vest, grinning at them contemptuously.

It began with a crack like a pistol shot—Mike's fist cannoning into the jaw of a pockmarked Cuban who had stepped out of line. It continued, as Lafe's thumbs uncoiled from his galluses. Mike had the senseless Cuban by the scruff now, flailing the body like a broken tree. Lafe's hand fumbled at his shirt-front—just as Mike heaved the Cuban at him.

Ames leaped across the veranda as Lafe went down; Ames' hands went into that shirt-front in the precious half-minute that followed, while Mike's fists cleared the steps of all comers. Someone shouted down the lawn, an alarm that was answered instantly from the darkness beyond.

Derring, on his way back, thought Mike. He stopped a long-legged boarder with a joyous smash above the heart. The steps swarmed with men now, just as Ames ripped both automatics from the giant Lafe, and split the night with twin blasts of flame. A Negro went down, with a broken shoulder; another man spun crazily on the top step before he toppled backward to the lawn. In that rumble, the veranda cleared by magic. Mike dropped his fists, and jumped back-to-back with Ames.

"Nice timing, Kit."

"Never mind that now. Into the house with you."

They plunged through the french windows. Mike could hear Derring on the lawn now, barking orders in two languages.

But even Derring was too wise to attempt a direct rush, at that moment.

The rest happened in a patter of running feet. A screen ripped in the bedroom. There was a sulphur flare as a light-cord ripped from its socket. The mob closed in once more out of the dark—identical men in dungarees, hunting through each room in the bungalow, whipped to frenzy by their terror of Derring.

Mike was in the kitchen long ago, clearing a path for Ames, who had paused briefly to make sure their others guns were gone. Both men ran across the back lawn with their heads low, eyes searching the ground ahead. The guns spat flame once more in the shadow of the oleanders; this time, they were answered by gunfire from two sides. Deliberate, harmless shots, that whistled through the leaves overhead. A black Hercules whooped up to stop Ames with a flying tackle, went down in a heap as a gun-butt connected neatly with his skull.

THE path to Mandarin opened before them now, miraculously empty; the pursuit howled behind, diminishing in the distance as they raced into the weed-grown boulevard, and paused on the edge of the hotel grounds, where a vintage roadster stood parked at the curb.

"Wait, Mike. It's too easy. There's a catch—"

"Not with the keys in the ignition," snapped Mike. "Jump in, you idiot. Why should they expect us to get this far?"

The roadster slipped into gear with the wheeze of a transmission badly in need of oil. The manhunt was converging on the boulevard when they took the turn leading to the oyster road and the junction. Ames could hear another car roar into gear somewhere behind them—a steady, powerful throb of a first-class motor whose spark-plugs were hitting in unison.

Mike set his jaw, and put the accelerator on the floor. "I'd drive without lights, if I dared."

Ames glanced back. "It's a straight-eight, all right. Strange, they don't seem to be gaining, so far." He took a long breath,

as Mike rode a curve on two wheels. "Too bad we didn't keep Willy with us. If you're to be believed, he can see in the dark."

"Don't let's worry about the aborigine. He'd have more sense than to let those rats corner him after sundown—" Mike hunched his shoulders automatically, when a shot came from the road behind, to be answered instantly, somewhere in the dense scrub ahead.

"Signal corps, eh?"

"Reserves, you mean," said Ames, grimly.

The big car was gaining slowly now, with the ease of an Olympic star overtaking a panting high-school sprinter. Ames smiled, despite himself: the whole pursuit was much too ruthless to seem like a race, now. He was sure of this when the big car slowed deliberately, inviting Mike to take a fresh burst of speed on the next curve. The roadster slewed into the straightaway at seventy an hour, and roared on toward the log barricade which rose from the road ahead like a visible nightmare.

Mike jammed his wheel to the right, missing the obstruction by inches. The roadster crashed to a sickening stop in the scrub beyond, as more men in dungarees rose out of the palmettes with the silent precision of watchdogs.

"Damn it, Michael, this is where they planned to bring us all along!"

Mike replied without words, blasting the heads back into the scrub with a burst from his automatic.

Now they were running to the right, with these new watchdogs on their heels, hearing the straight-eight slam to a stop on the road, feeling the pattern of their pursuit close on them from yet another side. Ames dropped to hands and knees, as a bullet sang past his ear.

Then Michael jerked him to his feet again. They plunged into the saw-toothed wilderness of palmettoes, where sun-baked ground gave way to swamp. They ran on, until swamp became bog, black, primeval muck which sucked cruelly at their legs, slowing their progress to higher ground.

Abruptly, they burst out on a spongy

bank, with the flat sheen of water at their feet. There was a marsh-sweet odor all about them—oddly suggestive of florists and decay in the same pungent whiff. A sure sign of a 'gator wallow, thought Ames, whirling to empty his automatic into the darkness.

He was still trying to reload when a dozen pairs of hot hands closed in on him, pinioning both arms effectively. He glimpsed Michael, still towering about a seething mass of bodies, still trying desperately to swing a well-anchored fist. Ames closed his eyes as a huge Negro swaggered up importantly, swinging the alligator whip.

He looked again, as Michael let out a final roar; dimly, as from another world, he watched his friend go down under that savage, lashing blow. Beyond hope now, beyond even fear, he watched them toss Michael into the brackish water; saw another Negro dive cleanly in after the slowly sinking body.

Someone was bearing down on Ames now. Derring himself, white-faced and gimlet-eyed. Deep in his trance, Ames watched his enemy stretch out his hand for the 'gator whip.

"This is indeed an honor, Mr. Derring—"

A great red light exploded behind his eyeballs, as the whip descended. Then he went spinning downward, into cool, slimy darkness without end.

VI

AMES opened his eyes. For a moment, he felt sure that he had been buried alive; that his mind, somehow disassociated from his body, now floated clear in this wet grave. He came to his senses with a vengeance, when something cold and scaly fluttered under his hand, and was gone. There was blood in his hair, a deep, throbbing ache inside his right temple. Yes, he was very much alive—and terribly afraid.

He raised his body slightly in the complete blackout, subsiding at once, when his forehead collided with a mud roof a few

inches above. There were other small, reptilian, flutters now—the spatter of claws moving away in muddy darkness. Ames put out both hands, and found that he could just touch the side walls of his prison. His other senses were returning; he was conscious of an almost overpowering stench—an unholy odor that seemed to be part of the viscous slime in which he wallowed.

And then Ames realized the sickening truth. This was a 'gator nest, one of those funnel-shaped caves hollowed in the bank, yards below the surface of the tarn. The flutterings all about him were made by the 'gator's young, waiting there helplessly all about him, until their mother returned from her hunting by moonlight. The fact that he was alive was, therefore, a minor miracle hardly worth exploring at the moment—unless he could find the strength to gain the surface of the lake again.

Then Ames remembered that Michael, too, had been dragged under water. He put out exploring hands, but received nothing but a sharp nip for his pains. No, there was no sign of his friend in that cavern; perhaps there were others along the bank.

Ames stirred weakly, pulling himself inch by inch toward the almost imperceptible gleam of water at the cave's end. Oddly enough, he could breathe after a fashion; enough to sustain life, at least, if not to give him the strength for a positive move. He collapsed once again, with his legs floating in the water—just as a dark body bored in from the tarn, and slapped wetly into the mud beside him.

Ames felt his senses reel, as he waited helplessly for the inevitable contact. He fainted again in earnest when he felt a human hand close gently on his shoulder.

WHEN he opened his eyes again, Ames was stretched full-length on the spongy bank, with a rolled coat beneath his head. Willy Emathla bent over him anxiously, and sloshed fresh water into his face.

The Seminole, stripped to the skin and shining with mud, would hardly have been a reassuring sight to a stranger, at that

moment. To Ames, he was a guardian angel in person—a trifle dark, perhaps, but no less efficient. The hunting knife between Willy's teeth completed the picture beautifully. Ames leaned back gratefully, and closed his eyes one more time. . . .

The tarn gleamed in a misty dawn when Ames sat up to look about him in earnest. The first thing he noticed was Michael Towne, standing naked to the waist against the gray glow of morning in a kind of immobile, sentinel calm. Willy Emathla, clothed now, and quite as impassive as ever, sat on his haunches just beyond. Both men moved toward Ames in unison when they saw he was awake, dropping down on either side of his impromptu pillow, without relaxing their vigilance.

"Think you'll last, old sock?"

"Why am I here? How did you—?" Ames' voice was harsh, croaking a bit in the upper register—a true echo from the tomb.

Michael grinned. "Sorry, fellow. This is Willy's story, not mine."

The Seminole spoke without preamble. "It is well I made holes, from above. Without the air, you could not have lived."

"What holes?"

"In the roof of both caves. There are only two in this bank. I had time to find out for myself, before they came."

Michael cut in sharply. "See how well they planned it?"

"I go to the hotel as you order, to watch the old one. When he is not there, I return to Land's Enc." Willy's inflection was still flawless: the change in tense was his only indication of stress. "By then, the house is watched from every side; I must move slowly in the dark, so I am not seen; I come close, beside veranda, so I hear everything. Then I come here, to prepare."

"Tell him about the alligators, Willy."

THE Seminole glanced calmly at the black depths of the tarn. "First, gentlemen, I must make sure there *are* no 'gators here to trouble you. Thanks to moonlight, that is very easy. With alligators, it is always so: When the moon is high, they

come from their caves to hunt. Sometimes it is fish. Or pigs, when them come down to the water's edge to drink. Always you will find them in the mudflats.

"In this lake, flat ground is on the far side. So all I do, is kill a pig in woods, and start dropping its blood there. There is a trail of blood now, right up to the pine woods. That way, they will hunt on far bank till morning—all of them. That way, it is safe for Indian to swim back here alone—to watch the black men dive, with you in their arms—to understand all. I know they do not wish to kill you with their own hands. I know you will breathe down there, until they go—"

Mike cut in again. "Got it straight now, Kit?"

Christopher Ames demonstrated his recovery by sitting up weakly. "Sure that none of them are around now?"

Mike smiled grimly. "Derring himself went to sea hours ago. The others aren't the kind to work by daylight. Of course, Willy and I have stood guard, just to be sure."

"It's straight from Poe. I wouldn't believe it, if I didn't have that stench in my nostrils now."

"It almost worked, Kit. D'you realize those fiends were tracking us with their feet wrapped in burlap just to make sure they left no prints? Why, they've even left a pair of our guns at the water's edge, exactly as though we had come bulling down here by our lonesome, just to get slapped galley-west by a 'gator's tail. Furthermore, there'll be no trace of that pair we dropped on the lawn at Land's End. You can also bet your bottom dollar that the house is in apple-pie order now, in case the sheriff comes snooping eventually."

"A gun would look very interesting at this moment," said Ames thoughtfully. "So would a county sheriff—if I could make him swallow a word of this."

"They've got to believe us, Kit. We've got Willy's word for it, haven't we?"

"This is South Florida, my boy—and Willy is a Seminole. Sorry, Mike—at this moment, we're just a pair of dumb

Yankees who went hunting after dark, and tripped in the mud." Ames took a thoughtful turn of the bank. "Where are those shotguns, by the way?"

"Willy fished them both out of the bog long ago. I'm afraid the powder's too damp to be of much use, but—"

Ames laid the wet Winchester repeater on his equally wet knee for a long, silent moment. "Believe it or not, I am beginning to cerebrate once more. D'you know what my next move would be, if I were still giving orders?"

"Speak up, fellow. We're still with you."

"After the way Derring has outsmarted us?"

"Come off it. Thanks to Willy, he thinks we're dead. If you ask me, a pair of energetic ghosts could do a great deal of harm at this moment."

"That's a point too," said Ames. "Well, Mike, if you're in a mood to indulge in a little quiet plotting with a half-drowned dramatist . . ."

JEFF PEARCE crouched over the engine of his battered roadster. Absorbed in his carburetor's timing, he caressed a still-tender jaw absently with the fingers of his free hand.

He was thinking—just as absently—of the things a fellow could do when properly liquored. Especially, a fellow who has pegged along hopelessly for most of his twenty-three years, riding herd to a mess of tick-ridden shorthorns that would only be shipped West later, to fatten on greener plains. Lucky cattle! A cowhand could only dream of greener pastures of his own.

Well, that was that. At least they had a roof over their heads here in Saltaire: as for his sister, she'd just take that money and go north next fall, or he'd know the reason why. For the present, he could only ride to work once more (unromantically, in a 1927 jalopy) down the same wood road.

Jeff did not see the muddy apparition slip through the back gate on noiseless tiptoe. Nor did he hear the swift approach, until cold metal pressed firmly against his spine.

"Don't turn, son," said Christopher Ames. "Just walk into the house ahead of me. Is your sister home?"

But Mary Pearce had already answered that question without words, as she opened the door with a wide-eyed, studied calm. Ames marched his man into the kitchen, and kicked out a chair from the still uncleared breakfast table.

"So I got here with minutes to spare. I hope I'm not keeping you from your classes, Miss Pearce; I also trust that you'll forgive me for wasting no time on tact. You see, I've certain important questions to ask you—quickly. . . . No, Jeff; sit quietly, and keep both hands on your knees. I'm only wondering what made you punch my friend at the station yesterday."

Mary spoke just ahead of her brother. "He was drunk, and looking for trouble. We had just had a quarrel about the—the sale of Land's End. Jeff said that I'd had no right to go over his head and sell to a Yankee—"

The boy cut in from the chair. "What's the matter, mister? Coming five miles with a gun, just to make me say I'm sorry?"

"Why did you oppose your sister's action?"

"Not that it's any of your mind, but she wanted to send me to college on that money. I said I'd be damned if I'd let her spend it on anyone but herself. After all, she's got the Pearce brains; I won't have her spending all her life teaching these backwoods crackers how to spell."

Christopher Ames glanced thoughtfully from brother to sister, and then back to the shotgun cradled in his arm. The caked mud on his cheeks cracked under a heart-warming grin. "Thank you, Jeff. . . . Mary, d'you mind if I sit down for a cup of coffee? I'll lean this theatrical blunderbuss in a corner. It's too damp to function, anyhow."

Mary Pearce accepted this change of mood without a flicker, as she came up to the table with a fresh cup. "It's your turn to talk now, Mr. Ames."

"Only if you promise not to laugh."

"There's nothing like a shotgun to destroy one's sense of humor."

Ames smiled gravely. "Really, I must crave your indulgence. I'm *still* not quite myself. You see, last night at Land's End, I came face to face with death." He sipped his coffee with a sigh of deep content. "Realities like these are very pleasant, after such a meeting. I was speaking in allegory, of course."

"Death at Land's End, Mr. Ames?"

"Death out of the sea, in a boat without lights. Death in its most intelligent form. Death for all of us, Miss Pearce, if we don't look sharp, and beat the cold devil back."

Mary Pearce sank down slowly into a chair facing Ames. "Go on, please."

AMES went on, with details—a complete account of their adventures in the tarn, from start to finish. Jeff slapped his thigh, with an animal whoop of joy.

"Sure you don't feel crazy as you look, mister?"

Ames sighed. "Thanks for reacting honestly, Jeff. I'm afraid your comment will be quite—well, quite typical."

But Mary Pearce had already stopped her brother with a look. "I believe you, Mr. Ames."

"Don't be polite, please."

"You accepted our story at its face value. Why shouldn't I return the compliment?" The girl met the challenge in Ames' eyes squarely. "I'm not entirely unobserving, you know."

"You've suspected Noble all along, then?"

"Let's say I've *wondered* about that—that Land Company. Of course, I've been too busy earning a living to worry really."

"An old American failing, Miss Pearce. Let's hope we don't all reform too late. Would you consider helping me now?"

"Please. If there's anything I can do—"

"You might begin by telling me what my chances are, if I go straight to the sheriff with my story."

Jeff cut in, one last time. "Don't you try it, mister. Old Buck Perry is a tough watchdog for that kind of fairy tale. Like as not, he'd jail you for trespassing on

those 'gators' private hunting grounds."

Ames ignored the interruption placidly. "Suppose I can prove that my fairy tale is quite real. Would you drive me up to Tampa, and a telephone?"

"There's a telephone at the store down the road, Mr. Ames."

"Somehow, I'd feel safer if I used one outside the county."

"Who you calling?"

"Washington," said Christopher Ames. "You see, I have friends who believe anything I say. Friends who'll fly here this afternoon at the drop of a hat, if I give the word."

Another quick glance passed between brother and sister—a battle of looks from which Mary emerged the victor. "Jeff will take you, of course. Won't you wash up first?"

"Not on this job," said Ames cheerfully. "It promises to be just as dirty later."

VII

CALHOUN J. NOBLE slumped in his airless office in a corner of the defunct Hotel Mandarin. Considering the fact that the company books showed no business transactions that day, a great deal of traffic had flowed through Noble's hands since morning.

Men in dungarees, sweating in the empty corridors all during the siesta quiet of afternoon—wiry, silent men, moving heavy crates and boxes from attic to ground-floor. Men who had slipped efficiently away into the scrub as darkness fell, like homeless ghosts.

Noble stared tiredly at the list on his desk. *Commit every item to memory, then destroy the record.* Those were the Chief's orders, and he had always followed them rigorously. Somehow, his brain was unequal to the task at this moment, after the evening he'd put in at the Junction. His head felt like a quivering mass of jelly now, responding queasily to the pathetic wireless appeals from his gastric region.

He read the list through, his lips murmuring items: Machine-guns—standard, Thompson, Vickers. Cartridge belts, bandolier clips. Tear-gas containers. Dynamite, in small red boxes with rope-cradled grips . . .

Noble's mind dwelt uneasily on that final item. Why should the Chief choose this moment to renew his stores at the various arsenals scattered through Cuba and the Islands? Why should part of the mosquito fleet be called in for that purpose—one day after the disposal of those Yankees?

Not that the Chief wasn't right, as always. There would surely be a nasty run-in with Perry, once it was evident that those two dunderheads were really missing. And yet, why should *he* shudder? At least, he was well out of it, even if the bodies were discovered, even if the airtight reason for their death was questioned in any way.

Calhoun J. Noble looked up testily as a figure whipped in through the doorway. There was no time to cry out, hardly time to snatch at the automatic in his desk drawer.

Willy Emathla lifted the struggling realtor across the desk-top, and knocked the gun from his hand in one competent back-hand gesture, precisely as a nurse-maid might deprive a baby of its rattle. Then he put both thumbs firmly into Noble's larynx, a pressure that continued until the man's eyes started from his head like purple grapes.

Then he permitted the realtor to regain his breath in great, choking gasps, even as he placed the muzzle of Noble's gun against its owner's stomach.

"Quickly, please. There is not too much time."

Noble realized that he was walking down the creaking steps of the Hotel, slipping under the wheel of his car with all the efficiency of a well-oiled robot. . . . The Seminole was on the runningboard in one dark flash; he crouched there, holding the door slightly open, and the gun muzzle was against Noble's side again.

THEY were in open country after a few minutes' driving. Noble had never stopped to notice how relentlessly the Florida scrub pressed in upon his domain. He turned off the road beside the swamp, parked obediently in a thicket of water-oaks, and walked ahead of Willy's gun-muzzle, straight through a cypress hammock.

"Sorry to be so brusqué about our invitation, Noble."

The realtor whirled, as an ash-blond giant stepped out coolly from behind a tree-hole. The color of Noble's face, at that precise moment, was hard to classify.

"Don't look so startled, please. I assure you I am quite alive—and mean you no harm in particular. Won't you rest a bit, after your drive?"

Noble took the proffered hand in a kind of involuntary, jerking reflex. Using his whole arm as a lever, Mike Towne flipped the man into a grotesque somersault. The realtor slapped into the muck at the lake's rim, flat on his back.

"Now, you mangy rat—will you talk, and talk fast?"

Calhoun J. Noble squirmed with an energy worthy of the epithet Mike had given him. His mouth was set in a taut, hard line.

"Did you find any papers, Willy?" Mike asked.

The Seminole handed over the list of ordinance, without a word.

"Fair enough, for most purposes," said Michael. "Too bad a typewritten sheet of this kind has no standing in law. No, my friend: I'm afraid you must convince the sheriff that Derring's gang has planned to use Mandarin as a nest for some time now. You see, he'll need the word of a respected citizen before he'll let the premises be raided without a search warrant."

Noble continued to struggle frantically. There was a thin line of foam at the corners of his mouth now. As he glared down at the pinioned figure, Mike Towne felt a twinge of nausea. The man reminded him of nothing so much as the rock-crabs he had speared as a boy at Marblehead.

"Strip for action, Willy."

The Seminole was already beside Noble, waist-deep in the water, the blade of his knife caressing the realtor's throat.

Willy's arm snapped around Noble's shoulders; Willy's free hand descended quickly, fastening the realtor's arm in an iron hammerlock. The two men rolled from the bank, and disappeared into the smoke-brown depths of the tarn.

Squatting on his heels at the edge, Michael Towne permitted a good two minutes to elapse before he struck a pair of stones together under water—Willy's signal to break surface and spread-eagle Noble on the spongy bank again.

"How's that for a sample? Next time, Willy has orders to take you to the cave—"

"Let me up!"

"—with a few baby 'gators for company. Charming creatures, really—and quite harmless, so long as their parents are out hunting. The smell, however, is something you must sniff to believe. Perhaps it'll refresh your memory, to say nothing of your spirit of cooperation."

"Let me up, I say! I'll tell you anything! I'll split this business wide-open—"

VIII

MOZO, the black Hercules from Haiti, stopped the big orange-truck at the crossroad, and pushed back his brimless straw boater to scratch his wool. The skurl of tires on macadam told him that the three other trucks had also braked in the darkness behind. At the moment, Mozo was frankly puzzled. For a moment, he considered getting down for a conference with the other drivers, deciding against it only as he cocked an attentive ear to the growing murmur under the tarpaulin of his truck.

This was the point where the white oyster road joined the cross-state macadam; for months now, Noble had conveyed them from here, across the marsh to Mandarin. This was only one of Derring's precautions, in a wilderness they

had come to regard as their own. Had not Mozo reminded the realtor of the arrangement, when they had parted a scant two hours ago in Mandarine?

The murmur under the tarpaulin grew louder, more insistent. Those men in dungarees, packed like sardines in the depths of the four trucks, had been given only two hours of rest and Mozo didn't like the job of dealing with them. He jumped back under his wheel, to sound a cautious blast on his klaxon: three short bleats, and a tattoo. He grinned, when the familiar short peep of the realtor's horn answered him, from a clump of yellow pines at the first bend. The cars swung into line again, four fat silhouettes nosing forward cautiously with all lights out.

Deep in that thicket of pines, Christopher Ames counted the seconds from the klaxon bleat. Noble had explained this innocent cavalcade completely enough. There were forty men in those trucks—picked hands, brought back under cover of darkness for the loadings. And now the fate of those men rested entirely in his hands, timed nicely to the second; it was a sore temptation to slip a bit, to blast some of those alleged souls to perdition. Still, he had worked the plan out carefully with the sheriff, after Noble's confession; it was impossible to change details. Even if they hadn't needed the camouflage inside those trucks so badly.

Ames pressed the lever under his hand, flattening automatically as the sandy loam mushroomed at the roadside ahead, a scant hundred feet in front of Mozo's slow-moving bumper.

Then he scrambled to his feet, and joined the swarming efficiency of the posse as it charged from the pine thicket, to possess those four orange trucks. The sheriff's men slugged the shaken occupants into submission, rolling them in the oyster road, stripping them with grim quickness, there in the quiet starlight.

THE launch eased over the bar in the full surge of the tide—a midnight-blue launch without trim, innocent of riding

lights. A dozen other craft followed in her wake, in perfect formation, engines throttled to the barest murmur.

The man atop the cockpit held up a palm, and all the engines died in unison. They drifted now with the tide, prows pointed for the pitch-dark shore. Paul Derring dropped down to the bows, and studied the coastline for a long time.

"Hold her steady, Lafe."

"Steady she is, sir."

"We're on the tick. D'you think they're standing by?"

"They'd better be."

"Mozo has his orders. Keep the back road covered, and bring in those trucks at ten sharp."

"Sending some of the arsenal to the keys, eh?"

"Never mind that now. I can rely on Mozo, at least; just as I can trust Noble with the details. But those hookworm-ridden monkeys—"

Lafe spat overside. "There's the signal now."

"Show your light."

Lafe flashed his riding-lights, a signal which was repeated from the wooded point of Land's End, a mile across the quiet water. Derring nodded briefly, blasted twice on the whistle at his wrist, and dropped down into the cockpit to take the wheel. The flotilla chugged into the bay, quite careless about the engines now, as the boats slipped up to easy berths alongside a broad concrete pier. . . .

Derring watched with satisfaction from the depths of the launch. A man for each painter, just as he'd rehearsed it with Noble; another man ready at the stern, to make all fast. The same routine, repeated precisely all down the length of string-piece; other workers, standing ready among the crates at the dock's end.

He took a quick glance toward shore, noting that the four orange trucks were parked beside the hotel veranda, with their tarpaulins lashed down. That meant, of course, that their precious loads had already been stored away: Mozo had his orders to stand by, until the flotilla was

outfitted, too. Strange, that he was not on the dock to greet their arrival. Strange too, that Noble had kept out of sight so carefully. But then, old Noble—a reliable watchdog, in his way—always turned mongrel in times like these, when the business of death was really in the open.

Paul Derring jumped up to the dock, and seized the first passing arm. "Where's everyone? Why don't you begin loading?"

"Sorry, sweetheart—we were waiting, just for you."

DERRING sidestepped—a second too late. Mike's fist had already connected crashingly with his jaw—at the precise moment the floodlight which the sheriff had mounted so carefully an hour ago sputtered alive from the hotel veranda. It bathed the dock in a hard, white radiance; it glinted wickedly on the shotgun barrels leveled into a dozen cockpits; it flashed on the deputies' badges, no longer hidden under borrowed dungarees.

There was a hitch—a brief one—in the launch nearest the sea: a scuffle on deck, when one of the Negroes scrambled to the machine gun mounted in the bow. Then a red flare, like the opening of a blast-furnace door, split the launch into an oily whorl of blood and matchwood.

None of the prisoners moved, after that object lesson.

"Up you come," said Mike.

But Derring sprawled inert across the string-piece, craftily suspending his breathing, waiting for Mike to move on to other business. Ames charged down the pier now, the apex of a flying wedge of men in business suits—the government agents who had flown down from Washington that afternoon, in answer to a mysterious but urgent phone call. Sheriff Perry was part of that wedge—proud, and still a bit breathless, as he pondered the effect this palmetto-war would have on elections. His pre-primary boom for state senator had been stalling in mid-air lately. Of course, with this kind of headlines to back him up. . . He paused importantly beside the still-inert Derring.

"Here's one you forgot," said Sheriff Perry.

"Sorry, Sheriff," said Mike. "He's out like a light."

Then he turned his back deliberately, timing the move so his foot lashed back in a swift reflex, cracking heel to wrist at the moment Derring's gun whipped out.

The automatic spun crazily down the dock, as both Mike and Derring made a simultaneous grab for it. Ames stepped forward to flip the gun overboard with a toe, while Mike jerked his opponent to his feet in one mighty heave.

"All in the day's work, sweetheart. Shall we settle this—*without* jiu-jitsu?"

But Derring had already plunged backward, without a word. The group froze on the string-piece, watching him hit the green-blue water in a long, raking dive, watching him churn for the open sea in a killing crawl that seemed to outdistance the spatter of gunshots all around him.

Mike grinned at Ames, and stepped back regretfully.

"Sorry, Kit—he's all Willy's now."

The Seminole had already dived from the string-piece, with the speed of light; angling far out, to cut off Derring's progress toward blue water, he sounded just as a head-on collision seemed inevitable. The gallery, lining the dock now in a silent but appreciative row, saw Willy Emathla rise like dark vengeance from the deep, to wrap four limbs about the straining white swimmer in a coiled death-grip. And then they sounded together.

Sheriff Perry stuttered a string of blue epithets, and signaled a boat to go out. The watchers stood silent, and the skiff circled the spot.

"Six minutes by the clock," said Mike.

"You mean, that brown *manatee* can stay under water for *six minutes*?"

"Hit your handcuffs under water, boys, before Derring drowns," shouted Mike. "Remember, we've got a playwright in our midst; we've got to give him a happy ending, now he's collaborating with the government."



The Divine Right

Presenting again that peerless fighter with a conscience, Refugee Smith. The text for today is this: As David swung his slingshot so shall ye swing the right that is divine!

By EUSTACE COCKRELL

Author of "Marching As to War," "No Minutes to Go," etc.

"HI, LOOK! Hiiii, lookee lookee lookee!" the man on the platform chanted, beating on a cowbell with a stick. "Lookee lookee lookee."

Refugee Smith tucked his recently won porcelain cat under one black arm, and put his pennant—emblazoned in gold letters *Excuse My Dust*—in his pocket and looked.

"Hurry! hurryhurryhurry!" the man shouted beating on his cow bell.

Refugee obediently quickened his step, walking down the midway toward the tent

with leopard-skinned supermen painted on its front under the faded legend: *Athletic Arena*.

Most of the people along the carnival midway were stopping in front of the tent now and two men had appeared on the platform on either side of the barker, who had laid his cowbell down and had picked up a sheaf of dollar bills which he was waving.

The men beside the barker bore scant resemblance to the pictures above them or to each other, one being short, wide and blond with the thick neck and gnarled

ears of a wrestler; the other a slack-muscled Latin, his face laced with scar tissue.

The barker laid down the money, freeing both his hands for his harangue, and gave tongue. Refugee caught part of it.

"... Have you got a rassler down there? If you have, here's his chance." He pointed to the wide blond man beside him. "This here is Ole Olson, the Scandinavian Scourge. If there is a rassler down there that can stay fifteen minutes with the Scourge without his shoulders bein' pinned—with your own referee officiatin'—I'll give him fifteen dollars. A dollar a minute, folks. That ain't hay."

The Scandinavian Scourge flexed his impressive muscles and sneered good-humoredly.

The barker turned to the other man on the platform. "And this is One-round Scinelli, folks. If there is a fighter down there that can stay four three-minute rounds with One-round without gettin' knocked out, we'll give *him* fifteen dollars. A dollar and a quarter a minute, folks. Easy money."

Refugee Smith nodded his kinky head in agreement. It would be easy money. Mr. One-round, judging by his face and general appearance, was what Mr. Willie would call a round heeled bum.

Refugee Smith sighed. He sure wished Mr. Willie hadn't told him not to tell anyone who he was; for fifteen dollars was a month's wages chopping cotton.

The barker was holding a brief consultation with a large party in sweat-stained overalls who had climbed up on the platform.

Of course, Refugee reasoned he didn't *have* to tell anybody who he was and it really ought to give these people a thrill to see a real fighter who was going to fight two nights from now in Madison Square Garden. He could just tell them his name was Smith. Lots of people, black and white, were named Smith.

Refugee sighed again and remembered Mr. Willie's stern admonitions and tried to dismiss the whole thing from his mind. He

looked back at the platform—still eager.

The large gentleman in the overalls had accepted the challenge of the wrestler. The barker turned to the crowd. "You all know this man, folks. Pete Perkins, your local blacksmith; and a brawny man is he. If the Scourge don't pin him in fifteen minutes he gets fifteen dollars."

Refugee couldn't keep his eyes off of One-round Scinelli. He knew One-round couldn't hurt him in four rounds. He turned and cast his eyes over the crowd. There was a little knot of colored folks on the outer rim. They were looking at him, at his loud jacket and his white shoes.

Refugee felt his chest swelling. A brown-skinned girl in a purple hat smiled a shy smile.

"... Now ain't there a fighter out there? Ain't there anybody out there that thinks he is proficient in the manly art of self defense? Ain't there anybody at all in Hyattsville that needs fifteen dollars? Ain't there ..."

IN THE parlor of a farmhouse in the hills above Hyattsville, Willie Wurtzel was entertaining those members of the press who had come up to see Refugee Smith, middleweight contender and erstwhile roustabout, in his last full workout before his debut in Madison Square Garden two nights later.

When Willie Wurtzel stood up to replenish a couple of glasses, it could be seen that Willie's torso had a prosperous bulge to it, a bulge that would doubtless have been still greater had not Willie been lashed across the front with a double-breasted waistcoat. This garment had a hue and quality that would tab Willie Wurtzel the length and breadth of West Forty-ninth Street as a fight manager: One with a fighter who not only could fight but could do so in a manner that people would pay to see.

When Willie Wurtzel sat down, he picked up his monologue where he had left off.

"Sam Langford was before my day," he said, "but this boy must be a carbon copy.

The Black Blitzkrieg, that's what they called him in Denver. In St. Louis he climbs in the ring without never havin' a glove on in his lie and stops Western Mahoney in two. He beats Sammy Stein just a month ago in Pittsburgh in the third . . ."

One of the reporters interrupted Willie. "This afternoon he looked fair. Maybe he can fight. But anyway it goes, you've done a wonderful job on the boy. That story about finding him in the middle of the river and how he thinks the Lord is in his corner because you saved him from drowning; that's wonderful stuff. And you handled it just right."

Willie Wurtzel was hurtly silent for a moment. "Yes," he said coolly. "But that's not what I'm talkin' about."

His voice began to regain some of its fervency. "We been up here workin' for three weeks. Nobody knows where we are until you come up today. Now, today, you see Refugee box the last time before the fight and you can see he is sharp as a razor. And," he said disgustedly, "you say he looks *fair*. Why—"

"Frankie Boomer isn't a sparring partner," one of the reporters pointed out, "nor yet a Sammy Stein. He is about the smoothest middleweight around. I think your eight ball is in for a bad night."

"He's done everything I asked him," Willie said. "He's won all his fights. He'll take Frankie. He's got a sweet a left hook as . . ."

"It won't take but a little while," the shill said. "Ain't you got any pride at all? That gal'll think you're scared."

"I'll bet that big colored fellow down there ain't afraid to get up here," the barker taunted studiously from his platform. The shill gave Refugee a little push.

"You don't have to shove me, white boy," Refugee said.

"Here he comes," the barker shouted triumphantly.

Refugee was on the platform now, look-down at the excited faces before him. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the admiration in the faces of the colored folks out at the edge of the crowd. He banished his last twinge of conscience and grinned down at them cockily.

Two more figures appeared on the platform from inside the tent: Pete Perkins, grinning self-consciously in ill-fitting tights, and the Scourge.

"In a minute," the barker shouted, "we are goin' into the tent. These two boys are gonna fight four rounds or less." He made a gesture that took in Refugee and the carnival boxer. "And these two are gonna rassle fifteen minutes or less. These two big matches can be witnessed for the price of one. One quarter of a dollar, a lousy, measly, two bits, folks."

The barker continued in this vein for a few minutes more, then moved over to the ticket booth. At his direction, the four men moved into the tent.

... "It would seem to me," one of the reporters said, "that your dark angel should be in bed by now." The reporter looked at his watch.

"He'll be in in a minute," Willie Wurtzel said uneasily. "I let him go down to the village. A carnival made a pitch down there this afternoon. I wanted him to get his mind off the fight."

"You let him run around loose?"

"I can trust him," Willie said.

Refugee Smith climbed into the ring in the tent and looked across at One-round

TEMPTATION in the form of a shill sidled up to Refugee's side, nudged him in the ribs. "Why don't you get up there, boy?" the shill said. "You'd be pretty proud of yourself if you won that fifteen dollars, wouldn't you?"

"Dat's sinful pride," Refugee said weakly.

The shill took a cautious glance over his shoulder. "That gal in the purple hat is watchin' you mightiy close," he said craftily.

"I oughta go home," Refugee said uncertainly. "I oughta go home right now."

Scinelli. Refugee was a little worried. His hands weren't taped like Mr. Willie always taped them and the gloves were old with uneven padding in them.

And he just didn't feel right. Pride had got him in here, sinful pride. He couldn't expect the Lord to be in his corner tonight, though from the looks of his opponent, he surely wouldn't need any help.

Still, he wished at least Mr. Willie was in his corner. "Lord," Refugee muttered placatingly under his breath, "all I ask is dat You don't pay no heed to this fight one way or the otheh." . . .

WILLIE WURTZEL heard the buzz of the crowd up in the Garden and it sounded like capacity. But he was troubled. He threw down a half-chewed cigar, took another from his pocket.

His fighter lay before him on the rubbing table, his lean black length honed to a razor edge of fitness. But there was something the matter. Refugee Smith acted funny. Willie talked, forcing confidence into his voice.

"There's sinners up there, boy," he said, "lots of 'em. You got to go tonight, boy. You ain't fought anybody as tough as this Frankie; you'll take him all right. You gotta take him. You gotta remember your duty up here in the Garden."

Refugee Smith lay on his back. A heavy frown creased his brow. He didn't answer.

"I guess it's kind of got to you, this bein' in the Garden," Willie went on half to himself, "because you sure have been actin' funny the last coupla days. But it's just another fight. You know what to do. It won't be like it used to be before you learned how to fight. It's just another fight."

Willie Wurtzel looked at his watch. "Gimme your hand," he said, picking up a length of gauge and putting his tape nearby.

Refugee Smith crossed his right hand over his chest and gave it to his manager.

"Naw," Willie said, not looking up, "the other one." He reached over and

took the colored boy's left hand. Suddenly he looked up. Refugee winced.

Willie Wurtzel felt his heart stop beating and then bound on heavily. He fingered the hand gingerly. "How?" he asked in a half whisper, letting his breath go out in a long sibilant sigh, seeing all his hopes and plans dissolving before him.

Refugee Smith looked at him, his eyes wet. "I was afraid you'd be mad," he said in classic understatement. "But I got the fifteen dollahs an' I don't want none for myself; not none of it."

Willie Wurtzel walked over and listened a second at the door of the dressing room, then bolted it and walked back. "Whatcha talkin' about?"

"I boxed de man at de carnival you lemme go to an' I neveh tol' 'em who I was an' I knocked de man out an' dey gimme de fifteen dollahs. I got hit all. De gloves was kinda old and when I hit Mr. One-round wid my left han' he didn't get up but hit hurt my han' most powerful an' I was afraid to tell you. I thought maybe de misery would go outen hit befo' tonight."

"You fool," Willie said, helplessness strangling his voice, "it's broke! You gotta broke metacarpel bone." He reached into his little bag and took out a hypodermic syringe and picked up the hand.

"We can't call it off now," he said. When he replaced the needle in the bag he added tonelessly, "Keep him from findin' out about it as long as you can but don't hit him with it."

Refugee Smith tried to summon a grin. "If I nevah knew whose han' dat was," he said as the anaesthetic took effect, "I would swear hit warn't mine, 'cause hit sure is dead."

"That's ain't all about you that's dead." Willie said in a flat voice.

There was pounding on the door and Willie picked up his bag. He pointed to the door, not able to speak.

FRANKIE BOOMER was a pale ghost that Refugee couldn't find. His hand was coming to life, now, and it hurt. He

hadn't tried to use it; but just holding it out, fainting with it had got it hit. It hurt but that hurt was not the worst. The voice of the crowd hurt Refugee Smith the most.

Frankie Boomer went around him like a cooper around a barrel and Refugee was bleeding from above one eye and his mouth was cut. But the cries of the crowd cut deeper. The Lord wasn't in his corner and the crowd knew it.

"Knock his halo off!"

"Kill the eight ball!"

"Slug him one for the heathen, Frankie!"

Willie Wurtzel leared down at the end of the third round. "Don't go out with the bell, boy. Don't go out."

Refugee Smith tasted the salty taste of his own blood, "y'cu mean quit, Mr. Willie?"

"Yeah."

"I can't do dat, Mr. Willie."

"He'll just cut you to pieces."

Refugee Smith looked down at the floor. "Lord," he muttered to himself, "I done sinned a double header. I sinned when I let my sinful pride get me in dat ring wid One-roun', an' I sinned when I neveh tol' Mr. Willie about my han' but I guess you know dat, Lord, 'cause You an' Mr. Boomeh are sure punishin' me."

The bell for the fourth round sounded and Refugee climbed to his feet and walked out to his punishment.

Frankie Boomer came in behind a long left hand, moving smoothly, and flicked Refugee's flat nose, clubbed a right to his belly and moved away. Refugee pawed the air with his left hand and moved in trying to find an opening for his right. Boomer tied him up, laughing. After a while the bell sounded.

Refugee Smith came back to his stool. Willie cleaned his face, whispering, his voice laced with pity: "Don't go out, boy. Don't go out."

Refugee Smith put his two gloves together in front of him, shut his ears to the voice of the crowd and in a whisper of resigned humility asked: "Lord, just don't pay no 'tention to me. But Lord, Mr. Willie

ain't done nothin'. You know dat, Lord."

Willie Wurtzel, listening, felt his throat go tight.

". . . He fed me whenst I'se hungry, teached me to box, an' . . .

Refugee Smith went out with the bell; and Willie Wurtzel, activated by long habit, gathered his stuff and scrambled from the ring. He looked up, watched Frankie Boomer spear Refugee's bad eye with a long left and move away.

Frankie stabbed the colored boy again, pulling his head back out of range as he struck. Refugee's frantic right whistled through the air in front of Frankie's face.

One of the reporters who had been up at Refugee's camp called to Willie. "Why don't you quote him a little scripture, Willie?"

Willie heard him, watching Frankie Boomer hit Refugee with a left lead and pull his head back. And suddenly Willie Wurtzel's face changed. He cast deep into his boyhood memories.

The bell rang.

WILLIE WURTZEL climbed into the ring. He rubbed the blood from Refugee's face, leaned down and closed his eyes in the effort of concentration. *The God of my rock; in him I will trust; He is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge . . . Thou savest me from violence.*

Refugee Smith wheeled on his stool. "Dat's de Word," he said. "Dat's straight from de Book."

Willie Wurtzel looked at the light in the colored boy's eye and racked his brain. *He brought me forth also into a large place: He delivered me, because He delighted in me.*

"Dat's me!" Refugee exclaimed. "Dis here is de 'large place'."

He teacheth my hands to war; so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms. Willie Wurtzel quoted from desperate memory.

Refugee Smith took a deep breath. His eyes under his bloody brows were bright.

Willie gave once more, freehand. "When he leads his left, swing your right a foot

behind his head, boy. With all your might, boy. As David swung his slingshot so shall ye swing the right that is divine!"

The bell sounded.

It was a sucker punch, winging from some place near the floor; going around Frankie Boomer's neck. But Frankie Boomer, careless with confidence, drew his head back heedlessly as he had drawn it back all night. He drew it back a foot.

Refugee Smith heard the drone of the referee's count; he felt his left hand, a red hot agony, jump with pain with every beat of his heart. But he didn't hear the crowd. The jeers of the crowd were stilled: suddenly, profoundly.

He was walking slowly to his own corner, his hands at his sides with the palms of his gloves turned forward; and under the ring lights his eyes shone white as they

stared into the upper reaches of the great amphitheater filled with the gallery gods now silent.

His back was to the referee and he heard the count reach *eight* over his stricken opponent; and he heard no sound of movement on the canvas of the ring.

"Lord," Refugee said through battered lips, "much obliged."

Down under the apron of the ring Willie Wurtzel watched his fighter. Suddenly he heard a voice muttering. It was his own voice.

"Lord," Willie Wurtzel said, "if I did wrong, forgive me." He paused a moment hearing the roar of the crowd as the referee reached *ten*. Then as he scrambled into the ring, he added:

"If I misquoted Lord, please forgive me for that, too."



"FORT MASSACRE" A thrilling new adventure of **WHITE EAGLE**

The White Indian

ALSO

"Hostage of Honor"

*a dramatic story of the
Redman's West by*

Johnston McCulley

complete in the December issue of

BIG CHIEF WESTERN MAGAZINE

At your favorite newsstand today!
10c

Crooked Caribbean Cross

By BORDEN CHASE

SMOOTH KYLE, special Treasury agent, has been ordered by INSPECTOR McNEARY to trace the history of a gun: an automatic originally shipped as part of an arms consignment to England, but—according to radio messages—sunk when the ship *Clivedenning* was torpedoed.

And every lead seems to point to Fifth Column activity in South America. RENO CORDOZA, on whom the gun was found, dies before he can talk—victim of *curare*, the deadly South American Indian arrow poison.

With the help of his blonde sidekick, GILDA GARLAND, Smooth discovers that Cordoza has been working for a new Manhattan gambling place run by two South Americans: JOSEPH GARADO and MIGUEL PANZA, with the advice of STEVE DREYFUS, a well-known New York gambler.

SPYING on Garado and Panza, Smooth and Gilda find that these two are being directed in some kind of international skullduggery by RAMON OBALDA, a lawyer who visited Big Reno Cordoza shortly before Reno died. With these three and Dreyfus is MARIA VALERA, singer in the gambling place.

Obalda leaves the hideout, directing the rest to meet at the airport; Garado and Dreyfus follow soon after; and Smooth has meanwhile sent Gilda to shadow Obalda. Now as Smooth watches, Panza tells Maria that he does not trust her: he is about to kill her with a *curare*-tipped dart when Smooth steps in and breaks that up by shooting Panza.

This evens a score. Earlier this same night, Maria saved Smooth's life in a mixup at the gambling place and now. . . .

Together they follow Garado and Dreyfus, who have chartered a plane ostensibly



This serial began in the *Argosy* for October 5

for Miami. But the course is shifted to Cuba and beyond: to a little island not far from the Isle of Pines. Here the occupants of the first plane are taken ashore in a power boat—and Smooth orders his pilot to return to Havana.

FROM papers he found on the dead Panza, and from conversation with Maria, Smooth has learned something of the setup. Garado and Panza have been running an expensive place, taking in many 100's from South American customers.

One man heavily in their debt is FERDINAND ALDOZA, the owner of a tin mine in Maria's native state, Bolivia. He has been in America trying to raise money for machinery; and meanwhile losing steadily at gambling.

Maria warns Smooth that there are many Germans and Italians in South America, but few Americans; that the people there regard the United States with distrust; and that her country needs help.

She tells him that the patriots of Bolivia have banded together into an organization called *Defendados*—DEFENDERS—and proposes that they visit one of these men, RUFINO PONSICO, now resident in Havana.

BUT first Smooth calls on the Cuban police, and explains his mission to CAPTAIN TEODORO SEIJO. That same night he and the captain, guided by a self-styled fisherman named JUAN ORTIZ, set out in Ortiz' power boat to find the island visited by Garado's plane.

There they discover a cove used as a submarine base and as a place of trans-shipment for arms. After they explore the place, Ortiz goes back for a bottle of wine and is discovered by the returning Germans; a battle ensues in which the Germans get away.

Captain Seijo is bitterly disappointed, feeling that he has failed his government seriously; and Smooth is left with a number of thorny speculations.

The arms they discovered could have come from the *Clivedenning*, or some other ship engaged in similar transport. But the story that the *Clivedenning* was torpedoed sounds like a phoney; because a ship carrying munitions wouldn't have time for a second radio message after being torpedoed.

Smooth's telephone report to Inspector McNeary in New York doesn't get him any closer to a solution. McNeary tell him that Gilda Garland followed Obalda and caught him reporting by telephone to a superior; but when Obalda was traced to the hotel where he was to report, the superior was gone—and Obalda was dead with a *curare*-tipped dart in his throat.

SITTING dispiritedly in a restaurant the next morning, Smooth notices two men—one of whom seems vaguely familiar. On a hunch Steve follows them out to a car, but is brushed off as the two speed away. Hiring a cab, he gives chase; but his driver is finally shaken off the track.

That night he has dinner with Maria Valera and Rufino Ponsico. There is an uneasy tension in the air, and everyone seems relieved when he proposes a visit to the casino of STACEY BELLVILLE.

This Stacey Bellville, according to what Smooth has picked up, is one of the men coordinating the work of agents in New York and Cuba. He introduced Steve Dreyfus to Garado and Panza, according to Dreyfus' story; and he is still operating here in Havana.

Well—it's a lead. Stacey Bellville will have guests tonight. . . .

CHAPTER XVI

HORNET ON THE WING

SMOOTH returned to the living room and an hour later drove with Maria and Señor Ponsico to the Prado, a wide avenue with a tree-lined central walk.

Here they were admitted to a house that was the replica of a dozen others in the row—large carved-wood doors, latticed windows and a gray stone front that appeared anything but hospitable.

Once past the doors they stepped into a different world. A servant bowed to Ponsico, bowed to Maria and looked sharply at Smooth. They were ushered into a small waiting room off the hall and a moment later Stacey Bellville appeared.

He had changed little since Smooth had known him on Broadway—dapper and slim, with an easy manner and hearty handshake. He looked at Smooth and his eyes widened.

"What brings you to Havana?" he asked, and extended his hand. "I didn't think Broadway could get along without Smooth Kyle. And Gilda—where is she?"

"Both of us needed a vacation," said Smooth. "Gilda went for a trolley ride and I bounced down here." He nodded toward the rear of the house. "How goes the game?"

"Not so good," said Stacey. He exchanged a few words with Maria and Ponsico then opened the door of a connecting room. "I'm getting by and that's about all."

Smooth glanced quickly about. Money had been spent on the furnishings and the room was in good taste. There were no tables here but a few guests stood grouped about a small bar. They glanced casually at Smooth and some bowed to Maria and Ponsico.

Stacey Bellville kept walking and Smooth followed him to a second room where there were roulette and dice tables.

The play was slow and Smooth guessed it to be small. There were about twenty men at the tables and an equal number of girls who were obviously on the payroll. Beyond the game room was a walled patio where a *sesteto*—a small orchestra—played quietly while a few couples danced the *son*. There were tables at the edge of the floor and waiters in white coats served the guests.

STACEY was watching as Smooth eyed the place. He smiled a little and shrugged when Smooth shook his head slowly.

"What's the matter?" asked the gambler.

"It doesn't jell," said Smooth. "You always played to big time, Stacey. You've put money into this place but—well, it just doesn't click."

"I don't get you."

"I think you do," said Smooth. He pointed to the patio. "Suppose you and I have a little chat?"

"Why not?" said the gambler. He turned to Maria and Señor Ponsico. "You will pardon us?"

"Of course," said the girl. She looked wisely at Smooth, then walked with Ponsico to one of the tables.

Stacey led Smooth to a secluded corner of the patio and offered cigars. "What do I know that you want to know?" he asked.

"Plenty," said Smooth. "Within the last two days someone phoned you and said

I was in Havana. I want to know the man's name."

Stacey laughed. "Nothing like coming right to the point, is there?"

"It might save a lot of grief, Stacey."

"You've got nothing on me, feller. I'm running a quiet little game and minding my own business."

"That's your story," said Smooth. "But how did you happen to introduce Steve Dreyfus to Joseph Garado?"

"Why not?" said the gambler. "Steve was in Havana looking for a place. I knew Garado needed someone to help him open in New York, so I introduced Steve. Nothing wrong with that, is there?"

"No," said Smooth slowly. "But it just happens that Garado grabbed most of the South American trade in New York. And I understand you cater to the same bunch in Havana."

"Why not?" said Stacey. "The crowd from South America likes action. It's easy money."

"Quit stalling! You know Garado's place is a blind. You know Clipper Delf turned the joint inside out. And you know Garado and Dreyfus left town in a hurry!"

"You can't prove it by me," laughed Stacey. He leaned forward and looked long at Smooth. "And if you've got any ideas about my place, you'd better think before you jump. I've got a few friends in Cuba."

"Got any in Germany?"

"Come again."

Smooth leaned back in his chair. "Look, Stacey. I never pretended to be a master mind, but I do know how to add. Everything in this setup points right to the Nazis. They're moving in, and in some way you and Dreyfus are helping them. So is Garado, for that matter, but he's different."

"Different?"

"Yes. He's a South American. But you and Dreyfus are supposed to be citizens of the United States."

Smooth paused and half closed his eyes. "If this were smuggling, narcotics or

counterfeiting I'd be willing to give you an even break, give you a run for your money. But it's a lot more than that, Stacey."

"And so—?"

"And so you can tell Dreyfus and everyone else in this deal they don't need to hire any lawyers. When it breaks there isn't going to be a jury trial; not any!"

"I THINK I know what you mean," said Stacey slowly. He looked at the tip of his cigar, then lifted his eyes and stared at Smooth.

"Of course you know that works both ways, Smooth. In the old days it was considered bad form to knock off a Government agent unless it was absolutely necessary. Now, they sell for a nickel a dozen. Better watch your step."

"In other words," said Smooth, "you're playing the deal out, even if it runs against your own country?"

"Did I say that?"

"It amounts to the same thing."

Stacey stood up. "Glad to have you stop in and use the tables while your in town," he said quietly. "You'll excuse me now. Business seems to be picking up."

He walked to the gambling room and Smooth followed. Señor Ponsico was standing at one of the roulette tables with Maria and two elderly gentlemen who were playing for fairly large stakes.

The wheel spun and the dealer tossed the ivory ball around the rim. It whirled half a dozen times, ran down to the base and bounced along the circle of numbered slots.

The croupier called the play and raked in the house winnings. Señor Ponsico turned and introduced his friends as Señor Clemente and Señor Fuentes, two Chilean exporters in Havana on holiday. They shook hands with Smooth and turned again to the wheel. Smooth watched their play for a time, then shook his head.

"I don't like to intrude," he said quietly, "but I doubt if you will ever beat this wheel. You're trying to compete with compressed air."

"With what?" asked Fuentes in surprise.

"Compressed air," said Smooth again. He pointed to the numbered slots at the base of the wheel. "Each of those cups has a small hole in it. When the play is heavy on a number it can be seen by a man who watches the table and passes the word to another man at the controls. He opens a valve and a small stream of compressed air keeps the ball from dropping into the winning slot."

"But that is fantastic!" cried Fuentes. "I have heard of wired tables but this—compressed air?"

"It's comparatively new," said Smooth easily. "Wired tables were never very effective but this is sure-fire." He smiled and pointed toward a small card room where five men were playing poker. "That dealer over there is one of the old-fashioned crowd. He uses an eyeshade and readers."

Fuentes' eyes flared. He rubbed his short white mustache and stepped back from the table. His friend Señor Clemente touched Smooth's arm.

"You mean this is a place of cheats—of frauds?" he asked.

Smooth reached up and took Maria's wide comb from the back of her head. He held it to the light, saw it was translucent, then handed it to Señor Clemente.

"Walk over to the card table and watch the cards through this comb," he said. "Better stand behind the dealer or there may be trouble."

The elderly South American took the comb as a child would take a new toy. He hurried to the card room and Smooth watched him take a place behind the dealer. The comb was lifted and Smooth grinned.

Luminous readers were old in the trade—so old they had been abandoned as impractical in most houses. A luminous ink was used to mark the backs of the cards and this was read by the dealer through his green celluloid eyeshade.

Suddenly Smooth saw Fuente reach forward and sweep the cards from the table.

"Thief!" cried the old gentleman. And then followed a torrent of Spanish. The players leaned from their chairs and added their voices. People hurried to the card room and soon two men were fighting. A woman screamed. Then another. The fighting spread across the room and Smooth smiled.

"Thanks, pal," said a quiet voice at his elbow.

SMOOTH turned and found Stacey Bellville standing behind him. The gambler's face had lost its color and his eyes were hard. He watched the scene of confusion in the room and the muscles of his jaws formed into round, hard lumps.

Smooth's hand went to the opening of his coat.

"Any arguments?" he asked blandly.

"Not tonight."

"Suit yourself," said Smooth. "But remember, this: no matter where you open a game, I'll close it!" He motioned to Maria and Señor Ponsico as the fight grew in size and noise.

"Time to get out of here, I think. Let's go to the Sevilla and I'll buy a drink."

A short fat man was struggling with the roulette dealer. The dealer broke free, pushed his opponent and ran toward Smooth and his group. The fat man followed, running with surprising speed. He jumped at the dealer, knocked the man against Señor Ponsico, and they both went down in a struggling heap. Maria screamed and aimed a shoe heel at the dealer's head. Smooth jumped forward and pulled the struggling men apart.

"Are you all right, *señor*?" he asked Ponsico.

The old gentleman didn't reply. He was seated on the floor, holding one hand to a nasty cut that ran the length of his forehead.

"*Dios!* He is hurt!" cried Maria. "Quick—help me, Smooth!"

Smooth put his hands under Ponsico's armpits and helped him to his feet. The elderly man was stunned and bewildered. He let Smooth lead him to the door and held a handkerchief to his head while they

waited for a cab. Ponsico was very pale.

"Where's the nearest doctor?" asked Smooth.

"No," said Ponsico. "We will go home, *señor*. It is a little thing—a scratch. Maria can clean it and dress it for me."

Smooth turned to Maria. "Think you can make it alone?"

"You do not come with me?"

"I'll be along in a minute. Just now I've got to make an important call."

Señor Ponsico was stepping into a cab that had pulled to the curb. Smooth turned and sprinted to the Sevilla Hotel. He stepped into a phone booth and after a short wait was connected with Captain Seijo. He told him of the trouble at the gambling house and Seijo laughed.

"Better get a couple of men over there fast," said Smooth. "Tell them to watch the front and rear. Learn where Stacey Bellville goes."

"You think he will leave?"

"That's why I started the trouble," said Smooth. "Stacey is through in Havana. The chances are even he won't return to New York. But he has to go somewhere."

"And that place?" said Seijo eagerly.

"It might be the same place Garado and Dreyfus went. It might even be the place where that plane-load of ammunition went."

"You think fast, *señor*," said Seijo. "I hope you are right."

"Same here," said Smooth. "Don't lose Stacey. If he tries to charter a plane, tell the company to say there's none available. If he buys a ticket for a regular flight, tell me the destination and get me a plane."

"And where can I reach you?"

"At Señor Ponsico's home. I'll wait for your call."

CHAPTER XVII

FLIGHT TO BARRANQUILLA

SMOOTH hung up and hurried to the cab stand. A short drive took him to the house on the Avenida de los Presidentes where he told the driver to wait.

Anna answered the door and waved him into the large front room.

"Señor Ponsico—how is he?" asked Smooth.

"Maria fixes his head," said Anna.

Smooth knew a moment of guilt. He had not wanted Señor Ponsico to get caught in the scuffle, but the idea had presented itself that a fight would chase Stacey out of town. Smooth, as usual, had acted upon impulse. As a result, this fine old gentleman had been hurt.

Anna had left the room and Smooth walked to the foot of the stairs. He called to Maria but got no answer. That cut hadn't looked any too good and she might be having trouble. Smooth mounted the stairs and called again.

"Yes," she answered. "What is it, Carlos?"

Smooth followed the sound of her voice and came to the open door of a large bedroom. It was high-ceilinged like most rooms in Cuban homes and a huge bed stood centered against one wall. Señor Ponsico was propped up against three pillows and Maria was winding a strip of gauze about his head.

"Anything I can do?" asked Smooth.

Maria turned and the bandage fell from her hand. "Oh—it is you! I do not know! When I hear you call I think it is Carlos, my brother."

"I don't mean to intrude," said Smooth. "But I was worried about Señor Ponsico and—"

"It is nothing," she said quickly. "Nothing—a scratch!"

"Yes," said the old gentleman. "It is a scratch." He took the bandage and handed it to Maria. "Tie it, my dear. Then go with Señor Kyle. Go out! Enjoy yourselves. The night is young!"

"Si!" said Maria. She tied the bandage, stood quickly and walked to Smooth. "There is somewhere you would like to go? To dance, perhaps?"

Smooth was puzzled. Neither Maria nor Señor Ponsico was being rude; yet obviously he was being hurried out of the house. Again that feeling of tension came

to him. Señor Ponsico's injury was not serious but it was mean enough to warrant some attention. Still, when Smooth came into the room Maria had acted as if nothing mattered but to get him out again.

"Why go out?" he said. "I have nothing to do and nowhere I want to go. Suppose we sit here a while and chat with Señor Ponsico?"

"A thousand thanks, *señor*," said the old man. "But I am so tired—very tired. If you do not mind, I will rest now."

"Yes," said Maria, and took Smooth's arm. "It is better if he is quiet. Come! We will go."

Smooth was marched firmly from the room and Maria closed the door. Then she turned and walked him just as firmly toward the top of the stair. She put her arm about him going down the steps and when they reached the lower hall she looked up at him and grinned.

"Always it is the fight when Smooth arrives, eh?" she said. "Maria think you like fights—yes?"

"Me? Like fights? Lady, you've got me wrong. There's nothing I like better than a good book and a soft chair, unless I happen to find a beautiful girl and an empty patio."

He pointed toward the garden and Maria laughed. "You are making fun," she said. "Why do you start the fight at Señor Bellville's place?"

"I don't like the way he combs his hair."

"Smooth! Tell me!"

"On the patio," he answered and pointed again to the garden. "And by the way—is your brother home? I'd like to meet him."

"Carlos?" said Maria quickly. "He is home, but he is sleeping."

"So early?"

Maria took Smooth's arm and walked with him to the patio. There was a stone bench near the tiled fountain and she seated herself beside him.

For a moment she was silent and Smooth watched her closely.

"CARLOS is tired," she said. "Yesterday he flies to Oriente Province with friends. All day they fish and fish. So—he comes home and goes to bed. Tomorrow you will meet him."

She rested her hands on Smooth's arm. "Now tell me, why do you make the trouble in Señor Bellville's place?"

"Oh, just curious," said Smooth. "I started a fight in Garalo's penthouse and met you. It seemed a good way to meet interesting people so I tried it again."

"You still joke with me," said Maria. She moved closer and rested her shoulder against Smooth's. "You like Maria Valera?"

Smooth wasn't doing anything with his right arm so he put it around her. Maria tilted her head back and looked at him. He wasn't doing anything with his lips, so he kissed her. She smiled.

"That is nice," she said softly. "You kiss Maria but you do not trust her. You tell her lies, too."

"That must be two other fellows."

"It is you," she said. "You do not tell me you 'ave the fight last night and are shooting."

Smooth looked down at the dark eyes that were half closed in a lazy smile. "Shooting? What makes you think that?"

Maria nodded wisely. "It is so. On the plane from New York I count the bullets in the holster. Seven are there at the bottom. Now the seven are gone."

Smooth sat erect and put one hand under his left armpit. Maria's hand was there, too. It was resting on the leather holster that held his gun, and the tip of one finger was moving across the small leather loops that had held the spare cartridges.

She laughed quietly and Smooth sighed. A kiss in the moonlight might be just a pastime in the north but evidently the girls from the tropics knew how to combine pleasure with business.

"Anything else you know about me?" he asked.

"Only that I like you," said Maria. "I try to help you because you help my

country. But I can do nothing unless you trust me."

Smooth could think of a thousand things to do, but trusting Maria wasn't one of them. Not tonight. Ever since he had come to the house Smooth knew the pressure was on. Something—he couldn't tell what it was—but something had gone sour.

He reached for his cigarette case and hoped Captain Seijo would hurry his phone call.

It came at length and Maria went to answer it. Smooth followed her from the patio and was standing at the foot of the stairs when she stepped into the small study to pick up the phone.

"Maria!" called a voice from the head of the stair. "Who is it?"

Smooth looked up and saw a young man in a dressing gown. It was only a flash. The man stepped back quickly when he caught sight of Smooth.

But that flash had been enough. Carlos Valera was the man Smooth had seen at the market in the morning—the younger of the two who had stopped in for coffee. It was he who had ordered the driver to hurry.

THINGS added quickly now. Carlos Valera was featured exactly like his sister. That accounted for Smooth's partial recognition. It also made clear why Smooth had been unable to place him, and why the face had fallen into the "pleasant" category. But it did not explain why Carlos had raced a car through dozens of one-way streets in order to avoid Smooth Kyle.

"It is for you," said Maria as she came to the hall. "I think it is Captain Seijo."

"Thanks," said Smooth. He picked up the phone.

"Some good news for you, *señor*." Captain Seijo's voice was cheerful. "Stacey Bellville wished to charter a plane for Barranquilla, in Columbia. There was none available, of course, and he bought one ticket for the plane that leaves in the morning."

"How far is—is that place?" asked Smooth cautiously.

"A thousand miles. It is due south from Jamaica."

"Can you give me transportation?"

"Gladly! I will wait at my office for you. Four men are watching Bellville. He will be safe until morning."

"Thanks a lot," said Smooth.

He hung up and turned to find Maria at his shoulder. Her eyes were serious now. The laughter had gone and she pointed toward the phone.

"It was Captain Seijo?" she asked.

"Yes," said Smooth.

"He has learned something new—about Bellville?"

"A little. He wants to see me."

"You are going there now?" asked Maria quickly.

"Yes," said Smooth, and walked toward the stairs. "I'll say goodnight to Señor Ponsico before I go."

Maria caught his arm. "No—please do not disturb him! I—I will say goodnight for you—later."

"I'd rather do it myself."

"Smooth, you are rude!"

"Oh, I don't think so," he answered. And in spite of Maria's hand on his arm started up the stairs. "Unless there is some other reason you don't want me to—"

"Reason?" she cried. "I have told you! I do not want him to be disturb!"

He shook her arm free and ran up the winding stair. Maria followed, talking quickly in Spanish. On the upper landing Smooth hurried to the room he had used the previous day—the room set aside for Maria's brother. He twisted the knob and pushed back the door.

The room was empty. He looked at the bed and saw the imprint of a body on the cover. He took out his gun and started the bath.

Maria ran toward him. "Smooth! What do you do? What is this?"

"Oh, just the old double-cross," he said. "A dumb guy and a smart dame: it's the same in any language."

He turned the knob, pushed the door and leveled his gun. There was no movement within and Smooth stepped forward quickly. The room was empty. He turned to Maria.

"Where's Carlos?"

"I do not know. He was sleeping but perhaps he gets up and goes out to the club."

Smooth did some fast arithmetic. He was sure the man he had seen at the top of the stairs was the man he had seen at the market. Definitely he was Maria's brother. She claimed he had spent the previous day at Oriente Province, at the far end of Cuba. That was plausible; but knowing the habitual politeness of Latins, Smooth reasoned that Carlos would have come downstairs to greet a guest no matter how tired he might be.

And now this sudden disappearance—Maria's attitude—everything added to the guess that Carlos was one of the boat crew back in that cove. Still, it was only a guess. If Smooth were wrong he might easily make an enemy of a girl who could be a valuable friend.

He put away his gun. No use searching the house. Carlos had had plenty of time to get clear; and undoubtedly he knew the neighborhood well enough to find a secure hiding place. For the time it was stalemate.

MARIA faced Smooth and her eyes were on fire. "You will please to explain, *señor*! This gun, this—everything!"

"I thought I saw a mouse," said Smooth. He grinned. "I'm high as a kite—excited. You'll excuse me, won't you?"

"I think maybe you are crazy, no?"

"A little," said Smooth. He walked with her to the stair. "Give Señor Ponsico my best. I'll drop in to see him again."

"You are leaving now?"

"Yes."

Maria said nothing. She opened the door and smiled as he walked across the narrow porch. At the gate, Smooth turned and lifted a hand.

"Be good," he called.

"Until I see you again," called Maria. She laughed.

Smooth hurried to the curb, woke the driver of his taxi and told him to drive to the airport. Captain Seijo was waiting at the administration building and he pointed to a speedy looking plane that stood on the wind-T.

"That will take you to Barranquilla in less than four hours," he said. "If necessary, the pilot will take you further. He is under your orders."

"Thanks a lot," said Smooth. "And here is some news for you."

He told Seijo of Maria: how he had met her and of the things that had happened since. He then told the captain of Carlos Valera and his suspicion that Carlos was one of the boat crew.

"Then why do you go to Barranquilla?" asked Seijo. "If Carlos Valera is in Cuba we will find him; and I think we can make Carlos tell us many things we wish to know."

"I'd only be in the way," said Smooth. "They know me, but you can put some men on the job who won't be recognized. If you grab Carlos and he talks, let me know and I'll bounce back to Cuba."

"You will keep in touch with me?"

"Naturally."

Seijo walked with Smooth to the cabin plane and motioned to a smart-looking Cuban pilot who stood beside it.

"This is Señor Entrialgo who is one of our best fliers," he said. "He will do as you say."

The pilot bowed, smiling; he looked like a man who could handle himself and a plane with thorough competence.

Smooth shook hands with Entrialgo and climbed into the plane. Seijo waved. Floodlights made a path in the darkness and the pilot raced the plane across the strip. It lifted, and Smooth saw the field drop away from beneath him with surprising speed.

It seemed only a matter of minutes before the dark waters of the Caribbean stretched out below.

CHAPTER XVIII

TREACHERY MADE TO ORDER

IT WAS still dark when Entrialgo pointed to lights on the coast of South America. The flight had been a straight line from Jamaica across the Caribbean and now the pilot was dropping down.

"Barranquilla is just ahead," he said.

"That line of silver to the left is the Magdalena River. When we land you will find the port a busy one, Señor Kyle."

"Yes?"

"Barranquilla is the dividing point," the pilot continued. "One can fly east to Maracaibo and continue through Venezuela, past the Guianas to Brazil. There are connecting lines that will take you down the east coast to Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo and even to Rio Gallegos at the tip of the continent."

"How about the west coast?"

"The same," said Entrialgo. "You can take a plane from Barranquilla to Guayaquil in Ecuador, then on to Lima in Peru, from there to Arica in Chile, and then straight down the coast to Aysen in the far south."

"Any others?"

"Short lines only," said the pilot. "To cross from east to west, one must go to Sao Paulo in Brazil. From this city there is a line to Puerto Suarez and then on to La Paz in Bolivia. From La Paz, a plane will take you over the mountains to Arica or Tacna."

Smooth wished he had paid more attention to his South American geography in school. Some of the cities mentioned by Entrialgo were familiar merely as dots on a map. Others had no significance whatsoever. One thing was certain: Stacey Bellville had a choice of many plane routes if he wished to leave Barranquilla; and if Smooth did not keep his eyes open he would lose him.

The plane banked and circled the field, landing lights appeared and Entrialgo came down to a fast three-pointer. Smooth climbed down from the cabin and started across the field.

"One moment, *señor!*" called Entrialgo. The flier grinned as he climbed from the plane. "Where are you going?"

"To the administration building," said Smooth. "I've got to make arrangements to find out where Bellville's going."

"And you think the plane company will help you?"

"Why not? We'd do the same for them in Washington."

Entrialgo took Smooth's arm and walked slowly with him toward the plane again. The Cuban was smiling, but he looked carefully about to see there were no mechanics within sound of his voice.

"Do you know who owns the Columbian air transportation system?" he asked.

"No."

"A gentleman by the name of Paul von Bauer—a German. He controls it completely. This airport is his."

"This— This belongs to a German?"

"*Sí, señor.* And so do the sugar plantations, and the cocoa and coffee plantations. They are all German owned. Herr von Ribbentrop has taken care of that."

Smooth leaned against the wing of the plane. "Hold everything! Do you mean Germany's foreign minister?"

"His nephew," said Entrialgo. "He has established a branch of the Bund in Columbia with two or three thousand members. They now control all of the flat land in the Choco Department, facing the Panama border."

"Wow!" cried Smooth. "That's news to me, feller!"

"It should not be," said the Cuban. "We in Havana know that the Germans have been active in Columbia for years. And now the Japanese are getting busy. They wish to start a few cotton plantations about five minutes flying distance from the Panama Canal."

Smooth whistled. "But why didn't Captain Seijo tell me we'd have trouble here in Barranquilla?"

"It was not necessary," said Entrialgo quietly. "We have a friend in the company's office—a Cuban who is a member of the Fascist group in Columbia."

The flier looked at Smooth and dropped one slow eyelid in a confidential wink. "He is the manager of the airport and he is trusted completely by Herr von Bauer. If you will wait here, I will talk with this friend and make the proper arrangements."

ENTRIALGO left and was gone for a half hour. When he returned, he winked knowingly and conducted Smooth to the administration building. Here he was introduced to Señor Moya who ordered breakfast served immediately and told Smooth he would be glad to co-operate in any way possible.

Smooth's requests were simple. No chartered plane was to be available if Bellville wished to continue. If he bought tickets to another destination, Smooth wanted to know where. If Bellville decided to stay in the city, Smooth would have to take it from there.

"That can be arranged," said Moya. "However, it will not be easy. Señor Bellville's name is on the list of *favored* customers. If he insists upon a plane, he may get in touch with my superior and then—"

"A favored customer, eh?" said Smooth. "Well, do what you can and I'll appreciate it."

During the next few hours Smooth caught up with some sleep, bought a change of linen and waited. Bellville arrived on the regular flight, went directly to the ticket office and tried to charter a plane. There was the usual customs routine and Bellville was regretfully informed there were no planes available.

Smooth was in the manager's office when the clerk came to report that Señor Bellville wished transportation to Arica, in northern Chile.

"Grand!" cried Smooth. "How soon can he leave?"

"That depends," said the manager. "If he crosses to Cristobal he can just catch the Clipper and arrive at Guayaquil at two-forty this afternoon. Tomorrow morning he can continue on to Lima, arrive

at noon and reach Arica the same evening."

"Not so good," said Smooth. "I'd rather have him arrive in the morning."

"In that case we will say there are no accommodations on the Clipper—that he must wait for the afternoon plane to Buenaventura. That means he will have to change planes and continue on to Talara in the morning."

"How far is Talara?"

"About eight hundred miles from Buenaventura. He then has another flight of about fourteen hundred miles to Arica."

"You mean it's over twenty-four hundred miles from here to Arica by plane?" asked Smooth in amazement. "Why, I didn't think Arica was even half way down the west coast."

The manager laughed. "You are from *America del Nord*; there are many like you who do not know the distances on our continent. It would be well if others from your country knew more about South America."

"Check," said Smooth. "But how long will it take Bellville to reach Arica on your schedule?"

"Allowing for changes and waits, he should arrive the morning after next."

"Sell him the ticket," said Smooth.

SEÑOR MOYA rang for the clerk and gave him the instructions. When he had left the office Smooth asked whether arrangements could be made to check on Bellville's trip along the coast. The manager was doubtful. He turned to Entrialgo.

"I have placed Señor Mendez in the office at Buenaventura," he said. "You can speak with him and he will be of assistance. If you need help from the police, he can say that Señor Kyle is a good friend of Herr von Bauer—that will bring co-operation."

He turned to Smooth again. "But in Ecuador and Peru and Chile—" He lifted his shoulders. "I think you will be wise to trust only yourself."

"Why?" asked Smooth. "Have the Germans taken over in Ecuador?"

It was Entrialgo's turn to smile. "It is the Italians who own Ecuador," he said. "The Army is strictly Italian; the officers are almost all Italian. The president's secretary is an Italian, and many of the members of the government, too. The Japanese are active and have started a colony near Bahia de Caraquez, a small town a few miles north of Manta in the province of Manabi. But of course the air service is a German monopoly."

"Germans own the air service in Ecuador?" said Smooth in surprise. "You're sure of that?"

"Very sure," said Entrialgo. "The planes are tri-motored Junkers—some-what like the ones used for heavy bombing by the German Army."

"What about Peru?" asked Smooth. "Are we going to have trouble in Lima?"

"We will," said Entrialgo, "if word of our arrival gets to Señor Gino Solochi."

"Who is he?"

"Señor Solochi is an Italian gentleman who is connected with the Banco Italiano," said the Cuban. "In Lima he is known as the vice president of Peru—but that is only a courtesy title. He owns most of the enterprises in the country and has built a very fine Caproni airplane factory there."

"Now isn't that just too ducky!" said Smooth. "How does he get along with his pals the Germans?"

"Oh, he lets them control the sugar industry, and he has allowed the Japanese to buy ten million acres along the coast to grow cotton. They get along very nicely, all of them."

"So they get along nicely, do they?" said Smooth. "And in Chile?"

"The Germans again," said Entrialgo. "You will see for yourself when we arrive."

"I get it. The further south I go, the colder it gets for Americans."

The manager shrugged. "Americans? All of these people are now Americans—but they are not citizens of the United States. I am afraid you have much to learn, *señor*."

"I'll double that and play it in spades," said Smooth.

They waited until Bellville's plane had left and then went to the field. Entrialgo's plane had been gassed and now it was rolled onto the strip.

"How'd you like to fly to Arica?" asked Smooth.

"Why not?" said the flier, and he put one hand on Smooth's shoulder. "I have orders to go where you wish. One way is as good as another."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Smooth laughed and walked with Entrialgo to the plane. . . .

THE stop at Buenaventura was made while the sun was high in a cloudless sky. Entrialgo explained that this was unusual—that in Buenaventura there was rain nearly every day of the year.

The plane had flown well inland from the coast, but as it dropped down to the airport Smooth saw that the city was located upon an island in the bay. A dozen steamers were moving across the harbor of the busy port, planes were circling above the field and everywhere was hurried activity.

Smooth waited in the cabin while Entrialgo went to the office to talk with Señor Mendez, another of Captain Seijo's agents in the employ of Herr von Bauer. A half hour slipped by and Smooth grew worried. Undoubtedly they had reached Buenaventura long before Bellville could possibly arrive; but with each passing minute Smooth expected to see the huge plane sweep down onto the field.

At length Entrialgo returned from the airport office and opened the door of the cabin.

"How goes it?" asked Smooth.

"Very good," said the flier. "Señor Mendez is clever. He immediately got in touch with the local police and explained that a suspicious American was due to arrive. He also said Herr von Bauer wanted this man watched constantly. The police are sending officers who will report each of Bellville's moves to us."

"Nice work," said Smooth. He pointed to a car that had stopped at the edge of the field. "That's either a delegation from the local Bund, or the cops."

"It is the police," said the Cuban. "I will talk with them."

He grinned at Smooth.

A man crossed the field and Entrialgo stepped from the cabin to meet him. There were a few moments of conversation and the man looked wisely at the plane. He nodded, pointed to a nearby machine shop and hurried back to the office.

Entrialgo called and Smooth followed him to the machine shop. They took places behind the wide doors and the Cuban spoke to the mechanics. After a great deal of discussion a crew was assembled and the plane was rolled into a hangar.

Smooth waited with his pilot and saw Stacey step from the commercial plane. He noticed that an extra man rode in the touring car that took the gambler to the local hotel, and knew Stacey was being watched.

The evening was dull and Smooth spent it in his room at a small hotel, receiving occasional reports from the police about Bellville. These included the type of meal he had ordered, the cafe in which he ate, the girls who spoke with him and the time he went to bed.

SMOOTH was awake early in the morning. Knowing police are the same the world over he stopped in at the local *Juzgado de guardia* and made a donation to "any worthy charity the captain favors."

The captain was properly grateful and assured Smooth that Señor Bellville would be under constant watch until he left the city. And true to his word, the captain stood with Smooth in the shadows of the hangar and saw Bellville leave for Talara. Attendants rolled out the Cuban plane and Entrialgo took off.

"It will be best," said the pilot, "if you do not speak of Señor Bellville at

Talara. We will stop for gas and food and then leave immediately."

"No dice," said Smooth. "Belleville might pull a fast one—leave the plane and go to another city."

"You think he knows he is being followed?"

"He might know. Stacey is smart—plenty smart."

Entrialgo shook his head. "There will be trouble, *señor*. The people of Peru are not too fond of people from the United States. There will be questions and much legal talk."

Smooth realized this might well be so. He was no longer in Cuba, and Belleville was in a country where he undoubtedly had many friends. Still, it would not do to let the gambler get out of sight. Once gone, Smooth knew he would never be found again.

"How much do you know about Talara?" he asked.

"It is very small," said Entrialgo. "Guayaquil is the big city, less than two hundred miles north in Ecuador. Talara is an oil town on the tip of Cape Parina and from here the coast slopes back toward the southeast."

"Is there anywhere you could leave me while you went to the field?"

"Many places," said the pilot. "The coast is open for miles. When we pass Fernandez I will look for a landing place."

"Good enough," said Smooth. "Drop me, then go to the field and gas up. Belleville hasn't seen your plane so he won't start guessing. Tell the attendants you're making a flight to Chile, or something."

"That is wise," said Entrialgo. He smiled. "I will see that Belleville takes off, and then I will return for you."

Smooth nodded. He liked this young flier. Captain Seijo had offered no explanations but Smooth suspected Entrialgo was one of Batista's new army officers. Real men, these, part of a young republic that was eager for the friendship of the United States.

Captain Seijo's attitude had been more than friendly. He had cut through yards

of red tape to furnish Smooth with a plane and pilot, and he had asked no questions.

As the plane raced south over the mountainous coastline of Columbia, Smooth dozed at times and awoke to find the pilot smiling at him. There was coffee in a thermos and a few sandwiches. Entrialgo advised Smooth to save them, explaining that he might need them while he waited for the plane to return. He pointed below to the city of Tumaco and then to the boundary of Ecuador.

Less than two hours flying took them across the Gulf of Guayaquil and the pilot dropped lower to study the coast line.

The day was clear and the sky above the Pacific was bare of clouds. Mountains rimmed the coast and stood with their feet in the ocean. Beyond were the bright yellow Peruvian deserts. Occasionally there was a green valley but for the most part the coast was a succession of arid peaks and gullies. At length Entrialgo pointed to a clearing.

"There is our place," he said. "From there I can reach Talara quickly."

He circled the surrounding countryside and Smooth looked down at the most deserted piece of acreage he had ever seen. Then the flier put the plane into a dive and skimmed across a sandy field. He banked, turned and came in slowly. The wheels touched and rolled without a single bump.

"Either you're good, or this place is perfect," said Smooth. "It's practically made to order."

"That is just the trouble, Señor Kyle," said the flier. "There are too many places in Peru that are made to order. Friends of mine have noticed that in flights along the coast."

"I don't get it," said Smooth.

Entrialgo had cut the motor. He pointed to the ground. "This clearing has been made, *señor*. It is close to the waterfront and oil tankers could bring gas and spare parts for planes. It is also less than a thousand miles from the Panama Canal."

CHAPTER XIX

THE HAPPY TOURIST

SMOOTH looked thoughtfully about. The field was screened by jagged hills on three sides but a comparatively level stretch of country opened off to the Pacific.

Smooth decided to take a closer look. He climbed out of the plane and staggered as the heat struck him—heavy tropical heat that closed in from all sides. Aloft, the wind had allowed him to forget he had crossed the equator. Now the cool wind was gone.

The flier grinned and handed him the thermos and sandwiches. "It would be wise to find shade, *señor*," he said. "I will return when our friend leaves for Arica. It will not be hard to overtake him."

Smooth nodded. It was too hot to talk. He watched Entrialgo turn the plane, taxi along the field and take off. Then he knew what it meant to be alone. The plane raced aloft and the sound of its motors faded.

Smooth walked slowly across the clearing toward an outcrop of rock on the side near the water. And as he walked he realized that much work had been done to level this square of ground. The natural conformation of the country was rough and irregular, but gangs of men with shovels had made this section flat.

He left the thermos in the shade of the rock and kept walking. A hundred yards distant he came to a long, low building made of corrugated iron. There were wide doors at both ends, fastened with padlocks. The windows were boarded and the walls and roof were painted to conform with the surrounding country.

From the air the building had gone unnoticed. A thousand planes might pass over it without anyone's suspecting that it was anything but another rocky ledge.

Smooth pried one of the boards from a window. The interior was bare but along the walls were solidly built benches. A few dozen machines and men to set them up would quickly turn this place into a machine shop.

And after replacing the board Smooth made another interesting discovery. At the rear of the building four short pipes extended from the earth. They were capped, but an easy guess told Smooth there was a tank buried beneath them.

Everything was thoroughly done—thoroughly prepared. Smooth wondered how many more secret bases had been built here below the equator. Dozens, probably. All ready and waiting for *Der Tag*.

And now shipments of arms were arriving. Men like Garado, Bellville and Dreyfus were working with the people who were arming a continent for war. Smooth felt his throat grow tight. He was beginning to like this case—like it a lot.

. . . The heat had lessened a trifle and the sun was low over the Pacific when he heard the sound of plane motors. He stood under the rock ledge at the edge of the clearing and watched Entrialgo bank the ship, circle the field and land. The Cuban was smiling when he beckoned to Smooth.

"It goes well," he said. "Señor Bellville took the regular plane. It stops once at Lima and then continues to Arequipa. There is another short stop at Tacna and then across to Arica in Chile."

"And you call that going well?" asked Smooth. "It means we have to play hide-and-seek with that guy all the way down the coast!"

"That will not be necessary. I learned that there are no planes available at Lima for hours. Before he can leave I can reach Arica, leave you there and return."

"Let me get this straight," said Smooth. He climbed into the plane and faced the pilot. "You want to take me to Arica, leave me there and double back to Lima—that it?"

"Yes," said Entrialgo. "It will be best if we do it so. I can get more co-operation in these countries than you, *señor*."

"Let's hope you're right," said Smooth.

ENTRIALGO gunned the motors and the ship rolled. It cut across the point of land, lifting high above the mountains that came to the coast, then it hugged the

shore line. The flier was anxious to show what his ship could do and he grinned occasionally and pointed to the gauge. Smooth nodded.

The miles dropped away and they flew into the night. Now and then Entrialgo pointed to a cluster of lights and called the name of the city.

At Lima they left the coast and raced above the mountains again, following the regular route of the commercial planes over the volcanoes El Misti, Pichu-Pichu and Chachani.

It was not yet midnight when Entrialgo pointed to the lights of a small town on the waterfront.

"Arica," he said. "It would be best if you spoke carefully here, *señor*."

"You don't think they'll like me?"

"I'm sure they won't," said the flier. "People from your country are unpopular for many reasons. Once these cities were busy shipping nitrates. Money was easy. Lots of money. But now the United States makes its own nitrate and the mines in Chile are valueless. The government favors Germany and Italy; it has consistently tried to block any Pan-American arrangements, and it is encouraged by Argentina."

"How come you know all this?" asked Smooth.

Entrialgo smiled. "I am a Cuban, *señor*. In my own country I have long heard of the injustices of the United States. Many of my people think you would steal from us and give nothing in return. They say we are slaves who must turn to you for the bread we eat.

"Some part of this is true. We are small and weak, and you are strong. But those of us who can think, know that many of the wrongs you do us are born of carelessness. You would not willingly do us harm—as would Germany or Italy."

Smooth let that tumble about in his mind as the flier put the plane down on the small landing field. Like thousands of other Americans he had never thought of any antagonism toward his country in South America.

He had expected it in Europe and

found plenty of it in Russia. But always he had imagined the countries to the south considered the United States a friend. Entrialgo's warning had come in good time. He remembered it as he shook hands with the flier and watched the plane take off.

The sound of the motors brought a shout from a small building at the edge of the field. Smooth turned and found a thin, dark-faced man coming toward him. He wore an unpressed suit of tan cloth and a soft straw hat. As he came closer he pointed toward the banking plane and spoke rapidly in Spanish.

"*No comprendo*," said Smooth.

The man frowned, looked sharply and Smooth motioned toward the office. Smooth followed to the low cement building in front of which burned a single light. The landing field floodlights had been turned off and the place seemed to have suddenly fallen asleep.

SMOOTH'S guide took him into a bad-smelling office where another dark-faced man in tan clothes was sitting with his feet propped on the corner of a desk. There was an exchange of Spanish and both men turned to look at Smooth.

"Where you come from, huh?" asked the man at the desk.

"Guayaquil," said Smooth, picking a name at random.

"You got passport, huh?"

"Yes."

"Why don't your plane stay, huh?"

"The pilot had to see a man about a dog."

"Dog? What you mean, huh?"

Smooth pulled a long shot. "Look *señor*—I'm expecting a man from the German consul's office. Is he here yet?"

Both men looked at each other. One shrugged. The man at the desk uncrossed his legs and then crossed them again.

"German consul?" he said. "This is no Santiago. This is Arica."

"What?" cried Smooth in pretended surprise. "Arica? I am in Arica?"

Again both men looked at each other. The one at the desk reached up and brushed

a fly from his ear, spat in the general direction of a brass cuspidor and sighed.

"This Arica," he said. "German consul in Santiago. You want to go there, huh?"

"Immediately!" cried Smooth. "Get a plane!" He puffed out his cheeks. "*Schnell! Schnell! A plane!*"

No sooner than it was out Smooth was sorry. This lazy bird at the desk probably spoke better German than Smooth. And that wouldn't be hard. *Dank, schnell, and ja* were about nine-tenth's of Smooth's German vocabulary. He couldn't get far with them.

"*Mañana* is plane," said the man at the desk.

Smooth had been holding his breath. Now he let it go. The bluff had gone across and the two men seemed to have lost their antagonism. One pointed to a rickety chair near the desk.

Smooth sat down, wondering what the answer would be if he were again asked for his passport. The man who had been standing found a chair and dragged it to the desk. He, too, sat down and crossed his legs on one corner. That left room for Smooth, so he did the same.

There were cigars in his pocket and he tossed them to his hosts. Both thanked him and smiled. So far so good. But Stacey Bellville would be bouncing into Arica in the morning. And what happened then?

No doubt Stacey would have a passport. And if he hadn't just picked a spot on the map, he would either have friends in Arica, or in some nearby city. Following him wasn't going to be easy. And definitely, Smooth didn't want Stacey to find him sitting here when the gambler arrived.

"*Señor,*" he said at length, "it must not be known I am in Arica. It is a government secret—very important."

"Huh?" said the man who spoke English. He brushed at a fly.

Smooth figured that hadn't gone across. He tried again: "There will be passenger planes arriving in the morning—*no es verdad?*"

"Aaaah!" said the one troubled by flies. "*Habla Espanol, eh?*"

"Not enough to worry about," said Smooth. "But what about those planes?"

"One comes. One goes."

Smooth opened his eyes wide and leaned forward. "On the one that comes—also maybe comes a man I must know where he goes—*comprendo?*"

"Aaaah!" said the fly-swatter. "*Habla Espanol, eh?*"

"Now don't let's go through that again!" said Smooth. He opened his wallet and took out a few bills. The larger ones went to the fly-swatter. The others went to his assistant. "These are for you—a present from Herr Hitler. I must know where the man goes!"

"*Gracias, señor,*" said the fly-swatter. He counted money and stuffed it into his pocket. "What man, huh?"

"The man who gets off the plane!"

"The plane that comes?"

Smooth drew a deep breath. "*Si, señor—the plane that comes!*"

"*Mañana,*" said the fly-swatter, and closed his eyes.

SMOOTH let it go at that. He recrossed his legs and dozed. Soon a pain that zig-zagged along his spine awakened him. He stood and tried to stretch. Each joint in his backbone yelled at him.

He looked at the two men and saw they hadn't changed position. Evidently it took practice to sleep through a night with your feet crossed on the edge of a desk.

Smooth decided to do some exploring. He stepped quietly across the room and opened the screen door. The landing field was empty and a nearby pair of low hangars appeared to be deserted. Heat lay like a heavy blanket across the place and made walking an effort.

Smooth decided to call off the exploring. In the darkness he couldn't see beyond a distance of fifty feet anyway. There was a bench near the door of the building and he tried another nap.

The roar of a plane motor awakened him. Morning had come and the town of Arica was stirring into life. A small monoplane had just left the field and Smooth

watched it circle and quickly head east.

Then he stretched, shook the kinks out of his neck and walked across the field. At first glance the town seemed to be of little importance. Built at the foot of a headland it was fringed about with rolling sandhills. Beyond were the Andes, glistening in the first shine of the morning sun.

A sleepy old street took him past an ancient church to the Hotel Poncifico that stood near the waterfront. A bathing beach was nearby, and further along were the docks from which launches put out to steamers anchored in the harbor.

As he walked Smooth wondered what had caused Stacey Bellville to pick Arica as a destination. Definitely there was little for a man of Stacey's type here. True, the Pan American Airways had built a landing for their planes, and a few blocks from the hotel Smooth found a railway station that had been drying in the sun for years.

But everywhere was a decided lack of activity. Even the man who ran the small restaurant near the depot seemed resentful.

There was no menu and Smooth searched his memory for the words that would bring food. The proprietor, sleepy-eyed and undecided whether to yawn or blink, stood at his shoulder and waited. Smooth wanted black coffee. He made a quick stab.

"Cafe," he said. "*Cafe—no leche.*"

"Uuhuh," said the proprietor. "*Cafe solo.*"

Smooth had been close. He tried to remember the word for rolls but the proprietor beat him to it. There was a card on the table and he pushed it at Smooth. On it were listed the staple items of food—English in one column, Spanish in the next and Portuguese in the third. Smooth ran a finger down the list. There was no word for rolls.

"*El pan—y—manteca,*" he said, hoping it would bring him bread and butter. "*Huevos y tocino.*"

"*No tocino,*" said the proprietor. "*Huevos pasados?*"

"No bacon, eh?" said Smooth. "Okay, feller—bring on the *pasados.*"

"*Pasados* means boiled eggs. You want some boiled eggs?"

Smooth leaned back in his chair and tossed away the card. "Why didn't you say so in the first place?"

The proprietor shrugged one shoulder. "Tourist like to talk Spanish. I don't care. I talk Spanish. What you want for breakfast?"

"Eggs and coffee."

"Hokay!"

In a few moments the proprietor returned, put the food on the table and sat down facing Smooth.

"You like Arica?" he asked.

"It's marvelous," said Smooth. "What do you do while you're waiting for the tide to come in?"

"Watch it go out."

Smooth blinked. "Right back at me, eh?"

The proprietor lifted one shoulder again. "Lots of smart fellows in Arica."

"Anywhere a man can get some action—have a little fun?"

"Lots of pretty girls in Arica, too."

"You can have them," said Smooth. "How about some roulette?"

"Oh, you like to gamble?" said the proprietor. He rubbed one ear and looked at Smooth. "All right—you gamble. Past Hotel Pacifico is café. Tonight is gambling there."

Smooth tried a long shot. "Is that Señor Garado's place?"

"Señor Garado is no more in Arica. You know him?"

"Oh, we're great pals!"

"So! Then you must know Señor Dultanto. He, too, is friend of Garado."

Smooth laughed. "Good old Señor Dultanto—why, I haven't seen him in years. Where is he now?"

"In La Paz sometimes. Sometimes in Arica."

"A busy man, eh? Runs places in both towns?"

"Not much in Arica—mostly in La Paz," said the proprietor. He stood up regretfully as two workmen came into the restaurant.

"In La Paz—oh boy! *Some* place, eh?"

"*Some* place is right, *señor,*" said Smooth. He finished his meal, tossed some Amer-

ican coins onto the table and left the restaurant. He hurried back to the air field and waited for Entrialgo to return.

There was activity on the field now and Smooth decided to keep out of sight. There was the matter of passports, and now that it was morning the fly-swatter might want to ask more questions.

CHAPTER XX

KYLE FROM KANKAKEE

HE FOUND a place near one of the hangars; and while he was waiting, he added the name of Señor Dultanto to his list. If the good *señor* was a friend of Garado, Smooth wanted to meet him. Perhaps he was the man Stacey Bellville had come to meet in Arica. Perhaps he wasn't. Smooth didn't know and there was nothing he could do about it at the moment. He used up one of his remaining cigarettes and watched the sky.

Soon he saw the Cuban plane streaking in from the north. It dove, circled and came to a quick landing. Entrialgo climbed out, said something to an attendant and started toward the office.

"Over here!" called Smooth. He stepped from the shadow of the hangar.

"Ah! *Buenas dias, señor!*" cried Entrialgo. He hurried toward Smooth. "Everything has gone well and our friend will arrive in a few moments."

Smooth shook hands with the tired flier. The Cuban's eyes were deep and heavy with strain, but he smiled and dismissed his night's work with a laugh. Bellville had come south as quickly as possible and had not left the airfield at any city on the way. But now it was going to be necessary to keep a close watch as they had no indication of what route he would take from Arica.

Entrialgo laughed again when Smooth told of the encounter with the fly-swatter.

"You were right," he said. "There is respect for the German people in most South American countries. But wait here; I will talk with these men."

"Better take some of this along with

you," said Smooth. He handed Entrialgo a few bills. "It's one language they all speak."

The Cuban grinned and took the money. He hurried to the low building across the field. Minutes passed, then he came to the door, and motioned to Smooth. With him was the fly-swatter.

"This is Señor Pareja," said Entrialgo. "I have explained that you are concerned about the Americano who will arrive on the next plane. He knows; it is a matter of state, and he is happy to help us."

"Swell," said Smooth. He shook hands with Pareja. "Nice little town you have here. Perhaps the American will stay."

"He will leave," said Pareja wisely. "Everything is arranged. His ticket waits and he will go immediately."

"Go?" said Smooth quickly. "You mean—"

"It is arranged," said Pareja again. He closed one eye in a knowing wink. "Señor Dultanto has left the orders."

"Oh! Señor Dultanto!" said Smooth. "Now I understand. Yes. That explains everything!"

Pareja laughed. "It is good that you meet me, *señor*. There are others in Chile who do not favor our cause."

Smooth laughed, too. Things were breaking fast and he wanted time to sort them out. He motioned to Entrialgo. "We'd better wait in the plane. Señor Pareja will take care of things here."

He turned to the fly-swatter. "And remember—nothing must be said to the American!"

"Of a certainty!" said Pareja.

ENTRIALGO waited until they were seated in the cabin of the plane, then he turned to Smooth with amazement in his eyes.

"What is this?" he asked. "The cause—Señor Dultanto?"

"Your guess is as good as mine," said Smooth. "I met a guy in a restaurant who told me Señor Dultanto runs a game here in Arica and another in La Paz. Evidently he's bought a ticket for Bellville." Smooth

laughed. "What did you tell Parejo to make him so sociable?"

"I merely told him you are a German agent. That is, I hinted that such is the case. He winked at me, took the money I offered and said he understood perfectly."

"I wish I did," said Smooth. "That crack about the cause didn't sound so good. A dollar gets you twenty Señor Dultanto is getting ready to turn this country inside out."

"*¿Quién sabe?*" said the Cuban. He pointed to the sky.

Smooth watched the plane come in and roll to a stop. Stacey Bellville was the second passenger to alight. He walked to the office at the far side of the field and a porter followed with his baggage. Soon another plane was taxied onto the field. Bellville's baggage was put aboard and later the gambler followed.

"Here we go again," said Smooth. "Do you know your way to La Paz?"

"Why to La Paz?"

"That's where Señor Dultanto has his plane. Is it much of a trip?"

"A little over an hour but we climb all the way. The city is twelve thousand feet above sea level." Entrialgo pointed to the heavens. "Tonight you will have a wonderful view of the Southern Cross."

"Sure you don't mean the Southern double-cross?" asked Smooth.

Entrialgo laughed as he gunned the motors and lifted the plane. As it climbed Smooth found a welcome relief from the heat of the seacoast town; but soon a chill set in and Entrialgo closed the vents. They climbed steadily, reaching a point above and behind Bellville's plane.

Endless expanse of barren country stretched out beneath them and for a time Smooth was reminded of the peaks and valleys of Arizona and New Mexico. A dozen changing colors painted the slopes, and nowhere in the vast region was there a sign of life.

Suddenly Entrialgo pointed to the north. Smooth turned and saw a blue plane heading toward them. It came quickly, dropping down from a great height.

"Probably going to Arica," said Smooth.

"From where?" asked the pilot. "There are no cities in that direction."

Smooth looked again. The plane was closer and seemed to be diving directly toward them. Entrialgo advanced the throttle slightly and banked to the south. The blue plane changed direction. The Cuban swung to the north. Again the blue plane swerved to intercept his course.

"Take the glasses," said the pilot. "There are no markings on his wings but I think he mounts a gun."

Smooth reached for the glasses and leveled them. Entrialgo was right. The plane's wings were painted a bright blue with no insignia on them; but Smooth saw the barrel of a machine gun mounted forward of the cockpit. He also saw the plane was coming straight as an arrow toward them.

"How fast can we fly?" he asked.

THE pilot answered by tilting the nose of the plane upward and swinging south. He advanced the throttle and the motors roared. They climbed and the blue-winged plane repeated the maneuver.

Then Smooth saw white streaks fanning past the cabin window. He touched the pilot's arm and pointed.

"Tracers," said Entrialgo. "He does not shoot good."

"Good enough to suit me," said Smooth. "How are our chances?"

"We will know soon. It seems Señor Pareja was not so stupid as we thought."

Smooth didn't answer. It was obvious things had jammed somewhere along the line. Pareja was the answer. The Chilean had played dumb, taken whatever money was offered to him, and tipped Bellville he was being followed. So far the numbers added.

But what next? A phone call to La Paz? Word that Smooth was on his way? Probably. And now a welcoming committee had arrived to shower machine-gun bullets instead of roses.

Another burst whipped past the cabin. Smooth knew enough about motors to

realize that Entrialgo was giving his everything they'd take. The ship was climbing whenever possible. At times the pilot banked, but as yet he had tried nothing but the most simple maneuvers.

A third burst of tracers finished that. The Cuban pulled a fast snap roll and dived. Smooth saw the sky change places with the earth. He felt himself slipping and grabbed the seat. The plane leveled off and he braced himself.

"The belt," said Entrialgo calmly. "It is best that you strap yourself tightly."

Smooth saw the Cuban fastening a wide webbed belt across his thighs. He reached for the belt attached to his own seat and got it in place just as Entrialgo put the nose of the plane up sharply.

They rolled into a half loop and turned. An inverted mountain peak rushed toward them and Smooth tried to cross his fingers. The plane dived and banked. Smooth found he couldn't move his arms. Then the mountain peak whizzed past and he found himself looking at the sky.

"He is in front, now," said the Cuban, laughing.

Smooth blinked and looked ahead. The monoplane with the machine gun was less than three hundred feet distant. Smooth noticed it was an open cockpit job with places for two, although there was only one flier in the ship.

The man looked back over his shoulder and Smooth decided it might be worth a shot. He took out his automatic and reached forward to open the door panel.

"Don't try it," warned Entrialgo. "If you put the gun out of the cabin, the wind will break your arm. You could hit nothing, anyhow."

"Maybe not," said Smooth. "But I could have a lot of fun trying."

"Wait," said the Cuban. "There will be much fun."

THE plane ahead had swung east and Entrialgo followed closely. They climbed, and soon the blue monoplane started to draw further ahead.

At times the pilot looked back. Once he

waved an arm. Entrialgo shook his head doubtfully and followed at full throttle.

"We are as fast, but he climbs better," he said. "Soon you will have your fun, *señor*."

Both planes crossed a towering range of mountains and swept out over the valley beyond. The air was bumpy and at times a down-draft caught the leading ship and dropped it a hundred feet in a matter of seconds. When this happened Entrialgo swerved sharply, trying to avoid the pocket and hold his altitude.

But now the blue plane turned north and headed along a winding valley. The Cuban turned also, holding tightly to his position.

"Here we go," he said suddenly.

The leading plane pulled a fast roll and Entrialgo did the same. This much Smooth was able to follow. Then the sky and earth started a mad dance, changing places so quickly that at length they became one confused blur of color.

Smooth felt his stomach sag. Then it lifted. He was jammed against the seat and then tossed against the restraining belt. The plane went into a screaming dive and when it pulled out Smooth noticed everything had turned to a greenish brown. He wondered about that. Then things went dark and he stopped wondering for a few seconds.

Coming out of the daze was like fighting back to consciousness after a hard jab to the jaw. In a moment Smooth's brain cleared and he looked out of the cabin window. Then he wished he hadn't.

A line of jagged rocks whipped past with the speed of a picket fence slipping by a train window. Entrialgo had decided to do a little hedge-hopping, using the rough tips of the low peaks for hedges.

He straightened out and again Smooth saw a line of tracers flash past the window.

"How long can we keep this up?" he asked.

"Oh, this is not bad," said the Cuban. "A few holes in the wing—a few in the tail. He is a bad shot. Very!"

"What do you want—a bullseye?"

"He has not hit the cabin at all," said

Entrialgo. He laughed and then looked at the curved roof. "Well—hardly at all."

Smooth looked up and saw a tear in the metal roof. He turned to look from the window and drew his breath in sharply as a cliff rushed toward them.

The plane banked and again the mad dance of sky and earth started. A moment later Entrialgo straightened out and pointed to a blue plane. It was in front.

"Now we will see if he likes fun," said the pilot.

He eased forward on the controls and the plane raced directly at the tail of the blue ship. The leader banked and turned. Entrialgo's bank was sharper and again he dove at the blue plane. Just when it seemed they must crash he lifted the nose, swerved and came in at an angle.

"I don't like to be a back seat driver," said Smooth, "but is there any point to what you're doing?"

"Si," said the pilot. He grinned and showed a line of even teeth. "I force him down. Make him land."

Again he dived, and again Smooth blinked and wondered what happened when two planes tangled in midair. The Cuban's wing tip almost brushed the tail of the blue plane. Then the leader climbed.

Again there was a series of acrobatics. Smooth was having trouble with the coffee and eggs he had eaten for breakfast. One more set of loops, chandelles and Immelmans, and he would start rooting for the blue plane to make a bullseye.

"Aaaah! That was better!" cried Entrialgo. "He is not so bad after all!"

SMOOTH said nothing. He had just watched a series of holes march across the cabin wall. He closed his eyes. When he opened them a wide river was almost under the right wing. He turned to look at the pilot.

"Rio Desaguadero," said the flier. "Beyond are the copper mines."

"Never mind the copper mines!" said Smooth. "Where's that bird with the machine gun?"

"Oh, he is still behind. But soon he will

leave. I do not think he likes it when I dive at him."

"Neither do I!"

"But what else is there?" said Entrialgo. "If I have a gun—aaah, that would be different! But with no gun, I must dive at him. Over the river it will be great sport!"

"Oh, wonderful!" said Smooth faintly. "Personally, I'd rather sit the next one out!"

The flier grinned and winked. Then it started again. Now Smooth had another color to add to the sky and the rocks. The dark river spun past the cabin window, twisted and turned into blue sky.

Again the coffee and eggs started to rebel. And again Smooth watched Entrialgo maneuver to a position above and behind the blue plane. Then came the roaring power dive and the sudden sinking feeling at the end of it.

Greens and blues changed to black and Smooth felt himself slipping. He came out of it and heard the Cuban laugh as he nosed over and started another dash at the blue plane.

They were close to the water now. Too close for the man with the machine gun. He shook his fist once, banked and raced off to the north. Entrialgo picked up the nose of the plane and flew east. A few minutes later Smooth managed to get his stomach under control and turned toward the Cuban.

"All finished having fun?" he asked weakly.

"He has gone," said the flier. "Like you say in America—he can dish it, but he can not take it."

"You can't prove it by me, feller," said Smooth. "Half the time you were all alone and I was in the blackness. But now what gives?"

Entrialgo pointed toward a distant rim of mountains. "La Paz is just beyond those peaks. First comes Corocoro, then Viacha, and then we are there."

He looked after the departing blue plane and laughed again. "I would like greatly to know who our friend was. He does not fly like an American—not like some I have seen."

"Army fliers?"

"No; men who fly for gold. You have many such. Some fly in Spain, in China—wherever there is war. They are real fighters, those fellows. I have seen them and I know!"

Smooth was interested. "You mean you can tell a flier by the way he handles his plane?"

"Sometimes. Each country uses different systems. That one was more like the German than any other. Of course, I can not say for sure—but maybe a German."

SMOOTH watched the jagged mountain peaks slip past under the wing of the plane. They stretched north and south as far as eye could see, and they made Smooth feel very much alone.

It was a new sensation. Time and again he had been sent on missions of danger and importance. Usually there were a dozen people shooting at him from all directions—people whose one job seemed to be the destruction of Smooth Kyle. This was routine. But Smooth had never felt as if he were standing alone against these people.

He looked again at the empty spaces below him. Perhaps the reason could be found here. Smooth Kyle was used to cities. Give him a crowded metropolis, traffic, tall buildings and subways, and he was at home. Crowds were his protection. Cab drivers and doormen, night club waiters and fast-money men were his friends.

But now he was alone, flying over the most forsaken stretch of country he had ever seen.

Soon Entrialgo pointed to a town on a mountainside. "Corocoro," he said. "The next is Viacha, and then you will see La Paz. You will like that city very much."

"How big is it?" asked Smooth.

"Very big," said the flier. "Two hundred thousand people live there—almost half as big as Havana."

Smooth began to feel better. He questioned Entrialgo about La Paz and learned that it differed greatly from other cities that were an equal distance from the equator. Life was faster.

From the Cuban's description Smooth began to realize La Paz might offer the same opportunities he had always found in the cities of the north. He looked ahead eagerly when the plane moved over the last rim of mountains. Then he drew a deep breath and whistled.

Before him stretched a natural basin that was but three miles wide and perhaps a quarter mile deep in a surrounding ring of mountains. Within it was La Paz. It was as if the city had been dropped from the bill of a passing bird and had lodged in this tiny crevice in the hills.

Entrialgo pointed to a set of towering snow-capped peaks and called their names—Illampu, Huayna-Potosi, Illimani—musical names given in the Quechuan language of the native Indians. Streams fed from the slopes and the valley was thick with vegetation and masses of flowers.

The plane rushed down and the flier pointed to El Alto, a village clinging to the western slope of the canyon. Then the plane turned in a wide circle and headed toward a well-kept and up-to-the-minute airport on the outskirts of the city.

Attendants hurried forward. Chocks were thrown beneath the wheels and a man waved a welcome. Smooth opened the cabin door. Then he shivered. It was close to noon but there was a decided chill in the air.

When he tried to stand Smooth experienced a feeling of lightness. He put one hand to his eyes and Entrialgo laughed.

"The altitude," he said. "We are still high, though not so high as a few moments ago. Walk slowly and you will be all right."

"That's what you think," said Smooth. "It may be altitude to you; to me it is a case of misplaced coffee and eggs."

A UNIFORMED attendant helped Smooth to the field and Entrialgo followed. He spoke quickly to the attendant and they were conducted to the administration building. Here the manager invited them to his office, asked for Smooth's credentials and shook his head slowly when Smooth said he had none.

"It is very irregular, *señor*," he said. "You claim to have come directly from Cuba, but—"

An attendant stepped into the office, motioned to the manager and there was a moment of quiet conversation.

"The bullet holes," whispered Entrialgo. "I will explain them."

"Better make it good," said Smooth quietly.

The manager returned and his eyes were serious. He was a short man, dressed in a gray business suit and tan oxfords. He wore a small mustache and twisted it slowly while he studied Smooth and the Cuban.

"Your plane," he said slowly. "It appears to have been damaged."

His eyes moved from Smooth's face to the Cuban's, and he was very much on the alert.

"You mean the bullet holes?" said Entrialgo, and he laughed. "*Es nada, señor*—nothing at all. The plane was formerly owned by my government. It was used in some military experiments and found to be impracticable. Unfortunately I have not had time to make repairs."

Smooth gulped. Entrialgo's story had as many holes in it as did the plane. Smooth doubted it would go across. When he saw the manager's face, he *knew* it wouldn't go across. He pointed to the phone.

"Will you call the United States Consulate?"

The manager picked up the phone and spoke to the operator. A moment later he turned and handed the phone to Smooth. "Señor Conover will speak with you," he said.

Smooth drew a deep breath. "This is Kyle talking—a traveling salesman from Kankakee, Indiana. I just bounced into La Paz with a line of Fuller brushes and I—"

"Hello, Smooth," said the voice on the wire. "How goes it?"

"Huh?"

"This is Conover—Bill Conover at the Consulate. We'd have sent someone there

to meet you but we didn't expect you so soon."

"Didn't expect—" Smooth blinked and looked at the phone. "Hey! What gives? How do you know—"

"Put Señor Herrera on the wire and I'll speak with him," said Conover. "Then grab a cab and come over. We'll have lunch together."

Smooth pushed the phone at the manager and walked to a chair. It simply didn't make sense. He looked at Entrialgo and lifted both shoulders. Perhaps it was the altitude. Perhaps he needed a drink.

Smooth searched his memory for a Bill Conover and drew a blank. Then there was that crack about Conover expecting him. Nothing added up.

Well, he was used to surprises, particularly on this job. In time everything would be cleared up—maybe.

He waited until Señor Herrera had finished talking and noticed the manager's attitude had changed completely.

"It will be quite all right, Señor Kyle," said the manager. "I will provide you with transportation to the Consulate. It is on the Avenida General Comacho. He turned to the flier. "And you too, *señor*. We will take good care of your plane until you return."

There were a thousand questions but Smooth decided to pass them up. He went with the manager and Entrialgo to the door of the administration building and waited until Herrera summoned a touring car. The driver was given instructions and the manager bowed to Smooth and Entrialgo.

"How did you arrange it?" asked Entrialgo when the car had turned into a well paved avenue. "What did you tell him?"

He was frowning.

"I pass," said Smooth. "A guy by the name of Bill Conover at the Consulate said he didn't expect us so soon. Now you take it from there, pal. You know as much as I do."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

At Four

By ROBERT ARTHUR

Author of "Napoleon of Nothingness," "The Pearls of Madame Podaire," etc.

THE colonel cradled the telephone and raised a weary glance toward the lieutenant, his aide. In the greenish light of the desk lamp, his sensitive features were haggard and drawn.

"We can't shoot them," he said slowly, placing his finger tips precisely on the polished desk and looking down at them. "Unfortunately. A state of war does not exist. And the proof against is not conclusive. Legally, I mean.

"The instructions they carried are cleverly worded. Their meaning is quite plain, but they *could* relate to more innocent matters. The enemy will make an incident out of it if we shoot them, and their army does not march. And even if it does. Retaliations, you know."

"But," the lieutenant protested, hot bitterness in his voice, "the man Schmidt and his six aides are the higher-ups, the ringleaders for the whole city! When we nabbed them, they were just setting out to take their stations. The hour has been set for four.

"Of course we can't confirm that, but every indication proves it must be correct. Schmidt and the others were to rally parachute troops, Fifth Column elements, saboteurs; seize strategic points, killing our civilians, our women and children, wherever necessary!

"We've chucked hundreds into jail tonight, but none as dangerous as these. Schmidt has been in charge of all the Fifth Column activities we've been fighting. The six are his chief assistants. They're disguised officers, every one, I'll swear to it. That makes them spies, and—"

The impassioned outburst checked. The lieutenant drew himself up.

"Sorry," he said stiffly. "But my cousin



An Argosy Oddity

married a Polish doctor, in Warsaw. They had two children. And—well—"

"I know," the colonel agreed, and passed a hand across his face, as if to wipe away invisible cobwebs that would not be displaced. "I know. But all we can do now is to jail them in a safe place, pending developments. Use your own judgment as to where to put them. And hurry back. It's half past three."

The lieutenant saluted, wheeled, strode out.

THE man Schmidt was taller than the lieutenant. His face was squarish, harsh, his eyes cold with self-confidence and almost mocking contempt. Indeed, as the lieutenant faced the captives, all seven were taller than he. They might have been cut from a single pattern, so much did they resemble one another.

They were dressed variously—in business suits, working men's clothes, a hiking outfit. But these made only unimportant differences. They all stood with the erectness that spoke of long discipline and training, and all seven faces held the same expression.

"Well?" Schmidt's voice was as cool and contemptuous as his eyes. "What is to be our fate?"

"I am ordered to incarcerate you in a safe place," the lieutenant told them, his voice firm, his words measured. "Pending developments."

There was no relaxing on the part of the prisoners. One gathered the impression they had expected nothing worse.

"You are wise." There was a bland brutality in the man Schmidt's tone. "We are but businessmen, workers and tourists, in your country peacefully on peaceful pursuits. You have made an error in arresting us. It would be unfortunate if you decided to shoot us. Our government would have held your nation responsible for wanton slaying of her peaceful citizens, and would have exacted heavy penalties."

"You are a good far." There was almost grudging admiration in the lieutenant's voice. "Your army is camped on the very brink of the river less than a mile from this spot, waiting orders to invade us. You yourselves are spies in fact and murderers potentially, since you intended to kill any of our civilians who stood in your way when the moment came for you to attempt seizure of the strategic points of our city."

"You are the advance guards, with torches in your hands, of an invasion that when it comes will be nothing but murder on a scale of unparalleled vastness. Yet you can proclaim your innocence with a straight face till the very end."

The lieutenant's mouth twisted wryly.

"We will not shoot you tonight, however," he added, "though we know for a fact your army will march at four this morning exactly."

There was no exchange of glances among the seven. Yet an indefinable altering in their expressions told the lieutenant that he spoke the truth, although Schmidt at once, quite steadily, contradicted him.

"That is not so," Schmidt asserted earnestly. "You are misinformed, the victim of hysterical rumor. My country has no intention of invading yours. We would stake our lives upon it. Nothing whatever

will happen at four, nor at any other time if your government will give us proper evidence of a desire to cooperate.

"But"—and a threatening note crept into his voice—"if our army did march this morning, your city would be ours by nightfall, your whole country in our hands within forty-eight hours. If you persist in the folly of opposing us, on your own heads it will lie. What can a country of eight million petty bourgeois do against a nation doomed to greatness? We have that many men in uniform!"

"I do not doubt it," the lieutenant agreed. "But if you do invade us at four, the number will be somewhat reduced by five. *Our* bridge will not help you, and it is not a comfortable time of year for swimming."

"Bah!" The expletive was an exclamation of impatience. "Your bridge! Your nice new bridge of which you are so proud! You will blow it up. Of course. Our headquarters has seen the plans of its construction."

"Before even it was built, you planned for its destruction. Deep within the foundations at your end are four secret chambers, into each of which has been placed a ton of high explosive. Your engineers calculated them nicely. Upon detonation, the supports and anchorage of your beautiful bridge will be destroyed with the utmost completeness, and the span itself will fall eighty feet into the river."

"So! It can not be used. No matter. We have boats. Rubber boats, hundreds of thousands of them. Pontoons. Prefabricated bridges built in sections ready to be thrown into place. We will not be delayed an hour—if we march."

The lieutenant nodded gently, as if turning something over in his mind.

"**YOU** are quite correct on all details, Captain—is it Captain?—Schmidt. I congratulate your intelligence service. However, the bridge will be destroyed and—an hour is something."

He stepped back.

"Sergeant!" He addressed the grizzled

non-com in charge of the guard squad who had been standing in the background, bayoneted rifles cautiously ready. "Bring the prisoners and follow me. We must find a place of safe keeping for them, and time is getting short."

The prisoners made a double file, with Schmidt at their head, and the guard took its place before and behind, at a safe distance. The lieutenant then led the little band out into the corridor, down several flights of stairs, past a number of sentries, and at last into a straight, wide concrete corridor, smelling of newness and damp.

For several hundred yards he followed this. Then he led them around a corner, down a flight of steps, and into a second corridor, lower and narrower, that ran at an appreciable downward slant for a hundred yards further. There it ended in a small dead-end corridor that crossed it like the second stroke of a T.

At either end of the short cross corridor was a bolt-studded iron door. Directly in the center, looking along the corridor down which the party had come, was a third door, also of metal, with a small, barred opening at eye height.

Two guards were even then in the act of closing this door behind them as the lieutenant's group of prisoners came to a halt, and they looked up in surprise as they saluted.

"The order just came to report to barracks, sir," the first reported. "We were just leaving our post."

"Quite right." The lieutenant's tone was brisk. "And since it won't be otherwise used, I'm going to lock a few prisoners in it for safe keeping—quite temporary. If nothing happens tonight. I'll be back to pick them up in a few hours."

"Yes, sir." The two guards looked surprised, but obediently surrendered the key and marched away. The lieutenant stood to one side as the seven prisoners filed into the small, square concrete room. When the last had entered, the sergeant swung the heavy door shut and thrust a padlock through rings on the outside.

The hasp clicked into place. The ser-

geant wiped his face, on which perspiration was standing out, and saluted swiftly.

"If the lieutenant will pardon me—" he began; but the officer nodded before he had finished.

"Certainly, Sergeant," he agreed. "Return to Headquarters with your men at once. I'll be along right behind you."

Relief showed in the sergeant's face. He formed his men quickly, and marched them off up the corridor almost at a trot, the thump of their heels clattering loud in the confined space.

"Thank you, Lieutenant." It was Schmidt, looking out through the small barred opening in the door. "There is a cot, a chair, and a telephone here. The telephone unfortunately has been disconnected, but otherwise we are making ourselves comfortable."

"You say you will return to remove us to new quarters shortly. If you do not—if at four, as you are so firmly convinced it will, our army marches, our friends will be releasing us within an equally short time. Consequently, since we will not be here long in any event, we have no complaint to make about the somewhat cramped conditions."

"I should, however, like to ask in just what place we are. My judgment of the direction and distance we came tells me we should be close to the river. But the concrete about us is obviously only a few months old, and I know that your underground fortifications do not extend down this far. So I am a little puzzled to place our exact position."

THE lieutenant extracted a cigarette from a pack and tapped it on his knuckles. He lit it, raising his eyes to the man Schmidt's harsh face as he flicked the match away.

"Puzzled, Captain?" he asked, his voice curiously soft. "I am surprised. Your information concerning us is so extensive, I had thought you would realize at once your whereabouts. We are within the foundations of our new bridge."

"Behind those doors you saw at the ends

of this short corridor in which I stand are two of the four secret powder chambers you mentioned a short while ago—the powder chambers, each holding a ton of explosive, upon which we depend to destroy our bridge in case of an invasion.

“Since a hostile move at four, such as has been rumored, would bring about the detonation within sixty seconds of these tons of explosive such a scant few feet from you, your position would be one of some peril if your High command really did intend to march this morning.

“As you have sworn it does not, however, Captain, and have expressed your

willingness to stake your life you speak the truth, I know you will rest easy.”

There was no answer.

The lieutenant thought about his sister in Warsaw, and smiled at the white face beyond the narrow bars.

“However,” he finished, “you will excuse me, I know. For your information, it lacks but three minutes of four, and I must get back to headquarters. *Au revoir*, Captain.”

Then he turned and strode without hurrying up the corridor, the firm sound of his tread echoing with a curious hollowness in the complete silence.



SATANS ON SATURN

Sinister, out of the sky, comes a monstrous thing shaped like a fish—but it lets down its own nets, of metal—to catch men! And on that cold planet where beings like devils live on Earthly flesh, two Americans meet strange and chilling adventures beyond their imagination. Beginning an exciting new fantastic novel—an outstanding work of science fiction—by

OTIS A. KLINE and E. HOFFMAN PRICE

THEY SHALL HAVE WINGS

Now it can be told—the strange and tragic story of France at war. Here is one fateful chapter, in which the heroic French airmen learn the bitter truth that the Devil, too, can fly. A dramatic novelet by

THEODORE ROSCOE

THE OLD HAVERTON TRY

Pull up another chair and we'll tell you about the only football team that ever ran backward to victory. Better still, we'll let the coach tell it—providing he is able to survive a few minor attacks of hysteria, paranoia, and coronary thrombosis. A short story that takes our autumn game on a romp through numerous happy nightmares, by

FRANCIS M. COCKRELL

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—NOVEMBER 11th



There the giant Negro and the outlaw fought with silent savagery

Black Fire

By WALT COBURN

AFTER BLACK BOY TOOKER has aided JAKE WIRE to break out of Yuma prison, the big Negro's usefulness to Wire is finished. So Wire cracks Tooker over the head, leaving him to the pursuing posse; and the Black Boy goes back to prison.

But eventually Black Boy Tooker is pardoned, and he returns to cook for the Seven Up outfit which holds a big lease along the Mexican Border. Tooker has sworn himself to two tasks: to serve and protect TATE CURRY, the young ramrod of the Seven Up; and to cut the trail of the red-headed Jake

Wire. Right now the Black Boy is concerned about Tate Curry because Tate is so deeply in love with PANCHITA GALLAGHER, the daughter of the saloon-keeper in Mesquite. The lovely Panchita is a flirt who has given her heart to no one, and so Tate Curry is suffering badly from woman trouble.

AS FOR Jake Wire, the red-headed outlaw has taken over the leadership of the Pozo Verde rustlers. For some reason Wire holds a bitter hatred for Tate Curry, and it is his plan to raid the wealthy Seven Up outfit. Through the watchfulness of Black Boy Tooker, Curry knows that the raid is coming; he and his men rout the outlaws

This two-part serial began in last week's Argosy

in a gun battle. But it is a vicious gunman named the Jayhawker who leads the raid; and afterward Tate Curry learns that Jake Wire is at present in Mesquite, receiving plenty of attention from Panchita Gallagher.

In the next days Tate Curry drives his men mercilessly in order to reach Mesquite as soon as possible. Eventually they arrive—to find tragedy there. Let-er-go Gallagher and his Mexican wife are dead, shot down by Jake Wire himself; the town has been gutted. Jake Wire has ridden off to his outlaw headquarters—taking Panchita Gallagher with him. “*Andale,*” Tate Curry orders his men grimly. They’re heading for the Pozo Verde Mountains; and Black Boy Tooker is happy because he’s going to catch him a red-headed rattler by the name of Jake Wire. . . .

CHAPTER VI

DAGGER GIRL

RED JAKE WIRE should have killed the Jayhawker that first night when he rode into the Pozo Verde hideout. He underestimated the lanky Missourian’s cunning; then, and even now he was too stupid, too well satisfied with himself and his brutal, heavy-handed way of handling things to realize that he was losing his power over his renegade outfit. He was too blind to see that the Jayhawker was slowly and surely regaining the leadership that Jake Wire had taken from him that first night.

Perhaps it was the whisky that he had been soaking up night and day for the past two weeks while he was forcing Mike Gallagher into a lawless partnership with him. Taking drink for drink with Gallagher as he blackmailed the bushy-haired Irishman into giving him more and more money. Threatening Gallagher with a picture of the gallows and a hangman’s rope. Bulldozing him into a dangerous proposition that would give Jake Wire the Altar Grant and the girl Panchita.

“You killed young Bob Culbertson in Wyoming, Gallagher. He was makin’ passes at Panchita and you killed him. You paid me five hundred dollars to take the blame and quit the country. Five hundred wasn’t enough. Young Culbertson’s old man is one

of the richest men in Wyoming. I kin send him a confession that will hang you higher than a kite. I’m willin’ to keep my mouth shut if you’ll do what I tell you to do.

“You told me up in Wyoming one night when you got to braggin’, that your wife’s real name was Margarita Zamora. That the Altar Grant in Sonora, Mexico belongs to the Zamora family and that she’s the legal heir to the whole Altar Grant which stays in the family and can’t be sold to anybody as long as she’s alive. That you was driftin’ to Mexico and when the sign was right you was goin’ to have her put in her claim for the Altar Grant and there was nothin’ to stop her from gettin’ all the land and cattle that goes with it.”

“But she’ll never do it, Jake,” Mike Gallagher had repeated his argument night after night. “She run away with a black-guard gringo that deserted her in Colorado. She’s got a lot of pride to her. As long as she’s livin’ she’ll niver put in a claim for the Altar Grant.

“But I’ve talked her into signin’ papers that a Tucson lawyer drew up fer us. We got married by a justice av the peace at Tucson. Which makes Panchita, whose real name is Francisca Gallagher, our child by legal marriage. And the old woman signed a will leavin’ her claim to the Altar Grant to Panchita.

“If ever our daughter’s left orphaned she’ll be able to claim one of the best cattle ranches in Mexico. But Panchita knows nothin’ about it and you’re the only man besides the lawyer that knows and I’d bust that red head av yours wide open with me blackthorn if ever ye opened that mouth av yours.

“Ye’re wastin’ yer time, Jake Wire. So long as the old lady’s alive there’ll be nothin’ done about me or Panchita claimin’ the Altar Grant. And ye kin talk yerself purple and black and blue in the face and it’ll git ye no other answer.”

“They’ll hang you quick in Wyoming, Gallagher, if I take a notion to tell what I know. I’m not tellin’ nobody about your old lady bein’ the heir to the Altar Grant. It’s you that’ll do the talkin’ and you’ll do

it before long, savvy? Or I'll write a letter to Wyoming that'll hang you. I'll give you another night to think 'er over. Now I'm takin' Panchita fer a little horseback ride."

"Keep your hands off Panchita or I'll kill ye, Wire!"

But Jake Wire always talked with his hand on his gun and Mike Gallagher knew that the big red-whiskered outlaw could and would kill him if he made a wrong move.

"Panchita," Red Jake Wire told Gallagher more than once, and he would grin, "is her own boss. I'm not forcin' her to do nothin' she don't want to be doin'."

And Jake Wire would leave Gallagher standing behind his bar gripping his heavy blackthorn shillelagh, his face livid with futile rage, his eyes fever bright.

AND for the girl Panchita, Jake Wire had another brutal and cold-blooded approach. "Remember young Bob Culbertson? Remember the night up in Wyoming that your old man caught him makin' passes at yuh? Mike Gallagher rapped him over the head with that Irish club he packed. He never meant to kill him but Bob Culbertson had a eggshell skull.

"I shore helped Let-'er-go Gallagher out up there in Wyoming when I took the blame for that killin'. I held the sheriff at the end of my gun and told him I'd hit young Bob Culbertson over the head with the barrel of my six-shooter. I locked the sheriff in his own jail and quit Wyoming. That's the kind of pardner I've bin to Mike Gallagher.

"I've bin wild and tough, Panchita. But you kin handle me like I was a ten-year-old kid. I'm not damn fool enough to go pawin' at yuh. You're as safe with Jake Wire as you'd be with your own father. I just want to be with yuh. I want yuh to git to know me. I want yuh to git to likin' me well enough to marry me. Don't keep a feller waitin' too long. Only sheepherders has patience.

"But it's shore a lucky thing all the way around that I'm easy-goin' and square-

shootin' because if I was to git ornery I could hang Mike Gallagher fer murder. But we won't tell nobody nothin'. We won't say anything to Mike Gallagher or your old lady. When you say the word we'll locate one of them Mexican padres and git spliced and surprise 'em. Bein' married to Red Jake Wire shore beats goin' to Let-'er-go Gallagher's hangin'. Don't it?"

Panchita listened to that same story night after night. She kept hoping and praying for a way out. If only Tate Curry would come back from the roundup. Tate would take quick care of Red Jake Wire.

Panchita spent hours on her knees in front of the little wall shrine in her bedroom where she burned candles in a container made of a broken whisky bottle to the painted wooden image of Mexico's patron saint. She said tear-stained prayers to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Praying for the strength and courage to bury her long knife in the heart of Red Jake Wire.

She resorted to trickery and bribed the Jayhawker with her smiles and whispering lips and her eyes darkened with pleading.

"Kill that man who has taken your place and I'll pay you more money than you've ever had!"

And behind Jake Wire's back she whispered to the renegades who took his orders.

"There is a secret reward for the dead body of Jake Wire. A thousand dollars. Why don't you kill him before he kills you some night when he is drunk and ugly?"

The Jayhawker wanted Panchita more than he wanted bounty money on Jake Wire's tough red hide. And he wanted the glory of killing the red-whiskered renegade who had so ruthlessly robbed him of his leadership. He was always waiting for the chance to shoot Red Jake Wire in the back. But the big outlaw never gave him that sure chance.

BUT the Jayhawker was cunning. He showed a sample of his craftiness when he suggested to Jake Wire that while Jake was giving the town life at Mesquite a big

play, he, the Jayhawker, would take half the outfit and slip down below the Border where the Seven Up was working. Spill the herd they had gathered and steal the Seven Up remuda.

Jake, willing enough to be rid of the Jayhawker, had really agreed. The Jayhawker had picked men he distrusted and a few more that he could trust, to go with him. When the attack was made that night the Jayhawker sent the men he distrusted down the slant to take the brunt of the fighting. He and the few men he thought would remain loyal to him when he killed Jake Wire, made a clean getaway. The renegades killed that night by Tate Curry's Seven Up men were all outlaws who had swung their loyalty to Red Jake Wire.

But Jake Wire had been too thick-brained to catch on. He cursed the Jayhawker out for failing and let it go at that. The Jayhawker grinned behind his unclean long-fingered hand and bided his time.

It was Panchita who precipitated the ruckus that got her father and mother murdered. But she did so innocently. Driven to desperation, she had tried to kill Red Jake Wire. She had agreed to go riding with him in the moonlight. When they reached a place where they were far beyond town she had gotten off her horse and sat down on a wide flat rock that was on a ridge looking down on the dim lights of Mesquite. She knew that Jake Wire had been drinking more than usual. She had heard him threatening her father but could not make out what hot words had passed between them.

"I'll see you in hell first, Jake Wire!" she heard her father say, his eyes glittering in the lamplight, his ruddy face mottled with wrath.

"And I'll see you hung before we meet up in hell, Gallagher," Jake Wire had growled.

Panchita was certain that Jake Wire would try to make love to her when she sat down on the flat rock. She had her knife ready, hidden from sight in the shadows.

But when he had taken her suddenly in his big arms he had crushed the breath out of her. She had struck at his back with all her might. The point of the knife had hit the heavy bone of his shoulder blade and glanced off, making no more than an ugly and painful flesh wound.

Panchita heard him grunt with pain. Then curse as his big hand gripped her slender throat. And that was the last thing she remembered until a long time later when she came awake to find herself tied to the back of her horse. Jake Wire's grip was holding her partly upright in the saddle while he led her horse across the rough country. Heading along the winding trail that led into the Pozo Verde Mountains.

Jake Wire's bloodshot eyes were watching closely as she regained her senses.

He untied the ends of her bridle reins from around his saddle horn and handed them to her.

"Take hold of them reins and set up straight," he growled at her.

JAKE WIRE'S back was bandaged and there was blood all over his shirt. His voice was thick with whisky, and ugly. He shook Panchita roughly and slapped her across the face with the palm of his hand. Not a hard blow but vicious enough to warn her that he was in a dangerous mood.

He pulled the cork of a bottle of tequila and told her to take a big drink because she'd sure need it. Her bruised throat pained her when she swallowed the burning liquor. Panchita drank willingly enough, though she had never taken more than a sip of the stuff in her life. She knew that Jake Wire was not lying about her needing something to give her the strength and courage to fight back. When her head had cleared she forced a faint smile that had venom behind it.

"You'll never get away with this, mister."

"But I *am* getting away with it." Jake Wire grinned.

He took a long drink and corking the bottle, shoved it into the big pocket of his chaps.

"One of the boys is fetchin' a Mexican padre from the mission at Altar. It'll be legal. And that's more than you got comin' to yuh after what you done to me with that fancy pig-sticker."

"My father will trail you. He'll kill you for this."

"You're still guessin' wrong."

"Tate Curry and his outfit—"

"The Jayhawker and the boys will take care of Tate Curry and the Seven Up outfit," Jake Wire growled. "This is Mexico. We're ridin' right now into the Pozo Verde hideout. I'm hopin' that Tate Curry will be damn fool enough to foller us there. We'll make buzzard bait outa him and his men. I'm hopin' to tangle with Tate Curry, personal. No man kin make the big play fer my girl and git away with it."

Jake Wire's green eyes glittered in the moonlight. His grip on her shoulder as he rode alongside her made her bite her lip to keep from crying out with pain.

"Listen, you little she-wildcat. Since the first time I noticed you wasn't a kid no more, up in Wyoming, I wanted you. And what I want, I take. Before I seen you again at Mesquite I heard how this Tate Curry was buildin' his loop fer you. And I swore I'd git him and git you to boot. I've played my cards accordin'. I've got you. And if Tate Curry gits past the Jayhawker I'll shoot him quick."

"You'd better commence learnin' how to git along with Red Jake Wire. Because I shore got ways of learnin' you how to behave. You got a little sample of it. I tried bein' patient, but you couldn't stand good treatment. From here on I'm usin' a spade bit instead of a hackamore on you. And I'll gentle you plenty quick."

He let go her shoulder and slapped her across the face. His laugh grated harshly.

"Set up straight in your saddle and ride like you liked it."

He had a short lead rope on her horse. Her feet were tied in the stirrups. Panchita licked with a dry tongue at the blood on her bruised lips. She tried to find a prayer to make to the Lady of Guadalupe.

They rode along in a silence that was

even more terrifying to the girl than was the red-whiskered outlaw's drunken bragging. She wondered what had happened, what was happening now back at Mesquite. What her father, Mike Gallagher was doing about her kidnapping.

Jake Wire was not telling Panchita that Gallagher and her mother were dead. He had given his men orders to keep their mouths shut about it. In the pocket of his chaps were the legal papers that made Panchita the heir to the Altar Grant. He had found them when he ransacked Mike Gallagher's strongbox. And he had found about five thousand dollars in gold and currency which he now carried in a canvas sack tied to his saddle.

He was not lyirg when he told her he had sent a man to fetch the padre from the Altar mission. He had given his man orders to fetch the padre by force if necessary. Jake Wire meant to hold as a threat over the girl the killing of young Bob Culbertson up in Wyoming. Let her think that he had her father prisoner, ready to deliver him up to the Law. That would, he figured, make her willing enough to marry him when the padre was fetched to the Pozo Verde hideout. After the marriage he would tell her that the Jayhawker had killed her parents. And he would have her watching when he killed the Jayhawker.

Red Jake Wire had given curt orders to the Jayhawker.

"I'm takin' her to the Pozo Verde hideout. Take the curly wolves and bush up along the trail. Busiwhack Tate Curry and his outfit when they come along. I'm leadin' 'em square into a bear trap when they ride into the canyon. Don't let any of 'em git away alive. Bush up in the canyon and wipe 'em out down to the last man."

CHAPTER VII

RIDE ARMED

THE Jayhawker told the Pozo Verde renegades that Jake Wire had gone locoed over Panchita Gallagher and that it was time they killed him off.

"Shootin' up the town and gittin' drunk

was one thing, boys. But when Jake Wire shot down Gallagher's old lady and killed Let-'er-go Gallagher, that was goin' too far. And runnin' off with Panchita is somethin' that will outlaw h'm in Mexico. And if Jake Wire is outlawed down here, then we're outlawed with him. None of us kin go back to the States.

"But as long as I was givin' you boys orders and we played politics with the right Mexicans we was safe enough in the Pozo Verde Mountains. You all know that, I reckon. We made a ivin' runnin' guns. We never bothered the Seven Up outfit. We let 'em alone and they let us alone. One of you boys would slip into Mesquite and Gallagher would sell him likker to fetch back to camp. Gallagher give us protection.

"Then Jake Wire ketches me foul and busts my gun arm. He elects hisself ramrod and he makes yo' boys like it. He sends us on that raid ag'in the Seven Up and that was bad medicine. Now he's murdered Gallagher and his old lady and he's run off with Panchita. He aims to force the padre at Altar into marryin' em.

"Boys, if we don't kill him he's goin' to have the whole Mexican army and Kosterlisky's Rurals huntin' us down. We'll git stood ag'in the 'dobe wall and shot down. And I'm damned if I'm goin' to be 'dobe-walled on account of that big locoed son of a warthog. How do you boys feel about it?"

He faced them grimly.

Almost to a man they were agreeing now with the Jayhawker. They had sobered up a lot when they saw Jake Wire stand there in the doorway of the cantina and empty his gun at Gallagher. Sending six heavy slugs into the fighting Irishman's chest. Laughing and cursing Gallagher with every shot.

They had seen Jake Wire re-load his smoking six-shooter and deliberately shoot the Mexican woman through the head as she stood there by her stove, petrified by fear. Cold-blooded murder of a woman who had fed every hungry man begging at her door.

They were a hard lot. Thieves and killers. But Jake Wire's brutality had sickened them a little. They were ready enough now to swing their allegiance back to the Jayhawker. The Jayhawker had always been crafty and cunning enough to give them protection of a sort here in Mexico.

The Pozo Verde country was their last refuge. The United States Law had driven them across the border. So long as they did not bother Mexico the Mexicans would let them alone. And the Jayhawker had been almighty careful never to jeopardize their none too secure status here below the Mexican Border. Up until this fruitless raid on the Seven Up herd they had never molested Tate Curry's outfit save to eat his Mexican beef when they needed fresh meat or steal an occasional stray horse.

The Jayhawker had played the game safe. He told them that Jake Wire had ordered him to make that cattle raid in a fool try at stealing the horse cavvy. The Jayhawker was handier with oily words than he was with a gun. And he swayed them now to his side.

"Jake Wire is headed for the Pozo Verde hideout with Panchita. Tate Curry is due tonight with his trail herd at Mesquite. Tate Curry is goin' to hightail it for the Pozo Verde Mountains with every man he kin find. And he kin have every Mexican in Sonora right at his back if he spreads the news that Jake Wire killed Gallagher and his Mexican woman and kidnapped Panchita. Because every Mexican in the country, good or bad, would kill the man that harmed Panchita.

"Red Jake Wire," the Jayhawker finished, his nasal voice lifted to a loud pitch, "gives us orders to cover his trail. Bushwhack Tate Curry and his men. I say to hell with Jake Wire and his locoed orders!"

"You bellered somethin', Jayhawker!" cried a tipsy renegade. "To hell with Jake Wire!"

Others joined in.

"Instead of bushwhackin' Tate Curry," the Jayhawker grinned as he came to the point to which he had been working, "we'll

ride into the Pozo Verde hideout and kill Jake Wire where we find 'im!"

"Jake Wire's got a sack of money from Gallagher's strongbox. What becomes of it, Jayhawker?"

"We split 'er amongst us!" was the Jayhawker's quick reply.

"What happens to Panchita?"

"We send her back to Mesquite! Panchita goes back to Mesquite to bury her folks!"

JAKE WIRE had never told any man that Panchita would be the only heir to the big Altar Grant. The Jayhawker thought of her only as Gallagher's daughter. The queen of Mesquite and the idol of all men who had ever seen her there. The Jayhawker's was a crafty gesture to make amends for Jake Wire's savage mistakes. He would be squaring himself to some extent with Tate Curry and every other man along the Mexican Border who might otherwise want to hunt him down.

The Jayhawker was not forgetting that he had shot the Border Patrol rider, Bert Lang. He was certain that Bert Lang was dead. He had seen him fall and seen the blood spill across his head and face. He would blame that killing on Jake Wire, later.

Jake Wire and the girl Panchita were a few miles ahead. The Jayhawker did not hurry. Let Wire and the girl reach the Pozo Verde hideout first. Then they would ride up on him and shoot him down. The Jayhawker was certain of his following now. Jake Wire's number was up. There was no use in hastening. If they overtook him now he might be suspicious. And the first bullet that left his quick-triggered gun would be aimed at the Jayhawker. Jake Wire never missed. The Jayhawker's gun arm was still stiff and slow and uncertain, not yet entirely healed from Jake Wire's bullet. At the hideout the boys would be better able to rush him. Fill him full of bullets, while the Jayhawker remained safe behind a tree trunk or boulder until the gun smoke cleared away.

The Pozo Verde outlaws, about fifteen

in number, passed whisky bottles back and forth. The Jayhawker drank to keep up his nerve. Nobody paid any attention to the one rider who halted to adjust a slipping saddle blanket. The man did not catch up with them again. Instead, he swung around and passed them without being discovered.

He rode hard, headed for the Pozo Verde Mountains. He was riding to warn Red Jake Wire of the Jayhawker's plot. No loyalty to Jake Wire prompted this ride. He was counting on the red-whiskered outlaw rewarding him with a big cut of the money he had stolen from Gallagher's strongbox. And he had a long-standing grudge against the Jayhawker.

He overtook Jake Wire as the latter was riding into the box canyon where the hideout was.

"The Jayhawker is doublecrossin' yuh, Jake. I come on ahead to warn yuh. He's ribbed the boys into tacklin' yuh when they git here. They ain't goin' to try to bush-whack Tate Curry and his outfit. They ain't coverin' yuh. They're cold-trailin' yuh here to kill yuh! That news orter be worth anyhow a thousand dollars, Jake."

"It ain't worth a plugged dime."

Jake Wire had pulled his gun and covered the man as he came riding up with his news. He pulled the trigger now. The informer gave a choking cough and grabbed at his stomach with both hands. He was thrown as his horse, spooked at the blaze of the gun within a few feet of its head, whirled and stampeded.

"The devil hates a squealer," Jake Wire told the white faced Panchita. "That rattler would've shot me in the back for any part of a thousand dollars."

JAKE WIRE ejected the smoking shell from his six-shooter and re-loaded the weapon. He laughed harshly as he shoved the gun into its holster. He uncorked the bottle and took a big drink and made Panchita swallow some of the tequila.

"It was the Jayhawker," he said flatly, "that used to boss that pack of curly wolves. I've taken 'em away from him once.

You'll see me take 'em away from him again."

Jake Wire left the dead man lying there on the canyon trail. He got a grim sort of satisfaction from the girl's horror. That would help fetch her around, he told himself, and take some of the broncho out of her. She'd just seen a sample of his way of doing things. Let her take some sort of a warning from that. And he grinned to himself as he pictured the Jayhawker's surprise and puzzlement when he found the dead renegade there at the mouth of the box canyon.

When they reached the head of the box canyon Jake Wire cut the ropes that tied Panchita to her saddle. He was using the ebony-handled dagger that belonged to her. A double-edged blade that had kept many a tipsy admirer at a distance.

There was an adobe and rock cabin beyond the corrals. He tied her wrists and ankles and put her on a bunk.

"You kin look out this window and watch how Red Jake Wire handles his wolf pack when they git to snappin' and yap-pin'," he told her.

He took a hatful of 30-30 cartridges and a carbine and climbed up on a rimrock ledge that overlooked the camp and the trail where it narrowed and came into the hideout. He sat there cross-legged and smoked and drank from his bottle, his carbine across his knees and the hat full of cartridges within easy reach.

Panchita could watch him from the cabin window. He had gagged her with his black silk neck handkerchief, knotting it so tightly at the back of her neck that it was cutting the corners of her mouth.

"Don't fret yourself into a lather," were his parting instructions, "because I want you to look purty at your weddin'."

He had kept her dagger, telling her he was going to use it to whittle on Tate Curry when he killed him.

And she could do nothing.

The big white moon was directly above the canyon now and its light brought out even small details of the scene. Moonlight and soft shadows.

CHAPTER VIII

RED MOONLIGHT

THE clatter of shod hoofs heralded the approach of the Jayhawker and his Pozo Verde renegades. Jake Wire rubbed out the stub of his cigarette and took a last big drink. He squatted on his hunkers, carbine gripped in his big hands and let the riders come through the narrow gap and into the hideout camp. He cursed under his breath because they were in the dark shadow and he could not pick out the Jayhawker from among the other riders. His big voice filled the canyon with its bull-like roar.

"Stand your hands, you mangey coyotes! Ride up here, one at a time, and git your fangs pulled. You first, Jayhawker."

They sat on their horses, bunched up in the shadow of the trees, talking among themselves in low tones. The Jayhawker, when he found the dead body of the murdered outlaw back yonder at the mouth of the canyon, had his first suspicion then that there was something wrong. He had given his men orders to open up as soon as they sighted Jake Wire. They were all to shoot at the same time. Kill the big red-whiskered outlaw without giving him a chance for his taw. Something had gone wrong. Jake Wire was up yonder on the flat rimrock. Warned and ready for them.

"What's eatin' on yuh, Jake?" the Jayhawker called out. "Come on down here and git married. We done fetched the padre," he lied glibly. But there was a slight tremor of dread and fear in his nasal voice. "Where's Panchita?"

"Panchita's where I kin keep an eye on 'er! Come on up here, Jayhawker! Fetch the padre with yuh!"

"He's got wise," muttered the Jayhawker. "He's ketched onto us, boys. Let 'im have it!"

But they had no target to shoot at. There was nothing but a bellowing voice. And you can't kill a voice.

"Come on up here, Jayhawker! I'll count five. If you ain't on your way I'll cut loose at that pack of yuh!"

"Ride on up, Jayhawker," said one of the men. "Call his hand. We'll be right behind yuh."

The Jayhawker rode his horse in behind the shelter of the corral. His carbine was gripped in hands that were wet with nervous sweat. He thought he could make out the shadowy outline of Jake Wire's head and shoulders. He lined his sights as best he could in the shadow and squeezed the trigger.

The canyon echoed with the roar of his gun. The bullet hit its mark. But he had mistaken an oddly shaped rock for Jake Wire and the bullet ricocheted off the granite rock with a screaming whine.

Jake Wire's carbine sent a swift reply. A bullet threw splinters from the top pole of the corral into the Jayhawker's face.

Then Red Jake Wire's Winchester was spewing streaks of flame. He was firing as fast as he could pull the trigger and lever fresh cartridges into the smoking breech of his carbine. The Jayhawker crouched low along the neck of his horse. Jake Wire's deadly hail swept the bunched riders and scattered them into the brush. That first volley of five shots had killed two men and wounded a third.

The Jayhawker and his renegades shot at the flash of Jake Wire's gun. But he kept moving up there. Shifting. Lying prone on the flat rimrock and shooting more slowly and carefully now. Bellowing his wild defiance. Their bullets nicked the rimrock and whined off at crazy angles. The canyon was filled with the din of gunfire.

One man rode at a run for the shelter of the cabin. Jake Wire's bullet knocked him out of his saddle. Another tried to reach the cabin on foot and was shot down before he got halfway across the hundred-foot clearing between the corrals and the cabin. None of the others had the foolhardy temerity to try to reach the cabin.

RED JAKE WIRE cursed and chuckled to himself. He had driven the Jayhawker and his renegades into the shelter of the brush. He had killed four or five of them. Wounded a couple or three more.

But he was not getting all the savage pleasure he wanted out of it. He wanted to see how the girl was taking it. He wanted to look at her terror-stricken face. He wanted to hear her scream and pray for mercy. He raked the brush with a last volley and re-loaded his carbine. He finished what was left in his bottle. There was more whisky at the cabin. And Panchita was down there. He picked up his hat full of cartridges and backed away from the edge of the rimrock. Their bullets whined all around him as he quit the rimrock. They'd keep wasting cartridges for a few minutes.

Red Jake Wire could move fast and without making much sound. He kept to the brush and rocks, and because they were positive he would never quit the vantage point of the rimrock they were not watching for his bold move. He gained the foot of the slope, crouched like a runner at the starting line, then ran. He was almost to the cabin before anybody sighted him.

Then the Jayhawker saw him and fired. But he was over-eager and his bullet went low. It struck Jake Wire in the thigh. The big outlaw stumbled, faltered, then dove headlong through the open doorway of the cabin. He rolled over and over and kicked the heavy door shut. Then he was at the window, and shooting. He shot one of the renegades who was not too well concealed. The man screamed with pain.

Jake Wire cursed the throbbing pain in his thigh. He hobbled over to where Panchita lay on the bunk and cut away the silk scarf that gagged her. He ripped the leg of his overalls and used the scarf for a tourniquet. The bullet had broken no bones but it was lodged there in the hard muscle of his thigh, midway between his hip and his knee. His groping hand found a whisky jug under the bunk. He pulled the cork with his big teeth, spat it out on the floor and drank thirstily. Then he sat on the floor by the low window and waited for a pot shot at anybody who moved out yonder.

But they were not moving from behind the brush that sheltered them.

For Panchita it was a terrifying nightmare. Lying on the bunk, she had been watching, unable to close her eyes, and she had seen men shot and killed. She thought Jake Wire was going to kill her when he cut away the gag from her mouth. Bullets had come through the open doorway in that brief moment before Jake Wire slammed it shut. They had missed her by inches. Now the paralysis of terror left her and she screamed.

Jake Wire let her scream for a minute. Then he called to her to shut up or he'd give her something to yell about. Panchita quit yelling. Jake Wire called to the men outside.

"One of your bullets hit 'er. I got 'er hogtied here in the cabin. You're more li'ble to hit her than you are me. Whenever you sons of coyotes is ready to call 'er quits, throw down your guns and come with your hands up. Fetch the Jayhawker. Where's your padre? If he's there, trot 'im out."

"Don't surrender, boys," the Jayhawker cautioned them. "He's gone locoed. He'll kill yuh. We can't charge the cabin now with Panchita in there. Directly daylight comes he kin see us out here and he'll pick us off. Our only bet is to git outa here. Come on." He gave his orders in a low whine that could not carry as far as the cabin.

The Jayhawker had no difficulty getting them to leave here. They had all of Jake Wire's target shooting they wanted. They got their horses and rode out of the hideout.

Jake Wire could not see them ride away, but he heard the noise they made and guessed that they were quitting the hideout. He cursed them.

"I whupped the Jayhawker and the whole damned pack. Not a man among 'em. Me, I'm a warthawg! I'm a fightin' son of a red timber wolf. Hear that, you little she-wildcat?"

"But my father and Tate Curry are not coyotes," Panchita was not yet too cowed to threaten him. "They'll come here. Your bullets can't turn them back. Every man in Mexico will be after you if you don't

turn me loose! You can't get away. You can kill me but they will kill you!"

There was enough truth in what the girl said to sober Jake Wire. This hideout in the Pozo Verde Mountains could, in a few hours, become a hopeless trap from which he could never escape alive. He took a drink, but the raw whisky had no more taste than water. His leg throbbed with pain. It would be daylight in an hour or so. He had to get out of here before it was too late. But he still had the cruel satisfaction of making the girl pay for her threats.

"Your old man ain't comin' here. Not unless a dead man with six bullets in him kin set a horse. Gallagher's dead and so is his old lady. The Jayhawker killed 'em."

"You lie!" Panchita's voice was a sobbing gasp.

"All right then, I lied. The Jayhawker didn't kill 'em; I did the job myself. And you'll know that ain't no lie if you ever git back to Mesquite alive."

Panchita Gallagher knew that Red Jake Wire was telling the truth.

CHAPTER IX

WHITE MAN GONNA DIE

TATE CURRY had ten men besides Black Boy Tooker. Then the Border Patrol rider Bert Lang overtook them. Tate did not argue when Bert Lang told him that the cattle would be safe enough in the pens.

They rode at a long trot. Pelon knew the shortest trail to the Pozo Verde Mountains and the box canyon that the renegades used as a hideout. They needed no orders. They were shooting to kill and taking no prisoners. This was Mexico where United States laws didn't count.

The Pozo Verde hideout had for too many years given refuge to outlaws who were wanted for every crime on the calendar up in the States. Tate Curry and his men were a law unto themselves tonight. Murder had been done. Homes had been looted. Stock had been run off. The Pozo Verde outlaws were even now mounted on horses they had stolen from the Seven Up

horse pasture near town where Tate always kept fifteen or twenty head of saddle horses.

The Jayhawker and his men were the scum of the Border. They merited no show of mercy if they were caught. Mexico had its 'dobe wall and firing squad waiting for them now. Across the Border there was an American gallows and rope with a hangman's noose knotted in its end.

Border Patrol Officer Bert Lang rode up in the lead with Tate Curry. Black Boy Tooker rode with Pelon. Behind them came the Seven Up cowpunchers and Pelon's *vaqueros*.

They were riding into the canyon in the Pozo Verde Mountains when they met the Jayhawker and his renegades. All notion of surrender was driven out of the Jayhawker's cunning brain when he recognized the Border Patrol rider. The Jayhawker fired the first shot. It missed Bert Lang's head by inches. Then everybody was shooting and it was a free-for-all dog fight, every man for himself. Bert Lang rode straight at the Jayhawker, his gun spitting flame. The lanky Missourian died fighting. Fighting in the open with the odds in no man's favor. Bert Lang emptied his gun at the Jayhawker's swaying body as he rode him down.

Tate Curry charged straight at the guns of the outlaws. He was still a little tipsy and the thought of Panchita being with Red Wire was making him reckless. Too reckless. His horse was shot from under him. Another bullet smashed his gun arm. Then Tooker and the others rode past him and their guns mowed down the renegade pack.

Tate lay with his leg pinned beneath his dead horse, his right arm broken above the elbow. Bert Lang and Tooker bandaged his arm. His right leg was fractured and had to be splinted.

The one outlaw who had been taken alive was badly wounded. He told them that Jake Wire had Panchita in the cabin at the head of the box canyon. That Red Jake Wire had gone clean loco on whisky and was holding the girl prisoner.

Tate Curry cursed and begged them to put him on a horse. Bert Lang had a time holding him down.

"Where's Tooker?" shouted Tate. "Tooker, fetch me a horse and give me a six-shooter. I got to git Jake Wire! Where's Black Boy Tooker?"

Black Boy Tooker had gone. While Bert Lang was getting his men organized again, the giant Negro had gotten on his mule and ridden quietly away. The black maw of the canyon had swallowed him. Black Boy Tooker had ridden off with his silver-mounted six-shooter in his hand. Big black fingers crooked around the ornate pearl butt of the long barreled Colt .45, Tooker was riding toward the hideout, humming softly to himself. Swaying gently to and fro in his saddle. White teeth bared in a grin. The whites of his bloodshot chocolate-colored eyes rolling.

"Got me a fancy gun. Goin' to git me a white man. Gonna git me a red-whiskered white man name ob Jake Wire . . ."

BLACK BOY TOOKER cherished the only grudge he had ever held against any man. The thorny brush had ripped his old faded cotton shirt to ribbons and he had torn the rest off. He wore no undershirt and he was naked to the waist. Across his huge, hairless, ebony chest was tattooed a big red star and the words Remember the Alamo. His black body dripped with sweat until it shone in the moonlight. He made an unreal and terrifying picture as he rode alone through the canyon.

Red Jake Wire sighted him, and for a minute he thought that he had lost his mind. That his brain had turned some kind of crazy flip-flop. He was looking at the big tattooed Negro trusty at Yuma Prison. The grave digger who buried all the dead convicts. The man he had knocked in the head that murky, sultry black night on the south bank of the maddy Colorado a mile below Yuma Prison. It was the Black Boy—whom he had killed that night.

Big Red Jake Wire never had believed in ghosts. But his brain was warped by too

much booze and by the throbbing pain in his thigh that sent torture all through his body. He had left Panchita tied up in the cabin while he went to get their horses. But the horses were gone. They had been turned loose or stampeded by the shooting. Every loose horse had stampeded down the canyon during the fighting.

Red Wire was afoot. Trapped here in the Pozo Verde hideout. The reality of his desperate situation had sent him into a sudden panic. Cold sweat bathed his big hairy body and for the first and only time in his life Jake Wire knew fear. He was in the grip of this fear when he sighted the half-naked Negro riding on a big mouse-colored mule. The Black Boy he had killed back on the Colorado river in the black shadow of Yuma Prison. His brain must have cartwheeled inside his skull.

Black Boy Tooker sighted Jake Wire limping across the clearing between the corrals and the cabin. He saw the red-whiskered outlaw wheel awkwardly around at the sound of the Abraham mule's shod hoofs on the rocky trail. Jake Wire had a six-shooter in his hand, but he did not shoot. He just stood there on widespread legs and stared. It was just the way Tooker wanted it to be. He called out to Jake Wire.

"Lawdy, if it ain't you! Long time no see you, white man! Red whiskers grewed bigger an' redder. Got yo'self a gun. Mebbysso got yo'self a knife, too. You got a knife, white man?"

Jake Wire had a knife. The two-edged dagger that belonged to Panchita. Something about the Black Boy and the way he talked made Jake Wire take the knife from his belt where he had shoved it.

"What are you doin' here, Black Boy?" Jake Wire's voice was dry and croaking.

Black Boy Tooker's chuckle was deep-chested. His left hand snapped open the long-bladed clasp knife. The Abraham mule had carried him at a shuffling walk within a dozen feet of Jake Wire.

Now he talked.

"Black Boy Tooker done sprung you outa 'at ol' Yuma jail house. 'En yuh whop

'is Black Boy ovah his haid wif a shovel-handle club. 'At red whisker white man, he sho' done fergit almighty quick about de laws ob gratitude. Do unto each other, says de rules. So heah Ah is. Got me a sho' purty gun. Got me a knife. You got a gun an' a knife. Whut's a-stoppin' us?"

BLACK BOY TOOKER was on the ground with a leap. Jake Wire's bullet grazed his skull. The Black Boy's shot tore the gun from Jake Wire's hand. Something like fear had made Jake Wire miss. But it was sheer luck that guided Tooker's bullet because he had shot at the white man's body. A six-shooter was not the Black Boy's weapon. A freak shot had hit Jake Wire's gun near the cylinder.

That ended the shooting.

Jake Wire still had Panchita's dagger. The quick pain in his gun arm had shocked him into cold sober thinking. He slashed wildly as the giant Negro came at him with the long-bladed knife.

A knife was the Negro's weapon and the Black Boy was grinning. Red Jake Wire had a white man's dread of a knife blade. But he had no time to be afraid. He was fighting for his life.

Black Boy Tooker shoved his fancy gun into its holster and his right hand swung free and empty. Both were huge men weighing over two hundred pounds. Big bone and hard muscle. Jake Wire had ripped off his shirt in the cabin and torn it into strips to bandage his wounded leg. So he was naked to the waist and there was a dirty strip of blood-stained bandage around the knife wound in his shoulder blade.

They were a primitive and savage sight as they fought there in the silvery white moonlight. A shiny ebony giant with grinning white teeth and rolling white eyes. A hairy red ape who snarled and growled.

Jake Wire made a wild lunge at the black man. Tooker's big right hand slapped aside the outlaw's knife arm and Tooker laughed. The point of his knife ripped down through Jake Wire's heavy red beard and found the jawbone beneath.

They were gripping their knives in their

left hands. Tooker shoved out his right hand as if to shake hands.

"Grab it, white man, and hang on. Hang on till us is cut apaht! The Mexicans hang onto a silk han'kerchief. We-uns ain't got no such han'kerchief. Grap a-holt ob hands like rasslers. Hang on till we gits cut away fum each othah. Grab a-holt, white man. Han' to han' an' toe to toe. Razzle-dazzle! Razzle-dazzle! Grab a-holt!"

The numbness had left Jake Wire's right hand and arm. He had on many occasions stood toe to toe with other big men and strained and twisted until he caught his man just right and flung him down. More than once he had twisted so as to snap the other man's arm at the elbow.

This was his meat.

He grabbed Black Boy Tooker's right hand. Tooker's eyes rolled and his big white teeth grinned savagely. The grip of that black hand was like the clamping of a steel vise. Toe to toe and their giant bodies braced. Steel blades glinted. Slashed. Blood showed as Jake Wire's knife point cut across the tattooed star on the Negro's barrel chest.

Crimson and silver and ebony. Tooker's knife ripped through the matted red whiskers and laid open Jake Wire's face from ear-lobe to nostril. Jake Wire's face was covered with blood. They were breathing heavily. Tugging and straining to keep from being pulled off balance. Their knives ripping until the steel blades were scarlet.

These two men had shared the same stifling prison cell. Tonight they fought in the open with no walls to close them in, no roof between them and the star-filled moonlight sky. Fought to the death, like two animals.

PANCHITA GALLAGHER, whose father had been a fighting shanty Irishman and whose mother had been the daughter of the Spanish dons, watched from the cabin doorway. Her face was chalk-white, bruised, her lips swollen and marked by dried blood.

Hands tied behind her back, her ankles

bound, she had rolled from the bunk and across the floor of the cabin, and now she had pulled herself to a kneeling position as she leaned against the door jamb. Horror darkened her gray eyes. Her bruised lips moved stiffly as she prayed to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Prayed for she knew not what because her brain was numb with fear.

Red Jake Wire was tiring. The Black Boy's knife kept slashing his face and the blood was in his green eyes. He put all his ebbing strength into the twisting jerk of his right arm. Black Boy Tooker was pulled off balance. A creaking cry of triumph broke from Jake Wire's lips. Then the cry became a scream of fear.

Black Boy Tooker had been yanked off balance. But as Jake Wire kicked at him, the black man had twisted sideways. There was the sickening crack of broken bone as Tooker's arm snapped. But Tooker's left arm was swinging with the knife blade gripped in his hand. The knife blade sank to the length of its six-inch blade in Jake Wire's body.

Jake Wire's grip on the black hand let go. The red-whiskered outlaw dropped to the ground, bent double. He let go the dagger that he had taken from Panchita. He lay doubled up on the ground, holding both bloody hands across his stomach wound. Death glazed his green eyes, and in those eyes was the light of a terrible fear. Fear of death that now swept over him and took him.

Red Jake Wire was dead.

Black Boy Tooker stood on widespread legs. His breath was labored. His ebony body was wet with sweat and blood and his right arm dangled uselessly, broken at the elbow. He wiped the blade of his knife along the leg of his overalls and snapped it shut. He put the bloodstained knife in his hip pocket and he twisted around to reach the pearl-handled gun with his left hand.

He cocked the gun, and standing there like some dark statue he emptied the gun, sending bullet after bullet into the dead body of Red Jake Wire. Then he threw down the gun.

THAT was how Tate Curry found Jake Wire and Black Boy Tooker. As Tate rode up the Black Boy grinned. His voice was low-pitched, deep-chested, soft. He pointed toward the kneeling figure in the cabin doorway.

"Thar she is, Mistah Tate. Safe as de bug in de rug!"

Then Bert Lang and Pelon and the others rode up. The Border Patrol man helped Tate from his saddle as Pelon's knife cut the girl's wrists and ankles free. And then Tate was sitting on the ground and Panchita's arms were around him; his good arm was holding her and she was sobbing and her tears were on Tate's unshaven cheek.

"Lawdy, Lawdy." Tooker grinned. He had found the partly filled jug of whisky in the cabin.

Pelon's vaqueros brought a dust-covered, bewildered Mexican padre into camp at sunrise. They had killed the outlaw who was fetching the padre from Altar.

Bert Lang had found the sack of money Jake Wire had stolen from the cantina and he had read the contents of the blood-spattered papers taken from Jake Wire's body.

The Border Patrol officer spoke to the padre in a somewhat excited mixture of Mexican and English.

"They want to be married right away, padre. *Muy pronto*. The man is Tate Curry, ramrod of the Seven Up Cattle Company. The lady is Panchita Gallagher. I think her real name is Francisca Gallagher. Her mother was Margari a Zamora who was the wife of Mike Gallagher at Mesquite.

"Francisca Gallagher don't know yet that she is the heiress to the Altar Grant. Neither does Tate Curry. Not that it makes any difference—you can see that for yourself. And she needs a husband like Tate Curry right now. Her parents were killed last night at Mesquite.

"You'll ride with us to Mesquite to give them the right sort of burial? Thanks. *Bueno*. And now, padre, drink this. You look like you'd had a hard trip. It's good whisky, Let-'er-go Gallagher's best.

Bert Lang turned the padre over to Pelon. Pelon could, after all, explain things better. Bert Lang's knowledge of the Mexican tongue, as taught him by Panchita, was limited to a few pretty phrases and some cuss words.

Black Boy Tooker tossed his silver-mounted six-shooter into the open grave that held the body of Red Jake Wire. Tooker's arm was splinted and he was wearing a new red-flannel shirt he had found in Jake Wire's warsack.

"Ashes to ashes an' dust to dust, white man. Us is even."

Black Boy Tooker walked away. There was no hatred left in his heart. His wounds were dressed and his insides were warmed by good whisky. He was wearing a bright red shirt. He had always wanted such a red-flannel double-breasted shirt with a double row of big pearl buttons. He had found a pair of shop-made boots in Jake Wire's warsack that fit him after he had slit them a little to make room for his bunions. He found some grain and gave his Abraham mule a double feed. He rubbed the mule down with a piece of wet gunnysack and talked low as he labored.

"Boss-man Tate gonna git hitched, mule. Gonna git hisse'f married to 'at Panchita.

"Bimeby 'ey have young 'uns. Boss-man Tate he sho' happy. Middle name ob 'at fust boy-chile gonna be name ob Tookah. Fust name gonna be Mike. 'At boy-chile sho' gonna be packed heaby wif names. *Mike Tookah Let-'er-go Gallagher Curry!*

"Waggle you' long eahs, you Abraham mule. Hee-haw fo' Black Boy Tookah. Got me a mule to ride an' a song fo' to sing at ol' weddin'. Got me a jug ob good likkah an' a shirt like 'em fiahmen weahs. Lawdy, Tookah, yo's sho' nuf happy! Sunshine an' moonlight. No mo' Yuma jail-house! Lucky Black Boy Tookah. Son ob de Lone Stah State. Remember ol' Alamo!"

No hate in his big heart, only happiness. The happiness of a small boy with his chores all done and a holiday coming. His big feet shuffled in the dust and he hummed a song. Black Boy Tooker was a free man.

THE END

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

WHEN somebody starts to talk about what the dialogue in historical fiction should be like, you might as well settle down for a long session of disagreement. The subject is as inflammable as the Civil War or the second Dempsey-Tunney fight.

Opinion in this matter divides itself somewhat as follows:

Medieval characters shouldn't be made to use twentieth century colloquialisms, because they didn't. But they shouldn't speak Old French either; nobody could read it. On the other hand, the stilted, literary English which is so often the speech in costume stories is quite accurate and unreal. That's the way the argument goes; and eventually the harried historical novelist is convinced that he must permit his characters nothing more than an occasional grunt.

Just now we're standing quietly on the sidelines. Meanwhile:

A few weeks ago a reader took exception to John Myers' modernisms in "The Harp and the Blade"; and now Mr. Myers finds a defender in

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

Mr. Andrade's objections to the use of modern English in historical novels remind me of the Southern preacher who objected to the teaching of foreign languages on the ground that if English was good enough for the Lord it was good enough for him.

If the authors took Mr. Andrade's advice literally, they'd have to make characters living in 9th Century France speak something between Gallo-romance (a late form of Vulgar Latin) and Old French. Try to find either an author who could write this dialect or a reader who could read it. Even the English of 1300 is nearly unintelligible without special study. So, if the writer has to translate his dialogue, why not into modern English instead of the no-more authentic King Jamesian?

NEW YORK, N. Y.

We've just received a very interesting circular from Australia. It's an appeal for books and magazines—reading matter for the British soldiers. What caught our attention—and naturally enough—was the fact that ARGOSY was the first in demand among American fiction magazines. It wasn't an alphabetical list, either.

NEW BENJAMIN AIR RIFLES WITH HAND PUMP
MADE IN U.S.A.



HARD ACCURATE SHOOTING WITH CHAMBERED AIR RIFLES WITH LEVER HAND PUMP anywhere, for practice firing or just plinking, around the house or camping, fishing, hunting, etc., at lowest cost. Shooting racy—no recoil or forward lunge to disturb your aim. Bolt Action-Hammer Fire-Hair Trigger-Safety Lock-Hand Pump. Single Shot BB \$7.50; Single Shot Cal. .177 or .22 with rifled barrel \$8.50; BB 25 Shot \$9.00. Also a complete line of **BENJAMIN GENUINE COMPRESSED AIR PISTOLS** from dealer or factory. Write Today.

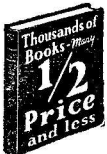
BENJAMIN AIR RIFLE CO., 888 Marion St., St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

LAW STUDY AT HOME
Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training.

More Ability: More Prestige: More Money
We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL. B. Successful graduates in every section of the U. S. We furnish all text material, including 14-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 48-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them NOW.

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 1058-L Chicago
A Correspondence Institution

ANY BOOK IN PRINT!



Delivered at your door. We pay postage. Standard authors, new books, popular editions, fiction, reference, medical, mechanical, children's books, etc.—all at guaranteed savings. Send card now for Clarkson's 1941 Catalog.

FREE Write for our great illustrated book catalog—A short course in literature. The buying guide of 300,000 book lovers. The answer to your Christmas gift problem. **FREE** if you write NOW—TODAY!

CLARKSON PUBLISHING COMPANY
Dept. MS40, 1253 So. Wabash Av., Chicago, Ill.

CASH for UNUSED POSTAGE

U. S. STAMPS WANTED AT 90% OF FACE VALUE. Money Order, check or cash sent on receipt. Send Stamps Registered Mail. **UNITED TRADING, Dept M6—1470 Broadway, N. Y. C.**

Send for **FREE CIRCULAR** of **PHOTOSTAMPS**. Your favorite picture on stamp at 1c each in lots of 100. Agents wanted. **NATIONAL PHOTOSTAMPS—Dept. M3—152 W. 42nd St., N. Y. C.**

WANTED—MEN

to cast 5 and 10c Novelties, Toy Autos, Ashtrays, etc. Can be done in any spare room, basement or garage and no experience necessary. A rare opportunity to devote spare or full time to profitable work. Apply only if over 21.

METAL CAST PRODUCTS CO., Dept. B
1696 Boston Road New York City

BUY RED ★ STAR MAGAZINES
when you want
GOOD FICTION

Genuine-Late UNDERWOOD NOISELESS

Now
\$34.85
CASH

OR
EASY TERMS While THEY Last!



MFRS.
ORIG.
SELLING
PRICE

\$125.00



Truly the most outstanding offer I have given my customers in years. Only because of an exceptional purchase can I sell these Rebuilt machines at the sensationally low price of \$34.85 (cash) or on easy terms of 70c a week. Each one carefully gone over and refinished so that its lustre gives it the appearance of a brand new machine costing over three times as much. *The mfrs. orig. selling price on this Underwood was \$125.00.* It's sent to you in Underwood packing box with Underwood book of instructions on care and operation.

A NOISELESS MACHINE

Latest achievement in typewriters! Provides writing perfection with SILENCE. For those who want the advantages of a quiet home or office. This Underwood's Noiseless mechanism eliminates the nerve shattering clatter common to many models. *An aid to better work because it allows clear thinking, reduces fatigue, improves accuracy.* This typewriter disturbs no one, for it is almost impossible to hear it operate a few feet away. You get all the features of a Rebuilt Underwood **PLUS Noiseless typing.**

FIRST CHOICE OF TYPISTS

OVER 5,000,000 UNDERWOODS NOW IN USE! Recognized as the finest, strongest built! Here is an office size Underwood with late modern features that give you **SILENT TYPING.** Has all standard equipment—keyboard, 2 colors, back space, automatic reverse, tabulator, etc. **THERE IS NO RISK! SEE BEFORE YOU BUY ON MY 10 DAY NO OBLIGATION TRIAL PLAN.** If you wish send the machine back at my expense.

WIDE 14" CARRIAGES

Wide carriage machines for government reports, large office forms, billing, etc., only \$3.00 extra with order. Takes paper 14" wide, has 12" writing line. **A Real Buy in a Rebuilt Underwood Noiseless!**

International Typewriter Exchange

331 W. Monroe St. Dept. 1036 Chicago, Ill.

EXTRA VALUE! TYPEWRITER STAND



Mounted on casters,
can be moved by
touch of finger

For those who have no typewriter stand or handy place to use a machine, I make this special offer. This attractive stand that ordinarily sells for \$4.85 can be yours for only \$2.00 extra added to your account. **Quality built. Note all its convenient features.**

NO MONEY DOWN 10 DAY TRIAL

Easy Terms—10c A Day

No obligation. See before you buy on wide open 10 day trial. Pay no money until you test, inspect, compare, and use this Underwood Noiseless. Judge for yourself without hurry and without risk. When you are convinced that this is the biggest typewriter bargain you have ever seen then say, "I'll Buy." Send only 70c a week or \$38.00 a month until term price of only \$38.85 is paid. Try it first, enjoy a full 10 days' steady use. **There is no red tape or investigation—My offer is exactly as I state it.**

2-YEAR GUARANTEE

I back this machine with my personal 2-yr. guarantee that it is in A-1 condition in every respect—that it will give first class service. Over 30 years of fair dealing and my 200,000 satisfied customers prove the soundness of my golden rule policy and prove that dealing direct with me saves you money.



Touch Typing Course

A complete home study course of famous Van Zandt Touch Typing system. *Learn to type quickly and easily.* Carefully illustrated. Written expressly for home use.

MAIL COUPON NOW · Limited Quantity on Sale!

International Typewriter Exchange, Dept. 1036, 231 W. Monroe St., Chicago, Ill.
Send Underwood Noiseless (F.O.B. Chicago) for ten days' trial. If I keep it, I will pay \$3.00 per month until easy term price (\$38.85) is paid. If I am not satisfied I can return it express collect. ☐ 10" carriage. ☐ 14" carriage (\$3.00 extra)

For quick shipment give occupation and reference

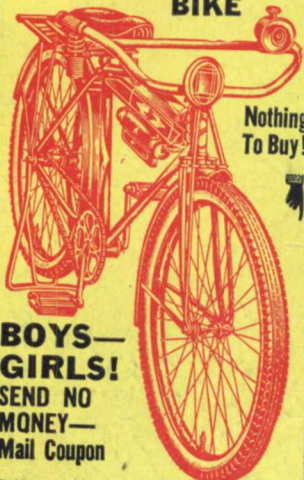
Name Age

Address

City State

☐ Check for typewriter stand (\$2.00 extra) Stand sent on receipt of first payment on Underwood.

GIVEN BIKE



Nothing To Buy!

BOYS—GIRLS!
SEND NO MONEY—
Mail Coupon

Fully equipped—Balloon tires and all. **NIFTY!**—THIS Bike, Cash or choice of other marvelous premiums given.—**SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE** good size beautifully colored famous Art Pictures with our well known White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE, used for chaps, mild burns, shallow cuts. Salve easily sold to friends, relatives, and neighbors at 25c a box (with popular picture FREE). Remit and select premium as per catalog. 45th year. We are fair and square. Many customers waiting. Act Now! M-1 Coupon! Salve and pictures sent postage paid by us. Be first—Write

WILSON CHEM. CO., INC.
Dept. MP-92-A TYRONE, PA.

BOTH GIVEN

Nothing to Buy—
Send No Money
Mail Coupon Now
Boys!
Girls!
Ladies!

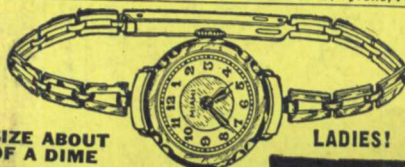


Cameras, Phonographs, Radios, watches in many styles, or Cash Commission GIVEN.—**SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE** beautifully colored art pictures with well known White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE for chaps, mild burns and shallow cuts, easily sold to best friends at 25c a box (with FREE picture) and remit as per catalog. **SPECIAL**—Some premiums GIVEN for returning only \$3.00. Be first—Mail coupon NOW! **WILSON CHEM. CO., INC.**, Dept. MP-92-B, Tyrone, Pa.



Nothing to Buy

Write or Mail Coupon

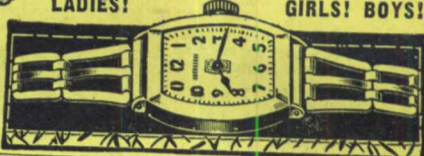


SIZE ABOUT OF A DIME

Valuable watches, other premiums or liberal cash commission GIVEN.—**SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE** pictures with White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE at 25c a box (with FREE picture) and remit as per catalog. 45th year. Be first. Write or mail coupon NOW! **WILSON CHEM. CO., INC.**, Dept. MP-92-C, Tyrone, Pa.

BOTH GIVEN

Nothing to Buy—
Send No Money
MAIL COUPON.
GIRLS! BOYS!



GIVEN

NOTHING TO BUY!



Send No Money

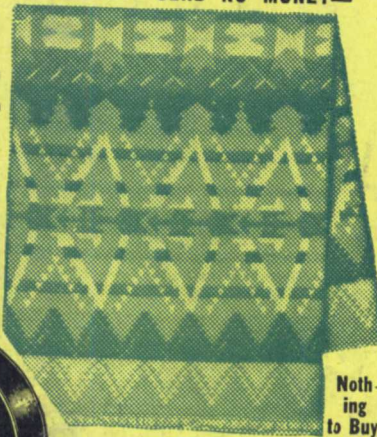
Mail Coupon!

Iver Johnson Bolt Action 22 Cal. Self-Cocking Safety RIFLE—22" long. **STURDY!** THIS Rifle, Cash, or choice of other valuable premiums given.—**SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE** beautifully colored pictures with White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE used for chaps, mild burns, shallow cuts. Salve easily sold to friends at 25c a box (with picture FREE). Remit and select premium per catalog. 45th year. We are fair and square. Act Now! Write for Salve and pictures or Mail Coupon! **WILSON CHEM. CO., INC.**, Dept. MP-92-D, TYRONE, PA.

BOTH GIVEN

NOTHING TO BUY—SEND NO MONEY—

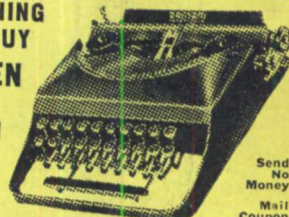
MAIL COUPON NOW
Premiums or Cash Commission



Standard guitar, Indian blankets, other musical instruments, other blankets, other premiums or cash GIVEN.—**JUST** sell White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE for chaps and mild burns to friends at 25c a box (with FREE picture) and remit per catalog. Write or mail coupon now! **WILSON CHEM. CO., INC.**, Dept. MP-92-E, Tyrone, Pa.

Nothing to Buy

NOTHING TO BUY
GIVEN
or CASH



Real portable type-writers, watches and other valuable premiums GIVEN—**JUST** sell White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE at 25c a box (with FREE picture) and remit per catalog. Many customers waiting. Be first. Mail coupon! **WILSON CHEM. CO., INC.**, MP-92-H, Tyrone, Pa.

Send No Money
Mail Coupon

MAIL COUPON

Wilson Chem. Co., Inc., Tyrone, Pa.
Premium Division, Dept. MP-92, Date.....

Gentlemen: Please send me 12 beautiful art pictures with 12 boxes WHITE CLOVERINE Brand SALVE to sell at 25c a box (giving popular picture FREE). I will remit within 30 days, select a premium or keep cash commission as per catalog sent with order, postage paid.

NAME.....

RD or BOX No.....ST.....

TOWN..... STATE.....

Print Your Last Name Only in Spaces Below:

WRITE, or PASTE COUPON ON A POSTAL or MAIL COUPON in an envelope NOW! Which premium do you like best?

Try White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE for Chaps, Minor Burns, Shallow Cuts