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MARCH

Magazine

**THUNDER
BIRD**

by

ARTHUR O. FRIEL



T. S. STRIBLING

ROBERT CARSE

GEORGES SURDEZ

CAPTAIN DINGLE

DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

GORDON YOUNG

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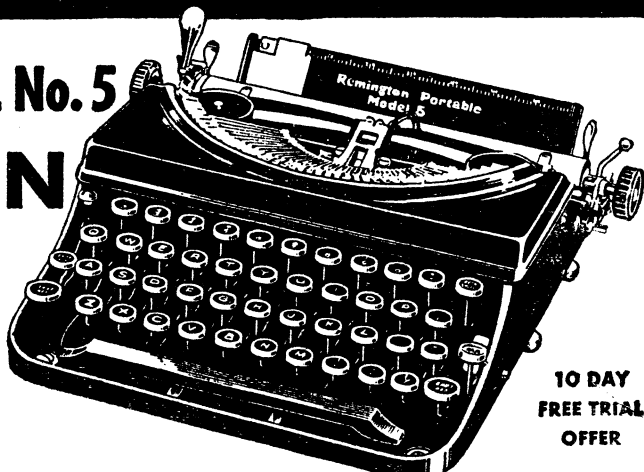
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Volume One

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Number One

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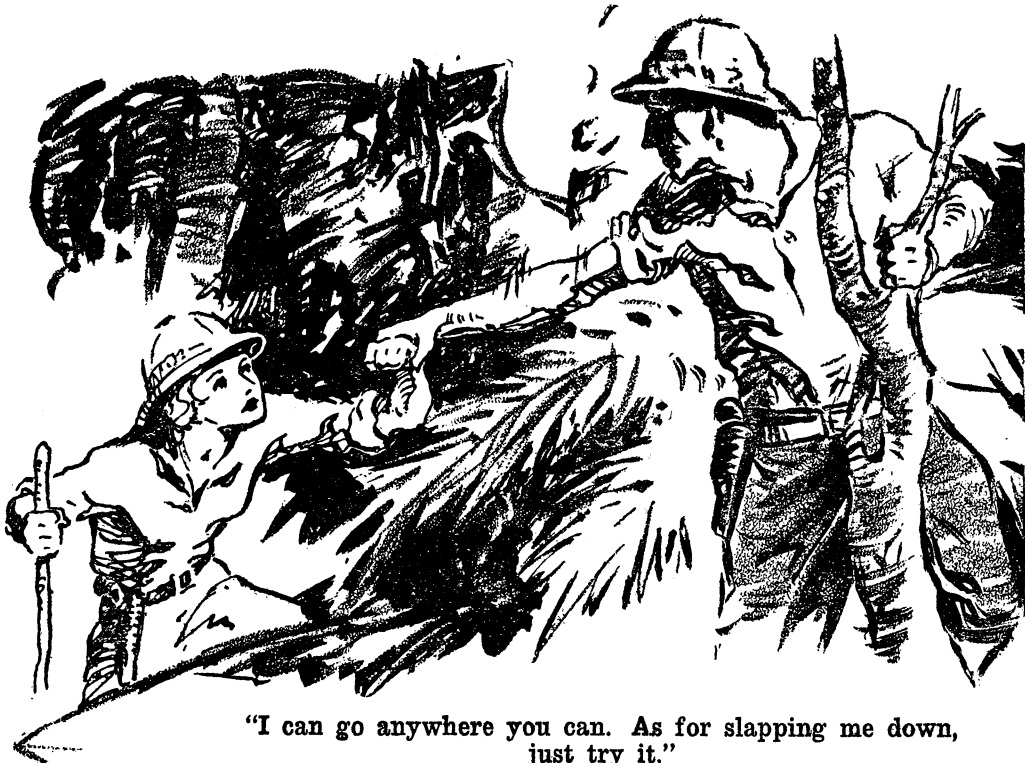
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"I can go anywhere you can. As for slapping me down, just try it."

THE THUNDERBIRD

A burning devil falls over the Orinoco, and Corwin, explorer, already faced with hazards of blowgun and headhunter, finds that he has a young and beautiful aviatrix to help—or hinder—him in his terrific fight with the green jungle.

CHAPTER I

A NATIVE LEFT TO DIE

THE dugout canoe crawled up the hot river.

Forward, four leathery *mestizos* swung paddles with tired strokes. Aft, a fifth halfbreed dragged a broader paddle, steering. Amidships, under a curved sunhood of palm fronds, a white man sat on the flooring, long legs outstretched, back against a tier of travel supplies, right hand flapping a handkerchief to repel the mosquitos.

Day was dying, yet still hurling across the parched Colombian plains its

grilling afternoon heat. Away to the east, leagues distant from the Venezuelan shore, massive mountains blocked off all wind. And here, midway up the tortuous Rio Orinoco, the air was stifling. So here *la plaga*, the plague of biting bugs, was at its infernal worst.

On the yellow-skinned, thinly clad natives the stinging bites seemingly had little effect. Yet even they, habituated since birth to such insects, occasionally interrupted their sway to slap off the torturers. The tanned explorer from North America struck more frequently, yet said nothing.



A NOVELETTE By ARTHUR O. FRIEL

Evading a strong current, the canoe swung close inshore. Along the steep bank it swam, following an eddy. The lone passenger perfunctorily scanned the dense tangle of waterside timber. Suddenly he sat up straight, then voiced a sharp command. At once the paddles halted.

Against a thick gray tree trunk was a brown human shape. Motionless, hardly noticeable amid the endless chaos of dull greens and drabs and shadows, it had been detected only by the idle traveler's random glance. Now the boatmen peered at it a second, then warily surveyed the adjacent belt of forest.

The white man drew himself out from the low cabin to stand erect. To the steersman he gestured shoreward. No response came. The pilot let the *curial* drift backward while he still contemplated the brown body.

"Pull in!" curtly commanded the white, speaking Spanish.

"A moment, *señor*," demurred the

man aft. "This may be a trap."

"A trap? Meaning what?"

"That fellow may be a decoy, *Señor* Corwin. This part of the river is Guahibo country. The Guahibos are bad *Indios*. More than one river traveler has died in this bush because he went ashore to look at something."

Corwin's gray gaze narrowed. Studying the verdure, listening intently, he discerned no menace. Somewhere downstream a pair of high flying macaws screeched raucously as they winged their way toward their home roost. Nearby not even a leaf rustled or a cricket chirped. The listener relaxed.

"A decoy?" he scoffed. "A decoy would be planted in plain sight, or would shout to attract attention. This man is like a dead one."

"Probably he is dead," quickly countered the other. "And he is only an *Indio*, anyway. Let us go on. Night is near, and—"

His objection died. The North Ameri-

can had stooped and seized a cartridge belt. Now he buckled it on, unsnapped a holster flap, and bleakly ordered—

"Put me ashore, Miguel!"

Without another word Miguel obeyed. The swash of his big paddle prompted the four ahead to use their own blades. The drifting shell resumed its forward creep, slid to shore, stopped as the *mestizos* grasped low bushes. Corwin stepped out and climbed the steep acclivity.

At the upper edge he paused, eyes again searching the silent woods. To snaky vines, to dense brush, to thickly leaved boughs he gave no attention. To stout trees he gave sharp scrutiny, seeking any peering head, any yellowish arrow or dark blowgun projecting past its side. Reassured, he strode to the brown man.

The immobile figure gave no sign of life. Naked, stiff-legged, stiff-armed, it stood clutching the tree, its bare back toward the newcomer, its black-haired head sunk on a shoulder. As Corwin eyed it he scowled.

"Devils!" he muttered.

From neck to knees the nude statue was streaked by puffy welts and open gashes. To it clung a horde of mosquitos, and up and down it crawled biting ants. Its frozen clasp on the tree was involuntary, for its hands were tied on the far side by strong vines. On the earth at its feet lay several sticks, broken or frayed. The story was plain: some man or men had bound the victim, whipped him unmercifully, gone and left him to suffer whatever form of death might come to him from the inhuman wilderness.

Up the bank now scrambled Miguel and a couple of paddlers, emboldened by the evident lack of danger. Contemplating the Indian, the steersman murmured understandingly through his nose:

"M-hm-hm! A bad fellow, that one. See how stiff are his knees. He refuses

to bend them even to death. A creature most tough, most stubborn, most disobedient to his betters."

He spoke as callously as if mentioning a wooden image. The paddlers, wordless, showed even less feeling. Orinoco rivermen are a hard lot. Hardest of all toward real Indians are those whose blood is only part Indian.

THE WHITE man ignored them.

Drawing a pocket knife, he reached past the tree and cut the bush handcuffs. The released captive fell backward, lay supine. As the liberator stooped he met the narrow gaze of hard brown eyes. The stubborn aborigine who had been abandoned to death was not dead.

Stiff, numb, the Indian peered inflexibly up at the stranger who had come from nowhere. Life sunk to low ebb, perceptions dulled by hopeless though tenacious stoicism, he had not detected the quiet footsteps and voices nearby. Now, shocked awake by his sudden fall, he mentally strove to read the character and intentions of the white man.

Into Corwin's answering look came a fleeting smile of encouragement. Stooping lower, he clutched an arm and a leg and lifted the helpless creature to rest across his shoulders; then, straightening, carried his burden to the canoe. There he unlocked a small trunk, produced medical supplies, and went to work on the lacerated back.

While he washed and salved and bandaged open cuts the patient remained motionless. The *mestizos*, afloat and ashore, watched sourly. One muttered—

"I hope we are not expected to carry that dog along."

"Shut your mouth!" grunted Miguel. "I will handle the matter."

Wherewith he descended to the water-side, squatted, and observed the efficient motions of the Northerner. With unobtrusive flattery he remarked—

"You are a doctor, *señor*."

"Oh, no," briefly disclaimed the American. "Just able to patch simple hurts."

"A most deft patcher, then. But, *señor*, your work is wasted on this creature. He was not so punished without good cause, and—"

"What cause?" interrupted Corwin.

"Eh? *Cra*, how do I know? Who left him here, and why, is beyond my knowledge. But it is clear that he gave serious offense to his master. It is clear also that he is without feeling or understanding. A beast of evil temper, who knew no gratitude to the employer who fed him and will know none to us. One might as well be kind to a snake or crocodile as to such *Indios* as this. Your good heart is most admirable, *señor*, but—"

He paused discreetly. The paddlers glanced at one another with covert grins. Miguel knew how to say things, how to put over his point. But then their mouths lowered. The point had not gone over this time. Without reply or hesitation the *señor* completed his job, drew the prone sufferer into the cabin, spread over him a thin blanket, and himself squatted outside the hood.

"*Vamos!*" he ordered. "Let's go!"

Muttering briefly, the boatmen resumed their former places and their former work. Rested by the short halt, angered by the addition of extra weight, they threw new force into their strokes. Aft, Miguel mouthed silent curses at his obdurate employer's back. That employer coolly repacked his medical kit, then settled into his previous contemplation of the river. The dugout swam onward at double time.

CHAPTER II

THE NATIVE SLEEPS

AS THE last glare of sunlight faded from the wilderness the canoe crossed to the Venezuelan side and grounded in a watery depression in a wide, gently sloping rock. Dropping paddles inboard, the workers stepped

ashore. Corwin drew from the cabin their *machetes*, which daily rode on the baggage pile, out of the way of bare feet. With these keen bush knives the natives quickly collected wood in the tree growth backing the stone; and, as brief twilight became darkness, a fire flickered up, to become steady flame. Over it was slung a large kettle of cool *sancocho*—stew. At the tree edge were hung the hammock and mosquito net of the *señor*.

The boatmen, following the river custom, were to sleep on the smooth stone, protected by the fire from night prowling jaguar or vampire, and able to act unimpeded if attacked by savages. The Northerner was to rest as usual in his *chinchorro*. The Indian still lay in the dugout. To a question concerning him Corwin curtly answered—

"Leave him alone."

And there, alone, he was left all night, huddled under the blanket which virtually repelled all insects and sheltered by the palm roof from heavy dew. For a short time after supper Corwin sat beside him, feeding him with heated stew, giving him water, feeling his forehead for fever, asking a few questions in bush Spanish. The queries evoked no response. Eating and drinking with minimum effort, the fellow remained otherwise wooden. As Miguel had asserted, he seemed without feeling or understanding.

So, leaving him to sleep, the white man went to his own bed, there to lie awhile thinking. The hardy indigene in the canoe would undoubtedly draw new vigor from complete rest throughout the twelve-hour tropic night; and tomorrow he might explain who and what he was and how he had incurred such cruelty. Although Miguel evidently thought him to be a rebellious peon, or debt slave, Corwin felt that he never had been subservient to any master. In either case, he must know much about other Indians of this region; much more than these halfbreed rivermen, townsmen, whatnot,

composing the present crew. And facts about the real Indians of this hinterland were what the Northerner most desired. To collect such facts was his chief mission.

Although skilled in several branches of exploration, Corwin was most interested in ethnology, the study of human races, basic reason for all other studies of this planet. Human life, with the effects on it of climate, environment, topography, alone makes geographic investigation worthwhile. And now Corwin, en route to investigate obscure lands far up the Orinoco, dallied with the idea of also learning more about the wild folk of this section near at hand.

His mind roved to the Colombian plains at the west, the Venezuelan mountains at the east, both of which were savage wildernesses inhabited only by savage tribes. Some of those tribes were named, and their habitats vaguely sketched, on decidedly imperfect ethnological maps composed by the two rival republics. If this Indian in the boat were a Guahibo, he could give valuable information concerning the prairie people; if a Piaroa, he could reveal even more interesting facts about the mountaineers who brewed weird poisons. And thus, without altering his predetermined course, the voyager might—

At that point the thinker halted imagination and silently ridiculed himself. That crude savage yonder in the canoe evidently did not even comprehend Spanish. He had given not the slightest sign of understanding any word spoken by his savior. And even if he did grasp his questioner's meaning, he was either too obtuse or too obdurate to formulate answer. From such a stony source would gush no spring of knowledge, now or later.

Thus concluding, Corwin shut his eyes and forgot everything. And everything remained unchanged until daybreak.

THEN, while beasts and birds clamored greetings to the new light, men

quickly made ready to use the early coolness in traveling. The cook heated the depleted stew and broke up a broad sheet of cassava bread. The other *mes-tizos* took down and stowed away Corwin's hammock and net. The *señor* himself inspected the extra passenger. To his disappointment, he found the Indian unimproved.

Dull eyed, apathetic, the brown fellow lay sluggish on one side. Ordered to turn over and show his back, he did not obey. When moved by the white man he rolled like a log, neither resisting nor assisting. Examination of his visible injuries, however, indicated that they were healing at a normal rate. His skin was cool, his pulse steady, though slow. There seemed no apparent reason why, although naturally stiff and lame, he should not show more life. Miguel, standing close, watched with a suspicious scowl.

"He is shamming, the lazy dog!" asserted the pilot. "You had best leave him here, *señor*. He will rise and walk *may pronto* when he smells no more free food."

For a moment the American's eyes also narrowed with suspicion. Then, without reply, he unlocked his trunk, drew forth his medical box, unlocked that in turn, and rapidly redressed the Indian's worst hurts with fresh ointments, bandages, and tape. While he worked, Miguel shrewdly studied the other contents of the thin trunk.

Neatly nested within it were other rectangular boxes like the one holding the medicines—steel cash boxes, each with sunken handle and slitted keyhole. Within them might or might not be cash, the hard silver or gold money needed in the back districts, where paper banknotes were distrusted. At any rate, the trunk was very heavy for its size. And this tight-mouthed *señor*, who traveled alone and gave out little information about himself, might or might not be, as he claimed, an explorer. He might

be a sly trader, revolutionary agent, or some other sort of undercover worker. In any case, he had some money. If all those boxes were full of it . . .

Into Miguel's close-set eyes came a glint which had been there several times since he first discovered the weight of that trunk. Then he turned quickly away. The *señor* had completed his job and was straightening up.

Ambling to the fire, the crew boss gave each of his dour-faced subordinates a narrow stare which conveyed two impressions: that he had in mind something which at present was not their business, and that they must carry on without question. Dumbly they squatted and ate fast. Corwin, joining them, downed his share with equal speed. Then, refilling his agate soup plate, he reentered the canoe and offered the food to the Indian.

The brown fellow looked at it hungrily. His chest swelled in a deep breath. But he made no move. His eyes turned up to those of the donor; and in them was the silent appeal of a helpless animal. When Corwin spooned the nourishment into his mouth he chewed slowly, swallowed hard, and soon stopped, although the dish was but half emptied. Given water, he drank with long gulps. Then he lay quiet. At no time had he moved any muscle below his neck.

"*Cral* I was wrong," retracted Miguel. "The fellow is truly sick. Any *Indio* who will not guzzle everything given him is almost dead. He must have some very bad disease. And in our small canoe, *señor*, it is not well to—"

"He has no disease," contradicted Corwin. "He is probably badly poisoned by the bugs that bit him. Anyway, I'll not leave him here."

"Very well, *señor*," Miguel shrugged. "I speak only for your own good. But I must warn you that we shall be delayed by carrying him. I promised to put you in San Fernando, where my arrangement with you ends, on the last

day of this month, which is the day after tomorrow. This *Indio* must weigh at least a hundred and sixty pounds; and in paddling upstream every extra pound uses up the strength of the paddlers. Since he is really sick, we do not mind the effort. But we do not like to fail in our promise to you."

"That's all right." Corwin's lips quirked in an appreciative smile. "An extra day or two doesn't matter. Nobody expects me at San Fernando. And for the overtime work I'll pay you fellows whatever seems reasonable. Any other objections?"

"None, *señor*." The crew boss grinned amicably. "Boys, to work!"

The stolid paddlers swiftly obeyed, their heavy faces brightened by the promise of overtime pay. Sliding their *machetes* into the cabin, they grinned momentarily at the *señor*; then took their usual seats. Half a minute later their shafts were thumping the thick gunwales in the short, rapid rhythm of all Orinoco canoeemen.

BRIGHT sun, low but hot, now flooded land, water, and boat. Donning his tropical helmet, the Northerner settled himself outside the narrow cabin, giving the Indian full room to rest uncrowded. At the stern Miguel smiled sneeringly. This taciturn foreigner who had seemed so coldly capable was in fact pretty soft. Any white man who unnecessarily exposed himself to the sun was rather a fool; one who did so for the comfort of a mere *Indio* was a mawkish imbecile.

Steadily the smooth-bellied shell crept on up the tawny waterway, paddlers stroking vigorously, passenger lounging comfortably, all enjoying the freshness and comparative coolness of early day.

A lively breeze sported about, ruffling the water, dispelling mosquitos, fanning faces and bodies of the voyagers. In the trees and on the muddy margins moved and called odd birds: whistling *pajaros mineros*, flitting black-and-yellow ori-

oles, softly murmuring *curassows*, gobbling *corocoros*—tailless creatures with awl-like beaks which industriously hunted riverside worms. Overhead stretched brilliant blue sky wherein drifted fleecy clouds of purest white. And off at the left, towering far into that azure expanse, the chaotic highlands of Venezuelan Guayana loomed more darkly blue, straggling far into the misty south. Indomitable, virtually inaccessible, harshly hostile, they defied all invaders.

On those mysterious bulks Corwin's gaze rested oftener and longer. Back into his mind came last night's yearning to know more about those stony giants. And in his eyes grew a wistful glow, on his long face a recurrently responsive acceptance of the challenge, tempered by practical calculation of possibilities. Behind that mountain barrier lay the almost unknown country he had come to explore: a broad river basin which he was now gradually approaching by the circuitous route of the Orinoco. Several hundred miles of the Orinoco must still be laboriously traveled before he could reach the mouth of the tributary which formed the entrance to that land. If, instead, he could cut straight across from here, pass through these highlands, observe their Piaroa people, then march on into the farther basin, much could be gained.

CHAPTER III

MOUNTAINS UNCONQUERED

WITH a sigh, he again abandoned the dream. Obviously no stranger could consummate that arduous overland traverse without expert guidance. And Corwin knew from experience that no white man could amicably meet wild, suspicious Indians unless accompanied or preceded by some native whom they knew and trusted. Nobody here could or would act as guide and sponsor; not even the Indian, who, whatever, his

tribe, was physically and mentally palsied. Shaking his head, Corwin turned his face from the alluring heights and again looked forward to fulfilment of his original plan.

Up ahead somewhere, at the point where the river turned eastward, was the last town in Venezuela, San Fernando de Atabapo, habitat of rubber dealers, tricky traders and various other shifty characters. There he would pay off his present crew, hire the next best one he could obtain, and carry on. To the problem of finding trustworthy men at such a notoriously treacherous village he gave scant thought now. Like other lone adventurers in the world's savage spots, he was rather a fatalist, taking reasonable precautions, but trusting largely to luck. Today was always today, and whatever might arise tomorrow could be dealt with at its own time.

Watching whatever came into sight, he spent hours in the rising, blazing sun, disregarding everything behind. And, behind, the sheltered savage lay unmoved, with eyelids almost—but not quite—shut. Whether or not the brown man's brain registered any impressions, the narrow eyes saw every little characteristic motion of the lean body, every varying expression of the tanned face which occasionally turned to observe things on the banks. Only once did the dark visage show life, and then only at gunshots.

Corwin, spying a pair of big *pauji* turkeys close together on a near shore, reached back for his small but powerful rifle, took swift aim, and shot both birds within two seconds. The paddlers yelled exultantly and raced to retrieve these replenishments of the stewpot. Laying back his gun, the marksman found the sick man's eyes wide open and momentarily alert. As the Northerner grinned, however, an opaque shade seemed to slide over the staring pupils; and as the boatment resumed work the brown lids closed sluggishly.

"Scared alive for a second," judged Corwin. "Not used to guns. Yes, he must be a wild one from away back. Indians who are even half civilized use guns themselves."

At the noon halt the birds were stripped and partly boiled while both crew and employer ate cassava and cheese. Offered the same coarse fare, the Indian grunted terse refusal. And for the rest of that day, while the canoe labored on through the intense afternoon heat, he lay entirely ignored. As before, the *señor* sat out in the grilling sun while the sick dog lay in shade. But now Miguel no longer sneered at his back. Soft fool though the self-styled explorer was, he was also lightning with a gun. In that recently demonstrated fact the pilot found food for much frowning thought.

Paddling along the deeps, poling along the shallows, hauling through labyrinths of enormous stones exposed by the dry season, the workers continued to progress. Observing them, the silent foreigner felt that they were delivering full effort, not shirking to draw the promised extra pay. So, when the night camp was made at a poor spot, he nodded when Miguel deferentially explained:

"It is unavoidable that we stop here, *señor*. That dead weight in your cabin has held us back. And night, as you know, waits for no man."

"I know," acquiesced Corwin. "And this place isn't too bad. I've slept in worse."

"*Cra!* And I too!" grinned Miguel. "*Pues*, let us make what comfort we may. Tomorrow night, I promise you, we shall rest at a cleaner port, Castillito. Do you know of it?"

"No."

"An island, *señor*, in the middle of the river. Clean sand. No mosquitos. And the next night we should be at San Fernando, only one day late."

"That sounds good. And I know you

fellows are doing the best you can. Here, give the boys some cigarets."

Grinning anew, Miguel passed the packet of smokes among the paddlers, meanwhile abstracting three for himself. When supper was ready all ate companionably. When it was over, the Indian accepted a full plate of broth and meat and another long drink of water. But, as before, he moved only his head and neck; and, as before, he remained dumb.

Again night passed quietly. Again day was spent in monotonous travel. Again the human freight lay without motion. His back now looked nearly healed. His drawn face and muscular body seemed somewhat less angular, better nourished, more healthy. But his eyes remained almost shut, lethargic, unreadable. And when darkness once more arrived he stayed in the same place, disregarded after inspection and feeding.

"There must be a dislocated vertebra in that chap's back," surmised Corwin, "knocked out of joint by a paddle edge or a gun barrel. After we reach San Fernando I'll go over that spine and try to punch the kink back into place."

Thereafter he conversed genially with the camp-fire group. As Miguel had predicted, they were staying this night in midriver, on a sandy shore at the tail of a small bumpy island. Steep rock walls, rising sheer as those of any medieval stronghold, gave the islet its name of Castillito, Little Castle. Here at the downstream end was a clean beach, on which now blazed a big heap of driftwood. No mosquitos bit. No jaguar, no snake, no Indian would attack here. The broad river flowing past on each side was an effective barrier to all sneaky destroyers on the mainland, and the fire would hold off all crocodiles slyly swimming the black water.

And only a few leagues farther on waited the squalid village where the crew, paid off, could revel with white

rum and dark women. So the anticipative paddlers now made merry for awhile, and Corwin joined in their jesting mood. At length eyelids grew heavy, and by tacit consent the canoemates lay down.

The *mestizos* sprawled over with bare feet to the fire. The white man ambled to his rubber poncho, which lay spread open at the base of the cliff; removed his shoes, loosened his belt, yawned, and dozed into swift sleep. On the ground between him and the stone wall rested his rifle. In a trousers pocket was his revolver. From force of habit he always slept with his guns at hand. Weeks might pass without sudden need of them; but, since they were his only life insurance, he kept his policy ever in force.

THE rivermen, careless here, slumbered virtually defenseless. Beside the fire lay one *machete*, recently used to chop wood. At Miguel's belt snuggled a double-edged dagger, his habitual weapon. Otherwise all steel was inside the canoe cabin.

Two or three hours drifted away. Men quietly snored. The bright yellow fire burned down to a slow, steady red. At length a ghostly shape sat up on the sand, looked all about, and keenly studied the unconscious *señor* over at the edge of the rock. Then, moving with smooth stealth, it crept among the huddled paddlers, squeezing shoulders, meeting startled eyes as they snapped open, whispering softly down into suddenly alert ears. Soon, without sound, all the boatmen arose and stepped farther along the short beach, fading into a black pocket of the upright stone. Their leader was their boss, Miguel.

More whisperings ensued, deepening to mutters. Quick hissings of rebuke by Miguel kept those mutterings too low to wake the *señor*. But one subdued voice objected:

"We cannot do that, *patron*. We are very near San Fernando, and—"

"And what of that?" interrupted Miguel. "Nobody expects him at San Fernando. He himself said so. And at this time of year almost nobody travels. The rubber season is past. The traders have taken all their goods upstream. There is no other reason for any one of consequence to be abroad. By the time any one does come along he will have tried to swim ashore, and the crocodiles—"

His teeth gleamed in the dark. The others eyed the black river. Comprehensive grunts followed.

"But remember," muttered some one else, "he is a foreigner, a *Norte Americano*. And now that the *Norte Americanos* are making our *politicos* rich by drilling oil at Maracaibo it is a serious matter to kill one. And we are known to have agreed to deliver him safely at—"

"Fool, I know all that!" broke in the pilot. "We do not kill him, I have told you. We only leave him here. And who shall know we did so? Our tale is that we all were attacked in the night by *Indios* farther downstream, the *señor* disappeared somehow, the savages plundered the canoe—something of that sort, which often happens hereabouts. Leave that to me! I am good at such explanations, as you should know."

More grunts, signifying that all knew his cleverness. But a growling voice added:

"It would be much better to slit his throat and stomach and sink him. Then there could be no—"

"Did you happen to see what hit those two turkeys yesterday?" purred Miguel.

"Mmmm!" answered long, low murmurs, followed by one further demur—

"How are we to open the trunk and boxes without his keys?"

"Have we not *machetes*? Are there

not stones? Have you tender children no strength?"

Some one hoarsely chuckled. Again Miguel grinned.

"*Vamos!* But softly," he prompted. "Not a grunt when you lift the bow, not a scrape when you slide her off, not a splash when you step in. Very, very softly!"

Softly they moved outward. Then one halted, whispering:

"What of the *Indio*?"

Miguel scowled, then shrugged.

"I forgot him," he admitted. "But he can do nothing. He is almost dead. And as soon as we are out of sight, we will dump him overboard. Come!"

Soundless as phantoms they stole toward the dugout, which lay with heavy prow high on the sand. From beside the fire the owner of the *machete* picked his blade, and for an instant he eyed the sleeping employer he was leaving to death. Serenely unconscious, Corwin lay inert. Into the canoe the *mestizo* quietly lowered his weapon. Then, grouped at the overhanging bow, the crew stooped, braced themselves, and smoothly lifted. Without the least grinding noise, the ponderous craft gradually floated backward off the shore.

Muscles strained, breath held, teeth set, gaze fixed outward, the deserters inched their way along, avoiding the slightest splash of big feet in upward creeping water. Suddenly one gasped a harsh ejaculation. From another broke a startled grunt. Motion stopped short.

Inside the cabin something had risen. A long dark shape was sitting up, its eyes faintly glinting in the dull fire-light. Silently menacing as a snake rearing its head, uncanny as a dead man revealing life, it faced the stealthy workers.

"*Diablo!*" squawked a boatman, losing his grip. "*El Indio!* He is — Beware!"

Other hands slipped. The tilted canoe fell, hitting water with a loud smack. In one more second the sha-

dowy watcher under the hood struck with serpentine speed. And Corwin, aroused by the voice and the noise, sprang from his bed.

Ducking out from under the low roof, the Indian leaped to the bow. In each fist gleamed a *machete* snatched from the baggage pile. With powerful sweeps he chopped down at two *mestizo* heads. Both strokes were deadly. One boatman collapsed with skull split. The other, ducking, took the edge across the neck and fell headless.

With a tigerish scream the slayer again raised his thick blades and sprang anew. But one foot slipped, and he fell headlong into the shallow water. As he sprawled, the fellow who owned the *machete* in the bow yanked it forth and swung it up. Then he staggered, turned half around, pitched sideways and was still. A bullet had hit him from behind.

CHAPTER IV

INDIO, RESCUER

CORWIN, comprehending the whole scene in one glance, had jumped forward with sidearm out. Now, as the *machete* man fell, the Northerner faced Miguel, ready, but holding his fire. Teeth gleaming in a downturned grin, the crew boss sidestepped and threw his dagger. A swift dodge evaded the missile. The revolver spat flame. Miguel doubled over on the sand, down to stay.

The fifth and last halfbreed gave his fallen boss one glance, then dived into the river. For a moment the tense Northerner held tight aim at the frantic splashes receding on the gloomy water. Then he let his gun sink. But he still watched. If that sneak should turn back. . . .

The fugitive never came back. Into the darkness he faded. Then sounded a sudden screech which ended in a gur-

gling gasp. One of the wary, watchful crocodiles out yonder had taken yellow meat instead of white.

Shoving his weapon back into a pocket, the white man sprang to catch the canoe. Almost free, the heavy shell now was being gradually drawn away by the sly river. Tugging, straining, lifting, he hauled it inward with desperate energy. All at once it grew light and moved forward with a rush. Gripping the opposite side, heaving with mighty force, worked the Indian.

With the dugout safely grounded, the savage coolly turned away and pounced on the halfbreeds. First he clutched Miguel, who, although practically dead, still twitched. With one powerful swing he heaved the yellow boss out into the river, prey to waiting reptiles. The other *mestizos* splashed to oblivion in rapid succession. As the last watery disturbance subsided into dull darkness the Indian loosed a ferocious yell. Then he turned again to the watchful white man. His brown face now was gashed by a hard grin.

The Northerner met his gaze with combined wariness and amazement. Such swift resurrection of a virtual corpse, such sudden strength in a broken-backed paralytic seemed incredible; and such naked ferocity needed keen analysis. Before he quite gauged the shining eyes he received another surprise. The dumb spoke. Moreover, the words were comprehensible. Although harsh, throaty, terse, they were bush Spanish.

"We friends, huh?" growled the Indian.

"*Cómo no?*" parried the white man. "Why not?"

The other chuckled, stepped to the fire, and squatted, mutely inviting conference. Corwin walked to the other side, added fresh fuel, and again scrutinized the dark visage. Then he prompted—

"You are well now."

"All well," agreed the other. "Been well all the time. Just little tired."

The Northerner frowned. Well all the time? Just lying down, being lazy? But then, understanding, he nodded. From this stiff-kneed, stiff-willed aborigine need be expected no confession of weakness at any time. And his concentrated resting had been inflexibly purposeful. His purpose had been not only to rebuild his strength but to use that strength on some predetermined object; an object which Corwin easily guessed. But, probing, he asked:

"What made you tired?"

The brown eyes chilled, slid sidewise, dwelt narrowly on the upstream darkness; the darkness where lay the cruel town of San Fernando. For a long moment there was no sound but the crackling of the newly burning wood. Then the vengeful gaze came back from the distance; and, shortly, the recent sufferer talked.

He had been made tired by yellow men from San Fernando. He, a free Indian—a pure Indian, untainted by mongrel blood, he proudly declared—had been caught with three others at the mouth of a tributary river by San Fernando traders bound upstream with a heavy boat and a small crew. His fellow Indians had been beaten into submissive service as boatmen. He himself had refused to submit. Tired of lashing him, the captors had left him to expire slowly on the Colombian side of the Orinoco; the Guahibo side, where perhaps the Guahibos might find him and amuse themselves in their turn.

"Guahibos beasts," he said. "Me man. Me Piaroa! Beasts hate men. Guahibos hate Piaroas."

The listener nodded again, knowing quite well what jungle Indians usually did to helpless enemies. The announcement that this fellow was a Piaroa, however, brought to his face a thoughtful look. The Piaroa saw that look, but

remained expressionless. Monotonously he completed his narrative.

Picked up by chance rescuers, he had lain still thereafter to rest, reach San Fernando, and avenge himself on his torturers. How he was to consummate that vengeance he did not know; but he meant to find some way to square his account after he arrived. These new men were going that way and would undoubtedly stop at that town. So he had just ridden along. Now the ride had unexpectedly ended. So that was all.

Corwin smiled, seeing much left unsaid. He knew that this rough, gruff savage had not stayed with him so long, lain so still, feigned stupidity so cannily, for the sole purpose of a rest and a ride to revenge. In the deep wild brain had been also a growing curiosity about the kindly white man, a fixed suspicion of all yellow men, which decided him to continue watching all of them, listening to all carelessly spoken words and making ready, if need arose, to defend his benefactor. This intention had been actuated by no conscious obligation or code of gratitude; it had been as instinctive and inevitable as his other determination to repay his debt of malevolence to the malefactors at San Fernando. Jungle men, like jungle animals, often had very decent instincts intermingled with their innate ferocities. And this fellow—

AT THAT point the jungle fellow shattered the thinker's mellow mood. Bluntly he demanded—

"You got much money?"

Mouth tight, Corwin regarded him coldly. Then, rising, he strode to the canoe. From it he hauled the heavy trunk. At the edge of the fire he unlocked it, unpacked it, opened each box. Only one of them contained money, Venezuelan *bolivares*, silver coins worth about twenty cents each, aggregating about three hundred dollars.

The other contents were the small, delicately refined instruments of the expert explorer who must travel light; solar chronometer, aneroid barometer, and similar tools; concentrated photographic equipment; complete medical and surgical outfit; and plentiful cartridges. All of these, vital to the continued existence and ultimate success of the lone investigator, were packed into the smallest possible space and locked up in little steel vaults. Their combined weight was more than enough to turn avaricious minds to thoughts of the heaviest precious metal—gold. Thus they had turned the mind of Miguel. Now, demonstrating his lack of much money, Corwin sought anew to probe the enigmatic mind of the Indian.

Blankly regarding the unexplained scientific, photographic, and surgical supplies, the Piaroa showed no interest. At the money he looked with bleak hostility. Far from coveting coins, he evidently distrusted men who possessed or prized many pieces of silver. Turning his gaze to the compactly nested cartridges, he regarded them warily, yet with mounting approval. At length he once more grinned; and, straightening up, he extended one arm eastward.

"You want go there," he said. "We go. Tomorrow."

With that promise he swung to the canoe, lowered himself inside, lay down in his usual place. Corwin, face aglow, opened his lips to speak; then, repressing useless words, closed his boxes and re-stored them in the trunk. As he worked his eyes still shone.

Eastward into the hostile mountains which he had vainly wished to explore, he now could penetrate with this watchful Piaroa who had covertly read his desire. And he knew that the volunteer guide, once homeward bound, would not reverse his course in order to renew his vindictive journey to San Fernando. By killing halfbreeds here on this isle the Indian had appeased his hunger for ven-

geance on Orinocan *mestizos*, and now he would be content to leave this yellow river far behind.

Locking the trunk, the owner stood and smiled toward the heights now invisible in the night. Presently he walked back to his poncho. And, with the camp-fire cheerily burning between them, the strangely met, strangely mated partners resumed their sleep in mutual trust.

CHAPTER V

THE MOUNTAIN TRAIL

DOWN a black precipice plunged a white cataract, smashing into foam on jagged rocks. Spray, drifting along the forested ravine below, spread welcome coolness through the torrid air. In smooth water at the foot of brawling rapids a dark dugout canoe lay with heavy snout on shelving shore. Beside that blunt prow squatted two men, a white and an Indian.

Both were tired. For days past they had been poling their clumsy craft up this rocky tropic river, working through withering heat. Now Corwin, tall American explorer, deliberately scanned the roaring waterfall and the dense jungle at either side. Hokko, muscular Venezuelan Indian, drowsed with complete abandon, bare brown body lax, brown eyes closed, aboriginal mind torpid. Although this was the end of navigation, it was only a halt in a long journey.

At length, fully refreshed, the Indian arose and unloaded the canoe. On shore he piled meager food supplies, several duffle bags, a small but heavy trunk, a rifle, hammocks, *machetes*, paddles. Then he curtly spoke in bush Spanish.

"*Vamo'!*" he grunted. "Let's go!"

The roar of the fall drowned the word, but the lean Northerner nodded.

"*Bien,*" he assented. "All right."

And, picking up his rifle, he followed the guide.

Into the waterside forest they faded.

Behind them the small cargo lay unguarded. Before them the matted jungle rose repellent. And beyond them, over the top of this steep slope, waited unexplored South American wilderness, too rough, too savage to have yet yielded its secrets to white men.

Up they toiled, treading a thread-like path, so damp that the booted Northerner repeatedly slipped. The barefoot Indian, spreading his broad toes, ascended as surely as a lizard. The roar of the cataract became a low monotone, muffled by intervening woods. At length the pair emerged upon bald rock—a smooth bump swelling above verdure which clothed a rambling ridge. On the crest of this protuberance the brown fellow laconically explained:

"My country. Piaroa."

Corwin's gray eyes shone as he contemplated the rugged domain of the Piaroa Indians. Northward, eastward, southward were mountains, a veritable horde of brutish bulks, shouldering one another in disorderly mass, receding into bluish heat haze, fading out into ghostly shapes thin as mist. Among them, a few leagues east, towered a huge block of sheer stone, monarch of all. It was, he knew, the Cerro Sipapo, never yet reached by scientists.

"Now I go," announced the taciturn guide. "You wait."

"All right," absently replied the other. "But first tell me, how can that Cerro Sipapo be climbed?"

A swift scowl creased the broad brown forehead. The brown eyes chilled. The hard mouth thinned, then snapped—

"No!"

"No!" drawled the inquirer. "Why not?"

"No! No man climb there. No man go near. On top live gods. Thunder gods. Man make them mad, they kill. You go there, gods kill you, me, my people. You no go!"

"Oh, I see." Corwin solemnly nodded. "All right, Hokko. I didn't understand."

"I know." The hard face loosened. "Now I go. Make talk to my people about you. Bring men carry your load. You wait."

Without further words the native strode down the rock and disappeared into the eastward jungle. The lone foreigner leisurely turned to look back westward whence he had come.

THAT way there were no mountains. Down below expanded sun-browned savanna, bumpy with scattered hill-ocks, dotted by green clumps of swamp-hole *moriche* palms, crossed by wavering streaks of waterside woods marking small rivers or creeks. Much farther away, in endless line from north to south, stretched the thick belt of timber fringing the master river, Orinoco, and at intervals gleamed short sections of the broad stream itself.

Toward that mosquito-plagued waterway the tanned traveler grinned derisively, remembering myriad itchy bites. Up here on the breezy ridge not one insect attacked. The freedom from tiny torturers, the escape from the eternal confines of tree walls, the proximity of the big hills which he had toiled hard to reach, made this stony knob seem celestial.

With that farewell grin he swung to study anew the forbidden Cerro Sipapo. After a long survey he sighed and abandoned the last lingering hope of ever reaching its summit. Although somewhat indistinct in bluish vapors, its precipitous front and ends were manifestly impossible of ascent. And even if its farther side offered a practicable gradient, the recent instinctive antagonism of Hokko made plain the fact that no man could thereby climb to the home of the gods.

Holy of holies to the fanatical tribesmen scattered about its base, the mountain would be as furiously defended against profanation as would the most sacred Mohammedan mosque against a

Christian. And for such deadly defense there was far better reason. No man-made church hurled thunderous death at its worshipers. This colossal block of rock, condensing clouds into torrential rain and free electricity into terrific explosions, was truly awful, dominating primitive minds with hereditary fear of devastating power.

So he turned from an unattainable dream to an accessible reality—the near cataract. Walking down the stone, working through woods, he presently reached the wet lip of the fall. There, in the comfortable shade of a spreading bush, he sat, laid aside rifle and helmet, ran long fingers through his black hair, and then rested with hands loosely clasped around updrawn legs.

The plunging thunder of the water roared in changeless monotone. The bright, hard sunlight of midforenoon beat on the narrow river, the thin mist floating from below, the greenery round about. Otherwise nothing was audible or visible. Any lesser noises, made by birds or beasts, were overpowered by the deep rumble. Soon the inactive man drowsed, letting his thoughts drift, yet retaining subconscious touch with his surroundings.

After a time the smooth roar of the cataract became bumpy, as if heavy rocks or logs were falling over the brink. At length sounded a harder thump, so jarring that the dozer opened his eyes and glanced around. Everything near was unchanged. Rising, he looked farther abroad.

"O-ho!" he exclaimed. "So that's it!"

The eastern sky, partly visible through the verdure, had dulled from bright blue to deep black.

Grabbing gun and helmet, he loped away through the woods to the bare stone knob and up to its summit. There, panting, he laughed with eager interest.

The top of the god-mountain was enveloped by a gigantic cloud. Its lower portion was almost invisible, swept by

sheets of rain. Across the face of the colossal blackness, and down into the terrified jungle, and up into the still sunlit zenith, flared streaks and streams of lightning. And, much louder than at the waterfall, recurrent thunder crashed.

For several minutes the lone spectator stood enjoying the aerial outburst, holding his watch in hand, timing duration of electrical explosions and length of sound waves, making mental notes, and admiring the display of elemental violence. Over here all was dry and quiet, and those fierce fireworks yonder were but a stupendous spectacle. But then suddenly his face lengthened.

Somewhere over there Hokko was trying to convince his people that this white stranger should be admitted to their land. But now the gods were exhibiting furious rage. The conjunction of events was most inauspicious. Bleakly Corwin contemplated the hostile cloud-giant. All at once his pupils contracted to peering pinpoints.

Against the aerial inferno showed a small grayish object which rapidly grew larger, nearer. A bird? A strangely rigid bird—a thunderbird—flying like a bat fleeing from Hades. What was the thing?

Nearer, nearer. . . . Then from the watcher broke an amazed exclamation—
“A plane!”

CHAPTER VI

THUNDERBIRD

AN AIRPLANE it was. Incredible, yet indisputable. A monoplane, its stiff wings now discernible, its whirling, rapid-fire racket now audible. In another moment it was almost overhead, free from the confusing backward blackness, etched against the azure zenith. And the man below voiced an inarticulate groan. He saw now that the thunderbird was afire.

From its tail streaked smoke. Whe-

ther struck by lightning or otherwise ignited, it was burning itself to death in the air. Its pilot, forcing it onward with utmost velocity, was keeping the flames behind him and heading for the savanna where he might possibly save himself. Not until he reached the open country could he hope to live—not even if he jumped. The hostile jungle would not only smash his plane to bits but tear apart his parachute, break his bones, kill him with shattering blows or with slower agony. Gamely he was carrying on to—

“Ah!” ejaculated the watcher.

The speeding fugitive had gone over the last hump and reached the almost treeless barrens. Now it swung, tipped, slowed. From it plunged a small dark shape. That diver fell—fell—checked, then floated on downward, dangling from a little snowball.

Corwin gave a gusty sigh of relief and glanced again at the doomed aircraft.

Instead of dropping in turn, it had leveled out and was darting again westward. For measureless seconds it stubbornly continued flight toward the Orinoco. Abruptly it swerved, tilted again, flopped over, then, gyrating, swooped earthward. A little distance from it fell a black dot.

“Two of them!” muttered Corwin. “Good boy! You tried— Open it, fellow! Pull your ring! Pull— O, God!”

Yelling in frenzy, he reached his own hands into air, fingers hooked. Then he sagged, sick. The far dot lengthened, spread tiny arms and legs, fought horribly. But over it bloomed no parachute. It became a thin streak, vanished. Seconds later the plane, now a mere meteor of flame, also smashed to earth. Behind distant treelets mushroomed a brief black cloud which quickly died out.

Gritting his teeth, Corwin straightened and again sought the snowball. For a second he glimpsed it near a belt of trees. Then it was gone behind them.

The first jumper had reached the ground alive. And that ground was close to the rambling river up which the canoe had recently toiled to the cataract.

Corwin took a long stride forward, then halted. From a shirt pocket he flipped a compass, took precise bearings. With expert eyes he also estimated distance. When he made a new start he knew just where to go, unconfused by dense bush or the winding of the waterway.

Down through the jungle growth he ran, slipping, sliding, falling on the slippery path, but unerringly rushing to the canoe. Reaching the dugout, he swiftly slid into it his rifle, paddles and poles, then shoved the heavy bow off shore. Aided by the current, he drove downstream.

Around smooth turns he paddled hard. Over rocky rapids he shot, shoved, struggled. Unaided by the canny judgment of Hokko, he hung the cumbersome boat several times on unnoticed stones and wrestled mightily to work it off. On either side arose always the thick wall of waterside trees, brush, vines, blocking all view of the open land beyond. Yet he never lost sense of direction or distance. And at length he suspended work to shout.

"He-e-e-ey!" he yelled. "Ye-a-a-ay! Where are you? *Donde 'stá uste'?*"

For a time no answer came. At his third call there sounded a dull growl in the sky, and the sunlight died out. Glancing up, he saw a sullen cloud crawling westward—the tired remnant of the Sipapo thunderstorm drifting to the Orinoco, muttering as it went. He again loosed strident hails.

SLOWLY the current bore him on. Woods and water remained unresponsive. Then sounded a short reply:

"Hello, there! I'm here."

Beside a thick tree trunk stood a fig-

ure in khaki clothes similar to his own. That tree was a rod behind him. He had looked at it in passing, but had seen nothing. The fallen flyer, ambushed, had scrutinized him as he passed. Now, emerging, the stranger continued the same penetrating watch. His right hand, hooked loosely on his belt, rested near the flat holster of an automatic pistol.

"Hullo yourself!" Corwin grinned, swinging his canoe to shore. "Hop in!"

The invitation went unaccepted. Coolly the flyer regarded the crude dugout and its solitary master.

That master's gray gaze chilled a little, and his lips opened for a curt command. But just then a louder voice spoke.

The broad cloud overhead emitted a hard rumble and a rolling thump. Weak lightning flickered. Impotent though the threat was, the man on shore flinched. Corwin's mouth quirked in sarcastic contempt. But as he again surveyed the newcomer his expression changed to amazed incredulity which swiftly became certainty.

Tall, slender, dark-haired but blue-eyed, the flyer had seemed a young man. But the rumpled hair, unconfined by any leather cap, was unusually thick and soft. The firm chin and jaw were smoothly beardless. The sloping shoulders were no wider than the hips. And the hand at the belt, although capably strong, was not masculine. Long, narrow, with slim fingers—indubitably it was the hand of a woman.

As the other regained outward composure Corwin suddenly became aware of his own appearance. For several days he had neglected to shave, and now his lean cheeks were covered by black stubble. His bush clothes were wet, stained, smeared with mud from his recent falls on the path. Altogether he looked tough. Lone North Americans found in the South American bush sometimes are tougher than they look—men guilty of many crimes, capable of many worse.

His brief antagonism vanished. Swinging off his helmet, he genially said:

"Let's introduce ourselves, Miss—er—Thunderbird. My name's Corwin. I'm doing a little exploring down here."

Her level brows lifted.

"Corwin?" she echoed. "What's the full name?"

"George Maynard Corwin, if it matters."

Evidently it did matter; for, with a quick smile, she stepped forward, right hand leaving her belt.

"I've heard of you, Corwin," she announced. "You've had articles in geographical magazines up home. And Governor Perez, over at Ciudad Bolivar, spoke of you only yesterday. But you're supposed to be away over in the Ventuari section by now."

"Changed my route," he explained, "to inspect this Sipapo region. And your name is—"

"Lee Burton. Christened Leona; but Lee for short. Got a cigaret?"

Her voice betrayed nervous strain. Danger fully past, her tense control was cracking in inevitable reaction. Hastily reaching for his rubber tobacco pouch, Corwin rolled a cigaret for her and another for himself.

Feet firmly braced, back straight, neck rigid, she smoked with long, slow draws, deliberately absorbing the full benefit of the soothing narcotic. When she tossed away the charred butt she was once more self-reliant.

Glancing downstream, she suggested—"Well—"

Corwin shook his head.

"There's nothing worth looking for down there," he said. "It was an absolute smash. Perhaps you saw."

A tight nod answered. Even while falling she had watched.

"So we'll go the other way at present," he continued. "Upstream a few miles I have the necessities of life. By the time we can reach them we'll need to eat. That's the only sensible course."

"True," she admitted. "And after that, what?"

"We'll have to figure that out. You're a long, long way from any civilized place, and at the moment I don't know just what to do about it. You've dropped in so unexpectedly that you've caught me quite unprepared."

"Of course. Fools always do that."

Corwin chuckled. The terse bluntness of this sturdy girl was pleasing.

"Those are your words, not mine," he reminded. "However, you may be right. Only fools come nosing into this death hole. I'm one. But that's all I'm good for. Whatever brought a girl like you down here?"

A frown creased her forehead, then was gone. With a wry smile she declared:

"If you'll just forget that I'm a woman, Corwin, I'll appreciate it. Nature makes mistakes sometimes."

"Now I'm here because I'm just sick of being a girl! Dancing around with idiotic boys, listening to inane twaddle, doing silly society stuff—Oh, well, never mind!"

"I had to hop off for somewhere, and the farther the better. I've always been interested in exploration. So I made a break for the Amazon, and perhaps farther. The plane was my own. But one needs a rest at times, so I brought along a professional pilot. His name doesn't matter now. A wonderful flyer, but—"

She paused, glancing downstream.

"But what?" prompted Corwin.

"Just too reckless and headstrong," she added, "in every way. I didn't want to buck that thunderstorm—we saw it gathering on the east side of that mountain—but he headed right at it, like a crazy kid in a roadster trying to beat an express train over a grade crossing. We got what the kid usually gets."

"It struck you?"

"Rather! We'd hardly crossed the eastern edge when that black cloud down below blew up at us like a volcanic erup-

tion. Perhaps our propeller vibration touched it off. Anyway, it was—it was just hell! There's no other word for it. It seemed to tear us all apart. By the time we broke out the other side of it I was half dead and the ship was burning. Well, that's about all."

"About enough for one morning's hop, I should say," he remarked. "But why were you flying this way from Ciudad Bolivar? To hit Manáos, Brazil, the only real town on the Amazon, you should have flown southeasterly, not southwest. That's the only sensible—"

"And that's why I didn't!" she broke in. "The sensible route has always been traveled before. I wanted to do something new. So I was flying for Iquitos, Peru. Nobody's flown there yet from this direction. And the air distance, if you don't know it, is only about three hundred miles more than to Manáos."

Corwin blinked. No, he hadn't known that. He worked on the ground, traveling slowly, meeting everything at close quarters, not speeding hundreds of miles daily far above the earth. His own past explorations up the Amazon had cost many weeks of travel and many months of studious observation; and so would his present investigations in this unexplored region off the Orinoco. Bee line air distances therefore were indistinct in his mind. This flying fool of a girl had given him a new fact. Moreover, she evidently had the intelligent intrepidity of a good explorer.

"I see," he said. "By the way, you didn't notice the height of that mountain, did you?"

"I did. By the altimeter it's just about six thousand. That's not absolutely accurate, of course. But it'll have to do."

"Yes, it'll do." He chuckled. "I've been aching to learn that little thing. So you've added something to scientific knowledge, if you care about that. And now suppose we start along upstream."

"All right."

Stepping in, she picked up a paddle. "A pole," he corrected. "Going upstream paddles aren't so good."

Without a word, she changed tools. They pushed out and up the resistant waterway.

CHAPTER VII

WHITE WOMAN, TRAILMAKER

FORWARD, he conned the rough course, working hard, voicing occasional instructions. Aft, she toiled with movements at first awkward but soon skilled, swiftly learning the simple technique of poling. As the slow miles snailed away she observed his unconsciously expressive motions. Men's unguarded acts often reveal their real characters more truly than do their faces, voices, words. Corwin's every move manifested habitual steadiness and deliberate judgment, unlikely to be swayed, now or later, by any amorous fancies or self-conceit.

When at last the roar of the cataract became audible he swerved the dugout to shore, lodging it between rocks.

"Let's talk here," he said. "My stuff's up at those falls, and there we'd have to yell at each other. Have another cigaret?"

"No, thanks. What's on your mind?"

"This much. We'd better load this boat up yonder and come back down. We won't eat until night. It'll be safer to keep moving. In about two weeks we can probably reach a port down the Orinoco where you'll be safe until some boat—"

"What's particularly unsafe up here?" she cut in.

"Everything's unsafe here. Particularly Indians. These Piaroa Indians are quite unsociable toward outsiders. They use blowguns, poisoned darts and such things. That's known. What else they may do to intruders is unknown; nobody's come back to tell all their quaint

customs. I'm here because I happened to save the life of a Piaroa who'd been caught, tortured and left to die beside the Orinoco by some halfbreeds. He's over east now making palaver about me to his people. But since he left me the signs have turned very bad. So we might as well—"

"What signs?"

"That thunderstorm. The mountain you crossed is the castle of their thunder-gods. Those gods went crazy mad this morning and then sent their dirty cloud down this river, where we are. From which you can perhaps deduce what the Indians think of it and what they may do about it."

"Oh, I see." Her gaze ranged thoughtfully upstream. "I touched off trouble for you by blundering over this way, didn't I? I'm sorry. But—"

"Oh, the storm would have happened anyway," he interrupted. "But—"

"But, as I was saying," she continued, once more incisive, "can't you laugh it off somehow?"

"I might. But you can't. And besides, you have to go out."

"Why?"

The swift retort stopped him dead. While he stared she tossed back her hair and regarded him with cool daring.

"Listen, Corwin," she pursued, "I don't have to go out. There's no good reason why I should, if I don't want to. My parents are dead. I'm not married. I'm not taking this trip for publicity. Nobody cares if I never come back, and neither do I. I'm doing what I jolly well please just now, and I like it. So much for me.

"Now about you. If you leave here you lose everything you came in for. Just now you have a live contact with these Indians. Run away, and it's gone forever. And if you think you're going to quit on my account, think again. I've decided to trail along with you, and the only way you can take me out

of here is to knock me out. And if you can do that, you're pretty good."

She paused, watching him with the ready, cool penetration of an experienced boxer. And, untold, he knew that this tomboy was not only a natural athlete but trained in physical defense. Girls' schools and girls' camps worked wonders these days for girls who would learn. The thought came and went in an instant, leaving him outwardly unimpressed. Dryly he countered:

"All of which is undoubtedly true. But nowadays I always work alone. I've learned that a partner proves undesirable."

"Why?"

"Because he soon gets disagreeable and tries to be the boss. And a woman would naturally be worse in that way than a man. So—"

"I won't do that, Corwin!"

Her tone now was hurt. Her eyes, too, had altered from audacity to reproach. And inside him something changed. Her look, her voice, her attitude were almost those of a high minded young man striving for achievement, but wounded by prejudiced antagonism.

FOR a moment he was silent. The distant waterfall growled menace, the leaves overhead flapped cheerlessly in random breeze, the muttering river tried to tug the canoe loose and wash it out and away. Then impulsively he responded:

"All right. But I warn you it'll be a long, tough game, lasting at least half a year. I can't do my work in less time. And meanwhile—or for awhile—you'll have to dress as a woman."

She frowned again. But her only objection was—

"How can I?"

"I'll show you."

He shoved the canoe out again. They forged on to the baggage heap below the cataract. There he unstrapped a

narrow clothing roll and drew out two white negligée shirts.

"My only dress gear, except a pair of white trousers," he shouted through the watery noise. "Can you figure what to do with them?"

"Easily." Her answering call held a note of laughter. "If you have a sewing kit—"

"Here." He produced a small roll of khaki. "But make it snappy."

She glanced around. A rod farther upstream stood a bulky rock, heavily screened by a thicket. Unspeaking, she walked to it and was gone. He set about making a meal from his small stock of pre-cooked provisions.

The crude refreshment had waited only a few minutes when she returned, transformed. By hasty tucks and a pleat, one of the shirts had shrunk to fit her snugly; by equally swift use of scissors and needle the other shirt had become a skirt, ill fitting but convincing. Nor were these the only changes. A rapid bath in the rushing waters beyond the stone had banished fatigue, brought fresh color to her skin and new glow to her eyes. And her walk, her every movement, even her straightforward but smiling gaze, were entirely feminine.

"Will I do?" she demurely asked.

"You'll do," he brusksly answered. "Let's eat!"

Laughingly she dropped her bundle of mannish garments and complied. When the frugal meal ended with a drink of river water he eyed the woods. The slanting light and shadows of the sun were those of midafternoon. The deafening monotony of the cataract wore on his usually phlegmatic nerves. Abruptly he arose and grasped his rifle.

"Let's walk!" he said.

And he strode into the woods. For a second she eyed his back angrily. She had become a woman again at his behest, and since then he had been tersely rude. What. . . . But then, with a quick

smile, she followed him. As she went, she seized from her flying clothes her pistol belt and buckled it on. But the precaution was not against him. Treading in his footsteps, she laughed; and to herself she said:

"Big boy, you're afraid of me! Well, you've brought it all on yourself!"

Up along the tiny path they clambered, neither speaking. The action gave them something to do; the height beyond would give them something to look at; the menacing bellow of the falls was almost stifled.

Corwin stopped short, rifle jerking forward, then sinking back.

"Company coming!"

Lifting his left hand, he held it high in imperious signal to halt.

CHAPTER VIII

A GIFT OF THE GODS

ONE second later a human brown avalanche halted. Skidding on bare heels, but drawing ready bows to full tension and leveling long blowguns with instantaneous precision, a file of almost naked savages choked the shadowy path. Hard-faced, they inimically regarded the white man. Hand still high, gun still low, he met their hostile gaze.

But then, despite himself, he moved aside. And savage eyes widened with blank amazement. Unbidden, unwanted just then, Lee Burton elbowed her tall protector and stood fully revealed, fearlessly facing the first wild Indians she had ever met. As they stared, Corwin barked—

"Hokko!"

From somewhere up the line Hokko, the messenger of peace, shouldered his way forward. The leader of the gang, a heavy-jawed brute, growled at him. But he doggedly continued his advance to his white friend.

"Hokko, what means this?" severely

asked Corwin, nodding toward the antagonistic array.

"Chief say," glumly explained the guide, glancing at the ugly-mouthed leader, "you bad, me bad. Gods mad. You get out or get kill."

"Tell your chief he is a fool!" tartly disputed the explorer. "The gods are not mad at us. They have brought me my woman. Are you blind?"

Hokko blinked at the miraculous white woman. His fellows still stood agape, evidently comprehending few or none of the aggressive Spanish words. Presently Hokko monotoned Corwin's contradiction in his own dialect. The sour chief voiced obstinate grunts.

"Chief says you lie," translated Hokko. "Gods very mad."

"Not at us!" insisted the white man. "Mad at a devil that stole my woman. Listen carefully. This is my woman. She grew lonely and came trying to find me. A big devil at the north—a big devil with wings—seized her and flew off with her. He flew this way to taunt me. But the gods of Sipapo were angered and struck him with much fire and made him fall and burn up. As he was falling my woman jumped free and fell into deep water and so was saved. The devil fell on earth away out yonder"—he swung an arm vaguely westward—"and if you search the savanna you will find his big burned bones."

Dramatically he paused. Hokko stood wide-eyed, digesting this colossal but, to primitively superstitious minds, credible lie. At the right moment Corwin concluded:

"The gods are friends to me and my woman. And if your people also are friends to us the gods will be friends to you all. Now tell your comrades what I have said."

With joyous quickness Hokko obeyed. While his sonorous gutturals sounded the white pair stood outwardly calm and confident. Whether or not the Piaroas had seen that burning devil flash over-

head and fall somewhere beyond the forested ridge, the tale fitted all facts known to them.

As the translator concluded, a wondering mutter went among the auditors, whose weapons had sunk to rest with tips on the ground. Abruptly the chief stalked forward, stopped a pace before the girl and stared at her anew. His thick right hand moved as if to grasp her arm. Then it stopped short, halted by a bass growl from Corwin.

The two men looked at each other. The savage drew back, remembering his own crude code. Among South American Indians it is a serious offense to lay hand on another man's woman, even without evil intent. And this woman was most obviously this white man's private property. As the blunderer hesitated, slightly ashamed but more angered, the Northerner quietly said:

"He doesn't quite believe you're real, Lee. I'm not letting him paw you over. But you could say something. Anything will do."

"All right. I think he's a good old sport under his ugly hide."

With that she smiled straight at the chief, then at the others. At the sound of her clear voice every frozen beholder relaxed. And when Hokko translated Corwin's next words the head warrior turned to his men with a touch of swagger.

"My woman says your chief is a man of much strength and much intelligence," the white man exaggerated. "And now I say that if you will give us room we shall go on upward. We wish to look again at the great mountain which brought us together."

A harsh grunt from the flattered chief moved the whole gang off the path into the woods. Ignoring them all, the dominant white man resumed his interrupted climb. Behind him, gaze now demurely downcast, his woman dutifully followed. When they had passed, the

long file of brown men walked close behind, silent as a brown serpent.

UP OUT of the timber they all marched to the bald knob of stone. There Corwin drew a quick breath of satisfaction. Over west, the dirty gray cloud had vanished. Over east, the Cerro Sipapo loomed in air which, recently rain-washed, was unusually clear. Divested of its veil of haze, brilliantly illuminated by the sinking sun, it seemed miles nearer than ever before.

At that majestic highland, so magically close and serenely friendly to the strangers, the tribesmen looked long. At length the chief turned, squinted into the blazing west, and muttered.

"Chief ask," translated Hokko, "where fall that devil?"

Pointing, Corwin indicated the approximate place on the prairie where the flaming flyer had plunged from sight. After fixing in mind direction and distance the commander grunted and strode back down the rock, followed by all his subjects.

"Chief go see devil," explained Hokko. "Other men bring up your load, make good camp over there." One thumb twitched toward the eastern jungle. "Tomorrow we go on to my home."

With that he departed. Rapid, noiseless, the whole troop disappeared into the western woods.

Corwin drew another long breath and relaxed. To the silently attentive girl he said:

"We're all right now. We're practically prisoners until the chief verifies something I told him—something about the crash of your plane. But after that we'll be ace high. He may not come back for a day or so, and meanwhile you'll have to continue the woman act. Then you can be yourself again, pants and all. But don't forget one thing; I'm leader here, and you're not to shove me aside again as you did awhile ago, down yonder. Those fellows were all

set to shoot if I made a move just then, and you should have waited for your cue. Hereafter, remember your place!"

"I will," she soberly promised. "At the moment I didn't quite realize what a tight pinch it was. But I played the game all right after that, didn't I?"

Eying her serious face sidelong, he suddenly smiled.

"And, as man to man, I'll tell you you've brought me good luck. And, partner to partner, we can go a long way together. You've got the right stuff to make a good partner."

"Thanks!"

The short word, the straight look, the quick grasp at his near hand, spoke the swift appreciation of comrade to comrade. Then, silent, smiling, both gazed again at the Cerro Sipapo.

CHAPTER IX

UP EAST OF THE ORINOCO

A LONG a green jungle trail meandered a human brown serpent tipped with white. Barebodied, barefooted, bareheaded, a score of stocky Venezuelan Indians trod the tiny path in close file. Behind these natives walked a pair of North Americans—a tall man in khaki and a slender woman in white blouse and skirt.

All were armed. The Indians bore bows, blowguns, quivers of arrows or of poisoned darts. The white man carried a short but powerful rifle. The white woman wore a holstered pistol. Yet none was on the alert for trouble. The savages were Piaroas, and this mountainous region east of the Rio Orinoco was their own territory. The civilized foreigners had been provisionally accepted as friends of the brown folk. And as they walked the white man faintly smiled.

Yesterday morning he had had no companion but one Piaroa whose life he had saved at the Orinoco. Yesterday

noon he had been entirely alone while that guide told his suspicious tribesmen that the solitary explorer was a *buen' hombre*—a man of good heart. Yesterday afternoon he had seen this girl aviator boldly venturing an uncharted route over the jungle, bail out from a burning airplane. He had rescued her from starvation in the unknown wilderness. And now, preceded by the warlike escort and followed by the daring woman whose venturesome spirit coincided with his own, he was whimsically content with his present luck. At the same time his cool gray eyes kept habitual watch of all ahead. Long experience in tropical exploration had taught him that good luck might at any moment become bad.

Ceaselessly moving, the column wormed its way through the dewy forest. Along shaggy hillsides it curved; up abrupt slopes it clambered; down steep ravines it slid on greasy soil, to labor upward again beyond, climbing always higher into the massive heights of land never yet surveyed by scientists. The long legs of the lean white man swung without fatigue, and his deep lungs breathed without effort. The woman traveled less easily. As the endless track squirmed ever onward she slipped and stumbled. But, with firm jaw set, she voiced no complaint.

At length the tall man paused, leaned against a convenient tree and volunteered—

"I'm winded."

The woman halted with him. But she did not lean against anything. Feet braced, hands clenched, head erect, she stood breathing fast, yet combatively meeting his quizzical gaze.

"You're a cheerful liar, Corwin," she panted. "You're stopping to give me a rest. I don't need it. Go on!"

He grinned at her, unmoved.

"You're another, Miss Burton," he drawled. "You do need it. And you'll

take it. No argument now, or maybe I'll slap you down."

Her blue eyes hardened and her knuckles whitened.

"I've told you before now that you're to treat me as a man, not as a weakling woman!" she flared. "I can go anywhere you can go. And as for slapping me down, just try it!"

"Think you can use your hands?" he teased.

"I don't have to think. I know."

Corwin chuckled.

"All right, you needn't demonstrate," he answered lazily. "You're a he-man. But you're also a green recruit in this man's army. I was a recruit in an army once, and I learned a lot. And, believe it or not, the rookie who walks himself to death his first day out is a fool. And the officer who lets him do it is a double fool. And any officer who expected an aviator to march like a hardened dough-boy would be a quadruple fool. You're an aviator, just landed. I'm officer of my own single-handed expedition, and not quite idiotic. So if you insist on trailing me you'll have to show sense. There's no ambulance following this outfit to pick up the brave but dumb."

Lee Burton's flushed face grew a shade redder. Then, tossing back her dark hair, she answered:

"Quite right. But, if you haven't noticed it, your Indians are leaving you."

He glanced aside, then nodded, unperturbed. The aborigines, with minds set ahead, had continued with never a glance behind; and now they were gone amid the matted verdure. Their freshly beaten trail, however, was unmistakably plain to his skilled vision.

"We'll catch up eventually," he replied.

HOLDING his position, he lounged for several more minutes, idly contemplating the jungle. Silent, she resolutely overcame her fatigue. When at length he heard the slow, deep sigh be-

tokening full restoration of energy he turned from her and deliberately resumed his course.

On through the woods they ambled, unhurried by the previous short, quick pace natural to the forest Indian. Around them soft sunshine sifted through the creviced canopy of leaves. Somewhere *pajaro minero* birds whistled sweetly to one another in cheery converse. Damp odors of earth and fallen foliage and coy jungle flowers blended in elusive yet perceptible aroma. For the time the two aliens were alone together in the virgin solitude, free to absorb its every subtle influence. After a time Corwin asked:

"How d'you like this? As well as the racket of a motor and the smell of hot oil?"

"Don't mention that," she responded. "This is heavenly!"

"Glad you think so. It's real, anyway. But it's insidious. When it gets into your blood you're never again content with the artificialities of civilization."

She made no audible answer. But, glancing again at the sun spotted wilderness, inhaling again its untainted atmosphere, she soon nodded. In a few words he had explained his own presence in these wastes, and the motive actuating all other true explorers: disgust with the shams and greed of money-mad towns, unconquerable yearning for dangerous but genuine realities. Although she had met him but yesterday, she had already known him by reputation; known him to be a lone adventurer into far places, a man who occasionally published a monograph esteemed by scientists, then disappeared for another year or two. And, although she herself was but a self-willed, self-reliant girl who had impulsively flown from banal New York society to experience new thrills, she found her first taste of rough life to be something for which she long had hungered. As for future consequences—

She recklessly smiled and swung along.

So they progressed for some time in wordless comradeship. All at once Corwin halted. His rifle lifted a little, hung half poised. On the trail ahead sounded a rapid beat of running bare feet.

Around a short curve sped a brawny Indian. At sight of the white pair he slowed abruptly, heels sliding on damp clay. Corwin's rifle sank. The native was Hokko, who had guided him here from the Orinoco.

"All right, Hokko," drawled Corwin in bush Spanish. "We're not lost."

Hokko scowled. His hard brown eyes fixed a moment on the white woman. His hard lips twisted, seeking words. His knowledge of the Venezuelan language was fragmentary at best, and now he was excited.

"*Maluo!*" he then blurted, thrusting his jaw at Lee Burton. "Bad!"

Corwin eyed him. After willingly leading the girl thus far into his homeland the fellow now could hardly be asserting that she herself was bad.

"Meaning what?" countered Corwin.

The aborigine struggled mentally. Then he said:

"You come. Woman stop. No good!"

"Why not?" retorted the white man.

Silence. The brown eyes probed the narrow gray ones and the wide blue ones. Then over them dropped an opaque shadow, and the heavy brown jaw gripped tight. Without another word Hokko turned and strode stolidly back into his mysterious green maze.

Coolly Corwin resumed his own gait. As he did so, however, he glanced down at his rifle.

"What's up?" demanded the girl.

For several steps Corwin gave no reply. Then he admitted:

"I don't know yet. Indians are funny folks, and if they don't feel like explaining things they just won't. Apparently some objection had arisen to our coming on—"

"You mean to *my* coming on," she interrupted.

"But we're going on regardless." He ignored her remark. "It's against my principles, and a social error besides, to let any Indian stop me from going somewhere."

He swung ahead with a more determined stride. Hokko plodded with a touch of stiffness, hinting anger at something—perhaps at the obdurate white people, perhaps at the unexplained obstacle beyond. Lee Burton quietly drew her pistol and slyly tested its sliding action. As the three advanced the quiet friendliness of the forest was gone.

At length the half light suddenly brightened. A few more strides, and the damp coolness also was gone. Hot sun, hard as a club, beat down into a clearing. Studded by low stumps, the clear ground rose to a knoll crowned by a broad tribal house, clay walled, thatch roofed. Outside that yellow habitation stood two groups of brown men facing each other.

CHAPTER X

TRIBAL FEUDS

HOKKO halted. Corwin studied the Indians beyond. Lee Burton surveyed the whole primitive scene, then relaxed from her taut poise. In an amused tone she queried:

"What's wrong with this picture? I was looking for a fast movie, but it seems to be a rather dull play."

At sound of her bantering voice both men frowned. Hokko, glancing at both his white people, looked very unhappy. Corwin, still contemplating the separate groups, observed that one much outnumbered the other, which stood with backs to the wall. No women or children were in sight. The house doors were shut. The stillness which had reassured the American girl was not peace. Rather it betokened imminent violence.

"Hokko, what goes on here?" demanded Corwin.

For another moment Hokko's mouth remained tight. Then suddenly he confessed:

"Trouble. Men against wall our men, Piaroas. Other men Mapoyos, from north. Boy from here steal Mapoyo girl last moon. Now Mapoyos want three Piaroa woman to pay. We say no. They very mad—and very bad."

His grudging explanation came in mixed Spanish, Indian and dumb show. At the end he shoved a thick hand again toward the white girl as if to push her back into the concealment of the jungle.

Over Corwin's long visage flitted several quick expressions. Comprehension, appreciation, hesitance, all came and went in a flash, hardening into stony decision. He comprehended now the unwillingness of the stiff-necked savage to admit fault in his tribe. He appreciated the previous bidding to come on with his gun but to leave the woman behind. He hesitated to lead her farther into a bad situation, yet determined to do so. When he turned to her his voice was calm.

"Follow on," he prompted. "There's an argument up yonder, but *maybe* I can adjust it. Take things easy."

Giving Hokko a slight push, he resumed his unhurried gait. All three went on up the slope.

Nearing the antagonistic groups, Hokko adopted a bold swagger, inimically eyeing the threatening Mapoyos. His fellow tribesmen, hitherto standing stubbornly defensive, also stiffened. The arrival of their white ally with his rifle heartened them as if he alone counterbalanced the odds against them. And as Corwin stopped beside them a Piaroa rasped some sarcastic epithet at the Mapoyos.

The Mapoyos scowled. Slit-eyed, slit-mouthed, they had watched the short procession advance up the hillside. Now

their hostile gaze dwelt a moment on the rifleman, flitted over the apparently unarmed woman—whose pistol hung behind her loose elbow—and again met Corwin's unreadable regard. This time they sneered. Despite his gun, they were near enough and numerous enough to overwhelm him by one concerted leap; and they knew it. From the largest man among them came a jeering retort to the Piaroa taunt. From his mates sounded derisive snickers.

Outwardly nonchalant, Corwin stood with thumbs under belt, rifle sagging under his arm, helmet canted back, eyes drifting over the invaders. In one slow survey he saw that they were lower in the human scale than the Piaroas. The latter were crude savages, poisonous fighters, using envenomed arrows and darts; they were not very brainy, not very clean. Yet their steady eyes were more intelligent, their firm jaws more manly, their muscular frames more symmetrical than those of the Mapoyos. The intruders, streaked with clay pigment, were lower of brow, flatter of nose, heavier of chin, longer of arm and shorter of leg; their faces and physiques were more ape-like than man-like, and their coldly cruel gaze was that of wild beasts.

Through Corwin's mind flitted momentary wonder that any Piaroa—even a boy—should have stolen a girl from a tribe so manifestly inferior. The abduction must have been a wild stunt intended to prove the daring of the juvenile warrior. Or perhaps the girl happened to be really pretty, as young females of the lowest families sometimes are. At any rate, the demand for three grown Piaroa women in recompense was preposterous; a mere pretext for the raiding of this settlement by a numerically superior force which meant to conquer and annihilate it. And any effort by him to arbitrate the quarrel by logical reasoning, as he had sometimes done among other tribes, would here be futile. Apes could not—

At that point his swift thoughts stopped. The glimmering gaze of the Mapoyos had veered again to Lee Burton, the first white woman they had ever seen. Straight, slender, composed, she stood beside her partner, coldly motionless as a statue carved from ice. In the monkey-like eyes contemplating her flamed rapacious desire. Reading that look, the obstinate explorer inwardly admitted—

"Hokko was right."

As if in answer, the biggest Mapoyo, evidently the chief, spoke again. His harsh voice now held an arrogant tone, and his clay-smeared visage leered at the pure white form. His warriors chuckled nastily.

Hokko growled like an angered dog. Among the other Piaroas passed a mutter of inarticulate antagonism. But none made a move, and all looked sidewise at Corwin.

"Mapoyo chief say," slowly translated Hokko, "he take your woman too."

No answer came. The rifleman gave no indication that he had heard. Piaroas eyed him with puzzled frowns, Mapoyos with widening grins. Even Lee Burton flashed a glance at him. Although only he and Hokko knew the Venezuelan words used by the interpreter, every one understood the threat of the Mapoyo commander. Every one also knew Corwin had been told what the Mapoyo had said. From the white man's continued inaction could be drawn only one inference. As it sank in, the girl's lips tightened; Piaroa jaws hardened; Mapoyo mouths stretched farther in complete contempt. He was afraid!

Then slowly he spoke. In English he said:

"This is worse than I'd expected, Lee. Were you saying awhile ago that you could use your fists?"

"I can," she curtly retorted.

"Well, if anybody bothers you, maybe you'd better."

"I will!"

Her tone now was biting. Her blue eyes, again confronting the savages, burned.

CHAPTER XI

A TRICK, BUT A KNOCKOUT

AMONG the ape-men ran another guttural chuckle. Their leader visibly swelled. Very quietly, Corwin muttered several more words in another language. Hokko, close by, stared side-long. Then the Mapoyo chief swaggered forward.

As tall as Corwin and twice as thick, he strode toward the white girl with an insolent leer at her presumable mate. As he walked he ostentatiously tossed away a huge bludgeon. Long arms swinging, heavy shoulders swaying, bandy legs strutting, he reached his goal. Meanwhile the white man imperceptibly moved sidewise, gun still low and seemingly unready, but following the chief.

For one second the Mapoyo stood gloating. His painted arms started forward, reaching. Then he jerked back, staggered, toppled, sprawled askew on the dirt.

The girl had moved. So quickly that staring eyes could not follow, she had shot one clenched hand to his thick chin. Now that hand was at her holster.

"Good boy!" grated Corwin. "Now hold everything!"

Another flashing glance, and she obeyed. Her whole arm was so numb from that furious punch that she could hardly feel the pistol. And for the moment no gun was needed. Tense, she waited.

Indians of both forces stared dumb-founded at the stunned chief. Fumbling dizzily on the ground, he forced himself up to new footing and stood swaying. His dazed eyes glared uncertainly and for a few seconds he made no new move.

Then Corwin laughed. Incisive, insulting, his ridicule cut deep into every

amazed Indian brain. With slow motions even more offensive he leaned his rifle against the house wall; then he stepped forward, pointed a finger at the groggy chief and continued his taunting mirth.

The goaded Mapoyo leader sprang at him, big hands swooping, clawing fingers outspread to gouge or throttle. They missed their marks. The suddenly brave outlander stepped smoothly forward. The tearing hands closed on his wiry back. Then, with miraculous swiftness, the big assailant again fell. On his broad body lay the lanky white man.

The other Mapoyos surged forward; then stopped and stood eagerly watching. With a twisting heave their leader had thrown his lighter opponent aside and fastened on him anew. Obviously the warrior needed no help. Gloating, his followers awaited the crack of the outlander's bones and his futile yells for mercy.

Furiously grappling, the ferocious chief strove to fulfill their expectations and frightfully avenge his own humiliation. Magically knocked down by a mere woman, ridiculed and mysteriously overthrown again by an unarmed man, he now was not merely a savage but a demon.

The white man already was half under him. With another heave the burly brute forced his prey flat. But as one taloned brown hand pounced again at the tight gray eyes it was caught and swung aside; and with a convulsive wriggle the underdog was out from under. Spilled over, the Mapoyo instantly seized another grasp. Side by side the two struggled.

Again the heavy savage rolled on top. But again, somehow, he rolled a little too far and met earth. His thick brown knees jerked upward but struck nothing. His hands hooked at face and throat, but missed. His powerful arms squeezed, yanked, wrenched at the wiry torso, yet broke no bones. Instead of

resisting, the man he held seemed yielding, going with him, moving this way and that like a squirming eel, giving no sure hold. And again, gradually, the thin battler arose to the upper position.

Breathing fast, he glanced around. His lips twitched crookedly. Then, hurled over, he sank his face against the Indian's shoulder and resumed his odd writhings.

Bunched close, the Mapoyos stood very near. Still nearer stood Hokko, now clutching the war club tossed aside by the cocksure chief. Farther back was Lee Burton, pallid, motionless, hand still on gun. All else was lost in renewed combat.

Kicking, biting, gouging, clawing, twisting, the Mapoyo bully exerted every jungle trick to smash his antagonist. But somehow he could not quite succeed. His mouth and nose began to bleed. His befouled visage betrayed distress. Strong as a bull, he yet could not break the sinuous white man who clung around him like a snake. Over and over the two rolled, and every new view of the brown face revealed more pain. Pain? Agony! Invisibly the white man was doing ghastly things to him.

Then Corwin struck. Once more he came to the top. Once more he glanced around. His body swung sidewise, came back like a steel spring; his right fist cracked under his opponent's ear. Sitting back, he rested, sardonically eyeing the other Mapoyos.

For a long moment the invaders stared. Their chief lay limp, eyes closed, mouth half open, face slowly welling more blood. If not dead, he was utterly at the mercy of the white snake—who, of course, would show none. From them broke instinctive grunts of rage. Hostile bodies swayed forward, then halted short. Glaring eyes centered on Hokko, who had shouted.

Standing beside his white man with club defensively raised, the Piaroa point-

ed. Mapoyo heads jerked across shoulders, looked backward. And every Mapoyo froze.

Their situation had changed. Awhile ago they had held the Piaroas against a wall, confronted and outflanked. But, fascinated by the duel on the earth, the Mapoyos had unconsciously drawn together, losing formation, massing in a huddle. Meanwhile the Piaroas had stolen around them. And now, with arrows and blowguns leveled, the recent victims held the erstwhile victors close herded. By mere snaps of strings and puffs of breath they could instantly strike death into more than half of the Mapoyo force. By other swift missiles and by hand-to-hand fighting they then could undoubtedly destroy the momentary survivors.

CHAPTER XII

HEADWORK

IN ONE astounded glance the trapped intruders recognized their hopeless predicament. Instinctively their eyes darted back to their commander, only to realize anew his utter uselessness. Panicky, desperate, they wavered, each confused brain struggling to see a way out of annihilation. Then, slowly, the white man rose from his vanquished foe. Quietly he spoke to Hokko, who repeated in his own dialect. The other Piaroas held their position.

Through the dirt and blood on his lacerated face Corwin smiled contemptuously at the huddled Mapoyos. Shirt hanging in tatters, torso bruised and bitten, arms gashed by tearing nails, his whole body smeared with dark earth, he was no heroic figure. But, astride his senseless enemy, he was indisputable conqueror and, for the moment, lord of life and death. One word from him would loose a massacre.

While his mastery sank into every tense Mapoyo mind he kept silent. Then

once more he spoke to Hokko. This time he voiced several drawling sentences.

Hokko scowled, momentarily balked. His vengeful eyes glowered at the Mapoyos, and his captured bludgeon moved slightly forward. Then on his dour visage came a gradual grin. Lowering the club, he began talking in his turn.

To the Mapoyos he delivered a speech much longer than that of the white man. With every word his voice gained vigor and venom. The Mapoyos listened with helpless rage, the Piaroas with vindictive enjoyment. Evidently the impromptu orator was expressing, with virulent invective, the collective Piaroa opinion of the Mapoyos, their ancestry and their progeny. Ending, he turned and spat on the face of their unconscious chief.

Throughout the tirade Corwin stood at rest. Now he stepped back, yawned and muttered briefly. Hokko blinked and moved grandly aside, repeating what Corwin had muttered to him. Followed confused action.

One by one the Mapoyos grudgingly dropped their weapons. One by one the Piaroas drew back into two lines, opening an exit toward the jungle, but still holding their deadly dominance. Between these menacing ranks the disarmed aggressors hastily retreated, nervously eyeing the arrows and blowguns leveled at them. Last of all went their broken bully, still on his back. Feet grasped by two of his men, he was hauled roughly away, head wobbling helplessly over roots, arms trailing behind on the dirt.

As the crestfallen raiders reached open ground they broke into a headlong run. Their chief, bouncing off stumps, still dragged at their rear. From the Piaroas burst a resounding roar of derision, punctuated by one more howled epithet from Hokko. Lowering weapons, the victors doubled over in paroxysms of mirth, relieving strained nerves with impulsive clamor.

Corwin, leaning lazily against the wall of the tribe house, grinned. But through mud and blood his bronzed skin showed pallid; and his set jaw and sunken eyes were not merry.

For a second he stood thus alone. Then Lee Burton was close at his side.

"You're hurt!" she accused.

His gaze remained fixed on the uproarious Indians.

"You'll keep that quiet," he said.

Soon the Piaroas, straightening up, looked once more at the forest into which their enemies had disappeared and gloated over the scattered weapons surrendered by those fleeing foes. Then they swarmed to the tribe house, hammered at doors and, as bars slid, marched noisily in to meet their scared women and children. Even Hokko temporarily overlooked the quiet white pair to swagger inside with his stolen war club prominently displayed.

As the last strutter vanished the real victor visibly sagged. Around him slid a swift white arm. Lee Burton's anxious voice asked—

"Just how do you feel?"

"Pretty rotten," he admitted.

"So do I."

He gave her a wan smile.

"No reason why you should," he croaked. "You did your stuff perfectly. And—"

His voice trailed off. His eyes swung along the woods at the base of the hill. Then he said:

"I see water down there. And I surely need a wash. Come along and stand guard, will you?"

"Gladly."

Pushing away her supporting arm, he walked off unassisted. She reached aside, seized his rifle and followed.

A SMALL, slow creek, almost hidden by trees and brush, flowed past the east slope. There, behind a thick trunk, he stripped off his rags and slid into the cool water. While he deliberately bathed

she stood keenly watching the farther shore, while her ears registered the recurrent small splashes he made beyond the bushes. It did not occur to her that no Mapoyo, weaponless, would loiter here hoping for revenge, that no other danger could be near this habitation in daylight and that Corwin had given her this seemingly important post only to buoy up her self-assurance.

Presently he reappeared, clothed and refreshed. Clean, cool, he grinned at her and rolled a cigaret.

"Thanks, buddy," he said. "That helped a lot. Between ourselves, that brown plug ugly was bad medicine for my insides. Nothing's broken, but practically everything is considerably sprained. After I stiffen up I won't be active for several days. So you'll sort of carry on for me, won't you?"

"I certainly will! And I'm glad to be of some use."

Blowing smoke, he laughed.

"You're of considerable use," he told her. "That lightning uppercut of yours was worth about a million dollars to me."

"How so? It only let you into a horrible fight which—"

"Which was inevitable and worked out as per schedule," he cut in. "And the way you backed me on every play of the game was—"

"Oh, throw the soft soap overboard! I hit that roughneck because I thought you were yellow. And I did nothing afterward because I was too dumb to know what to do."

Again he laughed, much amused.

"Have it your own way. All the same, you followed my lead without question. You thought what I wanted you to think, acted as I wanted you to act, and thereby confounded the enemy. Which qualifies you, rookie, as a good soldier."

Drawing again at his cigaret, he let that assertion sink in. Observing her involuntary flush of pleasure, he continued:

"The only way out of that tight jam, of course, was to do unexpected things and draw those apes completely off guard. Your punch on the big ape's jaw did the trick. It knocked his brain cock-eyed and dazed everybody else. After that he and his gang were just monkeys, blind while men closed around them. It was all just a matter of headwork. I had to use your head and the Piaroa heads to pull through. But they all worked. And so here we are."

She laughed shortly.

"Headwork—nothing else? I'd say there was some uncanny bodywork in it too, Corwin. How on earth did you hold your own with that gorilla?"

"Headwork," he dryly repeated, "plus experience. Once while I was in Asia I picked up some sneaky wrestling tricks. Hard pressure of a few fingers here and there, at just the right time, do extraordinary things to the other fellow. But to select the exact spot at the exact moment you have to use headwork. Otherwise you're just a clawing animal, like our recently departed Mapoyo playmate."

He drew one more slow puff of smoke.

"So, by headwork," he reiterated, "we're all alive and carrying on. Suppose, instead, we'd tried gunwork—what would have resulted? Death to us, to a few Mapoyos and to all our Piaroa friends. We'd have been swamped in no time. Or, even if we'd damaged somehow to outshoot those tough apes, everybody—even the Piaroas—would have credited the victory to our guns rather than our heads. And the logical inference from that idea is that if we're caught away from our guns we're helpless. Which, some time, might be just too bad for us.

"The Piaroas, of course, would never think of trying to do us in after this. This little tribe, and all other Piaroas throughout these mountains, are our eternal debtors. But I'm not confining my work to Piaroa territory; just pass-

ing through it to other lands and other Indians. Those other Indians will hear about us long before we reach them. And when we do reach them they'll respect us. We won't be just two ordinary white people, shooting our way through the poor brownies as the Spaniards down here have always done. We'll be extraordinary, superhuman, endowed with magical physical prowess and mental superiority, yet magnanimous toward our inferiors.

"You, a slim woman, can knock a big warrior to earth by a mysterious flash of one hand. I, a skinny man, can amuse myself with him and at the same time capture his whole horde. And then, instead of butchering them in a trap, we contemptuously let them all run, and make them the laughingstock of the jungle. And in the jungle it's death to any tribe to be despised. No tribe we'll meet will want to risk that fate by offending us.

"And although the Piaroas will try to hog the credit for this affair, they'll unconsciously give it to us by bragging about us, their marvelous, miraculous white friends. They'll tell the whole yarn with plenty of exaggeration, and the other Indians will deduce that we're the big brains of it all. By the time we move on we'll be demigods. In fact, we're demigods right now to the Piaroas, though they'll probably be too proud to admit it. You'll soon see."

THERE he stopped and flipped the cigaret butt into the stream. She watched it float gradually away. Soon she soberly said—

"I see now that you look a long way ahead."

"A fellow on a long trail has to, when

he can," he rejoined. "Often he can't. But if he makes his head work fast in a pinch he can see far enough to keep himself going. And, speaking of going—"

He arose, moving with evident difficulty. She stepped forward, hand darting to aid him, then dropped that hand and stood quiet. His thin mouth and resolute jaw forbade assistance. Slowly but steadily he moved up the slope. At his heels she followed, vigilant but silent.

As they neared the hilltop the Piaroas flocked from their communal domicile. Men, women and children streamed out in belated welcome to their deliverers. But, after a straight look at the dignified white pair, they too suppressed a natural impulse to assist the exhausted fighter. Dividing into two irregular lines, they stood motionless and speechless, the men wooden-faced, the women and children gaping.

Along this hushed lane Corwin proceeded without change of gait or attitude until he reached Hokko. Pausing, he drawled:

"After the long walk this morning we are a little tired. Are hammocks ready?"

"Si," answered Hokko in the same idle tone. "Como no? Why not?"

With a slight nod Corwin moved on. Indian eyes darted to Hokko, who muttered brief translation. Indian lips quirked in instinctive appreciation. The white man's tacit dismissal of the recent fight as totally insignificant, his casual admission that he was somewhat tired, made him even more superior, yet even more humanly likable. Neither then nor later did they realize that this slight halt was a subtle touch completing a continuous play of headwork.





The detective, the inspector of customs, the chauffeur all described the missing man.

THE NEWSPAPER

By T. S. STRIBLING

SENOR XENEPHON QUINTERO SANCHEZ had vanished into thin air. Mr. Henry Poggioli—some-time research man in criminal psychology, but now engaged in the less highbrow task of trying to catch a dope smuggler—and Mr. Slidenberry, inspector of customs, climbed into their taxi on the Miami waterfront rather at odds where to turn next.

These two gentlemen had been cleverly, almost insultingly, hoodwinked by the Venezuelan, Sanchez. In fact, Poggioli himself had been cozened into removing the illegal drugs from the United Fruit Steamer, *Stanhope*, for the profit, criminal use and no doubt ironic amusement of this fellow, Sanchez.

So, highly wrought up, they climbed into their taxicab in the sunshot street of Miami, and Slidenberry rapped out to the chauffeur: "State Fair Grounds—West Miami! Get us there quick!"

Mr. Poggioli, the psychologist, held up a prohibitive and annoyingly superior hand.

"No, no, Sanchez could hardly have gone to the Fair Grounds—"

The chauffeur, a largish youth with a smallish head, hesitated in a twitter of suspense between these contradictory orders. It was dawning on him that his fares were after a criminal, and he hankered to be allowed to take part in their exciting and romantic enterprise; but he did not quite dare to ask their permission.

Slidenberry looked at his companion.

"Why are you so cocksure he hasn't gone to the Fair Grounds? The concessionaires out there will bootleg anything from dope to Gatling guns!"

Poggioli replied absently—

"Simply because the people in Belize, Central America, know nothing about the Florida State Fair."

The inspector wrinkled his forehead.

"What has Central America got to do with Sanchez and his dope?"

"Simply this: Sanchez is a Latin and sailed from Belize. It is part of Latin psychology to follow one logical, completely worked out plan from beginning to end. Since in Belize he couldn't have known of the State Fair, he is not there now."

Slidenberry gave a skeptical smile.

"But if he had been an Anglo-Saxon he would have been at the State Fair?"

"Certainly. Anglo-Saxons are opportunists; Latins are logicians."

The taxicab driver caught his breath at such extraordinary deductions. Slidenberry, however, was impatient at such an academic turn.

"Well, if he is not at the State Fair, where is he? Driver, for heaven's sake, start somewhere!"

The chauffeur hastily cut his car out into the street. Poggioli continued his analysis—

"Well, knowing the character of Dr. Sanchez as I do, and realizing that he was once dictator of a South American state, I would say that he is now in one of the largest and most expensive hotels in Miami."

"Which one?"

"I don't know. Name over a few."

Slidenberry blinked after the fashion of a man thinking.

"The Astair, the Floridan, the Everglades, La Luxuriata, the Ferdinand and Isabella— But look here, don't you suppose he has already sold his dope?"

"You mean delivered," prompted Poggioli. "It was in all probability sold before it left Belize. Whether that con-founded money-changer was the final purchaser, whether he was Sanchez's tool who handed back the drugs to his employer when he received them from—er—"

"When he received them from you?" supplied Slidenberry dryly.

"Exactly—from me. That's what I

have not as yet determined." Poggioli nodded severely, then leaned toward the chauffeur and snapped, "Didn't I tell you to get us to a drug store with a battery of telephones?"

The taximan became intensely excited.

"Yes, sir; yes, sir—uh—are you two gentlemen real detectives? I've always wanted to be a detective. I—I believe I got talent. I can always figger out how a detective story is goin' to end—ever' time!"

Poggioli became aware of what the fellow was saying.

"Why, no, we're not detectives; Mr. Slidenberry is a customs inspector and I am a research man in criminal psychology."

"Oh," ejaculated the chauffeur, deeply disappointed. "I beg you-all's pardon, I'm sure." And he addressed himself to his driving.

THE CAB presently halted in front of a drug store. The two principals hurried inside to the cashier, had a dollar changed into nickels and disappeared in the telephone booths Poggioli looked up his numbers and began dialing. As he worked he could see the taxicab man outside his glass door, peering in at him with wide eyes and plainly straining his ears to overhear the messages of an officer in pursuit of criminals.

Soon the psychologist had the room clerk of the Ferdinand and Isabella on the wire. He began describing the man whom he and Slidenberry were seeking:

"Dr. Sanchez is an old man, heavy set, dark; a somber, rather distinguished face. He is wearing a brand new suit of clothes, new hat, new shoes, everything new—you couldn't help noticing him."

The voice at the other end of the wire was replying tentatively—

"I don't believe we have such a guest, Mr. Poggioli—"

The psychologist dialed another number and began his description again.

Presently, for some reason of his own, the taxi driver gave up peering and eavesdropping outside the booth and was gone. At first Poggioli thought nothing of this, but continued unsuccessfully with his entire list of hotels. Slidenberry came to his booth door, opened it and stood in silent impatience. After a space he asked in a lowered tone, interrupting the psychologist—

"If he is not in one of the big hotels where do we look next?"

Poggioli shook his head with the receiver to his ear.

"If he suspects I am trying to parallel his psychology, he may have taken an illogical step to throw me off."

The customs inspector made an annoyed gesture.

"Forget all that stuff for a minute!" he begged in an undertone. "Tell me what you think of our chauffeur."

Poggioli removed his receiver a little blankly.

"What is there to think of our chauffeur?"

"Why, hadn't you noticed how snoopy he is? I took a look outside just now and he's not in his cab. You don't suppose he's shadowing us, do you? You know, tipping off somebody where we are?"

Poggioli was taken aback at the idea.

"I should think not. It is almost inconceivable that Sanchez should have such an elaborate organization that he would own the very chauffeur in the street—"

"Just step out of that booth and take a look," directly Slidenberry in a low tone. "When I didn't find him in his car, it just struck me maybe he was telephoning too. Well, there you are."

Poggioli was out of his booth now, looking in the direction the inspector indicated. On a long slant they could just see the chauffeur's back in one of the cubicles.

"He'll say," predicted Slidenberry bit-

ingly, "that he's telephoning his wife that he can't be home for dinner."

At that moment the door of the suspected booth was flung open, the chauffeur dashed out and whirled to his employer.

"I've got your man!" he flung out excitedly.

Slidenberry was taken aback at this sudden turn.

"What do you mean—got our man?"

"Why, located him! I been phoning hotels too." He showed a handful of nickels he had not used. "I used the same description you fellows did. He's at the beach hotel, Las Palmas, registered under the name of Ferro."

The customs officer stared, then struck the knob of a booth door in exasperation.

"Dern it, I didn't telephone Las Palmas because that was your hotel, Mr. Poggioli! I didn't dream he would walk right into the place you were stopping at!"

"Neither did I!" ejaculated the scientist. "I assumed subconsciously that he would go to some other hotel. Here, let's get over there."

"Look here," begged the taxi driver as they rushed for the curb, "if I did that much I may do something else. You never can tell. Why won't you fellers take me on full time on this trip—give me a break?"

"Listen," interrupted Slidenberry, "there's nothing else to do. This Dr. Sanchez ran a lot of dope through customs, and we're going to the Hotel Las Palmas and pinch him and it. You've done everything you can do already. I appreciate it. Both of us appreciate it."

"And you won't take me on as a reg'lar detective?"

"Damn it, we can't; we're not detectives. If you want to be a detective why don't you get somewhere where detective work is going on?"

"Well, doggone it," cried the chauffeur wildly, "could you suggest some place like that?"

BY THIS TIME the trio had reached Las Palmas on the beach. All three leaped out and rushed into the lobby. A desk man, who evidently was expecting them, came forward at once with a pass key.

"Mr. Ferro is in 610, Mr. Slidenberry," said the desk man in a lowered tone. "The management would appreciate it if you would get him out with as little publicity as possible."

"That'll be all right," said the chauffeur to the clerk. "I have curtains on my cab, you know, that the youngsters use on necking parties. We can pull them down, and nobody will know who we got inside."

The clerk glanced at the chauffeur, then looked again at Slidenberry.

"I mean, I hope you have a Maxim silencer on your guns if you have to use them. There are the local elevators on your left."

The trio turned to the bank of elevators. Mr. Poggioli entered the cage with a certain annoyed reluctance. On such an expedition as this he invariably forgot the physical danger in the mental problem it posited. Now that the desk man had called the hazard to his mind, it struck him as idiotic to expose an exceptional intellect, such as his own, on a chore which any corner policeman could accomplish.

On the sixth floor of Hotel Las Palmas the psychologist lingered behind his two companions; and when they reached the door of 610 he was several paces to their rear. Slidenberry paused outside the room, turned and silently extended a revolver. Seeing only the chauffeur in reach, he said—

"Here, take this and if anybody fires from the inside when I turn the key, you shoot back!"

The taxi man accepted the post gratefully.

"This may not be using my head in a detective way," he whispered, "but it's part of the work, ain't it?"

"Possibly it is not using your head," corroborated Mr. Poggioli, "but, as you suggest, it is part of the work."

Complete silence followed this observation. Slidenberry lifted his fist and rapped.

"Open the door in the name of the law!" he called.

There was no answer. The customs inspector nodded warningly at the chauffeur, put in his key and turned the bolt. Nothing happened. Slidenberry pushed open the door. He and the taxi driver peered in from the sides of the entrance, then they entered cautiously. After a moment Slidenberry stepped back and growled to Poggioli:

"Damn the luck! We're late; he's sold his dope, blowed his coin on a dame, jumped the hotel and beat it. Here's the whole story right before your eyes."

When Poggioli entered, the bedroom presented a very simple face. It was in disorder; the bed was disarranged; a tray with two glasses and an empty bottle sat on a table; near a dresser on the floor lay a woman's compact; some pieces of torn newspaper were tossed into a corner, and a carafe of ice water had been overturned on a side table.

The taxi driver stood looking around the room with narrowed eyes.

"Love nest," he diagnosed, then glanced at Poggioli to see whether he had made a mistake.

"Well, I suppose this ends our chase," suggested Slidenberry, glumly studying the layout.

"Can't we go on and catch him somewhere else?" asked the taxi man hopefully.

"Why, no, there wouldn't be any use," snapped the customs inspector. "He's evidently got rid of his dope. It's gone. If we pick him up now we won't have a shred of evidence against him except a five-bolivar piece hollowed out, and what does that prove?"

The taxi man was sharply excited at the idea of a hollow five-bolivar piece.

This was the kind of thing he had encountered over and over in detective fiction, and it breathed of romance.

"I say, that's great," he praised. "A hollow dollar, what do you know about that! Well, now I suppose it's up to us to collect all this junk here for clews, ain't it?"

He set to work gathering up the bottles, glasses and newspaper in a bundle. Slidenberry glanced at him in distaste.

"What you going to do with that stuff?"

"Why, study 'em, of course," said the chauffeur.

"Oh, nonsense," disparaged the inspector.

Mr. Poggioli moved over to the bed and picked up a hairpin from the rumpled spread. He turned it in his fingers.

"That's odd," he observed slowly. "The woman was a brunette."

"How do you know she was?" asked the chauffeur quickly, giving up his own research for the moment.

"It's a black hairpin" explained the psychologist absently, "you know that blondes wear light pins."

"Why, sure," agreed the taxi driver, "that isn't hard to figger out," and he turned to his own collection to see if it suggested anything to his mind.

Slidenberry went a little deeper into the matter.

"Well, what is there odd about it if she is a brunette?" he asked, slightly out of patience.

"Nothing, except Dr. Sanchez himself is very dark, and if he were casually choosing a woman he'd pick a blonde, so I should say this was not a casual amour as you gentlemen seem to think."

Slidenberry stood frowning in the middle of the floor.

"Will you please tell me what difference it makes what kind of an amour it was, if the fellow's gone?"

MR. POGGIOLI went over to the dresser and picked up the compact.

He examined it, sniffed at the powder, scrutinized the lipstick. He held up a hand at the inspector's continued grumbling.

"Gentlemen," he stated, "this has not been a love affair at all. The woman who came here was a business woman, forty or forty-five years of age—a large brunette, dresses very plainly, avoids jewelry and is of a highly ingenious and subtle turn of mind. In fact, judging from this compact, I am sure it was she who hit on the idea of rumpling this room up like a deserted love nest to make it appear that Sanchez had disposed of his opiates and that further search for him would be futile. Incidentally, I will add that this woman is quite wealthy and that she made her money by herself."

To this extended analysis the chauffeur listened with distended eyes and finally gasped in a husky voice—

"My Lord, Mr. Poggioli, do you mean to say you doped all that out from a compact? How in this wide world—"

"Yes, I'd like to be let in on that," put in the inspector skeptically.

"It's very simple," returned the psychologist. "She is a large woman, because her compact is of plain silver. Small women choose flashy toiletries. She is middle aged, because her lipstick has about dried up. Young girls use up a lipstick long before it dries; middle aged women do not. She is wealthy and secretive and subtle, because she purchased a solid gold mirror and put it in a simple silver case. Any woman who buys expensive interiors and hides them in plain covers is not only wealthy, but must have achieved wealth through her own efforts and be cunning rather than straightforward. That's why I knew the appearance of this room was the woman's idea."

The chauffeur was astonished.

"Well I be derved! That's just as plain as A B C now you mention it. I swear, anybody could have seen that." He

went back to work on his glasses, bottles and paper with increased determination.

"Then this must not have been a petting party after all?" suggested Slidenberry, impressed by Poggioli's analysis.

"Certainly not. I am quite sure she was the woman to whom the delivery of the dope was made. This compact ought to simplify our problem very much. There can't be many women such as she in Miami."

At this the two listeners combed their minds in their respective ways. The chauffeur stood frowning and at intervals snapping his fingers as various solutions occurred to him and were discarded. Slidenberry mumbled over and over—

"Large brunette business woman, wealthy, cunning. . ."

"And of course a dealer in illicit goods," prompted Poggioli, "since she was receiving and no doubt buying a considerable amount of narcotics."

Slidenberry suddenly looked up.

"Why, that's—" Then he closed his lips and shook his head. "No, no, it couldn't have been she. She wouldn't stoop—"

"I know who you're talking about," chirped in the taxi man, "but she doesn't deal in illicit goods, does she?"

"Whom are you referring to?" asked Poggioli with interest.

"Why I'm talking about Madame Aguilar, who runs the speakeasy on Esmeralda Boulevard," stated the chauffeur, and he looked at Slidenberry.

The inspector nodded.

"I had Madame Aguilar in mind for the moment. She does fit the description, but I'm sure it isn't she. She has the respect of every business man in Miami and the confidence and the cooperation of the police. I know she wouldn't abuse it by turning a high class speakeasy into a hop joint."

"We might go down there and look into her place," suggested Poggioli.

The other two men agreed reluctantly.

The chauffeur began gathering his bottles, pieces of paper and glasses in a bundle. He reached for the compact in Poggioli's hands.

Slidenberry turned to him, annoyed.

"What do you want with that?" he demanded.

The taxi man moistened his lips.

"Why, I—I had a little idea."

"Yes, what was it?"

"I thought I would just hand this compact to Madame Aguilar and tell her I had found it and ask her if it was hers."

Poggioli looked at his man with an odd annoyance.

"Listen," he advised, "if she should say it did belong to her, she wouldn't be the woman who lost it there."

The taxi man's mouth dropped open.

"She wouldn't be the woman?"

"No, the woman who came to this room would never be caught in so infantile a ruse as that."

The chauffeur stared a moment longer, then grew brick-red in the face, made a last fastening to his bag of clews, and the three men started for the elevator and the street level.

IN THE lobby Slidenberry telephoned police headquarters for a squad of plainclothesmen to meet him in Madame Aguilar's speakeasy on Esmeralda Boulevard. He directed them to go in, order their drinks in the usual way but to watch for a signal from him to raid the place.

The psychologist was distinctly discomfited at such a procedure. For a squad of men to get up and draw pistols rasped his concept of life as an intellectual adventure.

"What will you and your men do when they place everybody under arrest?"

"Why, search the place for narcotics, of course," said Slidenberry in surprise.

The psychologist shook his head slowly.

"You don't want to start the raid until you know exactly where the drugs are hidden," he advised.

The inspector looked at his companion.

"Not search for them until we know where they are? My Lord, man, that's equivalent to keeping out of the water until one learns to swim! Why not search?"

"Because both Sanchez and Madame Aguilar are Venezuelans," replied the psychologist incisively.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Because the moment men begin a physical search for anything their bodily movements prevent any real mental novelty of search. To run about, peering here and there in every corner, is the most primitive form of search. But, remember, when one reproduces primitive movements, one automatically reproduces the primitive mind-set which accompanies those movements, and therefore one would never find anything hidden with forethought. The only way to hunt for anything is to sit absolutely still and relax."

The chauffeur said in amazement that he had never thought of that, but that he saw it. Slidenberry inquired with considerable satire why so many physical searches turned out very prosperously indeed?

"That's because you were searching for hoards hidden by Anglo-Saxons, men of your own race. Their instinct toward concealment paralleled your own. But if you were searching for something hidden by a Venezuelan, you'd never find it, because the Anglo-Saxon mind and the Latin mind are irrational planes, one to the other."

Slidenberry laughed ironically and asked Poggioli if he could think up an example of something he could not possibly find.

"Certainly, suppose I should dissolve a narcotic and soak it up in a sponge, it would be safe enough from your

men."

Slidenberry's mouth dropped open.

"Good Lord, we wouldn't find it like that, would we? I must tell the boys to watch out for wet sponges."

"Don't bother; it won't be in a sponge," assured the scientist.

"How do you know it won't?"

"Because that's an Italian idea. I'm of Italian descent."

The chauffeur shook his head in bewilderment.

"My stars, what a man!"

SANS SOUCI, Madame Aguilar's speakeasy, had the usual simple façade, peephole and two locked doors common to hundreds of thousands of such establishments in America. What distinguished it from the others was an interior characterized by a quiet restfulness and unity of style.

Madame Aguilar had done Sans Souci in painstaking mission style, possibly not so much out of choice as in deference to the prevailing Florida taste for that type of architecture. The interior of Sans Souci suggested a mission church, and the special alcoves around it reminded one of chapels. There were even candles and pictures on the walls of these alcoves and a sheaf of paper spills to touch off the wicks when a guest entered.

The three men had hardly seated themselves at a table when the customs inspector leaned forward and said in an undertone—

"Look yonder by the window; there sits Sanchez!"

The chauffeur became excited at once.

"Why don't you go over and arrest him?" he whispered.

Slidenberry frowned in annoyance.

"Damn it, the trouble nowadays is not in finding bootleggers and dope sellers! Everybody knows who they are and what they're doing; the trick is in getting legal evidence to prove it, and in picking a jury that'll convict them

when its proved. Now, there's that bird, sold his dope, collected his pay and is as free as the air!"

"I swear," sympathized the chauffeur, "I wish to the devil some of these clews would hook up with that old geezer!" He peered down under the table edge at the bundle in his lap, trying to find something in it that would incriminate the smuggler.

Slidenberry touched Poggioli's arm.

"Look here," he whispered nervously, "have you thought out where to look yet? We're going to have to do something. The boys are looking to me for a signal."

"You mean the plainclothesmen? Have they come?"

"Why, yes, that's them—among those tables."

The psychologist fingered his chin.

"Well, it struck me that there is a false note somewhere in the period decorations of those cabinets."

The inspector looked at his companion in bewilderment.

"False note in— Listen, man, my men have got to do something. If they don't Madame Aguilar will get suspicious this isn't a liquor raid and then we'll never find anything at all. Now, unless you know where the stuff is we've got to bust for it!"

"Wait! Not now," begged the psychologist. "Plague the luck, I almost had my finger on it—"

"On what?"

"The connection between the decorations and a possible hiding place."

"Oh, I see; that's more like it. Now work it out quick. The first thing you know that old devil over by the window will walk out of here and we haven't got anything on him to stop him."

In the midst of this anxiety the chauffeur grabbed Slidenberry's shoulder.

"Say, I got it!"

"Got what?"

"Where the dope is! Mr. Poggioli was right, you can find out more setting on

your bottom than you can by getting on your feet!"

"What is it you've found out either way?"

"Why, the dope's in the water," whispered the chauffeur dramatically. "You know, what they serve in glasses. I been watching that yellow haired man in the cabinet yonder. He hasn't eat nothing a-tall. Jest drunk his water and went to sleep!" The taxi man nodded slightly, but urgently, toward one of the booths.

Slidenberry touched Poggioli.

"Is this chap right?"

The psychologist shook his head.

"No, that's an echo of my sponge theory. Say, how did the Spanish priests in this country carry around their fires?"

THE inspector made a gesture of hopelessness and was about to give a signal to the plainclothesmen when a large, rather heavily built brunette woman approached their table. She was almost handsome, but her dark eyes were too impersonal and her lips too thin and resolute.

When she reached the men the chauffeur began a nervous fumbling among his clews. Slidenberry kicked him under the table. The woman paused with a chill polite smile.

"I would appreciate it, Inspector, if you would start your raid and get it over with," she suggested. "Your men make my patrons nervous. And, by the way, I hope in the future to relieve the police of this routine work."

"How's that?" asked Slidenberry amiably.

"Why, I made a little donation to Reverend Harshberger's church on Poinciana Avenue last Sunday. I'll visit the other churches soon." She lifted her jet-black brows with serious implication and passed on among her other guests.

The chauffeur watched her go with wide eyes.

"What did she mean by that?"

Slidenberry was full of repressed wrath.

"You idiot, you came within a squeak of pulling out that damned compact and asking if it was hers!"

"Yeh, don't you thing it would have been the thing?"

"The thing! It would have advertised to her that this wasn't a liquor raid but a dope search. She thinks we've been egged on to this by the preachers here in Miami. You heard her telling us that she believed she could buy them off too. That would have been the devil of a note for you to pull out that compact and let her know where we got it."

The chauffeur was taken aback.

"Well, I'm just starting in detective work, Mr. Slidenberry."

"M-huh, use your head and be more thorough if you're going to work with me."

"Mr. Slidenberry," chattered the chauffeur, "d-does that mean you've taken me on for keeps?"

"No, it means I haven't kicked you out yet, but I will if you make another break like that."

"Yes, sir," said the chauffeur gratefully; he considered this as something in the nature of a contract to hire.

The inspector turned to the psychologist.

"We've got to do something, Mr. Poggioli. If you haven't got anything figured out, we'll have to start a search."

The psychologist was just opening his lips to ask for a longer reprieve when a waiter with a tray of dishes crossed the dining room to the booth where the man was sleeping.

The scientist leaned forward watched the waiter intently for a moment and then turned to the customs officer.

"Listen, would indirect proof of the sale of narcotics be satisfactory?"

"Why, certainly, if it's conclusive."

The psychologist made a gesture.

"Then go ahead. It is not the line I

had hoped to pursue, but it doesn't admit of a shadow of doubt."

Precisely what signal Slidenberry gave Poggioli did not know, but simultaneously, here and there among the tables, half a dozen men stood up with drawn revolvers. Some one called out that every one was under arrest. A hubbub broke out in the speakeasy. Half a dozen men who had never before been caught in a raid tried to sneak to the door, but were stopped by the officers. Poggioli heard one man saying that he didn't know he was in a speakeasy, that he thought it was an ordinary restaurant.

But the greater part of the crowd were veterans and began laughing and kidding or complaining according to their kidney.

Madame Aguilar came down the aisle to Slidenberry. She asked, with a business-like expression, whether it would be necessary for her to appear personally in court or whether she might simply send the money by her lawyer.

Slidenberry wore the hard, gratified look of an officer making a deserved arrest.

"You'll have to come to headquarters, madame. This isn't a liquor charge."

The woman gave him a quick look.

"Not a liquor charge?"

"No, we are picking you up for selling narcotics."

The woman's face underwent a sudden and rather shocking change.

"You damned stoolpigeon," she screamed, "trying to ruin a respectable place! Some other speakeasy paid you to do this!"

Her invective rose to a shriek, and the next moment the woman was at Slidenberry with her nails in his face.

The customs inspector dodged, turned over his chair, then grabbed Madame Aguilar's arms and held them down. She tried to bite. The plainclothesmen rushed to the two, jerked away Madame Aguilar and stood holding her by the arms.

The woman continued her oaths and tried to kick.

The crowd collected around the center of turmoil, demanding to know what was the matter. The closer ones began telling those behind them:

"Pinched her for selling dope!"

"Dope, why this ain't a hop joint!"

"I don't believe it!"

A belligerent voice among the customers demanded to know what proof the officers had for such a charge. A plainclothesman snapped back that the proof would be presented in the police court.

"It's a frameup!" screamed the woman.

Half a dozen voices took it up:

"Sure, it's a frameup! The madame wouldn't do a thing like that! Come on, everybody, let's break up these prohibition racketeers!"

The crowd surged toward the officers. Slidenberry saw what was coming and shouted for the crowd to stand back and listen to the proof. In the momentary lull he called out hastily that Mr. Poggioli, the world famed expert in criminal psychology, would explain how he knew that Madame Aguilar was dealing in narcotics.

"Ladies and gentlemen, listen to Dr. Poggioli!"

THE scientist oriented himself in the face of this unexpected publicity. He pointed at the man in the booth.

"I think you will all agree this man is doped. Look at him; and, to make this absolutely certain, at the police station, we will use the stomach pump to make sure of what he has swallowed, take blood tests and nerve reactions in his present condition and in his normal condition—"

A trim, bellicose man of legal aspect, who later turned out to be from the office of the attorney-general, asked in a sharp cross-questioning voice why Mr.

Poggioli assumed the man had taken the dope in Madame Aguilar's speakeasy.

"Why couldn't he have had his dope on the outside and then walked into this place?" demanded the lawyer.

"That's impossible!" retorted Poggioli with academic brevity. "I had thought of such a possibility, but when I saw the waiter bringing dinner to the doped man, I knew it was impossible for the fellow to have got the drugs anywhere but here."

The crowd stared in perplexity. The man from the State's attorney's office asked in a guarded irony—

"Would you mind explaining the connection between the two, Dr. Poggioli?"

"Certainly I'll explain. To a man under the influence of opiates food is obnoxious. The most he would have ordered is broth. But this is a full dinner. Therefore, he must have taken the opiate after he had ordered his dinner, or he never would have ordered the food at all."

There was a silence which was broken by the chauffeur's marveling—

"Now, anybody could have thought of that if it had jest crossed their mind."

This moment of confused and admiring belief felt by all the crowd was shattered by the lawyer.

"What kind of evidence is this you're bringing up against a good woman's reputation? A man orders his dinner and goes to sleep, so a woman—God's last best gift to man—is guilty of peddling the damnable curse of drugs!" He whirled to his hearers. "Men of the South! Floridians! Will you stand by and see such an insult put on one of the fair sex? No! You know you won't! Come on!"

The crowd swung forward again when Slidenberry shouted:

"Wait! Wait a minute! My Lord, I didn't know I was ordering an arrest on any such damn fool proof as that. Wait, give me a chance to make an orderly search. If we can't find any dope,

that ends it. That's fair, people, that's fair, isn't it?"

The speakeasy patrons tacitly agreed to the fairness of this and fell into an angry buzzing among themselves that Madame Aguilar had been subjected to such treatment. The plainclothesmen scattered through the restaurant looking everywhere for the drugs. The spectators presently began jeering the searchers, calling out:

"Look in the sink!"

"Look in the sugar bowls!"

There was a good deal of laughter at these thrusts. Poggioli went over to Slidenberry.

"There is no possibility of their finding anything. In a polyglot civilization like ours, the law will have to accept psychologic proof or our whole social structure will go to pot."

"I don't care a damn about our social structure," growled Slidenberry, "and not much about the madame; it's that leather-colored old devil by the window that I'm after!"

In the midst of these grumblings a waiter walked across to the booth in which the drugged man slept and snuffed out the two candles burning over the table.

As he did so a sudden revelation burst on Poggioli.

"By George, I've got it!" he cried. "The old Spanish monks used wax tapers to light their devotional candles!"

Every one looked around at the exclamation. Slidenberry was embarrassed.

"What's that got to do with anything?" he inquired.

"Why, simple enough. Madame Aguilar substituted spills for tapers."

"Well, what if she did?"

"She is a woman of enormous attention to detail. She would not have been guilty of such an anachronism without a powerful and practical reason. The only reason she can possibly have is for a use of the spills which she could not accomplish with tapers. Well, spills will

hold something; tapers won't. Come on, let's unroll the spills."

AS HE strode toward the booths the crowd followed and the chauffeur called out in amazement—

"Mr. Poggioli, how in the world did you come to think about the spills when you saw the waiter put out the candles?"

At the query the psychologist assumed automatically his old college classroom manner.

"Simple enough, young man; the waiter took time to snuff out the candles even in the midst of all this excitement, so, of course, that made it all clear."

The chauffeur leaned forward and frowned.

"I don't quite see what that had to do—with anything."

Poggioli was surprised.

"Why, it showed the necessity of putting out the candles had been drilled into the waiter until he performed the chore automatically. This suggested that the extinguishing of the candles was of prime importance in Madame Aguilar's business, or why should she have so stressed the act." The psychologist glanced at the crowd. "Of course, the rest of my reasoning is clear to you all."

The chauffeur nodded, half hypnotized by his attempt to follow the thought.

"Yeh—yeh," he agreed, nodding his smallish head on his largish body. "I—I think I see it. Now—"

Somebody in the middle of the restaurant yelled:

"Naw, he don't see it, and I don't either. I don't see how the devil—"

Poggioli shrugged.

"There are always one or two like that."

Then he became sarcastically explicit.

"Now listen," he advised in a complete silence. "Extinguishing the candles was important. Why? Because that allowed them to be relighted for each guest. Relighting was important. Why? Because a

spill could be taken from the holder easily and naturally without arousing anybody's suspicion. This was important. Why? Because the upper end of a spill can be touched in a flame, a candle lighted, the spill extinguished before it has burned away half an inch and the remainder of the paper roll can be dropped very naturally and casually on a patron's table. Nobody would possibly suspect that a delivery of illicit—"

A variety of "oh's" and "uh-huh's" and "I see's" trickled over the crowd at the scientist's virtuosity.

The plainclothesman already were at the holders unrolling the spills. Presently a thin powder sifted from one of the rolls.

Slidenberry shouted at the man and made a desperate effort to catch some of the vanishing evidence.

Poggioli wagged a finger.

"Don't bother. There's plenty more left."

"But look here, will we get it all in these spills. S'pose it's all here?"

"Why, no, not likely. I fancy the madame put out what she thought she could use today."

"Then where's the rest?" cried the inspector. "I've got to get the whole—"

"That's another problem," answered the psychologist. "But get these people out, stop these plainclothesmen from jiggling about and we'll sit down and reason out where Madame Aguilar must have secreted the remainder of her hoard."

The plainclothesmen were getting

them out just as fast as they could. They were huddling Madame Aguilar, her waiters and her guests toward the door. The lawyer who had so eloquently defended the madame already had got out the door. He knew the officer at the exit and had no trouble getting clear of the speakeasy. The rest of the crowd was herded toward the police van outside.

Slidenberry started another complaint.

"That damned leather-colored smuggler who brought all this in here—not a scratch to prove it actually was him! The madame will deny that was her compact. That hollow bolivar we've got will be laughed out of court. We haven't got a Chinaman's chance to pin nothing—"

In the midst of this the chauffeur timidly touched Slidenberry's elbow.

"Uh—er—would you mind looking at this a minute, Mr. Slidenberry?"

"What the hell do you want now?"

"Why these here spills, sir—the ones that had the dope in 'em—some of 'em were torn out of this newspaper we picked up in Las Palmas in the old man's bedroom."

Slidenberry turned and stared.

"They do! How long have you known that?"

"Why ever' since I got the first 'un to fit, of course."

"Why in the hell didn't you tell me at once?"

"Why—why—I was trying to make all the spills fit, Mr. Slidenberry. You—you said a detective had ought to be thorough."



PERRY ADAMS



"As you live and profit by violence, so may you die!"
The silken scarf tightened.

WHEN THUGGEE AWOKE

India seethed with silent revolt. The League of Thugs moved that they might rule by the law of Ellora.

PINK streaks stained the morning sky as Chanda, the little Madras barber, hurried from the outer fringes of Peshawar bazaar along the dusty road to the British cantonment. He was indeed late; for, at this hour, three sahibs should have been shaved as they slept, according to custom.

The world was already astir. The pungent smell of burning dung was in the air as he hastened on his way, now blowing on the charcoal in the minute brazier which heated his shaving water,

now tucking in the ends of his turban. With a wary eye on his precious charcoal, he broke into a shuffling trot and arrived quite out of breath at the bungalow of Captain Bart Clay. He entered and placed his brazier, which supported a copper water container, on a small table near the bed. One arm flung above his head, the captain slept easily on his left side. Chanda gently took the outstretched hand and slowly bent the arm back and forth until the breathing rhythm changed; the sleeper muttered

and slowly turned on his back. Chanda deftly lathered his face and shaved him. When the lather was removed, he shook the captain slightly.

"Sahib, sahib," he said quietly, "hear Chanda."

Slowly the captain's eyes opened—sharp gray-blue eyes with hooded lids.

"Yes, Chanda," he said, now fully awake, "you have news?"

The Madrasi leaned over until his face was close to the captain's.

"They meet tonight, Captain sahib." He glanced quickly toward the door behind him. "The place is near Fort Jamrud. Follow the road past the fort until it bends to the north; leave it there and continue due west. You will observe others going in the same direction. Mingle with them and presently you will come to the mouth of a large cave. Say 'Kali' to the lookout, and he will pass you. It is at the hour of nine."

When Chanda left the captain called for *chota hazri*; he sipped his tea thoughtfully. The mild, insignificant little barber was always a source of surprise to him. It seemed a long time ago that he had identified the Madrasi who shaved him as the storm center of an infuriated and threatening group of tribesmen in the bazaar. It had been the work of an instant to push through the ring; his uniform and show of authority had proved sufficient to save Chanda from a beating, or worse. The origin of the quarrel remained obscure; but the Madrasi had seemed extraordinarily grateful.

It soon became apparent that Chanda was more than a mere shaver of faces; he was a practised and adroit informer. He whispered secrets of the bazaar, of the strange comings and goings of the native underworld, for he appeared able to ingratiate himself with the most dangerous element in the city.

Most of this perpetual scheming had a local flavor—almost routine. But one morning, a few weeks before, Chanda

had entered the bungalow with news of an entirely different nature. An evil, ominous conspiracy was taking form, nation-wide in significance; the secret was so closely guarded that no breath of it had come to the ears of the secret service.

Because of this knowledge Captain Bart Clay had suddenly found himself enmeshed in a chain of circumstances quite outside his regular line of duty, aided and abetted by the high authorities to whom he had instantly carried the details of the strange story.

India was indeed, he reflected, a land of fantastic surprises. He finished dressing and reported this latest development to his colonel.

"You'll go, of course?"

"Rather! Will you be good enough to let them know, topside?"

"I will. Are you going in the same rig as before?"

"Must, I think. You see, they'll doubtless remember me from the other meeting—I'm counting on that, anyway. Then too, I feel sure of myself in a Sikh disguise. Tog me up in something else and I might forget some little stupid detail, which would ruin everything."

The colonel put his hand on Bart's shoulder.

"It's a hideous risk, my boy. Don't want to lose my best company commander, you know. Only hope the results will be worth it all."

As Bart rode away he colored under his tan. Praise from the colonel was rare indeed!

WHILE Peshawar sweltered through a scorching afternoon, Bart painstakingly transformed himself into a personable and entirely realistic Sikh. He first applied a light, coppery colored stain to his ruddy features, then to his entire body. This fluid was impervious to water and perspiration, yet could easily be removed with a certain chemical. When it was dry, Bart donned

Sikh garments of white cotton, not too fine for his rôle of student.

The senior Indian officer of Bart's company, Subadar Ranjit Singh, had been in his confidence from the beginning. The fine old Sikh was waiting in Bart's sitting room; he was now called in to help with the wig. This was easily the most important part of the disguise. Sikhs neither shave nor cut their hair; beards are tucked up behind the ears. This covering was cunningly made in one piece, to include the hair of the head and beard. An hour elapsed before they had the wig adjusted and secured to their satisfaction. A white turban completed the costume.

Bart stood up and surveyed himself with satisfaction.

"I'll do, eh?"

The subadar pointed to Bart's native shoes.

"May they bring you back safely," he said.

Bart slipped from his bungalow with a prayer that prying eyes—the wrong eyes—might not remark his departure. The heat was stifling, and the distance to the cave too great to be made on foot. Presently he found a *tonga*—a roofed, two-wheeled vehicle common enough in India.

The drive to Fort Jamrud was long and tiresome; it was dusk when the conveyance approached the fort. Bart continued on foot. Soon he noticed small groups of men converging on the road; they were all going in the same direction. By the time he reached the bend mentioned by Chanda, these groups had formed a loose crowd, which streamed off the road and continued west. Bart mingled with them, speaking to no one. Several looked at him suspiciously, for he was the only Sikh in the throng; also, even in his simple dress, he appeared almost too clean compared with the rough looking specimens about him.

They were a curious mixture of creeds—Hindus and Mohammedans—and this

very fact was unusual and noteworthy, for only on the rarest occasions are the two religions found in each other's company.

Soon they were winding through the foothills. Two lights appeared; they were hurricane lamps placed as markers at the cave mouth. There was considerable milling around the entrance while each man was carefully questioned by a tall, thick-set Pathan.

Bart sauntered along; at last it was his turn. The man, obviously surprised to see a Sikh, questioned Bart searchingly. His answers were glib enough, but the Pathan seemed vaguely dissatisfied.

At last he shrugged his shoulders.

"It is, doubtless, as you say. Only a fool would come here blindly and I see you are no fool! I think you speak the truth. Go within."

Breathing more easily, Bart walked along a wide cavern; in the distance he could see light. Although somewhat reassured, he felt for his only weapon, a long Sikh knife, concealed in a sheath attached to a girdle beneath his blouse.

The main chamber was crowded; there were perhaps a thousand men present. As Bart looked about him he thought that, had a general jail delivery taken place, there could not have been assembled a more murderous looking lot of cutthroats.

At one end of the cave a crude platform had been erected. A tall, arrestingly ugly individual was shouldering his way toward it. Sly, slanting eyes, high cheekbones and broad, flat nose, the chin cleft and strong, revealed a decided Tartar strain in his pockmarked face. As he opened coarse, cruel lips to command a passage, his teeth, yellow and fang-like, made him seem like a snarling wolf. He had the air of an utterly ruthless man.

A wild demonstration greeted his appearance on the platform. On every side men shouted and waved. As he

stood motionless there were cries of:
"Sher Ali! Our leader! Speak, great one!"

At length the noise lessened, until Sher Ali—for it was indeed he—had secured an impressive silence.

"Men of the north," he began, "it is good to hear that I am not unknown to you!"

A rumbling laugh greeted this sally, for Sher Ali's exploits and innumerable hairbreadth escapes from the law were already legendary. He was the most notorious rifle thief in India, with a high price on his head.

"Tonight," he resumed, "throughout Hindustan, meetings like this one are being held. At this instant two hundred thousand men have been drawn together in every important place in the land. When each one of you was asked to join our movement, it was hinted that wealth and ease would reward your successful efforts. All this is true—true beyond your wildest dreams!

"But before we proceed every man must be sworn into our order by the sacred ceremony used by the Society of Thugs since ancient days. Once sworn, there can be no turning back. While there is breath in your bodies, you will be held responsible for our secrets. To reveal even the smallest detail means death.

"Think, even now, of the power that is in us—two hundred thousand strong! And we shall soon have a million, as leaders emerge from your number. By this power, unleashed to the full, will the vaunted Raj be crushed and strangled!"

A murmur of approval, swelling to a heady roar, ran through the crowd.

He raised his hand for silence.

"But know you this: As you live and profit by violence, so may you die!" He paused and looked about him. "Perhaps there are those among you who, having heard this, would prefer to withdraw before it is too late. If there are any such, let them come forward—now!"

Again the assembly murmured, while necks were craned to see if any, so far committed, would have the temerity to accept the offer. There was a stir on the fringe of the gathering. Three Punjabis were moving forward amid menacing gestures from all sides. Hands clutched at their clothing, fists were shaken and many spat at them. They hesitated before the platform; the murmur rose to a shrill clamor. But once more Sher Ali raised his hand and beckoned the three up beside him. As they stood facing the hostile crowd, he spoke again:

"Three there are. Look well upon their faces! Milk runs through their veins; we want them not. They indicate that they prefer to withdraw. Withdraw they shall!"

He made a sign behind his back. Instantly, as though conjured out of space, six huge Afridis sprang upon the platform. They seized the struggling Punjabis and in a second had slipped thin, silken nooses about their necks. And now the nooses were being drawn tighter and tighter as the luckless ones screamed in pain and terror—screams which ended in thick, gasping gurgles as the tension increased.

Their faces became livid; slowly they sank down, their tongues lolling out and bloody foam frothing from their mouths. With eyes starting from sockets, their last feeble efforts ceased and they lay still in grotesque attitudes. The Afridis withdrew the nooses, placed their victims in a neat row and disappeared behind the platform.

"There, my friends," said Sher Ali in the shocked silence that followed—the deed was shocking even to such men as these—"you see that the Brotherhood keeps its word! They wished to withdraw. They have withdrawn." He walked forward menacingly. "Such is the fate of those who would abandon the Brotherhood. Life itself is the price of withdrawal."

He stepped back and beckoned again. From the deep shadows behind him emerged twenty curious figures which drew up in line before the platform. They wore close-fitting golden helmets and masks; on each man was evilly painted in vermilion the face of a man strangling a horrid reminder of the three figures which had so recently been living men. Long robes of saffron colored velvet bearing crimson signs of the zodiac, completed the costumes.

SHER ALI raised his arms. In a sing-song voice, quite different from his previous tones, he began an incantation.

"By the holy tablets of Ellora, which are preserved to us; by the saintly memory of Nizam-u-din Auliya of Delhi and with the divine sanction of the Goddess Kali, known as Bhawani, Devi and Durga:

"The long sleep of the ancient Society of Thugs is ended. In the blinding light of a new day Thuggee awakes, refreshed, lusty, heir to a sacred power created by the goddess in us, the Brotherhood of Ellora; a power invoked out of slumber to deliver Hindustan from bondage, to enrich the worthy, to slay our enemies of the British Raj with the cunning of the Thugs since time immemorial.

"A power invisible, relentless, frightful, newly bestowed by the sacred Kali in this, our hour of greatest need. To thee, Kali, Peerless One, we pledge ourselves in awe, our lives and all of substance there is of us, well knowing that through thy mighty favor, and only thereby, may we triumph!"

He paused while the twenty acolytes, each holding a basket, circulated through the rows of silent, sitting men. The baskets were passed to all; each took a handful of the contents. When the distribution was complete he resumed—

"In this solemn sacrament we supplicate thee, Kali, even as have our forefathers back through the shades of antiquity."

He leveled his voice directly at the sitting throng.

"Follow me through the simple ritual, initiates; repeat my actions and my words:

"In my right hand, the hand of destiny, I grasp this sacred *gur*. And raise it to my forehead as a token that I bestow to thee my mind. And lower it to my heart as a token that I bestow to thee my body. And consume it so that thy divine favor may flow through my veins. Hear me mighty goddess, thy humble supplicant!"

While the men munched the raw sugar, Sher Ali stood with bowed head, as if in prayer. The acolytes slowly retired until they vanished as they had come. Talk had been subdued since the ceremony; it now ceased completely as he resumed:

"Brothers, the great Brotherhood of Ellora, of which I have the honor to be head, has the whole-hearted support of a great government, the name of which I may not mention. But its rich treasury is open to us, nevertheless.

"Our immediate object is to strike at all British officials and institutions, civil and military, yet never to leave a sign by which we may be traced. Soon all races and creeds will grasp the meaning of our violence; a united India will rise up under our banner and drive the Christian unbelievers into the sea. Hindustan will be restored to her rightful owners."

He now outlined a simple but complete scale of remuneration, based entirely upon results obtained. He stressed, in addition, the vast opportunities for looting which would fall to the brothers.

"There will be no more mass meetings like this," he went on. "The danger of surprise is too great. You will meet under your captains, who have already been appointed."

These captains were now made known. They ranged themselves about the cave and called out their specialties. The

brothers—most of them already skilled in some branch of crime—were divided into many groups, which included stranglers, poisoners, dynamiters, bomb men, gravediggers, rifle thieves, relay men and cheetah catchers. An intricate system of spying and scouting was indicated.

The meeting became general. Bart a little at a loss as to what his next move should be, suddenly saw the man who had acted as interrogator at the cave mouth approach Sher Ali and whisper rapidly.

Above the babel Bart heard Sher Ali call his name. He stepped toward the platform and was met by the dacoit.

"Come with me, Sikh, I would speak with you alone!" He turned on his heel, and Bart followed him behind the platform.

The Afridi stranglers fell in behind, significantly, and the little procession entered a narrow passage leading downward into darkness. As the descent grew steeper the air freshened until Bart could feel a slight wind against his thin garments. They made a sharp turn and entered a small natural chamber lighted by a single candle.

"Stay within earshot," Sher Ali warned his men; then, turning to Bart, "Well, Sikh, what do you here?"

Bart answered with another question—

"Were not my answers satisfactory to your man outside the cave?"

Sher Ali grunted and looked at Bart through eyes that were slits in his face.

"To him, yes; to me, no!"

Bart measured the man; the draft of air he had noticed evidently indicated some nearby exit from the cave. But the six stranglers were only a few paces away.

"Then what would you have me say?" he asked.

Sher Ali ignored his question.

"Where do you live, fellow?"

"I am of Lahore," replied Bart, quietly.

"But where, in Peshawar?"

"As yet I have no fixed dwelling. I arrived but today."

"Today?" Sher Ali shook his head. "Did you not tell my man that you were at the small meeting in Peshawar a month ago?"

"It is true! Afterward I returned to my father's house in Lahore."

"Yes? Who vouched for you for that other meeting?"

"Chanda, the Madrasi barber."

"A Sikh* allowing a barber to vouch for him! That is more than I can credit!"

THEY were interrupted by raised voices in the passage; both turned their eyes toward the opening just as a man appeared in the uncertain light.

A small man—Chanda! Had the cave fallen in, Bart could not have been more nonplused, for Chanda had never seen him in disguise. Bart's hand sought his knife.

The barber came into the room and looked about him uncertainly.

"I seek the great Sher Ali," he said. "I have a message for him."

"You have not far to seek, little man," said the dacoit. "But who are you?"

"I am called Chanda—Chanda the barber."

Sher Ali's face lighted with cruel purpose. He pointed one thick arm at Bart.

"Look well, Chanda, at that man. Who is he?"

Chanda looked searchingly at Bart, then shook his head.

"He is as much a stranger to me, master, as you are!"

"By Allah!" cried the dacoit, as he drew a curved sword which had been half-concealed in the folds of his cloak.

*Since a Sikh never shaves or cuts his hair, the implied close association with a barber would have been a most unnatural one.

"I felt you were an imposter from the first. Dog of a Sikh, you shall die!"

Uncomprehending, Chanda stood rooted in his tracks. Sher Ali raised his sword and crept toward Bart with soft, cat-like tread. The Afridis heard their master's angry voice and crowded into the chamber.

There was one slim chance. Bart took it.

"Wait, Sher Ali." His voice was calm, almost unconcerned. "You do not understand. Chanda is acting a part because you are a stranger to him. He knows that I am Tegh Arjun as well as he knows his own name. Speak, Chanda, it is safe. This is Sher Ali, our leader, the great one himself."

Chanda's face was a study. At Bart's first words he peered closely at the supposed Sikh, then looked beyond him as if the familiar voice were coming from the passage. All at once his expression changed.

"Is it so?" he said. "I have never before looked upon his face. As for you, Tegh Arjun—of course, you understand my caution." He chuckled. "To think that I mistook Sher Ali himself for a secret service agent!" His chuckle became a loud laugh; he bent almost double in his mirth.

The rifle thief slowly lowered his sword. Some quality in Chanda's laughter, coupled with the absurdity of being mistaken for one of his arch enemies, caused a slow smile to spread over his ugly face.

"Hé, so that's how it is! Have you known this Sikh for long?"

"May I know *you* as long," said Chanda, still laughing.

Sher Ali grunted as if satisfied. Then he remembered that Chanda had a message.

"I had almost forgotten," said the Madrasi contritely. "It is from Adil Shah, of the sweet shop in the bazaar. He would have you know that tonight

the explosives arrived. He has sent them to the place agreed."

The bandit nodded to his men.

"Wait outside; I shall be along at once." To Chanda he said, "Tell Adil Shah it is well. I shall see him before the Brotherhood's first night of terror. You may wait with the men."

When he and Bart were alone he said—

"Tell me now, why should you, a man of books, desire to be in the Brotherhood?" There was an undertone almost of friendliness in his guttural voice.

"Because," said Bart, "I hate the English—unclean Christian dogs!"

"Yet most Sikhs toady to them?"

"Not I! Devout Sikh I am, but I swear allegiance to no foreigners."

Sher Ali lowered his voice.

"I doubt you no longer. I need a man—a stranger, some one who is not in bazaar politics. My own men are needed for my affairs outside the Brotherhood. You are a Sikh, so you will not become overfriendly with the brothers, which is well. My own business and the affairs of the Brotherhood will take me elsewhere most of the time. I would have you learn the inside happenings—the things which go on beyond the eyes of Adil Shah, who is too fat to be active. He will give you a place to sleep and money for food. Chanda will show you his shop. Do you understand my purpose?"

Bart bowed politely.

"May my wits be sharp," he said.

Sher Ali had said his say. As was his habit, he walked away without ceremony; Bart followed. The Afridis and Chanda trailed them along the passage; presently they mounted a short flight of rough steps. After half crawling through a tunnel of no great length, they emerged into open air.

With a curt nod to Bart and Chanda, Sher Ali turned away; almost at once he and his men were swallowed up in the darkness.

For several minutes the two stood without moving; then, as if by common consent, they turned in the direction of Jamrud.

"I never expected you here," said Bart, after they had walked some distance. "It was only when I saw you that I realized you had not seen me in disguise."

"Yes, sahib. How unfortunate that you spoke!"

Bart told Chanda what had taken place at the meeting.

"Go to colonel, sahib, and tell him all; then, if necessary, bring me word at the shop."

"I have long known Adil Shah," said Chanda. "I can come to the shop openly without rousing suspicion."

Chanda had had the foresight to keep his *tonga* waiting under the walls of the fort. It was broad daylight; and by the time they reached the bazaar, the morning was well advanced. They entered the shop of the corpulent Adil Shah, to whom Chanda explained the situation in a few words.

The Moslem took Bart to the rear of the place and led him up an outside stairway to a room on the second landing. The place seemed comfortable enough, if dirty.

"You may sleep here," said Adil Shah; he handed Bart a key. "It is best to keep doors locked," he added dryly.

Bart went into the bazaar and ate a heavy meal—his first food since tiffin the day before. Back in his room at the sweet shop, he stretched himself on a pile of soft cushions. He was very tired.

LONG AFTERWARD he felt himself being shaken by the shoulder. He opened his eyes, heavy with sleep, to see a Sikh sergeant of police standing over him.

"Come, my brother," said the man, pleasantly enough, "I have shaken you long enough to wake the dead!"

"Come?" Bart was only half awake. "Come where?"

"You are under arrest!"

Over the Sikh's shoulder Bart saw the heads of other policemen framed in the doorway; and behind them fat Adil Shah wringing his hands apprehensively.

The inevitable crowd had collected. A touring car stood outside the shop; Bart was placed in it and driven rapidly away. At length the car turned into a familiar driveway and Bart saw that he was being taken to police headquarters.

He was led down a long corridor and up a flight of stairs to the office of Major Wilkinson, D.S.O., the police commandant. As soon as they were alone the major broke into a hearty laugh.

"I would never have known you, Clay. It's excellent. Sit down, won't you?"

Bart took a chair.

"I suppose this arrest was made to get me up here so that we could talk?"

"Of course! You can easily invent some yarn that will satisfy them in the bazaar. But, you see, you're our only source of information in this affair, here in Peshawar. Tell me what happened."

Bart did so.

"And there are only three days until what they call their first night of terror," he concluded.

The major listened attentively, then pointed to a mass of telegrams on his desk.

"Wires from here, there and everywhere regarding last night—the lot aren't worth much! Outside of your contribution, our people got into just two other meetings—widely separated—Poona and Calcutta."

"Well," said Bart, "a raid here would have been premature. It would simply have driven all the other branches to cover. If only our secret service can get some real information at most of the other places, one grand, general clean-up could be made throughout the country."

"We're doing our best," said the

major. "but the time is so short. Why, good Lord, three days are nothing!"

Bart nodded soberly.

"Now that we know definitely that Sher Ali is head of this, the thing to do is to nail him!"

"Yes," said the major with a mirthless smile, "put like that it sounds simple, doesn't it? Long before this Brotherhood was ever dreamed of there was a price on his head. And in ten years we've never laid a finger on him!"

"Who knows," Bart said, rising, "that I may not have better luck? We'll see, Major!"

The commandant of police stared after his retreating back.

AS BART made his way back to the sweet shop, a bold plan was taking shape in his mind, a plan so unexpectedly simple that he hoped it would not defeat itself by being utterly transparent. As he mounted the stairs to his room he little knew how soon he was to sow the first seeds.

He unlocked the door and pushed it open. Instantly a stunning blow on the shoulder brought him to his knees. He threw himself to one side and rolled like lightning toward the front of the room, where he came up standing, drawing his knife all in the same movement.

Sher Ali faced him. Two of the Afridis were with him.

"Tegh Arjun!" he cried, dropping the splintered remains of a small teakwood taboret. "Little did I expect to see you; Adil Shah said the police had taken you away. Why, he knew not."

Bart rubbed his numb shoulder ruefully and slowly sheathed his knife.

"Son of Allah," he said, "another finger's breadth and you would have cracked open my head."

The other shrugged.

"Kismet, my friend. I am always in danger of arrest in Peshawar And I did not know what they might have forced

you to tell. They have methods, those sons of pigs!"

"It was nothing," Bart said. "Some trifling error made in Lahore on my student identification card, which followed me here. But I have strange news for you."

"Yes? This has been a strange day. The boxes of explosives contained bricks. That is why I am here. There is something very wrong. But what is your news?"

"On my way back I fell in with some old friends of the 15th. Sikhs—men I knew in Lahore. They said it is common knowledge that the British have learned of the plans of the Brotherhood. More, that by some means they have discovered and stopped the source of the funds. Have you heard this?"

Sher Ali looked at him, open-mouthed. The two Afridis exchanged covert glances.

"No, by Allah, I haven't!" said Sher Ali. "I have just arrived from our place in the hills."

"It is an unfortunate rumor for the brothers to hear at this time, and ugly rumors have wings."

"But it is false!" cried the other. "I must find out at once how far this thing has spread. You, Tegh Arjun, call Adil Shah to me."

Bart did so. But the fat proprietor had no word of it, he said.

"Then have your men question the captains at once, Adil Shah; I shall wait here for their answers. Go now!"

Sher Ali was very much upset.

A long night of waiting followed. The four men dozed fitfully, sitting on cushions with their backs against the wall. Twice Adil Shah joined them during the lengthy vigil. At last gray showed through the narrow opening in the heavy curtains. Sher Ali got to his feet and stretched.

"We should have word soon," he said. "And if none knows more than Adil

Shah, I shall be forced to look upon you with new eyes, Tegh Arjun!"

"Why so?" asked Bart, in the same tone. "Because I have told you what is known even to sepoys?"

"It is true," muttered the other. But he was not satisfied.

Adil Shah presently came clumping up the flimsy stairs.

"All but two of the captains have been reached," he said, puffing, "and they, in turn, have spoken to many of their men. Nothing whatever is known of such a rumor! What say you to that, Tegh Arjun?"

"Merely that the spies of the Brotherhood are wanting. They should have reported this news yesterday!"

"We shall soon find out," said Sher Ali ominously.

But by the time the spies reported they said, truthfully enough, that such talk was on the lips of all. They had learned that Sher Ali had first asked the question the day before and, rather than appear remiss, they swore that they had first heard the rumors late the previous afternoon. In the end it became impossible for Sher Ali to determine with certainty whether the talk came genuinely from some outside source, or whether he had originated it by questioning his men.

That night the leader slipped away with his two followers. Nothing was said as to his destination or of the time of his return.

BY NOON of the next day—the day before the night of terror—there was a marked current of excitement around the shop. Furtive men whispered slyly to the fat proprietor as they passed; others spoke openly, but in words which obviously had a double meaning. Adil Shah's own runners were in and out of the shop like busy ants. There were many telegrams.

Bart paused on his way out in search of food. Adil Shah sat as usual, impassively waving a dirty cloth over his

sweetmeats to keep the flies away.

"The time draws near," Bart said. "Whatever is my lot, I shall welcome the action tomorrow night."

"Which now may not come to pass," said the other, with lowered eyes. "The brothers have demanded, here and everywhere, that their leaders face them tonight. It is said, if the British know what is planned for tomorrow and there is no money forthcoming why risk necks for nothing?"

"But the loot?"

"The risk is too great!"

"What is to be done?"

"A runner has come from Sher Ali this hour. Against his judgment, he has sanctioned the meetings everywhere. He will preside at the caves, at ten o'clock. You are to meet him there in advance of that."

"I shall be there." Bart stepped away from the booth. "Well, I go for the noonday meal."

He decided to cast caution to the winds and walk boldly to police headquarters. But he had not gone far when he saw the same Sikh sergeant of police who had arrested him.

"Ah, brother," he said pleasantly, "today you can not wake me from a sound sleep."

"Nor have I, today, a motor to place at your disposal," said the Sikh with a smile.

Bart guided their footsteps to a quiet spot in an alley, with blank walls on either side.

"Listen closely, Havildar," he said. "This is a matter of life and death! Go instantly to Wilkinson sahib. Give this message to him alone: Say that the Brotherhood meets tonight throughout India; that our meeting is at the caves at ten. Tell him Tegh Arjun sent you. That is all. Do you understand?"

"But what manner of man are you?" asked the sergeant in a puzzled voice.

"Don't ask questions. Go!"

"Very well, brother. But if I get into trouble you'll hear from me!"

They walked back into the bazaar street and parted casually.

WHEN BART reached the rear entrance to the caves he was recognized by the Afridi lookouts who told him that Sher Ali had already arrived and was to be found in the small chamber.

The bandit was in a surly mood.

"There is danger here tonight," he said gruffly. "Somewhere there are spies among us. If I could but learn who they are! But we will get the thing over with dispatch. I do not like these caves. It has been my custom to leave a line of retreat open always."

"But the rear passage?"

"Perhaps—perhaps not. *He*—let us go; the men must be coming in by now."

It was almost another hour, however, before the vast main chamber of the cave was filled with the rabble which made up the Peshawar membership of the Brotherhood. There was a new note in their talk, ominous and ugly. As Sher Ali at last mounted the platform to address them, Bart stood back, slightly to one side of it, so that he could both watch the men and command a view of the rear passage by turning his head.

When the harangue had been in progress for several minutes and Sher Ali was warming to his difficult task, Bart picked up one of several lanterns which stood about the platform and quietly slipped away. He hastened down the passage and was making the last turn, near the tunnel, when he heard several muffled shots. An instant later pebbles and loose earth streamed from the tunnel mouth, followed by a crawling Afridi.

"Fly, Sikh," he gasped, scrambling to his feet, "the English are here!"

Quickly Bart put down the lantern and drew his knife.

"You go to warn Sher Ali?"

"Yes, sahib. I warn Sher Ali."

The man started to crowd past him. Bart raised his knife and brought it down with a swift, clean stroke. The Afridi fell forward on his face, kicked and lay still.

More pebbles showered from the tunnel. An English sergeant appeared. He saw Bart and raised his rifle.

"Put it down—quick!" Bart commanded, standing quite motionless.

"Who in blazes are you?"

"Captain Clay of the Sikhs!"

"Blime," said the sergeant, "lucky you spoke when you did, sir, or I'd drilled you sure, in that getup."

British troops were coming through the tunnel, steadily, until some thirty crowded the steps.

"Listen, you men," said Bart, hurriedly, "probably the attack at the front entrance has already begun. The retreat'll be along this passage any second!"

He seized the lantern and carried it up the corridor, so that the soldiers were in deep shadow while the passage was lighted for some little distance. No sooner had he returned than they heard the sound of running footsteps.

"Shall we fire, sir?" asked the sergeant in a low tone.

"Over their heads first. If they don't stop, let them have it!"

Suddenly the passage was swarming with turbans and fezzes. The leading figure rushed into the light, and Bart saw that it was Sher Ali. Some of the sergeant's party fired a volley and the rush stopped.

But Sher Ali came on alone. With eyes rolling, his whole face distorted in a grin of wild hate, he kicked over the lantern, plunging the place into darkness. Another volley was fired, blindly; then Sher Ali was in among them, working havoc with the curved sword he knew so well how to use.

The beam of a flashlight stabbed the inky blackness to reveal Sher Ali hack-

ing his way toward the tunnel and supposed freedom.

Bart leaped at him; but with the speed of a panther the other turned and steadied himself for the rush. Bart saw his sword arm rise, then dived at him.

He heard the sword strike the earth with a mighty thud as Sher Ali came down, half on top of him, in a fighting fury, cursing and choking. Each writhed and twisted desperately to get an arm in position to strike. Then both managed to turn at the same instant, but the length of the sword worked against Sher Ali. Snarling, he tried to shorten his grip.

Trained in the subtleties of Oriental fighting, Bart shifted and struck speedily upward. The knife sank deep into yielding flesh, but seemingly checked the bandit's ferocity not at all. Again Bart struck, but his knife turned against a bone and snapped at the hilt. At the same instant Bart felt his opponent's sword cut at his chest. There was a sharp pain, and then the pressure slowly eased. The weight of Sher Ali's sagging arm carried the point away with it. Slightly dazed, Bart cast the body from him with a heave and sprang to his feet.

The brothers chose this instant to make a determined try for the tunnel. But the flashlight was turned on them and another volley fired, lower this time. Several dropped, and the rest paused.

"It is useless," cried Bart. "You are completely surrounded. Both entrances are covered. Do you want more bullets?"

They didn't. In a short time the entire cave was cleared; not one brother escaped. They had been caught like flies in a bottle.

Outside, searchlights played on a truly martial scene. It seemed as if most of the First Division were present! Infantry, cavalry, field artillery and mountain batteries; units of sappers and miners, of supply and transport; ambulances and

field hospital units. A whippet tank clanked by; planes droned overhead.

Bart clapped a field dressing on his slight wound and rode back to Peshawar with a brigade major in a staff car. As they drove into the city, they saw that all government buildings were ablaze with light. No one had thought of sleeping through a night like this!

"Come on, Clay," said the brigade major. "The G.O.C. wants to see you. He asked about a hundred of us to bring you back here if you were located."

And so it was that presently Bart was telling his story to the general officer commanding, Northern Command.

"Well," said the general when Bart concluded, "a magnificent job, Captain Clay—and just in time to prevent a mighty serious crisis. We've got Sher Ali; we've smashed this dreadful thing locally. And it looks, from early reports, as if we're in a fair way to break it up all over the country."

"Are many reports through yet, sir?"

"Well, they're coming in slowly, my boy, and nearly all are highly satisfactory. I don't think it's too early to venture the opinion that the backbone of the Brotherhood of Ellora is definitely broken!"

Shortly afterward Bart left headquarters and was driven to his bungalow. Another day was dawning. Excepting sleep, what he wanted more than anything, at the moment, was to remove the wig and beard he had worn and to revel in the luxury of a hot bath.

On Bart's veranda, blowing his inevitable charcoal to red heat, stood Chanda.

"Well, Chanda," he said, "you're just in time!"

"Yes, sahib. I have here the things to help remove your disguise."

"Excellent!" A sudden thought flashed through Bart's mind. "But how on earth did you know when I was coming?"

"Sahib, Chanda is a very good barber," he said.



Glick shuffled and dealt. "It is untouched magic, Destin  ."

LUCKY AT CARDS

Papa Blanc played for a black deuce, played and waited while drums rolled and machetes cut down men at night.

By HENRY LA COSSITT

IT WAS Joseph Glick, the lieutenant of Marines, who was lucky at cards, and Destin  , his faithful orderly, will confirm it; but perhaps Destin   will also aver that with Lieut. Glick it was more than luck. Probably, if pressed, Destin   will say that his master was capable of feats of magic, but that is neither here nor there, for none would believe it—at least, until he had played with Glick.

Herr Vrundt, the Dutchman and planter, is not quite certain, but is open to conviction concerning the black magic of it, and Castelnau, the doctor at Lancy, was once heard to say that Glick was in league with the devil.

Lieut. Glick was never without his cards. If he were landing—to take a situation in hand, of course—and there were a lull in the hostilities, he would withdraw from some cranny of his uniform a pack of cards, seat himself on the nearest available resting place, lay out an infernally intricate game of solitaire and assail it calmly. Bullets might fly, but Glick would play his aces.

Black jack, red queen, black king, release the ace— He observed with the eye of a scholar and took note of their curious and indefinite mathematics and compiled whole codes of laws of averages. There were those, of course, who whispered that at times the laws of

averages had very little to do with it and that Glick was quite deft at manipulation, but after all those who said it only whispered.

A curious fellow, this Glick, said the corps, with his packs of cards, but also an excellent officer and fighting man.

He was of uncertain age, well over six feet, rangy, barrel-chested, with stubbly, close-cropped dark hair. His eyes were blue and metallic and wide apart, but narrowed perpetually between lids that never seemed to be completely opened, and they were topped by heavy brows that joined above his blunt nose. His mouth was thin and his face was a graven image that became grotesque when he smiled because of several scars that lay upon it. The scars he never mentioned, for he talked very little, but he had been in China, the Philippines and in Nicaragua.

Finally, he was sent to Haiti.

This was because there was, at the time, a rebellion, and Glick had been there before. Emile, the *caco*, called the Magnificent, hitherto a very docile person indeed, had inexplicably raised the standard to the wild thundering of drums in the wilderness, and was running through the land leaving a trail of red terror. The killing was extensive, for in Haiti greatness may frequently be acquired by much killing. So Glick went after him.

Through the jungle, over the mountains, across the *savannes*, he went, until he found Emile, the Magnificent,—and shot him, thereupon burying him and the rebellion, and then he returned to his cards. And he was heard to remark ruefully that he had played for a black ace that had turned out to be only a deuce.

It was on the evening following the untimely death and burial of Emile the Magnificent, that Glick first met Destiné.

The lieutenant was sitting on the ground in a clearing at the center of a

group of *ajoupas*, into which all the inhabitants had retired in terror, and was chewing tobacco vigorously, being involved with a particularly knotty problem of *solitaire*. Now, if only he had had a black jack. . . .

He looked up suddenly, aware that someone was standing beside him and beheld a young negro clad in nothing but a pair of blue denim trousers that were ready to fly to the four winds. The negro was tall and well made and possessed, although very dark, of Caucasian features and straight hair. His eyes were intense. They were staring with something more than fascination, at the rows of cards before Lieut. Glick.

The lieutenant's metallic eyes fastened upon the negro ominously, but the next instant, having glanced back at his cards, he smiled. He had discovered a way to release his black jack. The smile cheered Destiné.

"*Ca ou té fai?* What have you been doing?" he asked in Creole, careless, typically, of his tenses.

"*Attendé!*" said Glick, also in Creole. He released the black jack and ran through the game rapidly, completely annihilating it. "*Voilà!*"

"*Magnifique!*" breathed Destiné. "It is a vast spell."

"Spell?" Glick was puzzled.

"*Oui, mon général,*" said Destiné. "The little saints—" he pointed to the face cards—"and the signs of the few and many *wangas*—" he pointed then to the spots—"together they are strong magic."

Glick, looking at his cards, was silent.

"I would be a great man," continued Destiné solemnly and apparently irrelevantly, his intense eyes staring thoughtfully at an immense *ceiba* tree. "I would be a *caco* or a wizard—"

"*Attendé!*" warned Glick. "Observe the fate of Emile, called the Magnificent. He was a *caco*."

"He was not possessed of strong mag-

ic," declared Destin . He shook his dark head. "Perhaps I would be president, then," he continued, looking questioningly at Glick.

"Perhaps," said Glick. He surveyed his cards absently and paused at the black jack, key to his recent victory over them, and thereupon had a hunch. He grinned.

"Perhaps you would be my orderly," he said.

Destin  accepted, in lieu of other great stations which were unavailable, was formally enlisted by Glick, and became efficient, and only occasionally was Glick forced to strong language. This was when Destin  pressed too fervently his suit to own a pack of cards, for Lieut. Glick could foresee the evils of gambling among the natives. But he became very fond of Destin —there had been little affection in Glick's life—and once, indeed, was known to have clouted a civilian for abusing his orderly.

A YEAR passed and in general Haiti lay quiescent, although there were rumors in the wilderness. There were drums in the wilderness, too, and there were tales of mysterious black conclaves by night.

And at Lancy, where Glick was commandant, there was fear. The throbbing and the sobbing of the drums could be heard and the whites looked up from their tasks and listened. By night, too, they barricaded their doors, for in Lancy itself there was much more than drumming.

It was spring and the rain fell. Great veils of it, sullen and menacing, beat upon the steaming earth and the little streets of Lancy were filled with puddles. And beginning with a certain Monday morning certain of the puddles ran red. This was because, beginning with that Monday morning, and continuing for five mornings thereafter, there had been found in the muddy streets a dead man.

The first had been almost decapitated

with a *machete*. The second had been shot through and through the heart; the third, fourth and fifth had met the fate of the first.

Panic was abroad in Lancy, for what, asked white and black alike, was this new and monstrous terror?

Glick scratched his jutting chin and bit off great fragments of tobacco and he chewed and listened to the throbbing drums, puzzled. For each of the dead men was a bushman, nothing more. Unidentifiable, unyielding of clues, they were, for there were thousands of *machetes* in the Haitian land, and as for the man who had been shot through the heart—they could not even find the bullet.

So Glick went among the natives. They met him with silence and fearful eyes, and what they knew he could not discover. He went among the whites, but they upbraided him and demanded that he do something and told him nothing. He doubted if they could tell him anything.

Hence, he returned to his cards because he could ponder over his cards, and he had discovered from long experience with their intricacies that if a man waits long enough he finds the combination he seeks.

It was on the evening of Friday, on the morning of which the fifth corpse had been found, that Glick, with two others, sat on the porch of Madame Champendal's Saloon and Caravanserai and played a game of poker. It was gathering dusk and in the murk near the porch rail stood a shadow,—Destin , very trim in his uniform, for he was now a good soldier as well as Glick's orderly. He watched the cards intently.

The others watched Glick. They were intent upon the game despite the tension that hung over them, hung over the entire town of Lancy.

"How many?" asked the dealer. This was Castelnau, the doctor, a medico who, within the last year, had become a man

of property. Since the owners of several plantations had been ruined by the eccentricities of Emile the Magnificent, Castelnau had taken their properties off their hands and it was said he was making money. He frequently talked of his properties, and lately, since the beginning of the murders, he harped on them, loudly demanding that something be done.

He was a man slightly over forty, with an overly ruddy face marked by a mosaic of tiny, purple veins of indulgence. His eyes were china-blue and always wide open with a slightly distressed expression as if he were fretting about something. This impression was heightened by the fitful, nervous movements of his white hands. He professed to be religious and perhaps he was, so far as Glick knew. What Glick understood, however, was that Castelnau was not a good gambler and hated to lose to Glick. It had become an obsession with the doctor.

The lieutenant looked at his hand, then laid one of the cards face down on the table.

"One," he said.

Castelnau's mouth widened into a snarl and in his eyes appeared a look of pure hatred. Nervously, he shot a card across to Glick, then turned to the man who sat next the lieutenant.

"Three," said this man gutturally. This was Herr Vrundt, called the Dutchman, and he had opened the pot. He was very fat, with little sparkling eyes of gray imbedded in his fleshy face and he smoked an enormous meerschaum pipe with a long curved stem. His head was completely bald, his expression sombre, for all his wealth, which, it was said, he had derived completely from his sugar and pineapple plantation, the largest and richest in the northern districts.

Castelnau dealt him three cards, then glared at Glick.

"The dealer," he said in his rather tense voice, "takes two!"

Herr Vrundt looked at his hand and puffed his pipe.

"Check!" he said.

Castelnau, still glaring at the lieutenant, shoved a stack of chips across the table.

"Five dollars!" he snapped.

Glick had not yet looked at his single draw. He did not look at it now. He turned to Destin  and said:

"Six o'clock. Tell the cook I'll be home in half an hour."

Destin  hesitated, looking intensely at the cards, but walked to the edge of the porch, where he stopped. Castelnau said querulously:

"Five dollars! Did you hear me?"

"Yes, doctor," said Glick. He pushed out a stack of chips to match Castelnau's, then followed it with another of equal size.

"Five more."

The Dutchman threw down his hand.

"Did you look at your draw?" snapped Castelnau.

"No," said Glick.

Castelnau hesitated, then raised the lieutenant and again Glick, without looking at his draw, raised.

Destin , waiting, sighed painfully. Although he could not understand the game, he sensed the tension. Glick turned, the metal in his icy eyes dangerous, and Destin  vanished.

The doctor stared at the raise, breathing heavily. Before Glick lay the single card, still unknown. His popping eyes held for a moment on the thin gaze of the lieutenant, then wavered as he looked at his hand.

"Damn it!" he cried. "You can't buck that! He holds four and doesn't even look at his draw!"

The doctor threw down his hand. There were three queens.

"What you got?" he demanded.

Glick raised his brows in slight question, but he threw down his four cards, one by one, smiling. There were the six of clubs, the seven of diamonds, the

nine of diamonds, the ten of hearts. The doctor's heavy face grew purple. Then Glick turned over his draw.

It was the eight of spades.

"An inside straight!" cried Castelnau shrilly. "And he drew to it! And he filled, if he needed it!" He stopped, beside himself, raised a glass of black Haitian rum and drained it.

"Lucky!" he stormed. "Always lucky! I never saw such luck at cards!"

He rose, and again there was pure hatred in his eyes. "I never saw such luck!" he repeated. "Godless luck—" the doctor could fall back on his religion at any time—"and I don't believe you respect the devil either!"

Glick drew a pack of cards from his uniform and shuffled them.

The action seemed to enrage Castelnau further.

"But while you play poker," he snarled, "men are murdered in the streets. And you do nothing but shuffle cards! Nothing!" He stopped for breath. "But what of us? What of our properties?" Castelnau glanced at the Dutchman as if for support, but Herr Vrundt only puffed the enormous meerschaum. "What of our properties? What of our lives?" And when Glick continued his game:

"Do you hear?"

"Very well, doctor." Glick spat a long stream of tobacco juice over the rail.

Castelnau flung from the porch.

GLICK WENT on playing; Herr Vrundt went on smoking. A negro came out on the porch and lighted an oil lamp and they sat in silence,—silence, that is, save for the slapping of Glick's cards and the sly dripping of palm fronds and the distant rumble that was the drums.

"They were all my men," said Herr Vrundt suddenly.

Glick hesitated only a moment in his play. If you waited long enough, he had

said, you always found your combination.

"All of them," continued Herr Vrundt impassively. "One, two, three, four, five,—all of them. They worked for me."

"You didn't tell me."

"No, I work by myself. I tell nothing,—until I must. Now I must. I am afraid."

Again he was silent, puffing ponderously.

"In the morning my workers go out; in the evening they come back, but half are gone. Where? Who knows? They disappear. I am afraid. I cannot go on like this."

Glick turned, looked sharply at the Dutchman. His icy eyes studied the little eyes in the walls of flesh for a moment.

"So I have told you," continued Herr Vrundt, "because if something is not done I will be ruined. You will do something?"

"All I can."

"That is all that is possible," said Herr Vrundt. "Good night."

He rose, walked off the porch. A moment later the hoofbeats of his horse died away. Glick suddenly picked up his cards, angrily stowed them in his pocket and walked off the porch.

A dark country, he reflected, and they made you work in the dark. Still, if one waited long enough. . . .

He thought suddenly of the black jack he had released the day he had hired Destiné.

He walked along the dark and silent streets, past the ruined walls of houses, the doors of which were still stopped with stones,—reminders of Emile the Magnificent. Now and then he passed a native, who, seeing him, disappeared promptly into the night. Glick had a reputation.

He came to his house, entered the gate, and walked slowly through the gardens he had set out. But as he came up to the house, he stopped, listening. Then,

creeping forward, he paused again beneath the kitchen window. Within, he heard a voice:

"I will be a great man! I will be a wizard or a *caco* or a *papaloi* or president! I am great already. You have observed?"

There was an affirmative murmur from the other servants.

"You will observe further. I will have magic, great magic."

Glick crept away from the window, entered his house by the front door. Immediately, the murmur ceased.

"Destiné!"

The orderly appeared immediately.

"*Oui, mon général.*"

Glick looked at the brooding, intense eyes for a moment and his own grew a little soft. The intense eyes, naive eyes, too, wavered slightly.

"Nothing," said Glick.

He ate his dinner in silence, listening to the drums. After he was finished it began to rain, a sudden burst that spattered softly and he went into his living room and laid out his cards.

If you waited long enough. . . . He was looking at a black jack. . . .

He started as the jangle of a telephone stood out sharply in the silence and he rose and answered it.

"Glick!" he snapped.

"This is Vrundt!" The Dutchman's voice was strained.

"Where are you?"

"In town. . . . The Caravanserai."

"But I heard you ride out."

"You did not hear me ride back."

"What do you want?"

"There's been another."

Glick's teeth snapped. "Where?"

"In the Street of Dessalines, by the warehouse."

"Yours?"

"Mine!" Herr Vrundt's monosyllable was a snarl.

"I'll be right down."

Glick hung up, stood for a moment, musing. He listened, but his house was

silent. The rumbling from the hills seemed louder then, and he turned abruptly to the layout of his cards. He saw the black jack, cursed, swept them up angrily and stowed them in his pocket. Then he strode from the house.

In the Street of Dessalines, by the old stone warehouse in which now were stored supplies for the little marine detachment and the *gendarmerie*, he found Herr Vrundt. Also, he found two inscrutable *gendarmes*. They saluted stiffly. Herr Vrundt, his meerschaum glowing like a monstrous eye, pointed.

Glick saw a form huddled in the street, knelt and examined it. The man had been shot in the chest and had fallen backwards across the narrow sidewalk at the base of the warehouse wall. The bullet had passed through the body and broken the spine. Where it entered the wound was small and clean, but where it had emerged—

Glick had turned the man over and the graven image of his face grimaced.

"He was a cutter," said Herr Vrundt.

Glick looked across the street at one of the ruined houses. Behind the crumbling wall the killer had probably lurked.

"How did you know?" he asked.

"I heard the shot. I was at the Caravanserai."

Glick studied the Dutchman for a long instant, then turned to the *gendarmes*.

"Did you hear?"

"*Oui, papa.*"

"Did you see?"

"No, *papa*. We were walking to the house of Madame, the Siren, when we heard. We saw but the shadows of the street and him who is dead."

The lieutenant stared at the corpse frowningly, then turned suddenly and regarded the blank wall of the warehouse intently. Then he hurried to the curb, knelt and examined the prints in the mud. He found that the man had been standing facing the opposite side of the street and guessed that the killer, be-

hind the ruined house, had called. But if that were so, the bullet, after passing through the body, would strike the wall. And striking the wall—the warehouse wall—it would spend itself.

Therefore, Glick dropped to his knees. He scrambled about on the sidewalk, in the street, before the frightened eyes of the *gendarmes* and the suspicious eyes of Herr Vrundt. Then he stood up, his stony face grim. Between a thumb and a forefinger he held an object.

"Let us go to the *caserne*," he said to Herr Vrundt, and to the *gendarmes*: "You will take him who is dead and you will bury him and you will say nothing! Nothing! I am heard?"

"You are heard, *papa*."

They lifted the corpse, hurried away. Silently, Glick and Herr Vrundt walked down the Street of Dessalines, turned and entered the wide enclosure of the *caserne*. Glick let himself into his office and switched on the light. He seated himself at his desk, then tossed across the object he had picked up in the street. Herr Vrundt looked at it, handed it back.

"Did you see?"

The Dutchman, his fat face quivering, nodded.

"A nickel jacket," continued Glick, "but the nose had been filed away. Hence the wound."

"Do you know the calibre?"

"Naturally. A .30. We use it."

Herr Vrundt started, gazing at Glick fiercely. The lieutenant sighed, shook his head. In his mind he saw the picture of a black jack.

("I will be a great man! I will be a wizard or a *caco* or. . .")

"You have heard, Herr Vrundt, have you not, that greatness among the natives frequently consists in the number of men you have killed?"

"Of course."

"The man who did this—did them all—" Glick stopped.

"You know?"

Glick nodded.

"What will you do?"

"Nothing!" And as the Dutchman's face became angry: "Nothing, that is, for the present. There are implications."

"Such as—"

Glick smiled mirthlessly. "I am uncertain."

Herr Vrundt rose. "You will inform me? I am going home."

Glick nodded. Herr Vrundt, at the door, withdrew the meerschau from his mouth and looked at the lieutenant.

"I trust the implications will not occupy overmuch of your time."

He went out.

GLICK lay the mashed bullet on the desk, looked at it for a long space. He drew out his cards. . . . The door to the office burst open suddenly and framed there was Castelnau. The doctor's flushed face twitched.

"Another!" he cried. "And you play that hellish game! Cards, while men are murdered!" He stopped for breath. "What if *we* are next? What of our properties? What of—"

He broke off, staring at Glick's face. The graven image had broken into its grotesque smile and it chilled the doctor.

"Get out!" said Glick.

"I'll—"

"Get out!"

Castelnau turned and rushed from the place.

Glick picked up the cards and the bullet, switched off the light and walked out. He went home.

The house was dark, dark and silent. He let himself in, sat down, poured a drink. His heavy brows frowned and there was a curious sadness in his steely eyes. He took out his cards, drew out the black jack and threw it on the table.

"Destiné!"

His voice was hollow in the silent house. He waited, conscious of the sly dripping outside and of the rumble from the hills, but no answer came.

"Destiné!"

But again there was no answer.

Glick rose abruptly from his chair. There came to the door a negro and for a moment he was relieved, but then he saw that it was not his orderly. It was his gardener.

"You called, *papa*?"

"I called! Where is Destiné?"

"I will seek him, *papa*."

Again Glick waited, listening to the distant rumble. In a moment the gardener returned, his eyes rolling.

"He is not here, *papa*. He has not slept. He—"

But Glick had brushed past him. The lieutenant ran down the hall to the little room at the rear, where Destiné lived. He burst in, switched on the light. The little room was empty, its neatness undisturbed.

Destiné's rifle, a Springfield .30, his kit and bayonet were gone also.

"Is it that he may be at the house of Madame, the Siren—" began the gardener hopefully, but Glick wheeled and left the room, his steely eyes unpleasant to see.

In the living room, he stared at the black jack, then started as the telephone rang sharply.

"Glick!"

"This is Vrundt."

"Well?"

"I've been raided."

Glick was silent.

"They burned the outbuildings and would have done for the house, but the servants happen to be loyal. Killed two."

Glick said finally: "Who led it?" There was a little tremor in his voice.

"A man," said Herr Vrundt stonily, "named Destiné. You know him, I believe." And when Glick said nothing: "Perhaps there are implications, lieutenant."

Herr Vrundt's tone was edged with angry malice.

"Perhaps there are," said Glick. "I shall be out."

He hung up, stood in thought for a moment, then called Castelnau. But the doctor was not at home.

Then he went to a chest of drawers that stood against the wall, and took from it a new deck of cards, the seal unbroken. . . .

The sun was well up when Glick reached the plantation of Herr Vrundt. He rode a roan horse with a blanket roll back of the saddle and he carried in the holster attached to his Sam Browne belt a Colt .45.

And though he rode through long acres of growing cane and pineapple, Herr Vrundt's fields were deserted. He came to the stretch where the cane had been cut, but no one was there either. And then he reached the house.

There was desolation about. Charred heaps marked the spots where the Dutchman's well kept outbuildings had stood. Here and there lay slaughtered fowls and swine in the blackened grass.

Herr Vrundt came out of the house to meet him. The Dutchman stared blankly, for Glick was unaccompanied.

"Are you mad?"

Glick dismounted. "No."

"But where are the troops?"

"There are no troops. Glick tethered his horse.

Herr Vrundt's face grew stormy. He jerked his meerschaum from his mouth with a hissing exhalation of breath.

"But there are many of them! He has a small army. What can you do alone?"

Glick was walking toward the house, Herr Vrundt waddling rapidly, trying to keep pace.

"Listen!" exclaimed Herr Vrundt.

Glick stopped. They heard, echoing in the hills, the angry rumbling of many drums. They were louder now.

"Don't you see?" asked Herr Vrundt desperately. "It will be Emile the Magnificent all over again."

"Perhaps," said Glick stonily. He en-

tered the house, sat down. "I will have breakfast," he continued.

Herr Vrundt's Teutonic calm shattered with the fragments of the meerschäum he dashed to the floor. He swore in Dutch.

"Idiot!" he yelled. "Breakfast! You ask for breakfast when the bush is full of death! Death for you and for me too! *Gott im himmell!* You are mad! I shall report to Port-au-Prince!"

"Have you a pack of cards?" asked Glick smiling. "I forgot mine."

But Herr Vrundt rushed from the room. Glick followed him, seized him by the shoulder, spun him around. The corpulent Dutchman looked up and was afraid of Glick's face. But the lieutenant smiled.

"Vrundt," he said, "I'm dealing this hand. Do as I say!"

For a moment the Dutchman looked at the man towering above him, then dropped his eyes. He shook his fat head, shrugged his sloping shoulders, went into the kitchen.

Glick got his breakfast and his cards. Herr Vrundt, with a new meerschäum, watched him bewilderedly.

Methodically, Glick played his cards.

"Vrundt," he said, "have you a man you can trust?"

"I have Louis, my cook."

"You will do without the services of Louis, the cook, for lunch and dinner, then, Vrundt."

"Why?"

"Because—" Glick played an ace, "you will send him into the bush. He has deserted you, understand?" Glick did not even look up from his game. "He hates you, you see, and he hates me. And he will find Destiné. He will say that I am here alone and that I shall ride into the bush tonight, alone."

"*Gott!* It is madness. You will be killed! What then?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. Tell him, Vrundt, and in order that his loyalty

may be unquestioned, tell him with gold."

And even though he believed it madness, Herr Vrundt told Louis, the cook.

THEREFORE, at eight o'clock by his wristwatch that night, Glick rode into the bush alone. He followed the trail from the Dutchman's plantation that led towards the mountains and he left behind a quivering and muttering Herr Vrundt. The Dutchman's huge face was gray.

But Glick rode calmly. He broke into a trot as he reached the forest, jogging along easily, humming to himself tunelessly. The humming, however, rose above his horse's hoofbeats and resounded in the trees. For several hours he jogged, then slackened his pace to a walk again.

Curiously, the walk became slower, as the horse picked its way along the little trail. And Glick, seemingly, had fallen asleep. But his icy eyes, his ears, were alert. He did not miss the shadow-like movements in the bush beside the trail; he did not miss the sly disturbance of the creepers and thick foliage.

And when he had reached a spot where the trail widened out into a little clearing in the forest, he stopped and dismounted.

Quickly, he made a fire and by its light unsaddled the roan. He unrolled the blanket casually, although he heard now a movement, definite and undisguised, nearby. And then he heard a voice.

"*Mon général?*"

Glick turned. Destiné stood not far behind him, and behind Destiné there were many natives. Their eyeballs shone in the gloom. In Destiné's hands was the Springfield .30 that Glick had taught him to use and to keep clean. The lieutenant had taught excellently. The rifle glistened in the firelight.

"You will raise your hands, *mon général,*" said Destiné.

The orderly seemed important; his brooding eyes burned as he spoke. At his command, Glick raised his hands obediently and noticed that on all sides, now, the bush was alive with natives. The arms they bore were a pot-pourri of lethal weapons, ludicrous, but quite adequate.

"What are you doing, Destiné?" asked Glick.

Destiné swelled, looked at his followers, beat his chest.

"I am Destiné, the *caco*. I am a great man."

A native, at Destiné's order, snatched Glick's colt from its holster, handed it to the orderly. Destiné, grinning, shoved the weapon into a pocket of the *gendarme's* uniform he wore. Glick seemed to pay no heed. He said:

"You will recall the finish of Emile the Magnificent, Destiné?"

Destiné's brooding eyes glittered as he smiled and Glick marveled. But also his sadness grew. He had been very fond of Destiné. The orderly said, in answer to the question:

"Emile was a fool! Emile did not have great magic. And you—you had greater magic. But now I have magic as great as yours."

"What magic, Destiné?"

The orderly drew from his pocket a pack of cards. As he did there was a murmuring among the natives.

"See!" said Destiné delightedly. "I have the little saints and the signs of the few and many *wangas*, and with them I may weave vast spells. With them I shall be great."

"I see," said Glick. "And what of me?"

"You, I will kill, *mon général*," said Destiné seriously. He said it calmly, without malice, without emotion.

"You do not like me, then, Destiné?"

"But yes, *mon général*, you I like very much and you have been a good *papa blanc*, but now I am as great as you and I must kill you. Do you not see?

I have killed six already, *mon général*, and you will be seven. A magical number, and you are greatest of all. Then I will truly be great."

Glick looked at the child-like face impassively, but inwardly he raged. There was no anger in Destiné; there was no hatred; there was only naïveté.

"The cards, *mon fils*," said Glick. "Where did you get them?"

Destiné frowned. Before Glick's icy eyes his gaze wavered. He looked as he had looked many times when Glick had caught him in some child-like misdemeanor.

"I am great," said Destiné sullenly.

"Of course," said the lieutenant and then, after a long silence: "Where is Castelnau?"

The natives murmured; Destiné looked frightened.

"Where is he?"

Destiné looked fearfully toward the edge of the group and might have said something, had not Castelnau himself burst into the clearing.

"Here!" cried the doctor. "Waiting!" The china-blue eyes were wide and unnatural with hatred; the veins in the fleshy face stood out lividly. "Waiting!" he cried again. "To see your finish! Lucky, eh?" The doctor laughed wildly. "Lucky, hell! Let your luck help you now, Glick. Try it!"

"Perhaps I will," said Glick. He was aware that the natives were watching closely. He smiled. "Very ingenious, doctor," he continued, "and very observing. I should have seen through Destiné's yen for cards, myself." Glick paused. Castelnau glared at him with triumph. "And now, when I am out of the way, I suppose you will worry Vrundt until he is forced to sell to you."

The doctor laughed.

"It was the same with Emile and the other properties, was it not?"

"It was."

"And what was the lure held out to Emile?"

"Gold. He knew more than Destiné."

"I see," said Glick. "I'm sorry I shot Emile. I should have known, but if one waits long enough— Do you think you can get away with this, doctor?"

"Get away with it!" Castelnau's cholera returned. "Why not? You will be gone, Glick. Who else will know?"

"There is Destiné."

"Destiné?" said the doctor softly. They were speaking in English, which was incomprehensible to the assembled natives. "There was Emile, Glick. And the marines will come for Destiné as you came for Emile. He will have murdered you, you see."

Again Glick raged, but his face was still a graven image. His calmness irritated Castelnau.

"Lucky, eh?" cried the doctor. He breathed heavily. "Kill him!" he shouted in Creole. "Kill the godless one!"

The natives sent up an answering shout, but above it sounded Glick's voice.

"Destiné!"

The orderly stiffened; almost, he saluted before he remembered himself.

"This man has given you magic, has he not?"

"Oui, papa."

"You believe his magic is as great as mine?"

Destiné hesitated, but said:

"Oui, papa."

"Look at my gun, Destiné."

The orderly pulled out Glick's confiscated automatic.

"It is not loaded, you see," went on Glick. Destiné saw that it was not loaded and was puzzled. "Do you know why?"

Destiné looked up suddenly, dawning understanding and fear in his eyes.

"You know?" shouted Glick.

"Kill him!" screamed the doctor, but the natives did not move.

"It is because—" Glick drew from his pocket the new deck of cards— "I have

my own magic. I will match it with Castelnau's."

The doctor yelled again, but the natives paid no heed. Destiné was watching Glick with fascination and Destiné was their leader.

"It is untouched magic, Destiné. You see?" He indicated the fresh pack. Destiné nodded. "Therefore we will join in combat, he and I, and we will see who can make the greater magic. It is just, Destiné?"

"It is a snare!" shouted Castelnau. "Kill him!" But Destiné said:

"It is just!"

"A snare, I tell you!"

"It is just," repeated Destiné.

Glick smiled. "Very well, doctor. A hand?"

Castelnau glared at the lieutenant, then looked at the natives. They were watching him curiously. He made a show of bravado.

"Very well, Glick. One *last* hand."

"Quite right, doctor." They sat down on the ground, cross-legged, facing each other. Around them, the natives crowded silently, their eyes rolling fearfully. Glick broke the seal on the box, threw away the cellophane wrapper.

"Cut!" he said.

The doctor turned up a six, Glick an eight. The graven image split into its grotesque smile.

"I deal, doctor."

Castelnau glared at the grotesque smile, but his bravado was waning. In his pop-eyes there had appeared a glimmer of fear.

"It is a snare!" he screamed again and started to rise, but the crush of natives behind him stopped him. They were pressing so closely they almost shut out the firelight.

"It is just," said Destiné solemnly.

"Make way," said Glick. "We cannot see."

Castelnau lapsed into quivering silence. Glick shuffled and dealt. The doctor picked up his cards.

"How many?" asked Glick.

"Two!" said Castelnau.

"Two," repeated Glick. "Observe, Destiné. I give him two and I—" he glanced at the doctor—"Attendé! I take but one."

He threw it face down in the dirt, and looked quizzically at Castelnau.

The doctor started. Rage and fear mingled to discolor his face, for he remembered, no doubt, the poker game of the night before. He stared bemused.

"You cannot do it!" he said huskily. "You cannot! You're not that lucky."

"What have you got, doctor?" asked Glick.

"Three aces!" screamed Castelnau, showing them. "Three aces! Beat them, damn you. Try and beat them!"

Glick smiled, looked up at his wide-eyed orderly.

"Observe, Destiné!"

He threw down a card, the nine of diamonds:

"Neuf!"

Another, the ten of hearts:

"Dix!"

Another, the queen of clubs:

"Reine!"

And the fourth, the king of hearts:

"Roi!"

"You can't do it!" screamed Castelnau. "You can't! You can't!"

"Observe," said Glick. "He maddens. My magic begins. Now! Attendé!—you have observed before, Destiné?" Destiné bobbed his head.

Glick turned over his card.

"Valet!" he said.

It was the jack of spades, the black jack.

From Castelnau there came a frenzied cry.

"An inside straight!" he screamed. "And he filled it!" He leaped to his feet, waving his arms. "Kill him! It is a snare!"

"A vast spell, Destiné, is it not?"

"Very vast," said Destiné gravely, eye-

ing Castelnau. "It has entered his brain."

"Of a certainty," said Glick.

"Lucky at cards!" cried Castelnau. "It is a snare."

Glick jumped to his feet.

"Destiné" he snapped. The orderly stiffened and saluted. "Bind him securely."

But Castelnau had begun to run, yelling wildly. And before Glick could stop him, the rifle was at Destiné's shoulder. And Glick had taught Destiné how to shoot.

The report whined away in the forest. Castelnau waved his arms, pitched forward and lay still. When Glick examined him, he was quite dead.

"Sept!" cried Destiné. "I am great."

But he quailed, then, for Glick was advancing. The orderly retreated, but backed into a tree. Glick reached him, wrenched the rifle from his hands, flung it to the ground and lifted Destiné from his feet.

"Attendé!" he shouted to the natives. "Observe his greatness!"

Glick turned Destiné across his knee and spanked him. . . .

IT WAS on the porch of Madame Champendal's Saloon and Caravanserai several nights later and Glick had just won a pot from Herr Vrundt. Said Herr Vrundt, puffing his meerschaum:

"But what of Destiné?"

Said Glick, playing solitaire: "Well, what of him?"

"Where is he?"

"In San Domingo. He ran away." And as if it were an afterthought: "I allowed him to do that."

"But he is a murderer!"

Glick looked up abruptly, but there was a softness in his steely eyes.

"No, Vrundt," he said. Castelnau was that. Destiné is the child who has been used shamelessly, and he has been punished as a child." The lieutenant sighed. "His gun is gone; his uniform is gone; he

is outcast, shamed, humiliated. His punishment is severe." Again he sighed, and then, as if again in afterthought: "Besides, was Oliver Twist the thief?"

The Dutchman pondered.

"Perhaps you're right," he said finally. They were silent for a moment. "But Glick," he went on, "how do you fill all those inside straights?"

Glick smiled. "Luck, Vrundt, usually. But if Castelnau had acted with sense, it would have made no difference whether I filled or not. The niggers didn't understand. He could have bluffed as well as I, but he never was a good poker player. Besides, he hated my luck.

"But—" the steely eyes twinkled; he swept up the cards before him, began arranging them—"that inside straight out in the woods wasn't just luck, Vrundt. I steamed off the seal and the cellophane at home and after I'd fixed the deck I put the package together again to look new."

Glick laid the arranged deck on the table.

"Will you cut, Vrundt?"

The Dutchman, frowning, cut. He turned up a six, Glick an eight.

"You see," continued Glick, smiling, "because I have fixed the deck, I know what you cut. Now, observe . . . I shuffle. . . ."

Glick did, indeed, seem to shuffle. He held the cards in one hand, turned them over and over with the other.

". . . but I do not really shuffle, for I do not disturb the order of the cards. Now I deal."

He dealt and they drew, the Dutchman two cards, Glick one. And Vrundt held three aces, but Glick had filled a straight, topped by a king.

"You see," continued the marine, "I couldn't lose with that deck, Vrundt. The right cards were certain to fall. It was cold. That was the way of it in the woods.

The Dutchman erupted an enormous cloud of smoke.

Glick rose, pocketed the cards.

"You will be here for a game tomorrow night, Vrundt?"

The Dutchman studied Glick for a long moment, then said:

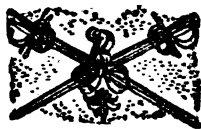
"I will be here."

"Good," said Glick. He smiled. "Perhaps my luck will break."

Herr Vrundt also smiled. "Perhaps. Good night."

He watched the tall figure vanish in the gloom of the street then calling Madame Champendal, procured a pack of cards.

Herr Vrundt, puffing his meerschaum thoughtfully, began to play solitaire.





The steel spike piercing his foot, the messenger unwaveringly read the tidings of a Russian army in flight.

THE CZAREVITCH

By NATALIE B. SOKOLOFF

The destiny of Russia was in the hands of a mad old czar. And the pride of Russia was a brave young prince.

ON HIS arrival at the palace in the Kremlin for an audience with Czar Ivan the Terrible, Gazin, chief of the Don Cossacks, was met by a group of *boyars*—all old dignified men, white haired, with long white beards and attired in the rich dress of their exalted rank. Bowing low in answer to his hurried greeting, they conducted him up the stairway leading into the throne chamber. The Czar, they explained, had not yet made his appearance. Would the chief be pleased to wait in this ante-chamber?

The Cossack nodded absently. There was a frown on his dark, black-bearded

face as, motioning the nobles to precede him, he threw a swift glance around, his black eyes gleaming with impatience.

Suddenly at the end of the corridor a door opened. A man, wearing the scarlet uniform of the Czar's guards, his broad face flushed with excitement, entered stealthily and swiftly; but on seeing the chief he stopped motionless. A significant glance passed between the two men. The soldier turned about and disappeared behind the door. Gazin with a quick look at the nobles, who had evidently missed the soldier's momentary appearance, hurried after the man.

"Well?" he demanded, entering a chamber where the soldier stood waiting for him.

"The Czarevitch will see you at once, Chief," the man said quickly.

"Good. Notice anything suspicious in the palace, Maxim?"

"Something's going on, certainly. The Czar and the chancellor have been closeted alone for hours every day. Every one is tense with apprehension, today especially."

He stopped short at the sound of steps nearing swiftly. Gazin nodded. Maxim hurried out.

A door was flung open. The Czarevitch, wearing the blue uniform and red boots of his regiments, entered quickly. He was very young, with a mop of gold curls, blue eyes and a smiling countenance.

"What is it, Gazin?" he cried.

The Cossack in his long black coat, heavy boots and enormous hat of shaggy fur, towered over the young prince.

"What is it?" the Czarevitch repeated, his face suddenly grave. "Why this secrecy?"

"Because you are in danger, Czarevitch," Gazin said.

The prince laughed.

"I, in danger? Here in Kremlin? Impossible!"

"Yes. Every one realizes it but you, Czarevitch. The army, the people, your generals and I. We've had a consultation. We know there are men of high rank plotting to prevent your leading the troops tomorrow."

"But who?"

"That's what I must find out tonight. For tonight is your enemies' last chance to strike the blow. Tonight is your last night in Kremlin, Czarevitch. Tomorrow we march against the Poles! But where is your bodyguard?" Gazin added quickly.

"Bodyguard?" the Czarevitch repeated, surprised. "You know I've never

had one. I do not need protection," he remarked proudly.

"You need it now. Ten, fifteen men at least."

The prince laughed gaily.

"Come, Gazin," he cried, laying a friendly hand on the Cossack's arm. "I am sure your fears are groundless."

Gazin surveyed him gravely. It was not a handsome dashing prince whom he saw before him, but the strength, the power, the destiny of Russia. The people were ready to bear every whim and pleasure of the mad Czar as long as his son and heir, the Czarevitch, was there with them, the promise of their future well being.

"Tonight is your last night in Kremlin," Gazin repeated. "Tomorrow we march."

"And march we shall," the prince cried gaily. "You and I, we shall meet in the Red Square tomorrow at the head of our armies. This danger you are imagining, you will please me to forget it."

And, giving another pat to the Cossack's arm, he went out quickly.

GAZIN hurried to the nobles who were waiting for him. A scarlet coated guard flung the door of the throne chamber open, and they entered.

It was a hall of great size, gloomy and steeped in semi-darkness except the farthest end where, raised on a dais, loomed the throne of the Russian Czars. The gold and jewels of the chair were ablaze in the brilliant sunlight which poured in through the two tall windows set with iron bars. Here all was color and radiance. The hall was crowded with *boyars* and superior officers, but it was near the throne that the bluest blood and military genius of the nation were assembled.

Brilliant though the assemblage was, one felt an ominous tenseness in the air; and the glances the men threw at one another were dark with apprehen-

sion. The Czarevitch alone seemed unaware of the heavy, foreboding atmosphere of this gloomy apartment.

As Gazin took his place in the front ranks facing the empty throne a door was thrown open. There was the sound of a shuffling step, of an iron pointed staff knocking over the stone slabs, then stillness; the mad Czar, called Ivan the Terrible, had paused on the threshold, his burning eyes sweeping the assemblage with a swift, suspicious glance.

All talk ceased. A ripple passed over the audience. Then one and all bowed to the ground and remained thus, rigid, afraid to raise their heads.

Gazin was the only one to straighten himself and look at the Czar.

Ivan the Terrible was a shriveled old man with a long pale face, bluish lips that twitched persistently, shaggy eyebrows, and thin gray hair falling about his shoulders in disorder. He was breathing with difficulty and there was suffering in his eyes. He was dressed in something dark, soiled, worn almost to rags. He stood leaning on a long staff, and it was the iron tip of this staff that had made the grating noise over the stone floor, heralding the Czar's approach. His other hand grasped the arm of the chancellor, a tall, strongly built man dressed in black from head to foot, with long white hair, white beard and a stern face.

Crossing to the throne, the Czar sat down in the gold chair, leaned on his staff and waved a shaking hand as a sign for the *boyars* to look up. They obeyed hastily, straightened themselves and stood motionless. Gazin saw the Czarevitch making his way toward the throne, smiling timidly at his father, the Czar.

"Ah," said the Czar with seeming restraint, "you have become aware of my presence at last? You saw me come in, yet it is only now that you greet me. Well, well." The Czar sighed as if with resignation.

"But, father," the Czarevitch cried, bewildered.

"There is nothing more to be said," the Czar cut him short. "Your actions speak for you. Ah, it's a sorry tale they tell. Ah' it's—"

The chancellor tactfully put a stop to what promised to become a scene.

"Pardon my interruption, Czar," he said, stepping forward hastily and bowing low "but you were asking about the Cossacks. Gazin, their chief, is come here to be presented to you. His army, which he has brought with him all the way from the Don, is camping outside Moscow."

"Ah," said the Czar, casting a look of approval at the Cossack who bowed smilingly. "Present him to me, Chancellor. Wait," he added, frowning suddenly, "what is it? Who is coming here?"

There was a commotion near the door. A man had entered hurriedly. From under his ragged kaftan gleamed a coat of mail. He held a scroll of parchment in his hand and on reaching the dais he dropped on his knees and held out the parchment to the Czar.

MESSENGER?" Ivan the Terrible cried, gripping the arms of his chair. "News?"

"Yes, your Majesty."

"Speak, man," cried the Czar impatiently, pushing the parchment aside. "Quick! Bad news? Good?"

The man hesitated.

Then his voice rang hollowly through the death-like stillness.

"Bad news, your Majesty," he said slowly.

"Ah!" The Czar's face went purple with rage. "So. And you dare come to me! A brave man. Ah. Get up! Stand here. Here, nearer."

And as the man, rising, stepped forward and stood by the side of the throne, the Czar, with a quick movement, plunged his long staff into the man's foot so that the iron point of it pierced

through the ragged boot just above the toe. Leaning on it, the Czar said calmly—

"Now read your stupid parchment, dog."

The messenger obeyed. Nothing showed the pain he was suffering save the large drops of sweat which rolled down his haggard face. His voice rang out clear and strong, through the hushed stillness while the Czar's staff sank deeper and deeper into his foot, and blood, staining the boot, seeped forth in a tiny stream, dripping over the steps of the dais.

The brilliant throng marveled in silence at the man's courage and it was with difficulty that Gazin conquered the impulse to rush forward and put an end to the appalling spectacle. He saw the Czarevitch, a few paces away, spring forward, only to be pulled back by his guardsmen.

"You'll make it worse," one of the officers restraining the prince said quickly. And the Czarevitch allowing himself to be persuaded, the officer whispered something into his ear.

"Wait!" The Czar's voice was ominously pitched.

The messenger paused in his reading. The Czar was looking at his son.

"What are you talking about there? Plotting something, eh? A conspiracy? In broad daylight, before my very eyes!"

Again it was the chancellor who hastened to turn the Czar's attention into other channels.

"There's the council, Czar, in an hour," he reminded, stepping forward quickly. "We have little time."

"Oh, all right. All right. How you do get on my nerves sometimes, Chancellor! Go on, messenger. Read on. Listen, my nobles." The Czar here waved a threatening hand at the audience. "Listen to his stupid report."

It was to the effect that the Poles had won a victory, that the Russian army was retreating rapidly, and that

the enemy would be marching on Moscow should fresh troops fail to arrive in support.

"Anything more?" the Czar snarled.

"That is all your Majesty," the messenger said quietly.

The Czar withdrew his staff. Blood still flowed from the man's boot. The man swayed; then, senseless, fell in a heap alongside the throne.

"Take him out," ordered the Czar loudly.

The guards dragged the limp form out.

"I will present Gazin, the Cossack chief, now," the chancellor began in his smooth voice. But the Czar waved the formality aside impatiently. He beckoned Gazin to come up.

"So you are the Cossack chief, eh?" he demanded, looking him over intently.

"Yes, Czar." Gazin straightened himself haughtily.

"I would like to see your braves."

"Tomorrow, Czar, I'll have them in the Red Square. The Czarevitch and I, we will lead our armies against the Poles tomorrow."

Across the Czar's face came a look of sudden anger, and his eyes shifted furtively to those of the chancellor by his side. The latter, clearly caught the look, but his countenance remained cold and impassive. Quickly the Czar rose and, leaning on his staff and on the chancellor's arm, shuffled out past the bowing nobles.

The Czarevitch followed him and, the door closing upon them, the assemblage broke into excited talk. Gazin, pretending unconcern, listened intently.

"The Czar is jealous of his son's popularity," an old *boyar* remarked with conviction.

"The Czarevitch is in danger," several whispered. "We must guard his every step."

SUDDEN shouts and the roar of a great crowd outside made every one

rush to the windows. Gazin looked down into the Red Square, flooded with sunlight and packed with people. The crowds were shouting joyfully:

"The Czarevitch! Our little sun! Our beloved prince!"

The royal procession made its way through the mob toward the council palace.

The Czar ascended the steps and turned to face the populace. The crowd, suddenly shrank back as if in terror. But when the Czarevitch ran up the steps, waving his hand gaily, they pressed forward eagerly, shouting his name. The Czar, turning on his heel, abruptly entered the building. The Czarevitch followed him.

Emerging into the square, Gazin hurried toward the outskirts of the city. Throwing a swift glance about him, he entered one of the huts.

"Get me an old cap and a sheepskin coat," he said quickly to one of the two men who sprang to their feet at his entrance. "And you—" he turned to the other—"you'll take this message to the colonel in our camp."

Producing a small wooden tablet and a piece of chalk, he scribbled hastily.

"Take the path through the wood, past the ruins of that old mill," he said, handing the tablet to the man. "Shortest way. Hurry."

The man went out quickly. Gazin, exchanging his uniform for the soiled clothes of a humble peasant, hurried out of the hut and along the street in the direction of the Kremlin. The Red Square, blue with dusk now, was deserted. The Czar's palace was dark, that of the council ablaze with lighted windows."

"The Czarevitch is still in council," the Cossack thought, and he hurried back into the street

There was a tavern on the corner which he knew to be the meeting place of the Czar's guards. He made toward it and, drawing his cap lower over his

eyes, strode into the parlor. It was a large room, brilliantly illuminated and crowded with soldiers of the Czar's guard. The air was hazy with smoke, the company loud and merry. Not a bench or chair was unoccupied except a stool conspicuously empty at a small table by the blazing stove where, a mug at his elbow and a pipe in his mouth, a man was sitting. He was a soldier of gigantic stature and powerful build, his scarlet coat unbuttoned, his head bent as if in thought.

"No," Gazin told the host, who was about to conduct him upstairs. "I'll sit here. At that table by the stove."

"What's the matter?" he added as the innkeeper, throwing up his hands in alarm, stepped back and surveyed him with astonishment.

"Nothing. Nothing," the host assured him hastily. "That is—do you know him? That man?" he motioned toward the giant soldier.

"Ah," the Cossack thought, "evidently a person of importance. Which explains why he sits so apart. I may learn something from him."

"Surely he won't mind a simple peasant like myself," he said aloud.

The host, shrugging his shoulders, led the way to the lonely soldier's table.

"Supper and beer," Gazin said, sitting down.

The host, casting an awed look at the soldier, hurried away.

"Nice weather we're having," Gazin, studying the stranger, remarked conversationally.

The other nodded without raising his head.

"Something of a recluse, evidently," the Cossack thought.

Supper being brought to him, he began to eat leisurely, meanwhile watching his companion out of the corner of his eye. Certainly this was no ordinary soldier. His coat was of a richer cloth than that of the others. And Gazin had not failed

to catch the awed glance the host had cast at the man.

"What about some beer, comrade?" he said gaily, lifting his jug and motioning the other to push his mug nearer.

The stranger coughed, blinked, then his eyes swept over the crowded room. Gazin followed his gaze. Every head was turned in their direction. Every pair of eyes was watching them. Gazin read curiosity in those eyes and something like grim malice. He frowned. What did it all mean?

"Come," he cried, turning his back on the room and lifting his mug, "your health."

The stranger studied him intently. Then taking up his mug:

"Yours," he gulped. "Your health, friend."

They touched their mugs and drank.

"You," the soldier said slowly, setting his mug down, "you're not afraid of me?"

"Well," Gazin admitted. "I don't think I am."

"You—" the other went on—"you know who I am?"

Gazin thought quickly.

"Of course I do," he cried gaily. "Who doesn't?"

"Yet you were not afraid to sit with me, to drink my health?" the other went on wonderingly.

"Oho!" the Cossack thought. "Evidently a very important personage."

"You don't mind, do you?" he asked with marked humility.

"No. On the contrary. I am glad to have a friend. I have very few friends on account—"

He sprang to his feet suddenly and snatched his hat off the table.

"I forgot. Talking here with you, I forgot I must be off. My work you know. Important," he added significantly.

"Aye, aye," the Cossack agreed, affecting understanding.

"Any time you want me," the other

said, "just ask for me in the Kremlin. Goodbye."

He hurried out.

"WHO is he?" Gazin asked, as the door banged shut.

"I thought you said you knew him," said the host.

"Who is he?" the Cossack repeated impatiently.

The innkeeper laughed, and the men nearby started to laugh too. Gazin, forgetting his rôle, made a threatening movement toward them; then, recollecting himself, he flung some coins on the table and hurried out of the tavern and into the Red Square. It was quite dark now. At the palace steps one of the sentinels ran up to him.

"Maxim?" Gazin whispered. "Seen the Czarevitch?" he added quickly.

"Yes, Chief. Went into palace with the Czar and the chancellor about an hour ago."

Suddenly a soldier emerged out of the shadows, hurrying toward them.

"Chief," he whispered, breathless with haste and excitement, "I've got news. It happened this way—"

"Quick, man," Gazin cut him short. "No explanations. What news?"

"Something is hatching here in the palace, Chief. The chancellor is expecting a messenger he sent on a secret mission. The chancellor is to meet him in the secret room."

"Where?"

"Here in the palace. There's a wing here that hasn't been used for the last hundred years—"

"I know where it is," Maxim put in excitedly.

Gazin's face, grave with thought, silenced him. Both were aware of the dramatic significance of the moment. They knew that the events of the night were to decide the fate of their country, that the destiny of Russia hung in the balance.

"You," Gazin said quickly, "return to

your post. "And the soldier hurrying off, Gazin turned to Maxim. "Lead the way now."

He followed him through a door in the palace wall into a dark passage and up the narrow stairs. Soon they were in a labyrinth of antechambers, halls, passages and stairways. But Maxim knew his way about. He walked on swiftly, Gazin at his heels. Death-like stillness was everywhere and not a light in all the hundred rooms they passed through. This was obviously a part of the palace long since uninhabited.

Maxim pushed a door open and they entered.

"The secret room is next this one," he whispered.

"Good. Return to your post," the Cossack said quietly.

"You'll never find your way out without a guide, Chief," the man whispered, anxious for his leader's safety.

"Do as I tell you."

Closing the door on Maxim, Gazin sat down on a bench. His vigil began. The time dragged. Moonlight was streaming into the room, but how far the night had advanced he could not tell. Suddenly he gave a start. Some one was moving in the secret room. There was the sound of excited voices, and then he saw a tiny ray of light from a crack in the wall. Crossing the floor noiselessly, he put his eye to it.

The majestic white head of the chancellor sprang into his line of vision. There was a candle somewhere in the room, and its warm light brought into sharp relief the man's stern features. He was talking to another man whom the Cossack could not see.

"Have the men taken him there?" the chancellor asked.

"Yes," the other answered. "They've just come back. Everything has been done according to your orders."

"You are sure they've secured him in the ruins of that abandoned mill?" the chancellor went on quickly.

"Yes. Just as you directed."

"Good. Did they display any curiosity as to his identity?"

"They understood that he was one of your enemies."

"One of my enemies," the chancellor repeated, and here he chuckled, caressing his white beard. "And the man," he went on, "the man who is to finish the job, is he on the way?"

"I've just seen him. He is to set off at once."

"Alone? You've made it clear he must have no helpers?"

"He understands."

"Good. Ah, very good," the chancellor approved, rubbing his hands like one greatly pleased. "And you've made it clear to him about the body?" he continued. "That he must place the body in the clearing?"

"Yes."

"Good. You may go now."

The Cossack heard the other man go out. The chancellor sat for a while, tugging at his beard and smiling to himself. Then he too left the room, carrying the candle.

GAZIN crept to the door and opened it quickly just in time to catch a glimpse of the black-clad figure moving away rapidly along the intersecting passage. He followed it. Suddenly the light disappeared. The chancellor had turned a corner. Gazin reached it in time to see him disappear behind a door. In a stride he was beside it, pushing it open cautiously. A winding stairway. He could hear the swift footsteps of the chancellor descending, see the light of his candle casting trembling shadows over the walls from below.

He bent over the railing. The chancellor stood fumbling with a lock. Then he disappeared suddenly. Gazin ran down the stairs. The darkness about him waned, and all at once fresh air swept across his face. He was standing in a doorway, and there was the river that

skirted the Kremlin walls some ten paces away, livid in the uncertain light. He ran along the bank, turned into the first street and hurried on toward the tavern where he had had his supper. His demand of a mount brought a sleepy looking stable-lad hurrying out, leading a saddled horse. Throwing some coins to the man, Gazin mounted quickly and set off at a gallop across the city in the direction of the Moscow highway.

The clap of his horse's hoofs resounded sharply through the stillness. The city was wrapped in sleep. Soon low huts began to flash past and then fields and woods. He was on the highway. And suddenly, straight ahead of him blurred by distance and indistinct in the dim light, he discerned the dark figure of a rider going at a rapid trot. He slackened his pace to watch the horseman who, all at once turning off the road, disappeared into the wood. Spurring, Gazin set off in pursuit.

Perhaps it was not the man the chancellor had mentioned. Perhaps it was just some peasant returning to his village. But Gazin took no chances. He galloped like a madman.

The tall trees of the wood were flashing past. And before long he had caught up with the unknown rider. As the other turned in alarm, Gazin shot out his fist, knocking him out of the saddle into the dense growth, whither Gazin instantly followed with a spring as nimble and swift as a panther's. The thud of galloping hoofs as the two riderless mounts swept on echoed and re-echoed in the silence of the night.

But the Cossack was deaf to all sounds. He was upon his unknown enemy, pressing him into the underbrush, choking his cries. The man struggled desperately. Gazin stuffed a rag into the man's mouth and, tearing his sash, bound his feet and hands quickly. Then he searched him for weapons. The sharpened dagger he found left no doubt in the Cossack's mind that the man was,

indeed, the chancellor's emissary. He dragged the motionless form deeper into the wood and, returning to the path, ran on.

The ruins of the abandoned mill, standing in a clearing, sprang into view. The structure had gaping apertures for doors. He rushed in. The first room was empty. In the next he discerned the figure of a man standing motionless in a corner. The man had a sack wrapped over his head and he was bound with ropes to a pole.

Gazin ran up to him and, cutting the bonds with the dagger, tore off the sack with frantic haste. The face disclosed was that of the Czarevitch, distorted by near-suffocation. He was gagged. The Cossack removed the cloth, the prince swayed and grasped his arm for support.

"Who? Who?" he whispered hoarsely.

"The chancellor's work, Czarevitch," Gazin said quietly. "This dagger—" He showed it to him, then went on to tell him all he knew. "But," he added, "who brought you here?"

"I know nothing," the Czarevitch cried, clenching his fists. "Nothing. I only remember falling asleep. I must have been drugged. But how did you guess it was me they were planning to kill?"

"Why, for whom else would the chancellor have been compelled to lay such a complicated plan? You see, he had to use several shifts of men. A party to take you out of the palace, another to bring you here, and then a special man to kill you. The chancellor knew he could not have induced any man, however base, to kill you. But your assassin would never have learned your identity. Your person, Czarevitch, is sacred to even the lowest of your subjects. Come," he added, leading the way into the clearing where the two mounts were wandering about aimlessly, "I won't feel at ease until I have seen you safe in the Czar's keeping."

THEY found the two horses not far off and swung into saddle, setting off at a brisk trot toward the highway. The sun was rising when they emerged into the road. And soon Moscow, luminous in the morning light, rose into view.

They entered and crossed the Red Square and, dismounting, hurried into the palace and up the stairs toward the Czar's bedchamber. A guard flung the door open and they burst into the room. The Czar apparently had just risen. He was at breakfast. He sat at a small table, a group of his *boyars* standing at some distance watching him respectfully. The chancellor stood at his elbow. The Czar was smiling and seemed in the best of humor.

"Father!" the Czarevitch cried, stepping forward. "Father, the chancellor . . ."

Every head had turned at their entrance, and now the *boyars* bowed low to the prince while the Czar sat as if turned to stone, the cup he was raising to his lips suspended in his arrested hand. The chancellor had stepped back and stood motionless. The conversation of both, however, was of such short duration as to pass unobserved by the others. Before the Czarevitch had time to finish his sentence, the Czar was already holding up his hand demanding silence.

The prince obeyed.

"My son," the Czar said quietly, "something has alarmed you? You wish to speak to me?" He turned to the *boyars*. "Leave us," he said.

"But, father," the prince muttered, bewildered.

"Czarevitch," Gazin cried suddenly.

He had caught a look which passed between the chancellor and one of the guards at the door, who then went out hurriedly.

"Czarevitch!" he shouted. "Go. Go. There is danger here!"

He grasped the prince's arm, dragging

him toward the door which was closing on the *boyars*. Two sentinels, rising as if out of the ground, barred his way.

"Father," the Czarevitch repeated.

The Czar appeared not to have heard him. His eyes on his cup, he continued complacently with his breakfast. The chancellor was smiling as if amused. Neither spoke. There was something so ominous in their silence that the Czarevitch paled with apprehension.

"What does it mean?" he asked slowly.

The Czar raised his head and looked at his son.

Hatred, envy, contempt and triumph were all in that maniacal glance which now left no doubt in the Cossack's mind as to the awful meaning of the Czar's silence. Gazin could restrain himself no longer. Seizing the Czarevitch by the arm, he sprang toward the curtained doorway at the end of the chamber. He flung the hangings apart, but both leaped back hastily as a group of soldiers filed into the room, surrounding them.

"Escape, Czarevitch," Gazin cried, "escape!"

He struck left and right with his fists. Something hit him on the head. Everything grew black before his eyes. Senseless, he fell to the ground.

When he regained consciousness he found himself in utter darkness, his limbs numb and sore. He tried to move, to rise, but something prevented him. Chains! He lay very still and, his eyes growing accustomed to the darkness, he saw that he was in one of the dreaded underground dungeons of the Kremlin. In one of those tiny cells where the prisoners are kept permanently in a half-sitting position and are either strangled by the Czar's executioner or left to die of starvation. The underground streams were forever throwing out the bodies of men thus disposed of in the Moscow River, which skirted the Kremlin walls.

A noise made him start. He listened intently. Some one was walking along a passage connecting this labyrinth of

tiny cells—a leisurely heavy step growing louder and heavier. All of a sudden the aperture in the door glowed yellow with light, then became black for a moment as the man outside came abreast of it and stopped, drawing the bolt. The door opened slowly, creaking on its rusted hinges. A man stood on the threshold, a lantern in his hand.

He stooped and, placing the lantern inside the cell, went down on his knees, crawled the few paces separating him from the prisoner; and, stretching out his huge arms, was about to grasp the Cossack's neck with his hands. His face was very near Gazin's and his blinking eyes met the Cossack's steadfast gaze. He dropped his hands abruptly.

The Cossack laughed.

"Well met, stranger," he cried gaily.

The man who had come to strangle him was the lonely soldier whose health he had drunk in the tavern the night before. He was the Czar's executioner.

"**W**ELL," Gazin went on, chuckling, "aren't you going to finish your job?"

The executioner sat down on the straw beside him, grinning.

"No," he said, "you are my friend. Can you believe it," he went on confidentially, "I've never had a friend before. One would think there was something disgraceful about my work."

"Tut tut," the Cossack chuckled, "it's your imagination. What's the matter with your work? It's all right."

"That's what I think," the other remarked with a sigh. "But the people are funny. They are friendly at first and then, when told my profession, why, they won't have anything to do with me. Now, you—you are the first—"

"Yes," the Cossack took him up heartily, "I knew who you were, didn't I? And yet, didn't I sit with you drinking and talking and all? Why, I admired you from the start. I liked you. As soon as I saw your face, I said to

myself, 'Now here's a man. Splendid fellow. One who'd make a lifelong friend!' How are you going to get me out of here?" he added hastily.

"Simplest thing in the world," the executioner assured him. "You see, I was to have strangled you and then thrown your body into a hole in the passage, into the river. Now who will know whether I've done so or not?" he demanded triumphantly.

"Who, indeed?" Gazin repeated.

"No one is allowed to enter these dungeons but the Czar, the chancellor and myself," the other went on. "So when I go up to the Czar after awhile to tell him that I've done what he ordered, he'll think that I have. He trusts me. See? Ha-ha-ha."

"Ha-ha-ha," the Cossack laughed. "That's fine. But look here, these chains, take them off, will you?"

The executioner, choosing a key from the bunch which jingled at his belt, complied eagerly.

"That's better," Gazin said. "Now—wait," he cried anxiously, at the other moved. "Where are you going?"

"I'll be back in a minute. There's another prisoner."

"Another prisoner? Here?"

"Yes. But the fact is, I'm not supposed to know anything about it. You see," he went on, moving nearer, "I wasn't here when you were brought in. And then, when I was called to the Czar and he gave me this order about you, he didn't say anything about the other man. Now, that's what made me curious. For I knew there was another man here, there being another door locked and bolted. I went to look at him, and who do you think he is?"

The Cossack knew, but he judged it wiser to play up to the man.

"Who?" he asked excitedly.

"The Czarevitch. Yes, the Czarevitch himself."

"What do you think they are going

to do with him? Will they order you to strangle him?"

"Order me to strangle him!" the other repeated. "As if they'd dare. I'm the Czar's servant and its none of my business what he does with his son. But I! To strangle my future Czar! Who do you take me for?"

"Of course I knew you'd never have consented, but—what are they going to do with him, do you think?"

"Take him someplace later on. They can't now. Too many people about. And the Czar and the chancellor, they can't leave the *boyars* and the clergy. The troops—"

"Wait," cried Gazin, "how long have I been here?"

"Since morning. Going on toward noon, now."

"Since morning? Then today—"

"The troops are leaving Moscow. The Red Square is packed with soldiers."

"And the Cossacks?"

"They are expected any moment now."

"Then listen, comrade. The Czarevitch is my friend. And I being your friend, it makes the Czarevitch your friend, too. Am I right?"

"Well." The executioner looked doubtful.

"Of course it does," Gazin said firmly. "Now, as soon as you take me out of here, you must watch the Red Square for the Cossacks. When you see them entering you'll hurry to the Czarevitch and tell him that you have come to do his bidding. Will you do it, comrade?"

"For your sake, friend. Yes."

"Good. Now take me out of this hole."

CRAWLING out of the cell into the passage where they could stand up at full height, they hurried on, the executioner lighting and leading the way. Traversing several corridors and crossing a bridge thrown over one of the underground streams, they ascended a stairway leading into the executioner's private chamber. Here, through a window

set with iron bars, the Cossack caught a glimpse of the Red Square flooded with sunlight and packed with troops. The bells of all the Kremlin churches were ringing loudly. The executioner opened a door into a back alley.

Gazin hurried out and along the passage into the street, crowded with holiday-garbed populace moving in the direction of the square. He turned into another alley, empty but for a young Cossack holding two mounts, who hurried toward him, carrying some garments.

Throwing off his sheepskin coat, Gazin hastily put on a long black coat and shaggy hat and swung into the saddle. The orderly mounted, and the two men cantered toward the intersecting street, black now with moving columns of Cossack troops. Gazin rode straight into their midst. The horsemen gave way before him and he galloped on, catching up with the front ranks just as they began to file into the Red Square, and thus entered the Kremlin at the head of his army.

Gazin swept his gleaming eyes over the magnificent scene. Everything shone and sparkled in the brilliant sunshine. The square was roaring with crowds. Troops were drawn up facing the Czar's palace. A broad space remained empty alongside the palace steps. Gazin rode into it and drew rein.

The door of the palace swung open. Preceded by a number of scarlet coated guards, there emerged on to the steps some twenty priests wearing robes of gold and hats covered with jewels. Ranging themselves along the steps, they turned to face the door. The Czar—his attire soiled and in disorder as usual—shuffling, but smiling, came out leaning on the arm of the chancellor.

The bells stopped ringing. It became very quiet in the square. Every one seemed to be waiting for something.

"You may bless the troops," the Czar said to the clergy.

"But the Czarevitch," one of the priests replied.

"Yes," one of the Czarevitch's guardsmen said loudly, "we are waiting for the Czarevitch."

"I'm afraid," the Czar said quietly, "you'll have to start without the Czarevitch. My son is not well."

"Here he comes," some one cried.

A ripple ran through the crowd. Then a great shout rose from it as if bursting out of one enormous breast.

"The Czarevitch!"

He was running up the steps leading from the dungeons under the palace. Bareheaded, his gold hair waving about his handsome face, he waved his hand to the crowd. Gazin galloped up to him.

"Czarevitch," he cried, "now's the time to acquaint the people with your father's plot. You will have the Czar in your power then."

"No," the Czarevitch said, "don't you hear the populace calling my name? My power lies in their love for me. Every one is on my side, and the Czar, I know, will realize it in a moment."

His horse was led up to him. He vaulted into the saddle and, followed by the Cossack, galloped up to the steps and swept a low bow before the Czar.

"Father," he cried loudly so that every one could hear, "your blessing."

The Czar, deathly pale, did not at once comply with his request. His fierce eyes darted here and there all over the square as if seeking support against his son. But every one was cheering the Czarevitch. The Czar wavered, hesitated, then hung his head as if acknowledging his defeat. Raising a shaking hand, he made a hasty sign of the cross in the direction of the Czarevitch's head, bowed low in deference and, turning on his heel abruptly, shuffled back into the palace, followed by the chancellor. The door closed upon them.

The Czarevitch turned to Gazin.

"No one must ever know," he said very low, his face pale. "No one."

And they whirled their mounts about and rode toward the gates to meet the enemy.





There were bursts of smoke on the Linnet's forward deck, a long drawn-out whine and shrill scream.

LANDING PARTY

In an African colony, Imperial German guns waited while a scouting party moved quietly into their range. A white flag hovered peacefully above.

By GORDON CARROLL

WHEN His Britannic Majesty's gunboat *Linnet* dropped anchor off Mobanga, it was a pleasant, sunny day in July of 1914. The *Linnet's* commander, Lieutenant Mainware, stood upon the starboard wing of his bridge and contemplated the narrow entrance to Mobanga harbor, denoted by two points of palm-girted beach, on one of which appeared a lookout tower and flagstaff. The flag was ribbed with the colors of Imperial Germany and the staff was planted in the soil of German East Africa.

Mainware had anchored here so that he could go ashore and pay a call upon Von Honerck, the governor of Mobanga, who represented the majesty of the Kaiser in this far-off land. By declining to

berth his ship inside the harbor, the *Linnet's* commander secured his crew against the unhealthy enticements of Mobanga's waterfront.

As the open boat which was taking him ashore left the ship's ladder, Mainware composed himself in the stern sheets and adjusted his white sun helmet. It was a smooth, open face he displayed; rather lean, and tanned by wind and weather. His eyes were gray and his hair a crisp brown. He was quite obviously English, and quite representative of the royal naval schools he had attended. And he was very proud of the *Linnet*, his first command.

While the oars dipped into the blue of the Indian Ocean, Mainware gazed at the lookout tower ahead, where the

German flag rippled above the palms. Finally his gaze narrowed and he addressed his coxswain, Davis.

"Appears like a second staff has been erected near the lookout. What d'you make of it?"

Davis squinted, seaming his leathery cheeks.

"Hard to say, sir. Mebbe they're rigging a new aerial tower for wireless."

"H-m-m," murmured Mainware.

He hardly agreed. Why should the Germans erect new towers when they already had a wireless station in Mobanga proper? And why place an aerial on the unprotected beach, anyway? He pondered these trivial questions until his boat nosed into the narrow channel and passed the lookout tower abeam. Then Mainware was able to see the harbor ahead, the white buildings and piers of the town of Mobanga.

He saw three large commercial ships anchored in the river, which probably meant prosperous maritime business. One of the freighters was in midstream, the other two lay near the north shore, yet there did not seem to be great activity aboard their decks. Only feathers of sooty vapor drifted from the funnel tops. Mainware decided to compliment Von Honerck upon this increase in port traffic.

A guard of *askaris*, under command of a white officer, was drawn up on the pier to welcome Mainware. The guards were stalwart blacks and they presented arms smartly. Mainware noted this fact. The last time he had visited Mobanga, some months before, the blacks had been slovenly, almost disrespectful.

Mainware left his boat at the landing stage and, accompanied by his guard, marched briskly along the sun-drenched street.

Von Honerck greeted him in a cool, spacious room of the official residence. The governor, well along in years, red-faced and burly, had some physical difficulty with his collar. The collar was

small, his neck was large, and he continually ran one finger around the starched linen to ease its pressure.

After the first formalities, Mainware drew off his gloves, but remained standing. A steward brought glasses, and the customary toasts were drunk. Then the governor, becoming more informal, waved his guest to a seat. He himself selected a capacious chair near the great teakwood table.

"Ach," he grunted. "Well, Lieutenant, it is good again to have your company, no? I welcome few visitors."

"Nor do I." The Englishman smiled. "Both of us have sort of lonely jobs. We're a long way from home."

The governor nodded.

"It is just so with all who tend the African colonies. If it were not for our work, we would become so quick—what do you say?—bored."

"Righto!" agreed Mainware. "But then, I have only been out here six months, and I fancy there is still a good bit of Africa for me to visit." He paused. "I see you've rigged a second flagstaff on the beach."

Von Honerck set his glass down slowly.

"So-so," he replied. "My signalman over there is an old sailor. He decides to make himself shipshape. Two flagstaffs, he tells me, are like two masts. He feels at home. So!"

"I see," said Mainware.

The explanation sounded simple. He lighted a Virginia cigaret and changed the topic of conversation. They chatted easily a while on trivial subjects. Then Mainware arose, and strolled over to a window from which he could view a portion of Mobanga's harbor. He rested one hand on his sword belt.

"Three large vessels in port," he observed pleasantly. "Allow me to congratulate you, Governor. It's jolly to see business booming."

From behind him Von Honerck replied:

"Ach, yes. When the ships come, we do not feel here that our colonizing work is wasted."

"I s'pose they bring you mostly building materials and such, eh?"

"Just so. They unload lumber, bricks and cement. A good business—very good."

MAINWARE continued to stare out the window. The sun now was high and heat waves danced above Mobanga's rooftops until the air shimmered in crystal-like strata. He blew a thin stream of cigaret smoke from his nostrils.

"Yes, indeed," he agreed at length. "Good business! Y'know, Governor, it's a dashed shame there should be jealousy between two great nations such as ours. And all over colonies. There's plenty of room for both of us. Africa is a large place. If we'd really work together, we'd accomplish more. More colonists, more ships, more business."

As he finished speaking, he turned casually from the window to his host. Surprising Von Honerck by his turning, he caught the other unaware.

There was in the German's face a strange, fierce, unnatural light. His eyes had narrowed; he sat forward in the chair, while his two fists, freckled and heavy, lay knotted before him.

Then as Mainware stared Von Honerck snatched a handkerchief from the teakwood table and mopped his forehead.

"*Himmel!*" the governor exclaimed. "The heat—it struck me of a sudden!" He ran one finger around his collar. "My heart, Lieutenant, is not what it was once."

Mainware registered polite interest. A strained silence settled on the room. Then suddenly the Englishman drew his gloves from his sword belt and advanced.

The governor, reading his intention, arose from the big chair.

"I have enjoyed this visit," said Mainware, extending his hand politely. "Not

often that I have a job ashore, y'know. Maybe in a few more months we'll meet again, what?"

The governor's hand, equally polite, took his.

"Just so, Lieutenant," he rumbled. His face radiated false cheerfulness. "In the meantime, we will look to good business in our colonies, no?"

Mainware nodded, donned his topee, saluted and walked from the room, his boots clacking upon the polished floor. Outside the pillared residence the *askaris* were drawn up, and they returned with him to the pier, marching smartly under the eye of their white officer. Again Mainware noted the change in the blacks' deportment.

As his boat cast off and headed out into the muddy river, Mainware addressed his coxswain.

"Let's pass close to that ship, Davis," he directed, indicating the German freighter anchored in midstream.

He had noticed a lighter moored to her side, and wisps of steam at her forward winches. There now seemed to be activity on her decks; a group of lascars was visible beyond the bulwarks. The *Linnet's* small boat canted in close to the larger craft. Mainware studied the name inscribed on the freighter's stern: *Hessen* of Hamburg.

At a raise of his hand, oars were shipped and the small boat began to drift past the freighter's afterdeck, the English sailors staring up idly at the rust-streaked hull. They continued to drift, slowly and curiously, until the ship's big buff funnel passed overhead. Then they approached the lighter moored forward and, as they did so, Mainware heard the harsh rattle of a steam winch and the creak of a boom. Cargo evidently was coming out of the holds.

He glanced upward to see a swinging boom etched against the sky, saw also the heads of half a dozen lascars pop over the rail. One of the lascars turned

swiftly and called to an invisible person on deck. In response, a German boatswain moved to the side and stared down at the *Linnet's* boat with surprised curiosity.

Suddenly he jerked one tattooed hand upward in involuntary movement, in uncertain warning, but the motion had been delayed too long. The *Hessen's* boom already was swinging out over the side, its cargo net filled with slender packing cases. It continued to lower. Mainware tilted his helmet to procure a better view, for he sensed some mystery in the boatswain's half-made gesture. The net descended until it was grasped by men waiting on the lighter below, the steam winch ceased its rattle, the boatswain placed his elbows on the rail with studied indifference as if to offset his previous action.

As the small boat's oars dipped once more, Mainware took opportunity to eye the packing cases now lying on the lighter. He wondered what variety of building material they contained; he was able to make out the shipper's name, stenciled black and bold against the white boards. *Waffenfabrik Mauser Aktiengesellschaft, Obendorf a. N.* Mainware read the legend again, to make certain. Then he jerked down his topee and directed the boat to pull away.

At this moment the German boatswain decided to take some notice of his passing visitors. He touched his capvizer and attempted unconvincing greeting. Mainware saluted; and as the distance between the two craft lengthened, he heard the steam winch resume its cough. The boom soared skyward, ready to continue the unloading.

Mainware, deep in thought, studied his polished boots. He did not glance at the muddy water alongside, flecked with sunlight, nor did he hear the oars creaking in their locks. He was quite oblivious of the white, gleaming buildings on shore, and the graceful, swaying palms that belted the harbor's inner beach.

Only once in the next five minutes did he raise his eyes. That was when his boat passed astern of the other two German freighters, anchored near the north shore, close to a breakwater. Then he stared only long enough to read their names—the *Bayern* of Bremen and the *Tayoba* of Hamburg.

He stored these names in his memory and resumed his meditation.

He was puzzled, although not quite sure he had reason to be. It had all started with that curious expression he surprised on Von Honerck's face, written clearly there, had been anger and distrust, even hatred. It was as if the sight of his visitor had been sufficient to stir a hitherto stifled, brooding emotion in the German.

Mainware was hard put to explain this enigma. On his previous call at Mobanga things had been pleasant, cordial, even hearty. Evidently within the interval something had occurred to change relations. But what? For a moment Mainware felt a twinge of prescience, a gleam of premonition, as if the air about him were charged with static. Then he dismissed the shadow and turned to his second problem.

Why would a German freighter be unloading Mauser rifles in Mobanga harbor? At first glance, the question did not seem important, for rifles were a staple commodity in Africa. But Mainware knew that the military establishment in Mobanga was fully equipped, and he had heard of no reason for additional munitions; that is, munitions bearing the stamp of the German government. If there was unrest upcountry, requiring arms and punitive methods, would not Von Honerck have mentioned it? Of course. . . But would he? Was there not in his new bearing, his animosity, a barrier to free conversation?

Mainware abandoned the questions with a shrug. All things considered, they might not be worth the contemplation he

had given them. He ordered the coxswain to pull direct for the *Linnet* and then leaned back in the stern sheets, enjoying the sunshine.

When making out his next report to the commander on his station, he would devote a few lines to the governor of Mobanga. He might mention the increase in Mobanga's port traffic and touch upon the fact that rifles were being unloaded from a Hamburg freighter. Then he would forget the whole thing.

IT HAPPENED that three days later, as July of 1914 was drawing to a close, Mainware sat in his small cabin below the *Linnet's* charthouse and wrote his report, mentioning those few points he had considered. The dispatch was sent off and the *Linnet* continued its unhurried way down the coast of Africa. But before Mainware received any reply to his report, England and Germany had declared war some five thousand miles away, and a harsh note was struck that was to influence all Africa's colonies and the people therein.

With the advent of war, the *Linnet's* leisurely routine was changed abruptly. A grim but hopeful attitude pervaded her crew's quarters, and there was much polishing of guns and war gear. But Mainware himself did not feel over hopeful. He knew, or rather he had been taught, that the cruisers usually got there first. Gun-boats, like the *Linnet*, were merely very small pawns in a great game. He faithfully performed his rather tame patrol duties, and occasionally thought of Mobanga, which was some distance to the north of his present station.

He recalled Von Honerck's strange behavior, and the three ships in Mobanga's harbor, and the Mauser rifles, and wondered if all this had any special significance in light of recent world events. He decided it did, and one evening, while the fading sun invaded the porthole and glowed wine-red upon his desk, he began

a second report to the S. N. O. He had hardly started when the wireless operator entered.

"Urgent message, sir."

Mainware unfolded the crisp paper. The message simply stated that the *Linnet* was to rendezvous at once off Mobanga with two British cruisers; that Mainware was to consult with the officer commanding. In a few minutes, the *Linnet's* bow had swung over and was heading north, while smoke coiled from her lone funnel in an inky cloud.

Some hours later, as a new day grew upon the Indian Ocean, Mainware stood in the captain's cabin aboard H. M. S. *Halmouth*, anchored off Mobanga. The *Halmouth* was a sizeable cruiser and her gray guns were swung out for action. Her captain, Norton, was a sunburned, hawk-nosed man. He was pleasantly incisive.

"So you think, Mainware," he inquired, "that Von Honerck was preparing for war during July?"

"Perhaps," Mainware replied. "At least you might say he was taking precautions for some eventuality. The shipment of Mauser rifles indicated as much. However, I saw nothing unusual ashore, no new fortifications, no signs of military activity."

"H-m-m." Norton tapped a sheet of paper on the table. "I have here," he said, "a pledge from the governor of Mobanga in return for immunity from hostile operations by the British navy. As you know, soon after the outbreak of war, the wireless station there was dismantled, and the Germans agreed to sink a floating dock at the entrance to Mobanga harbor. But they left three large ships inside—just why, I can't say. Now this pledge guarantees that the sunken dock will not be raised, that the three vessels in harbor shall be regarded as British prizes and that no attempt will be made to take them to sea. However, I'm not absolutely convinced."

He sat back in his chair and gazed at

the deck timbers overhead. He seemed to consider the pledge of a German as valuable, although he was a bit hazy about gaging its true worth. Slowly he transferred his gaze to an open port, through which was visible a glimpse of Mobanga's palm-fringed beach. Then he sat straight in the chair.

"No, I'm not convinced," he repeated. "That's why I wanted to talk to you about Von Honerck. I think I'd better have the governor here for a chat."

He pushed a button, scribbled a message on paper and handed it to the bridge messenger.

"There," he said. "That'll bring action! I've hoisted a signal for them to send a boat from shore. I want to talk to this Von Honerck. Now, Lieutenant, sit down and make yourself comfortable. How about a drop of tea—or something stronger?"

Mainware voiced his preference and then, loosening his sword belt, sat down. As he lighted a cigaret, he inquired—

"Any news of the *Koenigsberg*?"

Norton's brow lowered at mention of the German cruiser, now raiding in the Indian Ocean despite all efforts to capture her.

"No—nothing new. But she's being coaled along this coast somewhere, and I'm not sure but that if Mobanga authorities talked freely, we'd learn some interesting facts. For instance, about those three ships there in harbor and whether the sunken dock really blocks the channel."

They were still discussing the *Koenigsberg* and her phantom colliers when a white-jacketed steward entered the cabin, with whisky and soda.

HALF an hour elapsed before a motorboat came out of Mobanga harbor and brought up alongside the *Halmouth's* ladder. Mainware left the signal bridge, and joined Norton in the latter's cabin, where a group of officers had gathered to meet the visitors. They

were all standing stiffly, faces grave, as the door opened and a small, dapper German entered, clothed in khaki and puttees. He bowed, announcing himself.

"Captain Albert Grossfel, one time of the 7th Mounted Rifles, now acting-governor of Mobanga." He turned and beckoned a gaunt companion who stood in the doorway, bulwarked by two British marines. "This gentleman," the acting-governor explained, "is my colleague, Herr Tilssen, the district commissioner." The introductions completed, he stood with chest extended, hands along the seams of his trousers, eyes sharp and peering.

Norton glanced over to Mainware, who shook his head ever so slightly. Then Norton acknowledged the introductions with a frown. "I requested the presence of Governor von Honerck himself," he reminded Captain Grossfel.

The German bowed.

"I am sorry, *Herr Kapitan*," he said, "but the governor could not comply with your request. He is a very ill man. He is sick in bed with the fever."

"I see," replied Norton. He turned his glance on Commissioner Tilssen, but that official was staring straight ahead, through an open port, in the direction of the African shore. Norton frowned again. "I understand, then, that you speak with authority for the governor?"

"Yes, *Herr Kapitan*," Grossfel replied.

The *Halmouth's* captain nodded. Then he faced the Germans again.

"I merely want to remind you, gentlemen, that all ships in Mobanga harbor, under the terms of our previous agreement, are British prizes. I have come here to inspect these ships, to take such steps as may be necessary to disable them and to withdraw from the harbor any small craft which might be used against British forces. Do you understand?"

The district commissioner now broke his silence for the first time. "Yes, *Herr Kapitan*. But I must tell you that one

ship in harbor, *S. S. Tayoba*, is being used as a hospital ship. We request you do not molest her."

Norton turned to Mainware.

"Was the *Tayoba* in port when you last visited Mobanga?"

"Yes, sir. Anchored near the north shore, by the breakwater."

Norton returned to the Germans.

"Although the name of this vessel has not been communicated to the British government as a hospital ship, I will consider your request. I will send an officer to inspect her and if, in his opinion, disabling the engines would interfere with patients aboard, the work will not be done. Have you anything else to say?"

The commissioner's face grew even more cadaverous. Captain Grossfel shifted on his feet, ill at ease. He seemed to be groping in his mind for some topic which he had overlooked. Finally he spoke. "There is one more thing, *Herr Kapitan*. I would like first to confer with the military authorities in Mobanga."

Several sets of English eyebrows were raised. Mainware stifled a smile. Military authorities in an undefended port? It hardly seemed right! But Norton, face unchanging, waived the point with one hand.

"As you please," he said. "I will give you half an hour after landing before our boats enter the harbor."

The two Germans bowed and turned toward the doorway. The commissioner, lowering his head, ducked through the entrance and stood in the corridor. Grossfel prepared to follow him; he paused for one more question.

"Will your boats, *Herr Kapitan*, carry on operations under a white flag?"

The muscles twitched on either side of the Englishman's hawk nose and a flash of anger crossed his eyes.

"They will not!" he snapped.

At this, Grossfel took his departure, and the sound of retreating steps faded

away in the corridor. All of the British officers but Mainware filed from the cabin. The latter was detained by a motion of Norton's hand—

"Look here, Mainware," the captain remarked, "you know the personnel at Mobanga fairly well. Did these two specimens strike you as honest?"

Mainware fingered his belt.

"They look all right," he replied. "Just a bit put out, I think, because they know they're going to lose their colony. They're playing for every minute of time. Who wouldn't try to delay the unpleasant inevitable?"

"Perhaps you're right," Norton responded. "If it were not for the *Koenigsberg*, and the fact she's getting coal somehow, we wouldn't bother about these ships in Mobanga. But, we can't take any chances."

Mainware nodded. Norton glanced down to his desk top. Then he looked up quickly. "I tell you what, Lieutenant. I'm sending two demolition parties ashore. You take command of one steam pinnace. Your knowledge of the harbor may be of value. Board the *Tayoba* and see if she's being used as a hospital ship. If not, put an explosive charge under her low-pressure cylinder, followed by another inside it. The other party will take care of the *Hessen* and the *Bayern*. I'll send a third boat in to pick up any small craft. Is that clear?"

Mainware nodded, pleased.

"Righto! And if I get a chance to go on shore, shall I pay a call upon the ailing Von Honerck?"

"By all means," said Norton. "You might even take his temperature. I'll wager it's gone up these past few hours. Now—how about another whisky?"

THE half hour's grace was allowed before Mainware boarded his steam pinnace at the *Halmouth's* ladder. His instructions were to proceed to the *Tayoba* and inspect her. If demolition of the engines was necessary, he was to

delay the explosive charges until the other British party had attended to the *Hessen* and the *Bayern*. Then he was to complete his work and return to the cruiser in company with the other two small boats.

He glanced over his crew as he stepped aboard the pinnace. They were a good lot—an artificer engineer, a petty officer and seven ratings. With a leadsmen in the bow, ready to sound the channel for obstructions if necessary, Mainware waved to his coxswain. The boat sheered off from the *Halmouth's* gray side, then swung over and headed for the harbor.

As on the July day some weeks before, Mainware sat in the stern and adjusted his topee. The sea was blue and gently rolling; the sky fleckless. He drew forth a pair of binoculars and viewed the shore. It appeared unchanged, except that where the German flag had previously waved was now only a bare staff; the second staff, was as he had noted before.

While he stared, his eye caught a flutter of white alongside the lookout tower. The signalman there was hoisting a set of halyards, hauling aloft a flag. The flag was white—emblem of truce—The untroubled scene, calm and peaceful, challenged Mainware; he stifled a sigh, for he had hoped, perhaps foolishly, to find action here, a taste of resistance. But instead, the serene panorama reminded him of a May Day party in England. War, the kind of war he desired, was only a cloud upon the invisible horizon.

He turned to gaze astern, where the cutter was following. She was some two hundred yards distant, but coming along, feathering a curl at her bow. Beyond her, at the *Halmouth's* ladder, a third boat was preparing to cast off.

The channel offered no obstruction although, aided by the bright sunshine, Mainware could see the sunken dock lying about ten feet below the surface. However, it was impossible to say if the

channel were actually blocked to vessels of greater draft; this could only be ascertained by extensive soundings, and Mainware decided to postpone the task until later in the day. For the moment, the *Tayoba* was his goal.

The pinnace passed into the harbor and turned to starboard, heading for the breakwater, near which loomed the hospital ship. The cutter followed through the harbor entrance. Her commander proceeded straight up the muddy river, where the *Bayern* and *Hessen* were visible at a new anchorage, perhaps a mile away.

As viewed beyond the *Tayoba's* stern, the town of Mobanga simmered quietly in the sun. Mainware gave the clustered buildings a brief glance. The streets seemed deserted; windows were shuttered; the inhabitants might have been asleep. Mainware directed his coxswain to take the pinnace around to the ship's ladder, and as they came up under her side, he arose in the stern, cupping his hands.

"On deck, there!"

There was no answer, no sign of life. Again Mainware hailed. Again, silence. He turned and spoke to his petty officer.

"Strange, eh? Must be some one aboard."

But a third hail elicited no reply. Then Mainware went up the accommodation ladder and on to the grating. As he ascended to the deck, he frowned. Things weren't as they should be. If this was a hospital ship, with patients aboard, where were her crew, her officers, her deck force? He set foot on deck and, as he did so, he halted abruptly. On the inner harbor beach, some four hundred yards distant, he thought he caught sight of a metallic gleam, sharp and flashing.

He looked again, his eyes fighting the sun's glare. But there was nothing there. Only palms and thick bush and a strip of white beach. He shrugged and

turned away from the rail as the balance of his boarding party reached his side.

Walking forward under the shelter of awnings, Mainware felt a growing sense of mystery. The ship seemed deserted. No voice, no footstep, no moving figure, except those of the Englishmen who tramped her planks. Deck ports and doors were closed, scoops turned in; booms were lashed, hatches battened. But nevertheless two significant facts were apparent. A thin film of coal dust lay everywhere, covering canvas and wood alike. And from the engineroom skylights a smell of hot grease and metal was wafted along deck, revealing that the *Tayoba's* fires had not been drawn.

These facts gave Mainware pause; gave him proof that the ship was not what she purported to be. There was slight doubt she had been recently in operation, her rôle, that of a collier. But had she been tending the *Koenigsberg*? Mainware clamped his jaws. He didn't know; but at least he knew now why the Germans had called the *Tayoba* a hospital ship. They hoped to prevent a British party from boarding her and discovering the truth. He was reaching savagely for the knob of a saloon door when one of his ratings spoke up—

"Beg pardon, sir, but I found this by a ventilator."

Mainware took the object. It was a Mauser clip, containing four bullets with the ends sawed off. For the first time, Mainware inwardly admitted a qualm. He studied the cruel bullets, holding the clip before him. Then he swung about to confront his command and found their eyes hard upon his tanned face.

"I think we're up against something queer," he snapped. "You men scatter over the ship and see what you can find. Look smartly—keep your eyes peeled for explosives!"

As the men scattered, Mainware moved forward and entered a corridor leading to the officers' quarters. He

found each cabin, too, deserted. Nothing was in disarray; clothes and caps were hanging in their proper places, boots were on the carpet, but the owners had vanished. It was as if Mainware had boarded a derelict, abandoned by her crew in a moment of panic.

He slammed the door of one cabin behind him and strode along the corridor. At the wireless operator's room he tried the door, but it gave only a few inches, then struck an obstacle. He shoved stoutly, and the door gave way; he heard its force push some object across the floor. Inside, he found himself staring at an opened packing case, its top ripped off and hurled against the bunk.

There was something quite familiar about this packing case; it was like those he had once seen unloaded from another ship in Mobanga, the *Hessen*. Mainware moved around to the far side, read the stenciled inscription, then glanced inside the box at the telltale racks at each end, the grease stains where Mauser rifles had rested. The stenciled letters seemed to mock him: *Waffenfabrik Mauser Aktiengesellschaft, Obendorf a. N.* One glance was sufficient. A cartridge clip on deck, and here an empty rifle case.

Loosening the holster of his pistol, Mainware stepped from the cabin, mounted a companionway and emerged in the ship's wheel-house. Without pausing, he moved on to the bridge, crouched over and ran to the port wing, where he lifted his binoculars and focused them on Mobanga.

FOR a full minute he saw nothing—only the wide, sun-baked streets leading from the piers, the bleached buildings, the vacant, lifeless windows. He caught his breath. It seemed impossible. A populous town suddenly deserted? Then his glasses roved on, in widening circle, and discerned three figures. Three black troopers, who darted

without warning from a municipal building near the waterfront, dashed across an open space, and were swallowed in the trees lining a nearby street.

They were running toward the sea-shore, toward the curving inner beach, and Mainware swung his glasses to the right in pace with them.

But that sector was not to claim his continued attention, for soon, at the outskirts of the town, he saw other running men, some in khaki, some in white, some in the nondescript garb of merchant sailors. One group burst from the foliage and swept across a clearing, holding between them some heavy, unwieldy object.

Mainware strained his vision. The object, glinting in the sun, was a Maxim gun with tripod. Two *askaris* trailed it, bearing ammunition boxes. Ahead of the gun party, flitting here and there between the palms, moving rapidly toward the point of beach which formed one bank of the harbor entrance, were still other men, khaki-clad and belted. The curving shore was alive with moving figures.

All at once the truth burst upon Mainware, burst in startling suddenness. The Germans had planted a trap. Three British parties had been allowed to enter the harbor, under the flag of truce. Once they had passed through the neck, an ambush had been set upon the beach.

Behind those rows of stately, waving palms were scores of men, armed with rifles and Maxims. Even at this moment they hugged the warm sand, fingered their weapons, placed piles of cartridges within easy reach, awaiting an uplifted arm, the blast of a whistle, to send a burst of fire down the line.

Tense in the knowledge of his discovery, Mainware had a fleeting thought. What was the governor of Mobanga doing while these preparations were completed under his nose? Had he given such orders, or had command been snatched from him by embittered re-

bellious troops? Mainware leaned against the bridge rail and trained his glasses upon the governor's residence.

There leaped into his vision the glaring white front of the building and the imposing doorway. The door was ajar. At the portal a black trooper stood stiffly, rifle beside him. But where was the governor—the governor who was ill in bed—the governor who had signed the pledge of immunity? The big door suddenly swung back, answering his questions. Framed in the entrance was Von Honerck, burly and broad, dressed in khaki and puttees, his topee slanted at an aggressive angle. No trace of illness; no sign of fever; he held himself with all his old authority, his old assertiveness.

As Mainware watched, Von Honerck spoke tersely to the sentry, hitched his pistol belt and stepped from the veranda. In another moment he was walking eastward toward the sea, his figure hidden by a row of houses and the gardens which surrounded them.

Far up the muddy, winding river, the other two British boats had moored, unsuspecting, to the *Hessen's* side. Mainware eyed them, then ran to the starboard wing of the bridge and turned his binoculars on the lookout tower across the channel. He stiffened. Clear in the lenses was etched the second flagstaff on the beach, and as he stared a second white flag was hauled aloft.

Like its mate, it fluttered deceptively in the breeze. But the thing which seized Mainware's eye was a faint, almost indiscernible black line attached to the flag, which ascended with it, to join the two staffs in thin tracery. There were telltale knobs on this line, small knobs at either end which could only be insulators.

What joined the two staffs was a wireless antenna; and in the lookout tower below, surrounded by armed men, a hidden, chattering key would be sending its news abroad in code. Of how three

British parties had entered Mobanga harbor, and how, unknowingly, they were trapped. Somewhere in the confines of the Indian Ocean the *Koenigsberg's* officers must be smiling. What was the value of a pledge? . . .

Mainware cursed; then he returned to the wheelhouse, descending swiftly to deck and blew on the whistle which hung around his neck.

Into the faces of his startled crew he snapped his orders.

"Listen lively, men! The Germans have turned a trick. They've set an ambushcade at the harbor entrance, both sides. Rifles and Maxims. Not a chance for our boats to get clear without heavy loss. Now I want each one of you to get below decks; stay there; keep hidden! Don't show even a head."

As he barked each sentence, Mainware also was using his hands. He pulled off his topee and sent it spinning across the deck. His belt followed. Next he jerked at his tunic, ripped it open, ripped so swiftly that brass buttons fell rattling at his feet. Then he was on his knees, tearing the laces from his boots. They were free now, and he kicked them off. Clad only in trousers, rolled to the knee, he moved toward the ladder at the *Tayoba's* side.

"You're to keep hidden, men! Each one of you. By so doing, and showing no alarm, you'll puzzle the Germans. I'm going to swim the inlet, cross the point and signal from the outer beach. When you hear the ship's guns open, you can use your own judgment. The Germans—"

Mainware's petty officer stepped forward.

"But, sir," he broke in, "I can swim. Let me try for it." He glanced above the rail, judging the distance from ship to shore, a rippled surface of about four hundred yards. "I can make it easily, sir," he implored.

Mainware waved him back.

"Not a bit of it. I'll take the job."

Then, as his men stared at him, he set foot on the ladder, descended rapidly, slipped smoothly into the water and struck out for the *Tayoba's* bow. Above him, above the rail, the petty officer watched his tanned shoulders move through the water. Then the P. O. turned, snapped an order, and the British seamen vanished within the deckhouse. A steel door slammed behind them. Again the deck was deserted.

Mainware swam alongside the *Tayoba* until he passed below her forecastle and reached the bow. There he tread water and reached for the massive anchor chain, twining his fingers through one of the links to hold his body against the current. From this vantage point he studied the surface between himself and the beach, and from out of the mass of flotsam selected two objects. The closest was a floating crate; beyond that, perhaps fifty yards from shore, was a half submerged log. By using these two shields, he hoped to reach the beach unobserved.

He took a series of deep breaths, released his hold on the anchor chain, slipped down in the tepid water and struck out in the direction of the crate.

H E ATTAINED both goals in succession, unseen. Upon leaving the log behind, he headed for a flat-bottomed skiff which was pulled up on the beach, its stern just within reach of the sun-flecked waves. This last lap was the most dangerous portion of his journey, and he approached the skiff slowly until, with a final thrust of his legs, he glided into the boat's shadow and lay there, panting.

Now before him, between the skiff and the palms, lay a narrow strip of sand; and beyond the palms, perhaps one hundred feet, a roadway, being used by the Germans on their way to the harbor entrance.

Once across this trail, he intended to plunge through the vegetation on the

far side and ultimately arrive at the ocean, whence he could sight the warships offshore. The narrow road, ten feet in width, spelled the margin between success and failure. Flexing his arms, Mainware drew a deep breath. It was time to be moving.

He crept forward the length of the skiff and peered around its blunt prow, eyeing the curved beach. Deserted. Then he listened intently. He thought he heard footsteps somewhere; he strained his ears. Yes, men were passing not far away. He heard a gruff voice and the rattle of military accoutrements. But he could not pause to consider. The vital thing was to dive into that wall of foliage before him and there, well screened, await his opportunity to dart across the road.

He swept the beach with a last glance; then, crouched on his knees like a runner, shot forward, across the sun-warmed sand, through a fringe of tide-washed seashells, into a belt of dried grass and on to the palms.

At the road's edge he halted, waiting, expectant, his breath coming rapidly. For the moment there was only silence. He parted the leaves and stared, was poised ready to spring when another warning noise came. The sound of running feet, and of voices. He drew back and, three men swept past—three white men; one a trooper, the other two in merchant sailors' garb. The latter, Mainware realized, were seamen, armed and pressed into service from the freighters lying in the river. Tanned and hard of face, they clutched their rifles grimly. Then they were gone around a curve, their footsteps faded, and Mainware's muscles tensed.

He parted the foliage, burst forth from his shelter. Three swift steps, and he was across the roadway, had ducked into the wall of green, heard the leaves swish in his wake. He'd made it! A savage twitch curved his mouth as he

plunged forward, head down, elbows in to his sides.

But further progress was to prove a nightmare, for he had entered, blindly, a dark, dank tangle of vegetation. Sharp, knife-like grass twined about and cut his bare feet and legs. Rope vines, vicious tendrils, saw-edged leaves lashed his face. There were treacherous soft spots in the ground; the entangling arms of mangrove trees; a horde of insects that stung his flesh.

Perspiration poured from his forehead, until the salty moisture partly obscured his vision and his hair hung in knotted locks. His skin was showing crimson in twenty places and his feet were bleeding when he broke through the fringe of palms. He felt the sun strike his bare shoulders, and heard the soft thunder of breakers on the beach.

As he raised his head, wiping his eyes, his heart gave a great leap. More than a mile offshore, lay the gray silhouettes he sought. Two cruisers and a gunboat. And the gunboat was the *Linnet*.

At the edge of the beach, hidden from the harbor entrance by the curving shoreline, Mainware stripped off his trousers. Next he grasped one leg of the trousers in either hand and yanked sideways. The heavy duck split, and he held a piece of white material in each fist.

He snapped the cloth like a whip, stretching it to its utmost. Then, trailing the two strips over his shoulders, he commenced running up and down the beach, like a demented man or a marooned sailor who first sights rescue. Despite himself, Mainware was forced to smile. He felt like a fool; and no doubt he looked like one. But for a full two minutes, he continued his antics. Then he halted, his feet deep in the warm sand. Facing in the direction of the warships, he began swinging his arms in automaton fashion. There was a certain snap to his motions, a certain studied rhythm. As the strips of white cloth circled and crackled through the air, Main-

ware spelled his message in semaphore code:

"A. B. S. . . A. B. S. . . Open fire at once harbor entrance. . . German ambuscade both sides. . . Avoid harbor British there . . Quick. Mainware. All."

When he had wigwagged the last letter, he let the strips fall and resumed his mad running. Back and forth he sped, the cloth flying behind. He had to attract attention; had to draw binoculars upon his figure. He knew of no better way. He halted again, faced the sea, commenced to repeat the message.

"A. B. S. . . A. B. S. . . Open fire at once harbor entrance. . . German ambuscade—"

With a great sigh, again he dropped his hands to his sides. There was a burst of smoke on the *Linnet's* forward deck, a burst of smoke with a thin stab of flame in the center. Then a long drawn-out whine, a shrill scream in the air, and a sudden explosion amid the palms at the harbor entrance.

Hardly had the gun's reverberation rolled across the sea when a second pencil of fire leaped from the *Linnet*. Her twelve-pounder, R. F., had begun to speak, and a smoke haze spread about the gunboat's bow. Next, with clock-like precision, the forward turret of the *Halmouth* roared on a note of salvo and a great black cloud towered high in the air at the harbor mouth.

The *Halmouth's* sister ship took up the burden, and the sounds of high-explosive swelled to a deep-throated chorus. The palm-fringed beach, the lookout tower across the channel and the wireless antenna there were covered

with a flail of steel, which tore into the earth and sent clouds of debris soaring skyward. Like a pair of giant pincers, the barrage closed down on shore, nipping the best laid plans of Von Honerck, tearing his ambuscade asunder.

Mainware, gunfire thundering in his ears, slashed through the shallows at the water's edge, and waded out until the swells beat upon his chest. There he stood, watching the havoc wrought among the palms, far down the beach. He was still standing there when a boat came from the *Linnet* and lifted him from the water. He tumbled over the gunwale, drank deep from a canteen that was offered him and wrapped a seaman's jacket about his smarting shoulders. He saw the drifting cloud of smoke which hung about the harbor mouth; the brush on the shore, aflame. Then the boat swung about, breasted the long blue swells and pulled for the *Linnet*.

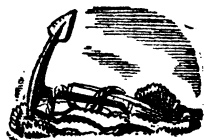
AN HOUR later, spruce and clean in new uniform, Mainware sat in Norton's cabin aboard the *Halmouth*, sipping a long, tall drink. He had been informed that the three British boats had safely escaped the harbor during a lull in the firing, that the ships' gun range had been lifted, until the town of Mobanga came in for an unhealthy shelling. The buildings were burning merrily.

Norton stubbed out his cigarette.

"Good work!" he exclaimed as Mainware concluded the story of his experiences ashore. "A lot of excitement to be having under a flag of truce, what?"

Mainware grinned.

"Quite," said he.





"Hold the lamp lower, Jens. Back up a little, Mr. Yankee Spy."

THE LOYAL LADY

Spy or no spy, a pretty Southern lady diverts our gallant Yankee captain. Is it a ruse?

By GORDON YOUNG

IT WAS well known to the Confederate Secret Service that General J. D. Franklin, a battered invalid soldier who in fifty years of fighting had lost a leg and an eye, was rather like an unofficial military adviser to President Lincoln at the beginning of the Civil War.

Lincoln, though commander-in-chief of the Union forces, knew scarcely more of military affairs than may be learned

from law books; yet he distrusted the explanations and reports of his defeated generals, their friends and detractors, all of whom, in Lincoln's classic phrase, had axes to grind. So, in the long hours of night, Lincoln would lean studiously over the battle maps in General Franklin's library and try to understand why the Union generals seemed timid and ineffective.

One night a tall, brawny young man

in the uniform of a cavalry captain came to General Franklin's house and was admitted by a mulatto girl, who showed him into a room where the general, leaning heavily on his crutches, was sticking black headed pins into a wall map of Virginia with much the air of an old sorcerer trying to bring about the painful death of an enemy.

The crippled general, with shuffle of foot and thump of crutches, hobbled near and fixed an effectionate eye on the young man.

"John, you were born in my barracks just before the Mexican War. I had two good legs then and walked the floor to keep you from squallin'. Your father was as brave a man as ever lived, and your mother was my daughter. So I expect you to do anything I ask.

"Now, boy, Mr. Lincoln believes that some first class liars have got McClellan by the ears. He has the biggest army a man ever commanded in America, yet he sits in camp refusing to budge. He says his spies inform him that the Rebels have him outnumbered, which is a poor reason for not fighting! So I want you to go into the Rebel lines and get information. Mr. Lincoln particularly wants information as to how the rebels make our generals afraid to fight."

Together the old general and the young captain studied the map, deciding on the best place and plan for getting in behind the Confederate lines.

The mulatto girl showed Captain Haynes to the door; then she ran upstairs, hastily wrote a note, opened a window and called softly. A negro's voice answered from near the stable, and there was a gentle stirring of bushes as an unseen form crept close to the house.

"Sam, yo' still love me?"

"Honey, I sho' does!"

"Then cotch this."

Something white fluttered down through the darkness, and the negro called softly—

"It's got it!"

"Don't yo' dare stop fo' bref!" said the mulatto urgently.

A FEW days later Captain Haynes, very much in need of a shave, rode through the Union lines and, having shown his pass at the last outpost, tore it into bits. He went on a mile or so and entered a laurel thicket where he dismounted. From the poncho roll behind his saddle he took the uniform of a Confederate cavalry captain, gray hat, boots and even spurs. He trampled the wrinkled uniform on the ground, lifting up blouse and trousers at arm's length from time to time and eyeing them critically. When he put them on he looked like a soldier who had recently been crawling about in the woods.

He led his horse to a little creek and with a bar of soap spread a thick lather on the horse's neck and flanks. This soon looked like dried sweat.

Late that afternoon he reached the Twin Pike bridge on Doty River and was challenged by a lanky man in butter-nut gray:

"Halt! Who comes thar?"

"Friend, without the countersign."

"A'right, frien'. You jes' stay whar yo' are till I git the co'pral." The sentry called, "Co'pral o' the Guard! Pos' Numbah One!"

The corporal with two soldiers at his heels came at a jogtrot from the picket camp beside the road and, seeing a horseman in the uniform of a Confederate captain, saluted.

Captain Haynes told a convincing story, but the corporal said:

"Orders, sir, er to take ever'body what comes to this here bridge to Major Rawks. He's at the tavern up the road a piece."

The tavern was an old two-story house with an encircling veranda shadowed by tall elms. A saddled horse at a hitching rack in the shade stamped fretfully at flies. Two or three soldiers were playing cards on the ground. They stared lin-

geringly at Captain Haynes, but did not rise.

Major Hawks was sprawled at ease in a rocking chair on the veranda. He smoked a pipe and fingered an old newspaper. He was middle aged, with a long mustache, rather prominent belly, full, red, cheery face and bright dark eyes. An intelligent, amiable sort of man, and very informal.

Captain Haynes saluted and stood attentively while the corporal began to explain. The major interrupted approvingly and sent him back to the bridge, then waved a hand toward a rocker.

"I'm Rawks of the 2nd Virginia. Personally, I think it's because I'm too good a poker player for the colonel. So he stuck me up here on special duty with a sergeant's squad. Sit down, Captain, and tell me about yourself."

Captain Haynes carefully softened his A's and R's as he said:

"Little to tell, Major. I'm Jordan, of Stuart's cavalry. Was taken prisoner about ten days ago when my horse was shot on a raid."

A Captain Jordan of J. E. B. Stuart's command had been taken prisoner about ten days before.

"A few days ago," Captain Haynes continued, "I had a chance to bolt—and did. Hid out in the woods. Made my way South. This morning I stole that horse, and here I am."

Major Rawks nodded cheerily.

"I can tell you've been lying out in the brush." He glanced at the earth-stained uniform. "Have a cigar?"

"Thank you."

"You're a long way from Stuart now."

Captain Haynes knew that, but tried to look disappointed.

"But it's mighty fine to know that you gave the cute Yankees the slip. Clever fellows, the Yanks."

Captain Haynes answered coolly—

"I am not used to hearing men in gray compliment the Yankee, sir."

The major waved his pipe indifferently.

"If you were in Stonewall Jackson's army you would, my boy. No cussin' allowed—not even of Yanks. Sit down, Captain."

Haynes sat down, doing his best to appear at ease. Major Rawks leaned forward in his chair and called toward the card players—

"Orderly, you'd better light out, I reckon."

One of the privates arose, stamped his boots, pulled down the brim of his hat, gazed for a moment at Captain Haynes, then mounted and rode away.

"Take the captain's horse around to the stable," said the major. "Give him water and corn and a good rubdown."

Another soldier quit the card game and led the horse around back of the tavern.

Major Rawks leaned back in the rocker and relighted his pipe.

"Wretched hole, this place, captain. You'll stay the night, of course. Keep me company. I don't like this job. But all the bridges are being watched. We know a Yankee spy is going to try to get through somewhere along the line."

Captain Haynes held the cigar away from him at arm's length and slowly pushed off the ash with a little finger. He put the cigar between his teeth and bit hard, waiting attentively.

"And I don't mind telling you," said the major, leaning nearer, "if that spy gets through it will be a bad day for the officer on duty. I'd rather be on the firing line—between two firing lines, sir—than on the lookout for an eel of a woman."

"A woman?"

"A Southern woman, sir. I'm not a bloodthirsty man, Captain. I think this war is mostly foolishness. On the Northern side at any rate. But a traitor, sir! Man or woman—the firing squad, I'd like to command it! One who is merely a spy, that's different. A spy serves his

country. But a traitor, sir, serves the enemy of his country. And this woman is of a prominent Southern family!"

Darkness came. The whippoorwills began their dreary cry, and fireflies drifted about like wind blown sparks.

The owner of the tavern, a decrepit fellow who probably exaggerated his limp and weakness to keep out of the army, hobbled through the door and invited the officers to supper.

The meal had been cooked and was served by a stout negress, black as jet. She wore a knotted blue handkerchief over her head.

A smoky lamp was on the table. The night was sultry. The officers were the only guests. The war had stopped all travel in the vicinity of the tavern. The supper was beaten biscuit, fried chicken, gravy, green corn and sweet potatoes.

Presently there was a scruffling tramp of feet on the veranda, and the corporal, with fixed bayonet and musket at the trail, came tramping in alone. He did not salute, but said in excitement:

"Major, thar's a mighty purty lady come to the bridge with a pass signed by Jeff Davis hisself!"

"Did you stop her?"

"Shore! An' we brunged her here. She's mad as a wet hen."

"Show her in, Corporal."

Major Rawks and Captain Haynes pushed back their chairs and arose.

THE woman, followed by two soldiers, swept into the dining room with click of heels and satiny rustle of wide skirts. Her gloved fingers lifted the hem of her ruffled skirt as she marched in. She stopped short, dropped the skirt, and with a proud lift of her head looked from the major to Captain Haynes. A dark feather swept back almost to her shoulder from the small, tight hat. Her brown eyes flashed. She was angry, but did not show bad temper. She was undeniably Southern, poised, pretty, haughty.

"May I ask, sir," she said with mock-

ing hauteur, "why the soldiers of the Confederacy no longer obey their commander-in-chief?"

Major Rawks bowed, smiled, pointed invitingly toward a chair and answered amiably—

"Any who refuses, I will shoot him myself!"

Captain Haynes looked very hard at her as he placed a chair, moving it near. He thought her as beautiful a woman as he had ever seen.

"Thank you," said the girl, and with a lingering glance she appeared almost on the point of mistaking him for some one previously met.

She did not sit down, but slowly stripped the long gloves from her arms; then, taking a letter from a small wallet, she said, "There, sir!" and offered it with the satisfied air of putting an objectionable person into his place.

Major Rawks unfolded the paper, glanced at it and, stepping nearer the lamp, read aloud:

"Pass the bearer, Miss Maybelle Marshall, through all lines.

—JEFFERSON DAVIS,
President, C. S. A.

"Hm-m," said the major, scrutinizing the signature. He laid the pass on the table, keeping his hand on it. "Corporal, what are the circumstances that caused you to detain Miss Marshall?"

"Well, sir, I heared a carriage comin' an' I says, 'Pete, stop that carriage.' So we jumped into the road an' said, 'Halt!' There was an ol' feller drivin' a spankin' pair of bays—how the cavalry ain't got 'em is a gosh-wonder! The lady here she give me fits an' showed that thar paper. I says, 'Ma'am, orders is orders—partickularly when you b'long to ol' Stonewall Jackson's army. So you'll have to come along back an' talk to the major.' An' I brunged 'er."

"Good. And, Corporal, search the driver!"

"Do you mean, sir—" Miss Marshall began angrily.

The major interrupting, said:

"I do. Just that! We are on the lookout for a Southern lady—female, I mean—who is known to have obtained a vast amount of military information and—"

"My brother, sir, would shoot you like a dog for that insult!"

"Woman, why were you trying to pass beyond our lines?"

"My aunt is ill at Drumtown. You may send and inquire. I am on my way to stay with her. My family is well known to Mr. Jefferson Davis! My brother is on the staff of General Lee, sir!"

"Ah," said the major, imperturbably, "that may explain much. A brother who has access to the confidential papers of General Lee!"

The girl whipped the long gloves like a lash across the face of Major Rawks. Her eyes blazed.

"You contemptible cur, sir!"

She faced Captain Haynes. "And will you, sir, a captain in the Confederate cavalry, permit this tavern barboy to insult a lady?"

Major Rawks rubbed at his stung cheek but did not display any excitement. He pushed the lamp carefully aside and at the same time, with eyes a-slant, watched the face of Captain Haynes as if wondering how much of an impression the appeal of this pretty ter-magant had made.

Captain Haynes with embarrassment said—

"Please, won't you sit down?" He touched the chair, moving it an inch or two.

"Not in his presence!" Miss Marshall folded her arms, turned her back and stood perfectly motionless.

"Come, Captain, let us finish our supper. Then we'll attend to this harridan," said the major, and sat down.

"Oh, I was quite through," Captain Haynes answered untruthfully.

"I wasn't," the major replied.

He took a piece of chicken. The negro servant had been standing in the shadows, listening. The major spoke to her—

"Dinah, warm up this gravy."

"Yessah. Sho'ly, sah!"

The corporal came in carrying a basket covered with a cloth. Behind him a private followed with a small hair trunk in his arms.

"What have we there?" the major inquired, turning about in his chair and munching at a last bite from an ear of corn.

"Thar's jell, chicken, wine, pickles an' pie in the basket, sir," the corporal said, and his tongue seemed fairly to lick the words. He placed the basket in the major's hands. "An' that thar trunk, it's locked."

The major turned back the napkin that covered the basket and poked about inquiringly.

"For my aunt, who is ill," said Miss Marshall, indignantly explaining.

"Um-m," said the major. He held the bottle of wine near the lamp. "This is confiscated for the hospital service. The captain and I being ill, we shall assign it to our own use."

Miss Marshall stamped a small foot.

"And, Corporal, if you have read French history, you know that one way of smuggling important papers is to bake them in loaves and fowls. Take this out to your boys. Pick the bones clean." To Miss Marshall, "You have a key to the trunk?"

"I have, and shall keep it!"

"Very well. Break that trunk open!" said the major.

Miss Marshall exclaimed in protest, but did not offer the key.

The lock, by the prying jab of a bayonet and thump of a musket butt, was broken and the lid thrown back. The major stooped heavily. His stomach was a little in the way. He pulled off a shawl and exposed dainty, white befrilled garments, edged with lace. Miss Mar-

shall cried out in lady-like embarrassment at the rude exposure of such intimate apparel.

"A loyal woman," said the major rebukingly, "would rejoice that we so thoroughly take care that no spies slip through our hands."

"You will find nothing that concerns you there, sir!"

"If I don't," the major replied as he emptied the trunk and began fingering every garment, "your person will be searched next."

The girl drew herself stiffly erect, gazing blankly at the imperturbable major, said, "Oh!" in a weak gasp and collapsed into the chair.

"But, Major Rawks," Captain Haynes protested, "you can't subject her to such indignity!"

"Can't, eh? Well, well, sir! Corporal, stuff these things back into the trunk. And, Captain, please do me the honor to glance at this!"

He drew a paper from his pocket and held it out. Captain Haynes took it, moved near the lamp and read:

"Major Rawks, Sir: If the female spy, Maybelle Marshall, falls into your hands, secure the papers she is known to possess, however you can. Stop at nothing to obtain them."—A. J. IMBODEN, Asst. Adjutant to Gen. Jackson.

"Now do you understand, Captain?" the major inquired placidly.

"But a woman, sir?"

"Huh. A spy, Captain. Worse, sir—traitoress! She either surrenders those papers or shall be stripped as naked as the day she was born!"

"Barbarous, sir!" said Haynes desperately.

"Undoubtedly," the major agreed with composure. "But war, my friend. She is a traitor. And one who has no honor can not claim the protection of decency and modesty. Corporal, disrobe this woman!"

If the major thought the order would

shock and terrify Miss Marshall into a confession, he was mistaken. She threw up her head defiantly and looked steadily at him.

The corporal, who had been stooping over the trunk, straightened and moved backward with uneasy shuffling, shaking his head.

"Ha, so you refuse duty!" said the major. "Consider yourself under arrest. Private Willets, disrobe this woman. Then tear the chevrons off Corporal Bagley's arms and pin them on your own sleeves!"

Private Willets was unwilling, but obedient. He, a backwoods youth, had learned that officers must be obeyed. He stepped toward the girl. She arose and stood motionless, facing him. He gingerly put out an unwashed hand. The slap of the girl's palm on his face sounded like the smack of a shingle on a plank.

"Then I'll do it myself!" said Major Rawks, springing forward.

"By heaven, no!" Captain Haynes exclaimed, and put himself in front of the girl.

"You, sir, to *me*?" said Major Rawks, calling attention to his superior rank.

"To any man who lives!"

"Ha!" The major eyed him as if noting his youth and making allowances.

"Consider the disgrace of having it known that a major in the Confederate army—in any army—with his own hands did a thing like that! Let us remember that we are gentlemen first, then soldiers."

"You would suffer military disaster rather than appear ungallant, sir?"

"How can there be military disaster in this case, Major Rawks? She is your prisoner. Let her be guarded and taken to headquarters where members of her own sex may search her thoroughly."

"Thank God," said Miss Marshall, "there is one gentleman in the Rebel army!"

"There, you see!" the major exclaimed. "She confesses her disloyalty! Disparages

our officers. *One gentleman* indeed, Miss Spitfire! These men who go on horseback have an exaggerated respect for a pretty face. But I will have you searched at once. And by one of your own sex. Dinah!"

"Yes, sah!" said the buxom negress.

"Come with us. Corporal, conduct this woman upstairs. Bring lamp and candles."

THEY filed up the stairs and along a dusty, uncarpeted hall. Major Rawks flung open a door. The room was musty from disuse. Another door led into an adjoining room; but it was locked and the key was on the other side. Major Rawks tried the communicating door vigorously and seemed satisfied.

"Corporal," he said, apparently forgetting that he had recently ordered the man's chevrons taken away, "put a guard down there at the foot of the stairs so our little bird won't fly away."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, Dinah, you search her from hat to heels. Understand?"

"Oh yes, sah. I'll sho' do dat. Lordy-lord, yes, sah!" Dinah glowered resolutely at the girl.

"And you, young woman, if you resist Dinah, I'll come in here myself and do the searching. The captain and I will be out in the hall. If you have any trouble, Dinah, just call."

The two officers stepped into the hall. Major Rawks took out another cigar, offering it, but filled a pipe for himself.

"Isn't it possible to be mistaken, Major?" Captain Haynes asked uneasily.

"It's always possible to be mistaken, my boy. But there is no mistake about my being ordered to arrest, search and hold Maybelle Marshall. By the way, this room here next to the fair prisoner will do you for tonight. Mine's at the other end of the hall. Having had first choice, I've naturally taken the best."

Dinah came into the hall holding out empty hands.

"Massa, sah, I's done gone fru her clothes wid a fine tooth comb an' dere ain't nuffin. No, sah, not eben a speck o' somepin, sah!"

Major Rawks swore, then mused for a moment.

"It is just possible," he said thoughtfully, "that she tossed her papers away in the darkness. Pitched them out to the side of the road when the corporal was bringing her up here from the bridge. Or they may be concealed about the carriage. Let us go down and look."

By lantern light Major Rawks and Captain Haynes went over the carriage. Haynes searched with zealous thoroughness, hopeful of being able to discover and secretly retain the papers. But nothing was found.

All the soldiers except the one on guard at the foot of the stairs had returned to the picket camp near the bridge.

"I think I'll walk down to the bridge," said the major. "Coming? Or perhaps you'd like to get some sleep after hiding out in the woods while the Yankees hunted you. Good night."

Captain Haynes returned to the house. The decrepit old tavernkeeper sat in a squeaky rocker smoking a corn-cob pipe. He urged the captain to sit and chat, but Captain Haynes declined.

The sentry, with very unmilitary bearing, lounged against the wall at the foot of the stairs.

In the upper hallway Captain Haynes, hearing low voices as he approached Miss Marshall's door, rose stealthily to his tiptoes and went nearer. He could not understand what was said, but it sounded as if the negress and the girl were friendly.

He went quietly into the room Major Rawks had selected for him and tried noiselessly to get to the communicating door, but boards squeaked faintly under his toes. When he did reach the door he could hear the voices much more clearly than when he had eavesdropped in the

hall. Among other things he heard the negress say:

"Honey, don' yo'-all fret yo'self none. Black folks dey know dat de Yankees is a-fittin' fo' us. Ol' major he ain't eber gwine fin' nuffin! I'll poke dem paper in de corn crib, an' if you don' come foh 'em, den I'll burn 'em, sho'!"

Captain Haynes, now excited and determined, tapped softly on the door.

"Oh, Lordy-lord, what am dat?"

"Who is it?" the girl demanded.

"The captain. May I open this door?" He turned the key even as he spoke. "I have something important to say."

"What do you want, sir?"

"I must tell you something important!"

"Since you have shamelessly listened, you know there is no need for the door to be opened in order to make yourself heard!"

"You misjudge me. I am your friend."

Captain Haynes opened the door slightly. Instantly it was closed against him by the forceful weight of the negress.

"Listen," he called in an insistent whisper, "I too am a Union spy!"

"Oh, Lordy-lord!" exclaimed the negress. "Don' yo' b'liev 'im, honey! A gemman he say anything fo' to fool a lady."

"On your honor?" Miss Marshall said.

"On my honor."

"Stand aside, Dinah. I know he is a gentleman."

"Lordy-lord!" said the negress. "We-all is sho' gwine git murdered by dat major-man!"

The girl opened the door, confronting him.

"You are a spy?" she asked; then she drew back, exclaiming uneasily, "No! You have tricked me!"

"I swear not!"

"How did you come here?"

"It is believed," said Haynes, "that our generals overestimate the number of the enemy. I was sent to learn what I could behind the rebel lines."

"I don't know what estimate the generals make," said the girl, "but I have the same information on the Confederate army as that of Jefferson Davis himself! It came from his office."

"Then it must reach our army!"

"It must indeed," said the girl, putting a hand to her breast. She hesitated, then said decisively, "I can trust you. I feel that I can trust you. You must get back to Washington."

"But I can't permit you to remain, Miss Marshall. We must escape together. The Rebels shoot spies whether or not they are women."

"Ah, but I dare not try to escape. That would be confession. As long as nothing is found on me, I shall be safe. I have influential friends. And if you take this, nothing can be proved. Here, I do trust you!"

SHE drew a heavy yellowish-brown envelop from her breast.

Captain Haynes took it, then took her hand and pressed it.

"You are a brave woman!"

"No, not brave, but loyal. How will you get back to the Union lines?"

"I can slip out and swim the river. Evade the guard at the bridge."

She shook her head.

"And you may get lost. You do not know the country. You would have to wander about in the night. You are a brave man, otherwise you would not be here. Go down and saddle your horse. Ride quietly down the road and, when you are challenged at the bridge, put spurs to the horse and dash across. The direct way is always the best way for a brave man!"

"But are you sure that you will be safe?"

"I am sure," she said simply, then smiled and held out her hand. "Perhaps we shall meet again. Goodby. Go now. This has been like an answer to prayer."

Captain Haynes had the unhappy feeling that she was bravely pretending to

be secure. Still her assurance was great, and her beauty and poise persuasive. He hoped indeed that they would meet again, and said so.

"Go!" she insisted, pushing gently.

He went back into his room and closed the door. He put the envelop in the inside pocket of his blouse, buttoned it at the belt and turned to the hall door. There he paused and threw his hat back into the room. If bareheaded, he would appear as if merely walking about for a little fresh air.

The sentry loitered with ungainly slouch against the wall at the foot of the stairs, but his eyes were watchful.

No one was on the veranda. The tavernkeeper had shuffled off to bed and the major had not returned. Looking into the shadows, Captain Haynes unexpectedly saw a horse tied to the rack under the elms.

He wondered how it got there; and in looking about he noticed a lighted window and peered through into the dining room. The orderly whom Major Rawks sent away that afternoon had returned and was alone at a table, eating. His blouse was unbuttoned and he leaned forward on his elbows munching an ear of corn.

Captain Haynes stepped over the veranda rail and dropped to the ground. He went up to the horse. It was not breathing hard. He ran his hand along the horse's neck and under the loosened saddle. There was no sweat, so he was assured that the horse was fairly fresh.

He began carefully tightening the girths, but paused, listening to the faint drumming clatter of many hoofs. Men were riding rapidly through the woods along the pike toward the tavern. He soon knew that they were cavalymen, riding at ease. The clanking of sabers could be heard, and voices that called half teasingly back and forth—soft Southern voices, playfully bantering.

Would they stop here or ride on toward the bridge? He certainly did not

care to let them get ahead of him on the road because they might at any moment turn back. But if he mounted at once and rode ahead they would very likely try to overtake him. He did not want them at his heels in a chase. He knew that Confederate cavalymen owned their own horses; and many of these horses were the best blood of a horse-loving, horse-racing countryside. It seemed best to wait. Most likely they would at least pause, perhaps stay the night at the tavern, and he presently could find a chance to slip away.

He stepped back, concealing himself in the shadows below the veranda as the horsemen turned from the road and cantered into the grove, stirring up a thick dust as if they moved through a cloud.

Mere boys, to judge by their voices and words. Confederate cavalymen were amazingly young and desperate youths who, knowing nothing of warfare, nevertheless taught the astonished world what cavalry could do.

HAYNES was crouching in the deep shadows below the veranda when he was suddenly flooded with light. The orderly who had been at supper came from the dining room bearing a lamp. He lifted it over the edge of the veranda and its glow accidentally fell on Haynes. He straightened quickly, stepping forward. There was no other way to pretend that he had not been trying to conceal himself.

A voice or two called in recognition at the orderly:

"Hello, Jenks!"

"What you doin' here?"

"No chance for us to find a bite if he's been to the table first!"

Others, noticing Haynes, became startlingly silent. They saw that he was a stranger and an officer.

A slim, boyish cavalryman stepped near. He wore the insignia of a lieutenant and saluted Haynes with a brisk air

of wanting to do the thing right.

Haynes returned the salute, and before he could speak the young lieutenant asked—

"Whom have I the honor of addressing, sir?"

"Captain Jordan of the 9th Virginia," said Haynes. "Stuart's command."

Silence came upon every tongue, and no man moved. The only sounds were the muffled stir of the horses' feet and the jingle of bridles as the horses, impatient for food and water, moved their heads inquiringly.

"You, sir," said the boyish lieutenant in a soft voice, "are a damn liar!"

He made no move toward his own revolver, but the other men drew guns.

"Hold the lamp a little lower, Jenks. Back up a little, Mr. Yankee Spy. Let's have a better look at you!"

Haynes stepped back. The orderly lowered the lamp. Men drew near, peering.

"Jordan of the 9th Virginia," said the lieutenant, "happens, sir, to be my cousin!"

Haynes grinned wryly and made a slight gesture very like that of a card player discarding the losing hand. By his look and bearing they knew him for a soldier; and being soldiers, they had no contempt for a spy bold enough to wear an officer's gray uniform and come within their lines. They did have a kind of awe-struck curiosity; he was already a condemned man, soon to be hanged.

"Bad luck," said the lieutenant. "Care to talk?"

"I think talking unnecessary, now."

The boyish lieutenant smiled a little.

"Sorry for you. I am, really. The truth is, sir, I've been North a time or two, wearing blue—so have been close to getting myself in the same fix you are in now. But it's bad judgment for you Yankees to impersonate our cavalry officers. We get about from one place to another so much we are well known all through the army. But I'll guess, sir,

that you are really a cavalryman, and we cavalrymen don't like calling ourselves foot soldiers, do we?"

"Fortune of war," said Haynes.

His first thought, now that escape seemed impossible, was for the bulky envelop in his blouse. If that was found on him, Miss Marshall would also be inevitably treated as a spy, no matter how influential her friends.

"Who is in command here?" asked the lieutenant.

"Major Rawks, sir," said the orderly.

"Rawks? Rawks? Who the devil is Rawks?"

"2nd Virginia, sir."

"Here comes somebody on the run!" said a cavalryman.

The lieutenant and others faced toward the road, listening to the faint flap of feet that came at a jogtrot.

Haynes lifted his hand to his head, stroking his hair. His hand then sank breast-low. The orderly held up the lamp, casting its glow as well as he could in the direction of the road. Haynes, without moving his feet, turned sidewise, drew the envelope and passed it under his left arm, pressing it there. He again stroked his hair with his right hand, and at the same time let the envelope slip down; then with a backward turn of his wrist he caught the envelope in his left hand, holding it behind him.

As a rather stout man came dimly out of the shadows, breathing hard, Haynes let the envelope fall to the ground. He stepped on a corner of it and with the other foot gently scraped and pushed dust over the envelope. In a moment he was sure that it was well covered.

"Ha!" said Major Rawks, puffing hard.

"I was down the road when I heard your horses. Too old and fat for running. I'm Rawks; 2nd Virginia; Major."

"I am Lieutenant Jordan of the Jeff Davis Legion. Special duty. And by chance, cousin of Captain Jordan of the 9th Virginia."

Rawks, puffing hard, seemed to gasp as he said, "Well, well!"

"And I've just uncovered a spy for you, Major. This man is no more Captain Jordan than I'm Robert E. Lee!"

"Ah!" said Rawks. Then, "I'm damned!" He came close to Haynes. "So you are a spy?" Rawks puffed harder. "A clever fellow!" It was like a reluctant compliment. "Lieutenant, let us just step aside here. I'd like a private word with you!"

THEY walked off a little way together and stood in the darkness. In a moment the young lieutenant swore in amazement, half laughing oddly.

"And who the hell would ever have guessed that?"

Haynes thought that the major must be telling of the pretty Miss Marshall, perhaps guessing that the two spies had met by appointment at the tavern.

"So now we'll take him into the house and put a guard over him," said the major, turning and coming again near Haynes. The lieutenant followed slowly. Under the glow of the lamp the young officer eyed Haynes as if rather amused, but said nothing.

Captain Haynes was taken into the tavern, up the stairs and returned as a prisoner to the room he had just left. Two troopers were placed temporarily on guard. They lounged against the posts of the open door, peering in with more curiosity than watchfulness, and talked about their supper which they hoped to get soon.

Haynes wondered that he had been brought back to this room. Either the major did not care whether or not he and the pretty spy were near enough to communicate, or else he hoped to overhear what might be said.

Haynes sat on the edge of the bed, locked his hands about a knee, peered thoughtfully at nothing, but listened intently to the gentle squeaks of the floor in the next room. From her window,

Miss Marshall could have overheard Lieutenant Jordan denounce him as a spy.

Presently Lieutenant Jordan came to the open doorway followed by the sentry who had been on duty at the foot of the stairs.

"You boys go get your supper," he said to his troopers. "This man will stand guard." The lieutenant paused in the open doorway and quite good-naturedly said to Haynes, "The major feels bad over the way you—you and the girl—fooled him. He's coming to have a talk with you about it."

Lieutenant Jordan laughed, and in leaving pulled the door to.

Haynes sat without moving, alone and unwatched. His eyes were fixed on the inner door between his room and the girl's where there was again a faint squeaking. He heard the latch stir softly. The door moved a little, cautiously opening to the width of a wide crack. A woman's slim arm appeared and reached out gropingly, offering something. The "something" was a small derringer.

Haynes moved with quick stealth on tiptoe across the floor.

"Take it," the girl whispered faintly. "It may help you to get away. You *must* get away! But don't shoot. That would arouse the troopers. Just threaten. They haven't found my papers?"

"No. But where did you get this?"

"I had it. Dinah let me keep it. Take it. You must escape!"

"And you?"

"I shall be safe if you escape."

In taking the small, toy-like gun from her he also took her small, slim hand and held it lingeringly. She peered through the partly opened door, smiled, pulled gently to free her hand, but somehow as if not wanting him to let go, yet whispered:

"You must, please. And escape, won't you? For my sake."

She noiselessly closed the door. Haynes then carefully turned the key and put it

into his pocket the better to keep any one from suspecting that he might have communicated with her. On tiptoe he returned to the bed and sat down, keeping the derringer concealed in his closed palm.

For a time the cavalymen could be heard walking about and talking on the veranda, but they soon quieted down and went away. He listened for any further sounds from the next room where the proud, dark girl was also a prisoner, but she was very quiet and not restless.

Silence came upon the tavern. The sentry before Haynes' door stirred now and then with dragging feet and yawned audibly.

Steps sounded in the hall. Haynes thought relief was coming for sentry, but heard Major Rawks ask—

"All quiet?"

"Yes, sir, Major."

Major Rawks opened the door, looked through, came in and pushed the door to. He stood for a moment staring at Haynes, then announced:

"I have saved your neck. The troopers wanted to hang you right off. It's their way with spies."

"Thank you," said Haynes, and his quick glance fell from the major's face to the big revolver at his belt, then on down to the floor.

"Very clever, the way you and that woman hoodwinked me! But who laughs last has the most fun. I knew her for a spy. I never would have accused you."

"I never saw her before, never heard of her before."

"Hmm. In your fix, I'd say that too," Rawks replied. "But nothing you can say is likely to convince me. I want the papers she gave you. I don't suppose they are on you now. But, anyhow, I'll begin by searching your pockets. Stand up. Raise your arms."

Haynes stood up slowly. He raised his arms, suddenly clapping one hand on the major's shoulder and thrusting the derringer close to his temple.

"Not a sound!"

Rawks drew back staringly, not trying to struggle. The derringer was within inches of his forehead. Haynes was a tall, strong, determined man.

"You can't escape!" said Rawks.

Haynes murmured:

"I am going to try. Face about."

The major faced about as if he had no thought of resistance. Haynes took the big Colt revolver from the major's holster and regarded it for a moment indecisively. He wished that he might retain it, but that would mean leaving the major's holster empty; and when they stepped out into the hall together, the empty holster might indicate to the sentry that Major Rawks had been disarmed and was the prisoner.

Haynes removed the caps from their nipples and replaced the revolver. Then he searched the major, taking some letters and papers that might be purely personal or might contain military information. He also took spare caps, a pocket knife, and removed a small lacquered case containing a wax candle and matches.

"Now," said Haynes softly, "you are going to escort me past the sentry and downstairs. True enough, one word from you and the sentry may stop me; but not before I shoot you!"

"I know that," Rawks replied readily.

"Where are Lieutenant Jordan and his men?"

"Jordan wouldn't sleep in the tavern, but rolled in his blankets with his men. They've bivouacked out behind the tavern."

"Tell the sentry you are taking me to Jordan. Tell him to wait here. You will do that?"

"Of course," said the major.

THE lounging sentry was resting his shoulders against the wall across the hall directly in front of the door of the room. He straightened a little, peering forward in the dim light.

"It's all right, Carr," said the major. "I'm taking him for a little talk with Lieutenant Jordan. Wait here until you are relieved."

"You bet, Major."

The major and Haynes went together down the dimly lighted stairs. Every impulse that Haynes had was to go stealthily, like a man escaping; but he resisted the impulses and walked with a natural step. The major seemed entirely submissive, almost too submissive for Haynes' peace of mind.

A half grown moon had come up and shimmered through the trees, casting silver splotches on the ground. Haynes found the spot where he had been standing when Lieutenant Jordan charged him with being a spy. The moonlight fell there. He could see that the yellowish-brown envelop was but partly covered with dust. Evidently he had not concealed it as well as he thought; and somehow he had a diminished respect toward the major for not having discovered it.

Haynes kicked it with his toe.

"Pick it up for me," he said, not caring to bend and leave the calm major in a position to strike or grapple.

"Ha, yes, certainly." The major was imperturbable. He stooped slowly, a little awkwardly, for his rounded belly was in the way. He flapped the envelop against his leg, knocking off the dust, and gave it to Haynes.

"Thank you," said Haynes. He slipped it into an inside blouse pocket.

"It would perhaps be treason for me to say that you are welcome," Major Rawks replied almost amiably.

"Where are the horses?"

"In the stable."

"Lead the way."

"Certainly."

They stood at the open stable door and peered into utter darkness within. The horses stirred, rattling halters, shifting from foot to foot, stamping lightly.

Haynes returned to the major the lac-

quer box containing candle and matches, saying:

"We will step inside and close the door, then you light the candle. This that you feel pressing against your back is a gun. Please remember that."

"The circumstances being what they are," said the major, "I shall not refuse any reasonable request."

He lighted the candle, dabbed melted wax on the bottom of an overturned bucket and set the candle upright.

"Now," said Haynes, "I'll have to tie your hands because I must turn my back to saddle these horses."

"May I give my word not to escape?" the major asked simply.

Haynes hesitated, then said with a slow shake of the head:

"On the field, yes, I'd take your parole. But I am a spy. You wouldn't accept the parole of a spy. So, as a spy, I can't accept yours."

Major Rawks shrugged his shoulders. He even smiled queerly as he put his hands submissively behind him, crossing his wrists. Haynes bound them with the end of a halter, then made the halter fast to a manger.

"I am tied up like a jackass," said the major imperturbably.

Haynes, with a horseman's quick eye, selected a black mare and deftly saddled her.

"She belongs to Lieutenant Jordan," said the major. "He'll give me hell."

"Perhaps not," said Haynes, and at once he laid a saddle on another horse.

"The lieutenant will be grateful that at my suggestion you left his mare."

Haynes replied over his shoulder:

"I shall ride the mare. This one is for you."

"For me!"

"There is the picket at the bridge. You will escort me—pass me across the bridge."

The major swore, now not imperturbably. Then, quickly—

"The countersign is 'Manassas'."

"Thanks—if it really is 'Manassas.'"

"On my word of honor, sir!"

"Yes. And on my word of honor, Major, you are going to pass me through the guard at the bridge!"

THE major, now in a mood to be sulky, was helped into the saddle. Haynes then tied a rope from one of the major's ankles to the other under the horse's belly. Then he loosened the major's hands, but retied them to the saddle-horn.

"You do your work thoroughly," said the major disapprovingly.

"I try to."

"Very tricky, you Yankees. We simple Southerners are easily taken in. You will release me at the bridge?"

"On the word of a gentleman," said Haynes earnestly, "I have told you that I never saw or heard of Miss Marshall before tonight. But you have refused to believe me. If I release you, you will have her shot as a spy."

"On my honor, I am now willing to say that I believe you." The major spoke with emphasis.

"You mean that you will let her go?"

"Yes, if that must be the price of my release."

"Major, I am sorry to say that I am sure you are lying."

"You can't take me as a prisoner past my own men!"

"It has been done once already tonight."

"But this is different! You will see. And if you did, Jordan and his troopers would be on your heels in no time. I have given you the countersign. Use that and ride on, or—"

"Major," said Haynes reprovingly, "I fear you are not upholding the Southern tradition for truthfulness and gallantry. You are rather excited, make rash threats and promises."

Haynes blew out the candle, then led the horses outside the stable. He kept hold of the halter on the major's horse

and, mounting, set off at a walk, noiseless in the thick dust. Trotting hoofs might have aroused the troopers.

When they were some distance along the road Haynes quickened the gait; but later slowed the horses down again to a leisurely walk so that the sentry on guard would not be suspicious.

Haynes rode leg to leg with the major and, holding the halter of his horse, kept him to the outside of the road.

A camp-fire was burning before a tent near the bridge. A nasal voice sang a sad backwoods ballad; and the shapes of lounging men lay in the shadows.

"Halt!" called a voice from the near end of the bridge, and a man stepped into the moonlight. "Who comes thar?"

"Friends, with the countersign," said Haynes, halting. He looked toward the camp-fire. The lumpish forms were sitting upright and the singer had stopped.

"Vance one," said the sentry, "an' give countersign!"

"Speak up," said Haynes in a low voice. "Tell him it is all right!"

"Not this side of hell!" the major answered calmly and firmly.

Haynes pressed the derringer against the major's side.

"Speak up!"

"All right, if I must I will!" Lifting his voice, the major called, "Watson, I'm a prisoner! And this damn Yankee—"

"Damn you!" Haynes exclaimed.

Instantly he dropped the knotted reins on the horse's neck, took the derringer into his left hand and, reaching far back, cut at the major's horse with the halter end, at the same time driving spurs into the flanks of the black mare.

The frightened horses plunged forward. Confused shouts, crying, "Halt!" to them, and, "Shoot!" to the sentry, went up from the camp-fire. Haynes with backward strokes lashed at the major's horse. The major sat upright in his saddle and swore angrily.

"Shoot this horse—stop him! I'm a prisoner!"

The sentry, dully confused, stood hesitating until the galloping horses were almost upon him, then flung himself aside to keep from being knocked down.

Haynes, bending low snapped the deringer at the sentry, who in an awkward crouch was bringing his musket to the shoulder. The cap exploded on the deringer, but there was no discharge.

With dashing clatter of hoofs on the bridge the horses passed in a swirl of dust. A single musket was fired. Major Rawks bellowed—

"Jordan's troopers—send them!"

Horses and riders dashed across the river and vanished into dense, wooded shadows. The first of the Union picket camps lay to the north, ten miles ahead.

THREE days later Captain Haynes knocked at the door of General Franklin's house. An old crippled soldier, whom the captain had never seen before, instead of the familiar mulatto girl, opened the door and ushered him into the library where General Franklin stood poking pins into the wall map of Virginia.

"Ha!" said the general with a queer inflection as he turned about. "Back already, eh?"

"By the greatest good luck ever a man had! Here's the fullest details on the Rebel army. It's well we know the truth, too, general! They've nearly twice as many men as we thought."

"Hmm—hmm!" said the general, scowling. "Let's see," he growled, and reached for the crumpled envelop. "How'd you get this?"

Captain Haynes began his story. When Haynes got to the part where the beautiful Miss Marshall had furtively opened her door and gropingly held out the deringer, the general snorted disdainfully and growled:

"That's enough. Enough!"

He hobbled across the room and struck a match. He touched the edges of the papers and held them until fire flamed

up, then tossed the priceless record into the fireplace.

"In the name of heaven," cried Captain Haynes, "why do you do that!"

"Pah!" said the old general. "McClellan's scared bad enough as it is. If he saw that report, he'd start retreating for the Canadian Border even though I told him it was a Rebel trick."

"Trick?" It can't be a trick, I tell you. Why, General, that report came from Jeff Davis's own headquarters."

"Huh, that part's true enough. That yellow girl of mine caught the stable-boy kissing a black wench; and to spite Sam she told me how the Confederate Secret Service had bribed her and him. She eavesdropped on my conversations, especially with President Lincoln, and sent off messages to the Rebel agents here in Washington. That's how your Major Rawks and the all too lovely Miss Marshall knew you were coming. From Jeff Davis's headquarters all right—and they wanted you to escape with it."

"And I'll bet both Rawks and that girl are stage actors from Richmond."

Haynes swore rather blankly, feeling very confused and somehow less disappointed that his precious reports were valueless than that the beautiful, dark Miss Marshall was not to be trusted. He laughed a little, not happily, then:

"I wish I'd captured her and brought her along instead of—you didn't let me finish, General! I took Rawks prisoner and brought him out through his own lines because I didn't want him to have her shot as a spy. So that's why the deringer wasn't loaded. Nor Rawks's revolver either! And why they put me back in that room next to hers. Well, I'll be damned!"

The general grunted.

"Well, my boy, you'll have to go back behind the Rebel lines and try again. And when any Southern girl tells you she is loyal to her country—don't be a fool! Believe her. She means the South!"

RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS



MASTER

Doctor Wickham, inquiring volcanist, decided early in his trip to Martinique that Captain Bill Thomas was a careless incompetent and no disciplinarian. That was before Mount Pelee belched lava.

A SHORT, plump, unhappy little man in a long fur coat plunged down the ladder from the fore-castle head. After him, yelling, rushed the gigantic gray-haired boatswain.

The fur-coated man darted through the glare of the cargo clusters illuminating the open hatch. He narrowly missed being smashed into eternity by a packing case that came swinging up over the side; he stumbled against an alarmed seaman who clutched at him. Recovering himself, he plunged up the ladder toward the saloon deck.

The boatswain bounded in pursuit,

his gray hair streaming, his arms flung ahead of him.

Cargo winches were clattering, stevedores singing out. Seamen were bawling incoherent and unobeyed orders as they singled up the mooring lines of the stumpy little freighter. Nobody seemed to take seriously the plight of the fur-coated landsman, although somebody tried half-heartedly to lasso him with a bight of manila line.

The big boatswain caught up with the little man at the head of the ladder. He lifted him clear into the air and set him down on his feet again with a thud.

Then he planted a leathery palm on each shoulder and shook him vehemently.

"Hellfire!" the boatswain roared. "Hellfire! That's what's before ye, man; and what are ye doing about it? Swelling around in yer fur coat with the pit yawning' in front of ye, and never a thought—"

With a frantic twist the captive escaped and scurried up the bridge ladder. There was no one on the bridge except a lean young man in a gray cap and an old brown overcoat. With his elbows hooked over the after corner of the port wing, this man, the skipper, was casually pulling upon a brier pipe.

Toward him the fugitive rushed.

His pursuer did not hesitate to violate even the high sanctity of the bridge. But the sight of the shipmaster turned the boatswain's mind from his quarry.

"You!" he roared, shaking a scarred, granite fist. "You! Skipper ye may be, but ye'll find that all men burn alike in the eternal fires o' damnation!"

"The fat ones burn faster, bouse," the lanky captain of the *Ellen Hurd* suggested mildly. He shifted his pipe to the corner of his mouth to speak more easily. "Have you considered the carpenter? There's a chunk of suet who needs a word in his ear—"

The boatswain uttered a groan of anguish at the thought of the carpenter's terrible plight. He wheeled and darted toward the ladder.

Captain William Thomas chuckled and tamped down his tobacco with a fireproof finger.

"Let him get a snootful, and he runs wild," he said. "Hellfire complex developments. A bit in your line, eh, Mister Volcanist?"

Dr. Stephen Wickham, the man in the fur coat, was still puffing. This remark did not aid him in recovering his wind. Before he could speak, the mate, vizored cap set squarely on his grizzled head, stepped briskly out of the wheelhouse.

"The bosun's about ripe, Henry," Cap-

tain Bill Thomas said. "I recommend a handspike—but be sure it's to the back of his head you apply it. He might object. And that Liverpool Irishman just knocked a stevedore cold. Maybe something ought to be done about him, too."

"Yes, sir," said the spruce mate gravely and departed.

By that time Dr. Wickham was ready to speak.

"Captain, as you know, although I am signed on the *Ellen Hurd* as supercargo, I am a friend of Mr. Hurd, and he instructed you to treat me as you would treat him. Therefore I have no hesitancy in saying that I have never before been on a ship where such gross laxity, such utter lack of order—"

"That's the way I feel about it," Captain Thomas agreed. "No discipline at all—this bunch. And these lively ones aren't half as drunk as the ones that are out below."

Dr. Wickham sniffed as the captain continued:

"We'll be heading south for Pelée in ten minutes, Doc. I hope the mountain doesn't blow itself off the map before you sight Martinique."

"I am not so much afraid of that as I am that this ship will not reach the island at all," the volcanist retorted.

"Somebody's been telling you about the sou'easter that's kicking up outside," the skipper deduced genially. "It's Force 6 and rising."

Dr. Wickham left the bridge without a word. Wandering disconsolately aft in that restless state which sailing time induces, he came upon the third mate, an enormous blond Scandinavian youth, dozing comfortably with his back to the steering-engine house. On his way forward again he encountered the mate.

The spruce Mr. Browne carried a spike under his arm. The clatter of the winches had ceased. So, too, had the exhortations of the boatswain.

"I didn't hurt him much," the mate explained as Wickham stared at his

heavy weapon. "That bosun has a head like a ball bearing. If I can help you make yourself comfortable, Doctor, just say the word."

"I doubt if any one could make me comfortable on a ship like this," the small volcano expert snapped. "Of all the utter incompetents I ever saw, that fellow up on the bridge—"

"An excellent seaman, sir," Mr. Browne murmured half-heartedly.

"And the recourse to a bludgeon in violation of the law—because he is too weak to enforce discipline by less savage means—is the least favorable aspect of the situation."

The tall mate shuffled his feet unhappily and was silent.

"I do not blame you," Wickham hastened to add. "You must obey his orders. But I wonder if Mr. Hurd is aware of what goes on on his ship?"

"Mr. Hurd's a mighty busy man, sir, and this hooker is the oldest of his fleet," Mr. Browne said vaguely. "I must go, sir; we'll be away any minute now."

WITH her decks a clutter of cargo gear and her hatches yawning, the *Ellen Hurd's* hawsers splashed into the dirty water of the river. She came away sluggishly, clearing the water from her whistle in a long but almost soundless blow.

In the wheelhouse Dr. Wickham listened with a frown to the flippant words Captain Bill Thomas addressed to the chief engineer through the speaking tube.

"If you've got any lumps of coal mixed with the dust in your bunkers make a fire with it, Peter," he said. "There'll be a breeze on our nose outside, and we could use some steam. Yes, that's the theory."

Snorting indignantly, the volcanist descended to the well deck for a last glance through the open hatch. His precious cases of instruments and supplies were stowed in the 'tween decks, on top of a

general cargo for the Lesser Antilles, that volcanic chain of islands that stretch from Puerto Rico to the South American coast.

Mount Pelée, on Martinique, was hurling tokens of wrath down its scarred flanks, though not so violently as in 1902 when it blotted out thirty thousand people in a single blast of fire. The eruptive symptoms supplied an excellent opportunity for an inquiring volcanist.

By a pierhead jump to the *Ellen Hurd* Dr. Wickham had promised himself to be first on the scene with recording microphones and motion picture and still cameras with automatic gear to operate them where no man could long stay alive. He had, as Captain Bill Thomas pointed out, enough stuff to build another volcano if Pelée carried away altogether.

Dr. Wickham noted that the *Ellen Hurd* was butting down-channel in a sorry condition. The mate, who should have been standing by the anchors on the forecastle head, was striving, with the aid of a fat, stupefied carpenter and a few disgruntled seamen, to get the hatch covers on and the tarpaulins battened down over them. The cargo booms were not yet secured, and the wires and ropes of their gear festooned the ship.

"I believe you said the captain was a seaman," Dr. Wickham said frostily to the busy mate, with a sweeping gesture toward the unholy tangle.

Mr. Browne coughed.

"We were late getting away," he replied. "And the bosun's out of commission—that makes it tougher—"

"If Captain Thomas can't control a man he should fire him," the volcanist retorted. "I suppose my valuable equipment—and the rest of the cargo, for that matter—will be shifting and smashing to ruin the moment we get out from under the land."

"The cargo's properly stowed, sir," the mate stated crisply. "That's my job."

Dr. Wickham peered at the precise, quick-moving officer.

"I believe you," he said with plain relief. "It occurs to me that I have a duty to perform, to acquaint my friend Hurd with what goes on in his ship."

"Please don't ask me to help you with it," Mr. Browne replied. "I'm mate here and I do my job. If the skipper doesn't—What I mean is, my job's to obey orders and get the work done."

"You have no wish to be a talebearer," Wickham agreed. "Neither have I, save that Hurd asked me to let him know what I thought of the ship and its company. Though I am a landsman, Mr. Browne, I know something of the sea. I have observed eruptions from Sakurashima to Vesuvius; from Stromboli to Kilauea; from—"

"Just a minute till I shake up that carpenter, sir."

Dr. Wickham nodded as the mate shot away from his side.

"A good man—and a loyal one," he murmured. "No flippant fool like the captain."

WHILE the *Ellen Hurd* slogged on toward the Narrows, traversing dark, deserted water enclosed by a circle of shore lights, the volcanist took himself out of the wind. The gale roared through the standing rigging, with shrill whistles as it gathered strength in gusts.

In the comfortable, if cramped, room which the mate had cheerily surrendered to him Wickham sat down at his portable typewriter. Soon it was clicking steadily under the vindictive thrust of his fingers. Every word he wrote was truth, for Stephen Wickham had a scientist's sturdy respect for fact. But there were words which charitably might have been left out.

When he struggled into the new oilskins that were a part of his equipment and went out for a final turn, the *Ellen Hurd* was frothing at the bows and dipping petulantly to the seas that went

racing under her. She seemed hardly to move. The pilot had left her. On the bridge was the second mate, a bearded and slightly bent patriarch who had already made plain to Wickham that in the days of sail he had commanded his own ship.

The hatches were all battened down now; the tarpaulins gleamed in the rain. As far as the scientist could make out the cargo booms had been secured and other gear stowed away or properly lashed. The mate had cleaned up his job. The wind was screaming; the gale was making up.

Wickham fought his way to the side of the ancient second mate who, scorning the wheelhouse, stood his watch on the windward wing of the bridge.

"Where's Captain Thomas?"

Mr. Rice peered at him, then stabbed a finger emphatically downward at the saloon deck.

"Asleep!" he roared. "Where would he be in the middle watch?"

Nodding curtly, the scientist returned to his cabin and thrashed restlessly in his bunk. For a small freighter, the vessel rode well. Her crawling progress was not enough to send her jarring into a big comber. But there was something about the uncertain throb of the engine that made him listen to it. Finally he realized that he was subconsciously waiting for it to stop. After that he went to sleep.

THE *Ellen Hurd* lay in the trough of the sea, rolling heavily in a smoothly rounded, tremendous ground swell. About her was blue water—the blue water that comes only from a deep bottom and a high sun. Flying fish, like startled birds, broke cover in one turquoise wave and skimmed briefly to another. All life was warm and easy, except Dr. Wickham, who was only warm.

The ship had earned that rest by nine days of travail. From southeast the wind, veering to southwest, had blown

harder. Then, still freshening, it had blown a full gale out of the northwest. But it was not reward of her seaworthiness that brought the *Ellen Hurd* to immobility on a tropic sea; it was engine failure.

The chief, who rarely said anything, had stated flatly that he would not answer for a slide unless he got a few hours at it. Promptly Captain Thomas assented to his demand for a full six hours—far too promptly assented, it seemed to the furiously impatient Wickham.

"Take your time, Chief," the skipper said casually down the tube. "You can't beat 19 North and 65 West as a place for a breakdown."

And then Captain Thomas, his lean brown body clad only in a pair of drawers, walked out on to the bridge and hooked his elbows as usual over the after corner to drowse in the sun.

Wickham followed him out. Thomas opened one eye. The scientist's glare should have blighted him like Pelée's own flaming gas, but he merely yawned.

"Hellfire deferred," the skipper remarked sleepily. "D'ye suppose that eruption will have calmed down by the time we put you on the beach?"

In a burst of wrath Stephen Wickham raised his clenched right hand and shook it in the captain's face.

"This is unworthy even of a man like you!" he raged. "I have made no secret of my intention to report you to your owner as a light-minded incompetent, unfit to command any vessel. But to take your revenge by deliberately delaying my arrival at Pelée—to hinder science and flout public welfare, for a cheap personal victory—"

The master of the *Ellen Hurd* examined him with unwinking attention.

"Couldn't we make a deal?" he suggested softly. "No report to Hurd; no more delay to you?"

"No, sir; we could not make a deal!" Wickham retorted. "I do not betray my

friends! You're not fit to command this ship, and I shall so report to Hurd!"

Captain Thomas removed his searching eyes from Stephen Wickham's red, defiant countenance and yawned.

"Go and wash your face, Doc," he said casually. "If we can't make a deal we can't. You're all wrong, but you're all right."

"Will you instruct the chief engineer to hasten his repairs?" Wickham demanded tensely.

"You do it," the skipper of the *Ellen Hurd* replied. "I haven't got the moral courage—nor the physical, for that matter. You do it."

"I will!" Wickham declared.

He swung around and stamped off the bridge. Down on the saloon deck he paused. Then, hastily, he slipped into his own room. There he overcame the trembling induced by his recent emotional outburst. With a solemn, determined countenance he descended to the engineroom. Inside the iron door he stopped dead on the grating at the top of a flight of steep iron steps. He looked down, gasping in the infernal heat.

The intricate and meaningless machinery of the *Ellen Hurd* lay motionless, silent, at his feet. He had the feeling of one gazing upon a stricken creature.

Clustered at one point on that still steel body were the grizzled, emaciated chief engineer and his younger assistants. All were naked to the waist, wet with sweat, black with gleaming grease. They alternately engaged in hurried, purposeful movement, or froze into attitudes of intense concentration about the operating chief. That mean-bodied, lean little man had a strange tool in his hands, and his face was the face of an archdemon of hell deep in the performance of dark mysteries.

It did not seem to be the moment to interrupt.

Dr. Wickham returned slowly to the master on the bridge.

"I find that the chief engineer is ap-

parently doing his utmost to repair the engine," he stated without inflection. "Although I am not acquainted with machinery, I must say that I think he is not a man who would wilfully delay the ship."

Captain Thomas nodded.

"An able machinist, the chief," he agreed genially as he pulled on his undershirt. "We may get you to Martinique yet in time to be fried. What'll the epitaph be? How about, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant'? If I know anything about Pelée you'll be overdone."

"I am not a scientist for the purpose of avoiding risks, sir," Dr. Stephen Wickham retorted with dignity. "I do my job, as your mate does his, for the merit there is in it."

"Good man, Henry Browne," the master of the *Ellen Hurd* conceded. "But about Pelée, you'd better report me before you tangle with that little hunk of hell."

He folded his arms on the rail and stared unseeingly at the empty horizon to southward, ignoring the resentful eyes of the volcanist. "I wasn't there in 1902 when she flattened out the city of St. Pierre before breakfast, but that must have been a party, Doc," he murmured. "Sixteen ships at anchor in the roadstead—and every last one of 'em burned and sunk. Sixteen! The wrecks are still menaces to navigation at the bottom of St. Pierre roads. You'd better wear running shoes while you make your observations of that peak, Doc."

"I do not require counsel, least of all from you," retorted the scientist stiffly. "I have had one opportunity to study Pelée after the little known eruption of 1929, when an interesting vent was opened in the northwest flank of the mountain—"

"You mean when she blew her top off, rocked the whole island and spilled molten hell into the sea," Captain Thomas interrupted. "The French ad-

ministration soft-pedaled that one. Dust from Pelée fell on the planks of this bridge when we were a hundred miles south of the island. And now—"

"And now we lie here idly in the sea while observations of inestimable importance to mankind are not made!" the scientist snapped irascibly.

Captain Thomas nodded.

"And while cargoes down the line spoil or are grabbed by better ships," he added. "I drove her hard—too hard during the last days of the gale."

"So I have heard—have reason to believe," Wickham replied.

"If you want the real scandal of it ask the chief engineer. You'll need asbestos paper in your typewriter to get down what he says."

"I appreciate the suggestion," the scientist said unbendingly. "Already I have gathered much material on your selection of seamen and ideas on discipline."

Captain Thomas chuckled.

"I'm a nudist, too; a nicotine addict; and I swear more than occasionally."

"I know Mr. Hurd will believe what I report to him," Wickham rasped.

"I hope you miss the mail."

Stephen Wickham scrutinized the unworried shipmaster with plain perplexity.

"You must hold what I believe is called an ace in the hole," he charged.

"A six-spot is about how my owner would rate me," the skipper replied. "When you and Pelée mix it, Doc, I'm all for the mountain."

Dr. Wickham strode off the bridge. Down on the well deck he encountered the gray-haired boatswain who had pursued him so ferociously on sailing night. The big man was hard at the intricacies of a wire splice. His eyes were upon the sweating watch as the men cleaned the faded paintwork of the deckhouse. When the glaring Wickham swept past him the boatswain ducked

his head hastily and dropped the fid on his foot.

Farther forward the carpenter, under the direction of the mate, was probing the depth of a deep crack in a cargo boom.

Wickham nodded to himself as his eyes lighted upon the industrious Mr. Browne.

"You'll get all the hellfire you want, Boatswain, one of these days," he murmured with conviction.

The mate greeted him punctitiously.

"You have a master's ticket, I believe, Mr. Browne?" Wickham inquired most casually.

The mate grinned, nodding.

"I've got the ticket; it's the luck I'm lacking, sir," he replied cheerily.

"I wouldn't despair," the volcanist assured him.

DISCIPLINE on the *Ellen Hurd* did not improve markedly as she entered the tropics. The patriarchal second mate came suddenly to life and kicked the stolid young third down the bridge ladder for not saying "sir." And the unruly Liverpool Irishman offered blatantly to reshape the mate's head free, with a chipping hammer. And, on the day that Martinique crawled near on the chart, somebody stole from Wickham's room the pint flask of brandy that had accompanied him around the world.

That evening the sun, enormous and dark red in a magnifying, invisible veil of fine volcanic dust, dropped into the sea on the starboard beam. Its going was noted with relief by more than one hand on the *Ellen Hurd*.

"Full o' blood, not fire," the fat carpenter remarked to the loungers of the first dog watch who lay scattered on the hatch.

The huge boatswain shivered.

"Fire and blood," he muttered solemnly. "I could do with a drink."

Having gotten rid of the ominous sun,

the seamen felt no better. The night that fell swiftly on them was no velvet, purple, tropical night, though the easterly trade wind blew gently. There was something alien about the stars, as if new constellations were twisting into being above them.

Two hours after sunset Dr. Wickham, coming up on the bridge, found the master of the *Ellen Hurd* staring fixedly out over the sea on the port bow.

"There she flames, Doc," he murmured, nodding. "Pelée on the spree!"

The volcanist looked eagerly. There was a puffy cloud afire in the sky. Lurid, it hung without movement over the unseen mountain. Now it was all aglow with savage scarlet; now full of flickering shades of red which never quite faded out.

"Probably a good vent has developed," Dr. Wickham murmured thoughtfully. "If the volcanic chimney is clear, then—"

"No more real fireworks?"

"How can I tell, miles at sea?" the scientist retorted testily.

"Guessing's easier," Captain Thomas suggested. "You'll be as close as you care to get by this time tomorrow—if we have any luck with the French officials at Fort de France."

But it was four o'clock next afternoon before Captain Thomas came trudging through the simmering *savane* of the city of Fort de France. His brown face was streaming wet, and he picked his way unseeingly past many chattering refugees from the wrath of the terrible Montagne Pelée, to northward. Three copper-colored officials—creoles in the West Indian use of the word—slunk dejectedly behind him. At the pier he dropped into the nearest shore boat and, as his retinue scrambled after him, pointed wearily toward the *Ellen Hurd*.

Three men met him at the top of the companionway—the wrathful Dr. Wickham, with a watch in his trembling, impatient hand; the sympathetic Mr.

Browne beside him; and the skull-faced chief engineer.

"Break out your hook, Mister," the skipper said to the mate. "I've permission to land a passenger, equipment and supplies in St. Pierre roadstead after these three"—he jerked a hand at the three officials—"have pawed his papers and smelt his stuff. Tell the steward to get 'em as drunk as possible. They're feeling low about going close to Pelée."

Dr. Wickham snorted, and glanced at his watch again. Mr. Browne, with a reassuring glance at the fuming volcanist, darted forward toward the windlass. The chief engineer spoke decisively:

"A word with you, Captain, before you heave—"

"Have you got enough steam and scrap metal to kick us ten miles over a flat sea?" Captain Thomas demanded.

The chief nodded grudgingly.

"But I've been taking a look and I will not answer—"

"You can have another go at your slide, or your tubes, or your holding-down bolts, or thrust-block, in St. Pierre Road, while we're unloading Jonah and his junk. There'll be no lighters or stevedores to be had under Pelée's guns, so it'll take us half a day."

"'Twill serve," the chief conceded.

Captain Thomas thrust his head sharply to one side, listening. From somewhere in the ship came a strident roar:

"Hellfire! Hellfire! Out of the bowels of the earth—out of the pit that has no bottom, to warn—"

Captain Thomas moved rapidly toward the forecastle head and pulled himself up the ladder with Wickham close behind him.

Mr. Browne was examining the trend of the anchor chain, while the carpenter stood by the hissing windlass.

"How did the bosun get that load, Henry?" the skipper asked rather tersely.

"Not from the shore, sir," Mr. Browne

stated. "I've kept all bumboats away. Shall I—"

"Let him roam around and work it off," Captain Thomas muttered. "There's another item for your report, Doc."

"I have already sent my report in the *poste*," the volcanist retorted. "I did not omit the condition of the boatswain, either. He stole my brandy; I'm sure of it!"

THE anchor was out of the mud and the ship under way before the boatswain showed himself on deck. Then he came bounding up to the forecastle head and raised a stabbing, frenzied arm toward the bridge.

"Into hell!" he bawled, and his voice rang out over the bay. "That's where he's taking us—into the pit of hell!"

"And a damned good idea, too," Captain Thomas muttered vengefully. "Blast it, I need that bosun today! No discipline at all, Doc."

"I agree," snapped the scientist.

He was staring feverishly to northward, although bold headlands and mountain peaks of the volcanic, quake-racked island screened the mighty Pelée from him.

Slowly the old, erratic engine of the *Ellen Hurd* thrust her along the leeward coast. The long white flanks of the great volcano heaved gradually into sight. Above those unearthly white slopes rose a sullen pall of black smoke and billowing gas. Foully that unholy shroud smirched the snowy splendor of the trade clouds that came drifting toward the crater. Rumbblings, like distant thunder, disturbed with their low vibrations the eardrums and the mind alike.

The *Ellen Hurd* worked in nearer to the deserted coast. Pelée's bulk crept higher over them as they approached. The ship steamed into the broad, curving roadstead. The mean little cluster of houses that marks the site of the buried city of St. Pierre became more

distinct. There was no sign of life among those crude buildings.

The ship edged nearer to the flanks of the mountain. The men off watch, black gang and deck alike, clustered forward, staring, muttering awed opinions.

Dr. Wickham glanced toward Captain Thomas as the *Ellen* approached the beach. The leadsman had not yet made a cast.

"There's just one place shoal enough to anchor, Doc, and that's over the wrecks that have lain on the bottom thirty years," the shipmaster said. "You can drop your anchor and run out all your chain and still find no bottom except close inshore. You're not distrusting this mountain's intentions, are you?"

"The explosive stage should be almost over, from what I have heard," the scientist said curtly. "If that is so, there is no danger at all."

"Hellfire!" roared the boatswain, up on the forecastle head.

His long arms shot up over his head toward the shrouded heights of terrible Pelée; his gray hair bristled around his head in wild disorder; the crew milled uneasily at the voice of this prophet of doom.

"Flames out of hell!"

"The bosun ought to be almost over the explosive stage, too," the skipper said. "That volcano seems to be reenforcing the brandy."

He hailed the leadsman and the man sent the weight hurtling ahead into the sea.

"Thirty fathoms; no-o-o bottom!" the man intoned, and the steamship, engine rung down, crept on under the shadow of the sullen cloud.

For the moment there was no sound from the ship save the hiss of her cutwater. And from Pelée came only that deep, unceasing mutter.

"There's the only place to land this stuff," Captain Thomas said, nodding toward a short pier running out from

the huddle of St. Pierre. The solitary figure of a man was standing at the seaward end of the wharf.

"One native left, and not a lighter or dugout in sight. They don't seem to like free fireworks here."

The leadsman got bottom then. The steamship nosed on slowly toward the beach.

"By the mark; nine!" bellowed the seaman. "And a half; eight!"

The skipper made a signal to Mr. Browne and the carpenter on the fore-castle head. The anchor plunked into the blue bay, and the cable went roaring out of the hawsehole in a swirl of red dust. The fat carpenter counted the shots of chain and clanged the bell. Pelée's soft thunder was eclipsed.

Captain Thomas stared distrustfully over the side.

"All I've got is hope that that hook isn't fouled for keeps in some wreck below," he said. "We'll lower a boat and have a gam with your friend on the pier, Doc. Owner's orders to put you ashore myself."

Wickham, his personal baggage already piled outside his door, assented eagerly. The hatch covers were off and the winches clattering under Mr. Browne's direction as their boat touched the water. Firemen and coal passers, freed from below during the repairs, poured up to stare at the malignant smoking mountain.

WITH the master of the ship and the volcanist together in the stern sheets of the boat, the four oarsmen pushed off and, grunting together, pulled toward the pier. Wickham's bags were piled in the bow.

Captain Thomas, having noted how his vessel lay to the wind and current, turned his attention to the rumbling of Pelée. The men got the rhythm; the boat crawled forward a hundred feet.

"That may look to you like a volcano that's—" Thomas began and then sud-

denly his voice was cut off in his throat. His hand froze to the tiller.

The smoke and clouds above Pelée had suddenly and soundlessly lifted. The serrated crater of the volcano was revealed as a lightning flash might have revealed it at midnight. The pall was rushing upward. It annihilated sun and blue sky in a sweeping, all enveloping puff of blackness.

A blow thudded on the skipper's eardrums; the boat trembled under him.

Almost on the instant the ragged heights of Pelée were wiped out. A great ring of smoke and fire curtained or destroyed the mountain top. From this red obscurity a wall of incandescent, glowing vapor dropped down over the flanks of the mountain. That flaming gas gathered bulk and vehemence as it rolled down the scarred white declivities. They had time to see its mighty swirling convolutions as it overwhelmed the land.

That was all Captain Thomas observed then. The world cracked.

Vaguely the skipper realized that he was wedged into the pointed stern of the boat, jammed there by the pressure of Wickham's plump body.

He struggled upward, dizzy and sick, pushing the limp Wickham away. His mouth and nose and lungs were filled with indescribable foulness; he retched violently, beating his stomach.

Wickham, glassy-eyed, open-mouthed, lay as still as a dead man. The four seamen were slumped over their oars; one with legs writhing and body swaying; the others stunned or stupefied.

The boat was lurching violently, beset by veering, buffeting gusts and erratic, scattered seas. The blue water had become black in an instant. The waves writhed like the seaman's limbs.

Captain Thomas darted a look up at Pelée. The mountain was still there, almost buried in an augmented pall of black smoke, beset now by lurid flashes and crashing explosions.

Thomas glanced toward the *Ellen*

Hurd. The ship, like Pelée, still existed. He punched Wickham in the ribs, slapped his face.

"Come to!" he snarled. "Come to, Doc! You're not out! How about this? More to follow?"

Wickham swayed and moved; he did not speak. His eyes awoke to terror. The skipper lifted his head over the side.

Behind Thomas, thinly as from a great distance in the rushing wind, came a hoarse, strangling voice:

"Hellfire! Hellfire! Prepare to meet—hell!"

"That blasted bosun!"

Captain Thomas coughed. He concluded his retching and slapped Wickham again. Intently he stared at his ship. There were leaping figures on the deck; shrill, high screams from the Martinique officials; hoarse shouts from firemen and sailors.

Wickham spoke; teeth chattering, yet eyes alert for every manifestation—

"A—a minor explosive—a gaseous explosion—concussion—"

"Minor, hell!" The captain's neck was still twisted toward the *Ellen*, but he spoke to the four seamen on the thwarts:

"Wake up, you lads! Come out o' that! You're still alive!"

The oarsmen were coming to—wildly staring; emptying themselves; throwing their bodies about in agony. They found refuge from panic in the level voice and controlled countenance of the skipper.

"I told you to pull!" Thomas said. "How about it? We're going back to the ship."

That energized them. Nothing like this had ever happened to them on a ship. Raggedly they swung their oars in the erratic seas.

The master straightened out their efforts with barbed words. He turned the boat as soon as it gathered way. But it was cruel work, in that leaping, crazy water, with a foul, strangling vapor to breathe and with gray, horrible twilight

dropped down on them. Pelée was thundering threats.

From the *Ellen Hurd* came yells and shrieks enough to convince Thomas that his crew continued to live. The voice of the boatswain was dominant; above the blasts from Pelée and reverberations from other peaks of the island came his strained, devastating bellow:

"Hellfire! Run or burn! Hell's mouth—yawning for ye!"

Captain Bill Thomas squinted at his ship.

The big boatswain was charging forward now, toward the forecastle head. In one hand he brandished a heavy wrench. He sent the elderly second mate spinning toward the rail as he rushed past.

Seamen and black gang alike came stampeding headlong after the boatswain, the one man on that stricken ship with voice and purpose left in his marrow. The slow moving third mate went down in their midst like a toppled ten-pin. His body was hidden by their rushing figures.

"Crazy drunk!" Captain Thomas grunted. "Pull, I said!"

"What's—"

"Going to pull a shackle pin, slip the cable—and no engines! Adrift—in this ruckus! Stop 'em, Henry! Pull—together—pull!"

Mr. Henry Browne was on the fore-castle head. He ran to the top of the ladder to meet the boatswain as he came bounding up. The man ducked his head like a charging bull. The top of his skull cracked against the mate's chin. Browne's head snapped back under the impact. He went staggering. The big hands of the boatswain closed on the officer's shoulders, flung him aside on the iron deck.

"They're mad!" Wickham chattered. "Have you a gun? The explosion's over! The relief of pressure—"

"Way enough!" the skipper commanded.

With a twist of his tiller he sent the boat gliding alongside the bow of the ship. He ran forward between the oarsman. From the gunwale he leaped to the steep, slanting anchor chain. Hand over hand he scrambled up toward the flaring bow of the *Ellen Hurd*.

"Look out!" shrieked Wickham, aware himself of the fruitlessness of his warning. "If they slip that chain, man, you'll be—"

Heedless of the menace of that iron last, every link of which was heavy enough to crack his head like a walnut, Thomas climbed on up the cable.

The boatswain yelled in sudden triumph. The cable stirred in the hawsehole. Desperately the climbing captain slung a hand high overhead. His fingers closed on the side. With a grinding crash the disconnected chain began to run into the sea. . . .

LEGS dangling, Thomas whipped himself ten inches from the hawsehole. Enveloped in flying rust, he held on while the last few deadly links rasped by his head. The end of the chain plunged to the bottom. The ship was adrift.

"Clear!" shrieked the boatswain. "Clear o' the burning pit!"

Captain Thomas swung a leg over the side. He pulled his head and shoulders to the level of the deck.

The gaze of the gesticulating boatswain swung from the empty hawsehole to the projecting head of the red-eyed skipper. So, too, did the gaze of the milling men around him. Mr. Browne, staggering forward, made a guttural sound in his throat.

Captain Thomas crawled on to the deck. Slowly he dusted the rust from his hands. Under him the ship gathered motion as the swirling wind and the unknown currents of the chaotic sea took command.

His eyes bore upon the boatswain. The wrath in them was under control.

But the wrath was there—such wrath as overwhelmed and made puny the wild terror of the clustered men. That leashed, tremendous rage menaced souls and bodies as no bursting mountain ever could. It shriveled all other fears.

"Well, Bose?" said Captain Thomas softly. Swaying, open-handed, sick, he stood there, with a rumbling volcano behind him.

The seamen moved hands and feet jerkily. This man was supreme master—dispenser of life or death. He knew it—knew it as he knew he lived. He knew, not because he was a shipmaster, but because he was Bill Thomas.

"You make too free with my anchors, Bose."

While he was alive upon that deck there could be no disobedience. There was in his eyes no challenge to them to kill him. He knew they would not dare.

"Hellfire!" croaked the boatswain, jerking a hand toward the black cloud of imminent destruction over Pelée's crater. It was not a cry of panic; it was a feeble explanation. The drink had died in the boatswain's veins.

Captain Thomas stepped toward the windlass. He was still dusting his hands. The boatswain was in the way. He scrambled aside. The skipper examined the windlass. The chain of the port anchor was locked on it. Captain Thomas did not touch it. He flicked a forefinger at it.

"Trip it, Bose," he commanded. The boatswain obeyed.

The anchor shot down into the sea. Chain rattled and roared after it, shot after shot, until the shipmaster jerked his hand. The boatswain applied the brakes.

Gently the *Ellen Hurd* brought up at the end of that long scope. Once more she was chained to her position under the smoke of Pelée. But now the smoke was not so dense, the twilight not so unnatural.

The red-faced, profusely perspiring Dr. Wickham, who had swung himself laboriously aboard by the falls of the boat, was staring forward at Bill Thomas with the unquenchable curiosity of a scientist. His plump fists, still doubled up to combat red, frenzied mutiny, were sagging, forgotten, at his sides. For a moment he had abandoned his volcano to look at a man.

Thomas walked aft on the forecastle head.

"If you want him to make Pelée look like a powder puff just tinker with that hook," Mr. Browne thundered at the men. Then, catching a command in the skipper's turned head, he hurried after him.

Thomas, at the top of the ladder to the well deck, trained upon his mate the eyes that had backed down the terrors of hell.

"How did the bosun get that brandy?" His voice was merciless; his eyes foretold the answer to his question.

Mr. Browne gulped. "I left it where the bosun would find it, sir," he replied sullenly.

Captain Thomas nodded. He clattered down the ladder, heading for the bridge. Near Wickham he paused.

"What's apt to happen now, Doc?" the skipper demanded, nodding toward Pelée.

"Nothing—after that," Wickham replied mechanically. "The explosion opened a huge vent in the mountain—a way for lava to well out freely—to flow rather than to burst forth."

"That suits me, Doc," Captain Thomas said cheerfully and passed on.

Wickham followed, still absorbed in contemplation of the man. The skipper ascended to the bridge. Dr. Wickham continued after him. From the bridge the volcanist looked down at the boatswain, who was slumped on the windlass slowly rubbing his forehead. The mate was motioning the men aft. Though

many heads were turned toward Pelée, they were obeying.

"Cowards!" Wickham muttered without conviction.

"They're no admirals, Doc, but they didn't sign as admirals," the skipper said.

In the wheelhouse he headed for the engineroom speaking tube.

"Look here," said Wickham abruptly. "I've seen enough, Captain, to realize that—ah—my conclusions concerning your discip—your fitness to command were entirely erroneous. I'll correct that by radio, of course—but—but I—I want to apologize to you before I go ashore. Captain, I—I'm sorry to say that I recommended that mate for your berth."

Captain Thomas smiled rather wearily.

"Don't let it worry you, Doc," he replied, as he waited for an answer from the engineroom. "Browne's a good mate—although ambitious. We'll never go on the beach during his trick on the bridge."

"Hurd, knowing you, will disregard what I said," Wickham asserted humbly. There was still a great perplexity in his eyes. "Is that why my report didn't bother you?"

The skipper turned away from the speaking tube.

"My guess is that Hurd will believe you," he replied with a certain grimness. "But here's how it stands, Doc; I'll run this wagon and her company for what there is in her and them and me, which isn't so much. An obsolete wreck, a disorderly crew and a slack master—but somehow the *Ellen* hangs on to her run while better ships rust at their moorings."

"The men do work hard for you, Captain—"

Bill Thomas turned back to the speaking tube.

"As for me, if I can't hold command without bluster and without bootlicking, Doc, I'll damn well lose command. That's me; other men are different, Doc, and better—but that's me."



GEORGES SURDEZ



The outside world was learning at this moment that a few Legionnaires had died.

CLAY IN KHAKI

"Discipline!" said the sergeant. When bullets spurted about him in the bloody sand and he faced the Arabs unarmed, his Legionnaires learned what he meant.

RAOUL CHAMBER believed that he knew Legionnaires thoroughly, that he could predict their reactions unflinching. He had served with the Corps two years in Morocco and had acquired a list of skirmishes, combats and pitched battles envied him by many older officers.

When he took command of the section of the mounted company, stationed at Post Bilama in the Occidental Sahara, the trouble was already underway; considering the types of men in the outfit, nothing could be done to prevent it. Chamber's predecessor had been an old-

ish lieutenant, with a Tonkinese liver, who had not taken much interest in his men. In a large garrison city, the less an officer interferes with established routine, the better. But a Saharan outpost, populated by sixty-odd Legionnaires and a score of irregular native cavalymen, *mokhrazenis*, offers another problem.

Bilama consisted of a few acres of sand fenced off from the immensity of more sand by loopholed walls and barbed wire. The few palm trees of the small oasis, by the dried bed of the river, seemed discouraged and ready to give up the struggle. Even the camels of the

caravans and military convoys appeared happy when they left the spot, and bore their loads with a semblance of resignation.

There was nothing for the eyes to behold save the aching glare of the sun on the plain and the remote, purplish etching made by the rugged crests of the Jebel bou Kerkou against the blue of the northwestern horizon. The Levantine who kept the single shop was more greedy than was decent even for one of his type; and the water drawn from the wells was apt to give, even the hardest men, dysentery.

The Legionnaires had little to do beyond the monotonous routine of outpost existence but to pray for the wireless reports from Colomb-Béchar headquarters, which occasionally sent the detachment hurtling across miles of waterless desert on the tracks of raiding bands of Berbers from Tafilalet. These pursuits were fruitless nine times out of ten, but they gave something to do.

Chamber arrived, cheerful and ready to pick up the burden. He was startled by the gloom written plainly on the men's faces. The buildings were white, neat, the yard speckless; everything evidenced the meticulous neatness typical of quarters occupied by the Foreign Legion. But the men were depressed, oddly grim. When Chamber questioned them they reported themselves contented, most contented. But there was a perceptible undertone of sarcasm in these statements.

"Good men," Chamber thought, "but there's something wrong somewhere."

He met the adjutant who had filled the interim between commissioned officers. Roubec was a tall, thin old fellow, with yellowish mustaches, wistful eyes and a large nose that told of years of intemperance. Roubec had been at Bilama two years without leave, and his mind had wandered a bit. He could not be called an inspiring leader.

He soon made it clear that he had

lived too long to fret. All spots on earth were alike to him, differing only in degrees of discomfort and the brands of alcohol available. Chamber was edified the very first afternoon when he heard Roubec address Chamba cameleers in fluent Muong dialect learned in Indo-China.

"This old chap is half mad," he thought. "He's lost all idea of place and time."

Yet it never occurred to him to write to headquarters and suggest a transfer, for Chamber had acquired the true Legionnaire's veneration for old-timers. He even made an effort to question him, as an evidence of tact—

"What's wrong with this place, Roubec?"

"Nothing, lieutenant." Roubec stared about him with fond glances. "Neat as a pin. But I don't know what's coming over the Legion since the War. I suppose the men have gone modern. All they think of is amusement. First thing you know, they'll form soviets and elect their own officers. Ask Verlinden, he'll tell you the same thing."

Chamber discovered that Adjutant Roubec had been a "Lazy King," and that Sergeant Verlinden had played the role of "Palace Mayor." Nominally, Roubec had ruled, but the other had been in effective charge.

Paul Verlinden was thirty-eight years old, a tall, broad-shouldered, sandy haired man, with the clean shaven jowls, patient smile and mild eyes of a monk. At first contact, he was likable, his whole personality radiating a fierce physical courage and a placid acceptance of hardships. He had served in the Legion since the War; had a splendid record.

But Chamber sensed something treacherous in his gentleness.

"What's wrong, Lieutenant?" repeated Verlinden. "Why—nothing."

"No trouble?"

"None to speak of, Lieutenant." Verlinden rubbed his massive chin thought-

fully. "A few chronic kickers in the bunch, you know. They like nothing, water is no good, wine is no good, food is no good. Guys who never had a full stomach before enlisting." The sergeant laughed easily, exhibiting a large hand which he closed into a fist. "I handled them. You know, they showed a tendency to herd together and pick leaders of their own, what they call *kaid*s in the prison camps. Just loud mouthed guys. But I shut their traps between thumb and finger."

The lieutenant shrugged. He could not undo anything that had happened before his arrival. Bilama had been left without an officer for weeks, was separated from control by a hundred kilometers of desert which, despite the shrinking of the world so often referred to, remains a considerable distance.

"All right, Verlinden. From now on allow all complaints to come through to me for personal investigation."

"Why bother, Lieutenant?" Verlinden grinned. "I am still able to handle them. They know me."

"I'm in charge," Chamber reminded him softly.

His distrust of the sergeant crystallized when Verlinden, instead of holding his ground, immediately softened his speech. Had the man been a coward, he would have felt less disgusted with his moral cringing. But that this large man, known to be heroic under fire, flushed and strove to avoid blame well in advance was a revelation.

"No matter what you hear, Lieutenant, there was no brutality. All was done according to regulations."

VERLINDEN spoke the truth.

There had been no physical brutality, which is understandable in an outpost where there are sixty armed men. All had been done strictly according to regulations. But there had been pettiness, bickerings and an appalling lack of understanding. The men's effort to entertain themselves, to dispel boredom,

had been squashed. Verlinden had forbidden the organization of a mouth organ band, such as existed elsewhere, and had prevented the gathering of a soldiers' chorus.

"Why?" Chamber asked him.

"Bad for them, in the long run. They get homesick listening to songs about the old home and mother. They're no good for days after listening to that drivel in their own tongues."

"What are you, Verlinden?"

"French, Lieutenant."

"By birth?"

"Well, Flemish, if you like."

"You don't like your own folk songs?"

"I don't, Lieutenant."

Chamber did not insist.

But he understood Verlinden rather well, and did not blame him too much. The sergeant, for the first time in his life and without special preparation, had become master of all he surveyed, sole arbiter of right and wrong, censor of morals. This new found power had affected him; he did not know where it started, where it ended.

"Assemble the section."

The men formed two lines, the first one on foot, the one behind mounted on mules, for in the mounted companies of the Legion there are two men to every mount. They alternate in the saddle, at an hour's interval, during the marches.

Chamber saw that he had an efficient fighting machine, the majority of the Legionnaires being fully trained soldiers, hard and resolute. As everywhere in the Corps, the German element dominated, although there was a scattering of other nationalities—Russians, Italians, Spaniards and one Martinique negro.

The lieutenant recognized a few soldiers who had served in his battalion during the Riff Campaign and shook their hands. He felt that he had made a good impression on them before, that they were glad to see him, and would do excellent missionary work among the rest.

He announced that during the intervals between patrols special attention would be paid to entertainment. Those who had talent would send in their names to the office and he would appoint a director of ceremonies. While he, the lieutenant, would not interfere, he would be happy to contribute advice if they decided to consult him.

"Laurens should be manager," a voice called out.

"No talking in the ranks. I'll look into that."

Verlinden had stood at his side, listening, and although the new chief's speech amounted to disapproval of his actions, he had smiled throughout. Chamber noted from his glance, however, that he was not pleased. To placate him—for a disgruntled senior sergeant is a thorn in an officer's side—he tried to explain his views.

Verlinden nodded.

"All right for an officer, Lieutenant. But a sergeant must bear down hard to get proper respect. I'm old fashioned, and I thought that discipline came first."

"Discipline," Chamber informed him, "should be freely consented to. Genuine discipline is offered by the soldier, not exacted by the chief."

"School stuff, Lieutenant." Verlinden licked his lips, and resumed, "I'm old at this game. The trouble with these entertainments is that the men get to think a star performer is bigger than a sergeant. It creates a leader not provided for in regulations."

"You have some one in mind, naturally?"

"That fellow Laurens."

"Where is he?"

"In the jug, Lieutenant."

"What for?"

"Impudence, Lieutenant. He's a fresh little fellow. The men spoiled him, making a fuss over his playing. He bought a drum from the natives, made a sort of violin out of a biscuit tin. When I told him to clean hitching chains, he asked

whether it wasn't better for him to rehearse the orchestra."

"Send him to see me, Verlinden."

"All right, Lieutenant."

CHAMBER refrained from smiling when Legionnaire Marcius Laurens entered the office. If this was Verlinden's idea of a Legion *kaid* the sergeant possessed much imagination.

The boy was certainly under nineteen, and although well knit and with a decent breadth of shoulders, was rather short of stature. He had delicate, doll-like features, very blond hair, very blue eyes, seemed shy, and boasted a dimple in one of his apple red cheeks. He halted at the distance stipulated in regulations, met his chief's eyes squarely, saluted.

Laurens' khaki uniform had been so often washed and scrubbed that it was worn sheer and white. The blue sash molded a slim waist, the buttons glistened. Although Chamber had served as an *aspirant* in the trenches of the Western Front when no older than Laurens, he experienced a vague sense of shock when he realized that this handsome fragile youth had endured the hard test of a forced march.

"I understand you're a tough character, Laurens," Chamber said.

"Yes, Lieutenant," the young Legionnaire agreed.

"I see on the records that you have been punished often of late. Have you any explanation to give me?"

"I learn military things slowly, Lieutenant," the lad answered in excellent French—French learned in school rather than in the Army. "I am scared of the mules. They kick."

"Unless you know how to handle them," Chamber declared. "I'll have some one show you. Suppose we make a new start? Your punishment is lifted. I've permitted the men to form a band, and I'm told you're the best musician in the section. See what you need, and confer with me. What do you play?"

"Piano, violin, Lieutenant. But in the Legion, a mouth organ." Laurence reached in his pocket and exhibited a nicked instrument. Chamber restrained a smile, for he saw that Laurens was willing to demonstrate on the spot.

"I'll hear you later, I guess. Laurens, how long have you been in the Legion?"

"Nine months, Lieutenant."

"How long here, at Bilama?"

"Two months, Lieutenant."

"Enlisted under age, didn't you?"

"Yes, Lieutenant," Laurens confessed, blushing.

"Wanted back home, too?"

"My family wants me to come back, Lieutenant."

"You'll get back quickest if you behave. Remember that. You may leave."

Chamber had picked for his orderly a Legionnaire whom he had known in Morocco, a large, stolid German, called Hartber. The man proved efficient, installed the officer's belongings in the whitewashed room in Building No. 1, seemed to know instinctively where to hang any particular photograph. Chamber asked him no questions, but removed his boots, unfastened his collar and sprawled in a canvas chair for a smoke.

The Legionnaire sorted shirts, aligned brushes.

"Buttons missing, Lieutenant."

"Just back from leave, Hartber. Laundry done by women. They're awfully sloppy, after one's been in the Legion and known real service."

"You bet, Lieutenant." Hartber shot a glance at the largest photograph. "Not the same jane I used to see in your tent at Arabou—this is a larger picture."

"Not the same, no, Hartber."

"They come, they go," the Legionnaire stated. He added, diplomatically, "This one's better looking." He lighted a cigaret, resumed his task, continuing the conversation. Before long, as Chamber had expected, he talked of Bilama. "The other day, when we learned who was coming, we were glad. A good officer

means a lot in a dump like this one. Then, the best musician we have here didn't get along with the sergeant, and that knocked our band to pieces."

Chamber was aware that a single question would close Hartber's mouth; a Legionnaire will gossip, but will not carry tales.

"You know how those things start, Lieutenant. When Laurens came, about two months back, Verlinden liked him a lot. Wanted him for his orderly. But Laurens said he wouldn't like the job. The kid gets money from home regularly, hires his own work done. So he saw no sense in slaving for the twenty francs a month that Verlinden pays. The sergeant got the idea that Laurens was too proud, and tried to take it out of him. I'm not saying that the boy isn't fresh. Where do you want your books?"

"Green ones on the shelf. Rest in the trunk."

"I was telling you about Verlinden. He was sore. So he made Laurens a *titular* at once."

In the mounted companies the Legionnaires who care for the mules are termed *titulars*. The man who alternates in the saddle on the march, but fulfills other duties both in the post and in camp, is a *double*. When a man is known to have had no previous experience with mules, he is customarily permitted to serve a period as *double* until he becomes familiar enough with the habits of the beasts to approach them without fear. The large Kabyle hybrids in use in the mounted are perhaps more particular in tastes, fussier than others.

"Gave him César, too. No harm in that mule, but he's a kidder. He spotted Laurens as green right off, and kicked and bit at him. A good crack on the snout would stop that, but the boy didn't know. He was never ready on time and got punished. I think you ought to shift him to Calumet."

"Is he tame?"

"Sure, and his *titular's* leaving for the

base hospital with dysentery, next convoy. He can do everything but talk. He'd take care of Laurens."

AFTER the siesta period of the afternoon, Chamber went to the office, and revised the list, placing Laurens' name opposite that of Calumet. Verlinden, upon consulting it, started and looked at the officer, but he made no comment.

Legionnaire Laurens reported later, very earnest, with the names of musicians. Chamber agreed to relieve these men from many routine tasks, that they might gather and practice. Laurens' enthusiasm was contagious.

"See, Lieutenant, we play the tunes on the jazz band, and everybody sings at the chorus. I'm forming a Russian quartet. Later on I'll write verse in German to suit the songs, because everybody understands German. And I'm going to work up a song for the section, sort of a slow chant, taken from that humming tune the Arabs play on their flutes—camel-leer's song—"

He hummed the air:

"Makes a fine marching song for us, but every once in a while, you'd want more snap in it, for instance, when we pick up the march after the hourly pause."

"Try it on your mouth organ, Laurens."

The young Legionnaire produced his instrument and played. Chamber had known before that Laurens must be an expert to be admired as a player by Legionnaires. He admitted that the tune, as reshaped by Laurens, matched to perfection the rhythm of a mounted detachment, and even suggested that he might write words for the chorus.

"You play the violin as well?"

"Better, Lieutenant."

"You should be with the orchestra at Sidi-bel-Abbès."

"Oh, no, Lieutenant. That's not what I came for."

"What then did you come for?"

Laurens needed no more prompting to relate his story. His father was a manufacturer in a large city on the Rhine. He had enlisted under an alias after running away from home. His folks had written to the French War Office, proving that he had signed while still under age.

But, being in the Legion and having passed eighteen by several weeks, Laurens had refused to leave. He explained that he would have felt like a small boy, coming home from Africa, from the Legion, and unable to relate truthfully a single adventure. He had so told the colonel.

"What did he say?" Chamber asked.

"He said that I had the making of a Legionnaire," Laurens replied proudly. "And that's when he authorized my transfer to the mounted."

The lieutenant was glad that he had reached Bilama in time to stop the sergeant's persecution. There was nothing evil in Laurens, but he had a fierce spirit of independence. The streak of wildness which had caused him to leave a good home, after a petty quarrel with his folks, would show itself again on provocation. Chamber had seen boys of Laurens' type develop into fine soldiers under the right chiefs, or start for the Penal Camp when misfortune placed them with harsh leaders.

In spite of his youth, perhaps because of it, Laurens had a knack for organizing recreations. While Chamber seldom attended the entertainments officially, he would sit on a campstool before his door, across the esplanade. There were rival choirs, one made up of Germans, one of Russians. The morale of the men picked up immediately. They were not wholly happy, for Legionnaires are not men fated to be happy. But they were enjoying the moment, which was all that the majority cared for.

Laurens and Calumet liked each other from the start. The young Legionnaire

was grateful to the big mule for proving docile, while the animal had an excellent disposition and was ready to love and follow one who cared for him.

Three weeks passed.

Adjutant Roubec absorbed his two quarts of wine and his drinks of anisette regularly each day, and went through his duties like a machine, never drunk, never quite sober. Sergeant Verlinden was punctual, respectful, never revealing by word or gesture any trace of resentment toward Chamber. He never spoke to Laurens save when absolutely necessary.

The officer felt that only one thing was lacking to bring about complete understanding — hardships and dangers shared in common, giving the men a chance to estimate his worth as it would give him the opportunity to judge them in what really mattered, military worth.

CHAMBER returned to Bilama one morning, shortly before noon.

Escorted by two native riders, he had gone to a small oasis a few miles distant to visit Sergeant Joust, who commanded the native militia in the region. Joust, although officially stationed at Bilama, liked to go on prolonged tours of inspection among the villages from which his men were recruited. He judged that he thus became better acquainted with them, and that they would follow him more cheerfully if the government called on them during an emergency. The cavalry sergeant had loaned the Legion officer a shotgun, and Chamber had spent some hours shooting pigeons in the grove.

For two or three days previously the lieutenant had felt weak and nervous. But he believed the symptoms to be those of malaria, from which he had suffered in Syria and Morocco, and paid no attention to them beyond swallowing quinine pills.

While Hartber was sluicing him with pails of cold water drawn from the well,

Chamber shivered, but dismissed this as shock from the impact of the icy fluid against his sweaty body. Yet he felt oddly light, his knees seemed made of rubber, while a steady ache crept up his limbs, flooding his chest with a definite uneasiness.

He managed to dress and to reach the dining room.

There, the sight of the fried eggs swimming in melted butter turned his stomach, and he sought to rise. The next moment the startled Hartber lifted him off the floor and carried him to his cot. The ambulance sergeant was sent for, came and held the lieutenant's wrist in a professional manner.

"He's sick, all right!"

Chamber heard him as if in a dream, tried to talk. He could think of the words, but could not utter them. The beings about him were queer men with lopsided faces, protruding eyes, who sprang senselessly from lethargic calm into terrifying actions. His room spun slowly, so that the pictures on the white walls passed constantly before his gaze.

On the important things he had to speak of, his brain refused to concentrate, but fastened upon an idiotic purpose, fruit of his fevered mind: he *had* to stick his finger into those pictures as they went by, but whenever he jabbed out, he was frustrated in his wish and his arm stretched endlessly through the open door and wobbled over the sunlit yard.

"I know I am delirious," he thought. "The room is still. It's my brain that's whirling. I must tell them, I must tell them. Verlinden must not be in charge—"

He felt a keen agony, remorse, that tortured him. Verlinden was not the man to forget or forgive. Something evil would befall the outpost if he, Chamber, relinquished charge.

"What's the matter with him? Malaria?"

"Or typhoid," said the ambulance man.

"He drank some dirty water during one of his trips, probably. I'll have Colomb-Béchar informed by wireless. They'd blame me if he kicked off."

"Any chance of that?"

"Always is a chance of that."

Chamber tried to speak, to explain that he was not dying. Both Roubec and Verlinden were in the room now. Verlinden was talking in an undertone. It seemed that they had already wirelessed Béchar and that an ambulance plane would come to take him to the hospital, a good bed and proper medical care.

"Roubec—Verlinden—"

"You'll be all right, Lieutenant," Roubec said. "Back in a month. The section will be all right. It isn't as if I were alone, Lieutenant, don't worry. Verlinden is here—"

"Verlinden—" Chamber murmured.

He again tried to speak, failed. He closed his eyes to gather his thoughts, to gather strength to express them. Closed his eyes for a moment.

When he opened them, the scene had changed.

The walls were whitewashed, but bare of pictures, the door was in the wrong place, and he could hear the shrill whistling of a locomotive. This gave him a clue. He was in Béchar.

A man in gray-green trousers and white shirt was stirring something in a glass, with a great clattering. Chamber knew those trousers and grinned. When would French orderlies and patients in military hospitals wear out the captured war stocks of the German Army? Victory had its drawbacks.

"Have I been here long?"

"Ten days. Don't you remember? You've talked quietly before."

"I remember now, yes. Where did you put my clothes?"

"Wait, the doctor will tell you."

Chamber questioned the doctor, who informed him that the news from Bilama was excellent. The lieutenant

wished to go back at once, but the doctor laughed.

"You get north for a few days, to Oran or Algiers. It's arranged for, your leave is signed. You were poisoned rather than ill. That happens near Bilama. I've had most of your fellows here at one time or another."

"Sure there's nothing wrong at Bilama?"

"I'll ask. But I'd have heard."

So Chamber was shipped north to Oran and the sea on the following day. In a week he felt as well as ever, save that something dimly remembered worried him constantly. Some one was in danger, he could not recall precisely whom. With an effort, he remembered at last, and laughed.

He had worried over Laurens and Verlinden! Doubtless, the noncommissioned officer had taken advantage of his absence to bully the boy a bit, but what harm could he have done? He must know that he, Chamber, would return and investigate. Nevertheless, he cut his leave short and went back to Colomb-Béchar a week before schedule.

"I want to get back immediately, Colonel," he told the commander of the territory. "By plane, if possible."

"Worried?" the colonel asked with an odd glance.

"I had scarcely made contact, Colonel. There remained many loose ends to be adjusted."

"There's some trouble there," the colonel stated. "You must know sooner or later. Three desertions last week from Bilama. Wireless reports only two recaptured. Know the men? Legionnaires Muller, Hermann, Rozier, François, and Laurens, Marcius?"

"I do, Colonel. Laurens got away?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Of the three, he is the one who would. Too bad."

"Oh," the colonel said, shrugging, "the natives will get him. He can't make the coast. I'll give you a line to the captain

at the flying field, to secure your transportation at once. By the way, what went on is your affair. You can shade the charges against the recaptured men after investigation. You know what occurs in outposts sometimes, and deserters may have cause for dissatisfaction. Which is not official speech, of course."

"Understood, Colonel."

AT THE aviation field, a short distance outside the town of Colomb-Béchar proper, Chamber did not receive an enthusiastic reception. The pilots disliked to fly in that direction, as they had to pass over the Jebel bou Kerkou. In the event of a forced landing, the aviators felt that even should they succeed in escaping injury they were exposed to death from thirst. There were no caravan trails, no automobile roads nearby. Moreover, the planes were often fired upon in that region, not only by hostile natives but also by reputedly friendly Arabs who saw an opportunity to fire on a tempting target with small risk of punishment.

As the soldiers rolled out the Breguet machine, the pilot assigned to the job, a lean second lieutenant, explained to Chamber:

"I was over there last week, looking for the deserters. Located two, and dropped a weighted message to the nearest patrol. Not hard to see them. They'd run out of water and signaled with their shirts. They wanted to be found as much as their pursuers wished to find them. Say, fix a landing place at Bilama some day, eh? The only good spot is pretty short and there's your wall right at the end, glaring in the sunshine. Mind sitting in the cameraman's lap? Only two seats and I want to take some pictures on the way back, to save a trip later."

The big plane slid off, lifted painfully. The heated air gave the wings poor support and it was difficult to obtain altitude. But the pilot, who had been flying

in the Saharan regions for several years, succeeded at last.

Chamber lost all sense of proportionate distances when in the air. Bilama was four days away by camel, two by horse; yet before they had been flying more than thirty minutes, the pilot tapped the plane on one wing, circled, jabbing his index down and shouting.

"Jebel bou Kerkou—Fom Rhedir!"

The Legion officer looked down upon the flattened, tormented panorama, lumped with knolls, spiked with crests and seamed with gullies. One of the deeper cuts was the Rhedir Pass, in the Jebel bou Kerkou! The cameraman, a corporal, shouted explanations.

"Spotted your deserters over that way—they'd missed the Pass by several kilometers, too far west. Another guy lost in there somewhere!"

It was true that somewhere in those hills, alone and thirsty was young Laurens. That is, unless the Berbers had found him. In that case, but for one chance in a thousand, he had been killed. In any case, he would find his fate worse than it could have been at Bilama.

Not long after, the walls of Bilama were in sight. Legionnaires could be seen swarming from the gate, and there were more than a score waiting by the time the plane grounded and lurched to a stop in the face of the glaring wall. The pilot shook hands with Chamber, refused an invitation to come in and have a drink.

"No ice—I'll wait until I get to Béchar."

He directed the Legionnaires to roll the machine back, turn it around. And he was off, with a parting wave of the hand.

The lieutenant walked toward the gate, followed by the silent Legionnaires. As he entered, he met Verlinden, manifestly freshly awakened from a siesta, buttoning his tunic as he walked. They halted, exchanged salutes. Verlinden extended his hand, dropped it when he

saw that Chamber did not respond.

"See you in the office, Sergeant."

"Very well, Lieutenant."

In the office Chamber found Adjutant Roubec asleep, his feet propped on a table, a bottle and a tin cup standing near. The typist rose from behind his table, saluted and went out, sensing that he was not wanted. The officer placed his képi on a hook and turned to meet Verlinden, who had followed.

"I've heard," he said.

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"I'll discover what happened. I give you my word that things will be straightened out, Sergeant."

"All within regulations, Lieutenant," Verlinden retorted coldly. Now that the conflict was brought out into the open, he had shed his attitude of exaggerated respect. "I have nothing to hide, nothing to fear."

"Has Laurens been found?"

"No, Lieutenant. The *mokhrazenis* are still out, though, looking for him."

"All right. You may go."

"Thank you, Lieutenant." Verlinden smiled calmly and left.

Roubec had been awakened by the voices, and when Chamber turned in his direction, the bottle had vanished, the old fellow was writing with an intent expression.

"Finishing a report on the desertions, Lieutenant—"

"Fine," Chamber said with irony.

"This reminds me of Lao-Kay, in the Tonkin, you know—"

"Adjutant Roubec, the next time I find you using this office for a café, you'll hear from me! With all due respect to your age and length of service, you reveal a singular lack of dignity—"

"I, Lieutenant?"

"Good day!"

Chamber walked to his quarters, somewhat relieved by the old soldier's bewilderment. Roubec had been left alone so much in the past two years that he had not expected to be rebuked.

Hartber was in Chamber's room, filling the zinc tub. Fresh linen and a pressed white uniform, with stripes in place, were disposed on the cot.

"What happened here?" Chamber asked. "Never mind discretion. I want to know."

"News came that you had gone to Oran, and Verlinden, like the rest of us, thought you had had enough of Bilama. He started to ride the musicians and shifted Laurens back to César and juggled him all the time for being late. The three left together because they couldn't stand it. But only two came back."

Chamber went to the lockup, and found the two prisoners, still worn and scorched from their experience in the open desert. They were somewhat subdued and frightened. Muller was a bony Prussian, Rozier a wispy, quick tempered Parisian.

"You were crazy to beat it through the desert," Chamber told them, "so all that'll be held against you is illegal absence."

"The sergeant bullied us, Lieutenant," Rozier started.

"Sergeant Verlinden is not under accusation; you are. Where did you leave Laurens?"

"He was with us when the plane sighted us, but he had water left. He said he wouldn't surrender and beat it into the hills. He won't be taken alive, Lieutenant. He'll shoot. He's only a kid and don't know better."

Chamber investigated each one of the charges made by Verlinden against Laurens, and had to admit that they were justified. Laurens had been impudent. Two of the charges were signed by another sergeant, Lemaure, a very just, silent young fellow, in line for a commission.

There was no clear case against Verlinden.

FOR two days, Chamber hoped against all common sense that Laurens had got through the hills. As soon as he struck French controlled territory he would be arrested. But he was very young, this was his first serious offense, and the courtmartial would be lenient.

But one morning, very early, Sergeant Joust of the native militia shook him awake.

"They've got him, Lieutenant."

"Laurens? Alive?"

"Was it likely?"

Chamber dressed hurriedly. Before the sheds, he found a group of horsemen, the tall, bearded *mokhrazenis* just returned. There were five of them, and one had his shoulder swathed in a bloody bandage. Fine sand dribbled from their beards, their turbans and cloaks. While they were not proud of their work, they showed no remorse.

"He shot first, Lieutenant," one of them explained. "That was three days ago, about six hours' ride within the hills. We tried to make him use up his cartridges, but he had full pouches. Our own water was low, and we had no time. When he wounded Khuyder, we grew angry, circled his position and shot him dead."

The native indicated the bundle across a saddle.

"That's him. He would have died anyway, as we were far from water and his was all gone."

Legionnaires were grouping, staring dumbly at the bundle.

"Have him buried, Roubec."

"Must be formally identified for the report, Lieutenant," the adjutant reminded.

Chamber looked at the men, realized they were in an ugly mood, and did not wish to add to their rage by exposing Laurens to their eyes.

"Take him to the ambulance, then."

Then he saw Verlinden. The sergeant had gone off duty at dawn, but had been awakened by the noise. Chamber tried

to warn him away, but the sergeant either misunderstood or elected to disregard the sign. He touched the nearest man, to urge him aside. The Legionnaire turned and stared.

"Assassin!" he said.

At once all of them were screaming the same word, and Chamber could not bring silence. Verlinden grew very pale but kept smiling, the same, tense, faintly derisive smile all knew. Once more he touched the man's shoulder, motioned with his head to have him yield the way. And, as if this gesture had released a trigger, a dozen hands groped for him, his face was scratched, the front of his tunic torn.

Verlinden stepped back, struck out once, and the man who had spoken dropped, stunned. The shouting ended abruptly, and the sergeant pushed his way through the soldiers, to face Chamber.

"You'll bear witness I was struck first, Lieutenant?"

"Yes."

"I thought I was needed."

"You are not. You may go."

"At your orders, Lieutenant."

And Verlinden turned, walked away, with his head high.

"Two men to take the body—the rest, back to your quarters. At once!"

Chamber followed the Legionnaires bearing the corpse into the small ambulance room reserved for noncommissioned men. There, the ropes holding the cloak in which Laurens had been wrapped were severed, the body was exposed.

Three days of being shaken on a saddle, in the heat, had not bettered its appearance. But it was unmistakably Laurens. His uniform was in shreds, his boots worn and lacerated from the sharp edges of stones. The blood clotted face was pathetic under the silken, light blond hair.

"It's him, all right," Roubec stated, without display of emotion. He had

seen so many dead men that one more or less did not affect him. "I'll take his papers out of his pockets for his folks."

"Have him buried," Chamber repeated.

He went back to the office with Sergeant Joust and suggested that the five riders who had killed Laurens be stationed outside for a time. Feeling against them was high among the Legionnaires, and perhaps justified. The killing of one of their comrades, deserter or not, by five grown men hardened to desert fighting seemed monstrous.

"What could they do? Get shot?" Joust asked.

"They did their duty. But they'll be better away from here a space."

A delegation of four Legionnaires entered, removed their képis, possibly to distinguish their errand from strict military procedure, and asked permission for the section to attend the funeral.

This presented a problem. Laurens had been a deserter, hence too serious a demonstration of grief was not advisable. But he decided to permit the men off duty to follow the body to the tiny cemetery outside the walls.

"No military display, understood?"

"Yes, Lieutenant. But can the band play?"

"If you wish," Chamber conceded.

Later he heard the jazz band organized by Laurens play the "Legion's March" in the distance. This was a violation of the terms on which he had granted authorization for a funeral. But he resolved not to mention the matter.

LIEUTENANT," Hartber said that night, "have I your permission to speak?"

"You seldom feel you need it. Go ahead."

"Seeing that the men are sore against Sergeant Verlinden, I think he should leave. They say it was his fault. Just because Laurens wouldn't be his orderly—"

"Enough," Chamber cut short.

He had thought of sending Verlinden back to Béchar himself. The men hated him, and they were men who did not hate for long without taking some action to relieve their feelings. While not as frequently as outsiders imagined, sordid dramas occurred in the Legion, and there were, at Bilama, the elements of a very troublesome affair.

But he clung to the hope, for two days, that the sergeant would present himself and ask for a transfer, which would have simplified matters considerably. A chief's request for the transfer of a sergeant must be motivated, and Verlinden had left no loophole. Moreover, Laurens had alienated all official sympathy through various crimes, desertion, resisting arrest.

At last, Chamber decided to speak frankly, and sent for Verlinden. The sergeant arrived immediately, evidently at ease.

"A change of air might do you good, Verlinden."

"Which means, Lieutenant?"

"That you can't remain here."

"Why not, Lieutenant?"

"For one thing, your own safety."

"Oh? I can take care of myself."

"In all decency, you should wish to—"

Verlinden moved as if tearing himself from his impassive pose.

"Lieutenant, may I speak? Thank you! From first to last, I punished Laurens justly. I thought him a bad, sulky Legionnaire, and he proved he was. I am an old soldier. I have fifteen citations for valor, have so far enjoyed the esteem of every officer I have served under. What happened, I predicted. Laurens got conceited, and thought himself my superior. May I be so bold as to say you are as much to blame as I am?"

"You're speaking to your superior officer, Verlinden—"

"I'm defending myself."

"I have a right to request your transfer, Sergeant."

"On what grounds?"

"The good of the service."

"If you give that motive, which is not subject to explanations that I might have to offer, which is not the truth in its entirety, Lieutenant, I'll blow my brains out."

"Valiant thing to do!"

"Perhaps not, Lieutenant, but you'd have to explain it. Which means that no matter what you say some will always believe I was mistreated, as you believe about Laurens. Lieutenant, you should play with the sergeants, not the men. You're young, you haven't had the experience. You've listened to a private in military matters. Hartber's been talking to you—is that true?"

"Go on, Verlinden."

"I don't know quite what story he told you. But Laurens, a nice kid anywhere else, was no good here. Too conceited. Put himself above the rest, above me—almost on a footing of equality with you. You forgot that only one thing counts in the Legion: discipline. If the greatest tenor in the Paris Opera came here as a private, I'd be his sergeant. You forgot that. And you haven't learned yet that in the corps an officer should see just so much, and no more. You don't like the way I'm talking to you?"

"No, Verlinden."

"Yet there are no witnesses. Laurens made fun of me before the rest, aped my accent, my gestures. One of us had to break. I was older at the game than he, and I got him." Verlinden laughed harshly. "Showed him that he had come to the wrong place for voice culture. You think Roubec an old sot. He is. But if he wished to get you into trouble, he could. He knows. And it's the old fellows like us who made the Legion. Not you."

"You're not a stupid man, Verlinden," Chamber admitted.

"I'm not, even if I can't play a mouth organ, Lieutenant."

"I see your point. See mine: your presence here is a cause for trouble, regardless of causes. You're an old Legionnaire. Tell me how to fix it."

"I don't want to leave under a cloud, as if I were kicked out. I'll apply for Indo-Chinese service, and you can approve. That will get me out of here in a month or six weeks." The sergeant laughed. "As for anything happening to me here, don't worry. Old Verlinden is always armed, can watch for his own hide. I was guard in a prison camp for two years, and the prisoners played for who would kill me. The men were buried. I'm not afraid."

"Agreed," Chamber said.

For the first time Verlinden showed emotion.

"I felt rotten about the whole business, Lieutenant. But now that you understand that I was forced, as you are forced, to do what I did, I like it better. And I don't mean what I say about encouraging gossip behind my back. You couldn't help it. A man's human, even if an officer. Know what the trouble was, really? This was your first time in an outpost, eh?"

"In the Sahara, yes."

"And you didn't realize that the world was smaller; that everything you did was watched, and that of all places, an isolated dump like this is the place where a man earns or loses prestige. Laurens came here too soon."

Chamber rose, nodded.

"Agreed, Verlinden. You may leave."

THE Legionnaire who served as clerk at Bilama sat in a corner of the darkened office, shuffling papers and whistling low between his teeth. Chamber lifted his eyes from time to time, scowling. He was composing a report of the condition of the automatic weapons issued to the section, and strove to find a

new way of asking for the replacement of a heavy machine gun.

Outside, the world was a mad whirl of light and heat. The sun spilled on the plateau like a downpour of flame, which vibrated and flowed like a tide over the walls of the outpost, licking into the remotest nooks for shade, stabbing with fierce intensity through the nailholes in the wooden blinds.

The officer wiped his moist palms on the linen scarf thrown over his shoulders, mopped his brow, resumed his task.

"Attention is called again to the St. Etienne on the north bastion. It is worse than useless, as it creates an illusion of safety in that zone that would not exist under combat conditions."

The whistling of the Legionnaire pierced through his brain, and he unconsciously filled in the words: "Caroline, my dearest, put on thy patent leathers." He spoke, "Leon!"

The whistle halted.

"*Mon Lieutenant?*"

"Would you like me to buy you a tin whistle? It's louder."

"Excuse me, Lieutenant."

Silence reigned. But Chamber knew that the poor fellow would soon be either humming or whistling the tune again. Once a man's mind started a tune during a warm afternoon, it was hard to stop.

Three weeks had passed since Chamber had come back to Bilama. There was no surface change. The men had sulked for a few days, then the death of Laurens seemed forgotten. Sergeant Verlinden was obeyed as before, and Chamber had cut short Hartber's speeches, aware that there had been some justification for the noncommissioned man's reproaches.

The whining roar of a plane's motor swelled, passed over the post, very near, dwindled. Chamber half rose, decided that it was too hot to move outside. It would be silly, as a matter of fact, to

go forth merely to gape at the machine as a cow stares at a passing train.

Could he blame Verlinden, fairly? After all, the mounted company was not a refuge for wild-spirited youngsters. Laurens had assumed a man's rôle too early and had suffered the penalty. He had run away from his home before, and if Verlinden were blamed, the boy's own family had been as guilty. Adjutant Roubec had tried to reform, with the result that he had gone to bed for a couple of days, shaking like a leaf. Chamber himself advised him to take a few drinks.

What was right and what was wrong? Chamber felt uneasy when he dwelt on the subject, afraid of his responsibilities. It was a strain to hold the power to make or break men.

Legionnaire Leon was humming again.

Then the door swung open after a hasty rap and a Legionnaire entered the room with a flood of light. He was Lemaure, the sergeant on duty.

"The plane dropped a weighted message, Lieutenant."

"Thank you, Lemaure."

Chamber opened the packet and read the first sheet.

It was a communication from battalion headquarters.

Application for Indo-Chinese service made by Sergeant Verlinden, Paul, forwarded to Sidi-bel-Abbes, with favorable note from major. Legionnaire Muller, Hermann, No. 15036, and Legionnaire Rozier, Francois, No. 11091, two months prison, sentence suspended, for "desertion in peace time from a territory in a state of siege," with attenuating circumstances granted. Papers of Legionnaire Laurens, Marcius, must be sent to Paris before return to family.

"Leon, type the decision concerning Muller and Rozier, have it posted up on the board," Chamber ordered.

The next paper referred to requests for supplies, weapons and ammunitions, the permanent assignment of a com-

missioned man of the medical corps at Bilama. The third was longer, and of more interest:

"Office of the Colonel,
Colomb-Béchar, Sud-Oranais:

Bulletin of Information, communicated all Posts. General situation perturbed. Intelligence Service communicates reports several armed bands leaving Taflalet region. Three hundred rifles, Ait-Kheb-bashes and Ait-bu-Seguschen, believed led by Ahmed ben El Haj, moving direction the south. Adrar Post communicates presence in region. Fifty rifles, Ait-Hammous, moving south toward Jebel bou Kerkou.

Information communicated by Aviation: Scouting plane reports strong group, fifty to seventy rifles sighted region Bou Kerkou, presumed moving to Rhedir Pass.

General orders: Commanders all post will detail additional patrols. Native partisans will be gathered. Automobile traffic all roads suspended. Runners to communicate information all posts deprived wireless.

"Send Sergeant Joust to see me, Leon," Chamber ordered. But the wireless operator arrived first, with news:

B. L., B. L., BILAMA. LIEUTENANT CHAMBER WILL TURN OVER COMMAND POST BILAMA TO SERGEANT JOUST, WHO WILL SUMMON PARTISANS OF NEIGHBORING TRIBE TO OCCUPY REDOUBT. LIEUTENANT CHAMBER WILL LEAD SECTION OF THE MOUNTED COMPANY TOWARD JEBEL BOU KERNOU, MAKE DEMONSTRATION OF FOUR TO SIX DAYS IN VICINITY OF FOM RHEDIR. MOUNTED SECTION OF ABADLA WILL MOVE IN SUPPORT. MOUNTED COMPANY OF BOU-DENIB WILL MOVE IN SUPPORT. SPECIAL INFORMATION: LIEUTENANT CHAMBER IS INSTRUCTED TO PROCEED WITH EXTREME CARE, AS EXACT WHEREABOUTS OF THREE HUNDRED RIFLES UNDER AHMED BEN EL HAJ REMAINS UNCERTAIN.

Within a few minutes, the bugler was sounding assembly, and Chamber was giving final instructions to the sergeants. Joust had already dispatched *rekkas** to the partisans, who would arrive by night-fall.

"We've had these alarms before and they came to nothing," Chamber said. "This time it looks as if it would be serious. The section starts as soon as possible."

Within thirty minutes all was ready.

Hartber brought Chamber's horse, and the lieutenant swung into the saddle. For a moment, he lingered, hesitated. There was always an instant of poignant expectation before these hasty departures. And this time, Chamber had a definite premonition that he would encounter the enemy. The men waited, watched him, motionless and mute, but visibly tense.

"Allons!"

The bugle brayed, and the men afoot led the way through the wide open gate, through the girdling wire. Before them spread the stony plain under the drenching light.

"Direction—bou Kerkou!"

THE plateau surged to meet the sky, up the gray flanks of the Jebel bou Kerkou, in an endless swell of tawny soil studded with dark boulders.

The mounted section progressed in two groups, those in the saddle and those afoot. The men on the mules rode some distance to the right and behind, out of the swirling dust churned by the boots of the marching Legionnaires.

Twice in the past three days the jagged gap of Rhedir Pass had appeared against the horizon, and each time Chamber had turned away. His instructions were to be careful, and the spot was ideal for an ambush. A handful of skilled riflemen could have halted and decimated a battalion.

Chamber disposed of great potential strength: four automatic rifles, some

*Rekkas: message bearers.

sixty carbines. But such a phrase as "volume of fire" became meaningless in the Sahara. There, one had to grope for one's foes, even after a combat was engaged. Attack might come from anywhere, and such words as rear, van and flanks were conventional. The native scouts whose blue cloaks made bright patches against the ochre soil were little protection from surprise.

Although the detachment was not within the hills, the nature of the soil, cut with deep ruts and shallow ravines, was such that a thousand Berbers might have concealed themselves and remained undiscovered until the first ranks literally were upon them. Chamber led the way cautiously, for to take his troopers within any one of the narrow gullies might prove suicide.

His orders, carefully worded to cover the responsibility of those who had formulated them and leave the burden resting on him, were to make a demonstration. He hoped to have an opportunity to fight.

He knew that the mercantile value of his detachment would prove a magnet to any band strong enough to have a chance of success. There were over thirty mules, each one worth several thousand francs in Tafilalet, sixty Lebel carbines, each representing, anywhere in the hostile zones, three to four thousand francs. Deemed by local standards, he had an enormous supply of cartridges. With other items of equipment, money, garments, the detachment represented close to a million in loot.

"Ci soir, li macache bono,
Si tu pas 'trapé l'duro!"*

Some one had thought of shifting from sentimental ballads and martial songs to the tunes chanted by the Moorish women, and the men on foot were singing with new enthusiasm. After four

days of constant marching, the Legionnaires did not seem too tired, showed a good spirit.

Chamber was forced to admiration, stirred with a vague pity. For he had some knowledge of what he was undertaking, while they had to trust him. And their faith was shown by their carelessness, their songs. Although not a few had been officers in luckier days, it seemed that his stripes invested him with a keener intelligence, with a surer knowledge than theirs. He was an officer.

Their trust was more difficult to explain, even to understand, than the loyalty of privates in other units. He was younger, less experienced than most, and not of their breed. Thirty-odd Germans, ten Russians, a scattering of Austrians, Swiss and Balkanese followed him. Why? What mysterious lure was there in the word Legion to have brought them here, from all classes of society, from all nations of Europe?

He glanced at his watch, seeing that they were looking at him expectantly. Their muscles warned them of the passage of time, and they knew that the hourly rest was near. He lifted his hand. Verlinden blew his whistle.

"Easy on the water—easy on the water—don't swill."

The men sprawled where they had halted, only a few had taken a single step after the signal. It appeared as if their legs had been slashed from under their torsos at one time. In the mule lines there was some confusion, for the animals saw the men drinking, heard the gurgling of water, and manifested their own thirst.

Chamber occupied the ten minutes jotting notes on a small pad, consulting compass and maps. He identified the visible crests of the Jebel bou Kerkou. Then Verlinden blew the whistle again to end the pause.

The men who had marched were helped on the mules, hoisted into the saddles between the high packs. The

*Sabir slang (Sabir is a dialect mixing French and Arabic, a sort of North African pidgin-French) Meaning: This evening, no good at all, if thou hast no money.)

march started once more. At first those who had been mounted were stiff, and grunted and swore. Then they quieted down and settled into the easy, persistent, elastic stride. Sweat trickled down their sunburned cheeks, gleamed like varnish, beaded their bristling chins with shiny globules.

The air appeared flattened into perceptible, moving layers, vibrating in an odd, slanting dance, sprinkled with a million tiny flecks of flame.

"Cork that canteen! No drinking on the march!" Verlinden called.

Verlinden, in the open, was magnificent. Heat, thirst, fatigue showed no grip on him. His bearing was as smart, as crisp as within the post. He knew the men hated him, and he did not love them. But his duty was to keep the detachment moving, to preserve its efficiency. He walked oftener than was his turn, to leave his mount to a tired man.

"No drinking, no drinking—" he repeated.

Fifty minutes, another halt, and the men again changed places on the mules. The crests seemed to sway in the distance, to bob with each stride forward.

*"A la Légion, nous n'avons qu'une devise, C'est marche ou crève sans pinard dans ton bidon..."**

"Halt, there! Halt!" Verlinden called.

The sergeant ran forward, touched Chamber's knee. The lieutenant leaned from the saddle, peered into the glare, following the pointing finger.

One of the native scouts had turned and was galloping back. His comrades, some distance behind, had halted to wait for him, poised high in the saddle. The sun gleamed on the rapidly unslung and loaded carbines.

"He's seen something, Lieutenant."

"We'll soon know."

As they watched the horse appeared to stumble, faltered, slid forward to roll sidewise. The Arab was free of the stirrups and running in one movement. As his companions converged toward him at top speed, all in the section heard the first shot.

Tack—ho!

Chamber was very calm, glad to be faced by something real, after the expectation of the last few days. The Arab whose horse had been killed came up, holding on the stirrup of a friend. He halted before the officer, panting.

"They're—there—"

"How many?"

"I saw two. But—there are—more—"

The lieutenant nodded. Unless there were enough of the raiders to fight on something like equality, they would not have revealed their presence. The important question was whether the men ahead were part of the three hundred rifles commanded by Ahmed, or members of the weaker Ait-Hammous band driven through the hills by the approach of the Bou-Denib mounted company north of the range.

"Adjutant Roubec, take Group 4, fall back four hundred meters with the mules. In case you are attacked, close up with me at once. Don't permit them to slash between our front line and your men. Understood?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"Verlinden Group 1. Lemaure, Group 3. I take the center with Group 2. Liaison men by my side!"

This formation brought forty-five men in a long line, a few feet apart. Flung against the immensity of the land, they covered but a very small area. The Legionnaires looked at one another, perhaps understanding fully for the first time how pathetically few they were.

Chamber waited a few minutes, hoping that he would obtain some clue as to the others' identity. Meanwhile, the automatic riflemen had stripped the can-

*In the Legion, we have but one motto, It's march or croak without wine in thy canteen...

vas jackets from their weapons and inserted the first magazines. But the plain might have been empty of human life, and the Legionnaires might have doubted hearing that first shot, had it not been for the body of the horse.

"Advance," Chamber signaled.

He could hear the boots of his men striking the hard sand, hear their breathing. They reached the native scouts, who had remained on observation. Their chief, who bore corporal's stripes stitched to the breast of his *gandoura*, claimed to have seen half a score of riflemen, indicated various spots.

"Advance." The lieutenant repeated the signal.

He was trying to shape a plan of action. He motioned to Verlinden, instructing the sergeant to lead Group 1 in a circling movement, to slide, if possible, between the enemy and the hills.

At the same time, he called Sergeant Lemaure and Group 3 closer to his central group. From time to time he turned to look toward Roubec's group. It might be unwise to leave this coveted lot of mules so far behind, yet, under the circumstances, there was nothing to warrant his exposing them to rifle fire.

"Range eight hundred," he called.

"Eight hundred!" the sergeants repeated.

The pace quickened.

"Six hundred—"

"Six hundred—six hundred—"

Three flickers of flame ahead, three shots.

"Hold your fire. Advance."

"Hold it—hold it—"

"Four hundred!"

"Four hundred—"

THE LEGIONNAIRES crouched lower, looked straight ahead now, without a glance at their companions. Then the first general discharge came from the hidden enemy, a long, ripping volley. Chamber's patience had had the desired effect. Untroubled by the dis-

charge of his men's guns, he could estimate the number of riflemen opposing him. There were between twenty and thirty, judging by the sounds.

"Ait-Hammous?" Sergeant Lemaure called.

Chamber shrugged. He did not know as yet.

Fifty meters farther he ordered a pause. But he signaled to Verlinden to keep his group progressing, hoping to slide Group 1 between the raiders and the line of hills, their obvious retreat. But the Berber chieftain saw through this plan, for the next volley stretched further to Chamber's right, again directly opposite Verlinden's men.

Chamber turned toward Group 4, which was keeping its distance, and Roubec signaled that all was well with him. There were many hours of daylight remaining and time did not press. The lieutenant scanned the vicinity.

On the right, flanking Verlinden's men, was a rather high, rugged bluff. As no shots had come from the crest, Chamber knew it was not held by the enemy. He sent a runner to Verlinden, informing him that he, Chamber, was about to open fire on his front, thus engaging the foe's attention. Verlinden's group would start forward, as if to climb the knoll. But as soon as the rise of ground shielded them from view, the Legionnaires of Group 1 would hasten and round the hill, bringing them on the flat ground, capping the Berbers' line.

The natives were firing oftener now, and the bullets fell short, by a hundred yards at times. This caused much amusement among the younger Legionnaires. But the veterans grumbled, refused to laugh. The range was as yet too long for accurate shooting by the raiders, but when it was shortened to their preferred distance, the detachment might expect some breakage!

Thus far, no one had seen anything of the enemy save the flicker of their

shots. Chamber had an automatic aimed on a spot selected at random, ordered the gunner to fire a few bursts. This caused several men to dart from cover, at a peculiar, loping gait, which cut the yards with startling speed. Seeing that the range was correct, Chamber ordered the automatic of Lemaure's group to fire. Covered by the discharges of the two automatics, he advanced a hundred yards with his *voltigeurs*, the men of the groups armed with carbines.

The automatics' crews then came forward, shielded by the firing of the others. By this time it was not wholly safe to remain upright, for bullets were nosing very near. Chamber was satisfied, for he was almost within striking distance without having suffered a casualty.

"Everything goes well," he mused. "Almost too well."

He unslung his glasses and scanned the base of the knoll which Verlinden's group should have reached. But there was nothing in sight there. Sweeping back, he saw the Legionnaires prone on the ground, Verlinden standing, evidently shouting. Chamber swore—it was no time to harangue the men. He stood and waved his hand.

"Get on with it, Verlinden, get on with it!"

Lemaure ran up from the left, having turned his group over to a corporal.

"Something's wrong with Group 1, Lieutenant!"

"I can see that! But what?"

"The men refuse to obey."

"Refuse to obey?" Chamber wondered.

"There was some talk of this before we started. But I'd thought they'd behave when the time came. They won't follow Verlinden in action!"

Chamber reddened with helpless rage.

"But they can't do that, Lemaure!"

"Of course not, Lieutenant," the sergeant admitted, with a very straight face. "But they can delay action a bit."

"I'm going to them and straighten things out," Chamber outlined. "I'll

come back as soon as I get them moving. You take charge until then. In an emergency, rallying point toward me. Understood?"

"Right, Lieutenant."

The lieutenant ran toward Verlinden's group, almost crying with humiliation. The natives had had ample time to figure what his gestures had meant; his hopes of an easy victory were vanishing. As he came nearer he beheld a strange and, to him, unreal scene. Verlinden, standing, was pointing his automatic pistol at his men, and they, in turn, had converged the muzzles of their carbines upon him.

"Lower your guns, all of you," Chamber panted. "What's the meaning of this?"

He saw humiliation and rage written clearly on the sergeant's face. But Verlinden did not speak, merely indicated the soldiers with a lift of the chin.

"Obey your sergeant, Legionnaires."

They did not rise, did not answer. Chamber leaped forward and dragged the nearest man, Hartber, to his feet. He strove to control his voice. But the ridicule, and the real danger of the situation, made him choked. There were a few men among the Berbers who could adjust sights, and bullets were passing constantly.

"Are you going to obey—?" the officer lifted his pistol significantly.

"We don't obey a murderer before the enemy, Lieutenant."

"Obey."

Hartber closed his eyes, stood still. Chamber saw that he was waiting to be shot. He felt that his chief would not hesitate to sacrifice him at this time, but was not willing to be the first to yield. A remnant of sense saved the officer from pressing the trigger.

In an instant, a half dozen yarns he had heard flashed in his mind. The tales that fed the gossip of the mess tables in the Legion, of isolated detachments returning without officers, of unexplain-

able, or unexplained tragedies. To act as they had, these men must believe their cause just. And he knew them well enough to be aware that life counted little against traditions.

He pushed Hartber away, lowered the gun.

"Corporal, you take charge!"

"What do I do, Lieutenant?"

"Circle—" Chamber whirled, with his mouth open.

The automatic of Group 4, the reserve protecting the mules, was hammering desperately. And the lieutenant saw the whole mass running forward, men and animals mixed, toward him. At the same moment, timed to perfection, the fire from the known positions of the natives swelled intensely. There were several hundred rifles on the field—consequently, Ahmed had scored another surprise.

SERGEANT LEMAURE had no reputation for showing initiative. On this occasion, he acted true to his character, met the situation with great calm and strict attention to routine. According to orders, he headed his groups toward Chamber and did not move to protect the mules save by long distance firing. A further dividing of the already scattered forces would have spelled disaster.

A more brilliant, or more conceited, man would have attempted to make the most of an opportunity to show his worth. Lemaure simply obeyed.

With the trap sprung and all movements brought out into the open, Ahmed's plan of action was easily understood. A part of his band had engaged the Frenchmen's attention, while the rest slipped out of the hills to attack the mules, sole objective in the Berber's mind.

By an odd trick of fate the mutiny of Verlinden's group had contributed to the premature attack on the convoy. Had the group obeyed the sergeant, the

combat would have been so far engaged in front that the mule guards would have been overwhelmed before the Legionnaires could extricate themselves and return to help. In all probability the halt in the French advance had been attributed to suspicion on the leader's part and not to a mutiny, and Ahmed had believed there was no further cause for delay.

"Rallying point, the crest," Chamber called.

He indicated the bluff, and Verlinden's group scrambled to the top, while the lieutenant led the rest, more slowly. The group under Roubec had suffered severely, the adjutant himself had been shot through the jaws. There were four dead, but the bodies had been retrieved and brought along.

Chamber did not allow himself to yield to panic. The crest he occupied was a good position to defend, and he gave orders that the smaller boulders be rolled into place to form a continuous breastwork, while the automatics kept the attackers at a safe distance.

He found it impossible to shelter the mules wholly, but counted on the Berbers' anxiety not to harm possible loot as preferable to concealment. A dead mule was worth nothing to Ahmed's men, and they would avoid hitting them when possible, until they were certain they had failed.

The section soon formed a square atop the hill, each face armed with one of the automatics. The enemy was closing in, but very cautiously, unwilling to give targets to the quick firing weapons, which they had learned to dread. The fusillade came in gusts, whenever one of the advancing groups found convenient shelter. Then Mauser bullets spat-tered on the stones, and whined from all directions as they ricocheted.

"The scout plane from Béchar is due in this region soon," Chamber informed his men. "It will spot us and find the Bou-Denib Company. We're fine so long

as we stick here. We have enough water for a couple of days. Nothing to worry about."

For a moment, he had thought of reorganizing his men and attempting to break through. But the odds were five to one against him, and the Legionnaires were worth little more than the Saharans once in the open. The advantages springing from better discipline and long training disappeared in the desert, where a Lebel in the hands of a European was only a match for a Mauser wielded by a native.

There were but two of the irregular riders in the square, and one informed Chamber that their comrades had galloped away at the time of the surprise attack on the mules:

"Tonight, they reach outpost. Wireless—" the Arab who talked imitated the buzzing of the instrument—"Soldiers come quick—airplanes, automobiles, *Tirailleurs*, all damn business."

There was a spell of comparative calm, during which the lieutenant moved from one automatic to the next, correcting the range, assigning targets.

He came upon Verlinden, who had taken a saddle from a mule some distance away from the firing line and was seated with his back resting against a boulder.

"Getting lots of experience in one day, Lieutenant?"

"Rather," Chamber admitted. "I suppose both of us did."

"I wouldn't have believed they'd do this, that's so."

"No one knows everything, Verlinden."

"That ends me in the Legion," the sergeant stated. "I'm burnt out, cooked, done, finished! Everybody'll hear of this, and no one will give me another chance."

"I don't show up so brilliantly myself," Chamber said, shrugging. "This will need explaining."

"Don't fret about this. You've done

as well as any one could, I'll say that. After all, you were lucky."

Chamber went to the southern face of the square, by automatic 4. The raiders were creeping up, seeking a favorable spot from which to launch a rush.

"Distribute grenades. Riflemen, fix bayonets."

Within the next hour three men were hit, and all three were killed.

Lemaure touched Chamber's shoulder.

"Verlinden's on the other side of the square, Lieutenant. The men'll get sore if he takes part in the fight, but he is my senior and I can't tell him."

The officer ran toward the Flemish sergeant.

"Keep out of the way—"

"My own hide's in play—"

"Better let others fight for it," Chamber snapped impatiently. "There has been sufficient trouble—"

Verlinden, clubbed his carbine, broke the stock on a rock. The sharp crack resounded through the detonations, and several men turned around. They grinned.

"Verlinden's deflating," one shouted.

In the slang of the French Army, a man who loses his nerve is compared to a punctured balloon. And the word deflating did not merely signify fear, but utter moral collapse in this case. Verlinden probably felt the truth of the accusation, understood that the moment of tragedy had passed, that he was becoming a ludicrous, pathetic figure—a sergeant of the Legion not permitted to share in an action.

"Deflating, little fellows? Deflating, Verlinden?"

He was astonishingly quick for a large man. Before the lieutenant could grasp him, he had leaped forward, hurdled a boulder, and was in the open. He turned toward those left behind, and all saw him laugh. For a moment he seemed about to aim his automatic pistol at the man who had goaded him, then he

turned to face the enemy and walked down the slope.

It was suicide.

Then followed a bizarre development.

Before this lone man, who walked so calmly, the natives remained puzzled. The firing slackened, almost came to a stop. Some distance down the hill, Verlinden tossed his *kèpi* away and went on bareheaded, his skull exposed to the fierce Saharan sun. The nearest Berbers allowed him to come with ten yards of their hiding place, and it was not until he lifted his pistol and fired upon them that they shouldered their weapons again.

IT WAS an incredible, nightmare scene, a lone man in khaki facing the swarthy riflemen. Chamber understood Verlinden—such a man could stand hatred, but shriveled before scorn. He was a true Legionnaire, in love with the spectacular and, his life being sacrificed, he granted himself the luxury of exacting admiration from the very Legionnaires who had laughed.

To die was nothing—if it meant that he would be remembered. The exchange of shots was brief, did not last six seconds.

Verlinden staggered, as if hurled backward by the impacts, sank to his knees. He fired two shots in this position, then collapsed gently on his side, like a man dropping off to sleep. More and more missiles nailed him to the rocks, sent tremors through his body.

The Legionnaires turned white faces toward their officer. Chamber, shaken by emotion, wiped his forehead with his grimy palms.

Wounded men crawled back to the line, hoisted themselves on rocks to see the body. Their rage spent, the Berbers were no longer wasting shots into it.

"That's settled," Chamber thought.

But he was wrong. The mad sequence, started that day with the mutiny of Group 1 under fire, had not reached its

climax. For the Berbers tried to reach the corpse, to haul it into their hiding place.

Verlinden had gone down in full sight of the Legionnaires' line, but as the body sank, his legs had slid into a depression seaming the slope. The nearest of the enemy must cross an open space thirty feet wide to reach this gully, in which they would be safe from direct fire.

The first attempt came almost immediately, for the sergeant had an excellent pistol—the men facing him had learned it shot straight—cartridges, probably a watch and money. Thirty feet is not a long distance normally, simply a matter of four or five leaps, consuming perhaps four seconds. But the Berber had not really started before he pitched forward, for every carbine in that sector of the line had been trained on him.

Like Verlinden but half a minute before, the Berber was riddled after he was dead. And when the firing paused, another raider, inspired by greed or perhaps wholly by vanity, sprang into sight. He reached the gully, tumbled into it. But as Verlinden's body was not moved, it was evident that he had been hit.

An odd conflict grew within the larger conflict; the dead sergeant became the center of attention. Before long, the nearer raiders stopped rushing, as an automatic rifle and fifteen carbines covered the spot.

Word had reached the natives down the slope that there was loot to be found. Several of them entered the gully, which they intended to follow to the place where they might reach out and drag Verlinden away. It was inevitable that they would eventually succeed. For, save in a few spots, and then for a mere two or three feet, they would be covered.

Chamber watched these intervals with fascination. And he saw man after man flitting by, so rapidly that the quickest marksmen could not press the trigger in time. The lieutenant had witnessed such episodes in battle before, and knew

the stubborn, mad pride that kept both sides from admitting failure. He was not wholly free from the general excitement, and the fate of the dead man, huddled in the glare on the slope, seemed of supreme importance.

Verlinden, the spark of life gone from him, was no longer merely a man, a man cordially detested by his kind. He had become a symbol, a Legionnaire. Verlinden's personality had fled wherever the spirit travels after death, but there remained his clay and his uniform.

His head, taken as a trophy through the market places of desert villages, would be a reproach to his Legionnaires.

Too late! The body had moved, the natives had it! A jeering shout rose from the Berbers. There was an instant of agonized waiting.

Then, what was left of Group 1 was running down the slope, running like madmen.

Chamber tried to stop them, was brushed aside, knocked off his feet. And for an instant, he was about to follow them, blindly.

There was no time. Quick to take advantage of the sudden gap in the line, the raiders charged at the sector left unprotected. Chamber gathered a few men, fought off the assailants with grenades and bayonets. Several mules were taken, led away down the slope, while knots of men dropped before the automatics.

It was soon over, and the square was reformed with the men left. Roubec was found knifed, and several other wounded men had been finished off. The attack repulsed, Chamber had time to think of Group 1. Some of the Legionnaires had evidently survived, for a brisk fire from the gully poured into the fleeing natives.

An hour later the raiders had disappeared into the hills, with a few mules as loot. Chamber reached the gully, and

found three Legionnaires alive. But the bodies of the fallen—Verlinden, Hartber and the others—had been preserved from mutilation. The three survivors of Group 1 seemed dazed. They looked at their lieutenant, and he saw that no more than he did they understand clearly what had guided them.

And he had a last surprise. These men who had not flinched from death, who had risked and invited death, were afraid of him, feared what he might say, were terrorized by words!

"We got him in time," one explained, pointing to Verlinden.

"All right."

The speaker hesitated, shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

"Lieutenant—?"

"What?"

"Are you going to report this?"

"The combat?" Chamber smiled. "Naturally."

"And nothing else, Lieutenant?"

Chamber had learned. In the Sahara there were things an officer saw, and other things he could not see.

"There was nothing else," he concluded.

They stared at him in silence for a long moment, then all three relaxed, grinned. And somehow, instinctively, Chamber had the sensation that in that instant he and the section had fused into one, that he had won them over.

He turned away, for the long expected plane from Colomb-Béchar had appeared in the sky, and he had to prepare the cloth panels to signal the observer. The machine swooped lower, circled, and a hand waved understanding. So Chamber knew that at this moment all Saharan posts of the region, the outside world was learning by wireless what it was meant to know.

There had been an indecisive combat, a few deaths—and that was all.

DONALD BARR CHIDSEY



Smugglers climbed the steep rocks near Malling Keep.

ON A DARK NIGHT

Barfreston was a gentleman and a swordsman, Col. Malling was a baronet and a rogue, and Riding Officer Slake was just tough.

COLONEL SIR GREGORY MALLING was six feet two, and proportionately broad. He was forty-three years old. But there was no fat on him; and when he shrugged his shoulders and took off his cloak he was as light and lively as a boy.

"So you'd fight?" He folded the cloak and placed it upon a rock. He drew his sword. "It's my luck that none of my men are about." He glanced back toward the cliff while he tucked in the lace at his right cuff. "It would be so

much easier to order a gamekeeper to shoot you down—"

George Barfreston had ridden hard from London, after very little sleep the previous night, and his nerves were frayed by worry, his temper sore. His impulse was to spring upon the big man; but he held himself erect, placed his hands behind his back and teetered on his heels.

"No, I do not demand a fight." He spoke quietly, with a great effort. "What I do demand is that you permit

me to search your home. You're not dealing with an excited boy, Malling. I'm going to get into that place if I'm obliged to kill you and every one of your servants to do so!"

"Bravo," murmured Colonel Sir Gregory Malling.

George Barfreton swallowed hard; but he kept his voice low, his manner quiet.

"I stopped at the inn where they took the footman, and I talked to him before he died. I talked with the driver too. I know them both—they're servants of Barbara—and, from what they told me, the leader of that band *must* have been you, sir!"

"Conclusive," said Sir Gregory. "Irrefutable." He spread his feet, bent his knees to loosen the muscles of his legs, made a few counters with his blade. "Why not take this amazing evidence to a king's magistrate? I'm sure he would be interested to hear that the master of Malling Keep has turned tobyman and abductor and the Lord knows what else. With a search warrant—"

"I haven't time! If you refuse to permit me to search Malling Keep, sir, I'll use the warrant that hangs by my side!"

Sir Gregory smiled.

"Well, then," he said, "what are we waiting for?"

George Barfreton drew his own sword. There would be no profit in further argument with this fellow. He knew Sir Gregory's stubbornness. He knew, too, Sir Gregory's reputation as a swordsman; but time was precious, and at that moment he would gladly have fought all of Lucifer's lieutenants in order to search the house atop the chalk cliff.

He stepped forward, his knees bent, his blade held low.

"*En garde, sir!*"

"I am always on guard," said Colonel Sir Gregory Malling.

For perhaps a full minute neither man

moved. They stood tense, studying each other. Then George's right foot slid forward, and he feinted a lunge. He had hoped to learn Malling's favorite parry. But Malling didn't stir, only smiled.

There was no sound in that desolate place, and very little breeze. The cliffs of chalk stared solemnly seaward, oblivious of these humans, or perhaps bored by them. A thin, unsubstantial haze hung half-heartedly over the water. Only one vessel was in sight, a dogger—two-masted, beamy, bluff-bowed—probably a Dutchman: she moved at an almost imperceptible pace, stolid, phlegmatic.

George Barfreton lunged again, this time with better speed, stretching himself farther. But again Colonel Malling refused to stir.

"Try once more," Malling suggested.

George feinted for the right shoulder, dropped his point and lunged very low for the right hip. He went in full-length. The parry was so swift, so light, that he scarcely felt it. But the riposte slipped through the drape of his shirt at the left shoulder. This was no fault of Malling's: George's right foot had slipped slightly in the sand, so that his body was somewhat lower than it would normally have been. His face was white and cold when he came back out of that lunge, and instinctively he retreated a few steps.

"You were lucky," Sir Gregory whispered. "That should have been through the heart."

George recovered his previous position. He tapped Malling's blade on one side, then on the other. He disengaged, tapped the blade again. At all this the colonel merely smiled.

"Beginning to wish you hadn't been so hot-headed, eh? I don't suppose I should expect you to rush in again after that?" Malling spoke slowly, tauntingly. "Well, I'll save you the trouble. I'll finish this thing myself."

He began to move forward with tiny,

tight, cat-like steps. His guard was high, his point steady; the tantalizing smile never left his lips.

"The only thing I'm troubled about is what to do with your body."

He cut over, disengaged, dropped into a swift lunge. George countered twice; the weapons slithered together and the guards clanged. George retreated two steps. He had caught that attack barely in time, and he'd had no chance for a riposte.

"Perhaps the sea would be best. The king has been frowning upon affairs of honor recently, and I dislike meddling officers." Malling continued his steady advance, and his blade moved rapidly now, disengaging, circling, licking in and out. "So perhaps the sea would be best. Now if—"

"Stop all this flumbubbery!"

Each swordsman retreated several steps before he lowered his blade. Then each stared in astonishment at the newcomer.

HE WAS a very short man with enormous shoulders and practically no neck at all. He wore a brown felt hat with a broad brim, and his hands were thrust into the pockets of woolen breeches, which were mouse-colored and baggy. He wore also a brown woolen tailcoat, but no cloak. His head was huge. His eyes were small, blue, set wide apart. His mouth was tiny, his jaw thick and heavy. His face was expressionless.

"Who the devil are you?" demanded Colonel Malling.

The truncated giant blinked at him.

"Riding Officer Slake, sir. Recently of Liverpool."

"Do you know you're trespassing on my property?"

Riding Officer Slake nodded gravely.

"Then get the devil off!"

Riding Officer Slake said apologetically:

"I think this young gent should go

with me. I don't think you ought to kill him."

"Must I get permission from the Customs House before I kill a man?"

"No-o—" "Slake stroked his chin—" "No, I don't remember there's anything in the ordinances that says about that."

George snapped—

"This is a private quarrel, and neither of us desires your interference." He told Malling, "The man's mad."

"Oh, indubitably," said Malling. Still, he seemed troubled. "We will ignore him. *En garde*, sir!"

Again the blades touched, tinkled together. Malling began a wary, crouching advance. George Barfreton remained motionless.

"Stop!"

Riding Officer Slake had drawn two huge iron pistols, and now he cocked them, pointing one at George, one at the colonel.

"I'm a representative of the king," he said doggedly, "even if I am supposed to prevent smuggling, not dueling."

Malling whirled upon him.

"Are you going to get off my land?"

"I am," said Riding Officer Slake, "when you've put away your steel tooth-picks and when this young gent comes along with me."

"Damme, then I'll get men who'll put you off!"

Colonel Sir Gregory Malling sheathed his sword with a clack, snatched up his coat and cloak and stalked away in the direction of a path which led up the side of the cliff.

Slake chuckled, pocketing the pistols.

"Peppery sort, ain't he?"

But his manner changed when he saw George Barfreton start for the cliff path, his sword still gripped in his right fist.

"Hi!"

He scampered to a position in front of George and again produced one of the pistols.

"You can't go up there, sir! Why,

they'd blow your head off before you got within a mile of the place!"

George paused. What the man said was true. It would be suicide to try to force a way into Malling Keep in broad daylight, with Sir Gregory already warned. And suicide wouldn't help Barbara.

It would have been different if Malling were dead. But Malling was very much alive, thanks to this meddling fool.

"Will you please keep out of private quarrels? Will you please understand that when gentlemen fight they've no wish to have a Customs House official waving guns around and giving commands?"

His face was almost purple with rage. The little man only shook his head slowly, almost sadly.

"Don't take it so huffy, sir, if I may say that. After all, I saved your life, eh?"

"I'm perfectly capable of defending my own life!"

"Oh, you were fast enough. But he was faster. The way he—"

"It was no concern of yours."

George turned in sick disgust, sheathed his sword, put on his coat and his cocked hat; he threw his cloak over him arm.

"I heard all you both said." Riding Officer Slake seemed in no wise offended. "I was behind that rock there. And at first I was for letting you fight it out, because it looked as if you might stick him, sir, if I may say that. And Riding Officer Slake wouldn't weep none if somebody was to put a French sword through Sir Gregory Malling." He chuckled. "But when he began to go faster than you, and I could see he was going to stick *you* instead, I just decided—"

George wheeled upon him.

"An eavesdropper too! You're a damned impertinent rascal, sir, and a disgrace to the service! I misdoubt that you're even an efficient riding officer!"

You're a fool, and I'll see to it that you're dismissed!"

Slake stared with baby-like eyes, his mouth open. Presently, however, he grinned.

"Oh, you can't hurt me with words, sir. Can't hurt me with anything at all, if I may say that. See this scar?" He pointed to the left side of his neck. "And this one? And this one on my forehead here?" He tipped back his hat, and George saw that the tops of his ears had been cut off. "You're noticing my ears, sir? Some Manxmen did that. Smugglers. Next time they said they'd cut my whole head off. Three nights later I killed two of them and captured two more, and the rest went back to Man—and stayed there. So you see, sir, you can't hurt me at all, if I may say that."

"Oh, you must be very tough indeed!"

"I am. I've got lots of other scars, too."

"Now why ever did they transfer such a paragon from Liverpool?"

"More work here. The old Owlers still operating. They want me to stop it. All the way from Ramsgate to Winchelsea."

"You don't mean you're the only Preventive Service officer along that whole stretch of coast?"

"The only honest one," Slake explained. "Or maybe it's that I'm the only one ain't afraid of the Owlers. They can't kill me."

"That's too bad," said George; and he strode down the beach in the direction of Folkestone.

His eyes were aching, his pulses throbbing; but for all his weariness he walked very fast, angrily. He was trying to think of some other course to adopt in order to get to Sir Gregory's home. It seemed hopeless. And time was so important.

SOMEWHERE near the town George Barfreston discovered Riding Officer Slake trotting at his elbow. The little

man's legs were very short, and he was panting, but he babbled indefatigably.

"I don't suppose you like me, sir? Nobody does. That's because nobody likes the taxes. I think the blessed king himself is the only person in England, besides Riding Officer Slake, that's got any respect for the import ordinances—and sometimes I ain't even sure about the king."

"I might dislike you less," George conceded, "if you only chased smugglers and didn't interfere with other people's affairs."

"But I was pursuing my business this afternoon, sir."

"In broad daylight? Did you expect the smugglers to stop off shore and signal to you that they were about to land some goods?"

"No, sir. But I wished a look at that path up the cliff, so—"

"Please leave me! I'm very busy!"

George stalked on, head high. A few minutes later he was climbing the streets of Folkestone, where the citizens glanced curiously at him—suspiciously, too, for they didn't like strangers there. George paid them no heed. He asked for and found the king's magistrate, and spent a noisy hour arguing with that personage, pleading and blustering. But at the end of the hour, when he emerged into the twilit street, he still was without a search warrant.

Dover? There would be a magistrate there, to be sure, but what reason did George have to suppose that he would be any more sensible or reasonable than the fool whose presence George had just quit? Both of them would be afraid of Sir Gregory Mallings.

For a moment he thought wildly of riding back to London, where assuredly his family influence would be sufficient to procure a warrant. But even in London this might take some time, and he couldn't spare the time.

He stumbled down the crooked little street, biting his lips, scowling aimlessly. He saw a sign, the Red Lion, and re-

membered that he'd had nothing to eat or drink since early morning.

"Beg pardon, sir, but you didn't get the warrant then, if I may ask that, sir?"

George turned wearily upon the fellow.

"Must you be forever popping up in front of me? What are you doing here, I'd like to know?"

"Still pursuing my business, sir. And maybe it's a speck the same as your own business, if I may say that, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"You see, sir, I've been in Kent only about a week; but I saw right off that I wasn't going to be able to stop the landings. Too long a coastline. Too many little creeks and bays. Too much marsh like at Romney and Walling and Dungeness. Besides, even if I see them landing goods, what can I do?"

"If you're such a wonderful fighter—"

"Yes, sir. But even Riding Officer Slake can't whip fifty men. Not all at once, sir."

"Don't you have authority now to call upon the dragoons?"

The man groaned.

"Two hundred and twenty, half of them on leave, the other half drunk. They know they have to turn out, but they think it's underneath their dignity to be receiving orders from a mere Preventive Service man. So they take half the night, and when they do come they make so much noise they warn everybody away."

"What's all this got to do with me?"

"Well, sir, they land the goods near where I met you, and carry it up that path to Mallings Keep. There the stuff's stored, and they take it away in small lots from time to time. How do I know? Because that's the only place around here it could be! Oh, I know the farmers and merchants and everybody are all mixed up in it somewhat, but that ain't enough. There must be one big place where it's all stored. And that's Mallings Keep. If I could seize everything there, and if I could arrest

Sir Gregory himself, then people'd think twice before they handled goods that hadn't been dutied."

"So you think Sir Gregory himself is a smuggler?"

"There ain't a doubt of it, sir."

George Barfreston muttered—

"Well, I'm sure he's not above breaking a few laws now and then to make money."

"And that's what I wished to ask you, sir. Riding Officer Slake ain't one to work with anybody else at all, by ordinary. But it might need two hammers to crack a nut like Sir Gregory, if I may say that, sir. So—who is this Barbara lady?"

George, for the first time, regarded this fellow with real interest and some respect. After all, Slake had determination. And he did look tough—cunning too, possibly, for all his moon-like countenance.

Finally George said:

"Here's an inn. Come have a drink of brandy and we'll talk about this."

"Thank you, sir, but I'd rather have ale." Slake trotted in after him like a happy dog. "I'm certain that no duty's been paid on the brandy here."

"Please yourself. I'll have brandy just the same."

"They only pay eighteen shillings a half-tanker for it in France, and they can sell it here for as high as four pounds."

GEORGE thumped the table. "Bring me brandy," he told the girl.

"Bring me ale," said Riding Officer Slake.

They had one end of the long room to themselves. They leaned on their elbows, their heads together, and spoke in whispers. But whispered conferences were not unusual at the Red Lion, Folkestone. Pirates and buccaneers, Owlers, Jacobites, smugglers, spies—all had at some time talked low over this very same table.

"The Barbara you heard us speak of is the Honorable Barbara Sanding of

Wallet Manor, Herefordshire. She's my fiancée. She happens also to be an orphan and very wealthy. According to the terms of her father's will—he died two years ago—if Barbara marries before she is twenty her husband becomes the sole trustee of the estate. Otherwise the present trustee retains control for another five years. He's Sir Herbert Marsh, a cousin.

"Now the estate happens to include some items in which Sir Gregory Malling had a great personal interest. A mortgage on Malling Keep, for one thing—buildings, property and all. And that's only one item. Sir Gregory, smuggling or no smuggling, is a poor man."

George sipped his drink. It was very good brandy.

"I don't understand much about such matters, I'll admit, but I do know that Gregory Malling has some sort of grip on Sir Herbert, and that he's very, very anxious to have Barbara refrain from marriage until after her twentieth birthday—which occurs next month. He set all kinds of slanders in circulation about me, but Barbara laughed at them.

"He came to me and asked me to postpone the wedding; begged me, even tried to bully me. I asked him point-blank why he was so eager to have Sir Herbert remain as trustee, but he refused to answer that. I began to suspect that when my lawyers got their hands on those estate accounts they'd find something very interesting. I don't trust that man. I don't like him either."

"I noticed that," said Slake.

"His first idea was to marry Barbara himself. That would have made everything very simple for him. He courted her for some time. I don't say he didn't really love her, either. I think he did. Perhaps that's one reason why he hates me so violently.

"Well, we were to have been married next week, and she'd gone to Paris for a wedding dress. Yesterday she landed here at Folkestone and started up for

London, to join me, in her own coach with a footman and a driver. A few miles away the coach was stopped by tobymen, six or seven of them, led by a very tall fellow in a black mask. The driver ran away. The footman was badly beaten and left for dead. He was later taken to a nearby inn. Barbara was missing.

"At five o'clock this morning the driver arrived at my home in London and told me about this. I know the man, and I believe him. He was half dead from exhaustion and fright. Besides, he'd run away almost as soon as the tobymen appeared.

"Of course, I rode here immediately. I stopped at the inn, and there I interviewed the footman. He died soon after. But I was certain from what he said, and from what the driver had said, that the leader of that band was Sir Gregory Mallings himself. Only Sir Gregory could have planned this thing so neatly, or have any cause to kidnap Barbara."

"But how to prove it?"

"Precisely: The footman was dead. There'd been nobody but me to hear his story, and he was too weak to sign a statement. The driver was still in London. I knew Mallings was guilty, but how could I convince anybody else?" George took a swallow of brandy and water. "You know the rest. I went to Mallings Keep alone—or tried to go there—and met Sir Gregory on the way."

Slake seemed never to question the story, never to doubt the conclusions. Positively, George thought, the fellow was a relief after that crusty, suspicious magistrate.

"What do you think Sir Gregory will do with her?"

"I don't know. Perhaps he's only keeping her till her twentieth birthday—about three weeks. Perhaps he's trying to force her to marry him, or to sign a marriage contract. Or possibly he's trying to force her to sign some-

thing else, something which would permit him to keep control of the estate."

"Think he'd kill her?"

George turned his brandy glass around and around, making a series of wet, linked rings on the table.

"No. He'd kill me—yes. Or you. Or almost anybody else who got in his way. But to kill her would mean an examination of the accounts by the lawyers of her heirs. Besides, I really think he still loves Barbara."

"If you could only get some evidence to indicate that the young lady might possibly be in there, you could get a search warrant, eh? That's just like me. If I could swear I'd seen smuggled goods in that house, or had seen them taken in, I could get one too." Slake rose. "We're looking for the same thing, Mr. Barfreton, if I may say that. Will you be here tomorrow?"

"I don't know. I don't know what I'm going to do."

"I'll see you here tomorrow then."

FOR a long time after the officer had gone George Barfreton twisted his glass around and around, making those little wet circles on the table. So Mallings was a smuggler? There was nothing so extraordinary about that—many a gentleman of Kent or Sussex habitually permitted his tenants and others to land undutied goods on his property—but it made George's particular problem even more difficult. For it meant that Mallings Keep would be well guarded at all times. It meant also that Sir Gregory would find it an easy matter to convey Barbara to France or Holland.

The machinery worked both ways. Indeed, the original smugglers, the Owl-ers, all had been exporters; and even now there was a brisk business in shipping wool to the continent.

If only they had been permitted to fight it out! Slake might be an excellent Preventive Service man, but he was no judge of swordplay. That fight which

had seemed to him one-sided, in fact had been tolerably close. George had made the mistake of underestimating his opponent, and had been too eager, too quick to press the attack. He would know better a second time.

But there might not be a second time.

After dinner, and after Folkestone had grown dark, he pocketed a brace of saddle pistols, wrapped his cloak around him and sallied forth. He had no clear idea of what he was going to do, but he was too nervous to remain quietly seated at the Red Lion. Perhaps under cover of the night he'd find an opportunity to get closer to Malling Keep. In spite of his experience that afternoon the sea side still appeared to be the best for approach.

The shore twisted in and out. The beach was much narrower now, for the tide was coming up, and there were places where he barely was able to squeeze between the cliff and the eager sea. There was a gentle sea breeze, and the water was quiet. The sky was packed with clouds—not low-hanging, threatening clouds, but comfortably thick ones between which the moon rarely managed to push its light, while the stars never showed at all.

It was, George reflected, an ideal night for smuggling. No doubt that was why Folkestone had seemed almost deserted.

At sea, but not far out, he saw in one of the rare periods of moonlight four or five unlighted vessels. They were small, and looked fast. They might have been fishing smacks, or doggers, or even simple yawls. The moonlight did not remain long enough for him to determine whether they were standing out, or coming in, or coasting.

As he neared the Malling property he walked more slowly, peering ahead, peeking around corners of the cliff at the numerous turns. He had reached an outjutting of the cliff, a considerable promontory which tapered far out to sea in the form of a sandspit, when he

stopped in his tracks, his nostrils twitching. He smelled tobacco.

Tobacco was not a smuggler's commodity. Besides, this was burning tobacco. Somebody was smoking a pipe nearby.

He had paused, and was pondering upon this, when he heard someone coming behind him. He dodged back into the deepest shadow of the cliff, behind some rocks. Five men appeared from the direction of Folkestone. They passed very close to him, though they didn't see him. Three of them glanced out toward the sandspit, but if they smelled the burning tobacco they showed no sign. Very soon they were out of sight.

George, starting from the shelter of the rocks, stumbled upon something soft. He knelt, feeling with his hands.

It was a man, roughly dressed, tied hand and foot with hempen cord. A dirty handkerchief had been thrust into his mouth and tied in place there. The man's eyes were open, and he seemed conscious, but dazed and bewildered. The back of his head was sticky with blood.

George started to fumble with the knots. Then he stopped. After all, who was this man? He searched for weapons, and found one. Yet he did not feel assured. He still was troubled about that tobacco smell.

Abruptly he quit the bound man. He had decided to follow his nose.

It led him out along the sandspit, which was very narrow. At some places the encroaching sea wet his boots. As he got nearer the end of the spit he saw something low and dark, almost indistinguishable from the dark seas beyond. He got closer, and saw that the thing was a sort of tent, a mere three sides of canvas erected on poles to screen light from the land. His hands on the butts of his pistols beneath the cloak, he circled it.

Riding Officer Slake sat with his back against the canvas, a leather telescope

on his knees, in his mouth a large black pipe. Beside him was the lighted lantern. In front, bound and gagged like the man on the beach, lay another man, who glared up at Slake with angry eyes.

"Good evening, Mr. Barfreton." Slake motioned to the sand at his side. "Please sit down, or else they might see you from the shore."

"Who might?"

"Sir Gregory's bruisers. Naturally they guard this end of the beach while they're bringing anything in."

George sat down. It was all very strange, but he trusted Slake.

"Then won't they smell your pipe? I did."

"It ain't my pipe." Slake took it out of his mouth, gazed at it dispassionately, pointed the stem at the bound figure.

"It's his. Maybe if somebody didn't smell it they might think he'd fallen asleep, and they might come out here for a look."

"Is that what you are out here for?"

"A look? Yes." He tapped the telescope. "If we get moon enough."

"There's a man trussed up at the foot of the cliff back there."

"I know."

"Did you do that?"

Slake nodded solemnly.

"This one too," he said.

"How'd you do it?"

"I just walked up behind them and hit them on the head."

THE moon appeared suddenly in a forgotten cloud rift, and the officer clapped the telescope to an eye. Even George could see the smuggling fleet now—eleven or twelve small vessels of all sorts: cobbles, hovelings, decked wherries, shallops. They were about half a mile offshore. Small boats were moving between the fleet and the beach.

"Tea, mostly," Slake reported, without removing the telescope. "They can buy it at eleven pence in Holland, and it fetches from three to five shillings

here. They got some chests, too, that I can't make out what they are. Silks and laces and such, likely."

"Why don't you stop it?"

"How?"

"The dragoons!"

"Take two hours, at the quickest. By that time it'd all be finished."

"And the tea," George added bitterly, "would be stored in Mallong Keep."

"Yes, most of it. Likely the townspeople quilt away as much as they can, to pay them for helping with the work, and the rest goes out of Mallong Keep in small lots."

"If only one of us could get into that place!"

"Yes, if only we could." The moon had retreated, and Slake lowered the telescope, sighing. "But they'll have all entrances guarded. This lantern here is a guider. There's probably another one like it on that point over there, but we can't see it. If anything goes wrong, the guard at the end is warned, and he runs out and tells the man here, who waves a signal to the ships. They always work it that way."

He stared gloomily over the water. The fishing boats were scarcely visible now, the small boats not at all.

George rose.

"Well, there's no profit sitting here watching it all."

"Can you swim good?" Slake asked unexpectedly.

"Not notably. Why?"

Slake shrugged.

"You sound as if you mean to walk to Mallong Keep, and I wondered if you're strong enough to swim with your hands tied behind you and a fifty-pound weight around your waist."

"They wouldn't dare do that to me!"

"There was one washed up near Ramsgate the other day that looked as if it might have been a handsome young gentleman too, once."

George pursed his lips, turned up the collar of his cloak.

"Can you swim, then?"

"I am a very strong swimmer," Riding Officer Slake said. "Besides, they can't kill me, no matter what they do."

"Good night," said George.

"Good night, sir. Keep in the shadows."

GEORGE BARFRESTON walked quickly, angrily, his chin high. The officer's complacency irritated him; and the helplessness of the thing—sitting at the end of a sandspit and gaping at smugglers through a telescope—made him furious. Not that he cared about the smuggling. But where there were ships to bring things from the continent, there were ships to take things back. Things like wool—or Barbara. Right here in England it could happen! Almost within sight of Folkestone! Right here a man could abduct an heiress and store away vast quantities of untaxed tea, yet remain the lord of his own castle, immune from search, untouchable, inviolate.

On the beach George turned in the direction the five townspeople had taken, ignoring Slake's first victim. He walked quietly, watchfully, keeping close to the cliff; so he heard the guards before he came in sight of them. They were five monstrous, misshapen shadows, clutching bludgeons. One had a musket. They talked and joked with no attempt at secrecy. After all, who would dare to approach the smugglers?

What was required of these guards was simply to give warning of a possible approach of dragoons or the even less likely arrival of a large group of riding officers. When they all got close to the water's edge to signal a small boat which was headed for a point too far up the beach, George Barfreстон slipped past them without trouble.

He breathed more easily when he had put them behind him. He was inside the lines now!

Clinging still to the deeper darkness at the base of the cliff, he rounded another corner and came in sight of the very

stretch of beach where the goods were being landed. Seventy or eighty men were there, talking, humming, shouting softly. The confusion was considerable. The men worked hard and fast. They wore tarpaulin petticoats; some were shirtless. They waded into the mild surf, helped beach the boats, hauled out the tea in bulky oilskin bags and carried it to the foot of the cliff path, where other men, more trusted—perhaps servants from Malling Keep—took it in charge.

There were tubs of brandy too, and some large chests which might have contained silks, as Slake had reported. Almost every small boat now had at least two and sometimes three larger boats in tow, and the smuggled goods were heaped in the larger boats. Obviously time was precious. The tide was at flood.

A hand fell upon George's shoulder.

"What are you doing here?"

He turned to face three men. They were rough fellows who carried cudgels, and they looked much like the men at the end of the beach.

"Hm-m—a gentleman!"

Now George regretted his fine clothes. Roughly dressed, he might have passed unchallenged in this confusion. Still these men did not appear to be truculent, only suspicious. So he shrugged and turned away.

"*Nom de dieu!*" he muttered impatiently. "Must you fools forever be pawing me with your dirty claws?"

Behind him a man whispered excitedly:

"That's French, what he said! He must be that French gentleman milord told us to watch for."

They came around in front of him, and now their manner was more respectful. They looked him up and down, seeming especially interested in his wet boots.

"Did you just come off one of these boats, sir?"

"But of course! Do you suppose I

dropped here from heaven?"

"The *Dottie Clark*, sir?"

"*Mais certainement!*"

"Then you're wishing to go the castle, sir?"

"I've been wondering how long it would require for you to comprehend that simple fact. Sir Gregory expects me, of course?"

"Oh, yes, sir! He said for us to bring you right up to him."

"Ah, *c'est bon! Honi soit qui mal y pense!* Let's be on our way."

"Wee-wee," said one of the men; and added, "I speak a little French myself, sir."

"Very commendable," said George Barfreton.

Several thoughts throbbed in George's mind during the course of that climb. One was a realization that if he actually did come face to face with Colonel Sir Gregory Mallings it would mark the end of his life, for surely Sir Gregory would not permit him to escape after what he had seen. Another thought, a more comforting one, was that he was being taken to the place he had wished to go and by the very men assigned to keep him away; that apparently he was not suspected; and that his pistols and his sword were still with him.

Finally, he wondered who this gentleman from France might be. A Jacobite? It seemed altogether likely. He knew as well as everybody else that the King Over the Water corresponded regularly with his adherents in England and Scotland, and that most of these letters were, quite understandably, carried by smugglers. Often, too, it was found convenient or advisable to send messengers of distinction, envoys who would not venture openly to reenter a nation from which they had been exiled.

That Gregory Mallings was concerned with some Jacobite plot or other seemed likely. The man had long held a grudge against King George's government, which he believed had not rewarded him properly for his war services. And it

was precisely to such persons, the disgruntled ones, that the Jacobites turned and who turned to the Jacobites.

A GENTLEMAN from France. George Barfreton smiled as he toiled up the steep way. The men, one in front, two behind, were carrying bags on their shoulders, but they did not seem to expect him to do likewise. So he smiled in the darkness. He even whistled a little tune.

"To the left over here, sir, and right through those trees. You'll see the path when we come to it."

Mallings Keep was not really a castle, though once a true castle had stood there, and the ruins still were visible. But Mallings Keep now was a manor house, comfortable, not very large, not very old either, and surrounded by spacious if rather wild grounds. This night it was lighted in almost every downstairs window, and men were bustling in and out of a side door.

"We'll go in the front, sir."

"We'll go in the side," George said crisply, and made for that door. "I wish to see how they store this stuff. Just curiosity, you understand. Something to tell them when I return."

"Of course, sir! But ain't you in a hurry to see Sir Gregory?"

"No," said George.

The side door led into a well lighted passage, at the other end of which were steps descending to the wine-cellars. The wine-cellars were extraordinarily big—extended, indeed, over a greater area than the building itself, though much of this space clearly was new. Two passages crossed in the center; and numerous large, square cells, some of them doored, some three-walled only, led off on each side of each passage. In the center, commanding a view of the steps at the end of the passage, sat a wizened, sharp-eyed little man. There was a quill in his right hand, an inkhorn and some sheets of paper in front of him. The men who brought in the tea

and brandy paused beside this table, and the little man counted their burdens, recorded the amount, waved them on. He glanced suspiciously at George Barfreton, but said nothing.

"You see, sir, it's put here until the merchants send men that take it away at their own risk, because Sir Gregory won't—"

George interrupted:

"Very good. And thank you. I'll look around myself and join Sir Gregory upstairs in a little while." He handed each man a gold sovereign. "I don't wish to keep you from your work."

"But Sir Gregory told us that as soon as you came ashore—"

"Tut-tut: *Nom de dieu! Est-il possible? Je suis* all right here. Get out, please! *Departez-vous!*"

The three men hesitated—not about accepting the money, but about leaving George Barfreton in Malling Keep alone. He clucked his tongue impatiently and turned his back upon them. High-handed behavior, sheer impudence, had brought him here; and the same, he believed, should afford him a means of avoiding the master of the establishment.

"If you really wish to see Sir Gregory," rasped the little clerk, unexpectedly breaking the silence, "there he is, right behind you."

George wheeled about. Colonel Sir Gregory Malling, his right hand extended and on his face a pleasant smile, was coming toward him.

"Ah, Gerald! It's good to see you again! And did you have a pleasant crossing, eh? Not too rough? Let's go upstairs and—"

He stopped.

"Oh," he said softly. "My little knight errant again."

George said:

"Yes. But this time I've brought pistols."

Gregory Malling smiled.

"And this time," he murmured, "I have brought gamekeepers."

"I have greater faith in the pistols."

"Do you?" said Gregory Malling.

George did not see or hear anything wrong, but he felt it. He sensed it. He took a step backward, turning his head, tugging out his pistols—and the ink-horn the little man had thrown caught him just above the left ear. Staggering, he saw Sir Gregory spring to one side. He pressed a trigger with his right forefinger, but there was nothing more than a dull click. The left pistol exploded an instant later, but by that time his left arm had been struck by a cudgel. Another cudgel caught him at the base of the skull. He fell to his knees.

He was conscious of being hit on the head several times, though there was no pain. Dimly he heard Gregory Malling's voice.

"In here. That's it! Take his sword, and put this—" He didn't hear the door close.

The room, he learned after a painful examination conducted chiefly on his hands and knees, was about twelve by fourteen feet, and perfectly bare. There was no window. The walls and floor were of rough stone; he couldn't reach the ceiling. The only light, a reluctant yellow slit, came from under the door. George stretched full-length on the floor and got one ear as close as possible to that slit. A faint scuffle of feet was all he heard.

Except for a sore spot on his left arm and some bruises at the back of his aching head, he seemed unhurt. His pistols and sword had been taken, but his wallet was untouched and his clothes were not torn.

AFTER some time he heard a door slam shut, then a scuffle of feet again, growing louder. A chain rattled. The door was thrown open.

"Come out, knight errant!"

George quit the cell, blinking, and found himself at the end of one of the cellar passages, the end farthest from the door. The clerk was gone, though

his table remained. There were five or six chests on the floor. There were also Gregory Mallings and three of his men; they were the same three who had escorted George to Mallings Keep, but there was no longer anything deferential about their manner.

Colonel Sir Gregory Mallings smiled, tapped a bandaged left hand.

"This was all the damage your pistols did, Barfreton."

"What a pity," said George.

"It was very good of you to come here and save me so much trouble. Here, of course, there's no need for you to dance around in front of me, showing me what a brilliant fencing pupil you were. Here, we can simply beat you to death."

George took snuff.

"Your hospitality overwhelms me," he said.

"It will," Mallings promised. "When you thrust your head into the lion's mouth, you must expect it to close its jaws upon you."

"Is that what you propose to do? Bite me to death?"

Sir Gregory smiled.

"No. We'll bash your head in, as I said before. We did not do so previously because there were too many men coming in and out of the cellar then. But the goods are all cleared now, and nothing remains but to carry down a final item, one of these chests."

"With my remains inside of it?"

"Precisely. And somewhere between here and Flushing it will be shoved off the deck. So you see, nobody will know except my three friends here and my secretary, who saw you knocked down and dragged away. And none of these estimable persons—" he grinned at the bruisers—"will ever tell."

"You are sure of that?"

"Oh, very sure! Indeed, Barfreton, it's not likely that anybody associated with my little commercial enterprise out there would tell about this chest, even if they knew. They must be aware that

a murder occurs now and then in the best of smuggling groups, and the least said the better. Still, there's no need for taking a chance."

"Most certainly not. Where is Barbara?"

"Upstairs, on the second floor, in a very comfortable room. If you hadn't come poking into my business I would have released her at the end of three weeks and permitted her to fly back to your waiting arms. That is, if she'd cared to do so—which I question. She's been showing signs of changing her mind about you, Barfreton."

George chuckled.

"Some of your play-acting is good, Mallings," he said, "but some of it's hopelessly overdone. Still, I'm delighted to know that Barbara at least is safe." He pointed to the chests. "Which of these is to be my coffin?"

"Why, there's no reason, sir, why you shouldn't decide that for yourself. They're all easily emptied, to accommodate you. They contain silks and muslins and the like, mostly for my personal use. Some of it I plan to give to Barbara." He nodded toward the chests. "Do take your pick. But I must ask you to hasten, knight errant. The last boat is prepared to shove off and awaits only your corpse."

George shrugged. He was becoming impatient and irritated by all this fancy talk. He grabbed the lid of the chest nearest him and threw it back.

"Very well. I'll take this one."

Something stirred among the fleecy finery, and a bare wet head rose.

"You can't do that, Mr. Barfreton, because somebody's in here already," announced Riding Officer Slake. "If I may say that," he added, as he rose to his feet.

Any sort of person, in any manner of garb, would have paralyzed the five men in the passage by appearing under these circumstances; but certainly Slake was the strangest sight they'd ever seen anywhere. He was wet from head to

toe; and except for coarse yellow underwear, he was naked. His baby-like blue eyes blinked innocently, a contrast to his prehistoric head, his clipped ears, his scars, his thick jaws, his shiny bald pate. An *echelle* of pink silk, intended to decorate the bodice of some grand court lady, hung over one of his shoulders; and a rose-point *fichu*, indescribably fluffy, had somehow become entangled in the string which held up his drawers.

"Where the devil did *you* come from?" Malling gasped.

Slake nodded down to the chest in which he stood.

"From here," he replied.

He saw the *fichu*, and detached it with awed fingers. He bent his knees and raised an exquisite Spanish shawl, which he held in front of his body, tucking it under his armpits. He stooped again, and this time his hands reappeared with two iron pistols.

"Do you always appear where you're not wanted?"

"Yes, sir," said Riding Officer Slake. "At least, I try to, sir."

"And how the devil did you get in that chest?"

"Well, I was wishful to have a look around, and I couldn't think of any other way to come here, being as you'd probably not welcome me if you saw me first. So I undressed, almost, and swam from that point out there—"

"There was a man stationed on that point. Two men."

"I hit them on the head," explained Riding Officer Slake. "And so I swam out from there, when I saw how some of the boats were towing others that were loaded high. And I swam quiet, sir, until I got to one of the boats going toward shore. And I climbed in the back, under cover of some tea that was piled up in the second boat, so the rowers in the first boat couldn't see me. And I crawled into this chest, which wasn't locked, sir. It was filled with flumbubbery French things for ladies,

but I threw most of that overboard to make room."

"So? And now that you're here, what do you propose to do?"

"Why, to arrest all of your here, sir, excepting Mr. Barfreton, on a charge of conspiracy to defraud his gracious Majesty King George out of his tonnage and poundage monies lawfully due him."

"With wet pistols?"

"These ain't wet, sir!"

"They must be. No man could swim quietly and hold two heavy weapons like that clear of the water." Sir Gregory looked at his bruisers. "Kill him," he commanded quietly. "Strike him down. He can't hurt you."

They did not seem so certain of this. They moved cautiously toward Slake, eyeing the pistols.

"But they are dry!" Slake wagged the pistols. "I kept them in a waterproof bag I always carry for emergencies just like this, sir."

Sir Gregory asked—

"Where is this bag, then?"

"Here at my feet. It's wet outside, but perfectly dry inside. Come take a look at it, if you don't believe me, sir."

Sir Gregory nodded to one of the men.

"Fetch it, Marshier. If there is any such bag."

Marshier moved dubiously toward the chest. He began to fumble among the finery.

"Nearer me," Riding Officer Slake said. "Near my feet."

Marshier moved closer, and Riding Officer Slake brought one of the pistols down on his head. It was a short blow, but a hard one. The man dropped without sound.

SLAKE sprang out of the chest. The pistols were wet, but they were heavy things, and long. They were excellent clubs. One of them crashed against the side of a bruiser's head, and that bruiser slipped to a heap on the floor. Slake stepped back, whirling with

amazing agility, in time to catch upon one of his huge shoulders a cudgel blow meant for his head. The cudgel fell again, but again it met only a shoulder. And Slake jumped at the remaining bruiser, his arms swinging like the arms of a windmill, the terrible iron pistols again and again slamming aside the bruiser's one weapon.

It happened very quickly. Gregory Mallings was reaching for his sword, and George moved toward the cudgel Mar-
sher had dropped. As for Mallings, he spun on his heel, raced down the passage and through the doorway. The door crashed shut behind him.

But it was not locked, and George Barfreston was through it the next instant and running up the steps three at a time. He had forgotten to pick up the cudgel.

He could not see Mallings, but he could hear the man running and shouting:

"Gerald! Gerald! There's a madman here!"

He pounded along a corridor on the main floor of the house, through a pantry, across a large, dim dining room, into the entrance hall—and collided with a young man in black broadcloth. Gerald Hornsby! George had known him in Paris. A gay blade, of good family, notoriously a Jacobite, but probably in the movement less for love of the Stuarts than for love of excitement.

"Oh," said Hornsby. "Oh—Barfreston."

George punched him in the jaw. Hornsby banged back against a wall, his eyes big with astonishment. George punched him again, and he collapsed.

Colonel Sir Gregory Mallings had been counting less upon the assistance of this young man than upon that of a loaded blunderbuss and a brace of loaded pistols which he knew to be in a box in the entrance hall under the staircase. He found the box locked; but it was a slight thing, and he had started to tear off the lid with his hands when the flat

of a court sword rapped those hands severely. Gerald Hornsby's sword. But George Barfreston held it.

"Forget the firearms, Sir Gregory. You have weapon enough at your side."

Mallings Keep was curiously quiet. No doubt the servants were down on the beach. Gerald Hornsby was seated on the floor, grotesquely slumped, his back against a wall, his eyes closed. Possibly a fight was still being waged in the wine-cellar, but no sound of this reached the two men in the entrance hall.

Colonel Sir Gregory Mallings forced a smile. He had recovered control of his nerves. He was play-acting again.

"Always true to the story-book tradition. I should have run you through without a word."

"I have no doubt of it," said George.

"And I'll run you through still."

Colonel Sir Gregory Mallings drew. "This afternoon I was playing with you. Tonight I'll kill you as quickly as possible. *En garde*, sir!"

George Barfreston encountered not the cool and scornful swordsman of the afternoon, but a fury unleashed—two hundred and thirty pounds of steel and whiplash gone mad. Sweet and deadly the blades slithered together, and Mallings' point was alive with threat. The man advanced in quick, short steps, beating, stamping, feinting, lunging, his movements perfectly timed and breathlessly swift. George retreated. He was astounded, but he was cool. Mallings was the excited one, now.

"Stand still, you Galahad! Stand and be spitted!"

George made no reply, but continued to retreat. Twice he felt the colonel's blade sting his right forearm, and once it licked briefly the muscles of his right shoulder.

"Stand and give me a—"

Mallings lunged full-length. George caught the blade in a counter, raised it, slipped in with his own. The colonel was quick, and lifted away. But his

right ear dripped blood when he recovered his stance. George laughed at the fear in the man's eyes.

"So you too know how to be afraid?" he whispered. He leaped forward, beating the colonel's blade. He lunged, missed, recovered with a laugh, lunged again. The colonel caught his blade, but didn't dare to try a riposte. The colonel sprang back.

George bent his right arm, took his point-out of line and sprang in again, handling his sword like a saber, slashing as if for the right flank. It was a dangerous attack, starkly simple, unexpected. Malling's blade was thrown high. He tried to recover, stepping back; but he teetered on his left heel, while his eyes were fixed in amazement as if upon something beyond and above George. Blood gushed from his throat; then he fell with a crash.

THE men, who had been holding the boat for some time, were dumb-founded at the sight of that stumpy fellow wrapped in a bright Spanish shawl and carrying a couple of iron pistols.

"I came to tell you that the man you're waiting for won't arrive. There's been a change in plans."

"Man? We weren't waiting for a man! We were waiting for a chest!"

"Yes, but the man should have been in it. And he should have been dead. But he ain't. He's the most alive thing you ever saw, up there now kissing and hugging his wench so's to make anybody ashamed to watch them."

"Who the devil are you, and what are you talking about?"

The little fellow in the Spanish shawl waved the pistols, motioning toward the cliff.

"Riding Officer Slake. And I'm arresting you for conspiracy to defraud his Majesty King George of his lawful tonnage and poundage monies by bringing tea and things into the country without paying duty. Now come along, and move fast! You've done a wealth of hauling already tonight, but there's a bit more I need you for. Some bodies to be moved."

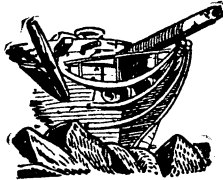
On the way up the path one of the men spluttered:

"Why, you fool! When Sir Gregory hears about this—"

"Sir Gregory," said the officer, "is one of the bodies I wish you to move."

"The men will kill you!"

"Nobody can kill me," said Riding Officer Slake. "I'm too tough."





The night was shrill with screams as the hot liquid hit the fat man.

'WARE SHOALS

Somewhere off Australia there was a wreck full of ore. Two tough men were after it and one of them was Red Saunders.

CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE

THEY were searching for Merry-maid Reef, and it was uneasy going as the twilight deepened. The *Black Pearl* schooner was manned by as many keen lookouts as would ordinarily be found in four vessels of her tonnage; but when the sun definitely dipped, and the sea crept under the velvet blackness that would presently be night, four glum Gilbert Islanders, whom glumness befitted as little as horns might befit angels, came slowly from aloft.

"See not'ing, Cappen," grumbled Billy, the boatswain, scarcely daring to meet the eye of Red Saunders, his revered and idolized skipper. Saunders was disappointed. Not that he cared

much, as a rule, whether land were made today or tomorrow; but this trip there was opposition, and it would be a case of first hooked gets the fish. He asked shortly:

"Nothing in sight? No sail?"

"Not'ing atall. Not one lilly bird, sar."

"Seems you're worryin' a lot over an empty sea," grumbled Tod Carter, the mate. "That means peace to me."

"Let it mean peace to us, then, Tod," laughed the skipper genially. "Heave the schooner to, head to the eastward. We'll eat."

Just one week out of Temboyna, it was the first day to close upon a sea empty of all else but the *Black Pearl*.

The snug little cabin was overfull when four men sat down together to eat, and another man, Tommy, the cook, served them. The schooner was but eighty tons, and she was no pleasure yacht but a trader, with goodly space allotted to profitable freight. Nevertheless, her living quarters were generous enough for common use; it was the uncommon circumstances which crowded her supper table.

Red Saunders, skipper and owner, was a behemoth of a man himself; his mate, old Tod Carter, measured much less in altitude, beam, and tonnage, though a he-man enough in ordinary company, being but a scant six feet tall, and weighing a paltry one hundred and eighty pounds, lean. And they were the only sitters at that able as a rule. Now there was Ruby Belcher, an inch taller than Saunders, and ten pounds heavier; to say nothing of the little showman, Professor Moseley Arlington, who weighed in at the featherweight limit, and stood five-ten in his tall hat. Moseley Arlington was born Moses Abraham, but that's no name for a showman traveling abroad, hence the change. The show was still in Temboyna, whereby, more or less, hangs this tale.

"I suppose there's no mistake about this yarn of yours, Ruby?" Saunders said, supper nearly over.

"It's no yarn," Ruby protested. "The wreck's there, and there's a strong box full of coin aboard her. Haven't I reason to know it?"

"Why couldn't Hurtog handle it himself, with some local craft? As Resident, he's got more power than any other official I ever came across—or if not power, then gall and effrontery. Same thing in his case. Plenty of vessels calling at his shop."

"The wreck's outside his country's territorial waters, in Australian jurisdiction, and he's too canny to tackle what amounts to a looting job with his own vessels. He wanted me to put my *Con-*

cha into the thing, on a share. I'm Australian register. I might have seen the thing eye to eye with him, if the shares had been fairer. But he wanted me to stand the risk, of confiscation, jail, whatever might turn up, use my gear, crew, and schooner, and take one-tenth of the proceeds. When I jibbed, he found some flaw in my last clearance and seized the ship. By some trick or another he's got most of my boys in the jug; when I went up to see him, to squeeze his fat neck if necessary, he had an army corps of cops with stickers there waiting for me, and I got jugged too. He's a holy terror, is that fat man, Red."

"S' help me! 'E's a 'ot 'un," the showman put in. "Wants the earth, 'e do. 'E'd ha' pinched my show if I 'adn't already sold it to 'is own chief of police, wot was ambitious to compete wiv 'is greedy boss. And if you gents 'adn't 'elped me orf the beach while Captain Saunders 'ad the boss cop shut up aboard this very 'ooker, so 'e couldn't ketch me to get 'is money back, I'd be in chokey back there myself."

"Didn't we see Ruby's schooner putting out after us from the other side of the island?" growled Tod Carter. "Wasn't the whole ridge of high land dotted with lookouts, watchin' the way we went? The fat man 'ud ha' been after that wreck long ago only he needed one more vessel to load valuable cargo into, and the chance came when we sailed into port. Seems all we got to do is—"

"All we have to do is to find that reef," said Saunders, rising from the table and ruffling his mate's unruly hair. "Set a watch, Tod, and we'll move with first peep of day. Reefs are not for night sailing, my lad."

SINCE that night when, hard pressed by circumstances forced by the corrupt authority ruling Temboyna, Red Saunders fought Ruby Belcher in the show tent of Moseley Arlington, for a

stake to help all three out of a mess, puddled up for them by that same crooked official who had arranged a betting killing on the fight, the two free-lances of the Eastern Seas had become firm friends. Ruby Belcher, whose parents had given him the rather more imposing name of Beauchamp, saw in Red Saunders a man of his own kind. Each played his game with little thought of ultimate gain, and a lot of consideration for the sporting element in it. This much might be read in the men themselves—or in their present condition. All that had accrued from their recent visit to Temboyna was, net: Ruby had lost his vessel and all she contained, he had been thrown into jail, had almost starved through the malignancy of a fat man he had dared to cross; and had been on the verge of drifting into a nasty stage of beachcombing through sheer helplessness. Saunders had fared better. He had landed old Kalang's pearls far enough down shore to be safe; and the money was in the locker. The showman had fared very evilly indeed in spite of the sale of his show to the Police Commandant at a forced price.

There were hopes of recovering the *Concha* for Ruby; but the first thing to be done was the finding of that rich wreck that had excited the greed of fat Mr. Hurtog. Saunders had sailed on what was almost a forlorn quest. Hurtog was cunning; he never, in his dealings with Ruby, told the precise position of the reef. It was only through the showman that a clue was secured. He had engaged a drunken sailor, who nevertheless could beat a roustabout at tent erecting even though too drunk to speak clearly. And the sailor, sitting astride the high ridgepole of the big tent drunk as Noah's sow, shouted down at Mr. Moseley Arlington his sailory opinion of a greasy little man who paid sailormen measly wages to do lubberly jobs in a blooming circus.

"S' help me!" the little showman told

Saunders when relating the incident, "e was so drunk I was afraid 'e'd fall orf and get swep' up wiv the sawdust! I arsked 'im where was the fortune 'e kep' shoutin' about, wot would make 'im independent of little greasy showmen—me, may I die! a greasy showman, gents, wot never uses no more on me 'air than 'ud make it a bit clarssy!—I arsked 'im to give it a name or shut up. I paid 'im to work, not to tell fairy tales. And, s'help me, 'e told me 'e was a sailor on the Rooshian steamer wot went missin' wiv all 'ands som'eres in these seas, and 'ad a ton o' posh on 'er, besides a cargo of ore from the mines. But 'e wouldn't say nothink about where she wos—only wink, and come nigh tumblin' orf at me feet. But I knowed about the steamer, 'cause I'd read about 'er up in Formosa before I come here."

From such fragments had been gleaned such information as Red Saunders must lay his course by. The sailor had talked too loudly. Somebody had told the fat Hurtog about the drunken yarn, and Hurtog too had heard about that golden wreck. He clapped the sailor into the security of a stone jail until ready to use him. Unfortunately the sailor was nothing but that—a steamer deckhand, or a windjammer fo'mast hand, no idea in his woozy head about positions or directions beyond the knack of holding a ship to set a course by wheel and compass. It was Tod Carter and Saunders who, in private conference, furbished up all they had heard concerning this wreck; they recalled the circumstances, and remembered certain facts, and hit upon Merrymaid Reef as the most likely spot to seek the prize. Red told Belcher of the decision, and Ruby shrugged.

"As likely as any. I know that Hurtog had got a pretty keen idea of the position from somewhere, because when we talked over the thing before I turned it down, and stores and water were mentioned, he assured me that it was but a

week's sail—and don't forget he meant to go along with me. You can guess how likely he is to risk starving that fat swagbelly of his, skipper."

So here lay the *Black Pearl*, hove-to on a gentle sea, too near to Merrymaid Reef to risk further sailing until daylight.

AT DAWN the schooner filled away. Long before the light crept over the sea, two men were aloft, seeking. Saunders took a pair of powerful prism glasses to the main crosstrees and scanned every fathom of sea, every inch of the visible horizon. Merrymaid Reef was not much of a mark. On the charts it was marked P. D., which simply means Position Doubtful. On some, shipmasters had taken it upon themselves to add E. D., which means Existence Doubtful. But it is never safe or wise to ignore the fact that for a reef to be marked on a Government chart presupposes an actual sighting of either the reef or some appearance, so vividly convincing that a sane and sensible master mariner is willing to stake his professional reputation upon it, and sends in the report under his own valued name.

"Make out anything, skipper?" Ruby called up. Saunders shook his head. He started to descend.

"It's hazy. There are birds in a bunch down in the south-east, though. Keep her off a point, Carter."

Birds sometimes cluster over a dead whale, a dead sailor, anything in the shape of food floating. Sometimes they flock above a reef awash, where either shellfish offer direct food, or food for fish attracts finny eatables to be eaten while eating. If the latter were the case now, the birds were as likely to have picked upon Merrymaid Reef as any other. This was not the precise position given on the charts for Merrymaid, but wasn't it marked P. D.? There was no wreck visible. Could not the steamer have struck and sunk?

The breeze faltered, almost died. Smart though the schooner was, she could not sail without wind. Lookouts aloft watched not only for the reef, but for wind. And, when the *Black Pearl* had sluggishly covered two miles in over an hour, Billy at the maintruck gleefully hailed that a breeze was darkening the water right where those birds hovered.

"Trim her in flat," Saunders ordered, and took a careful bearing of the flock of birds. The schooner would have to beat up to that position, whatever it turned out to prove. The breeze was long in coming. The dark ripples faded and died many times before wind could definitely be made out. Long before that happened, Billy, now free to scan other quarters of the horizon, caught a gleam of sail out on what had been the weather beam.

"Sail oh!" he bawled. "Dat a schooner fo' sure, cappen. He comin' fas'. Mus' be bringin' de win' 'long wid him." Saunders merely acknowledged the hail, waiting for the amplification he knew would come as soon as Billy's hawk eyes showed him the truth without the possibility of error.

"It's the *Concha*," grumbled Tod Carter under his breath. "And here she comes a-kiting with a fair wind! How is she on a wind, Ruby?"

"She can't hold this schooner," grunted Ruby, loyal to his present ship even to the belittling of his own. "Don't be such a crab, Tod."

"Crab! Young feller, when you've seen what I've seen, and know Red Saunders and his luck as well as I know it—"

"What's wrong with my luck?" grinned Saunders, still waiting for Billy's word. "That lad'll lose the breeze, same as we did. Won't he have to beat, same as we? Didn't Ruby just tell you—"

The windward breeze that promised and failed, threatened and forebore, and acted like a variable rather than a steady slant, gathered itself into a black mass

and came driving down in a squall of fierce rain which blotted out sea and sky for five minutes. When it passed, the sea fell flat and the breeze was all but dead. Billy, glistening in the sudden sunlight like a bronze statue at the masthead, sang out:

"Dat schooner de *Concha* fo' sartain, cappen! He's comin' fas' wid a fair win'." A short pause, then: "Dar a little speck o' somet'ing 'way furdur dan de birds. Look like it could be wreck, cappen."

"There you are!" chuckled Saunders, whanging the mate on the back. "Head her across that fellow's bows while this breeze holds. By the time it dies altogether we'll be getting what that fellow's got."

In the faintest of airs the *Black Pearl* moved but slowly, calm though the sea was. Soon from the deck the naked eye could see the white foam at the bows of the *Concha* as she swam grandly forward with her booms wing and wing. Brown men and white moved uneasily about the *Pearl's* decks in their impatience. Now that they had seen that speck which might be the wrecked steamer they sought, it was doubly maddening to see another vessel on the same errand eating up the advantage they had gained, through sheer luck of winds.

"Ah! Now she's beaten!" cried Ruby. The *Concha's* boomed-out sails, emptied of wind, swung inboard. They filled in a moment, but it was the dying breath of the fair wind. The *Black Pearl* moved on, as slowly as ever, but making way towards the other. And now the *Concha* edged towards the *Pearl*, who seemed to be having the first of a new breeze.

The vessels were within a mile of each other when the faint air expired. The sky turned to speckless blue, the sea to a glassy shimmer. The *Pearl* lay a mile nearer to that distant speck than the *Concha*, whose people could scarcely yet have detected it.

"Keep a close watch on them, Tod,"

the skipper said. "If you see them lowering a boat, get our own over quick. It's a damned long pull, but we'll have to make it if they start it."

Saunders lay down in a long deck chair and dozed. He always did that in such situations, where action meant futility, and the future might bring action indeed which demanded all his alertness. He was just about entering upon the third phase of a dream which was pleasantly satisfying his notion of how a man's life should be rounded out after disappointments dire, when he sprang to his feet wide awake at the sharp, if distant, crack of a rifle.

"Shooting sharks?" he asked Carter. Glancing at the *Concha*, he estimated her distance and the possibility of rifle shots coming his way. He knew it was possible shots might be tried, if any good could come of it; he scarcely believed that any firearm aboard that schooner would have the range to bother him.

"I'm waiting for the next shot to find out," returned Carter gloomily. The flat calm would never have soured Tod Carter but for the proximity of that vessel, a rival. Saunders joined him, and together they watched the *Concha* through glasses. Scarcely had the focus been fixed when the whiplike crack of a high power bullet passed close by their heads, and a few seconds later the report of the rifle came down from the *Concha*.

"Break out my rifle, Tod. The man must be crazy!" gritted Red. He peered at the distant vessel. She lay head on, and it was hard to distinguish men from gear. But as he watched, the third shot followed, and this time the bullet chunked into the *Black Pearl's* side five seconds ahead of the report.

Carter appeared with the rifle, and with him came Ruby and the showman. Ruby's keen eyes glittered with battle lust; the little showman was all curiosity—and to his credit he showed no un-

easiness, even when the fourth shot ripped a splinter out of the rail a yard from where he stood.

"S'help me, 'e's shootin' at us, ain't 'e?" he whispered to Ruby. Even then he would not talk out loud, for the skipper was sighting for his own shot.

"Soon find that out!" muttered Red, and fired. Carter watched the result, shook his head, and growled.

"Hundred yards short."

"And at extreme elevation!" snapped Red, charging his chamber. "That fellow has a long-legged gun for sure. What's his game, now?"

Slowly Tod lowered his glasses. The *Concha* had swung and was slowly but surely moving.

"They're sweeping her," he growled. Long sweeps out on each side could be plainly seen as the schooner showed her bow and then her broadside. The skipper swore. The *Black Pearl's* sweeps had been cut up to make temporary repairs to the wrenched galley. And when it was seen that she made no effort to answer sweep with sweep, no more shots came from the *Concha*.

"Thinks he can scare us!" laughed Ruby.

"Let him think so!" rejoined Saunders, and threw one long leg over the rail to perch and ponder the situation.

IT WAS getting towards dusk. The *Concha* moved very slowly. With two men at each oar it was no light job to move a vessel of ninety tons; and frequent reliefs were not possible with a sparse crew, few of whom were sailors. Saunders scrutinized the sea beneath him. There was no change in color. He told Billy to get a cast with the deep sea lead, and it told him nothing except that the line was not long enough. He scanned the eastern sky. It was there that the first hint of night would appear, while the west was ablaze with the sun's departure. In that hint would be his guide. He wanted a calm night,

not too light with stars. And there would be no moon until near morning—a mere sliver of a last quarter moon. He glanced at the *Concha*, barely moving now, her sweeps swinging heavily. She had gained more than the mile she had been astern. The fact caused Saunders little worry. As soon as the twilight stars shone in the east he called his boys softly to him.

"Billy, just as soon as your eyes can't see men aboard the *Concha*, it'll be too dark for them to see you. Get the long-boat all ready to swing out. I'll take five of you. Put in tools, and two diving hoods, some dynamite, and a rifle for every man. Carter, see that all the torches have fresh batteries, and put biscuit and water in the boat. You'll come, Ruby."

"And me?" Carter demanded, tired of always being left.

"You stay and hold the hot corner, Tod. That'll be here," Red told him shortly.

As darkness fell, four shots in swift succession rang out from the *Concha*, four bullets chugged home somewhere about the glossy hull of the *Black Pearl*. It was a final warning. Across the stillness sounded faintly the creak and grunt of the great sweeps chafing in the bulwark ports of the slowly moving schooner. Red took his rifle again and fired at a venture, more to let the other ship know he was awake than for any other reason. And across the darkling water pealed a scream. There was an interruption in the grunting of the sweeps in the ports. Red chuckled.

"Sorry it had to be one of the galley slaves," he muttered. "The range was 'way over the sights, Tod, in case you feel like trying to wing another. I shot at the second reef band of the foresail."

Only the black dot of the *Concha's* shape eclipsing some horizon stars revealed her position, when Saunders at last ordered the boat away. And when his brown Islanders moved, they moved

like greased shadows. Many a year of tempest and calm, short rations and feasting together, had welded that little crew into such a piece of sensate machinery as rarely blesses a shipmaster. The skipper had given his orders, now, when movement was to begin, not a word more need be uttered. Five minutes after the longboat touched the water, she had vanished into the velvety gloom beyond which lay the reef and the wreck. So perfectly was she handled, that not a whisper of oars on tholepins gave hint of her whereabouts. Tod Carter felt the little showman shiver against his side.

"May I die, Mister Carter, they've mizzled!"

"Did you expect 'em to burn a flare?" growled Tod, and set himself the usual task of seeing things where no sight availed, hearing where no sound was, holding the hot corner for his skipper and refusing to bother about what the skipper might be doing until signaled.

The time hung heavily. Two hours had passed. No black spot marked the *Concha* now. No shots had answered that chance one of Red's that had stung a rower. The little showman had shivered in the silent blackness until he fell asleep. Only one man remained aboard the *Black Pearl* besides the mate and the little showman. That alone made the little landsman shiver. How could his land-logged senses understand the ways of seamen on the sea? How understand the mystery of losing one's self in darkness black at the Pit and still know the way home?

Carter sat aloft in the main cross-trees. Up there the lapping of the water about the hull did not dull his hearing. Tommy, the cook, snored softly in his galley.

Tod Carter was almost ready to quit his tall lookout for a more solid roost. He had been lulled nearly to sleep up there by the gentle movement of the becalmed schooner on the deepwater swells.

Either the *Concha* had swept ahead too far to be watched to good purpose, or her people had decided that they had established such an advantage over Red Saunders that they might safely rest until daylight.

"Oars!" Tommy suddenly appeared at the foot of the mainmast and called to the mate. Tommy sleeping was scarcely less alert than most people are when awake. Through his dreams of unlimited tobacco, soft-eyed brown girls, and two full days of liberty with as much gin as he could hold, had spoken the rattle of oars, and his revered skipper was coming back with the wherewithal to make his dreams come true.

"Oars, sar!"

Carter was already coming down. He had heard the sound. It was now quite clear, and with it came the uproar of angry voices.

"Bring the portable searchlight, Tommy," said Carter quietly, and laid Red's rifle handy, tearing off the lid of a fresh box of cartridges. The little showman awoke, came shivering to Tod's side again, and his teeth chattered almost as loudly as those voices.

"Captain comin' back?" he asked.

"Can you shoot?" growled Tod. Moseley Arlington's teeth chattered harder; but the little man had good stuff in him.

"If I carn't, you're out o' luck, ain't you?" he returned. "Where's a gun?"

Distant, greatly muffled, not to be certainly placed, a dull rumbling report broke the hush that followed a sighting shot fired by the mate. Whether Tod's shot hit, or passed near or far, it caused the rowers in that boat to hold their noise. The dull report sounded like distant heavy gunfire, or a mine, or anything possible. Tommy, listening keenly, gurgled. He had brought up rifles and shells enough to stand off a fleet; now he could make his own personal preparations, and he did so with a grindstone and a set of cook's knives.

Soon the onrush of a boat sounded nearby, and a voice hailed from the darkness.

"Aboard the *Black Pearl*! Your game's up! We know Saunders is at the reef, dynamiting the wreck that belongs to me." Another dull report rumbled over the sea. "We know all your men are away. I am going to seize the schooner. Do you surrender? You cannot fight us!"

"S' help me, it's 'Urtog hisself!" whispered the little showman, and handled his rifle bloodthirstily.

"Shut up!" growled Tod. Bidding Tommy keep track of direction, and stand by with the searchlight, Tod bawled back:

"You got fine ideas, fat man, but I have better! Here we are—come and get us!"

Tommy flashed the powerful light fair upon the crowded boat two hundred yards away. It shone upon a bulky figure standing up, and Carter took a pot shot at the fat man, who sat down promptly with a hand clapped to his swinish face. As if unable to ignore the example, the little showman took a shot as well, and his bullet went skipping along the water, striking the surface half a dozen times, and at last struck the blade of an oar, stinging the rower's hands so badly with the shock that he dropped the oar and tumbled backwards from the thwart.

"Keep the light in his eyes!" Tod warned Tommy, and as the boat came on with wildly thrashing oars he yelled a warning to her people too. "Keep away, my lads! Your fat man's crazy. You can't set foot aboard here, and so I warn you. Keep clear."

The boat foamed on. Somebody was shouting at the fat man in the stern, and the voice was shrill and savage.

"Hang 'em! String 'em up! Let Mister Red Saunders work and we'll take his stuff from him on the deck of his own vessel! I'll take charge of *him*, and that greasy little circus swindler, too!"

"May I die, the police! 'Im gasped Arlington aroused: "Mister us for it now! Le. What're yer waitin'?"

THE boat circled to escape the glare of Tommy's light, and Tommy followed the boat with the spot. Twice the boat circled the schooner, from which came no sound—nothing but that inexorable beam of blinding radiance. A film covered the stars. The gentlest of airs fluttered the schooner's sails and whipped her booms so that the sheet blocks thudded. For an instant the foresail cut off the light rays, and down the darkened path came the boat, her two white men yelling excitedly.

A few drops of rain fell heavily out of a small black cloud which scudded fast overhead. Otherwise the night remained as placid as a pool of grease, as far as weather went. Only that rushing boat, with those two yelling maniacs, spoiled a peaceful scene. Tod Carter glanced at the sky. Raindrops meant more to him than mere water. He missed that swift scud; it had passed. He saw the stars as bright as ever—and he also noticed that they twinkled twice as hard as usual. He took one uneasy look in the direction of the wreck; then was all action towards that boat.

"Gimme that light, Tommy! Fetch the hot water boiler—quick!"

Tommy was well prepared for an ancient trick much favored by Red Saunders. Red always preferred to avoid killing if possible; and there is much persuasion in a pint of boiling water expertly applied. Tommy kept a boiler full always. Carter shot the light full into the faces of the fat man and his white comrade, and as the boat swept around to run alongside, Tommy slung a dipper full of scalding water over the rowers in a fanshaped shower.

Down went the oars. The night was

shrill with squeals. The boat drifted on and bumped into the schooner's side, and Tommy flung another shower, this time upon the outstretched hands and arms of the white men. One of the oarsmen, a scowling great hairy man who might be a Cossack but undoubtedly looked like a jailbird, took up his oar and thrust the boat off, caring nothing for the curses of his masters.

"Hold on!" yelled Hurtog, spitting with fury and shaking his fingers. "Catch hold, or I'll shoot you down!" He dragged out a pistol and pointed it at the hairy man with trembling hand.

"Wet that gun down, Tommy!" snapped Carter, and a dipperful of hot water sloshed over the pistol. It fell with a clatter into the boat, and again the hairy one tried to fend away from that scalding stream. Other oarsmen joined him, seeing the pistol fall.

But Hurtog and his comrade were not so easily beaten off. The police commandant had secured a hold of the schooner's chainplates and ran the yoke lines through. It held the stern of the boat and let her bow swing out. Hurtog groped for the gun, Carter's dazzling light playing over his head, and as he knelt he found it; from his knees he fired, a snap shot, aimed without looking at that blinding eye of light. And the bullet hit the rail, glanced, and caressed Tod Carter's funnybone, and down went the light, and out.

Blam! went the little showman's gun, right alongside Carter's ear as he bent and danced with the pain of his tingling arm. *Smash!* came the answering shot from the boat, and Tommy's dipper flew over the side. Then came a sharp rain squall, and the starlight was blotted out. In the uproar the oarsmen shoved to get the boat away, the rudder was jerked out of the gudgeons by the yoke-lines and the policeman, holding an ear creased by the showman's bullet, let the rudder go. The boat drifted clear, and with the rain came a little breeze, which

pushed the *Black Pearl* gently forward.

It was dark enough now for anything to happen. Carter stepped to the wheel, edging the schooner off to prevent her coming up into the wind and losing way. The bulb of the searchlight was broken, and the boat was lost in the darkness. But the fat man was a persevering gunman. Three shots cracked out rapidly. The burning gases stabbed the blackness of the night like blinking, tigerish eyes. The first shot brought from the boat itself a scream which could be heard over the noise of the next two, which thudded solidly into the schooner's low bulwarks. Then the grind and thrash of oars again. Hurtog had put the fear into his crew and here they came, out of the dark, and the schooner moved faster, the breeze grew out of another rain cloud, and Carter must steer.

Close astern the boat again swung around to board; and as she edged out from the schooner's lee she found the wind. Rain swished down, there were no stars, the sea was ruffled. And the squall began to whistle. The *Black Pearl* moved like the witch she was, and left the boat in her swirling wake. Carter stood on until he felt that the squalls were going to persist, then he tacked ship and stood up for the position of the reef, the wreck, and the longboat. And as the rain came hissing across the decks, blinding the sight and setting the sea to boiling, he began to worry about Red's longboat out there in the rising wind, among the shoals of a reef, alongside or near to a wrecked steamer which was more likely to be a ragged mass of metal than a shelter.

"Sail!" yelled Tommy, from the end of the bowsprit, where he stood lookout, holding on to the fore topmast stay and as erect as a statue of bronze. Carter could not see him, but he had little need of further direction where to look; he was scarcely concerned in what was to leeward. Broad abeam to windward a blacker piece of the night's black-

ness came foaming on; a roaring ridge of white was the bow wave of a vessel; without a fathom to spare the blot passed astern—a schooner, running wild with gear all in a mess—the *Concha*.

"That lot's taken care of for awhile," grunted Tod Carter, and sent the little showman forward to tell Tommy to come aft and light a flare.

"There's nothing else to windward that I care a damn about except the skipper of this boat. If this grows into weather, he'll need to find us, and in a hurry."

THE weather was not growing into anything bad; but it did carry on in stiff rain squalls for an hour, and by that time the sea had kicked up smartly. The *Black Pearl* kept beating back and forth, in short tacks and head reaches, holding to the line of bearing from the wreck, and going no farther aside from it than would gain her distance. Never so far that her flare could be missed by any boat seeking her from the wreck. The stars reappeared before dawn. The last squall sped down wind in a shriek and a slather of tremendous rain; then the night cleared. The schooner sailed slowly, and as the flare leaped up in an expiring burst and died, Saunders' hail came out of the windward murk. Soon the longboat appeared, half full of water from the last squall, but rowed strongly, and Carter brought the schooner into the wind for her to hook on. A grinning bowman got a hold, and the boat was safe—then it happened: the *Black Pearl* came to a stop with a jar and a quiver, and the ominous thud of keel upon hard reef shook her to her trucks.

"Hobs of hell!" swore Saunders, first over the rail and at once feeling the jar of stranding. "What have you done with the ship, Carter?" Up to the moment the skipper had been as full of sportive content as Tod had ever seen him. Now he peered closely into the old mate's face and sniffed suspiciously.

Ruby Belcher hove his bulk aboard and joined the group.

"You go b'ile yer head!" growled Tod, savagely. "I won't tell you one bloody thing now! You smell me? My blood an' bowels!"

Saunders jumped into the boat again, sharply asking Carter for a sounding line. That Tod produced. No amount of personal peeve could change him from a complete sailorman. And no sailorman, however complete, could have avoided that grounding. He got the dipsey lead and handed it over, sullenly, but smartly. The skipper took the boat all around the schooner, sounding. And he swore vividly as he tried astern. After completing a ring of soundings that covered every possible spot where an anchor might be dropped for the hauling off of the vessel, he returned silently on board.

"No use running out an anchor, Tod. Have to wait until the wind comes right to back her off, and I'm afraid we'll have to wait for spring tides. Get the boat on board, and tell Tommy to feed all hands a full meal. What a damned nuisance!"

"If you're still bellyaching over me runnin' the ship—" Tod Carter snapped, turning short around on his heel when halfway to the boat tackles. Red laughed, quickly smothered the impulse, and laid a hand upon Tod's shoulder:

"Shut up, you old firecracker! If I hadn't stayed out all night, taking cover from a bit of a squall, it wouldn't have happened. It's my fault, but a damned nuisance just the same. Luckily it isn't a complete disaster. Hurry up with the boat, and come down to eat."

It might be an incomplete disaster, a full meal just before dawn was comforting, but there was something wrong, and Tod Carter knew it. He suspected it when the boys made a lot of fuss dragging the boat in. He was sure of it when daylight came and revealed a wide and shining ocean, the wrecked steamer fair in view a mile away, and the *Con-*

cha, towing her boat, just reaching up under easy sail within line throwing distance of the prize. He went to tell Saunders.

"Spring tides in two days, Tod. Tell me when the wind shifts," the skipper said sleepily. Tod went to tell Ruby Belcher.

"Give me a shake when the skipper turns out," mumbled Ruby, drowsily.

There was no sleep for Carter. He ranged on deck until the sun was high, the sole figure visible on the *Black Pearl's* deck. He saw the *Concha* take her own good time and tie up alongside the wreck. He saw, through glasses, the fat man and the commandant enter the companionway under the bridge, and he saw them presently come out and glance over the side at the sea level. Then they started systematically from forward to aft, and opened up hatches. All the hatches except two were above water. The steamer lay partly submerged, but three-fourths of her was accessible as to the deck openings, and, as Carter knew only too well by the listing of the *Black Pearl*, soon the tide would fall enough for them at least to examine those other holds—or at least to open the hatches.

He sat himself on top of Tommy's galley and gave himself up to gloomy cogitation. He took a rifle up with him, and once or twice took a squint along the barrel at the scene of activity. There were a dozen men with the *Concha*, and every one was busy as a shark with a dead whale flinging off hatches and tarpaulins. He cursed them for lubberly workmen even while cursing them for interlopers; nobody cared to roll a tarpaulin up, or to place hatch covers in order for replacing. But as the sun rose higher, things happened over there; a dark pile grew alongside the main hatch. And when the tide began to flow again, the dark pile was slung aboard the *Concha*.

Still no wind. Saunders appeared from

time to time, and Carter at last set a watch, so that no move could be missed. The longboat sat in its chocks amidships, just as it came aboard—diving hoods and other salvage gear heaped on the airpump between the two middle thwarts. Carter began to have it cleared out; Saunders bade him leave it.

AT THE end of the day a breeze blew smartly for two hours, just right for backing off. The tide was down. Toward morning the wind blew again, and the tide was only just past the turn. There was not wind enough or water enough. Saunders hung on to backed main and foresails, with booms tackled out, until the schooner groaned and the foresail began to rip. He hung on after that. But when the wind hardened and split the sail from head to foot, and the vessel quivered to her keel, the tide was gone.

All through the next day the *Concha* swung cargo gaily. She soon rode deeper. Ore is heavy as well as valuable. Saunders made a calculation, based upon Ruby's knowledge of the vessel's body form and tonnage-per-inch.

"It's a damned nuisance," he said again, at supper, "but I figure she'll have all she can carry by tomorrow noon, and she won't have made a scratch on the bulk."

It was easy to see all was not right aboard that wreck. Deep rode the *Concha*, yet the two whites seemed more than uneasy. They seemed angry. The *Black Pearl* had powerful binoculars, and her brown crew had powerful eyes. All were fixed upon the scene of frantic excitement occurring about the companionway under the steamer's bridge.

Very soon the *Concha* began to cast off. It was getting dark, and the sky held signs of unsettled weather. Still the double conditions that would make the floating of the *Black Pearl* possible did not quite coincide. Saunders expected to try in an hour. He had little

fear of anything Hurtog might do, though his ship lay helpless; but he wanted no hindrance, and if he were able to move under sail, the *Concha* could never come near him, laden as she was.

"Here's a steamer, skipper! A fast one, too! Lord, how she's slipped in on us!" Ruby hailed from forward. Saunders had wondered at a sudden haste aboard the *Concha*. He gazed at the steamer—lean, gray, a four-funnel.

"A cruiser!" he grinned. "Australian, too, isn't she, Tod?"

"Aye, and damned if she ain't copped the fat man! Talk about the luck o' Red Saunders!" growled Tod Carter, and spat noisily into the sea.

In the dusk the gray cruiser swept grandly around and lay at rest near the wreck. Men aboard the *Concha* went crazy with fright, and dropped her lines over the side, making a terrific mess of getting sail on her; and the warship dropped a launch, manned it with smart young sailors, and it was alongside the *Concha* before the schooner's foresail drew.

"Hey, Ruby! Isn't this ship afloat?" shouted Red, suddenly feeling the true motion underfoot. He stepped to the helm, looking at the dark water. There was a slow movement about the rudder. "Get the jib on her!" he called out, and as the sail rattled up the stay and the sheet was hauled to windward, the little vessel's head fell off and the *Black Pearl* was her own saucy self again.

"Ain't thinkin' you can outfoot that cruiser?" laughed Tod Carter. Here was real authority in gray steel. He despised much of the sort of authority they met and flouted, but this was authority he had been brought up to respect. Whenever the *Black Pearl* found herself within hail of a warship of a real flag Tod Carter felt uneasy until they parted company, no matter how innocent he might actually be at the moment.

"We'll run clear of the reef, Tod, and

lay-to until he boards us. He'll do that, never fear," returned Red.

"Can't we slip him in the darkness?" suggested Ruby, seeming to feel as uneasy as Carter.

"Not a chance, even if we wanted to," grinned Red.

True to expectations, in half an hour the big launch foamed alongside, and a dapper young lieutenant climbed nimbly aboard.

"Captain Saunders?" he nodded, looking in puzzled fashion from Red to Ruby, and grinning pleasantly to find them grinning in the dusk. Saunders answered him.

"Have you boarded that wreck?" the officer asked.

"I went over to have a look-see, and my mate ran the schooner on the reef," smiled Red. "You saw us get off, didn't you?"

"The skipper of that schooner says you have looted the wreck."

"The skipper of that schooner is myself!" snapped Ruby Belcher, and rummaged in his pockets for his papers. He handed them to the lieutenant, who examined them by the light of a torch. The officer looked a bit puzzled again. He laughed in the end, however, and nodded.

"I'll hold on to these, Captain Belcher," he said. "Australian register, I see. We're taking that schooner in to look her over properly. You'd better follow, Saunders. We can clear things up in less time in port. No doubt you'll recover your vessel, Belcher, and Captain Saunders will lose very little time if he puts no obstacle in the way of our examination. Look out for our signal when I get on board. You'll follow at your best speed, of course. Here—Jones, Tagg—" indicating two of his men—"remain on board here and take charge."

Ruby and Carter stared at Saunders. Red took it all so pleasantly. Two navy flatfoots planted on board the *Black Pearl*? And no protest?

But the sailors were pleasant fellows, too. They made no fuss. They alternated as watchmen, lent a hand without being asked, and gave no signs of nosiness. The warship signaled the course, and moved ahead, ordering both schooners to hang out a good light at the masthead. Through the night she circled around the sailing craft every hour; and when, toward morning, the wind fell light, and progress was slow, she sent a towline aboard the *Concha*, and from her another to the *Pearl*, and towed the convoy at ten knots.

IN PORT DARWIN things moved faster than was customary in that distant little town. The two schooners were tied up together at a wharf and their hatches removed. No further guard was placed on the *Black Pearl*, but, after Ruby Belcher had laid his complaint, and his papers had been scrutinized, a double guard was set over the *Concha* and her crew placed under restraint. Hurtog and his commandant, both purple with fury, made a fuss which ended in their being thrown into prison.

"There's little doubt about the *Concha*," the commander of the gray warship told Saunders. "She's confiscated, and Hurtog and the other fellow will have to stand their chance unless their own government can straighten 'em out. Belcher will get his vessel back after examination, unless he's—well, Saunders, I'll look you over now."

That search was friendly, but thorough. Ruby Belcher followed the party around, lending a hand as requested, glancing at Saunders from time to time with a queer expression. When the hold had been gone over even to probing behind the sheathing and under the floors, and the living quarters rummaged as completely as any Customs sleuth could do it—the officer in charge of the search party questioned the two sailors who had been left aboard the schooner. Very soon he rejoined Saunders.

"Seems all right, skipper," he said. "I have no doubt that Hurtog fellow is a keen liar. We're waiting now to get a reply to our wireless for information about him—"

"Oh, he's a pukka official in Temboyna, sir," Red grinned. "What are we supposed to have aboard here?"

"There was a consignment of specie. He says it's been taken from the wreck. It's not aboard the *Concha*, that's absolutely certain. We ripped out every locker and bulkhead, and combed the ore cargo as it came out."

"Did you think of looking for it under water?" suggested Red. "It's an old trick, sir. On a line, you know."

"Thanks!" smiled the officer. "I'll try that. It's hardly sporting, but I'll have to try it on you too, skipper."

"Go ahead, sir. D'you want to sweep with a line, or can I lend you some diving gear? Glad to help, since you'll find nothing here."

Speaking so, Saunders called Billy, and they began throwing off the pile of gear covering the air pump in the longboat. They put on two diving hoods, which needed no air line and were fine for shoal water. There were two regular diving suits, too. The officer had his jacket off already.

"I'll go down myself," he said. "It'll be quicker and more convincing. One of the hoods will do, thanks."

In smart navy fashion the officer put on the hood and went down. The bottom of the harbor was but three feet below the keel; it was possible to examine the spaces under the wharf, too; and while down he could walk under the *Concha* as well, completing the job utterly. In twenty minutes he came up, got out of the hood, and into his uniform.

"Nothing down there, captain," he said. He looked around the schooner, was about to leave, when he had another idea.

"Loose your sails, please," he asked.

Billy and his boys had the canvas out of stops and half hoisted in no time. Nothing there. To show how thoroughly the job was done, one of the sailors was sent to feel in the galley funnel; another to peer beneath the bowsprit where there was a space between spar and headboards. But that was all.

"You are clear, captain," the officer said. "Better hold on until our skipper gives you the signal. Anything we can do for you?"

"No, thanks, sir—unless you have a bit of timber to repair that broken galley side."

"How about a couple of long oars?" grumbled Tod Carter, who saw a bit of light at last. The schooner would now proceed to the wreck and load a full cargo of precious ore while the warship was fussing over Mister Hurtog.

"I'll send them over," the officer said, saluted, and stepped on to the wharf. He turned to call out: "By the way, Saunders, that wreck's in admiralty court now, and we left a guard on board, in case you might—well, you know. Fair winds to you!" Once more he turned, and this time came right back to the *Black Pearl's* side.

"Captain, if Belcher cares to stand by here awhile, he'll get his schooner back as soon as we dispose of the case. It won't be long."

"Thanks," Ruby answered shortly, then exchanged glances with Saunders.

There was something between the two big redheads which was clear over the head of Tod Carter. He stood a bit on one side, regarding them queerly. And his weather beaten face went absolutely aghast when on Ruby's word Red called Billy to him, and gave orders which resulted in the longboat being cleared of gear down to the airpump in two minutes. And when Red unscrewed the airpump, and showed a box devoid of all pumping parts and filled with square,

chunky boxes of specie, the mate's eyes almost popped from his head.

"Saunders' luck!" the mate uttered, jerkily, as if vocal strings had been pulled. Then his day was absolutely ruined for further shocks. Nothing that could happen now could impress him. There was Saunders, leaving all that treasure lying on the open deck in full view of the cruiser! More, Red was striding up the cruiser's gangway. Finally, here came Red back again, bringing not only the officer who had made the search, but the commander of the warship. Billy had been less stricken than the mate, being in on the hiding of the gold.

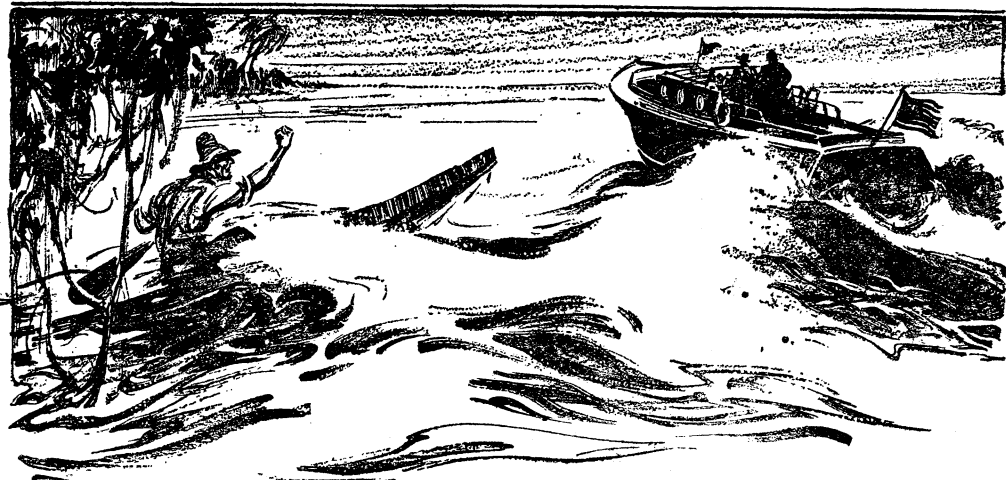
"Mighty good officeh no take de pump suit fo' divin'," grinned Billy, screwing in the last screw and leaving the air pump outwardly intact. Then the navy men were aboard, staring at the little pile of specie. They stared long, and they stared at Saunders.

"Just what is your motive, Captain Saunders?" the cruiser skipper wanted to know. "This is the stiffest yarn I ever had to swallow. Where was it hidden?"

"You'll have to permit me to keep that little secret, sir," Red grinned. "But as for motive, we were out to beat a crooked official who had done us both a rotten turn. Now it's a different matter. The insurance people will remember us, perhaps, and we'll lift a bit of square cash there; and if we can get the job, on contract, for the two schooners to discharge and freight that ore, our hard-tack will be buttered thickly enough."

The commander looked hard into Saunders' eyes; and he gave Ruby Belcher a keen look. Here were a pair of uncommon freelances in his experience. Then he bowed to them, courteously, and left, and gave his promise regarding the ore and the insurance recommendation. All he said, on stepping ashore, was:

"It's too bad that fat piker couldn't see what we've seen!"



The motorboat shot by with a ripping snarl from her high speed engines.
The pirogue bucked in its wake.

THE DUMB FROGS

When Jean Lebeau returned to the peaceful fishing village, two detectives followed him—Jean was on hand when murder was done in the night.

By JAMES MITCHELL CLARKE

JEAN LEBEAU drew the measuring stick from his gasoline drum, looked at the scant inch of wet showing, then very quietly laid the stick aside. He turned to stare off over the bayou toward the bustling activity at the landing two hundred yards away, eyes narrowed in speculation and anger. This was the second time some one had come aboard at night, drained the gasoline from his tank and the spare drum on deck and left him stranded at the anchorage.

He knew he was not well liked on the island. When he left four years ago, he had gone with the hot words of youth on his tongue. Narrow from generations of isolation on this Gulf island, suspicious of new things with all the hard-mindedness of the French peasantry from which they took descent, the islanders had resented and blocked his attempt to cut their home up into building lots for a summer resort. So Jean,

after selling his inherited property, had gone, leaving enemies behind.

Now he was back, a real estate operator no longer, but a fisherman like the rest. All he had was a good boat and the strength of his hands. He did not ask forgiveness. Four years of ranging up and down the Gulf Coast, years in which he had seen more of the seamy side of life than is good for a young man, had hardened Jean; but they had also given him the strength to walk alone. He did not ask anything of these folk.

And yet such petty, underhanded enmity was not like them.

Still puzzled, he was about to go over the stern into his dugout canoe, when a voice hailed him from the bank. Young Noel Renan stood there making excited motions with his arms.

"Mr. Jean, Old Man Garfield wants you at the store. He says to come fast, yes. I am here in the car."

It was on Jean's tongue to refuse. But

Old Man Garfield owned more boats, houses, oyster beds, acres and goods than any one in three parishes. He ruled the island from a swivel chair in one corner of the general store, and he did not issue such a summons for amusement.

Jean dropped down into the pirogue, cast off and knelt to paddle ashore. But as the dugout's nose poked out from behind the boat, his shoulder muscles leaped into cords. His paddle churned white as he backed water. The pirogue lost way, checked, as a big motorboat shot by with a ripping snarl from her high speed engine and a wake which shot the canoe crazily into the air and dropped it with a lurch and a splash of water over the gunwale.

Two men were in the speedboat. One turned and shouted:

"Dumb frog! Watch where you're going."

The other laughed. As Jean expertly steadied his bucking craft, anger ran through him. "Dumb frog" they called him; and then went tearing among small boats like crazy men. Once he himself had thought the fishermen stupid. Now he was one of them. All summer people were had enough, but these two, Farman and Leach, were the worst. They seemed to think the islanders some species of animal or fish.

Noel had the motor running when Jean came, and he sent the car tearing off down the glistening road of white shell.

"What does Mr. Garfield want?" Jean asked.

"I don't know, me." Noel skidded round the first turn and tore on. "He only said to come fast. Some men are there."

Jean entered the dimness of Garfield's big store, blinking and wrinkling his nose at the commingled odor of everything from oilskins to spice. He did not see the two men who sat flanking Old Man Garfield in the corner until

he had come quite close. The one on the right was small, intelligent looking, alert. The round black eyes and heavy jaw of the other bespoke single-minded determination which left little room for feeling. They looked Jean up and down with impersonal, appraising stares.

Old Man Garfield waved a large, dark hand.

"This man is Mr. Grant, Jean," he said, indicating the smaller. "And Mr. Praul."

The men did not smile or even nod. They kept on looking at Jean. Old Man Garfield heaved himself up from the round backed chair. His bulk and smooth, dark skin and drooping white mustache made him look like an amiable walrus—without tusks.

"We will go where we can talk," he said, and led the way through staring loungers into a room behind the store.

"These men want to ask you some questions, Jean," he said. "They are from the Government in Washington. I have looked at the papers to show. You must not get mad."

This was merely confirmation of what Jean knew already. He recognized a detective when he saw one.

GRANT began the questioning. His manner was crisp, but friendly. Praul, on the other hand, set out to make himself as disagreeable as possible. Every look, every question or comment seemed calculated to make Jean angry. Jean did not know whether this behavior followed the separate characters of the two or not. But he recognized it as a form of police inquisition — one friendly questioner to draw information from a man by a suggested sympathy, another to jolt it from him by making him angry.

A nameless, unreasonable fear possessed Jean. He had done nothing he must hide; yet these men made his hands damp with clammy perspiration, his backbone cold. The questions went on

and on, meaningless to Jean, but somehow holding the promise of disaster. Where had he been on February eighteenth? Why had he rented that deposit box in the Hibernia bank? Where had he got the large sum in cash he had paid for his boat? When Jean said he had won it on a horserace, Praul laughed nastily.

Grant's questions swung suddenly off on a new track.

"Lebeau," he said, "in Miami you went around with Nick Cascio and Spider Street and Duke Travis, the book-maker. You were pretty good friends with them, weren't you?"

"Not very."

"No? You ran with them all the time. Looks to me like you were pals."

Jean shrugged.

"You know how it is around the race-tracks. You go with people, but you don't know them very well."

Praul said, with meaning—

"Not unless you belong to the same mob."

Jean opened his hands to let the breeze cool the palms. What was this all about, anyhow? Why didn't they get to the point? Grant looked at him hard for a moment.

"You say you won that money on a horserace?"

"Yes."

Praul's laugh exploded on the heels of Jean's answer like a cork popping. Jean turned on him, his hands clenched, anger showing in his face. The detective sobered instantly. His round eyes grew hard once more.

"How far do you think you'll get by handing us stuff like that? Come clean and save yourself some trouble. And don't try to get hard, see?"

Jean's reason struggled a moment with his anger. You couldn't hit a detective. No matter what he said, you had to take it.

"I told you the truth," he said.

Praul grinned.

"Lucky at the racetrack, aren't you?" Old Man Garfield spoke for the first time since the questioning began.

"It's bad," he said, "to call a man a liar if you don't prove it."

Praul stared at him, blinked, but said nothing. There was enough authority about Old Man Garfield to make most men think twice. Grant said at once:

"We've gone far enough with this for now, Praul. Lebeau, a mail truck was held up in Miami on the night of February eighteenth. The driver was killed and about twenty thousand dollars in cash and negotiable securities taken. Some of those bonds turned up in New Orleans early in April.

"You ran with a mighty tough crowd in Miami; and you turned up in New Orleans with a pocket full of cash about the time the bonds were sold. Besides that, we've got a straight tip that the man we want came out to this island. I don't say you're the one—but we're going to stay here till we get him."

"A lot of people have come here this summer," Old Man Garfield said.

"I know it," Grant said. "I'm going to look around some. But Lebeau will have to stay where he'll be handy if we want him again."

"Listen," Praul said, "you can't let this man go, Grant. All he'd have to do would be run up into one of these bayous and we'd never see him again. There's a jail here, isn't there?"

He asked this question of Old Man Garfield. Garfield stroked his mustache and pierced Praul with a look from under shaggy brows.

"If Jean say he will not go away, he will not."

Grant looked from Garfield to Jean.

"Will you give me your word?"

Jean gave it.

"All right," Grant said. "Then you'll be here when we want you. Thanks, Mr. Garfield."

Grant shook hands and left. Praul, scowling, followed him.

Jean stood a moment staring after them with his black brows knit, his mouth a tight line.

"They will watch you now, Jean," Old Man Garfield said. "They will make some little hunt on the island, and watch if you do anything like a guilty man."

Jean nodded, still frowning darkly.

"They'll try to hang it on me, all right," he said. "They could make it stick, too. I didn't rob a mail truck, or anything else. But what's the good of saying so? They think I did; and I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. That's how people get sent to jail."

"If the man they want is here," Garfield said, getting up, "he will not get away. It is a poor place to hide, this island. Here we know everybody."

Jean shrugged, and turned with a bitter attempt at a smile.

"What's the difference? If they don't get the right man, they've got me. Anyhow, it's white of you to back me up, Mr. Garfield. I know I'm not well liked here."

Old Man Garfield's bright eyes appraised Jean from the immobile bulk of his face.

"I have know your papa before, and you since you were born, Jean. You have sometime act like a fool, but you would not rob. It is that you don't understand the men of this island. That is why you don't get along good. It is where you belong. Nobody wants you to go away."

"No?" Jean said. "Then why do they steal my gasoline? That's too much trouble to—except for meanness."

Garfield stopped and laid a heavy hand on Jean's arm.

"Somebody has stole your gas? I don't know any island men who would do that. A little they steal here at the store. But gas, no."

"Well," Jean said, "this is the second time. I might as well get enough here to move my boat and take it up in a skiff."

THAT afternoon Jean found that his room at the Widow Mouton's house had been entered and his possessions turned upside down. The widow herself looked suspiciously at Jean and finally admitted that some men had questioned her closely. On his return that evening, Jean found Praul waiting for him. He stayed two hours, asking questions, talking about gangs and how much good a big shot like Cascio could do a man. He appeared again next morning while Jean was dressing before a five o'clock breakfast. He seemed to think he could catch him off his guard.

Grant also talked with Jean again that day. Obeying a summons, he found the smaller detective in Garfield's chair in the dim corner of the store.

"You're in a bad spot," Grant said. "I hope you didn't do it; but if you did, you'd better take what's coming to you and get it over with. A man might be honest all his life, and just slip one time when he needed money badly. I might myself."

"What I said was straight," Jean told him. "Where I made my mistake was in knowing Cascio and that outfit. It makes me out a liar no matter what I say."

Grant nodded.

"That's a tough mob," he said. "I don't want to make this any harder on you than I have to, Lebeau. Garfield says you're straight, and I'm willing to believe him till I find out different. You can take your boat out, if you'll be back every night."

"Giving me a chance to run out and put myself in the sack?" Jean asked.

Grant grinned at him.

"Suit yourself."

The screen door banged. Farman and Leach, the two who had so nearly cut Jean down in the speedboat, had come in. They were making for the post-office counter, as always, in a rush. Old Man Garfield, waddling walrus-like across the floor, was directly in their

path. They swerved, but Leach jostled him. He turned with an ugly look.

"Out of my way, Santa Claus! Shake the lead out of your hump."

Grant said:

"They're in a hurry, those lads. Who are they?"

Jean told him, adding that they were a dentist and a business man from New Orleans.

"They're down for the summer," he said. "They rented a house and they think they own the island. One of them's going to talk a little too hard to one of us fishermen and get poked in the eye."

IT WAS good to get out into the open Gulf. Jean fished for shark two days and delivered good catches to the skinning sheds. The third day, Friday, he broke down fifteen miles out. It was midnight before his boat limped with a sputtering engine into the bayou which split off a low-lying patch of land from the main island. He put the boy who helped him ashore, and rowed back to clean up the boat himself.

It was a job better left for daylight, but Jean did not feel like sleep. He had caught no shark that day; but thoughts swam through his mind, worrying him like sharks tearing at a crippled swimmer. Grant and Praul had found nothing to implicate any one on the island except him. False leads, yes: Fourchon, the barber, had knifed a man at Lafitte in Barataria; Holtz, the Austrian from Biloxi, had served a term in jail. But they were as far from Miami and mail robberies as Old Man Garfield himself.

Praul still came to his room, questioning, insinuating, trying to make him lose his temper. So far Jean had kept himself under control. But he did not know how long he could help putting his fist into that heavy jowled face. Grant's friendliness—though he appeared to be a good sort—was far from whole-hearted.

Jean felt, as he cast off the skiff and

rowed across the dark, wind-ruffled bayou, as if the whole weight of life's evil circumstances were bearing down to crush him. The net of events which enmeshed him was so suspicious that determined men convinced of his guilt might be able to prove it before a court. And Jean had a dark, bitter sense of foreboding. His luck was out. In this game the next card dealt him was likely to be as bad as those before.

As he grounded the skiff on the muddy salt marsh, this sense of oppression and foreboding increased. It was very dark. Tall, fantastic clouds stood up dimly in a sky faintly illumined by stars. A wind stirred the marsh grass and made a running whisper along the water.

Jean swung his oars to a shoulder and picked his way to the low levee which divided the marsh from the island's fertile fields. The odd, waxy scent of oleander flowers blew on the warm wind. A thousand winged insects hummed in the dark. From the island's other side the long, slow sound of waves came steadily. Trees shook their leaves to make an uneasy murmur.

This commingled sense of beauty and brooding wakefulness was not new to Jean. It was part of him, in his blood and veins, tonight intensified by his own trouble and his own desire. Since that night in Miami when he decided to quit the racetracks, he had known that he must live here. Like a fish which must live in water between salt and fresh, this island between land and sea, with its half-liquid air bearing together the scent of flowers and marsh, was his natural habitat.

It had never seemed more desirable than now. Yet there was no peace. Grant and Praul were ready to take him. Perhaps tomorrow. Perhaps later. In that hour Jean could see no way of escape.

Brooding, he followed the levee path till it rose at a turn above the surrounding growth. There he stopped, motionless as the fencepost beside him. Not a

house showed a light at this hour. The chance of any one's being about was unlikely. Yet between some trees Jean had seen a glow—small, but very clear and sharp. As he waited it came again, in another place. Then it went out and stayed out.

Jean's brows knit, and his hands gripped round the oars. Where he had seen that light, no light should be. It was his own property, somewhere near the old house in its dense, neglected garden. Jean had gotten it back by default of the people to whom he had sold it. But since his return he had been there only once.

Walking lightly, he followed the levee till he came to the high oleander hedge back of the house. There he stopped again. A shadow darker than other shadows had appeared on the path. He was not quite sure he had seen it at all, or whether the creak he had heard was a gate swinging, or a tree limb straining in the wind. He went on.

The old sagging gate was closed. Jean opened it enough to admit his body, closed it again. He was now in pitch blackness. Overhead the fronds of palms his father had planted met in a high arch. On every side was garden growth which had become almost jungle. All he could hear was the dry, rain-like rattle of the palms.

Jean continued down the tunnel, stepping carefully so as not to crackle the litter of fallen branches underfoot. Every few yards he paused, intent and straining to catch any noise. But except for the night birds and insects he seemed the only thing alive here.

Presently the blackness lightened, and he saw the old house bulking dimly against the sky. The kitchen ran out this way in a long ell, with a porch at one side. At this moment the old place looked as if no one had ever lived there. It had the strange, unearthly look of uninhabited places seen at night. The living can not conjure up the dead, then. Build-

ings seem beyond all time and place, and never meant for human beings.

Jean took one step more, and then a light flashed on. The sudden glare showed for an instant part of a man. All but one leg and an uplifted arm were in darkness. The light moved, but before anything more was revealed, the uplifted arm fell. There was a dull, crunching sound, then a thud. Jean knew those sounds. He had seen a man blackjacked before.

THE electric torch crazily illuminated trees and shrubs as it fell and turned end for end. It finally came to rest with its beam turned full on the fallen man. He was a small man in a neat gray suit. Jean knew him for Grant. The other had his back turned. He bent over and began to beat Grant's head in. The black-jack rose and fell methodically.

Jean did not stop to think that Grant had brought trouble to him, or to puzzle out the meaning of what he had witnessed. The oars were a poor apology for a weapon, but all he had. He dropped one and shifted his grip on the other till he had it about the narrow part, just above the blade. By that time he had covered half the distance to where Grant lay.

The other man heard him coming and turned. Jean, still ten feet away, swung the oar downward like a long club. He struck the man, but not squarely. The oar glanced off one shoulder, leaving him unbalanced but still on his feet. Jean swung the oar again.

The blow never got home. A gun crashed from the porch shadows. Jean stumbled, fell on his face.

After the first numbing shock as the bullet ploughed his side, he went unconscious for awhile. A strong light beating on his eyelids was the next thing he knew. He kept his eyes shut while a man's tobacco laden breath beat in his face and a rough hand felt his heart.

"He's not dead," a voice said. "I better rub him out."

Another voice said:

"I've got a better one than that. We'll—"

The voice subsided to a mumble, too low for Jean to catch. Presently another shot sent echoes crashing about the old house. The men tramped toward Jean again. They had turned their light off.

"We better scram," one said. "I don't think we woke anybody up, but we might, shooting that way. Damn the dumb frog!"

He kicked Jean, starting up pain which sent him back into unconsciousness.

WHEN Jean came to he was in a bed. Light streamed through an open window, and Mrs. Garfield was peering at him through her glasses.

"Lie still," she said to Jean. "Old Man, he's waked up."

Jean ran his hand along his side, touching bandages. He was very sore, and felt weak as a new born calf. Just then he could not connect any of last night's events. Old Man Garfield came waddling through the door. His face, as always, was unrevealing as some dark wood, carven and polished. But he said:

"This is bad, Jean. Somebody has killed Grant. They think it is you."

Jean shut his eyes. He could not for a moment comprehend what Garfield was saying. Then the full force of this new turn struck and left him numb. He and Grant must have been lying near each other. Grant was dead. He had tried to save the detective, and now must bear the blame for killing him. He opened his eyes and said—

"Who thinks so?"

"That man Paul. You were there, shot, and Mr. Grant had his gun in his hand with one shell fired. I don't know, me. You have not say whether you killed him or not."

Jean looked at Old Man Garfield long

and questioningly. It was hard to make himself believe that the storekeeper was not joking. Yet it seemed to be true; Garfield would take his word for what had happened. Not—Jean thought with a return of bitterness—that it would do him much good.

"I didn't kill him," he said. "But I can't prove it. I never got a good look at the men who beat his head in and shot me."

Old Man Garfield inclined his head slowly, as if this part of the matter were entirely settled. He said:

"Do you feel good enough to talk? Paul is wait downstairs. Ever since you and Grant are found he has been storm around like one hurricane."

Jean straightened his shoulders beneath the bedclothes.

"Sure," he said. "Bring him in."

Paul did not come alone. The island sheriff, Big Picot, and his two fisherman deputies, Michel Dupree and Fortuné Collette, slid in silently after him. Jean knew these leathery, weathered faces well. They were a familiar if not friendly presence in the room, and somehow comforting.

Paul walked straight up to the bed and said—

"You're going to burn for this."

Jean looked steadily into the red face from which Paul's hard, round eyes protruded angrily. He said:

"Hang. They don't have the electric chair in Louisiana. I didn't kill Grant, Paul. But you're just the kind to get me for it, anyway."

For a moment the detective was too angry to speak. His voice came out a little hoarse.

"We don't arrest innocent men in the Federal service, Lebeau. You ought to know that. But how you can have the face to lie that way is more than I see. It gets me. Hang or burn, I'll see that you get yours if it's the last thing I ever do."

"I guess," Jean said, "you've got the

evidence. But I thought you Federal men checked back on everything."

Praul snorted.

"Check back? When we found you right there with the blackjack a foot from your hand, all over blood, and one shell fired in Grant's gun? Poor devil. I told him not to go around alone. And I told him to lock you up. But he wouldn't listen, and this is what he gets for it."

The man, undoubtedly a good detective where tenacity and courage were required, had a mind too stubborn to admit any possibility so far from the visible facts as the truth. Jean realized this, but he had to play every card he held.

"Your evidence is just circumstantial," he said. "And I say I didn't kill him. Why don't you give me a chance?"

"What chance did you give Leo Grant when you slugged him to death? But go ahead. Sing me your song, and I'll listen."

So Jean told him, beginning at the moment he first saw the lights, and ending with the kick which sent him back into unconsciousness. Praul's mouth turned down in a look of disbelief and disgust.

"Now I'll tell *you* what happened," he said. "Leo Grant had a hunch, or maybe more than a hunch, that you'd cached that stuff in your old house. He was smart, Leo was, but he liked to work things out by himself till he was all set. That's how he came to go there alone. He was waiting till you came back there, just to make sure. That's how he was, a good guy; if you didn't do it, he wanted to give you a break.

"But you saw Grant first and slugged him. He must have shot you once as he went down. Then you mashed in his head. Come on, get up out of that bed. I'm taking you to New Orleans right now."

JEAN lay looking up at the ceiling. For a moment he was rigid. Then the tenseness went out of his body. He

looked at Picot and Dupree and Collette lined against the wall—men he would never see again. It was all over. He was through, finished with the island, with fishing, with life itself. As long as there were only men or an ocean or hard times against you, you could fight. When fate turned thumbs down, you were through. He felt, in a curious way, already dead.

He was about to force himself to get up when Old Man Garfield spoke. His quiet voice had never carried more authority than now.

"You can't take Jean," he said. "There are things to find out first. What he has said is true, I think."

"Find out?" Praul shouted. "What is there to find out? Don't try to tell me what I can't do or you'll get in wrong yourself."

Old Man Garfield said:

"Jean is no liar, him, nor a thief. He says there were two men, and we will find those two men."

Praul glared at the old man, then deliberately turned away.

"Get up, you!" he said to Jean. "I'll take you along now for the Miami job, and put in charges for killing Grant later. I'm not sucker enough to stay here and have one of these frogs turn you loose. Not me."

Jean lay and watched as if from a long distance. Pain and his own resignation made him detached from these happenings. Praul was wrought up. His partner had been brutally killed. Police in any service are unrelenting in their efforts to convict the murderer of a brother officer. And Jean knew also that his story was fantastic. Praul would not change his mind.

Again Jean started to get up. But Old Man Garfield, moving with surprising swiftness, had interposed his ponderous bulk between himself and Praul. His very look suggested immovability, passively challenging Praul's course like a great smooth stone. Garfield's personal

strength was like that, also; calm, heavy, immobile—but a great force nevertheless.

"You will not take Jean," he said.

Praul's hand went to a rear pocket where a revolver made a bulge.

"Old Man Garfield," he said, "you're interfering with the law. Move out of my way before I have to move you."

Old Man Garfield stood exactly where he was, looking at Praul. The detective, breathing a little hard, waited for what he must have thought a reasonable time. Then he started to draw the gun.

At his movement, Collette and Dupree left their places. Big Picot, who was the kind to follow anybody's lead, hesitated, but came along.

BEFORE he could get his gun out, Praul found himself surrounded by islanders. They looked big, and even Old Man Garfield suggested a great strength beneath his fat. They said nothing, but Praul slowly looked around at their faces and put his gun away.

He blustered, fiery in the face.

"I'll have you all sent up! Do you know what this is—do you? It's complicity with a crime. It puts you right in with this murderer. You'll go to the pen, and for plenty long."

Old Man Garfield said:

"You couldn't get a boat to go. Nobody on the island would take Jean."

"Then I'll go to town for one! And when I come back, I'm taking the lot of you with me. Don't think I won't."

Old Man Garfield inclined his head.

"You may do so," he said, and turned his back.

Praul went out, his heels falling angrily on the floor. Jean had to fight to keep tears out of his eyes. He was weak from his wound, and he was French. These men whom he had believed unfriendly had given him a reprieve, a fighting chance for life. He held out his hand, unable to say a word.

Fortuné Collette bent over the bed foot.

"You have not got any idea at all about these men?" he asked. "Who they were?"

Jean shook his head.

"It was dark by the old house. I couldn't see them, and I didn't recognize the way they talked."

Collette shrugged expressively.

"That is bad, yes."

The three islanders went out with somber faces and slow steps. Jean turned to Old Man Garfield.

"If I get out of this," he said, "I'll owe you people more than I can pay back. You—you believe me."

"You were born here, Jean, the same as us. We are one family here. What a man says is true, we must believe."

"Everything makes it look bad for me," Jean said, after a time. "I won that money on a side bet with Nick Cascio. He'd rub out his own father for ten dollars, and I'd got to the place where I had to go in with his gang or leave town. Racetracks are no place for a poor man, if he's honest. I ducked out that same night, put the money away in the vault and went up the river till I was sure Cascio wasn't having me followed."

"I thought I'd come back here and start over. A city's no place for me. I—I got in with the wrong people all the time. Down here it's different. I thought I could run my boat and maybe build up a business. Then this had to happen."

Jean stared out the window with bleak eyes. Old Man Garfield said thoughtfully:

"Maybe it is not so bad as it look, no. Praul will not find out anything; but he is not the right man to look anyway. I know this island, me. It is a hard place to go away from."

Garfield rose and waddled out, leaving the room quiet except for the murmurous buzz of a wasp on the window pane. Jean lay thinking for awhile, then his weakness made him sleepy. He dozed

until Mrs. Garfield brought his lunch.

Afterward, a memory kept him awake. It was too vague and shadowy to mean anything, but tormented him because it seemed important. He lay trying to make it come clear until he was worn out; dozed, and thought again, without result.

Shadows were long in the room when he woke for the second time. And as he lay between sleeping and waking, the memory of a voice came almost like some one speaking in a dream. In spite of the pain in his side, Jean sat bolt upright.

"—damn dumb frog!"

Those were the words he had heard last night before a kick made him lapse back into unconsciousness. Praul had used the phrase, but the voice had not been Praul's. Many summer visitors called the islanders "frogs"; but one particularly. He had called Jean that only yesterday morning.

It took Jean half an hour to put on his clothes. He had to steady himself by holding to a chair. Shirt and trousers were stiff with dried blood. He got down the back stairs unnoticed, passed behind the store and lost himself on the path which ran between huge water-oaks and on between tall hedges.

He felt strong enough until after he had gone to his room in the Widow Mouton's house, found his gun and started on. Then his wound began to tell. The heavy, oppressive air felt like unseen hands trying to pull him down. Every hundred yards he had to sit down to rest. Once, seated on a log, he put his hand to his side and found that blood was oozing through the bandages.

After that he had to rest at shorter intervals. The island was very quiet this lazy afternoon. He met some children on the path, but no one else. For the most part he was alone. Everything, after awhile, grew to huge proportions, like a dream. Fields glimpsed through trees seemed very far away, houses remote. The path stretched on and on forever.

DARKNESS was near when Jean pushed open the gate and forced his legs to carry him toward the house Farman and Leach had rented. As he went, he fumbled at the gun, finally got it out. A curtain moved behind a front window. A man's face appeared briefly, went away. Jean walked on. He would walk right into the house. He clung to the thought, making it hold him up.

He stopped when he reached the steps, gathering what strength was left. He would need it all to get up there. A voice spoke from the right of him:

"Well, look who's here! Little Oscar himself."

Jean turned, swaying. He could stand only by forcing every ounce of his will into collapsing nerves and muscles. This man in dirty white trousers was Farman, the one who claimed to be a dentist, the one who was always calling people "dumb frogs". He stood scarcely two yards away.

Jean raised the gun. It felt heavy as a cannon in his hand. He reeled a little, steadied himself, framing words with his lips.

Farman grinned and came forward swiftly. He knocked the gun aside with an easy push of one hand. With the other he struck. Jean pitched forward, his brain whirling. He did not even know that Farman caught him as he fell.

When his head cleared he was lying on the ground, tied up. Leach was coming down the steps with a sawed-off shotgun in the crook of his arm. He cursed.

"That dick's goofy," he said. "What did he let this mug go for? What'll we do; take him out in the boat and drop him for shark bait?"

Farman stood over Jean, thoughtfully scratching his head.

"Not so good," he said, "but maybe it's the best we can do. Come on, help me lug him inside."

The night was as still as the night before had been windy. Jean, lying in the dark of the speedboat's small cabin,

made all that he could out of familiar sounds. This splash was a fish jumping. That rushing noise a gar breaking the surface. Farman and Leach were poling the boat silently up the bayou toward the pass into open water.

In a little while they stopped, coming alongside another boat. They stayed there quite a time, but whose boat it was, and for what purpose they stopped, Jean could not tell. While they lay alongside, he had been fighting to keep his senses. His wound and weakness affected him that way; for awhile everything would be vague and meaningless, then a period followed in which his mind and senses were unnaturally clear.

Jean heard one man stop poling. Farman spoke.

"I've got a good one. We don't drop this kluck overboard, see? We take him up to New Orleans, plant some of our stuff on him and leave him ashore."

Both men had been drinking. Farman chuckled. Leach said:

"What's the idea? He might beef so loud somebody'd start looking for us. I'm tire of being *hot."

"We aren't hot," Farman said. "Praul thinks it was the dumb frog. If we dump him overboard, he might get washed ashore before the sharks finished him, and it would look phony—us taking it on the lam the same night. This way it looks like he lammed himself. Praul gets him back, and everybody's happy. Get it? Get it?"

Jean heard a grunt as Farman, still chuckling, dug Leach in the ribs.

"You've got a swell sense of humor, you have," Leach said. "But it's not such a bad idea at that."

The speedboat moved steadily with a faint swish. A group of stars low on the horizon told Jean that it was somewhat past morning's darkest time. Light would begin to come in an hour or a little more. But by then the fast craft would be halfway to New Orleans.

After awhile Leach said that he wouldn't pole another foot. Farman dropped his cigaret overboard.

"O. K.," he said. "This is far enough, anyhow."

Jean heard the engine cough as they turned it over against compression. But the crackling rip of exhaust did not follow; only a subdued mutter. Jean, after a moment, realized that they had put the exhaust under water.

"Let's go," Farman said.

The gears meshed. She trembled, feeling the power. Then the propeller bit and she moved off, sluggishly at first, as if unwilling to leave the island. Then Jean felt the planks push up beneath him as her bow rose. The engine's sound grew to a hum. In a moment they would be well on their way, at thirty knots an hour.

The engine coughed twice, steadied, then died suddenly. The bow settled. Farman, cursing, stepped on the starter. It ran at once, but the moment he threw in the clutch, it died. Three times the engine refused to take her load. After that he could not get it started at all.

"That's your underwater exhaust," Leach said. "What a swell mechanic you turned out to be!"

"Shut up and hand me that crescent wrench!"

For fifteen minutes or so, Jean heard the sounds of furious tinkering. Then they tried again. The engine fired once forward and twice back through the exhaust, but that was all. The starter whirled like a sewing machine as one of them kept his foot on it, and finally quit.

Farman's slightly drunken voice rose in a volley of obscenity. Jean heard a rip and a splash, as if he had torn the battery loose and thrown it overboard. They went to work again, cursing the engine, their luck and each other.

FOUR times they tried to start. Jean heard one and then the other strain and grunt to turn the powerful engine

*Slang for outlawed.

over by hand. All they could get was a dull *phut*. The speedboat struck a mud bank with a soft jar and remained motionless. The voices of Farman and Leach grew strained, desperate. They had to get the speedboat running.

The constellation dropped from Jean's sight. The cabin's darkness paled little by little. Jean could make out a coat hanging on the wall, then a locker with some bottles on it. Outside, the men toiled on, so intent on the engine they did not know that morning was on the way. An electric torch still threw its glow on the engine bed.

Suddenly Leach gave an oath which was a tense cry.

"Look coming! Four boats—no, six. All the frogs on the island must be out after us."

Farman did not answer. A moment later he came plunging into the cabin, opened a locker and snatched up weapons.

"It takes more than a bunch of dumb frogs to stop me," he said. "Take this and hold 'em off till I get this scow running. Trouble's in the carbureter. Won't take a minute."

Jean lay quiet, trying to ease the ache in arms cramped intolerably behind him. If Farman got the boat to run, they might get through, but probably would not. All the fishermen could shoot, and some were experts. A sense of exultation possessed Jean. He was going to die. Farman and Leach would kill him. But his friends would take these two. Islanders would clear his name.

He heard a whining sound outside and the drifting crack of a rifle. Leach answered. It sounded as if he were using a pistol, which was hopeless as long as the islanders kept their distance. The firing continued intermittently, without much effect. Bullets occasionally struck the speedboat, but the men were protected. Leach evidently could not reach the fishermen's boats. Occasionally clinking

sounds came in moments of quiet, as Farman tore the carbureter apart.

Jean heard a sudden smash, as if he had brought his wrench down on some metal part to relieve his feelings.

"I'm going to kill him," Farman said. "Know what that lousy frog did? He filled up his gas tank with water. That's what stopped us. It won't burn in a million years. I'm going in there and rub him out right now."

Leach ordered hoarsely:

"Never mind him now. Grab that Tommy gun and get over here. They're coming up in a fishboat."

Farman scrambled over to take his position. The boat rocked.

"They think they've got us," he said. "Shoot down on us from the deck. But they've got another think coming. Wait till they get close enough and I'll fix 'em."

Jean could see in his mind the whole scene. The fishing boat would be cruising down with a dozen fishermen aboard ready to pour their fire into the speedboat's cockpit. Farman would wait till the last moment, then annihilate them at close range with his submachine gun. Jean could picture them crumpling, coughing blood; Fortuné Collette, Dupree—perhaps Old Man Garfield himself.

It couldn't be. Jean twisted his neck, searching the cabin wildly. An empty whisky bottle lay on the floor. As drowning men seize at straws, he fastened on it as his only help in this extremity.

INCH by inch he pushed himself across the floor till he got the bottle against the wall. He raised his heavy shoe, brought it down. The bottle broke under his heel. Squirming and rolling, he twisted round till he was lying on the glass. His bound hands were under him. He moved until a sharp edge sliced him. Rising a little, he brought the edge to bear on the rope and moved back and forth with a sawing motion. His hands grew wet with

his own blood. Broken glass got into his cuts. But presently he felt the rope give. He pressed down, pulling his hands apart. They came from under him suddenly, leaving a finger ripped from end to end.

There was no time to lie still and gather his strength. Jean pushed himself erect and sawed through the lashing on his feet. Another bottle lay on a locker—a full bottle. He took it by the neck and, helping himself with his other hand, made his way across the cabin.

The fishing boat's engine was loud, very near. Farman had the gun's muzzle on the coaming. His hand was tense on the firing mechanism, ready to draw it back. Leach had an automatic in his hand and another beside him.

Jean held to the door frame, poised the bottle and brought it down on Farman's head. The bottle slipped from his bloody hand, but Farman sagged forward on to his gun.

Leach jumped to his feet and turned. He was only a yard from Jean, whose lacerated hands were empty, whose strength was all but gone. But for a brief moment Leach's gun did not bear on him.

In that moment Jean half fell, half lurched forward. He wrapped his arms around Leach, throwing all his weight against him. Together they went over the side, down and down into the cold, dark bayou.

FOR the second time Jean came back to consciousness in bed at the Garfield's. Old Man Garfield sat by the bed. Collette and Dupree and Picot with some others stood about. Still other islanders were in the hall outside, peering through the door. Jean smiled. The faces grinned at him, as men grin when something good has happened to a friend.

Old Man Garfield said:

"You have to lie quiet, Jean. You have lost much blood."

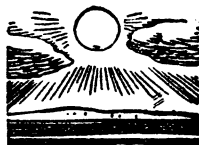
Then he told him how they fished him and the bewildered Leach from the water; how they found what was left of the mail robbery loot on the speedboat; how Praul had started for New Orleans with Farman and Leach, leaving many apologies and praise for Jean.

Jean took in this all; but when it was finished he knit his forehead, still puzzled. He turned to Old Man Garfield.

"You—" he said. "You must have been the one that watered my gas. They stole it, all right, and it stopped them. But how did you know they would?"

Old Man Garfield's face remained like a graven image, but his inward chuckle showed in his eyes.

"I said this island is hard to go away from, Jean. You can only go by boat. Now, a big thief is a little thief, too. He will steal all he can. So I guessed the man who took your gas might be the one Praul want. Those were smart men, yes. They were so smart they caught themselves."





Before the basha realized it his prisoner's hands were on his wind pipe.

THE SULTAN'S ERROR

Al-Lateef was chief of the Sultan's secret service and the Sultan's jewels had been stolen. But it was the murder of his friend that made Al-Lateef face unknown danger in the African night.

HALF an hour after his Majesty the Sultan had told his secret service chief of the mad thing he had done, Al-Lateef was in saddle and riding northward as fast as the legs of a good horse would take him. All through the hot African morning he rode—snatching a half-hour rest beneath a rusty olive tree by the roadside, where a half dead beggar pursued vermin—then on through the hotter afternoon, the calm of crimson sunset, the cool of a starlit night. Northward from Fez to El-K'sar, every mile behind

him was marked by shame and anger at his royal master's thoughtlessness and by anxiety for him whom he followed.

There was reason for the anger, shame and anxiety—good reason. His Majesty, the young Sultan, having immediate need of money and only empty private coffers to answer his need, had selected several items from the collection of royal jewels, packed them into a small bundle and sent them to his representative in Tangier. That much of it was all right; the rest of it was all wrong.

The Sultan had chosen as his mes-

senger Al-Lateef's beloved young friend, Harun—first scribe to the vizier of the treasury—and had sent him off alone with the fortune in jewels, not even taking the precaution of keeping the matter a strict secret. So that it had startled Al-Lateef's ears even before the Sultan, at last heeding his messenger's safety, had sent for Al-Lateef and suggested that perhaps he had been too hasty; that perhaps Harun might run into danger; that perhaps Al-Lateef had better follow after the young man in case—

"Perhaps? Perhaps, sidna?" Al-Lateef had replied, with as much respect and calmness as he could muster. "There is no perhaps about it, sidna. The palace knows of Harun's errand. And what the palace knows all the world knows. You have sent Harun to his death. And—and he was a friend of mine."

"In that case," answered the Sultan, more irritated at having been stupid than at his servant's words, "you had best reduce the danger to the minimum by following him with all speed. Nor do I wish to lose the jewels."

Al-Lateef had mentally damned the jewels, left his master's presence and followed his advice to make speed; but he was two hours or more behind Harun. He had ascertained that several men whom he distrusted had also found reason to travel northward that very morning, and he could not put from his heart the belief that Harun's fate was sealed. As he rode he kept watch for some lifeless figure by the roadside, or the circling of carrion birds in the hot skies. Even though he finally came to the dark gates of El K'sar without finding that which he feared to find, the obsession still persisted to such an extent that he found himself saying quick little prayers for his friend's soul.

At last the journey was done. Al-Lateef reined in his horse, dismounted and tethered him among some palm trees beside an ancient mosque. Then

swiftly—almost carelessly, such was his haste—he assumed the slight disguise he had decided upon, that of a wandering minstrel. He rubbed earth on his face. The old *djellab* he wore would serve, he decided, since the night would aid him. From the saddle he untied an old *gimbri* of the sort used by Moroccan minstrels—a turtle shell covered with gut, a round stick run through it, three strings—the native banjo.

He hurried toward the gates of the city. Somewhere behind those black walls sprinkled with stardust Harun would be resting. He had traveled, Al-Lateef had learned, as a simple muleteer. Probably his intentions would be to sleep in the marketplace, as did other muleteers. But to find him—and, on finding him, to discover that he was too late? As Al-Lateef hastened toward the Fassi gate fate was at its ceaseless labors, even as he feared.

The *sôk*, or marketplace, of El-K'sar, that walled enclosure which in the daytime is such a riot of noise and color and motion and smells as only a North African marketplace can be, now lay silent in the dark arms of a Moroccan Summer night.

NIGHT—the time of rest and peace, and of that primeval danger which civilization has vainly tried to convert into security. No longer need man guard himself against the wild beasts which prowl by night. But in place of them has come a deadlier danger. The two-legged mammal beside whom the saber-toothed tiger and its predatory ilk were timid folk. The deadliest animal of creation—man.

One of these now moved along the eastern edge of the *sôk* of El-K'sar, noiseless, covered by the night. On all fours he slowly crept along the base of the high stone wall, toward the door of a small shop built against it. He bent his ear against the door. Beyond its wooden panels he heard steady, slow breathing—the sound of sleep. He rose carefully and silently.

He moved his arms. The starlight glinted upon a long knife in his right hand and an iron key in his left. He inserted the key in the ancient lock without the shadow of a sound and, as he turned it, the door swung inward a finger's breadth. Again he listened. Then he nodded. His clenched jaws caused his teeth to grate a little. He took three swift steps into the blackness of the shop, knelt when the sound of the sleeper's breathing was at his feet, raised his arm and struck. He struck again.

The sleeper's breathing stopped; his sleep became more profound. Rough hands searched him and found what they sought. The murderer crept from the room, gained the wall and crept along it till he came to a broad gateway. Then he rose, passed through the portal and went his way through the sleeping town like one on legitimate business, his slippers whispering against the ancient cobbles.

But as he came to a door within a wall and paused there, searching in his *shakarah* for the key, other slippers titillated around a corner, and a hurrying man ran against him. He growled surlily and laid a quick hand upon his knife hilt. But the other apologized with swift humility.

"Forgive me," he pleaded. "Forgive a poor minstrel whose thoughts were on a song." He bowed, holding a *gimbri* against his breast.

"A minstrel, eh," grunted the other man. "Well, begone! Begone!" He pushed open the white-painted door, entered and slammed it shut behind him, leaving the minstrel staring. But once inside he paused, and a word of fear wrote itself upon his face. "*Allah kerim!*" he muttered. "That was no troubadour. That face I know. It was the face of Al-Lateef."

"My lord the dog is irritated," muttered the minstrel, and was about to pass on.

He raised one hand to adjust his

turban which had been a trifle displaced in the encounter.

"*Y'allah!*" he exclaimed. "What is this?" He stared at his hand and then raised it to his nose, which told him what his eyes could not determine. "Blood! Blood on my hand. Now what—where—"

He laid the banjo-like *gimbri* upon the ground, drew a handkerchief from his *shakarah* and carefully wiped away the sticky stain which was like thick ink on the back of his hand. He watched, but no more blood came nor was there any wound. The conclusion was not to be avoided. The blood had come from the hands of the man with whom he had collided—the man who had entered this house.

He bent and picked up the *gimbri*. He stared at the door, then looked about him, noting the house and location. Here the Street of the Leather Workers turned into the Street of the Cloth Merchants.

The face of the man had not been clearly discernible—heavily bearded, long and narrow. The minstrel would remember that much, and the house, and the blood. He was a man who had both need and ability to remember such matters. He was Al-Lateef the Clever One, chief of the Sultan's secret service.

Suddenly in the darkness fear again chilled him. Was he too late? Had his fears been all too warranted? Was the blood upon his handkerchief that of the man he had raced to protect—the man who had carried in his *shakarah* a royal treasure?

He pondered this swiftly. On one hand was the coincidence of meeting this man; and coincidence is always apt to be misleading. But was it much of a coincidence, after all? Any one who entered the town would have to do so by this gate or the other one. Granting the chance which took him to this particular gate, the rest might follow easily enough. Or, if this blood was that

of the man he sought, had Allah himself caused this encounter to take place?

Only Allah knew the answer to that question yet. And Allah made no reply; unless a man's own imagination may sometimes be the answer of God to his most puzzling questions.

Moved now by fear as well as by duty and friendship, Al-Lateef the minstrel thrust his slippers along the wandering street toward the *sôk*. He was faced by a situation which sickened him a little. Harun, dead or alive, was in some small cubbyhole of the heterogeneous structures surrounding the *sôk*. Which one it was Al-Lateef had no way of telling, now that haste pressed him irresistibly from behind.

AT THE entrance gate of the *sôk* he paused to study the scene. Soundless darkness. It would never do to go creeping about in the night, seeking—well, for any help Allah should deign to send. An open door, for example. The silence proved that if murder had been done, it had been quietly accomplished, leaving no frightened witnesses to shout horror. And it was scarcely probable that a murderer would leave the door of his victim's house ajar, to call early attention to the crime; murderers were, as a rule, pretty careful and business-like, Al-Lateef reflected.

He might try to seek out the various *fandak* masters of the *sôk*, they who rented rooms and shops around the marketplace. But that would not do. They would resent being disturbed at this hour of the night to be asked the silly question, "Can you tell me where a muleteer from Fez sleeps?"

Y'allah! There would be a score of muleteers from Fez. He would get his head beaten, and with justice. Further, he no more knew where they slept than where Harun lay.

Well, there was nothing to do save make a circuit of the marketplace and ascertain whether anything out of the usual was to be noted. Or wait till

morning. That would be the sensible thing to do, of course. Just because he had encountered a man who had blood on his hands, the law of chance would say there was little possibility that the blood was Harun's.

But the imagination is unrestricted by the law of chance, wherefore Al-Lateef set out to circumnavigate the *sôk*. There was just sufficient light for him to perceive the closed doors in the walls, and the dark figures of sleeping animals or humans on the cobbled pavement when he drew close enough to be in danger of stumbling over them.

At a point halfway around the wall he came upon an open door. His pattering slippers halted. For a moment his heart thrummed. This was the picture his imagination had painted for him—an open door, perhaps ten paces ahead.

Even as he paused to stare at the black oblong, a shadow crept around the corner of the building, hesitated for a moment, then slithered up to the doorway and stepped upon the threshold. But there came a sudden scurry within, as of rats fighting. The figure in the doorway was hurled back by the impact of a plunging man to roll upon the cobbles, and the assailant, caroming from his fellow like a billiard ball, raced toward the gate, his naked feet padding in the darkness. And instantly he who had been overthrown was up again and in pursuit.

A strong force impelled Al-Lateef to follow; but a stronger one held him to the spot and drew him toward the doorway of that room. Oddly, his mental picture was of vultures frightened away from a meal—vultures which had come too late.

He stepped across the threshold of the door. He drew from his *shakarah* a tiny electric torch and pressed its spring. A silver finger pointed, weaving over the floor. It came to rest upon tragedy. Al-Lateef recoiled, with a grunt which was a primitive vocalization of sorrow, rage, perception of the inevitability of

destiny and of the correctness of his previous fears.

He fell upon his knees beside the body of his friend Harun.

There was no need for Al-Lateef's reluctant fingers to tell him that the royal jewels were no longer on Harun's body; and three minutes of search showed, too, that they were hidden nowhere in the dingy little room where fate had overtaken him. Harun's dark eyes watched the search with a stony stare, until at last Al-Lateef drew the lids down over them, covered the face with a fold of the *djellab* and, with a sigh which was a funeral tribute, rose and left the room.

At daybreak he would send word to the basha. The Sultan's emissary should return to his royal master arrayed in the strange majesty of death, part of the price of imperial error. The peace of Allah be upon him!

And where, now, was the remainder of that price, the regal jewels?

"*Y'allah!*" muttered Al-Lateef to himself, as he again stood in the outer darkness. "*Y'allah!* There is the one who had blood on his hands, who entered the house on the Street of the Leather Workers; there is he who dashed from Harun's quarters, and the one he overturned in his rush from the darkness. Of these, assuredly two were aware of Harun's mission. The one who had been concealed in the house: was he the murderer? Does he now possess the jewels? If so, what of the blood on another's hand? Or was that merely a coincidence?"

He found no answer to his riddle in the bright twinkle of the stars overhead, or from any omniscient voice in the great darkness. There appeared to be but one course open now—to investigate the occupant of the house on the Street of the Leather Workers.

But while he was doing that the man who he knew had been in Harun's room, to whom the strongest evidence pointed as Harun's murderer, might be racing

from El-K'sar to safety with the Sultan's jewels. How to find him whose face he had never seen; how to trace him from the *sôk* to his hiding place?

Al-Lateef dismissed those problems for a broader one: Was the fugitive the one to be sought, or the man who had blood on his hands? The former, the former, Al-Lateef's reason spoke loudly. But against his reason surged an irrational force which was stronger—ingrained belief in *kismet*. The belief that Allah Himself must have brought about that chance collision in the darkness; that He would not have done so had there been no cause.

So Al-Lateef accepted the larger vision and was about to depart when a lantern flashed in the gate of the *sôk*, revealing two pairs of brown legs scissoring along. Straight across the *sôk* they came. The lantern cast no light upward; it revealed only the walking legs and the flapping garments about them.

WHEN they were within twenty paces of him, Al-Lateef perceived the flicker of starlight upon a rifle and the faint gleam of a white *sulham*, betokening a man of some importance. And he bethought himself that this was no place for him to be found. Wherefore, with swift caution he retreated into the deeper shadow beside the house; to go farther away was impossible now. And then voices reached his ears.

"Directly ahead of us is the house," said one of the approaching pair. "And I have no doubt that the murderer is hidden somewhere in the *sôk*. It was, no doubt, one of these muleteers or other travelers."

"You say, *sidi*, that, you had business with this man?" asked a deeper voice.

"Yes. He was not to arrive until close on midnight, and was to depart at dawn. So I awaited his arrival. But when I reached his room, some one had preceded me. He was dead—murdered. Wherefore I sought you out."

As the speakers drew closer, Al-Lateef started. He had heard that voice before, not an hour past. It was, he was certain, the voice of the man with whom he had collided on the Street of the Leather Workers. But now the blood was explained. Whoever the man was, he had brought one of the city guards to look into matters.

They were now at the door beyond which lay the Sultan's messenger, and Al-Lateef could faintly see their forms. A captain of guards and a man in a white *sulham*. When they entered the house, Al-Lateef decided, he would make his escape. It would not be expedient to declare his identity yet. The jewels had been stolen and must be recovered. Harun must be avenged. But even as the decision was made, he was startled by a loud cry from the man in white.

"There—there at the right! Along the wall!"

Before Al-Lateef could move they rushed toward him. In two breaths they were close enough for the lantern to reveal his form and for the rifle to cover him. There was nothing to do except curse his evil luck and submit. Harsh hands seized him; other hands twisted his *djellab* about his neck in a sort of garrote, so that, should he struggle, he would choke himself.

"Who are you, and why are you skulking here?" demanded the captain of the guards.

"A word with you, Captain," Al-Lateef said. "Alone, if you please."

"Alone!" The guardsman laughed. "I think not. Come along."

Al-Lateef suffered himself to be led to the doorway. The door was thrown open. The lantern revealed the contents of the room.

"Hmph!" grunted the chief guard. "Dead, as the sidi said. And"—he whirled upon his prisoner—"I find you sneaking here. Hmph! Tomorrow there will be a shooting."

Al-Lateef felt it was time to speak.

"The dead man," he said, "was a friend of mine. Naturally I did not kill him. He was the Sultan's messenger."

"Oho! He was a friend of yours, and you did not kill him, eh?" gibed the guard, and the man in white sneered. "A likely tale!"

"I came to—to protect him," Al-Lateef said.

"Ho! Better and better. You came to protect him. And who are you? His Majesty, perhaps?"

"I," replied Al-Lateef, "happen to be the chief of his Majesty's secret service. I am known as Al-Lateef."

"Truly! That is good. That is very good. Well, consider that I myself am his Majesty Abd-el-Aziz, and that you shall be shot as a murderer tomorrow."

"If you will free one hand," suggested Al-Lateef, "I have a paper."

"No. Where is the paper?"

"In my turban," replied Al-Lateef.

A brown hand tore his small turban cloth from his head, unwound it, found a square of paper, opened it and studied it.

"I can not read," said the guardsman, offering it to the man in the white *sulham*. "What does it say?"

"It says," replied that one, after a moment, "that the bearer is Al-Lateef, chief of the Sultan's secret service. It carries the imperial seal."

The chief guardsman scratched his head.

"In that case—" he began.

But the man in white cut him short, looking oddly at his captive.

"I know Al-Lateef personally," he said. "This man is not he. But I must reveal a secret, Captain. The dead man—the dead man is Al-Lateef. He was disguised as a muleteer. I was to meet him on official business. This fellow"—he snarled at Al-Lateef—"has proved by possessing this paper that he killed him. The sooner we shoot him the better pleased the Sultan will be. Perhaps

we should apply the law of the fugitive. Are you a good shot, Captain?"

"An excellent one, sidi," responded the guard.

IN AMAZEMENT Al-Lateef listened to this vicious proposition, coming upon the heels of all the rest. To apply the law of the fugitive—to force him to run and then shoot him down as he ran! His head was a mad scramble. A dozen questions shrieked at him. Who was this man in white? Why was he lying? But there was no time to consider these matters. His slippers were actually pressing the narrow bridge between life and death. One misstep, and he was lost. White *sulham* was obviously some one of importance. The guard was an ignorant fellow, easily influenced by authority, accustomed to obeying white *sulhams*. Al-Lateef thought.

"Captain," he said, "I must confess a lie. I am not Al-Lateef. The one who is dead is, as the sidi says, Al-Lateef. I—I killed him because he sought my capture. There is a great price upon my head—a thousand duros, perhaps more."

"A price! A thousand duros!" cried the guard. "And who are you?"

"That I refuse to say," replied Al-Lateef. "But take me to your basha, and the thousand duros are yours."

White *sulham* laughed nastily now, as the guard glanced toward him.

"I am the basha," he snarled. "And you are a dead man." He turned to the guard. "See that his bonds be secure. Then leave him with me, and go ye to bring four men for a firing squad."

"But, sidi basha—" began the brown fellow, who was no brutal murderer and knew something of the danger of that sport, basha's orders or no basha's orders.

But he got no farther. Manifestly, the basha's nerve had reached the breaking point, or his anger was an uncontrollable thing, or he was in mortal fear. Assuredly it had been fear—panic fear

—which had caused him to call out the guard to help him capture and kill Al-Lateef before Al-Lateef could learn what he might learn. Surrendering now to the anger of a master toward an unruly slave—was the basha, the civil and military governor of the city, to bandy words with a hireling captain of the guards?—his hand dropped to his belt. A long knife flashed past the guard's face as he swiftly recoiled, but the hilt of it broke his nose. He grunted and stood, swaying, while the blood dripped; and his eyes grew red in the darkness.

"Obey me, then, swine!" rasped the basha. "See to the bonds."

In silence the guard strode to the captive man and felt of the wrists tied behind him.

"You have a pleasant master, slave," muttered Al-Lateef.

He shivered a bit when the guard's menacing reply came to him.

"Now, sidi. Now, yes. But—in-shallah."

"Make haste, there," commanded the basha. "Make haste. Bring the squad."

The guard slipped swiftly away, leaving the basha and Al-Lateef facing each other in the dim light of the lantern placed on the ground.

Suddenly Al-Lateef made an odd discovery—or was he mistaken? Was the rope which bound his wrists loosening, almost without motion of his hands? He experimented cautiously, beginning to jeer at the basha to keep his attention occupied. He said insulting things which cast dirt in the man's beard; but his hands now worked in slow movements. His heart pounded a little faster. He had not been mistaken. The rope was loosening swiftly. Suddenly his wrists were free, the rope in his fingers. And he understood. The guard had retaliated against the basha for the little matter of a broken nose. Now, what was the next step?

"—And so," he heard the basha say, "for those insults, Al-Lateef, I shall have you shot in the back and your body

thrown on a dunghill for the dogs to eat. May your soul roast in hell forever!"

A sudden idea leaped in Al-Lateef's head, and, a second later, he leaped in the same swift fashion at the man in the white *sulham*. Before the basha realized it, his supposed prisoner's hands were on his windpipe. He was borne to the ground, and a powerful body bestrode him. He was no weakling, and fear gave him strength; but not sufficient to overcome the muscles and the madness of Al-Lateef. Once, at the last, he raised his enemy from him by a burst of sheer strength of arm and shoulder muscles. But Al-Lateef held to the throat and twisted now with all his force. With a groan the basha relaxed, surrendered, fell limp and trembling.

With all haste now—he could already hear the distant tramping of approaching soldiers—he tore the white turban from the basha's head, ripped off a piece of sufficient size and thrust it into the basha's mouth. Then, rising, he tore the white *sulham* from his enemy and the brown one from himself. He put the latter on the basha and slipped the white garment over his own head. He turned the groaning basha over on his face, lashed his wrists together with the rope which two minutes before had bound his own. And then, gripping his *djellab* collar, he dragged the basha away from the lantern and toward the wall, taking also the remaining length of turban cloth.

After a moment's search he found that which he knew would be somewhere near the butcher shop—an iron hook set in the wall, on which the butcher hung meat in the daytime. Good enough; shortly it would carry other meat.

He jerked the basha upright, raised his bound hands and slipped them over the huge hook. Then he quickly bound the fellow's ankles with the turban cloth. That would keep him from turning around. And, as a last touch, he pulled the *koob*, or hood, of the brown *djellab*, down over the basha's face, get-

ting one last look at mad eyes as he did so. Then he reached beneath the garments, found the leather bag which all men carry there, took from it a bulky package, which clinked softly as he squeezed it, and dropped it into his own bag. The Sultan's jewels!

"Here, sidi," said the guard a moment later, "are the soldiers. You—you are—the murderer is not gone?"

"Not gone—of course not," growled Al-Lateef, cleverly imitating the basha's voice. "There he hangs, waiting to be shot in the back. Are you ready?"

"Ready, sidi," said the guard.

He gave a sharp order to his men. There was the shuffle of slippers, the clicking of rifle bolts.

"Shoot, then," commanded Al-Lateef.

A sharp command. A crash, and a flash of flame. Powder smoke in the heavy night air, eddying around the yellow flame of the lantern on the ground. The dark bundle on the hook kicked, shivered and was quiet.

"Dismiss your men now," commanded Al-Lateef, careful not to let the light shine upon his face.

The four riflemen stamped off. Shooting was their business. What difference when and where the deed was done?

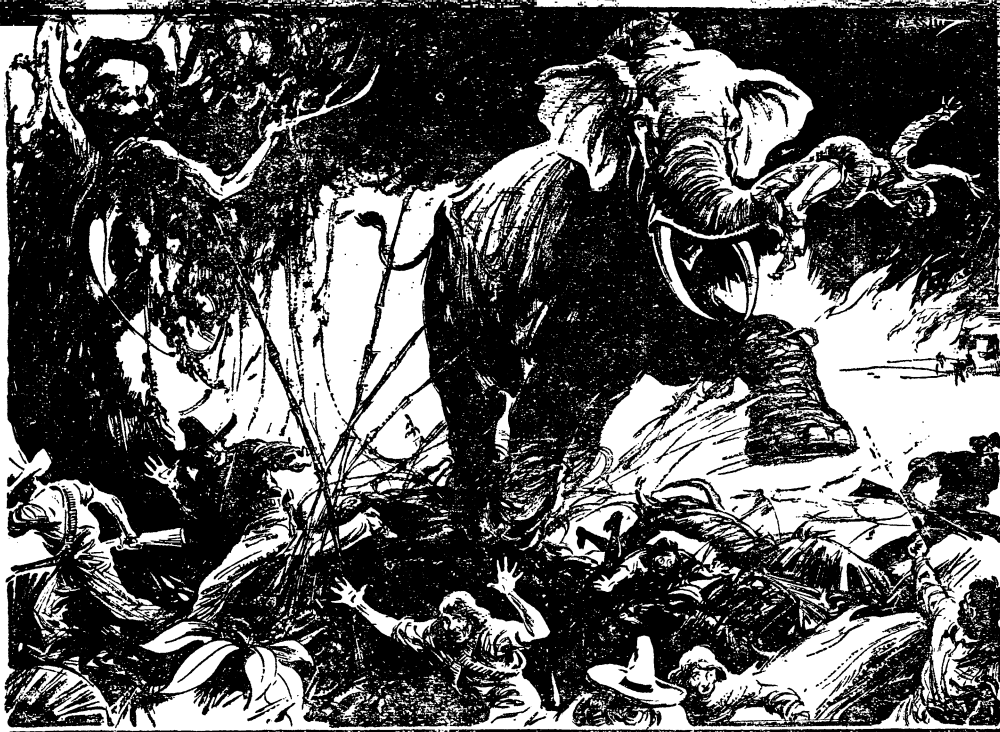
"We ride swiftly now," said Al-Lateef, lifting the lantern. "Look."

He held the light up to his face. The guard stared unbelieving, round eyed. Al-Lateef crashed the lantern to the ground, extinguishing the light.

"I am Al-Lateef, of the Sultan's secret service," he said. "The basha murdered my friend and stole the Sultan's jewels. Your men have just executed him in my place. You must come with me to safety until the truth be made known. I have horses waiting. Come."

Followed by the guard, Al-Lateef crossed the *sök*. At the gate the captain of the guards turned to look back. He seemed to see something, dark though the *sök* was.

"Two hundred-weight of pork," he growled, and followed Al-Lateef.



The beast charged—stamping, goring, killing. . . .

BROTHER OF A GOD

As a substitute for a gasoline tractor, the stubborn elephant wasn't worth his fodder. Prodded by the memories of the indignities he had undergone, the great beast justified the loyalty of a friend.

By ROBERT CARSE

FERGUSON was in the cable office at Puerto Luz sending off a message to the tractor company in New Orleans when grinning little Badruan came in and told him about the elephant. Ferguson at that moment was still very angry, and very intent. His shipment of tractors, due on the monthly ship, had not arrived; and would not, according to all logic of shipping routine, arrive for a month or so more.

"Well?" Ferguson spoke in Hindustani, the language he used with all his *finca* hands, recruited four years before from British Guiana and previous to that time straight out from their war service in France. "Still sober, hey?"

"So, sahib. Still sober," Badruan said with some degree of pride. Out of Ferguson's fifty or so plantation hands, he was the laziest and most shiftless, and knew it. He was also the most charming and witty, and knew that too; else Ferguson would have fired him long ago and sent him home, or at least away from the big *finca* in the hills. "But it is not, sahib, the desire that is lacking; it is the opportunity. I have been busy. It is an elephant—"

"An elephant!" Ferguson, in the act of pushing a wad of bolivar notes toward the cable clerk, looked up keenly at his servant. "You *are* drunk then. Where

would a man—even you—find an elephant in Puerto Luz?"

It was the slight, round-shouldered East Indian's turn to smile. He spread his hands as he did so.

"But he is here, sahib; on that broken ship which has just come into the port. I have seen it just now and talked with the elephant. It is a good elephant, sahib; one more than twenty hands high."

Ferguson said nothing to that. He had spent one third of his mature life in India; another third in France, commanding a Sikh battalion; and the last third here in this little tropical Central American country, where he employed the sort of men he had commanded in France, recruiting them in preference to the local breed of utterly lazy, stupid and sullen *chulo*. With that breadth of experience behind him, he could tell pretty much whether or not one of his men was lying to him, even such a clever dissembler as Badruan. He moved across the fly-field room to the door, stood beside the silent native and stared down the street.

And what Badruan had just said seemed to be so. Alongside the dock, making fast now, was a big two-stack combination freighter. Aft, visible among the clutter of her deck gear and cargo booms on the well-deck, was distinguishable the grayish-brown bulk of a large and seemingly very live elephant.

The ship, Ferguson observed, with keen, quick eyes, had seen trouble. Her foretopmast was broken off short at the crosstrees; two of her lifeboats on the port, inboard side were missing from their gallows frames and the bridge wing on the same side was badly crushed in.

"An American ship," said Ferguson aloud, reading the flags on the halyards.

"Yes, sahib." Badruan comfortably squelched warm sand between his toes as he spoke. "From that place New York, to that other place, Buenos Aires."

Ferguson knew the man at his side

very well; he did not show his surprise as he turned and looked at him.

"Who told you that, Big Ears?"

"The sahib who owns the elephant, sahib. He came ashore from the ship first in a launch. He is almost crazy, that sahib; I met him down by the dock, where he was looking for the cable office. The ship has been in a storm. That sahib also owns lions and tigers—many animals. They were below in the ship with the elephant. During the storm the elephant became afraid and broke from his ropes—so the sahib told me. Then, in his fear, the elephant smashed the cages of the other animals about him, and they killed one another, sahib, during the storm. That is why the other sahib acts now like a crazy one."

Slowly, Ferguson filled his pipe from his pouch, lighted the stringy tobacco.

"And what," he asked, exhaling smoke, "is the ship doing in here?"

"It can not go on, sahib. It is injured. And the crew, so the other sahib said, will not go on with the elephant in the ship any longer. They are afraid, which is foolish."

"Yes?" Over the bowl of his pipe Ferguson looked down at Badruan. The man had served him first as a field hand but, proving wholly worthless there, had been transferred to the house as a personal servant. Ferguson knew only too well the man's amazing ability to pick up information and gossip, no matter in what language, and how badly garbled the facts might become in Badruan's transmission of them later. "But you said the sahib asked you for the cable office."

Badruan smiled, nodding.

"Truth, sahib. But he also asked me first where he could find a drinking house that was open. He was, so that sahib told me, badly in need of a drink."

"Why?"

Badruan shrugged his narrow, naked shoulders.

"It is because that sahib is the owner of the elephant and the other animals.

It was that he possessed a—" Badruan paused, not having the word in his native dialect which he now needed.

"A circus?" supplied Ferguson in the plains dialect.

"So, sahib." Badruan smiled with relief. "It is that. He was to show his animals in that place, Buenos Aires. And now he cannot, for the lions have killed the tigers, and other tigers have killed the lions; the rest the sahib and the men of the ship were forced to shoot. All but the elephant, because those other animals were mad with fright and the storm."

Ferguson stood silent, his big, brown fingers cupped about the warm bowl of his pipe. Quite easily, he could visualize that scene in the hold of the laboring, storm pounded ship. It was, he thought grimly, enough to make any circus owner lose his mind.

"Sahib—"

Ferguson looked up. There was an apologetic yet eager grin on Badruan's round face.

"The little gasoline machines—the tractors—have not come?"

"No."

"Ah." Badruan thoughtfully, scratched the skinny brown barrel of his chest. "That is too bad. The building of the road from the new cuttings must be held up then, is it not so?"

"Yes." With three or four good, forceful English words Ferguson described the plans and promises of shipping companies and tractor salesmen. "It is so."

"Ah." Badruan stopped scratching his chest, and gave attention to his right ear. "But all the luck is not bad, sahib. There is the elephant—"

"The what!" Ferguson cursed in English, and Badruan jumped, as he knew his employer liked him to do.

"But yes, sahib, the elephant. One good elephant is better than ten little gasoline machines in this place . . ."

"Yes?" Ferguson cursed him, quite good naturedly. "And who would train and handle this circus elephant, who

never in his life probably has seen the jungle, or a forest, pulled or carried anything more than a canvas howdah?"

"Badruan, sahib."

"You?"

"So, sahib." Badruan's thin chest seemed to swell as he spoke. "I am not a Sikh; I am not a mountain man like the rest of those bearded laggards who make so much trouble for the sahib. I am Assamese, of the southern hills. True, my wife was of the Sikkim, and I was there when the sahibs sent out the call to us to come and fight in that place, France. But it is I who know elephants, sahib. I have lived with them, slept with them. My father was of the elephants, a *mahout*, and my uncle, too, and my uncle's uncle . . . Yes. That elephant will walk, he will work for and obey me, sahib."

Ferguson smiled then. He could not help it. Against the palm of his hand he knocked out the dottle of his pipe.

"An elephant," he said slowly, as if talking to himself, "would be good—quite good. You are not lying, Badruan?"

"No, sahib. By Shiva, I swear it."

BADRUAN hunkered with respectful silence at the door of the little dock-side *posada* while Ferguson talked inside with the owner of the elephant. For ten minutes previous Ferguson had stood on the dock while Badruan had showed the planter the elephant's good points. Ferguson, from his Indian years, was not unaware of the average worth of elephants; and this one seemed, despite the rope galls and claw scratches along his flanks and legs, to be a good one. The owner of that beast, Ferguson found upon entering the *posada*, was already a good bit more than slightly drunk, and eager to sell the elephant. And Ferguson, vaguely remembering Indian prices, knew the figure asked for the beast on the ship to be a ridiculously low one. He drew up a check and a receipt right there.

"You can cash that here in town this afternoon if you like," said Ferguson, standing up.

"Good," said the late owner, "and thank God!"

During the next hour or so Ferguson watched Badruan intently. The little brown man's boast seemed to be justified; he did know something about elephants. At the dock he went aboard the ship, talked there with the mate and the boatswain in his bad but voluble English, then talked with the elephant in a language which no one, not even Ferguson, could understand. Then swiftly, deftly, he slipped the big canvas and rope-sling, the boatswain had rigged, under the beast's stomach and watched the boatswain make the hitches fast.

It was done quite quickly and smoothly. The beast did not make any sound or sign of resistance as he was swung up from the deck and overside; he did not move as he was lowered to the dock. Badruan stood waiting for him there and stroked him affectionately along the trunk.

"Good," he whispered, "good, brother of a god!" Proudly, he looked up at Ferguson, standing on the deck above. "Is he not a fine one, sahib? If you will, you may ask that man of the ship there to pass down those ropes, and I will prepare him for the pack he will carry for us on the trail."

It was then, as Badruan looped the soft old hawser ends in place around the great barrel of the body, that the elephant rebelled for the first time. He snorted, and made the shaky old dock quiver and squeak with the pounding of his vast feet. But Badruan was ready for him; he had supplied himself with a broken handled boathook from the ship. With the hooked steel end of that, he clipped the big beast a savage blow alongside the tender ear folds.

"*Arré!* Be still, you! Is it that you want to fool with Badruan, in whose veins runs the blood of real *mahouts*? Ah, I did not think so! Stand so, then, while I set the ropes."

Ferguson, Badruan and the elephant left the town a little over an hour later. The planter rode the horse which had brought him into town and led the native pack burro which had been the servant's mount. Badruan brought up the short and strange procession now; he more than brought it up: He made it. He rode the elephant, seated cross-legged on its neck, his back against the small pack of supplies for the *finca* which he had stowed there.

In his right hand, as proudly as though it were a real elephant driver's bronze ankus, he held the short-handled boathook. The fingers of his left hand were caught in the belt of his tattered khaki shorts. Without word, gesture or indication from him, the elephant followed squarely in the track of Ferguson and the led mount.

ON EITHER side of the dusty, wide road, as long as it ran through the town, the citizens of Puerto Luz gathered to watch that procession. None of them had ever seen anything like this before in their lives. But Badruan noticed none of them. He stared straight ahead at the faint purple of the distant mountains. He was fully awake, but he was dreaming the hidden dream of his lifetime. He was not here; the only thing which was real to him was the soft, smooth muscular movements of the great beast he rode and commanded.

Some of Badruan's dream was still with him when the trail began to mount up into the sharp range of hills lying between the sea and Ferguson's *finca* on the wide plateau above. Ferguson slowed the pace of his own mount on the first narrow windings of that trail and turned in his saddle to watch the elephant. It was dropping behind, and now it had stopped completely.

"*Haie*, Badruan!" Ferguson's harsh shout was a command. "Get that thing of yours moving; we can't get caught here in the dark!"

Sweat glistened on Badruan's face; his

lips worked nervously, and without sound.

"It is a stubborn beast, this one, sahib," he said with a quick, hoarse little laugh when he saw the Scotchman in front of him.

"Bring him on," said Ferguson. "Make him move."

"Yes, sahib."

Badruan dismounted and wheeled on the elephant, looked up into its small, watchful and slightly reddish eyes.

"Now, you," he murmured, and raised the hook high in his right hand. "*Mäil! Mäil! Move!*"

He struck at the soft-padded feet; struck hard, time and again.

Those shrewd blows brought pain, and a thick gurgling noise. But the beast did not move. Not forward. It leaned inward—toward the stunted junipers lining that side of the trail. It pressed against them until they cracked and broke beneath its weight. Their sinuous limbs and trunks scratched against and then caught at the pack ropes on the vast barrel of the body. They tore from those ropes the canvas-wrapped pack they held. And then, as if with malevolent knowledge of its contents and value, the beast stamped with both hind feet upon that pack, ended by scuffing it off into the rocky bottom of the canyon, some two hundred feet below.

Badruan screamed out at that, and lost his head for a moment. He beat at the elephant with the hook, at its tender trunk and the folds of the ears, even at the eyes. Ferguson halted him; locked his arm from behind and took the weapon from him.

"Enough of that," he said quietly. "If you kept on with it long enough, he'd trample you, or pick you up in his trunk and flip you down there, too—" He looked down into that gorge as he spoke, his Scottish blood exerting itself. "It wasn't much—the missus's new sewing machine, and those opera and jazz rec-

ords from New York. A couple of parts for the tractors, a little canned stuff, and my pipe tobacco for next month. Well"—he looked at Badruan—"I don't know who's worse: you as a *mahout*, or this as a beast of burden. Anyhow, I've got the two of you on my hands, and let's see what you can do with him, now that he's got nothing to carry but you."

Badruan did not answer; he could not. He stooped and took the elephant hook from where Ferguson had dropped it in the trail. Ferguson had already gone to remount his horse and proceed. Badruan was alone in the trail with his former pride and present charge.

"You," he said in the hill dialect, looking into the beast's eyes as he would look into the eyes of a man. "Pick me up now, take me on. Quickly. The sahib is a good sahib, but he is very angered with us both."

He stood utterly still then, waiting. And the elephant obeyed. It encircled him and held him lightly with its trunk; it lifted him up and deposited him on its forehead and neck. Then it went on, with quick and sure steps. Riding there, Badruan reached down and softly scratched the sensitive earfolds.

"It is as I thought," he whispered. "You are no common beast of the plains, no carrier of stone or puller of logs. You are from the hills, as I, and you are really the brother to a god. Once, my people worshiped your people—and that you know—but you must learn to carry me, obey me and carry loads. If you do not there will be trouble, much trouble; and we are both of us far from home in this country . . . *Haie! Mäil! Move* now, quickly, big brother! Show the sahib."

Under him the tremendous shoulder muscles quickened, tightened. Along that dangerous, narrow and strange trail, the elephant swung at a fast and certain trot. Confidence flowed again through Badruan's veins like odd and potent liquor. Putting back his head, he softly began a little chant—a song of the hills,

of the hill people, of the elephants who had once been the hill people's gods.

THE silver light of the quick dawn was coming through the jungle roof when Ferguson pushed his stumbling horse at a trot down the driveway which led from the main trail to his own plantation. Close behind him, as they had been for hours now, were Badruan and the elephant. Hearing that strange, booming thud of hoofs on the driveway, dogs awoke in the big house and in the workers' barracks; lights flared and people came running forth to meet them.

Ferguson went on into the house without waiting long there, carrying to his wife the big bundle of mail and newspapers he had luckily slung over his own shoulders when leaving Puerto Luz. It was Badruan who received and informed the crowd. On the trail he had been nodding and reeling with weariness. Now he was wide awake.

"Thou," he said in the hill dialect, blinking in the lamplight from the door of the barracks, "kneel." He tapped the elephant with the hook end.

Slowly, grunting, it knelt.

"Stay so."

He lifted the hook to his hip and swung, smiling squarely into the lamplight, to face the group of muttering, staring Sikh field hands who had formed about him.

Old Salim Baig, the plantation foreman and a man who had been a sergeant-major in France, where he had won two medals for bravery, was the to speak first one.

"And what would this be?"

Badruan looked back at his charge proudly before he answered.

"That is a good question for a Sikh mountain man to ask, Salim Baig. This is an elephant. And I am its keeper and *mahout*."

"Yah!" Old Salim Baig laughed shortly in the gray stiffness of his beard, to be joined in that sound by the rest of the big mountain men around him.

"And if that was so, what are you going to do with it here?"

All the way up the trail from Puerto Luz, Badruan had been preparing his answer for just this question; it was Salim Baig who had complained about Badruan when he had worked with the other men in the fields and forests, and who had seen to his transfer to the house as a menial servant. Salim Baig was also the man who had direct charge over and great pride in the three tractors on the plantation. Badruan spoke rapidly.

"The sahib Ferguson is sickened of those tin toys of yours, the little gasoline machines. He has bought this beast to take their place and to do the hard and difficult work they can not do."

"Yes." Salim Baig had been slowly stroking his beard. He now stopped that motion, and came to his fine, full height. "I will let the sahib tell me that, not you. And where are the supplies you were to bring up from the coast with you? They are not on the mule or on that thing you call an elephant."

Badruan had prepared an answer for that also. But, before this ring of hard eyed, cynical men it escaped him. He started to speak, stuttered, stopped; and then, when he found the right words and began, Salim Baig's sharp old eyes had already taken in the loose hanging pack ropes on the elephant's back.

"So! It is not hard to see what happened to those things, which the sahib was foolish enough to entrust to you and that beast there. Lost along the trail, hey? Enough! No more loose words from you—'*mahout*'! And do not try to come into the barracks to sleep and eat with real men, real workers. Not now, and not unless the sahib commands it. You still belong in the kitchen of the big house doing women's work, Assamese." He made a commanding gesture to the grinning ring of Sikhs about him. "Get back, you, and let this fancy story-teller be; you have men's work to do, and this is not a street bazaar."

Out near the stable, to the biggest *ceiba* tree there, Badruan picketed the elephant, using the pack ropes and making of them a stout ankle lashing. Then he dropped down with his back against the tree, his precious hook between his knees, and slept. But before he slept, to the slowly moving ears of his charge he damned Salim Baig and all his ignorant kind.

FERGUSON found him there when he came forth from the house at noon. "Come on." He stirred the slight, sprawled figure with his boot toe. "Up, you. Go eat and wash your face, find fodder for the elephant. Then we'll see whether I've made a good gamble or a bad one."

He had, decided Ferguson an hour or so later, made a bad gamble. He stood beside Salim Baig and two of the assistant foremen along the freshly cut trail which ran from the main coffee plantings of the *finca* out to the new area in the forest where the hands had been working for months with axes, saws, machetes and dynamite to clear additional space for more plants.

Badruan and the elephant toiled there now. At least Badruan toiled. The elephant did not toil, neither did it move. It stood quite still, head and trunk stubbornly down, great legs spread. On its forehead hung the protective mat of canvas and rope that Badruan had rigged two hours ago. Before it on the ground, blasted loose from its roots and chopped clear of its branches, lay one of the last big trees in the clearing. It had been Ferguson's idea, and Badruan's hope, that the elephant would move that log, roll it to the edge of the clearing.

The elephant had not stirred it an inch. Badruan had exhorted, cursed, prayed and beat with his hook. The elephant had not moved, nor had the log. Nor, it seemed, would they now. Badruan stood beside the log and his charge. Sweat gleamed on his body. His shiny

black hair beneath the edge of his turban was soaking wet; drops ran along his arms and fingers and fell brightly from the hook head. His eyes were wide, staring and bloodshot, his voice a hoarse croak which he hardly understood himself. His back was toward Ferguson and the little group beside the trail. He was looking at the elephant. Then, abruptly dropping the ankus to the ground, he turned and gazed at Ferguson.

"I can not, sahib," he said huskily, "and this will not."

Ferguson, watching him intently, was not sure whether the bright moisture about the man's eyes was that of sweat, or of tears.

"All right. That's enough for today. He's a circus elephant and probably never did a bit of this kind of work before. Take him back to the stables and let him rest. And rest yourself, Badruan. Tomorrow we'll try him with carrying cement for the new drying floor. Get going now; take him away."

The next day the elephant began carrying cement sacks for the new coffee drying floors. But it would not carry more than five hundred-weight at a time, little more than a mangy, flap eared hill burro could handle. With the sixth hundred-pound sack, it utterly refused to move, stood sullenly and stiffly while Badruan, Salim Baig, even Ferguson himself, tried to trick, cajole or beat it into motion.

"There's no use," said Ferguson finally. "Let the damn beast be. Lucky I didn't pay a steep price for the lazy beggar. Less good than a burro, and that's all. Come on, Badruan, get him on his way with the five hundred-weight. Make him heft that, anyhow."

So, for weeks, until the drying floor job was done, Badruan and his charge went on. After that, though, he and the beast were practically idle. As old Salim Baig phrased it, there was little or no work anywhere for an elephant that would not work.

That was said at night, after supper, as the field hands squatted down in the soft darkness against the wall of the barracks. Badruan, who had lived with the other hands in the barracks ever since the night of his return from Puerto Luz, hunkered now at the end of the line, a bit away from the rest of the men.

And at the end of that line there was a sudden, quick scuffling sound of bare soles on hardpacked earth. Badruan was on his feet as Salim finished his lengthy speech on the general worthlessness of elephants and Assamese.

"Salim Baig! What you have said is enough, and more than enough! Stand up, and I will give you a hillman's answer to the words of a Sikh dog! Stand up, or I will pull that beard from your face by the roots!"

Salim Baig made no answer except to take the mouthpiece of the *tuga* pipe from his lips and spit upon the arch of Badruan's bare foot. Badruan screamed out with incoherent rage then, and made as if to bend forward and hit him. He did not; a tall, skinny young man, one of Salim Baig's nephews, rose up between them. He put his hand against Badruan's chest and pushed him flat on his back on the hard ground.

Badruan's head bounced. His turban unwound and came off. Then, very swiftly, he gathered his feet and knees under him, leaped up and in. And as he leaped, the short knife he kept in the waistband of his khaki shorts gleamed in a high arc above his head.

The nephew of Salim Baig saw the knife. He sidestepped and somewhat checked its driving flight, but not enough so that he broke its final whipping motion. It tore past his guard and rasped across two of his ribs. He was a strong man; the blow did not knock him from his feet, and the pain did no more at first than hasten his own movements.

He caught Badruan's knife hand with his two hands, bent the fingers creaking

back until the blade dropped to the ground. He had no weapon himself, else he would have killed Badruan right then and there. What he did was to take Badruan by the throat and choke him until he was unconscious, then fling him away, and reach down for the knife. But Salim Baig's foot was securely on that knife, and Salim Baig was pointing toward the lighted porch of the big house, where Ferguson's tall form could be seen facing the barracks.

"Enough." Salim Baig caught his nephew by the shoulder. "The little hill rat has been paid back, well paid. Sit down now, thou. In the morning, I will talk with the sahib, and then the keeper of elephants will go and sleep in the stable, or somewhere away from true men and warriors. It is all, I say. Sit!"

Badruan's days as a *mahout* ended the next morning, and his work as a house servant recommenced. He was docked two months' pay by Ferguson and given a white house jacket and strict, curt orders not to go near the workers' barracks without express permission. The elephant he saw only twice a day, to water and feed it, that was all. That beast was tethered to a big, stout tree behind the stables. It was, as Ferguson told his wife, somewhat of an expensive luxury and a problem; he could find no real work for it around the plantation, and could not spare a man or time to take it down to the coast and attempt to sell it, even if there were a market. Let it sleep and eat, he grunted over his pipe; perhaps, some day, he would find a use for it.

THAT use came four months and some weeks later. Ferguson's promised shipment of new tractors had not arrived from the States, and he had not even gone to Puerto Luz to make cable inquiry for them. In the northern provinces, back of the capital and toward the Salvadorean border, a half-breed Indian guerilla general had raided

a couple of towns, burned them after looting them and then defeated the Federalist forces sent against him. As a result, he had now proclaimed himself "liberator" and the head of "the new provisional government," and was marching south and toward the coast, his ragged army growing every day as outlaws from all over the Central Americas trickled in to join in the pickings.

To go out on any of the main trails meant danger, and to attempt to go down to the coast and Puerto Luz was something quite like inviting suicide.

And Ferguson really needed now to go to Puerto Luz. First one, then two, of his precious American tractors had broken down and could not be fixed for lack of the necessary parts. It was the day that the third and last one, overheated through a leaky gasket on the water pump, broke down and cracked the motorhead, that Ferguson decided to use his elephant and Badruan.

The foundered tractor was stuck at the edge of the new cutting. If it were left out in the heavy moisture of the open tropical nights, it would, in a few weeks, be a rust-scaled and highly worthless wreck. It should, like its equally unfortunate predecessors, be towed into the plantation, stowed in a dry shed and closely blanketed with tarpaulins.

There was only one way in which that task could be achieved: with Badruan's old love, the elephant. Standing in the door of the kitchen where Badruan helped the native woman cook wash up the breakfast dishes, Ferguson explained all that.

"You understand me, Badruan?"

Badruan let down the last plate with a clatter, wiped his hands on the sides of his khahi shorts.

"So, sahib. Absolutely—" He paused to stare out through the mesh of the kitchen door at a great, gray, lazy bulk standing in contented somnolence under the shade of a tree by the stables. "That

is a good elephant—even though you do not believe me. I—I know that, sahib. When it first came here, it was from the sea, and from storm, and from those awful cities to the north. It did not know these hills and this jungle, sahib. Now it does, and now it will work. Of course, I have not told you this, because of many things—"

Ferguson almost cursed. He pointed instead toward the door.

All the plantation was there to watch when Badruan led his elephant forth to the new cutting and the foundered tractor. For the beast he had fashioned a strong harness of canvas pads and rope. One big, double-bighted rope he led back from the beast's foreshoulders and made fast to the front end of the tractor.

Salim Baig and Ferguson stood near him, intently and silently watching.

"You see, sahib?" Badruan looked up at Ferguson. "Before, I was foolish, and always asked this one to push with its head. I was wrong. Now I have fashioned this harness—and it will pull."

"Yes." Ferguson looked over at the heavy little tractor. "But, this way, a man will have to ride on the tractor and steer it."

Badruan spread his hands and smiled.

"It would be the same if he was to push it, sahib. And to this beast now, that added weight will be as nothing."

"All right!" Ferguson's voice was sharp. "Get on the tractor, Salim Baig. Start your elephant, Badruan."

Badruan saluted and stood back, and as he walked toward the elephant, the ankus lifted in his hand, he looked at the crowd alongside the mouth of the trail and smiled. But the smile went from his face then; he stood close to the elephant and spoke to it. He spoke to it in that hill dialect that no man here except himself knew.

"I am ready," he whispered slowly. "And the sahib, too, is ready. And all these bearded wolves from the mountains that stand there believe that you and I can not do it, little one. Let us

show them. Pull now! Move! *Mäil! Mäil!*"

At those last words the elephant did move. It went forward until there was no more slack in the rope that stretched to the tractor. Then it stopped. Badruan stood beside it. He uttered his piercing, singsong cry again and again. The elephant did not move. For the first time Badruan struck with the ankus, at the foreshoulder and flank. He struck again, many times. The beast did not move or make a sound. He strode around to the other side, the other flank, called out his shrill command again, and struck. The elephant did not stir.

Badruan dropped the hook. There were tears—tears of rage, of humiliation and futility in his eyes. He stood close in beside the elephant and spoke hoarsely to it, exhorted, cursed and pleaded with it. He stopped only when Ferguson, a reddish flush of rage showing darkly under his tanned, leathery skin, stepped in and stopped him, pushed him back, and picked up the ankus.

"Get away, you!" said the big man. "Stand back! No more prayers and tears. This damn thing moves—and movies now. *Mäil*, you! Hop it!"

Ferguson was a very strong man, and he hit with all his strength, using both hands. He did not aim for the foreshoulder and the flank as Badruan had done. He slammed his hail of blows right upon the tender trunk, and close in, about the eyes. As he struck the fifth time, the elephant moved.

It wheeled, snorting, squealing, bellowing. It lashed with its uncoiling trunk at Ferguson, and almost mowed him down. It kept on toward the tractor. Its eyes were red balls of flame, its short, sawed-off tusks were white gleams of light.

Old Salim Baig, who sat transfixed on the iron bucket seat of the tractor, saw it coming, and commanded enough will power to jump. He was too late. The

vast forefeet had already mounted upon the motorhead, come crashing down upon it, and the whistling trunk caught about the old man's body, to send him hurtling end-over-end off into the newly planted field.

Then, with swift, absolutely sure and terrific blows, the beast demolished that tractor. It cracked the engine block from its bed, it caved in radiator and carburetor pipes, snapped off the seat, the steering wheel and gear shift rod, then turned, broke short the rope that held it, and lumbered off unhindered toward the trail leading to the *finca* buildings. For maybe a minute then there was no sound except the dull, reverberant pounding of its padded feet . . .

Badruan stood shaking on the edge of the group that centered about Ferguson and Salim Baig while the Scotchman set the old foreman's broken collarbone. That group was quiet. Ferguson was the only one to speak. He did so as he straightened up from his deft surgery.

"I've been wondering for a long time what I should do with that damn beast, and now I know. Shoot it, by heaven, and shoot it quick!"

Badruan did not hear any more; did not wait. He wheeled and ran rapidly toward the *finca* stable buildings and the tree where he knew he would find his elephant.

It was there, when he came panting and lurching up to it. It stood peacefully grazing, trunk snuffling out over the soft, bluish green grass.

"Quick, little one!" whispered Badruan, clapping his hands together in command. "Quick, we must go—they are going to shoot you for what you have done! Go! Go! Go!" The last words were an hysterical shout, uttered from the back of the beast, where Badruan sat clinging with his knees while they raced down the trail that led toward Puerto Luz and the sea . . .

IT WAS near midnight when Badruan and the elephant reached the abrupt edge of the plateau where it dropped down to the coastal plain which bordered the sea. The elephant moved slowly, and with heavy, blundering motions, putting its bruised feet down with great thumping sounds. On its back, hanging there by sheer instinct alone, Badruan slept, wholly exhausted.

But it was that same instinct which kept him hanging to the elephant's back which awoke him, made him start up and tighten his grip about the ankus handle. The narrow trail before him led through a blue gash of moonlight. In that light the little man could see that the trail ahead was barred by a huge and newly cut tree trunk. The elephant slowed, then stopped, right before that barrier. Badruan gaped at it with wide eyes. Man had placed that log there—no quick, furious flurry of a tropic storm had done so. And there was wood smoke in the air—he could smell it distinctly; and see, down there, behind those rocks, the dull gold-red embers of a fire.

A high-powered rifle cracked. A cold breath whipped across his cheek; it sent a shudder of instant fear down his back. He fell, rather than rolled, from the beast's back, and started for the lush undergrowth alongside the trail. He did not reach it; small, dark men in wide straw sombreros and white jean pants came out from there, and the moonlight glinted on the rifles and *machetes* in their hands.

Badruan stood still; he pushed his scrawny hands so high above his head that his arms hurt at the sockets. And then they stood and laughed at him, prodding him with their rifle muzzles and knife points. One of them, distinctly different from the rest inasmuch as he wore boots, a felt hat and a khaki jacket, came forward and walked around the elephant. He swore in explosive, hoarse Spanish, then came back, to study Badruan.

"Yours?" He pointed to the elephant. Badruan's sweaty face slowly lowered in a nod.

His hand caressed the butt of the big automatic sagging at his belt. He moved a pace closer to Badruan.

"You can drive this elephant?"

"But no, señor. He is lame; look at his feet. And he is no good. My boss was going to shoot him for being no good; that is why we are here. Let us go on, señor. He is—"

He stopped speaking; a slap across the mouth stopped him. The man with the boots wiped the palm of his stinging hand across his jacket, and turned from Badruan, prone in the trail.

"Maybe this fellow," he said in a cold and awful sort of voice, "is a liar. Maybe not. Anyhow, I know how to handle his elephant without him. Bring up the packs; load them on this thing here. Then cut poles—good, strong, long ones. You, *chico*, fill two of those pots with embers from the fire. We will dip the pole ends in the fire and prod this big thing with them. Then we will see if he will move."

He halted, laughed then kicked Badruan.

"Get up, you! See that pack there beside the trail? Pick it up and carry it. Don't open your mouth, don't try to run. If you do, I'll have your feet fried in one of those fires. Most of my mules are worn out and can not go on, or I would dip you in the fire now. Maybe later, unless"—his voice slowed—"you will show us the short way to the *finca* Ferguson."

He reached out and grasped Badruan's turban, yanked it away, and then locked his powerful fingers in the long, thick hair, twisted terribly at it.

"You understand?"

There were tears of agony in Badruan's eyes; his slight body shook with the pain.

"Yes, señor; yes!"

"Good, then!"

The man released his grip in Bad-

ruan's hair and stood back from him, turning to call harsh commands at the men clustered in the trail. Most of them were already in motion. From the place where the fires burned, they led up whinnying and faltering pack burros, lifted the loads from their backs and heaped them, carefully and with a great deal of nervousness, upon the back of the motionless elephant.

IT TOOK perhaps half an hour for the bandit leader's plan to materialize. But then things happened with a terrible rapidity. Badruan, laden with his heavy pack, was thrust back into the undergrowth edging the trail. No one stood in the trail but the bandit leader himself and the twenty men whom he had armed with long, green, sharply pointed poles. One after another, at the leader's command, those pole bearers had dipped the points of their weapons into the two glowing earthenware pots holding the embers of the night's campfires.

Those pole points now gleamed brightly red; small sparks spat hissing from them. At those pole points, and at the men who carried them, the big beast in the center of the trail slowly swung his eyes. A gradual trembling passed over him; he lifted his trunk and tusks and snorted up at the blue light of the moon. A hoarse gust of laughter came from the booted man, and from the men carrying the poles.

"See! See!" yelled the bandit leader. "He understands! All right, give it to him; make him move!"

The twenty men stepped quickly forward; they howled and thrust with their blazing pole tips at the beast's legs, at his ears, his trunk. He bellowed with pain and anger, then fear. He tried to break away, back into the brush, or go ahead. But everywhere, on all sides, were those frightful poles, and they gave way only on one side—slowly, in front of him; in the direction he, and the little, weeping, half-mad man alongside the trail, had just come with so much haste.

Badruan showed them the short cut, the little known side trail to the *finca*, a few minutes later. They tortured him until he did so. When they went on along it, he was hardly aware of the fact, and fell many times, to be kicked up, shoved on. The last time he fell was among coffee plants, and the rich, stinging smell of the flowering buds was in his nostrils. They let him stay there; left him and the nearly dead elephant, the few pack burros, and a guard of three men, to watch them and the loot they had carried.

The rest went on stealthily through the rows of the coffee plants, led by the booted man. Badruan did not know anything of that; he was in a coma. And out of that he came only when a savage blast of rifle fire burst against his eardrums.

He sat up slowly and gaped about him. Nearby, squatted down on their knees, rifles in their hands, were the three guards left to watch him, the elephant and the burros. They were straining forward in the first flickering of the pale dawn light, wholly intent on what was going on there in and about the *finca* buildings.

For a short time Badruan listened as they listened. He could, he thought, hear Ferguson sahib's voice, and the voice of old Salim Baig. But of that he was not sure; the rifle firing was regular and intense now. Badruan took his eyes from the three men in front of him, and looked to his left, and then behind.

To his left was the elephant, sprawled over on its side as if dead. Behind were the half dozen or so pack animals, in the same position. It was those animals Badruan crept toward; on the back of one of them, thrust through its pack straps, he had made out a *machete*.

HE CRAWLED to that pack burro; he got the *machete* into his hands. Then he came to his feet—and moved in swift silence.

He had killed one of the guards be-

fore the other two were even aware of his presence and looked up at him. The second he stabbed through the throat, and it was only the third who made any effort at a real fight before he, too, went down. Badruan laughed—a shrill and quite terrible sound—and turned, running toward the elephant, wiping the blade of the *machete* with his fingers.

"Thou," he whispered. "It is your time; my time. Up! You hear me? Up—brother of a god!" time and again in his hill dialect, hacking at the pack ropes on the beast's back, kicking away the junk with which it had been burdened. The next moment they were crashing forward through the coffee plants.

And then they were out in the main clearing of the plantation, past the coffee-drying sheds and near the low, white-washed barrack. That building was deserted and in flames. No one was there; rifles licked blue flashes from the windows of the big house, where Ferguson and those of the field hands who lived and had guns still fought. And in the light of that building they had fired, the booted man and his outlaws were slowly closing in upon the big house, moving forward now in a concerted, eager, confident rush.

Those men may not have all heard the wild thunder of those immense feet behind them. Some, at least, did, and turned to gape; then scream and try to run. But those padded feet either smashed them or the tusks caught them, gored them, or the lashing fury of the long trunk locked about their bodies, hurled them to death. The booted man himself turned and shot with both hands at the great beast above him. And at those striking fingers of flame, the elephant sprang aside in frantic and instinctive fear.

That gave a chance to the booted man and some of the others close to him. They fired again and again at the elephant, and at the naked, screaming man flat on its back, and tried to rush off into the darkness. But, in the light of

the flaming barrack building, Ferguson and Salim Baig had seen, understood, and came forth.

Even then they were nearly too late. For the beast which carried Badruan followed his cries, and turned staggering right and left, stamping, goring, killing . . . The end of it came over by the edge of the clearing and the drying shed. Ferguson, Salim Baig and half a dozen of the big, yowling Sikhs overtook the elephant there.

The elephant was through; it was down—dying. About it were knotted a dozen men, who hacked and shot at it and at a naked man with a bloody-bladed machete. That man was Badruan; Ferguson and those with him recognized the fact when they had cleared away and killed the ring of men there, the last of the attackers.

Badruan staggered and fell, trying to join in that final attack. He stayed where he had fallen until Ferguson came to lift him up and examine his wounds.

"You'll live," said the big man very softly, as he would to a beloved small child. "You'll live, you wild man—" Something that was like a laugh but more like a sob made him cough and stop speaking.

"Lift me up, sahib," said Badruan in a whisper. "Lift me up, so that I may see that one which has brought you all your good luck, the one who really saved you now."

He broke loose from Ferguson's aiding hands and stumbled forward a few paces himself. The elephant lay still, very still. To it, crooning the words, Badruan spoke. It did not answer in any way. And slowly Badruan turned. His head was back, and his eyes were dry, and he seemed quite strong, quite proud, as he looked at Ferguson, at Salim Baig, and the bearded, battle-stained Sikhs.

"It is just now," he said with great distinctness, "that you have had the honor to see the passing of a brother to a god."



"Pearls for a sword!"

RED HANDS

The waters of the Volga run crimson when Cossack, Muscovite and Gypsy meet.

By HAROLD LAMB

CHARNY came to himself a little at a time. First he was aware that he sat in a saddle. Then he saw the familiar gray steppe grass and felt the wind on his head.

His head troubled him. It was wet with sweat, and it had no lambskin kalpak on it. Inasmuch as most of his skull had been shaved a few days ago, the wind felt cold. A fiery thirst tormented him.

Besides, the level steppe behaved strangely. It rose dizzily and then dropped away from him, although his horse paced along steadily enough.

Charny knew what this meant.

"I've been licking the pig," he thought.

He remembered singing a chorus with some fellow Cossacks in a town tavern. After that—night and the saddle and a rushing wind.

"Devil take it all!" he muttered. "I've come far."

No town was visible in the swaying steppe. The Cossack bent over and looked down. He had no coat, but his wide leather breeches were there and his prized shagreen boots—he looked on each side to make sure. His shirt appeared torn and stained with tar. What

mattered most, he still wore his sword. So he had not drunk that up.

But the horse! After awhile he drew rein and dismounted, holding firmly to the saddle-horn. Streaked with sweat and dust, with burrs clotting its long tail, this black horse was certainly not his. A good horse, however, a wolf-chaser.

"How did I get you, *kounak*?"

Evidently after the drinking bout he had taken a horse from the stable and had raced off into the plain—natural enough, after so many cups of brandy. It was afternoon now, the sun almost setting, and Charny saw no sign of a trail. Only the waving grass, clusters of dark oaks, the hazy sky—and the brown sail of a boat moving majestically over the grass, far off. The Cossack closed his eyes and looked again. The brown sail was still there.

Well, brandy played tricks like that. Worse than the *myzga*, the mirage. Charny tried to remember whether he had gone north, east, south or west from the frontier town, but without success.

Leading the horse into the nearest shade he loosened the saddle girth slowly. He searched for a picket rope and found none. Letting out the rein, he slipped it over his shoulder and lay down, his head on his arms. He would sleep for awhile and then let the horse find the way to water. . . .

Instead, he woke with a start. The red glare of sunset filled the sky, and the wind had ceased. Along the ground he had heard the thudding of hoofs upon the hard clay. Instantly he leaped to his feet, his hand touching the sword hilt at his belt.

Then he relaxed. Only one rider had come up, a Cossack on a piebald horse—a broad Cossack with long arms, wearing a clean sheepskin coat, a black kalpak with a red crown, and polished boots. His was a brown, lined face, like a Tartar's, with tufted mustaches.

"*Tfu!*" grunted the rider. "Draw that

curved sword and I'll slap you in the snout."

Charny's head was clearing. The other man had saddlebags, with a rolled-up bearskin and a jug behind the saddle—evidently a registered Cossack, on service. In that year of the Lord 1684 it was well to look twice at one who rode alone and armed in the eastern steppe. The towns and the Muscovite merchants lay under the sunset to the west, and the steppe here was at the edge of the frontier.

"What man are you?" Charny asked.

"They call me Vash. I patrol from the Zarit *stanitz*a. The others turned back, but I kept your trail like a weasel."

Zarit, Charny remembered, was the hamlet where he had been drinking at the tavern. He looked at the man called Vash expectantly as the other dismounted.

"Seventy versts you rode between midnight and now," went on Vash. "Straight over the steppe to the east. Well, I'll take you back."

"Why take me back?"

"Don't you know? Last night you licked the pig—you were dancing the *hopak* in the Cossack's bed* when his Highness, the lieutenant of the Starosta, rode by. He said something, and you pulled him out of the saddle and used the whip on his hide until he danced. *Tfu!* There was a devil in you—"

"How did I find the horse?"

"It's his Highness's charger—a good one. The Starosta gave command to all of us of the border patrol to follow and bring you back. They are raging like bulls in a pen, the Starosta and his men. Come on, it's late."

CHARNY knew well enough what awaited him at Zarit: the stocks; the scourge; or his ears clipped off. They had his horse and his silver, his *svitka* and his hat, while he had one of their

*The trampled earth in front of a tavern door where Cossacks were likely to be found asleep in the morning.

best chargers. So, he had stolen nothing. Moreover, he was tired of the Russian settlements where a man could not even drink without being caged.

"My road is to the east," he decided. "The devil take your Starosta and his commands."

Vash considered a moment, his slant eyes measuring the tall fugitive. Then he leaped at Charny, his powerful arms clutching. But Charny was in no mood for a fight. Stepping aside, he drew his curved sword swiftly.

"Steel to you!" shouted Vash, jerking out his own sword.

For a moment the two Cossacks circled warily, Vash half crouched, his muscles tense, while Charny sidestepped softly, waiting. Then Vash leaped again, his saber swinging over his head. Charny parried the slash at his ribs and drew back while the Zarit Cossack pressed him with cut after cut.

Suddenly the taller man stepped forward, twisting the curved blade of his saber about the other's sword until the hilts locked. Without warning he wrenched the blades toward him, and Vash's sword flashed into the air, falling to the ground behind Charny, who set his foot upon it.

"The devil's in you still!" Vash muttered, rubbing his hand. "Get into the saddle, and may the dogs bite me if I don't carve your ribs bare. To fight on a horse—that's the best way. Only sheepherders fight on their feet."

A smile touched Charny's thin lips. With the red glow of sunset on his half-shaven head, his dark eyes seemed on fire.

"Well, what will you do?" Vash asked irritably. "Don't you see I'm your prisoner? Do you want me to take grass in my teeth?"

"Do what you like." Charny picked up the other's sword and sheathed his own. "I'm not going back to Zarit to be strung up on a rope."

"Well, I can't go off into the steppe

without a sword. Now listen, you aren't my captive any longer, that's clear. I won't try to take you back there." Vash's tufted mustache twitched in a grin. "Allah, they say his Highness the lieutenant howled when you kissed his hide with the whip. It's all one to me. Only give me back the sword."

He held out his hand.

"Faith of a Cossack. I pledge faith by all the Cossack brotherhood, alive or dead, out yonder." And he motioned to north and east, to south and west.

He had served, that Vash, in the wars, and his oath was the oath of a Zaporoghian—of a free Cossack who had once belonged to the great war encampment of the Siech. If he gave his word as a Zaporoghian, it could be trusted.

Charny handed him back his sword.

"*Aya tak*," he said, "Aye, so. Now give me water from that jug."

Vash sheathed his sword and stared.

"Water! Would I carry water with Mother Volga flowing under my snout?"

And, remembering the brown boat's sail out on the steppe, Charny laughed. Truly his head had been bitten. Ten minutes later the Cossacks and the horses were drinking at the bank of the wide gray river that flowed soundlessly between borders of high rushes. Charny thrust in his head, snorting, and wringing the water out of his scalplock. The burning fire left his brain, and all at once he felt ravenously hungry. He found Vash sitting his horse on a sand mound that rose above the rushes. The Cossack of the patrol had barley cakes in his bags, but both of them felt the need of meat or gruel.

With experienced eyes Vash studied the river in the deepening twilight. Swallows flitted overhead; out in mid-stream a log raft drifted without lights, although the deep notes of a boatman's song came from it over the water. On the far side the gray sandbanks were turning black. Upstream he made out

the blur of some large islands. But he shook his head.

"Not a tavern; not a fishing boat. Nothing to eat here."

"Yonder's a fire," observed Charny. He knew nothing of the Volga, but he had been born in the steppe and he had noticed what the other had missed; the faint glow of firelight against trees upstream near the islands.

"Gypsies, it may be." Vash nodded. "Well, God gives."

As they rode north, keeping to the hard ground above the rushes, he explained that this portion of the steppe was deserted except for a few Summer huts of *burlaki* or rivermen. Gypsies sometimes followed the river trail. Farther north bands of river pirates haunted the shore, rowing out from inlets to board and capture cargo boats, killing the crews and setting the vessels afire after carrying off what they wanted. To the south near Astrakhan Tartars raided across the Volga in the Winter, to seize cattle and slaves in the villages. Richly laden merchant vessels downriver, or carrying salt and fish and seal-skins north again, passed this region without stopping.

"We only kill flies," grumbled Vash. There was no sport for the Cossacks of the Zarit patrol, except to pick quarrels with the governor's militia. "And kiss the cow girls when there are any along the river."

IT WAS almost dark by the time they approached the fire, and Vash drew rein with an exclamation. The place seemed to be a large encampment without tents or huts. Along the shore in the firelight some two-score men sat at meat around three smoking pots. Most of them were armed with short sword and pistol, while pikes were stacked in military fashion. A few of them, in fine clothes, looked like Russians. And Vash noticed that these had no weapons, al-

though there were two women in their number.

Among the crowd he made out Kalmuks in white felt hats and a scattering of *burlaki*.

"There's no wagon train, no horses," he muttered, spitting out the sunflower seeds he was chewing.

Charny, who was hungry, urged his horse forward. As they came down to the shore some of the men rose to meet them.

"Whose men are you?" demanded Vash.

The strangers made no answer. They stared at the horses, and one went to the top of the rise on which the fire had been built to peer into the darkness behind the Cossacks. Some one else threw a dish of grease on the flames, which soared up, hissing, lighting up the shore.

Vash noticed a figure in a priest's hat and veil seated by the women, who had bold painted faces and the physique of Amazons. At least three of their companions wore the fur-trimmed garments of boyars—noblemen. But these, although they looked curiously at the patrol rider, had nothing to say. Perhaps they spoke only Russian and did not know the Cossack speech.

"Well, people," Vash remarked, "is there no one to bid us to sit down to bread and salt?" The odor of mutton and garlic tickled his nostrils.

A tall man in a red Tartar *khalat* rose from his place and came over to the Cossacks. He had curly hair the color of wheat, and he bore himself as if accustomed to command. With his hands thrust in his girdle he inspected Vash and Charny without haste.

"What seek ye?" he asked curtly. He spoke in the fashion of the Muscovites, like a boyar.

"We are riders of the Zarit patrol—" Vash stretched a point to include Charny—"And, by Allah, we want to set our fangs in meat."

"Well," said the tall boyar, "I am

Kolmar, the lieutenant of Astrakhan, and I have no meat for you thieving dogs." He spoke to one of his followers and turned back to the fire.

Vash glanced anxiously at Charny, who had hosed whipped the lieutenant of a smaller town after drinking brandy. It would not do, he thought, to try that game with this Kolmar. Cossacks would not have turned hungry men away from such an abundance of food; but these chaps seemed to be Muscovites with a following picked up along the river.

Charny, however, was more interested than angry. Suddenly he reined his horse forward, passing Kolmar and halting to stare at the women and the priest.

"If you have no food for us of the steppe," he said slowly, "give us at least a blessing, little father."

Some of the men laughed, and the bearded priest turned his head as if troubled. Hastily he raised his hand and muttered something.

"Get out!" said the Lord Kolmar softly. "And if you show your head this night you will taste a bullet."

One of the women cried out shrilly; but Charny wheeled his horse and trotted off. He headed straight away from the river, as Vash joined him, and kept on until he was beyond the last of the firelight. Then he halted and sat motionless.

"The ox-tails—the stall cattle!" muttered Vash. "They had white bread and kegs of mead enough for a barrack. But then they're Muscovites, and God made them so they can't see beyond their whiskers."

"Kegs and chests they had," Charny observed thoughtfully.

His eyes by now were accustomed to the gloom. A half moon, low over the river, shed an elusive light. To Vash's surprise, he began to quarter the ground at a hand pace, bending down to inspect the light patches of sand between the clumps of dwarf oak and saxaul.

"There's no bread here," Vash remarked after he had grown tired of following his companion about.

"Nothing at all," Charny agreed. "Only the tracks of men who came out for wood. No carts, no horses, and no tracks of many people."

For a moment a chill of dread touched the Cossack of the patrol, who had all the superstition of those who ride the steppe. Kolmar and his people had food chests and kegs with them, and they could not have carried such things on their shoulders. In fact, they did not seem to have passed over the surface of the steppe. And Vash had seen so sign of a boat. They were there on the shore, waiting by that fire, as if they were dead souls who haunted the river in the hours of darkness. He thought of the florid faces of the women, and the silent priest, and glanced over his shoulder uneasily. True, they were not like honest folk of flesh and blood.

But spirits did not boil mutton over a huge fire, nor did they slake their thirst with honey-mead. Moreover, Kolmar had been a real boyar, ready to blaze away with powder and ball. No, they must have landed from a river boat, although why they should have done so on this deserted stretch of shore Vash did not know.

"The fire," Charny said softly. "Did you see where it was?"

Hastily Vash glanced over his shoulder, half expecting to find the fire moving away somewhere. But it still flared and smoked on the rise by the shore.

"Devil take it!" he grunted. "Haven't you ever seen a fire before?"

"Not like that."

Vash reflected that he himself would have built a fire in a hollow out of the wind, where it would not catch the eye of roving Tartars. Or, to cook meat, he would have made a small fire between rocks and let it die to embers. But

these men had made a blaze as if to signal down the river.

"Well, they're Muscovites," he responded. "And they have women to keep warm. Why shouldn't they kindle up?"

Then he started. They had been walking the horses slowly down-river, when Charny's mount shied away from a clump of saxaul. Something slipped out of the shadowy thicket and sped away soundlessly.

Charny was after it in a minute, lashing his horse through the brush. By the time Vash caught up with him the Cossack had dismounted and was wrestling with a dark figure. A knife flickered in the moonlight as Charny caught the arm of his antagonist and jerked. Charny had muscles of pliant steel in the hundred and eighty pounds of him, and the figure went down on the sand.

JUMPING from the saddle, Vash was going to kick the stranger in the head—because a knife in the dark is more to be feared than any sword. But Charny pulled him back and spoke to the stranger, who made answer in a whisper.

"It's a woman," muttered the Cossack of the patrol, bending down. "A girl. Eh, she's pretty, too. A dove. *Hi—hop!*" He began to twirl his long mustache.

"Shut up!" grunted Charny. "She's a Gypsy, and she can take us to some food."

"But—"

Charny took the rein of the black horse in one hand, and he twisted his other fist in the end of the Gypsy girl's long, loose hair. She was barefoot, with a sheepskin *chaban* over her slender shoulders, and she led them swiftly toward the river.

"But," whispered Vash, coming up, "look out for yourself. These Gypsies are witches. They know how to lay spells. They can cut your heart out of your body."

The Gypsy girl laughed softly, hearing this. She did not make any effort

to escape from Charny until she scrambled down into the gloom of an oak grove, with a warning cry that sounded like a night bird's.

It was answered from below, and the Cossacks saw that they were at the river's edge, a long musket shot upstream from the fire of the Muscovites. Beneath them, a timber raft was tied to the shore. On the raft whispers sounded faintly and bare feet moved over the logs.

"My people," explained the girl. "They are honest folk, O my falcons."

Vash doubted this. It would bring bad luck, he thought, to follow this girl of the night. Charny, however, let go the girl and leaped down to the raft.

"I am Yamalian," a gruff voice greeted him. "What would you, Cossack?"

"I," Charny answered, "am a masterless man from Zarit with a stolen horse, and this comrade of mine is a fugitive who has kissed one girl too many. Give us bread and salt."

A chuckle came out of the darkness.

"Be welcome."

THE Tsigans—Gypsies—being horse traders and singers, were on good enough terms with the border Cossacks, who liked to hear the tales they brought up and down the river. They knew more, even, than the Yiddish traders, although how they got their tidings remained a mystery. They drifted over the steppe with their carts and strings of ponies, their hags and children; some of their girls, like Makara who had guided the Cossacks to the raft, were beautiful and fiery in spirit.

Yamalian had two of his sons on the raft. While the Cossacks ate hugely of his *kasha* and bread washed down with Vash's brandy, the old Gypsy explained that they were on their way south to Astrakhan where they would sell their logs and spend the Winter months when the Volga was frozen. They had tied up to the bank for the night.

"Now tell the truth," Charny demanded. "What will you steal from the Muscovites down the shore?"

From the raft the mound with its blazing fire was in plain sight over the fringe of rushes at the shore. Most of Kolmar's men had disappeared, but the women with their boyars and the priest were still to be seen. The Gypsies had not even a lantern on the raft. The only light came from the moon piercing the branches of the oaks.

"Eh, from them—nothing," Yamalian sounded sincere enough, and Makara laughed a little.

"How did they come?"

"By boat, in two *saiks*. This morning they passed the raft, O my falcon. Now the *saiks* are hidden in the rushes."

"As you are hiding in the shadow—why?"

Yamalian was silent a moment.

"Because I am afraid."

"When was a Tsigan afraid of darkness? And when did nobles of the north journey with their women in open *saiks*? What kind of priest gives a blessing like a fisherman? Eh, tell!"

"I am afraid. The fate of every man is in God's hands."

"Of what are you afraid?"

The old Gypsy made no answer, but the girl, Makara, said defiantly—

"The red cock."

Charny only shook his head impatiently. Vash, who had been chewing sunflower seeds and spitting them out, leaned forward, startled.

"Eh, the red cock will crow?"

"Before the first light," assented the girl.

"Here?"

"At the fire."

"What is this red cock," demanded Charny, "and his crowing?"

Vash felt for the brandy jug and took a long swallow.

"River pirates," he whispered. "Red hands. After they have attacked and

slain, and taken out what they wish, then they kindle up with fire, and the boat goes burning down the river. They say it is the red cock crowing. Allah, we would have had more than bread in our gullets if we had sat down with them."

Many things became clear to Charny—the two score armed men waiting on the shore, their boats concealed in the high rushes. He wondered why they should sit by a fire and why some of them wore the dress of noblemen.

"Red hands down from the north," muttered Vash. "But that Kolmar is a nobleman, devil take me if he isn't. What are the women for?"

Yamalian chuckled.

"Are you a Cossack, to ask?"

"But they're dressed up like pheasants. Aye, and this Lord Kolmar of Astrakhan has on Tartar rags. Eh, why?"

Makara, who had been watching Charny, leaned forward impatiently.

"When the red hands work, keep your tongue between your teeth."

It did not please the stocky Cossack to be spoken to in this manner by a girl.

"Well," he snorted, "you were spying on them. What did you find out?"

But she shook her head. Charny, the one who had run her down and thrown her to the ground—who had stolen a horse fit for a prince—was the one she wished would look at her.

"What is that?" Charny demanded of Yamalian.

Far up the river a pin-point of light appeared. Presently it vanished, to reappear again.

"It's a boat, the *Kniaz*."

"May the dogs bite me!" Vash clutched at his head. "How do you know?"

Yamalian did not see fit to explain how tidings of the ship's approach had crept down the river ahead of it. He

knew the talk of the rivermen, the whispers that passed up and down the broad water—and Makara had ears like a cat.

"A rich ship," Vash muttered to Charny. "The last one down before the ice closes up north—for Astrakhan at the Volga mouth, with gold and gear, powder and arms and merchants' goods. *Hi-hop!* The red hands know. They are waiting like wolves." He turned to the Gypsy. "Where's your skiff?"

In spite of the instant protest of the men on the raft, Vash searched until he found a small skiff tied to the logs.

"It's devil's work Kolmar and his lads are about," he explained. "There are honest folk on the *Kniaz*. I'm going to warn them."

"Nay, Falcon," Yamalian objected. "They have cannon, muskets. What harm to them?"

"The devil only knows." Vash considered and shook his head. "It's clear these red hands came to wait for them. Now I must go out on the water and tell them to keep away from the fire. Plague take Makara—if it wasn't for her I would not be able to go."

Charny entered the skiff with him, and a Gypsy took the oars. Yamalian had whispered to him to look out for the skiff. Just as they pushed off the girl jumped in beside Charny.

"See how she loves you," Vash grumbled. "But it's bad luck having her along on the water."

The girl, however, showed no inclination to be put back on the raft.

"*Na koni!*" Vash cried. "Make haste."

THEY met the *Knaiz* about a league up-river. First the patch of a square sail, half furled, showed in the moonlight and then the blunt bow of the small bark—that was a large ship on the Volga. A great lantern on the break of the after-deck gave the light that Charny had seen at first. Little air was stirring, and the ship barely had steerage way in the current. A sailor in the bow

took soundings steadily, for the shifting channel and submerged islands made the river treacherous.

"*Hail!*" Vash stood up to hail. "Who commands there?"

"Keep off, you swine!" retorted the leadsman.

Heads began to show along the rail. Light came from the ports of the after castle, and the light wail of a violin ceased. Some one shouted at the skiff in Russian, and a sailor repeated it.

"Have you a message?"

"Aye, so. There is danger down by the islands."

"Come over the side. The serene, mighty lord will speak to you."

At a word from Vash the Gypsy swung the boat in, and the Cossacks hauled themselves up by a rope to the shrouds.

They dropped over the rail and stopped, surprised. A seaman held a blazing pine torch close to their heads, and a half dozen soldiers in helmets and breastplates pointed long pistols at them. Behind these guards stood three officers—one the stout Muscovite ship's captain, another a young ensign in a green uniform, and the third a dry little man who held himself stiff as the gold-headed cane he carried.

"Halt!" he snapped, and put a round piece of glass in his eye to look at them. He said something they did not understand, and the green ensign translated.

"Tell your names, occupations, your master's name and your business upon the river. But first lay down your swords on the deck. It is forbidden to come over the side with small arms."

Instead Charny took a step forward.

"Allah! We have come to warn you."

The officer of the eyeglass gave a second command, and the ensign explained:

"I shall count four, and if at the count of four you have not laid down your weapons my men will shoot you. Come now, fear God! One—two—"

The Cossacks exchanged glances. On land they could have run for it, but here on the cramped deck with the water behind them they were helpless. With a mutter of anger Vash drew his saber and dropped it, while Charny laid his down silently. The ensign picked up the weapons, and the guards lowered their pistols.

It seemed to the Cossacks as if the men on the *Kniaz* were marionettes, bobbing up and down at the pull of invisible strings. First he of the eyeglass snapped out words, then the green ensign sang them out like a parrot, and the seamen ran about or barked answers. Vash peered over the bow and saw that they were approaching the dark blur of the wood where lay the Gypsy raft.

"Look here, Excellencies," he exclaimed, "the devil himself is squatting down behind that bend. Only listen—"

Hastily he told of the meeting with Kolmar and his armed band, of the watch fire and the tidings of the Gypsies.

"May the hangman light my path if they aren't red hands—pirates. If you don't want your hides ripped, keep to the other side of the islands until you are past the fire."

The dry little man glared behind his glass and snapped out questions as a sap log shoots sparks. He ordered Makara and her brother up from the skiff and questioned them without result, because the Gypsies were afraid of the officers.

"What was the name of the leader of this band?" he demanded finally.

"Kolmar, lord lieutenant of Astrakhan," Vash made answer.

The green ensign scowled.

"That is a lie. Here stands his High Well-Born Excellency, Franz, Count of Fugenwald, who has been appointed Lord Lieutenant of Astrakhan by his Imperial Majesty, the Czar of All the Russias."

And he pointed to the erect little German, listening respectfully as Fugenwald rattled forth more long words.

"Moreover, his Excellency says to you that he entertains suspicion aroused by your coming. His Excellency has been warned against the outlaws of the Volga, and he has taken steps to resist them. These four carronades—" the ensign pointed to two pairs of twelve-pounders in position in the waist of the ship—"are charged with chain shot and iron. My twelve men of the Moscow *strelsui* are armed with pikes and pistols, and the twenty members of the crew have swords and axes."

"But for God's sake, go outside the islands. Look!"

Vash pointed at the tree-covered islets dead ahead of the *Kniaz*. But when the ship's captain turned inquiringly to Fugenwald, the German ordered him to keep to the inner channel, to pass close to the fire on the mound. Two seamen swung the long tiller over, and the *Kniaz* turned sluggishly toward the land. Fugenwald and the captain went aft to join a young Russian woman who appeared, wrapped in her cape, at the break of the poop.

"A lady!" muttered Vash. "Give us our swords and let us go."

The ensign shook his head.

"Nay. You two mangy dogs won't sneak off until we find out what your game is. If anything happens here, you'll be hung up on hooks as a warning to lawless men." He went to the rail to stare at the fire. "Eh, there are people signaling."

"What will they do?" Charny whispered.

It was the first time he had ventured on the deck of a ship and he did not like it.

"God knows." Vash spat out his sunflower seeds morosely. "These guards are militia—captain's a Russian—commander's a German, and the lady's his wife."

He looked around into the unfriendly faces of the pikemen, several of whom still stood by the Cossacks with drawn

pistols. No love was ever lost between the Cossacks and the Moscovite militia. Unseen by the men, Makara slipped away along the rail and vanished into the darkness of the cabin passage.

By now the *Kniaz* was almost abreast the fire and drawing in toward shore. Fugenwald was holding a spyglass to his eye. Charny climbed up on the spars amidship to see better.

IN THE firelight on the bank the two women, the priest and the boyars waved and shouted at the ship. One of the men ran down the mound, as if to throw himself into the water. And the cries of the women became distinct.

"Aid! Aid for the lost! Take us in, good people!"

The Countess Fugenwald was urging her husband to send ashore for these castaways who looked like nobles.

"In God's name!" The voice of the priest came over the water. "We were seized and robbed by lawless men. We have nothing left."

Shading his eyes from the lantern-light, Charny studied the shore. The chests had vanished, and there was no sign of Kolmar or his men. Nor could he see any trace of the long boats. He glanced around for Makara, but she had disappeared.

Then came a rumble and splash from the bow of the *Kniaz*. The anchor was down, and the bark turned slowly in the channel, until the sail flapped lazily and it brought up, opposite the fire.

"What now?" Charny demanded.

"The've tied the vessel. They're going to send a small boat to the shore to talk to our friends. Hi—wait!"

But the tall Cossack was down from the spars and up the after-deck ladder with long strides. Grasping the burly ship's master by the arm, he swung him round.

"Eh, haven't you a nose to smell a trap? Loose the boat. Take a whip to her."

Removing his clay pipe from his bearded lips, the Moscow captain pointed with it toward the rail. Seamen stood by the two port carronades with lighted matches in their hands. The pikemen, fully armed, manned the rail, where torches smoked and flared.

"Where's the trap?" the captain growled. "You've been licking the pig this night, my lad."

"He wished to turn us aside from rescuing these poor souls," echoed the Russian lady. Pearls glimmered softly on the collar that bound her throat.

Charny went to the rail and stared down. With two sailors, the young ensign was entering Makara's skiff to go to the shore to bring off the priest and the nobles. The ensign stood up, as the skiff pushed into the forest of rushes as high as a man's head along the shore.

And then with a splash a length of the rushes fell down. Orange flashes lighted the faces of the ensign and the two sailors as firearms roared and smoke swirled. A man screamed, and two portions of the rushes began to move toward the side of the *Kniaz*, a stone's throw away. Down in the gloom between the fire on the shore and the torches on the ship the two dark shapes drew nearer with oars swinging at their sides, and men tearing apart the screen of rushes that had hidden the two longboats. But the bodies of the ensign and the two seamen were visible, sprawled in the skiff.

"*Sarin na kitchka!*" voices roared from below. "Death to the white hands!"

Then the pirates were alongside the bark, throwing grapnels over the rail, clutching at the shrouds. Pistols blazed up from the *saiks*, and powder wreaths dimmed the torches.

"O Mary, Mother!" cried the Russian woman.

The captain let fall his pipe, shouting hoarsely. No one had fired the cannon, which could not have damaged the boats beneath them. Fugenwald, with an oath,

clutched at his sword. But his commands, in German, went unheeded.

Something cold and hard was thrust against Charny's hand, and he gripped the hilt of his saber. Makara had brought it to him, her dark eyes aflame with excitement.

"Strike, Cossack!"

It passed through Charny's brain that even the Gypsies could not fly from the ship. They were all in it together.

"Down with the torches! Shoulder to shoulder. Strike, lads!"

His voice cut through the tumult, as a sailor with a torch staggered and dropped, his face smashed in with an ax. The remaining torches were hurled down into the *sails*, leaving only the great lantern and the moonlight.

"Back from the rail, you dog-brothers," Vash roared. "Behind the spars with you, bull-tails!"

The Muscovite pikemen, after discharging their pistols into the gloom—their eyes had been dazzled by torchlight—were struggling clumsily at the rail, their long-shafted weapons of little use against the short pikes and knives of the Volga outlaws. Some of the sure-footed sailors were making good play with axes, but the pirates were coming over the rail with a rush.

Kolmar appeared in the shrouds, pistol in one hand, sword in the other.

"Slash the white hands, lads," he laughed. "Ho, women and gold for a frolic!" And, throwing back his head, he howled like a wolf.

Charny had been snorting and stamping with growing eagerness. This fighting at hands' strokes was to his liking.

"Make way for a Cossack!" he called, vaulting the poop rail. "*U-hal!*"

With both knees and the hilt of his sword he struck a Volga man, knocking him to the boards and slashing his body open below the ribs as he rose, dodging the thrust of a pike. The shaggy *burlak* raised the short pike to throw it, but

the Cossack's saber whizzed, and the curved blade took off the man's hand.

"*U-hal!*" Charny's war shout rose. "Come down, wolf, and you will howl!"

Kolmar had seen his two men fall, men of the *Kniaz* rallied to Charny's leadership. He hurled the pistol that he had just fired and jumped down into the clear space between the end of the spars and the after-deck. Snarling, he made at Charny, swinging a heavy cutlass.

Twice he cut at the Cossack's head, and twice he was parried. They were under the lantern, their backs guarded by their men on either side.

When Kolmar felt the weight of the Cossack's blade, he crouched warily.

"Fool," he called softly. "There's gold and gear under your hand. Come over to us. To the fish with the white hands!"

But Charny's saber flashed about his head, dripping blood.

"Your head will go first to the fish," he retorted, laughing.

The voice of Kolmar was the voice of a nobleman, and Charny was not minded to trust a voice any longer. He leaped back as the cutlass swept inside his blade, the point tearing across his chest. Instantly the leader of the outlaws cut down at his knees, and Charny jumped.

"Ho, the Cossack dances!" Kolmar shouted, pressing him.

A pistol roared near Charny, and he had the stench of powder in his throat. He parried a cut, and twisted his blade about Kolmar's cutlass, locking the hilts and thrusting up. For a moment the two men strained, shoulder to shoulder, steam rising from Kolmar's yellow head. His utmost strength could not force down the Cossack's arm. But his free hand felt at his belt and rose with a knife.

Charny saw the thrust of the knife, felt the steel rip over his shoulder—and wrenched himself free. Kolmar's cutlass slashed down at him, but struck harm-

lessly against his side, all the force taken from the blow. For the Cossack's blade got home first on the man's bare head, splitting it above the jaw.

Kolmar dropped to his knees, when Charny struck again, severing the spine behind the ears, cutting the head from the body.

"Here's for you, red hands," he called, and caught the smoking head from the boards to hurl it among the Volga men.

A Kalmuk ran at him, but a stocky figure brushed him aside. Vash fought off the Kalmuk, shouting:

"*U-ha*—the Cossacks are dancing. Join in, brothers."

The rush of the outlaws had been stopped at the spars, while the rest of the crew had had time to come up. Some of the armored Muscovites were down, and the rest were fighting with desperation, seeing death at hand. Sight of their leader's head flying through the air brought the Volga men to a stop, and when Charny and Vash pressed around the end of the spars they gave way.

"Come on, dog-brothers," Vash urged.

The curved swords of the Cossacks rose and fell. The outlaws, leaderless, began to drop into the boats. Some leaped the rail, into the water, and climbed into the *saiks*, and in a minute they were clear of the deck, except for the groaning wounded who were soon silenced by the axes of the crew. Mercy was unknown on the Volga.

From the *saiks* the outlaws retreated to the mound, beyond pistol shot. Charny was sitting, panting, on an overturned keg, when he saw Fugenwald striding past and heard a command. With a blinding flash and roar the two carronades were fired, the chain shot and scrap iron sweeping the knoll, scattering the surviving outlaws into the darkness. Only the bodies of three or four men were visible by the fire.

"Eh—" Vash grinned—"his High Mighty Excellency is starting to fight

when everything's over. But it was you, you dog-brother, who sent the red hands off howling."

"THE head," Count Fugenwald explained precisely, "of the man Kolmar has been identified as that of a renegade and a river slayer who has shed blood like water in the northern district. From the scene of his crimes he fled into the steppe. He had the wit of a noble and the cruelty of a Kalmuk. It is apparent now that he laid a trap for this ship, dressing up five of his followers—for two women came with him into the steppe—in the garments of others he had put to death. So, by the discipline of my militia and the destructive fire of my two carronades, we are victorious over the notorious Kolmar and his band."

Approvingly he tapped his eyeglass on the paper in front of him. He was seated on the after-deck, and the morning mist was clearing away from the *Kniaz*, still at anchor in the river, gray under the first light.

Behind him in place of the dead lieutenant stood the Russian ship's master who translated his Excellency's words to the two Cossacks who stood before him, silent but with restless eyes.

For an hour the whole ship had been ransacked for the jeweled collar and other valuables of the countess, which had disappeared during the tumult. Nothing had been found.

"However," went on the count, "you two lads bore yourselves well. I commend you and reward you—so!"

He picked up the paper which bore his seal and folded it, handing it to Vash.

"I have written," he explained, "to his Excellency the governor of Zarit to free you, Vash, from patrol duty and bestow upon you the ranking of sergeant in his Excellency's town guard. As for you, Charny, you have assured me that you have no duty except that of caring for his Excellency's horses. So I have sug-

gested that you be raised from groom to master of the Zarit stables."

Vash turned the paper in his hands uneasily and passed it to Charny, who looked at it thoughtfully and tucked it into his belt. Both Cossacks were looking over the side, where a log raft was drifting slowly past the *Kniaz*. Behind the raft floated a skiff, and on the raft stood two horses, stamping restlessly. One was a black charger, the other a piebald pony, and their saddles had been removed. Charny nudged Vash, who found his tongue at last.

"We thank your High Well-Born Excellency," he said eagerly, "and we accept the letter joyfully. But we wish to be sent off in a skiff to that raft. Look, our horses are waiting for us there."

Fugenwald glanced through his glass and nodded amiably. After all, he would come to Astrakhan with a reputation.

The Cossacks climbed down into the skiff with alacrity. A few moments later they leaped from it to the raft, shouting farewell to the Russian seamen who headed back into the current.

"Now, you old son of a dog," Vash exclaimed to the anxious Yamalian, "you wanted to get away with our horses."

"As God lives, I heard you were dead."

"In a sow's ear, we were. Makara saw us on our legs."

"But the shore, my Falcon, it was a-swarm with outlaws. Truly, I saved the horses for you."

Vash grunted and turned to confront the Gypsy girl, who had come out from the thatch cabin to look at Charny.

"Eh, little hawk, where have you hidden the pearls you snatched from that Russian dove?"

Indifferently Makara glanced at him; but her dark eyes glowed as she stepped before Charny, the wind whipping her dark hair about her throat.

"Will you take—pearls?" she whispered.

Charny smiled down at her.

"Nay, keep the pearls, little Makara. Pearls for a sword. Now I have had enough of the water. My road is on the land. Swing over, Yamalian, swing east."

When they had saddled the horses, and Charny had landed at a point on the east bank of the Volga, Vash followed him, leading the piebald pony.

"How will you get back again?" Charny asked.

The stocky Cossack pulled at his mustache reflectively.

"Then you're not going to Zarit—" he grinned—"to be master of the stables?"

Charny shook his head and drew Fugenwald's letter from his belt, handing it to his companion.

"Not I. You take it."

"I'm not going back. Too many lords and officers. I'll draw my rein with yours, you brother of a dog." Vash stepped to the river's edge and tore the seal from the paper. Then he tore the paper into pieces and scattered them over the water. "Now they can't make me sergeant of the militia."

Charny laughed joyously.





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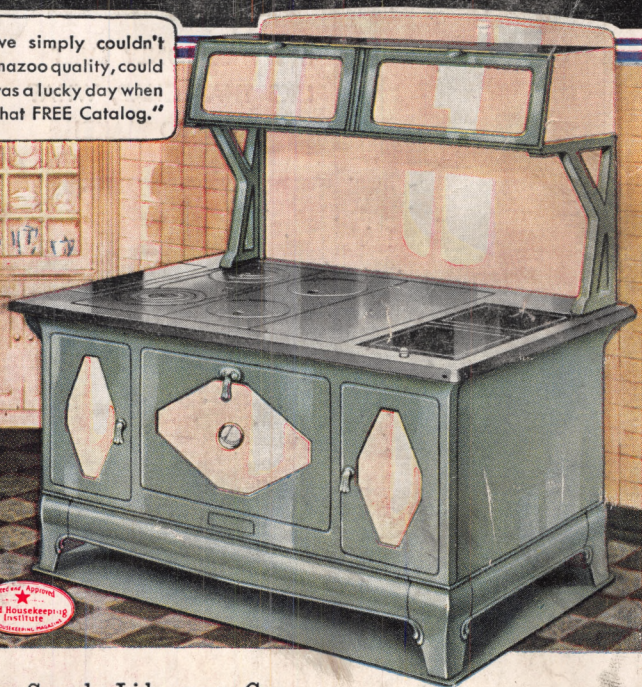
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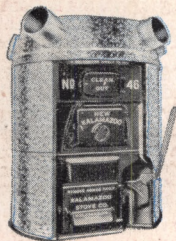
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