

PARDNERS—A novelette by **James B. Hendryx**
OPEN AND SHUT—**William Patterson White**

Short Stories

March 10th

Twice A Month

25c

THE GOLDEN GETAWAY

A
Complete
Novel by

**George
Allan
England**

Part I

**The Cattle King
of Little Egypt**

A new serial by

**Raymond
A.
Berry**



G.F.
WITTMAN
-50-

Short Stories

**THE BIGGEST AND BEST
ADVENTURE MAGAZINE**



*Book-length novels,
novelettes, thrilling
short stories*



THE LINE-UP FOR 1933

Stories of

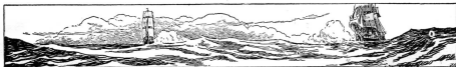
THE NORTH by *James B. Hendryx, Robert E. Pinkerton, B. W. Sinclair, etc.*

THE WEST by *Clarence E. Mulford, W. C. Tuttle, Charles Alden Seltzer, etc.*

THE EAST by *H. Bedford-Jones, J. D. Newsom, A. R. Wetjen, etc.*

THE SOUTH by *J. Allan Dunn, Jackson Gregory, L. Patrick Greene, etc.*

And these are only a few—the best man in each field of adventure writes for SHORT STORIES.



SHORT STORIES. Issued semi-monthly by DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & COMPANY, INC., and entered as second-class matter at the Post Office, Garden City, N. Y. YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION PRICE—In the United States, Mexico and American Possessions, \$2.96 per year; in Canada, \$5.50; and to all other foreign countries in the Postal Union, \$6.00; price payable in advance, and including postage.

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Give me your measure and I'll PROVE You Can Have a Body like Mine!

I'LL give you PROOF in 7 DAYS that I can turn you, too, into a man of might and muscle. Let me prove that I can put layers of smooth, supple, powerful muscles all over your body.

If you are underweight I'll add the pounds where they are needed and, if you are fat in any spots, I'll show you how to pare down to fighting trim.

And with the big muscles and powerful, evenly-developed body that my method so quickly gives you, I'll also give you through-and-through health—health that digs down into your system and banishes such things as constipation, pimples, skin blotches and the hundred-and-one other conditions that rob you of the good times and the good things of life.

Here's All You Do!

Just jot down your name and address on the coupon below, mail it to me—and I'll send you, absolutely free, a copy of my new book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It reveals the secrets that changed me from a 97-pound, flat-chested weakling into a husky fellow who won the title of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" against all comers! And it shows how I can build you into an "Atlas Champion" the same easy way.

I haven't any use for apparatus that may strain your heart or other vital organs. I don't dose you or doctor you. Dynamic-Tension is all I need. It's the natural, tested method for developing real men inside and out. It distributes added pounds of powerful muscles over your body, gets rid of surplus fat, and gives you the vitality, strength and pep that win you the admiration of every woman and the respect of any man.

NOTE: No other Physical Instructor in the World has ever DARED make such an offer

Charles Atlas

The 97-pound weakling who became the holder of the title:

"The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"—won in international contest against ALL strong men willing to compete with him.



Charles Atlas As He is Today.

Gamble a Stamp—To Prove I Can Make YOU a New Man!

Gamble a stamp today by mailing the coupon for a free copy of my book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It tells you all about my special Dynamic-Tension method, and what it has done to make big-muscled men out of run-down specimens. It shows you, from actual photos, how I have developed my pupils to the same perfectly balanced proportions of my own physique, by my own secret method. Was my system did for me, and those hundred of others it can do for you too. Don't keep on being only 25 or 50 percent of the man you can be! Find out what I can do for you.

Where shall I send your copy of "Everlasting Health and Strength"? Put your name and address down on the coupon, and mail it today. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept., 10-6 123 East 23rd Street, New York City.



CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 10-6
123 East 23rd Street, New York City.
I want the proof that your system of Dynamic-Tension will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name.....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address.....

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

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Beware Kidney Acids As Your Age Advances

Sleep Fine—Feel Years Younger—Make Guaranteed Cystex Test

As the years advance our Kidneys often fail to function properly and many feel run-down, old and wornout. No man or woman can afford to lose energy and slow down because of Getting Up Nights, Backache, Leg Pains, Nervousness, Lumbago, Neuralgia, Dizziness, Frequent Day Calls, Dark Circles Under Eyes, Headaches, Frequent Colds, Stiffness, Muscular Aches, Burning, Smarting, and extreme Acidity, due to poor Kidney and Bladder functions, without testing the most modern, guaranteed medicine for these troubles.

Thousands of men and women are discovering the refreshing pleasure of sleeping fine and feel years younger by combating poor Kidney and Bladder functions with a Doctor's prescription called



Cystex (pronounced Siss-tex). This guaranteed medicine works so fast it circulates through the system in 15 minutes, often giving amazing benefits in 24 to 48 hours. The secret of its great success is its double action of aiding the Kidneys in their function of filtering and purifying the blood, thus reducing Acidity, and in soothing and toning sore, irritated Bladder and urinary membranes.

If you are losing pep or made miserable by poor Kidney and Bladder functions, don't worry and lose time. Get Cystex from your druggist today under the fair-play guarantee to fix you up to your complete satisfaction or money back on return of empty package. Cystex is only 75c and must do the work or cost nothing.

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If you suffer from sour stomach, gas, bloating, bad breath, coated tongue, dizziness, heartburn, poor sleep, heart pressure, or biliousness, due to stomach acidity, don't take soda. It only makes matters worse. Thousands of sufferers say that the greatest medicine in the world for these troubles is Dioxet. It checks stomach acidity in 15 Minutes and thus stops pain and distress

and soon aids nature in restoring normal functions so that you can eat and drink what you like and sleep fine. Try Dioxet under the fair-play plan to fix you up to your satisfaction or money back on return of empty package. Only 50c. If your druggist can't supply you, write The Knox Co., Kansas City, Mo.

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G.H. Brooks, Inventor

Why worry and suffer with that rupture any longer? Learn about my perfected invention. It has brought ease, comfort and happiness to thousands by assisting in relieving and curing many cases of reducible hernia. It has Automatic Air Cushions which bind together as you would a broken limb. No obnoxious

springs or pads. No salves or plasters. Durable, cheap. Sent on trial to prove it. Beware of imitations. Never sold in stores nor by agents. Write today for full information sent free in plain, sealed envelope.
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\$5,000 WILL BE PAID TO ANYONE WHO PROVES THAT THIS

is not the actual photo of myself showing my superb physique and how the Ross system has increased my own height to 6 ft. 3 1/4 inches

Hundreds of Testimonials. Clients up to 45 years old gain from 1 to 6 inches in a few weeks!

No Appliances—No Drugs—No Dieting
ROSS SYSTEM NEVER FAILS. For Ten Dollars Complete
Correcting Testimony and Particulars 6 cents stamped.
"Allow time for return mails across the Atlantic!"
G. MALCOLM ROSS, Patent Specialist
Scarborough, England, (P. O. Box 18)



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PANTS MATCHED TO ANY SUIT

DON'T DISCARD Your OLD SUIT

Wear the coat and vest another year by getting new trousers to match. Tailored to your measure. With over 100,000 patterns to select from we can match almost any pattern. Send vest or sample of cloth today, and we will submit FREE sample of best match obtainable.
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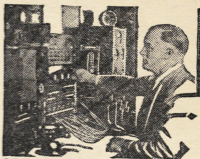
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to Learn at Home
to fill a
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Radio Job



**SPECIAL Radio Equipment
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Given Without Extra Charge**

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With N. R. I. equipment you learn to build and thoroughly understand set testing equipment—you can use N. R. I. equipment in your spare time service work for extra money.

I have doubled
and tripled the
salaries of many.
Find out about
this tested way
to **BIGGER
PAY**



FILL OUT AND MAIL
THIS COUPON
TODAY

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 3CA2
Washington, D. C.

I want to take advantage of your offer. Send me your Free Sample Lesson and your book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." I understand this request does not obligate me.

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY STATE

"R"

**Here's
Proof**



**Made \$10,000
More in Radio**
"I can safely say that I have made \$10,000 more in Radio than I would have made if I had continued at my old job."
VICTOR L. OSGOOD
St. Cloud Ave.,
West Orange, N. J.



**Jumped from \$25
to \$100 a week**
"Before I entered Radio I was making \$25 a week. I earned \$110 in one week servicing and selling Radios. I owe my success to N. R. I. You started me off on the right foot."
J. A. VAUGHN
Grand Radio & Appliance
Co., 2107 S. Grand Blvd.,
St. Louis, Mo.



**\$500 extra in 6
months**
"In looking over my records I find I made \$500 in my spare time in 6 months. My best week brought me \$107. I have only one regret regarding your course, I should have taken it long ago."
HOYT MOORE
R. R. 3, Box 919,
Indianapolis, Ind.

Clip the coupon and mail it. I'm so sure I can train you at home in your spare time for a big pay job in Radio that I'll send you my first lesson free. Examine it, read it, see how clear and easy it is to understand. Then you will know why many men with less than a grammar school education and no technical experience have become Radio Experts and are earning two to three times their former pay as a result of my training.

**Many Radio Experts Make
\$50 to \$100 a Week**

In about ten years the Radio Industry has grown from \$2,000,000 to hundreds of millions of dollars. Over 500,000 jobs have been created by this growth, and thousands more will be created by its continued development. Many men and young men with the right training—the kind of training I give you in the N. R. I. course—have stepped into Radio at two and three times their former salaries.

Get Ready Now for Jobs Like These
Broadcasting stations use engineers, operators, station managers, and pay up to \$5,000 a year. Manufacturers continually employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, service men, buyers, for jobs paying up to \$5,000 a year. Radio operators on ships enjoy life, see the world, with board and lodging free, and get good pay besides. Dealers and jobbers employ service men, salesmen, buyers, managers, and pay up to \$100 a week. My book tells you about these and many other kinds of interesting Radio jobs.

**Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a Week
Extra in Spare Time
Almost at Once**

The day you enroll with me I send you material which you should master quickly for doing 28 Radio jobs common in most every neighborhood, for spare-time money. Throughout your course I send you information for servicing popular makes of sets! I give you the plans and ideas that have made \$200 to \$1,000 a year for N. R. I. men in their spare time. My course is famous as the course that pays for itself.

**Television, Short Wave, Talking
Movies, Money-Back Agreement
Included**

Special training in Talking Movies, Television, and Home Television experiments, Short Wave Radio, Radio's use in Aviation, Servicing and Merchandising Sets, Broadcasting, Commercial and Ship Stations are included. I am so sure that N. R. I. can train you satisfactorily that I will agree in writing to refund every penny of your tuition if you are not satisfied with my Lesson and Instruction Service upon completion.

You Don't Risk a Penny

Mail the coupon now. In addition to the sample lesson, I send my book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It tells you where the good jobs are in Radio, what they pay, tells you about my course, what others who have taken it are doing and making. This offer is free to all residents of the United States and Canada over 15 years old. Find out what Radio offers you without the slightest obligation. ACT NOW!

**J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Dept. 3CA2 Washington, D. C.**

The Famous Course That Pays For Itself

I'll give away this Fortune



\$6000.00

in Cash Prizes

I'M GOING TO GIVE \$3,500.00 CASH to some deserving man or woman; \$1,000.00 to another; \$500.00 to a third; \$200.00 to a fourth—25 Big Cash Prizes in all, totaling \$6,000.00, and 200 additional Grand Prizes worth Hundreds of Dollars. Every month I am distributing many, many other rewards worth hundreds and thousands of dollars. Sounds too good to be true?

Think What \$3,500.00 Would Mean In Your Life!
\$3,500.00 ALL CASH—to spend as you like. Your worries gone—Your dreams come true. All the joy and happiness you have been longing for—over night. Probably you would start in business—buy a home—pay a mortgage—or invest this money for greater opportunities—\$3,500.00 Cash would give you a flying start toward the better things in life!

HUNDREDS HAVE WON

Throughout the past year we have given away hundreds and thousands of dollars in Big Cash Prizes—in all parts of the United States. It's Your Opportunity to Win—NOW!



Mrs. Elizabeth Grizka, New York, won over \$1,500.00. She writes: "... the squarest firm I ever dealt with."



Joe Walsh, a minor in Pennsylvania, won \$4,700.00 in Cash Prizes.

Be Prompt! \$100.00 Cash Certificate At Once!
 To make it worth your while to be prompt in sending your name—if you will see that your letter or postal card is postmarked not more than three days after you read this notice, I will send you a \$100.00 Cash Prominence Certificate AT ONCE, entitling you to an extra \$100.00 in Cash, should you be the fortunate winner of the First Grand Prize.

TOM WOOD, Manager

H-O Building Dept. A-400-D, Cincinnati, Ohio

so: We have a big manufacturing plant. We are one of the country's large distributors of famous Beauty and Household Products, and this stupendous Cash Distribution is a part of our nation-wide advertising campaign. Every dollar spent in this gigantic Cash Distribution will help make our products known in every community. This is our way of advertising.

YOU NEED ONLY SEND YOUR NAME

No house-to-house canvassing. It's not a "Good Luck" chance. No puzzles to solve. No names or stories to write. No experience is required. **Anybody may win.** Salesgirl, housewife or school teacher—mechanic, clerk or farm boy—everybody over 16 years of age has an opportunity. **YOU** have a real chance to win \$3,500.00 or any of 225 Big Grand Prizes.

Send no money, there's only one thing to do now

Just write your name and address on the coupon below and mail it in an envelope or paste it on a one-cent postal card. Many big fortunes have started with only a coupon, a name, and a postage stamp or postal. Send **YOUR** name today—**YOUR** fortune may depend just upon this coupon!

THIS COUPON may bring you a FORTUNE

TOM WOOD, Manager,
H-O Building, Dept. A-400-D, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Yes, tell me quickly, without any obligation or expense on my part, how I can win \$3,500.00 and enjoy happy, carefree days again.

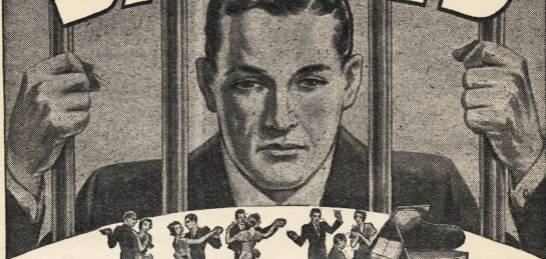
My name is

Address

Town..... State.....

Date I read this offer.....

BARRERED



—because he couldn't entertain

ARE you too, ruled out, barred from parties and popularity? You are probably just as attractive, interesting, clever as anyone else. Yet others always capture all the good times while you alone are left out in the cold.

Why? Find out why and the bars that shut you out will fade away and disappear. Most people who miss popularity are themselves to blame. Friends would invite you out if only you had something to add to the general gaiety. For that is why we have parties . . . to entertain each other.

And yet, so many think ability to entertain is a special talent. If you mention music (the greatest single factor in popularity) they say, "I can never learn to play. I'll need a private teacher. It will cost so much, and take so long. No, not for me."

They remain barred outsiders because they don't realize that no one need be a musical genius to learn to play . . . that thousands have acquired a musical education

without teachers, tremendous expense, tedious practicing and boring scales.

Forget Theories — Do What 600,000 Others Have Done

Already, six hundred thousand men and women have chosen this new method of learning music, many just as discouraged as you now. And every single one of them chose this method of learning to play their favorite instrument.

Most started towards popularity by coming across such an advertisement as this. At first they may have doubted that a way had been found to make learning to play easy and inexpensive instead of boring and costly.

But all proved to their own satisfaction that they could learn to play at home, without a teacher, in half the usual time, and at a cost of only a few cents a day!

Make up your mind to read this offer through. Take advantage of the opportunity it brings you, yet place yourself under no obligation . . . the offer that convinced over six hundred thousand that the U. S. School of Music Method was the ideal way to learn to play.

Send for Free Booklet And Demonstration Lesson

The U. S. School of Music will send you a complete, explanatory booklet and a Free Demonstration Lesson. All you promise is to read through both book and lesson—thoroughly. Nothing more, because once you see this booklet, you will be convinced that you, too, can learn to play your favorite instrument. You won't have to be urged. You will urge us to hurry your first lessons to you.

That's a fair offer, isn't it? You would be satisfied before you begin. If you want popularity, if you would like to be able to entertain and surprise your friends, to make real music—jazz or classical—roll from your finger tips the minute you sit down to play—ACT NOW! Mail this coupon today! No obligation. Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 863 Brunswick Building, New York City.

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC 863 Brunswick Bldg., New York City

Please send me your free book, "How You Can Master Music in Your Own Home," with inspiring message by Dr. Frank Crane. Free Demonstration Lesson and particulars of your easy payment plan. I am interested in the following course:

..... Have You Instrument?

Name

Address

City State

Pick Your Instrument

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Piano | Cello |
| Organ | Mandolin |
| Ukulele | Harp |
| Cornet | Saxophone |
| Trombone | Flute |
| Piccolo | Clarinet |
| Guitar | Viola |
| Hawaiian Steel Guitar | |
| Sight Singing | |
| Voice and Speech | |
| Culture | |
| Drums and Traps | |
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| Control | |
| Banjo (Plectrum, 5-String or Tenor) | |
| Piano Accordion | |
| Italian and German Accordion | |
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Plan Used by Famous Physician of Great Eastern University
in Curing Students . . . Now Given to
Rupture Victims Everywhere



Part of New Method . . .
Amazing Suction Cell Retainer . . .
Makes Cruel, Gouging Trusses
Unnecessary

Rupture Reduced In 30 Days ... OR NO COST!

HERE is great news for rupture victims. A two-fold rupture system has been developed, tested by thousands of people. It is based on the remarkable record made by Dr. Jay W. Seaver at a great eastern university, and a special new kind of way to support rupture. You do not have to wear leg wraps, torturous springs or cruel hard pads. Instead, Suction-Cell Retainer provides deep-tissue support for your rupture. A special offer is now being made to truss victims. That offer says that unless your rupture is actually and decidedly reduced in size within 30 days after wearing Suction-Cell Retainer, it does not cost you one penny. Read below the details of results accomplished by Dr. Seaver and then mail coupon immediately for free proof offer.

SCIENCE is every day making new accomplishments. Dr. Seaver's records have shown that he actually cured rupture among the students of the university in more than 7 out of 10 cases. Some of them were baseball players, some gymnastium performers and others athletes engaged in strenuous exercise. He not only freed them from having to wear trusses but allowed them to go ahead in their exercise. Now, thanks to another man widely experienced in rupture relief, the essentials of the Dr. Seaver methods are available to everyone,

with the radically different Suction-Cell Idea for retaining rupture.

Suction-Cell Retainer has nothing to do with medicines nor pastes, and can be used without cumbersome straps or elastics; weights but a few ounces and is not noticeable through the clothing. Rupture sufferers and people wearing it say they scarcely know they have it on.

But most important of all, when used according to instructions, it guards against the dangerous "coming down." What the wearing of Suction-Cell Retainer really means is best indicated by the extraordinary offer now made to send it to ruptured people for free proof use—with the understanding that unless it actually reduces the size of the rupture, during trial, there is not one cent of cost.

Every man or woman who is ruptured owes it to himself to find out immediately full details concerning this modern advancement in rupture relief. Authorities say that many victims face the grave dangers of strangulation, because their ruptures are never properly held. In many cases appliances worn actually cause this danger to be increased. Everyone who mails the coupon below is now be-

ing sent an interesting booklet on rupture; facts are given about the danger and cause of strangulation, the importance of proper replacement of rupture and other vitally interesting information.

You will also receive letters showing what the new methods have accomplished for people of every age in every walk of life—some of whom had been ruptured for more than a score of years. You will receive information about the methods as used by Dr. Seaver at the great Yale University and you can determine for yourself what they will mean to you.

Do not delay an instant. Mail the coupon now so that you will be entitled to the decidedly valuable **FREE PROOF OFFER** before it is withdrawn.

NEW SCIENCE INSTITUTE
8807 New Bank Bldg., Steubenville, Ohio

Mail FREE PROOF COUPON Immediately

New Science Institute,
 8807 New Bank Bldg., Steubenville, Ohio.

Send me at once free details of the Dr. Seaver method,
 Suction-Cell Retainer, and the Free Proof Offer which
 allows me to use Suction-Cell Retainer, with the under-
 standing that it must reduce my rupture within 30 days
 or it costs me nothing.

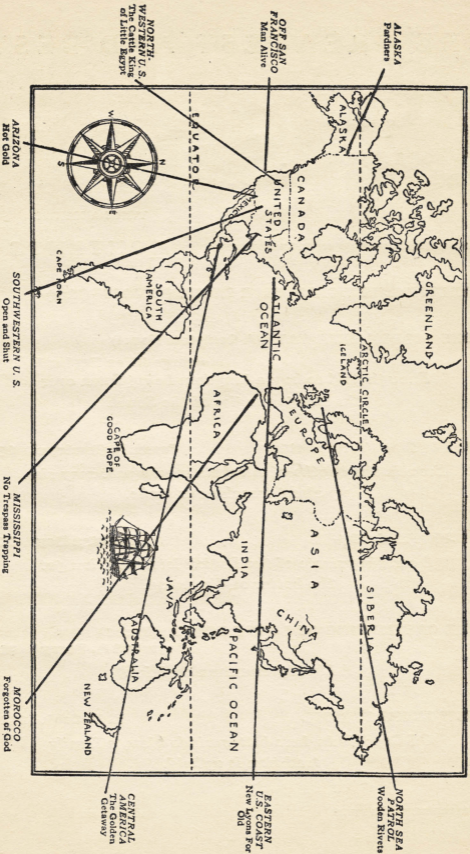
Name.....

Address.....

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

Mail FREE Proof Coupon Immediately

AROUND THE WORLD WITH SHORT STORIES



THE GREATEST AND BEST



Short

TWICE A MONTH

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*Enough gold to buy a kingdom being flown over
the savage jungles of the South*

PARDNERS (A Novelette)

James B. Hendryx 69

*Even in the depths of Alaska a man's past may rise
up along treacherous trails.*

FORGOTTEN OF GOD

Houston Day 85

*A certain private of the Legion lets ambition get
the better of discretion.*

THE CATTLE KING OF LITTLE EGYPT (Part 1)

Raymond A. Berry 92

A king by common acclaim.

NEW LYONS FOR OLD

B. E. Cook 121

*Off Cape Cod where bitter winds blow, a family
tradition is upheld.*

ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

Stories



HARRY E. MAULE, EDITOR

Title Registered in
U. S. Patent Office

MAR. 10th, 1933

NO TRESPASS TRAPPING **Raymond S. Spears 131**
All kinds of animals are caught along Old Mississipp'.

ADVENTURERS ALL **Lewis F. Lionvale 136**
Wooden Rivets.

HOT GOLD **H. C. Wire 138**
Remarks: Crack shot, cool headed. This man is OK.

MAN ALIVE! **Frank J. Leahy 144**
A deep-sea diver begins to believe in ghosts.

OPEN AND SHUT (A Novelette) **William Patterson White 153**
*To some folks ten thousand dollars for one cartridge
would seem like a fair trade.*

THE STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE **165**

OUTLANDS AND AIRWAYS **168**

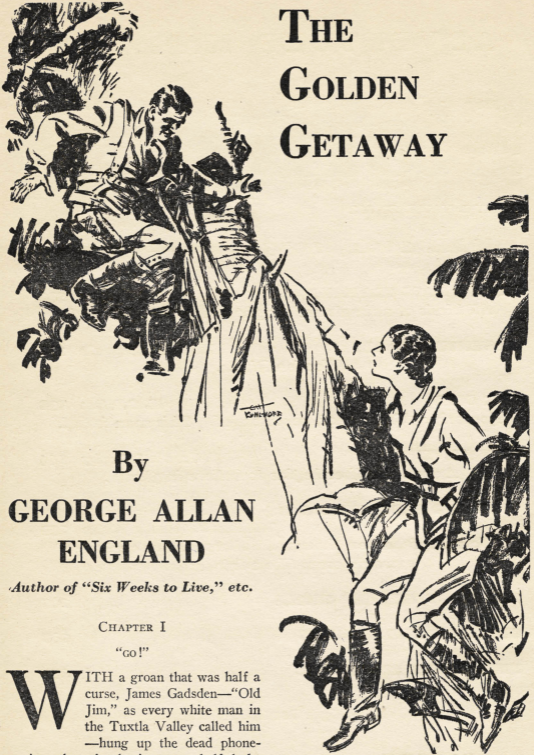
ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB **170**

COVER—Edgar Franklin Wittmack

Vol. CXLII, No. 5

Whole No. 653

THE GOLDEN GETAWAY



By
**GEORGE ALLAN
ENGLAND**

Author of "Six Weeks to Live," etc.

CHAPTER I

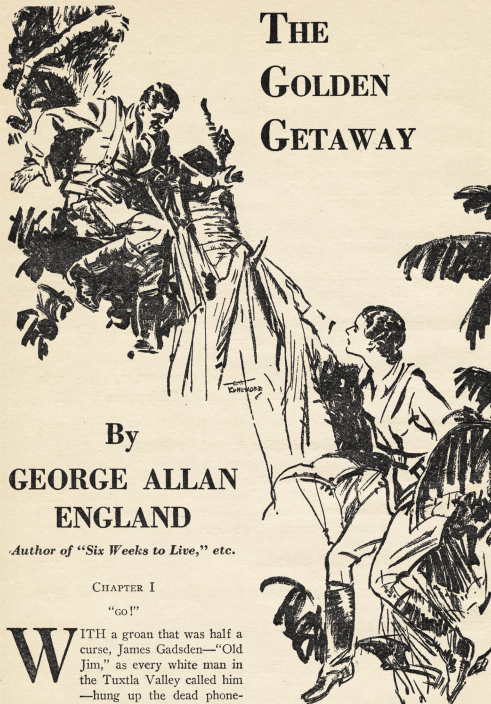
"GO!"

WITH a groan that was half a curse, James Gadsden—"Old Jim," as every white man in the Tuxtla Valley called him—hung up the dead phone-receiver there in the immense, half-darkened living-room of Las Palomitas Rancho. Dismay lurked in the gesture with which he tugged at his flowing white mustachios, and the sweat on his face was not all caused by the close, semi-tropic heat of

that sweltering late October afternoon, down there in the Republic of Eldoradia.

"Well, by Job, they've up and done it, after all!" he growled, turning eyes of anger on his daughter Janice and on young

THE GOLDEN GETAWAY



By
**GEORGE ALLAN
ENGLAND**

Author of "Six Weeks to Live," etc.

CHAPTER I

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*Only two—to fight fate and all the
evil jungle gods.*



Peter Barzil, the flyer. "I didn't think those hell-hounds would really have the infernal nerve to tackle American property. But I reckon El Tigre and his gaug of 'Liberators' have nerve enough for anything. They've sure cut our Los Pozos wire—last wire we had left!"

"Phone's gone, dad?" asked the girl, a little line of anxiety drawing down between her straight brows. "It's dead?"

"Deader than last year's revolution. I only wish this year's was dead, too!" Bodily the rancho shook his leonine head, on which had poured the sun of many a decade in this little four-by-five Central

American republic. "They're closing right in on us, the 'Liberators' are. El Tigre—the whelp's son!—is making good his threat. And the Rancho, here——"

"Entirely cut off, sir?" asked Peter.

"Absolutely!"

"Nice little revolution! Not so hot, eh?" And Peter's blue eye studied the long cheroot he held in his competent, sun-burned hand. A hardboiled-looking fellow, this Peter; a devil-may-care chap with freckles enough for half a dozen, and with hair that in certain lights burned downright red. Twenty-eight years of knocking about a world as adventurous as

*Only two—to fight fate and all the
evil jungle gods.*



Peter Barzil, the flyer. "I didn't think those hell-hounds would really have the infernal nerve to tackle American property. But I reckon El Tigre and his gang of 'Liberators' have nerve enough for anything. They've sure cut our Los Pozos wire—last wire we had left!"

"Phone's gone, dad?" asked the girl, a little line of anxiety drawing down between her straight brows. "It's dead?"

"Deader than last year's revolution. I only wish this year's was dead, too!" Bodily the rancho shook his leonine head, on which had poured the sun of many a decade in this little four-by-five Central

American republic. "They're closing right in on us, the 'Liberators' are. El Tigre—the whelp's son!—is making good his threat. And the Rancho, here——"

"Entirely cut off, sir?" asked Peter.

"Absolutely!"

"Nice little revolution! Not so hot, eh?" And Peter's blue eye studied the long cheroot he held in his competent, sun-burned hand. A hardboiled-looking fellow, this Peter; a devil-may-care chap with freckles enough for half a dozen, and with hair that in certain lights burned downright red. Twenty-eight years of knocking about a world as adventurous as

himself—of frolicking, fighting, and always coming back for more—had given him an unsentimental outlook on life; just as it had endowed him with a physical set-up that well filled-out his khaki shirt, cord breeches and leather leggings.

"By Judas!" he repeated. "This situation isn't so hot, at all. The Los Pozos wire—you say it's your last one?"

"That's right, Peter," nodded Old Jim. Though only two days had passed since Peter, on a good-will flight South, had swooped his biplane down on the Rancho, he was already no longer "Mr. Barzil" to the rancho. Because—well, because he wasn't at all the "Mister" kind. Now Old Jim went on: "And those buzzards of revolutionists will be swarming through Aguila Pass before night. Inside an hour, maybe. And here we are, trapped, with over a hundred thousand in gold coin on hand. Fine, eh? By damn!"

"Boy! How exciting!" laughed Janice. "We're going to have a regular battle, right here at the rancho?"

"Shhhhh!" her father commanded. "Let me think!"

"While you're thinking, sir," put in the aviator, "maybe I can allee samee do a little thinking of my own. How many men has this El Tigre got?"

"The devilish jackal claims over a thousand, and a fine lot of cut-throats and bandits they are, too. If every bad egg among 'em had to wear a white cap, they'd look like a flock of sheep."

"Ah, but I take it they're far from sheep, sir. More like wolves, eh? And a thousand of 'em. Hmhhh!" judged Peter.

"That may be all hot air. Probably five hundred effectives would come nearer it. That's enough, God knows!"

"And armed with——?"

"Rifles, machetes, knives—and an insatiable thirst for gold."

"I see. The last is a powerful weapon, sir. As defenders here on the rancho, you have——?"

"Hardly seventy-five men, all told. That's including the cooks, Chinks, servants, Japs, *mosos*, everybody. And our armament and ammunition—just odds and ends. So, with all this gold on hand——"

"They're wise to the gold, sir?"

"I reckon so. Must have been a leak, one way or another. Some damn traitor here at the rancho must have been spilling our *frijoles* all over the country. And now El Tigre and his mob are swarming down on us like buzzards on ripe meat. So—let's see, now—let's see——"

A MOMENT'S silence followed, heavy in the sultry stillness of mid-afternoon, in the half-dusk of the long living-room. Janice broke that silence:

"Listen, Dad! Why can't we barricade the ranch-house, here, stand siege and wipe 'em out as they come?" Her dark eyes gleamed with excitement. Color glowed in her cheek, under the creamy richness of her skin. "What a peach of a scrap we could put up, Dad! There's a lot of crack-shots on the Rancho, some of 'em almost as good as you. And as for me—well, if I can't pop a dozen or two of El Tigre's jackals before they——"

"Ah, but you aren't going to be here, Jan!" the rancho cut her short. "And the gold isn't, either. You'll be on your way over the Sierra Castillo, and gone!"

"Gone? Where to—and how?"

"How? By plane. Peter, here—he'll take you. Eh, Peter?"

"Of course, sir. But——" And a shadow crossed the flyer's face. His idea of girls was that they were all very well for an idle hour, but when it came to risky work, not so good. "Of course I'll do anything you want, sir. But all the same——"

"No 'buts' to it, at all! You'll fly my daughter and the gold to Puerto Quemado, over in San Nicador." Now the old rancho spoke with crisp authority. Already his nerves had steadied. He turned to the girl. "I'm not taking any chances with you, Jan!"

"Chances, Dad?"

"Yes, to put it mildly. If that hyena of an El Tigre wins here, he and his men will go on the loose. I know 'em, damn their black hearts! And when it comes to women——"

"If I go, you go too!" Passionately she clasped her father's arm. "I won't leave you here to get killed!"

"You'll do exactly as I say!" There in that hot dimness, lighted only from the patio, the rancher's face showed thin and brown, suddenly hard with unshakable decision. "Thank God for this chance to send you out! The way Peter dropped in here, on this Pan-American flight of his, is simply providential. We're going to use him!"

"But if there's a bit of a jamboree coming, sir," laughed Peter, "I'd awfully like to stick around and take a whirl at it, myself. You see, I've got my own private grudge against these 'Liberators.' I've had a run-in with 'em, already, and here's a chance to pay off. So——"

"No, no, no, it's all settled! On your way. And say, Peter—that gold——"

"Yes, sir? About how much will it weigh?"

"Around five hundred pounds. Exact value, \$112,500. Can you manage it?"

"Can do!" Peter declared. His big-toothed smile looked reassuring. "But why not plant it somewhere right on the ranch, here? After all, if we happen to crack up, it'll be better to know just where the gold is."

"If you crack up, with my girl, what use is the gold to me? But, nonsense, you won't crack!" He buffeted the young chap's shoulder. "With your air-record, I'd trust you to fly through hell, with tissue-paper wings. And anyhow, the gold can't stay here."

"Of course you know about El Tigre's ruling——"

"That no gold shall be taken out of Eldorado? Not even our own American coins? Rather! Just another scheme so that he and his bunch of robbers shall

have more to loot! Well, they shan't get my gold. The only metal El Tigre must find here is just what I told his messenger he'd get—cold lead!"

"Okay, sir. But if it was safely buried——"

"No, Peter, my boy. Some of my peons would slip word of it to El Tigre, if he captured the rancho. And then he'd torture me, to find out where, till I either gave up or died. No, no—the gold is going, too!"

"All right, sir," while Janice hung on every word. "It'll be a bit of a drag on the plane. I've only got a 500 H. P. Mailwing, but she's a willing bird. She'll make good."

"Fine! That's the way to talk. You've only got to make eleven thousand feet altitude, through Quetzaltenango Pass." And



Old Jim sharply slapped his hands together, thrice, to summon his *mayordomo* now waiting orders outside the door. "We'll fool El Tigre, yet! My cattle—yes, he'll probably get all he can drive off or butcher. But Janice, here, and our good yellow metal—by God, no!"

"Right, sir. Let's hop!"

OLD JIM began pacing the tiled floor, his deep-sunken eyes glowing with excitement.

"Now we *are* talking!" he exclaimed. "Load up with all the gas you can carry, from our truck-garage drums. What have you got for a shooting-iron?"

"My 8.5 Luger."

"That's a good one. I'll give you a Colt, too. Janice will pack her S. & W. And I'll put in a rifle, just in case—but there, you'll make the coast, all right."

"And then?"

"At Puerto Quemado, get in touch right

away with Lester F. Hall. American consul, you know. Put Janice and the gold in his hands. Tell him to shoot a wireless instantly to the U. S. Destroyer *Alfelden*, now lying at Bahía Pozonegro. That'll bring us a bunch of leathernecks, P. D. Q!"

"It will? Why, Bahía Pozonegro is over four hundred miles away, on the Pacific side!"

"I know. But the *Alfelden* can steam down to Río Asqueroso, forced draught, and send devil-dogs up the Río in launches, to within twenty miles of the rancho. That's our one best bet, Peter. We can probably hold out one day, here. Maybe longer. But there's not a second to lose. Get away!"

"Señor?" put in another voice; the dry, cracked voice of the *mayordomo*. A small, lean figure, there he stood just inside the door, huge sombrero in hand. A wizened little old man he was, who might have been any age between fifty and eighty; a brown old man, clad Indian-fashion in a faded blue cotton shirt, white knee-trousers, and rope-soled sandals.

TIO FAUSTINO ULLOA was his name, but nobody ever called him anything but Tío Tino, often shortened to "Titino." Now he was bowing, was asking in the Spanish patois of Eldoradia:

"The Señor, he does me the honor to summon me?"

"Yes, Titino. That gold—that payment for our September cattle-sales—get it out of the safe, at once." Titino knew the combination of that safe, as well as Old Jim did, himself. More than twenty years the *mayordomo*—for all he was a pure-blooded Maya Indian—had been Jim's right-hand man. Now the *ranchero* continued in the same Spanish that (like Janice) he used as fluently as he did English:

"Sack up the gold in buckskin bags. About ten kilos to a bag—a little over twenty pounds. There'll be around twenty-three bags." Listening intently, Peter understood the drift of it. His

Spanish, though a bit sketchy in spots, would serve for most every-day purposes. "Have all the gold carried out to the Señor Americano's *avión*. Understand?"

"*Divinamente, Señor*. And then——?"

"Put a Remington rifle in the *avión*, and plenty of ammunition. Also provisions and water for three days, in case of accident."

Titino crossed himself, to avert even the possibility of that. He asked, "The señorita also is going?"

"Yes. At once. That is all, Tino."

Silently the *mayordomo* withdrew, his sandals noiseless on the tiles and the thick panther-skins.

"Get ready, Janice!" Old Jim commanded his daughter. "And look lively. In half an hour you'll be on your way. Go!"

CHAPTER II

QUETZALTENANGO PASS

ROARING, the heavy-laden Mailwing took the air, after a long run across the broad meadow that stretched nearly a mile between the ranch-house and the foothills of the Sierra Castillo. At the stick, and sitting on his chute-pack, was Peter Barzil. The rear cockpit held Janice, with her chute strapped to her straight young back.

Though flying was no novelty to her, now the wine of a tremendous excitement pulsed in her arteries. This excitement for the moment overcame even her very lively fears about having to leave her father at the ranch——

"For you'll be doing me an infinitely greater service, going for help," had been his final word to her, "than just by staying here and shooting 'Liberators.' You'll be saving us all, don't you see? And the rancho, too. So, away with you, Jan. *Va con Dios!*"

Thus they had parted. And now as the plane took off, the thrill of this adventure strongly possessed her. That thrill took a keener edge, since in the baggage-com-

partment just behind her lay twenty-three buckskin sacks, each filled with about five thousand dollars in gold coin, part of it American, part Eldoradian.

As up, ever up and higher circled the droning plane—though all too slowly as if somehow unaccountably loggy—Jan's dark eyes gleamed. The spirit of youth and daring, itself, she laughed as the Mailwing whirled spiralling toward those formidable mountains, the passage of which challenged her.

BUT Peter Barzil did not laugh. Already anxiety was fingering at his stout young heart; not anxiety for the fate of the rancho, but for that of the plane—and with it, the girl's. For already it had become perfectly obvious to him that, due to some reason he could not fathom, his ship was performing far from well.

"Crate feels damn heavy!" Peter growled, adjusting his stabilizer for balance. Even with a passenger and all this gold, she ought to climb a whole lot better.

Anxiously he peered northeast at the jagged purple line of the Castillos, above which hung a billowing dazzle of cloud, and beyond which extended the sweltering and formidable lowlands of jungle, swamp and peril from wild beasts and wilder men. Over those mountains and across that deadly jungle he must fly, to the distant Caribbean and to Puerto Quemado. And if he failed to skim across that blocking barrier, or if the jungle claimed him—

"It'll be just too damn bad!" thought Peter.

The way his Mailwing was functioning, prospects looked far from brilliant. Though with a steady, ear-battering roar the Monsoon motor kept her steadily mounting as she spiralled into cooler air, her climb was far too slow. She handled with almost unmanageable unwillingness—tail-heavy even with her stabilizer in the extreme nose-heavy position.

All this greatly puzzled the flyer. He

had personally overseen the stowing of the supplies and the placing of the gold-sacks. "Is this confounded bus drunk or crazy, or am I? Or what the hell?"

UNCONSCIOUS of Peter's anxiety, Janice was now looking over the rim of the cockpit. What seemed a hurricane raged howling round her ears. That gale and the uproar of the motor deafened her. With keenest interest she watched the earth fading vastly far below. The plane itself seemed stationary. Only the huge bowl of the valley sank and drifted away, tip-tilted at improbable angles as it slowly rotated like a cosmic wheel.

How strange a world! Now the buzzards usually seen far aloft, were banking and volplaning away down there below. Through the heat-haze of the lower air, everything was hard to identify—meadows, corrals and sheds, palm-groves; the store, the vaqueros' quarters, even the sprawling red-tiled ranch-house with its patio and out-buildings.

Those tiny dots, scattered afar on that green billiard-table—could they be cattle at pasture? Those other and still more insignificant specks—human beings?

And one of those tinier atoms, could it be her father, the magnifico of Las Palomas? Janice thought she could catch a microscopic white flicker, as if something waved. But even of this farewell she could not be quite certain. And now, as she strained her eyes, she became aware that the tinier specks were all beginning to drift toward the ranch-house.

Running, they must be. Running—but why?

"The attack!" thought Janice. "It's already begun?"

Yes, that must be the answer. Some of El Tigre's advance-guard must have commenced invading through Aguila Pass. Over the cockpit coaming, Janice studied the hazy and diminished map below, behind the steady-quivering wings.

She located the Pass, strangely hard to find in that sun-dazzle. Though no sound

of firing won to her above the ear-stunning tumult of the motor, she could distinguish a scatter of tiny, white-cotton balls at the valley's rim. These snowy puffs drifted down-wind. Rifle-fire! El Tigre was driving in the vaqueros, was pressing onward toward the ranch!

BUT now all this was left behind. Directly ahead, as the plane straightened out, the immense flanks of the Castillos were looming up; vast, dim green expanses all folded and wrinkled like a giant's poncho flung in a heap.

Still far above the plane, that wilderness of peaks reared to the sky. Could the Mailwing clear those summits? Already, oppressed by her strange loggyness, she seemed unwilling to skim through even the lowest pass, the Quetzaltenango.

Yet she must push on, through that air growing thinner, cooler with each minute. What use, now, to turn back? Aboard, she had no bombs with which to shatter the "Liberators." The Mailwing, with Janice and the buckskin bags of gold, must—somehow or other, at whatever cost—be jockeyed over the top.

Now the mountain rim towered still far above, and the plane seemed to have reached her ceiling, seemed not to have even another yard of climb in her. Repeatedly as Peter tried to inch her stick back, she fell off.

Rather desperately Peter scanned the horizon. Was there no lower pass out of this damnable valley? True, Old Jim had told him this one, straight ahead, was the easiest outlet. But might not Old Jim be mistaken?

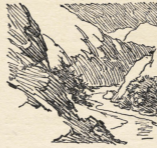
Now the sierra was swimming directly at them. Already near the timber-line, sparse woods were giving place to tremendous masses of bare gray rock, sprinkled with stunted bushes. Peter circled, gaining a little—trying to lift himself by his own boot-straps.

"Damn it, I need another thousand feet!"

He kicked right-rudder, pulled her into

a right turn. No lower pass, that way! A sharp rapping on metal caught his ear. Janice was trying to signal. Half-turning, he glimpsed her.

She was leaning out past the little celluloid windshield, shouting at him. The roaring tumult whipped her words away, but he could still lip-read something of her question



—
"What's wrong? Can't make it?"

"Not just yet!"

"I'll bail out!"

"God's sake, *no!* Dump the gold!"

"Never! The food and water?"

He nodded assent. Even though this would lighten the ship far less than jettisoning the gold, still it might turn the trick.

"Okay—out with 'em!"

She drew back into her cockpit and began heaving cargo overboard. As sacks and water-jars spun into the abyss, vanishing like runaway meteors in the forest tops far below, the Mailwing began slightly and unwillingly to respond.

Even the loss of only a hundred pounds somewhat boosted her ceiling. Slowly upward crept the altimeter pointer. Eight hundred feet more might put her over.

"And I'll jockey that out of her some way, by Judas, or I'll bust her wide open!"

PETER gave her left rudder, banked and came round once more, for all along to eastward he saw only higher peaks. Nothing to be gained by holding that course. Damn her, wouldn't she climb? So then, what? Drop the gold, or part of it? Five thousand dollars a bag—some ballast!

He confusedly figured he might have to chuck out thirty or forty thousand dollars' worth. That ought to do the trick. Yes,

but—Lord, if Janice only knew how to fly a plane, he'd bail out, himself; take a chance with forests, "Liberators" or what have you!

Gas! Why not dump some gas? The idea hit him a stinging blow. At last, a real solution! Provided always he didn't lose too much.

With a firm hand he pulled his dump-valve lever, that released the precious liquid. Caught and whirled into a spray by the slipstream, the gas glistened and reflected a rainbow as it fell.

Counting slowly, Peter eased his lever at the beat of four. Two hundred and twenty-five pounds gone. Great!

Ah yes, but—now the gauge showed only thirty gallons remaining. And ninety minutes, a hundred and fifty miles still to fly—provided they got over the range at all!

"Not so hot!" judged Peter.

Still, nobly the Mailwing responded. Up, ever up she climbed, her altimeter pointer mounting toward the 11,000 that Peter knew he had to reach. He sighted Quetzaltenango Pass; swung directly for it, in between two craggy peaks. Not yet had his bus made the necessary altitude, though at this rate a chance now existed.

A chance, yes; but could she hold this climb? Far below, the plane's shadow was jumping in fantastic loops and scallops along ravines, up cliffs, over tree-tops. Now it seemed to pause a second, then to surge onward.

WITH full gun roaring, Peter Barzil charged on through that high, cool air. The rocky V of the Pass swooped toward them. Individual crags, rocks, bushes emerged from the mad confusion of buttressed pinnacles; took menacing form. A lonely place to die! Peter thought he heard the girl shouting at him: "Can you make it?"

He turned his head, cried back at her: "Skin of our teeth!"

Then on both sides the Pass walls flanked them. Mailwing was batted in

cross-currents and air-pockets. Skimming like a gigantic hawk, she flicked leaves of bushes as she tore ripping through.

Suddenly the rocks dropped away. Those rocks fell, ridge beyond ridge, along the seaward slope of the sierra. The plane's nose swooped left and down, a hundred feet.

A second—and she had shot through the gap, was rocketing out over the jungle beyond.

To vast distances stretched diminishing mountains, down to the fever-hazed and deadly coastal plain.

There, infinitely far through a shimmer of furnace-heat, both sky-riders could just glimpse a long blue flatness that mistily gleamed in sun-glare—the Caribbean, the sea at last.

CHAPTER III

CRASHED!

JANICE laughed in triumph.

"Over!" shouted Peter to the blazing sky of late afternoon. "Over, by God!"

And he too laughed, even knowing that hardly a spare quart of gas remained, except perhaps—with the supremely best of luck—enough to reach the nearest port along that far-off, shining sea.

But the last laugh is the best, and now this last one lay with the malicious little devils always tangling and breaking the threads of human destiny. For hardly half an hour after having whirled out across the lowland jungle, the little devils had their will.

THOUGH still inexplicably tail-heavy and clumsy, the plane was making excellent time. Now far below her lay a very different country from the Tuxtla Valley and the Sierra Castillo; a country that seemed to quiver with green fire; a country to which the Mayas well gave their native name of "Metnal"—which is to say, Hell. Here, far and wide to vaguest horizons stretched a lush, poison-

ous, arsenical-green jungle of palms and ceibas, giant gum-trees, cedars and mahoganies, with all manner of huge, grotesque, tropical monstrosities. Still velvet-soft though their plumed tops appeared, in reality all those tufted, crooked trees were brandishing arms of deadly menace.

In case now of a forced landing or a crash, even to get down to the sodden earth, from the height of two or three hundred feet to which those jungle monsters soared, would in itself be a task difficult and hazardous in the extreme. And once down—down in those fever-stewing swamps, in those morasses and lagoons—what then? How make progress toward the sea; how escape the lurking caiman, the prowling black jaguar, the water-moccasin, the deadly cascabel-serpent and a hundred other venomous creatures? How circumvent the "bravos" and the "sublevados," or untamed Indians of the fever-belt?

Not easily were Peter Barzil and Janice Gadsden to be quit of this appalling wilderness, of this deadly jungle where Nature's seething crucible eternally boils and bubbles, transmuting life to death and back to life again; where Man dies like the tiniest insect of a million swarms.

There, as the plane swooped onward, no wisp of smoke indicated any human habitation. No hint of any clearing existed in all those heat-shimmering leagues. But none the less, men were there, unseen, beneath that matted forest room. Only a few men, wide-scattered throughout all

those immense expanses, yet none the less, men, and capable of infinite cruelties. Mayas they were, for the most part; *chicleros* or gatherers



of chicle for the world's chewing-gum markets.

There, unseen in the fever-sweltering vague gloom of that green hell, they were toiling in tiny and scattered camps of rude thatched huts. There they were living precarious and terrible lives, dying swift and unknown deaths; there their corpses could scarcely touch the ground before they were attacked, seized, disintegrated by furious and insatiable insect, bird or mammal gluttons.

From such a Gehenna, what hope of escape for any white man could exist?

A RAIN of gasoline shot suddenly back into Peter's face. Instantly he snapped the switch, cut off the ignition. Only too well he understood. The copper gas-lead had broken. Now raw, volatile gas was pouring down on the hot manifold. It was already spilling and spraying out over the wings.

Even with the switch cut, the overheated motor might torch off the liquid that now bathed wings and engine. A single spark—a puff of flame, and from mid-air the Mailwing would hurl down in swift fire-spirals.

"Got to bail out!" Peter shouted back at the girl, through a humming silence that seemed to ring in his ears. Speed now had gone out of his wings. The ship, sagging to a stall, nosed down with slowly-turning club like a lazy windmill in the air-pressure. "Go on, step off!"

"Oh! You don't mean—?"

"Shut up, and jump!"

Still she hesitated. Peter stood up and twisted round.

"Get out o' here!" he yelled. "Then pull the ring—but not too quick. Count three! That'll clear you from the ship. Out!"

He saw her staring at him through those oval-windowed goggles. Still she made no move.

"Say, what's the idea?" he taunted. His teeth showed in a grin, but it was a grin of rage. "God's sake, get out—or I'll come back there and chuck you out!"

Janice shouted something bitter, he

didn't know what, but she unbuckled her safety-strap.

"Count three—see you're clear!" shouted Peter. Now the ship was gathering tremendous speed in a steep nose-dive. "When I lift her nose, step off!"

"All right!" She crouched on the brink of nothingness. Pale to the lips, still she managed a laugh. "Here goes!"

Sharply he hauled back on the stick, pulling the plane into a powerless stall. The Mailwing's nose bucked up toward those sun-dazzled tropic clouds so high above. Beneath her wheels the far-off glimmering sea on dim horizons sank away.

"Now!" he yelled.

Snatching a glance round, he saw the flash of her going overside. Not a second too soon, with those hot sprays of gas ready at any second to roar into shrivelling flame.

Staring over, he saw something that spun down the void. That fall was very far from graceful. Head over heels and upside down, Janice catapulted off, sweeping away, shrinking to a toy mannikin.

Then suddenly a lovely white chrysanthemum blossomed against the vivid greenery. It shot astern.

Her 'chute had opened. For the moment at least, Janice was safe.

PETER unsnapped his belt and sprang up. He literally dived backward out of his cockpit, back past the plane's wallowing tail. Doubled like a jack-knife he hurled down through high blue space, a hundred feet a second.

One!

Reeling, the cosmos spun. A swift upward rush of air caught him by the throat. Everything became a blurred vortex.

Two!

Where was Janice? And the plane? He glimpsed it, reeling down the sky like a runaway rocket.

Three!

A hard tug. *Prrrrrrrup!* Taut fabric stretched, above him. With a jerk, his

harness snatched him short. Now he was swaying gently earthward.

Brain cleared. Senses steadied. Peter saw the girl's 'chute drifting down, far behind. Pulling a handful of shrouds, he spilled air, in an attempt to float a little nearer Janice. Swaying down the vacancy, down out of coolness into growing heat, he fell.

The riderless plane, already dwindling there to northwestward, drunkenly swooped. In a last dizzy spin she drove her nose vertically down. A second more and she would crash.

NOW the last glimpse of Caribbean had vanished as the jungle rose to blot it out. And their ship? Already far away, she suddenly nosed up into a stall. She fell in a reeling spiral. Peter saw her strike the vivid green forest roof and vanish.

One second she had been visible. The next, silently gone! Unbroken acid greenery swallowed her up with all her freight of gold.

Almost at the same instant Janice struck the treetops. Peter saw her parachute tangled on that deep-piled velvet. Beneath it, what might not have happened to the girl?

And what was happening to Peter? Now the tufted forest was sweeping up at him. The violent roar of a band of howler-monkeys, still unseen, flung angry discords up at him. Then as he hauled on some of his shrouds to steer his chute away from the menace of a gaunt, dead limb aiming to impale him, a heat-gust slewed him half-way round. He fell a-crash through a thick leafy screen. He caught, and dangled heavily, nearly three hundred feet in air.

HUNG by his harness and a spiderweb of silken strands above him, he pendulumed in a green gloom. By contrast with the blinding sun above, this strange half-light left him for a moment almost blind.

The shock of his suddenly-arrested fall, though not too severe, a moment confused him. But rallying almost at once, he began to see a little of the amazing environment into which he had been so swiftly plunged. All about him towered up gigantic trees, from which—contorted like serpents glimpsed in some horrible nightmare—descended writhing vines and streamers. Foul and miasmatic stench assailed him, a rotting dankness mingled with perfumes of aerial flowers that somehow appeared obscene. Over this stewing, steaming heat a brooding silence once more fell, poisonous with heavy implications.

Peter pulled himself together, found himself only a bit wrenched and bruised. No bones smashed—thank God! He took off his helmet, and now fully master of himself, strapped it to his belt. Peering down, he discovered that he could not see the earth at all. Below him appeared only an impenetrable tangle of interwoven confusion.

Peter took a deep breath and hailed, "Aho, there! Janice! You all right!"

Back presently drifted the faintest echo of an answer:

"All right, so far! Are you?"

"Okay! Can you get down?"

"On my way, already!"

At a considerable distance he heard a crackling, as of branches and foliage being broken, but he could see nothing of Janice. Vision would not pierce a hundred feet through that mad tangle.

"Careful, there!" Peter shouted. "This place is like prussic acid—one drop will kill you. Nice little place!"

"Oh, I'm all right!" her voice drifted back. "Lots of vines to grab. Bet I'll get down before you do!"

"Lord, what nerve!"

His own nerve had to be confoundedly steady, in this situation heavy with peril. At a height not less than that of a thirty-story building, there he dangled from the crest of a twisted and enormous gum-tree.

No whisper of breeze stirred the Turk-

ish-bath heat of this foul jungle. Sweat like rain was already beginning to drench Peter. Flyer though he was, he found it nerve-tensing work to clamber back up his parachute-shrouds to the limb whence it hung.

There, safely astride at last, he pondered for a moment. From a tough web a poisonous spider—known to the Mayas as a *xtabul*—beadily eyed him. That web, the chute—yes, Peter decided he must keep it. By all means! As a tent, a protection against weather and insects for both Janice and himself, it would be indispensable.

Cautiously he arose to his feet, after having unbuckled and taken off his chute-straps, which he slashed free and dropped. He stood there on the limb, holding to knotted lianas, and cut such of the silk yoke-lines as were too inextricably tangled with twigs and branches of that aerial thicket.

By virtue of much hauling and yanking, more knife-work and plenty of strong language, he freed the chute. This he bundled all together, wrapping round it such of the lines as he could salvage. He tossed the bundle away.

It bounded down through creepers, branches and green tangles. For a second, it caught. Peter thought it was stuck there; but no, away it fell once more, vanishing with a crackle and a thud in emerald dimness far below.

"What's that?" sounded a faint cry. "You fallen?"

"No! Just dropped my chute. Where are you?"

"Half-way down, and all right," Janice called through the forest. "Can you get down?"

"Can do!"

"How high up are you?"

"Top floor," he answered. "Going down!"

Starting his descent, he found the giant gum-tree a baffling problem. Its smooth and slippery trunk, even so near the top, was too big for him to encircle with his

arms. He had to grapple the parasitic vines and runners that matted round it, and down through intolerable heat and stench he swung himself, ape-like, from branch to branch. Along the cable-like vines, ignorant of deadly perils that might lurk among them, he sought foot and handhold where he could.

No native of that land, no Maya *chiclero*, would so carelessly have risked a passage down that tree, without first looking keenly at each place where foot or hand must grip. But Peter—what did Peter know of tree-work in that particular hell?

TEN feet down he made, twenty, thirty, never letting go one grasp till he had found another. Already insects had begun to make the grand discovery that dinner was ready. Maddening tropic pests filled his mouth, nose, ears. Their stings, tiny scourges of flame, set him



slapping, cursing and scratching. How much farther down to earth? Now Peter had scrambled fifty feet; now, strained and bruised, with blood oozing from a dozen scratches, seventy-five feet down. Already tangled thickets covering the earth were beginning to grow dimly visible. From almost immediately below, a cry rang up:

"Down, soon?"

"With you in a minute. I've had all the education I want, in the higher branches. Now I'm getting to the lower ones."

"Yes, but I beat you down!"

"Bargain-day, eh?"

Clutching a gnarled vine, Peter stretched a leather-puttee'd leg toward another branch. Just as his foot was landing there he heard a faint little whisper of sound, an odd dry rustle.

An ominous, small hiss drifted on that steamy, dark and superheated air.

"Holy Hell!"

Not one-tenth of a second too soon he jerked up his leg, with its unprotected ankle where shoe and puttee failed to meet. A black and yellow flicker of living swiftness flashed below him. Just where his foot had been, he glimpsed a flat, triangular head, deadly and sinuous curves. Yammering a wordless curse, with all his strength Peter stamped down on this terrific messenger of death. He hung by his hands, crushed and ground and stamped again. Even in death the diabolical reptile still tried to sink its fangs in him. It lashed about his ankle. Full of sheer horror, Peter kicked it off.

"Look out below there!" he yelled. "Snake falling—stand clear."

Below, he heard bushes crackle—knew Janice was scrambling away from the deadly menace of the serpent that might not yet be quite dead. Sudden nausea gripped him. The jungle swam and whirled.

Though Peter knew it not, he had just encountered a *charcán* or tree-snake, scourge of the *chicleros*, most terrible of any reptile on that hellish coastal plain; a *charcán*, whose fangs bear the message of certain death and swift.

CHAPTER IV

INTO THE JUNGLE

PRESENTLY the paralyzing shock of this close brush with death began to pass. Peter got a grip on his nerve again, and once more forced his way downward through the ever-thicker tangles of creepers and toughly-interwoven vines. Lord, if he only had a machete! He skirted a

huge, brown, melon-like termites'-nest; tangled himself in thorns that tore trousers and skin; pulled loose and slid through writhing branches.

Suddenly he caught sight of Janice, gingerly picking her way back toward the giant gum-tree whence she had so incontinently fled at his shout of alarm. Though scratched and a bit ragged, she seemed fit; a competent, slim figure in her riding-breeches and boots, with her Smith & Wesson and her cartridge-belt slung round her waist.

Peter scrambled down the last few feet, swung clear and dropped beside her into a bit of less tangled growth, looking quite other than the trim young flyer who had so recently spun his Mailwing aloft from the Rancho de las Palomitas.

"Heavens, it didn't bite you, did it?" she said, poking the dead snake with a riding boot toe.

"If it had, d'you think I'd be climbing down?"

"No," she said, dangling her helmet by a strap. "I guess *not!* They're bad, these charcán snakes."

"Yes, I've heard about them. But—well, let's forget charcáns. *We've* got to travel!"

"That's right—Peter."

"Okay, Janice. First, stock-taking. I'm a hundred per cent. You?"

"Got a twisted leg," she answered. "But nothing to bother about." Stooping, she rubbed her left knee. "I can hobble pretty fast if there's any place to hobble to. Which way to hobble, now—that's the big question!"

"Why, toward the plane, of course, or what's left of it. Off that way, I think." He pointed in the general direction where it seemed to him the wreck must lie. Though in this vague obscurity, what was there to distinguish one direction from another? "We can't leave over a hundred thousand in gold kicking round loose, just like that. Buckle your helmet into your belt, allee samee heap big birdman, and let's blow!"

He crashed his way to where the chute bundle lay, and picked it up.

"You're taking that along?" she asked.

"M'yeh," he nodded. "It only weighs about eight pounds, anyhow, and we've got to have it for shelter, nights."

"Nights? You mean it's going to take several days to reach the coast?"

"Well, maybe a day or two, anyhow," he admitted. "That is, unless we run across a railroad or something."

"Railroad! In the Metnal! But—how about the Rancho, Peter? Dad said he could only hold out, one day!" Her eyes darkened with a consuming fear. "If we don't send help——"

"The Rancho? Oh," he royally invented, with one of his expansive gestures, "El Tigre and his thugs are getting themselves most royally butchered at the ranch." How he hoped she would believe him! "Your dad and his people will chew 'em up alive and spit 'em out. Now don't you go worrying about that blessed ranch! We've got our own job all cut out for us. Here, be nonchalant—and then on our way!"

He offered her a cigarette, chose one himself.

"Anyhow," he added, as they took fire from his lighter and found temporary solace in smoke, "I've got this case nearly full of cigarettes. And smoke keeps off at least one per cent of the bugs. Well, shall we toddle?"

TEN minutes later, with the chute lashed to his back and with his pocket-knife in hand, Peter Barzil was bucking the tropical jungle; was by main strength forcing a way through a formidable and untrodden wilderness. Close on his heels Janice followed, limping rather badly as she thrust her way along.

Thickets of interwoven bamboo, almost hard as glass, barred their progress. Bull-thorns, *rompa-ropa* bushes and spiked cacti with hooked spines caught and tore them. Even with a machete the task would have been tremendous.

Hordes of parasites hummed, buzzed and shrilled their thin and cruel war-songs, as on the lost pair thrust their toilsome and uncertain way. Now or again they stopped, panting, sweating, to take such bearings as they could; though in that vague light, now fading as afternoon declined, all directions were the same.

Steam rose from the ragged land drenched shirt of Peter. Already he was gulping for air.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, slapping bugs. "Gallon of something wet and cold wouldn't go bad, eh?"

"Make it two!"

Neither of them said a word about snakes, perhaps on the old principle that if you speak of the devil he's likely to appear. But they kept the sharpest watch they could. Yet in those tangled thickets where every root and tendril has a snake-like form, how tell the harmless from the deadly? At any moment a vine might become a *fer-de-lance*, a creeper might swiftly transmute itself into a *nauyaca*.

ONWARD, struggling and suffering but with iron determination, the castaways hacked and fought their path. From tangled plants and vines, ticks brushed on to them. Later those ticks would all be heard from!

Now or then a bird or beast of the deep forest was flushed. Once an ant-eater was disturbed, ripping into a fire-ants' hill; and once a peccary crashed grunting away. Lucky for Janice and Peter they did not run foul of a herd of those ill-tempered tusk-bearing demons! Again, the formidable roaring of an old bull alligator drifted from some fetid swamp unseen. With a rush of wings, a startled bird—a lovely, long-tailed creature, royally green and blue and purple—soared up among the tangled limbs. Iridescent, it made a flash of flame through that gloomy air.

"A *quetsal*!" cried Janice. "He is good luck. We'll be out of here in no time."

"Less than that," Peter nodded his more than auburn head.

"Think we're going the right way, to find your plane?"

"Reckon so. And—hello, now! Smell that, eh?"

She sniffed, while Peter swatted mosquitoes.



"Smoke, you mean?"

"That's right, Janice. Smoke. Drifting this way, this way, seems like. Must be from the plane."

"Oh dear, if

that's burned up—"

"I know. Tough. Good-by compass, rifle—but anyhow, the gold can't burn. That's something."

"That's a whole lot!" she affirmed. "That gold means more to me than just a mere hundred thousand or so. It means doing what dad told me to and trusted me to—if we get it out to Puerto Quemado. It means—but let's see what's happened!"

"Maybe," Peter hopefully suggested, "that smoke isn't from the Mailwing, at all."

"Oh, but I'd a lot rather it was, than have it come from a campfire or a native settlement! These jungle Mayas are—well—we've only got two revolvers."

"Bad actors, eh?"

"Yes." Her face darkened. "Ever since the Conquistadores finished torturing and killing them, looting their temples of gold, burning their books and smashing up their idols, they've been death on Spaniards."

"But we're not Spaniards!"

"Tell them—if you get the chance! We're white, aren't we? Well then, these *sublevados* usually shoot first and inquire afterward. And then too, there are other tribes here in the Metnal, that put *curarú* on their arrows, and that like to cut off your head and shrink it down to about the size of an orange."

"Nice little tribes!" laughed Peter. "Well, let's have a look at the fire, anyhow."

And in the holster at his hip he loosened the ugly-snouted Luger.

ONCE more cutting their way, limping, dragging themselves through fantastic and incredible tangles, or mired down in bog-holes that steamed like caldrons of torture, they labored toward the smoke.

This smoke, drifting on air that stank and stifled, was now beginning to blue the confused spaces between colossal trees, the interlacing lianas and rank thickets. Then all at once, ahead and to the left among almost impenetrable barriers of that forest like a Doré drawing of Inferno, a wisp of fire glinted.

"Look!" cried Peter. "There she is, by Judas—there's what's left of her!"

They fought their path along, slashing, hauling, breaking vines. At last, a-reek with sweat and insects, panting and spent, they burst through into a kind of swampy little glade or clearing.

Here gorgeous and incredible butterflies fluttered away. Here a few rotting and creeper-tangled logs, with crumbling stumps, told that aforesome some intrepid handful of woodsmen had cut cedar and mahogany in this desolate spot.

But this meant nothing to Janice and Peter. All they could see now was just the smoking wreckage of the plane, that symbolized the wreckage, too, of all their plans.

HIGH aloft in the forest ceiling of green, a break had been made by the Mailwing when it had crashed. Through this break obliquely slanted a lance-like ray, blue-smoked; a ray far-stretching from the low western sun.

This ray showed them only too distinctly the complete disaster that had overtaken the Mailwing. There now the machine lay, half-buried in muck. There it still smouldered, a torn, shattered, twisted chaos of skeleton metal.

"Good-bye, baby," said Peter. "*Adiós!* And—God's sake, what's that?"

"What's what?"

"A man!" The aviator pointed. "See there?"

At sound of their voices, a half-seen and vague figure jumped up. This figure had been crouching at the other side of the wreck, poking about it with a stick. Now the man for a second faced them—a small, wizened little creature, half-seen at a considerable distance through blue-drifting vapors.

"Here, you!" shouted Peter. "What the devil you doing with my ship?"

The man raised an arm. Smoke jetted. A bullet pinged and whimpered. As the report cracked, that bullet spudded into a tree. Clipped leaves sailed and spiralled down.

Peter whipped out his Luger and whamed away four times. The shrivelled-up little figure vanished. Smoke and shadows at the far side of the tangled clearing blotted it out.

"Get him?" cried the girl.

"Darned if I know, by Judas! He's on his way, anyhow."

From all about the forest, tumult burst forth. Beasts and birds, startled by the firing, loosed an uncanny tumult. The maniacal, nerve-shattering laughter of a jungle-hen burst out. A trogon flapped away. Monkeys set up a terrific pother. As all this died, silence once more fell across the festering wilderness.

"If that's one o' your wild Mayas," laughed Peter, his blue eyes squinting, "if that's a specimen of their marksmanship, when it comes to hitting anything, no can do."

"You mean you don't know him?" the girl exclaimed, in dismay.

"Know him? Certainly not! These jungle-gentlemen aren't on my calling-list—yet! Who's your friend?"

"Tio Faustino!"

"Who's Tio Faustino?"

"Why, Titino, of course! Our mayor-domo at the ranch!"

"Impossible! No!"

"But yes, Peter—I tell you, *yes!*" She seized his arm, shook him with the violence of her frightened affirmation. "He's here, I tell you. Titino's here!"

"But, how the——?"

"He stowed away somehow, on the plane. Lived through the crash. And now—now he's here, after that gold. Here, armed—ready to shoot us down, from ambush!"

CHAPTER V

CAMP CASTAWAY

THE sheer incredible quality of this news left Peter without speech. "Can't be!" He suddenly found his voice. "Why, we left him helping your father get ready to stand off El Tigre. How can he be here?"

"But he *is!*" Her bobbed hair shook with the vehemence of her affirmation. "Haven't I known that old Maya since I was knee-high to a cricket? No two men like Titino!"

"Yes, but——"

"I got a good look at him, Peter. He's here, all right. Though what he was trying to do with the ruins of the plane, or why he shot at us——"

"I've got it! The filthy swine! That's why the bus flew so tail-heavy. Why she wouldn't lift over the mountains till we dumped the gas—by which same token your precious old family retainer is responsible for our being mired in this hell-hole!"

"You mean, he *did* stow away!"

"Right, the very first guess. If he'd been full man-size, he couldn't have got away with it. But he did—the wart! Must have climbed in through the rear cockpit before we got aboard. When he was stowing the last of the gold, he stowed his own sweet self, too. He perched in there, just aft of the baggage-compartment. Some ride!"

"But how did he get through the crash, alive?"

"Plane's fall must have been broken by the trees, and by bushes and things. Didn't hit hard. And he wiggled out before she torched off. Anyhow, what does it matter? He's here, isn't he? Come on, let's have a look-see!"

Alert, gun at the ready, he pressed forward into the ancient clearing. Janice, drawing her own weapon, limped after him.

"Not beyond the power of the human intellect to guess what he's up to," said Peter, with a harsh little laugh. "It's the gold he's after. Bet you diamonds to dimes he's under orders from El Tigre himself."

"But Titino's our oldest employee. Dad's always thoroughly trusted him. How could he get orders from El Tigre?"

"Didn't El Tigre send in a messenger to the ranch? You take it from a flying fool, Janice, that messenger slipped your Old Trusty a command to stick by whatever gold was on the place, and keep it ab-so-lute-ly from leaving Eldoradia. And to think he lived through that crack-up. Another joke—a hot one. Devil takes care of his own, all right!"

Bitter silence fell, through which from some far and hidden place tolled the liquid, silvery bell-like note of a palomita, the rapid hammering of a carpintero-bird. With dark eyes brooding, the girl nodded.

"Yes, I guess you're right," she bitterly acknowledged. "Makes me think of the old Spanish proverb, 'The deepest wound comes from the hidden hand.' And then too, 'If you wash a donkey's head, you waste both labor and soap.' Dead right, eh?"

"I know one, too," Peter laughed. "Many a mouth that's thirsted for gold, drinks earth!"

"You mean you'd kill Titino?"

"Oh, no! I'd put medals on his manly chest, not lilies. He certainly deserves 'em."

"Yes, I know this thing of having Titino mixed up with us makes it pretty

bad. He can raise the whole region against us, as white people and Anti-Tigristas."

"Fine! More medals!" Tensely watchful, he pushed on toward the wreck. "Things aren't too bad, though. We're alive, and we're Americans, and we've got two guns and plenty of ammo. So you see——"

"It's not just ourselves I'm thinking about," said Janice, following the path he opened. "It's dad. If Titino was a traitor, must be more traitors back there. And in that case, what chance has dad got? Oh, Peter, we've got to work fast!"

"M'yeh, that's right."

"Got to reach Puerto Quemado and get that wireless off to the destroyer. Hurry, hurry!"

"I know, Jan, but don't fly off the handle. Here we've got about a truckload of gold dumped in this nice little neck of the woods, and *sublevados* infesting the whole shop, and dear old Titino running on the loose." They came up close to the smouldering wreck, its heat quivering on the close air. "There's only one thing to do, though—start from right here, and keep going."

"Leave the gold, you mean?"

"Most of it. Take some, though. Might be handy as a lubricant, in case of a jam. Rather have the grub, though."

"No," she objected. "Plenty to eat in the jungle, if you know what's what. But the rifle—that would have helped, a lot."

"So would the compass. But spilt milk—no better for spilt tears."

"What's the first move?"

"Camp right here. Got to wait for the plane to cool off a bit, before we start gold-digging. And besides,



I've got a foxy little scheme that needs a bit of darkness."

"What scheme?"

"Wait. You'll see. Let me think, now—or what I flatter myself is thinking!"

PETER slipped off the bundle of his chute, sat down on a fallen royal-palm, and sank into deep cogitation. Alertly Janice kept watch for any sign or sound of Titino. But the renegade, who had more than once seen her shoot a sprinting jackrabbit, kept discreetly out of view. Save for the silent winging of gaudy butterflies and moths, the dart and flash of brilliant, metallic-throated humming-birds, no sign of life appeared in that steamy, heat-blurred opening.

"All right!" suddenly exclaimed Peter. His tone was that of a conqueror, but the way he scratched his bites was less heroic. "I've got it!"

"Got what?" Janice demanded. "Prickly heat?"

"Oh, sure. But a lot more than that, too. Got a plan!"

"Well, even a plan's something. But I'd rather have a little action. What are you going to do now?"

"Never mind, woman. You'll know, soon enough."

Her lips angrily tightened, as she regarded him in the fading light. "Loosen up, can't you?" she demanded.

"Here—have a cigarette."

They both smoked in silence, she now sitting down on the log beside him. Together they stared at the smoking ruins of the Mailwing, inside which—unless Titino had played them some inexplicable and scurvy trick—they supposed the gold still to be lying.

All round them, palm-fronds, tree-ferns and monstrous tangles of nearly impenetrable jungle walls seemed to stand guard with ominous hostility. Somewhere in a dismal morass not far, frogs set up a hoarse "*Currump! Currump!*" Night was coming on.

SUDDENLY the aviator got up, tossed away his bag and began loosening the cords of his parachute bundle.

"What's the idea, Peter?"

"Make a shelter. We're staying here, tonight. 'Camp Castaway,' we'll call it.

Under shelter, with a smudge going, I reckon you can worry through the night."

"I can? How about you?"

"Oh, I'll stand guard with a long pole, to poke ventilating-spaces through the swarms of bugs," he laughed. "Now, you rustle up some wood for the fire!"

She looked indignant at his brusque command, but Peter didn't even know it. He was already busy opening up the chute. More than twenty feet in diameter and of the finest silk, it offered possibilities.

When the bundle was undone, Peter set to work knotting yoke-lines and stringing them up. Presently he had a cord stretched and over this cord he draped the chute, lashing down its edge to roots and bushes.

Its circular form made it hard to adjust. The tent thus formed sagged and wrinkled like the hide of a very aged elephant, but by a million miles it beat having no tent at all. And when Peter had gathered a heap of leafy branches to cover the sodden ground, it offered distinct possibilities.

"Grand Hotel de Jungle, all ready for the big opening!" he announced. "Now let's start the home-fires burning."

He kindled a cheering blaze, so located that the smoke would drift down toward the tent and discourage at least part of the insect pests. As night descended like thin gray veils, this smoke wafted far among the darkening aisles, up through the lofty aerial terraces of the giant forests. Together on the palm-log Janice and Peter sat with companionable cigarettes, staring into the blaze.

"If I only knew dad and the ranch were all right," she began. "If——"

"Stop iffing!" he commanded, with fire-light making his reddish hair redder still. "Your iffing won't help 'em one darned bit. They'll manage, some way. Our big job is just to keep alive and get this bunch of gold down to the coast. And the farther you shove everything else out of your mind, the better it'll be for both of us, and for them, too. Now I've unloaded

my little oration, and you know I'm right. *No es verdad?*"

"I admit it. Sorry, Peter. I won't grouse, again!"

To this he made no answer, but presently got up and—Luger in hand—started to prospect and wander all round their encampment. Unmindful of snakes, he rather thoroughly explored the adjacent thickets and jungles. Where might Titino be? Was he lurking, spying, planning murder; or had he departed to raise a band of *sublevados* against these two white intruders of their tropic fastness.

Quién sabe? Who could tell?

AT ALL event, not Peter. The bird-man did not know. For all that, he looked well-pleased; seemed to have found what he was looking for.

Soon he came back to where Janice was still gazing pensively into the fire. Its light cast liquid sparkles in her dark-brown eyes—which, unromantic truth be told, were watering a good deal from the acrid smoke. But despite all that, since it diminished the stinging, biting, boring, sucking, buzzing and tormenting bugs, O blessed smoke!

"Let's have a squint at poor old Mailwing, now," said Peter after a while. "Reckon she's cool enough to get into."

"I do hope," Janice exclaimed, getting up, "the gold isn't all melted and run together."

"Not likely. Takes nearly 2000° to fuse gold. And the fire in our plane—no, I don't think it ever got up to anything at all like that. The gold will be okay. Wish I could say as much for my compass. We could afford to pay ten thousand for that—yes, twenty-five. Well, anyhow ——"

Together they once more approached the wreck, now cooled to a point that allowed Peter to climb inside. Darkness had almost fallen, but the aviator could work by sense of touch. He huddled down among charred ruins that smelled most atrociously, and began pawing about.

Janice, her heart pounding a little with tense anxiety, stood waiting for his verdict. This was not long in coming. For almost at once Peter began to feel heaps and mounds of gold coin, pretty hot but still perfectly intact. Not one was melted. Thank heaven for the fire that had prevented Titino from carrying off and burying that treasure before Janice and Peter had been able to get there!

The masses of wealth were now lying loose among ashes and charred wisps of buckskin and miscellaneous wreckage.

"All okay!" Peter announced. His voice, from down inside the warped fuselage, came muffled to her. "Bags are all gone, and the gold's scattered all over the shop. But it's all here. Hooray!"

"How are we going to carry all that, through these swamps——?"

"No can do." He stood up, looked over the burned cockpit coaming. Janice had become a vague, half-seen figure in that gloom now shot with wavering firelight. "What little we lug off with us, we can dump into a few silk bags made from the chute."

"And the rest of it——?"

"Stays right here at Camp Castaway. But not where any lousy renegade Titinos or any Maya *bravos* can get their dirty paws on it," he made cryptic answer. "But we can't do anything, just yet. The gold's mostly all too hot to handle. And anyhow, night hasn't got dark enough yet for a little plan I have." Grimed and ashy, he clambered out of the wreck, dropped beside her. "We might as well rest while we can. There'll soon be work enough."

"What kind?"

"Doggoned hard."

"Thanks for being so specific."

"Welcome!"

SILENTLY pondering, he returned to the campfire, tossed on more wood; then, while sparks whirled and spiralled upward, sat down to brood with deep abstraction.

"Well?" she presently asked, from her

place beside him on the royal-palm log.

"Oh!" He seemed to waken, with a start. "Say, Janice, you'd better get into the tent and have a doss-down. Rest while you can. And whatever happens, keep quiet."

"What for?"

"Little girls mustn't ask questions."

"They not only must, but will! What do you think is going to happen?"

"Well—durn near anything *might*, by Judas! But things usually don't. Just the same, though, you want to keep still. If you hear any artillery-practice, lie low. Don't make a holler, or pop out of your tent, or anything. Just play dead. Get me?"

"Oh, I suppose so. And I dare say I've got to mind you—cave-man?" And she crept in under the silken shelter Peter had constructed. No further sound came from her. The birdman, left on guard, sat all alone.



Now he threw no more wood on the fire, but let it die to ruddy coals. Motionless he remained, as if intently listening. But save for the waken-

ing night-sounds of the jungle, nothing reached his ear.

After perhaps half an hour more he got up and with his knife began cutting sticks and bushes. Night had now fully come, but he toiled more by sense of feeling than of straining sight. Somewhere not far off a little owl began hollowly to chuckle and complain. More distantly, beside a scummed and stenching bayou where from stagnant waters miasmatic vapors rose ghostly-white, a chorus of tree-frogs shrilled their insane chorus.

Still Peter labored. His work was slow and painful. Doggedly he kept at it, ignoring blisters and aching muscles, hun-

ger, thirst, sweat—everything but just his purpose.

At the end of a long time he had built a sort of fence or kraal around the tent and the fire. To this enclosure only one narrow opening gave access.

His task completed, Peter surveyed it as best he could in the darkness that had sewn up the night. He sat down for a bit of a rest and smoke; then, cutting a few more sticks, wove them into a kind of framework. In gloom he worked, that hid him from spying eyes—were there any there to watch him.

Over his framework, roughly like a human body, he stretched his jacket, setting his helmet on top. This lay-figure he propped up on the log, beside his fire.

Now he piled wood on those coals, to illuminate his decoy.

"I hope you die in a good cause!" he murmured.

Silently now on hands and knees he crept away through the opening in the kraal. Night had dropped a wall of almost solid black. Into that wall he faded, vanished and was gone.

Out there somewhere, silent, watchful, tortured almost beyond human endurance by the incredible savagery of insect-swarms, Peter Barzil settled down to long and patient vigil.

CHAPTER VI

THE CACHE IN THE FOREST

NIGHT grew thicker still. Far aloft, through the break in the forest nave densely matted with aerial roots all tangled and intricately interwoven, a glory of tropic stars filtered down into that black and poisonous stillness. Peter had no eyes for starlight. He was on watch for something quite different and less beautiful.

Steadily the monotonous chirring of the tree-frogs rasped his ears. Strange and inexplicable sounds near and afar, shrill or furtive whisperings of the jungle—the ever-busy antiphony of death and life—won to him. High aloft, a family of ring-

tailed monkeys woke with a terrified sudden chatter, as a stalking tree-boa seized one of them. The scream of a black jaguar wailed far off.

Inside the kraal, Peter's fire burned up, blazed, cast fantastic shadows dancing up against the forest giants enmeshed in creeper-stalks, in snake-like climbing plants. Away through that heated sullenness of night drifted the smoke; away over the silk tent, off into vaporous, dimly mysterious vastnesses. And now the fire began to burn a trifle lower. Was Janice sleeping? Or was she awake, and only obeying Peter's injunction of silence? Peter could not know. Crouched in dark concealment, Luger in hand, he still kept his solitary watch.

AND suddenly a bullet sizzled through the kraal. Two more! Three stabs of flame punctured the night, from the lower branches of a huge tree not far away. Slugs spudded into the manikin on the log.

With commendable realism this lay-figure toppled forward, rolled beside the campfire.

Then the old Luger hove into action—five times, six, fast as Peter could pump it. A cry of pain sounded; a thud, as of a body hitting the dank, mossy earth.

Silence, again.

A cry issued from the tent: "What's that? Peter—you all right?"

"Cut that out!" he ordered. Listening, he crouched.

Jungle and forest grew loud with fantastic cluckings, screeches, grunts and growls, with life startled and disturbed. But presently this all died down. Peter heard no human groaning, no sound as of a man who dragged himself away, wounded, through tangled brush and vicious vegetation.

"Got *him* all right!" grimly Peter judged. "Good little old trusted family-retainer Titino."

Peter loaded up again, and kept on waiting. He lay doggo for ten minutes, fif-

teen; each minute a massive slice of eternity. At last, tortured and swollen with insect-stings, cautiously he made his way back to the kraal. At the tent—

"Janice!" he whispered.

"Peter! What is it?" Dimly he saw her raise one side of the chute-cloth, and peep out into the dying fire-glow. "You're all right, Peter? Not hurt, or anything?"

"Fit as a whole orchestra of fiddles. And you?"

"I'm all right. But—oh, I was scared, Peter."

"I guess that's the way Friend Titino felt, too. Only he probably can't feel anything, now."

"Titino?" she asked, crawling out of the tent, a trim figure in her riding-boots and trousers. "Why, what's happened to Titino?"

"Lead-poisoning, I hope, administered by old Doc Luger. We'll soon see."

"Was that Titino shooting?" And she stood up, facing Peter in the firelit half-gloom.

"It was. Plus me. Good old Titino—he did just what I reckoned he would. Snuk up on us, climbed a tree and unlimbered his Big Bertha—on a dummy figure I rigged up for his special benefit. Then all I had to do was cut loose at his fire."

She stared at the punctured manikin. "I think it was a grand idea. I'd never have thought of it in a thousand years. Sure you got Titino?"

"Well, didn't you hear him holler and flop?"

"Yes, but you never can tell. These Mayas—they're harder to kill than a cat. Every last one of 'em has nineteen lives, and some have twenty. I'll feel safer when I view the late lamented's remains."

"All right by me, Jan. Let's go and hold the autopsy. But tote your gun—just in case!"

He picked up a glowing stick from the fire, waved it to a vivid flame.

"*Vamos!*" he cried.

TOGETHER they left the kraal. Guns ready, they scouted among the lights and shadows eerily dancing among masses of creepers that clambered in corkscrew-twisted tangles.

"Over here," said Peter. This big tree—here's where I dropped him."

"Yes, but where's the cross showing where the body was found?" she asked, straining her eyes while Peter held his torch aloft. "I don't see one darned thing, except bugs and bushes."

"Hmmp! That's funny!" And Peter cast about for some spoor of Titino. "I know here's where he fell. He had his boots on when he fell, so what the—only he didn't have any boots. Nothing but sandals, and—hello! Here's one of 'em, now!" He stooped, held up a native rope-soled sandal, with blood on it. "Claret, too. I got him, okay. But where the devil—?"

"Look!" Janice pointed. "There's his trail. He's crawled off, somewhere."

Enthusiastically they followed the track of broken-down and separated undergrowth, and for a few hundred feet the trail was easy enough to follow. But soon it faded, vanishing in a thicket of Spanish bayonets that menacingly bristled.

"Hold on," warned Janice. "Snakes are 'specially fond of those plants. Better go slow, now."

"I couldn't tackle that sort of barricade, snakes or no snakes," Peter remarked. "A Spig might crawl through that, but not a human being. We're stopped, right now!"

"Isn't this just the limit? Now we're no better off than we were before. Worse—because we haven't got so much ammunition."

"No, better. Titino won't be back in a hurry. Wounded, all right. See this leaf?" He held the torch for her to see by. The leaf glistened sticky-red. "Chances are he'll kick off, anyhow, from his wound. No medical help. Jungle, exposure, bugs and all. I reckon the coast's clear for our next step."

"And what's that?"

"Back to Camp Castaway, and I'll show you!"

LIGHTED by the now-dying torch, taking a chance on snakes in the gloom, they struggled back through heat and muck and stifle to the kraal. There Peter dismantled the dummy, and heaved its framework on the fire. He added still more wood. As the flames once again blazed up, he examined his jacket.

"Couple of holes," he showed Janice. "Here's where Titino's bullets went in, I guess, and here's where they came out." He curiously stuck a finger through the holes. "Well, anyhow, they aren't big enough to let gold-pieces slip through. That's something."

By the light of the now up-burning fire he turned to the wreck of the plane. Janice followed him there. Inside the warped fuselage he spread out his jacket, and began scooping up ashes, gold coins and twisted bits of charred buckskin.

This conglomeration he dumped into the jacket, while Janice anxiously watched.

"Very rich mixture, as we say in the flying-game," he laughed. "Here you go, Jan. Few thousand, for a starter."

His jacket was full. He bundled it together and hoisted it, heavy-laden, out of the cockpit. No easy job, that.

Strong as Janice was, the weight almost broke away from her. But she made shift to lower it safely to the soggy earth. Peter meantime swung out of the wreck.

"Come on!" He seized one side of the burden.

"Where to?"

"I'll show you!"

In the firelit gloom stumbling over roots and branches, forcing their way through tangles that slashed and tore at them, they carried their precious burden toward a spot already carefully selected by Peter.

Janice limped a good deal, but gamely said nothing about her twisted knee. In a few minutes, floundering through the most dismal desolation, they reached a little

hollow among sea-grape and palmetto thickets.

"Here!" said Peter. "Drop it!"

"Going to bury it here?"

"That's right. This place is all measured. Twenty-seven paces from here to that big ceiba-tree." He pointed in the gloom at a vast bulk towering near by. "And thirty paces, this other way, to a dead sapote that's been busted wide open by lightning. Get this, and get it straight, in case—well—anything happens to Peter."

He made her repeat it several times. Satisfied at last that she had learned the lesson, he got down on both knees and cleared away the superficial forest mould. A dank, oppressive smell enveloped him;

a fevered, unhealthy stench of mud, rotten roots and mephitic gases. But vigorously he kept on. And having reached the black, mucky earth itself, he attacked it with both his knife and his fingers, while crouching beside him, Janice helped there in the dark.



FOR perhaps a quarter-hour they dug. At last—

"Reckon that's about enough, now," he judged. He explored the cavity with his hands, found it sufficient. With close-packed leaves he covered bottom and sides of the hole, then dumped gold, ashes and all into it—right heavy stuff, such as blood is shed for, life and souls are risked and lost for.

"Now the rest of it?" asked Janice.

"Yes, all but what we can carry to the coast. And we'll be on our way with that—*mañana!*"

Inside of two hours all the gold except about fifty pounds was securely buried under debris and leaves. The amount reserved for transportation at once—and worth between eleven and twelve thousand dollars—lay beside the fire, in Peter's jacket.

So far as Peter could judge, he had

dropped no gold-pieces in the jungle, to mark any path to where the bulk of the treasure was buried.

Very carefully he made a final inspection of the plane, crouching in the blackened and twisted fuselage, scraping all round with eager fingers. Not one more coin could he find.

"Well, that's that," said he, clambering for the last time out of the wreck. "If anybody can locate any mazooma here now, they're allee samee more than welcome, thank you. Now we'll just bag up the fifty pounds, and be ready to evaporate."

"When?"

"Right after breakfast, on the first train north."

They returned to the kraal and set about making bags in which to carry the fifty pounds of gold. Peter cut a breadth of tough silk from the edge of the chute, doubled it, fashioned it into a couple of crude sacks. After taking a few gold-pieces for pocket-money in case of running into any situation that might demand it, the castaways put about fifteen or sixteen pounds of coin into one bag, and the remainder into the second. All this money they carefully cleaned of ashes and dirt, to save weight.

"I really ought to take more than a third or so of the gold," Janice protested. "You've got the chute to carry, and you'll have to break trail, so give me half the gold, please!"

"Shhhhh, or the leprechauns will hear you!" he jested. "And these Spig leprechauns are sure some bad actors. And what they do to you is a caution. So then—turn in. Tomorrow's the big day."

"How about you, Peter? You'd better rest a while, and let me stand guard."

"Tomorrow night, yes. Not now."

Smoking a final cigarette together, they argued the point. Janice had to yield.

"All right, you win," she admitted. "But I'd like you a whole lot better if you could scare me up a drink of water, somewhere. I'm parched!"

"Ditto, but no can do. *Mañana*, yes—

that's good Eldoradian business, eh? Toddle off to bed!"

"Well, good night, Peter."

"*Buenas noches, señorita!*"

CHAPTER VII

JUNGLE HELL

SHE awoke to find a desolate drizzle making the forest a steaming Gehenna. Only a gray light seeped through the lofty canopy of leaves. Old age would have found that prospect infinitely depressing, but as Janice crawled out of the tent and saw a cheerful fire burning, her spirits welled up gladly.

Beside that fire, Peter was sitting on the fallen log. He held a pointed stick, on the end of which something was grilling over live coals. An appetizing odor drifted on the sullen-steaming air.

"Hello, Peter!" she called. "How did you sleep?"

"Oh, fine!" he bravely lied; he hadn't closed an eye, all night. Though his face was swollen and he badly needed a shave, he managed to smile. "Ready for breakfast?"

"Starved!" She stretched her slim young body, then buckled on her cartridge-belt and gun, and limped toward the fire.

"Can you walk, today?"

"I can hobble, some. What's there to eat?"

He gestured at half a dozen green coconuts lying near, with their ends roughly hacked off, then critically surveyed his cookery as he turned it on the sharp stick.

"No microbes in that kind of drink," said Peter, as the pure, sweet liquid from a nut spilled down the girl's chin. "And now, how about a slice of iguana?"

"Oh, I couldn't!"

"If you didn't know, you'd think it was chicken. Come on, take a chance!"

Gingerly she accepted it, still on the pointed stick. Peter cut himself another slice from the grotesquely frilly creature he had shot and dragged in long before she had awakened. "How is it?" he asked.

"Not bad."

"Not bad is good. 'Specially when that's all there is, and there isn't any more."

BREAKFAST and comforting cigarettes finished, they made sure their guns were both fully loaded, the cigarette-lighter was safely stowed in one of Peter's pockets where it could not possibly slip out; and then got under way. The hour, as shown by Peter's wrist-watch, was hardly six. Ahead of them stretched a tremendously long day. It needed to be long, were they to get clear from this infernal morass.

First they took down the tent, then wrapped it about the larger sack of gold, and slung the combination on Peter's broad shoulder-blades. The other bag was stowed on Janice's. Even this work made them sweat with heat and humidity that rendered the air malodorous and stifling. Prickly-heat added to the torments of bug and tick-bites, but now the castaways paid less heed. Beyond certain limits, misery almost ceases to make itself felt.



"Well, which way now?" Janice asked.

"I reckon about *there* would be right," he pointed. With neither compass nor sun

to guide him, his guess was frankly little more than random. In that mad maze where trunks obstructed every path, where distorted vines and creepers hung in flat green ropes or zigzag twists, all directions blent in one.

Bravely enough though, for all this, they set out. He trekked ahead; she followed, Indian-fashion, and both of them felt a tinge of unspoken regret at leaving Camp Castaway. Though but a miserable boghole, none the less there lay the wreck of the plane, which seemed their

only connecting link with the outside world. There they had put up a tent, made fire, cooked, eaten, sat together, been companionable. Even its primitive insufficiency was vastly better than the stark savagery of the surrounding jungle. To abandon it, to plunge into that sodden and rain-dripping wilderness was hard, indeed.

SLOWLY they forced their path, bent forward with the weight of their burdens. Cautiously too they walked, for at every footstep dragged up out of the muck, how could they know they might not be ambushed and shot down by *bravos* or by Titino—who after all might not have been killed last night?

No telling! Nor did they know, either, at what instant the root or tentacle they trod on might swiftly transmute to a ferde-lance.

With heart-breaking exertions they floundered on and now and then Peter blazed the bark on some prominent tree.

"Got to keep a line on our path," he told Janice, in a breathing-spell, as he wiped sweat and bugs from his inflamed face. "Some o' these days I'll be coming back to do my treasure-digging stunt, for you."

"If somebody else doesn't beat you to it."

"You mean—you think we've been spied on?"

"*Quién sabe?*" she shrugged.

Half an hour of lathering toil taught them something about what a genuine Eldoradian wilderness can be.

Through the primeval slime of black cedar and mahogany swamps they pushed on, where giant dragon-flies darted and poised; where tangled mangroves sprawled in the mud like monstrous spiders terrified but frozen in flight; where under the leprous scum of pools insatiable leeches lay in wait. Carrion crabs scuttled on clattered mire. Slug-gish toads stared pop-eyed at them from green-coated morasses that abominably stank with oozy-bubbling eructations.

Over slippery fallen tree-trunks they slithered, beside black bayous where water-moccasins lurked in silent menace. High above them glimmered the mockery of waxen-white flowers with golden hearts, of tree-borne orchids that dropped pale pink blossoms through the gloom.

"Wait, please," gasped Janice, spent and breathless. She lowered her burden to the mucky earth, rubbed her shoulder where the cords had bitten deep. "Why not climb a tree? Mightn't you possibly catch a glimpse of the ocean?"

"No good," he said. "Even if we got the right direction, we'd lose it again in five minutes. Only thing we can do is trust to instinct and keep plugging."

"All right. Hike!"

He picked up her burden, with a smiling, "I'll just take this, too."

"You'll do nothing of the kind!"

"Ah, come on now, Janice. You're all in. I won't mind toting this, too. Really, now!"

Her only answer was to slump down on the root of a fallen tree.

"Unless you let me carry my own load," she issued her ultimatum, "you'll have to carry me, too."

At this he laughed, beaten.

"You win. I draw the line at that!"

Once more they trekked, with torture laboring ever at their side.

"Judas priest!" once exclaimed the aviator, as with an inflamed hand he brushed a colony of flies from his sweating and muddy face. "If I had that damned Titino now——"

"Look!" Janice interrupted. "See there!"

"What is it, now?"

"Right there, don't you see? A trail! Just beyond that ceiba-tree. No no, you dumbbell, not that way! More to the left. A trail, Peter, a trail!"

YES, even in that drizzling gloom, there in that wilderness of hell, the trail was unmistakably visible.

Hard-beaten, even though narrow, it

skirted the thicket where the castaways had been almost on the point of collapsing. Infinitely it cheered and revived them both, despite the fact that they could not even guess whence it came, whither it went.

Though it might lead nowhere in particular, or even only to some village of deadly-hostile *sublevados* or *bravos*, none the less it was a path, a road. It helped banish the appalling loneliness of this wilderness which had reduced them to the utter insignificance of gnats. It spoke to them of something beside just hideous forests and swamps, serpents, insects and all the unmeaning and deadly fecundity of the jungle. Men, human beings, must certainly exist at some point along a path.

"What gorgeous luck, Peter!" exclaimed Janice. "A *chicleros'* trail!"

"Trail, eh? Great stuff! But where to?"

"Don't know. Out of here, anyway."

"That may be," Peter answered, squinting at the path. "But we're got to go slow. As I understand it, these *chicleros* are the husky boys that usually drill you with home-made slugs, fired out of old Spanish muskets, and then afterwards inquire who you are—maybe."

"Oh, I can manage *them*, all right."

"Hope so. They wouldn't cut a throat or two for a couple bags of gold, eh? Certainly not. Nice little *chicleros*! Well, anyhow, we've still got plenty of ammo."

Gaunt and weary, he shoved forward into the trail. Janice closely followed.

"Which way now?" she wondered.

"All looks alike to *me*!" He dug up a broad golden double-eagle from his pocket. "Heads, to the right. Tails, left." The goldpiece spun in that dark, rain-dripping air of morning. It fell with a tiny thud on hard-packed earth now slippery with moisture.

"Peter! Look out!" screamed Janice, as he stooped to pick it up. "Snake!"

Peter's backward jump would have set a world's record at any Olympic meet.

"Where?"

"Don't you see?" she cried, recoiling. Unsteadily she pointed. "*Coralillo!*"

Now the aviator saw a streak of the most beautiful red, black and yellow, coiled there not six feet away from the goldpiece. A perfect jewel of a snake, most exquisite, most deadly. With tense head watchful, ready for the kill, there it waited.

"Reception-committee already on the job, eh?" asked Peter, deftly scooping up the goldpiece from a distance.

"Heads it is," he announced. "Right face. Forward—march!"

ONCE more they set out along this narrow path winding through the sodden and miasmatic jungle. Though the trail was only a streak in that vague, blurred light, none the less it marked a human path. Slippery, rutted and deeply pockmarked by the hoofs of pack-animals, still it wakened half-chimerical hopes in the forest castaways.

Steadily they pushed on, though now or again stopping a moment to rest and listen with great caution. Silence hung heavily ominous; the view closed in, narrowly restricted. No telling at what bend in the trail they might find death ambushed.

"Pssst!" Peter suddenly cautioned.

Dimly, indistinctly, through thickest vistas, something had grown visible. Something like a rude, thatched hut.

"What is it, Peter?" the girl whispered, coming close.

"A camp, there ahead. Easy, now!"

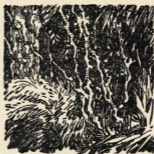
CHAPTER VIII

JANICE HAS A PLAN

SILENTLY they both tautened their senses for any sign of human life, only too likely to be hostile. Peter's inflamed and squinting eyes strained for any sight of motion, there ahead. None appeared. No word drifted, no cock crowed, neither did any dog bark, as ordinarily at all Maya settlements.

Save for the sudden harsh loud cry of a whooper crane all was silent.

Janice drew her gun. Peter did as much. A-thirst, giddy with over-exhaustion and with the oppression of the strangling heat that gripped their throats, once more they scouted forward.



Watchfully they pushed along, ready to shoot at the bat of an eyelash. Now the hut was becoming plainly visible, with two others grouped round a sort of roughly-cleared patio in the jungle. Old sticks and firewood lay scattered all about. At one side towered an immense, smooth-barked gray tree with sloping buttressed roots.

"Deserted Village, Central American Model," commented Peter as the lost pair entered that sad, abandoned little camp.

"This place hasn't been occupied for a long time. We're monarchs of all we survey."

"Only I'm not much of a surveyor. Well, anyhow, here's where I rest my feet."

"Me, too," said Janice. "Whew, it's about time!"

Cautiously they approached one of the huts, just a rough, windowless structure with palm-wattled walls and a high thatched roof. Still no indication of life appeared.

"Hello!" shouted Peter. "*Quién vive?*"

Unanswered, his voice was swallowed up by the hostile forest and, rather overawed by the loneliness almost as oppressive as that of the jungle itself, they inspected the rest of the camp—only those three crude huts, in all. Beside one of them, a roughly-dug well of evil appearance showed dark-coated water.

"It's an old *chicleros'* place, all right," judged the girl.

"Hasn't been occupied for some time, I reckon, by the way things are growing up in the patio, here. Not so cheerful, eh?"

"Pretty bad, but anyhow, there's a roof to get under, out of this diabolical rain-drip. Small favors thankfully received!"

Even that shelter was a comfort. In rotting disrepair though the camp was the thatch still would shed water. And under a roof of sorts, the earth at least was not so mucky.

With a sigh of relief, Peter unslung and dropped his burden near a log that had served as a seat. On this he wearily sank down.

"Judas! Well, anyhow, we're here."

"Where is here?" asked Janice, likewise casting off her load and sitting down. "Oh, my knee!" She fell to rubbing it again, while she surveyed the dismal hut.

Bad as this was, it looked no more disfigured and dishevelled than they did, themselves. Both of them, wet through, had become disreputable mockeries of what they had been, with ripped and tattered clothing, with hands and faces scratched, oozing blood, and swollen by poisons of insects and plants.

The only occupants of this mournful camp seemed to be small and hostile creatures. Peter and Janice hoped no deadly serpents lurked in the thatch, as so often happens in such huts. Up under the eaves black wasps were humming round their nest. Near-by, ambushed in a web, a *chintu* lay waiting; a flat, crab-like spider, swift and stealthy, with horny plates and wicked calipers, the bite of which meant a high, dangerous fever.

"The other huts must have been where they slung their hammocks," said the girl. "This one was the *cocina*." She pointed at a crude fireplace of stones and baked mud. "They used to cook their chicle here, as well as their grub."

"M'yeh. Wish they'd left a little. Almost anything would come in handy."

"Doesn't seem to be anything but that junk in the corner." He nodded at some old tin cans, a Standard Oil container—

universal utensil in the tropics—and a rough water-jar. Well, let's be nonchalant again."

A bit of a smoke revived them. Peter got up, walked to one of the other huts and looked in—no hard task, as the structure was without walls; merely a roof on palm-posts.

"Not so warm," he judged. "Left a sick dog, when they cleared out." Its clean-picked skeleton lay inside.

He inspected the third hut.

"Nor here, either," he added, to Janice, who now rejoined him. "Nothing but a few old rags hanging round."

"Rags?" Interest sounded in her voice.

"Say, in case there are any native clothes here, I've got an idea!"

"What kind of an idea?"

"Never mind. Bring the rags out—if they're not too bad. And for heaven's sake, look out for snakes!"

PICKING up a stick of firewood he entered the hut, where on rude pegs some ancient and cast-off clothing hung. This he poked, dislodging a crimson scorpion that fell to the earthen floor. As this loathsome creature sidled away with menacing claws and with venomous tail raised over its back, to strike, Peter's heel crushed it to a pulp.

Then on his stick he brought out the clothes—of course cotton stuff—to the dim light of day.

"Well, here they are," he told Janice, not understanding her plan at all. "Just what's your idea?"

"First, let's see what you've got here. Shake them all out, Peter. Tarantulas just love old clothes."

"Tarantulas show very poor taste," he judged, as he shook the garments, without disclosing any more pests. "What can you possibly be up to, now?"

She still declined to explain, but busied herself inspecting the clothes. These totalled a ragged coat-like shirt; a pair of badly torn long trousers; and another pair of shorts such as most Mayas wear. All

three pieces were mildewed. They had obviously been long discarded. And when any chiclero discards clothing, that speaks volumes for its condition.

"They'll do, though," she judged. "They'll have to do!"

"You mean, to wear?"

"Yes, Mr. Peter Barzil; I mean, to wear. That's not too high a price to pay for our lives, is it?"

"Our lives? I don't get you." And he shook his red head. "I should think putting these duds on would be pretty nearly a death-sentence."

"Not after they're disinfected. We're going to make a fire, boil these clothes and take a bath. Clean up, properly, sabe? And after that——"

EAGERLY she explained her plan of campaign. Listening, Peter's blue eyes lighted up with swift approval.

"By Judas, you *have* got a great idea. You've certainly got a head on you!"

"Well, light a fire, first, and let's get these clothes boiling."

"Okay!"

Presently the Standard Oil tin, with water and clothes, was standing on a blaze in the crude fireplace. When the clothes were well boiled, Janice suggested that Peter go out and gather a few coconuts, while she hung out the garments and heated some more water for a bath. "Don't come back too soon, mind!" she added.

"Huh! Don't I get a bath, too?"

"Yes, while I'm catching forty winks. Go on, now—be on your way!"

NOON found two seeming Indians, two natives of Eldoradia, plodding along the trail. The naturally brunette complexion of the smaller was hardly more natural-appearing than that of the larger, which had been artfully dyed with *tsigal-juice*, like his hair.

This larger Indian, in a torn shirt and tattered trousers of coarse white cotton, bore corded to his back a clay water-jar.

The jar seemed heavy; as why should it not, with between eleven and twelve thousand dollars' worth of goldpieces in its belly?

The smaller of the Indians walked with a limp, and wore ragged shorts, also a native coat-shirt, the loose hang of which effectively hid curves that now very emphatically needed concealment. This traveller carried, as a back-load, a bundle of silken cloth, at the center of which lay a wrist-watch and some rings.

Both trekkers had revolvers and cartridge-belts slung round them. Both were barefoot, save for sandals fashioned from boot-soles and from parachute yoke-lines. The boots they had recently worn, together with their flying helmets and all their discarded clothing, they had carefully and thoroughly burned. Even thus do desperate generals burn their bridges behind them, to make retreat impossible.

Physically they were standing the strain well. Some liberal draughts of coconut-milk had greatly restored their forces. The little nap Janice had caught had much rested her. Their hot baths had not only relieved their insect-bites and vegetable poisonings, but had also refreshed them and built up their morale again.

That their clothing was still wet from the thorough boiling it had received by way of disinfecting it, mattered little. For as they labored down the trail, the sullen rain kept soaking it still more. But to be clean again, and perfectly disguised—here lay matters of highest import.

Steadily on and on, through stifling heat, they trudged away from the deserted camp.

"Lucky for us we're on a trail, now," said Peter at last. "If we weren't, we'd be cut to ribbons in no time. We simply couldn't negotiate half a mile of jungle, without boots."

"May have to get back into the jungle, yet, if this path gets us nowhere. It *ought* to reach some place, sometime!"

"Paths usually do. Oh, things are looking better all the time. Rain's letting up,

too. You really think we can get by as natives, if and when we happen to meet up with some of 'em?"

"Why not? I know I can make the grade with them, if you only don't forget your rôle."

"I'll certainly try not to, Janice."

"Well then, we ought to get away with it. I can guarantee my Spanish as the real thing. I speak this local patois like a born Eldoradian. Haven't I chattered it since I was toe-high to a snail?"

"That surely ought to help some, and—what's that?"

"What's what, Peter?"

"Don't you hear something? A bell?"

With hearts begining to pound a little, they listened.

"Wait—yes, that's right," assented Janice, her dark eyes glowing with excitement. "A bell. That's a *remuda* coming,

sure as you live!"

"You mean a mule-train?"

"That's right.

A pack-train. Chicleros on the move. Probably freighting down a load of gum,

from up-country. Oh, boy, are we in luck?"

"Allee samee heap big luck! That is, unless they just happen to start the fire-works, at sight."

"But why should they open fire on their own people?" asked the girl. "Forget that we're white people. That's out! We're a couple of Indians!"

"I've been called an Indian, more than once, but I never had to be one. However—"

"Shhhhh!" the girl cautioned. "Keep still, can't you? This is my show, now!"

Tautly silent they stood and listened, every nerve like piano-wire. Nearer by moments, ever nearer through that steaming and infernal jungle—closer, louder—jangled the musical faint *tink-tink-tinkle*

of the mule-bells that to the castaways spelled—what?

CHAPTER IX

"Where More is Meant Than Meets the Ear."

OF A sudden, in addition to the bell they heard a few faint strumming chords on a guitar, and then a distant voice that hoarsely sang. The words failed to reach them. All that came was the air; that of a melancholy plaint, lagging and in a half-minor key.

"Spanish, eh?" whispered Peter. "So then, these aren't dyed-in-the-wool wild men. Judas, I only wish I could play chords like those!"

"You play the guitar?"

"Say, I'm the original ring-tailed virtuoso! But never mind about me. How about these chicleros? Think they're Spanish?"

"No." She shook her close-clipped head. "No Spaniards in the Metnal. Their lives wouldn't be worth a centavo here. These chicleros are all natives. But most of 'em know Spanish. And—shhhhh!—play dumb, Peter!"

Ever more tensely they waited, keyed-up to what might in a minute or two become a very ticklish situation. What was now plodding down the trail toward them? Life—death?

The musical dissonance of the mule-bells grew ever closer; and louder sounded the twangling chords, the melancholy lament of that sad-voiced minstrel. And now a moving bit of color grew visible along the trail—a dash of scarlet which was the blazing high-spot of a native serape.

With it moved an immense-brimmed sombrero. And then the jungle castaways beheld a lean, dark-skinned, parchment-faced and one-eyed ruffian. This fellow was picking away at his guitar and swinging his sandalled feet as he sat sideways on the crate-like pack-saddle that bestrode a gaunt mule's back.

Following the lead-mule with the rider



and the musical bells, five other mules came treading patiently under heavy loads. Sorry-looking animals they all were, like most creatures belonging to a breed of men who have no pity on four-footed animals. They appeared starved, rib-staring and galled, lame and broken-spirited; and all about them swarmed, hovered, darted and stung a dense cloud of insects.

Their backs and sides were laden with heavy packages of chicle, most precious crop of Eldoradia. And at the end of the file, two plodding bareheaded figures trailed along; two Indians clad in white undershirts, abbreviated cotton trousers and blue aprons—these little aprons being the last vestigial traces of the simple breech-clouts that their long-past Maya ancestors once had worn.

On, on drew the remuda, closer and closer still. Then suddenly—"*Hola!*" Janice hailed, raising her hand.

The gaunt man on the lead-mule stopped his song and his guitar-strumming. He hauled his animal to a stand. More than willingly all the others stopped.

"*Caray!*" exclaimed the rider, staring with his solitary orb at the two figures there in the path. "*Quién va!*"

"Friends," Janice answered, speaking in Spanish as he had done. With a bit of a swagger she walked toward him, thumbs in cartridge-belt. The man, she and Peter saw, was armed. Though his weapon was only an archaic shotgun hung to the pack-saddle along with a machete, even this should be treated with respect. And moreover, the two drivers might have some more modern weapons.

Boldly Janice confronted the musician, while Peter now lagged a trifle in the background. For the present his game had to be a passive one—very.

"We are friends," repeated Janice, her appearance impeccably that of a young Maya. "How far to the next pueblo?"

"El Suspiro, you mean?"

"Of course," she eagerly grasped at this wisp of information, which Peter no less swiftly noted. "How far?"

"Ten kilómetros, little more or less, if God wills," answered the musician, boring intently at her with that solitary gimlet-eye of his. Janice felt it pierce her. Did the fellow suspect anything? Did he guess? He looked like a typical Eldoradian of the lower class, shrewd, suspicious, wary.

A little silence fell. The mules flapped suffering ears and tails. Gently the bells tingled. On that heavy air was suffused the sweetish perfume of raw chicle, pervasive, cloying.

"Ten kilometers, eh?" the girl repeated.

"It might be fifteen. But it is not far, thanks to God."

"And you are just coming from there?"

"*Qué va!* No! We are thither bound, to sell our gum to El Gallego, the alcalde of that place, who handles all gum from this region. You are headed the wrong way." With narrowing optic he scrutinized Janice. Back—you must go back, to reach El Suspiro. How does it happen that you are lost?"

"Oh," she shrugged, "the devil always helps lose those who wander far from home. In this accursed part of the country it is easy to go astray, no? El Suspiro, you say—a few kilometers. And from there to the sea?"

"A matter of fifty kilometers, at most, down the Río Fangoso. But six kilometers below El Surpiro runs the frontier of San Nicador." The parchment face twitched with a flicker of hate against that accursed and neighboring republic.

"Those swine of San Nicadorians!" murmured Janice. "They are worse, almost, than the Americans, themselves."

"No, amigo; nobody could be worse than the Americans! But El Tigre will soon sweep them out. Their wealth will soon be ours, and their bones will fall to the buzzards, God willing!"

"Ah, so you are Liberadores, like ourselves?"

"*Claro que sí! Viva El Tigre!*" And And—

"*Viva!*" echoed Janice.

NOW, decidedly, matters were going forward! Already in only a few minutes' contact, Janice had discovered how far it was to a settlement and to the frontier, also that this *chiclero* belonged to the party of their deadly enemy, El Tigre. All probabilities were that the pueblo itself was a nest of Liberadores, but as to this Janice thought is wisest not to inquire for the present. Soon enough that fact might be discovered!

In spite of this political complication, Janice felt high encouragement. But, masking her elation, she stood a moment



and pondered. The aviator, betraying no sign of having heard anything, tried to look as much like a wooden dummy as nature would permit. But he was thinking:

"Only about sixty kilometers to the sea. And hardly more than twenty to the frontier, and safety!"

The two drivers had meantime straggled up along the line of gum-laden mules. Each of them had a revolver belted on. Their sharp looks were charged with inquisitive hostility.

"And who," demanded the guitar-player, his tone far from friendly, "who may you be?"

"A couple of Liberadores, like yourself."

"Of course. Otherwise, it would be suicide for you to be found in the Metnal. But beyond that—? These be unhealthy regions for strangers, especially if they have Spanish blood. Many such a one has come hither to find bacon, and has got only broken bones."

"Ah, but we are not strangers. We are Eldoradians, again like yourself. Doing a little independent chicle-buying."

"So, eh? And your names—?"

"I am Eduardo Chambalán. My companion here, who is stone-deaf and cannot talk, calls himself Gumersindo Ramírez. We are both from Halachó. Both of us born in this country, but my friend passed some years of his early childhood in Peru. And now, who are you?"

"I am Arturo Hopelchén, a chicle-buyer—and your servant. Of course they call me El Tuerto," he added, with a grim smile; *el tuerto* meaning a one-eyed man. "But a single good eye often sees better than two bad ones, if God wills. So, you are independent buyers, eh?"

"Yes. A new venture, for us. And we find an untried task like an uncracked nut. A hard life for me, especially with a deaf-and-dumb partner."

"*El probecito!*" commiserated the musician, with a sharp glance at Peter. "But it is God's will. Every man is as God made him, and some a great deal worse. He hears nothing? He speaks nothing?"

"Nothing. As a child he spoke, but the fever deafened him, and he forgot how to talk. He can still sing a little, though. A strange case. Very strange."

"He can sing, you say?" demanded El Tuerto, while his two brown-faced comrades stared in wonder. "*Caramba!* That is strange indeed. What can he sing?"

"Not much. Only some old songs of his childhood in Peru. Songs not in Spanish, but in the Quiché tongue. You know that language, any of you?"

"No more than we do English, which they say only Satan can learn. Will he sing for us?"

"Why not?" And Janice's heart gave a bound of exultation. Was not this stupid fellow tumbling into her trap, heels over head? Was not a miraculous way developing, to communicate secretly with Peter, and to get an answer back? She held out her hand for the guitar. "I know a few words of the Quiché tongue, myself. It is a most strange jargon. For instance, if I ask for food, drink and lodging for a night, I must say:

"Peter, we-ought-to-use-these men-

and-mules-some-way. But how? Sing-your-answer!"

"That is the devil's language, worse even than English!" exclaimed the one-eyed man. He shoved back his huge sombrero, while Janice handed Peter the guitar. "Good Christians could never learn that. It sounds like trying to eat soup and whistle at the same time, as the other says. Well, now for the song, eh?"

He settled himself more comfortably on his packsaddle, offered Janice a brown-paper cigarette and took one himself. As smoke wafted on the dank air, now free at all events from rain, Peter ran a few chords. His sore and swollen hands made playing hard, but he managed. To the tune of *Mademoiselle* from Armentières" he sang:

*"We've got to have these mules, some way,
Have this gum!
So, buy them if you can. If not,
We'll grab 'em, some!
Back at the old camp, I and you
Will teach these birds a thing or two,
With a hinky-dinky parlez-vous!"*

His chant continued, in the kind of voice Peter imagined a deaf-mute might employ—and raucous enough it was. The song outlined a plan so daring and original that Janice almost betrayed the exultation it inspired. To mask it, she turned away from the Eldoradians and faced Peter. When his song was done she held out her hand for the guitar.

"*Olé!*" applauded El Tuerto. "Your companion sings well, even though he cannot speak like a Christian. A miracle, indeed. And you—do you not also sing?"

"Oh, just one little Quiché chorus."

With hands far from unskilled, Janice fingered the strings, then sang to the air of "Swanee River":

*"Way down within these tropic jungles,
Far, far away,
That's where you bet I understand you,
Get every word you say!"*

*We will buy this gum, and hire
All these mules, and so,
Working your scheme, which is a knock-
out,
Back to the camp we'll go!"*

She ended with a laugh:

"*Bastante!* Enough of this!" And she handed back the guitar to the one-eyed man. "Enough of all this singing. Now to business, eh?"

"Business?"

"Why not? You have chicle. We wish to buy chicle. Well?"

"Ah, but it takes money to buy chicle!" returned El Tuerto, with a scornful glance at the bare heads, ragged clothes and sandalled feet of the pair. "For money the dog dances, and gum is sold."

"And who, pray," demanded Janice, "who tells you that we have no money?"

"The same questioner who asks what man would go to a goat's house for wool."

She matched his proverb with still another:

"Yes, but many have gone for wool and have come home shorn. You judge us by our clothes, *compadre?* Well, it is I who tell you that this time you judge like a blind man appraising a diamond. If you had our gold, you would not close a sober eye for ten years. However, since you choose to consider us beggars, may God return the same to you."

"Eh? What say you?"

"I say you probably cannot sell this chicle. You are no owner—merely, I take it, some peon of a real proprietor."

At this El Tuerto's one eye gleamed with anger.

"Ah, now you take the wrong boar by the ear! he retorted. Peon? No! I am an independent dealer, selling in the best market that God wills to send me!"

"Then why not sell to us?"

"Your money is as good as any, if you can show it. But do not try to put in needles and draw out iron bars!"

Janice laughed. "You amuse me, *amigo*. There is a deserted camp along this trail

of the devil. We will go back to that, with you, and there we will show you the color of our money!"

"It is well!" agreed the one-eyed man, slinging his guitar to the pack-saddle, and giving his mule a kick with a horny heel.

His steed's bells began once more to tinkle, and the other mules, lame and raw and heavy-hung with ticks, plugged along after their leader. As the remuda passed, Janice and Peter slung their parachute-bundle and their water-jar (with its precious burden of gold) over the backs of the two most lightly-freighted mules.

Then they stood aside while the whole remuda and the two drivers drew on a little way ahead. Peter was all for closely following, but Janice plucked him warningly by the ragged sleeve and held him back.

THE distance grew wider between themselves and the remuda, till at time the drivers were hidden past bends in the trail. Now only the persistent sweet perfume of the chicle remained, with the jingle-jangle of the bells, drifting through that steaming and verdant half-light. And now in whispers Janice and Peter could talk.

"Taking chances with that gold," said he.

"No—on the contrary," she answered, limping beside him in the slippery mud of the mule-path, "that's the safest thing we could do, letting it go ahead of us. If we'd kept our loads, those cut-throats might have suspected they contained valuables. Do people ever see what's right under their very noses?"

"Judas, I don't know but you're right. Well then, this scheme of ours——"

"Looks like a winner to me, Peter. But I don't get all the details. Now, after we reach the deserted camp, what then?"

As he laid out the plan of campaign, she interjected some special ideas of her own—and Janice certainly had plenty of ideas. Thus in secret they formulated a program both daring and simple; a pro-

cedure that, with success, might spell life for both of them as well as salvation for the Rancho.

With success—yes! But failure lay completely outside their scheme of things.

"I don't see any possible way for this to slip," Peter with high hopes affirmed.

"Nor I," agreed Janice. "Only, you know about counting chickens in the shell."

"M'yeh. But here," and Peter laid a painful, inflamed hand on the butt of his Luger, "here's a winning argument! If everything else goes flooie, haven't we got a couple of persuaders even more forcible than gold? And can we use 'em?"

CHAPTER X

THE STICK-UP

NOW then, *compañero*," Janice started the ball of negotiation rolling, when fly-tormented men and mules all stood in the rough little patio under the gigantic and huge-buttressed tree, "now how much gum have you, and what quality?"

"Seven hundred kilos, all told," El Tuerto answered, pushing his sombrero back at a rakish angle and tossing his serape over the pack-saddle. He blew clouds of smoke into the misty and fetid air of the swamp. "And as for the quality, that is of the best."

"A scalded cat dreads even cold water," smiled Janice. "I have bought gum, before now. As well look for five feet on a dog, as for an honest chiclero."



"Ah, but I am different! Genuine chicle, from the finest sapote-trees. Do you not smell that perfume?" Noisily he

sniffed. "No inferior grade can smell like that! This gum of mine is well-cooked and free from all impurities. I am not like some scoundrelly chicleros who load their pack-saddles with stones, sand, even dirt, to increase the weight!"

"Yes, I know all those tricks," Janice nodded, while Peter dissembled his admiration of this shrewd, idiomatic bargaining. "Trust no one, and you will never be deceived, as the other says. One time, before I learned the game, I even found a pair of overalls in a cake of gum. But I made the seller rebate the weight of them—and I kept the overalls. So now, *hombre*, we will examine a few cakes of your so famous gum."

"As you will," El Tuerto shrugged, while his two henchmen looked sullenly on.

Peter's admiration grew as the girl bargained and chaffed and insisted on her rights in true native fashion. As last she and the one-eyed ruffian seemed to have come to satisfactory terms and Janice motioned Peter to fetch the water-jug.

"Good wits jump swiftly," said she to El Tuerto. "I am glad you will be content with one-fifty, for a contented heart is better than a continual fiesta." Pointing to the ground, inside the little kitchen-hut, she indicated that Peter was to spill out some of the gold.

Hand on the butt of her gun, she stood guard, while the broad, dull goldpieces rolled on that hard-packed floor.

At sight of this amazing flood of wealth, the three native Eldoradians uttered startled oaths.

"*Ay, mi madre!*" exclaimed the one-eyed man. "What is this that looks so good to sore eyes? Wealth of all the Incas?"

"Nay, brother. Nothing but our usual small-change," Janice smiled. "This may teach you not to judge wine by the bottle. And remember this too, my friend. Whatever gold we do not pay to you is ours! We know well how to protect it!" She slapped her gun. The Eldoradians,

all armed, by no means appeared impressed. "Let us see, now. Seven hundred kilos of chicle, at one-fifty—that comes to one thousand and fifty pesos, gold. Is it not so?"

"Correct," nodded El Tuerto, his one eye gleaming with craft and cruel greed. The drivers' faces reflected evil thoughts, ominous with deadly portents.

"Remember," Janice warned, "we have other metal, too, beside gold. We have plenty of lead."

El Tuerto only grunted, as he drew out his buckskin money-bag. While Peter stood guard, Janice knelt and counted out the fellow's payment there on the earth, in little piles of a hundred pesos each. The remaining gold she dumped back into the water-jar.

"And you, I suppose," she asked, "have steelyards, to weigh the gum? We shall demand full weight."

"You shall have it," replied El Tuerto in a tone of menace. "And over!"

"There, now, your money is all counted out." And arising, Janice pointed at the piles of native and American gold. "Pick it up!"

Suspecting no ruse, wholly carried away by greed, the three Eldoradians very neatly fell into the trap. They crouched and with eager, clutching fingers began this most welcome task. A nod of understanding passed between Peter and the girl.

"And you will freight the gum for us, to El Suspiro?" asked Janice. "Of course you will carry it free?"

"Why do you say 'of course?'" El Tuerto growled, still pouching gold. "Was that in the bargain?"

"I repeat, you will carry it for us—free."

"*Qué va!*" he refused, not even looking up. "How you get it to El Suspiro is no affair of mine. The blind eat many flies, but I still have one eye, and swallow none!"

"Which does not prevent our having the drop on you, my friend," laughed Janice.

"*Arriba las manos*—and stick 'em high!"

Crouching and helpless, the three Eldoradians found themselves staring, all of a sudden, into the very maw of death.

SIX phenomenally dirty paws reached as if to pluck leaves from the forest ceiling. Goldpieces fell and rolled spirally to rest. Kneeling, squatting there beside the half-garnered money, El Tuerto and his brace of evil-visaged comrades outdid each other in stretching.

Two exceedingly businesslike guns in the hands of two very earnest chicle-buyers made disobedience seem of slight value.

"*Mil diablos!*" snarled El Tuerto, while Peter very deftly took the muleteers' cartridge-belts, and frisked them of their hardware, which he crammed into his own belt. Peter, in rags and with two guns plus the Luger in his hand, made a splendid understudy for a genuine pirate. "So then, after all you are only *bandidos*? You pretend to pay us, only to take our guns and rob us also?"

"Nothing of that!" Janice flung back at him, as the drivers mumbled scraps of supplications, blasphemies and prayers. "And speaking of flies, a closed mouth catches none. So the quieter you keep now, the better for your health!"

"Robbers, eh?"

"Listen! We will pay you even more than your thousand and fifty pesos. But you are going to earn every additional cent."

"Earn it? What do you say? Do not mock us!" implored El Tuerto, changing his tone. Now with the fear of sudden death somewhat weakening, he had already begun to foresee some possible ruse wherewith to turn the tables. "What is it you want us to do?"

"You are going to stay here," Janice dictated, while she and Peter held steady guns on the crouching captives. "Stay here, all three of you. We are going ahead with the chicle and the mules."

"And why?"

"The 'why' is not your affair!"

"Is this some political ambush?"

"Silence! Or you will learn that death is the only thing that has no cure!"

"But our mules," protested El Tuerto.

"You steal our mules, revolvers, shotgun, food——?"

"No, you will get them all back, in time."

"And where?"

"At El Suspiro. Everything we take shall be returned to you, or paid for. But here you stay, a while. That inconvenience shall be well paid for, too."

"You joke, señor," the one-eyed man tried to smile. For the first time he had given Janice a title.

"Keep your hands up, there, or you'll never live to be hung!" commanded Janice, as Peter turned to the mule-train. From a pack-saddle he took a long coil of rawhide riata. "Now you're first, Tuerto. Lie down on your face!"

"Me? Never!"

A bullet almost clipped his right ear. Without argument, El Tuerto collapsed, face-down. His huge sombrero rolled away, over the floor of the kitchen-hut.

Laughing, Peter jerked the fellow's hands around behind him, and got busy with the rawhide. In three minutes El Tuerto was scientifically hog-tied, with his wrists and ankles thoroughly lashed. Now the man lay helpless, calling on an astonishing variety of saints and demons for protection and vengeance.

"*Cállese la boca!*" Janice silenced him. She motioned with her gun at one of the muleteers. "You're next!"

Without resistance this fellow submitted, begging only that his life be spared. The third man proved less yellow-spined. In silence he underwent his tying-up. He even managed a grim smile.

"Only the mountains never meet again," he growled. "You two and I shall sometime settle this account. You shall pay me your debt—later."

When all three had been secured, Peter dragged them like so many packages, into

the farthest and darkest corner of the hut. He tossed the money-bag to El Tuerto. Then Janice and he unslung the bundled-up parachute and opened it. Their rings and the wrist-watch they dropped into a saddle-bag. When the chute was opened, they hung it like a mosquito-net over the prisoners, who were now sweating, cursing and uttering the most sanguinary threats.

"That'll do for you!" Peter suddenly exclaimed, in broken Spanish, as he brought the water-jar with the rest of the goldpieces. "We aren't giving you the tent because we love you, but because you may have to stay here twenty-four hours, and if you didn't have it, the bugs would kill you, *sabe?* Be good, now, and you'll be happy—yet!"

In blank astonishment at hearing the dumb man speak, they fell silent and staring.

"And here's a little more money to pay for hiring your mules, machetes and equipment," added Janice, dropping a few extra gold-pieces beside them. "Gold—ah, is it not a plaster for all wounds?"

"Well, so long, folks," Peter mocked. "Enjoy yourselves. Hope the mountains meet a million years before you and we ever do," and he lowered the chute all round them.

CHAPTER XI

THREE SHOTS

HALF an hour from then, much refreshed and leaving the captives vociferating unthinkable torments to be applied to them, Janice and Peter drove the little cavalcade out of the old chicle-camp.

A quickly scratched-up meal had done much to restore their forces. The pack-train saddle-bags had yielded cold jerked beef; a few of the hard biscuit known as *galletas*; and some guava paste. These, washed down with strong hot coffee hastily boiled in one of the muleteers' kettles, were as good as a feast.

The pack-train moved toward the un-

known pueblo of El Suspiro, and—on the way—toward the spot where the jungle fugitives had emerged into the trail after having hidden the bulk of their gold.

Janice, olive-skinned and dark-eyed as many a native, led the procession. She was armed with her own revolver and with one of those borrowed from the captives. Over her left ear she had stuck a vivid crimson hibiscus, Indian-fashion. Now seated astride, perched on El Tuerto's brilliant serape folded on the pack-saddle; with El Tuerto's vast sombrero tilted back on her cropped head; with her shorts, her bare legs and her sandaled feet dangling, she made a figure that only a very sharp eye would have suspected as anything but that of an Eldoradian. Yes, Janice had certainly gone native!

Peter too, riding the rear mule—its load of chicle having been distributed among the others—made an excellent imitation of what he wasn't. A poncho and a machete, together with the shotgun and the guitar, swung from his saddle. His armament, plus the gun, was his own Luger and the other pistol taken from the prisoners. Both he and Janice wore a cartridge-belt—likewise borrowed from the Eldoradians—slung bandolier-fashion. They looked as swashbuckling and devil-may-care as you please.

ONWARD the little caravan pushed. For some half hour it wound heavily, with bells a-tinkle, along the narrow and muddy trail, leaving its pungent sweet perfume of chicle on the air of that frightful Gehenna of a wilderness. Far above, now the sun had come out; had begun to turn the swamps into steaming kettles of putrescence. Though no direct rays could penetrate the forest awning of leaves, increased light and heat betrayed their presence.

Suddenly Janice reined her fly-switching mule to a halt. The whole remuda stopped, with the characteristic willingness of such starved beasts to cease exertion.

"Here's the place, Peter," Janice called back to her companion. "Here's where we struck the trail."

"That's right," he assented, sliding off his mount and joining her. "Well, it's a case of Good-bye, lady, I've got to leave you now."

"Yes, I suppose so. But——"

"You stay here with the mules, all but the pair I'm taking with me. I'll leave the shotgun, in addition to the two shooting-irons you've already got. You're well heeled, all right. And I'll be back—some-time."

"Don't be any longer than you can possibly help, Peter." She swung a leg over the saddle and jumped down. "No telling who or what might drift along here."

"Oh, you'll be okay! Chances are, nobody barges along this God-forsaken trail once a week, or a month. But if anything *should* happen, remember, fire three shots. It's a long way to where the gold's buried, I know. But there's a chance I might hear your signal. And if I do, I'll answer the same way. You'll know I'm coming!"

Even as he spoke, he was unloading packs of chicle from the two strongest mules—sweet-smelling bundles of gum lashed in palm-leaves and each weighing perhaps a hundred and twenty-five pounds. These bundles he stowed beside the trail.

With a machete he cut in two what remained of the leather riata. Half of it he knotted round one mule's neck and tied to the pack-saddle of the other. The other half he similarly fastened to the second mule's neck, to serve him as a line with which to lead the mule—both mules in fact. He hung four saddle-bags on their pack-saddles; and now, machete in hand, was ready to depart.

"Well, I'm on my way."

"Wait, Peter! Let me go, too!"

"What? And leave the mules and the

chicle unprotected? The things we need so vitally? Remember, Jan, they're the big factors in the whole scheme."

"I know, Peter. But——" Dismay lurked in her deep brown eyes. "But, oh—I'm frightened to stay here alone. Really, I am. Isn't it silly of me? But still——"

Peter took her firm little chin in his strong thumb and forefinger, turned her face up and looked her square in the eye.

"You're scared to do something—anything—that may save your father and the ranch?"

Like a cloud-shadow sweeping over an upland plain, her momentary weakness vanished. Still higher rose her dishevelled bobbed head.

"*Vaya con Dios!*" cried she.

AN HOUR from then, leading the recalcitrant mules, Peter was back near the spot where Janice and he had passed the night. Now guided by the blaze-marks he had made on the way out, and not having to stop and cast about for the path, his progress had been vastly more rapid than before.

Watchful for snakes, but buoyed up and tremendously enheartened by hopes of ultimate success, Peter shoved through those pestilent morasses of slime and mud, those stagnant and green-scummed marshes of warm and slimy water.

With lessened menace now black mangroves and clutching, ripping thorns tried to impede him. A keen-bladed weapon like the machete proved very different from a mere pocket-knife.

Carefully now Peter approached the camp-site, loud with birdsongs after the rain. One of the fly-switching mules uneasily nickered, as if sensing some hidden danger; but Peter could see nothing that appeared to menace. No sound, no sign of anybody near.

With something that came as near sentiment as his practical and hard-headed way permitted, Peter looked at the charred ashes of the camp-fire—their camp-fire.



He glanced at the place where he had strung the tent for Janice; where she had slept. There her bed of boughs still remained. He thought he could still see the little hollow where she had lain.

"Hell!" he growled. "Don't be a plain damn fool!"

Without delay he macheted his path—dragging the mules after him—to the huge ceiba-tree near the kraal, and thence to the gold itself. Easily enough he found the place. But his heart was pounding with exertion and anxiety as he tied the animals, muddy and mucked to their lean bellies. Was the gold still there? He thought the leaves and forest-detritus over it looked as if they had been disturbed, but perhaps this was only imagination. At all events, a few minutes now would tell the story.

Losing no time in rest, he fell digging with his machete. Insects and sweat tormented him, but he paid no attention. At top speed he labored. Every moment now was precious, every second.

ALL at once, to his infinite relief, his machete - point struck something hard. Metal—gold! Yes, there the cache lay, safe and whole. Peter thanked whatever queer gods he believed in, and dug the faster.

When it was all exposed, he began loading it into the saddle-bags. In great double-handfuls he scooped and carried it. Now or then goldpieces dropped into the leafy litter. He did not even stop to pick them up. Later, he would salvage them. But for now all he wanted was to get the bulk of the treasure safely aboard his mules.

More freely runnelled his sweat, more savagely the insects struck and stung. But apart from cursing them, he gave no heed.

Now one mule's load was full—more than two hundred pounds, thought Peter. And now he began on the other. Kneel, scoop, get up, dump the gold into saddle-bags; turn, kneel, scoop—lathering toil!

But for thousands, who would not pant and sweat and suffer?

The second mule's burden was almost complete. Now only a few more handfuls of gold remained in the excavation. Ten or a dozen more, and Peter would have it all. Just a few minutes, and—

What was that?

Hardly a wraith of sound yet all too terribly eloquent in its appeal, he heard a tiny nick in the jungle silence. A pistol-shot!

Tensely he stood, to listen.

Two more signals followed. Three revolver-shots that desperately called him.

"Help!"

CHAPTER XII

TORTURE

FOR one taut moment he stood there. No other shot sounded. Jerking out his Luger, he fired thrice in air.

The jungle wakened to confusion. Gorgeous-hued parrakeets screeched as they flashed their living flame of plumage through dense thickets. Noisy black and yellow banana-birds circled and fled. Cackles, grunts and croaks sounded.

Already, as a few clipped leaves spiraled down, Peter was furiously at work. He feverishly scooped up most of the remaining goldpieces and flung them into a saddle-bag. Such coins as fell, remained unheeded.

With sick anxiety at his fast-bumping heart he untied his mules and dragged them away on the back-track through the jungle. Now he gave no slightest heed to poisonous plants or to the possibility of snakes. Speed! Nothing mattered now but speed!

For all his haste, though, he took good care not to wander astray. Above all he must follow his blaze-marks. Once in a while, exhausted and half-strangled by the miasmatic heat, tortured and inflamed by insects, he had to stop for breath. The mules, too—badly overloaded—had to be

spared a little. Suppose one or both should drop?

Onward again Peter fought his way through that dim, brooding, venomous silence. At last after what seemed ages—and with afternoon already well-advanced—dragging his gold-freighted mules after him, he burst through into the chiclero trail.

"Janice! Where are you?"

No sound of her. No sign. Girl, remuda, everything had totally vanished.

"Janice! Janice!"

Emptily his voice echoed in that immense and formidable jungle which seemed to mock his anguish and his terror; that kingdom of mystery and swarming life, of sudden pitiless death.

PANTING with heat and exhaustion, mud-smeared and bruised and far from good to look upon, Peter Barzil peered up and down the green tunnel of the trail, wholly at a loss. Could he be mistaken? Had he emerged in the wrong place? No; this was the spot, right enough. Here lay the bales of chicle he had unloaded when he had plunged into the jungle. And yonder the earth was all freshly trampled with hoofs.

"I sure left her right here. But where the devil now——?"

Yes; where, and what, and how? A score of urgent questions swarmed for answer. Again Peter shouted. And once more only silence enfolded him. He seemed infinitely alone; and yet somehow he sensed the strangest possible feeling, a sort of subconscious intuition, that someone else was near; that hostile eyes were spying on each move of his.

Peter wanted to cut loose with his revolvers at every thicket, every bush and tree. He checked that mad fantasy. Just a sheer waste of ammo., that might vitally be needed later on. Let's see, now—what to do? Be sensible; go about this damn thing right. Fighting down his panic, he rallied.

"Hell! Maybe she just got tired of

waiting, and started along toward El Suspiro!"

But those three shots. That danger-signal? No getting away from the fact of trouble in the wind. Had there been any violence here? Had any fighting, killing taken place? Anxiously he scrutinized the earth. No blood was visible. He sensed a vast relief. And yet—after all, the absence of blood proved nothing. Nothing proved anything. Janice—he must find Janice!

WHAT could be simpler?

"Just got to follow these mule-tracks away from here!"

Of course! And the tracks all led along the trail, away from the direction of the deserted camp where still lay the chiclero and his two muleteers, trussed up and helpless. Or—*did* they still lie there? Peter felt a stab of panic. Ah, now he began to get a glimmer of what must have happened.

"Those devils must have got free, some way. And now—the curse of hell on 'em! —they've captured Janice!"

He jerked the riata attached to his leading mule, and tried to get it under way.

"Come along, damn you! Get a move on, the pair o' you!"

Spent and exhausted, the mule hung back. A couple of kicks in its mud-dripping belly hurt Peter's sandalled toes far more than the mule. Peter whacked it with the flat of his machete. The lamentable beast heaved slowly forward, followed by the other, both hardly able to stagger under their load of gold.

As Peter got under way, he glimpsed a tiny bit of crimson on the miry earth. The hibiscus Janice had cocked so jauntily over her ear.

He snatched it up, looked at it a moment, thrust it into his shirt pocket. Another man than Peter might have put it in his left-hand pocket, over his heart; but Peter wasn't the kind to think of anything like that. His only reaction was anger. And as the hibiscus went into his right-

hand pocket, which was handiest, he exploded:

"If they've hurt her, damn 'em! If they *have*—!"

STARING, he fell silent. For out of the jungle, about thirty yards away, a man had stepped into the trail. Noiseless as a wraith, a small and wizened figure had suddenly appeared.

This man, in faded blue cotton shirt and white knee-trousers, had a cartridge-belt and pistol slung round his lean hips. He was holding up a leathery hand as if for parley.

Amazed, Peter instantly recognized him—Titino, the *mayordomo* of the Gadsden ranch; Titino, the traitor.

"Why, you son of hell!" cried Peter, in his broken Spanish. He drew his Luger, pulled down on the *mayordomo*.

"If you shoot me, it will be bad for the *señorita*!" defiantly announced Titino. "She will surely die." His shrivelled face was malicious as a gargoyle's. "Once already you have shot me." He gestured at a rude bandage, made of a strip of his blue shirt and lashed tightly round his left wrist. "But you will not shoot me again, señor. Or the *señorita* will starve to death. Her life depends absolutely on me!"

Dumb-smitten by the rascal's effrontery and his formidable threat, Peter could only stare. His gun sagged, lost its aim. With a kind of swaggering insolence, as one who should say, "I hold all trumps!" Titino advanced.

His yellow and crooked teeth, his torn, muddy shirt and trousers, his naked splay feet made him an ugly, repellent figure. But more than all, the diabolical malice in those lop-lidded Indian eyes of his—eyes impenetrably hard as jade—might have dismayed even a more seasoned fighter than Peter Barzil.

"Spare hard words, señor," Titino mocked, in his dry cracked voice. "Words to the ear, only, but a stick to the bones. And——"

"Tino! You know where she is?"

"Why not? Even though she was disguised as a man, how could I—the old family servant—fail to know her? She is now my guest. I know, ah yes—indeed, I know!"

"You swine! Where is she?"

For a moment the *mayordomo*, who had now stopped hardly ten feet away, chuckled to himself, such as a very old and malicious parrot.

"Where is she?" he repeated. "That, ah, is a most interesting question. A grand, valuable question, indeed. A question the answer of which might be for sale!"

"For what?" gulped Peter. "For sale?"

"And why not, señor? Fortune gives her favor to the daring, and it is her favor I seek. Have I not flown like a beetle, señor, or any other bug? Flown in your devil-machine and risked my life, to win what I seek? Have I not, thanks to God, escaped death when the plane fell? Then did you not shoot me, though—praise be!—with only a slight wound?"

"Where is the *señorita*?"

"Softly, softly, señor! Have I not greatly suffered since then, following you both through these jungles of hell? But fortune is favoring me. She has given the *señorita* into my hands. Where is she? That, ah, is a secret I will sell you."

"Sell it? Why, you—you——! At what price?"

"For all the gold you took from the Rancho, or what you have left of it. Gold that El Tigre forbids being taken out of the country. Gold that I, a Tigrista, shall give back to him!" And with a theatrical gesture, Titino smote his thin chest.

Peter's homicidal rage was checked only by the certainty that any false step might cost Janice her life.

"Easy, señor!" Titino's snake-like eyes gleamed. "It is a good bargain I offer you, eh? Surely you will not refuse. Her life, for a little gold."

"You devil!" stammered Peter, his imperfect Spanish almost breaking down.

"First you wrecked us, stowing away on my plane. And then—you tried to kill me. And then—you traitor to the Señor Gadsden and the Rancho—you kidnapped the señorita! And now you try to—why, by God, you ought to be wiped out like a filthy tick!"

"And leave the señorita to die of starvation in the jungle, eh?" mocked Titino. "Ah no, you cannot kill me, Señor Americano. And you cannot find her by tracing the mules. Those mules are now in one place——"

"Where?"

"And she is in another place. A place very safe, where you alone could not discover her in one thousand years. And if you injure me, señor, if you even lay one small finger on me, I will never tell you—no, not for all the gold in Eldorado!"

Defiantly he edged closer, a small and shrunken figure of diabolical, greedy malice. All his long years of false loyalty and service to the white-man had now sloughed off, leaving his barbarous soul poisonously naked.

"My price—will you pay it?" he snarled. "Or do you prefer to let the señorita starve to death? Starvation, remember, is very slow. It——"

PETER'S fist, a piledriver of rage, caught Titino flush on the lean, unshaven jaw. It lifted the *mayordomo*, with the breath smitten out of his body, right off the ground. He traced a swift trajectory, landed on his right shoulder, writhed over on the other side and lay still—down, out.

"Judas, what a damn fool thing to do!" groaned Peter, at the very instant he had done it.

But his ear, applied to the *mayordomo's* bony chest, conveyed welcome news. "Thank God, his clock's still ticking!"

Suffused with gratitude, Peter knelt there in the trail. His brain seethed with the maddest thoughts, problems, speculations.

"Said he wouldn't talk unless I gave him all the gold, eh? Well——" and Peter began formulating various methods of stimulating conversation in recalcitrant parties. A slow fire of twigs on a man's naked breast has been known to encourage remarks. Or a rat, under a kettle lashed upside-down over a man's belly, has proved capable of inducing speech when the rat has started to dig out. Or——

"Got it!" exclaimed Peter. His glance had just encountered a large, rough mound of earth beside the trail, seeming to have distinct possibilities. "That surely ought to get results. Fire makes smoke. N. G. Rat, I haven't got. No can do. But this, here, is just as effective. Silent, sure and guaranteed to work," decided Peter, with a joyful grin.

Taking the unconscious *mayordomo's* gun and cartridge-belt, he stowed them in one of the saddle-bags; then fetched a piece of leather riata and made a good job of thoroughly hog-tying Titino, just as he had done the *chicleros*.

He then dragged Titino up on the *bibi-jagua-ants'* nest beside the trail, dumped him there unceremoniously, and anchored him with the end of the riata knotted to a *marañon-tree* that grew up through the nest. Finally, he gagged Titino with a rough stick and some strips of cloth torn from the *mayordomo's* own shirt.

"Now then," he judged, "I reckon before long you'll be one of Central America's prize orators, *amigo mío!*"

Surveying his handiwork, he found it good. The layout could hardly have been better, for making a man loosen up on valuable information. This *bibi-jaguas'* nest, he saw, was an old and populous one, that must have been many years in building. All of six feet high and probably fifteen in diameter, its roughly rounded dome and immense subterranean passages must contain many hundred thousand leaf-cutting ants.

As Peter watched, he could see tremendous activity among the formidable crea-

tures. They were brown and of two very distinct kinds; first the workers, then the guards or soldiers. These latter, between



half and three-quarters of an inch long, were twice the size of the workers and were armed with powerful nippers. They were busily policing the lines of workers departing or arriving by various winding paths, nearly all the inbound workers with snipped-out pieces of leaves held over their heads like tiny parasols.

A curious sight, this, common enough in the tropics; a sight of fascinating interest, and of no danger to a free man. But more to be dreaded, if bound and laid upon one of these monstrous nests, than *balam* himself, the black jaguar of this Mayan land.

Already some of the soldier ants had discovered the invader and had begun to swarm up him. Every soldier hastened to take a nip. Each nip of course removed only a tiny bit of skin. Each in itself, even though it left a minute drop of formic acid in the wound, was but a trifle. But multiply that trifle by scores, hundreds, thousands, myriads—!

"He'll talk, all right," grimly smiled Peter. "Or I'll leave him like that clean-picked skeleton of the dog, back there at the deserted camp. When he wakes up and finds out what it's all about—he'll talk!"

PRESENTLY old Titino groaned, stirred, made a feeble effort to move his hands. With interest Peter watched him, unmindful now of his own sufferings, even half forgetting his acute anxiety about the girl.

Ever more and more thickly clambered the angry soldier-ants, in hosts and armies.

Now the alarm had been spread, below, and militant hordes were rushing up. They covered the *mayordomo's* body, hands and face, his bare legs and feet.

Again the man groaned, tried to roll over, but could not. He opened dazed, bleary eyes. For a moment he lay there staring, feeling his skin afire but not yet realizing what manner of disaster had befallen him. Then with a sort of horrified gulp he spasmodically struggled to get up. In vain!

Suddenly, as he saw the American, swift understanding and most unfathomable terror leaped into his evil face. He sought to cry out something, but the rough gag reduced it to a mumble.

"Yes, amigo, you're damn right," said Peter, while the *mayordomo* strained at his bonds till his face darkened, and on his neck and brow the veins knotted. "Yes, you're on an ant-hill. You didn't think an American would go in for native methods of torture, eh? Well, if I was dealing with a human being, I wouldn't. But when you threaten Janice—you stop being human. You become a snake. That's how I'm going to treat you, *sabe?*"

"Uhhhhhhhhh!" sounded a mumble, past the gag.

"Well, are you going to lead me to her?"

The *mayordomo's* eyes were like a snake's, indeed, as defiantly he shook his head.

"*Muy bien!*" said Peter. "I've got all the time that hasn't been used up yet, and so have the ants." He lighted a cigarette and leaned against a *jovillo*-tree, as if to make himself comfortable for the forthcoming show. His air was one of keen though impersonal interest.

The ants seemed thoroughly disposed to cooperate with Peter. They were rapidly increasing, both workers and soldiers, swarming everywhere inside Titino's clothing as well as out.

Some crawled into his nostrils, some into the corners of his mouth held by the gag in a sort of horrid and sardonic grin.

They dug his lips, his ears, his now tight-shut eyelids. Ever more and more thickly showed the tiny bright crimson beads. More, ever more armies of infuriated ants kept arriving in droves. Already Titino was vanishing under a horrible and crawling mass of torment.

"Ah, so thus a man dies, for obstinacy," said Peter, enjoying his smoke. "For this, and for the hope of certain gold that does not belong to him. Interesting, very. I admit that no white man could endure this. But you are an Indian, and a very dirty one. Well, Titino, when they get through with you, you'll be perfectly clean. Cleaner than in all your life—just bare bones, no?"

An agonized groan burst from the wretch. He nodded his head as if in affirmation.

"That means you'll talk?"

Another and more violent nodding.

"Ah, that's better, now. I rather thought you would!"

With due deliberation Peter blew another arrow of smoke, then with knife in hand climbed up on the nest. He cut the gag away. The now thoroughly enraged ants nipped his bare feet and ankles, but he gave no heed.

"There you are now, Titino!"

"*Por Dios, señor,*" thickly mumbled the tormented wretch. "I surrender! Take me off this accursed corner of hell!"

"Not just yet, my lad. Where's the señorita?"

"I cannot—tell you," whined Titino, his mouth and eyes screwed up into the most amazing contortions.

"You can't tell me? Why not, dog?"

"I must lead you there."

"And you will do that—without treachery?"

"Sí, señor," sputtered and cringed the agonized wretch, with armies of vicious ants tearing away at him. "On my honor, yes, yes, yes!"

"Honor! If you keep your word, it will be the first time in your life!"

"My word, I will keep it—as God lives!

But only take me from here, señor. Have mercy! I perish!"

"Damn fine thing if you did! You'd better be good now, Titino, because if you aren't, back to the ants you go—to stay!"

Casting off the riata from the marañón-tree, Peter unbound the *mayordomo's* bleeding feet.

"Get up, swine!" he commanded.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE CITY OF THE DEAD

GROANING, cursing, Titino rolled off the ant-hill and struggled up unsteadily to his feet.

"*Ay, madre de Dios!*" he entreated. "Loosen my hands, so I can pick off these sons of Satan, with fiery jaws. I bleed, I suffer. My hands—free my hands!"

"I should say not!" Peter said firmly. "You're a whole lot safer, tied up. Let the ants bite, till they drop off. Do you good. Stimulate your activity—though it's tough on the ants, sucking blood like yours!" Violently he shoved Titino along the trail. "And this is nothing to what you'll get, if you try any funny business with me! Where is the señorita?"

"Come, and I will show you—but *mal rayo!* May an evil lightning split you both!"

"Never mind about the lightning, Titino. Get a move on!"

Peter with one hand led his mules, with the other held the riata which was tied to the *mayordomo's* wrists still lashed behind his back.

"*Arre, arre!*" he commanded, using the muleteer word employed only for animals, as if Titino had been only a mule. "And remember, the first false move you make, you go back to the ant-hill. The ants and buzzards will surely pick your filthy bones!"

To this the *mayordomo* answered nothing, but only muttered curses in the Maya tongue, of which Peter understood no syllable. But hard words broke no bones.

Once more Peter's spirits began to rise. Titino, he felt, certainly would not have dared injure Janice. Soon now she would be found. Yes, matters were decidedly coming on. After perhaps ten minutes' plodding, Peter and his captive came to a region where the forest thinned as the trail led up a slope. Here one of the rare limestone outcrops of the coastal plain reduced the tropic vegetation to a minimum. Direct sunshine of mid-afternoon began to beat in on them. Heat grew brain-addling. The trail became hard-surfaced, so that now it was almost imperceptible as it meandered over barrens.

Suddenly far ahead a bell jingled very faintly. Through a screen of stunted forest drifted the raucous *hee-haw-hee-haw* of a mule. Peter could vaguely distinguish the animals that Titino had driven off. With his heart a-surge, he lifted up his voice in a long hail—

"Janice! *Im coming!*"

Old Titino, though suffering torments from his lashed wrists and from a few still persistent ants, only sneered:

"Howl like all the wolves of hell—she cannot hear you. Did I not tell you the mules were in one place and the señorita in another?"

"Shut up, swine, and lead me to her, or——!"

"Ollrait!" returned the *mayordomo*, using the wide-spread Latin-American word of assent. "Soon now you shall see her!"

Titino's soon must have been something like a typical *mañana*. It seemed to signify an indefinite time. And time now was growing very precious. The sun already, Peter saw with dread, was beginning to decline. Must they risk another night in the jungle? Haste, more haste!

"Get busy, there!" shouted Peter, and Titino veered to the left, taking his course over sun-heated rocks where no footfall could leave any visible spoor whatever. After a few minutes of this course, during which time Peter still drove his human animal and led his gold-freighted quadru-

ped ones, the other mules were lost to sight.

And now the slope once more descended. Patches of earth and jungle began to reappear, the sun's ardor was lessened and again the high forest commenced to close about the trekkers.

"Where you going, you dog?" demanded Peter. "If you're leading me into some kind of trap, don't you forget I've got two guns, and you'll be the first to die!"

"No trap at all, señor," Titino insisted. The old *mayordomo* now seemed suspiciously meek and willing. "The señorita, she is here—here, among the ruins of Hecelchakán."

"Hecelchakán?"

"Sí, señor. A lost city of the ancients."

"The ancient Mayas, you mean?"

"The same, señor. See, already? Now we are coming to it!"

Unable to gesture with his hands, he nodded his bullet-head at a vague overgrown mound. Beyond it another dimly appeared; and now, still as Peter trudged along, he saw more and ever more heaps of ruins. Some showed traces of ancient and fantastic masonry jutting through the overgrowth; stones curiously chiseled into dim, square hieroglyphs.

"Old Maya city, eh?" thought Peter, vaguely stirred. Even in his present desperate strait, something about the majesty of this silent and deserted city heavily weighed upon him. As he drove Titino ever deeper into its tangled mazes where once vast throngs of busy people dwelt, its present solitude oppressed his heart, as if a mighty hand had closed there, as if a tremendous and fateful voice had thundered:

"Thou shalt not——!"

VIGOROUSLY Peter shook off this numbing sensation.

"Holy hell! What's just a bunch of old ruins, anyhow, to get a fellow's goat?"

"You're sure she's here?" he demanded of Titino. "And all safe?"

"I am sure, señor." Titino's voice was sheer venom.

"She'd better be, or you'll have a wonderful time with me. A very fine time!"

"In a minute now—only one little minute—you shall see her."

Once more Peter shouted:

"*Ohé, Janice! Where are you?*"

"It is useless, señor," grimaced the *mayordomo*. "She cannot answer. Her mouth—it is tied up."



"What? Why, damn you! You had the infernal nerve to do that? One more debt for you to pay, with interest. Get along, animal! *Pronto!*"

"But listen, señor!" And old Titino cringed before his captor. "After I lead you to her, you will not kill me?"

"God, I ought to! But shut up, and get going!"

Now ever more terrified as he drew near the place where he had hidden Janice—for suppose that now she were not there, what hideous tortures might not befall him?—old Titino whined and mumbled as he plodded on. Peter and he and the two gold-freighted mules, how singular a caravan to be invading this august and fearsome City of the Dead!

The present ruling of El Tigre that no gold should cross the frontiers—was it derived from some ancient and primeval taboo? And would the old Red Gods still today, as then, take vengeance on him who broke that law?

Suddenly Titino stopped in a vague clearance where long ago woodchoppers had taken out mahogany and logwood sticks. Here the sun once more penetrated. A little coarse saw-grass flourished among the ruins; excellent lurking-places for deadly reptiles.

Hungrily the famished mules began cropping this grass. Far above the tree-

tops a beautiful and snow-white heron swam away through sunshine, with wide wings slowly flapping, long legs trailing far behind. Black parrots sounded their single, piercing, sugary note. A boa-constrictor more than twelve feet long lazily slid away and vanished amid sun-baked piles of fallen masonry.

Peter fondled his Luger butt.

"Some place!" he growled. "Come on now, you son of a flea—where's the señorita?"

"There!" And Titino nodded at a mound off to the left. "There, señor, you will find her!"

Peter's scrutiny rested on a huge, brush-tangled heap of ruins, mottled with sun and shade; evidently once a mighty pyramid. At one side yawned a darkly ominous-looking aperture, almost entirely overgrown with thorny vines and twisted root-masses.

"What do you mean, there?" demanded Peter.

"Inside that mound is the señorita. Come with me, now. I will lead you in!"

For all his eagerness, Peter hesitated. The very air of this dead city hung heavy with treachery. Once he should enter that ancient ruin with the venomous little Maya what might not happen?

For one thing, such a place might prove a regular nest of poisonous serpents. Again, Peter had no assurance that Janice had really been hidden there. The *mayordomo's* statement might be only a ruse to send him into a veritable snake-den. Or some sagging block of masonry might have been poised so as to crash on him. Again, some gaping black pit, some deep well, might have been lightly covered with loose sticks and rubbish, to trap him into a death-plunge.

Or might not Titino have accomplices hidden there, to butcher him? Might not unguessed and unthinkable horrors threaten? And—once Peter were disposed of—then would not Janice and the saddlebags of gold be Titino's prey?

"Lord, what now?"

Peter Barzil didn't exactly know what now. Peter felt extremely shaky. He licked dry, cracked lips, and knew his heart was pounding.

"I will lead you," suavely invited Titino. "I will so gladly show you the way to the señorita."

"The hell you will!" Peter retorted. A strong sap of suspicion pulsed in his arteries. "Look out!" it seemed to warn. "Don't get into close quarters with this Maya devil!"

Peter ground his Luger muzzle into *mayordomo's* washboardy ribs.

"Oye, animal! I will go alone. And if I don't find her, I will come back, and—what will happen to you?"

Titino's eye betrayed a flicker, as if to say:

"Ah, but much can take place, before you come back from there!"

"What part of that old ruin is she in?" demanded Peter. "The truth now, if you want to live!"

"The truth you shall have, señor. Go straight forward, down that tunnel, sixty paces. Then turn right, into a kind of room. This room is made of rock. There you will find her."

"And you, *you* will stay here, till I return with her!"

"Of course, señor. You can trust me."

"Yes, as the lamb trusts the wolf. Come along with me, you son of the pit!"

He dragged Titino to a bottle-paunched palm near by, and with the riata securely lashed him to this tree. The *mayordomo's* hands still remained bound behind his back, and that back was hard up against the palm, on the other side of which were the knots that Peter had just tied.

"There, my friend," exclaimed Peter. "I think this will hold you for a while. And if you try any tricks, may Satan help you, for God won't!"

Even now with Titino lashed up as securely as Peter could contrive, the American dared not risk leaving the gold out there with this most accomplished of super-villains. Titino had wrecked the

plane and had abducted Janice. Well, by all the gods and devils, not now should he elope with perhaps a hundred thousand dollars in good yellow-boys, for El Tigre!

No; Peter must keep that gold always with him. So, tying the riata of the leading mule to his belt, and gun in hand, he scouted through the tall grass toward the doorway of the mystery-pyramid.

That somebody had been there before him, and very recently, was clear from the manner in which the grass and thickets of low bushes had been trampled. Peter advanced, dragging the weary and tick-tormented animals with him. He picked up three or four fallen palm-branches, dry and inflammable, and bundled them together for a torch.

The pyramid entrance—though Peter knew nothing of this matter—was a typical Mayan stepped arch. Now the curiously carved stones were sagging to their fall. Across the upper part of that ominous doorway, anchored to cracked masonry, a huge spider-web stretched out. There a gigantic spider that looked like black velvet sat on watch. Yellow wasps flickered in and out. Peter with his palm-leaves whipped them away; swiped down spider, web and all.

A shadow fell across the clearing; the shadow of a buzzard, slow-wheeling far aloft, on watch from its tremendous observation-towers of the air.

Into the dark passageway shouted Peter: "*Janice! Helloooooo, there—Janice!*"

Only faint echoes answered. Dragging the gold-loaded mules behind him, into that ominous darkness he advanced.

DARKNESS, indeed!

Strange, how quickly and how completely that darkness swallowed the light of day. Hardly twenty paces from the entrance—rough paces over tumbled piles of earth and fallen stones that made the wretched and unhappy mules stumble—and nearly all outside illumination had faded.

With dilated pupils the explorer peered

ahead. What might not lie there? Just venomous reptiles might be the least of possible horrors. But nothing met his eye; nothing save a jet-black horizontal pit.

A stifling closeness of decay and dust rose to his nostrils. Something squeaked a-flutter round his head. More and more things hurtled past him, punily protesting.

"Hell, what now? Oh—only bats!"

Relieved, he struck his lighter and kindled his palmleaf torch. The palms blazed up, but could not repel the darkness very far. Like a real, tangible weight, this darkness pressed in upon the flame as if eager to devour and extinguish it.

For all that, though, the smokily-flaring fronds gave him a certain range of vision. Once more he advanced, with torch held high. And now the smoke blent with the dust of centuries hoary with age long before the first white-man ever set foot in these primeval jungles.

On and still on. On, forgetting snakes, perils, everything but just the girl. Thirty paces; now forty, fifty—and there, ahead at the right, just as Titino had told him, now Peter dimly saw the black yawning of a transverse chamber.

"Janice!" again he shouted. No answer. Scared bats chattered and swarmed out. He slogged forward, dragging the treasure-mules. Now the chamber loomed vastly before him. "Oh, Janice, are you here?"

The smoky torch waved high, a comet in that midnight dark. It revealed a vague something that lay amid dust and litter, between fallen blocks of limestone, dim shapes of ancient confusion. A half-seen something—a human creature.

Peter stumbled to the girl. One second, and he was kneeling by her.

"Janice! Are you hurt?"

Only a moan replied.

The dying torch-flare showed that she was bound, gagged and helpless. He thrust the stems of his flaming fronds down into the dust of ages, and with shak-

ing hands freed her. Now liberated, she seemed inert.

Merely groaning a little, with no word of answer to all his broken questions, she still lay there passive.

"By God," cried Peter, "if that devil's hurt you——!"

POWERFULLY he gathered her up in his arms. Leaving the torch to smoke and die, he plunged back out of the chamber. The patient mules, borne down by their saddle-bags of gold, trailed after him.

Far ahead, a vague and irregular patch of light, the pyramid doorway beckoned. Peter carried Janice out, at his best speed. There among the lush verdure of the clearing, the tangles of palms, almendras and mangos, he laid her down. Again beside her he knelt, shaken with an appalling fear.

Not dead, at all events—thank God for that! Badly scratched and torn, bruised and with an ugly bluish lump on her fore-



head, she lay there. Her eyes remained closed, face flushed; and in her full brown throat the pulses beat too fast.

"What's the matter, Jan? Don't you hear me—can't you answer?"

She tried to speak, but Peter caught no words. Was this some swift tropical fever? Some vital injury?"

He chafed her hands and wrists, slapped her temples, cheeks and throat.

"Janice, Janice!"

Thickly now she was trying to articulate something, then lapsed again into a hazy languor of unconsciousness.

"Doped, by Judas! That devil of a Titino——!"

Peter sprang up, untied the mules' riata from his belt and crashed back through the thickets to the tree where he had left the mayordomo securely tied.

There, right enough, stood the tree. There, at its base, Peter saw the trampled saw-grass. But of the captive he had just a few minutes ago left there, now no sign of trace remained.

CHAPTER XIV

INTO THE PUEBLO OF THE SIGH

AN HOUR from then, with the sun now disturbingly low, the mystifying situation had begun to clarify itself.

Janice had recovered enough to sit on an elaborately sculptured Mayan cornice-stone, fallen in the grass; to smoke a couple of cigarettes with Peter; and to tell what had happened to her in his absence. As for the disappearance of Titino—

"That's all my own idiotic fault," Peter admitted. "If I'd had the sense of a tick, I'd have noticed that a barrigón-palm swells out big, a few feet from the ground, and is thin at the bottom. So of course —"

"Of course all Titino had to do was work the riata down, loosen it and squirm out."

"That's right. Some stunt, though, to untie those knots. Must have done it with his teeth. Anyhow, he's vamoosed."

"Yes," said the girl, "but his hands are still lashed behind him."

"Oh, he'll get out of that. Nice little Tino! Trust a snake for anything. And now we've still got that devil hanging round the jungle. I ought to have kept him with me, when I went into the pyramid. Driven him in ahead of me. And then, when I'd found you, shot him!"

"Ah," and her dark eyes deepened, "but you couldn't have done that, Peter."

"Reckon not. That's part of the white-man's burden. But he certainly had it coming to him, the way he kidnapped you!"

"That was partly my own fault, for being so careless," she explained, rubbing her bruised forehead. "After you left me, to go back for the gold, I just sat there watching for a while, on the pack-saddle. There was nothing suspicious anywhere round. Then I went and got the guitar, and sat down on one of the bultos of gum and sang and played a little. I was so lonesome!"

"And then?"

"A hand grabbed me from behind, by the throat. Choked me. I kind of twisted round. Saw it was Titino. Managed to draw a gun. He tried to wrench it away, and I tried to shoot him. You'd be surprised how strong he is! I fired three shots, anyhow."

"Too damn bad one of 'em didn't plug him!"

"Then he slugged me."

"I'll kill him for that, so help me! And —"

"And after that, things got kind of woolly. All I remember is being tied on a mule's back, and jogging along. After that, a terribly bitter taste in my mouth. And then—"

"Well?"

"Next, a light shining in my eyes—and there you were!"

"I see," nodded Peter, throwing away his bag. "You were awfully dopy, Janice. Titino must have drugged you, some way. Wonder what he used?"

"Oh, these Mayas know dozens of such plants. There's mandrake and thorn-apple and heaven knows what."

"Wait till I catch him!"

"I'm afraid you never will, Peter. And remember, he's got the shotgun now, and both my revolvers, and plenty of cartridges. And what's to prevent his getting to El Suspiro first, and telling those Tigristas we're Americans, trying to carry gold out of the country? And after that, it'll be just too bad for us. We haven't got a minute to lose. Not a second!"

"Dead right, Janice. Can you travel now?"

"Guess I can hang to a mule, if you'll help me aboard. Let's be on our way!"

With his help she bestrode the more lightly-burdened treasure-mule, and clung fast while Peter led both animals back out of the ruined city.

Gun in hand, Peter kept a sharp eye out for the mayordomo. Titino, he feared, might already have freed his hands, have returned to the other four mules left in the limestone clearing, and there got hold of the weapons he had taken from Janice. Even now the venomous old Maya possibly might be lurking anywhere on the way.

"Here, take one of my guns," directed Peter. "And if Titino starts anything, between the two of us we ought to be able to finish it. Shoot to kill!"

"No need to tell me that, now," the girl laughed. "And listen here, Peter. We mustn't risk carrying all this gold out to El Suspiro, in these saddle-bags."

"No? Bury it again?"

"Oh, not at all. We've got to get it there this very night, but not in the bags, where it might be discovered. If it was discovered, how long d'you think we'd last?"

"Well, we wouldn't die of old age, that's a cinch," he laughed, still leading the exhausted and suffering mules. "But what's your idea, Janice? Want to send it to Puerto Quemado by parcel-post, freight or express, or maybe registered mail?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, stop your nonsense and listen! This is serious. The thing to do is hurry right back to where our mules are parked. Then light a fire, unload the chicle, and get busy with the machete. You'll see!"

ANOTHER hour, with the sun sinking fast, and all the gold was so securely hidden that no one—ignorant of the secret—could possibly have suspected its hiding-place. Peter surveyed this work, and then Janice, with enthusiastic admiration.

"Grand scheme!" he approved. "It

wouldn't have occurred to me in a billion years. Some red-hot camouflage!"

Excellent camouflage, indeed. Now as the raw cakes of chicle lay there beside a smouldering little fire, who could have guessed that each had a heart of gold? And that one of them, in addition, held the fugitive's rings and Peter's wrist-watch? Yet each had been slashed in two with the machete. Each had had its center dug out and packed with yellow-boys. Then the cut surfaces had been melted, and the cakes had been jammed together again.

The gum removed from inside had served, when melted, to smear over the outside of the cakes. This layer, when rubbed with dirt, effectively concealed any hint that the cakes had been tampered with. The disguise was perfect.

Had no spying eye beheld them at this work, which filled the air with perfume, Janice and Peter now felt almost completely safe in their last great effort—the supreme test of skill and nerve in getting past El Suspiro and across the San Nica-dorean frontier.

"All right," Janice approved, even her sharp, feminine eye detecting no blemish in this disguise. Her head had cleared, her strength very largely returned. "Now let's pack up the bundles again and be flitting. We've got to reach El Suspiro before dark. Wandering round the jungle at night with about a hundred thousand in gold isn't exactly my idea of healthy exercise."

"Nor mine. But I reckon most of our troubles are over, now," judged Peter with an optimism that the immediate future was to prove only too ill-grounded.

DUSK was beginning to draw gauzy veils over the forest world as the worn-out remuda trailed into El Suspiro.

A long way and a hard one that had been, beset with heat, weariness, anxiety and the ever-present torment of maddeningly-voracious insect-swarms. The trek had included crossing one of those infernal Central American suspension-bridges of

rotten sticks laid across twisted fiber ropes even less reliable. This present bridge had swung over a broad river edged with mucky shoals where spider-lilies whitely clung to mangroves backed by towering jungle.

There crabs had scuttled in the mud of centuries, logs had grunted and sunk—showing those logs to be alligators—and deadly water-moccasins had undulated away, leaving a long V of wake on the turgid, paint-green current.

Most of the mules had plodded out stolidly enough on this precarious, swaying apology for a bridge. But one, heavily-laden with concealed gold, had balked almost in the middle.

During the fugitives' struggle with it, hauling on bridle and beating with machete, this accursed rebel had broken through the decayed flooring. It had endangered the whole bridge and had almost plunged the entire outfit into waters dangerously alive with electric eels, with sting-rays and with *pirana*-fish, that almost instantly tear a man or animal to pieces.

Exhausted, shaken, half blinded with sweat, Peter and Janice had made shift to pry, scourge and haul this devilish mule up out of the cracking, yielding floor, and drag it across to the farther bank.

"Whew!" from Peter. "Hope that's the last river we have to cross. If we strike another, this damn mule is buzzard-bait!"

"Won't be any more rivers," judged the girl. "Isn't that a dog barking, now? We must be coming into El Suspiro, already. Let's put on our war-paint."

Pursuant to the plan she had evolved, they donned the poncho and the serape they had taken from the *chicleros*. These made their disguise even more effective than before.

Mightily bucked up, they listened there in the trail now growing dark among the green wilderness giants, above which a few pale stars already had begun to wonder down. Faint, far, the mournful notes

of a dog's barking drifted through those forest aisles. Machete-blows whacked. With bells a-tingle, forward once more the little caravan struggled into the deepening dusk.

EL SUSPIRO—"The Sigh"—how appropriately named! How mournfully it appeared to be sighing in unison with the broad dark Rio Fangoso, along whose bank a kilometer below the bridge it sprawled its melancholy length.

The hour seemed propitious for reaching this wholly unknown place.

"We're playing into luck," judged the girl, as wearily and lamely they trudged by the first clearings, hewn from solid jungle; tiny gardens where in feverish heat yams and bananas throve. "In this half-light we'll never be suspected of being anything but natives."

"Right! My idea is to just eat a bite, rest a few minutes, hire some fresh mules—if possible—and shove right along tonight. Or maybe get one of those big Indian canoes——"

"All right," Janice cautioned. "But remember, you're deaf-and-dumb again. Not another peep out of you, Mr. Peter, till we cross the frontier!"

In silence now save for the somnolent plod-plod-plod of the mules' hoofs, the dingle-dangle of those eternal bells, the

chicle - remuda pushed onward. A tension of excitement possessed both Americans. Now only an hour or so, perhaps much less, might deter-



mine their fate. Success or failure lay in delicate balances of destiny; life or death itself.

The first scattered outposts of the pueblo revealed themselves as *bohios* or huts. Some of these boasted walls of up-

right stakes, wattled and chinked with mud. Others were merely open-sided shacks with high-peaked roofs of thatch. These open-faced houses exposed the entire menage going about its various occasions. By the light of dim lamps, men, women and children, pigs dogs and goats all dwelt together on terms of amicable intimacy, while featherless red poultry, lovebirds and parrots roosted on cross-beams above.

Smoke from wood fires drifted. Beside iron plates set on stones and covering red-hot coals, women were baking tortillas that they had rolled flat on broad leaves. Barefooted Eldoradians were drowsing in sisal-fiber hammocks. From somewhere echoed the lazy twangle of a guitar.

Though Peter was now limping almost as badly as Janice, still he kept his heart bold as they drove their gaunt and sweating remuda into that mournful lost village at the back of nowhere.

Now they reached a broad, grass-grown sort of street between a straggling line of huts and the river itself. Along the muddy bank appeared crude little wharves of poles driven deep into ooze among the mangroves. Here and beyond, half-glimpsed in the dusk, native dugouts lay on the dark waters; or were drawn up on land with palm-leaves over them to keep off the shrivelling, cracking rays of the sun, by day.

Ahead, a bright streak of light cut a broad ribbon from the door of the biggest building in the pueblo. This building stood beneath the sheltering branches of an immense ceiba. The light out-streaming from it illuminated a strip of river-bank, where at a rather substantial pier three large dugouts were moored.

"There's the village headquarters," thought Peter. "If we make good there, we're all set. If we don't, well—"

It was at all events a comfort to know they were well-heeled, with plenty of ammunition. Though, in a village of El Tigre partisans, what (after all) could one

white man and one white woman do, if recognized?

So far, it seemed as if the new-comers had wakened only a little interest but no slightest suspicion. In that vague light they certainly looked ragged and dirty enough to pass for up-jungle traders. And since they had already apparently fooled the three chicleros back there along the trail, how could they now fear detection? Were not the mules and the bundles of chicle the genuine article?

"We'll get by with this, all right," Peter assured himself. "And the frontier's only six kilometers further, now!"

Despite all this, both he and Janice felt their nerves tauten as they approached the pueblo headquarters—probably the office of the alcalde, the trading-post or general store, and whatever else in that line El Suspiro boasted.

But no one challenged, no one questioned them. Unmolested, they drove their weary mules. Here an Indian poling a long slim canoe across dark waters, where star-gleams were beginning to tremble, lifted a hand in silent greeting. There a barefoot woman looked up and stared at them from where she squatted, smoking a long cheroot. Other women, kneeling at stone *metates*, were too busy grinding maize even to glance at them.

Potbellied naked brown children frankly stared. Men in vague white, loafing, smoking and gossiping along the miry bank, gave them—here or there—a good night.

"*Buenas!*" answered Janice, while Peter once more played dumb. Thus they came near the pueblo center, a long and low structure, yellow-plastered, with a rude porch under which the earth lay hard-packed. Here stood a rough table of split logs, with an equally primitive bench on either side.

Peter halted his lead-mule. The bells ceased their music. All the other mules gladly stopped. Straps and saddles creaked. The reek of sweat and chicle

rose acrid-sweet through the whining hum of insects.

"*Hola!*" cried Janice, in at the open door. She flung her serape back over her shoulder, a vivid spot of color in the broad belt of light from the doorway.

CHAPTER XV

TRAPPED!

COMING!" growled a thick voice in Spanish, from the vague interior. Various oaths followed, of the particularly unpleasant Latin-American sort. "What in the devil's name is wanted now?"

As Peter and Janice waited there in the porch, two or three vague Indians sauntered up, stopped, leaned against the walls. More casually joined them. Matches flared and cigarettes glowed; smoke drifted on the feverish swampy air. A mangy hairless dog awoke, sniffed, growled and once more fell into a coma.

No word was spoken by anybody. In silence the Eldoradians and the new-comers suspiciously eyed one another. Peter's glance took in a few details of the *tienda*. Through the open door he could see, by the light of a brilliant carbide-lamp, heaps of breadfruit and cashews lying on the dirt floor, together with bags of coconuts; riatas and pack-saddles hung on pegs; bunches of bananas and plantains suspended from unsquared beams; hammock-rings on posts; old-fashioned scales; canned goods irregularly heaped on the roughest of shelves.

One singular object particularly caught his eye—a human head, apparently that of a white man, which had been shrunk down to about the size of a grape-fruit, and was now peacefully resting alongside a box of *galletas*.

"Great stuff!" thought Peter. "I wonder who that bird was, and what he did to annoy these kindly, hospitable folks?"

Peter gathered his poncho a little more closely about him, and felt glad of its disguise.

A smoulder of fire in one corner blent

its smoke with the now familiar aroma from a heap of chicle near it. Less agreeable was the stench of ancient turtle-shell and fish-offal from the river mud.

By way of climax to the peculiarities of this lone outpost in the wilderness, Peter saw a radio loud-speaker over the door. There a long horn projected—one of the most improbable sights you could imagine for El Suspiro, but true. Even far from the world as it was, at least this contact with civilization had been made. Wonderfully comforting it looked.

But Peter's observations were cut short by a shadow that fell athwart the broad pathway of light.

In the doorway loomed a powerful man, fat and yet muscular; a regular giant of a fellow. This ruffian-appearing individual was clad in a white undershirt that revealed formidable muscles and a mossy chest; dirty linen trousers, and native rope-soled sandals.

Unshaven, dark, and with one ear cropped half off; with a squint both penetrant and sinister; and with a loose-rolled Eldoradian cigar lolling in a cruel gash of a mouth—how pleasant a reception-committee!

BUENAS!" grunted this sinister Hercules, in the local patois, folding his huge and hirsute arms. "What remuda is this? Who are you, and whither bound?"

"Independent chiclero-traders, from far up-country," answered Janice. "We are on our way through to San Nicador and Puerto Quemado."

"Ah, so?" The ruffian's practised eye glanced at the bultos of gum on the mules' sides, revealed by the rays of the powerful carbide lamp. "A fairly large lot of gum, there. I might buy it."

"Thank you, no. We are not selling here. All we seek is a bite to eat, a drink or two, food for our animals—then away, this very night."

"Not tonight!" And the Hercules blew much smoke. "*Mañana!* Then you will travel better. And you would do well to

let me have this gum. I am the alcalde, here; the chief trader. Assuredly, you must sell to me!"

He leaned immensely against the door-jamb and scratched himself. The interested listeners increased. A group formed, half-seen; some with wide sombreros, but for the most part bare-headed—men in faded drill garments, ragged, barefoot. A tense little silence fell.

"*Muchas gracias,*" answered Janice. "I thank you also in the name of my companion, who is deaf-and-dumb, poor fellow. But we do not wish to sell. Hungry, though—yes, we are hungry and thirsty. And what have you here in El Suspiro, to eat?"

"Enough, such as it is. And very good, what there is of it!"

"*Que venga!* Let it come!"

"And business? The selling of your chicle?"

"First we will refresh ourselves, compañero."

"As you wish." The alcalde of El Suspiro clapped his hands. From within, a *mozo* appeared; received orders, vanished. Janice and Peter sat down on the rough-hewn bench. Exhausted though they were,

they still kept
 keen - awake,
 hands never
 far from gun-
 butts. For was
 not this an El
 Tigre settle-
 ment?

In silence
 the villagers,
 now steadily



augmented by new arrivals from huts along the river—huts dimly illuminated by oil-lamps and smoky fires—watched these strangers in poncho and serape on the bench. Unwinking, expressionless, the black eyes stared, as the *mozo* quite at random dumped food and drink on the rude table—rice, chili-con-carne, boniatos and fried plantains, half a *flauta* of bread, and a calabash of warm beer.

AS THE new-comers fell to with a will, "*Buen provecho!*" muttered the alcalde, with the old Spanish formula of politeness that now might mean much or nothing. He cried, "Tequila!" at the servant, and eased himself down on the other bench across the table from Janice and Peter.

The vivid light through the doorway showed his huge bulk. Beyond him loomed the night, where the circle of watching Indians stood ghostly and silent; and where the flicker of innumerable fire-flies had begun to spangle that tropic darkness.

When the ardent spirits were set before the alcalde in a thick, dirty bottle, he tossed off a glassful, neat; followed it with another—enough to intoxicate three men at least—and made boast:

"I am the *jefe* of this place. They call me El Gallego, or El Fuerte—the strong one!" Vaingloriously he thumped himself on the hairy chest. "I buy and export much chicle. You will sell to me, is it not so?"

"We will see," Janice stalled.

"Everybody sells to me," insisted El Gallego. His tone was heavy with menace. "It will be far better for you, if you sell to me."

"I tell you," the girl repeated, "we will see!"

El Gallego poised his cheroot. A thin, poisonous smile curved his bewhiskered lips.

"Those who know what is good for their health, they all sell to me!"

"Ah, but if we prefer to export our own chicle?" she returned, with an indifferent air.

"*Caramba!* No one can catch trout with dry breeches, and no one can go against El Gallego's will, with a whole skin!" The bully slammed his glass down on the table, with a crack like a pistol-shot.

"How interesting, my friend!" The girl's tone was coldly insolent. With eyes levelled full at the rowdy's face Janice queried, "And if we do not prefer to sell to you?"

"What one prefers and what one does, are often cats of two different colors!"

Silence again, through which the ever-increasing on-lookers seemed tautening as if for action. Through that silence drifted the mysterious night-sounds of the vast, encompassing jungle. On the river—the broad, silent, dark-bosomed river flowing ever to the sea these two fugitives so ardently longed to reach with their gold—wimpled silvery lights, ripe with mellow softness, from the looming glory of stars. The mule-bells drowsily tinkled.

"Listen!" exclaimed the huge and hirsute bully, smiting the table till it shook the crude dishes from which the Americans were eating. "Listen, you; and do not join the army of idiots always marching to destruction!"

The threat in El Gallego's voice grew potent. He poured into his capacious maw another hooker of that ardent white poison. How much, wondered Peter, did this ruffian know? Had he already been tipped off that the chicle was only a blind? Did he suspect what lay inside it? If so—

Peter felt his skin pucker with the goose-flesh of battle impending. Sweat, not from the stifling heat, oozed on his forehead. In his throat the pulses were beginning to pound like hammers. To lust for action, and to remain deaf-and-dumb, passively eating—what an ordeal!

"Hearken to me, and be wise," repeated the Hercules, and fixed a threatening eye on Janice. "Here I will give you a fair price for your gum, a top price. I will pay the export tax, and arrange all custom-house business, at the frontier town of Las Pocilgas. You will save time, money and risk. Let us strike hands on it, and call it a bargain! And at once. For look you, I have a dugout leaving this very night."

"A canoe, tonight?" The girl's heart gave a leap that almost choked her. "Down-river?"

"Of course."

What gorgeous luck! Once they could

get their gum and themselves aboard the dugout, once they could slip down-stream and across the San Nicadorean border —!

The formidable Hercules shattered this alluring vision.

"You will sell to me, all, everything," he dictated. "Everybody sells to me. The chicle is mine, already mine! Come, here is tequila. Drink—drink with me to bind the bargain!"

VERY well," Janice agreed, with admirable coolness that amazed Peter, whose temperature was now rising to fantastic figures. She pushed back her dishes, leaned elbows on the rough table. "If you insist, it shall be as you wish, Señor Alcalde. But why hurry? We are tired. Is not tomorrow another day?"

Amazed, Peter listened. What might her strategy be? He could not even guess. But Janice—well, she knew these people from the ground up. Let her have her head!

"Tomorrow will not do!" the now half-drunken alcalde denied her. "My cargo leaves at midnight. So first we shall do business. After that, you can rest. How many kilos have you, and what quality? And name your price."

Driven now hard into a corner, Janice evaded:

"We will employ you as our agents, to export the gum. We will pay freight and export-tax. You will make a handsome profit."

"No, you must sell!"

"*No puede ser!*" she told him it could not be.

Then very hotly El Gallego cursed with words not good for any white-woman to hear. Among the Indians that had now increased to a crowd surely embracing nearly every man and boy in El Suspiro, ugly mutterings ran like horizon grumbles of heat-lightning, to presage tempests drawing on apace.

"Who in the name of all demons are you people, anyway?" snarled the bully,

poisonously vicious with tequila, with greed and bafflement. He dumped still another swallow of white flame down his bewhiskered gullet and spat on the hard-packed earth. "No one," and he smote his furry chest, "No one refuses El Gran Gallego!"

A moment's silence accented the drowsy tinkle of the mule-bells, the hum and whine of insects dancing round the light.

"Pablo! Joaquín!" roared the alcalde, staggering up enraged and swaying against the table. "Some of you come hither. Those mules—that chicle! Unload that chicle and pile it here!"

SLIM and strong, a blaze of color in that vivid serape, the girl sprang to her feet. Peter also jumped up. Across the table they confronted the drunken bully.

"This is robbery!" Janice cried.

"Well, who are you, to call me a robber?" mouthed El Gallego. "Not Eldoradians, I swear! Maybe San Nicadorians. Bah! Foreign swine—and to hell with you both!"

"Ah, so?" Janice laughed, cool to the marrow; while Peter greatly marvelled. "I take it, by that remark, you are a follower of El Tigre?"

"By God's wounds, yes. Death to all foreigners, especially Gringos, and *viva* El Tigre!"

"Ah, what a hero is El Tigre!" she mocked. "And what a wonderful victory he won yesterday at Las Palomitas Rancho, back in the Tuxtla Valley!"

This chance verbal shot, fired by Janice with well-planned purpose, closed El Gallego's brawling mouth like a leaden slug. The bully gasped, stared and choked.

"Who—told you that?" he demanded. By his chagrined expression she read, clearly as in print, that El Tigre had been beaten off. And a wave of glowing exultation surged through her blood. She flushed, with mocking laughter.

"Sí, señor—a hero! Wonderful, eh?"

A Liberator, who with his whole army cannot defeat one old rancher and a handful of *vaqueros*!"

"*Nombre de Dios!* Who told you that?"

"Ah, there are little birds in the jungle," she laughed. "Even though you have a radio, there are other ways of getting news here in this devil's jungle. But enough of this. Here—here is payment for what you barbarians call food and drink!" She flung a goldpiece on the table. "Keep the change for a tip, Gallego. And now, we go. Since you refuse us a boat, we follow the trail—a good road because it leads out of here. *Adiós!*"

A brave gesture, but doomed to failure. For already El Gallego's peons were unloading the mules. Already, there in the broad white path of light from the doorway, they were piling the heavy bundles of chicle.

"*Muy pesado!*" grunted a peon, complaining of the unusual weight. "What gum, eh? One would say something lay inside it—something heavier far than chicle ever was!"

El Gallego, the crowding Indians, the mules, river, fireflies, tropic night, everything for a second appeared to blend in mazes of confusion round the fugitives.

But though here now was ruin, here was disaster, they still held their nerve.

"*Eso no!*" Janice forbade the unloading, while Peter drew his guns. "Are you bandits?"

"Put those guns up, fool!" roared El Gallego. "I make only one bite of such as you!" Now more than three parts drunk, he swung toward his peons. "The old tricks, eh? Loaded bultos? Ah, name of all the saints!"

He snatched a machete from a peon's belt, and staggered toward the growing pile of bultos.

"Now, by God, now we shall see!"

From along the dark bank of the river drifted a frantic cry—

"Wait, wait! *Ay Dios*—wait for me!"

Some one was running there, hobbling, rather, with a grotesque and painful

shuffle. At every step this some one cursed, exhorted, commanded them to wait, only to delay a moment.

With machete poised, El Gallego faced this desperately hurrying stranger.

"Who now, in the name of hell?" he slavered. "And what?"

In the dim glow of the village huts, then into the penumbra of light cast by the store and so right to the zone of brilliant illumination itself panted and staggered the new-comer.

An old man he was, old and wizened, with a bandage on, with hands and face and neck all swollen and red-spotted from poisonous ant-bites.

This man brandished violent arms of passion at Janice and Peter.

"Behold them!" he wheezed with the most venomous malice. His mouth fairly foamed over, with rage. "Robbers, thieves! Murderers, traitors! *Ay, Dios mio*—what they have done to me!"

In Peter's very face was shaken the furious and skiny claw-fist of Titino, the old mayordomo.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GOLDEN GETAWAY

"ANOTHER lunatic?" Janice laughed, her nerve still holding. "Who is this fellow, this idiot?"

"Who am I? She asks who I am?" shrieked Titino, while a listening eagerness possessed that wolf-faced mob. "After wounding me, torturing me, they ask—!" He shook his injured wrist on high, pointed at it with a bony finger. For a second he gasped, unable to articulate. "That chicle, they stole it! These filthy swine of foreigners, they robbed three of our own Eldoradians. And inside of that gum—*ay, madre de Dios!* what is inside? My commission—I demand a commission, a share—for telling you—"

"What talk is this?" demanded El Gallego. Drunkenly he lurched to the mayordomo. With his free left hand—the other still gripping the machete—he seized Ti-

tino and shook him till the venomous old creature's bones rattled. "Who are these chicle-traders? And what share, what commission, do you mean?"

.. "But am I not telling you?" the mayordomo panted, his wizened face a mask of hate, greed and rage, there in that vivid band of carbide-light. "Mark you this—it is I, I who tell you. One half of the value I must have. You must pay me at least a quarter!"

"A quarter of what, fool?" roared the alcalde, with another joint-loosening shake, while Peter and Janice cleared guns for battle. "All saints and demons, is this then a madman?"

"I must have not less than an eighth of it!" vociferated Titino. Now, in danger of others discovering the gold, his pretense had shucked clean off that he was trying to recover the gold for El Tigre. The crowd stared with unwinking amazement. Were this indeed a madman, no harm must befall him. For are not such folk under God's especial care? "Ten per cent is mine, mine, for telling you!"

"*Mil diablos!* Telling me what?"

"The gold! There in those bultos of chicle—the gold, the gold—!"

HE CHOKED to incoherence. His wheezing breath sawed in his throat, skinny as a starved chicken's. Silence fell, through which tinkled the bells as the lead-mule shook its head to drive off insects. Scents of smoke and gum, sweat and liquor mingled with miasmatic vapors from the sluggish - flowing river.



Muted with wonder and an illimitable avarice, El Gallego stared, swallowed hard and released his hold on Titino. The old mayordomo staggered back against the tense, ragged spectators.

Fate, life and death themselves hung in balances more sensitive by far than any that ever weighed bales of chicle.

Suddenly the alcalde's huge, hairy barrel of a chest emitted a roar half rage, half merriment.

"Gold, eh?" he vociferated. "Smugglers of gold—when El Tigre says no gold must leave the country?"

Titino found his breath once more.

"Cut the gum open!" he panted like a blown log. His lean finger vibrated at the chicle, lying there in the pathway of light. "See if I do not tell the truth. Then you will believe me, also, when I say they shot me in the wrist, struck me unconscious, tied me on an ants nest. They drove me like a mule—bound me to a palm. But I escape—I climb the tree, and watch—I follow them. I see them put the gold inside the chicle! They are bandits!"

"So, eh?" demanded El Gallego, swinging his machete. "Well, now the hidden cat shall be seen." His bloodshot eyes glistened with ferocity. "Now this gold—I shall see it, and it shall be mine!"

But it was not El Gallego's blade that severed a bulto. Peter had quite another plan, and it was Peter's blow that set the chicle gaping.

He leaped to the packsaddle where hung his machete, and—swinging round—struck squarely on one of the heaped-up bundles.

Again he slashed, and a third time. And as he hewed, he shouted: "Gold, yes! Damn you, gold!"

Already he had wrenched open a bale. There in the brilliant carbide-light the staring eyes of El Gallego and all the others caught the gleam of yellow metal.

"I'll scatter this crowd in a second, Janice," the aviator told her. "Stand by, to keep 'em scattered—and if you have to shoot, kill. Get Titino first—then the alcalde!"

His speech, in English, meant nothing to them. But the old mayordomo shrilled:

"Do I not speak the truth? Gold! And hear their talk—the English. Gringos, I tel you—bandits, smugglers of gold—kill them! Kill these *Americano* swine!"

"Oro!" shouted Peter. "Gold—take it!"

Laughing, he scooped up great handfuls of the broad yellow pieces. He flung them, scattered them in a bright shower the like of which had never yet been seen in Eldoradia.

Eagles and double-eagles struck, spiralled, rolled all down the hard-beaten pathway and the river-bank. Away, in front of the dim-lighted huts spun a rain of gold, a sowing of golden harvests.

"Oro! Oro!"

In a dozen voices, a score, a hundred, the wild cry echoed through that jungle pueblo as the Indians dived and scrambled.

Wiped out, forgotten for the moment was all thought of hated Gringos, of possible smuggling, of Titino's sufferings, of El Tigre, of everything but gold, gold, gold.

"Go and get it!" roared Peter, with a wild, mad hilarity, a magnificent gesture of hell-may-care. And still he flung the yellow-boys. "Pick it up, you carrion-buzzards! Lap it up, you lousy curs. Grunt, swine—wallow! *Gold, gold!*"

More avid now than even swine or buzzards, those supposedly impassive Indians went stark mad.

In a shouting tangle they battled, struck, swore and cursed, knocked one another down, rolled and clawed, howled, scrambled. On the hard-packed earth and in the mud, in light and out in gloom, and along the dim fronts of the huts they battled. Buzzards, curs, swine? No—panthers, wolves!

Not even El Gallego himself could resist that maddening lure of yellow metal. With hoarse and drunken cries he dropped his machete, fell to his knees and with fat and dirty fingers began to rake in all the money he could reach. Panting, staring, he buffeted Titino as that worthy tried to

snatch a few eagles from the golden scatter.

Peter fired a swift word at Janice, "Now then, you stand 'em off!" He flung the final coins. "I'll take the bully!"

"Stand 'em off?"

"Keep 'em back and away. I'll handle this bird, myself!"

ON THE instant Peter sprang up, jerked out his guns and rammed the Luger into El Gallego's fat, sweating back.

"Get up, you filthy jackal!" he growled.

The universal language of the gun spoke plainly. El Gallego, paling to a dirty waxen yellow, heaved himself up. From his high-raised hands, golden coins dribbled and rolled away out of the brilliant light.

Still absorbed in their battle, the Eldoradians seemed to pay no heed.

"Plug 'em, Jan, if they start anything!" Peter ordered.

"Nothing but!" she laughed. Already her guns were bearing on the still-busy mass of Indians.

"Now, Gallego," commanded Peter, "load all our bultos into that biggest dug-out at the wharf!"

"*Cómo, señor?*"

"You heard me. Jump!"

El Gallego understood. The Luger sharpened his fuddled wits. Like all bullies a coward at heart, now his soul turned yellower than his hide. Yellow like the gold itself. Panting and sweating and with hands that shook, he dragged the heavy bultos down along the wharf. He dumped them into the canoe.

Now two of them were stowed; now three, four. The fifth. Only four more remained.

But of a sudden——

"Look, look!" shrieked the mayordomo, from down along the river-bank. In the gloom he had raked in all the gold he could reach, and had once more become aware of what was going on. Look! Stop the bandit Gringos—kill them—kill!"

Janice, who had taken cover out of the light-streak, by moving a little down-river, fired at the vociferating mayordomo. Her bullet zoomed past his ear, plugged into a hut beside which he was gesticulating. Titino dived into that hut, head-first, like a rabbit going to earth.

"Kill them, kill!" he screeched.

That shot and that cry silenced the tumult. Every gold-piece that could be found in the dark had been snatched up, and like tigers only tantalized by a preliminary taste of blood, now the Eldoradians were drifting toward the tienda.

If one bulto had yielded so rich a yield, how about all the others?

"*P'atrás!*" the girl warned them back, while Peter drove the already exhausted Gallego to speed his freighting of the chicle. Seven of the bultos now lay distributed along the bottom of the dugout canoe. Only two more remained on shore. "Get back there, all of you! I won't tell you twice!"

For a moment the mob hesitated. The prestige of the white skin—even though torn and dirty and in rags—still held them. That, and the guns.

Between the Indians and the American who now temporarily held them at bay, stretched the broad and white-gleaming band of light, to cross which any man must expose himself to instant death. Like a tangible barrier it still for a moment held the Eldoradians.

But how long could it hold them? Seeing the gold-laden chicle being loaded into the dugout, and beholding their *jefe* himself enslaved to this task, how long would they do as now—merely clotting together, muttering, waving fists, throwing curses and foul threats?

Now only one more bulto had to be loaded.

"Move, you son of a dog!" commanded Peter. "*Pronto!*"

On the instant, at the door of the hut where Titino had vanished, once more the mayordomo vaguely reappeared. He

held in hand an ancient, Spanish muzzle-loading smoothbore gun, designed to fire a slug that could almost tear a man to pieces.

A dull roar boomed. The slug hummed not a foot over Janice's head.

Peter turned loose, twice, three times.

At the third shot, Titino crumpled, pitched forward and sprawled down the river-bank.

"He won't wreck any more planes or kidnap any more white women," nodded Peter, very grimly. Then, as El Gallego paused to stare and to wipe sweat—"Get busy, you, with that last bulto! Into the canoe with it!"

The last gold-packed bulto was loaded; the mob, a moment dumb-stricken by Titino's fate, now had begun to shout again, to mill about and advance.

"Get in!" Peter commanded the bully. "Up there at the bow. In—and grab a paddle!"

"But, señor——"

Another shot, almost clipping the alcalde's fat toes, ended all argument. El Gallego with alacrity obeyed.

"You're next, Jan! Midships. Keep your gun on his backbone, and if he starts anything, drill him!"

Janice ran down the wharf. She cried, "Hold 'em, Peter. Hold 'em!"

"Okay—but for God's sake, jump!"

She landed safely in the bongo, knelt, dug her revolver most convincingly into El Gallego's dorsal vertebrae.

"Oiga, my friend," she commanded him to listen, while the mob came on, gathering homicidal momentum—a dark, formless hydra-headed monster of the night. "If you stop paddling, or even try to turn round, the alligators will fatten on your carcass. *Comprende?*"

"Yes, yes—but what are you going to do with me? And where——?"

"Silence, you carrion-buzzard!"

With the terror of swift death chilling his now sobered heart, the bully took a paddle and meekly waited the command to labor.

PETER meantime rammed one of his guns into its holster, snatched up the machete and backed down the wharf.

One slash of the blade, and the plaited palm-fibre painter fell severed. The dugout started to drift. Peter gave a wide leap to the bottom of it, aft of the gold-laden bultos. He turned, to face the dim-lit village and the broad white glare of light from the door of the tienda.

A pistol squibbed somewhere along the bank, but only a leaf in the dark jungle across the river took harm.

"On our way!" shouted the American. "Paddle like hell!"

Janice transmitted the order. Groaning, El Gallego—captive and humiliated, now a ruined man since forced to labor like a peon, and for Gringos!—dug his paddle into the inky current.

Down-stream the dugout surged, on this golden getaway. A sudden memory smote Peter. He cried to Janice:

"Tell 'em about those chicereros in the deserted camp! We mustn't leave 'em there to die!"

When Janice had called back the few words that would save those wretches, she added with a laugh:

"And we'll return your precious alcalde, *mañana*—if he's good. So *adiós!*"

Peter's affectionate farewell was a rattle of revolver-fire over the huts, to hint that pursuit would be unhealthy. Then he snatched a paddle and fell to work. The dugout straightened away down-river. A bend suddenly swallowed El Suspiro's lights. Jungle darkness fell.

Sounds of shouting, of confusion and helpless rage all faded. In silence, broken only by a little encouraging ripple at her bow, the dugout gathered speed.

Paddles dipped in unison. Jungle banks slid by, faintly luminous with fireflies. And as the long, gold-laden canoe bore Janice and Peter toward the dark frontier and safety, vastly high through tangled forest-giants glowed a wondrous splendor of warm tropic stars.



PARDNERS

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

Author of "Raw Gold," "Sand," etc.

The aftermath of Retribution Creek

DR. J. HARRISON STANFORTH stood on the observation platform of the rear car as the train chugged upgrade toward the summit of White Pass. There was a far-away look in the blue eyes that swept the rugged slopes. Unheeded were the shining rails, the even grade of the road-bed. He was seeing a rough trail—a trail of rocks and snow—and an endless line of pack-laden men, sweating, cursing, toiling up the steep slope. The hum and click of the wheels on the rails, became the whine of saws and the tap of hammers, as men toiled in the muck, whip-sawing lumber, and knocking together rude boats with which to battle the lakes and the Yukon.

"Eight hours from Skagway to White Horse," he muttered, "and two more days to Dawson—and all in perfect comfort, without the turn of a hand—God! It was different in '97! We were lucky to make it in sixty days—lucky to make it at all. A lot of 'em didn't. Thirty-four years—a long time in a new country. The old timers will all be gone."

Two days later, on the deck of the *Canadian*, he drew a letter from his pocket. It was postmarked Dawson, Y. T., and

addressed to Mr. Clyde M. Tichnor, Gen. Traffic Mgr., M. B. & P. Ry., Chicago, Ill. He reread the scrawling script:

Dear Sir:

Will meet you at the landing in Dawson Sept. 1 as per yrs of June 7. Plenty of game.

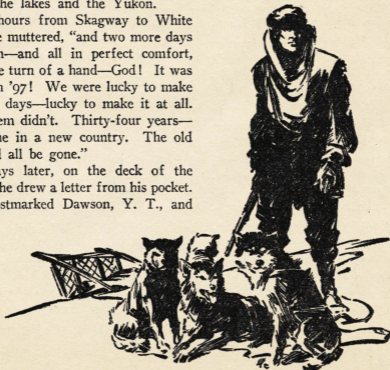
Yrs. truly

Caribou Bill.

And, an enclosed note in Tichnor's handwriting:

Dear Caribou:

Owing to business conditions I won't be able to hunt this fall. This will intro-



duce Dr. J. Harrison Stanforth, a better hunter than I am, and a fine fellow. Hope to be with you next year.

*Sincerely yours,
Clyde M. Tichnor.*

Pocketing the letter, Stanforth stepped to the rail and stared ahead into the gathering twilight where the once familiar outline of Moosehide Mountain loomed dimly against the evening sky. Lights twinkled on the flat, and along the river front—the lights of Dawson. With a long-drawn whistle, the steamboat rounded toward the landing, and Stanforth smiled as his glance swept the buildings.

"Not so many people as in '98—but electric lights! She's a city now, instead of a camp."

Lines were cast and the boat warped to her berth. The gang plank was run out, and a score or more people stepped ashore, many of them to be greeted by friends waiting on the dock.

Stanforth held back, his eyes scanning the faces of the waiting ones. Conventionally barbered faces, for the most part—faces whose owners were conventionally clothed. Upon these the doctor wasted no second glance, but his eyes paused in keen scrutiny of a half-dozen or more men who stood upon the edge of the small crowd. If Caribou Bill were at the landing, he would be among these pac-shod, mackinaw-coated men. From among these, the doctor singled one—a man turned fifty, his beard shot with silver, whose keen gray eyes passed swiftly from face to face of the disembarking passengers. The man was evidently expecting someone, yet not by so much as the flicker of an eyelash did he betray disappointment or surprise, as his glance shifted from face to face. As he walked down the plank, the doctor met those eyes squarely. Keen, steady eyes, they were, with a glint of hardness—like flint. The eyes held steadily upon his own.

Smiling slightly he paused. "Caribou Bill?" he asked.

The other nodded, without taking his eyes from his face.

The doctor handed him an envelope. "I have your letter here—your letter to Tichnor. There's a note that will explain."

Opening the envelope, the man glanced at his own letter and carefully read the enclosure. Again, the keen gray eyes were looking steadily into his own, and the doctor started at the abruptness of the question:

"You been here before?"

"No—no, I never have hunted here. I've done considerable hunting though; deer in Michigan and Minnesota, moose in Maine and Quebec, caribou in Newfoundland. One trip into Africa for cats."

"Friend of Mr. Tichnor's?"

"Yup. He asked me to join his party this fall, but with the depression on, the party fizzled—so I came alone."

"What are you after?"

The doctor smiled. "Bear—caribou—moose. I've got a bet of a hundred with Tichnor that I'll bring out a bigger head than he did. If I do, the hundred's yours. I want the head. I'll leave the matter of outfit to you. Brought my own guns and ammunition. When do we start?"

"How long do you figure to stay out?"

"I'm in no hurry—forty days—sixty. Fact is I've been working too hard. Need a change."

"Ever pack?"

"Sure. You'll find that I'll be able to keep my end up after the first few days. But—is this a packing expedition? How about a canoe?"

"We'll pack in about ten days beyond canoe water, if you want to get into the real country. There'll be eight, nine hundred pounds of outfit. We can pick up some Siwashes. They won't come very high."

"Expense is no object. You'll want money for supplies?"

"Tomorrow'll do. Ought to get away by noon. I'll call for you at the hotel. Good night."

SHORTLY after noon on the following day, the men took their places in a canoe, with the outfit stowed between them, and headed up a river that flowed into the Yukon from the eastward.

"Up the Klondike, eh?" observed the doctor, from his place in the bow.

"You know the country?"

He had an uncomfortable feeling that the steely gray eyes of Caribou Bill were boring into the back of his neck. "No, no! There was a map on the boat. I studied it a bit coming down—to kind of get the lay of the land."

In the early evening of the third day Caribou Bill swerved the canoe ashore on a bar at the mouth of a deep gulch through which a tiny creek trickled in from the southward. The wind had risen, and for an hour had been whipping a fine cold drizzle directly into their faces. They made camp in the shelter of a rock wall at the mouth of the gulch, and leaving Caribou Bill to attend to supper, the doctor strolled up the narrow defile toward a long, rounded heap of gravel. It was an old heap, sprouting coarse grass and bushes. At its upper end, he paused and gazed downward into a deep hole that blocked the gulch from rim to rim. The hole was filled with the crystal clear water of the creek that trickled into its upper edge and out its lower.

At the fire, Caribou Bill grinned thinly as he watched the man who stood for a long time staring down into that hole. Presently he turned back, and the bearded lips relaxed their grin.

"Must have been quite a mine here, once," ventured the doctor, as he took his place beside the fire.

"Yeah. Just the one. She was a pocket. No other claim in the gulch paid wages."

"When was that?"

"They finished her up in nineteen-one. Took out close to two million."

"There must have been a lot of fine stuff. I see they used mercury riffles. Part of the old sluice is still standing."

"Yes, they used quicksilver. Yer a minin' man, eh?"

"No, no! I've seen a little of it—in—in Africa. What do you think my chances are of beating Tichnor's head?"

Caribou Bill poured the tea and heaped



the doctor's plate with food. "That was a fine head," he answered. "Biggest bell I ever seen on a moose. I don't rec'lect the spread."

"Fifty-seven inches. My best head is fifty-one."

"I've seen 'em over sixty. Not many. Best I can promise is to take you where the big ones are. I sure could use that hundred."

TWO more days of paddling and poling against the current brought them to an Indian encampment at the foot of a long rapid. It was at once evident to the doctor that his guide was in good standing with the natives who crowded about him with wide, flat smiles, and guttural grunts of salutation. A few words from Caribou Bill in their own language, and as if by magic, the canoe was unloaded and drawn clear of the water, and the tent set up on a level spot at the edge of the encampment.

Followed then a long conference in the Indian tongue, punctuated by many gestures and much pointing, at the high mountains to the northeastward, at the doctor, at the bales and pieces of luggage piled beside the canoe.

Caribou Bill turned to the doctor. "We leave the river here," he said. "It'll take about ten days to get into the back country. There's no trails—an' plenty of tough goin'. A good man won't be able to handle more'n a hundred pounds. There'll be clost to half a ton, with the packers' blankets, an' all. We can get as many as we want at a dollar a day and grub. What do you say?"

"Better get ten of 'em," smiled the doctor. "That will leave you and me free to hunt, or do a little exploring if we feel like it. A dollar a day! That's different than—" he paused abruptly, his glance shifting from the eyes of flinty gray. "You got them cheaper than I expected," he added quickly.

"A hell of a sight different than the seventy-five cents a pound we paid to get stuff packed over the passes in ninety-eight—them of us that was in on the big stampede."

"I've heard about it. Times have certainly changed. You can come in by railroad now."

"Yeah," answered Caribou Bill. "But the old timers don't never forget. We'll camp here tonight, an' hit the trail in the mornin'."

AS CARIBOU BILL had said, there was no trail leading into the wilderness of mountains that seemed to reach on and on interminably to the rising sun. Burdened only with his rifle, the doctor found himself lost in admiration of Caribou Bill who unhesitatingly led the way, followed by the ten pack-laden Indians, up canyons, across innumerable divides, along steep hillsides, and across foaming mountain streams. Never for a moment did the man appear at a loss—never once did he consult a compass. On and on he went, threading a country that it seemed impossible that the foot of man had ever before trodden—a veritable labyrinth of peaks and passes, of narrow canyons, and dark silent gorges.

Then, suddenly, on the tenth day, they

halted before a cabin. It was a tiny affair of poles and mud chinking, looking ridiculously out of place amid the mighty grandeur of this mountain fastness.

Depositing their packs before the door, the Indians received their pay and silently departed. The doctor watched them go, and when the last man had disappeared he was conscious of a peculiar feeling of loneliness. Just two men in the heart of a wilderness whose overwhelming vastness dwarfed them to insignificance. Suppose something should happen to Caribou Bill! He turned swiftly to see the guide peering into the open door of the cabin. The man seemed so unconcerned—so perfectly at home that the doctor's mood passed.

"Who the devil ever built a cabin here?" he asked.

"I did—a few years ago, when I prospected this creek."

"Good Lord! Have you prospected clear out here?"

"Yes—here, an' beyond."

"Is this the place you brought Tichnor and his crowd?"

"Hell, no! They only had a month. We'd have spent it all goin' an' comin'. I'll make a broom an' we'll clean up the shack an' move in. A damn' carcajou gnawed in, an' he's chewed up everything but the stove."

Both set to work, and a couple of hours later surveyed with approval the neatly arranged interior. Bunk, benches, and table had been repaired with new spruce poles, and the supplies conveniently distributed on rude pole shelves, and along the floor at the base of the wall.

Supper over and the dishes out of the way, the doctor picked up the water pail and stepped to the creek a few yards distant. In the rapidly gathering twilight, the chaos of distant peaks that showed to the southward, looked even more somber and forbidding than they had by day. A sense of illimitable vastness pervaded the scene. The tiny burble of the creek served somehow to accentuate the profoundness of the silence. Across the little valley, the

trunks of a group of stunted birch trees stood out with startling distinctness against the dark green background of spruce. They looked like bleaching bones. He filled his pail and returned to the cabin. He wished Caribou Bill would talk more. Why were guides so given to silence?

"Does this creek find its way to the Klondike?" he asked, as he set the pail on the table.

"I couldn't say," answered Caribou Bill. "There's a waterfall a ways below here—after that she runs off into bad country."

"Bad country! Worse than this?"

"Yes—plenty worse. Deep box canyons, an' high divides."

"Has this creek a name?"

"It ain't on any map. Guess, maybe, I'm the only white man that ever seen it—but you. I call it Retribution."

"Retribution! That's a peculiar name for a creek!"

"Yeah—ain't it?" said Caribou Bill.

"But," persisted the doctor, "why did you name it that?"

"Well, it looks to me like, if a man got in here, an' he didn't know the way out, he'd get paid back for every mean an' ornery thing he ever done. That's what retribution means—my understandin' of it."

CARIBOU BILL shifted the candle, and hunched his bench a bit nearer the stove. The doctor seated himself on his duffel bag with his back against a stanchion of the bunk, and lighted his pipe. He flexed his muscles and stretched his arms above his head. "This is the life," he said. "I'll bet I've worked off ten pounds since I hit Dawson. A man's lucky that can live this way all the time."

Caribou Bill thrust a sliver into the draught hole of the stove, withdrew it, and held its blazing end to his pipe bowl. "It's healthy," he admitted. "But it don't get a man nowhere."

"What do you mean?"

"Well—take you an' me. I live this

way all the time. I work hard, an' sweat every day in the year—not because I want to, but because I've got to. An' what have I got to show for it?

"You live in the city. By the looks of yer hands, you don't work hard—leastwise, you don't have to sweat. Yer up here for fun—an' the trip's costin' you more money than I see in a year."

"You measure life, then, in terms of money?"

Caribou Bill puffed thoughtfully on his pipe. "Well, it's a mighty good thing to have—enough, anyway, so a man wouldn't have to worry."

"Are you married?" The question came abruptly.

"Yes. She was called the most beautiful girl in the North when I married her. An' I loved her like I didn't know a man could love. We're older now—but the love ain't never changed. A man ain't got only so long to live—an' I've got to be away so much of the time, when I might be there with her."

The doctor laughed—a short, hard laugh. "My wife was beautiful, too; is yet, for that matter—knows how to keep that way. But we neither of us married for love. I left medical school with money, a matter of half a million—and she married it. Her father had been immensely wealthy, but his business had crashed. My money reestablished them, in a measure. I married a social position—anted my half-million in a game for big stakes, the entrée to a practice among people who would rather pay ten thousand for having their bellies ripped open than ten hundred. I play the society game in Chicago. Eat too much, drink too much, attend this function, and that—not because I want to, but because it's good business to be seen there, to meet and know the people who will be there—for the same reason that you're there! It's a hell of a game! I love to be close to nature. I'm only happy when I'm out like this."

"It looks like you'd made it pay."

"In money—yes. I know anatomy. I know something of the why and the wherefore of people's ailments. I've got a steady hand, and plenty of nerve. So have a hell of a lot of surgeons who don't make any money. The trouble is they didn't pick out the right



people for patients. You've got to go after money where the money is. I did. I've profited, not only because I charge 'em in five figures—but I've made 'em like it. Like it so well that they're forever slipping me tips on the market—tips straight from the men who make the market. Yes, I've made it pay—have run my million ante up into several millions. But as far as happiness goes—or contentment!" The man paused, and made a gesture of impatience. "You tell me you love your wife—that you begrudge the time you are away from her. There's happiness in that, man! My wife and I begrudge the time we're together—which isn't too much, at that. She likes to travel—Europe, Florida or California in the winter. I hate it. The wild country for me. There are no children, thank God! But I'm getting fed up on it all—sick of it! I never want to diagnose another case, never want to smell another hospital. I will, of course. But to hell with it!"

"But yer what they call successful."

The doctor's lips curled cynically. "Yes, I suppose so. It's what men call success."

"Folks envy you—an' all that."

"The damned fools!" bitterly.

"But you ain't contented."

"I've never been contented—never happy."

"It looks like a man would be," mused Caribou Bill, more to himself than to his listener, "who had more money than he know'd what to do with—who could go wherever he wanted to, whenever he wanted to—who never needed to worry about winterin' through."

"Are you contented, Caribou?" The question came abruptly.

FOR a long time Caribou Bill smoked in silence. "Well—I suppose I am. That is, I suppose I'm closer to it than what you are. Of course, there's lots of things me an' my wife would like to do that we can't. Lots of places we read about that we'd like to see, that we know we never will see. But on the other hand, we've got good health. We've got two of the finest sons livin'—nineteen, an' twenty, they are. They're off workin' a prospect now; my wife's home alone. She's just the bravest, finest woman alive. We don't live in Dawson—our cabin is way back in the hills, a week's trip. But she never lets on she minds. Most women wouldn't stay there. I guide in the fall—to get money to winter through on. In the summer I prospect. Yes—take it all in all, I suppose you could call us contented."

"Have you always lived in this country?"

"No. But, for a long time—a hell of a long time. I come in . . . but maybe I talk too much."

"No, no! Go ahead!" urged the doctor. "It'll do me good to hear a contented man talk. God knows, I need a lesson—in contentment."

Caribou Bill refilled his pipe and lighted it with a sliver. "We've had tough sled-din' most of the time. Way back, when Dawson was a live camp, an' there was plenty of work, an' wages was good, it wasn't so bad. But when the country petered out, folks moved on, an' work was scarce. There was more men than jobs—an' that's bad. Bad for the country, an' bad for the men. I steambated for a while. But that's no job for a married man—not one that loves his wife, an' wants to be where she is. So I took to trappin', an', of course, I prospected. We went way back in the hills an' built us a cabin. Our boys was born, an' grew up—good trappers—good prospectors—good men. When prices are right we make out

good enough. But the last couple of years, with fur way off, it's been tough. It don't take a great deal to run us—but what we need, we need bad. You like the wild country. You said you like to be clost to nature. But let me tell you—there's such a thing as bein' too damn clost to nature! Nature is hard. You either live; or you don't. There's no half way."

"But didn't you ever make a strike—back in the gold days?"

Caribou Bill nodded slowly. "Yes. One."

Swiftly, the doctor's eyes sought the man's face and fixed there. The voice had not risen, but into it—into those two short-clipped words—had crept a note of flinty hardness, a note that seemed to strike to the doctor's very soul, foreboding impending disaster. In vain he tried to catch the man's eyes. Caribou Bill's gaze was riveted steadily upon the stove. He was speaking again in a tone of the same flinty hardness.

"In a gulch, off the Klondike, it was, that gulch where you asked about the mine. I an' another young fellow throw'd in together. I run acrost him in Dawson. We each filed a claim, an' agreed to go pardners. Gamblin' an' drinkin' had come high, so we didn't have much of a grub-stake. But I had enough to last us a couple of months. An' the way things was then, we might make a fortune in less time than that. The country where we was was spotted. A man either hit it; or he didn't. We worked together—sunk a shaft on each claim. Run 'em down equal, workin' first one an' then the other. We wasn't doin' much good. Then one day on his claim we busted through some hard, slaty lookin' rock into rotten rock that laid underneath. It was old rock, so rotten you could crumble it in your hand—an' she was shot full of gold! Coarse gold—big jagged nuggets, an' smaller ones. We'd struck it! We was rich!

"We was low on grub. My pardner took the biggest nugget—clost to a hun-

dred ounces, it weighed—an' went down to Dawson for supplies. He didn't come back. I waited a week, thinkin' probly he'd gone on a spree. I would have, them days—with a strike like that. But he hadn't. He'd sold the claim. Yup—sold out, an' got his money, an' hit outside on the steamboat. I couldn't believe it at first. But that's what he done. On the records, the claim was his. There was nothin' to show we was pardners—not the scratch of a pen between us. There seldom was, them days. Men trusted one another."

THE man paused, thrust a sliver into the fire, and relighted his pipe. The candle flickered, throwing soft shadows upon the face of the doctor—white as a frozen mask.

"My claim was no good," continued Caribou Bill, his eyes still on the stove. "Neither was any of the others that was filed on the gulch when news of the strike got around. I never made another strike. I've filed a hundred claims since—a hundred disappointments. I got married the next year, and—well, like I told you, it's be'n tough sleddin'."

For the first time, the steel gray eyes shifted to the face of his listener. "A cool half-million was what they paid you for the claim, wasn't it, Jack? The half-million that you called your ante?"

The cold pipe dropped from the doctor's hand to the dirt floor. Long, strong fingers—fingers that had, without a tremor, guided the knife that meant life or death to more than one millionaire captain of industry—tremblingly fumbled at the throat of his flannel shirt. He rose to his feet slowly, like an old man. The blue eyes stared glassily into the bearded face. The stiff lips labored to form a name. "Bill Halliday! My God—Bill—I—you." The toneless voice died, the stiff lips continued to move—but no words came.

"Yes," answered the voice from the beard, "me."

"And—you knew—back there in Dawson?" The words came jerkily.

"Yes. Before yer feet hit the dock.



When I read Mr. Tichnor's note, I was sure. We've both changed quite a bit, Jack — since ninety - eight. Even our names has changed.

'Caribou Bill' don't sound much like 'Bill Halliday.' It ain't so much of a jump from 'Jack Stanforth' to 'Dr. J. Harrison Stanforth.'"

THE man paused, puffed his dying pipe to life, and continued, speaking his words deliberately. "Yer thinkin' you was a fool to come back, Jack. Maybe so. You would know more than me about that. You took part of that half-million, an' bought yerself an education. I'd liked to have had one, too—but it's too late now. An' there's my boys. They'd like to be minin' engineers, instead of common prospectors. But it seems to a man who ain't got no education except what he's picked up by lookin' an' listenin', that you couldn't help but come back—that, somehow, God's got a habit of sort of evenin' things up. I suppose, Jack, that you don't believe in no God. I've guided men who was scientists, an' I've listened to 'em talk. Most of 'em don't seem to believe in any God—an' a doctor's a scientist, ain't he? Well, maybe they're right. Men that's educated ought to know more about it, than men that ain't. But, Jack, there's somethin' that balances the books. An' if it ain't God; what is it?

"Take you an' me now. Back in ninety-eight we was even—just a couple of young bucks that had guts enough to tackle the big stampede. We was there in that gulch together with only a couple of claims, an' a couple of months' grub.

"Take it now, thirty-three years later. Once more we're in a gulch with a couple of months' grub. But—there's a difference. You've got education, money, social position—everything a man is supposed to strive for in life. Yet, accordin' to your own tell, you ain't happy—nor yet even contented. You've got a beautiful wife, a beautiful home, automobiles—I know all about it, Jack. Six or seven years ago I was guidin' a party. They was from Chicago, an' in their mail was a Sunday newspaper. It come rolled up big as a len'th of stovepipe. I read every word of it—but the piece I liked best was one about you—a whole page, with pictures. There was a picture of yer wife, with pearls around her neck, an' diamonds in her hair—an' another of yer home. A regular castle, ain't it, Jack? On the Gold Coast, the piece said—whatever that means. An' a picture of you steppin' into a big automobile with a nigger in uniform on the front seat. You'd changed—took on weight, an' was all dressed up—but I recognized you, an' there was the name—Dr. J. Harrison Stanforth. I'd never heard the 'Harrison' part. But 'Stanforth' ain't a common name—it's a name I hadn't forgot.

"The piece went on to say how you was one of the foremost surgeons in the world—how you'd been honored, even in Europe. It told a lot about you—how rich you was, an' all. It didn't say that you was a thief—that you'd got yer start by robbin' yer pardner. They didn't know that, Jack, but you knew it. Maybe that's the reason you ain't been happy—knowin' that was standin' agin' you on the books.

"Now let's look at the other side of the picture. I've lived hard, Jack. I've froze, an' I've starved, an' I've worked till I thought I'd drop. I never got no education—an' I ain't honored. There's never been a time when I ain't had to worry about money; not money for trips, an' pearls, an' automobiles, but money for flour, an' clothes, an' ammunition. Things

that if you haven't got 'em, you die, an' yer wife dies, an' yer kids.

"Yet, Jack, I can't say I ain't been happy, nor contented. I love my wife like I don't suppose many men love theirs—an' I know she loves me the same way. We love our boys—an' them us. I ain't a thief, an'——"

THERE was a sound from the shadows by the bunk—a choking, sobbing sound that resolved into words. "You—you've had all the best of it! I've never known what happiness is—nor contentment! And good God, Bill! What else does life hold—worth while?"

"Pearls — automobiles — diamonds — a castle to live in—education—honor—folks all envyin' you——"

"Dross! Empty husks!"

"Maybe. If that's so, we're startin' even agin. We're up a gulch—just us two. We've got a couple of months' grub. We're back where we started—back to ninety-eight. Only, this time, it's me that's goin' away. That's fair enough, ain't it? Only I ain't stealin' nothin'. I ain't takin' even my share of the grub——"

"What!"

Caribou Bill rose from the bench, and reached for his pack sack. "Yes, I'll be goin' now. We'll start in to balance the books."

"But," cried the doctor, his eyes wide with horror, "good God—it's murder! I can't find my way out of this damned wilderness! Stop and think——"

"Did you stop an' think—back in ninety-eight?"

"You've got me, Bill. Name your price. How about half of what I got for the claim? Two hundred and fifty thousand, Bill—a lot of money."

"That's fair enough, Jack, barrin' interest. But we'll forget the interest. We'll say I've draw'd that in happiness—an' contentment. Hand it over."

"Hand it over! Good Lord, man—you don't think I carry a quarter of a million around with me, do you?"

"Where is it?"

"In Chicago, of course! I can give you my check——"

"An' stop payment by wire before it left Dawson."

"A note, then. You can bring suit on a note."

"An' have it throw'd out of court for duress, or somethin'. An' me up maybe fer kidnappin' an' extortion. No, Jack. You can't steal a quarter of a million off me the second time. It would make me out a fool. The first time was different. I thought you was honest, then."

"But—how can I pay it?"

Caribou Bill shrugged: "There don't seem to be no way, Jack. So I'll be goin'."

"You're a fool, Bill to turn down all that money! I'm willing to pay! Think what that money would mean to you—and to your family!"

"You've got a lot more money than that—an' you say it ain't meant much to you."

Swift anger flashed into the blue eyes. "Damn you! There's law in this country! You can't prove your case against me! But—if I get through to Dawson I can prove mine!"

Caribou nodded thoughtfully. "You might—if you get through. But you won't. You won't never even mention it. There's a telegraph now—an' reporters to flash news all over the world. There's some of the old-timers left that know about that deal. What a great story that would make, Jack. There'd prob'ly be another piece in the Chicago paper about the great Dr. J. Harrison Stanforth—pictures, too. Remember my camera, Jack? It was a good camera, for them days, an' I've saved a lot of pictures. You'd look younger, an' you wouldn't be dressed the same—but folks would recognize you. There'd be affidavits, too. Like you said, I couldn't prove my case in a court of law. But with the pictures, an' all, the case would stand up in the court of public opinion. Reporters are smart—they could easily check up on your first half-million.

What would folks say—the millionaires—
an' the society folks—when they read
—”

WITH a bound the doctor leaped for his rifle, and swung the muzzle into line. His nerves were taut now—the finger on the trigger as steady as a finger of steel.

The bearded lips of Caribou Bill parted in a smile, as the flinty gray eyes met the narrowed eye of blue that squinted along the unwavering barrel. “Pull the trigger, Jack. An' then set the rifle down. I ain't a plumb fool. I slipped the cat'ridges out while you was gone for the water.”

The rifle clattered to the table, and with a stifled oath, the doctor sprang forward as his doubled fist shot out. He had been no mean boxer in college, and during the younger years of his practice, he had continued the sport in the gymnasium. The fist drove hard. Missing the chin, it flattened Caribou Bill's nose. The man reeled backward, as his rifle and pack sack hit the floor, and red blood splashed his beard. He struck out wildly as a shower of blows smothered him. He tried to guard his face, but his arms were beaten down by powerfully driven fists. Again and again he lashed out, only to have his fists thud harmlessly against forearms and shoulders—blows he knew the doctor never felt. And all the time he was backing away—giving ground before that onslaught of pounding fists. Round and round the stove that occupied the center of the room, he backed, his head whirling dizzily from the impact of those blows. He could hear the doctor's breathing now, as the air pumped in and out of his laboring lungs. The rain of blows seemed to be slowing—seemed to land with diminishing force. The doctor's mouth was open, his chest heaving as he surged forward, striking viciously—one, two—one, two—in an obvious effort to finish the fight.

Watching his chance, Caribou Bill stopped suddenly, raised his heel, and sent it crashing into the other's midriff. There

was a bellowing grunt as the doctor collapsed like a rag doll and sprawled upon the floor at the edge of the bunk. Caribou Bill stood looking down upon the contorted face, blotched and livid above the gaping mouth through which the spasmodically heaving chest was laboring to pump air into the starving lungs.

“Knocked the wind out of you, Jack,” he said. “Had to do it. You'll be all right in a little bit.”

DELIBERATELY he picked up the doctor's rifle from the table and pumped the cartridges out of it, as gagging and retching, its owner struggled to a sitting posture and stared in wide-eyed surprise. “Had to lie to you, Jack—about them cat'ridges. Fact is, I never thought about yer rifle bein' loaded till too late. You ain't played much poker lately, I guess. I'm glad you didn't pull the trigger, an' call my bluff.” Gathering up his pack sack, and the two rifles, the man stepped to the door. In the doorway he paused. “I'll leave yer rifle down by the crick where you can find it in the mornin'. So long, Jack.”

Dr. J. Harrison Stanforth raised himself to the edge of the bunk. For a long time he sat there, his eyes on the door that Caribou Bill had closed behind him. The red glow at the draught hole of the stove died to blackness. On the table, the candle burned to a stub, flared snokily, went out. Still the doctor sat there.

Daylight showed at the edges of the door when he opened his eyes. He stirred, stiffly, and gingerly he stretched aching muscles. He was lying sidewise on the bunk, fully dressed, head pillowed on his arm, feet on the floor. He got to his feet, and stepping to the door, threw it open and breathed deeply of the bracing air. The little valley showed gloomy and somber in the gray light of morning. Across, on the hillside, the white birch trunks looked more than ever like dead men's bones. Then, far to the southward, the peaks blazed suddenly into gold.

TURNING into the cabin, he took a towel from a peg, and walked slowly toward the creek. His rifle leaned against the bole of a twisted spruce near where he had dipped the water the night before. Stripping off his clothing, he stepped to the water's edge. Thin ice rimmed the shore, and he shivered slightly. Clamping his teeth, he waded in, gasping as the ice-cold water swished about his knees. There was a sudden crashing of underbrush a short distance upstream, and a magnificent bull moose trotted swiftly across an open glade and disappeared in the spruce timber. Unheeding the cold water, the doctor stood staring at the place where the moose had disappeared.

"Sixty days' grub for two men is one hundred and twenty days for one. And with game as plentiful as it seems to be, I can winter through, if I have to. It's a cinch I'm not going to try to find my way through that damned labyrinth of peaks and canyons. I couldn't pack grub enough to see me through." He smiled grimly. "Edythe's in Paris by this time. She don't know, nor give a damn where I am. But someone'll start a search—someone with a belly-ache, if no one else

t h i n k s t o.
Tichnor'll give 'em the tip where I went. I'll have to alibi Bill Hallid a y though. God—if that story should ever get out!"

He became suddenly aware that his legs were aching with the cold, and wading to his waist into the deepest part of the stream, he threw himself flat, to emerge a moment later, blowing and gasping. A vigorous towelling left his skin lobster-red, and in the exuberance of the warm glow, he dashed off a creditable hundred yards. Trotting back more slowly, he paused to frown at some sharp pieces of jagged rock

that showed in the coarse grass. "No more of that—not barefooted," he muttered. "A bad foot out here alone might prove serious."

Dressing himself, he walked to the cabin and cooked breakfast. Retrieving his rifle, he stuffed some cartridges into his pocket, and struck off down the valley. Two or three hours later he stood on the verge of the waterfall, and confirmed Caribou Bill's assertion that below the fall the river ran off into bad country. Returning, he shot a young bull moose, and that evening he dined royally.

THE next morning he packed in the rest of his moose meat. The weather turned warmer. Fat bodied green flies appeared, crawled about on the meat, and deposited clusters of loathsome white eggs. The doctor scraped the eggs off, and sank the meat in the creek. The next two days he spent in building a smoke house out of green spruce poles. "Better lay in some meat while it's here," he told himself. "The game may move on when snow comes."

Then for several days he hunted and explored the country, venturing into the next valley and the next. He killed another moose, and set to work smoking meat in earnest.

On the morning of the eighth day of his occupancy of the cabin, he looked up from his task of adding green wood to the fire in his smoke house, to see an Indian regarding him in solemn silence.

The doctor stared in startled surprise. He had dismissed the thought of encountering any Indians, believing that Caribou Bill had seen to it that he was far beyond the haunts of the natives. "Hello!" he exclaimed. "Where the devil did you come from?"

"Klahowya." The man pointed to the smoke issuing from the crevices between the poles, and sniffed the air audibly.

"Smelled the smoke, eh? Fine!" He was thinking—here's a man that can guide me to Dawson. But why not hire him,



and finish the hunt? He'd show Bill Halliday—damn him! Only yesterday he had caught a glimpse of a moose that, if he knew anything about heads, would beat Tichnor's. Aloud he said, "You savvy white man talk? You know what I say?"

The other nodded vigorously.

"Great! You know the way to Dawson?"

Again the man nodded.

"All right. How would you like a job—work for me—help me kill a big moose—maybe ten, twenty days—five dollars a day?" He held up five fingers before the man's eyes.

The man shook his head. "'Oman ver' mooch bad seek—mebbeso die. Mus' got to git meat. House burn oop. No got nuttin'. Mooch git burn—on de leg—on de arm—on de back—clo's git burn on fire."

"Your woman got burned!" exclaimed the doctor. "Where is she?"

THE Indian pointed to the southward. "No me 'oman. Wite man 'oman."

"A white woman! Good God—where?"

The man continued to point to the southward. "Two day."

The doctor frowned, and eyed the man sharply. "Hell, man, that's bad country! Caribou Bill told me. There couldn't be a white woman in there. You know Caribou Bill?"

At mention of the name the man nodded more vigorously than before. "Caribou Bill 'oman git burn! She house all burn to hell. She no git out queek. She git burn."

For long moments the doctor stood with narrowed eyes gazing into the south, as his brain raced. So that's why he told me it was bad country down that way! Didn't want me prowling around there and finding my way back to Dawson on his trail! Caribou Bill—Bill Halliday—the man who deliberately walked off and left me to die like a dog in this damned tangle of peaks and passes! Bill Halliday, who knocked the wind out of me with a vicious kick

in the belly, and walked off and left me! Bill Halliday—who flaunted his happiness, taunted me with it! And now Bill Halliday's wife, the woman he loves better than life itself—dying, maybe, suffering tortures. God how the tables are turned! I hold the power to end that vaunted happiness, once for all! Mine is the knowledge—the skill to relieve that suffering, to save that life!

The blue eyes glittered with the unholy fire of vengeance, and the lips curled back in a snarl of hate. Then sanity slowly returned, and the eyes into which the wondering Indian stared became once more the calm, steady eyes of J. Harrison Stanforth, the *surgeon*! "God damn Bill Halliday!" he cried aloud, and whirling upon the astounded Indian, pointed to the little cabin. "Get in there and help make up two packs! Blankets! Grub! Then you hit out for Caribou Bill's! And by God, you're going to travel some to keep ahead of me!"

IN THE late afternoon of the second day the two burst into a clearing on the bank of a small river. The carcass of a young moose from which pieces had been cut, hung from a pole supported in the crotches of two trees. A heap of ashes from which protruded a warped and fire-reddened mass of iron that had once been a cook stove marked the site of the cabin. To one side, close against the edge of the spruce forest, a patched and weather-worn tent had been pitched. About a small fire, above which a kettle boiled, sat three Indian women.

"Where's Caribou Bill?" demanded the doctor, his eyes sweeping the clearing.

Evidently the man was the only one of four who could speak English. He answered, as the others stared blankly:

"Caribou Beel, no here. Mebbe-so Dawson. My brudder gon' for fin' heem. Git doctaire."

"How did you know where I was if Caribou Bill didn't send you?" asked the doctor, eyeing the man sharply.

"Me—I'm ain' know 'bout dat. I'm hont de meat—I'm fin' you—w'at you call —meestake."

"How did you happen to be here?"

"We hont—oop de riv'. See de beeg smoke. Come queek. House mos' burn oop. 'Oman een de riv'. We pull um out."

"Where's the woman?"

The Indian 'pointed, and throwing off his pack, the doctor strode swiftly to the tent and threw back the flap. On a pallet of spruce boughs over which had been thrown a filthy blanket, lay a woman, her head pillowed on a ragged coat. A second blanket, equally filthy, covered her to the chin. Despite the smoke-blackened cheek, the doctor saw at a glance that she was handsome. She lay on her right side, her lips parted, her eyes half closed. Dropping to his knees, the man threw back the blanket and his lips compressed into a tight line as his eyes expertly appraised the damage to the fire-swept body. The dress, a wrapper of some coarse cloth, had been burned away from nearly the entire left side of the body. The left leg, from knee to hip, a considerable area of the left side, and the left arm from elbow to shoulder showed a succession of blisters, some of which had broken. To the cracked and puckered skin adhered shreds and patches of charred underclothing. In several spots bleeding had taken place. The pulse was feeble, though regular, the respiration shallow and labored, the feet and hands cold. The woman evinced no sign of consciousness.

"Burned deep, or it wouldn't have bled," he muttered "and—the area! The shock! And these damned filthy rags! In a hospital—fifty-fifty, maybe! As it is—one chance in a thousand, if her heart holds out!"

REPLACING the filthy blanket, he stepped swiftly to the fire. "How long will it take to get to Dawson?" he demanded.

"Seex, seven day—mebbe-so ga lak hell —fi' day."

"We're going like hell!" cried the doctor. "Come alive, now—everyone of you! Dump that stew into something else, and fill that kettle with tallow—cut every bit of fat you can get off that moose and throw it in the kettle and melt it. Heat a couple of stones in the fire. Tell the women to cut a couple of poles and I'll show 'em how to make a stretcher. Come on, now—jump! We've got to get this woman to a hospital!"

From his pack-sack, the doctor produced a bottle of whisky. Heating water in a tin cup, he added an ounce of the liquor, and stepping to the tent, succeeded in making the woman swallow several spoonfuls of the liquid. The two hot stones, he wrapped in one of his own shirts and placed at her feet. When the tallow was sufficiently melted, he carried the kettle to the tent, and thickly smeared all the affected area. With the help of the Indians he wrapped the woman in one of his own blankets, moved her onto the improvised litter, and carried her to one of the two canoes that were drawn up on the bank of the river. Food for the trip was loaded into the other canoe which with the three Indian women at the paddles, headed downriver closely followed by the canoe carrying the injured woman, who remained in a state of coma, her only movements being an occasional restless jerking of the head, or a flutter of the eyelids.

THEY portaged four times that day, and seven the next. At each stop the doctor forced a few teaspoonfuls of whisky and water, or a little warm broth between the woman's lips. Her pulse remained feeble, but steady. A growing restlessness manifested by a more frequent tossing of the head, an occasional twitching of the limbs, invariably accompanied by low, whimpering moans, warned the doctor that consciousness might at any moment return to rack the body with hideous torture.

On the afternoon of the third day the canoes reached the broader, deeper Klondike at a point which the Indian asserted was only a short distance above the rapids at the foot of which was the Indian village.

As they landed for the portage, footsteps sounded down the trail and the next moment Caribou Bill, accompanied by a physician from Dawson, and two Indians carrying a canoe burst upon the scene. With a hoarse cry, Caribou plunged toward the canoe in which the blanketed form lay amidships upon its improvised litter. The doctor, who had just stepped ashore, held up a warning hand.

"Easy, Bill—take it easy! We don't want to rouse her. So far, nature has been kind. She's suffering—but she's only vaguely conscious of it. A return to consciousness would mean hideous suffering."

The Dawson physician thrust himself importantly forward. "Carry her ashore," he ordered, "and I'll examine her."

Without a word Stanforth nodded to the Indian, and himself taking one end of the litter, they lifted the woman from the canoe and deposited her gently upon the bank. She twitched and moaned feebly as the physician stooped and drew back the blanket.

"What's this mess?" he cried scowling at the grease-coated, fire-blackened body.

"Moose tallow," answered Stanforth. "It's the best we could do."

The physician snorted, and as he reached for a black leather bag, Stanforth glanced into the face of Caribou Bill. Sweat glistened on the man's brow as he stared in frozen horror upon the cracked, and puckered, and blistered skin.

"Buck up, Bill," he said. "These burns always look worse than they are."

"Worse than they are!" exclaimed the physician, fitting a needle to a syringe. "With a good third of the skin area involved—and supuration already set in in a dozen places! If I can save this woman's life, she'll be a helpless cripple!"

He turned toward the patient, syringe

in hand. Stanforth stepped between. "No morphine, please, Doctor," he said quietly. "She's not suffering unduly."

THE physician frowned impatiently. "Step aside, my good man!" he ordered. "You have doubtless done the best you know how. This woman should not have been moved. Nor should unsterilized grease have been applied. But you could not be expected to know that. You have done your part. Now I will do mine."

"Not with that hypodermic," replied Stanforth. "It has been found that, in cases of burns, morphine, if it does not actually induce the formation of injurious toxins, at least accelerates their development to a dangerous extent."

"Bosh! Where in the devil did you get that idea? What do you know about toxins?" exclaimed the man, still holding the syringe in one hand as he endeavored to shove Stanforth aside with the other.

"Not as much as I wish I knew," answered Stanforth, in a voice of ominous quiet. "But if you don't put that damned thing back in your bag, I'll pitch it in the river—and you after it."

The physician, his face flaming red, whirled on Caribou Bill. "I'll not be responsible for your wife's life unless you get this fellow away from here!" he cried.

Caribou Bill glanced from the irate flushed face to the calm face of the other. The narrowed gray eyes met the eyes of blue and held there in a gaze of burning intensity. Then the bearded lips moved.

"This man is a doctor, too," he said in a voice of flinty hardness. "I'll pay you for your trip. But—I'm trustin' her life to him."

A half-hour later, at the foot of the rapids, Caribou Bill laid a restraining hand on Stanforth's shoulder as he was about to take his place in the canoe with his patient. "I'll paddle this canoe with a fresh man," he said. "You get in with them Siwashes. They're fresh, 'too. Yours about wore out."

"I'm all right——"

"You may be all right now," interrupted the other. "But you don't look it. Yer tired, man! We're goin' to make Dawson in one run. Get in that canoe an' get you some sleep! Remember, Jack——your



work begins where ours leaves off—at the hospital."

Stanthornton nodded. "Guess you're right, Bill. But land every four hours——

just for a few minues. I want to keep my eye on the patient."

Caribou's eyes dropped to the inert form in the canoe. "Has she got a chance, Jack?" he asked, in a voice that sounded choked and throaty. "An' will she be crippled for life?"

"Hell yes, she's got a chance! And, by God, she won't be crippled if there's anything in medical science that'll prevent it! You can bet your life on that!"

IT WAS long past midnight when the lights flashed on in the operating room of the hospital in Dawson. Two young internes and a couple of nurses completed hasty preparations for an emergency case, while in an adjoining room, Dr. J. Harrison Stanforth scrubbed and scrubbed at his hands.

"Who's the medico in the checked shirt and whipcords that's going to operate?" whispered one of the nurses.

An interne replied with a shrug. "Search me——name's Stanley, or something. I just saw Doctor Blaine down the hall. Caribou Bill took the case out of his hands and gave it to this fellow. Blaine says it's just plain murder. It's a damn shame."

The door opened and a white-clad, stern-faced figure stepped into the room, scrubbed hands encased in rubber gloves. With a curt nod, he stepped lightly and

swiftly to the table upon which lay the anaesthetized patient. The saturated sheet was turned back, the man's glance swept the white enameled trays of instruments that stood ready to hand. Then he set to work. For three solid hours the internes watched breathlessly as those firm, capable hands went swiftly and surely about their work with knives, forceps, and scissors. When he had finished, the tubes of a dozen drains protruded from the bandages. The stern-faced man strode abruptly from the room, and the nurses wheeled the unconscious form away on a rubber tired carriage.

Alone in the operating room, the white-coated internes eyed each other.

"Say!" breathed one in awed reverence, "did you notice how he——"

"Did you see that intravenous application of glucose and saline solution all during the operation? Where'd he get that? Who in hell is he?"

"I don't know. But I do know one thing——old Blaine's a damn fool!"

Day after day the doctor worked. Blood transfusions were resorted to. One by one the drains were removed. Each week new areas of live skin were implanted upon the damaged surface——skin gladly donated by Caribou Bill, by the internes, the nurses, by many of the patients, and by the doctor, himself. And each week the areas of healthy skin tissue expanded.

SEPTEMBER slipped into October, and October into November, and still the doctor remained in Dawson.

Then one morning well toward the middle of November, he accosted Caribou Bill in the visitors' room in the hospital.

"Well, Bill——the job's done. The *Selkirk* leaves for Whitehorse in an hour——and I'll be on her."

"We better be gettin' to the hotel," said Caribou Bill. "I'm helpin' you aboard with yer duffel."

On the deck of the steamer the two stood beside the rail.

"An' you say she ain't goin' to be crippled, Jack? Are you sure?"

"Hell, yes, I'm sure! She won't even be scarred! Prettiest job of skin grafting I ever did."

"Well—Jack—there ain't nothin' much I can say—except that the books is balanced—an' away overbalanced, far as I'm concerned."

"What do you mean?" asked the doctor sharply, his glance shifting swiftly toward the bank building that occupies a corner on Front Street.

"Mean! Good God, man you've given me back—her! I know what them young doctors have been sayin'—an' the nurses, too. They don't believe there's another man livin' could of done what you done."

"Oh, hell—forget it! I'll tell you, Bill—this trip's done me a world of good. I'm just ra'r'in' and snortin' to get back to work. The way she's come out of it has made me happy. But remember, Bill—a good long rest is what she needs, now. And say—how about a hunt next fall? I'm hell-bent on getting a head that will beat Tichnor's."

There was a twinkle in the keen gray eyes. "If you ain't here, right on the

nail, Jack, I'll come down to Chicago an' get you. An' how about the same place, Jack—jest me an' you, an' a couple of months' grub—up a gulch together?"

The roar of the boat's whistle all but drowned the words. The doctor extended his hand. "Fine, Bill! So long!"

CARIBOU BILL watched the steamer out of sight, then turned and walked toward the hospital. As he passed the bank, the banker himself stepped onto the sidewalk to greet him effusively. "Hello, Caribou! Has your friend gone?"

"Yeah. He just went on the boat."

"Who the devil is he?"

"Why?"

"Why! Good Lord, man—don't you know? He did some telegraphing about six weeks ago with the result that we're holding a half-million dollars in AI securities to your order! He stipulated that we were to say nothing to you about it until he had left. Who is he, anyhow? And why the devil should he—?"

"Him?" said Caribou Bill, after a moment of stunned silence. "Why, he's my pardner. The best damn pardner a man ever had!"

PEARL OF SULU

*A complete novel of sea pirates of the Pacific
—who guard well their sacred dead.*

by

Charles L. Clifford



IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF SHORT STORIES

FORGOTTEN OF GOD

By HOUSTON DAY

Author of "The Arab's Beard," "Mutiny in
the Desert," etc.



Corporal or corpse —in the Foreign Legion.

MONSIEUR, I agree with you. Tonquin is a miserable place. Opportunities by which you might prove your worth to your employers must indeed be few in this city. Yes, I understand your disgust perfectly, for once I too was young and ambitious.

An anisette? *Oui, monsieur, merci.* I drink to your success. But you must be patient. Some time, and in some way, the chance you desire so greatly will come, perhaps at the moment when you least expect it.

I recall the first time I was awarded a corporal's chevrons. For months I had been longing for the moment, but when it came I was so astounded I could not find words with which to thank the lieutenant.

Our section was stationed at the *Kasbah* of Ain Sinna at the time, and of all the

Saharan *postes* the Foreign Legion has ever defended that, monsieur, was the most desolate. Two scrawny palms, the oasis boasted, no more. The well yielded barely enough brackish water for our most urgent needs. Our blockhouse stood alone, bare and stark, surrounded by breast-high walls. There were no native tents at the watering place, for we were in the line of *dissidence*, and it was only rarely that a heavily guarded caravan passed our way.

But the life was not monotonous, monsieur. Far from it. For two days, three days, some times a week or more, all would be quiet. We would go about our work, quarrel among ourselves, and spend our idle moments cursing the officer who had ordered our section to Ain Sinna. Then the ocean of sand about us would spew up a band of fierce, blue-veiled Touaregs, and we would forget our complaints in the excitement of battle.

We had been there four months when I was ordered out on a working party to get fuel. I went willingly, monsieur, with a minimum of grumbling, for I was ambitious, and who knows but what Lieutenant Thibaud might some day observe the alacrity with which I obeyed orders and see in me something better than a gatherer of camel chips.

Corporal Snetoff, a lazy Russian, was in charge of our detail, and as soon as we reached the old caravan trail a hundred metres from the fort he sat himself down, lighted a cigarette, and ordered Hartmann and myself to fill our sacks and be quick about it. That, monsieur, is the way executives work, and perhaps it explains the reason why I was ambitious to advance myself. I have never loved labor.

But the trail had been picked over, monsieur, and the chips were scarce. For half an hour Hartmann and I combed that part of the path that was in plain view of the fort, while the corporal loafed.

I threw my sack on the ground in disgust. It was still less than half full. "At this rate we shall be here all night," I told Hartmann. "Come, let's push down the trail. Snetoff is not looking."

"But it is against orders to go out of sight of the fort," he objected. "The lieutenant will be angry."

Hartmann was a *bleu*, a recruit, who had been left with the last group of replacements from Sidi bel Abbes, and he had a wholesome respect for officers.

But I was not to be put off. I cursed. Fort? Bah! Our *poste* was virtually a jail. It made us the prisoners of the savages we were attempting to subdue. "The lieutenant will not know about it," I argued. "That *cochon* of a corporal will be wandering back to the walls in a few minutes for fear of missing supper. Come, the Touaregs have not been seen in the vicinity for a week."

Hartmann grumbled a little, but he was as anxious to get his sack full as I, so he followed me down the trail.

IT WAS a decision I regretted very quickly, monsieur, for even as we had been arguing, the villainous natives had been creeping up on us. The sand was whispering a warning as the wind sighed among the dunes, but I had heeded it not. The sun beat down fiercely, and I was eager to finish and get back.

We were behind a great dune, scarcely two hundred metres from the *kasbah*, when they closed in. I was bending over gathering chips, my Lebel swung over my shoulder, when a verminous savage leaped upon my back and bore me to the ground.

I wrestled free, and was up in an instant. There was no time to unslung my rifle. Touaregs were closing in on all sides. There must have been two hundred in the band that had gathered behind the dune.

But the number that had leaped on us got in each other's way. I whipped out my bayonet and lunged at the tribesman who had knocked me down. The point pierced his neck, but before I could draw it free a rifle butt struck me a stunning blow on the head.

I was unconscious only for a second or two, and my first thought on opening my eyes was one of amazement that I should still be alive. Three of the blue-veiled ones held me pinned to the ground. I saw Hartmann swinging his rifle by the barrel. That recruit fought like a man. Yes, and died like one too, for the next instant a knife thrust all but disemboweled him.

Ah, but those Touaregs are inhumanly cruel. Hartmann's plight gave me a chance to view what was to be my own fate. He was still alive as he fell, and to prevent him from crying out the savages stuffed his mouth with sand. Quickly he was stripped of his uniform, and then they set to work upon his quivering flesh with their knives.

I struggled to free myself, fought fiercely to grasp a weapon with which I might shorten his dying throes, but another blow in the face with a rifle butt quickly dazed me. I closed my eyes. My stomach had sickened. I could not watch.

Hartmann was lucky. He died quickly, cheating the savages of their pleasure. Meanwhile, the men who had pinioned me to the ground had torn off my uniform, leaving me as naked as my comrade's corpse.

I shuddered, monsieur, and ground my teeth in impotent rage. I knew that they would be more patient with me, the torture would be prolonged, and for hours I would writhe and suffer. I closed my eyes again and steeled myself for the ordeal, vowing that I would not give those beasts the pleasure of hearing me scream.

BUT the blade that I momentarily expected to pierce my flinching flesh was slow in coming. My muscles relaxed. I opened my eyes.

The Touaregs were arguing among themselves, and I sensed that my fate was at stake. Some, I could see, were eager to put me to the knife at once. Their eyes glared over the blue *lithams* that covered the lower part of their faces. But why should the others wish to delay, for that obviously was the reason for the disagreement?

For a moment I was puzzled. Then, in a flash, everything became clear. Two of the "blue men" had donned our blood-stained uniforms. In this disguise they could shoulder our sacks and walk within the walls of the fort. Once there, treacherous

knife thrusts would silence the sentries. Meanwhile, the main group could circle to the opposite side. There the rolling dunes had crept nearer the *poste*, and

from this concealment they could sweep down upon the handful of defenders. Of the outcome of such a surprise attack there could be no doubt. The *Kasbah* of

Ain Sinna was doomed. And when the fort had been taken the attackers could put me to death at their leisure.

I felt sorry for my comrades, monsieur. I reviled myself, too, for having disobeyed orders. But I had little time for self-recrimination. The natives, I saw, had reached an agreement. At a signal from their leader, the trio that held me to the ground tightened their grips, and at the same time one of them clamped his hand over my mouth to muffle an outcry.

My heart sank. I had guessed wrong, I believed. I was to taste the knife at once. One of the Touaregs grasped my leg and lifted it from the ground. Another stepped up, clubbed his rifle, and brought it down viciously across my shin bone. My leg cracked like a reed.

For a moment I was faint. The guttural voices around me seemed far distant. I awaited the next blow with a prayer that unconsciousness might rob me of pain. But while I waited, the savage that had lifted my leg let it fall.

I looked up. Those who had desired to delay my death had won their point. The main group was moving off. They led their camels, so their heads would not show above the dunes. The two that had donned the Legion uniforms picked up the sacks and started walking at a snail's pace toward the fort, their heads bent, as if they were scanning the sand for chips.

IN FRONT of me sat the guard they had left. He was a filthy beast. From neck to ankles he was clad in his *gandoura* of faded and torn cotton cloth. His eyes glittered malevolently above his veil as he warned me by signs that should I attempt to cry out his heavy bladed knife would soon silence me. A moment later the desert had swallowed the others and we were alone.

Ah, monsieur, my plight was desperate. With my leg broken so that I could not walk, and with a guard ready to decapitate me if I should attempt to crawl, I knew that escape was impossible.



But I looked toward my captor, searching his eyes for a sign of drowsiness. I knew better than to look for mercy. In all Africa there is no more barbarous a tribe than these nomads of the Sahara. "Forgotten of God," the Arabs call them, but as I reflected on the four months that we had been left to bake in the fierce sun without relief my lips curled bitterly. It was we, the Legion, who were the forgotten. Even our own officers had forgotten the lonely outpost at Ain Sinna.

Hartmann's body was rigid. Gleaming in the sand by his side I saw the cartridge he had always carried in his sash, "the last bullet" that some day he had expected to use on himself. It was just such torture that he had experienced before he died that he had hoped to avoid. Poor devil.

I recalled my own precautions. Remembered the percussion cap I had purchased from an artilleryman at Colomb-Béchar. For a moment a deadly sort of hope stirred in my breast. If I but had the cap to grind between my teeth my death would be prompt and painless.

With an effort I sat up. Instantly my guard was on the alert. He tightened his grip on his knife, and moved nearer. His eyes gleamed with pleasure as he saw the pain the effort to move cost me.

I looked in the sand about me, and strained a few handfuls through my fingers. But unlike Hartmann's cartridge, my fulminate of mercury cap was nowhere to be seen. It was futile to look for it.

Disappointed? Yes, monsieur, I was, but not greatly. I had not expected to be so fortunate. But I learned, too, in sitting up that my leg was not as painful as I had expected. Already it was numbed to my knee. I glanced at my captor. Perhaps I could get him to do that which I lacked the means to do to myself.

Ah, monsieur, hope of life dies hard. Even as I hungered for the stabbing pain of a knife that would end my suffering for all time, I speculated on the possibility of overpowering my guard. A quick leap, a twist of the wrist, and his weapon would

be mine. His camel was kneeling nearby. Even with my crippled leg I knew I could mount, and while the Touaregs were still moving toward the point where they intended to launch their attack I could race to the fort and give the alarm. The thought was no sooner born than I decided to put it into execution.

GATHERING my good leg under me I leaped for the Touareg's throat. My clumsy movements gave him warning, but in attempting to spring to his feet he slipped, and I succeeded in grasping the blade of his knife. The keen edge cut deeply into my hand. The pain of my broken leg swept my body in a convulsive wave. But with the ferocity of desperation I struggled to wrest the weapon from his hand.

We fought like beasts, rolling over and over in the sand. We clawed and gouged, and I even sought to fix my teeth in his wiry neck. But I fought a losing battle. I knew that I had lost when my fingers closed on his knife, instead of his throat. That Touareg was strong. He would have been a match for me even if I had not been handicapped by my broken leg. In a moment he had torn himself free, and stood over me, his eyes glistening angrily.

I took a last look at life, closed my eyes, and bowed my head to offer him a target. I did not want him to bungle.

But I waited in vain. He did not strike. I looked up. His eyes had narrowed, and I saw that under his face cloth he was laughing at me.

I collapsed panting in the sand, too sick with pain and despair to move. My leg ached with great pulsing throbs. My lacerated hand smarted like fire. The sun beat down on my scorched skin, and I writhed in misery, clawing at the sand like a wounded beast. And it was while I was cursing the fate that would not let me die that my fingers closed over the percussion cap that I had sought before in vain.

My pain vanished. My twitching mus-

cles became still. A great joy welled within me. Slowly I sat up. I was conscious for the first time of the dryness of my mouth. Thirst, hunger and pain. Soon all would be ended. But the thought brought a pang. My joy evaporated. I was young and did not want to die.

The two Touaregs who had donned the uniforms had not taken the trouble to carry the *bidons*. I reached for Hartmann's which was nearby preparing to drink before ending my life. The guard made no move to take it from me as I unstopped it and raised it to my lips. But as soon as I opened my mouth to the tepid stream, he lunged forward and knocked it from my hands.

I raved, monsieur, and cursed him in French, English and Spanish, cursed him and his ancestors before him. My anger seemed to give him pleasure. His eyes sparkled, and his shoulders shook. Reaching out he picked up the *bidon* and lifting his veil, he held it over his mouth as he had seen me do.

I watched him, licking my parched lips with a tongue like sandpaper. When his mouth was full he spat the water upon the sand.

I was angered beyond all reason. In a soberer moment I would have known that he would welcome any excuse to anger me or cause me pain. But I was mad, monsieur, mad with rage. I attempted to throw myself upon him, but now the pain in my leg was too great. I sank back on the sand, my face contorted with pain.

My misery seemed to give him great pleasure, for immediately he turned the *bidon* upside down and let the water flow out on the sand.

MONSIEUR, my spirit was broken. I was ready now to die. Of what use was there to wait? Each moment I lived but added to my pain. I fingered the percussion cap and my thoughts became somber. "Gaston Le Brix," I said to myself, "you wanted to be a corporal. Instead, in another moment you will be

a corpse, and the world will be none the loser."

I thought of many things in that pregnant moment while I raised the percussion cap to my mouth. Some of the thoughts were bitter. Some were pleasant. But there were many things to think about, for I have lived.



It is hard to face death when one is young. But I had no choice. The pain I had already experienced during the fifteen minutes that had elapsed since I had persuaded Hartmann to follow me down the trail and the moment I had started raising the

explosive to my mouth convinced me that I would not be able to cling to my stoicism when I was tortured. I would rave. I would scream. This would delight the cursed natives and help me not at all. So I was content to die.

My hand had reached my lips when the tribesman saw the glint of metal. Instantly he sprang at me. I jammed the cap into my mouth. My captor was upon me like an animal downing its prey. With one hand he pinioned my throat to the ground. Before I could grind my teeth his filthy fingers were in my mouth, my jaws had been pried apart, and he had the explosive.

Ah, monsieur, I know your thoughts. You are thinking that I was slow in biting purposely. That I clung to life as a coward. That is not true. I have reasoned since that at the moment I did not realize my own weakness. That my hand, while it had seemed to obey the command quickly, had faltered in fatigue. That, perhaps, is what had happened.

I sat up with a groan, my last hope dashed. It was with an effort that I repressed tears of disappointment.

For a moment I was foolish enough to think that my guard would toss the fulminate of mercury away. My heart leaped hopefully. But I had not reckoned with the inborn greed of all savages. He sat back, squatting on his haunches like an ape, as he inspected his acquisition.

I could almost see his primitive mind at work. What was good for the hated foreigner, he was thinking, would be good for him, too. But his forehead was wrinkled in perplexity. He recognized the fact that it was metal that he held, and no metal he had ever seen had proved good to eat.

He glanced at me again. Quickly I contorted my face in a grimace of despair and rage, gnashed my teeth, and cursed him fluently with every vile word at my command. I even crawled a few inches nearer him, despite my leg, as if to fight to regain that precious prize. This move decided him. He was satisfied. His eyes squinted derisively as he put it into his mouth.

Monsieur, for a moment my heart stood still. Would he swallow it? Or would he bite into the deadly explosive. The moment I was left in doubt was only as long as it would take a man to spit, but to me it seemed endless. The Touareg, triumph gleaming in his eyes, ground his teeth.

Ah, but that fulminate of mercury was even more powerful than I had believed. The artilleryman had not lied when he had said it was from primer of a .520 mm. howitzer, which you know, monsieur, fires a twenty-inch shell. There was a muffled blast. I felt the concussion strike my face, and found myself staring with joyous, unbelieving eyes at the headless torso squatting in front of me. Slowly the thing that had once been my captor crumbled into a heap of dirty rags.

I cried out in delight. Then swiftly I remembered the predicament of my comrades. The Touareg's camel had clambered to his feet in fright. For a moment I thought he was going to bolt. "*Adar-yani!*" I shouted. Fortunately, he un-

derstood my Arabic and sank to his knees. I crawled to his side and pulled myself up.

Ah, monsieur, it was then that I treated the garrison at the *Kasbah* of Ain Sinna with the strangest spectacle that has been seen in Africa in many a day. Naked from head to foot, my body smeared with blood, I raced from behind the concealing dune and swept down upon the fort.

"*Aux armes! Aux armes!*"

I shouted the warning at the top of my voice. The two Touaregs clad in Legion uniforms heard me. They spun around. They had got within fifty meters of the walls. Their rifles came to their shoulders. They waited, aiming carefully. It was useless to seek to avoid them, so bending low over the camel's neck I screamed my warning in his ear, spurring him to greater speed.

A rifle exploded almost in my face. I felt the searing flash of powder and heard a bullet whine past my ear.

"*Aux armes! Aux armes!*"

My narrow escape only made me shout the louder. I could see the sentries level their rifles. The dolts, they aimed at me, ignoring the two savages I had passed. *Zut!* I was furious. Was my suffering to go for nothing. Was I to be killed by my stupid comrades?

There were more shots from behind. A bullet struck my mount, and his stride broke. He staggered. Ah, now I was an easy target. I saw Lieutenant Thibaud raise his binoculars. I took new hope, and heedless of the consequences I straightened up so he could see me, offering a point blank target to friend and foe alike. At the same time I shouted his name.

The lieutenant recognized me. Recognized, too, the Touaregs masquerading in the Legions' uniform. I saw him whirl and give an order. Rifles spat from a dozen spots on the crenelated walls. I was saved. I had succeeded. And although I did not look over my shoulder I knew that I would get my uniform back and that when I did I would find more than one bullet hole in it.

The grinding bones in my leg made me dizzy. My camel wobbled, threatening to collapse at any moment. But I kept my jolting, swaying seat, and camel and I, both nearer dead than alive, reached the outer walls. There I slipped to the sand and fainted like a school girl, after panting out my story.

WHEN next I opened my eyes I was feeling much better. The pain in my leg had lessened. My slashed hand no longer smarted. Outside the block-house I heard the sharp bark of Lebel's. My comrades were holding their own. The attack had not taken them by surprise. Protected by walls, and with unlimited ammunition, they could withstand a siege of any duration.

The machine guns' explosive chatter sounded good to me, I can assure you, monsieur. Our *trente-sept*, the little sister of the .75 as the men called it, was sending shell after shell into the horde of treacherous Touaregs. Ah, the cannon is a great civilizer. Thirty-five shells a minute our little field gun fired.

I closed my eyes again and was dozing when I heard footsteps. I looked up. In front of me stood Lieutenant Thibaud. He was a young officer, scarcely a year out of St. Cyr. His face, it seemed, would never become toughened to the scorching wind and sun for his nose was always peeling. He looked at me sternly for a moment, and then said: "Gaston Le Brix, you disobeyed orders!"

"Yes, monsieur lieutenant, but——"

"There are no buts. You were ordered to remain in sight of the *poste*."

"But there were no chips."

"Do not argue with me, dumb one. You disobeyed orders so you must be punished."

Ah, discipline. It is always with the Legion. I actually believe Lieutenant Thibaud would have ordered his own brother shot by a firing squad, if the discipline of his section demanded.

He turned to the orderly who had ac-

companied him and asked how long I would be laid up. Four weeks he was told. Monsieur, I groaned inwardly. I knew he was debating the severity of my punishment. There would be another black mark on my record, too. My chances of becoming a corporal were slighter than ever before. I had expected no reward for my timely return. After all, I had only saved my own life. But neither had I expected to be punished.

The lieutenant turned to me again. "Le Brix," he said, "for four weeks you will be confined to your quarters. You not only ignored orders, but you lost government property. I have reason to believe, though, that your uniform and rifle will be recovered, so I will not add an additional penalty for that offense."

He paused and glared at me for a moment with his sharp, piercing eyes, then turned and walked toward the door, leaving me the most disconsolate of men. At a sign from him the orderly left us.

THERE was a lull in the firing. We could hear the shouts of the men inviting the Touaregs to attack again and meet their *illah Allah*.

The grim lines in the lieutenant's young face faded. He smiled faintly, and then winked at me. "We are giving them a warm reception, *mon enfant, n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Oui, mon lieutenant," I stammered, not knowing what was coming next.

The firing had died away, and I knew the Touaregs had been repulsed. I observed that there was a quizzical light in the lieutenant's eyes. Then he said, "your return was most timely, Le Brix, even though your appearance on that camel was most unmilitary. But I am not an unreasonable man. I will not hold that against you. So when you are able to walk again, stroll over to that lazy Russian, Snetoff, and ask him for his chevrons. He will sell them to you cheaply, I am sure, for I have already demoted him for coming back to the *poste* without his detail."

*The ranchers of Little Egypt take desperate issue
with the men who want to over-graze their range.*

THE CATTLE KING OF LITTLE EGYPT

By **RAYMOND A.
BERRY**

*Author of "The Flyin' Packass,"
"Square Riders of the Circle M,"
etc.*

Part I

CHAPTER I

ROYAL CONCLAVE

TWO men coming up the road!" Thus summoned back to consciousness Mark Harper, lean, sun-cured owner of the Skillet Ranch, lifted his tousled head from where it was pillowed against one of the rough, bark-covered poles supporting the ranch-house porch, and, after yawning prodigiously, gazed speculatively at the black-haired, black-eyed brother of thirteen who had disturbed him.

"I don't know, Ariel," he observed. "Seems like sometime I'll have to send you out to civilization and have one of those head specialists examine you. It's not natural for a kid to go into such convulsions of excitement just over a couple of riders. From your voice I thought there would at least be a circus parade."



Ariel's contagious grin widened until it threatened to eclipse all other features in its ivory studded expanse. "Gosh, Mark, if I waited for anything like that to come to Little Egypt before I got excited, I'd be calm a long time. Nothin' has, or ever will, get here except what'll slip into the hampers of a pack saddle."

"Maybe you're right," conceded the older brother as he squinted against the afternoon sun down the chokecherry and service berry bordered trail toward the green checkerings of fields that marked the heart of Little Egypt. "Maybe you're right, but I've seen little troubles ride in here like seeds in a sheep's wool and, once in, they sprouted till they became heap big grief. Where are the two you saw?"

"Behind the big boxelder. They looked like Tom Fitkin and Jim Coffey. 'Tain't time for another o' your bachelor meet-in's, is it?"

The ranchers of Little Egypt take desperate issue
with the men who want to over-graze their range.

THE CATTLE KING OF LITTLE EGYPT

By **RAYMOND A.
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Author of "The Flyin' Packass,"
"Square Riders of the Circle M,"
etc.

Part I

CHAPTER I

ROYAL CONCLAVE

TWO men coming up the road!" Thus summoned back to consciousness Mark Harper, lean, sun-cured owner of the Skillet Ranch, lifted his tousled head from where it was pillowed against one of the rough, bark-covered poles supporting the ranch-house porch, and, after yawning prodigiously, gazed speculatively at the black-haired, black-eyed brother of thirteen who had disturbed him.

"I don't know, Ariel," he observed. "Seems like sometime I'll have to send you out to civilization and have one of those head specialists examine you. It's not natural for a kid to go into such convulsions of excitement just over a couple of riders. From your voice I thought there would at least be a circus parade."



Ariel's contagious grin widened until it threatened to eclipse all other features in its ivory studded expanse. "Gosh, Mark, if I waited for anything like that to come to Little Egypt before I got excited, I'd be calm a long time. Nothin' has, or ever will, get here except what'll slip into the hampers of a pack saddle."

"Maybe you're right," conceded the older brother as he squinted against the afternoon sun down the chokecherry and service berry bordered trail toward the green checkerings of fields that marked the heart of Little Egypt. "Maybe you're right, but I've seen little troubles ride in here like seeds in a sheep's wool and, once in, they sprouted till they became heap big grief. Where are the two you saw?"

"Behind the big boxelder. They looked like Tom Fitkin and Jim Coffey. 'Tain't time for another o' your bachelor meetin's, is it?"



"It's not," Mark refuted, "but if it was, I'd insist that you quit hanging around the door trying to listen in on our talk. You're not old enough to think about joining our organization."

ARIEL took a hitch at his bibless overalls. "I can cook a meal as good as you fellers and ride a horse just as well and just as far. I kept up with you when we rode down to the far end of Fifty Mile Mountain and back one day. I can shoot just as straight as you. Why can't I join?"

"You say you can do those things just as good as I can?"

"Almost," qualified the boy.

Mark Harper relaxed against the post once more. "That's better," he grumbled. "Saves me the trouble of taking you down

and digging out a rib or two. That 'al-most' is what bars you. Besides you don't belong in a bachelors' organization. Bill Mudge was telling me just the other day how you were shining around the little Hearn girl. You're going to be a lady's man, and when you grow up you'll marry and raise a flock of kids to perpetuate the family name."

Ariel blushed becomingly. "Aw, you're not so ancient yourself, Mark. Twenty-five ain't a ripe old age. 'Twouldn't surprise me any if you old batches are dealin' with a matrimonial agency right now."

"That will be all from you on that subject," replied the older Harper with mock severity. "Long as I'm the only relative that you've got to show proper respect to, I've got to see that you give it to me. Now clear out. Fork your nag and ride



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over into the greasewoods, and see if you can locate where that spotted cow has hid her calf. Fog now."

"All right," conceded the boy, with an audacious roll to his twinkling eyes, "but I'll be back plenty soon to hear an earful if you don't hurry. Hello, Tom. Howdy, Jim. The Cattle King is sending me out so I won't be polluted by listening to you fellers."

JIM COFFEY, a tall, angular man with four inordinately long arms and legs attached to the corners of his small, fat rectangle of body, slid from his saddle and watched the whistling Ariel leap over the corral fence.

"What I want to know," observed Coffey, after a moment, "is where you fellows get the big words."

"We practice them nights," explained Mark gravely. "We get them out of a couple of old almanacs and a big book of facts. Sometimes we use the dictionary a bit. Memorize them and then say them to each other. Great way to become forceful men, with a big fut—"

Coffey's companion snorted. "Like thunder, you do, Mark. I know how you learn things. You just gather them up out of the air the same way that a sponge does water—without any particular effort. Things come easy to you, or not at all. Danged if I wouldn't rather be like you than any one I know."

Mark Harper grinned indolently. "Thanks, Tom. Makes me feel mighty prosperous, being complimented this way. Tie up your steeds and come inside. Ariel and I were over to the ice caves this morning and brought back some ice. Got a bucket of lemonade."

"Why don't you fix a man's drink?" demanded Fitkin as he shoved his small, apple shaped head into the cool interior of the log dwelling.

"I'm bringing up a kid brother to the best of my limited ability," replied Harper. "My knowledge of what he should and shouldn't do doesn't go far, but I drew

the line at strong drinks. Sit down, boys, and tell me the latest gossip. What's happened since I last caroused beneath the glare of Egypt's one gas lantern?"

SEATED in a comfortable wooden chair, Coffey tilted back on two legs and hooked his thumbs in his suspenders.

"Well, there's two major events taken place since Tom and me seen you last. One is the coming of a siren to Little Egypt."

"You mean that Hearn's bought the new-fangled contraption for calling in hay hands that he talked about?"

"No, sir. I mean the kind of siren that lures strong, handsome men like yourself to buzz round and round the house where said siren is located, and bash their silly heads against the walls till they're plumb exhausted—not to mention foolish. We've got a mighty smart and eye-satisfying little woman over at Hearn's."

"Married lady?"

"Nope. Single, but with an eye out for the men. She even smiled at Fitkin, which shows she's democratic. But not common. If anyone tries to get funny with her she can freeze 'em stiff in no time."

"How long is this affliction due to stay in the valley?"

"That's a question—one which most of the boys are interested in. There don't seem to be any reason for her bein' here other than that she wants to."

"Which is the best reason in the world,"

remarked Harper as he picked a gray cat from the middle of the bed which stood at the far end of the big combination bedroom, kitchen and living-room. "Go



on, Jim. I'll just drop Smut out of the window. What's the lady's business?"

Fitkin, who had remained silent since entering the cabin, now clumped across the floor with spur chains tinkling until he stood looking into the high, pine cupboard at the left of the stove. Now he answered Harper's query with his usual bluntness.

"I can tell you her business. It's bein' a pest. She asks a million useless questions every day. Where did you move the matches to?"

"Over in that far corner of the top shelf," informed Harper. "Can't you stretch that rubber neck of yours far enough to see them?"

COFFEY chuckled. "Tom could, but he's scairt. Last year when we was broke over at the big Dillion rodeo, Tom stood in some muddy ground trying to see over the fence. His legs sunk and Tom, bein' interested in things outside, just kept on stretchin' till he must have been nigh to eight feet high. The sun came out while he was standin' that way and it sort of bunched his muscles. His chin caught on the fence top and his boots in the mud. Looked for a time like he might pull in two somewhere about the waist. That experience made him mighty fearful about using his elastic."

"You've got no reason to crow," countered Fitkin, "Sometimes when you're talking with your arms and legs like a frog, you're going to get your extremities all tangled up around that square fish body of yours so that the circulation will get cut off and you'll strangle. Mark, I see you've got that new rifle you was talkin' about hung up over the door."

Harper nodded. "It's good. Never saw nicer sights or better balance. I can hit most anything up to a mile. Stopped a bear over on Paint Point last week. When I was cutting out a steak I found a bullet with hair wrapped around it that had pretty near gone through the brute lengthwise."

"Did you ever have the revolvers gone over like you said you was going to?" quizzed Coffey.

FOR answer, Harper walked to a large chest with a blanket thrown across the top and, removing the cover, opened the box and pulled forth a pair of pearl-handled weapons nested in heavy leather holsters. Quickly he handed one to each of his guests.

"Feel how easy they work," he suggested, "and try the triggers. They're empty now."

Coffey pulled and a hammer clicked home. "Got them filed down considerable," he observed. "Won't take much of a squeeze to start lead from it."

"Holds straight, too," opined Fitkin. "No side pull at all to speak of. You must be figurin' there's going to be need of artillery out here before long."

"I know there is," Harper answered soberly, "unless we decide to take our licking without resisting. But now let's get back to the lady. What sort of questions does she ask?"

"Cattle and Harper seem to be her prime interests," averred Fitkin. "And she's been gettin' plenty about both."

"But none of it correct," Coffey put in.

"None except what Abraham Hearn tells her and all of the rest of us have explained on the quiet that said Abe is a natural born liar. I've told her that. Jim's said the same."

"It's the idea of you bein' the local Cattle King that interests her in you," drawled Coffey. "That and your bein' handsome, white and free—especially the last. Women, the pretty ones, at least, resent seein' an unbranded male that's eligible. She says that some day she may want to go into ranchin'. Of course, if she does, she'll want to pick up a man along with the place."

"Supposing we leave the lady to pursue her devious ways unsung for a while and concentrate on that other event you mentioned," suggested Harper.

"A good idea," conceded Coffey, "and here's your letter."

HARPER accepted the soiled missive which his friend handed him and, as he did so, his black eyebrows arched. "It's been opened."

"Yes," agreed Coffey, "Tom and I opened it. You see we felt as though we ought to know the worst so as to prepare you for the shock if it was serious."

"Sometime I'm likely to grow cranky over having you two inspect my mail in advance," cautioned Harper.

"We are very discriminating in what we open," assured Coffey. "This is really public property, bein' a message that has to do with the welfare of all the citizens of Little Egypt. Read it and howl."

Swiftly Harper ran his eye over the few neatly typed lines on the stiff bond paper. At the bottom, signed in heavy strokes, was the name, Arthur Bobson, President of the Richglen Commercial Bank.

"He wants to meet you in Spanishville," opined Coffey in an aggrieved tone. "Don't care about seein' any of us other sterling citizens of Little Egypt at all."

"He kind of demands to meet you," added Fitkin, "and there's a nasty slant to the way he asks it."

Harper's gaze rested momentarily on first one and then another of his comrades. "Of course you know what he wants, I suppose."

"He wants to make arrangements for the paying off of our notes," replied Coffey. "He wants it with a terrible hankering. And we haven't got the money."

"He knows we haven't got the money," answered Harper. "He's going to demand that we turn in our stock."

"But that's ruin for us," stated Fitkin. "Land, stock and everything wouldn't square us with the Richglen bunch with prices what they are. What makes them crowd us when they're letting all the sheep owners hold back?"

"That's just it," commented Harper. "They want to make a sheep range of this."

FITKIN got to his feet and paced the floor. "I'd rather die fighting than let it come to that," he stated savagely. "I ain't goin' to be driven from the place I've worked for."

"Nor me," echoed Coffey. "It's crooked, dirty business. I'll protest it with a gun."

"I agree with you," stated Harper, "and if we are all united it would make things just a bit more favorable for us. But having Abe Hearn and a few others sit back passive makes it harder to get sympathy from outside. I'm afraid we're going to be considerably misunderstood in this deal."

"What are you going to do?" demanded Fitkin. "Write him a polite answer invitin' him to go to the devil the quickest way possible?"

Harper shook his head. "No, that wouldn't be business. We've got to meet him half-way—be polite and try to talk him into an extension of time."

"Which you can't," added Coffey.

"That's likely right," agreed Harper. "Wants me to meet him Friday. All right. I will. This is Tuesday. And in the meantime, boys, we'd better study pretty hard on how we'll handle Bobson's refusal."

"We should never have got into debt to the bankers this way," growled Fitkin.

"We had to, or else have our water rights stolen," retorted Harper. "Just remember that if we hadn't built the Hardscrabble Ditch two years ago we wouldn't have had water enough this year to keep us from drying up."

COFFEY nodded. "That's where we acquired our debt right enough, and there was no way around it. We could have paid out if cattle hadn't kept goin' lower and lower. Now the Richglen boys have got us in a corner and are kickin' us in the belly. I don't like it."

"It's not a comfortable situation," agreed Harper, "but we've got to remember one thing."

"What's that?" quizzed Fitkin.

"While it's all right to be armed, we want the other fellow to make the first warlike move."

"I don't see exactly how that's to be done," complained Coffey. "Takin' our stock won't be called warfare. That will

be just the
workings
of justice."

"We've got
to think," answered Harper,
"think hard. Probably I can bluff Bobson into giving us a

little additional time—a couple of weeks or so."

"But we've got to get the stock off the mountain right away," observed Fitkin. "Be gettin' a snowstorm before long now."

Harper grinned. "If we did, at least Bobson wouldn't get the cattle. Hold them as long as you can, boys. At least till I get back from Spanishville. We'll decide then what to do next."

Coffey rose and stretched. "Hate to move," he commented. "But maybe Tom and I ought to be goin' now. Some of the boys might make a break too soon. Sure you're right about this, Mark?"

There were furrows upon the forehead which Harper turned toward the questioner. "How," he demanded, "could anyone be sure of this business? It's all blind guessing. If any of the rest think——"

Coffey held up a restraining hand. "We don't think," he assured Harper, "only at rare intervals and then very mildly. If anyone can get us fellows out of this jam it's you, Mark. We know it. Only a fellow can't help wondering where he's headed. I mean whether the next six months will see him a busted hobo, serving time in the penitentiary or dead with his boots on because of having questioned the law as laid down and enforced by men of Bobson's type. We'll dangle along now. Saw that pinto saddle animal of yours over

by the Opal Wash. If I get a chance I'll dab a rope on it."

In the doorway Fitkin paused and brushed the hair from his eyes.

"Mark, if you can't do nothin' else with Bobson, kick him. Kick him right hard where he lives. Do it for me."

CHAPTER II

STORM

MARK HARPER awoke from a sound sleep that night with wet splatterings on his face. Raising himself on an elbow he glanced through sleep filled eyes out through the open window into a howling darkness. It was storming. Rain was swishing in from the east, and the cottonwoods about the cabin were shivering in the grip of a hungry wind that gnawed and worried their branches with invisible teeth.

Wind hags were squalling along the rim of Flask Mesa, the towering walls of which rose upward not more than half a mile from the ranch-house. Mixed with the shrill, infuriated cries were low rumbling growls, as though some night-spawned giant were grumbling beneath the lashing of the hags' tongues. Lightning was there, too, scuttling back and forth between monstrous, bloated cloud masses which sagged upon the mesa top in swollen black folds.

Harper was about to pull the window down and go to sleep once more when something strangely different from anything he had ever beheld upon the mountain before arrested his notice. Close to the top of the mesa was a point of light which flickered, yes, and moved. Was it an electrical display like the luminous balls which he had seen floating across the Beaver Meadows on Iron Mountain?

The answer to this was, "No." The light at which he looked moved with a method suggesting the direction of a human brain. Someone was coming down the cattle trail which Mark had blasted to the mesa top. Or, rather, they were at-



tempting to come down, for, after reaching a certain point, the light paused, then, after a time, retraced its bumpy path up the mesa side.

Whoever was up there wanted to get down and had found the trail either obstructed or washed out. Harper glanced at his watch. It would be getting daylight soon. He might just as well get up a bit early and investigate. Whoever was above must want to get down badly or they would not be trying to come through the storm.

Slipping into his trousers, buckling a revolver holster about his waist and jamming a hat down upon his head, Harper ran for the door.

As he reached it, Ariel's head popped up from the covers and the boy demanded, "What you got a light for, Mark? Where you goin'?"

"Outside," came the non-committal answer. "You go back to sleep. If you wake up again before I get back, build a fire and have a hot drink ready."

"All right," came the drowsy answer. "Blow the lamp out."

Pulling the door tight behind him, Harper made his way to the corral and called the black gelding he usually rode. "Nig, come here!"

From the shadows a soft nicker answered and a moment later a velvet nose explored Harper's person, while the man cinched the big stock saddle upon the wet back.

"Goin' on a fool's errand tonight, Nig," the man confided. "You and I go for such trips from time to time right along. Can't help it since the time we didn't go when I had a hunch something was wrong at Mat Gordon's place. He lay two days with a broken leg because I failed to follow a hunch. Could have been there within a few hours of the time he got hurt. Here's where we head for the mesa top."

FOR ten minutes horse and rider moved upward through the rain and lightning until they were clear of the trees and

creeping along the slick expanse of sandstone following a narrow trail which consisted of a series of close-spaced pockets that had been made by charges of dynamite.

Harper knew the very number of these foot-wide craters. It had taken exactly six boxes of dynamite for the job. Ahead the miserable excuse for a trail swung sharply around a shoulder of sandstone—so sharply that a rider must draw the inside leg up unless he wished risking having it scraped upon the rock. Turning this corner, Harper found ahead of him a gap. The bridge of logs which he had used to span the cut had been washed out by the flood water which had ripped down the ravine above.

Before he had time to more than observe this, a scream reached his ears. There was a quality to the cry that sent queer little tremors of apprehension prickling along his spine. The giver of that anguished call was in terror—moreover, it was a woman.

Already Harper's fingers were busy with the rope which hung beside the saddlehorn. Quickly he untied it and, allowing a good-sized knot to flow through the honda whirled the hemp about his head. On the far side of the chasm was the stump of one of the trees that had gone into his bridge. If he could only drop his noose. . . .!

SOFTLY the coils slithered through the air to settle perfectly about the stump. So far, so good. Harper looked about for something to which he might anchor the near end. The trees which he had used on this side were too far away for their stumps to be available. Also the rock was too smooth to be of use. Impatiently he urged the black a trifle closer to the gap, then swung the beast around so that its head was pointed away from the chasm. Quickly he jerked the rope reasonably tight, then made three half-hitches about the horn. Lightly he patted the gelding on the flank.

"Lay to it, old boy," he ordered. "You've got a big steer to hold this time."

The black snorted, then moved ahead a step until he felt the tug of the tightening rope, after which it continued to exert a steady pull that held the hemp taut.



"Good work, old boy," complimented the owner and, grasping the rope in his gloved fingers, he swung swiftly across, hand over hand. On the far bank he called, "Ease up on it, Nig."

Instantly the tension slackened while the horse glanced inquiringly back at its owner.

"Branding's over," announced Harper. "We'll just slip the rope off this animal. Wait a minute. I'm not ready for you to go yet."

Slipping off a glove the owner of the Skillet Ranch bent down and filled it with the bright red gravel that lay in a tiny fan upon the narrow shelf. With the glove two thirds full he cut the honda from his lariat and, unraveling the end, tied the glove to it with a tightness that would insure its staying. This done, he tossed the rope and glove across the crevass.

"Get for home, Nig," he ordered, enforcing the command by striking the animal with a thrown pebble. The gelding snorted, then started down the tortuous path at a trot, while Harper turned about and began walking swiftly toward the summit.

Before he had gone a dozen steps he heard another scream and broke into a run. A couple of minutes more and he came out panting upon the mesa top. The point at which he hit was in a bunch of piñon pines. Among the trees was a rock and upon the rock was huddled the form of a young woman, dressed in riding breeches and red flannel shirt, open at the throat. In her hand was a flashlight, the

battery of which was nearly exhausted. She had this feeble light pointed toward a clump of service berries at which she stared as though fascinated.

"What's up?" Harper demanded.

At the sound of his voice the girl turned a chalky face toward him. Somehow Harper found time to note that, even in fear, the lady was pleasant to behold—and young. Also she was small, not, in all likelihood over five-feet-two, if standing erect. Moreover, she was certainly a stranger to Little Egypt.

"What seems to be the matter?" he repeated.

"It's something over in the bushes," the girl answered huskily. "See the branches shake! I'm afraid it's going to jump on me. *Oh-o-o!*"

THE exclamation ended in a terrified gasp and, looking where the girl's wide eyes were focused, Harper saw twin pools of green flickering hate staring unwaveringly toward the girl. No wonder that she was frightened past movement. It was enough to try the courage of an armed man and, in all probability, she had no weapon of any kind.

As these thoughts flashed through the rancher's brain his fingers were jerking the revolver from its holster. The muzzle swung upward and metal-jacketed destruction ripped from its throat in a long-drawn crash of man-created thunder.

An infuriated, savage squall of brute pain answered. The brush shook to a sudden thrashing and then a tawny body leaped from the cover to strike, yowling, upon the stone from which Harper had jerked the girl but an instant before. More flame flashed from the rancher's revolver and the big cat, after biting savagely at its own blood-stained flanks, sagged flat and motionless upon the ground.

"Sorry I was so sort of rough," apologized Harper, glancing at his shaking companion as he slipped his smoking gun back into its holster. "Guess that cat gave you a pretty nasty scare."

The girl nodded her head, apparently unable to speak for a second.

The man went on reassuringly. "Probably he'd have gone off if I had given him a chance, but I can't afford to let the beasts go. These cougars kill lots of calves and colts."

Color was beginning to surge back into the girl's clear-skinned face and throat. Fascinated, Harper watched the small, full lips ripen from the palest pink to an inviting red. A dimple that had fled in time of panic returned from Heaven knew where and played tantalizingly upon cheeks that reminded the rancher of red grouseberries against a background of fresh snow. Now her teeth showed white and even as she answered in a voice that was husky. "I've called until I can scarcely croak. You are mistaken. This beast intended to kill me. He was playing with me just as a cat does with a mouse. He followed me for hours."

"They do that way," Harper informed her. "When a stranger comes into their range they'll follow lots of times until he leaves. Wasn't there anyone with you?"

"No. I came up here alone for a ride yesterday. I never thought of there being any danger. I intended to get back early last night but forgot where the trail led down and wandered around. It was long into the night when I did finally find the path and then it was washed out."

"I know," replied the man, "I just crossed the place."

The girl looked at him disbelievingly. "You couldn't do that. A person would have to be able to fly."

"You would be surprised what a person can do when it is necessary," he stated. "I suppose you're the young woman who is staying at Hearn's. My name is Harper."

"And mine is Barbara Bently," smiled the girl. "I'm ever so glad to meet you, Mr. Harper. But I suppose that I am trespassing on your ground."

"You are, Miss Bently, and I ought to tell you that it isn't wise for you to be wandering around in these rocks alone. A

lot of disagreeable things other than what you've just experienced can, and sometimes do, occur."

THE girl laughed. "I'm not naturally timid and I've always been used to going where I pleased. It seemed silly to ask anyone to accompany me when everyone is so busy preparing for the round-up. Just when will you be bringing the cattle down from the mountain? Everyone in Little Egypt seems to look at you as the oracle from which all knowledge and information must flow—if it does at all."

ALREADY the rancher was busy gathering wood for a fire, but he looked up long enough to say, "You're kidding me, Miss Bently. It isn't fair for an educated city girl like you to start making a monkey of a country hick. I don't know when the cattle will come down."

"But they told me that you had the deciding of it," persisted the girl.

"I know," replied Harper, frowning as he considered his coming meeting with Bobson. "But I haven't decided yet."

"Why not? Don't you plan things ahead? Perhaps you are one of the men who always acts on hunches."

"Perhaps," the man echoed dryly—and continued with his wood gathering.

"What are you making the fire for?" quizzed his companion. "Is it a signal for help?"

Harper shook his head. "No. I thought you would like to get dried off."

"But people would see this fire and come, wouldn't they?"

"Someone out searching for you might if they saw it, which is doubtful. There are still clouds lying down in the valley."

UNEASINESS began to manifest itself in Miss Bently's face. "There won't be anyone looking for me," she stated. "I said before I left yesterday that I might stop at the Barker place over west a few miles. Mrs. Barker had given me a very cordial invitation. Did you make a

bridge when you came up, Mr. Harper?"

"No. The trail is just the way you saw it when you went down to look."

The perturbation in the girl's face deepened. "Then how are we to let folks know that we are up here? Can you shoot your gun to call their attention?"

"No, the wind would scatter the sound before it had carried any distance."

"I suppose you can get back as you came, but I can't and I'm afraid to be left

alone for fear another of those terrible cats would come."

"I could leave you my gun, as far as that goes, but it so happens I can't go back



the way I came."

Tiny tongues of flame started from the pile of dry leaves and twigs which Harper had gathered from around the trunk of a piñon. Soon a fire was blazing brightly.

"See here," demanded the girl, stepping so that she directly confronted the man, "you are totally unconcerned. You have it all planned out how we'll get back down from here. Won't you please tell me?"

HARPER looked into the brown eyes that were at once admiring and pleading. They did things to a man. Vaguely he realized that this girl possessed that two-lettered commodity by which the papers and cinema audiences set such store. He would have to tell her. A man couldn't refuse to answer that sort of question for such a girl and remain a gentleman.

"I sent word back to my kid brother by my horse," he explained.

"Oh! You wrote him a message?"

"No. Just sent a glove with some of the dirt from down there in it. There isn't any other like it around. Ariel will understand quick enough."

"Ariel? That is a strange name."

"It fits, though. If you had tried to keep track of the kid as long as I have you'd understand. Here is a rock for you to sit on."

"Thanks," murmured the girl, seating herself by the dancing blaze. "Mr. Harper, you must be a singularly reticent man."

"Why?"

"Because everyone seems to know so very little about your business. In small places I have always found that the neighbors claim to know more about the affairs of any outstanding citizen than the man himself. You appear to be the exception that proves the rule: No one will venture the vaguest hazard at how many cattle you own, whether you have any other wealth or anything of the sort about you. All they say is that you are the local cattle king. Aren't you rather young and attractive appearing for a ruler?"

"Perhaps if I'd let my beard grow, I'd fit the part better," suggested Harper. "I may have to in order to live up to my reputation."

THE girl's answering laugh rippled merrily through the cedar scented solitude and Harper, finding himself filled with new sensations and desires, fell into a thoughtful reverie.

"What is your majesty studying about?" she asked presently.

"I was thinking that it was going to be harder for me to keep my mind on cattle and bankers now that I've met you," he replied with disconcerting directness.

Barbara Bently flushed with gratification and, switching the conversation hastily, asked, "How many cattle have you, Mr. Harper?"

"I don't know exactly. They are hard to count. Usually we go by the amount of vaccine we buy. I'd have to look that up."

"You could guess, couldn't you?"

"I could, but there's been too much guessing done in Little Egypt already."

The girl rested a firm and rather aggressive chin on the back of her locked fingers. Harper noted that they were long and slender with the nails well kept.

"Of course," she began, "one cannot come to a place like this without hearing things about the valley's business and so on. I have been told that the men of Little Egypt have been hard hit these last years. Some of them, most of them, in fact, talk and act as though foreclosure proceedings will start before long. Do you think there is any danger of that?"

Harper stretched himself with lithe grace upon a fallen cedar across the fire from her.

"There is a possibility that such a thing may occur," he agreed.

"Part of the cattlemen appear to feel very keenly about the affair," Miss Bently went on. "Especially the younger ones."

"It's not their age so much as their freedom that makes them that way," responded Harper. "The married ones are too battle-scarred."

Barbara brushed this facetiousness aside with a quick gesture. "Two of them, Mr. Fitkin and Mr. Coffey, even hinted darkly of serious consequences—perhaps gun-fighting. I'm afraid they are rather impulsive."

"I suppose so," agreed the man. "All they'll lose on the foreclosure will be everything they've worked for all their lives. That shouldn't excite them so much, of course, even if they did reach a point three years ago when independence seemed in sight."

"You are talking almost as bitterly as the others," the girl observed, "but surely you would be too sensible to fight the law?"

"Is that a statement or a question?" queried Harper.

"It's a question," answered Miss Bently. "I have known you less than an hour but the nature of the acquaintanship has been such as to make me keenly interested in your welfare. Would you be foolish and stand in the way of the foreclosure being

made in an orderly manner? There seems to be no doubt about the settlers here failing to live up to the terms of their notes."

"It's so rare that I have company like this that I hate to use the time talking about unpleasant matters. I'd rather spend it wondering how anyone as interesting and different as you ever strayed into Little Egypt. But, aside from that, I never know exactly what I'll do in any crisis until it arrives. I doubt if many people do. You think you're going to act a certain way and then something happens which causes you to kick all your carefully made decisions into the discard.

"You've had hard decisions to make before, then?"

THE man's black eyes crossed with the girl's gray ones for an instant and then, as Barbara Bently's looked away, he answered, "Anyone who amounts to anything at all has had his dark hours. Listen."

From below came the faint report of a gun.

"My brother, Ariel," stated the man. "He's back at the washout. Sounds carry farther up than down. We'd better go to meet him. Funny I never thought to ask about your horse before. What became of it?"

"I had it tied to a cedar. While I was a little distance away, it snorted and, breaking loose, ran off. I guess the cougar frightened it."

"Probably," said Harper. "This is a good-sized mesa up here so there's no use hunting till we've got saddle horses up. Then Ariel and I will get the animal."

"What's that thumping noise?" demanded the girl, half way to the break in the trail.

"Ariel chopping wood," her companion informed her. "He's felling some small quaking asps back in that little niche to use for a temporary bridge. Ariel's thirteen, but he's a man when it comes to doing things."

"Would you allow a boy like that to be-

come involved in trouble that might possibly make an outlaw of him?" Miss Bently asked quickly.

HARPER glanced back at her with a frown. "I've told you I don't know what I'll do till the time comes. As for Ariel, keeping him out of trouble is a job. Mostly he's a kid, but every once in a while the last year, whenever there's some sort of emergency, he acts like a man. I don't know what he'll do if feeling gets strong enough over this sheep situation."

"Really," answered the girl, "I don't see why you men of Little Egypt are so incensed about sheep. Is there any difference between having the hills pastured by them and by cattle?"

"All the difference between plenty and starvation," answered Harper. "Sheep graze in flocks. They not only eat, but they stamp out as well. In time they destroy the vegetation so completely that you have dust storms on hills that would remain green and grass covered with cattle grazing there. Also, sheep can be put on hills so nearly denuded that no one would think of running cattle on them."

"It doesn't seem possible."

"Some day you'll recognize it as a fact," Harper answered grimly.

CHAPTER III

NO THREAT—JUST PROPHECY

WELL, what did you find out?" Arthur Bobson put the question with characteristically explosive abruptness. Dish-faced as the result of an argument with a pack mule in the earlier and more strenuous days of his career, Mr. Bobson was nevertheless possessed of a

considerable amount of forceful attractiveness.

Now the Richglen banker drummed upon the side of a highly polished patent leather Oxford, draped carelessly across a freshly pressed trouser leg. The pink carnation in his buttonhole contrasted pleasantly with the gray about his temples while the indefinitely pigmented eyes held a look of eager anticipation.

Barbara Bently, who had seated herself opposite the banker at the big table of Spanishville's private home hotel, brushed stray ringlets back from her forehead while she surveyed herself in the tiny mirror of her vanity case.

"Very little, I'm afraid you'll think. Or, at least, not all that you expected. Here is a list of part of the men and the number of cattle they are reputed to own."

Bobson took the sheet from the girl, glanced at it and emitted a sound similar to a grunt. "What's the matter? How about the rest? Some of the biggest names are not on it."

"It was all very baffling," explained Miss Bently. "Strange as it seems, most of the men reputed to have the most stock are bachelors——"

"And should be only too glad to talk with as charming a private secretary as any man ever sent into such an out of the way hole."

"They were willing to talk—about anything except cattle and what they intended to do with them. On those subjects they were absolutely dumb."

"Why? Did they suspect I sent you out there?"

Miss Bently shook her head.

"I don't think so. They didn't act like that. Men who feel as strongly as they do about this matter wouldn't be so agreeable to a woman they suspected."

"What is your theory then?"

Barbara Bently hesitated, then said, "I may be mistaken, but I have a feeling that Mr. Harper——"

"Cattle King of Little Egypt," Bobson threw in. "Go on."



The girl smiled. "Well, I think that he has warned the others not to talk to anyone. Mr. Harper seems to be a singularly able man."

BOBSON scowled. "That idea dawned on me when we were handling the Hardscrabble Ditch. If it hadn't been for Harper we would have driven a bargain then that would have been a whole lot more agreeable to our stockholders. This time, however, things will work out differently. What is it you were wanting to say, Miss Bently?"

"I was wondering if it wouldn't be a good thing for you to attempt some sort of compromise with the ranchers out there. I am afraid there will be serious trouble if you don't. Even a lost cause is hard to beat if it has a capable enough leader."

"Have you met this Harper?"

"Yes."

"What do you think of him?"

"Just what I've indicated. That he has a strong personality and is, in the main, level-headed. I'm deeply indebted to him. In fact, he saved my life."

"How was that?"

Briefly the girl explained.

"Sure that isn't affecting your judgment?"

"It would necessarily to some extent; yet, even discounting that part of it, he's still a man to watch."

BOBSON stroked his smooth-shaven face with white, prominently-knuckled fingers. "That's worth considering," he mused. "Perhaps I can make something of it. You rode in with some of the ranchers?"

"With Mr. Harper himself. He told me he was meeting you at twelve. I told him that I had to be in town much earlier."

"Does he suspect where you are?"

Barbara shook her head. "I sent him on an errand—to hunt up a man out south of town a little way who has a lot of Indian curios to sell. He's to bring the man

in with him if he finds him. I really do want to get some things."

"You are a good planner," commented the employer. "Were you able to find out if the people of Little Egypt were disposing of any of their cattle on the sly—driving them out over Boulder Mountain?"

"I scarcely think they have. If so they've kept wonderfully close-mouthed about it."

"Neither the Hearnns nor the Buckners knew anything about it?"

"No-o."

"They haven't any cattle themselves and they promised to let us know anything they found out," meditated Bobson. "It's possible, some of the men in Little Egypt may have paid them more to double-cross me but I doubt it. Queer that they don't know how many cattle the different fellows have. Of course it's an extremely rough country. If men keep still, it's hard to know."

"They guessed," said Miss Bently, "but it was only guessing."

"And we have to have facts," declared Bobson. "Before we can grab those cattle we've got to know that there's enough of them to pay the major part of the indebtedness. If there isn't, we'd get hid unmercifully for closing in at a loss when waiting a little longer might have made the ranchers solvent. We've simply got to get a tally on the cattle and, as a consequence, I'm having a man to come in who will help you out there."

"Who is it?"

"Victor Swensen," smiled Bobson. "You know him so well that the two of you should get along fine. Also he's a complete stranger to the natives of these parts."

"Where is he?"

"Coming in by car. I didn't dare have him with me. I had him appointed stock inspector to make a pretext for his survey."

"Why will you need to have me out there, then?"

BOBSON'S geniality increased. He fairly beamed. "You haven't completed your vacation yet. You've got three weeks. Rest and recuperate. You'll never find a better place to do it in. And, while you're idling, get better acquainted with some of the bachelors. Their reserve will break. A man will tell a beautiful woman anything, given time and encouragement. If the men out there start smuggling cattle out and pocketing the proceeds, we've got to know about it. Also it's more than possible that they'll have little bunches tucked away in the hills that our inspector will never discover. Some one will whisper tidings of those in your ears."

"I'm not so sure that I relish this job," said Miss Bently.

Bobson's features hardened. "I pay well," he pointed out. "Times are tight.

There are lots of capable girls out of work. Your sister won't be out of the hospital for some time yet. Her expenses are a heavy burden for you as it is."



As he finished

Bobson stepped to a window and looked out.

"Mr. Harper is coming," he observed blandly. "Perhaps it would be as well for you to slip out the back way."

Barbara Bently nodded and, rising to her feet, moved toward the kitchen door with a smooth grace which made the exit appear unhurried, yet it was done almost instantly. A few seconds later Bobson was letting his caller in at the front.

"Sit down, Mr. Harper," he urged, pointing toward the chair so lately occupied by Barbara Bently.

HARPER removed his hat and took the indicated seat.

"Glad you are so punctual," Bobson

continued. "Promptness in a man always inspires a banker with confidence in him. Makes him feel that the person exhibiting it has developed character."

"In this case," drawled Harper, as he flicked a grasshopper from his sleeve, "it doesn't mean a thing except that, having decided to talk with you, I wanted to get it over as soon as possible. Any business that we have had lately has been unpleasant. There is no reason to expect this to be any different. What do you want?"

"I wish to remind you once more that your notes and those of your subjects out in Little Egypt are overdue," purred Bobson, "and, in conjunction with that, I wish to urge that you make arrangements for payment."

"You know that we can't do that," answered Harper. "Money's tight all over the country. We are caught in the price depression the same as everyone else. Why expect us to pay when you don't the other fellows? You are tiding the sheepmen over, aren't you? Then why not us?"

"Bankers always have the privilege of deciding who will be good credit risks and who will not," answered Bobson. "Just now our board feels that it is time to call for money from you fellows."

"Or take our cattle."

"I haven't said that."

"No, but you've hinted in a dozen different ways that it was the alternative. Mr. Bobson, I'm here to ask you to give us another year. It is good business to do that. The country is short of beef. Business appears to be on the mend. Our cows are down to nothing now. Give us another year and they'll be high enough to clear us and leave a balance. Foreclose now and we lose everything."

Bobson shook his head. "Sorry, Harper, but it can't be done."

HARPER'S hands gripped the side of the chair in which he sat until his knuckles showed white, but he managed to keep his voice level as he said, "What you mean is that you don't want to wait.

I'm not absolutely dumb. You are a sheepman. So are most of the other directors of the Richglen Bank. You've watched sheepman after sheepman who didn't have backing go to the wall. Also, now that feed's scarce in the state due to several years of drought and the over-grazing that's been practiced for forty years, you are wondering what you'll do for pasture. So you looked over into Little Egypt, and you saw that our hills still have good feed on them and our mountain range is covered with grass. You want to get hold of that country and put sheep on it till it becomes the same sort of Godforsaken wilderness that the rest is."

Bobson listened with an impassive countenance. "Supposing," he asked at the end, "supposing that you are right, how could you prevent it? We have everything you possess mortgaged."

"That on the ground runs another year," Harper reminded.

Bobson frowned. "That's true, but without the stock it's a certainty that you can never meet the indebtedness on the ground. No, Harper, we've got you where the wool's short. Most of the near-sighted loons out there don't deserve anything better, but you're a bit different. We are inclined to deal more leniently with you."

"Just what do you mean?"

THE banker leaned forward in his seat. "It's like this, Harper. Naturally we wish to see this matter settled with as little unpleasantness as possible. If you would be willing to explain to the people that there's nothing to be gained by hanging on—that, if they'll quit now we'll take land, cattle and everything and call the slate clean instead of holding a judgment over them. If you'll do that and get them to clear off so that we can have the ground for sheep next year, my associates and I will fix it so you won't lose so badly. We'll take over your place, right enough, but we'll deposit in the bank a sum of money that will go a long way toward squaring things."

"How much?"

Bobson took a little time to answer. Should he haggle, or name the maximum sum at once? He decided on the latter course and said, "Twenty-five thousand."

"And all I have to do for that is to be a Judas to neighbors and friends that I have known all my life?" The question was asked in a low tone, yet there was a searing quality to it which made Bobson uneasy.

"No use being theatrical about it," he sneered. "You'll be telling them nothing but the truth. If you don't, they'll lose more in the long run—and you with them. It's simply a matter of good business."

"Look out of your window at Spanishville Creek," directed Harper. "It's three hundred feet wide now and twenty feet deep. When the first settlers came, you could step across it. Over-grazing by sheep did that. And now you are trying to make the condition still worse by getting into one of the few places not already ruined. All the grazing in the state will be limited to the Forest Reserves in a few more years. You stand for robbery of the land and call it business! Business!" The scornful inflection which Harper put upon the word hit Bobson's ears with an effect identical to that of a hand slap full upon the mouth. Both men had risen and were staring at one another across the table.

"Harper," stated the banker coolly, "you've had your chance—and you didn't take it. Now look out! No man can talk to me the way you have and not regret it, especially a hill-billy from Little Egypt. Not even if the rest of the savages do look up to him as a little god with bells on. Why, man, I can smell the corrals on your boots and see the alfalfa sticking to your hair. I'll make a monkey of you for this and then, when I'm through with you, I'll find means of having you locked up behind bars. I'll——"

Arthur Bobson paused, painfully aware of inability to find words with which to express the things he intended doing to the man before him.

"If you are through, there's a word I'd like to say," observed Harper. "I'm admitting that you boys who help to elect the ones who make and enforce the laws have got it all over us range folks when it comes to pulling strings and making black look white. But maybe we aren't as helpless as you think. Right from the start we've had to fight everything, water shortages, floods, low prices, crooked buyers, sheep—and a county that didn't give a hoot whether we lived or died. Altogether it's got a bunch of us into the habit of sticking together through thick or thin and fighting till the cows come home. Perhaps, Mr. Bobson, you'll succeed in prying us loose, but if you do, we're going to cause enough excitement so that the whole state will have a chance to find out just what's taking place. As for you personally, I doubt if, when it's all over, you'll be in a position to care how it comes out."

MR. ARTHUR BOBSON did not intend that any rancher from Little Egypt should be instrumental in causing him to lose the poise, the sneering poise, on which he prided himself.

"Are you threatening me, Mr. Harper?" he asked. "Pardon my suggestion that that is a dangerous and unwise thing to do."

Harper stepped toward the door, then turned and looked back and looked at the banker.

"Advice flows from you so freely, Mr. Bobson, as to lose some of its great value. But I am not threatening. I'm just doing a bit of prophesying. A man can afford to indulge in forecasting once in a while providing he picks subjects where he has a chance to influence the outcome. Good day!"

CHAPTER IV

THE CHIEF IN THE TREE

THE dilapidated auto stages that conveyed passengers over the nine-thousand-foot Spanish Mountain Divide and

down into the valley beyond invariably halted within the grateful shade of the giant cottonwoods grouped around the Spanishville Co-op. Here was a soda fountain where the parched traveler might moisten a dry throat with half-chilled drinks while feasting his eyes on the Indian relics and Navajo blankets displayed for sale.

Barbara Bently, just escaped from the hotel, spied Mr. Victor Swensen in the act of stepping from the boiling, paintless wreck that had brought him in. He was mopping his forehead with a handkerchief and the eyes with which he viewed the scene were most decidedly melancholy.



"Hello, Vick," greeted

the girl, looking up into the newcomer's face. Then added in an undertone, "Mr. Bobson told me just a few minutes ago that you'd be in."

Victor Swensen, Attorney-at-Law, who was well over six feet in height, came as near smiling as his professional gravity permitted. He had acquired this mantle of dignity as an asset to his calling. The longer he assumed this air the more impossible it became to cast it aside until now the thirty-year-old legal counselor of the Richglen Bank was swathed in solemnity for the duration of his natural life.

"Did Bobson tell you what I'm here for?" he demanded while still holding Barbara's hands.

"Stop, Vick! For mercy's sake let loose or people will think we are engaged or something."

"Let them think it, then," consoled Swensen. "We will be after this expedition into the desert."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that when this affair is over I'll have money enough so that I can ask a girl to marry me, and I can keep her right. I won't take 'No' for an answer then as easy as I have in the past. Did Bobson tell you what I was to do?"

"He said you were going to try to count the cattle."

"And that's only the beginning. He expects me to take charge of the foreclosure proceedings and attend to getting the cattle out. If I can handle it smooth, there's a cool ten thousand in the deal."

"Mr. Bobson doesn't intend to stay around here while the business is going through himself?"

Swensen shook his head. "He doesn't seem to like it down here. I've got a hunch that maybe he's afraid of some of the settlers out in Little Egypt. I've heard there are some pretty wild characters among them."

"And some smart ones." added the girl. "I have met most of them and they are nobody's fools. You've got your work cut out for you, Vick."

Swensen's expression was wolfish as he answered, "I'll tame 'em. How do I get out to Little Egypt?"

BARBARA, who had long since freed her hands, turned to see Harper coming toward them. "There's the man I rode in with now!" she exclaimed. "It is possible that I could manage for you to go out with us today."

Smiling, Barbara beckoned for Harper to join them.

"Mr. Harper, please meet Mr. Swensen, the new cattle inspector. He's an old acquaintance of mine and he wants to go out to Little Egypt."

"Glad to meet you," acknowledged Harper, then glanced questioningly at the girl. "Would you like to have me arrange for him to accompany us out?"

"It would be fine if you could."

"I think I can," replied the rancher. "If Mr. Swensen is willing to have his luggage go in with the pack train tomorrow."

"Fine," agreed the latter, "but haven't you a passable wagon road out there?"

Harper shook his head. "We haven't a decent pack trail from now on. We can't go back the way we came in, Miss Bently. A flood from up in Bert's Fork washed

the road out for half a mile. Just talked to a herder from out west who had been down along the creek. We can't even take a horse over it."

"How will we go?" demanded the girl.

"Over the new Death Hollow trail," explained the rancher.

"Say," Swensen broke in, "what kind of a country is this?"

HARPER looked the newcomer over carefully. "This, Mr. Swensen, is the frontier of things mechanical. Right here is where the automobile stops and the horse begins. Look at the saddle ponies drowsing under the cottonwoods. Fine looking animals aren't they? The country around Spanishville—particularly the Little Egypt district—has the best saddle stock in the West. Our animals have to be good in order to carry a man over the rocks."

Barbara Bently became acutely aware that this explanation was more than half for her.

"Do any of those animals come from quite a distance?" she asked.

"I can see brands from Fifty Mile Mountain, from the Henrys, Paint Point and half a dozen other places that can be reached only by saddle. Those two bays by the post-office come from down close to the Colorado River. Just beyond is one from over near Hole-in-the-Rock."

Swensen glanced disapprovingly at the horses. "What do the owners do when they get this far?" he asked in his richly nasal twang. "Do they take automobiles on out and keep going as long as they can? It seems like that would be the sensible thing to do."

Barbara flushed. It was like Victor to say something cutting even when he wanted and needed to be tactful. He couldn't seem to help it.

"Some of the people go out right enough," Harper answered easily. "Quite a few of them stay away just long enough to get an education, then drift back to use

their sharpness in skinning the stay-at-homes."

Barbara started. Was it possible that Harper knew anything about Swensen's origin on a Southern Utah ranch? No, that was preposterous, yet it might be that enough of the outdoor atmosphere still clung to Swensen so that Harper had been enabled to make a good guess.

Now the two men were measuring each other with their eyes as Swensen asked, "But why does anyone stay in a place like this? I can understand their being born there but the remaining——" He shook his head in wonder.

HARPER smiled. "Isolation has its advantages. We work out simple and more direct ways of handling our problems. And, if the rocks and distances bar us from many things we might enjoy, they also keep out many undesirable things and people."

Even in the shelter of the cottonwoods, Barbara Bently was acutely conscious of the stifling September heat as she listened to this statement. A horse pawed and the street was filled with a fine, lung-penetrating dust. As she gasped for breath she understood that the pause following Harper's remarks was pregnant with the birth of a lasting enmity between two strong men—an enmity more fierce and surcharged with danger of physical violence than that which existed between Bobson and Harper. For here youth was matched against youth—yes, and just as well admit it, she herself added to the situation's complexities. Bobson should have ordered her away.

Harper was glancing at his heavy silver watch.

"Half past one," he announced. "The horses will be ready for the back trip. Supposing we start?"

"Where is Ariel?" asked the girl as the three rode westward over the long, sweeping lift of cedar and sage which would eventually lead them to the river.

"Gone on ahead," answered Harper.

"I should think that he would have waited," observed the girl.

"Ariel likes to travel faster than we do," explained the man. "He fogs his horse through those canyons at a speed that would make most people dizzy. It's his age."

TWO hours later Mr. Swenson watched a narrow cleft in the mesa ahead widen into a great gorge, gouged deep into the smooth, quartz-veined folds of rock. Death Hollow, with a thin, sinuous line of sunlit water winking up at them from far below with a thousand ripple-created eyes.

As they dropped downward along a twisting, precipitous trail, green plumes of cottonwood, birch and boxelder appeared unexpectedly in the mouths of the smaller side gutters entering the larger ravine through which they wound. A pair of chicken hawks circled and screamed above an inaccessible cliff-side nest, which was marked by splashings of white upon the crag beneath. Fantastic figures materialized in the rocks along the trail, only to vanish into nothingness as the riders' angles of vision changed.

Near the bottom of the gorge cliff dwellings were visible with their mud and rock walls clinging to niches in the canyon side like nests of giant swallows. Among these silent dwellings were some so perfectly preserved that the girl half expected to see the owners emerge from the tiny, windowlike openings.

She voiced the sentiment aloud and Harper answered, "Some folks claim that this valley is still haunted by the ghosts of the folks that once lived here."

"I don't believe that even a ghost would hang around such a place," said Swenson.

"Vick, you're stupid!" declared the girl. "It's beautiful—so restful and quiet. Think how always of nights the cliff dwellers could go to sleep listening to the creek snoring on its bed of rocks."

"And always they had to shin up a hundred feet of rock with a gourd of water

or an ear of corn," answered the lawyer. "No, I can't see anything fine about it except that the gully below their nests would be a fine place to throw worn out razor blades—which they didn't have."

AT A turn in the trail, Harper halted and pointed across the canyon at several rows of parallel markings on the cliff opposite.

"Know what those are?" he asked.

Barbara shook her head. "What?"

"Hand prints," the rancher explained. "Several hundred of them. Been there for centuries. That jutting rock above prevents the rains from ever striking them."

"What in the world do they mean?" queried the girl.

"I don't know," admitted Harper.

"Why don't you ask me?" demanded Swensen.

"All right," said the girl defiantly, "what do they mean?"

"What would they mean if I put them there?"

"Why, nothing, of course."

Swensen nodded. "Correct. And that's all they mean whoever put them there. The people who made them were probably playing. People waste a lot of time trying to speculate sense into things that haven't any."

The explanation seemed most reasonable to Barbara yet somehow she resented it.

"Vick," she broke out, "you're an awful killjoy. Given a chance you'd strip the romance and mystery from everything. I'm going to ask Mr. Harper to tell me something about the ghost stories he mentioned. If you don't like them, you needn't listen."

Mr. Swensen smiled to the limit of his weighty dignity. "Go ahead, it's getting time for fairy tales anyhow."

Barbara turned coaxing eyes upon the rancher. "Come on, Mr. Harper, please tell me some of those interesting stories. Don't pay any attention to Mr. Swensen."

"I certainly won't," smiled the young

rancher, "and if the stories interest you, you are welcome to hear them. See that biggest cottonwood that stands alone by the creek with that low bluff behind it?"

"Yes."

"Look right through the top of the tree and you can locate a sort of monument of stones on the bluff."

"Yes, I see that, too," answered the girl as her eyes came to rest upon a slender black shaft rising above the sage that dotted the hill top.

"Well, that pile of stones marks the grave of the first man to see the chief in the tree."

"The chief in the tree?" There was wonder in the girl's tones.

HARPER nodded. "That's correct. This Kerns was a bandit and a murderer. He came out here in the way early days to keep away from the law, and he built himself a small cabin close behind where the rocks are piled. One time a prospector passed by and found Kerns in the middle of the cabin floor with a badly sprained ankle. Kerns begged the prospector for something to drink. Said he was afraid to stay where he was when he was sober.

"The prospector had no liquor along but asked Kerns what had frightened him. Kerns replied that the day before had been hot and dry but in the afternoon a queer Indian summer haze had filled the valley. Shortly after this he began smelling wood smoke and, glancing out at his cabin door, he was startled to see several tiny wisps curling up from the bottoms along the creek. Around these smokes he saw, or thought he saw, indistinct figures, while to his ears came broken fragments of unintelligible speech.

"Just after that he glanced at the cottonwood and saw the thing which he said chilled him to the bone. The big tree seemed to have its entire top filled with a luminous mist, something like a spider web wet with dew and struck by sunlight.

It was like that, only different. Then, suddenly, a great face grew out of the mists. It was the face of an Indian and it filled the entire tree. It's a big tree—has been a big one for a long, long time. I suppose it had fifty feet of foliage then, which gives you an idea of the size of the head.



"It was that of a chief and so distinct that Kerns swore he could see a long scar upon the left cheek. He could even count the bear teeth in the necklace at his throat and see the veinings in the eagle feather head-dress that he wore. The chief's eyes seemed angry and they followed, so Kerns declared. No matter where he moved, they always watched him, haughty and fierce. Then, abruptly, the tree trembled and the chief's mouth opened and words came forth which rumbled in the canyon. Kerns said that he fainted."

"Is that all?" Barbara asked breathlessly.

"It's only the beginning. Several days later a party of surveyors called at the cabin. Kerns was dead in his dooryard with his face twisted into an expression of utmost horror while his hands were clamped tight over his eyes as though to shut out an unwelcome sight."

A MOCKING light showed in Swensen's eyes as he asked, "Without intending to kick on this yarn of yours, Harper, I'd like to ask how many have seen this face?"

"Four, counting Kerns. And all of them were men who had done the Little Egypt Country dirt."

"Thought you said Kerns was a bandit who came in to hide. How did that hurt anyone?"

"While he was here he made a living trapping out the remaining beaver and cheating the Indians of the district."

"Where are the other three men?" queried Swensen.

"Dead. They each died shortly after telling about seeing the face."

"How?"

"One man's horse pitched him over a cliff. A boulder fell on the third while the last one died of a knife wound."

"What dirt did these men do you Little Egyptians, besides what Kerns had done?" probed the lawyer.

"One was a cattle thief and finally a poisoner of springs. Another was a crooked assessor who tried to tax us to death and shot a settler who objected. The last was a man named Hutchinson. He was the first man to attempt stealing Little Egypt's water rights. He nearly succeeded. Did get part of them, in fact. If he hadn't, it wouldn't have been necessary for us to have built the Hard-scrabble Ditch. While the men of Little Egypt were fighting him, two of them were railroaded into the penitentiary. They're still there, but Hutchinson is dead. Two days after he had told residents of Spanishville about seeing the Indian, his horse went through a rotten bridge. He died slowly of thirst and pain on a pile of loose boulders."

THAT is the strangest story I ever heard," commented Barbara, glancing with a little shiver of apprehension toward the lone tree. "Of course," she added, "I know it is nothing but superstition. Still one could easily become superstitious, living in such a lonely land. You don't believe it, do you, Mr. Harper?"

"I merely told you what happened," answered the rancher. "Most anyone in either Spanishville or Little Egypt will tell you the same."

"Vick," asked the girl, "what do you make of it?"

Swensen rode steadily, his face set straight ahead before he said, "It looks

to me, Barbara, as though the citizens of Little Egypt took pretty drastic means of clearing the country of people to whom they took a dislike."

"You mean you think they were murdered?" Harper demanded sharply.

"That's what they call making way with people in most sections, isn't it?" Swenson demanded with his nasal notes twanging belligerently.

"Now don't be stupid again, Vick!" Barbara reproved sharply. "You don't suppose the people who died would be accommodating enough to aid in the plotting against their own lives by telling this story of the Indian each time, do you?"

Swensen shrugged and the girl, catching his profile against the orange of the western sky, perceived that his features were set in stubborn, fighting lines. "That last," he said, "is something into which I would have to look more deeply before making an intelligent answer. I have a feeling that, if one investigated, he would discover that the men who heard these tales from the victims were either denizens of Little Egypt or else strong sympathizers in some way."

"I am afraid that Mr. Swensen is arriving in Little Egypt with a poor opinion of its citizens," observed Harper.

HIS manner of making the statement was light—inconsequential—but Barbara thought she detected a subtle mockery in his tones. Was it possible that Swensen had hit the nub of the matter with his first guess? She shivered at the possibility, then brightened as she recollected that these accidents had doubtless taken place before Harper was old enough to have had any active part in them. Again, too, Victor might be wrong. She wished she could see Harper's face, but that was impossible for it was hidden in the shadow of his wide-brimmed hat.

Now he was speaking again. "Mr. Swensen, you are going to find the country around Little Egypt rather empty of stock till the herds come off the mountain.

That will probably be some days yet. Part of my stock is already down—out on the mesa. If you cared to get busy at once, I could take you to look at them first. I'm going out tomorrow."

"Fine!" exclaimed Swensen. He spoke with an eagerness that showed he considered himself lucky to have the enemy thus play into his hands and Barbara, listening, found herself torn by conflicting emotions. She should be glad that events were shaping themselves along the lines she and Swensen were paid to see that they went, yet she found it impossible not to be disappointed, and a bit disgusted, that the Cattle King of Little Egypt had not shown greater perspicacity.

CHAPTER V

MOUNTAIN TRAIL

THERE is someone riding toward us." Swensen made the statement as though surprised that humans, other than the three of them, moved, or had their being in this strange country.

"Ariel," Harper answered in a matter of fact tone.

"But I thought you said he went on to Little Egypt," protested Barbara. "He must have turned back before he got there."

Harper shook his head. "Ariel got there all right. He's just coming out again for fun."

"It's a dull country where a man or boy would make an extra trip of that sort for pleasure," Swenson commented. "I should think he would be too tired to sit in the saddle."

Harper laughed. "I've known him to ride a hundred miles without any longer rest than was needed to snatch a cup of coffee and a little food. Not all on the same horse, of course."

Sparks flew from iron shod hoofs and Ariel, dressed in blue Levis, as the cowboys call their overalls from the name of the most common brand, and a chambray shirt of the same color, the tail of

which had slid from the trousers, was upon them in a rush.

"Hello, Mark. Howdy, Miss Bently. Have a pleasant ride?"

Ariel's voice held a husky quality which made it doubly attractive to the girl. Also his black eyes contained a restless audacity startlingly different from anything that she had ever seen in a boy as young.

"Ride over to Hearn's?" Mark Harper asked the lad.

"Uh-huh."

"See anything of the men?"

"Fitkin and Coffey. They said everything was all right."

Harper appeared satisfied for he asked no more questions and accordingly the boy switched his attention to Barbara and Swensen.

The girl introduced the two, and Ariel asked, "How do you like your horse, mister?"

"All right," conceded Swenson. "If it hasn't any life, it at least hasn't fallen down. The saddle's not as comfortable as some I've seen. Aside from that everything's fine."

Ariel's bright eyes roved knowingly over the lawyer's mount.

"That's one of Jensen's nags," he announced. "It's not what you'd call a fast animal but it's got a good bottom. Reason that it's so slow on the trail now is that it hasn't been grained. Jensen don't have to keep horses fit for roundup work."

"Will Mrs. Hearn be expecting an extra lodger tonight?" asked Barbara.

"Sure. I told her there was another man along."

"How did you know it?" asked the girl. "You hadn't met him."

Ariel's mouth opened. He started to speak, then halted abruptly. Mark Harper was whistling some bars of an old song.

"How did you know, Ariel?" quizzed the girl.

"I told him," explained the older brother. "He joined me just after I talked with Bobson. We both saw you

talking to Mr. Swensen. Ariel lit out just a little before I met you."

"Oh!" ejaculated Barbara.

BUT she was puzzled and, glancing toward Swensen, detected a perplexed look upon his Scandinavian countenance. What had Bobson let out of the box? Surely he had not told who Swensen was. Of course not, for if he had, Harper would not be asking him to ride out and inspect his stock. The matter of a stock inspector and his arrival must have come up in a way that Bobson could not avoid. Evidently no harm had been done.

"Thompson's turnover just ahead," announced Ariel. "He had a horse go over that steep place one night."

Swensen looked askance at the deep ravine into which the boy pointed. "Did he live to tell about it?"

"Uh-huh. He was a tough old bird. Nearly seventy. Rolled clean down and didn't even lose his store teeth out."

"I didn't know there were such trails in the world until I came here," Barbara remarked.

"And I never suspected there was such a country," retorted Swensen. "All rocks. I don't see how the first settlers found their way in."

"It was a case of finding the way out," replied Harper. "A trapper came in from over the big mountain. A hard trip but one can make it if time is no object. Once down in he decided to push on through to the south. He lost his way. Wound in and out of canyons and over rock humps until his sense of direction was about gone. Then, as a last resort, he turned his pack burros loose and followed them around until the burros finally picked a trail through."

As the older Harper talked, Ariel, who



had been at the rear of the line of horses, urged his mount over a seemingly unscalable slope of sandstone and brought up at the side of Swensen who was behind the rancher and ahead of Barbara.

"Here, none of that!" protested the lawyer. "You'll crowd my horse over the edge!"

Ariel grinned wickedly. "Aw, I couldn't do that! Your horse ain't got life enough to fall."

With a jerk on the reins the boy twisted his buckskin so that the beast's tan rump was against the red of Swensen's animal. Watching with breathless amazement, Barbara saw the boy's foot kick free of the stirrup, after which he shoved out a leg and, twisting his heel, roweled the lawyer's horse in the flank with his spur.

CHOKED with horror the girl beheld the bay snort and buck. A wordless exclamation of surprised fear escaped the rider as the horse reared upward and appeared about to topple backward into the gulf below. Dimly in that same instant of hectic action Barbara was conscious of seeing Mark Harper's horse pivot on a spot almost the size of a hat and plunge toward Swensen. After that Harper's hand shot up and, catching the reins of the rearing bay, pulled the startled brute back to earth.

"What happened?" he demanded.

"Your brother crowded my animal too close," answered Swensen in a voice choked with angry resentment. "I tried to tell him not to do it."

"Ariel," reproved Harper, "you know better than to pull a stunt like that."

The boy's eyes were dancing like those of an imp. "Shucks, Mark, how did I know the thing would buck? Mr. Swensen said it was dead on its feet."

"You get ahead and stay there!" ordered his brother.

Again the horses fell into a quiet string and Barbara breathed deep with relief. Victor Swensen had not seen Ariel use the spur. She would not tell him, for

there would be serious trouble if she did. Meanwhile she would carry for days, perhaps years, the recollection of Ariel's handsome, smiling face with the puckish, twinkling eyes that had watched with eager interest while Swensen's life had hung in the balance on the rimrocks.

Of one thing she was absolutely certain. Ariel would not have minded had Swensen toppled into the depths below. Was the boy so cold blooded that he did not care about life? He was tender-hearted at times. Hadn't she seen the motherless bear cubs that he had been raising on the bottle at the Harper ranch? And hadn't different men in Little Egypt mentioned the fact that, for a kid, Ariel was especially gentle with horses? To be sure he was very young and perhaps the enormity of his act was beyond his understanding.

Apparently the boy had taken some strong dislike to the lawyer and had acted on it with all the forthright abandon of a young savage. But the reason for this dislike? Did it have its source in Swensen's air of superiority, or did the boy suspect his reason for coming to Little Egypt? If the latter, these suspicions must have been imparted to the boy by his older brother. Perhaps these men of Little Egypt were going to be harder to dupe than even Barbara Bently had realized.

One thing was certain; at the first opportunity she would quiz the boy and see if she could get new light upon the subject from his conversation.

CHAPTER VI

LOST—ONE CATTLE INSPECTOR

WHERE is Swensen? What is he accomplishing? Why don't I hear from him? Answer at once and give information!

"Bobson"

Barbara read the short communication over several times. Its brevity suggested

the fury of the man who had dictated it. In Hearn's stable was resting the horse of the messenger who had brought the letter from Spanishville. In an hour or so he would be ready to go back, and Bobson was expecting Barbara to send a full and satisfactory explanation.

Where was Swensen? If she only knew! Seven days ago he had ridden away from the store in the company of Fitkin, Coffey and Harper. Apparently they had gone off into the fourth dimension. At any rate nothing had been seen or heard of the quartet since that time. What could have happened? Barbara had asked herself this question a thousand times in the past few days. Now the query buzzed through her brain until it threatened to drive her mad. Impatiently she sprang from her chair in the Hearn's dining room and rushed to the kitchen where the ample-hipped, generous bosomed Mrs. Hearn was busy with the culinary incantations that later would develop into dinner.

"Mrs. Hearn," asked the girl, "what do you suppose has become of Mr. Swensen?"

Mrs. Hearn swept her iron-gray hair away from her eyes and looked intently at the questioner. When she answered it was with a certain brusque harshness to her tones that was contradicted by the genial kindness of her smile.

"You're mighty worried about him, ain't you, Miss Bently?"

Barbara flushed. "I'm not worried—I mean, it's natural——"

"There now," beamed Mrs. Hearn, "Of course you can't come right out and say so as long as you aren't engaged—which I reckon you ain't, or I'd have seen a ring. But I wouldn't fret so hard about him. It's better to find out before you marry him that afterwards that a man's indifferent and won't stay around. Just between you and me, I think Mr. Swensen would make a mighty poor husband. He's right self-centered, if you ask me. Always would want his own way about every-

thing and expect no end of waiting on ——"

"Oh, stop, please," laughed the girl a trifle hysterically. "That's not the reason I've been fretting. But he's a good friend of mine and now people are beginning to write and ask questions."

Interest gleamed behind Mrs. Hearn's flour-besmudged glasses.

"That so, honey? Who's askin'?"

"Just—just folks," faltered the girl.

"Well, now, if it's just folks, I wouldn't worry a mite," soothed the older woman, "but as for tellin' what's keepin' him, I don't suppose the Lord Almighty himself would try to do that. But I can vouch for one thing. He'll turn up all right."

"What makes you so sure of that?"

Mrs. Hearn appeared surprised. "Didn't you see who he left with? Well, nothin' will ever happen to those three, unregenerated sinners. They'll appear some of these days and Mr. Swensen will be with them."

"If I only knew where to look, I'd start hunting myself."

MRS. HEARN brushed the flour from the bread board, washed her hands at the sink and threw the water out of the window before asking, "Why don't you find out from Ariel where they went?"

"I did ask him, but he said he didn't know. I supposed when Mr. Harper talked about the mesa he meant the one I was upon, but it seems that the country is simply studded in all directions with mesas that have a few of Harper's cattle on them."

Mrs. Hearn nodded. "That's so. You see there isn't room on the mountain for all their stock and so the ranchers let some of their younger cows stay on the mesas all summer. Water gets scarce a year like this but there's enough, seepage to keep them going. Why, there's Mark Harper out in front of the store now. He's come to see if there's any mail for him, I reckon. Go on out and ask the scalawag what's happened."

Before Mrs. Hearn had finished speaking, Barbara was through the door and running across the street toward Harper's horse.

"Mr. Harper," she demanded breathlessly as she came to where he waited,

hat in hand,
"Where's
Mr. Swensen?"



The rancher's face registered deep surprise. "Isn't he back yet?"

"No, he isn't," Barbara answered impatiently. "You must know that he isn't. He left with you and Mr. Fitkin and Mr. Coffey."

Harper nodded. "That's so, but I went only a short distance with them. A rider from the mountain overtook us and said I was needed up there. So they haven't got back? That's queer. They must be having a great trip."

"It surely wouldn't take all this time to inspect the cattle you mentioned," Barbara pointed out.

"No-o," conceded Harper, "not unless Mr. Swensen insisted on seeing every cow. He appears to be a very thorough-going individual. He wouldn't do things by halves."

"Nonsense. He's too smart a man to waste all his time on one small butte top when he has so much country to cover!"

"Is he on a time schedule?" quizzed the rancher.

Barbara flushed. "I heard him say that he needed to get done soon."

"Soon means different things to different people," Harper explained. "Now with me it means almost immediately, within a few hours, say. On the other hand, I've known men who thought of it in terms of months. Maybe——"

"You are just trying to be aggravating!" flashed the girl. "Please stop joking and

tell me why Mr. Swensen hasn't come back!"

Harper's face became serious—almost too serious—as he replied, "I think perhaps he's hunting. The mesas are great places for that, you know."

"I don't believe it!" the girl flung back, "I wish you would tell me where he is so that I could look for him."

HARPER shook his head. "I can't very well do that. It's too rough a country for a girl to set out alone in, and you couldn't hire a guide for any price at present. You seem anxious about him. He must be something very special to you."

Again Barbara flushed, even deeper than when quizzed by Mrs. Hearn. "He is nothing more than a good friend to me," she said with some warmth, "but people are asking about him—people who intimately know us both."

"What people?" asked Harper.

"I can't see that that is a point which matters!" she retorted, "But I do insist that you either tell me where he is so that I can look him up, or that you get in touch with him yourself and inform him that he is wanted."

"I might not know myself exactly where he is," answered Harper. "The three of them could have moved to some other point. However, I'll agree to find him if I can."

"And deliver my message?"

"Yes."

"When will you start?"

"Today. At once. Right now. In other words, immediately, if that suits you."

Barbara looked up at the young rancher with mingled emotions playing over her expressive face. She was angry and troubled, but she was also puzzled and a very little amused at the way he responded to her questions. And, while he had watched her keenly, so keenly as to cause added embarrassment, there had been a suggestion of mirth in the lines about

his mouth and in the depths of his dark eyes. At the end of the street, where he took the trail toward his own ranch, he turned and waved his Stetson. And the girl, watching, waved back, though she doubted her own desire to do so.

CHAPTER VII

A LAUGH ON THE INSPECTOR

AN HOUR later Mark Harper was at the ranch-house where his younger brother was waiting for him on the porch.

"Been any message for me from either Fitkin or Coffey?" he demanded.

The boy grinned happily. "Gosh, Mark, it's good to have you back. Kind of lonesome here at the ranch without any of you batches around. Yes, Tom must have been in yesterday while I was gone. I found this on the table when I come home."

As he spoke the younger Harper placed a piece of torn wrapping paper in his brother's hand. On it was scribbled:

"Mark, for the love of Mike, get up here. Jim and me never did claim to be lion tamers. Things are gettin' plumb tough. We're both clear out of alibis. If something don't happen soon, there'll be an explosion sure. This fellow is no softy. Hurry!"

"Tom"

Harper whistled softly—whistled the same danger-inspired tune that had halted Ariel back on the trail to Spanishville.

"Mark," wheedled his brother, "You're going to let me go along, aren't you?"

Harper's hand closed on the boy's shoulder. "Sorry, kid, but there's got to be someone here to look after things and bring word of any new development. Tough luck, but that's the way she stacks up. When things get settled down again, we'll all go on a hunting trip to pay for it."

"Are you going to be back right away?"

Harper shook his head. "The ranchers

haven't got all the cattle off the mountain and scattered through the gorges yet. No, if I can help it, we won't be back for several days."

"Listen. What if Miss Bently comes stewin' over to ask me a lot of questions. What am I goin' to tell her?"

"You tell her just as little as you possibly can," directed his brother.

IT WAS mid-afternoon when Jim Coffey greeted Harper at a tiny cabin set in the center of a hundred acre patch of cedar.

"It's about time you was gettin' here, Mark. If you'd have been a day later, Tom and me would have been a pair of ravin' lunatics."

"Where is the cattle inspector now?" inquired the new arrival. "He hasn't left, has he?"

"No, but he can't stand our society for only short stretches any more. He goes off by himself for hours at a time and, when he gets back, he looks at Tom and me as though he wanted to kill us. I tell you it's terrible having a man turn on you the way he has on us after we have tried our best to amuse him."

"Is there any danger of his finding his way down?"

"Not unless he seen you come up. We got here after dark and he's so turned around he couldn't follow a cement boulevard down a straight canyon with no side ravines."

"How long before he got disgruntled?"

"About three days, I'd say. We hunted up enough cows to keep him happy and he was as nice as pie. Then we put in considerable time pointin' out imaginary mesas and describing non-existing herds that were supposed to belong to different ones of us. He got a lot of kick out of taking notes on all that. Figured on visiting them just as soon as we got down from here."

"After he got tired of that," Fitkin put in, "we sort of amused him for a day chasin' a deer. Since that time it's been

plain hell. I never seen a man with such a mania for makin' fires. We told him that we didn't dare to have them on account of the danger of burnin' off all the grass on the mesa. But that didn't mean a thing to him and, after trailin' around and kickin' out the blazes he started for about a day, we had to have an accident and lose all the matches but just enough to build a fire in the stove."

Harper grinned appreciatively. "Where are the horses?"

A smile appeared on Coffey's leathery countenance as he pointed to his partner. "Tom took them off the hill and turned them loose. Ain't he some cowboy?"

"Listen, Mark!" Fitkin broke in, morosely. "If I hadn't, Swensen would have got off long before now. He's an ingenious cuss, once he gets started. He rode one horse after another till I felt certain one of them would take him to the trail. Of course he probably wouldn't recognize it with that big log lying across it but still, if he hung around long enough, he might get it. Especially if the horse led him that way enough times."

"And he's awful distrustful," added Coffey. "He won't believe hardly anything. We found a couple of sickly cows over here about half a mile and spent some time foolin' with them. Told him that you'd expect us to look after them till you got here and that made him talk scandalous. We've stood a lot at his hands. We got worried for fear he'd shoot us sometimes, so after that he lost his gun. Thinks he lost it on one of his ridin' trips and has hunted like a good one. Tom happens to know that it was slipped from his holster when he wasn't lookin' just after he got on his horse one time. Anyhow, we decided firearms weren't safe anywhere but strapped on to mine and Tom's hips."

"And cookin's another awful trial to the cuss," said Fitkin, "and he don't take to dishwashin' at all. Gets out of it every time he can. We've told him that it'll help to keep his mind occupied while he

waits, but you can't reason with him any more than you could with a pig."

"He's gettin' tougher all the time," commented Coffey. "We sure ought to let him go before long. If we don't, we'll have to tie him up—that is, if we're men enough to do it. There he comes now. Look at him pick up speed. He's seen your horse, Mark."

THE man striding toward the cabin certainly bore but faint resemblance to the well-groomed, debonaire individual who had ridden with Harper into Little Egypt but a week before. This man's clothing was torn and soiled and, most disguising of all, was the heavy salt and pepper beard which had sprouted from his chin.

"Never seen whiskers grow ranker than his have right in this dry weather," observed Fitkin. "Jim and I have been bettin' on how long they are right now and I claim there's a good inch of them."

"If he'd only let me shave him with my hunting knife like I offered we could measure them," said Coffey, "but no one's going to tamper with them while Swensen's feelin' the way he does."

Before there was time for further talk the door swung open and the young lawyer stalked inside.

"Harper," he roared, "this is as dirty a deal as was ever pulled on any man."

"What's the matter," asked the rancher. "Haven't Fitkin and Coffee treated you right?"

"You know confounded well they haven't. Stalled around pretending they had to stay until you came. That was all hot air. Why didn't you come quicker?"

Harper stared at the questioner as though amazed. "How come you think that I'm at your beck and call?" he demanded. "All I offered to do was to let you examine some of my stock. I've done it, haven't I?"

"Yes, and kept me a prisoner in this purgatory for seven days!"

"Kept you a prisoner? Is that right, boys?"

"No, it ain't," Fitkin denied stoutly. "He's been free every minute to go and come as he pleases and he knows it."

"But they knew that no stranger could find his way off this mesa alone," rasped Swensen. "I was brought here after dark on purpose. I offered both these men good money to set me on the down trail. Would they do it? You bet your life they wouldn't. Virtually, I have been kidnapped, and you fellows are going to pay mighty dear for it."

"See," Fitkin explained plaintively, "that's the way he raves all the time. We do all we can for him, and, because we don't dare neglect our work he accuses us of danged near every crime he knows."

"Swensen," queried Harper, "how do you figure on making a kidnapping charge out of your trip out here? Miss Bently heard me ask you if you cared to go and you willingly accepted without any urging whatever. No one is compelling you to stay now. You are free to do exactly as you please."

"Free?" shouted the lawyer. "Am I free when you keep me from building a fire to signal with? Isn't that interfering with a man's freedom of action?"

"Perhaps," answered Harper, "but you've got to admit that a man has some rights on his own property. This is my ground. I feel that it is dangerous to have fires built promiscuously on this mesa for fear of starting forest fires. You'd have a lot of trouble convincing any jury that I'm wrong."

SWENSEN was trembling visibly with emotion, yet he managed to speak with a semblance of self-control. "All right!

All right! Let's cut out the comedy and get down to brass tacks. You're here now. You can look after your mangy cows. There's no earthly excuse for your refusing to send one of these men down with me."

"I can't very well order them to go," replied Harper. "They're under no obligations to do as I demand, but I'll ask them if they will."

Whirling so that his back was toward Swensen, Harper winked at his fellow ranchers, then said, "Tom, how about you? Will you take Mr. Swensen back to Hearn's?"

Fitkin shook his apple-shaped cranium in a slow, sad negation. "Sorry, Mark. I'd like to, but I can't go off without my horse. I've been hunting it what spare time I had for several days. The animal always meant a lot to me. You know that. I feel like I'm obliged to stick around till I find it. If it wasn't for that —" Fitkin sighed dolorously.

"How about you, Jim?" queried Harper.

"Me? Me take Swensen anywhere? No siree, not after all the insulting things he's said to me. I wouldn't take the cuss six feet, unless it was underground. I'm done with him."

"What's to hinder your taking me out yourself, Harper?" asked Swenson.

"If these boys were going to stay so as to look after things for me, I suppose I could," answered the rancher, "but I'm afraid they'll want to be footloose now."

"Absolutely," stated Fitkin. "I'm startin' home on foot at once, but I'm not takin' Swensen along for a walkin' companion. I figure I'll pick up my horse down at the foot of the mesa somewhere."

"I don't need any company," retorted the lawyer. "All I ask is for somebody to show me the trail down the mesa and I'll make the rest by myself. If Coffey is going to hunt his horse, surely he'll have no objection to my accompanying him that far."

"None except that I'm looking in the



other direction for the horses," answered Coffey. "Tom's all off about their being down at the foot of the mesa. And I can't figure to hoof it enough out of my way to show Swensen the trail."

"Ride Harper's horse, then, and I'll walk," snarled Swensen.

"Ride that critter of Mark's?" Coffey's tone expressed the utmost surprise. "He'd kill me, sure, if I did."

"Bah!" growled Swensen. "You men lie by the mile. Harper, let me take the animal. He knows the road. He'll take me to the head of the path. It can't be over two or three miles to it. I'll turn him loose there and let him come back."

"I'd like to," Harper replied affably, "but I don't dare to. Coffey's right. It would be suicide for anyone besides myself, who isn't a professional, to get on this black. He'd kill you. Any bunch of men who know the animal would back me in that statement."

AN INARTICULATE howl of fury escaped Swensen as he charged at Harper, his fists clenched. Before he reached him, however, Fitkin and Coffey had seized him by the arms and were holding him back.

"Isn't it tough?" lamented Coffey. "The solitude and heat seem to have undermined his reason. Think we'll have to tie him up?"

"Listen!" raved Swensen. "I'm going to get you for this, Harper! I'm not the man to fool with this way, and you'll find it out. No one can make a goat of me and not pay for their fun. You're holding me here by force. Understand? Force!"

"I don't understand anything of the kind," objected Harper, "and I doubt if anyone else would. You can go or stay as you please but we'd just as well come

to an understanding about one or two points now. If you intend to make this cabin your headquarters until I'm in a position to take you back to Hearn's, all right and good, providing you behave while you're at it. Stay peaceably, do your share of the work, and everything's O. K., but keep acting disagreeable and you'll be bunking under a greasewood with the stars for a light and a breeze for your blankets. This is a rough country, Mr. Swensen, and, if you insist on being hard, you can expect the same from me."

THE lawyer had ceased his struggling. "Let loose of me, you two," he ordered. "I'll stand. But it won't be because I'm one whit bluffed by Harper's talk. Someday I'll give him that chance he's asked for, and, when I do, it won't be me that'll need the patching. Harper, I'm no fool. You have made a sucker of me this trip. I know what you're stalling for. It's to keep me back from finding out how many cattle there are in Little Egypt. But, in the end, I'll finish my job, and this little play of yours will make things just about twice as hard for you as if you had let well enough alone."

Mark Harper smiled. "You're talking absurdities, Swensen. You are the new cattle inspector. You've told everybody you were. All right. My cattle have had a clean bill of health for years. Why should I go to any trouble to keep an inspector from doing his job throughly. Anybody will tell you that the idea is crazy. You've just been the victim of bad breaks. Take my advice and say that you've been hunting. That way your reputation won't be hurt, as it will if folks discover that you've hung around the top of Lone Mesa for over a week because you couldn't find the trail down. There's a laugh in that, Inspector, and it's not on me."

(Bobson and Swensen have only begun their fight against the cattlemen of Little Egypt—as you'll discover in the next SHORT STORIES.)



NEW LYONS FOR OLD

By B. E. COOK

Do barnacled geese lay golden eggs?

CAPTAIN MARCUS BARR was worried. He had reason to be. Up and down, back and forth, wing to wing he paced the bridge. Already the weary *Pendeltona* lifted, rolled awkwardly on a rising sea. A nor'easter was coming.

What did it matter to L. M. Lyons that his ship hadn't been to drydock for twenty-six months? He was safe and snug in his overheated New York office.

Back and forth. Even Mr. Meginson began to fidget against it. The Old Man hoisted his reefer collar. There was ice in the wind. He halted abruptly behind the helmsman. "How's she steering?" he demanded.

"Like a crate, sir. No life in 'er."

"Nothing to the southward," the captain rejoined; "keep her up."

"Keep 'er up, sir."

Again that wearisome pacing. "No life . . . humph! That's just it," he muttered to himself. And hadn't he told Lyons as much? Told him be-

fore last trip. Lyons had made a promise then. "Take her to Morse's soon as discharged—next trip." So he had said. That trip had come and gone. This ten day charter to the West Indies had popped up. The *Ferristona* had been down in Baltimore; she couldn't take it. The *Cestona* had been somewhere at sea; she still was, so she wasn't available. Here, therefore, stood the *Pendeltona*, down to her winter mark in that ten day cargo, grass-plastered and half a dozen boiler troubles within.

"Holy heavens, man, we can't pass up this charter when charters are so scarce! Be reasonable." That had been L. M. L.'s argument.

Barr, of course, had been silenced by it; Lyons owned her. Drydocks be damned!

Mare's tails had gone overhead. They were down in the west now. The mackerel sky had gone, too. In their wake a slaty gray. Whitecaps were multiplying below it. The *Pendeltona's* heave was more distinct, more ghoulish.



Old Wagner, the first officer, appeared at the weather stairhead. Wrinkled and grizzled, but agile beyond belief, was Wagner; some of the buoyancy of youth had clung to him. Years of service in Lyons ships had also made of him an institution. He winked to Meginson and passed on to the captain, his leathery features scored by a broad grin.

Barr seemed to be expecting something, for he ceased his glum pacing, marked the grin and remarked half accusingly, "Mister Wagner, what's funny? Out with it, I need it."

"Joke all right, Cap'n. 'Tain't on you this time, though—nor me neither."

Barr's first thought was the boilers. "Anything wrong below?" he demanded.

The mate went into the lee wing to squirt tobacco juice overside. "It's this way, Cap'n; I hadda ship two new hands jest 'fore we left Boston. One's name's Svenson, t' other calls hisself Johnson. That's a laugh."

Barr tried to smother his impatience. The wind howled a siren's whine overhead and he observed a snowflake that had settled on Wagner's cap. "Well?" he prompted, his real attention on the weather.

"Well," resumed Wagner with rhetoric pause, "his name ain't Johnson at all. It's Garvey Lyons."

The captain's head seemed to snap upward. For once he was jolted out of his usual poise. He leveled a finger at the grin. "You mean to tell me"—in measured tones—"that L. M. L.'s son Garvey's on here as a sailor?"

"I told you his name's Johnson, sir."

"Don't be a fool, Wagner! You've known him ever since he was a kid. You knew who he was. This lands me in a hell of a mess."

"No, no——"

"Yes, yes. I had a run-in with L. M. L. two days ago. He'll swear I did this to get even."

Mr. Wagner's grin vanished. He brushed snowflakes off his eyelids. "Now don't let it worry yer, Cap'n," he urged.

"I'll take the gaff—lord sake, I been over forty years in Lyons ships!" He hove his chew away as he always did when there was somewhat to say.

"'S like this, sir. Old Garvey Lyons, this man's grandad, was the squarest man ever took ship outa port, and a high ratin' skipper to boot. Why I sailed 'long o' him fer years. Then his wife raised ructions till she made 'im go ashore. She hated the sea, that woman, and she brought up their boy to hate it, too. She had some money of her own, Cap'n Garv' hadn't done so bad, so he begun collectin' a fleet o' these ships. Had an even dozen when the War broke out, and anybody't had ships then didn't need to look up gold mines. I tell yer, he was proud of 'em; they was fine, trim bottoms, all of 'em. But his blood was half salt water, he took no peace ashore. I allus vowed that's what killed 'im.

"Then that son o' his—L. M. L. they call 'im—he took over and . . . well Cap'n, you understand. He ain't no chip o' the old block at all, he's his mother's son."

CAPTAIN BARR understood perfectly, hadn't he been ruminating on this very subject for hours? The Lyons Fleet of twelve now numbered four. Four neglected, eternally driven, barnacled geese being killed for laying the golden eggs.

"But this young Garvey we got in the fo'c'sle," Wagner went on, "he's the chip. Allus did itch to plant his web feet on a deck. Lord sake, they've done ev'rything to make 'im a lawyer, but him and college didn't mix. Two years of it and out he come; guess he got fired. He's old Garv' number two or I'll eat my hat."

The skipper leered over him. "Yeah, so I've heard before! And you've deliberately signed him on here against his father's wishes. Fetch him to the bridge at once."

Barr's pacing resumed at a swifter rate. Still more to worry about. He'd been so engrossed in some one else's views of Lyons' affairs that he had forgotten the

weather momentarily. Snow in the face brought him back to it. He squinted east. Already the storm was on. Night was coming in black and white from that ugly east. Was that Race Point flashing between squalls to starboard? It was almost abeam, six miles off, he figured. Pretty close. Overside the seas looked sharper. That also tallied, he was crossing the southeastern end of Stellwagen Bank. Now for the whistling buoy. "Twenty, four fathom there," he sighed in momentary relief. He called to Meginson.

"Take an east by south course from the buoy," he called.

"East by sou', sir. How long that way? Looks nasty."

"Log off forty knots. I'll be around. We're giving the Cape plenty of room tonight, plenty," he warned.

That indeed was the point; if only he could get the *Pendeltona* well to the east-



ward of Cape Cod and as far as possible on the way to Nantucket Shoals lightship before the brunt of the gale overtook her. Then she could run be-

fore it into deeper water, maybe run out of the worst of it. He was mulling this hope somberly when a solid squall of fine snow engulfed the laboring freighter. It hid her in a pillar of white.

"Here's Johnson, Cap'n," Old Wagner had returned.

BOTH the mate and his young charge were grinning when the exasperated skipper wheeled. But how close the resemblance! Even he was forced to admit that Lyons was a fine, youthful version of that four-foot portrait of the former Garvey Lyons in the New York office. And no wonder the forced attempt at law had failed; here stood a physically perfect

six-footer, a full fathom tall; broad and deep chested. Red hair and wide eyes whose color he could not see because of the dusk. They met his cold inspection squarely, little realizing the hidden approval behind it.

"So you're Johnson," he grunted.

"Yes."

The captain had expected a romantic youngster, not this. Here stood excellent material to be schooled upward to a master's ticket—if only he were not L. M. Lyons' son. That notion, however, he put aside bruskiy.

"I shall radio your father at once," he declared. "We can't be party to this sort of thing."

The young man's jaw clicked shut. "I don't see it that way, Captain Barr," he rejoined firmly. "I signed the articles. I am obeying orders. I'll admit I'm darned green, but from the looks of that fo'c'sle crowd I reckon I'll darned soon learn what they know. Blast it—hey! What's the idea?" This to Wagner for kicking his shins.

"Say 'sir' when you speak to officers," the mate answered.

"Oh! Sorry, sir. My mistake."

Barr couldn't have helped liking young Lyons had he tried—and he didn't try.

"Well," he slowly concluded, "got to radio your father nevertheless. But," he conceded, "I can't see but what you'll have to finish the trip with us, so learn seamanship while the learnin's good. This'll prob'ly be your one and only chance. You're just Johnson, another ordinary sailor, here. Remember that."

MARCUS BARR labored himself into a sweat over the wording of that radiogram to L. M. L. "You've got a splendid son, L. M. Lyons. For God's sake give him his head, he belongs in his grandfather's footsteps." That is what he wanted to say. What he did send, though, ran thus: "Your son is member of my crew. Shipped as sailor under name Johnson."

Then he began to speculate. Ten to one L. M. L. would order him to pull the lad out of the common herd and carry him as guest. That meant running short-handed on deck, at least to Havana.

The wind was blowing a good twenty-five knots when he emerged from his cabin with that message to L. M. L. Snow lay thick enough to crunch under foot. The wireless room's port hole was closed and half covered with it. The ship hove a shower of brine up her side and over him. It froze where it struck. Over the starboard quarter he happened to catch the flash of the buoy. He almost believed he could see a sweep of Highland Light abaft the funnel—or was it imagination?

"If only we can get south of this blasted Cape . . . forty knots east by sou', eighty knots south a half west for South Channel. No, that'd take nine, maybe ten hours—damn this creepin', creepin' along!" Thus he thought aloud. "And those chattering dynamos, not one but needed re-winding. Cripes!"

HIGH overhead a helmsman shook himself out of his reefer and sweated to the wheel. She yawed. She wove S's astern. She bowed low on the course, deep into jet black vales of night and snow. She rooted like a fattened hog, some two points alee of the course. Chase the lubbermark. Whirl the spokes. Steady . . . away she goes again! Off came his shirt in the cold blast. Two bells more to relief, only two, thank God!

The *Pendeltona* creaked throughout with ague. She groaned up one side of the Atlantic mountains, shuddered, and lumbered on down the other side until her forward well disappeared. Ice lay a glassy sheen over winches and standing gear. Slush sifted toward the scuppers to plug them. Captain Barr tallied it all, he seemed to suffer with the ship. Having foregone supper, he now gulped black coffee.

It was late evening when at last she swung her port quarter to the weather

on the run south. South a half west this way for eighty knots. Georges Bank to port, Cape Cod Shoals to starboard, and a thirty-mile wind on booming seas that hammered her stern plates and rudder. How was the glass?

Wagner reported that it was rising a trifle; both he and the skipper stood the third's watch with him tonight. Rising glass; that was a relief, but it didn't last long. The wind edged farther down toward the east. And did it blow!

CAPTAIN BARR was gaunt with hunger. He realized that it made conditions appear to him in their worst light. A long, tedious night lay before him. And he had abundant confidence in the old mate now standing at Tasker's elbow. So he stole a few minutes in the officers' mess to snatch a bite alone before L. M. L.'s answering radio message should come. Hadn't he plugged the old *Pendeltona* around this graveyard of ships time and again on the same, nerve-wracking formula? She'd always come through.

Why the devil didn't that steward fetch meat or—a small uproar in the passageway behind him cut off his thoughts. He grunted and swiveled in his chair to see a young Hercules in new dungarees and oilskins heave the steward aside with one sweep of his long arm. Barr stiffened.

"Sorry, sir," Garvey Lyons apologized, his face a study in anxiety. "That chef tried to block me but I've been hearing things and they're not so good. Is this ship as bad as the men say she is?"

Captain Barr's lower face stretched into a grin. His eyes, however, remained stern. "Scared, eh?" he taunted.

The barb went home. Anger showed itself in the greenhorn's gray eyes. It would, Barr observed, the hair was red above them.

"Scared? Bah! All I want's the truth. Is this *Pendeltona* in bad shape or not?"

Barr held his coffee high to avoid the ship's violence. Slowly and deliberately

he stirred it. Finally he countered with, "Who says she is?"

"Everybody not on the bridge, sir. They blame the owners, they say my father's let everything on here go to ruin, that he'll never put out a dollar for upkeep so long as she floats."

NEVER had the captain heard a greenhorn talk this way. It was plain to him that this owner's son was not so much frightened as chagrined at the accusations he'd heard. He was taking it almost personally.

"My grandfather always boasted," Lyons continued, "that the Lyons Fleet was the best found lot of ships on the coast. There's a lot of pride in a thing like that, sir."

Barr saw no occasion for undecieving him, however. He evaded the issue by saying in judicial tone, "You're new to this life, Lyons, or you'd know there's always jawing going on in the fo'c'sle. Always a sea lawyer or two to find fault with their grub and the ship and her condition. Usual thing. Better look at it that way."

A wave of relief swept the anxiety from Lyons' face. "Thanks, sir. I——" A sailor burst into the mess room with a yellow slip of paper.

The captain opened it impatiently and read: "Put Back To Boston At Once."

"Oh the damned fool!" he growled.



He saw young Lyons moving toward the door. A dozen impulses seized him. Only half as many restraints curbed him.

"Johnson, come back here," he snapped.

The accumulated resentment of years seemed to have burst its dam of formality. "Read that from your father!"

Lyons read, not yet realizing to the full what it meant.

"Of all the fool orders!" Barr exploded. "We've done double watches in the stokehold to get this far, making for South Channel and deep water. Now he comes this! That's how much he knows about routing ships . . . rotten boilers, grassed hull, worn out engines. Holy cats! We're in the bag." A bitter laugh escaped him. "We—we presuming to buck a no'theaster off this lee shore"—he jumped to his feet. "Damn an office navigator!"

"Then it's true!" declared Lyons. "Your men are right."

CAPTAIN BARR'S exasperation hit the roof. For years he had endured L. M. L.'s vagaries. He smashed his coffee mug down on a plate. "That's not half of it," he roared. "I've begged for an overhauling for months, begged a man to condition his own property. All he sees is the almighty sheckels in one more cargo, one more trip. Always one more. Look at his ships; every last one is on her uppers!" He scowled at the radiogram. "And now we're to turn this one around here somewhere between Georges and Cod against an onshore gale o' wind. She's not fit for it. She don't handle."

Lyons' red head went high. "Don't do it, sir. He doesn't know——"

Abruptly Barr took himself in hand to resume the strain. He went suddenly calm. He seemed to regret what he had disclosed. A cold grimness enshrouded him. He seemed to Lyons to move beyond reach, as it were. He shook a hand toward the alleyway outside. "Back to the fo'c'sle, Johnson," he ordered. "Sailors don't pass out policy to masters. One o' your family's enough to deal with. Hold your tongue about what's been said here. Get for'ard."

Lyons went, but not to the fo'c'sle; he was filled with chagrin and a keen sense

of responsibility. That radio from his father had come in answer to the captain's report that he, Garvey Lyons, was on the *Pendeltona*. So he was the cause for this dangerous attempt to return to Boston. To be sure, his father had been operating ships long enough to know better, he knew the condition of the *Pendeltona* certainly; yet Garv' Lyons' sense of responsibility lay a crushing burden on his shoulders tonight.

He watched the captain all the way to the wireless room. In there, the Old Man sent: "You Forget *Pendeltona* Has That 10 Day Charter Perishables Havana. Due Not Later 26 Inst."

Lyons, of course, couldn't see that one. Nor L. M. L.'s "Perishables Be Hanged. Get To Shelter." Nor the captain's dignified reply that ran: "Dangerous To Turn About. Off Cape Cod In Easterly. Thick Weather."

Lyons saw Barr go back to the bridge, saw the wireless operator trail him with another message. It read: "Land My Son In Boston Earliest Possible. This Is Final."

That one he did learn. He cornered Chick Fels, the operator, on the ice below the bridge and squeezed it out of him. He got Fels so peeved that he spat out the entire series of messages. It had tasted rank anyway. There was satisfaction in throwing the mess at L. M. L.'s own flesh and blood. He wound up with, ". . . so papa's boy must be hurried back to port!"

But the news of the change of course ran the length of the ship. Her swing north roused the watch below; heading into what had been following seas altered her her motion completely. She hove two coal passers out of bed. They yelped; they scented danger; they picked up rumors that the *Pendeltona's* captain had abandoned the trip to Havana; they led a motley little crowd forward to verify some of these whispered things. Who was on the bridge anyway? Where was that Old Man? What ter hell——?

MEGINSON discovered their bobbing heads lining up the weather stairway. He sensed that they had come to object to something. "Git for'ard," he snarled, ere they could speak their piece. "Keep 'way from this bridge t'night!"

Meanwhile the captain watched her blunt nose come round into the weather and beyond it a trifle. A huge sea sideswiped it. Freezing lather smeared everything forward. Inch by inch she was icing herself deeper in; her head would be one, solid berg in . . . how soon could he hope to get her stern-to the blizzard in Massachusetts Bay? Her headway from now on would amount to little more than two, maybe three, knots. He realized, too, that she was being pushed to the westward. And now, starting on the new course, he almost admitted that she wasn't up to the job before her. Like a weaving fighter concentrated upon the ship's destruction, the wind blasted her, now north-northeast, now northeast; and the snow came thick and unremitting.

Only the officers of the *Pendeltona* kept their thoughts to themselves tonight; it was their habitual decorum of silence. Not a man in the watch below ventured to turn in. No sleep was possible after that handful of malcontents that Meginson had denied a hearing returned. A premonition of disaster had become epidemic.

It was the earlier stage of this situation that had prompted Lyons to approach the captain in the mess room. Assured by the off-hand way in which Barr had treated it, he had quit the fo'c'sle to hang in the lee at the weather stairhead.

"Hell, Cap'n"—Meginson was shouting—"we had a chance standin' south."

"Orders from the owner by radio," Barr explained. "Keep an eye for lights to leew'd, I'm not so sure . . . we must be somewhere below Nauset, figuring wind and the set of the ebb against us. Below Nauset, eh?"

Lyons strained every faculty to hear what the second mate, the navigating offi-

cer, would give as his estimate of the ship's uncharted position.

"Don't mention Nauset to me!" the mate declared. "That there half mile bargits its name fr'm its distance off the beach; we found that out in the *Constance M.* It runs up an' down the coast fer miles, and ev'ry storm puts a new quirk in it. Lord knows we must be north o' that place, but o' course this wind and sea and time—" He got no further.

Lyons wouldn't have heard him if he had. The *Pendeltona's* ice-laden bow soared down at a dizzy angle, hit something solid and stuck there. The next black mountain curled straight over her. She shook like palsy. Breakage crashed within her. Lyons was bounced off his perch to the ice and brine on the deck below. The huge sea swept him past the mate's room, flung him at a stanchion. There he clung, half stunned. When it smashed on aft, he felt himself, stanchion and all, plunging downward. The whole ship was keeling over—no, up she came . . . to loll away over on the other side. She was aground on a sand bar.

Sheer determination forced Lyons' numbing clutch from that stanchion. He dragged himself, freezing, soggy clothes and all, away from it. He got to the stairway again. On his knees he went upward to the top.

" . . . somewhere off-shore," Wagner was saying, "we ain't 'way in onto the beach. Cape Cod all right."

"Half Mile Bar, surer'n hell!" That was Meginson. "Lookit that Coston light your helmsman's wavin'; the damn thing ain't showin' ten foot one way or t'other."

"Guess you're right," the skipper agreed. "Mister Tasker," he added to the third, "fetch Fels here. Hurry up."

IN THE crimson flare of the third Coston came Tasker to report that Fels, the wireless man, was dead. The crash had hove him out of his chair and opened his skull. He lay sprawl under the big,

antiquated sending machine. No radio would serve the *Pendeltona* tonight.

Lyons managed to approach old Wagner when he was alone, it was not easy, for the entire superstructure lay at an almost vertical angle. The wheelhouse clock



tinkled six paired strokes; three A. M. and no prospect of daylight for hours to come. The very idea of waiting in imminent danger that long seemed intolerable; he opened his mouth to say so when every light in the ship went out.

"I knowed it!" exclaimed Wagner. "Dynamos shot; chief's down there'n the wheelhouse now to warn the cap'n agin it. No steam fer the whistle. Ain't this a pretty muss!"

"All our standing round and talking gets us nowhere," Lyons snapped. "Let's do something, there's forty-odd lives at stake. And those redlights, who'd you s'pose will ever see them in this snowstorm? Come on, let's go!"

Somebody puffed steam over his shoulder. "The crew's messman's gone overboard, Mate."

"Now ain't that sense! He'll never live to swim ashore in this," declared Wagner.

"You don't get me, sir; he slipped, he's—he's gone."

Lyons held his breath. Now for something more than fireworks and words.

But nobody made a move to recover the messman, not one. Their outward calm, their acceptance of another death in their midst amazed him. Were they all resigned to a similar fate? Could forty men do absolutely nothing to save their lives before the wreck broke to pieces? No radio,

no whistle, only ineffectual redlights whose flares were cloaked in dense snow. The situation was desperate; nothing could be done. The only question seemed to be: which would come first, the coast guard rescuers or death by drowning in a drawn and quartered wreck? Nothing to do but wait for daylight to reveal the stranded hulk—nothing? Garvey Lyons refused to believe that. He ransacked his brain for some sane plan of rescue. Anything were better than stolid waiting amid the crunch and groans of a disintegrating ship. He could make out the foam on the thundering seas racing past; at least they were heading toward land. Two silver cups over the fireplace back home loomed in his mind; they were trophies won in long distance swims. Aye, he could get himself through water and do it far better, no doubt, than any other man here.

THESE ideas sprouted a forlorn hope within him; he soon built it into a rescue plan that would have branded him as stark mad had he mentioned it. He turned away, started to feel his footing to the deck.

"Hey! . . . Johnson, where you bound?" Wagner had noticed.

Then the captain's hoarse call, "Into that radio room, Johnson. We'll be taken off after daylight."

There won't be anybody to take off by that time; so did Lyons make unspoken retort. He knew they were watching him, he was the owner's son—but what of it? He was also the cause of that fateful exchange of messages; his father had ordered what at present looked very much like the death warrant for forty-four men. Two already had paid the price of his blind bull-headedness. So Lyons went into the radio room. Somewhere under foot lay the corpse that had been Fels. He counted ten slowly, then stole outside. Inch by inch he edged on down to the main deck amidship, shed most of his clothing and mounted the bulwarks. He dove into the next sea that rounded the

Pendelton's stern and swam madly to keep from freeezing numb and to ride ashore with it.

That sharpening mountain ridge of water swept him in a headlong dash for shore. It crested. He slipped down the rear side and off the advancing column. He slid backward despite a terrific struggle to retain that first, swift pace. Then he was in a deep hollow. He imagined he was gaining again when another coamer caught him up and hove him bodily to the hissing crest. He gasped for breath in its froth, kicked, stroked, and sped on in with it for perhaps twenty fathoms. Then he lost more headway.

He was losing ground more than ever. His legs were growing leaden and sluggish. His hands seemed no longer his. He began to see the premature end of this bold adventure; it spurred him to desperation.

The next sea swept him on. He fought off freezing, fought away death, in the fiercest swimming he'd ever known. Now the crawl. Now a shift to the side stroke. On and on he bored his bitter cold way. More and more came the consciousness that death lay all around him. One chance, only one, in a thousand even if he should reach the hard-pounded beach. But it was his only chance. Forty lives were at stake, forty. That figure raced in and out of his mind, all the time he rode that third sea, "forty" kept coming to him. He almost reached the sands on it—almost. The booming in here was deafening. White suds creamed around him and stung with the poignancy of brine below freeezing. It buried him. Out came his head, but it mixed with scant air in his lungs. His heart hammered. His head refused to stay clear. He imagined he heard bells. He gasped when the suction drew him feet first. He was losing the struggle again!

Blind fury seized him. At least he'd die on the sand; not here. He began to see things; the specter of death rose before him. It challenged. It taunted him. One-two, one-two. He lashed out and

out, a human whip-end. Another sea came before he regained his headway. When it lifted him, he spent every last ounce of beef and will and skill into a final struggle for shore.

But fate had other plans. He rode the crest in. It broke. He shot into the foam, whirled sidewise and rolled straight down. He was spinning when he hit the sand. He lay panting on one side when w-h-a-n-g! Hiss-ss! His sea was swirling over him.

NOW that he had reached shore alive, his next job was to stay ashore. But the sand slid from under him. In mere seconds he'd be in an undertow. He'd never survive that and he knew it. So he dug in. One arm refused to own him; the other elbow obeyed, bit in. His feet dug with little or no feeling. Inch by inch up the beach he moved to escape the next flood of freezing water. The very sound of its approach startled him. He dug in his chin, flattened and waited.

It reached only his lower legs. He bored sand at four points just to stay put. But again it trickled away in the backwash. His battle to save forty lives seemed lost after all, the next on-comer would take him, exhausted, in its maw.

Already he moved out . . . backward! The entire ocean at his back now became a hideous monster, a tremendous glutton

for lives. Still he refused to succumb. Reason had fled, but instinct stayed by him. It saved his life in that awful moment of sheer, seeming defeat.



Whimpering for breath, half frozen and well nigh exhausted, he wriggled sidewise to the on-coming hosts and rolled clumsily up the beach beyond their reach.

Not satisfied with the rough ice beyond

the storm's high waterline, he rolled on and still on. Ice-brittle grass clipped his face. That broken left arm responded to the grilling; it commenced to ache. Red curtains rose and fell before his vision. Sand peppered him. Salt water bubbled at his mouth. He went completely dizzy, still rolling among dunes over driven snow.

There's no knowing how far he'd have gone before exhaustion halted him. As it was, the side of a building stopped him. The force of its resistance normally would have stunned a man; it brought him half way back to reason. He tried to get his stiff knees under him. They balked. Oh how weary! But he knew that life hung on immediate action. Forty lives, ship breaking to pieces. . . . He soon found, by crawling around it, that the building was a small shack. Also he located the door. He pounded it. Nobody came. That failing, he fumbled the old-fashioned latch, set his weight on it, and tottered inside.

Round and round he swayed in the dark. Feeling was returning because he began to ache all over with the cold in this shelter from the wind. But this wasn't saving the *Pendeltona's* men. Abruptly he came to realize that his getting ashore alive, severe fight though it was, had not been enough. A beach could be miles from living beings, from rescuers; how could he hope to rouse help for the marooned crew out there somewhere in the storm? Life saving stations there must be, somewhere along shore, but where? It came over him now that he couldn't have traveled a quarter of a mile to save his own life, let alone another forty. It made him sick and faint, that sense of futility after all he'd been through. He pitched onto unyielding iron. A stove lifter bounded away. Stove! Maybe matches, must be matches here. Where? A warm fire . . . fire? That, too, gave him a great idea.

HIS aching hands went all over that ancient stove. They reached beyond, behind it until, on a rough, splintery shelf

they tipped over a tin box. Loose things within it rustled with a familiar sound. He trembled when he found matches, did Garvey Lyons. He struck one. It filled the place with a niggardly, yellow light. The reluctant stinginess of that wan flame somehow angered him, but he spotted a kerosene lamp on a table littered with worn out cards. He knocked the lamp off onto the floor. The glass shattered, acrid fumes of spilt coal oil filled his nostrils. Stooping over it, he lighted a second match and applied it shakily to the soaked wick.

Thanks to the wind, the flame soon spread, for the shack leaked in a thousand cracks and knotholes. Soon the spruce floor smoked, crackled and flamed upward. Next the table, a chair, studdings; the shack became a torch. Its roaring fury was Garvey Lyons' last appeal for the rescue of the old *Pendeltona's* crew.

The flaming finale of lobsterman Russ Hatch's dingy beach shack was at its peak of lurid glory. The second patrol in the 12-to-4 watch out of Station 39 was down-beach nearly to the halfway house. His entire attention was seaward, but driving snow filled his eyes and the wail of wind his ears. Any Coston lights off shore tonight would be screened by the blizzard; only the possible blare of a siren could come through if some ship hit the graveyard. That and the radio—the *Pendeltona* had neither.

Second patrol passed the end of the last big dune when a lighted circle appeared in the storm, away on his right. He shielded his eyes, still unconvinced.

"I be . . . that's Hatch's shack!" he exclaimed, and made for it in a slogging trot.

His first discovery was a man half dressed. He sat hunched so close to the fire that he steamed all over. He was nursing a broken left arm and almost touching him was the shack door; it had fallen outward instead of in.

LARKIN MURTREY LYONS had to shake out his Sunday bib-and-tucker into traveling tweeds doggone fast to catch the eastbound express that Sabbath noon.

The land of sand was in darkness when, eventually, he strode urbanely into Tromsett station and demanded the whereabouts of that driver he'd wired ahead for to take him to the coast guard station.

The station master's boy trailed in with two other natives. He pointed significantly. "That there's the father o' the feller 't swum ashore," he informed them.

L. M. L. heard it. Yes, he'd learned by telephone that Garv' had saved the *Pendeltona's* personnel, but Garv' would. "My son!" he mused. "He would." And the *Pendeltona*, she was most handsomely insured—a fact that had been carefully guarded from Marcus Barr, by the way. Everything was as bright as the flinty blue moonlight outside. He was supremely satisfied all round.

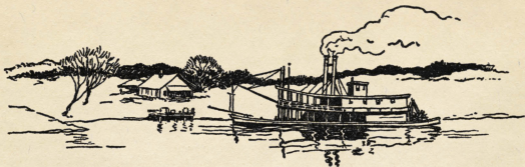
But he must take just the right attitude toward that wilful son of his. Young fool! With clubs, theaters, social register connections and the cream of metropolitan living at his lidding—no doubt he'd done a brave thing, but he must remember.

The proprietor of a chattering sedan broke in upon his ruminations and plowed him down to the beach behind a boiling radiator. L. M. L. paid the fare gingerly, almost pompously.

He stomped his feet, flung open his great coat expansively and entered the coast guard station with the supreme consciousness that he was making an impression. The owner of the Lyons Fleet had arrived.

Unfortunately for him, the steam on his spectacles prevented him seeing the fathom-tall young man with arm in sling slowly, deliberately rise from the largest chair in the room.

L. M. L.'s first intimation of his son's presence was when a parboiled, right fist hit him squarely on the point of his chin.



NO TRESPASS TRAPPING

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

Author of "Off His Beat," "A Trapper Sets for Pirates," etc.

The price on some sorts of animals is higher than others.

JUD TRUSLOW floated down the Mississippi looking for a place to trap furs and spend the winter. This was his first trip down and naturally he just didn't know some ideas prevailing among a certain set of river people which might have saved him trouble in the beginning—or perhaps it wouldn't. A Yankee is a good bet and never a sure thing as regards his activities, wherever he is.

Truslow saw a big dark raccoon sunning himself in the afternoon sun on a cottonwood limb; he saw a mink playing at sliding down hill on a slick clay bank; he killed two wild geese flying over, shooting them with his 25-35 repeating rifle; and he tied in to the bank at Bearhide Bayou right in the middle of Troublesome Reach.

He shot the coon out of the cottonwood and set a trap for the mink, and settled down to stay. The season was late, furs were prime and so far as running out lines of traps Truslow appeared to know all about his own business. For one thing, looking around, he made sure that no one else was located anywhere through that reach either for hunting, trapping or fishing. That made it look like open country, but the element who lived up Bearhide

Bayou had run everybody out of there, not caring to have neighbors around who might be nosey as to their affairs. Truslow didn't see what this meant to him.

The Cobberts were a bad family, in those parts. They had always lived on the River in shanty-boats, and every generation or two one or another achieved distinction getting hung legally or shot in an uncommonly notorious fracas; the hanging or shooting was always preceded by a long and varied series of exploits. Now there were three of the Cobberts, supposed to be cousins, but perhaps they had just decided to hide their true identities behind a name which, locally, had achieved a distinction in the clipping files of newspapers where the hard, mean characters of Old Mississipp' are kept on file for historical or entertainment features. Usually they were known as the Bearhide crowd. Lon Cobbert was the leader, a tall, slab-sided and nearly white-eyed man with a soft, reddish beard and a yellowish complexion.

TRUSLOW had a hundred traps put out within three days. He caught five coons, three possums, four mink and a small otter the first night. Subsequent catches were sufficiently numerous to stir his Yankee trapper heart with delight.

He crossed over to the Hearsay landing and bought supplies behind the levee in that old cotton town. He mentioned his surprise that nobody appeared to be trapping across the river either up or down stream.

"You trappin' yon side?" the grocery man inquired, politely and with quick concern.

"Oh, yes—good fur country! Why?" Truslow asked.

"Why—uh-h—I reckon seo-o!" the man admitted noncommittally.

In the hardware store, where Truslow bought ammunition for his shotgun and laid in 500 shells for his 22 rimfire 10-shot automatic, the dealer inquired if he was off the river, recognizing that he was, of course, by the mud on his rubber boots.

"Oh, yes!" Truslow answered, "I'm trapping across on the east side."

"Sho! Yo' are!" the man exclaimed. "Hub—"

Truslow wanted some domestic meat—a beef steak—so he went to the butcher shop. There he mentioned, casually, that he liked tame meat for a change, and added that he was trapping just across the river, and would probably be coming over every few days.

"Yo' ain't trappin' anywhere near Bearhide Bayou, are you?" the man asked.

"Oh, yes, just above there, about a half mile, on the dead eddy, against the thick-brake island."

"Sho!" the man exclaimed, and quickly wrapping up the meat, he seemed glad to get his pay, before anything happened.

Truslow was nonplussed. He had quite a bag full of supplies to tote back to his skiff and he started on his way. Even people in the drygoods stores and passers-by came out to watch him go past. He felt like a one-man parade along main street. Every one was looking at him and stopping to watch him on his way.

SUDDENLY, from around the corner of the large entertainment hall at the corner opposite the levee, a tall, slithering,

long-legged man suddenly emerged and confronted the trapper who came to a quick stop to prevent a collision.

"Howdy!" the interrupter greeted, and Truslow saw on his suspender over a dark blue flannel shirt the badge of City Marshal, No. 1.

"How de do!" Truslow greeted, wonderingly.

"Yo' all a stranger in these parts?" the officer asked.

"Yes, sir—I started down east in the Montezuma Marshes, of New York, in an automobile. I traded it at Evansville, Indiana, for a shanty-boat outfit, practically complete, and dropped down the Ohio. I'm tied in over above Bearhide Bayou; I'm trapping there on the islands and across the Bottoms, into the Scatterings."

"Yas, sub, so I heard, suh," the City Marshal nodded. "I reckon yo' got friends, lots of friends in theh, among the folks?"

"Why, no," Truslow shook his head, "I haven't seen any one at all. In fact, the first man I've spoken to in more'n a week was here in the groceries."

"Sho! Mr. Brocker was tellin' me, suh—what yo' said," the officer twisted uneasily. "Course, 'tain't nobody's business—everybody is plumb peaceable, naturally; at the same time some reckoned, yo' bein' probably a stranger mightn't to know, suh, the situation."

"Oh, I have a hunting-trapping license!"

"An official license or did somebody tell yo' hit'd be all right trappin' oveh theh—that nobody'd have any hard feelings?"

"Why, I didn't specify where I'd stop—just in the state!"

"Then the—uh-h-h—yo' got local permission oveh theh?"

"Is that a private preserve? It isn't posted!"

"Well—uh-h—not 'zactly private—but—uh-h-kind of subject to quit-claims, suh!"

"So-o! Somebody here claims that territory?"

"Oh, not—not anybody this side the river!"

"Say, Mister! Just what's the joke or hook?" I bite!

"Well, of course, if yo' got relations—anybody important, back where yo' come if there should be a difficulty—an unfortunate incident—like you being found dead or even got mixed up into a fracas, naturally it'd be regrettable. We'd much rather hit'd happen somewhere else. Course, that ain't even in our state jurisdiction, oveh theh, but the news of it'd be sent out from here, likely, and so we'd get the credit of having had a stranger killed up here. We always like to give ev'ry body a fair warning, kind of a chance—"

"You say that's open country—in another state—and that it's none of your business?" Truslow asked. "Seems mighty friendly of you to fair-warn me, Mr.—Mr.—"

"City Marshal Tawney, suh."

"Mr. Tawney! My name is Truslow, Judson Truslow."

"Yas, suh, Mr. Truslow. We don't harm any strangers on this side Old Mississip'. People you traded with thought probably you was real innocent, ignorant and a softpaw; two-three the girls said it would be a ter-ble shame if anything happened to you, and you neveh knew what struck you; you see how that is!"

"Why—well—is there any one, specially, that you think it would be a good idea for me to keep my eyes open, if he comes around?"

"Yah, suh! If yo' jes' step oveh't the City Hall I'll show yo' some documents, suh, an' yo' c'n judge for yourself!"

TRUSLOW went to the City Hall. People beamed with relief when they saw him smiling. Lots of times a stranger is touchy and doesn't realize how friendly local people are to those who trade in their stores. The City Marshal showed the trapper a file of reward notices. They recorded that Lon Cobbert, Game Cobbert and Rough Joe Cobbert were wanted, each

to the extent of \$1,000 reward, for being murderers, robbers, river pirates, and general nuisances.

"I be'n laying off to go git one or two of them, to kind-a break up their operations," Tawney confided. "At the same time they don't op'rate much, lately, on this side the reach, an' I'd hate to git mixed up out of ouh state's jurisdiction. Course, Sher'f Ondore, oveh in Graise county's a fine, honorable gentleman, but sensitive and high spirited. If I should interfere in his county I'm not sure'f he'd take hit kindly, in the spirit hit's meant to indicate, or if he'd feel like I was criticising his administration, the very last thing I'd have in mind; you see how that is, Mr. Truslow."

"Oh, yes! I see-understand!" the trapper exclaimed, and took a good look at the reproductions of pictures of tall, lanky Lon Cobbert, bull-built and heavy-set Game Cobbert, and the youthful, dishonorable and treacherous Rough Joe Cobbert—who all habitually carried four side arms, two butcher knives and a long gun each, for self-protection and in eternal preparedness for emergencies.

Of course, the way things were, when Jud Truslow was on his way, with the best wishes of the crowd who came to the landing to see him off, going back to Bearhide Bayou eddy-chute, he wondered at the condition which had developed. The last thing in the world he would have looked for was trouble; at the same time, he came



of a good many generations of people who minded their own business and looked after their own rights, without violence if feasible, but

looked after them to the full extent necessary. Of course, he hadn't said anything about this phase of his experience, inherit-

ance and character. Some folks who watched him were of the opinion, which they were ready to bet on, that he wouldn't any more than land on his boat than he would cut loose and head for at least a hundred miles down old Muddy Gut, seeking peace and safety.

As a matter of fact, he swung his boat out into the eddy and anchored it. He had his trap sets all along the banks and in the edges of the bayous, sloughs and Shaker Lakes, where he could reach most of them from the bow of his skiff, which he drove with a light outboard motor. He had loved the wilderness tone of the Bottom Brakes and the charm of the wide, quiet Mississippi flood. Now he loved the country no less, but with a new feeling of increased alertness, resentment and readiness to attend strictly to his own business.

THE second morning after the visit to Hearsay, he saw a large white placard opposite his anchorage, stuck on the trunk of a tree. With a pair of binoculars he studied the sign and when he had figured out what it was intended to convey to him he made a copy in his own legible, and even copperplate script the better to get the idea, all according and without error. His transcript read:

NOTIS, RIVEH RAT!

This hyar
 Bottoms frum up 2
 KABOOdeLL lanIn
 clar down 2
 Git Aout Pint
 is OURN
 so YOU move NOW!
 sined and
 cealed by th
 BARRHIDE Byoo
 Pierates

"The sons of guns!" Truslow grunted, and taking his 25-35 rifle, his 22 automatic pistol and his automatic shotgun he boarded his skiff, which was dangling at the stern and started up Bearhide Bayou

to see about this proposition which had been so sternly and emphatically put up to him. Incidentally, he carried along some stout white line and a lunch, in case he should be gone quite a while.

City Marshal Tawney had given him information as to the lie of the Bottoms and the curves of the Bearhide green water flow, and when Truslow was three miles up the stream, he ran his skiff into a south fork and tied it to a snag. Then he cut across on foot to where he could hear shouts and yells, whistles and whoops.

A good still hunter, Truslow came through the brake, which had huge gum and cottonwood tree trunks, some red oak, a good deal of wildgrape vines—to judge by the sound as well as the looks—and patches of cane on the high ridges, some of which were a good four feet higher than the red oak growths and at least six or eight feet higher than the soft tupelo gum swamps.

When the trapper came in sight of the celebration put on for the declaration, warning and anticipated obedience of the invading shanty-boater, he saw four men; three of them he identified from the reward notice pictures, and the fourth, he guessed to be Buckteeth Hackmire, whose boast was that he could thank God that his photograph had never been taken, due to good fortune, neglect of the authorities and an elusive nature. The four were proving to one another's satisfaction that they could hold a gallon jug with one hand and drink out of it. They had four jugs and standing all in a row with their backs to the timber and, facing the shanty-boat whereon they lived when at home, they proceeded all to drink at one and the same time from jugs held by the handle with one hand on their right shoulders, except Lon, who was left-handed. Each man had as reported two belts, four holsters and two sheath knives to prove to the world that they were eternally ready to resist to the last drop of their blood, to the last twitch of their trigger fingers the encroachments of Federals, sheriffs, detec-

tives or miserably dishonorable low-down scoundrels seeking rewards at the expense of the necks of their fellow men.

Truslow slipped forward and spoke with a slow drawl:

"Hey, you fellows! Don't move or I'll cut your back bones right plumb in two!"

Gurgles ceased in throats while streams of distilled worked grape-juice poured down over the fronts of four shirts. Four pairs of eyes, less one which Buckteeth Hackmire had lost long since, turned on mobile necks to look back. The man they had fair-warned by placard to move on had come to them.

"Get those hands up!" Truslow said coldly. "Drop the jugs!"

The crocks tipped off the shoulders and fell to the ground.

"Now, Lon! Just you and nobody else unbuckle your belts in front and let them drop—don't hurry too fast—and don't make any extra motions! All of your eyes front—and don't look around.

"By gawd—" Lon began and then stopped. He started this time with his hands and did as ordered.

When the fourth belt had fallen to the ground, Buckteeth turned to look back, and on the instant his overslung nose came into full profile a 22 caliber long rifle shell plucked in the automatic pistol. Buckteeth gave a yell, grabbing at his nose, but the cold voice of Truslow told him to let it bleed—wouldn't do any hurt for high blood pressure! Buckteeth whimpered and sobbed, doing as he was told.

"Now you boys get aboard your launch," Truslow ordered, and they went into the stern of a craft 25 feet long and 5 feet wide, which had served as a cargo carrier at night, and on whose jackstaff at the stern hung a black flag with bones from an old graveyard hung into the fabric which was stretched by a kind of picture frame arrangement.

Truslow sat in the bow, after casting off the painter. One of the pirates started the motor and the others sat in glum realization as they drove down Bearhide Bayou on their way to the river eddy.

"You understand, if we have an accident, like running aground or hitting a snag I'll have to shoot you on the charge of trying to escape," their captor explained, mildly, and the bridgework of the 22 slug in Buckteeth's nose left no faintest doubt in their minds that he meant exactly what he said. He sat with the 22 pistol in his hand, too, and they regarded its muzzle with painful dismay.

They crossed to Hearsay and landed at the fish dock where Truslow stepped out first. The others followed. Every spectator noticed particularly that the odds were four to one—but that they were very uneven, at that, the four being in a hopeless minority.

City Marshal Tawney heard the news and came scrambling. He marched the four in a six man parade to the city lock up, and when the pirates were behind the bars of the chilled steel cage, telegrams and telephone messages were sent, and the local officer turned to the trapper, smiling.

"Yo' sho' made a good catch Mr. Trapper!" he said. "Sho! Theh's four thousand comin' to yo'. Sho! Ain't that like a Yankee!"

"Not net," Truslow shook his head. "You got 25% due you, of course. Why, you know yourself I'd never known about what big game there was over there up Bearhide Bayou, if you hadn't given me the way of it and the directions, along with the pictures of the animals!"

"Well—dog-gone, now!" the listeners chuckled. "That's right—I leave it to anybody, if that isn't right!" the city attorney exclaimed, being a judge of such things as right and wrong. "Now that's what I call genuine sport!"

Adventurers All



WOODEN RIVETS



THE scene of this particular experience was laid in the North Sea, that stormy body of water which stretches from Scotland to Norway. The Armistice after the Great War had been signed and the United States Navy had to sweep some 57,000 mines from this area. These mines had been planted to bottle up the German submarines, and it can be noted right here that very few, if any, of Fritzie's subs succeeded in getting across the mine fields. Occasional oil slicks gave mute testimony to their failure.

Three flotillas of mine sweepers were engaged in this hazardous task. They swept from daylight to dark and were out on the job as long as fuel, water, provisions, and sweeping equipment held out—with the exception of those times when big blows came up and the boats had to make a run for shelter along the coast of Norway and in the anchorages of the Shetland Islands. All this meant that the ships were at sea from two weeks to a month, and then into the home port at Kirkwall for provisions and fuel and repairs—and then to sea again. During the short hours of darkness, the ships had to lie to with steam up until daylight gave them an opportunity to continue sweeping.

In order to expedite the sweeping and keep the fleet provisioned up, a number of British trawlers—steel hulled steam fishing boats—were chartered and manned by U. S. Navy crews. These brought sup-

plies of food and replaced sweeping equipment, the latter being frequently lost from the ships and destroyed by mine explosions. They also acted as buoy carriers and mine field markers.

My boat—the *Peter Johnson*—was one such trawler. She had a crew of twenty men and was captained by a Columbia River pilot. I was chief engineer. We were detailed to carry buoys, sweep cables and sweep kites to Flotilla Number One which was somewhere in the North Sea.

One squally morning we located the sweepers in spite of poor visibility, and started to unload kites and buoys to be picked up by the boom of the *Oriole*, a crack sweeper. The *Peter Johnson*, a much smaller type of vessel, was in the lee of the *Oriole*, thus cheating the wind and seas of some of their force. A heavy sea was running and we had to jockey around to keep clear of the *Oriole*.

I was at the throttle in the engine room and the constant stream of bells came down the engine room telegraph. One-third ahead; stop; 2/3 astern; full speed astern; 2/3 ahead; full speed ahead, and a jingle which meant to give her all you've got. Meanwhile we were bobbing, maneuvering for favorable position. The men at the side were using fenders to good advantage, keeping us from bumping the *Oriole*.

Suddenly, in the midst of frantic signaling from the bridge, the two vessels came together with a resounding smack and a

sickening lurch. While we couldn't do much damage to the *Oriole*, she could do a lot of harm to us. But there was nothing to do but continue to discharge until the job was done. Then we shoved off for Kirkwall.

There seemed to be no evident damage to the *Peter Johnson*, but in the course of running before a squall, she began to act sluggish and not to answer the wheel as she should. A quick inspection showed we were taking water fast and that the heads of a dozen rivets had been sheared from a plate of the starboard coal bunker. Through these rivet holes, just below the water line, old Father Neptune came pouring in. The bilge pump direct-connected to the engine had lost suction, which meant that the strainers were clogged with coal dust washed down from the bunker.

With a fireman as assistant, I climbed down into the coal bunker and clawed to the edge of the steel plates whose rivets were sheared. Some of the rivets were still in place, and the others had been pushed in by the force of the water. Result: nine 3/4 inch solid jets of water. Further result: Davey Jones' Locker! Our hand pumps were useless because they received their suction from the same suction wells as the steam pump and as I said before, all strainers were solidly clogged.

The captain gambled that we could make port while still afloat, but I was doubtful. Came an inspiration! I grabbed the fire-

room broom and quickly sawed up the broomstick into three inch lengths; whittled a taper on one end of each length, and in a jiffy was down in the bunker with a hammer. I thought it would be a simple matter to drive the plugs into the rivet holes. But—well, there wasn't any room in which to swing a solid wallop with the hammer, and the ineffective tapping wasn't sufficient to hold the plugs in place. They kept working loose. Furthermore the other rivets whose heads had been sheared were still in the holes but leaking badly.

Another idea! If it was impossible to drive plugs from the inside, the only other thing to do was to drive them in from the outside. So, with a hammer in one hand, steel drift pin in the other—with pockets full of broom stick, I went over the side. Gasping, spluttering, choking, freezing, swells covering me one minute and leaving me dangling the next, I did my stuff. Twelve holes, twelve wooden rivets. I was finally hauled up with half the North Sea inside of me. But the leaks were practically stopped and after clearing the suction strainers the steam pump began to gain on the water, and we finally were back to normal draft and dry bilges.

I wasn't the worse for wear, either. A change of clothes, a hot cup of strong java, and we were on our way to Kirkwall. The wooden rivets held until a permanent repair could be made. And when I got to Kirkwall—well, that's another story!

Lewis F. Lionvale.

\$15 For True Adventures

UNDER the heading *Adventurers All*, the editors of *SHORT STORIES* will print a new true adventure in every issue of the magazine. Some of them will be written by well known authors, and others by authors for the first time. Any reader of the magazine, any where, may submit one of these true adventures, and for every one accepted the author will be paid \$15. It must be written in the first person, must be true, and must be exciting. Do not write more than 1000 words; be sure to type your manuscript on one side of the page only; and address it to: "Adventurers All," Care of Editors of *SHORT STORIES* Magazine, Garden City, N. Y. Manuscripts which are not accepted will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope for that purpose.



HOT GOLD

By H. C. WIRE

Who knows a lot about the men of the Forest Service and the Border Patrol.

A number one man on the Border Patrol certainly got results.

NICK RING, number one man on the border patrol, Arizona Division, passed along the dark, adobe-fronted street of Arico, came to a cross street, darker still, turned left and continued with one outstretched hand feeling the way.

His groping fingers moved silently over the rough adobe bricks, came to a recessed window, then to a door. Nick Ring stopped.

In the records of the border patrol, Nick Ring was listed thus: Age 25, height 6 ft, weight 165 lbs, hair chestnut, eyes brown, scar over left eye, old bullet wound under left arm. Probation. El Paso, Del Rio, Yuma. Remarks: Crack shot, cool headed. This man is OK.

As he stood motionless in front of the recessed doorway, no sign of Nick Ring's six feet, one hundred and sixty-five pounds showed in the pitch black of the night. For a moment he waited. Voices

came to him. His left hand reached out, his right went down, loosening a gun in its holster.

The door opened suddenly, flung inward by his weight. Light flooded out. Only for an instant. Then Nick stepped in, kicking the door shut behind him.

He blinked once, squinting against the abrupt light of the room. He swept his free left hand in a gesture of ease. "Go ahead," he said to the place in general. "This isn't a pinch." All sound and movement had stopped short at his entrance.

Activity began again, yet warily. Voices took up their talk in low monotone. Cards clicked as a dealer shuffled. Dice galloped. A roulette ball whirled smoothly around. Money clinked.

The room was long, low-ceilinged, heavy with a feeling that no sight nor sound of what happened here would ever go beyond its massive adobe walls.

Nick Ring could haul this place in at

any time, lock it up. Yet he didn't. Better have his tough eggs all in one nest. He could come occasionally and look them over. Some time there'd be a clean-up. But tonight he was not after gamblers and line-runners of the common sort. There was bigger game than that.

NOWHERE in Nick's oath of office was it stated that he should appoint himself guardian to the younger generation. His job concerned men who were already wanted; nothing was said about helping the border kids steer clear of their first entanglement on Uncle Sam's backyard fence.

But Nick Ring was not far from those times himself, when picking up a flea-bitten burro on the Mexican side and sneaking it across the line, was a lot more fun than going to school. Harmless enough. Yet from this first flea-bitten desert canary, the next steps were short and easily followed. You got in with the right gang, you made easy money, you grew up—and then it was no longer a boy's game.

Nick understood, and here in the burned red hills around Arico, occasionally took on a line of duty that was in no way official.

He had come into town tonight on a tip—and he was looking for a nineteen-year-old boy named Joe Hunter. He had been watching Joe for six months, and he knew that soon this young wildcat would go too far. Then it would be the old story; a boy turned into a wanted man—and the end would be the rope, a bullet, or the pen. In this case it was not the boy alone who would pay a price; in a small adobe at the edge of Arico was a bright-faced girl named Jerry. It was for this sister, as well as for Joe, that Nick Ring was here tonight.

HE STOOD with his back against the closed door. Various pairs of eyes flashed up their looks, taking him in covertly, with suspicion, or merely wonder. In a moment he hunched away from the

door and went along the aisle between rows of gambling tables.

Over each was hung a shaded electric light that cast a yellow cone down upon hands of men who played there, but not upon their faces. Nick reached a bar at the room's end.

The man behind it grinned. "What'll you have Ring?"

"I'll have a look at Pete Reno," Nick answered.

The sharp face across from him went suddenly blank.

"Pete? I don't know where Pete is." The man was thin, his flesh pale, his eyes small and a cold gray—not at all the usual picture of a jovial bartender. But in this place nothing was usual.

Nick wiped his hand along the bar, looked at his fingers, and then for a time casually surveyed the room. "Who is back there with Pete?" he asked suddenly.

"Lef—" The bar keeper caught himself. But he had spoken off-guard.

Nick laughed. "All right. Lefty's there." The indifferent movement of his hand had brought it close to the man's body. In a sudden closing of fingers he clamped the other's right wrist. His voice clipped in low tones. "Touch that button and I'll blow the joint up! Keep away from it. I'll do my own announcing when I go back!"

He jerked his head in the direction of a door behind the bar. "So Lefty's back there with Pete Reno, is he? All right. Now one more. Is the kid back there, too?"

"Say, listen——" the man began.

"*You* listen!" Nick snapped. "Is Joe Hunter back there? I want to know!"

"Well, if you want to know, Boots, you ——"

Nick gave the wrist grip. He could break it like chickenbone. "Play ball with me, Dishtowel! I'm looking for that boy. Is he back there? Speak up or we'll take a walk!"

The man winced. He looked around, hesitated, then nodded.

"OK," said Nick. He let go the man's arm, but kept his own hand outstretched. "Slide along and open the door. Then keep in front of me and go to the right room back there. Tell Pete you want to see him."

THEY passed from the main room into a dim hall. Nick stepped close on the other's heels. They reached another hallway at right angles, turned into it, moved past three doors like those of a cheap rooming house, and came to an end one. When they halted, Nick motioned with a jerk of his chin. The man put out a tight fist and knocked.

"It's me, Pete," he said softly.

The heavy silence of adobe walls was increased back here to a tomb-like oppression.

The man said again, "It's me, Pete."

Then the door opened a little. Nick jabbed his boot into the crack, blocking the door from being shut again. He motioned with his head. "Beat it, Dish-towel!" The man vanished backwards.

Silence lay beyond the door crack. "Hold everything!" said Nick. "I'm coming in." Using his boot toe, keeping his hands free, he pushed through.

A man, who unseen, had been holding the door with his weight, stepped back. He was heavy, scar-faced, looked like a one time third rate pug. Now he could be anything—bodyguard, gunman, hijacker—anybody's underdog if it carried a price.

Nick shifted a glance at him. "Hello, Lefty." Then, "Hello, Pete."

Pete Reno sat in watchful self-assurance, dangling his fat legs from a table top. He was short, round, veneered over with smoothness. Everything about him was smooth; his round head, his body

in a gray suit, his speech. He had small gray eyes, and a thick mouth, out of which, as Nick entered, he took a chewed black Havana and said, "What the hell, Ring?"

NICK ignored him. Pete Reno owned the business of this place. This was his office, furnished with a desk, a safe, the table and three chairs. He owned other businesses also, known to the border men but not proved—more of those things to be worked out in time. At this moment Nick Ring's interest was not in Pete Reno.

A railroad brakeman's lantern lighted the room. It hung from a ceiling beam over the table, throwing its glow downward in a haze of cigar smoke. Across from Nick, in a chair tipped back against the adobe wall, sat Joe Hunter, and Nick's first thought as he saw the boy, was that this trail tonight had run into a dead end.

For Joe Hunter leered up at him, a swaggering tough-guy's grin out of a face too young for it. Hands in blue jeans pockets, he slouched lower in his chair and hooked his shoe toes around the legs. He was tall, blonde, blue-eyed, usually likable. But green! A green kid who needed a whale of a jolt.

As Nick Ring stood looking down at the boy, he was thinking of Tom Hunter, the father. Old Tom had been dad to Nick himself, in a way. Nick felt the debt. Back in the red hills the old man had found a placer pocket and staked a good claim. It had come down to Joe, here, and his sister Jerry. No excuse for the boy hiring a Mexican to work that Apache Gulch mine the way he did, while he himself hung around this place of Pete Reno's.

It was six months since Nick first had a hunch that Joe Hunter was doing more than hanging around. Pete was taking him in and would use him. How, Nick hadn't learned—until this afternoon.

"Joe," he said. "I want you to come along with me."

Joe rocked back and forth on his tipped



chair. "Yeah?" He turned his head and looked at Pete Reno, for orders.

Reno slid down off the table top. He took a step back away from Nick, not toward him. He threw down the cigar stub, wiped his hands smoothly together. "What's this, Ring? A pinch? If it is, all right. If it ain't, then you get the hell out of here!"

Nick shifted both hands up and hooked his thumbs over his belt. "Want to hear a bed time story, Pete? You too, Joe?" He turned a little and looked at Lefty Bole. "And you.

"Nice piece of hi-jacking pulled off this afternoon. Up Apache Gulch. I've kept it under cover, so none of you have heard about it yet." His glance shot from Pete Reno to Joe.

Reno's face kept its smooth round mask. But the boy's eyes had suddenly flickered. Nick saw it. Reno saw it.

"Apache Gulch?" Joe asked. "You say this hi-jacking was in Apache Gulch, this afternoon?"

"Sure," said Nick. "Those dry panners up there had got together for a clean-up. They put their gravel through a blower and had separated out around six thousand dollars worth of dust. Couple of masked men using high powered rifles shot up the camp, then took the gold. Neat job. Steered by somebody on the inside, of course. Somebody talked too much and let it out about this clean-up. Because those men weren't telling how good it was going to be."

NICK paused. Lefty Bole had shifted a little toward one end of the table. Nick leaned his shoulder blades back against the closed door.

Joe Hunter let his chair down onto all four legs. His big hands were out of his pockets and he was propped forward, fists on his knees. He stood up slowly.

"Sit down, kid!" Pete Reno snapped, then faced Nick with hard cold eyes. "All right, Boots, good story. What's the idea of telling it here?"

"Just this, Reno. That gold is hot. It's sure going to burn somebody!"

"A warning, eh?" the man scoffed. "Well, thanks!"

"That's all right," said Nick easily. "Any little thing I can do for you, Pete, I'm glad to do it. I'm going to save you a lot of trouble some day."

Reno's small hard eyes fixed on him. "You'd save me a lot of trouble right now by getting the hell out of here! This is a private office. Do you see any hot gold lying around? If you do, help yourself. If you don't, then suppose——"

Nick wasn't listening. He was watching Joe Hunter.

Joe had sat down in his chair at Pete Reno's order. His hands were open flat and he was rubbing them up and down his blue jeans legs in a way that Nick had seen old Tom Hunter do. It was a sure sign that the Hunter blood was boiling up. Now Joe was doing it, and it was old Tom all over again. Joe's face darkened, puzzled. Suddenly it dawned with an angry look of recognition.

He shot that look up at Nick, a clear signal, then with the flicker of an eye he sent Nick's glance toward Pete Reno's office desk.

Nick had taken in details of this room upon entering. He had seen the table in its center, the safe in one corner, the chairs, the desk, and had noticed the shotgun that lay across its flat top. Near the gun were four boxes of shotgun shells. One box was open and some loose shells were lying beside it.

Toward those shells Joe Hunter had surely flicked an eye. Nick stood waiting. What about them? What was the boy trying to tell him?

The moment grew tense with silence. Casually Nick straightened. He thought it was casual enough, yet next instant three hands had grabbed for guns. Nick's went to his holster. Reno reached for an open drawer in the desk. Lefty Bole flashed a fist up under his coat.

Nick had the shortest move to make; his gun jarred the room while the other two were still reaching. But from close at his side Bole charged him, head down, slugging, and the aim meant for Pete Reno went high. He saw Reno throw up an arm. Then overhead the lantern shattered and fell.

TURMOIL that filled the pitch black room could have lasted only a few minutes. It seemed longer. Nick was locked with Lefty Bole, down on the dirt floor, struggling with his arms around a bear-like bulk. The table crashed over. He heard a chair whang against the wall. A snarl came from Joe. A grunt out of Pete Reno. There was a scrambling sound over in the direction of the office desk.

Nick had all he could do. Lefty slugged at him with his gun. They rolled. A leg of the smashed table split them apart. He heard a scuffle. Then the door opened, swung shut again. A thick silence filled the black room.

Instinct warned Nick not to move. He could hear nothing. But he could *feel*. Someone else was in there, waiting, even as he waited, for a tell-tale sound of movement. He held his gun ready.

In a moment he put his hand out in the dark. He could touch nothing. Must be almost in the middle of the room, away from the adobe walls. He felt down on the floor. His fingers touched something metallic. An exploded shell. With it in his hand he waited, straining his ears into the dead silence. Perhaps he was wrong. No one in here — all escaped out the door. But instinct was too strong. He was not alone.

Suddenly, between thumb and forefinger, he flipped the shell into the dark. It struck a wall. Instantly a gun blazed, its

red flame pointing in the direction of the sound. He saw Lefty's form, black and crouching in the corner on his right, and his own gun whipped toward the man.

The flash of Lefty's fire had not faded when Nick shot. His bullet caught the gun hand still raised. His own flare held another second of light, and in it he saw the man's weapon fall. Lefty cursed, lunging up.

NICK stepped back. "Hold it! Move and my next shot won't be for your hand!"

He struck a match in the smoke-filled room, saw that Lefty Bole was out of the fight, for the man was doubled over, holding a bloody wrist against his body. The place was wrecked, but the thing that caught Nick's eye first, was the desk. It had not been overturned in the scuffle. Its top was bare. The shotgun shells were gone.

Joe? Pete Reno? Nick backed out. Lefty could take care of himself for awhile, in here. A strap iron hasp and a bolt locked the door on the outside. Nick flipped the hasp over and dropped the bolt, and then, in the passageway, he heard sounds that had not penetrated to the private office.

Shouts came from the front gambling room. He leaped down the passage and suddenly the sharp sting of gun smoke was in his nostrils. Then at the door into the room, he stopped short.

The whole place was a struggle of men, shouts, curses. Only a light near the bar was left burning. All the rest was dark, smoke-filled, and a wreckage of furniture, while up toward the front end men were fighting to get out.

Nick leaped on in behind the bar and stumbled over a form crouched there. The barkeeper threw up an arm. "For God's sake!"

"What's happened in here?" Nick snapped, yanking him up. "Where's Pete? Where's the kid? Come on——"



The barkeeper gaped. "Ain't it a pinch? Ain't we raided?"

"Pinch? Raided? What the——?"

THE man took a breath, gulped. "Pete came there." He pointed to the door behind Nick. "Started to run through, carrying something. Kid came behind him. Yelled at us. Let out a shot. Pete ducked back. But ain't it a pinch?"

Nick grabbed him by the collar and spun him around. "Which way did Pete and the kid go? Is there a back door to this joint? Quick!"

The man nodded.

"Then move!" Nick ordered, and a shove helped the fellow get started. "Show me!"

Down the end of the passage, opposite the office door, was another. It stood open. Inside was a bedroom—Pete Reno's quarters. A tall dresser had been yanked away from the wall. Back of it was a low opening through the adobe bricks.

Shoving the man first, Nick bent and entered. They came into air filled with the smell of hay and horse sweat. It was an old stable, no longer in use and supposed to be deserted. Yet to Nick this smell of hay and horse was fresh. He was making more than one discovery tonight!

Thin lines of light showed around a door crack dead ahead. He put his face close to the thin man's ear. "Dishtowel," he whispered hoarsely, "we're going in there, you first."

"God! Don't!" the man begged. "Don't!"

"Then what is it?"

"Honest I don't know!"

NICK hesitated. But no use waiting. No telling what the kid had got into by this time. He raised a boot against the door, shoved, leaped back. He still had his captive gripped by the neck. The man tried to break away, stumbled out into the light of the open doorway, and suddenly pitched down.

From inside a gun had blazed. A young

voice said, "Come and get it, you crooks!"

"Joe!" Nick burst out. "Hunter! Where are you, kid?"

The young voice laughed. "Nick? OK in here, Nick. Come and see. Bring that dishwipe with you, I didn't kill him."

Nick passed through the door arch and into what had been the harness room of the stable. A horse stood there, saddled, with saddle pockets in place. Further back, Pete Reno was tied, standing, to a post. In the middle of the board floor was the pile of shotgun shells. The paper of one had been slit with a knife.

Joe Hunter came to where Nick had stopped and stood looking at him, solemn-faced.

Nick stared down at the open shell. No lead shot was in it, nor powder, but grains of gold dust that glittered in the lantern light. Nick glanced up at the boy's face. Then he grinned.

"Little job of line-running tonight, huh, Joe? How much was Pete paying you to smuggle these shells across?"

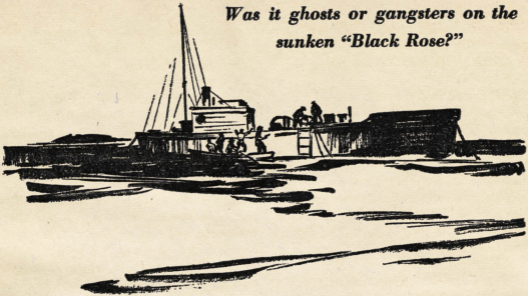
"Fifty bucks for the shells and some other stuff. I was to get across and deliver them to Pete on the other side—an hour's job—easy money I called it." Slowly he wagged his head. "What a fool I turned out to be! Fifty bucks—to smuggle at least five hundred dollars worth of my own gold out of the country!"

NICK'S grin widened. "Yes, that's what I thought Jerry said your share of the Apache Gulch clean-up would be. I guess that whole run of Gulch gold is here in these shells." He sobered, and his brown eyes narrowed into the boy's level look.

"Well, Joe?" he asked. "How about it? You've been a fool, all right. But adobe walls tell no tales, and even Jerry won't ever know about this, unless——"

The boy's hand came out. "You're white, Ring. Will you shake on that? I'm through with easy money. I'll go back to work tomorrow." Slowly he grinned, "And like it!"

Was it ghosts or gangsters on the
sunken "Black Rose?"



MAN ALIVE!

By FRANK J. LEAHY

Author of "Cherubs on the Beach," "Pressure," etc.

CAPTAIN SELBY chewed at the ends of his moustache impatiently as he paced up and down the heaving fantail of the salvage tug, *Chagny*. At midnight, two hours before, he had driven his ship out through the Golden Gate onto a triangle of deep-sea moorings, five miles offshore and twenty-five fathoms above the ill-fated yacht, *Black Rose*. The yacht had rammed dead on into a big, lumber-laden steam schooner, and but eighteen men of the possible twenty-five on board had been rescued by the schooner, which stood by as a buoy marking the scene of disaster until the arrival of the *Chagny*. Of those lost, two were known to be firemen, one the owner, Tony Wardell; the four others were merely suspected as having been on board.

There was on the *Chagny's* fantail, besides the grim crew of air-pump men and handlers tending the deep diver now down, a shivering little group huddled deep in the upturned collars of their overcoats—

detectives and newspaper men. For Tony Wardell was—had been—Public Enemy Number Thirteen; big shot of a narcotic-smuggling, counterfeiting, rum-running ring; a terrorist, racketeer and wholesale murderer.

"Four on Monte's line," reported a tender, and answered with four sharp jerks.

"What!" snapped Captain Selby, swerving upon the telephone tender. "Why's he coming up? Find out. He's only been down fifteen minutes."

"His exhaust valve's leaking," reported the man with the receiving set clamped over his ears.

The captain swore. "Well, give him slow decompression. I can't risk him getting the bends—not tonight."

The tenders at the rail braced themselves against the bulwark and heaved hand over hand on the heavy load, starting Monte Ring up.

After several interminable minutes the skipper ordered, "Out stage!" A winch

banged, out went a diving platform to be lowered to the twelve fathom level, and the telephone tender reported that Monte had climbed aboard.

"Up stage—slow!" bawled Selby.

The winch reeled in, stopped—reeled in, stopped—and the captain, at the end of his patience, demanded, "All the way up now!"

IN A moment the diver broke dripping through the surface, clinging to the bails as the stage swung in and was landed on deck. The dressers sprang into immediate action, slid a bench under Monte, stripped him of his shoes and weights, and twisted off his helmet.

Monte's face, in the white glow of diving lights, was strained as he stared about him, blinking. Then he rose, leaned far over and let a bucketful or so of water pour from the neck of his dress; sat down again.

"Well, Monte," spoke the captain, "what luck?"

"No luck," was the reply. Someone handed him a lighted cigarette.

"Make a full report," Selby said quietly.

"Well, when I went down I landed on the bottom, about fifty feet from the starboard beam of the wreck. Her whole bow's smashed in, and she's layin' a little over on her port keel. When I got onto her boat deck I saw that her mainmast is still standing, but the foremast's broken—smashed the bridge when it fell and poked its truck into the stack. But no bodies. Nor were there any down on the main deck. As reported by the rescued part of her crew, there were those two firemen down below, I knew that—so I decided I'd try and get them out, anyhow. All this time, though, my exhaust valve was sendin' a steady dribble o' water across my shoulders and down by back, and since my dress was gettin' full, I asked to be taken up."

He swayed a little on the bench, shivered, and added, "Better get me in the tank for a few minutes."

"Of course!" cried Selby. "What am I thinking of? But you know how worked up I am over this job, Monte. Quick, you men—hustle him into the tank. And, Mr. Larson, fetch that bottle of whisky. And coffee. Feel all right, Monte? No pains, dizziness, nausea?"

"No, I'm okay," answered the diver, affecting a grin. "But get me out o' this punk suit."

In a moment the dressers had him stripped down to heavy diving underwear and socks, then he was seized by two of them, on on each side, and rushed for'ard into the recompression tank. The heavy steel door clanged behind them. The captain cracked open a valve, compressed air whistled into the chamber, and when the pressure needle pointed at sixty pounds, he shut down on the valve and stepped through the air lock into the recompression chamber. The dressers went out.

The mate came in and left the whisky and steaming coffee, and departed. The captain mixed a stiff coffee-royal, and Monte fell to sipping it.

YOU know, Cap'n," Monte spoke, "it's creepy down there on that *Black Rose*, somehow."

"Certainly," replied Selby. "Why shouldn't it be, with those dead men still in her? And it's up to you to get them out. You! One man! Think of it; a salvage ship the size of this *Chagny* with only one diver aboard! I'm disgraced. One diver! Three others on shore; always on shore when anything important turns up. Hell and water, no wonder I'm grayheaded!" Then, in a modified voice, "But can you do it, Monte? Think! The eyes of the country'll be on the *Chagny*, Tony Wardell being who he was. Can you?"

Monte gulped the last of his drink.

"On a job like this," he said, "I could put up with the inconveniences of hell. Look what a shame it'd be if Tony Wardell didn't get buried in a five-grand casket."

Selby nodded thoughtfully, plucking at his moustache.

"Not only Tony," he said, "but those other four. His gang enemies."

"If they were aboard. Nobody knows for sure."

"The cops out on deck there say they had a tip-off. That's why they're hanging around; and those newspaper men."

"Tony was givin' the four a last ride, eh?"

"Yes. But if so, where are they, the five of them? They weren't rescued with the crew. And the crew, loyal to gang principles, won't talk, according to advice from the steam schooner before she hobbled into port with them. What happened then? You tell me"—he shrugged emptily—"or show me. Yes, show me. I hope you can, Monte. It'll be a



feather in our cap, and these days a feather would look good. How did Tony Wardell die; and did he murder four rivals before he died, or were the five of them trapped before he had a chance? There's a deep, dark mystery for you to solve."

"And it'll probably remain deep and dark," said Monte. "But I'll see what I can see—for old alma mater."

ON DECK, a cold, autumn wind swept down over the sea. The *Chagny* pitched heavily to her moorings, her flat counter smacking regularly into the troughs, her anchor cables paid out to the bitter ends. In the darkness beyond the glow of her diving lights lay two smaller tugs, standing by to give the *Chagny* aid if she started swinging down the wind and away from the wreck; farther off to windward were the lights of a coast guard cutter, as she cruised on her lonely patrol;

closer aboard, to leeward, lurked a small, low craft, not to be identified.

Soaked with spray, weary, sleepless, the crew bent at once to clothing Monte again in diving dress. He sat on the equipment chest, legs outstretched, while they fussed around him; and when the telephone had been tested, the helmet came down over his head, the air pump was started, and he was pulled to his feet and walked to the rail.

Captain Selby picked his way through the tangle of hawsers, wires and shots of anchor cable hampering the deck and stood with his face close to Monte's open faceplate.

"Good luck, Monte," he called. "And here"—he took the diver's hand and pressed something into it—"here's a skeleton key that should open any cabin doors. Here's your torch, too. There's an extra line attached to your belt, and—that's all, I guess."

He heaved a sigh, stepped back. Monte's faceplate was slammed shut and screwed down; he felt of his exhaust valve and adjusted the air. Then he was on the diving stage, and in a moment his helmet disappeared once again under the surface, leaving in wake a foaming circle of white bubbles.

IT WAS chill, dark, below; lonely with an emptiness that gripped Monte's heart, while the building pressure of deepening fathoms gripped his body as he sank toward the bottom. At the twelve fathom level the stage halted, and he jumped off. A jerk came on his lifeline. He answered it quickly—everything was okay. Then, suddenly, the lead soles of his shoes struck the bottom.

"Hold it!" he spoke into his transmitter.

He snapped on his electric torch, the light cutting feebly through the pitch-black water. A rush of the tide thudded against his body, lifted him off his feet, lowered him again gently, as if he were being toyed with by an invisible hand. Digging his coppered toes into the ocean's floor, he

pressed forward, like a runner filmed in slow motion.

In a moment he pulled up short. A gloomy wall confronted him—the starboard keel of the *Black Rose*. He studied it with his torch, then made his dress sufficiently buoyant to blow himself up into the main deck, somewhere 'midships. With making his descending line fast to a stanchion, he reported to the topside.

"I'm aboard, and okay."

The words sounded flat and unnatural above the rustle of his incoming air. With his torch cutting only about three feet into the dark water, he released the rail and crossed down the listing deck to the superstructure.

He wiggled his light around at his feet when he had gone for'ard as far as the bridge, lightened his dress and climbed the ladder. He peered along under the dodgers, opened a door and peered into the smashed chart-house. But of dead men no sign. He retraced his weary steps, careful at all times to keep his lines clear. Arriving again at the point where he had boarded the wreck, he sank to his knees, with his shoulder and helmet against the bulkhead, to rest.

A SUDDEN sound, as of dull thumping, roused him out of his lethargy. But when he strained to listen, the sound had ceased. He laughed to himself; shook his head in his helmet, swallowed hard to clear his senses, and pulled himself to his feet. Imagination, that sound. The thumping was inside his head; must be. Already he had been down about a half hour on this dive, and the pressure was closing down on his body to echo the thumping of his heart in his head. And still he had nothing to report.

He was conscious suddenly that he had that skeleton key clutched tightly in hand. He could think of no reason why any of the cabins should be locked; and still, why not? In the event Tony Wardell had taken four enemies for a last ride, perhaps he had locked himself in with them, and

was gloating over them, telling them they had stepped on his toes and were about to be rubbed out for so doing, when the crash came—to somehow imprison them. It was a hope, a chance; but, if true, what, after all, would be the resultant advantage of all this anxiety and night diving to the *Chagny*? Captain Selby would receive his salvage fee, the cops would muscle in on the glory of bringing in the bodies of five wanted gangsters, and he, Monte Ring, would be sick for a week, what with handling a crop of stiff and flirting with an attack of the bends.

But—he'd better snap into it and get it all over with.

Then, again, that far-away thumping! Funny about that sound; couldn't remember ever having heard one like it before in deep water. His arms and legs trembled a little, his heart seemed to be flopping disconnectedly around in his chest, but that chill running up and down his spine—why did it persist? Was it a new symptom of deep water sickness, or—or was there really another presence there aboard than his own?

HE CURSED. Summoning up scorn to drive imagination into the background of his wits, he laid a hand on the



knob of the door in front of him and forced it open. Stepping into the cabin, he flaunted his torch about to pick out the overturned chairs, the empty settee and bunk; swept the floor, every foot of

it and sighed with relief upon finding no bodies. No diver likes to handle dead men; above all, he, Monte Ring.

He tried the cabin immediately aft, and

the ones aft of that. With the same result. Then he heard the skipper's voice above the burble of his air, felt a sharp tug at his lifeline.

"Monte! All right down there?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Well, report once in a while."

"Nothin' to report. Nothin'."

He snorted. The Old Man was like that—impatient; on this job, hot for a word of glory for the *Chagny*. Competition had been nosing him out; some sensational salvage—rescue—and shipping circles might snap into the fact that the *Chagny* was no fool's ship.

All cabins on the starboard side of the wreck had been entered; not once—although a few of the doors had given trouble—had the skeleton key been necessary. It now remained for Monte to cross to the port side to continue the search—the seemingly hopeless search. The thought of the weary steps ahead sickened him. He had a fuzzy taste in his mouth; his bared hands were numb with cold, but his body was sweating. He wondered how much longer he could stand the dizziness in his head; took several deep breaths to clear it, then jumped out of the covered main deck to the ocean's floor. From there, by lightening his dress, he blew himself up for the second time this night to the boat deck.

The broken foremast, ropes, guys and the wireless antenna were all snarled up together up there, and in his pale torch-light it was difficult for him to cross the deck without fouling his lines. He had to cut his way with his hooked knife through some of the tangle; and then at last he was jumping off to the port side of the wreck. Mounting again into the main deck, he paused for a moment to rest, perspiring freely from exertion, lungs gasping.

A sudden, faint rap—sharper now than that thumping he'd heard before—came to him. Despite himself, he started, amazed at the acuteness of his imagination. He swallowed hard to sharpen his hearing; listened intently. Silence. A little wave

of self-pity swept through his brain. He was in bad shape, he decided, hearing things that couldn't possibly be, the noises sounding louder as the minutes of his lonely dive unraveled. What moment would he pass out? He reached to give the topside the signal to take him up, when again that rap, more imperative now, sounded from within the *Black Rose*.

"Damn me!" he snarled. "This son-of-a-buck of a wreck is haunted, that's all there is about it!"

He filled his lungs, fighting to clear his head, and a knife seemed to stab through his chest to prick at his throat and brain. The pain wore away, and he started forward, grimly.

DOGGEDLY pushing his way along the sloping deck, he halted suddenly and turned, his back against the rail, hoping he had advanced closer to the source of the rapping sound, but now again he heard only the immense silence of the undersea darkness. This angered him, and he turned again to continue forward a few paces, then thrust through an open door into a cabin.

Inside, he stopped, his flesh creeping; not at anything he saw there with his torch, but with the feeling that he had heard a human shriek. He listened for the sound to be repeated, then, despite his weariness, his dizziness, and the chill that felt for the marrow of his bones, he laughed, trying to push the possibility of rappings and shrieks out of mind. But, as a matter of fact, such things were possible, and that was the hell of it. If there had been an air pocket, now, formed on one of the cabins as the *Black Rose* went down—as his diving pal, Paddy Devine, had once found in a sunken liner, occupied—there was a chance, a hope, that there was someone in that pocket, and alive. Man alive! He wondered; and, wondering, he felt new strength in his creeping exhaustion; and with this strength he hurried out on deck again and clumped aft, opening each cabin door as he went.

Only now, he did not search the interiors for bodies. First of all to make sure about that air pocket—and to lose no time; not now, after four hours of shipwreck.

High hope dwindled within him as he opened one door after the other. Was it his imagination, after all? Probably so. Well, such a wreck as the *Black Rose* would play upon a diver's nerves. How many men had been taken for a last ride in her? Tony Wardell's yacht—a shambles. Lord, but he was getting woozy in the head! He was staggering.

He tried the second to last door, port side, aft. It was locked.

A sudden sound! That rapping again, sharp and close at hand, in spite of its far-away quality; and slowing down, weakening. Then a shriek—for help—as that of a man in mortal fear; so distant as to be almost a trick of the senses—but real! Terrifyingly real!

Monte's blood ran cold in his veins. Man alive! Beyond that locked door a man was alive. Alive after four hours in a sunken ship on the bottom of the ocean! It seemed improbable enough; but it was true. A man was in that cabin, rapping frantically on the bulkhead with some metal instrument. And—Monte saw him as he brought his torch into play—the man had his face pressed against the port glass, eyes wide, staring at him.

Tony Wardell! Even in that darkness of the deep, even though Tony Wardell's hair was known to be as black as a raven's wing, and now appeared to be ghastly white—even so, Monte knew it was he.

The imprisoned man voiced a new scream of appeal, then disappeared from the port. Perhaps he had crumpled, in lost consciousness, at last. No. The knob of the door waggled violently.

Monte inserted his skeleton key, turned it, took a firm grip on himself for receiving the man, and strained to open the door. But the door was stuck fast!

Again Tony Wardell appeared at the

port, his face flattened against the glass, lips moving.

AT FIRST, Monte could catch no meaning in the volley of words shouted through that steel bulkhead. Then, gradually, with his helmet pressed against the port, he began to understand. Remorse and terror. The good God had at last lost patience with him, Tony Wardell. This night, lining them up against the bulkhead, he had riddled four men with bullets. And then had come the crash of shipwreck—the cracking of his head as he was hurled across the room—unconsciousness—and awakening to find the door jammed tight against his escape, with the ship going down—and this—

The stream of words grew wilder, more incoherent, as Monte listened; a story that spoke of those four dead men who had muscled in on the racket—the Tony Wardell racket. And those dead men were in that cabin with him now, as they had been through the long hours, centuries, since he had burnt them down. Pichetto and Gunner and Luigi Mongone and The Deacon—all staring at him now through the darkness from under waist-deep water that stunk of blood. He could stand it no longer. His guns were empty. There was the water, but he was afraid to die in that water. He didn't want to die—not there! God help him! Help! Open the door!

Monte shuddered; shook his wits together. Open the door! He tried again, but it held—warped fast. What next?



Above all, Tony Wardell must not die; not till he dropped through a hangman's trap. Since the door couldn't be opened without smashing it, bit by bit; since to do that would mean the man's inevitable drowning, there remained

but one thing to do—send for an iron-lung.

He reached to his signal line, hesitated. Wardell was speaking again. Monte could barely hear.

"Open the door!" sounded the snarl. "Hurry! Air—foul. Gas! Damn it all—help!" He rapped on the glass with what appeared to be the butt of an automatic, his face contorted horribly in the eerie torch-light, his lips continuing to babble crazy, snarling appeals and blasphemies.

Monte, trembling on his legs, an electric tingle in his mouth, reached once more to his signal line. Could he stick it out through his building weariness to see this rescue effected? But he couldn't fail—now.

CAPTAIN SELBY, standing at the rail of the *Chagny*, staring glumly at the stream of bubbles that appeared on the surface of the choppy sea within the glow of the diving lights, suddenly tensed as the telephone tender spoke through his transmitter.

"What is it?" he snapped.

The tender listened a moment, started, lifted the receivers from his head and held them out toward the captain.

"Monte wants to talk to you."

The captain snatched the set, clamped it over his ears, listened intently to the distant, flat tones of the diver above the air roaring through his helmet.

"What?" he piped suddenly. "Man alive, you say? . . . Tony Wardell? Good! That's great! . . . What? . . . Four dead men in the cabin with him? . . . Good God! . . . Yes? . . . All right. And you, Monte? . . . You're sure? Very well, then, son. Stand by." And he ripped the set from his ears.

"An iron-lung!" he bawled. "Attach it to Monte's extra line. Bend a heaving line around it and keep a strain on it as Monte hauls down, so the thing won't snag on the wreck before he gets it in hand. Quick now! Tony Wardell's alive

down there in an air pocket—four dead men with him."

Mumbles and gasps of excitement ran the rounds of the weary, brine-drenched men.

The iron-lung—a grotesque bag, wound with straps and tubes—was carefully attached to the end of the diver's extra line, as ordered. The captain spoke to the telephone tender, and the tender spoke into his transmitter. There was an instant of strained silence, then the lung began to move downward, disappeared; a man at the rail let a supporting line run slowly out between his fingers as he held all slack.

Captain Selby took up his position by the telephone tender, pawing at his moustache nervously. Headlines in the morning papers—Salvage ship, *Chagny*, rescues Tony Wardell from twenty-five fathoms down! Admirable piece of salvage work! Competition would turn green with envy.

A tug at his sleeve disturbed him. He swerved to frown at one of the detectives as the man jerked his head indicating a boat that was lurking close off the *Chagny's* lee rail. It was the same craft—low in the water, with racy lines, and with lights extinguished—that had been observed lying to, earlier in the night, far out in the darkness. There was a low purr of her motor, scarcely to be heard, what with the grinding of the diving air-pump and the moaning of wind in the *Chagny's* funnel-stays.

The captain affected indifference. "Mr. Larson, there!" he bawled. "See what that thing alongside wants."

The mate nodded and crossed to the lee rail. Selby turned attention again to his work. He said something to the telephone tender, the tender spoke to the diver below, listened and nodded.

"Monte's got the lung," was the report.

"Good!" muttered Selby. "Now we're getting somewhere."

HE PAID no attention to the mate's voice bawling out into the darkness; fixed his eyes upon that circle of bubbles

beyond the rail. Salvage ship *Chagny* saves Tony Wardell for the noose! A pleasant thought.

An excited voice at his shoulder interrupted. That same detective again. The captain scowled fiercely.

"What do you want now? Can't you see I'm—"

The other gestured him down. "I know you're busy, cap'n. But that boat there. I don't like the looks of it."

Selby lifted his glance. He cocked his ear to catch a reply to the mate's bellowings; but there came no reply.

"You see?" spoke the detective. "She's up to no damn' good. If you ask me, there's a load of gunmen aboard her, and there may be trouble."

Selby looked at the other dumbly.

"Trouble? I don't see—"

"That boat's been easing alongside for a long time," cut in the detective. "And she was right where she lays now when you called out about Tony Wardell being still alive. I say that boat belongs to the mob whose four men Wardell bumped off tonight. Get the idea?"

CAPTAIN SELBY nodded, but it was quite evident it was all very hazy to him.

"I'll find out," he snarled. "I'll stand for no interference in this night's work. I can't afford it."

He stumbled across to the lee rail and joined his mate. The low, dark craft was still purring, with her nose into the sea, about fifty feet away. There was a huddle of dark figures in her open cockpit, none distinguishable, all facing in silence toward the *Chagny*.

"You, out there!" yelled the captain. "I'm Cap'n Selby. Account for yourself or shove off. If you don't I'll signal those tugs to stand up and drive you off."

Now there came an answering voice, "Don't signal no one, Selby. Get that straight."

"Eh? What's that?"

"You heard me. Don't you bat an eye.

We want Tony Wardell when you bring him up. Do we get him?"

"Do you get him? Why should you?"

"That's our business. He burnt down four men t'night. We heard your diver's report—and either you turn Tony Wardell over to us or we'll see 'at he don't get rescued at all. See?"

Selby gasped, and mumblings spread abroad over the decks of the *Chagny*.

"What's your answer?" demanded the gangsters' spokesman.

"My answer?" snarled Selby. "This—go to hell!"

"Okay," snapped the voice. "It's your funeral then, not ours. Remember that diver of yours down under."

"We'll take care of him all right." The captain swerved upon his mate. "Larson, jump up and signal—"

A gun cracked out in the darkness, and a bullet hissed by Selby's head. Everybody who could crouched behind the bulwark; the mate started crawling for'ard to the bridge ladder, and the detectives began to answer the fire.

Then the speed boat's motor broke into a starting roar, but she made no attempt to retreat, continuing her ragged gunfire. Selby lunged across the fantail to join the telephone tender; snatched the receiving set and clamped it over his ears.

"Monte!" he called into the transmitter. "Can you hear this racket? If you can, don't get scared. We'll—"

The rattle of a machine gun spoke up.



The captain screamed and pawed at his shoulder. Shouts filled the air, the captain, still on his feet, bawled a command, a man cut and ran up the weather deck to the bridge. One of the men at the air-

pump yelped and slumped to his knees, blood spurting from his hand.

"Keep that pump going!" cried Selby.

More fire, to and from the *Chagny*. Lights started to blink far up on her foremast. There was a spatter of bullets against the teak air-pump casing; the other pumper cursed and slapped at his ear—and two others leaped in to keep the grinding going. Once that machine stopped, Monte Ring, far down on the *Black Rose*, was lost!

Then the sudden cry from the mate on the bridge, "Here comes the coast guard cutter!"

The blaring of a siren grew upon the confusion about the *Chagny*. Captain Selby's voice rose above the din: "Monte! Come up when you're ready—and bring Wardell up!"

BUT in the pitch-black darkness that still lurked down under—although there was a creeping hint of daylight to eastward—Monte Ring was not yet ready to come up. With the iron-lung received and ready in hand, he was still knifing away at the splinters of the door's lower panel which he had to kick in with his heavy shoes. And still from within the cabin came the calls of the imprisoned man, less frantic now, but impatient.

These appeals and the continued rappings angered Monte although he understood the reason for them. When he had kicked in the panel, the water had deepened inside, compressing the air, and rising—surely—from the man's waist to his neck.

Then he had the panel ready, and he rose to press his helmet against the port glass, calling to the man within; and, when Wardell came to listen, he added, "Put on the iron-lung. I'll hand it to you. Can you hear me?"

He caught a faint "Yes—hurry!"

"All right," he answered. "Listen. Strap on the bag—pinch the nose clip—take a good shot of oxygen—bite the

mouthpiece. Understand? Good. When you've done that, duck your body and come out feet first through the panel—and I'll take you up. Ready?"

He dropped to one knee and shoved the bladder-shaped bag into the created opening; felt it snatched away from him.

For a long moment—a full minute—he waited. Then a grotesquely hooded figure crawled clumsily through the aperture. Monte immediately seized him, pulled him erect, and held him tightly with one arm as he trudged with him down the listing deck to where his lines extended up surfaceward. Then he gave four jerks on his lifeline.

In an instant they were taken off their feet. They rose rapidly, Monte conscious of the other clutching him almost in a death-grip. Then they reached the stage, at twelve fathoms, and Monte struggled aboard with his burden.

"On the stage," he reported to the top-side. "Take us right—on up."

AND the next thing he knew he was in the Iron Doctor, under heavy pressure. There were several figures around him, all watching him anxiously; one of them handed him a lighted cigarette. He puffed at it, inhaled deeply—and grinned. And the anxiety wore out of the faces. The old cigarette test never failed.

"You're okay," pronounced Captain Selby, who seemed to have a lot of blood spattered on him. "Better off than some of the boys who got bullet-creased. Yes, I'll say you're okay, Monte. In fact, you're great. Rescued—captured Tony Wardell alive."

"Where is he?" asked Monte.

"The cops have him in a sick bay under lock and key—in a coast guard cutter that showed up just in time for a lot of things. To capture about a dozen thugs of a rival gang, for example. Man alive, what a night! But we're made, sailor, we're made. The *Chagny's* in the who's what now."



OPEN AND SHUT

By WILLIAM PATTERSON WHITE

Author of "Neck or Nothing," etc.

Trying to outguess road-agents sometimes come high.

I

I THINK the general manager suspects something," said Lafe Merseymere, the superintendent of Mines of Yarrow.

"Blah, bluh, and a couple of hoots," rejoined Counsellor Tom Deeside. "Try woollen socks."

"No, but I think he does," protested Merseymere. "We'd better not, I think."

"You think too much," said the counsellor easily, and poured himself a short two fingers. "Dangerous—with your brain. Stop it. I'll do the thinking.

Hasn't our enterprise panned out prettily, so far?"

"Yes, but——"

"But me no buts. That's Shakespeare. Sound fellow. Knew his way about. Short on morals too—like you."

"Why not include yourself?"

"Because I have none whatever. You have—a few. Enough to make you head-shy. Here, let me fill up your glass. Down it. That's right. Even Dutch courage is better than none. Listen, Lafe, the boss may suspect something, fool if he didn't, but he doesn't suspect us, and you can lay to that. If he did, would he

plan to have you bring in the next payroll from Soledad? Not he."

"I don't like it," insisted Lafe. "I think I'll quit."

"Think so, do you?" The counsellor's voice and manner were as bland as cream on apple pie, even when he added, "I don't think so. You will continue to do precisely, exactly and so forth as I suggest. I put it to you, won't you?"

"Damn it, yes," said Lafe, paying the penalty of the lesser villain the wide world over.

Counsellor Deeside smiled like a large, friendly cat and remarked, "Really, your fetching the money from Soledad makes it all the simpler."

"How?"

"I'll tell you," said the counsellor, and did so in detail to the increasing horror and affright of Lafe Merseymere.

"My God!" breathed the mine superintendent, glancing over his shoulder at the closed door quite as though he expected the Law to enter on spurred boots. "My God!" he repeated, scared eyes coming back to the heavy countenance of the counsellor. "We—we haven't come to that yet."

"We have now," the lawyer told him. "You may take that as an incontrovertible fact." He smiled again upon his coadjutor. "You'll go through with it, won't you?"

"He'll go through with it," said Bill Deeside, the counsellor's brother, and owner of the Rocking D, speaking for the first time. "He'd better."

"But—but I'll be suspected of—of complicity," babbled Lafe Merseymere.

"What a fool it is!" The counsellor's tone was indulgent. He might have been speaking to a child. "I've just taken the trouble to explain why no suspicion can possibly attach to any of us. If you will bring your mushpot of a brain to bear upon the matter, you will perceive that I have thought of everything. It is, to employ a local term, one fine, large cinch."

"Bub—but murder!" babbled Merseymere.

"But fiddlesticks! Dear, oh dear, I wouldn't have your tender conscience for a pretty penny. Now, now, don't argue. It's useless. Have another drink, you need it."

II

FIRST DEPUTY GEORGE TYNE, riding west through Ren Canyon in the Lunas, stopped to water the Balky horse at Tulare Stour's water pen. Tulare and his son, Sam, were sitting on the top rail of the water pen fence. The fence needed repairs and the clothing of the two Stours needed patching. They were poor as poor, and the adobe house beyond the water pen reflected their ownership from every angle.

The Stours gave George grunted greeting.

"Lo," returned the first deputy cheerfully, and looked west through the wide portal of the canyon. "Clouds bankin' up yonder, and—"

"I'll say it for you," said Tulare, and uttered the Southwestern ranchman's forbidden remark, "It may rain."

"Bad luck to say that," remonstrated the deputy. "I wasn't going to."

"Ah-h bad luck!" snarled Sam. "What else is there in this country?"

"Yeah, what else?" His father fixed George with a malignant eye. "Why don't you drop the sock and hand over your dam' notice?"

George opened his eyes wide in puzzlement. "Notice? What notice?"

"The notice of foreclosure, what do you guess?" snapped Tulare.

"I never guess," George rejoined equably, "and I've no notice for you."

"Then you will have," grumbled Tulare. "Bad luck! Oh, hell! Here I've got plenty horses to satisfy that mortgage of the Limitar bank's, gimme time to sell 'em. Good horses, too. Like there is in the corral here." He jerked his thumb to-

ward the corral behind him, in which stood ten or twelve horses. "But they won't wait. Demand their cash. So they'll nicely foreclose, sell me up and glom the lot."

"Pap's always paid his interest promptly too," struck in Sam, glowering. "Seems like they could give you a little time," said George.

"Hold your breath while they do," Tulare spat on the ground, passed his sleeve across his mouth and remembered his manners. "Light and look at your saddle, George. We've eaten, but it's no trouble to warm up the beans and make coffee." He made as though to slide down from his perch.

"Don't you bother. I ate a small snack in the saddle and I drank at Deer Spring." George's eyes strayed to a couple of canteens hanging from a post beside Tulare. On the frayed and tattered felt covering of each the Stour brand, a Lazy S, had been painted in red. Done long ago, the paint was chipped and faded, but the brand was still plain to read. "But I'll be thirsty before I reach Soledad. You might lend me one of those canteens to take across with me."

"They're played out like everything around here, George." Tulare lifted both canteens, held them horizontal. "Only ones we've got. I've been meaning to solder on patches, but I haven't any solder."

George noted the large holes in the bottoms of both canteens and swung down. "Then I'll get me a drink now, and drift along."

"Going to be tough to lose all that," said Tulare, jerking his head toward the horse-pasture, as George wiped his mouth on his sleeve.

THE Stour horse pasture was a tremendous horseshoe-shaped *rincon*, scooped from the rim-rocked mass of Horseshoe Mountain, largest of the Lunas, opening on Red Canyon, directly south of the Stour domicile. George

agreed with Tulare. It would be tough. From where he stood beside his horse he could see past the corner of the water pen to a gate fifty yards away, set in a barbed-wire fence strung across an open flat between the heels of Horseshoe Mountain. The flat was nearly a half-mile in width, and the fence ran on either hand to the lowest of the rims, four-layered like the filling of a gigantic cake, that blocked egress from the pasture except by the gate, more effectually than any fence could have done.

Beyond the fence and the inward curving heels of the mountain was fine, rolling land, brushy and bare in many places, but covered in the main with the grass that gave life to the horses that roved it. George saw some of them here and there. Not many. Most of them would be in the upper half of the pasture, where there were three waters, each with its guarding stand of cottonwoods.

Yes, it was tough. But George said no sympathetic word. It was not etiquette to do that. Indeed, George felt that Tulare was transgressing good taste in broaching the matter. According to the code, a man must either pay his bets, or refuse to pay them. Whichever he did, he must not complain. Tulare was complaining.

So George merely said "So long" to the Stours and went his way.

It was not far, hardly three-quarters of a mile from the Stour ranch house to the portal of Red Canyon, the pillars of which were Herradura's western heel on the south, and a knob of red granite, called the Red Sister, on the north. Where the ranch trail turned south to climb the low point at the base of Herradura's heel, George left it, heading southwest for a certain wagon road that ran to Soledad.

Less than a hundred steps beyond the portal the surface of the ground changed from rock and brown earth to sand and gray 'dobe; soapweed and sage replaced desert willows and sotol, the Southwestern sun took full charge, and the breath of

the long and rolling loneliness that the Spaniard in his wisdom named Lo Soledad Larga, smote George Tyne in the face as pleasantly as the blast from a furnace.

FIVE miles of brush-popping, and George's Balky horse turned his small neat hoofs into the wagon road. Many parallel deep ruts and high centers in the 'dobe, two shallow ruts and a low center



in the sand, that was the thoroughfare known as the Soledad road. Those living at the eastern terminus, the town of Yarrow, beyond the Lunas, called it

the Yarrow road. But they were miners mostly. It is said that the continued handling of dynamite tends to make folk irresponsible. To those running stock, it was always the Soledad road.

Three hours and eighteen miles out of Red Canyon an approaching dust that the first deputy had seen for the past sixty minutes became a bay horse and Lafe Merseymere, Superintendent of Mines of Yarrow. Meetings mean more where folk are few. Both men pulled up for a chat.

"Howdy, Lafe. You picked a cool day." George's grin was wide.

Merseymere's answering smile was the usual ghost. He always smiled economically. It was words he wasted. "Yeah, I know it's hot, but I had to. Going through tonight."

"You must like to ride."

"It's not that. I'm in a hurry to reach Yarrow. I'm"—he hesitated, a slight twitch and flicker in the eyelids below which looked out a pair of rather close-set gray eyes—"I'm carrying the payroll." He patted the bulging coat tied behind the cattle of his saddle.

George cocked an eyebrow. "I thought that payroll always came in east from Severn."

"It did used to—but those two holdups taught us caution. The paymaster and his guard will make the regular trip in tomorrow from the railroad on the east side, but they won't be carrying any money. Nobody will suspect me of carrying it."

George's eye was sardonic. "You must think they're all fools around here, Lafe. Four days before payday you call at Soledad P. O. for a registered package. They know you there, but you don't get your mail there. P. O.'s in the general store—always full of loafers. Shucks, all Soledad knows you're carrying the payroll. News travels. Gun loaded?" The sardonic eye rested on the pearl-handled six-shooter in Lafe's holster.

Merseymere laughed. "Don't worry about my gun, George, or anybody in Soledad knowing either. Wells Fargo brought the package from the big city. I told the agent it contained valuable mining data and books sent to Soledad by mistake. So that's all right."

The eyebrow above the sardonic eye slid higher. "Is it?"

The laugh again. "Why not?"

GEORGE did not immediately reply. He shifted sidewise in the saddle to stare narrow-eyed at the rolling stretches of the Soledad, black in the west against the sun, gray-green in the east under the fantastic Lunas, beyond whose magic peaks and pinnacles lay Yarrow town. The puckered blue eyes returned to rest reflectively upon the superintendent's countenance.

"Most anywhere between here and there is one Gawd-awful good place to leave a man."

"Huh!"

George nodded. "To some folks ten thousand dollars for one cartridge would seem like a fair trade."

"I tell you nobody knows I'm carrying the payroll except us two and the general manager."

George's tone was dubious. "I wonder. Keeping to the road?"

"No, I'm taking the short cut through Red Canyon. I'll stop at Stour's for a bait and a bite."

"Listen," said George seriously, "it's none of my business, and Tulare and Sam are good as wheat, but you don't know who might be stopping there tonight. These are hard times here and right now. People need the money. You're known to carry cash of your own. Somebody might hold you up on your own account, and find the payroll. If I were you I'd stick to the Soledad road and I'd shun the company of my fellowmen until I locked the door of the office safe on that payroll. If I didn't have to report in Soledad tonight I'd go back with you."

"You undertaker!" chuckled Lafe, but his eyelids were not quite steady. "I'm leaving before you scare me to death. So-o long, I'm a-goin'."

"Take care of yourself and your ten thousand," said George Tyne, and lifted his bridle hand and jogged on toward Soledad. When several hundred yards of desert divided him from Lafe Merseymere George addressed the Balky horse. "Trying to outguess the road-agents sometimes comes high. Lafe acted like he knows it too."

The Balky horse merely twiddled his fine-drawn ears. What fools men were! They talked.

Said the sheriff, when George reported late in the evening: "Notice of foreclosure—Stour ranch and brand, George. I wish you'd take her across to Tulare's *mañana*."

III

THE Lunas were black under the gold and the blue when George faced the Soledad, for the sun was still under the world's rim. The first deputy bestrode the Chinkapin horse, a long-legged blue roan, with bottom, a Roman nose, and nerves steady in time of stress. With George went an extra gun, a forty-four with a five and a half inch barrel. It lay under his vest, between the waistband of

his trousers and a blue denim shirt, the short barrel just clearing the point of his left hip bone. George was not one to borrow trouble, but it is ill arguing with the poor in purse, and a year and a half in the sheriff's office had taught George that one never knows.

As he rode he wondered whether Lafe Merseymere had made it through. Stopping at Stour's, if he had followed out his stated intention, was a piece of plain tomfoolishness. The Stours were honest enough, at least they'd never been suspected of anything untoward, but, as he'd told Lafe, somebody else might have drifted in. Other people's money. A man couldn't be too careful how he handled it.

By the tracks Lafe and himself had been the last travelers on the Soledad road. Briskly, eastward, George followed the hoofmarks of Lafe Merseymere's horse. The sun was up-and-down when George reached the place where the east-bound tracks of his Balky horse issued from the brush and turned into the road. Overlaying these tracks were the hoofmarks of Lafe's bay. George did not recall telling Lafe of his own ride through Red Canyon, but Lafe evidently had guessed as much and had obeyed suggestion.

So it was that George, following the two sets of tracks, came to the low point at the base of Herradura's western heel, and there lost the tracks in a mess of other tracks made by a big herd of unshod horses that had come from the direction of Stour's and poured over the point toward the south. George glanced south where the Black Monks marched solemnly across the horizon. Those lowering dark mountains were in Old Mexico, and their foothills fringed the Border forty miles away. Down along the Lunas between the Black Monks and Red Canyon all was desert—sand, mesquite, sage and soapweed, without a ranch or well or spring to break the loneliness until one reached the Rocking D, a small ranch two miles north of the Border, owned by Bill Dee-

side, brother of Counsellor Tom Deeside, a legal gentleman of Yarrow.

Thoughtfully George ran the tracks heel. Considerably more than two hundred horses had made the tracks. The Stours had some three hundred head, he recollected having heard. He discovered that the horses had been driven from the pasture, the gate of which had been left open, into the space between the corrals and the house, where they had been headed and turned west across the flat toward the portal.

Horse thieves or the Stours?

GEORGE hailed the house as he rode past. The kitchen door stood open, but there was no reply. No smoke drifted from the leaning stove pipe that was the chimney. The lack of smoke had no significance. It was past time for dinner. He rode on to the water pen. While the Chinkapin horse watered George looked about him. Vaguely he sensed that there was something missing in the water pen. Not the Stours, although they were certainly missing. There was something else that should have been in the water pen that wasn't.

When the Chinkapin horse had drunk eight swallows and a snatch, for the water was cold and the horse was hot, George crowded him close to the fence and looked over into the corrals. Not a horse was in, and no saddles lay against the fence. He looked at the house and the open kitchen door. People in that country invariably closed all their house doors when they left home for even an hour or two. No telling what might be moved to enter. Skunks, which walk wide of no man, have a predilection for investigating the open door.

George hailed the house again. No answer. He dismounted, tied Chinkapin to the fence and walked without haste across a maze of hoofmarks to the kitchen. There was no more disorder than is usual in a kitchen kept by menfolks, but there was something missing. This time George

had no difficulty in fathoming what it was. The coffee pot was gone from the stove.

Inspired by more than mere curiosity, George went through the Stour residence, and found that a couple of Winchesters he knew the Stours to possess, were missing, as were the blankets from the two beds. A certain amount of food was in the storeroom, but sugar and salt had been spilled, and dropped coffee beans crunched underfoot. Apparently the Stours had gone traveling. It had already occurred



to George, in view of the Stours' expectations as to the mortgage, and the hoofmarks heading west and south, that father and son might have been moved to transfer their livestock to Old Mexico, in

which country's progressive atmosphere an American bank would get fat trying to make a foreclosure stick. The ranch itself wasn't valuable. Hardly worth while to pay taxes on it. What mattered was the horses. They were so much cash on the hoof.

"Ol' Limitar bank's going to be very sick if those horses are all gone," said George philosophically, as it wasn't his mortgage. He served the foreclosure notice by spreading it flat on the tattered oil-cloth of the kitchen table and weighting it with a chili bottle.

THE case was clear enough in George's mind. The Stours had fallen from grace and removed their assets. But he, George, had no intention of madly pursuing the removers. They must have started the previous evening, a night of full moon, and undoubtedly would be many miles south of the Border by now. The Border was the dead line for such minor issues as diversion of assets, as far as the sheriff's office was concerned. Of which Border more presently. Besides, the blue

roan, with forty miles behind his heels, was in no shape for a hard ride. The Stours might have overlooked a horse or two in the pasture, but even with a fresh horse he could do no more than ride south and establish the fact that the Border had been crossed by the Stours and their horses. So much George would have to do because banks are fussy creatures, and the one holding the mortgage would wish to know the extent of its bereavement. It was just too bad for the bank.

Philosophic George rustled a tin can for boiling water for coffee, a frying pan without a handle for potatoes—there was ample of each left—and then looked in the woodbox. It was empty. Lazy scoundrels, those Stours. George went out to the woodpile. But there was no wood cut and in common with all lazy households the vicinity of the wood-pile was thoroughly gleaned of chips. Remained the axe. The helve was sticking up from between two big mesquite roots. George took hold of the helve and heeled one of the roots aside preparatory to chopping off an end. The blade of the axe came into view. He stood transfixed. The blade was dark red with dried blood.

George lost his appetite and his philosophy and got busy.

Within five minutes he located Lafe Merseymere under the wood-pile. George identified him primarily by his clothing. The coat that had bulged behind Lafe's cantle the previous day now was wrapped snugly around Lafe's head. It was pretty damp. With Lafe were his saddle, his bridle, his saddle blankets, and all that was externally his except his hat. Of a package that might have contained a payroll there was no sign.

WITH careful fingers George removed the damp coat enveloping Lafe's head, and promptly wished he hadn't had to. He rewrapped the coat and went to the watering trough for a drink.

Then he untied Chinkapin and, the horse

having cooled, let him drink his fill before he stripped off saddle and bridle and turned him into the night-trap to roll and graze until such time as he had finished what he had to do here. The discovery of the murder had considerably altered George's plans. Until he discovered evidence to the contrary he would have to assume that one of the Stours was a murderer and the other one accessory after the fact. Which assumption involved a hard ride to the Border, with a one-man invasion of Old Mexico to follow. The invasion would be strictly unofficial. For Papa Porfirio, the bullet-headed soldier with the mole on his chin, who ruled in Mexico City, looked stiffly askance at any traipsing within his borders of American sheriffs, their deputies and posses; and Papa's *rurales*, in stiff looks, were no whit behind Papa. In fact they endeavored to keep a look or two ahead of him. It was healthier.

Consequently George Tyne, the first deputy, would stop short at the line, and Jorge Tenorio, a Mexican puncher, would cross it and proceed to follow the trail. George's hair was black, and he spoke Mexican Spanish like a native. He would not be able to bring back the horses, of course, but he hoped to play even-steven for the murder.

By five o'clock George had completed a most careful search and examination both of Lafe's clothing and the premises. He had found nothing to controvert the assumption as to the Stours' blood guilt. Nowhere in the vicinity had he discovered more than four sets of boot-tracks—his own, a set to which he had been able to fit Lafe Merseymere's boot-soles, and two other sets made by boots with run-over heels—he'd noticed the previous day that the boots of both Stours had badly run-over heels. These latter two sets corresponded in every particular with other footprints, some days and some weeks old, in and around the corrals and at the watering-trough.

His own footprints were the only ones at the woodpile. Whatever tracks had been made during the process of concealing the body and possessions of Lafe were padded out by scurrying hoofs. He had not even been able to fix the place where Lafe had been killed.

The absence of Lafe's hat appeared to indicate that it had been taken to replace another. Both of the Stours' hats were dilapidated, George recalled. Since there was no water between Red Canyon and the Rocking D ranch near the Border, it followed that, if the horses had been run off to Mexico, a halt at the Rocking D troughs would have been imperative. George had every hope of picking up a definite clue at the Rocking D. That he had not found the hat that presumably had been replaced by Lafe's, was only to be expected. A killer may leave clues, but he certainly does not leave visiting cards.

IV

GEORGE led the saddled blue roan to the trough for a drink before going up into the pasture in quest of a possible overlooked horse. When George had had his own he took down the canteen he'd hung on the horn before starting across the Soledad. As he unscrewed the cap, it came to him with a jerk what was missing from the water pen. The two played-out canteens that had hung from the top rail on which Tulare had been sitting were gone from that place. They should have hung there still because who, contemplating flight, would burden themselves with useless articles?

Soberly George filled his canteen and hung it on the horn. Then he mounted and swung out of the water pen, across the flat and into the horse-pasture. The gate he was careful to close behind him. There wasn't a horse in sight, but if any had been left behind the likeliest place to search was the vicinity of the waters at the upper end.

Near the middle of the pasture was a notch between the ends of twin rocky ridges running east and west. Each ridge was possibly a quarter-mile in length. These ridges afforded foothold for a thick growth of greasewood and formed, in consequence of both rock and brush, natural barriers. Horses driven toward the ridges would naturally head into the notch. Hundreds of diverging hoofmarks on the north or Red Canyon side of the notch showed that many horses had poured through it and fanned out immediately on emergence, only to be bunched again and driven toward the gate. Nor had the bunching been easy. The riders—two in number and riding unshod horses—had had to ride.

From a horseman's viewpoint, George could not understand why the riders had choused the animals through the bottleneck of the notch, when they must have known that, once through, they'd spread all over the place. It would have been much simpler and easier to have swung them in one bunch either east or west of the ridges, thus keeping them together all the way to the gate. Had this course been followed the work would have been considerably lessened and time saved. Yet the riders had wasted time. George pressed on thoughtfully through the notch. No grass grew in the bottom of it. There was bare and dusty ground, cut and trampled and packed by the hundreds of hoofs that had passed over it.

Beyond the two ridges was a long, broad flat, scored by hoofmarks all tending toward the notch. It was becoming clear to George that not one bunch of horses but several bunches had been herded into the notch from as many different directions. This made the error of the riders more glaring. Even had they been guilty of bad judgment for once, the spreading after passage of the first bunch should have taught them wisdom. But apparently not. They had continued to haze bunch after bunch through the notch, thus continuing to waste time.

Which was odd. Taken in conjunction with the other solecism, that of the played-out canteens, it was odd to a superlative degree—provided the same men were responsible for both solecisms.

After visiting in turn the three waters and finding not a horse at any of them, George turned back to the gate. Forty miles to the Border. But Chinkapin could manage it at a pinch. He'd have to.

V

PLANT both heels on the ground and admire that good-lookin' saddle," Bill Deeside, the lean ranchman, bawled cheerily from the kitchen doorway in response to the hail of the first deputy. "You're just in time for a late breakfast. We're loafers today."

"What good wind blows you here, George?" Counsellor Tom Deeside, the brother of Bill, called over his relative's shoulder before George could reply.

"Business," replied George, his voice thick with thirst, for he had given all the water in his canteen to worn-out Chinkapin. "See where a horse-band stopped here to water yesterday."

"Why, yes," said Bill. "Early yesterday morning the Stours watered a big jag of horses here on their way across into Mexico."

"Tulare and Sam Stour, huh? Either of 'em wearing a good, almost new gray hat?"

"Tulare was."

"That settles it." Stiffly and heavily George dismounted. "They're wanted for murder and robbery."

"Huh? What! You're joking!" Thus the counsellor, properly horrified.

"No joke. Facts. Lafe Merseymere's dead and the mine payroll's gone."

VI

THEY take Lafe's horse?" asked the counsellor.

"Guess so," replied George, spooning out a second helping of beans. "I found his four shoes where they'd been chucked over the fence into a corral. All circumstantial evidence, but that good gray hat Tulare was wearing seems to clinch it."

"You know, George," said the counsellor, "I wondered if it wasn't diversion of assets. I knew of the mortgage, and it occurred to me they might have been moved to stumble from the straight and narrow. But of course not knowing the rest, you understand—" he broke off to utter commiserating clucks.

"Murder didn't occur to us," chipped in Bill. "They acted natural, didn't seem worried or excited a-tall. Like I told you, they said they had a chance to sell their ponies down in Sonora and were in a hurry to get there. Why, just to show you, they left half a dozen played-out ones here. Said they'd pick 'em up on their way back. On their way back!" He laughed harshly. "Fooled us plenty. Well, I'll keep the half-dozen on the bank's call. Oh, yeah, and several more drifted back here during the day. I put 'em in the pasture with the others."

"Yeah," said dull-eyed George, plying a weary fork. "I'm goin' across after I get a little sleep. They've got a long start, but they'll have to stop sometime. I'm leaving my star here, and I'll need a fresh horse and a rifle."

"Sure, anything I've got and can do," said the accommodating Bill. "Speaking for myself, I'll go with you."

"Me too," chimed in the counsellor. "I liked Lafe Merseymere."

George shook his head. "Nope. Go alone, I guess. Job like this, one man won't attract so much attention as three. There are *rurales* over yonder. You can help out by sending word to Yarrow and Soledad. Your punchers—"

"Both of 'em are over west hunting



strays," said Bill. "They won't be back for another week. But Tom and I'll go for you. Glad to."

"You bet," said the counsellor heartily. "Humph, those Stours must have gone witless to kick the bridge over complete like that. Any more coffee in the pot, Bill? Thanks." He spaded sugar into his refilled cup and stirred thoughtfully. "Ol' Lafe Merseymere. I can hardly believe it yet. A good fellow if there ever was one. Always ready to help out when folks were in *borrasca*. A right popular man, Lafe. His death is a distinct loss to the community."

"That's life," contributed Bill, with frontier philosophy. "Here today and gone tomorrow. Bed, George?"

George completed his yawn. "Not yet. Got to make out my report for you to take to Soledad, Bill, that is if you're the one going there."

"Sure, I'll go to Soledad. Yarrow is Tom's home town."

"Fair enough." The first deputy flapped open a notebook and licked the business end of a stubby pencil. "Tulare and Sam Stour," he continued in a mutter, scribbling rapidly. "Father and son, aged forty-five and twenty-two respectively. Full beard, and needed a shave, *respectively*, or had Sam shaved, either of you notice? You saw 'em a good thirty-six hours after I did."

"Sam needed a shave all right," said Bill.

George set it down, an earnest tongue distending his left cheek. "Other distinguishing marks—let that go. Oh, Tulare was wearing a good gray hat. Lessee now—blankets and—uh—Winchesters on their saddles—in scabbards or tied on?"

"Scabbards," replied the counsellor. "Near side."

"Now—uh—now—anything else on their saddles besides the blankets—slickers for instance?"

"No, neither of 'em had a slicker," said Bill.

"They had canteens though," supplied

the counsellor. "I recall the canteens especially, because they had a Lazy S in red paint on each one, and they filled 'em at the trough."

VII

THAT certainly went off nicely," said Bill Deeside, riding north with his brother.

The counsellor smiled. "Our perennial luck—in spite of the unexpected. I didn't expect that the body would be found immediately. Dear, oh dear, suppose George had been a day earlier. One shudders." The jolly counsellor laughed merrily. "As everything turns out, it's just as well. I can cut short my visit to you and return to my lucrative practice at Yarrow. I must get in touch with Lafe's executor. The estate will be a fat plum for an attorney."

"Well, by Gawd!" Bill exclaimed in some admiration.

"I rarely overlook any bets," said the counsellor modestly. "Can't afford to."

"You overlooked one when you picked Lafe Merseymere for a partner."

"Not at all. I knew he was safe only up to a point. Once that point was passed—so long, Lafe. Let this be a lesson to you, Bill—if you're scared, don't show it. Even the devil hates a coward. Lafe would be alive today if he'd been the pure quill—and a better judge of character. My character, at any rate. I've no sympathy for him whatever. Why, he knew that the success of this latest *coup* depended on the coldest kind of nerve, knew that he'd lost the little he had, knew that I knew he'd lost it, and then expected me to trust him to see it through. The man must have been plain simple."

"He was—all those things. Still, the more I think of it, the more I wonder if we were entirely wise in leaving him to be found."

"Oh, Lord—harping on that again!" The counsellor stared keenly at his

brother. "Not beginning to lose *your* nerve, are you?"

"You know me!" snarled Bill. "I'll gallop where you're afraid to walk. I'm just wondering whether——"

"Stop wondering. Man, I tell you we don't *want* a mystery. We want an open and shut affair with an obvious body, an obvious robbery, and an obvious decamping on the part of those responsible. We have all those things—complete. Now don't say we didn't push those horses far enough south and that George will run into 'em. I know he will. I expect him to. He'll think the Stours saw him coming and lit out, and oh dear, oh dear, won't he ride himself bowlegged trying to cut sign in that rocky country." He chuckled richly. "And to think I carried the payroll out of the house right under his snoring nose."

BILL glanced at the bulging coat tied behind the counsellor's saddle. "We'll divide it soon as I can meet you in Yar-row."

"We'll do nothing of the sort," denied the counsellor. "We won't even open the package. We'll keep her as is for a month or two—that is, I will. I know you, William. When you have money, you spend it, and your half of Lafe's roll is burning your pocket right now. So we'll wait until you sell a bunch of steers, when there'll be an excuse for your blowing yourself. Then we'll declare our dividend. By the way, I think you'd better start northwest for Soledad right now. If it should transpire that we'd ridden together all the way to the wagon road, you might be taxed with lack of zeal, and that would never do. My regards to our sheriff, *amigo*. *Vaya con Dios*."

The sheriff was suitably shocked at the news brought by Bill Deeside, and wouldn't hear of Bill's going to the hotel.

"After that long ride you deserve the best in the house," said the sheriff warmly. "The second deputy's off just now, and you can have his room in the jail. Jailer's

a good cook, and he'll look after you until it's time for you to go across for the inquest. That'll be in a day or two, I guess. Huh? Oh, yes, you and Tom will have to testify as to seeing the Stours and all. George's report is only hearsay, you know. Come along, you look all played out."

VIII

SHERIFF tells me their trail petered out, George," called the counsellor sympathetically from where he sat on his heels beside his brother Bill outside the Stour adobe.

"It did," replied the first deputy, halting before the pair. "How"—he nodded toward the kitchen's open door—"is the inquest coming?"

"Took a recess for a few minutes after we testified," replied Bill, who was playing one-handed mumblety-peg with a pocket-knife.

"Waiting for me, I guess. There's Slim now. Hey, Coroner, when you want me?"

"Not just yet." Followed by the sheriff, Coroner Slim Fay walked toward the trio. "But I'm telling you, George, next time you move a body without permission you're due for trouble."

"Yeah?" Tolerantly George watched the coroner squat beside Bill. "Have you noticed the weather outdoors lately? Sure I put him in the storeroom. Why not?"

"You're too fussy-feathered, Slim," chimed in the sheriff, easing down at the counsellor's elbow.

"That's Slim," sighed the counsellor. "You heard him making us testify to every last stitch the Stours had on. Hells bells, what on earth does it really matter whether there was a red Lazy S on their canteens or not? What I hear from George, they didn't kill Lafe with any canteen, Slimolcum."

"Law's law," said the coroner succinctly. "Lemme try my hand with that knife, Bill. I used to be a dabster at mumblety-peg."

"Yeah," continued George, his calm eye dwelling on the counsellor and his brother, "law sure is law, and that's what makes plenty work for the sheriff's office. It has been busy. Up in the horse pasture. Lot of horse tracks I couldn't reason out at first. Several bunches of horses, one after another, had been choused through a notch between two ridges when it would have been a lot easier to drive all together around either end. Don't move, Bill."

Bill stared fascinated into the muzzle of the short-barreled forty-four that had miraculously appeared from the neighborhood of George's waistband. "All set, Coroner. Sheriff's got Tom's gun."

"Thanks, George," said the coroner gratefully, "it was a leetle on the wrong side for me to snatch. You set steady, Bill. If George misses you, I won't."

"This is plain idiocy," announced the counsellor, coldly furious. "What are you trying to do, you fellows?"

"We've done it," said George. "You see, Tom, those canteens you and Bill swore the Stours filled at Bill's trough, couldn't be filled. Big holes in the bottoms. You didn't notice that when you took 'em off the water-pen fence. So after you two left I got me a couple of horses and rode 'em turn-about to Soledad and got there ahead of Bill."

"I expect you must have got pretty tired," remarked Bill with unexpected aplomb. "Too bad it was all for nothing."

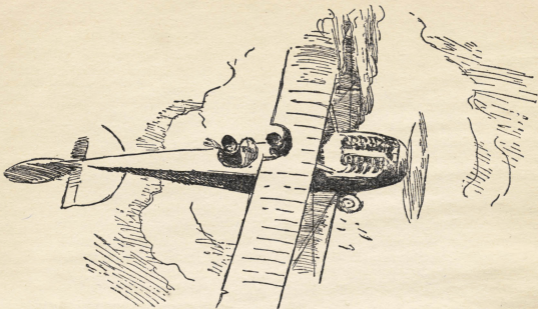
"Since you choose to become personal and call our words into question, George,"

sneered the counsellor, "I fear I must ask you to produce those canteens."

"Your lying about those canteens," George continued with phlegm, "cleared the Stours and showed me there could be only one reason for all those horses being hazed through the notch—to hide something, the way the emigrants used to do when they came across the plains in forty-nine and anybody died. They'd bury 'em in the trail and then drive their bull-wagons over the grave, so the Indians couldn't locate it and dig in. Boys, the sheriff and I and four good men dug that notch from end to end, and sure enough there were the two Stours and their hats and their saddles and blankets and Winchesteres and the grub and the canteens, and—those canteens can't be filled."

I ONLY got in an hour ago, George," said the general manager of the Mines of Yarrow. "I've been away for a few days. Yes, the assistant super told me the news. Too bad." Nonchalantly the G.M. began to fill a black cutty. "And the Deesides aren't saying anything, huh? Don't blame 'em." The G.M.'s smile was grim. "You see, George, after those other two holdups I became a little suspicious that Lafe was in cahoots with the road-agents—no, I didn't suspect anyone else in particular—so I fixed it up with the bank in the city to send up a package of newspaper for Lafe to lug to Soledad. The paymaster brought the real payroll across from Severn same as usual."





The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

The Golden Getaway

A CENTRAL AMERICAN background of ancient civilization, of modern industry and archeology, of poison snakes and iron hard Indians, of burro trains and airplanes, of gold and chewing gum, is the one *George Allan England* has chosen for "*The Golden Getaway*" which leads off this issue of **SHORT STORIES**. This fertile and little exploited field for romantic and exciting fiction was once the seat of one of the world's most advanced and truly civilized peoples, but now little more than a vast and tangled jungle. About the time that Christ was spreading his doctrine of the brotherhood of man, and our ancestors were running about northern Europe and the British Isles in a semi-barbaric state, the Mayans for a thousand years had been keeping a nightly record of the movement of the stars. They had developed an architecture stately in proportion and rich in detail that makes present day construction look like the crude carpentry of a child.

Then came the Spaniards, who burned their books, enslaved their people, and robbed their cities which they left to the hungry tentacles of the jungle. To this

day, however, the Maya Indians are an artistic, scrupulously clean, industrious and self-respecting people.

Now the long fingers of commerce have probed into this wilderness. Fruit plantations mingle with the old Spanish haciendas; tourists and seekers of easy divorces visit the coastal towns; and, of all unromantic things, the gargantuan chewing gum industry depends on this country for its existence. Thousands of natives employed by the big companies tap millions of trees in jungles covering millions of acres to supply America yearly with \$114,000,000 worth of jaw exercise. These *chicleros* play their part in Mr. England's exciting story, so another export—adventure—has been added to the list of the jungle empires of the south.

Butterflies That Bite

IN TALKING of the curse of insects which infest the tropics—as George Allan England did at some length in "*The Golden Getaway*"—there seems to be something after all which his hero and heroine were spared.

Long known as the most terrible jungle in the world, the wilds of northeastern

Paraguay have disclosed new wonders as a result of the explorations of Dr. Donald Wees. In a letter brought out by native runner, Dr. Wees told of living on yellow worms and braised alligator and of fighting swarms of insects that apparently have something like human intelligence. They came upon spiderwebs that trap birds and small animals; one of these webs spun across the faint trail makes it almost impassable. Slashing his way through miles of living forest that held every form of animal life, Dr. Wees was trying to reach the headwaters of the Paraná. His men struck out into the jungle with a bag of rice, a can of yerba mate, and eighteen pounds of flour, hoping to shoot enough game to add variety to this fare. According to late reports, the whole expedition agreed that their most fearful experiences had been with the biting butterflies. These voracious insects bite somewhat as a large horsefly does. Quite often they draw blood from the traveler who has neglected to coat his exposed skin with a pungent salve.

His Own Country

THOUGH "*The Cattle King of Little Egypt*" is Raymond A. Berry's first contribution to *SHORT STORIES*, he is a well-known writer of Western fiction. Raymond A. Berry is of the cattle country. His home is somewhere up around Jackson's Hole in Wyoming, and it would be pretty hard to get closer to the heart of the West than that. This writer makes it a practise to weave real and vital issues of the present day rangelands into his stories, and that this policy is a good one is assured by the enthusiastic reader response which his work receives.

Mr. Berry says, "Of late I have been trying more and more to build my stories around real problems and real men, and with this in view I have for a long time been gathering material for a range story dealing with the exploiting of the public domain. This has been done both by stockmen, who have deliberately over-

grazed the free range in order to keep out rivals, and by mining companies who have patented large areas of non-mineral land so that they could control and sell the grazing privileges.

"In some sections there are as high as forty per cent more sheep than there were ten years ago, while overstocked watersheds are rapidly denuded of vegetation. And when the vegetation goes the soil soon follows, so that much of the land can never be reclaimed.

"The whole matter of the public domain and what is to become of it is looming very large in the minds of Westerners at present, and the question is beginning to take shape as one of our major national problems."

Snow and Sand Off Shore

NEW LYONS FOR OLD" brings a new contributor to *SHORT STORIES*. Berton E. Cook has bunked for'ard on eight ships along the Atlantic coast. Bumped against it once. Says he ruined good grub in a coastwise 2-sticker's galley in a brief emergency when the REAL steward quit. Also he has tallied spruce a hundred feet high in a timber cruising outfit. He senses a ship as something almost human. The poor, over-worked *Pendeltona* in his "*New Lyons for Old*" seems indeed to suffer along with her distraught master in the snowstorm off Cape Cod. And young Garvey Lyons—well, judge him for yourself, then you'll be telling us.

"I went straight to Nauset and the life guards for the actual behavior of unlucky tramps caught on that Half Mile Bar," he declares.

"Perhaps a bit of truth and fact have woven themselves into this tale. Wasn't it last winter that a stricken collier did the unprecedented stunt of riding a gale off that coast and beyond by roving around in an 8-mile circle? She, too, had an owner's son aboard. As for other characters in the story, there was one rainy night when we

missed Portland Lightship and ran miles on up the Maine coast . . . and another furious day and night in a raging tumult off the Jersey coast—oh yes, there are real people in 'New Lyons for Old.'"

Berton E. Cook plans to souce his web feet in brine again this summer if he has to hop a hooker running in the downeast granite trade to do it—and swing the slack out of peak halyards along with the rest of the grunters!

Wildcrafter Extraordinary

RAYMOND S. SPEARS, author of "No Trespass Trapping," was born in Bellevue, Ohio, and raised in Silver Creek, Buffalo, New York City and the Adirondacks. His first nature observations were printed when he was twelve years old. His first wild life conservation work began when he was fourteen, and he is now Conservation Director of the American Trappers' Association campaigning to increase the national fur supply from less than \$40,000,000 to more than \$200,000,000—which is perfectly feasible. New York and Pennsylvania have raised their fur production by intelligent conservation well up to their quota of this amount.

Mr. Spears has worked as a reporter on some of the most famous journals in the

country and has contributed to many others. He is now conducting a department for WEST magazine called "Wilderness Wages," in which he instructs people how to make a living away from civilization. He has hiked, boated, ridden and motored over the entire country. He used to be a great hunter, but now does most of his hunting with a camera. "More sport," he says.

The Mississippi River where "No Trespass Trapping" is laid is a locale with which Mr. Spears has the greatest familiarity. He has spent much time boating, trapping, hunting and fishing throughout its ever-fascinating length. Once he even traveled down it in a rowboat.

And in the Next Issue

HOW well the Sea Gypsies of the Pacific guard their sacred dead is a tradition—and a menace. Major Charles L. Clifford has made it the thrilling central theme in his complete novel in our next issue. There is also in the story the part played by the Philippine Scouts—or one in particular—in the drama that had its beginning back in the days of power of the pirates of the Islands. The title of the story is "Pearl of Sulu."

In the next issue there will also be a story of the "Major" by L. Patrick Greene

READERS' CHOICE COUPON

"Readers' Choice" Editor, SHORT STORIES:
Garden City, N. Y.

My choice of the stories in this number is as follows:

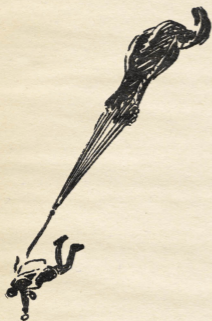
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—wherein the Major starts out for revenge. To tell what he found would be to give away the plot of one of Mr. Greene's best stories. Its title is "*Vengeance Trail*." *James B. Hendryx* will also be back in the next number with a story of those intriguing rogues of Halfaday Creek—near enough to the Alaska-Yukon border for safety for wanted men

of two countries. It is called "*Convicted*." How a particular mate of the West Indies trade got by with a lot of bluff while the captain, drunk or sober, picked up cargoes is told by *Richard Howells Watkins* in his story "*Loud Mouth*"; and there will be as well yarns by *J. Allan Dunn*, *Leighton H. Blood*, *Raymond A. Berry*, and others—all in **SHORT STORIES** for March 25th.



OUTLANDS AND AIRWAYS

Strange facts about far places and perilous air trails. Send in yours.



Fire Planes

IN THE tragic department store fire which occurred recently in Tokio, in which so many lives were lost, a new use was made of airplanes. Two of them soared over the burning building, rope ladders trailing from their fuselage. A number of people were able to grasp these sky-hooked fire escapes, and were rescued. New uses for airplanes are being found all the time, though seldom are they as spectacular as in this instance. Perhaps sometime we will see lined up in front of our fire house for Saturday inspection, in addition to the usual shining equipment, polished red autogyros.

Pathan Prowlers

THEY would give an arm to get a British service rifle, would those Pathan prowlers, natural-born thieves who live along the Indian border. In spite of safety measures instituted by the British troops who are stationed in those remote corners of their Empire, rifles are occasionally stolen from them. A common device used by regiments or detachments on the march, is to dig a hole when the night's camp is reached, place a blanket at the bottom, cover the blanket with layers of rifles, which in turn are hidden by timbers or planks. Then blankets are placed over the whole, and a shelter tent is erected.

The soldiers then sleep over the hole.

Even more ingenious, however, was the plan of a group of Pathans. An Army guard tent had been pitched near an arms storage tent. One day, an amused sentry was watching a native attempting to persuade his scrawny bullock to stay on the road. The animal, hitched to a big wheeled, rickety native cart, apparently had ideas vastly different from those of its owner, and would go everywhere but in the right direction. The driver made the air sulphurous with Hindustani invectives, not very complimentary to the ancestry of the bullock. Now this way, now that, the cart finally reached the front of the guard tent, where it promptly and efficiently fell to pieces!

The grinning sentry could no longer hold his laughter. He burst into a loud guffaw, and the guard detachment rushed outside to see what the joke was. Finally, compassion overcoming their natural amusement, the Tommies, with even the sergeant of the guard assisting, helped the perspiring driver to gather his cart together, and tie it up with nondescript pieces of rope and rag.

Eventually, he was able to go on his way again, and the soldiers commented upon the celerity with which, to their surprise, he made his departure. They watched him as he drove down the old hill road.

A few moments later, the shrill cry of a bugle rent the air! From another direction, companions-in-crime of the ancient bullock cart man had entered both the guard tent and the arms store, and had helped themselves to all of the arms and ammunition in sight, while the soldiers had been busy outside!

Planes Used by Cowboys

TOM ARNOLD, operator of the 100,000-acre XU Ranch in north-western Nebraska, has used the airplane

in performing the chores incident to rounding up cattle, and disposing of beef on the hoof, to such an extent that he figures he and his modern cowboys flew 65,000 miles last year. He owns also some 60,000 acres of grazing land in South Dakota, and he has found the airplane useful in flying supplies from there and in fence riding expeditions. He completes sales of cattle by taking prospective buyers in his airplane from Denver and Omaha to his ranch.

Another Nebraskan, Leonard Keys, who with his brother runs a large ranch, in six months has flown with his men about 32,000 miles over prairies as they swept grazing herds in their native haunts. He states that the use of the plane has saved "days and days of time."

And Cowboys of Mongolia

FROM the plane-forking cowboys of Nebraska, just turn to the rim of the Gobi Desert near Lake Baikal where lives a peculiar tribe called the Buriats. Nowhere else in Asia can there be found more skilful horsemen, for they live almost constantly in the saddle. The Buriat horse is famed for its speed and endurance, and it is small wonder that the affection between animal and master is very deep. The horse, according to their religion, should be sacrificed at the owner's grave, but the dead man's heir usually substitutes an old worn-out nag. At other times he pretends to tie up a valuable steed to starve in an open grave. However, the cord is so thin and weak that the animal soon snaps its tether and gallops off to join the herd. Sometimes, a procession of wooden horses is burned at the grave to provide a number of suitable mounts for the spirit's use in the next world. Quite often these cowboys of Mongolia shave their heads and wear a pigtail, while some train their hair in the shape of a horse's mane.

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB

HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, 90 Short Stories, Garden City, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.

Fill a mail bag for the Philippines.

Dear Secretary:

I have been getting much pleasure out of reading **SHORT STORIES** for quite a few years and wish that I could recall the first **SHORT STORIES** that I read, but I seem at a loss to do so.

I am a soldier stationed in the Philippines away out in Manila Bay about thirty miles from Manila, to be exact. This is my second whirl at the Islands and possibly my last.

I would like to become a member of the Ends of the Earth Club. Please enroll me and I assure you that I will answer all letters from members with the greatest of pleasure. Would like to receive enough mail to make the mail orderlies earn their money and not receive pay under false pretenses.

Sincerely,

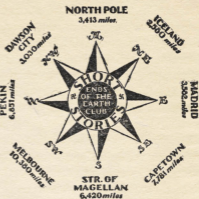
Pvt. Morton Halsey

Battery F
60th Coast Artillery,
Fort Mills,
Corregidor, Philippine Islands

This reader has two hobbies, stamp collecting and photography—and wants to learn about big-time printing.

Dear Secretary:

I wish to make application for membership to the Ends of the Earth Club and will be only too glad to correspond with other members.



My hobbies are stamp collecting and photography. If any members wish to exchange stamps through the mail I will be glad to do this as I have two collections.

Just at present I am working in a print shop and if any printers see this letter I wish they would send me the particulars of how a linotype machine works or how pictures are printed and developed.

Sincerely yours,

Edgar J. Anthor

Buckley Cottage,
Skillman, New Jersey

A lady who likes stampedes—letter stampedes included.

Dear Secretary:

I have read **SHORT STORIES** for some time and like it very much. I would like to correspond with readers who are interested in ranching, horseback riding and aviation so please send me a card which will make me a member of the Ends of the Earth Club.

About three years ago I lived in the Yukon and can tell a few interesting tales about the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. Now I'm living close to the Hand Hills where there are few sheep ranches but where wheat is mainly grown. About seven to fifteen miles out are small cattle and horse ranches.

I am very interested in stampedes and in many different kinds of sports so come on all you people and fill my mail box every day and give my arm a bit of exer-

cise as vacation days are here and I might forget how to write. I promise to answer all letters and send snapshots if requested.

Sincerely,

Anne Jusypink

Watts, Alberta,
Canada

This Hollander has tried mining in the West, now he wants to see how it's done in Africa and the Orient. Who'll join him?

Dear Secretary:

The fact that I am just now applying for membership in the Ends of the Earth Club does not mean that I have just discovered your magazine. I have been reading it now for some three odd years.

I have been to the mining regions from Nevada to Mexico.

I was born in Holland but would like very much to travel in out of the way places, especially Africa and the Orient.

Hoping to receive my membership card and also many pen pals whose letters I will answer, I am,

Sincerely,

Cornelius Ouerzyl

R. F. D. 1, Box 1296,
Montebello, California

Move over, adventurers—there's always room for another.

Dear Secretary:

Is there still room in the club for one more? I am a soldier stationed in Brooklyn and would like to know of some of the far places from other members of the club. I have made the trip back and forth across the United States and have spent time in Panama with the United States Army.

I was born in Ohio but have spent quite a bit of time traveling with the Army. I have the wanderlust but when in the service you go just where they want you. Yet I have seen some of the world.

I would like to hear especially from

people living in Montana, Wisconsin, Alberta or Manitoba. I guarantee to answer all letters promptly.

Yours truly,

Charles R. Campbell

Headquarters,
First Division,
Fort Hamilton,
Brooklyn,
New York

A toast to The Ends of the Earth Club.

Dear Secretary:

I am proud to be a member of the Ends of the Earth Club. I like especially the correspondence. I do hope that our zealous comrades will endeavor to spread our noble club's fame to the ends of the earth.

Let us anticipate this club's endurance by forming one great brotherhood of adventurers. So let's go.

Sincerely,

Thomas B. Symonette

Rock Sound
Eleuthera
Bahamas
West Indies

Who has stamps to exchange?

Dear Secretary:

I have been reading SHORT STORIES Magazine for over two years and will continue to do so.

I would like very much to join the Ends of the Earth Club. I have been in ten foreign countries and thirty of the states. I would like very much to hear from members. I will answer all letters. I am very much interested in stamp collecting. I could supply any number of Chinese stamps to members wanting them. I also have some old United States stamps.

Yours respectfully,

Marvin P. Martin

American Legation,
Peiping, China

SAVE THESE LISTS!

WITH hundreds of letters from new members coming in every day, it is obviously impossible to print all of them in the columns of the magazine. The editors do the best they can, but naturally most readers buy SHORT STORIES because of the fiction that it contains. Below are more names and addresses of Ends of the Earth Club members. Most of these members will be eager to hear from you, should you care to correspond with them, and will be glad to reply. Save these lists, if you are interested in writing to other members. Names and addresses will appear only once.

- Burt Loesch, 201 Kenneth Road, Glendale, California
 Henry J. Logan, 118 Cedar Street, Somerville, Massachusetts
- Dorothy Loring, 2644 Winnemac Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
 A. Luitjens, Massena Hotel, Bakersfield, California
 George F. McCabe, U. S. Veterans Hospital, Castle Point, New York
 William H. McCormick, Fitzsimons, Colorado
 Charles McElroy, c/o J. Dayton, 629 N. Main Street, Ada, Ohio
 William McElmee, 2156 N. 5th Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Glenn McGinnis, Box 427, Wapato, Washington
 John McGovern, 626 Bowers Street, Iowa City, Iowa
 Ian J. McKechnie, Pender Harbor, British Columbia, Canada
- Blair A. McKinnon, Noranda, Province of Quebec, Canada
 Rita McLauchlan, 28 Broughty Ferry Road, Dundee, Scotland
 John B. MacFarlane, c/o Washington House, P. O. Box 1034, Liberty, New York
 Henry Magoolaghan, "B" Company, 2nd Battalion, Royal Irish Fusiliers, Windmill Hill, Gibraltar
 Paul J. Mahay, Co. B, 33rd Infantry, Fort Clayton, Canal Zone
- J. H. Malone, Marine Detachment, U. S. S. Sacramento, c/o Postmaster, Seattle, Washington
 Harold Mann, 89 Audubon Road, Boston, Massachusetts
 Domingo Martinez, Jr., 4 Villa los Pinos Street, Santurce, Puerto Rico
- F. E. Martish, General Delivery, Huron, Ohio
 F. A. Mason, Deer Park Avenue, Babylon, Long Island
 C. M. Matson, Oreville Fire Department, Oreville, California
- I. Meek, Company B, 6th Infantry, Jefferson Barracks, Missouri
 C. W. Melville, Jr., 1200 Masonic Avenue, San Francisco, California
 William Buddy Mendlowitz, 1624—80th Street, Brooklyn, New York
- George Menke, Govan, Washington
 Alfred Merritt, Box 52, France Field, Canal Zone
 Lawrence L. Messenger, Selfridge Field, Michigan
 J. Middler, 809 Lake Pointe Road, Grosse Point Park, Detroit, Michigan
 Edith Anne Miller, 633 Herron Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- Irving Miller, 210 Monroe Street, Syracuse, New York
 Sam Miller, 210 Monroe Street, Syracuse, New York
 Esther L. Millman, 448 Public Street, Providence, Rhode Island
- Biff Minogue, 10835 Superior Avenue, Clive, Ohio
 Pauline Bobbie Modiz, 618 Jefferson Avenue, Sheboygan, Wisconsin
- Arnold Moebins, 3043—N. Eighth Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
 W. J. Mohan, 188 Prospect Street, Williamstert, Massachusetts
- A. F. Mohler, 1808 Washington Street, Hamburg, Iowa
 Heinie Mollette, 426 W. El Segundo Boulevard, Hawthorne, California
- Richard Morgan, 435 Quincy Street, Dorchester, Massachusetts
- M. William Moroze, 45 Green Lane, R. D. 7, Trenton, New Jersey
- William Morrison, 495 Charlotte Street, Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada
 John A. Mowat, Battalion A, 13th Coast Artillery Corps, Fort Barrancas, Florida
- Wally Munro, 5648 Dunbar Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
- L. B. Murphy, Park Saint Charles, Lincoln, Quebec, Canada
- J. F. Murray, 4246 Maypole Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
 E. Murtash, 101 Linwood Street, City of London, Ontario, Canada
- Rocco Musumecche, 327 W. Main Street, New Iberia, Louisiana
- Vincent Mushmock, 222 French Street, New Iberia, Louisiana
- A. A. Narramore, 108 Dartmouth Road, Portsmouth, England
- Jim Nelson, c/o Gowen Sanatorium, Shreveport, Louisiana
 Leonard Newman, Richard Place, Rye, New York
 C. Nichols, 160 West 98th Street, New York City, New York
- Helen T. Nickerson, West Head, Cape Sable Island, Shelburne County, Nova Scotia, Canada
 Mary Nickolee, 219 South 14th Avenue, Maywood, Illinois
- L. Stanley Nobel, Cherryville, Missouri
 Alagorn Nordgson, Bountiful, Utah
 Corporal Jimmy Norman, Company M, 35th Infantry, Schofield Barracks, Territory of Hawaii
 Charles L. Norton, 38 West Street, Whitesboro, New York
 Irving Nusbaum, 1917 Eye Street, Northwest, Washington, District of Columbia
- Edward O'Gole, 2714 Warren Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois
 John O'Donnell, 2998 East Thompson Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Frederick C. Oliver, 126 West 112th Street, New York City, New York
- John Olson, Jr., Kings Park, Long Island
 Charles O'Neill, 5209 Clark Street, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
- B. G. Orem, 2206 Lynnbrook Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland
- M. L. Ort, 5545 Collins Avenue, Miami Beach, Florida
 Sally Osborne, 150 West 64th Street, New York City, New York
- Bert Oscanon, 1014 Schuyler Street, Portland, Oregon
 Cornelius Ouerzyl, R. F. D. 1, Box 1296, Montebello, California
- Miss F. I. P., 96 Rankin Avenue, Asheville, North Carolina
- Chara Lee Padgett, 1415 Fourth Avenue, Gadsden, Alabama
- George Parker, 1515 Oak Park Avenue, Berwyn, Illinois
 Robert J. Pauly, 100 Calumet Street, Depew, New York
 Don J. Payne, 2232 West 100th Street, Cleveland, Ohio
 Esther M. Peck, 14 Bradley Street, Saco, Maine
 Florence Pedersen, 2952 North Kenneth Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
- Joseph P. Pekresky, S. S. Eugene V. R. Thayer, c/o Sinclair Navigation Company, Houston, Texas
- Mrs. Mildred Penner, P. O. Box 712, Houston, Texas
 Thomas A. Pero, 16 Iowa Street, Worcester, Massachusetts
 Francine Perseful, 505 Parker Street, Little Rock, Arkansas
 Helen Peterson, 816 Michigan Avenue, St. Joseph, Michigan
- Mrs. Elsie Petrie, 622 Barton Street East, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
- Llora L. Phelps, Maybury Sanatorium, Northville, Michigan
- Albert Philbrick, 117 North Spring Street, Springfield, Ohio
- Ethel Philipporn, c/o M. S. S. Howell, Michigan
 Ernest A. Phillips, Jr., 69 Lenoxdale Avenue, Dorchester, Massachusetts
- Ruth Phillips, 213 B Avenue East, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
 W. J. Piggott, 4237 Drolet Street, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
- R. S. Pitt, "Wayside" Amersham, Bucks County, England
 Kirk Pointer, Box 552, Coquille, Oregon
- Mrs. Carolyn G. Ponder, 1708 Fairfield, Shreveport, Louisiana
- Frank Pontinen, 11708 Detroit Avenue, Suite 8, Lakewood, Ohio
- William A. Price, 435 Eighth Street, Brooklyn, New York
 T. North River, New Jersey
- John Francis Quirk, c/o White Dental, 51 Hanover Street, Manchester, New Hampshire
- Robert Quirk, 132 Maywood Street, New Bedford, Massachusetts
- James Ragsdale, Battery B, 18th Field Artillery, Fort C. H. Randall, Box 98, Billings, Montana
- Bill Reblin, 637 Washington Street, Gloucester, Massachusetts

In the next issue



VENGEANCE TRAIL

*The "Major" seeks re-
venge in a novelette by
L. Patrick Greene.*

PEARL OF SULU

*A young officer in the Philippines dares
the gods of the savage Sea Gypsies.*

A complete novel by Charles L. Clifford

Other features by

James B. Hendryx

J. Allan Dunn

R. H. Watkins, etc., etc.



SHORT STORIES for March 25th

Go to School at Home!



It's Cheaper to Get a High School Education Than to Get Along Without It

High School training is **essential to success** in any kind of work or activity. It gives you a good **general education**—prepares you to **enter college** or engineering school—forms the basis for **specialized training** in your chosen line.

In Business: Many beginning jobs require High School training, and most better-paid positions are unattainable without it.

In Industry: The specialized training necessary for advancement in engineering, building and manufacturing is based on High School training.

In the Professions: Doctors, lawyers, C. P. A.'s, etc., must have highly technical training, for which High School work is the foundation.

In Teaching: Practically all states now require teachers of any grade to have at least a High School education.

In College: All colleges require complete High School training for entrance, and base their instruction on High School work.

In Social Life: A High School education assures correct speech and gives a general knowledge of many subjects.

In Public Activities: The ability to think quickly, write correctly, and talk convincingly results from High School training.

U. S. Government statistics show that a High School graduate earns \$347 a year more than a Grade School graduate—or \$33,880 during his working life. That's why it's cheaper to get a High School education than to get along without it!

If you can't finish your High School training by resident study, we can give you equivalent training by home study in about two years. We use standard texts and guarantee college entrance.

Like the best resident colleges, our School is chartered as an educational institution, not for profit. Established 35 years. Thousands of successful graduates.

Let us show you how to get on the road to success. It will cost you nothing but a stamp. Write today.

American School

Dept. H-376, Drexel Ave. at 58th St., Chicago, Ill.

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NOW TAKE TIRE PRESSES THROUGH SIDE WALL OF TIRE

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GOODRICH-U.S. FIRESTONE FISK AND OTHER TIRES.

LOWEST Prices on Earth!

Thousands of satisfied tire users all over the U. S. A. will vouch for the **LONG, HARD SERVICE**, under severest road conditions of our standard grade of tires recommended by the **ORIGINAL SECRET YORK PROCESS**. To introduce this genuine tire value to you, this tire responsible economy offers. **ABSOLUTELY FISK'S** a modern tire gauge with each 2 tires ordered—now take pressure through side wall of tire in a few—no dirt, **OUT OF YUKON** IN BUSINESS makes it possible to offer tires at **LOWEST PRICES** in history. Guaranteed to give 12 months' service.

Don't Delay—Order Today

Size	Tires	Tubes	Size	Tires	Tubes
30x2	\$1.00	\$0.75	38x4	\$2.00	\$1.50
30x2 1/2	1.20	0.90	38x4 1/2	2.15	1.60
30x3	1.40	1.10	38x5	2.35	1.80
30x3 1/2	1.60	1.25	38x5 1/2	2.50	1.90
30x4	1.75	1.35	38x6	2.60	2.00
30x4 1/2	1.90	1.50	38x6 1/2	2.75	2.10
30x5	2.05	1.60	38x7	2.85	2.20
30x5 1/2	2.20	1.70	38x7 1/2	2.95	2.30
30x6	2.35	1.80	38x8	3.05	2.40
30x6 1/2	2.50	1.90	38x8 1/2	3.15	2.50
30x7	2.65	2.00	38x9	3.25	2.60
30x7 1/2	2.80	2.10	38x9 1/2	3.35	2.70
30x8	2.95	2.20	38x10	3.45	2.80
30x8 1/2	3.10	2.30	38x10 1/2	3.55	2.90
30x9	3.25	2.40	38x11	3.65	3.00
30x9 1/2	3.40	2.50	38x11 1/2	3.75	3.10
30x10	3.55	2.60	38x12	3.85	3.20

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25	22.50
30	27.50

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OF THE HIGH-GRADE BUSINESS MAN**

E. Lawson, of Tennessee, clears \$108 profit his first 3 days in this business. He tops off these earnings with \$113 profit on a single deal a few days later. J. C. May, Conn., cleared \$262.55 the first nine days he worked. J. E. Loomis, Oregon, earns \$245 his first 9 days. A. W. Farnsworth, Utah, nets \$64.16 his first day, a Saturday. S. Clair, New York, writes he is clearing as high as \$70 a day. W. F. Main, Iowa, cleans up \$291.50 in 9 days. B. Y. Becton, Kansas, starts out with \$530.53 net for 46 days' work! These men are beginners. How could they enter a field totally new to them and earn such remarkable sums in these desperate times? Read the answer in this announcement. Read about a new business that does away with the need for high pressure selling. A rich field that is creating new money-making frontiers for wide-awake men. Those who enter now will pioneer—to them will go the choicest opportunities.

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TREMENDOUS CASH SAVINGS IN OPERATING COSTS FOR THOUSANDS
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\$4,707 SAVINGS

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In Two Months**

Sanders Ridgeway of Kansas invests \$88.60 and saves \$4,707.00 between April 5th and June 23rd! Bower Lumber and Feed Co., West Virginia, invests \$15, report savings well over \$1,000.00! Fox Ice and Coal Co., Wisconsin, saves \$3,564.00! Baltimore Sporting Goods Store invests \$45, saves \$1,690! Safety Auto Lock Corporation, New York, invests \$15, saves \$486.45! With these and scores of similar results

to display, our representatives interest every business man, from the very smallest to the very largest. No one can dispute the proof in the photo-copies, of actual letters which our men show.

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Here is a business offering an invention so successful that we make it sell itself. Our representatives simply tell what they offer, show proof of success in every line of business and every section of the country. Then install the specialty without a dollar down. It starts working at once, producing a cash saving that can be counted just like the cash register money. The customer sees with his own eyes a big, immediate profit on his proposed investment. Usually he has the investment, and his profit besides, before the representative returns. The representative calls bank, collects his money. **OUT OF EVERY \$75 BUSINESS THE REPRESENTATIVE DOES, NEARLY \$60 IS HIS OWN PROFIT! THE SMALLEST HE MAKES IS \$5 ON A \$7.50 INSTALLATION!** Our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They are getting the attention of the largest concerns in the country, and selling to the smaller businesses by the thousands. You can get exclusive rights. Business is GOOD, in this line, in small towns or big cities alike! It's on the boom now. Get in while the business is young!

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My up-to-date home study Course gives you the ground work you need to get and keep a real job in this fascinating, fast growing industry. Scores of my graduates, who didn't know a thing about Aviation a few months ago, are holding down fine jobs right now—in the air and on the ground. *Open forty different types of jobs to choose from*, once you have this necessary training. Get the facts about my practical training, free Employment Service, and Money-Back Agreement NOW!

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You don't need to give up your present job—don't need to leave home, to get your training in Aviation. I've made it easy for you. I've put my own fifteen years of experience—backed by over 400,000 miles of flying—five years of instructing in the Navy—all into my thorough, quickly mastered home study Course.

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★ **MYSTERY** ★



**NOVELS
MAGAZINE**

WINTER NUMBER
1933

THE BURMA RUBY

J. S.
FLETCHER

*A novel of the mysterious death
of the town's Mayor.*

MURDER ON "B" DECK

VINCENT
STARRETT

*A novel of intrigue and sus-
pense on the broad Atlantic.*

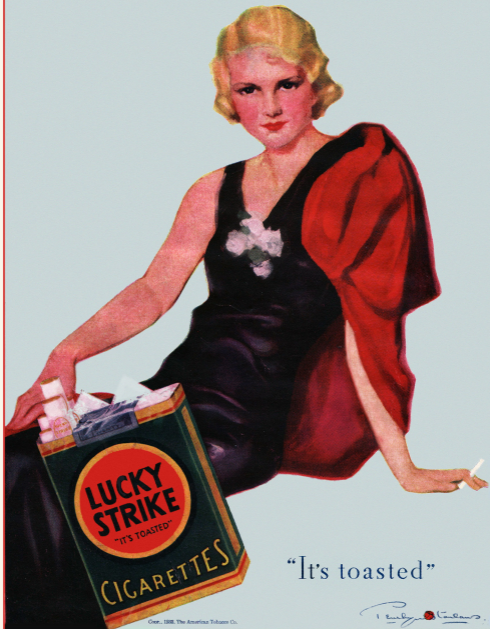
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