

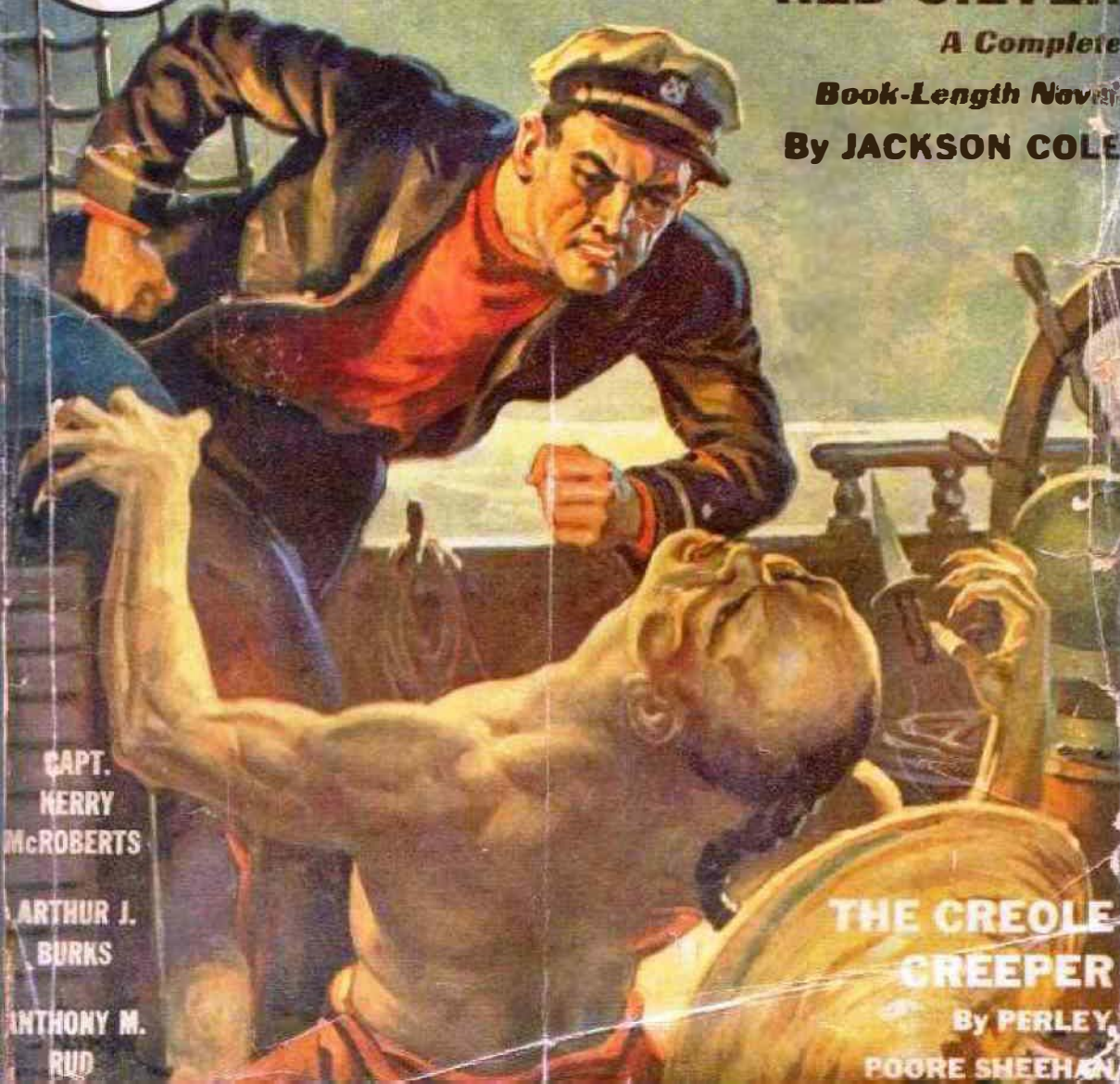
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THRILLING ADVENTURES

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FEATURING
RED SILVER
*A Complete
Book-Length Novel*
By **JACKSON COLE**



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ARTHUR J. BURKS

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THE CREOLE CREEPER
By **PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN**

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

Print address and be sure of reply

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Student of
GEORGE F. JOWETT
from Drawing by
FRYOR



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7 inches to my chest
4 inches to my biceps
5 inches to my neck
... by using the
Jowett System of
Physical Training"

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Larry Campbell came to George Jowett for help when he was 20 years old and weighed only 110 pounds—a weak, underdeveloped stripling. TODAY he is a perfect physical specimen—a strong man who has won many strength competitions.

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3 INCHES TO YOUR CHEST **2 INCHES TO YOUR BICEPS**

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Drawing of
GEORGE F. JOWETT
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THRILLING ADVENTURES

Vol. VII, No. 1

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

September, 1933

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Where Readers, Writers and the Editor Meet

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I'LL PAY \$250.00

Just for the winning answer to this question

I am going to give \$3,500.00 to some deserving man or woman who answers my announcements. You may be the one to get it! But, before I give it to anyone I would like to know that the money will be used wisely. What will you do with this fortune if I give it to you? Just answer this question—tell me in a sentence of 20 words or less what you would do with the \$3,500.00—nothing more to do toward the \$250.00 cash prize! Sounds easy? It is easy! Nothing "fancy" is needed—just tell me in plain words what you would do with the \$3,500.00.

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If you give me the \$3,500.00 prize, I will use it as follows:
(Write your answer plainly in here, in 20 words or less)

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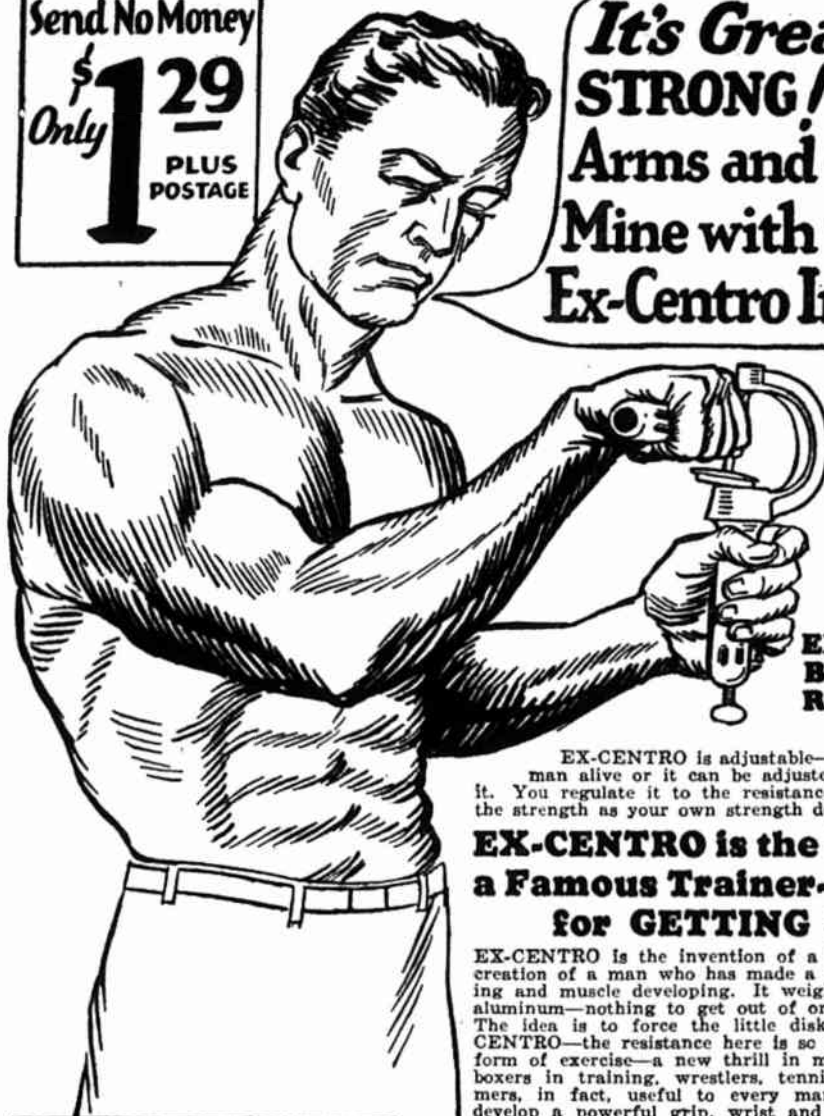
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TOWN..... STATE.....

Send No Money

Only \$1.29 PLUS POSTAGE

It's Great to be STRONG! Develop Arms and Grip like Mine with this New Ex-Centro Invention



EX-CENTRO weighs only One Pound

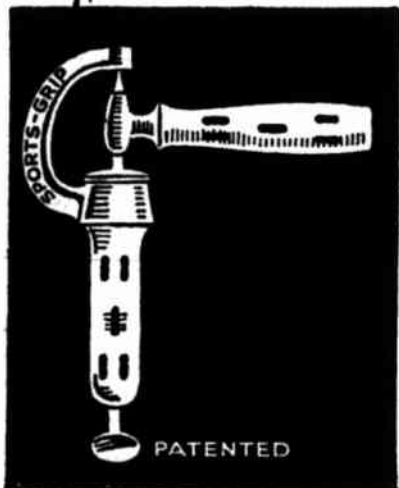
EX-CENTRO is a herculean one pound giant. You will be amazed at the work out and the fight EX-CENTRO gives you and how quickly it develops a powerful grip, wrist and arm.

EX-CENTRO Can Be Adjusted To Resist Strongest Man Alive

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EX-CENTRO is the invention of a famous trainer—it is the creation of a man who has made a life's study of body building and muscle developing. It weighs but a pound—made of aluminum—nothing to get out of order. Will last a lifetime. The idea is to force the little disk into the center of EX-CENTRO—the resistance here is so great that you get a new form of exercise—a new thrill in muscle building. Great for boxers in training, wrestlers, tennis players, golfers, swimmers, in fact, useful to every man or woman wanting to develop a powerful grip, wrist and forearm. While you are developing these muscles, you also develop the chest and shoulder muscles, because every part of the upper body is brought into play while you are trying to conquer EX-CENTRO. It's amusing and entertaining. You will get a big kick out of trying to lick it—your friends will gather around and everyone will want to try it. Be the first to enjoy the great benefits of this new marvelous muscle building invention.



Send No Money

EX-CENTRO is sold with an absolute guarantee of satisfaction or money back. You take no risk whatsoever. All you do is send the coupon—no money now. We ship by return mail. You deposit \$1.29, plus postage, with postman on arrival. Clip and mail coupon today—NOW!

EX-CENTRO, Inc. Dept. 408 120 W. 42 St., N. Y.

EX-CENTRO, Inc., Dept. 408 120 West 42 St., New York, N. Y.

Send 1 EX-CENTRO, with full instructions, by return mail. I will pay postman \$1.29, plus postage on arrival. It is understood if I am not fully satisfied I may return after 5 days trial and you will refund my \$1.29.

Enclosed find post office money order for \$1.29. You are to send Ex-Centro by return prepaid mail. I save the postage.

Name.....

Street.....

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

NOTE: If you live outside of the U. S. A. send \$1.50 with order.

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FOR
AS
LOW
AS

75 CENTS

Repairs Worn Spots for a Few Pennies

**Pays AGENTS
UP TO \$6 AN HOUR**



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Miles
Extra
Wear
GUARANTEED**

**Spreads on Like
Butter on Bread!
Dries Overnight.
Wears Like Part of
the Tire Itself.
Anyone Can Apply It.**

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SPREAD-A-TREAD ends costly vulcanizing or re-treading. Saves buying new tires. Helps prevent skidding, punctures, blow-outs and accidents due to poor tires. Seals holes and cracks. Rebuilds tire from outside without taking off car or even letting out the air. Reinforces weak spots. Vulcanizes itself to the old tire so that it cannot crack or peel off. Saves delays and repairs. Protects fabric against water, grit, rot and wear. Makes driving safer. Test Spread-A-Tread at my **RISK**.

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Two Weeks**

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Name

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MAIL COUPON FOR FREE SAMPLE

Mail Coupon for **FREE** demonstration sample and special agent's exclusive territory offer. I will show you how other men are making up to \$6.00 in an hour with this amazing product that is bought eagerly by owners of motor cars and trucks. Mail coupon today.

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RED

CHAPTER I

Enemies All

A Complete Book-

By JACKSON

Author of "Valley of Giants,"

BUCK CARNEY was suddenly wide awake. For ten electric seconds, on raised elbow, he listened intently. His other hand snaked along the floor toward his ready gun.

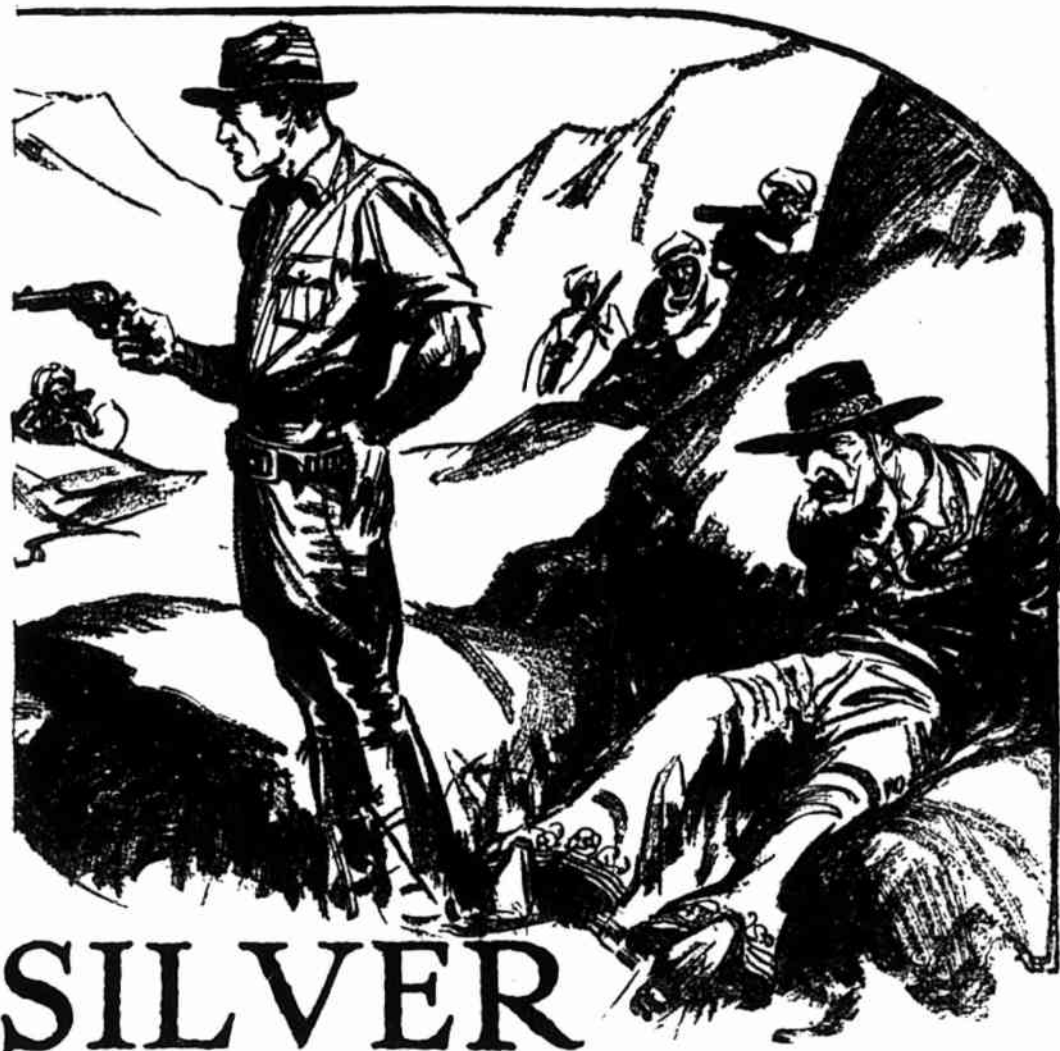
His keen eyes bored into the ebon night, piercing the shadows of the room. Body tense, he tried to catch again that whisper of sound that had awakened him.

Once again came that hint of

stealthy movement. It quivered alert every sense of the straining man who lay in the upper room of the queer inn in the most out-of-the-way spot in all Southern Spain—of Buck Carney to whom peril and danger were the very breath of life.

Buck Carney knew what it was to ride with Death as a stalking companion, but nowhere had he felt its

An American Mixes It With Spanish Desperadoes



SILVER

Length Novel

COLE

"Pearls of Peril," etc.

erie presence more greatly than since his foot had touched Spanish soil. Was its dread presence touching again, with chill fingers, all the hopes that had brought him across mountains and across miles of sea, with a high heart, toward treasure?

There it was again!—that whisper of a sound! A mere tremolo of movement! Ears less well-trained

to warn of danger than Carney's would have heard no sound at all.

He softly moved his blanket aside, came up on his knees to a crouch, with gun clasped grimly. The uncurtained window behind him was open to the night. Through it there came a silvery radiance that filled the room with a dim illumination. Slithering across the room, like a shadow, Carney moved out of the moon glow.

He had been sleeping on the floor beneath that window, following the admonition of a soldier of fortune's

and Raiding North African Moors in the Black Sierras

invaluable sixth sense, that warned him not to occupy the massive bed in the room. Except for hat and boots, he was fully clad.

A faint gleam of another light flickered out of the darkness to meet his eye. It came from below, through a crack in the floor. Carney dropped down, noiselessly, and brought an eye to the crack. Men were in that room below—silent, waiting, ominously black-browed men.

Carney's whisper of recognition of one of them came in a raspingly in-drawn breath. *El Lobo!*

The Wolf of the Sierra Morena again! How came he here? And why?

The dread El Lobo, mountain of human sinew, whose very name was spoken in frightened whispers! The man who had honored Buck Carney with his obviously murderous intentions ever since Buck had arrived from America a month ago! The man whose vigilance had made for Buck Carney a death threat around each street corner of Cadiz!

And as suddenly changed. For some reason, as unaccountable as his desire for Carney's death, the Wolf had shown indications of wanting Carney to live.

WHY? Did El Lobo also know of the treasure of Montecristo! Or had he decided that the American adventurer, held captive, would be worth a pretty penny. Even an American without a cent could bring heavy ransom if properly advertised.

It was evident that El Lobo had caught up with him again. Buck hadn't expected successfully to evade the Wolf for any length of time. And he hadn't—for here he—El Lobo—was now at this *Tavern of the Three Snakes* with his band of guerrillas.

Carney knew that he was looking down into the main room of the tavern—without having to recognize his one-eyed host, Don Pancho, who was silently passing around glasses of wine. All the men below were quiet—strangely silent. They must have arrived in silence, or he would have heard them sooner.

CARNEY saw El Lobo, with mountain-cat litheness, move across the floor and out of sight.

Carney's glance came back to the room and centered of a sudden on the big old cupboard against the wall. *It was swinging noiselessly open!*

From within, a shadowy face appeared—a face Buck Carney would have known anywhere in the world, in shadow or sunshine.

El Lobo!

Carney's gun came up and forward, square in the man's face. He hissed a command for silence. Thank God for his years in Mexico, and his ability to speak Spanish like a native!

Carney caught a glimpse of the cupboard that showed him an open trapdoor.

"Hands up!" his whisper rasped. "And come out of that!"

Just one second too late. El Lobo's hands came up, but at the moment of the raising of one of them a knife whirled and gleamed through the dim moonlight straight at Carney's gun wrist.

Carney's gun roared. His bullet sent El Lobo reeling to a fall. But the handle of the thrown knife—loaded with lead to balance the heavy, five inch blade—caught Carney's wrist. His pistol spun from his hand. The knife sped on and sunk itself into the soft wood of the floor.

For one blind moment, Carney was stunned with pain. But he

headed in, dodged and plunged, then he and the murderous El Lobo were locked and rolling in fierce embrace.

It was gouge and strangle while it lasted, but Buck knew what part of the room he meant to reach—or was trying to reach. His gun was lost, under the bed somewhere. But there was the knife that had whizzed by him and stuck into the floor!

In a few minutes' tense struggling, he had jerked and jolted the battle to where he could reach the weapon. With the point of the blade he plucked his antagonist under the chin.

EL LOBO let out an agonized gurgle and relaxed. And then Carney himself let out a shout, in raucous, blasphemous Spanish.

"Quick!" he howled. "You, below! El Americano jumped out of the window! Catch him! He's wounded!"

The ruse succeeded. There was an answering bellow and stampede below. The bandits were off in hot pursuit.

"Amigo," Carney gritted to El Lobo, "shall I cut your throat? Or will you do as I say?"

El Lobo nodded his answer.

"Bueno!"

Carney let him up. He felt the mesh of mystery surrounding him that he had felt ever since reaching Spain. He did not know its reason but he would let no bandit alive kill or capture him for an unknown reason.

"El Lobo," he gritted, "you know the way to Montecristo and to the Don Bartolo Valdez you have not wanted me to see?"

The man wavered for a moment, but Carney's knife was at his throat.

"Si—!"

"You'll be my guide there—if you want to live!"

The hullabaloo still roared from

below, and there was instant danger of more bandits—followers of El Lobo—coming up through the trap door.

But Carney, safe for a moment after he had stuffed El Lobo's own dirty neckerchief into his mouth as a gag, recovered his gun, and reached for his hat.

He prodded the bandit chief in the back with his gun as a signal to advance. On the double-quick they went toward the main door of the room and out into the stygian darkness.

At the foot of the steps, Carney gave one sibilant order:

"March!"

El Lobo "marched," with Carney guiding with prodding gun, straight to the stable doors. Not for one second did the American relax vigilance. He meant to shoot on sight if he was seen or interfered with.

Eyes straight ahead, Carney did not see the one witness to his getaway with the Wolf of the Morenas. From an embrasure in a window outside in the patio, Pancho, the one-eyed proprietor of the inn, looked and gloated. He gave no hand to help El Lobo. He raised no outcry.

Crooked and sidewise, he slid from his shadowed retreat as the yells of hunting men grew more muted in the distance, and made his way back into the inn. The shadows swallowed him as he muttered:

"I shall go to the Moors!"

CHAPTER II

The Bandit Guide

WHILE THE NOISE of the search reached them in echoing, yelled reverberations, Buck Carney ordered his captive to saddle and bridle two horses—his own and another. El Lobo demurred for only one second.

"You'd like to live, maybe?" Carney menaced. "You might, for a while longer, if you do as I say! But you'll have a bullet bored through you as sure as you're a foot high, if you don't lead me to the *Castillo de Montecristo* before sun-up!"

"Si!" El Lobo growled and cast one helpless look for aid into the shadows where his own men had disappeared.

A gesture from Carney ordered him onto a horse, and his eyes narrowed with hope. A bandit on a horse! What might not come—even with a man with weapons back of him! The next moment his hopes were hurled to the earth. The *Americano* was busy—busy with riata. Over the bandit's heavy shoulders, the American tossed a rope. A running noose. It tightened, held the man's arms to his sides.

"Ride!" said Buck Carney, and they were off, El Lobo in the lead, the rope that bound him held in the unrelenting hand of the man who followed him on horseback.

The reason for El Lobo's sudden renewed activities deviled Buck Carney's mind every second during the time it took him and his captive, riding steadily, to leave the *Posada de las Tres Serpientes* behind.

What if it were known he had come to Spain bent on a treasure hunt? Spain had been in existence for some centuries, and others had searched for troves. Why should he be, from the moment of his landing, a special focal point on which bandits set their gaze—and their pointed knives?

A GLEAM came to Buck Carney's eyes as he thought of Don Bartolo! The grandest pal a man ever had, though a dreamer. The Spaniard he had run across three

years ago in Sonora, Old Mexico—Don Bartolo Valdez, to give him his whole name, who had turned out to be one regular guy when it came to standing by a man when there was trouble—

And back there in Mexico, under the moon one night, sharing the same saddle for a pillow, Bart had spilled the wild yarn—Buck had not really believed that Bart was one of the Spanish *grandees* until about a month or so ago when Bart had been called back to Spain. Bart's story had sounded like a romance—all about his home back in Spain, and the mine that went all the way through the mountain under the castle—"Full of gold, a king's ransom in gleaming pearls and rubies and sapphires—" Buck could see Bart's eyes gleam as he had said that. And Bart had said:

"It's there! It's there! It's been there a thousand years—just waiting for somebody to get the clue to where the treasure chamber is—The Moors sealed it up with all that wealth when they were forced out of Spain—They never came back—"

And all Buck said was:

"Well, let me know any time Mr. Aladdin comes around and drops a lamp or a key or something—"

THAT was what a fellow would say, Buck thought. Peril-seeker, adventurer, gambler in life as he was, he could not yet quite account for the impulse that had made him drop everything and head for Spain when, something more than a month ago, a cablegram had come to him from Don Bartolo.

A cablegram exactly like Bart. Buck would have known it was from Valdez even if it had not held their code words—"Red Silver." He and Bart had agreed upon them when they had talked about the abandoned mine under the Valdez



*Carney's rock
caught El Lobo
in the chest.*

castle. The mine, Bart said, had once been noted for its production of sulphide of mercury, Red Silver. That was to be the code when, and if, Bart ever got a line on where all that treasure was.

Such a legend! But Spaniards—they always dreamed—Cortez and Balboa, and—Bartolo Valdez wasn't such a bad dreamer himself—Anyway, Buck meant to give him a whirl. He took the next steamer after he got the message:

*"Looks like hot stuff Stop
Meet me in Cadiz 13 Calle
San Stefano Stop The silver
is red—"*

The Calle San Stefano was there

all right, but no Don Bartolo. No one who knew anything about him. But there had been an El Lobo quite, quite prominent, as Buck knew after dodging knives plenty of times. Why? It didn't make sense. But it made him stubborn. Even a week of careful questioning in the neighborhood proved fruitless. No one seemed to know Senor Bartolo Valdez, or cared who he was!

Then one night—that old man on the street who had whispered:

"If you want to see certain friends, you can find them in Montecristo—"

That was all. The old man had faded into the street shadows. Buck

was nonplused, for the moment, but soon guessed why. He had already learned of El Lobo—and the interest El Lobo had in activities around this place. And this old man, surely a friend of Don Bartolo, couldn't be seen talking to anyone looking for Senor Valdez, of the treasure trove.

There was nothing left for him to do but find a place named Montecristo, and to avoid a few cutthroats in so doing. Where in time was Montecristo? No one seemed to have heard of it. A lot of blind trails had been followed before Buck Carney at last reached the country that sheltered it and—*The Tavern of the Three Snakes*.

* * *

CARNEY spoke only once or twice during the first of the ride, and then only to assure El Lobo, in unmistakable terms, that he meant what he said about shooting him if the *castillo* was not sighted by sunup.

Buck Carney did mean it. He had no illusions about the outlaw who was serving him as an involuntary guide. El Lobo would dump him if he could. He would circle around and bring him to the cutthroat inn if he dared—on the chance that one of his comrades back there would get a chance for a pot shot.

But Buck kept his eyes front and trusted to his ears to keep a lookout on the back-trail.

There was little chance of a flank attack, even if they were followed. The trail followed mostly side-hills and ridges, where any shooting would have to be done from a risky distance, especially in the dim moonlight.

The moon was still fairly high. But it was in the last quarter. And much of the trail led through the heavy shadows of a forest that had never been cut.

The riata around El Lobo, though,

was like a live nerve. Carney kept it taut in the dark places along the trail. Even there enough light strained through the branches of the trees to give him a silhouette of the huge man on the leading horse.

A half mile further on, after a stretch of hard going, Carney brought the horses to a stand for a breather on a level bit of ground. El Lobo took the opportunity for a parley.

"Senor," El Lobo said, "will your grace permit me the favor of a word?"

"Yes," said Carney, "if you make it short enough and keep your voice down."

"Senor, we meant you no ill to-night."

"I'm not interested in lies!" growled Carney.

"Senor, pardon! It is no lie. Will you hear me? It was only information we wanted—"

"By cutting my throat!"

"No, Senor! If you would only have been willing that your belongings be searched—"

"Silence!" commanded Carney.

THROUGH the mountain stillness he thought he heard the click of a horse's hoof against a stone. But even in his tenseness, his mind was asking: "What could it possibly be that he was supposed to have that El Lobo wanted?" Carney could think of nothing. But he meant to play the game through, force his way to Don Bartolo and the precious treasure.

"We're moving on!" Carney warned his bandit captive, as he flicked the horse ahead with the end of his rope.

Somebody else was out in that dark forest now! This game was getting interesting.

His thoughts were incompleated.

Suddenly the riata with which El

Lobo was noosed fell slack! In spite of all Carney's watchfulness, the bandit must have been cutting at the rope in the darkness all along, most likely with his teeth. He could reach it by lowering his head.

Before Carney could move in his one moment of astonishment, El Lobo was disappearing from his sight as the bandit dived from his horse into the brush!

Carney fired once, and shot out a curse as he knew that he had missed in the darkness. The bullet whizzed by El Lobo's shoulder as the bandit lurched to one side to escape it. Carney saw the man stumble and fall, as his gun hand once again jerked to position.

EL LOBO'S horse, freed of the weight, jumped, squealed at the sound of the pistol shot and bounded ahead. Carney's horse gave a leap to follow, but Carney checked him with one hand as he swung the muzzle of his gun down on El Lobo.

"Don't move!" snapped Carney. "I've got you this time!" El Lobo's life was worth no more to Buck Carney at that moment than a gnat's.

"Senor!" El Lobo began. He was squirming and panting.

"Shut up and lie still!" gritted Carney.

El Lobo's eyes narrowed as he heard the other horsemen. There was a thread of hope. They might be his own men! But the hope was gone almost as quickly as it came. He breathed out a frightened whisper: "*Los Moros!*"

Moors! But Carney was wasting no time. At that moment, Moors meant nothing to him. In a single lithe movement he slid from his horse and crouched under the cover of the rocks and bushes near where El Lobo was sprawled. The huge bandit was shivering with fright.

"Free me!" he begged.

But there was no pity in either Carney's heart or voice. His gun covered El Lobo.

"Turn over and put back your hands!" he ordered.

El Lobo tried pleading. Carney put an end to that with a slap from the flat of his gun. Rapidly he was binding the man. But he had thrown only the first few hitches around El Lobo's arm when a hail came out of the darkness.

"*Ola! Americano!*"

"What?"

"We are friends of yours!" came the shouted reply. "We will do you no harm—All we want is the bandit, El Lobo! Our scouts saw you take him from the *posada*, *Tres Serpientes!*"

"No! No!" El Lobo pleaded in a hoarse whisper. "Amigo! Save me! I have not that which they seek! *El Americano* himself knows that well!"

CHAPTER III

Up from Africa

LOS MOROS!" Moors! How much that name was to mean to the seriousness of Buck Carney's adventure! How much of an attempted frustration of the plan to carry out triumphantly that scheme for wealth at which Bart had hinted, and that to the American was appealing, if nebulous! Gold! Treasure! Wealth! Moors? Of course—Carney had expected them. In the offing. But—

Now they were here! Moors! And at his feet a pulling, pleading giant of a bandit begging to be saved from them. Why?

Buck Carney laughed. But curiously that appeal of El Lobo's to be saved from a black Nemesis, so far as Carney was concerned, found support from an unexpected quarter. He had given his word to this bandit that he

should live if *he*, Carney, saw a certain place by sunrise. He would have to make good his promise.

For now, he threw up his head to meet—the sunrise! Even on the lower levels of the Sierra Morena a certain glory of the morning was promised. It was the hour when Buck Carney had promised death to El Lobo unless the *castillo* was sighted, and—

The upper peaks were already flaming red and gold. Carney, raising his eyes in the direction of the unknown voice that was addressing him, gave a start of surprise. For, just emerging from the mist, in the middle distance, was a ruined castle. He knew on the instant that it was the one for which he had been looking. Montecristo!

There could not be two castles like that—not in the Sierra Morena; probably not in all Andalusia. It was as Bartolo had described it to him: The two great towers that stood out, joined by a battlemented wall—all of it so massive and so old and overgrown that it might have been a part of the mountain itself.

The castle by sunrise! Well, this dog of a bandit, El Lobo, had made good on one thing! There it was—less than a mile away, crowning a flat-topped mountain-spur on the opposite side of a narrow, thickly wooded valley.

Montecristo! Bart was there—Don Bartolo!—his partner! It was almost like going home.

THERE was no time for more than a glance. A longer look would have been sheer recklessness.

"Show yourself!" Carney commanded the unseen spokesman. "I won't shoot."

"Is El Lobo there?"

"Yes."

"Armed?"

"No. Tied. And I have him covered."

Suddenly from the rocky, wooded ridge just ahead a tall figure rose up, no more than fifty yards away—one of the strangest figures Carney had seen in Spain. In spite of his strangeness, he was instantly recognizable as a fighting man by the way he carried himself.

"Me," he announced, "I am Abd-el-Kerim."

His face was jet black. No white showed, even in his eyes. As if to contrast it, he was dressed almost entirely in white. A high white turban was on his head, bound tight and set low, and a long white cloak fell from his shoulders almost to his heels. Under it he wore some sort of khaki uniform of regulation European cut, with a holster belted to his hip. And spurred boots!

He stood for a second or so as if to let the power of his name sink in. Then he strolled forward.

Carney stood where he was. El Lobo was insufficiently tied. He would need watching. But he had a quick, instinctive feeling that the advancing, armed Moor would bear watching, too.

"You're near enough to talk!" he snapped. "Stay where you are!"

A SWIFT blaze of anger flared into the jet eyes of Abd-el-Kerim. But he stopped.

"I want this man!" he said arrogantly, and flicked his black eyes at El Lobo.

The bandit was crouched almost at Carney's feet—a fact that the American could not overlook. It was as if a dog were crouched there, seeking protection.

"What is this?" Carney snorted. "A request, or a demand?"

"I want him. That's all."

"Maybe it's not enough."

"You go. You're all right. My men won't shoot you. You leave him here."

Carney shook his head.

"Are you his friend?" the Moor demanded with sudden intensity. "In league with him to defraud the sons of the prophet?"

"He's my prisoner," said Carney laconically. "I don't know any sons of prophets."

Abd-el-Kerim stood for a moment thinking. Then he nodded.

"Prove it," he said. "If you wish, if you have nothing to do with what he would carry out, with the theft of which he is guilty, you go ahead and kill him."

"Listen!" Carney told him. "When I do a little job of killing, it's because I have to—not because some guy orders me to!"

The Moor shifted his hot black eyes to El Lobo.

"He would torture for what he wants," he said. "So I would torture to get it back. If you have it, he would torture you for its possession. Prove to me your innocence by at least picking out one of his eyes—cutting off his nose—"

"For what?" snapped Carney. "What's worth all of that?"

Abd-el-Kerim shrugged. "You know," he said shortly. "You have been watched since you arrived in Spain—you are harmless, Americano, unless—"

"Adios!" snapped Carney. "The parley is ended."

Abd-el-Kerim moved a hand toward that holster belted under his cloak.

"Don't draw that gun!" snarled Carney.

"Why not?"

"You might try to use it."

THE Moor held his hand, but his jetty eyes were blazing a threat into Carney's gray ones.

"This man is to be tortured for information he possesses," he announced calmly. "To the death! You try to stop it, you die, too!"

Carney shrugged. "Maybe you'll join us."

"I've got you both covered with a dozen guns."

"I've got you covered," said Carney softly, "with one gun."

Black men rose up on every side, more ebon-hued sons of the blazing sun than Carney had ever seen before in his life. Each one with a carbine held in a steady hand. It was good-night! Or farewell to the bright new day!

Just when there appeared no way out, just when it seemed that a crash of gunfire was already the matter of a split second, El Lobo made his dash for freedom.

His life in this spot could by no possibility last more than a short time longer. The Moors wanted him—in deadly, venomous earnest. Why, Carney could have no idea. But he recognized a death threat when he saw it. With a moment to think, he could not have blamed El Lobo for his sudden action.

But he was busy himself—looking into that black sheik's eyes. And in the moment of the American and the man from Africa taking one another's measure—El Lobo leaped! His movement was so unexpected that action from any man, black or white, was for the moment suspended.

ONLY Abd-el-Kerim, the Moor, moved. He had to.

For it was at the Moor that El Lobo sprung. Behind his leap was all the feral savageness of the wolf for which he was named.

Carney risked one shot as El Lobo rushed toward the Moor. It nicked the bandit along a shoulder, but did not halt him. He dared not shoot again because of the Moor. Even now there would be some among Abd-el-Kerim's followers who would be certain that Carney's one shot was for their chief.

He got a plain view of black faces peering at him from behind screening carbines. He leaped forward! A roar followed him as bullets sang past his hurtling body.

He plunged for cover.

Where he was headed, Carney had no idea. But he knew he must not pause for an instant. He must keep going—downhill as he was headed! He had no choice. He had still less when he reached the slope's bottom. It suddenly stiffened there until it was a precipice—not bare rock, fortunately, but shaggy with broken rock and brush.

Above him they were still firing. Fusillades rang out and reverberated as he scrambled, slid, and dropped.

He found a sloping shelf that would hold him for a time, protected from the pursuing riflemen by a rocky needle that tilted outward toward the valley. He rested there, waiting, catching his breath, looking out toward the mountain-shoulder above which reared the ruined towers and ramparts of Montecristo.

A rustling, scrambling sound beyond the rock whirled him to a quick alertness. But before he could balance himself for defense or attack, he was once more facing—El Lobo!

NEITHER of them was armed. Carney had lost his gun in his headlong plunge. But that did not stay them. With snarls of animal rage they hurled themselves on one another, fighting like primitive men. They fought to the edge of the precipice, hung there for minutes, swaying, struggling on the sloping, crumbling shelf. Then they were falling!

They whirled and clutched as they fell. Rocks came up to meet them, bushes, the tops of trees. The valley mist was thickening about them—

Carney had no idea how long afterward it was before he came to himself. His first hazy idea was that he had

been put out by a bullet. But he was not forgetting El Lobo. He, too, had fallen. He must be somewhere around. Cautiously Buck pulled himself together, crawling over rocks and low growth.

It must have been a quarter of an hour later when he suddenly raised his eyes from the edge of a little pool to which he had crawled, and saw—a girl!

CHAPTER IV

Laura

SHE stood on the other side of the gulch, up a little way, in full view, but obviously ready to take quick cover in the rock and brush that surrounded her.

Carney gave her the chance to disappear. He looked about him. El Lobo was nowhere in sight. Smashed in the rocks, maybe, or gone if he could still drag himself.

He raised his eyes. The girl was still there. She was dressed in some unstriking way that a man would never remember or be able to describe. But her face and her figure!

Dark-eyed, she was—eyes that seemed almost too big for her delicate heart-shaped, ivory colored face. She was bare-headed, and her wavy black hair cascaded about her shoulders.

A delicate, feminine girl. Yet she carried a rifle in her hands, a high-powered tool. The way she held it was sufficient proof that she knew how to use it.

Carney pulled himself up, first to his knees, then to his feet. He faced her, holding out his wet empty hands.

"*Buenas dias!*"

"Are you hurt?" she called to him.

"Not particularly. But perhaps you can help me. I'm an American—"

Before he could say more, she ut-

tered a sharp, glad cry. A flash of vivid expectation came into her eyes.

"Not—not Senor Carney!"

"The same! How did you guess?"

The girl took eager steps forward.

"You are my brother's friend!" she cried. "Don Bartolo! Oh, his joy, his relief, when he knows!"

IT was evident it was a joy and relief she shared. She flashed on flying feet down to the rocky bottom of the gorge—a torrent when it rained.

"No greater than mine to know that I've dug up his hiding place," Buck assured her, hurrying to meet her. "Where is he?"

"At the *castillo*." She tossed her head toward where the ruined castle was somewhere up above them, but out of sight.

"He hasn't met up with any trouble, I hope?" Buck asked quickly, and saw her face grow serious.

"He—he's had an accident," she admitted. She was still a little breathless from her run, but her eyes were shining with excitement. "Oh, but I'm sure he will be all right now! Your coming will make such a difference!" She rounded the pool, cradling the rifle against her breast as she put out her hand in the welcome a man might have given. "I'm Bartolo's sister," she said.

"Doña Laura?"

"Laura!"

A second Buck hesitated. "Aren't you afraid to go about like this in a bandit-infested land?"

She nodded slowly, in confession.

"Barto and I have both been afraid for me—for both of us," she said. "But what must be, must." She added, with a brightening, unmistakable smile: "But part of our fear is gone now." Her voice was soft and thrilling.

Their tones were casual enough, but in the manner of each was that

of two pioneers who had happened to meet in a hostile country. Laura Valdez was as alert to danger as a young doe. Carney, too, was on his guard—with a swift thought for those black ruffians who had sent him on the run down the mountain; remembering, too, El Lobo and his men.

"What's all the trouble around here?" Carney asked soberly.

"Too much to tell—in a day—or a week," Laura said, with a brave attempt at a laugh that was more of a sob. "Come with me—if you're sure you're not hurt—I heard shots up there. I saw you coming down the mountain—"

"That's past," assured Buck, and he reached over for her rifle. "I'm still able to carry arms, you see," he added cheerfully.

AS they made their way up through the rocks and heavy forest, Laura Valdez was able to tell Carney at least a little of what he wanted to know. Her information was more or less vague.

Since the revolution she and her brother, her father and a few other Royalists had come to the *castillo* as the safest refuge. And Bartolo, it appeared, since his experiences in America, had stepped into a mess of trouble. It was not a dream—all he had told Buck in America about treasure under the castle. The trouble was that others knew, too, and the family had discovered that to their sorrow since they had fled to the *castillo* when the revolution had taken away all that was worth while financially in their lives. They had been more than willing to call the *Castillo de Montecristo* a sanctuary merely—for them and their friends—until Bartolo had returned from America with a New World idea of making Old World wealth come to their aid.

It was true. There was treasure—in abundance—somewhere beneath

the *castillo*. Their real trouble now was that those others knew it. The bandit, El Lobo, for one. And the Moors who had recently come over from Africa to claim the wealth as theirs by right! Life, said Laura, had come for the Valdez family to be just one bit of dodging one death after another.

And, she added informatively—the big thing that showed Buck Carney why *he* had been of especial interest—nobody knew just where was the map that would show the exact location of the "treasure chamber" in the vast maze of mines under the *castillo*. It had been stolen from the Moors who had held it for a thousand years since their exile from Spain. The Moors were deadly in earnest about getting it back. *They* thought—and others thought, that El Lobo, the bandit, had stolen it. He showed too great interest in the mines and in *The Cave that Talks* which was at the mines' entrance, and where the remaining Moors were now camping and trying to ferret out, without the chart, the treasure-chamber entrance.

OTHERS still, and of recent date, apparently, the bandit, El Lobo, believed that Bartolo Valdez was the man who was custodian of the valued map—and that he had taken it with him to America, possibly given it to a trusted friend for safekeeping. So—

"So," said Laura Valdez to the man she was not the only one to know was "closer-than-a-brother" to Don Bartolo Valdez, "we've all been working at deadly cross purposes—no one knows what step to take next except to kill whoever really has the map. You can perhaps realize its seriousness since you have been honored by their espionage since your arrival. My brother could not meet you as planned. He was hurt, painfully, as you will learn. He will tell you how

and why— Oh, please, please don't ask me everything! You have come! You have come! It is enough!"

"Not quite enough," said Carney. "The Moors—what have they got to do with all the mess?"

"Bartolo will tell you—"

"Bart!" said Buck Carney grimly. "Bart! What happened to him?"

"Hurt," said Laura, slowly. "I told you. He came—when I sent for him. Father was gone—missing—he went down in the mines—alone—*his* mines—he came upon a party of Moors—" She stopped, looked away from Carney. "Barto went after him—the Moors—they almost killed him! Wild Moors from Africa. And our father is missing yet!"

She stopped suddenly, startled, looking off into the forest. She laid an arresting hand on Carney's arm.

"Listen!"

CHAPTER V

Don Bartolo

DONA LAURA, poised for flight or quick action, spoke tensely.

Buck Carney nodded. He had already caught that flutter of movement that had brought the girl to attention. On the other side of the wooded ravine—they had been following its steep up-slope—some one was on the move. A figure came into sight. "Pancho!" Carney breathed. "That one-eyed inn-keeper!"

The host of the cutthroat *posada* was not more than a quarter of a mile away, headed down the ravine straight toward them, but it was plain he had not seen them yet. He plodded along, the lead-rope of a loaded burro in his hand.

"You know him?" Laura whispered.

"I ought to!" Carney's mirthless

laugh rumbled under his breath. "I spent last night in his assassin's den—as El Lobo's prey."

"El Lobo!" Laura whispered awed-ly. "The bandit! Oh, he is the one to be reckoned with—I know it now as well as the Moors!"

Carney did not question her further, then, looking down into her distressed eyes.

"How far are we from the *castillo*?" he asked.

"Not far—just around the next shoulder—"

"Here! Take the carbine! You're not afraid to go alone. You've shown that. Just tell Don Bartolo I've stopped to pick up a little information. It's about time somebody found out just *who* has that map!"

The girl's eyes were startled.

"Not unarmed!"

"I'll not be unarmed long!" Carney promised. "Hurry—but be careful! There's no time to lose!"

For one moment their eyes met. It was as if they had known each other always.

And there was no doubt where the authority lay. Without a word, Doña Laura took the carbine as Buck turned and disappeared into the brush.

FOR a full minute after he left her, Laura Valdez stood watching. With this new friend gone, so, too, was some of her confidence. She was in the grip of a terror that left her motionless. She, who had believed she had become so familiar with terror that nothing could shake her any more.

With a sharp start of recollection, she turned and her eyes swept the secretive forest. Slowly she made the sign of the cross. Then she was running up the trail toward the castle like a frightened deer—to the *Castillo de Montecristo*.

The Castle of Montecristo, to the

Moors, in the days long gone, before they had been expelled from Spain, had been more than a castle. It had been their *Cazba K'vair*, the greatest of all their strongholds—The descendants of those ravaged blacks had never forgotten—!

WATCHFUL, with her rifle held ready, Laura Valdez panted up the trail toward the castle. Not even here could she relax vigilance. With all speed she found her way through a ruined and overgrown labyrinth of walls and brush to one of the monumental towers. She entered and sped through narrow and twisting passageways until at last she was climbing two narrow flights of stairs. At the head of the top one, she came to a small door and knocked. She went in when a voice was raised to bid her enter.

The small door gave admittance to a room as big as a church. It looked like a church, with its groined roof of stone arches supported by massive stone columns.

In a far corner, by a tall mulioned window, were two men. One of them was old, dressed in black, a professional man. The other, younger, more distinguished in appearance, lay before the window on a rough cot—a cot that had been made by stretching a green cowhide over a wooden frame and letting it dry.

He wore pajamas and an old dressing gown. His head was swathed in bandages.

"You are better, Don Bartolo," the doctor was saying.

"But you need at least another week of quiet—"

"Quiet?" Don Bartolo shot out. "When hell's to pay around here!"

Both men rose as Laura Valdez came into the room and hurried toward them. Bartolo reached her side in a moment.

CHAPTER VI

The Snake and the Wolf

"Thank God!" he breathed, when he felt the warmth of her presence. "you are here! You got back! When we heard that gunfire down in the valley—"

"I've seen him!" Laura cried breathlessly. "He's come! Senor Carney!"

"Buck? Where is he?"

"Careful!" warned Dr. Alfredo, once of the Spanish court, now exiled.

He was thinking only of his patient. But sister and brother ignored him. Laura went on excitedly:

"He's gone to find out why El Lobo wants him, Bartolo!" Laura cried eagerly. "He thinks he may be on the trail of the map that's made us all look death in the face!" Suddenly she broke down, sobbing. "But oh, they'll kill him! They'll kill him!"

No one knew better than Don Bartolo the menace that Buck Carney now faced. His face was drawn and white as he dropped down onto the cot, the sudden weakness overcoming him. It was the first time Bartolo had been on his feet since his accident, or his premeditated fight, rather, with the Moors in the subterranean depths of the Montecristo mines.

THEN, as suddenly, Don Bartolo was on his feet again. He leaped toward a pile of leather packs and mule harness that lay in an embrasure in another window. He tore at them feverishly.

"Don Bartolo!" Dr. Alfredo cried out. "For the love of Heaven!"

Don Bartolo turned, a rifle in his hands, standing proudly erect.

"Sorry, Doctor," he said, "but it's my friend! Out there alone—with fiends!"

With firm, determined stride, he walked to the door.

BUCK CARNEY fell upon bigger game than he had started out after when he left Doña Laura.

He was willing enough to see the one-eyed inn-keeper alone. Some instinct told him that from Pancho he would find out much that was puzzling, and an innate sense of character reading had already told him that Pancho knew more of the business that was disturbing the Sierra Moreno than he had let on. His business out here right now, for instance, was not altogether the peaceful one of taking supplies to the Moors who had encamped themselves in the Cave-that-Talks. As if they had a right and leave to it that no man could challenge!

For almost an hour Carney stalked the one-eyed man, watching his every movement, with the patience and skill of an Indian. At last he circled to head him off in what appeared to be a likely place and was laying in wait for his one-eyed erstwhile host when he made the startling discovery that he was not the only one who had spotted Pancho and his burro on that secret mountain trail.

Around a shoulder Pancho came in sight. So, too, did some one else—El Lobo!

The two were walking slowly along, side by side, with the burro trailing along behind. They were at the bottom of a wide arroyo, or "wash" when Carney first saw them. Both men were uneasy. El Lobo, undoubtedly, because he was still on the scout. Pancho, for reasons of his own.

With all the precaution of his Indian-trained woodcraft, Carney edged himself from cover and

crawled out, inch by inch, on the rock ledge just above them. Now, luck being with him, he would discover why they had tried to kill him in the inn! Now he would learn why, day after day, night after night, ever since he had come to Spain, Death had been at his right hand!

He waited, crouched, as still as the stones about him. His reward was swift enough. The hoarse voice of El Lobo rose to him as the bandit growled:

"I've a good mind to slit your gizzard right now, One Eye!"

"Why, El Lobo?" Pancho softly whined. "When I've always been your friend!"

"My friend! Death of a rat, you sewerage-saving cook for friends of hell! Do you think that I don't know that you are now on this trail for a chance to take from the Americano the map that has been stolen from the blackamoors!"

CARNEY froze. Pancho was whining in a conciliating tone:

"But what if I were coming to you, Chief? What if I knew that the Americano had not the map, that I knew where it was taken, and had come to tell you where to look—"

El Lobo's hand was suddenly at the inn-keeper's throat.

"I'll throttle you, spawn of hell! Where is it?"

Pancho pulled away from the bandit, grinned evilly, as one who recognizes he has the upper hand.

"I fear not death," he said, "while I hold information—The damned Americano—he does not know—" With El Lobo's hand still at his throat, he boasted: "For pesos, there is much I could tell El Lobo of what it is the blackamoor have talked since they came not so long ago to the *posada*, *Tres Serpientes*,"

Pancho cackled: "Gypsies, Spanish gypsies, like Pancho, know the language of the blacks of Morocco as they know their tongue of Spain—Ha! Ha! El Lobo would know? El Lobo would spend hours and many pesos on the Americano who never saw the map of the Moors that tells of the secret treasure-chamber in the deep mines of Montecristo!"

BUCK saw the giant hand of the bandit shoot out, grasp the throat of the inn-keeper. Pancho's one good eye popped from its socket. El Lobo was gritting, with the positiveness of his election to the right of power:

"By all the unholy fiends of hell that have made me the lord of the bandits of the Sierra Morena, where then, is that map that would lead to world treasure? If not in the keeping of the Americano, where then—fool!"

The one-eyed inn-keeper's laugh came in echoing cackination:

"Find out, oh, lord of all the robbers!"

"If you—if you—"

Carney heard the scream and the bang of Pancho's head against a rock. And El Lobo's gutturals—

"No! Spawn of the gutters! You but make mirth! You would play with your lords and masters! I will not believe that a dog of a filthy cook could ever get near enough the secrets of the Moors to look at, much less possess, the map that would lead to fortune!" Carney could see with what viciousness and contempt he hurled aside the owner of the *posada*. "You would make game of me! The Americano has that map! Don Bartolo took it to him! I shall kill the Americano!"

El Lobo dismissed the subject as swiftly as he had entered it.

"*Basta!*" he said. "What have you in your pack?"

Pancho, hoarse from the release of his choking, whimpered:

"Cheese, bread, oranges—"

"Sausages?"

"The *Moros*, to whom I take rations, will not at Christian sausages."

"The swine! Anything to drink?"

"The *Moros* won't drink our wine."

"I'll make them drink their own blood before I'm through with them!" El Lobo promised. "Go and bring me some bread and cheese. Then on your way! And the Lord on High save you, One Eye, if ever I find that you *do* know where is that which I seek!"

BUCK CARNEY heard Pancho cursing his burro. Presently he was back with what he had to offer. El Lobo, in turn, cursed him, but notwithstanding, began to eat—

No further word was spoken as Pancho and his burro moved on. Buck Carney flattened closer against the rock. After his feed, would El Lobo sleep?

It was the obvious thing to do in that land of siestas—wait. But Carney had no time to wait. He must have his showdown with this bandit here and now—If one of them should die, then at least Buck should have learned something of this map of mystery that so clearly concerned his friend, Bartolo, and for the possession of which the most desperate bandit in all Spain was willing to risk his life and liberty—to kill anyone who stood in the way of his possessing it.

Carney had but one uncomfortable moment realizing that he was the objective of the merciless "Wolf's" present seeking.

Now!—Now was the time for that show-down!

No man can listen well when his jaws are working. El Lobo was totally unconscious of any immedi-

ate danger threatening as he worked at satisfying his hunger. That was an added inventive to the husky American. For hours no morsel of food had passed Buck Carney's lips.

El Lobo, with what workings in his distorted mind no man knew, had his eyes fixed on a mountain vista horizon as Buck Carney worked his way back on the rock ledge above the bandit's outdoor dining room. Noiseless as a cat, Carney dropped from the ledge and slipped around in a careful detour to one side of where the bandit sat.

In Carney's hand was a long, sharp rock-splinter he had found—a weapon almost as good for swift work as a knife.

But on rounding the rock, coming upon El Lobo in the clear, Carney realized on the instant that he was up against odds that might well mean disaster—for him! The first thing he saw was a long-barreled revolver glinting in the sun as it lay on the ground at El Lobo's side. The bandit must have borrowed or taken it from one-eyed Pancho!

QUICK as the human hand could travel, El Lobo snatched at the weapon. But he was at a disadvantage, too—half choked with food, in an unfavorable position, caught wholly by surprise.

With his hand on the ground, two swift finger moves jerked the trigger twice. Both shots missed? And before the bandit could raise his hand for a truer shot, Buck flung his rock. It caught El Lobo in the chest and kicked him over against the rock.

Head down, Buck dove for him. They came together in a snarl so swift and so compact that they might have been hammered from a single piece.

El Lobo's gripping fingers had not loosened on the gun. Buck

Carney's whole effort—all he had, and then some—was also centered on that gun. He got the barrel of it in his left hand! The barrel was hot. It was hotter—in the tenth of a hundredth of a second. For he had barely touched it before it let out another blast of fire and a stifling breath!

Carney felt a smear of flame across his forehead; then blood. His hold on the revolver-barrel was slipping when he smashed his right hand over to clutch El Lobo's pistol-hand.

He was fighting for his life. So, too, was El Lobo. The bandit must have outweighed Carney by all of fifty pounds.

With a snarl of rage, El Lobo lowered his bull head and set his teeth into Carney's shoulder! It was the very pain of this unexpected, savage new attack, perhaps that gave Buck Carney the strength he needed. In one last supreme effort he wrested the smoking gun from the murderer's hand. Two more shots rang out, spitefully reverberating along the ravine!

Two shots—only! But those two spattered El Lobo's life away.

CHAPTER VII

The Wolf Pack

CARNEY cast one flaming glance at the man who lay on the ground. He recoiled at the thought of touching him. El Lobo—dead! No doubt of that! But he must touch him—

The map of mystery—the map that meant much to Barto, to Laura, to *him*, Buck! He must search for it wherever it might be found. This dead bandit may have been lying, like his kind.

His hand went swiftly through El Lobo's pockets. No map—nothing—
one relief!

Buck's hand felt cleaner when it came out from a pocket jingling with the robber's gold. Well, that was that! Now, any moment, he might be discovered.

With a gesture of repugnance, he flung down the bandit's empty gun and ran across the arroyo in the direction the one-eyed Pancho had taken.

HE watched his trail carefully, however. No use leaving a trail another enemy might follow—not in such a crisis.

On the far side of the arroyo he picked out a leaning oak that offered cover in its crotch and at the same time would give him a view both of the trail taken by the inn-keeper and his burro, and the water hole where El Lobo lay. He crouched into the tree's hiding. His jaws clamped shut on a thought.

Just a little while longer—and he was going to take a map from Don Pancho!

Right now he would wait—he did not have long to wait. As he had foreseen, Pancho had heard those shots— He was coming back—coming on a sliding run, exactly like a snake when it knows there is danger in the wind. He had left his burro up the trail for the sake of better speed. But speed was nothing to the man's caution.

He came to a pause for reconnaissance on the rim of the arroyo in a clump of brush, watching, so close to Buck's hiding place that the American could have jumped him. Which the American was tempted to do, but which was not in his plan.

There would be no benefit in seizing the little crook and demanding that he turn over "the map." He would simply lie—say he didn't have it. There was only one course to be taken with the one-eyed inn-keeper for the present—follow him. Watch for a chance!

Seeing nothing, hearing nothing that was out of the way, Pancho, snake-like, slitheringly, slid down the side of the wash and started across. He was half-way to the water-hole before he saw El Lobo lying there. Dead. There could be no mistake about that!

Torn between curiosity and fear, still the snake, Pancho lingered. Then he was slinking forward again. Suddenly he stopped with a jerk, stooped and turned and took it on the run in the direction from which he had come.

The next moment Carney knew the reason. A gun banged and a haze of smoke lifted off to the left! Another off to the right! Both bullets whistled close to Pancho's head! As suddenly as he had started to run, Pancho dropped in his tracks and crouched.

A couple of riders were jumping their horses into the arroyo. Others followed. All of them white—a dozen or so—El Lobo's men, Buck knew on the minute. They must have been scouting for him all along, following his trail.

One of the horsemen let out a shout as he located Pancho. He roused the fugitive out of his hiding place with the flick of a quirt. Pancho was talking with voice and hands, protesting, trying to explain. But he was driven on the run back to where El Lobo lay.

SOME of the horsemen had dismounted by the water-hole to look at their fallen chief. Others still sat their horses and were milling about with their carbines, ready for an attack or a chase.

In his hiding place, Buck Carney grinned wryly. Small chance of his tracks being discovered now, with all that stamping about.

A roar of shouts broke out when his captors brought Pancho in, and a fresh burst of excitement. Men

on foot and riders crowded in menacingly. There were signs enough that El Lobo had died with food in his mouth. And beyond doubts it was Pancho's own gun that lay beside the fallen robber chief.

They were accusing Pancho of El Lobo's murder!

Little time was going to be lost there by the water-hole. That was certain. Buck knew how such things went. He had not spent the years he had on the Western plains of America without knowing lynchings. But this was different again. He *couldn't* let them lynch Pancho, without a word of protest. In the first place, it was not Pancho's murder, but his, Buck's. Not that that made a great deal of difference. El Lobo's number had been up a long time. The principal thing now was—

HE wanted Pancho himself! He wanted what that wily innkeeper had hidden some place—probably to sell to the highest bidder—and he wanted nobody else to find it. None of the attackers, so far, could suspect. They were followers of El Lobo, but the Wolf kept his own secrets.

There men thought only of swift vengeance— They were getting ready—

Buck Carney slid out of the crotch of his tree as he saw the men by the water-hole make their first movements.

Without any great excitement, one of the horsemen uncoiled his rope and tossed it over a tree branch. He sat there ready to ride away as others noosed the rope around Pancho's neck.

Across the arroyo echoed Pancho's final scream of protest. And the laugh from his captors as he moved back.

Buck Carney started across the arroyo on the run, keeping to cover as much as possible. He was not taking

any chances he did not have to take. But he did not let caution hinder his speed. One good jerk on that rope and Pancho would be beyond saving!

He was almost on the fringe of the mob when he uttered his shrill cry of warning:

"Quida'o! Los Moros!"

Look out! The Moors!

It was as if he had hurled a firebrand into a pack of wolves. Panic struck El Lobo's men—a moment of circling, quick movement.

BUCK spotted a horse with a carbine swung at the saddle. With the excitement at its height, he ran to the horse. He had vaulted into the saddle and jerked the carbine free almost before he was seen. Only the owner of the horse was vigilant. He was one of the men who had been preparing Pancho for his execution. Now he was after Buck Carney on the run.

Even now it was not a mere get-away that was uppermost in Buck's mind. He was here to get Pancho out of his mess, and to get Pancho's secret.

The bandit on the ground made a leap for the reins as Buck pivoted the horse. *"Quien—"*

The butt of the carbine ramming at his head broke off his sentence. It was a glancing blow, but the Spaniard, never so much at home on his feet as in the saddle, spilled over as he bawled and cursed.

It had all happened in a few moments. But they were big seconds, stuffed not only with events, but with perceptions; things that all hands, with the possible exception of Pancho, had been trained to notice.

That false alarm was not going to last forever. These men were outlaws. They were fighters. They lived on the scout.

With a yell, Buck jumped his horse through the flurry of men and horses, rock and brush, sand and water.

In this part of the world they did not tie their ropes to the horn of the saddle. That was lucky—for Pancho. Otherwise, he would have already been jerked to the tree branch—and over it—as the horseman who had noosed him jumped his mount twenty or thirty yards away.

All the horsemen were scattering. It was part of their system in a fight, and Buck's one hope of making a get-away—with Pancho!

Still dazed, Pancho stood with the rope about his neck. At that moment he had no more recognition for Buck than for the man in the moon. As Buck swung down to collar him and lift him up, Pancho dodged, dragging his rope like a frightened dog. In his panic he jumped right under the neck of the horse Buck rode.

Buck called to him. Pancho was deaf. He scrambled. The rope he was dragging snarled a root, came taut.

Buck's mount struck it. It stumbled. It fell.

CHAPTER VIII

The Captive

BEFORE Buck could struggle to his feet, gun muzzles were drilled on him. Commands were barked for him to raise his hands. The guns backed the orders up. He raised his hands—and kept them raised—as he came up from the ground.

Other horsemen were circling in. The horse which had tossed Carney scrambled to its feet and shook itself. Pancho sat on the ground, the rope still about his neck. His one eye was squinting, beginning to gleam.

It was Pancho who was first to recognize Buck. His tone told that in the recognition he read some happy omen to himself.

"Por Dios!" he cackled. *"The Americano!"*

"*Quien?*"

"*Que—*"

"It's the Americano, I say!" Pancho shrilled. "It was he who killed El Lobo! For the map!"

That appeared to be language they could all understand. The map! Apparently every bandit in Southern Spain knew what "the map" meant, for eyes gleamed suddenly, some of the riders began to show signs of recognition of Buck. Some of the glances were more curious than fierce. In the faces of some was even something approaching admiration. This Americano, then, did know more about the map than had been told; it was possible, too, from what Pancho said, that he had battled El Lobo for it, to the death. And El Lobo had made them all believe that he still sought it! What was the truth! Where was the map now? Search would soon show. There were men there who would make good use of it, even with El Lobo gone! But groans of disappointment went up as grimy hands sought quickly through Buck's clothing—through every possible hiding place—no map was on him! But he would know where it was. There were ways of finding out.

They crowded around again.

"*El Americano!*"

"*Que guapo!*"

But there was no admiration on the face of one Spaniard on foot who rushed in. He choked out an epithet as he flourished a knife in his hand. It did not take the smear of blood and black on his face to warn Buck that this was the man whose horse he had borrowed.

The spot was warm. But after all, as Buck figured it, he might as well die of a couple of bullets—and swiftly—as to be cut to ribbons with a knife. And it would all be in the same cause—the cause of adventure! Too bad, though, if he had to die now, that he would never get near that treasure.

Here went, then—the chance!

As the Spaniard plunged, Buck fell back on one hand and shot out a kick. It was one of the first tricks he had ever learned as to the proper guard of an unarmed man against an attacker with a knife. The kick caught the Spaniard squarely in the middle. The horsemen roared with laughter. They liked brutality in any form, those men, so long as it did not touch them. No man's hand lifted a gun for a shot. Buck's hand on the ground found a rock. He came up with it, shouting to the man with the knife to hold off, but ready to make him if it came to that.

Others were calling to the knife-wielder to hold off. Still others were mocking him, urging him on. The voices were guttural, and not too loud.

All the horsemen were dancing around, head in. These riders were horsemen—none better in the world. And it was not so strange—Buck having always been a horseman himself—that he could sympathize with the man who menaced him with the knife.

"Brother," Buck said, "permit me to explain—"

HE was stalling, playing for time. Murder was in the air, and there seemed no way out. His words were broken short as another horseman scrambled in—a man who had been off on the scout. His horse was smoking.

"*Basta!*"

He spat out the word—"Enough of this!"

Steady as a rock, he sat his nimble-footed horse—a dark man with cold and level eyes—staring at Buck. Carney took quick note of the respect with which the others regarded the man. With El Lobo dead, here was the new leader—right now, at any rate. There could be no mistake about that. And a man who would

never give in as long as he thought Carney might know of that damned map! Carney knew he was facing even worse struggle than when El Lobo had haunted him from pillar to post, from street corner to forest and to the inn of the three serpents.

"Pedro!" the new leader snapped. "Put up your knife. A dead man can tell no secrets! I want this man! And you, Americano, drop that rock!"

HE spat out a couple of names, ordering their owners to tie this *cimarron* before he could play any more tricks.

Cimarron! An outlaw of the animal world. The epithet burned!

Buck was tied. No easy way of getting out of those ropes, without plenty of time! He could tell that by the expert way in which the job was done. How was he to get hold of the inn-keeper now! Hell, here he was, as excited as every bandit in Spain over that map they were all raving about—and he thought he knew at this minute where it was! And couldn't lift a hand to get it! Pancho must be laughing in his sleeve—if he was not scared to death about dying.

The new leader told off scouts. The men sent on outpost did not want to go, but they went. There was a slight diversion—and Buck Carney's heart was higher with hope than any of those outlaws imagined—when Pancho was picked up in the brush while he was trying to slip away, and brought back with his hands tied behind his back. A little later Pancho's burro was also found and sent in. That was not so bad! Still a chance!

Sitting in the gravel with his back against a rock, most of Buck's attention was taken up in watching men scoop out a hollow in the arroyo bottom. Most of it was done with hands

and knives. Presently, without any ceremony, but with a certain solemnity, the body of El Lobo was laid in the hole and the hole filled. At the new chief's orders, one of the men cut a couple of sticks and tied them together with a withe in the form of a cross. It was stuck into the turned earth.

Buck remembered— There was a scattering of such crosses along all the trails of the Sierra Morena.

The simple ceremony over, Buck, tied hand and foot, was hoisted onto the burro—Pancho behind, an added burden to the already over-packed little animal. The whole party moved on up the arroyo a mile or so and into a gulley that tightened into a gorge between high cliffs. Pancho, the American noted, did not have his hands tied. Probably these bandits who held him and the inn-keeper captive, held their Spanish confrere in more or less contempt. They had no fear of his trying another escape—as the Americano might, given the opportunity. But then, they knew nothing of how much Pancho knew of what was their life interest, as Buck Carney did.

PANCHO, before the battle, had believed El Lobo alone guessed that he might know something about the map. El Lobo was dead now—Pancho would have to depend on Buck Carney if he meant to cash in on any knowledge he might possess— Or if he really had the map, his only customer was Buck. Once let these bandits know that he had it, and they would take it from the one-eyed man, and toss his body aside for the jackals.

Buck recognized the strategy of the bandits' move up the gorge the instant he saw the spot. It was a place that one man could have held against a hundred, for in one place the gorge was no more than four or

five feet across—room enough only for the passage of a pack animal.

Beyond, it widened to a basin where there was grass and shade, water, and a long tilt of smooth rock. It was time for food and a smoke when they reached the place, and the long afternoon siesta. It was a spot fitted by Nature herself for outlaws!

Pancho's whisper came to Carney from where the inn-keeper sat on the burro's back, behind the American.

"Hist, *Americano!*"

Carney growled: "Well? What have you got to say?"

Then Pancho's whisper: "You would have the map? You heard me talk to El Lobo! I did not lie! He was too sure— Last month I, Pancho, the reviled, took from the Moor, Abd-el-Kerim, the bit of old paper that means a king's ransom—"

Carney growled again: "And now you would sell it to me?" But it was well for his bargain that the Spanish gypsy on the back of the burro could not see the gleam of elation in his eyes!

Pancho spoke for a moment, eagerly, swiftly.

"*El Americano!*" he said then. "I will place within your pocket the map! We will bargain later!"

BUCK CARNEY felt the rustle of a paper—Pancho's hand in his pocket. He laughed aloud. He had that damned map that had meant death and destruction! *What* was he to do with it now? How use it?

Pancho's move was not a moment too soon. As soon as the bandits arrived at their camping place, he was moved on to a spot away from Buck Carney. Carney was never to see the man again—though at the moment such an idea never occurred to him.

A bandit they called El Gaucho—because, as the outlaw himself told Buck, he had spent a number of

years in the Argentine—took care of Carney. When it came time to eat, he fed the American from the point of a knife. Now a hunk of sausage or cheese from Pancho's pack. Now a hunk of bread. None of them felt it safe to allow the American the use of his hands.

El Gaucho made a game of the feeding, and laughed heartily, poking the morsels too far to the left or to the right.

Buck flattered El Gaucho for his wit. There was hope to be derived from this clown—not much, perhaps, and that little forlorn, but it was something.

EL GAUCHO capped the game by giving Buck water from a gourd, pouring it over his face and down his neck.

The sinister successor of El Lobo came over to see the sport, but there was no smile on his face, nor laugh on his evil lips.

"Amuse yourself, *Americano,*" he said tonelessly. "Later, I'm going to hang you—barefoot—over a little fire. You shall tell, then, of the map."

But he was going to have his siesta first. From the position of the sun, it was already about noon.

"Gaucho, *amigo,*" said Buck softly, as the unsmiling chief turned away, "he will never hang me."

"Why?"

"Because I'm buying that knife of yours—for one hundred dollars gold!" Buck's words came in a voice no louder than a breath.

El Gaucho stretched and loudly yawned. Others were beginning to turn in, but there were still plenty of eyes shifting in their direction.

"Ho!" said El Gaucho. "I will stake the hands and feet of this damned cimarron!" More softly than Buck had spoken, he whispered, "Where?"

"At the *castillo*."

"When?"

"Moonrise—this night."

"*Bueno!*" El Gaucho now roared aloud, as he hammered home a stake with a rock between Buck's hobbled feet.

CHAPTER IX

The Hot Trail

EVEN AS El Gaucho drove home the stake, it was not clear, even in his own mind, just what he would do. He wanted that hundred dollars *oro* the Americano offered. The prospect of a trip to the *castillo* and being smiled on by Royalists tickled his clownish heart. At the same time he hated to think of the fun he would miss seeing this *cimarron* dance at the end of a rope over a little fire.

Anyway, while he was making up his mind, he might as well have a little more fun of his own. El Gaucho was a humorist.

Having staked Buck's feet, he pulled out his knife and began to play with it—a five-inch blade as sharp as a razor, yet heavy enough to slit the throat of a steer; needle-pointed.

"*Aval!*"

He tossed the knife into the air whirling. It came down so close to Buck's face that the point of it almost reached an eye before El Gaucho, quick as a cat, caught it by the handle.

El Gaucho laughed and performed the trick again.

"*Que bonita!*"

He said that the knife was his little sweetheart. Nobody could buy a knife like that. It was sacred. He would as soon think of selling his honor. And he laughed again.

Time after time he repeated his trick, but as Buck neither laughed nor winced, nor paid any apparent

attention, El Gaucho tired of that sport and proceeded to stake down Buck's hands as he had his feet. He paused now and again during the process to jerk back Buck's head and playfully pass the blade around his throat.

Buck said nothing. He could tell. El Gaucho was simply trying to make up his mind.

Most of the other bandits were asleep—stretched out on the ground, with their heads wrapped up in their blankets. They were scattered, each near his own picketed horse. The sentinels were too far away to see or overhear.

The way El Gaucho had him fixed now, Buck could neither lie down nor sit up straight. He was only half-seated, his legs stretched out in front of him, the weight of his shoulders supported by his arms staked and bound behind him. If he were forced to hold this position long, he would be too paralyzed for swift action even if his bonds were cut.

IT looked hopeless. There seemed no way out for him this time. Buck tried to face the matter philosophically, realizing that there was no possibility of aid coming to him. Which was because he had no long-lensed eyesight that could look through rocks and mountains and see what was happening not so far away.

For down the trail from the *Castillo* of Montecristo a figure was riding a plodding donkey—what looked like the figure of an old woman. To all appearances, Don Bartolo Valdez was an old woman. He was shrouded in a huge hooded cape. His head was doubly concealed in a big cotton muffler, and a broken sombrero flapped about his shoulders. The flea-bitten donkey on which he was perched was only

about two sizes larger than the average burro.

Buck Carney's friend was not trying to fool himself about how strong he felt, but he was going to the aid of his friend!

There was little chance, Don Bartolo believed, of his being attacked by the bandits who infested the region, or questioned.

He looked too much like a native. But then it was no time for taking chances.

It was not too likely the bandits would give him more than a passing glance. Scattered native families were here in the Sierra Morena—charcoal burners, goatherds, poachers, even a few small farmers. They could be useful to outlaws on occasion. They might, at times, go in for a little outlawry on their own. In any case the regulars never bothered them.

VALDEZ found the trail for which he was looking. Following it, however, was slower than he had counted on—

He was in a "draw" between two brushy slopes and a steep forest of black pine when suddenly he cut the trail of a party of horsemen going at a gallop.

He picked up a fresh cork and smelled it. *Aguardiente!* El Lobo's men!

He gave his donkey the heel and let the little animal hit its high along the trail after the galloping horsemen.

Back in the bandit camp, El Gaucho lit a cigarette and sat down crosslegged at Buck Carney's feet.

"Two hundred gold?" he murmured through the smoke. "And how do I know I'll get it? You may get shot in the getaway."

"*Bueno!*"

"Three hundred!" said El Gaucho. "You see, I may get hung myself."

Buck held still, looking at the man. El Gaucho evaded his eyes.

"That," said Buck, "is quite true. This new chief you've got doesn't like you, anyway."

El Gaucho scowled. He drew out his knife and contemplated it.

"Five hundred!" he muttered. "Five hundred gold!"

He jerked the knife into the air and this time—either wilfully or by accident—missed his catch. Buck jerked with a half-groan, half-curse, as the blade nicked the raw flesh where the bullet had grazed him earlier in the day.

"Leave the knife where it is," he said, panting a little.

But he saw El Gaucho suddenly start and stare. Then the bandit leaned over and picked up the knife. He made a pass with it before Buck's eyes.

For some reason, El Gaucho was tremulous with fear. That was plain to Buck. Had he been spied on? As yet Carney knew nothing of the stranger El Gaucho had caught sight of, staring at him. Who was he? El Gaucho went on with his bluff.

"Goat!" he growled. "Sewer-filth! For a little, I'd—"

A cold voice cut in:

"Death—if you make another move!"

CHAPTER X

The Long Chance

THE VOICE, scarcely more than a whisper, yet as edged and deadly as El Gaucho's knife, stopped Buck's heart for the space of a beat. The words were such as might have been uttered by the sinister successor of El Lobo. They might have been aimed at El Gaucho or at Buck himself. Still—A memory! Something in that voice! A thrill started Buck's heart beating to make up lost time.

"Bart!" He whispered it sibilantly—in English.

"Me! Don't turn your head—There's a sentinel looking."

Then Don Bartolo, dragging his step a little, came around where Buck could see him! He had put aside most of the outer wrappings he had worn when he left the *castillo*. But a blanket was now muffling his head and shoulders, and on his head was one of the bandits' hats—big enough to stay on in the wind—and pulled low.

"Stuck up a sentinel in the middle of the gorge," he said. "He's tied—"

Don Bartolo went to work with all speed. In a pair of seconds he had wrenched the knife from the gaping El Gaucho and cut the rope on Buck's feet and arms. He kept El Gaucho covered every minute, never relaxing, but speaking to him only by looks and signs.

"Ease yourself, Buck," Valdez told Buck. "But keep your general position. Take this gun. I've got two more."

FOR the first time since his original threat, Valdez spoke to El Gaucho.

"Turn round, you! Sit as the Americano sits—unless you want your throat cut!"

And the speed with which El Gaucho was tied would have won for Don Bartolo a prize in any rodeo.

The stake that had held Buck's feet now held El Gaucho's hands—behind his back, his bound arms propping the weight of his heavy shoulders.

"We're right here back of you," Valdez menaced El Gaucho softly. "Move—or bawl—and I'll cut your heart out!"

El Gaucho quivered as to the touch of a branding iron as Valdez

lifted off his hat and passed it over to Buck.

"Okay?"

"Set!"

"Get up and stretch yourself. Have a look. We'll need a pair of broncs."

Valdez did not move as Buck got up—with El Gaucho's hat on his head. Buck's own movements were measured—the juice squeezed from every second, though, and no time wasted.

His first glance, veiled and casual, was for the sentinel Valdez had mentioned. The man was on a bald spot of the high ridge that helped shut in the basin. Unquestionably he was looking this way. But of what were his thoughts or his suspicions there was no sign. He was motionless, squatted on his heels.

THERE were a couple of likely looking horses picketed not far apart down in the general direction of the gorge. That would have to be the way they would make their getaway. The head of the basin was choked with brush and timber. The sides could have been ridden under ordinary conditions. But this condition was not ordinary. Speed was going to be needed when the shooting began, and a chance for cover.

"Those two horses over there!" jerked Buck. "Ready? Go!"

Both men leaped forward. At their second bound, the sentinel on the hillside shrilled a whistle. He was on his feet. He banged out a signal shot!

The two comrades put on speed. They separated a little, each headed for the horse he had selected.

For precious seconds, Buck was occupied with his animal and the bandit who claimed it—while hell was beginning to pop in the little valley behind him. But his bandit

was down. He had forked his horse and built a hackamore—no saddle, no bridle. He was ready to go!

He jerked his head around to see how Bart was making it. Bart was not making it. He was on the ground—propped up on one arm. His gun was drawn, but he was not shooting!

BUCK jumped his horse to where Bart lay and slid from his back. The horse tried to go somewhere else, but he was no kicker. Buck held him.

"For the love of God, ride!" Don Bartolo pleaded.

"To hell with you!" Buck roared.

He put down a hand. Valdez took it.

They were not wasting time in arguments. Buck hoisted him.

"I've only got one good leg," Valdez panted. "The other flopped."

He put his two hands to the horse's mane. Buck mounted. He had Valdez across the withers of the animal before it could rear and they were off at the gallop!

All that saved them in those first few seconds—and every second sweating blood—was the confusion in camp. Blankets must come off before heads could pop up. Wide awake on the instant, the bandits were running then for their mounts, saddling and bridling. From where he sat tied and staked, El Gaucho was bawling his head off.

"*Que hay!*"

Some one must have put a bullet into the substitute prisoner by mistake.

It took more seconds before El Gaucho could make the world understand that he was El Gaucho.

But Carney knew what was coming—and when it did come it would be fast. That neck of the gorge where it was only a few feet across! He must reach it! His horse thun-

dered on, and he took one deep breath of relief when he passed the place in safety. As soon as there was room enough, he turned his horse to one side.

The first of the pursuers to reach the spot was the black-browed successor to El Lobo.

Carney's bullet went through his heart.

"*Uno!*"

He passed the information to Don Bartolo.

Bart, sagging down onto the horse's mane, braced as if he had received a stimulant.

"*Dos!*"

Carney fired again.

There was no missing in this rocky bottleneck, even shooting from the back of a dancing horse.

"*Y tres!*"

THREE riderless horses—panic-stricken horses—rearing, kicking, striking, as wild to get out of the line of fire as humans, wheeled and thundered back the way they had come.

They left their riders sprawled on the rocky trail.

Pursuit was blocked. Not for long, as Carney well knew, but long enough for any man in such a tight squeeze to make the most of it.

Which Carney did—

The bandits left behind were still cursing and trying to get through the pass when the horse carrying their late prisoner and Don Bartolo Valdez was panting up the trail toward the *castillo*.

Don Bartolo was all in—he would be in no physical condition to enter any frays for some time more to come. But he was still able to tell Buck Carney, before they reached the castle, something of what the romantic story which had urged him to send for his American friend was all about.

CHAPTER XI

Into the Depths

IT WAS a story of which Carney already knew considerable, but Don Bartolo expatiated, telling some of the things he shrewdly guessed, more that he knew from the history of his Spain.

It had much to do with the Moors being back in Spain—and why. They had come for treasure—treasure of which they believed they alone knew.

When the Moorish chieftain, said Bart, was preparing for his treasure raid into Spain, the only obstacle in his path, or so he believed, was the presence at the castle of Montecristo of the Valdez family, who now had owned the *castillo* for hundreds of years.

The Slave-of-the-Merciful and certain of his followers had had an eye on the ruined castle in the depths of the Sierra Morena for a long, long time. They had already done quite considerable preliminary exploring about Montecristo, which for years had lain there as wild and empty before the new revolution as most of the country around it. The Moors had been able to camp there for weeks at a time, unobserved.

There had never been any difficulty connected with their secret visits. Moors had always been able to come and go as they pleased in Spain, even after they had been expelled.

It was only a short run from Morocco to Spain—one that any kind of a boat could make between sundown and dawn. Or they could come over in the daytime—to sell dates and coral. Many of them were smugglers. As for that, there were Moors in Spain who had never left, but who lived on—generation after generation—in some hole in the mountains where it would have been unhealthy for Spanish troopers to have found them.

But of all the Moors who had come to Spain, or who had continued to live there, Abd-el-Kerim and his band were the only ones who remembered the history of Montecristo or who now took an interest in it.

When the Moors had ruled Spain it was not as Montecristo that the castle was known. It was the *Cazba K'vair*—the Stronghold Supreme.

It was a place that could never be captured. It was as safe to the followers of the Prophet as Mecca. The Moors thought so.

WHEN the Spaniards began to drive the Moors out of other parts of Spain, a curious change took place. For a thousand years treasure had flowed out of the *Cazba K'vair* and the mountain under it; now treasure of other sorts began to flow back to it. The followers of the Prophet, on the run, were bringing their treasures here for safekeeping.

There were tons of it—silver, gold, gems and ivory, works of art—

An earlier Abd-el-Kerim had been the custodian of all that wealth. When it began to look as though the Stronghold Supreme itself was likely to fall into the hands of the Christians, that earlier Slave-of-the-Merciful got busy. For a hundred days and nights his slaves were busy carrying wealth down into the depths of the mountain. There was a natural cave down there—two thousand feet below the sub-cellars of the castle; a cave as big as any mosque in Bagdad. When all the treasure had been transferred to it, the custodian had sealed it up.

No Dog-of-an-Unbeliever would ever get it. The only known entrance to the cave was closed with upward of two hundred feet of rock and cement.

But—just in case of accident to himself or any successor of his before the Moors again came back as

masters—the earlier Abd-el-Kerim made a map. It was a secret map, showing just where the treasure lay, and where the bore would have to be made to get at it again.

The map had gone to Morocco.

It had been there for five centuries, until the present Abd-el-Kerim found it. And now it had been stolen! Blood was flowing over all Southern Spain in an effort to get it back!

Don Bartolo's own father, Senor Valerio Valdez, once a prince, had been kidnaped because the Moors thought he might know of its whereabouts. They suspected him almost equally with El Lobo. And at all events they would hold Don Valerio prisoner to keep him from interfering with them.

Where his father was now, Barto had no idea— But Barto was now in this present condition of physical disability because he had gone down into the mines to try to find him.

Bartolo said solemnly:

"So you see that I did need you, Buck—even above and beyond treasure! That was what I thought about first when I sent for you. Now my sister and I need the only man in the world who can help us. My father *must* be found!"

Carney's laugh was not mirthful.

"I have the map," he said simply. "How I got it will be for a story another day. The thing now is your father. Where do you believe he is?"

"Somewhere in the mines," said Bartolo. "And I—"

"I go into the mines—today," said Buck.

They had hardly realized that they had reached the castle or that Laura Valdez was there, with her eyes full of heartfelt thanks for their safety as she came to meet them.

"And I," she said to Buck Carney, "will go to guide you."

Buck looked at her a long minute, then back at Don Bartolo. Bart was

reeling, his eyes already closing with his weakness. Buck said to Laura Valdez:

"Yes—we go today!"

CHAPTER XII

The Cave-that-Talks

THEIR preparations were swift and simple. Doña Laura prepared a haversack with what they might most need—rope, candles, matches. And both of them were armed.

Even while the shaking Don Bartolo was being put to bed after his faint—he held up till the last minute—Doña Laura and Buck Carney were hastening to a disused wing of the ruins and making their way through tangle. Through jungly gardens and broken walls, they reached a breach in the ancient ramparts. They found themselves on the rim of a steep drop, covered with black oak and laurel.

Through that dense thicket they went on, straight down, until they came to a ruined "*templete*" or pavilion. The little marble building disguised the entrance to one of the ancient Montecristo mines. They stopped to light their candles.

For a shadowy interval they paused before plunging into the dark that lay ahead.

"Go back!" urged Buck.

Laura looked at him levelly.

"Do you want to go back?"

With one accord they moved ahead. Nothing more was said, except an occasional whisper—or warning, or explanation.

But Buck could see that the girl was right in more ways than one. He would never have been able to thread this strange underworld alone—not, at any rate, without taking weeks about it. He could see, however, that Laura was following a

steady course that took them down and down—always down to lower levels—and always in the same general direction. He could tell the direction, in a general way, by the drift of the strata.

This was a mine all right. And it was a mine where Moors worked, making their way toward treasure, regardless of human life if it interfered. It might still be one of the richest in the world. But before it could begin to produce new fortunes, another fortune would have to be put into it—for modern equipment, for drainage.

That bugbear of all deep mines—water!—was here in plenty. Hardly ever were they out of hearing of water. It was drip and ripple, and now and then they would be following a swift flow of dark water; again there would come to their ears the drone of some far-off cataract—

SUDDENLY, both of them stopped in their tracks as if at a sharp signal!

From down below somewhere, there came to their ears the sound of a steady thudding—muted and still far down: the sound of heavy hammers. As suddenly as they had heard the sound, the hammers stopped.

Still Buck and Doña Laura stood still, holding their breath, their candles tilting in the breeze. A sharper sound rumbled through the old mine—louder, louder! Shouts came! Yells! And the muffled shock of gunfire!

Buck Carney grasped the girl's arm tightly.

"El Lobo's men!" he exclaimed. "And the Moors!"

It was a wild guess, but one that was instinctively correct. Too far away to see any man of those who at that moment were hurling themselves into a battle to the death, his reasoning power told him that there

could be no other reason for the gunfire ahead.

He was right! El Lobo's men *had* come! They had come to the Cave-that-Talks, to kill off the blacks and seize the treasure for themselves! If Moors could do it, so could they—map or no map!

The chain of caverns running back to Abd-el-Kerim's treasure-chamber was a roaring hell of sound. El Lobo's men—all that were left—had worked their way into the Cave-that-Talks through one of El Lobo's old hideouts. They had taken the Moors by surprise.

And the Cave-that-Talks was justifying its name!

CHAPTER XIII

Don Valerio

THE Cave-that-Talks had always been, not so much a whispering gallery as a thunder gallery, a natural and colossal loud-speaker, picking up every sound and multiplying it, then sending the multiplied sound up and around and back again, often after long intervals, in rolling echoes.

Such sounds as reverberated from it now made it thunderous. No living soul within the depths of the mine could keep from hearing what was happening. It came thus to the ears of one man, a prisoner.

Back in the hollow of the cave not far from where the Moors had worked at their business of trying to open a way into that long-sealed-up chamber of theirs, Don Valerio Valdez—former grandee, Knight of the Golden Fleece, once millionaire—had lain for almost a month as a prisoner of Abd-el-Kerim.

Don Valerio had no doubt that the Moor would eventually kill him. He had a perfect conception, by this time, of what the Moor was trying to do.

The place where he lay had been used as a prison before. It was a place—as he could see each time a light came in—that had a hundred chains and links fastened to floor and walls. One such chain was fastened to one of his ankles. It was heavy enough to have held an elephant, let alone a man.

But now, as Don Valerio heard that mounting thunder from the outer caverns, there flashed through his mind thoughts of the plan that had been growing there. But it had formed more as a dream than as something he could carry out.

"Ali!" he called out suddenly and sharply.

A tall Moor, carrying a torch and a knife, ran into the place.

"Those are not brigands, but troops!" Don Valerio shouted.

Ali, already touched with panic, drew nearer and bent his head to listen. Don Valerio was ready for him. Using his last ounce of remaining strength, he lifted his hand and struck the tall Moor over the ear with an iron link. Ali staggered. He stood there swaying. Would he fall? Would he recover himself?

Already, with flying fingers, Don Valerio was picking at the cement that held his chain to the prison's damp wall. He had not failed to note that dampness, nor that the cement had crumbled.

Ali fell.

With a wrest of his body, Don Valerio wrenched the long spike free from its hole in the wall! Except for the chain and the link on his leg, he was free—Free to die! But his enemies would die with him. He knew how the Moors had been working with dynamite that they hoped would open up the still lost treasure chamber!

All the time he had been lying there in his echoing prison, Don Valerio had been hearing things—

shouts and laughter, queer songs; screams. Now shots! But, through it all, he had always heard the sound of water.

Once, long ago, he had studied mining at the royal university in Salamanca. Forgotten things were now returning to his mind.

Dragging his chain, he picked up the torch and knife that Ali had let fall. He hauled himself in the direction of the dynamite blast the Moors had prepared, and which his keen ears had told him about as though he had seen it.

Yes, there was the fuse. There were the caps— Searching rapidly, he found a stick of dynamite in a cache. He fastened a cap onto the end of a length of fuse, then kneaded the cap into the oily, soft dynamite—

THIS was going to be the end! It would be the end of many things. It would be just as well. If things went on as they were, why, he would be killed, which did not matter so much now. But Don Bartolo would be killed! And Laura—

The length of fuse ran out. With a steady hand, he touched the end of it to the flame of the torch. Like a red eye, the lighted fuse began to retreat in the direction from which he had just come.

A burst of echoing shouts came nearer! Don Valerio lifted his eyes. Abd-el-Kerim was coming on the run along the gallery where he stood.

Abd-el-Kerim, at sight of the Spaniard, stopped. His face was like a jet of black flame. He held a torch in one hand, but his pistol was in the other.

There could have been only one thing that made the Moor hold his shot just then. The thing was a mystery. And the mystery was—that Don Valerio raised a hand and smiled—

From that first outbreak of shouts

and shooting, Carney and Doña Laura made a desperate attempt at speed. And this was no trail for a race. It was a maze of traps and pitfalls. Yet they rushed on.

The thunder of the place, growing instantly louder, held them mute. A growing dismay descended on them, freezing their hearts. Not on their own account—but for the sake of him they had come to save.

It was as if they were speeding into a battle of underground devils; as if they were already in the midst of it. Through a twisted cleft and down a long, jagged descent they made their way until they reached the first of a series of great natural hollows in the earth. Laura gasped:

"The Cave-that-Talks!"

CARNEY ran, crouching, but with his candle held high and his pistol ready. Suddenly he fired!

The shot came so swiftly it was as if it had not been a premeditated shot at all, with no thought of direction. Yet the shot went true.

There had been a Moor standing over there on the other side of a pool of darkness, and beyond the Moor was a white man—

The Moor slumped over sideways, groping for support. From his limp hand dropped gun and torch. Laura Valdez' cry rang out: "*Padre!*"

By the flickering light of the torch, Don Valerio looked as if he had been challenged by a ghost. He shot one glance at that running eye of red at the end of the fuse, then he labored forward. His drawn white lips were shouting:

"Run! Run! For God's sake! To the higher level! Don't wait for me!"

It was at that moment that Buck

Carney did what he had already done once before that day—lifted a member of the ancient Valdez family in his arms. He ran, shouting to Laura. Laura ran. She led, holding the flickering torch.

Breathlessly they were just climbing back into that steep and ragged cleft when the explosion came!

IT rocked Montecristo! It was to shake it from depths to dome, change the entire inner map of the mountain—wipe from Southern Spain the menace of brigands, black and white!

For, even before the multiple roar of the dynamite rose to its full volume, there sounded from the bowels of the earth an even greater roar—the roar of pent-up waters!

Abd-el-Kerim's treasure chamber was at last open. There no longer was a need of any map. But in the course of centuries it had become a stupendous reservoir!

It took hours for the waters to pour out of the mine and clear a way to see what was in the chamber.

The glory of sunset was pouring down once more as Doña Laura, holding to her rescued father's arm, stood with Buck Carney on the mine's rim.

It was true! All that Don Bartolo had said! Layer on layer, gold, silver, gems lay flashing in the sunset! Rubies, emeralds, silver encrusted by the centuries, but still shining! The wealth of Montecristo! The Valdez family had come at last into their own! And Buck Carney?

Looking down at treasure so great that it would take months even to pile up, his glance went once to Laura Valdez. She was looking at him—shyly. All the treasure in the world was not in gold and silver!

Next Month: DANGER TRAILS, A Complete Book-Length Novel of Pulse-Stirring Thrills by Captain Kerry McRoberts.

The Creole Creeper

*"Shanghai" Steve Kirby Defiantly Plunges Into Savage
and Pulse-Stirring Combat With the Most
Hated Bully of the Java Sea*

A Complete Novelette

By PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

Author of "Captain Trouble," "The Leopard Man," etc.

HE WAS one against four and they fell on him in the thick hot blackness of the tropic night.

"Shanghai" Steve Kirby had no warning. Not a sound heralded their coming, for they slid stealthily up the shed roof to his open window and into the stuffy room of the squalid Sourabaja Hotel. Kirby was a marked man. For two whole days and three nights, they had followed his trail, and now—

Dead to the world, in slumber, he felt their weight as they pounced upon him and he came up fighting. The stench of the rum-soaked quartet smothered his first outcry, then his wits came to his aid and warned him not to yell. A shout for aid, for help from "Forty-Fathom" Farnum or the "China Chick", would have brought him a long knife between his ribs, or a broken skull.

"Belay there ye tough scum," growled the leader of the gang as he fiercely fought in an effort to free himself from their clutches. "Be a good sea-farin' dog an' no barkin' mind ye, 'r we'll slit yer gullet. There now."

Kirby lashed out with his right fist and smashed a face that was

only a blob in the dark. He heard a gulp and a nasty oath, and went down struggling like a pack of fire-crackers as something was flung over him. Rope!

He felt the burn of it on his jaw. Then a thousand ropes. They seemed to whirl through the air, coil after coil. From the black void of the Java skies they fell on him until it dawned that they were winding an old dredge net over his head and body.

STILL Shanghai Kirby kept his tongue, fighting with a ferocity that left bruises and drew plenty of blood from the attackers, until they had him wound like a trapped lion.

"What in the name o' the devil do you think you'll get here?" he demanded finally, cursing the panting four, for he knew in his heart what they were after. His blood raced hot and cold. "You're wastin' your time my buckos."

"Don't come none o' that, Kirby," was the answer from a big beast of a man who leaned over him as he lay trussed on his bed. "We got the right room an' the right lad. Where's them two black bullets ye been huggin' 'round' witcha?"



Like dynamite, Chili John's joint on Trigger Island exploded!

"You're crazy, whoever you are," snarled Shanghai Kirby. "What do yuh mean—bullets?"

"The spoils, Shanghai," grated the thug. "Them twin black spoils. Eve'y-body in the islands knows ye gottem. Shell 'em out." He laughed softly, suppressing his heartiness at his own joke, lest somebody in the thinly partitioned hall suspect something, or some light sleeper in an adjoining room, rousing, become curious.

The four had their orders to work quietly and to kill only if threatened with failure or capture. Now they hung over Shanghai's bed while Kirby lay motionless determined to stall, to sell either his fortune or his life at the highest price he could get.

"You thick skulls are too late," he told them. "I figured you'd try this—it's the Creole Creeper's kinda trick, this dark attack—and I put them where they'll be safe."

"You're a dirty, double-crossin', lyin', scurvy pup," declared the

spokesman for the thieves. "Light the candle, Thumb," he ordered one of his mates. "Go easy now an' we'll turn this dump inside out. He's gottem here. The hog wouldn't put 'em far away. Look aroun'."

"Keep away from me," snapped Shanghai as they finished probing every nook and corner, every crack in the room. "So help m—"

WITH a muffled crash they dropped on him, a pair of them, big burly, sweat-soaked sons of the islands and despite his battle they rammed a gag between his teeth. After that it was simple. They clawed the salty rope of the net, working it up tighter about his arms and middle, ripped his shirt open and snaked out the money belt which he wore next his skin.

Kirby's black gems from the floor of the southern ocean were gloated over for an instant, held on a horny palm under the flickering candle-light, and then they lashed his body

to the flimsy iron cot, and slid over the window edge into the night—

II

ALONG THE WATERFRONT in Sourabaja it was generally known that day that Shanghai Steve Kirby had refused the equivalent of seventeen thousand dollars for his twin black pearls. For two days he had been the toast of the Java jungle port.

As he went about with his two ever present companions, a white man known as Forty-Fathom Farnum and a lean young Chinese called the China Chick, Kirby was the envy of the scavengers that thronged the dives and joints along the sun-fried shore.

The story had swept like a typhoon among the islands. Shanghai Kirby had plucked a fortune from the sea floor. The shell men came from far and wide, following the story and the trail of Kirby's little lugger across the Java sea to Sourabaja. Others came too; the riff-raff of the nations, all colors, creeds and callings, especially the vulture breed, the Islands' underworld.

And at its head, the uncrowned king of the killer clan, came Dirk Snyder, the "Creole Creeper"—named after those slimy creatures that infested the dank Louisiana swamps from whence came this ruthless desperado.

Snyder came for his cut; the cut that he forced from every spineless, craven creature from Singapore to the Solomons. All the shell hunters, the owners of the tiny boats that plied the island waters in search of a scant living, and possible wealth, paid their regular tribute to Dirk Snyder. All except one man.

Shanghai Kirby never paid and when the Creole Creeper cornered him in the dingy bar at Sourabaja and smiled his oily, confident grin of

congratulation, Kirby smoked a hand-made butt and blew a gray cloud into Snyder's only eye.

That left orb was a cruel, steely thing that pierced a timid man's "innards." The right had gone to feed the fish years ago when Snyder tangled with a berserk swamp Indian. That was before the days of Snyder's power below the line. Now the name of the Creole Creeper shut men's lips; they feared and hated him but not one dared to challenge his rough-shod reign.

"I hear you made a killin', Shanghai," Dirk Snyder had said that afternoon in the sandy-floored bar-room. "I had a dream 'bout yuh, too, night before last. Musta been the day yuh drug 'em up. Let's see 'em, Shanghai."

Kirby felt the pack close around him, heard the grating shuffle of heavy feet as the human tide engulfed himself and the Creole Creeper. But Kirby was no man's plaything.

He had a reputation himself among the island dens. Given an even break with pistol, a diver's knife or bare hands Shanghai was more than a match for any of them—white, black, brown or yellow. And they let him alone. All except Dick Snyder who feared no risk for he ran none. Snyder never moved a finger; his crimps and rum-soaked thugs jumped at his command.

KIRBY smiled disarmingly as he opened his palm and held it before the Creole Creeper's solitary eye. Snyder's face twitched with fierce passion. His eye grew round and bright. An audible murmur rose to almost thunder around them, and Snyder swallowed, wet his lips with trembling tongue, then ran the fingers of his right hand through his flowing blue-black hair.

Two pearls, black as a soft summer night, nestled on Kirby's palm;

black balls of dull fire, their living lustre seeming to smoke and their size—men argued, hissing between clenched teeth—somewhere between one-fifty and two hundred grains. God of the Southern Seas! A King's ransom in the damn blonde Yank's fist.

"Not bad," said Shanghai, slipping them back into his pocket.

Snyder leaned close to Kirby and almost whispered.

"You been defyin' me for two years now, Shanghai," he snarled, his face puckering into that snaky look that had given him the nickname of the Creole Creeper. "I want my share o' these beauties, Mister Kirby. Don't forget, I've kept my temper with you a long time. A man with those on him ain't safe in this part o' the world."

KIRBY laughed softly. "With men like you around, Snyder," he told the ace-thief of the shell territory, "an honest man ain't safe any place in the world."

"Be careful, Shanghai," warned Snyder savagely, then, "Hey, get away, avast there, ye dogs," to the swarm that hemmed them in against the bar. "You're no beach bum, Kirby. You got brains. I've had men fed to the sharks an' you're no better. Remember, I cut a third on the price you get for them. You can always find me at Chili John's."

Shanghai Steve Kirby stared Snyder in his port eye for a moment or two, his rage cooling. Then he reached out a flat powerful right hand and placed the palm quickly against the Creole Creeper's face. With a shove that seemed not even a slight exertion he knocked Snyder twice his length along the bar and against the wall at the end. When the seething bully lurched to his feet, Kirby chuckled.

"That's the way I cut you, Snyder,"

he said. "When you begin to put the screws on me I'll bury you the first shot. Lay off me."

The coolness of Shanghai Kirby stunned and awed the crowd in the barroom. Snyder stared after him as the tow-headed Yankee walked out the door.

Then while the suffocating heat of the tropic day cooled with the last rays of a blood-red setting sun, that slid like a melting copper coin into the slot of the sea, Dirk Snyder sent word to his man-breakers. He would not wait to see if Shanghai Kirby would turn over a cut on the price of the twin black pearls.

The Creole Creeper took them by force, and Shanghai Kirby knew what Snyder took them for, even in the black of the night, he knew the hushed voices of the thief's ruthless thugs.

The one-eyed one had made the first real move.

III

KIRBY, TRUSSED UP like a squirming Octopus in the net, was released at dawn by the China Chick, who, reaching Shanghai's door, realized that something was wrong. The grunting of his white friend and the bolted door was ominous. So the China Chick went in via the route four men had taken a few hours earlier in the dark.

"I was a damn fool, Chick," swore Shanghai when the Celestial had unwound the miles of net from Kirby's stiffened body. "Where's Forty-Fathom? We've gotta shove off if that guy pulled anchor."

The China Chick, quick as a cat and a terror with a six-gun, spat from between his gleaming even teeth when he learned the facts.

"Farnum dead drunk last night," he informed Kirby. "We stay Lou's joint down stleet."

Kirby cursed harshly, not at Farnum's drunk of the night before because a pearl fisherman has to tear it up sometime on shore. With swift precision he cleared out of the shambles that Sourabaja called a hotel and, with China Chick at his elbow, started for Lou's joint.

HERE they found Forty-Fathom and shook him roughly to complete consciousness. From here they scouted the shore line for a sign of the Creole Creeper's fast cruiser. There was no trace of it in the anchorage and Kirby learned from a blousy beachcomber that the Creole Creeper and his gang had shoved out during the night some time. Maybe it was early morning.

"Chili John's dive," mumbled Shanghai, remembering what Snyder had said to him.

"Huh," snorted Farnum. "What are yuh talkin' about?"

"With his speed," said Shanghai, "Snyder is probably at Trigger Island by now, the sneaking sea slug. Well—we—"

"Plenty tough place," cut in China Chick. "Plenty bad men."

"Yeh," laughed Kirby viciously. "And three more are on their way there. Come on. We'll pack in some grub."

While they stowed breakfast Shanghai talked. He explained what he meant to do, providing, of course, that his companions were willing to risk the danger that they were sure to encounter.

"There's no need o' yuh goin' sentimental, Shanghai," said Forty-Fathom Farnum, swilling vile coffee. "Was there ever a time since we been pardners that you hadda ask us to take a hand?"

"Aw," grinned Kirby, his leather tanned face gleaming with sweat, "can't yuh take a joke, you two. I know if there's a fight you two

wrecks'll be where its thickest. But get this now. I want Snyder and the pearls."

The others grunted assent.

"He sent his bloody terriers to surprise me last night," concluded Kirby growing madder now. "Tonight we surprise the Creole Creeper, an' if Chili John's dive get's in our path we'll pull it down."

"Sweet Genevieve," shouted Forty-Fathom as they started on a fast run from the restaurant to the shore. "Where I love it most is anywhere there's a battle royale."

Shanghai Kirby did not quite share the attitude of his comrade on the proposed journey. As they hauled up the sheet on the lugger and he eased her nose around the point, bearing Eastward, he was wrapt in cold sober thought. The years of Dirk Snyder's reign was growing short.

IV

IT WAS DARK before Shanghai's lugger slid quietly into the calm waters of Dead Man's Bay. Through the tropic night that falls like an indigo blanket over the palms and the beaches of pink sand Kirby and his companions had marked the winking lights on the sloping shore. The Trigger Island rendezvous of the Creole Creeper and his snakes.

"Chili John's joint is goin' full blast," remarked Forty-Fathom Farnum as they lowered the canvas. "Lookit the gang that's here, Shanghai."

The three of them glanced around the tiny bay where a hundred or more craft lay at anchor. Power boats, cats, a lugger or two, a sloop that perhaps belonged to some crooked trader, and countless dhoneyes, strange native boats.

The China Chick let the anchor over without a splash and they stayed aboard until the lugger had

swung to her cable's length, gently. From up on the shore came the mingled bedlam of sound that marked the station with the brand of reckless abandon, the haven of lost men. The canoe, dropped over the side, Shanghai and his pals lowered themselves and paddled quietly toward the shore. There was Snyder's high-powered cruiser in the shadow of the tree-fringed bank.

"Not too close together now," warned Kirby as they began climbing the hard packed uneven slope. "Snyder may be expectin' us and he'll know this corner of the globe has got too small for him and me. Spread out a little."

Outside of Chili John's joint the tropic night twinkled with the sooty lights from a score of smaller crumbling shacks, sprawled about to make straggling streets and winding alleys. Dives where the scum of the Seven Seas could drag the pipe or gamble to their heart's content.

From one of them came the horribly discordant notes of a piano being beaten dolefully by some drunken derelict.

CANNED music from a phonograph a hundred feet to their right, screamed through the cracks of a building patched of mud and sand and thatch. From the waterfront, in the shadows at their left, Shanghai saw two brawny sailormen, clad in nothing more than staggled off whites, climb staggering toward the Chili dump. Trigger Island! A right name for the blot on the ocean's bosom.

Holding back, the three visitors let the drunken deep-water dogs enter first. And with the opening of the door came a roar of rough men's voices raised in welcome. A moment later Kirby parted with his friends.

"Around the back," he said. "This cur is as yellow as a lime. He'll

try to break for it if I'm lucky enough to corner him. Don't let him get out."

"Luck, Shanghai," said Farnum, which the Chinese echoed.

And Shanghai Kirby sent his shoulder against the door of the robber roost to burst into the long barroom.

The babble that had filled the stinking den up to that instant was shut off as if someone had fired a gun. The whole joint froze in its sweltering flesh while a man might gulp three fingers of Hennessy. Then Chili John Grunn, or Green as he sometimes called it, bellowed like a bull.

V

SHANGHAI!" he yelled lustily in greeting. "Shanghai Kirby's come ashore, mates. What'll it be, Steve? Name yore disinfectant. Nothin' but the best stuff this side o' the Equator."

"Haul your blabbin', John," snapped Shanghai Steve narrowly. He showed no suggestion of the anxiety he felt. His eyes probed the crowded place for trace of Dirk Snyder. "Where's the Creeper?"

Chili John cleared his throat with a loud grating noise. Several bleary-eyed sailormen climbed awkwardly from chairs and started toward Kirby, mouthing half intelligible words.

Shanghai planted himself solidly with feet spread, moving away from the bar. He knew he was facing the pack, and already he had spotted two of the hellions who had robbed him of his rightful prizes. Where was the Creole Creeper lurking and why didn't someone speak? The air was tense, filled with the fumes of raw cheap alcohol, rotgut liquor and heavy, strong tobacco smoke. Edging toward him a half dozen thugs came cautiously and halted only when Kir-

by's swift hand yanked a yawning black six-gun from the waistband of his trousers.

"Gees!" yapped Chili John. "Don't start nothin' Shanghai. Cripes ye'll wreck the joint. Ye want the boss?"

Chili made a motion with his head, toward the wooden stairs at the back. Shanghai laughed. And one of the bar flies made a leap for the stair to warn Dirk Snyder. He never reached the top.

Snatching a half-empty bottle from the bar Shanghai hurled it like a bomb, catching the fellow in the back of the head and knocking him spinning over the banister. As if on signal, like a charge of dynamite ignited by a lightning fuse, Chili John's joint on Trigger Island exploded.

MEN tore and swore at one another. Some trying to get to the front, hurling chairs and bottles. Guns smashed over the rattle and clatter and Shanghai Kirby was plunging through the thick of the scrimmage toward those stairs. His swift feet climbed three at a time, while his six-gun rocked the low-ceilinged room with thunderbolts. Diving under tables and behind pillars the scrambling scavengers fired and ducked, their haste spoiling their aim, their snarls and cries of raging pain almost drowning the quick opening of a door in the upper hall.

Then running feet and the slamming door again. A window crashed as a pistol roared from the jungle outside in the dark. Somebody screamed with frightened pain. The battle downstairs had become a mad orgy of drunken misunderstanding and mistakes. Men crawled to the door and toppled from windows—wounded, dazed, delirious.

Chili John, from a position behind the bar, poked up his head.

"Where is he?" he inquired of a

murderous looking hawk-nosed breed. "That blood spillin' Shanghai Kirby?"

The hawk-nosed one whose shirt was ripped to the shoulder where blood dripped down his back glanced toward the stairs, furtively, as the crashing of a splintered door was heard. A few of the bravest started slowly up the stairs.

VI

SHANGHAI HEARD the bark of the pistol outside and knew that it was Dirk Snyder trying to make an escape through the window of the building. He had no time to lose, and as he ran along the narrow short hall, he leaped clear into the air and landed with both feet against the door that had slammed but an instant before.

Sprawling full length he shot through into the room and for a few seconds there was a fierce struggle. A candle was knocked out and rolled under a bed, and Shanghai Kirby clinched with the vicious Snyder.

With his pistol shoved into his belt he smashed right and left at the furious robber baron. Snyder cursed and panted, putting up a battle that drove Kirby to his best. Lurching to his feet Shanghai hauled the fighting Snyder upright and slammed him against the wall, plastering him with a volley of right hand punches that sagged the stouter man.

"I'll kill you, Snyder," snarled Shanghai close to the thief's face. "Better calm down and fork over my pearls before me and my pals cremate you and your gang."

"What?" blurted Snyder, fastening his arms around Kirby like bands of steel wire. "I ain't got your pearls you dirty double-cr—Oh—ugh—"

Kirby's blow dropped Snyder like a felled ox, for Shanghai had gotten

the range there in the dark, and now he scrambled over to yank Snyder to the bed where he ripped the clothing from him like a man would tear the burlap wrapping from a chunk of beef.

A wallet, carefully concealed inside Snyder's shirt, held the stolen pearls. Kirby struck a match and looked at them, but when the creaking of the stairs reached his absorbed attention he sprang up shoving the treasures into his pocket.

DIRK SNYDER groaned in agony but Shanghai had stepped out of the room and just in time. Two crouching figures at the head of the stairs half spun about, firing as they did, and the bullets burned their way into the panel behind Shanghai.

"You two bit hunks," yelled Shanghai recklessly as he fired.

A rising rumble of threatening voices broke out anew in the bar below, but Kirby knew the fate of men who hesitate. He had come in and he had to get out. In two long jumps he was at the stairs where he fell back with a slug cutting along his ribs on the right side. A couple of quick shots over the banister scattered the mob below, and a strange thing happened.

While Shanghai crouched with his pistol in his fist, ramming fresh cartridges into the chamber, a sudden silence blotted out every sound in that room under him.

It was eerie, almost weird. He could look over, cautiously, and see the cut-throats poised like men caught by death, stiff, stark, motionless. And here, just a few feet from his gun muzzle he could make out the side of a face. Chili John himself, a big revolver in his claw. Death must be standing in the doorway of the joint.

But it was only Forty-Fathom Farnum and the China Chick, drawn

into the joint by the second flare of gunshots. Now they stood and they took it all in. The China Chick caught sight of Chili John on the stairs and opened the ball with a slug that knocked the dive keeper cock-eyed. Chili John catapulted backward downward, slanting across the rail and a dozen pistols stammered the language of the maimed and the dead.

The joint was in an uproar. Somebody had taken a pot shot at the China Chick and the Chinese, wise and quick as a cat, knowing he'd better save his lead, ducked, grabbed a bottle from the bar and hurled it. Men ducked right and left.

Cursing heartily, Shanghai Kirby waded down the stairs and into the smear of broken glass, spilled liquor, broken furniture and crazy men. He tried to fight his way through without killing, swinging right and left with pistol butt and fist.

The refuse of the seas was here with flashing knives and salt hardened maulies.

VII

AT 'EM!" shouted Shanghai, fighting like a stevedore. His fist caught a flat-nosed helion under the ear and tore him clear of the floor. Then Shanghai felt the shock of men on his back. Someone pinned his arms to his sides.

China Chick drove a bullet through a half raised knife wrist and Forty-Fathom shot the ear off a breed who was piling in to beat Shanghai's brains out with a heavy chair leg.

Shanghai bellowed with pain as the fiends tore and slammed him around. Neither of his friends dared shoot now for fear of hitting Kirby. The mob had turned its entire attention on killing or capturing the man who had bearded the tiger, in his den. Kirby had to pay. Blows

rained around him and kicks were aimed at his face and body.

Forty-Fathom motioned to China Chick to stand by with ready gun. Then Farnum hurled himself in and began cutting right and left with the pistol barrel. Shanghai's body was almost buried beneath the writhing mass of the Creole Creeper's thugs.

With a warwhoop like a savage redman, Farnum tore into the fray; a south sea drifter who had been a bum in Colon did a flying leap and landed in the middle of the tumult.

Sprawling right and left they broke. Guns were knocked rattling along the floor and knives whirred, their dagger points biting deep into the spongy rum-stained boards.

"E-e-o-o-www!" It was the China Chick, sniping a kriss wielder and bringing a wild scream of death from the bronze throat.

"Clean 'em!" shouted Shanghai as he broke loose and dragged himself out of the tangle of living, dying and dead. Blood streamed from his face and arm, and his shirt was plastered red to his ribs.

Someone staggered and fell across the dead Chili John Gruhn.

FORTY-FATHOM, nicked and bleeding in a half-dozen spots, rushed to where Shanghai staggered toward the door. The China Chick, seeing the crisis at hand, pointed his last shot at one of the lamps over the bar. The glass shattered and the whole mess fell sputtering as Kirby grabbed a lunging sailor by the belt and hurled him aloft to fall with a crash on a thug who crouched with a palmed knife.

"Fire," came a shout of terror from behind the bar.

Flames were springing up, swiftly, licking hungrily at the seasoned, alcohol drenched woodwork.

Men, wounded and panic-stricken, cried hoarsely. Knives flew now like

feathers. It was toss-up. Shanghai felt the hot splash of a blade as it bit his shoulder. He saw the China Chick, pale looking and like a little child, suddenly double and lean forward. A bullet had got him bad, maybe. Shanghai swept the Celestial up in his arms as he backed toward the door watching the pandemonium that flooded the dive.

Through broken windows men were diving and leaping to safety. A surge of human driftwood flung itself toward them as they crashed out into the night. And there they saw the flames breaking through the walls. Chili John's place was in flames. The light from the blazing matchbox lit the jungle and the shore. A hundred shouting red-eyed denizens of the other shacks hung back in the shadows.

"The water!" shouted Shanghai to Farnum. "These rats don't know us from the others in this light. Quick!"

SLIPPING off into the shadows they skirted around to the shore, found their canoe and shoved out to the lugger. Shanghai put the China Chick down in the little dog hole they called a cabin and with a grim satisfaction he grabbed the tiller and luffed the boat out of the bay.

Behind them they could see the wild figures of men running in and out of Chili John's joint, carrying others—Dirk Snyder perhaps—and Shanghai Kirby smiled. His twin black pearls. They reposed comfortably in his money belt now and—well it was a long run to Pearl Town, but they had better set their course that way.

"We'll get rid of these hoodoos, Farnum," he said as they scuttled through the ocean night. "And then when we meet up with the Creole Creeper we'll have a free hand."

"Personally," said Forty-Fathom, painting his wounds, "I thought it

was a good brawl, but you shoulda killed that breed Snyder. The fleet woulda voted yuh a honorary chairmanship 'r sumpin."

VIII

SLOW AS the lugger was Shanghai bent her course in a winding path through the thousand tiny islands that dot the ocean surface in the Southern Seas. He knew that Snyder's cruiser was fast; that if the Creole Creeper was moved to make it a running fight they would have their hands full and likely their bodies—with lead.

"We'll keep away from open water," Kirby told Farnum, "and when we come off Macassar we can duck in and stock up for the run through the straits. Take care of Chick, will yuh, Forty?"

Unchallenged they beat up the wind all night and all the next day keeping under the green palm fringed rim of the islands. Then at nightfall, cutting through a flock of dhoneyes just in from the shell beds, Shanghai ran into Macassar and anchored along the point.

Macassar, almost as tough as the Trigger Island hangout, was a bigger settlement, famed far and wide as the port of missing men. Hot and bald it squatted on the rock-sand shore like a boil.

It was the stalking ground of Death, and filled with the stench of crawling men. Malays, Chinese, Japs, Arabs; half-savage blacks from the jungle tribes, broken white men, from every corner of the globe. And over it all lorded a score of tough skinned Dutchmen, with clubs that chopped splinters off of brawling heads.

This was the place where Shanghai, with Forty-Fathom and the slowly recovering China Chick walked up the street and turned to-

ward Harney's place. Here the lights were brightest and the noise loudest.

"Packed," remarked Kirby as they looked in. Yes, Harney's was packed with two-bit pearlers like himself, with native divers, white gamblers and the riff-raff that one finds at Macassar any night of the year.

Kirby shoved through the motley crowd, leading the way to the counter where a couple of fat Chinese would throw food at them as fast as they could order. Farnum pulled up on one side of Kirby and the China Chick on the other.

They ate hungrily of the best the simple menu offered.

SHANGHAI, however, felt something hanging over him. Call it a premonition or what you will. He kept his eyes on the mirror, fly-specked and cracked, that covered the wall behind the counter. Here he could watch the crowd while he ate.

"Nervous," inquired Forty-Fathom observing his friend's alertness. "You ain't figurin' that—"

"This vermin infested group of islands," said Shanghai, "is too small for Snyder and Shanghai Kirby. I know it. And because I'm not a killer, a murderin' dog that lives off the sweatin' toil of others, this cut-throat has followed me for years. I seem to feel him still at my heels."

"We keep good watch," cackled the China Chick. "Me—I think I hear engine—too."

"Engine," repeated Shanghai. "You heard his cruiser, China?"

"I don't know," said the Oriental. "I go see—have a look maybe."

"Wait," Shanghai grabbed his friend's bandaged arm. "Stay here China. We don't look for trouble. If it comes we take it standin' up o' course. But I've got my pearls. Let them start it."

Men were barging into Harney's

place and rolling out. A steady casual stream, loud, often boisterous. There was the usual talk dropped by bits as they met, drinking; talk about pearl beds, and coral, and tons of shell and prices, and those who noted Shanghai Kirby's presence whispered of the twin black babies. Men stood and looked at his back. Hard-boiled weather-beaten soldiers of fortune like himself, slapped him as they passed.

"Hyah, Shanghai? Here yuh been fishin'."

KIRBY finished eating, rolled a smoke and paid the bill for the three of them. Then he backed off and with his friends started for the door.

That was the signal.

Six sinister figures sprang on them from the shadows of the long room, and in a flash Harney's place was a milling madhouse. Shanghai heard the rush of feet and turned, punching as he leaped. His companions lashed out with their fists, and the China Chick following the example of his chief did not draw a gun but slid a keen edged knife from his belt. Into the lunging mass he plunged hacking right and left, delicately with the point, bringing throaty howls of pain and fury while Shanghai and Farnum fought back to back with flying fists.

"What the hell's it mean?" roared Shanghai. "Hey, Harney."

But Harney knew nothing, only that his place was in a panic. Behind the bar the boss stooped, ready with a sawed-off shotgun. He saw Shanghai's fist catch a red stubbled chin and knock the fellow backward against a post. Another dived in to bring Shanghai Kirby down, but Kirby was in his element. His foot came up and crashed into the other's groin, curling him in agony like a snake.

Not a gun had been fired. Fight-

ing men were everywhere, many of them in it for the pure joy of physical conflict, utterly ignorant of reason or rhyme. Slowly but surely Shanghai's party battled toward the door and here, caught completely by surprise, Kirby felt the stiff jab of a heavy object pressed against his ribs.

With a rush, he and his friends were swept out the door and into the crowded street where Shanghai beat down the Dutch cop's club to find himself surrounded.

"That's him," he heard a sharp voice cry, and something told him before he looked that his fears were well founded.

It was Dirk Snyder, the Creole Creeper of the Islands.

IX

MY PEARLS, officer," Snyder was shouting. "This thief has got them. Search him. Throw him in the lock-up. Look out!"

Shanghai's swing did not reach the leering Snyder and now more of the husky Dutch cops came, dragging Forty-Fathom Farnum and the China Chick, clubbing them into submission as they fought for freedom.

Kirby's eyes took in the scene quickly. Snyder had trailed him and was gloating openly, confident in the strength of the bullies who stood on all sides. Fury flamed in Shanghai's eyes as he looked the horde over, but the law gripped him with iron claws and he could only curse.

"You dirty half-breed crimp," he snarled at Snyder lunging toward him. "Your pearls, are they? Why damn you, everybody in the islands knows these pearls are mine. Here—Take your hands off me officers. I'll break that rotten crab's spine."

The Dutchmen held him in a vise and Snyder screamed venomously.

"Yes, they know you've got them,"

he shouted, "but how many of them know you stole them from Dirk Snyder?"

"You lie, you tripang eater," snapped Forty-Fathom. "I was with him when he dug them outa shell."

A scowling vicious face was thrust out at Snyder's shoulder. The killer chief's head man, a hellion whelped from the slop of Penang's alleys; a barracuda in a sea of scavengers. It was one of the four who had crept into Shanghai's room that night and robbed him of his prizes. "Bloody" Tasman, they called him.

"You son of a gun," he cursed now, pointing to Shanghai. "You stole them from Snyder while we slept at Sourabaja. Give them back now and we will go away."

SHANGHAI kicked out and missed Tasman's belly after which he was dragged off, fighting desperately between four of the island's police.

Down the street they went to the jail and Kirby fought all the way, battling like a mad man as they bore him in and bound him before Snyder's grinning face.

"Inside his shirt," said the oily Snyder. "He has the pearls hidden there—twin black pearls. There!"

Snyder reached swiftly and plucked the folded piece of Kirby's sleeve in which he had wrapped the precious stones. One of the dull-witted policemen whom Kirby suspected as being a part of the plot reached out and touched Snyder on the shoulder.

A great crowd had collected in the street outside and through this the other police were pushing Farnum and the China Chick. Snyder's gang was there, many of them cut and wounded, bleeding from the shooting back on Trigger Island, also from the brief battle in Harney's place.

Shanghai swore crimson oaths on the head of the Creole Creeper's

mother; on the head of the police and on the thugs who roared at him in derision. He had been framed, cleverly, swiftly and without a chance to save his black gems.

"Take these ropes off me," he snarled. The veins stood out on his forehead like ridges on a red sandy shore. "That scum of the Singapore gutters has lied like hell. You're robbing me. My pearls!"

The China Chick silent, drooping now in the grip of a sturdy lawman, saw Shanghai, and winked slyly. Then he groaned like a man in pain of death and he slumped over, sliding from the surprised cop's fingers to lay in a sodden heap on the floor. The cop kicked him savagely rolling him over against the wall. In that flash of space, the scene had changed.

"Stick 'em up—don't move!" barked Shanghai Kirby, his fist filled with the gun from Chick's belt. No man moved now for sudden death had stepped into their midst. "It's my play and I'm shooting the works."

Farnum and the China Chick leaped into action, one unfastening Kirby's bonds, the other corraling the weapons of the crowd. Teeth bared like a grinning idol the Celestial retrieved his knife from a table near-by.

For a tense moment loaded with the menace of the maddened Shanghai the room almost trembled. Scarcely a breath was heard as Kirby scanned the faces present. Then he shook his head and swore feelingly. Dirk Snyder had vanished like a draught of foul air.

OUT through the door and down the littered street of Macassar went Shanghai Kirby with his two pals, spread out, like an infantry wave going over the top. They were headed for the waterfront and running with every ounce of speed in their tough legs.

X

IT WAS A running fight with Shanghai's party in the center. Ahead of them raced Dirk Snyder and his thugs, and behind came the Macassar gang, police and all, shooting wildly, shouting, but keeping carefully out of range of the infuriated Kirby and his two pals.

Forty-Fathom Farnum, lean and fast as a darting snake, forged ahead. He saw the dory first where it showed in the growing light of early morning. Close behind came Shanghai Kirby with the Chinese near him. Farnum shot as he swung off to the left where he spied a light canoe pulled up on the beach off the point. It was closer to the Creole Creeper's cruiser than Snyder's own dory on the shore.

Snyder saw too late. He turned, leaped into the sliding boat while Bloody Tasman whipped a gun out and fired a warning slug at Farnum. They were hard pressed and he saw in a flash that the Macassar bunch had deserted them. With a shrill yell of rage he emptied his gun at Shanghai and the yellow man.

"Halt," shouted Shanghai and raised his pistol, but they were swinging out across the water like frightened dock rats, Tasman fumbling for cartridges.

"Cut 'em off, Farnum!" bellowed Kirby seeing Forty-Fathom already going after the fleeing crooks.

Snyder saw it too, saw the ragged, half-naked white man speeding through the shallows and with a maniacal scream he pointed away toward the myriad tiny islands along the Celebes coast. The two brutes at the dory's oars swung the boat around and rowed desperately at the nearest island.

Shanghai, reckless, inflamed by the dirty trick of the island bully, was paddling like a machine, while China

Chick kept the fleeing thieves dodging and ducking his lead. It was a race now for the island and with a satisfied grin Kirby nodded. The island was showdown land for the Creole Creeper. A silent vow formed on Kirby's lips. It was Snyder or himself from this day forward. One of them would never come back.

Across the lightening water they sped, gaining with every stroke of the paddles. This was no lugger against a speed boat. Kirby laughed, his eyes flashing with the nearness of the twin black pearls.

The dory, even then, was sliding up on the beach. Kirby fanned a shot at them as he saw Snyder and Bloody Tasman leap out with their evil companions and run wildly through the shallow water to the shore.

"Duck, Chick," he shouted, as the enemy turned there.

TWO of the brutes opened fire on Shanghai's canoe, but instead of hiding, Shanghai rose up and the sound of gunshots rang out like one. A bullet tore a strip of Kirby's belt away, but one of Snyder's five crumpled in the sand. The others fled into the jungle brush.

"There," cried Kirby, pointing as they ran the craft onto the shore.

He ran, as he called out, on the trail of crackling branches and scattered leaves. Dirk Snyder's shining black hair bobbed ahead of them, now and then, as the island bandit frantically fled. With a sweep of his hand Kirby shouted back to Forty-Fathom.

"They've separated," he called back. "Take them, Farnum."

Forty-Fathom had run his canoe ashore a hundred feet further on. Now he went diving into the tangled undergrowth in pursuit of the hired killers, while Shanghai and Chick cut after the Creole Creeper.

Somebody was running with Sny-

der and a few minutes later, crashing their way through the trees, they discovered that it was the vile Tasman. A few yards beyond the pair were swallowed up in the choked jungle and vines. Like hunted animals they had disappeared and Shanghai halted with China Chick by his side.

"They can't be far," he said, panting from the strain of his fight and pursuit. "Here. There's a hill or a mound 'r something. This way."

The two climbed through the brush up a steepening slope and Shanghai searched, climbing around on the rocky coral outcropping until he came to a sudden halt and pointed.

"A cave!" he said. "That's where they went."

China Chick never hesitated, but flung himself down through the matted growth with Shanghai and they stood for an instant at the entrance to a gloomy cavern, musty, damp and with its walls perforated by millions of tiny holes such as coral always forms.

CROUCHED low they started in. No sound but a low murmur as of wind greeted them. No footsteps. Nothing. But once inside they both realized that the darkness was not as black as it had seemed from outside. And they began running as fast as they could through a narrow echoing passage.

The cave was like a burrow, a vermin nest, dug out of coral and it wound first right, then left, twisting, turning until with a dive into an abrupt angle Shanghai Kirby, with the Celestial at his heels, came out into full view of Dirk Snyder.

A bullet whistled past his brow and chopped coral onto Chick's head. The crash of the exploding cartridge rocked the strange dungeon, then a fierce blast of the pistol battle thundered and shook the earth.

Smoke filled the weird tomb. And Shanghai heard the voice of Dirk Snyder cursing Bloody Tasman for a fool.

"Drop those guns," barked Shanghai leaping into full view on the edge of what he now saw was a ledge of coral below which lay a dark underground pool. "Come through, Snyder. I want my pearls."

The Creole Creeper's eye glittered in a strange light that Shanghai now saw was a reflection from the far end of the water. Somewhere the sun was driving down in there, a shaft of golden light like a blade of sharp metal.

Through the filmy layer of smoke that drifted upward they heard Snyder's voice.

"One step, Shanghai," it said. "You make a move toward me an' you'll never see the lousy black pearls again."

XI

THE CRUEL leering face was screwed up into a vicious snarl and Shanghai Kirby saw Snyder's hand emerge from the shirt front holding that folded piece of his cotton shirt. He saw Snyder edging backward cautiously, his glaring eyes boring into Kirby's. In half extended clawing hand lay the pearls and Snyder's bitter biting words came to the American adventurer like the toll of a funeral bell.

"What the Creole Creeper loses," he hissed, "no man gets."

Like a man who springs from the torment of hell Shanghai Kirby leaped at Dirk Snyder. But it was too late. A yell of triumph streamed from the wretched killer's lips and he flung the pearls far out into the bottomless watery grave.

For a single insane second Kirby hung in the very air. All four of them in fact were gripped by the

realization of what had just happened. The price of a king's ransom was sinking again into the sea from whence it had come.

Shanghai jumped and his powerful fist arced over in a killing swing that landed on the Creole Creeper's jaw. Snyder shot out, backward, limp, into space, then fell without a murmur into the water below. Shanghai knew the China Chick had moved, too, was tangled with Bloody Tasman some place on that ledge.

But his eyes would not let him look. He was watching, fascinated now, creeping slowly toward the waters' edge, seeing the pearls. Clear as a spring that water, and in the piercing shaft of sunlight he could see the spotless floor of sand. Sinking slowly downward, gone forever now—the pearls.

"God!" breathed Shanghai, following fortune's urge.

Far out like a falling rocket he shot, hitting the water with no more splash than a spear. Down—down—down—he clawed and kicked. It had been months since Shanghai Kirby had done a "skin dive" and here he was with pants and a flapping shirt and shoes, fighting like a demon for depth, already spent with the battles of the past forty-eight hours.

BEFORE his eyes were the pearls, sinking lower—lower always while he strained every muscle in his body.

He saw small fishes darting here and there, curious, snapping at the rag that wrapped his precious pearls, then jerking away to shoot away into the shadows of the grotto.

Still he swam, desperately now, for his unpracticed lungs were bursting with the pain and his head reeled with the pressure as he reached the depths.

Ten feet—fifteen—twenty—thirty—always there it was, just beyond his

grasp—a fortune in the palm of a hand—thirty-five.

Vivid sunlight now and the ocean, the tunnel to the southern sea floor. Shanghai kicked his last half-conscious stroke, closed his eyes—and his fingers fastened around the rag-wrapped pearls and—white sand. Bottom!

Mad with pain and half-dead he shoved with all he had and felt himself pushing upward, tortured by the desire to open his lips and breathe. Up he came, years it took him, years of agony, of despair and still he fought for the prize that was his. He saw the shadow of the coral ledge and the darkness of the dome above, then was aware of a dull splash. He gulped a dying breath and with the cool air rushing into his crushed chest he struck out for the ledge. He was alive!

MOANING with the agony of the punishment he had taken he climbed out on the coral and felt, back of him, a movement in the water. He turned and rose dripping to see the China Chick knifing the depths. Far down, below there, he saw the distorted picture of Bloody Tasman waving arms and legs like a bunch of crimson seaweed ripped loose by a swift current. Chick had played his part.

"China!" Shanghai almost toppled over, shouting, "Quick!"

The big hand of Kirby reached out and clutched the slim brown fingers, slid to the wrist, then Shanghai yanked with all his power throwing the yellow lad out upon the coral ledge with only feet to spare.

Like a torpedo the giant body of a barracuda, killer of the seas, shot past under the shelf, his gaping jaws set for the lure of living flesh.

"Damn!" breathed China Chick. "Pletty close."

Shanghai threw an arm about

Chick's dripping body and they turned their backs. A barracuda is not particular who furnishes his meals. Still weak and staggering a little Shanghai Kirby led the way with China Chick behind him; back through the winding coral grotto to the sun-splashed jungle and the outer air. Soon they were trotting over the trail they had come, through the jungle, and Shanghai raised his voice in a shout.

"Hey Farnum," he called eagerly.

A VOICE some distance on answered, and when the two came out on the shore they found Forty-Fathom seated on the sand smoking a Spanish cigarette which he said he had found in a coat under the dory's thwart.

"The pearls?" asked Forty-Fathom in a manner that indicated he took them for granted.

Shanghai patted his pocket and smiled.

"Good," said Farnum, inhaling deeply. "Where's Snyder an' that killer of his?"

"They—well," Shanghai shrugged lightly, "it was a toss-up, pardner, an' they lost. The Creole Creeper has cashed his last chip."

Forty-Fathom gestured across the water toward Macassar.

"He had a nice craft there," he chuckled. "We oughta do something about that, Shanghai."

THE town on the tip of the Celebes was already slumbering in the rising heat of the tropic morning, and Shanghai Steve Kirby looked at Dirk Snyder's cruiser.

"We'll borrow that," he said with a laugh, "for the run to Pearl Town. Snyder'll never need it any more. He's one snake that has trapped himself."

Scrambling into a canoe they paddled across to the side of the trim cruiser and crawled aboard. There was nobody there and not a hand was raised from the shore or the craft that lay at anchor around them.

It was the law of the islands; the survival of the fittest.

The cruiser's engine roared, and the anchor was raised. Backing into the clear Shanghai Kirby opened her wide and swung into the west for the Straits. A grim smile played around the corners of his mouth.

"The devil has gone to his doom," he muttered.

*Another Larry Weston Story by the Author of
"Brother of the Tong"*

THE AVENGER OF LO CHANG

By **LIEUT. SCOTT MORGAN**

*Continuing the Breathless Adventures of an American
on the Exciting Trail of the Three
Pearls of Death!*

A Story You Can't Afford to Miss!



**SIR
JAMES
BROOKE**

WHOSE
FIGHTING
SPIRIT
MADE
HIM A

Famous SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE

RAJAH, - KING OF SARAWAK, BORNEO.

IN 1840, JAMES BROOKE, RETIRED ENGLISH OFFICER, (ON ACCOUNT OF LUNG WOUND RECEIVED IN THE BURMA WAR) BOUGHT A YACHT AND SAILED FOR BORNEO IN SEARCH OF FIGHTING ADVENTURE. HIS ARRIVAL WAS AN IMPORTANT EVENT IN THE HISTORY OF NORTH BORNEO.

FORCED TO FIGHT HIS WAY THROUGH A PIRATE ATTACK AT SARAWAK, HE RESCUED THE SULTAN WHO WAS AT WAR WITH REBEL HEAD-HUNTING DYAKS. BROOKE SOON GAINED THE SULTAN'S FAVOR BY HIS DARING AND ADVISED THE AGED RULER ON MATTERS OF GOVERNMENT. HE WAS APPOINTED PRIME MINISTER.

LATER, BROOKE CHALLENGED THE REBEL CHIEF OF THE DYAKS TO A DUEL IN HIS OWN STYLE OF FIGHTING TO SETTLE THE REBELLION. ALTHOUGH BROOKE HAD NEVER FOUGHT WITH NATIVE SWORD HE WON AND CRUSHED THE UPRISING. FOR THIS THE SULTAN PROCLAIMED HIM RAJAH, KING OF SARAWAK.



THE KINGDOM SOON BECAME A HAPPY AND PEACEFUL COUNTRY. TODAY, SARAWAK IS A RECOGNIZED AND PROTECTED MALAY STATE, THE HEREDITARY KINGDOM OF RAJAH SIR JAMES BROOKE, BEING RULED BY HIS DESCENDANTS.

"ROARIN'-FIGHTIN'" AVERY -

THE "PRIVATEER" WHO DID THE THINGS FOR WHICH PIRATE KIDD WAS HUNG.

IN 1691 JOHN AVERY'S RIP-ROARING FIGHTING AND MARVELOUS INGENUITY SAILED CIRCLES AROUND KIDD, TAKING THE GREATEST PRIZES THAT WERE EVER CAPTURED BY A PIRATE.

HE OUTFIGHTED AND OUT-MANEUVORED KIDD AND AFTER AVERY'S CAPTURE OF THREE GREAT SHIPS FROM INDIA THE KING OF ENGLAND RECEIVED WORD "IT WAS ALL DONE BY KIDD" - AND SO KIDD WAS HUNG.

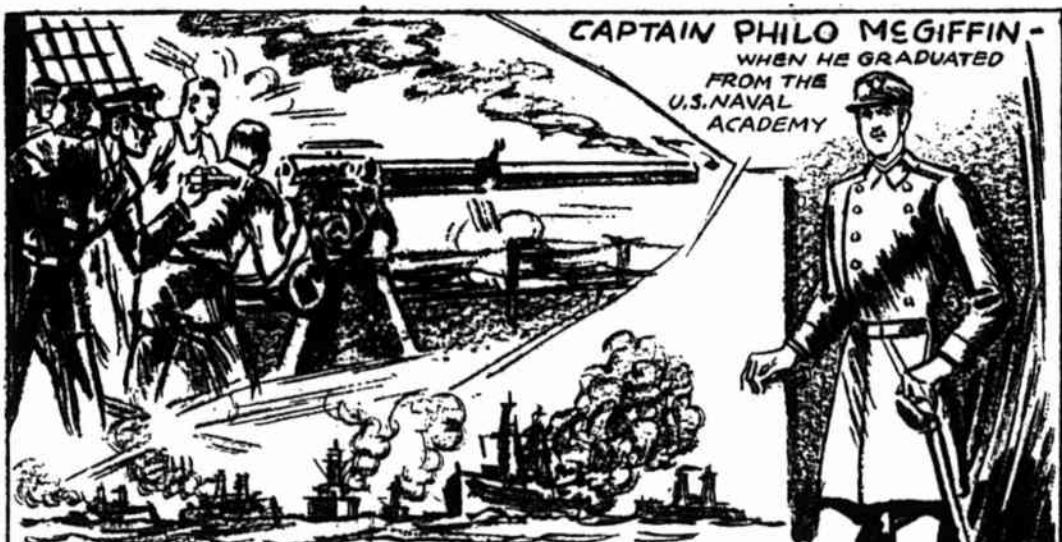


SKETCHED FROM A PAINTING OF AVERY, 200 YEARS OLD.

This is the Original Illustrated Adventure

CAPTAIN PHILO MCGIFFIN -

WHEN HE GRADUATED
FROM THE
U.S. NAVAL
ACADEMY



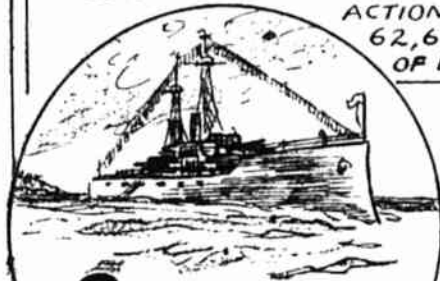
"DARE-DEVIL" MCGIFFIN COMMANDED THE CHEN YUEN, CHINA'S LARGEST BATTLESHIP AT THE GREAT BATTLE OF YALU, SEPT. 16TH, 1894

HIS SHIP,
RECEIVING THE
CONCENTRATED FIRE OF THE
ENTIRE JAPANESE SQUADRON,
WAS STRUCK 400 TIMES!

LATER THE JAPANESE
TESTIFIED THEMSELVES THAT
THE CHINESE FLEET, HEADED
BY THE CHEN YUEN, NEVER
LOST FORMATION. MCGIFFIN,
THE U.S. NAVAL GRADUATE,
THROUGH HIS KNOWLEDGE OF GUN-
NERY AND NAVIGATION SAVED
THE CHINESE FLEET
FROM BEING ANNIHILATED.



DURING THE WORLD WAR, OF THE AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE 36,931 WERE KILLED IN ACTION, 13,613 DIED OF WOUNDS RECEIVED IN ACTION, AND 62,670 DIED OF DISEASE.



EVERY UNITED STATES WAR VESSEL IS OUTFITTED WITH MORE THAN 150 FLAGS!



THE FASTEST-RUNNING ANIMAL IN EXISTENCE IS THE CHEETAH OR HUNTING LEOPARD, WHICH HAS BEEN KNOWN TO ATTAIN - FOR SHORT DISTANCES - A SPEED OF 80 MILES AN HOUR

Feature—the First to Appear in Any Magazine

JUNGLE RENEGADES



Desperate Strife on a Perilous Quest in the Heart of the African Wilderness

By REX SHERRICK

Author of "The Mafia Doom," "The Battle of the Chairs," etc.

THE FATE of a man he had never seen was in Dick Colby's hands. He looked out of the little hotel window onto the glaring street of Yaounde. The light of early evening glistened on the faces and bodies of swarms of blacks.

He was in the very heart of Africa.

Colby was on edge. Not afraid, mind you, but he had traveled a good many thousand miles on this secret mission, and now he was waiting. For whom? Colby did not

know. Somewhere, out of range of his vision, black fingers beat a rhythmic tattoo on some crude drum and the faint, weird strains of twanging strings made barbaric discord with a savage voice that rose and fell like the chanting of some great jungle demon.

A Bamoum chieftain cantered through the crowded street unmindful of the shouting, scrambling natives who flew from beneath his plunging horse's hoofs. Colby turned from the window and rolled a cigarette with the dexterity of an Ameri-

can cowboy. As he struck a match and held the flame before his face there was a soft tapping at the door of his room.

"Come in," said Colby without moving.

The door opened swiftly and a tall, sparsely built man entered. He gave Colby a sliding glance and shut the door. The American noted the soiled pajama-like costume and the pith helmet. A bulge inside the waistband hinted at a weapon of some sort. A frigid silence seemed to frost the very walls of the little room.

Neither man had spoken so much as a word. The visitor was almost as dark as the natives in the street down there. Colby wondered what he was; hardly a white man.

THEN the newcomer moved. He was staring into the eyes of Dick Colby as one of his long arms rose slowly to his helmet and drew it off.

Colby saw the high forehead and the thick black hair with nary a kink. He was aggravated by the silent ceremony and snapped a finger as he spoke.

"Come on," he demanded. "Why all the ranygazoo? If you—"

He cut his words short as the man jerked something from inside the helmet and shoved it forward, holding it out for Colby to observe.

It was the torn half of a photograph.

Dick Colby's eyes were riveted on the picture.

The lower half of a jungle view; it showed the body of a white man from the waist down with the legs bound tight with creeper thongs that wrapped him to a gnarled and twisted tree trunk.

Unconsciously Colby tensed himself, then from his inner pocket he drew a case and extracted something

which he tossed on a table near his visitor. The man picked it up, glanced at Colby, then laid his torn fragment beside it. It was a perfect match. The picture was completed.

"I knew it was you," declared the visitor now with manifest relief. "Suppose everythin's accordin' to Hoyle."

"If you mean—the price," broached Colby, "yes," then he roused himself from his absorption in the picture on the table. He turned on his visitor suddenly. "Why all this damn secrecy? Where's Vanderlin and what's the matter with getting started right now? Who are you, anyway?"

"You can call me Smith," he said, his tone placative as he raised a hand for quiet. "You read the letter didn't yuh; so you oughta know how secret this business is. Don't blame me. I'm only riskin' my life for the sake of Vanderlin. Take it easy. There's four hundred miles of jungle between you an' him. We start at seven in the mornin'."

COLBY frowned and his blue eyes blazed with a new anger. Four hundred miles of jungle.

Turning on the man, who lied when he said his name was Smith, he started to speak. But Smith was at the door.

"I'll have everything ready at seven," he said, and he was gone silently.

As the door closed Dick Colby swung on his heel. His eyes fell on the torn photograph. The picture, complete now, was of a white man bound to a jungle tree, and pinned against the trunk by a score of savage spears. For the hundredth time Colby stared at the tilted face of the dead man. It wasn't the millionaire Herman J. Vanderlin. But who was it?

II

LIKE the black tribes of this French Mandate of Cameroun, Dick Colby was up at dawn. He was ready for Smith when the latter arrived at seven, and was made to realize at once that this mysterious wanderer in South Africa's wild places knew what he was doing.

"We make the first hundred miles by auto," said Smith as he directed the packing of Colby's baggage in a rattling, noisy car.

It took them two whole days to make the journey from Yaounde to Ayos, which crouched on the bank of the winding river Nyong. There the two white men, for Colby was positive now that Smith was one of those "forgotten men," there, at Ayos, they secured carriers, six powerful blacks. Forging the river, they struck the well-defined trail.

Smith was walking in the lead, Colby behind him, and after them the burden bearers, swinging along singing a monotonous chant to which their bare feet kept time. Smith was wearing a belted pistol now, like Dick Colby, and one of the blacks carried a high-powered rifle that the pale white man had just brought from the States.

"How many miles can we make in a day?" inquired Colby casually as they tramped through the chattering jungle.

"All depends," replied Smith, without turning his head. "Maybe twenty. Sometimes twenty-five 'r thirty. It's the rivers that'll slow yuh up."

Dick Colby smiled grimly at the thought. The Vanderlin family had placed a lot of faith in him. If Wall Street should learn the plight of the fabulously wealthy operator the front pages would blazen the news across the United States like a tornado. More than one stock would

drop with a crash. Fortunes would be swept away overnight.

But the secret that had been sealed between that far-off jungle prison and the palatial Park Avenue home was known to only ten humans, and Dick Colby had been selected as one of the ten.

As a mere kid in the World War Corporal Richard Colby had won the Croix de Guerre and the Distinguished Service Medal. He had later outsmarted a Mexican firing squad, and even taken a fling at exploration in the Arctic.

And here he was beating it down into the Cameroun jungle carrying fifty thousand dollars in American money with which to ransom the great Vanderlin.

By noon of that first day they reached a clearing, and Smith called a halt to eat. They had crossed two narrow black streams. Colby wondered aloud how far they had come.

"'Bout fifteen mile," stated Smith, ordering the natives to prepare a fire so that they could make some tea.

COLBY noted that the black men beat around in the tall grass with their spears as if to scare away any serpents or wild beasts that might be lurking. As they built the fire and sat down he tried to get Smith to loosen up, to tell him more about the Sultan who had captured Vanderlin and had forced the American to write home for the ransom.

"Oh, these tribes," said Smith readily, "ain't as dumb as you might think. They're Mohammedans, yuh know; smart like the Arabs up north. This Sultan of Dja sees a chance to get some real money an'—"

Colby cut in suddenly.

"Wait a minute," he said. "How is it that you, a white man, are representing this black hellion, Smith? I don't savvy the—"

"Me," said Smith astonished. "I ain't representing no nigger. I was one o' Vanderlin's guides on his hunting expedition. The tribe killed the other two. I'm Vanderlin's man."

"Well, then," continued Dick Colby persistently, "how come this coon let's you loose? Why wasn't he afraid you'd inform the civil or military authorities?"

Smith stared into Colby's face for a long silent minute.

"You wanta know?" he answered in an undertone, letting his eyes waver and probe beyond the edge of the clearing. "He ain't let me outa sight of his runners. Haven't you heard them keepin' up with us in the jungle? They escorted me into Yaounde an' they're escortin' you an' me back. One false move an' I'd a-been a dead man."

Dick Colby did not say any more. He glanced past Smith into the fringe of the jungle. There was something treacherous, deadly, in its dark silence. He raised his eyes to the gap of light, hot sky. On the stiff, bare topmost branch of a vine choked naked tree he saw a giant bird perched motionless. A vulture.

III

AT THE end of the third day they had covered practically a hundred miles. It was slow going through the dense jungle. The trail was getting rougher, narrower. There were streams. Now and then they had come upon a big jungle cat or a drove of vicious wild zebras that had to be beaten out of their path, or killed.

In the second tiny village they reached, the carriers from Ayos demanded their pay and turned back. Smith gathered a new crew and they went on. Each day Dick Colby became more and more suspicious of his guide. Smith was furtive. He

seldom looked you straight in the face, and he never talked unless a direct question was fired at him.

The first time he offered a suggestion Colby knew that he had made no mistake. The man was up to something.

"What do you wanta lug that bag for?" asked Smith, pointing to the small pigskin case that Colby kept in his left hand. "Why don't yuh let one o' the blacks carry it?"

Colby laughed lightly.

"You and I both know why, Smith," he said. "Suppose one of these boys let it drop in some river?"

SMITH shrugged his shoulders and grinned. He tried to hide the satisfaction that Colby's vague explanation gave him. So that was where he carried the fifty grand. Good old U. S. A. currency, the best money in the world. His stride seemed to become more elastic, his long legs took new strength.

Behind him Dick Colby swung along, his ears filled with the almost deafening chatter of long-tailed monkeys and the scream of countless brilliant birds who swept through the tops of the trees with a rush of wings like the roar of an airplane motor.

Swift slithering snakes slid through the tangled undergrowth along their trail. Small frightened mammals were off like shadows into the darker distances at their approach. Swarms of buzzing insect life flooded the foliage where streaks of dark green and piercing shafts of tropic sun drenched the misty arch through which they pushed.

Most of their night camps were made on the edge of tiny native villages cleared in the jungle. Here they were treated as guests of the local headman, or sub-chief.

Colby could understand none of the conversation that went on be-

tween Smith and the tribe, but he gathered from Smith's jargon of kindergarten English and motions and the sign talk of the chief that there really existed somewhere farther south a Sultan who ruled these far-flung tribes.

"Just the same," Colby told himself as they took the trail in the early morning, "I'll be ready for Mister Smith. If he starts anything I'll give him the works."

AS they piled up the miles and the hours upon hours the tension between the two white men tightened. Each was striving to hide it from his companion. Few words were spoken. Whenever they stopped to rest, which was often, or to build a fire and eat, Colby caught Smith's eyes again and again focused on the pigskin case.

If he but knew it the germ of the idea only developed in Smith's crafty mind on the fifth day. The half-way point. And on that day, Colby with a spirit of recklessness, turned his tricky kodak on the guide beside the campfire.

"What's the idea?" demanded Smith.

Colby, who had here and there along the trail, gotten the camera from its case that hung over his shoulder and shot views of the country, merely laughed.

"Just a picture for me to take back home," he said jokingly.

Smith growled something beneath his breath and scowled blackly. Colby pretended not to notice his annoyance. But the incident once more strengthened the ransom carrier's conviction that he had best be on guard every moment. Why should a rough and ready customer like Smith object to having his picture snapped?

The question was soon forgotten on the ever winding trail. In the

middle of the afternoon they came to a deep dark river moving sluggishly between sloping muddy banks. To cross it they had to go over a flimsy crude bridge woven of vines and lashed to the trunks of trees.

One at a time they crept over this perilous foot path where a misstep or a loss of balance as the bridge swung like a slack wire, would have hurled a man down thirty feet into the gaping jaws of mammoth crocodiles that seemed to wait. Baited traps to snap on human prey.

Colby sent the blacks across first to test the bridge, then motioned to Smith. The guide looked down at the slithering reptile monsters whose crusted backs and snouts were close packed beneath the threads that formed the bridge. There was no danger. And Colby, who carried the fifty grand, knew that he was safe on that bridge while he held the pigskin bag.

ONCE again they settled down to the steady stride fitting the pace of the black men. But this day they did not reach a village by nightfall. Smith went on until the party came to a clearing, and here the natives beat and chopped the grass and brush for a camp site.

"You ever been in Africa before?" inquired Smith as they smoked by the blazing fire after supper.

"Not this part," said Dick Colby. "I was in Morocco for a while, but they've got too many dialects there for me. Why?"

"Oh, nothin'," replied Smith, his face in a shadow. "Guess I'll cork off."

Dick Colby looked across the fire at his white companion. The faces of the negroes, or Bamoums, were daubed with fiery highlights. Shoving back from the fire, Colby rolled himself in his blanket and closed his

eyes. His ceiling was a blue-black sky, his walls the jungle fringe where a hundred pairs of glinting golden eyes were now focused on the aura of light that blazed in the center of the clearing.

IV

COLBY woke with a start. The big logs on the fire still crackled and sputtered. Bright embers glowed. For a quick breathless moment the American listened with keened ears, rising halfway on an elbow. As he blinked his eyes and stared across the fire towards where Smith's body should bulk on the matted grass, his hand mechanically moved to his throat for the feel of the kodak strap.

He always slept with that strap around his neck and the camera in its case close beside him. Now his fingers slid habitually down the strap and Colby sat up with a start.

"Gone!" He spoke half aloud as he leaped to his feet. "Gone! And the pigskin case."

Smith was gone, too. What had awakened Colby? There were the motionless forms of the black boys. Sleeping or playing possum? A white man never knows.

Colby let out an oath that would have scorched lips less used to trail hardships. He was fumbling around in the grass for his— Ah, he had it. The flashlight. With a click he snapped it on and swept the area around the fire.

"But why the camera?" he demanded of the African sky, and even as he spoke he knew the answer. That picture he had shot of Smith. So that was it. Well, it was his own fault for kidding Smith, for diverting his attention to the camera.

He glanced at his watch, then shouted to the blacks. Six stupid

natives arose lazily, rubbing their eyes, staring. Colby pointed to the trail of rope sandals on the narrow black ribbon of trail leading south.

"Come on," he cried, "snake a leg. Ketchum thief." He motioned and urged them to action. But the blacks remained grouped now, close, shaking their heads.

The jungle tribesmen will not hit a dark night trail even in their own haunts. Night holds its terrors for the simple aborigine mind. Dick Colby's carriers refused to budge.

"To hell with you, then," swore Colby starting off on a dead run along the jungle trail, his flash lighting the way and his pistol gripped in the other fist.

Unmindful of what prowling menaces might block or flank his headlong rush through the hissing jungle, Dick Colby set out to overtake the fleeing Smith. If Smith had known the real reason for Colby's rage and racing stride he would have thrown the pigskin case to the winds and dived into the tangle of the forest keeping only the smaller camera case.

FOR the camera was only a blind. A dummy, Colby called it, when he had it made especially for this purpose. It was nothing more than a hollow shell, a money bag that looked for all the world like a genuine kodak. And cleverly hidden beneath its innocent looking frame reposed fifty thousand-dollar bills in American cash.

It could not be that the man called Smith had guessed at Colby's secret of the money hiding place. Then why—the question tormented Colby as he ran now—why had the man bothered to take the supposed camera with him when he fled with the other bag—the one he should have believed held the money?

Had Colby known Smith better,

known more of his past history, it would not have struck him as strange. Stranger indeed was the fact that Colby had wakened from his sleep by the fire, that he had not been killed there in his camp. Murder and Smith were not strangers as the police of Algiers could have told Colby.

So, because, even in the vast length and breadth of Africa, Smith trekked always with one eye on his back trail he had grabbed Colby's camera as he fled with his loot, not even suspecting that it was the camera held the loot itself.

The camera, to Smith, was evidence. It held a picture of him, of his face, and Smith was leaving nothing behind him this time. When he got far enough away from the scene of his crime he would hurl the plagued kodak, case and all, into some deep dark jungle pool.

Smith was a wanted man! And now he was plunging like a wild thing through the darkness. Creepers and trailing, hanging vines snatched at him, throwing him right and left, knocking him down to rise, panting, and run on.

Trailing the staggering footprints behind him, fresh and strong, Dick Colby's even rapid strides, aided by the flashlight, ate up the distance.

"He can't be very far ahead," breathed Colby. "I'll cut his head start down damn soon."

Colby would get him if he had to run all night.

V

FIERCE raging hatred of the underhanded coward drove Colby in a mad race through the night. Dodging the branches of trees and the tangled network of hanging vines, the roots that sprawled across his path, the stinging, cutting blades of reed-like grass

that grew sometimes over six feet tall, he battled his way. His plight, the realization that he was practically alone in the damn jungle, that the ransom money, a fortune, had been taken from him like candy from a child, filled him with a kind of terror that put wings to his feet.

HE did not shout nor call out. He knew better than that. Nor was his terror the kind that breeds from fear of the blinking oval eyes that dot the night blackened jungle.

Swift startled beasts crashed through the dense growth at the coming of his flashlight, at sight of this strange man creature that flamed as it ran. The snorts and grunts of the jungle folk echoed his passing, and with each hundred yards or mile he knew not now how far he ran, he wondered what kind of monkey man he now pursued.

"I'm still on his track," he panted mystified by the speed of the man he chased. "Through the dark he can travel as fast as this!"

It seemed hours to Colby who soon began to run softly, on his toes, where the growth permitted. And while he ran as silently as he could he listened, his ears strained ahead for a trace of sound; the beating of a man's body rushing through the narrow path.

No sound came back to him but the noise of his own passage through the forest. Not until he broke out into a wide strip of treeless ground, a stretch of plain hidden under the still depths of giant grass.

"It's him," he almost shouted, as the sound of stumbling feet came back to him.

Colby could picture as he ran the desperate Smith, clawing for air in his spent lungs, forcing his weakened legs to drag feet of lead. For that is how Dick Colby felt. His

body ached with the gasp for breath, and his head reeled with the pace he had set for himself.

In spite of his pain, the misery of his tortured flesh and bones, a savage smile was graven on his lips as the sound of Smith's staggering steps echoed back to him. The flashlight on the trail showed him the weaving, drunken zigzag path, crossing and recrossing the ribbon of bare black earth.

Then without warning it broke off and was gone. The sounds died away to nothing and Dick Colby came to a dizzy halt, playing the light around like a man searching for a way of egress from some mystic chamber. Bracing himself to steady his trembling legs, he stared at the end of the trail. Silent, perplexed, his smile gone, he whipped the light beam back and forth.

The crackle of half-dry grass magnified in the tense stillness. Colby turned his light and his head, saw the tall grass at the trail edge climbing back erect, filling in slowly a cleft that a few minutes later would be practically obliterated.

With a shout of triumph he flung himself into the high grass, reaching above his own head, and with a stumbling recklessness he fairly swam through the waving sea of stiff grass.

VI

THE chattering of a thousand monkeys penetrated Colby's dim consciousness and he sucked in a deep breath, staggering weakly. His eyes squinted narrowly into the blackness before him and something drew them downward.

Water! Black water. He had sense enough to throw his flash on it. A narrow stream. He peered down dully, slowly aware that the muddy bank was even now show-

ing trace of recent passage. Water was oozing into a man's footprint. Smith must be just beyond.

Colby took an iron grip on his gun and jumped in forgetful of all else but the man he wanted. Fighting like an animal he reached the opposite side and struggled up the slippery bank.

Far down the merest skeleton of a trail now before him he heard a wild snarl, and, with a deafening roar of thunder that sent the apes and parrots into a torrent of noise, a pistol shot crashed like a cannon through the halls of the forest. There was the swift, "tsk-tsk-tsk" as the bullet slashed its way through leaves and grass. Colby heard the slug sing past him and he sent his flash beam as far as it would go.

AT the same instant he raised his own pistol and blazed. The boom of the gun rocked his ear drums, shook him to life, and he started running. In the ray of his light he caught the glimpse of the man he meant to catch or kill. For Dick Colby there was no quarter now. It had to be a jungle end. Death!

Smith saw him, saw the black-shattering splash of the light against the tree trunks and the vines, the glint of the pistol, and the floundering legs of Dick Colby closing in on him, driving him to madness.

He made a gesture to throw the camera from him. Heard Colby's hoarse, strained throat shout something. With the camera case shoved under the arm that held the pigskin bag he clutched his revolver and ducked behind a tree trunk, firing as he dropped.

"You sneakin' half-caste," barked Colby viciously as he threw himself flat, shooting from the ground.

Shots echoed back and forth, crazy shots fired by men whose lungs fought for life, whose bodies

heaved with the toil of living. Bullets ripped young branches from knotty trunks, several creepers from roots that were buried in dark, dank undergrowth. Then followed a thick heavy silence and one man rose stiffly on hands and knees to creep forward up the gradual slope of the trail, his eyes fixed on the bole of a distant tree. It was Dick Colby.

SMITH, a sinister black shape in the jungle gloom, skulked backward, keeping the tree between him and Colby. Glancing swiftly over his shoulder, jerking his fox face, Smith felt his way, retreating, to draw the oncoming American into his trap. But Colby was stepping into no more traps. He had halted and was carefully reloading his pistol.

Ready once more, he started forward, his eyes alert and his ears—Stop! What hell-sent fiend sent that scream from the pit of Hades? Over the somber funereal solitude of the forest came a hideous ear-splitting cry. Smith! No, not a man alone. Some sharp-clawed denizen of the jungle had blasted that cry from a crimson steaming throat. Then Smith!—

Colby jumped to his feet and ran like a sprinter. At the edge of a little glade he blundered to an unsteady halt. A pistol shot rang out. Colby blazed his light in a wide arc. The cruel spitting snarl of a big cat, mingled with a scream like a person in the agonies of death.

Colby's light caught the flurry of a mottled gray beast. He heard the strangling cry from Smith, the beating of the ground, the leaves, then he dove forward and with the aid of his flash sent a volley of slugs into the threshing, snarling giant leopard.

The thing threshed out with saber claws, turned, losing its hold on the throat of the man, to bite at itself

in a fury of pain. Colby had another bullet left.

He kept his gun on the beast until it wilted, jerked spasmodically, then lay quiet.

"Great God!" breathed Dick Colby, laying hold of the big cat's tail and dragging the body from above the silent Smith. "Did he get you, Smith?"

"Listen—" Smith's voice was a thin whisper that rasped on the end of the single word. Dick stooped quickly. "Colby—that ransom—stuff—"

"Yeah," said Colby, looking at the life blood spurting from the fellow's throat. "I was—hog—wanted all—listen—the Sultan ain't—in on it—see Riton—and—Jongrey—got trade station—same place—holdin' Vanderlin."

A crafty gleam flashed into the dulling eyes of the stricken Smith and he gasped.

"Want me to—" Colby began but stopped as Smith spoke.

"Keep away from—there—They're—gonna kill—yuh both—beat it with—the dough."

Colby turned his head and rose. Stepping away, he picked up the camera case.

After he had recrossed the last stream he paused to listen to the deep throaty growl of a leopard somewhere near in the jungle. The mate of the one he had killed.

It was jungle law.

VII

FOR days Dick Colby wandered in the jungle. From that night when he had lost his trail in the dark he had no idea how far he had strayed from the route on which they had been camped.

However, with daylight he continued hiking. He had a pistol and plenty of ammunition. There was a

good knife in his pocket and he had the precious camera case once more hanging around his neck.

He had gathered enough in his days with Smith to know that many of the tribes through Southern Cameroun were safe for him to meet. He followed a route pointing southwest by the sun. Stopping now and then at the clusters of Bantu huts that formed the tribal villages in clearings or on the edges of the jungle he made signs and asked the direction of the Sultan's palace.

"Dja!" he told them. "Sultan—Dja!"

THEY fed him, curious, mumbling among themselves and made signs pointing to his head. Then they pointed the trail and he went on.

As he pushed forward fighting his way through tangled thickets, his clothes became torn to shreds. He was a ragged, half-starved creature whose bared flesh became darker and darker with the suns. In the cool dampness of the jungle trails he shivered. Thorns and branches tore at his face and body, covering him with bloody wounds until he became a veritable native, scarred and blackened, heedless of pain or fatigue.

Once in broad daylight when he lay on his belly to drink from a clear shallow stream he saw his reflection in the water. And he laughed. It was the first time Dick Colby had laughed since the time he had pretended to snap the photo of the unfortunate Smith.

"A regular sure-enough jungleer," he admitted, "tattooed 'n everything."

Colby did not know how long it took him to reach the town where the Sultan of Dja lorded it over his choicest subjects, but he noted with considerable alarm as he emerged from a broadening trail into a roll-

ing grass-covered plain that several blacks were waving their arms frantically as they ran toward him.

Here the trail across the grassland was wider. A score or more of stark naked tribesmen were prancing out to greet him. Colby saw the spears they waved. Then he heard their shouting.

In a few minutes they had surrounded him and were staring stupidly, babbling in wonder at his condition. This was evident in their expression and the way they approached and stared at his scars.

"White men," said Colby. "Here—this place—palace—white men?"

They nodded and pointed the way to the town where Colby, walking with his naked escort, could see a score of Bantu grass huts and a couple of buildings that looked like 'dobe. More substantial. One of these was taller than the rest. The Sultan's palace, Colby assumed.

THE natives were flocking out to meet them. Some wore bits of sketchy clothing, but most were naked like those who surrounded him. When they reached the first of the huts Colby halted.

"You take me—white men—two white men."

One of the black fellows nodded, his ugly face frowning.

He held up three fingers.

Colby caught the correction. Three white men. Then they did know about Vanderlin. A few steps farther on and they were standing before the less impressive of the two whitewashed mud buildings. A heavy-set bearded man in gray silk pajamas stood in the doorway.

"Well, what the hell!" this man called out. "Are you a white man 'r some new kind of medicine faker?"

"I'm white," answered Dick Colby, walking over to the speaker. "Or I was. Anyway, I'm lost. The tribe

in the next village, a thousand miles or so, it seems, told me there were white men here. Honest, mister whatever your name is, but I was never gladder to see a white face than I am yours."

"How the devil do you happen to be wanderin' around this end of the world? My name's Riton."

I WAS part of an expedition that came into the Belgian Congo," said Colby calmly. "We were split up all galley west by a tribe of cannibals and I've been running in circles ever since. Where is this place?"

"Cameroun," said Riton, "where yuh from?"

"Texas," said Dick Colby, then he laughed heartily. "But I guess I don't look much like Texas now, heh?"

"I thought yuh was a scarecrow, first off," replied Riton.

He seemed to be guarding something, fending Colby off, and the lad from the States broke the bars down with the universal man challenge. "You haven't got anything to smoke 'round here, have you?"

Riton jerked a glance backward through the arched doorway. A voice from inside had called. "What's the excitement? A nigger get killed 'r one o' them die from the sleepin' sickness?" Leaning down close to Colby's ear Riton spoke.

"I'm takin' yuh inside," he advised, adding, "only we got a cracked old bird here with us. He thinks he's rich an' we're humorin' him. Ain't got long to live. Agree with him. He's the damndest liar in two continents."

"That's my specialty," agreed Colby. "Is he harmless?"

"Sure," answered Riton, leading the way inside where the hot daylight was cooled in the dark shadows of a low ceilinged room.

"What did you say your name was?"

"Colby," repeated Dick cheerfully.

"Shake hands with my partner, Mike Jongrey," said Riton, "and also Sir Herman Vanderlin."

They shook hands all around stiffly, Jongrey measuring the newcomer and casting a swift sidelong glance at his partner. Riton smirked and spat on the floor.

VIII

COLBY wanted to lie down and sleep, but he knew he didn't dare. He waited until after supper, served by a black woman with a short calico skirt; naked from the waist up.

The four men ate in silence, except Vanderlin, who watched Riton and Jongrey steadily and kept up a stream of questions. How were things in the United States? What was the market doing? Had they solved the farm question? And so forth.

The moon came up, and with it came a messenger from the Sultan of Dja. Riton, who appeared the head man of the team, translated the word. His highness commanded the visitor to appear at the palace.

"We'll go over first," said Riton. "You bein' a fellow American, we don't want yuh to get in any jam. We pull heavy with this monkey."

At the door Riton turned and mumbled in Colby's ear.

"Keep an eye on him," he said, meaning Vanderlin. "We'll be back in a second."

No sooner had they faded from view when the fear-graven face of the millionaire Vanderlin appeared close to Colby's. There was pleading in his eyes.

"Can you help me to get away from here?" he begged. "These men will murder me. They have been

holding me for a ransom that will never come. Please!"

HOLD your horses, pardner," said Colby. "Have you got a gun?"

"They keep everything padlocked here," said Vanderlin. "Oh, my God, if there was only—"

"Listen," said Dick Colby. "It may be just possible that this pair of hellions are trying to catch us on the sneak. Here. Watch at the door."

Vanderlin leaped to the door. He was really an active, able-bodied man. But against a pair of armed brutes he had never had a chance. Now he leaned out, watching.

Dick Colby picked up a heavy wooden home-made chair and with hand and foot pried the back legs apart.

"Quick," called Vanderlin. "Here they come."

Colby heard the crunching steps that instant, and a moment later the big Riton stepped through the door, his hand close to the weighty gun belt. A smashing blow on his skull dropped him like an ox and he fell forward as the slower Jongrey entered the house.

Colby came down with the chair leg in a swift arc, but Jongrey's eye had caught a glimpse of his fallen partner. With a lurch he swung aside, throwing out an arm and grabbing for his pistol.

As he moved Dick Colby felt the club batted from his grip, and he plunged in to close quarters. Vanderlin, seeing the groaning Riton climb snarling to his feet, leaped on him and there was a fierce double battle on. Vanderlin, the score evener now, fought like a wild man.

Colby heard the clatter and slap of a pistol smashed from somebody's fingers. The thud of blows, and the oaths filled the room. Jongrey was a bigger man than Colby, but Dick

was fighting for more than a ransom now. It was his life.

His fingers were locked over Jongrey's wrist bearing down on the gun hand, while he himself sought to extricate his right hand from the tangle of flashing bodies and reach his own belted pistol.

He heard the banging of the other pair as they smashed against the thick wall. His right hand tore free. His gun was in his hand. He could shoot. Then with a vicious curving swing he brought the gun up behind Jongrey's head and—Jongrey wilted to the floor.

It was only a short jump to where Vanderlin was fighting a losing battle against Riton. The jungle crook felt the brush of Colby as the newcomer slammed against him. There was the crunching sound of metal against bone and without a whimper Riton was out of it.

Then Colby worked like lightning. They got ropes, jungle-made of roots, and bound the two man-beasts like swine, gagging them with rags ripped from their own shirts.

"Now," ordered Dick Colby, grabbing the renegades' pistols, "through that window, Mister Vanderlin," he indicated.

OUT into the pale moonlight Colby and Vanderlin climbed. They dropped to the ground softly, disappearing into the undergrowth at the circular outskirts of the village. A short tortuous run through the dark and they were free. The wide grassland lay before them. Colby plunged in, calling Vanderlin after him.

"You've got a lot of walkin' to do," he warned. "Can you hold out?"

"I walked in," said Herman Vanderlin. "Come on."

For hours they ran and walked, halting only brief moments to gather breath. Long ago they had reached

the jungle trail and were racing eagerly along, looking back now and then, pausing to listen.

IT would be morning before any pursuit would start, and before that Dick Colby would be prepared. He would have a whole tribe of spearmen as carriers on the return journey, carrying nothing but spears and watching the back trail.

Neither tried to talk while they ran. They needed the wind to put ground between them and the village of the Sultan of Dja. When the dawn threatened far away in the east, and they could smell the cook fires of a village not far ahead of them, the light twinkling through the network of trees and vines, Dick Colby drew Vanderlin to a fallen trunk. "Sit down gentle," he ordered, "and get your breath. Take it easy and don't get panicky. If your heart is okay we'll make it."

When he could speak the millionaire sportsman turned to his companion, his face pink and puffy.

"You're a nervy youngster, Colby," he said with feeling. "I don't know just how I'm ever going to— Say, by the great guns! Do you know— Say, I'll bet you don't really believe that stuff about me being held for fifty thousand dollars ransom by those two ruffians. Do you?"

"Sure," nodded Colby, laughing, "but you told me yourself that you didn't think the ransom would ever get there."

"Well, I didn't, 's a fact," said Vanderlin. "My goose was cooked."

"That's where I was ahead of you," continued the blue-eyed Yank adventurer. "I knew the ransom would get there."

Vanderlin looked at Colby's half serious expression and frowned.

"You knew it?"

"Sure," said Dick Colby, swinging his camera case around before him

and unsnapping the lock. "Take a quick look."

He had the kodak in his fingers, pressed a hidden button and away came the back. Inside, packed flat and smooth, was a large stack of American bills.

"Fifty grand," said Colby. "I'm the fellow your family sent to collect you C—O—D."

"And you didn't pay," Vanderlin was shaking his head in utter confusion. It was like a miracle.

NO," said Dick. "I had too tough a time getting it there to give it up to a couple of crooks like they were."

"Well, I'll be—"

"I know it," agreed Colby, "but you can tell me this. Who was the gent on the photo—the fellow full of spears—that half of photo you enclosed with your ransom request?"

"I never knew," said Vanderlin. "It was before this awful thing happened to me—those renegades overpowered me. We had come upon that poor fellow as you saw him in the picture. I just made the picture, and those devils thought it would be a nice suggestion to send the upper half to my wife as a warning."

"Look," said Colby, rising. "This tribe up here is going to stage a breakfast. We're just in time. And we can hire an army to cover our retreat to Yaounde."

"But I haven't got a nickel," said Vanderlin, forgetting.

"I have," assured Dick Colby, as they hurried along toward the welcome fire. "And by the way, I'm not exactly sure who this money belongs to. What do you think?"

"What do you care," laughed the millionaire, clapping his rescuer on the shoulder. "If you spend that getting us back I'll see you are provided with some more." Dick Colby grinned, and smacked his lips.

THE DEVIL FISH



*Treachery, Peril and Breathless Adventure Stalk the
Decks of the Schooner Spindrift in the
Region of Dead Man's Isle*

By **CAPT. KERRY McROBERTS**

Author of "Mounty Justice," "Legion of the Frontier," etc.

FROM where he leaned against the lee-rail of the little auxiliary schooner, *Spindrift*, Lane Yancey studied the rugged line of the distant islands to the north. He watched that far-flung shore-line, strangely fascinated. Like a sleeping snake it lay outstretched along the edge of the horizon, deadly and still. A sleek, fat snake, gorged with cankerous, gangrened blood of lost and forgotten men. The terrible penal settlement of New Caledonia—to which only the most desperate of French criminals are banished!

He pictured the sweltering plantations where condemned murderers and degenerate felons worked out their endless sentences, the unfathomable forests where stark, watchful natives lurked in the shadows of the trackless jungles, the barrier of shark-infested reefs that barred escape by way of the open sea—

Suddenly his eyes tensed, narrowed against the blinding glare of the calm, still waters.

"What do you make of that, skipper?" he called to the bronzed, broad-shouldered man at the wheel on the

little bridge just above him. He pointed to the northwest, where the gray land mass merged into haze at the edge of the Coral Sea.

"Looks like a piece of wreckage!" he added.

Jerry Desmond—Captain Jerry to the members of his little crew—turned quickly, peered in the direction indicated. Glass in hand, he intently surveyed the distant object lying low in the water. "Huh!" he grunted. Swung the wheel hard over.

"What do you make of it?" Yancey repeated.

THE skipper shook his head gravely. "Dead men, looks like to me," he announced. "They're generally dead, Yance—when we pick 'em up in the sea like this."

Yancey was on the bridge by now. He took the telescope from the skipper's hand, glued it to his eye. He saw the object was a raft, very small—across which two almost naked men lay sprawled.

"Two poor devils who've tried to escape from the convict settlements," Desmond surmised. "They often put out to sea without sufficient food and water—and die like this."

He rang for half speed ahead, then for the engines to be stopped. Shortly they drew alongside the raft with its lifeless burden.

The crew of Tahitian boys clustered at the starboard rail. Pete Randall, the second officer, threw a rope over the side. One of the crew slipped down, stepped gingerly onto the raft. He grabbed one of the men, shook him, knelt closer, shouted out something in his native tongue.

"They're still alive" the skipper exclaimed.

He called down to Randall: "Get 'em on board—quick as you can. We'll try savin' the poor devils."

Yancey stared hard at the pitiful bundles that lay stretched out on

deck a few minutes later under the shade of a deck awning tended by Jack Duval, the half-caste bo'swain.

Contrasting types they were. One strong-muscled, hulking, massive—built like a gorilla. The thick black beard he wore, and the hair on every part of his visible body, made him look more like an ape than a man. The other was obviously of a better breed—tall, slim, firm-muscled.

The beast-like one recovered first. He drank greedily of the water offered him. Glazed eyes cleared as he looked about him, saw the deck of the schooner. He said nothing—only stared dumbly at the limp form of his companion still lying unconscious beside him.

"Where do you two hail from?" the skipper snapped sharply.

The man only grunted. Jack Duval asked him the same question in French. Even then he gave no answer.

THE other was coming round now. He moved slightly, lifted his head. Smiled feebly as his eyes met those of Yancey.

"Bonjour, m'sieurs!" he said slowly, thanking the men about him—"Je vous remercie!" The words edged out through dry, swollen lips.

"That's all right," Yancey said cheerily. He pointed to the ape-like man at the other's side. "Can't your partner speak?" he asked.

"Ah, Anglais!" the man exclaimed. Then he broke into almost perfect English. "I must make my thanks for your so timely arrival. Water, it is finish. We almost finish, too. I—" he glanced up into the bronzed features of Captain Desmond. "Where are we, M'sieur Capitan?"

"If you came from the convict settlement," the skipper replied sternly, "you haven't come far. There's the island over there."

The man raised himself on one elbow, gazed at the distant shore.

"But we are not escaped convicts," he smiled grimly. "You mistake, M'sieur Capitan. We are from the schooner *Rapanui*—got away from the wreck three days ago, after that so terrible storm. This"—he pointed to the hairy man at his side—"is by name Pierre Gaspard, one of our seamen. I myself was first officer of the *Rapanui*. My name is Antoine Latouche. You must not think we are escaped convicts. Eh, Pierre?"

THE other nodded. "Oui," he growled, watching his companion's lips.

The skipper grunted. "H'm!" he observed. He had noticed the marks of the leg-irons on their ankles and knew they were lying. "However, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt," he said. "There's a reward offered for the return of escaped convicts—but I want no such blood-money."

Latouche's face lighted up. He staggered to his feet. "You are a ver' kind man, M'sieur Capitan," he bowed. "Merci!—we thank you greatly."

"The bo'swain will give you some clothing," the skipper concluded. He had not the heart to send these poor brutes back to the misery of their island prison. "You will lend a hand with the crew when needed. When we arrive at Brisbane, if you two get ashore without my seeing you, well and good. If not—well, I'll have to report you. Understand?"

Latouche nodded. "I understand," he said. "Oui," agreed the other. Duval took the two new arrivals down below as the captain ordered. They were to be under his care for the rest of the trip. Desmond put the bows of the *Spindrift* back on to her course. It had been just another incident in the day's work.

As the little schooner headed across the changeless ocean, Yancey stood at the rail and watched the dis-

tant islands fade into the murk of the tropic twilight. The island of the dead—of the dead-alive!

Since the day six weeks before, when he had accepted the invitation of his old friend Captain Jerry to accompany him on one of his periodical tours of the trade stations in the Fijis and New Hebrides, never had Yancey experienced such a feeling of awe and dread as now surged through him. Until today the South Seas had held only glamor and beauty, the charm and mystery of perfumed isles, exotic and alluring. Now, there was a new note in the air, a discordant harmony.

Somehow—since the two fugitive criminals had been brought aboard—the ship seemed different. That horrible, beastly grin on the face of the animal-like man below. The crafty, smile-masked eyes of Antoine Latouche. The ghastly prison's deadening hand had seared them both with its loathsome mark, poor wretches!

II

FOR two days the *Spindrift* plowed her way across the Southern sea. Gaspard and Latouche had settled down to the routine life of the schooner. The third night, Yancey had relieved the skipper for a spell at the wheel, as had been his custom. It was a moonless night, but the sky was ablaze with stars.

He heard voices and looked back to see a tall, slim shadow in conversation with Randall, the first officer, who stood on the bridge behind him, silhouetted against the rail at the head of the companionway. It was not one of the Tahitians. The skipper was below in his bunk. It could only be Antoine Latouche.

What was he doing on deck?

When he looked again, Latouche had gone. Randall was alone. Yan-

cey gave no further thought to the incident.

An hour went past. The first officer was not now in sight. A short, squat figure suddenly loomed up beside Yancey. It was Jack Duval.

"I'm takin' over now," the half-caste announced abruptly.

"You're what?" Yancey snapped. "What's the big idea? The skipper takes over after me. Who told you to take this trick?"

THE tone in the bo'swain's voice was firm. "Orders," he said simply. "I'm takin' over—that's enough."

As he spoke he glanced quickly over Yancey's shoulder. Yancey turned quickly. But he was not quick enough. Two great hands flashed out of the shadow of the binnacle, jerked him suddenly away from the wheel. Duval shouldered in, grasped the wheel firmly, swung the schooner sharply about on her course:

Taken by surprise by the sudden maneuver, it was some seconds before Yancey could recover his balance. He had recognized his assailant as Pierre Gaspard, the silent, brooding convict with the ape-like build. With all his available strength behind the blow he struck out straight into the brutish face before him.

But the powerful blow provoked nothing but a grunt. Hairy, steel-muscled arms reached forward, circled Yancey's body. He was powerless in their crushing embrace. Slowly he was being lifted high into the air—was being rushed to the side of the rail. His breath was leaving him. He could not struggle free from the monster's death-grip.

Why?—What?—His brain was swirling madly—

He felt himself being held poised in the air above the rail—had the vague impression that the powerful muscles were tensing for that final effort to heave him far out over the

side of the vessel, like a useless burden, into the dark depths beyond—

A sharp, commanding voice stayed the mad rush of the murderous beast.

"None o' that! No killing! I said no killing, you—!"

Yancey recognized the voice—Pete Randall's. The first officer held an ugly revolver in his hand. His eyes gleaming like pin-points, he had bounded to Yancey's side. The beast-man uttered no sound—but slowly he set down his burden, obedient to the imperative voice and the threat of the menacing revolver.

As Yancey felt his feet on the firm deck again, he did his utmost to wriggle free. A great hairy hand took him around the throat, almost choked the life from him. With his last despairing breath he called out to the first officer:

"Good God, Randall—make him—let me go! I'm—"

But Randall seemed not to have heard. He was calling loudly for Latouche. Gun in hand Latouche quickly appeared—yelled to his brutish companion:

"No killing! You hear! Take him down below, as I told you—throw him in with the skipper."

BREATHLESS, faint, Yancey was carried forcibly below by the husky giant. The door slammed, was bolted shut from the outside. He turned to see the skipper wriggling to free himself from the ropes that bound him.

"What's all this about?" Yancey inquired, still breathless.

"It's mutiny—rank mutiny! Quick! get these ropes untied."

"But—Randall; why Randall? He's sailed with you for years."

"I can't understand what's come over him. Something those two murderous devils 've cooked up, I reckon. Every man-jack aboard's against us,

Lance. They're at the bottom of everything—the damned wretches."

Things had happened suddenly, he explained. He was dozing in his bunk—had awakened, startled—someone was in the cabin—it was Latouche, the revolver in his hand pointing dead at his heart. Before he realized what was happening, the muscular ape-man pounced on him, held him tight while Latouche bound him fast to his bunk. Then they looted the arms from the gun rack, went out, bolted the door. They were determined, these men. Why? What was afoot? Why had the vessel's course been changed?

THEY were not to know that night. Early the next morning, the door was unbolted and the two ex-convicts, Pete Randall at their side, came resolutely in, revolvers in hand. The doorway behind them was blocked with members of the Tahitian crew. Randall spoke:

"You're wonderin' what this is all about, Cap'n," he said, haltingly.

"I certainly am," the skipper roared. "I'll see you lose your ticket for this, you mutinous dog! I'll see you in prison, you whelp!"

"Keep your shirt on, Cap'n," Randall said coolly. "I saved your hides last night, both of you. My friends here wanted to heave you over the side—but I prevented 'em. I felt sure you'd listen to reason, Cap'n—an' come in with us on this thing and—"

"What thing?" Desmond barked. "What are you talking about?"

"We're on our way to make our fortunes, Cap'n—an' I rather think you'll want to come in with us. We didn't ask you out'n'out last night because some of us had the idea you wouldn't agree—an' they wouldn't give me the location of the treasure until I'd first captured the ship and turned her about. So—"

"Treasure! What do you mean—treasure?"

THESE two men"—Randall indicated Gaspard and Latouche—"spent some years in the convict settlements. From time to time men try to escape from there. Most of 'em die at sea—some of 'em get away, picked up by ships like ours; but others neither get picked up nor die.

"They just drift—drift with the tides—to an island they call *Homme Mort*, to the north—one of the rocks in the group marked Huon on the maps. The winds and currents finally carry all floating things, boats and rafts, up there.

"Gaspard here escaped on a raft with two other convicts, about a year ago. The others died. But Gaspard had the good fortune to reach shore—found the men on Dead Man's Island—and the treasure they had discovered there. There are eleven escaped convicts on the island.

"They're waiting for a ship to get away. Gaspard got away—hailed a trade ship one day when he was out fishin'—was picked up. But the captain was after the reward—took him back to the settlements. That was how Latouche got to know about—"

"You mean to say you mutinied just to get a ship to rescue these eleven murderous castaways?" Yancey exclaimed.

"No—not for that," Randall explained. "The treasure, man!" His eyes glistened. "Wedged in a cave, where it was driven by the storms, the convicts found a big sailing vessel—the *Esperance*, about eighty years old. Its hold is packed with bar—gold and bullion—probably a treasure ship returning from the East when it was wrecked. That's the treasure we're after. Pierre says there's enough wealth there to make us rich for life. An' I mean to get mine, no matter if—"

So that was the bait that had been dangled before the officers and crew of the *Spindrift*—that had tempted them to mutiny.

"And your intention is—?" the skipper interrupted, calmly.

"To go to the island, rescue the men, land 'em in some far-away spot—Australia, perhaps. We'll make our own conditions for aiding 'em to escape—a half share of all the treasure, divided between us."

LATOUCHE agreed. "That is the proposition, m'sieur. I was for killing you and your friend here—but Randall he say no! He say you are good skipper—we talk business with you. You come in with us—captain the schooner for us—an' one-fifth of the gold we salvage shall be your own share, personal."

Desmond's voice was thick with rage. "You thought I'd lend myself to a scheme that's going to return eleven blood-thirsty criminals to the world—for the sake of a pile of dirty gold."

To Randall:

"You'll have to take the ship alone. I'll have nothing to do with this. I'll—"

"It's the only chance you'll get," Randall threatened, fingering his revolver. "We're playing fair with you, skipper. We mean to get that gold—whether you come in with us or not."

Latouche snarled impatiently:

"Pah! I told you this cochon was pig-headed. These two will not see sense. Better get them out of the way. There is a quick way to end this talk—once and for all!"

Randall suddenly stepped forward. The fact that Duval and he were the only men aboard who could navigate the *Spindrift* gave them some degree of power over the murderous pair.

"No killing!" he roared. "There's to be no killing!"

Latouche snarled. "You want we let them live—make trouble?"

"They'll make no trouble," Randall said. "That island—it's a mighty lonely place," he leered. "There's men there haven't sighted a ship in more'n ten years, you say. Once you're marooned there, you're stuck for a good long stretch. Well, now—here's an idea, Antoine. When we've taken these friends of yours off—and the gold—we'll dump this pair ashore. Let 'em have the damned island all to themselves. No killing!—an' we'll be easily rid of 'em."

A gleam came in Latouche's eyes. He clapped Randall on the back.

"Bon!" he agreed. "That is ver' good idea." He backed to the door. "Come, mes amis—let us leave." The door was slammed tight, bolted. Yancey and Desmond were left alone once more.

III

DEAD MAN'S ISLE! The two prisoners viewed it through the open porthole. They had been penned in for three days and nights, fed liberally, but never once permitted on deck. It was a rugged-looking island, high in the centre above the frowning cliffs, covered with dense jungle. The vessel lay a half-mile or so outside the reef, her steam siren tooting frantically. One of the ship's boats was threading its way through the reef. It contained Latouche, Duval and four of the Tahitian crew.

The afternoon passed. The evening twilight deepened. Then the ship's boat returned—accompanied by two other boats from shore. That night there was great activity aboard the *Spindrift*, strange voices, quarreling.

Early the next morning, Randall and Latouche opened the cabin door.

"You're a damn fool not to come

in on this, skipper," Randall said. He was in high spirits. "The gold's there—they've got some of it out of the wreck. Going to change your mind?"

"No," snapped Desmond. "You yellow-bellied hound!"

Randall laughed. "Then you two'll stay in the cabin till we're ready to leave here—that'll be about two weeks, maybe."

Latouche swaggered up with two pistols in his belt. "They'll be of use to us, *mon ami*," he grinned. "We'll send them ashore—to help us move the gold down to the boats. We need all the men we can get."

Randall nodded approval. "Right. They'll come ashore with us now."

AS the longboat neared the inhospitable beach, Yancey and the skipper hunched in the bows, Latouche, Duval and Randall facing them, Gaspard and two of the Tahitians pulling at the oars, Yancey surveyed the strange group at the water's edge waiting their approach. They appeared to be more like beasts than men. They howled and gibbered in several languages as they rushed out and dragged the boat up on the sand.

They were almost naked, with leathery, sun-scorched skins, heavy-bearded jowls, eyes that glared out wildly from beneath tangled, matted hair that hung down over their foreheads. Marooned here for years—many of them. Dead men! Yancey shuddered at the thought that such beings might be free again to roam the civilized world! Beasts; Animals!

Latouche and Gaspard climbed ashore ahead of the others. Tools from the ship were being heaved onto the beach. Yancey felt that every eye was that of a foe as he climbed down from the boat, mingled with the strange horde that had circled

Desmond and himself. Pete Randall stood to one side, revolver in hand, looking rather bewildered.

"Let's get to work," Randall called out sharply to Latouche. "Let's get some of that gold stowed on board, right away. We're wasting—"

Latouche turned on him with a lightning gesture. He was smiling a twisted smile. "Sorry, *mon ami*," he sneered. "You'll never see that gold!"

"I'll never— What!" gasped Randall. Stark fear was in his eyes.

The answer came in a flash from Antoine Latouche's hip. Randall reeled backwards, one hand clutching his breast where the bullet had drilled through, the other vainly trying to pull trigger with his last despairing flash of energy. He fell forward, sagged to the ground.

Latouche was still smiling. "Your work is finish', M'sieur Randall. Now we have navigators of our own. We need not divide with white-livered scum like you." He wheeled sharply, turned to Yancey and Desmond.

"Your turn now!" he snarled.

The revolver rose level with Captain Desmond's eyes. In a split-second the bullet would have stabbed through into the man's brain. But quicker even than the trigger finger of the killer was Lane Yancey. He flashed in under the outstretched arm—caught Latouche about the knees—hurled him backwards. The bullet went high. Instantly, the howling horde rushed forward to their leader's assistance.

YANCEY was up in an instant—just in time to meet a rush from the ape-man. He ducked aside like a dancing phantom, drove his fist with all his strength into the centre of the brute's stomach. He glanced toward his companion. Three of the murderous horde were hanging on to

the flailing arms of the muscular captain. These human tigers would tear them to pieces.

As Gaspard doubled from the impact of Yancey's stomach punch, Yancey darted to one side—and the third bullet, the bullet which Latouche had meant for him, took one of the others in the chest, dropped him.

A chunk of driftwood lay at Yancey's feet. He seized it, darted between the clawing, clutching beastmen like an elusive half-back, reached the skipper's side just as one of the horde fastened a death-grip around Desmond's neck, from behind. Crash! The man's skull was shattered under the impact of the blow from Yancey's club. The strangle-hold was broken. Two lightning blows from Desmond's great fists drove the others back.

"The jungle," Desmond gasped. "It's our only chance!"

Latouche was maneuvering for a position to fire again. Gaspard was up, growling like a maddened beast. A bullet seared Yancey's ear. He turned—poised just long enough to take aim—drove the chunk of driftwood with all his might at Latouche's snarling face.

"That'll stop him shooting for awhile," he said as, followed by the half-naked fiends in human form, screaming like savage beasts, they raced to reach the cover of the tangled, protecting jungle.

IV

BREATHLESS, they stumbled among the trees. The creepers caught at their feet. Spiny spikes clutched at their clothes. But they did not slacken. The wild beasts behind wanted their blood. Latouche, with bleeding mouth, was driving them on.

The interior of the island sloped

sharply upward. That very fact saved their lives. One by one their half-starved pursuers dropped back out of sight. They were out of range of Latouche's questing bullets. The cries died away. Desmond leaned against a palm and panted. Yancey peered back, down into the death-still jungle.

"They'll waste no more time searching for us," he observed. "They'll be too eager to get that gold aboard, I rather imagine. That fiend Latouche! The way he shot Randall down—in cold blood!"

"Pete Randall was a fool to think they'd play him fair," Desmond said. "They only wanted him as navigator. When Latouche found capable seamen among these brutes, it was taps for that yellow traitor."

Yancey said suddenly: "We've got to find that wreck. We may find a way to delay 'em from getting away with the gold—and we'll have more time to do things. Maybe we can get back to the *Spindrift*—get guns and ammunition, and get out of this mess. The old treasure hulk is in a cave somewhere on the north side—where the cliffs are high enough for caves."

THE two resumed their tramp through the rising jungle. It was the middle of the afternoon before they emerged on the cliffs on the far side, above the water's edge. Yancey pointed down to the sea below. One of the boats from the schooner, with four convicts aboard, was making for the foot of the cliff almost below them. Soon it pulled in, out of sight. When it reappeared two hours later the boat was low in the water. There was a weight amidships.

"The old ship's under the lee of the cliff here," Yancey said. "They're getting the bars out. I'm going to have a look at her."

Desmond gazed down the sheer

wall of the cliff. "It's a tough climb, Lance!"

"I'll make it, Jerry—don't worry." He threw off his coat, tightened his belt. "I'll be back before dark," he said, as he swung over the edge.

The first part of the downward climb was easy. But the last sixty feet was almost perpendicular. He clung on by fingers and toes, picked out crevices that gave him a firm foothold, worked his way from projecting rock to scrubby bush—and finally reached the rock-strewn beach below.

It was an isolated beach, cut off by projecting rocks on either side. The only approach was by way of the sea or cliff. Where the beach bent in beneath the cliff, he found the deep, high cave he sought. A dark, shapeless mass dimly showed, wedged beneath the rocky walls. It was the treasure ship. At high tide the cave might be half full of water. But just now the water was not more than a foot or so deep.

YANCEY worked his way into the cave, found a rusty ladder that gave access to the crumbling deck. The rotting hulk was covered with slimy seaweed. Everything smelled of the sea. Many men had been there before him. Hatchways were ripped up; rotting cargo lay strewn over the foredeck.

Down one of the gloomy hatchways he climbed by way of the rusty iron ladder that still existed. He found himself in a long corridor which had once joined the forepart of the old windjammer with the officers' quarters in the stern. It was getting dark outside, under the cliff.

He took from his shirt pocket a precious box of matches, lighted one, felt his way back along the corridor, struck more matches. Finally he reached what had been the ship's strong room. Under masses of fallen

woodwork he saw crumbling boxes wedged in behind the rubbish. A week's work at least, before the convicts could saw through this mass of wreckage. A chance for Desmond and himself, after all.

For some time he rummaged around inside the old hulk. Time to get back up that cliff, now. He fumbled his way along the corridor to the open hatch, was about to mount the ladder—when there came a heavy creaking sound on the deck overhead. It was as though some heavy weight was being hauled across the deck. Had the convicts returned?

The lapping of the waves told him that the water had risen higher about the old hulk since he had come aboard. He would have to swim for it, to reach the foot of the cliff. Even though men were working above, he must risk it. They might not see him, if he took advantage of the darkness.

Stealthily he mounted the ladder, peered over the rim of the hatchway. No one was on deck. The cave was in deep shadow—but Yancey could see that the water was half way up the vessel's side. He edged cautiously toward the crumbling rail of the old hulk—stumbled over something! A thick rope that lay across the slimy planks! Impatiently he kicked it—to move it out of his way. The rope squirmed! Rose in the air!

SHEER horror held Yancey spellbound. Then a gasp of fear escaped him as he sprang back to escape the loathsome thing that reared quivering before his eyes. A tentacle! Alive!

Swish! Something lashed in from the other side—closed tight about his waist! Thick as a hawser—covered with mouth-like suckers! Yancey strained back with all his might—tore at the thing—was free before it

could tighten. The waving tentacles stroked the air—feeling for him.

He sprang back, made for the hatchway. A great squat head with two huge, glowing eyes and a beak-like face, appeared over the side of the hulk. Squirming, waving tentacles advanced before it. A giant devil-fish! This cave was the lair of this menacing sea-monster.

Hastily he slid down the ladder. Above him the ominous creaking of the crumbling deck gave notice that the slimy monster was now on board the hulk—crouching, feeling, waiting for its prey to come within reach.

There was no escape for him that night. It would be too dark to climb the cliff. He must remain in that creepy old hulk all night, hoping the sea-monster would go away with the next ebb-tide. He made his way into the treasure-room in the stern. It was like spending a night in a grave!

V

THE endless night had passed. The lapping of the sea against the side told Yancey the tide had gone down again. Cautiously he crept along the gangway, mounted the ladder, peered over the edge of the hatchway. There was no sign of those loathsome tentacles. The way was clear.

He was about to slip into the shallow water, when a burst of ribald singing crashed in from the sea at the mouth of the cave. One of the boats from the schooner was rounding the jutting rocks. He counted six among the motley crew. He ducked down quickly, crawled backwards to the open hatch. His retreat was again cut off. He must find a hiding place.

The noisy crew boarded the wreck, yelling lustily. Yancey recognized Latouche's voice. Heavy feet clumped

down the ladder. Soon the whole gang was at work below, only one remaining on deck to take the heavy bars which the others passed up to him. Yancey concluded that the one above was Gaspard.

An hour passed. Then the boat pulled away from the schooner. Yancey heard Latouche order Gaspard to remain behind—until they returned later. Now to get away. Only the ape-man stood between him and safety.

SLOWLY Yancey crawled up the ladder. His searching eyes picked out the hulking bulk of the hairy beast-man standing by the crumbling rail far astern, gazing out toward the sea. He edged to the vessel's side, slid down into the shallow water. So far—good! He was half-way to the rocky beach before Gaspard spied him.

The beast-man let out a savage bel-low of rage, hurled himself over the side, plowed through to the rocks where his quarry madly scrambled up the first few feet of the almost sheer wall, reached out his ape-like hand.

The clutching fingers closed about Yancey's ankle. With a crash he fell back. The great arms seized him, held him in their steel embrace, dashed him violently to the ground. Claw-like hands were at Yancey's throat—his senses were swaying—his breath was being shut off by those steel fingers! The scene turned red! Lights flashed across his brain! The horrible pressure continued. Then—

He felt the hand being snatched away from his throat—felt the air rush back into his lungs. Through a film he saw Gaspard's face contorted in horror. The snarling beast was being slowly dragged back—too terrified to struggle against the resistless force which held him!

Yancey's brain cleared. He felt limp with horror! For the ally which had saved him was the hideous sea-monster—the giant devil fish!

From the deeper water, twelve feet away, it reared its slimy, bulging body from the sea, supporting itself on unseen legs upon the mud! Two of its tentacles had caught Gaspard around the body from behind. As Yancey watched, a terrible change came over Gaspard's face. Limp as a corpse, he had been dragged halfway towards the parrot-like beak. Now—suddenly awake to his fearful doom—the beast-man went stark, raving mad!

He screamed wildly, braced his feet in the mud, clawed at the scaly tentacles which had him. But he could not squirm free. Other slimy, cup-covered tentacles reached up from beneath the water, coiled about him, held him in their death-grip. Yelling like a maddened beast, he was drawn back slowly, far from the shore.

Like a spider entrapping a fly, the horrible monster enmeshed the struggling, raging brute, binding his powerful legs, his steel-muscled arms. Slowly, relentlessly, the hideous creature mastered the writhing man. Then it sank slowly beneath the water, dragging its victim with it.

THE sea shut out the rest of the nightmarish sight. But the thrashing, foaming waves gave evidence of the losing fight the beast man was making—until the merciful waters drowned him, clutched tight between those dread, crushing tentacles.

Yancey's legs felt weak. To escape! Could he make the grade? It needed all his reserve energy, nerve and resource before he finally reached the top of the cliff. He threw himself on the ground to rest.

From his elevated perch he could see some distance beyond the head-

land. Suddenly he tensed. There was the boat with Latouche and his crew—pulling madly for the outer reef. Latouche stood in the bow, waving his arms wildly. His companions bent hard at the oars. There was the *Spindrift* where it had been anchored since their arrival.

IT was slowly putting out to sea! No sails were set. The auxiliary engines must be in use. Could it be? Had the resourceful skipper regained command of her? He watched the men in the longboat. They seemed as greatly surprised as he. Was he to be marooned here with these human tigers?

The schooner tacked, veered into the wind, stopped with such perfect precision that Yancey knew it could only be Captain Jerry at the wheel. About a mile out she lay, placidly rocking in the slight swells.

Latouche and the men in the boat redoubled their efforts at the oars. The longboat was about four hundred yards from the vessel—when a puff of smoke showed from the deck. The report of the rifle told the convict horde that they were not to be tolerated aboard. Latouche waved his men on, grabbed an oar. One of them had been hit.

Something was fluttering from the mizzen-mast. The recall signal! Yancey strained his eyes. That signal was meant for him! In some way the crafty skipper had regained his ship, was lying off there in the hope that he was watching from the cliff.

He ripped off his shirt, waved it in the breeze. For several minutes he did this. Then one of the crew in Latouche's boat spied him. Shots followed—wild shots. But they had served a purpose. The recall signal dipped in acknowledgment.

He must reach the beach, negotiate that mile swim to the side of the

schooner! He put on his shirt, drew back into the jungle. He had seen Latouche signalling to the shore. The longboat was coming in. They would soon be searching for him. Now was his chance—or maybe never.

Food and drink were his first problem. A cocoanut palm provided him with both.

Then he began to worm his way down to the shore.

Torn and ragged, he at last emerged on the beach, some distance from the spot where Latouche's boat had landed. It was a longer swim from here, but he could make it. If he was spotted, he would have to trust to luck and his muscles. Captain Jerry and his rifle would take care of his pursuers, once he got under way.

He threw off his shirt and shoes, raced down to the water's edge, was about to dive in—when something struck him flat in the back! He staggered forward, fell to his face. Before he could regain his feet, someone jumped upon him.

Strong hands gripped the back of his neck—drove his face deep into the sand.

"So! Caught you neat and pretty, *mon ami!* Now it won't be long before we get the schooner once again. *Allons!*" he called out gruffly.

IT was Antoine Latouche. The murderous, half-savage mob swarmed down to join him from the bushes where they had been waiting. But for their leader's interference, they might have torn the prostrate, struggling Yancey to shreds. Latouche screamed wildly at them, his face contorted with rage:

"Back, pig-dogs! Have you the brains of cockroaches? Tie his hands!

"Into the boat with him. We must have that schooner!"

VI

HIS arms tied in front of him, Yancey was pressed down in the bottom of the longboat when they reached it some distance down the beach. Immediately the boat was launched. The men at the oars pulled straight for the silent schooner.

Evidently Captain Desmond had not witnessed the struggle at the water's edge. No doubt he believed Latouche and his crew were going to make another attack. About five hundred yards distant from the vessel the men at the oars stopped rowing. Latouche stood boldly in the bow of the boat, cupped his hands to his mouth. "Ahoy there, M'sieur Captain!" he shouted.

"What do you want, you damned scoundrel?" the skipper roared.

"We want your ship."

"Like hell you do. I'll fill your damned carcasses with lead."

"*Mais non!* M'sieur Capitan." Two of the men lifted Yancey into sight. "Here—you see?—we have your ver' good friend. You see him alive! Shall I tell you what we do to him—before he dies?" He held his revolver at Yancey's head. "He will not die prettily, *mon capitan!* You will watch us shoot him to little pieces? *Oui?* It is for you to make the choice. His life—or your ship! First will I shoot off one ear—then the nose—then the other ear. You will hear him shriek. *Oui?*"

Yancey gritted his teeth. "Don't give in to him," he yelled.

Latouche smiled. "See—I will make him one ear less."

Searing flame tore close against Yancey's head. He felt a stinging pain in his ear. Warm blood flowed down his face. The lobe of his left ear would always be missing. Captain Desmond reeled back in horror. What must he do? If he gave up

the ship, they would both be murdered. As he hesitated, Latouche called out savagely: "Make up your mind—before I shoot off the other ear." He turned to carry out his threat.

AS Latouche turned, Yancey—who had been bracing himself between the two human tigers who held him—swerved suddenly to one side. The quick jerk tumbled one of the men overboard into the sea. The gunwale dipped. The next moment they were all in the water. A triangular fin appeared less than a hundred yards away! Shrieks of terror arose from the fear-stricken convicts.

"Sharks! Sharks!" they screamed.

Yancey was as conscious of his peril as anyone. Bound though he was, he still had his legs free. He kicked out—managed to keep above water. Mad yells arose beside him. The swimmers were endeavoring to reach the *Spindrift*. Aboard the vessel there were signs of activity.

A boat was being lowered. Captain Desmond, revolver in hand, stood in the bow, urging the Tahitian rowers on to greater speed. He was risking the loss of his vessel in an endeavor to save the life of his friend. Hands clutched at the boat from all sides. All was mad confusion. A shriek! One of the struggling men disappeared beneath the water, leaving a blood-stained trail behind. A pair of human arms encircled Yancey, dragging him under! It was Latouche who had clutched him, in a last desperate effort to bargain with the skipper.

"Save both of us—or neither!" he screamed to Desmond.

Yancey butted him under the chin, freed himself and burst to the surface. Strong arms seized him, dragged him aboard the life-boat. Through a forest of waving arms, the fighting skipper pressed back to the schooner's side.

He cut Yancey's arms free. Carried him up the ladder-way to the deck. Bandaged his ear.

"Now let the murderous devils come aboard—one at a time," he said to the Tahitians, who had finally recovered from their mutinous mood. The terrified convicts were dragged on deck. One by one they were locked in the cabin, the strong door bolted tight. "How many?" he asked, when no more were in sight.

"Five," Yancey reported. "Latouche and one other are missing."

The skipper stared over the side. There was no sign of the convict leader. But there was a disturbance in the water on the portside—as though a struggle was going on below the surface of the water.

"Some shark is making a meal out of the most poisonous criminal I've ever met," he said to Yancey.

HE stroked his chin thoughtfully. "The others—the best place for them is the island. They might as well stay dead—out of harm's way, poor devils. The world will be well rid of 'em, when they finally die off" He warped his vessel in as close to the reef as he dared, drove the five men over the side, watched them swim ashore and rejoin their remaining companions on the beach.

Not until they were far out at sea, bound for Brisbane, were they reminded of the gold bars which Latouche and his crew had already shipped aboard the *Spindrift*—enough, they found, to make them secure for life.

Some day—when the motley, half-starved crew had died away—they might return and salvage the rest of the gold. Until then, the island of dead men could retain its secret. The *Esperance* could continue to rot—watched over by its slimy guardian sea monster and the beast-like horde that had once been men.

Sword of Amorbach



*A Tense Story of Gallant Battle and a Cruel, Grasping
Count of the Colorful Middle Ages*

By GUIDO RENGETTI

Author of "Waters of Strife," "The Inn of Treachery," etc.

WITH a rattle of chains the castle drawbridge fell very slowly across the yellow waters of the moat. As the portcullis was raised, a swearing, shouting, laughing troop of men-at-arms came running out, pelting before them, with sticks and stones and refuse, a man whose hands were tightly bound behind him.

His shoulders were bare, and from his waist hung the tattered remnants of a monk's habit. His knotted cincture, now swinging in the hands of a burly, black-browed ruffian in a greasy leather jerkin, left his back

seamed and bleeding. His ears, shorn by Hartwig's orders, were tied about his neck with a piece of bowstring!

With every whistle of the cord a voice from the battlements above, where Count Hartwig stood, roared approval.

His dull red hair was uncovered, and in the breeze his thick beard blew about his face. Under their shaggy brows his blue eyes snapped, and a grim smile parted his thin lips.

"Lay on, Erich, lay on," he shouted. "By all the saints, thou art a jewel, and I love thee. How now, Sir Monk? Do thine ears burn with

all that has been said of thee? Thou'lt listen to no more pretty penitential tales, no sound of the wicked world will come to thee to disturb thy meditations.

"Drive on, Erich, drive on to the gates of Mannheim. And you, holy father, pray give my respects to his grace. Tell him I'll come anon to see how well my carving suits his palate."

AS the men-at-arms disappeared under the crest of the hill, Hartwig turned on his heel and strode away to the watch-tower which commanded a view of the four cross-roads.

The castle, perched high on a granite crag, reared its gloomy walls above the level of the surrounding country.

It frowned down menacingly on the prosperous little town of Amorbach.

The emperor who had given the founder of the house permission to build his castle, asked how he expected to subsist in such a barren spot.

"I shall command the four cross-roads, sir," was the reply, "and, please God, travel will be good."

As time went on, the lords of Amorbach grew to depend more and more on the four cross-roads and the goodness of God, until the utter rapacity of the present head of the house had made his name a thing of fear throughout the country.

He protected his dependents against his robber neighbors only that he might pluck them more thoroughly himself.

The townspeople lived in very terror of their lives, for no home was safe from his ravishing hand, and no purse from his greedy fingers. They quailed at the sound of his voice, and the distant clatter of his men-at-arms as they went lurching through

the town was enough to send all flying to cover.

His exactions grew heavier and more frequent every year. Driven to desperation at last, a delegation came to ask a lightening of their burdens.

It brought as a propitiatory offering a bag of gold and bales of valuable goods.

Trembling with fear, they were brought into Hartwig's presence. He listened to the appeal, and then ascertained the amount of the offering.

"Out upon your scurvy souls," he shouted, "to insult me with your beggarly pittance," and, taking a sword from the wall, he snapped it across his knee.

"Look, you sirrahs!" he cried. "And ye bring me not four times the sum this day two weeks, I'll break each one of you likewise!"

The delegation withdrew, thankful at being allowed to retain their heads upon their shoulders, and bore the dread news to their waiting friends.

Four times more gold! They gasped in amazement. It was as much as Metz, or Treves, or Cologne could raise in a month. But Amorbach!

It was not to be thought of. And in two weeks!

YET something had to be done; they knew Hartwig too well to doubt his word. The money could not be obtained, and there was no use thinking of armed resistance.

Assistance must be found somewhere, but no one knew where. Hartwig was acting within his powers, and the Emperor, if appealed to, would not dare to interfere with the little business transactions of the most unruly noble in his realm.

There was one refuge—the newly appointed Bishop of Mannheim, in whose diocese Amorbach lay. But

there was slight chance that he would dare to aid them.

Hartwig had little regard for episcopal rebuke, and Ludwig, the former bishop, had dreaded him as he did the plague.

ONLY once had he been moved to remonstrate against the most degrading indignities—when a mule-train laden with silks and velvets for vestments had been plundered at the cross-roads by Hartwig's order, and sackcloth and ashes sent in their stead, with an ironical message advising Ludwig to lay aside purple and fine linen and do penance.

Like his body, Ludwig's protest was feeble, but it brought Hartwig riding into Mannheim in full armor to shake his mailed fist in the old man's face.

The shock of the incident killed Ludwig within a month.

But all Hartwig's endeavors to secure the vacant office for a kinsman proved fruitless.

His fury knew no bounds when he received the news that a Franciscan monk, of whom nothing was known except that he had been a knight of renown before entering orders, had been chosen by the Pope.

Hartwig not only remained away from the consecration services, but took the occasion to rob priest and layman alike who were flocking to Mannheim for the ceremony.

The new bishop gave no sign of resentment when the unfortunate victims of Hartwig's wrath poured out their story of their wrongs, but they who saw the quick flash in his steady eyes knew that the crozier of Mannheim had fallen into manful hands.

Quietly Gregory—for so he was called in religion—set about straightening out the affairs of his diocese. His own life was one of rigorous simplicity, and he demanded the same

of his clergy. He spoke little, and then with a soldier's bluntness.

The military appointments of his palace were perfect as Hartwig's own, and their discipline relentless. Yet to the poor and afflicted his heart and purse were ever open. The kindness of his face was known in the prisons, the workshops, and the poverty-stricken hovels of his people.

To him the townsmen of Amorbach looked in their hour of need, and secretly the chosen ones went to Mannheim. With tears they besought his assistance.

"It were a sin and a shame that such things should go on in this Christian land and the diocese of Mannheim, unchecked and unpunished," he said when they had finished. "I shall send my good Father Anselm, who has had wondrous success in touching hardened hearts, to speak to this man on the error of his way, and persuade him to turn from it. Go you to your homes and pray. I will do what I can and God wills."

Disappointedly the delegation withdrew. They had little confidence in an appeal to Hartwig's spiritual nature.

Their report filled Amorbach with dismay. With eyes of pity they saw the frail looking monk who entered so fearlessly within the castle walls to plead their cause, and anxiously they awaited the result of the interview.

HOPE was just stirring in their hearts when the shouts that came from inside the gates foretold Father Anselm's failure.

Accustomed as they were to sights of Hartwig's savage cruelty, they were unprepared for this. Never had a priest been so grievously maltreated, and an angry growl ran through streets as Erich and his fellows drove their victim through the

town and out upon the road to Mannheim.

MANNHEIM had long been dark and her people soundly sleeping, when the moonlight, streaming through an open window of the bishop's palace, found Gregory kneeling before a great, cross-handled sword, buried in prayer.

That sword had served as his crucifix all the long years in camp and on the march before he laid it down in the supreme sacrifice of his life.

It had been a hard struggle before he had made a choice of the cord and cowl, for he came of warlike stock. Fighting was his only pleasure.

The gabble of Court he hated above everything. He loved the shock of battle, the shrill screams of the men-at-arms, the crash of axe on shield and helmet, the mad neighing of horses, the splintering of lances, the rapid ring of eager swords, and when all was over, the hard earth for his bed and the strong leather saddle for his pillow.

It was while weak and helpless from a wound in the face and the ravages of a long fever that the change came into his life, as he listened to the voice of an Italian monk of Assisi, Francis, who came to visit him and brought the gentleness of a woman into his lonely life.

He spoke not of wrathful judgment and punishment, but of the dignity of self-conquest and of the greatness of a love for God's forgotten ones, the sick, the poor, and the afflicted.

It was useless to try to forget the words. With each day's returning strength they took firmer possession of the warrior's soul.

But, it was hard to keep down the passionate craving for conflict that always rose in his heart as day after day the stories of outrage and robbery and murder came to his ears.

He kept up his sword practice because of the hollow pleasure that came from the very handling of the weapon. Often the rising spirit was exhausted in a bout with his former squire, who had followed him into orders and had taken the name of Anselm.

The sallies, the repulses, the pangs of hunger and thirst and the long nights of endless vigilance. What would he not give to strike and be struck at again, with heart beating and brain afire.

If he could only bring this tyrant of Amorbach to his feet in the old way!

Gregory crushed his hands on the iron hilt of the sword in the effort to control his emotion.

"Save me, O God, from my evil desires," he prayed. "Let me not yield to this bitter temptation, but send me Thy grace to strengthen my soul."

A staggering step in the corridor without, and the sharp breathing of a man in pain, roused him from his meditation.

"Open, in God's name, open, your lordship," gasped a voice.

GREGORY, with a nameless fear clutching at his throat threw open the door, and started back with a cry of horror as a figure, covered with dust and blood, fell across the threshold.

"Anselm—Anselm!" he cried, as he saw the mutilated head. "Who has done this deed of hell?"

Bravely the stricken monk tried to speak as the bishop raised him in his arms, but only a whisper, "Hartwig of Amorbach," came from his fainting lips.

Gregory for an instant stood appalled. Never in all his life had he seen such devilish, wanton ferocity worked on a human thing!

Serfs were sometimes treated so,

but only for the worst crimes, while Anselm was a priest and his messenger.

It was an insult to the Church and to him as a prince of the Church.

Above everything, Anselm was his friend, his squire, and his spiritual brother; the only one who understood his reasons for becoming a priest, and sympathized with him in his struggle to live up to the best his vocation demanded.

He loved him for their years of comradeship, for his courtly kindness, his ever-ready friendship, and the delicate beauty of his gentle face.

LIFTING the unconscious Anselm, he laid him down on his own bed, and while the tears flowed unashamed down his burning cheeks, a fierce, bitter oath broke from his lips.

"For this day's work, Hartwig of Amorbach, I'll have thy blood in return. By the just God, I swear it!"

Amorbach had just arisen for another day of anxious expectancy, when a loud cry from the church square brought a crowd of town-folk to the spot.

A sheet of parchment with a seal attached had been fastened to the church door during the night, and had a mysterious air about it that filled the apprehensive group on the steps with a sense of foreboding.

The words no one could read, and the muttered attempts to do so made a confused hum, which grew louder with the increasing concourse. Old Father Werner, the village pastor, attracted by the disturbance, came to the door.

He started as he saw the seal, then began to read. As he did, the blood rushed into his pale cheeks and then receded, leaving them whiter than ever.

At last he finished, but his lips still moved mechanically, and the people watched in breathless interest.

Father Werner wet his lips feverishly.

"It is the major excommunication put upon Count Hartwig, by His Grace of Mannheim!" he said in a hoarse voice.

The major excommunication!

A shuddering cry came from the listeners, and trembling fingers made the holy sign on blanched faces at the awful words.

Absolute isolation, total separation from all human kind, family, friends and followers, deprivation of care in sickness, and of the sacraments in death, and burial like the beast of the field outside consecrated ground, were the tortures that made the lot of the foulest leper happy in contrast with that of the forsaken wretch on whom it was imposed.

It was the last resort employed by the Church to bring her unruly children to obey her commands, and inflicted only for the most heinous crimes.

No one dreamed that the bishop would dare hurl it at Hartwig's haughty head. A feeling of awe at the hardihood of the fact seized them all as they looked at the fatal red seal and the bold signature above it.

Like the fear of the black death, the news spread through the town, and the streets were filled with an excited throng, hurrying to the church to see for themselves.

Then, as if with a single impulse, the entire population poured along the path that led to the castle, whose inmates had long since been aroused by the uproar.

AS the men-at-arms looked out over the walls and saw the dense, packed mass, they wondered. There was no sign of attack and no weapon to be seen!

At a loss to reckon with the situation, Erich determined to rouse Hartwig from his bed, but as he

started, Hartwig's voice was heard shouting a greeting from the postern-gate.

He had received no intimation of the sentence of excommunication, for he stood there in the warm morning sunlight, smiling, wrapped about in a richly-furred cloak, a mighty man.

"Give ye good-morrow, my friends," he cried, the tones of his powerful voice carrying strong to every ear. "Ye rise early to greet me."

The silence deepened, and it nettled him.

"Are ye turned to stone, that ye stand there and stare with fish-eyes and say naught?" he asked.

AYE, and small wonder," scoffed a cripple, "since we have looked on thy Gorgon face."

The gibe struck deep.

"Ho, there, Erich!" bawled Hartwig. "Send me a bolt from thy cross-bow into yon crippled cur's hide."

There was a sharp click as Erich set his bowstring. He raised the bow to his shoulder, but there it stayed, for the cripple was jerked back into the crowd.

In his place stood a monk, who had a dignity that held Erich motionless.

He towered like a giant over the people near him, who seemed as much surprised at his presence as Erich.

Hartwig, unconscious of the change, fumed at the delay.

"Hast thou lost thy thick wits also?" he roared. "By my soul, I'll jog thy dull brains when I reach thee."

The words roused Erich. One target was as good as another, and this was an easier mark to hit. His finger was about to loose the string, when the monk began to speak in a clear, crisp voice that demanded attention.

Hartwig's mind was riveted by the

first sentence, and, reckless as he was, the chill of fear crept into his blood.

Once before he had heard those words, and as a result the haughtiest monarch in Europe bent his neck, and the proudest will in Germany was broken like a reed.

But Henry might yield if he would; there would be no pilgrimage of atonement for Hartwig.

With the townspeople he could settle later, but first he would humble this upstart bishop who had dared put him, of all men, under the ban, and for the mere cropping of a monk's ears.

With the hardest riders and the sturdiest fighters in the Empire at his back, he would teach His Lordship of Mannheim his place for all time.

With an oath he again ordered Erich to shoot, but still the command was unheeded. Astounded at such persistent disobedience, he ran to the battlements.

As they saw him coming, the men-at-arms, who never before knew what flight meant, turned and rushed headlong from his presence. It was the instinctive regard for the law of the Church, which was inherited with their blood from centuries of dutiful ancestors.

HARTWIG stood aghast, scarcely believing his eyes. These men, who had fought side by side with him for years, who were bound to him by every tie of fear and utility and common interest, were deserting him in his hour of greatest need. His blood boiled as he saw them all, from scullions up, tumbling over one another in their haste to get across the drawbridge and outside his contaminating walls!

He picked up the cross-bow which Erich had dropped, and waited. The last to leave was Erich, who hesi-

tated between a churlish love for his master and the dread of the ban.

He walked shamefacedly, and looked back several times to the gate. He was almost across when Hartwig saw him, and, with a snarl, let fly the bolt.

Erich heard the sound, and turned a gloomy face to receive the missile full and fair in the throat.

For a second he stood in his tracks, and then, with a dying effort, brought his hand to his head in a half-salute, spun on his heel, and toppled over into the moat.

At the bloody deed the waiting people turned with a frightened yell and disappeared down the hill, leaving Hartwig gazing into the waters of the moat, where a few bubbles rising lazily to the surface marked the spot where Erich lay, his day of service ended.

EXCEPT for the light which came from the blazing logs on the broad, open fireplace, the banqueting-hall of the castle of Amorbach was in darkness.

The walls of oak, stained black by the smoke of years, were almost concealed by the weapons upon them.

Conspicuous amongst the weapons hung the sword of Count Wolfgang the founder of the house.

It was a wondrous blade, long and broad, with a rough iron hilt, and although the Counts of Amorbach were famed for their strength, none of them had ever cared to use it as a weapon.

When Wolfgang was on his death-bed he called his serving-men to his side and bade them bring his sword. It was brought, and with it came the heir of the house.

"It has done many a bloody and cruel deed in my day, for which God have mercy on my sinful soul," the old warrior mumbled, "but 'tis a good blade, and has stood me well,"

pressing the hilt lovingly against his bony cheek.

"Canst wear it, son?" he asked, eyeing the massive man before him.

"Nay," was the answer, "nor any man in Germany save thyself!"

"Then, listen," cried Wolfgang, raising himself from the bed and holding the sword aloft. "I'll sheath it, and until one comes who can draw it forth and use it as I could, the power of this house shall stand!"

Summoning all his remaining strength, he shot the steel back into the scabbard, and, with a smile of grim content, dropped on the bed lifeless.

There it hung, high over the head of Hartwig as he sat, the last of his line, childless and alone.

No sound was to be heard, and the silence grew so oppressive that the old boar-hound, his constant companion and the only living thing that had not deserted him, whimpered and shivered.

HARTWIG patted the shaggy head, then lifting a huge goblet of wine to his lips drained it at a pull.

The strong liquor filled his veins with a cheerful warmth, and his gloomy heart with fresh courage.

It was tonight that the townspeople were to bring the money, and almost a week since he had been put under the ban. He ground his teeth with rage at the thought.

"If I but had his lordship here now," he muttered through his clenched teeth, "I'd teach him to meddle. I'd strip him of his dignity, the cockerel. I'd—"

The boar-hound reared his head from the floor with a sudden growl, and then sprang to his feet, every hair on his back straight and bristling.

Hartwig listened, and heard the

faint, steady clap of sandals in the corridor.

The sound came nearer, and, as Hartwig rose to cast a fresh log on the fire, a tall figure stepped through the doorway and into the shadow.

Hartwig sprang to the place where his weapon lay, and, with it drawn in his hand, sank quietly into his chair.

Neither man spoke, and only the snapping log in the fireplace and the continued low growling of the dog broke the stillness.

"Well," said Hartwig at last, "who art thou that comest so boldly into this forbidden presence? What is thy want?"

FOR answer the newcomer stepped into the light, and Hartwig, with a thrill of fierce pleasure, recognized the monk who had delivered the sentence of excommunication.

Here was someone on whom he could wreak his vengeance, at any rate.

The habit, drawn tight across the shoulders, which were a good span broader than his own, showed the deep curve of his mighty chest.

"Fairly met again, Sir Monk," cried Hartwig mockingly. "My spirit craves religious exercise sorely, and from thy bulk thou art the very man to give it to me. May Satan seize me if I suffer thee to depart without a token of my regard!"

"'Tis not consolation thou need'st, Hartwig of Amorbach, but the fear of God in thy sinful heart," answered the friar quietly. "I come to deliver a message from His Lordship of Mannheim, and am empowered by him to make the terms of thy submission."

"Submission?" snarled Hartwig savagely. "Does he think I am ready to yield because thy Latin jargon has frightened a few superstitious

men-at-arms? If thou art come on any such quest thou art a fool, as I shall prove to thee before this night is done. Submission! I'll see his soul to hell first, the insolent dog!"

"He bids me say," went on the monk, "that unless thou comest to Mannheim within the week, on foot and unarmored, and there in the cathedral before the high altar do public penance for thy sins, do make restitution for thy past crimes, cease from thy present course toward thy people, and do make barefoot pilgrimage to the most holy sepulcher for the cruel maiming thou didst his monk Anselm, he will seize thy castle and hang thee from its highest tower for the murderer and thief thou art!"

Curse after curse left Hartwig's lips as he heard the threat, and he brought his fist down on the table again and again.

So loud was the noise that the shield which was fastened on the wall above the sword of Wolfgang swayed dangerously to and fro. A touch would bring it down.

Hartwig struggled to his feet, and, brandishing his sword in front of the portraits of his ancestors on the walls about the hall, he fairly shrieked in his fury.

LOOK down on me, all ye Counts of Amorbach—Wolfgang, Rudolf, Ludwig and Eberhardt, and all the rest. Curse me all if I avenge not the insult of this man who drags your names and mine in the mire!"

He turned on the monk and roared:

"Go to Mannheim to be mocked and jeered at by every mangy knave 'twixt here and there? To kiss his lordship's sandaled toe, I ween, while all the misers of Amorbach look on and grin. I'll go, but 'twill be to have out his accursed tongue and feed it to my hound!"

The monk stood with his back to

the fire, his arms folded in the wide sleeves of his habit, and his cowl drawn over his head, concealing his face.

"But first I'll carve thy broad back for uttering such a message," cried Hartwig, rushing on him.

"Thou art brave against a weaponless man," sneered the monk, as he turned when Hartwig was almost upon him.

Hartwig stopped short, surprised and amazement staring from his face.

"Wouldst fight?" he asked wonderingly. "Wouldst have a weapon?"

The monk, with an effort, spoke in a quieter tone.

"I am a man of peace, and have not to do with things of blood."

"Aye," cried Hartwig, "it was ever the cry of thy cloth when put to! Thou art like thy bishop and all the rest, fit for naught but shriving women and sniveling prayers."

"I know for myself that they who take the sword shall perish by it," answered the monk; "but, for my master, he is a better man and a better swordsman than thyself, Hartwig of Amorbach."

AT the bold assertion Hartwig's smoldering rage burst into fire.

"Thou liest," he shouted; "in thy teeth thou liest! I have met the best swords in Europe, and never but once was I conquered, and then by a trick of Gilbert of Montleon."

Carried away by his fury, he swept aside the brown cowl and dashed his mailed fist twice into the monk's exposed face.

A quick, dark bruise, the imprint of Hartwig's knuckles, followed the blow. The still, gray eyes of the monk blazed wide open, and then narrowed to two glinting points.

"Ah, God, 'tis too much!" he breathed passionately, wiping the blood from his face. "I will fight thee now, but for a stake. If I win,

thou wilt make the submission. If I lose, my life is forfeit, and the bishop will lift the ban unconditionally. Is it a bargain?"

Hartwig was startled at the easy assurance with which the offer was made, but there was no time to ask questions.

"There are weapons," he said gruffly, motioning to the walls. "Take thy pick; and say thy prayers well, for they will be thy last."

Hartwig fixed two blazing torches in the holders set in the sides of the room, and then stood waiting, the point of his long sword resting in the rushes on the floor.

The friar tried weapon after weapon, but none seemed suited to his taste. With an exclamation of impatience he flung the last one down with a rattle that shook the chamber.

The wavering shield dropped from its hook with a crash, and in its fall dragged down the sword of Wolfgang from its fastening.

"A sign, a sign from Heaven, holy paladin," scoffed Hartwig. "'Tis my ancestor's sword. Mayhap it will suit thy fantastic taste."

"Mayhap," said the monk, as, with an ease that bewildered Hartwig, he unsheathed it. Rolling back the sleeve of his habit, he disclosed an arm round and slim at the wrist, but swelling above into great ridges and mounds of muscle that stood out under the smooth, white skin with every movement of his hand.

BALANCING the long, wide blade in his grip, he swung it around his head in a flashing circle, bent it across his knee, and saw it fly back straight as before, true to the test.

"'Tis a good blade, and will answer. 'Tis worthy a warrior's arm," he muttered softly.

He turned, and in the bright light his face, though marred by the bruise

and a long, red scar running from temple to chin, seemed strangely familiar to Hartwig.

"Art ready?" asked Hartwig hungrily.

The monk's answer was a wave of the hand, and Hartwig caught the gleam of a ring on his finger. Franciscan monks did not wear rings, and instantly his suspicion was aroused.

"Thy name?" he asked sharply as he raised his weapon to begin the combat.

"Gregory, by the grace of God, Bishop of Mannheim," was the answer as the swords met in mid-air.

For an instant the room reeled before Hartwig's eyes, and the walls rocked with the pounding of the blood in his temples, for he was mad with joy.

GREGORY, the man to whom he owed the bitterest hours of his life, was here before him, with nothing to stop his vengeance but a hand's breadth of steel.

He laughed, but the sound had no mirth. Concentrating all his passion and his outraged dignity to strengthen his arm, and all his cunningness of fence and long experience to aid his brain, he settled to the task in hand.

The bishop fought shrewdly, like one feeling his way and testing his adversary's attack, but it was only his amazing strength of arm that saved him from the blows which fell with such terrific rapidity from Hartwig's weapon.

Up and down the great hall they stamped, crushing the rushes under their feet, while their swords clashed until the sparks flew in showers.

The bishop was deadly pale, except for the two burning spots on each cheek, while Hartwig's face never lost its devilish smile of triumph.

But Gregory's old battle spirit was slowly rising in all its savage fury

and power. Then came the old ease and subtlety of sword play.

There were no more awkward parries, but a finished hand and impregnable defense.

Hartwig changed his attack with lightning-like speed, and the weapon which felt so strong and fast at first now darted at legs and head and sides like a snake's tongue.

He knew the combat could not go on as it had, and, as the minutes wore away, the conviction grew that he had met an equal, perhaps a superior.

THE thought drove him to desperation, and the grip on the other sword steadily grew stronger and surer!

The bishop seemed to weaken, and was being driven into the trap when he tripped on his long habit and half fell. With a snarl Hartwig struck at the dropped guard, but before he could recover, the sword was beaten from his grasp by a stroke that paralyzed his body from finger-tip to toe. "A trick, a trick," he panted, "by Satan, the trick of Gilbert of Montleon! Who taught it thee?" he cried.

Gregory silently pointed to the fallen weapon, but Hartwig waited until his arm had recovered its feeling before he renewed the battle.

But his skill was gone, and almost before he realized it he was fighting desperately for his life.

He no longer looked for an opening to strike, but strove with all his might to keep away that awful sword.

His eyes grew dazed following its gleaming path about his head and its flashings in his face.

His breath came in quick, short gasps, and he felt an overwhelming desire to shut his eyes against the swing and play of the bishop's blade as it pecked at his face—always at his face!

(Concluded on Page 128)

Conclude this Smashing, Pulse-Stirring Novel of

DRY RIVER RANCH

A Three-Part Serial

By ANTHONY M. RUD

Author of "Frozen Face," etc.



CONCLUSION

SYNOPSIS

Bob Burdett has been willed the JB Ranch, known as the Ranch of Bones, by an uncle. The mystery surrounding this ranch concerns the Maggie Creek's sudden and inexplicable dryness. A trust fund of \$100,000 is left in escrow for Bob, to be delivered to him if he clears the mystery.

He leaves with his adopted dad, Pop Argyle. An attempt is made on Bob's life by a member of dangerous Plug Hograth's gang of Jimtown. Enroute, Pop and Bob overtake a bandit, Emilio Rodriguez. Pop Argyle identifies an initialed gun the bandit carries. It is the gun of Bob's dead father. He accuses Emilio of the death of Burdett, Sr., and of Bob's sister Ellen.

Pop and Bob bind Emilio and take him prisoner. In Jimtown, a bartender whose tongue has been removed by Hograth's gang warns the travelers not to stay in town, and other intimations come that Hograth does not like strangers.

Pop and Bob are guided to the residence of Don Julio, who offers to imprison the bandit and invites them to

partake of his hospitality. Drinking with Don Julio, Pop and Bob are given knock-out drops in the liquor, by Don, who is an ally of Emilio's. After Pop and Bob are fast asleep, Emilio, released, approaches the two with a deadly poniard raised aloft. This is the vengeance he craves—death, with the victims unable to strike back in any way.

Bob wakes up, kills Emilio. Then Pop is aroused from the drug, the two ride to Dry River Ranch. The wells there are dry and the place is very desolate and mysterious. Pop and Bob enter the ranch house.

Inside, they hear thumping, as of a heavy man walking. Bob runs to the upper floor to investigate. Tense, ready to fire, Pop waits in the lower hall.

Now Go on with the Story

CHAPTER X

*"Shoes Never Walked By
Themselves"*

THE upper hallway was half in complete darkness. Bob noted with a premonitory shiver that the front portion was dimly lighted. A door opened to one of those front rooms through

Breathless Adventures and Exciting Perils in the Far West



which came the illumination. Of a sudden, coming to a stop, Bob realized that from this room opened the window and shutter Pop and he had seen swing open!

Exercising all the care against noise of which he was able, Bob moved stealthily toward that open doorway. He paused and listened, but no sound came from the house, which again had gone as silent as a stagnant pool. Half-pressing the trigger of his six-shooter, Bob slowly entered the room.

It was bare. There was no one in sight, and the door of a shallow clothes press stood open, revealing the wall behind.

Bob looked down at the floor, and his lips curled in a grin that was more than half bewilderment.

"Oh, Pop!" he called. "Come up here. I want for you to look at somep'n!" With that he put his back to the wall, and waited.

Warily the elder puncher complied.

When he peered in the door, Bob left the wall and walked out toward the middle of the room.

"There's what we heard," he said matter-of-factly, pointing his revolver downward.

In the middle of the floor lay an enormous pair of yellow-tan oxford shoes—empty! And the strangest part of it all lay in the fact that the shoes were not set side by side, parallel, the way in which they would be picked up or dropped by any person moving them. They toed slightly outward, and the right shoe was two feet in front of the left!

"Looks like he vanished while he was takin' a step," said Bob. He was beginning to be amused by what he realized was sheer mummery. Bob started to lean over to pick up one of the highly-colored foot coverings. "Mebbe they b'longed to a

darkey minstrel," he said. "Once down to—"

"Stop!" yelled his partner in sudden dismay. Bob straightened, glancing inquiringly.

Not saying another word, the veteran lifted his six-shooter and pumped two hasty shots through the thin air above the suspicious articles. Both shots smashed into the wall beyond, knocking loose fragments of plaster.

"Now *what* in the name of time?" demanded Bob, astonished. He glanced first at the wall, then at his comrade.

POP had the grace to look foolish, though his eyes still bulged out. "I—I"—he stammered—"I thought mebbe he was still in 'em!"

The younger man nodded, restraining his desire to laugh. From now on, he decided, he would make no further play on Pop's ingrained superstitions. After all, who did not give credence to some sort of foolishness or other?

"It's not a ghost, Pop," he said seriously. "There's someone of solid flesh and blood in this place beside ourselves. Shoes never walked by themselves that I know of, an' I'd hate to start thinkin' so now!"

"I s'pose it ain't ghosts, but dammit, what is it?" asked Pop.

"Le's go out in the sun a while," evaded Bob. "I'm thinkin' some about water, an' b'lieve I'll take a look for some more of them wells. That two foot of dampness is all right, but it ain't goin' to keep our hosses satisfied more'n a day or two. An' the water in our cans tastes pretty flat right now."

Carrying his collapsible canvas bucket, he went in search of other wells. He found two which had been dug below the lower rampart of the dry lake. The first was nothing but mud at the bottom, but the

second held a couple or three feet of surface seepage. Coming back, he gave this to one of the horses, after tasting and making a wry face over its alkaline flavor. He spit out the mouthful. He made four trips, and the animals drank thirstily.

"It don't taste very good," said Bob, "but it'll help out some, I reckon."

"Tain't pizen, is it?" demanded Pop sharply. "Lemme see! I wouldn't put no Injun trick past them—"

He stooped, scooping up a few drops from the bucket and wet his tongue. Instantly he straightened, and horror gleamed out of his faded eyes.

"Ars'nic!" he yelled, dropping the bucket. "Boy, didja swaller any? Tell me, *didja?*" Pop fairly danced up and down in his frantic excitement.

"No, I spit it out," answered Bob, paling. "But the horses—"

There was no need, presently, to call attention to the animals. From their direction arose a succession of groans, snufflings, queer noises, and the restless stamping of hoofs.

Pop choked. He saw one of the horses, his own pack horse, shivering and bunching itself like a cat facing a belligerent dog. It was a picture of equine misery.

"Get the nitre!" he bellowed. "It's in yore pack, Bob. Heat up some good water, too. An' bring all the blankets we got!"

GIVING heavy doses of the spirits of nitre internally, bundling the two saddle mounts till they looked like clothes racks, Pop worked and fumed his savagery at the devils who had perpetrated this outrage.

"Knew we'd be all-fired careful about the fust well!" he gritted. "Stuck that stuff down there, then. We fell for it. Oh, damn 'em!"

Nitre wouldn't of done humans no good!"

Even as he spoke his pack horse, the first one watered, fell kicking to the ground in violent convulsions. Dodging the flying hoofs, Bob yanked out his revolver, reached forward and put a merciful bullet through the poor brute's brain.

"Wish that was Hograth!" he gritted, "ef he's the one responsible."

In time the nitre brought relief to the three other horses, but hours of grim struggle passed before the two punchers knew they had won. The horses were lying down now, swathed in the blankets. Bob built a small fire, heated a can of beans, and the two ate this only, not even caring for coffee. Then as the fire died, and the shadows of late evening closed down, they lay down fully clad beside the horses, and slept.

A half moon arose. As its first light fell through the bars of the corral, a slender shape detached itself from the gloomy bulk of the bunk house, and moved nearer. It stopped at the poles of the corral, and stood silent a whole minute. Then it faded back as noiselessly as it had come, and disappeared.

Pop and Bob slept on.

CHAPTER XI

"I'll Go Look for the Key"

AWAKENING next morning while it was still dark, Bob found his muscles in kinks from the hard ground. Also it was uncomfortably chilly.

Pop still slumbered, so quietly Bob built a fire and put on the coffee. He watered the horses, and gave them last handfuls of grain from the sack they had brought. Hereafter they would have to graze, though

that would not be difficult in the luxuriance of the valley. Water was the problem. As they ate breakfast Pop told of a test for arsenic which was reliable.

"Bile a silver coin in the water. Ef the coin turns black don't touch the water. It's pizened!"

The horses were droopy and spiritless, yet they were able to eat and drink. Bob's buckskin pony looked able to carry a man, and Pop announced his intention of using him.

"I'm gonta leave you with the spooks," he announced determinedly. "Some-eres up thataway the water of this here creek has got locked up. I'll go look for the key. Look for me when I get back here, son! I'm takin' a blanket roll, 'cause there's no tellin' how fur I'll have to go."

Bob nodded. "Good luck, fella," he said in farewell.

Immediately he had put away the dishes, he took the bucket and went out exploring for other wells. There had been eight of them bored, according to his uncle's letter. In time he found the rest.

POP'S test revealed that all but one were poisoned. After a thorough boiling of a potful from the latter, a silver quarter showed no sign of corrosion, so he tasted the water.

"Gyp!" he announced aloud, making a wry face. "Well, it's all right to help out with the ponies, but I can see we ain't going to stay here very damn long—less'n Pop is lucky!"

Taking his saddle horse and the remaining pack animal, when these showed signs of perking up, he attached ropes to the saddles, and, after arduous labor managed to drag the carcass of the poisoned horse three hundred yards down the trail on which they had come from Jimtown. There he levered the dead

beast over the edge, tumbling it into the dry bed of Magpie Creek.

Passing the bunkhouse, which as yet he had not had opportunity to explore, Bob stopped. It might have been his imagination playing him tricks, but he could have almost sworn that he had heard a hollow *thump* from within those walls and boarded windows!

Quietly he stepped to a window, and put his ear against one of the boards that had been nailed across. There came a faint scraping noise.

He jerked his head away, and threw his Stetson aside. That sound *might* have been made by the curved brim, rubbed against the board, but he thought not.

He tried the door. It was locked. He saw that it was of flimsy pine, however, cracked and case-hardened, so drew back. One smash of his shoulder splintered it. A second, harder smash knocked it from its hinges and sent him sprawling headlong inside—with six-gun ready for a quick shot, however.

THE place was silent. He looked about him with wondering eyes. Piled there in stacks that reached to the ceiling was all the furniture which once had adorned the ranch house! It almost filled the long bunkhouse, leaving only a T-shaped, narrow aisle. And the aisle, in spite of the fact that the burlap and paper-bound furniture was inch deep in alkali dust and sand, *had been freshly swept!*

Moving quietly up and down the narrow aisle, Bob peered under and through all the apertures he could find, but discovered nothing.

Two things bothered Bob. One was a sort of intuition, perhaps. He *felt* as if someone were here! Adding that to the noises he had heard, gave him a determination to find out more.

Then there was a second, less palpable attack upon his senses. He could *almost* smell an elusive sort of perfume! Queer!

SNIFFING about only served to banish the impression, so tackling a rack of chairs each of which was corded in dusty newspapers, Bob started to clear out the furniture.

An hour of struggle with unwrapping lessened his enthusiasm, though. Some of the pieces were too heavy for him to handle, also. He amended his original determination, and ended by carting a few chairs, a table and a bed into the old sitting room of the ranch house.

He had uncovered about thirty square feet of bunkhouse floor, discovering nothing.

"Get Pop t' help me with the rest—some time," he reflected, wondering with an amused grin how his partner would take to the idea of sleeping inside the bewitched ranch house.

Since Pop doubtless would not get back till late, Bob ate a cold meal and then smoked peacefully. Of course there was somebody about trying to scare them, but as long as that person did not start shooting, Bob thought he could stand it.

He was wandering around, scanning the valley, examining closely the back of the bunkhouse, when he came upon the footprint.

Instantly Bob dropped to his knees, examining the print closely. A low whistle of amazement and partial understanding came from his lips. This mark had been made by a high-heeled range boot, yet it was too small for any cowboy to have made.

A woman? Instantly another idea struck Bob, and he dismissed the thought of any female creature being here in this wasteland. Mexicans ordinarily had small feet. He had

noticed even while drugged that the fat *jefe* of Jimtown wore boots no larger than size three or four. Doubtless when dolled up in fiesta attire he would suffer for the sake of vanity, and squeeze into something like twos!

Beside the one print, he found other marks on the ground near at hand. An Indian, or perhaps even old Pop, might have followed the trail; but as the ground here was very rocky, except for this one patch of sand, Bob was baffled quickly.

Probably it had been a scout from the *jefe's* band. Whoever it had been had stood just here, screened from observation from the direction of the ranch house by a clump of chaparral. Probably this had been the blackguard who had poisoned the wells. Certainly he had been spying.

"You're the ghost, damn yuh!" muttered Bob. "Jest let me in six-gun range, an' I'll lay yuh, all right!"

Remembering that he had left a bag of Durham on the featherbed in the ranch house sitting room, he went in to secure it. He sat on the edge of the soft bed and rolled a cigarette.

JUST as he was about to raise the wheat straw cylinder to his tongue, he stiffened, and his face grew grim and eager. From upstairs—the room of the yellow shoes, without doubt!—came an unmistakable racket which caused his blood to race.

Jaggety-bagetty—clickety-clackety—bonggg!

For all the world it sounded like dry bones being tossed aloft and caught in a wooden chopping bowl, the last, heavier noise being that of the bowl being dropped to the floor!

Jerking out his weapon, tossing

away the unlicked cigarette, he made swiftly for the stairs. Just as he started up, three steps at a time, another sound smote his ears, a wail. The room was completely empty save for one thing: a grinning human skeleton! One leg was stretched out on the floor, while the knee of the other was hunched up almost to the bony chin!

Half on the foot of that leg, and still clutched by the bony fingers, was one of the yellow-tan oxfords!

CHAPTER XII

"Plug Hogarth Won't Wait!"

DURING the night that had preceded Bob's gruesome discovery of the skeleton, and nearly two hours after the two adventurers had dropped off to sleep, an overall-clad figure on a diminutive pony came slowly into what seemed a blind canyon of the Mosser Hills.

Time and again the slender rider chuckled to herself, for she was eighteen, full of animal spirits and mischief. And she considered that she had played an excellent series of jokes.

The right and wrong of what she did never had troubled Molly Trench particularly. It was enough that her dad and mother wanted people kept away from the ranch.

At the western end of the supposedly blind canyon, the girl swung lightly from her mount, approached the wall of rock, and seized hold of a piece of rock and lifted it. There was a wooden framework on which a heavy canvas painted gray was stretched and flecked to imitate the surrounding granite wall.

Before her was a black tunnel. She led in the pony, replaced the canvas screen, and lit a lantern. Then she led her pony into the tunnel.

The only real perils were the human beings to be encountered beyond the western and eastern ends of the two main reaches—particularly on the western side, where Plug Hogarth dwelt as undisputed emperor of a wide-flung cattle domain.

Emerging from an unscreened opening a mile further on, Molly Trench looked at a substantial one-story house of stone blocks set in a narrow valley. No one ever could have guessed the existence of such a spot.

Beside the residence, which was in excellent repair, there were out-buildings which once had seen the crushing of ore. Then there was a long, low-roofed structure of bare rock which had been the quarters for the guards.

ALL the high-grade ore long since had been taken away; though Plug Hogarth had tried many times, he had found none. He looked forward to the day when he could extend, taking in the now barren JB, clear to Jimtown. He would own that town as well, restoring it to its former prosperity.

There were two horses tied outside the house, which caused Molly to stop at the mouth of the tunnel. She led back the pony into the darkness, and then she swiftly crossed the bare yard to a window, shadeless and unlighted. Two men were just leaving her mother, who stood looking into an adjoining room.

One turned as he emerged, and spoke in a loud voice.

"Member, Doctor!" he adjured grimly, "I've done give you the message. An' Plug Hogarth won't wait!"

From a bed inside the second room a man was coughing.

Consumption was not the trouble of Thayer Trench, M. D., admired physician of Los Angeles. He still

carried a bullet which had plowed its way through the top of a lung; and he knew full well that his hours were numbered. He silently cursed the human devil who had lured him and his family for this "ranch vacation."

UNDER the covers lay a loaded automatic pistol. He had hoped for one more glimpse of Plug Hogarth. Doctor Trench could not escape, for the Jimtown end of the trail was in capable hands, while the other way out to westward lay across the center of his main ranch.

Trench had lied to his women, let them think that something in his past accounted for the manner in which he had knuckled under to Hogarth. "A hold over him" had made him stay on, sending messages to his hospital and friends that he liked the new country and might not return.

This evening had been the first time that Thelma Trench, his wife, really had understood the real horror of it—knew why and how he had come to be wounded, and what lay before them all. It was not merely a job of chasing interlopers away from that dry ranch which Hogarth coveted. The beast wanted Molly as well. Yes, he would marry her, even let Mrs. Trench come and live at his ranch, if the girl came willingly.

When Molly burst in, after waiting until the two cowboys had vanished into the western tunnel, her mother had collapsed in a chair.

"What was it Hogarth wouldn't wait for?"

"He's—he's got to have that ranch!" her father said hoarsely. "I know it doesn't belong to him, but if he—he keeps it the way it is for a while, he can buy it in—cheap. And now two men have come to take possession."

The doctor buried his face in the

pillow, gripping the butt of the automatic.

"Oh, is that all!" answered Molly. She giggled. "I've got them on the run already," she said, thinking of the palpable fears of Pop.

"I'm going right back, and I'm going to take those two gunnysacks you have in the closet."

Her father coughed. "They—they aren't all human bones," he said, but Molly was helping herself to another cup of coffee, and did not hear.

"I'll have 'em on their way back, scared out of their wits, by tomorrow noon!" she boasted, and smiled. "Don't worry about me, Mother."

Fifteen minutes later the girl rode back through the tunnel, carrying the two gunnysacks of bones.

CHAPTER XIII

"Fightin' Wages for Fightin' Men!"

GLEASON HOGARTH, known as Plug, was a handsome man at forty. Just short of six feet, he was heavy at the shoulders but not fat. At home he looked like a prosperous cattle buyer. In San Francisco or Los Angeles he seemed more like a young and forceful bank president.

Only three immediate goals lay before him.

First, he meant to marry Molly Trench. But in the city his obvious infatuation had been ignored.

Second was the acquiring of the JB property. The creek had flowed just a few feet above one of two levels. A well-placed charge of giant powder, precipitating a cave-in of the wall and roof at a strategic point, had turned the water of the creek into the lower level, where it poured eventually into another subterranean stream.

Plug Hogarth had smiled triumphantly over this secret coup; for well

he knew that by digging or blowing out this rock dam, at any time, he could send the cold, clear water surging again.

Lastly, he was obsessed by the belief that somewhere in this old mine there *must* remain ore which would pay richly for modern development.

Fully dressed, shaved and ready to ride out to the mine residence, Hogarth looked out of the window and saw four of his men waiting beside the corral where five saddled horses were tethered. Four of those ponies were carrying war-bags and canteens, as if for a long trip. And he had asked for only two of his men—Joe Ahearn and Mexicali Mike, the pair who yesterday had delivered his message to Doctor Trench. There was trouble brewing. Once in a while his men tried to buck his authority, but he always managed to come out on top. This time he reached in a table drawer, counted out two hundred dollars from a roll of bills, and thrust this sum in his trousers pocket.

Then he opened a small leather case, lifting therefrom two small, loaded double-barreled derringers. One he slid butt-foremost into the sleeve of his whipcord jacket. The second he thrust into the pocket of his buckskin vest.

"Reckon we won't be ridin' with yuh this mornin'," announced Ahearn, as Hogarth walked up to them, thumbs hitched in the lower pockets of his vest.

"What's wrong? Don't you like the pay?" replied the ranch owner.

"The wages have been good—but not now any more."

"You strikin' for a raise?" interposed Hogarth quickly.

NOPE. We're aimin' to sorta drift—Mexico, mebbe. You been payin' fightin' wages for fightin' *men!* Ain't any of us who ain't

earned a rope, I 'spect—you, too, Hogarth. But warrin' on women an' city docs ain't in order. There been too many phone calls an' letters from Californy. Let's have our time."

Instantly the four found themselves looking into the twin barrels of the two derringers.

Hogarth said softly: "I won't quarrel. When you ride away I'd like to have you go either north or south. Any time you feel like coming back, I reckon I can make a place for you—"

"Don't worry," said Ahearn. "When yuh send a postcard to us, stamp it heavy. It'll take a dollar to carry to where we're goin'!"

Hogarth nodded. He pocketed one derringer, and withdrew the two hundred in bills. He tossed this to Ahearn. "Good-by."

He turned and walked straight to the bunkhouse. Of his regular riders there remained only the chinless Louie—a vacuous but deadly killer—Francisco, a breed, and three men who were out on other parts of his range.

After telling Louie and Francisco to get ready, and seeing that the others had ridden out to southward, Hogarth climbed to the cupola of the ranch-house. There was a big concave mirror with a shutter arrangement, a heliograph. He began manipulating the shutter.

CHAPTER XIV

"Yore Gang Has Tried to Kill me!"

BACK at the JB ranch-house young Bob Burdett was gripped by momentary terror.

He looked again at the skeleton, dogged challenge in every line of his body. It sat there, motionless.

"There sure ain't a soul in here," he muttered, glancing into the empty clothes-press.

Swiftly he returned to the chamber downstairs he had quitted. There noiselessly he removed his boots, setting them at one side, and immediately returning to the staircase.

His strategem was obvious. He was to appear a badly scared young man who had retreated to his former position.

At the first faint click of bones, which he expected, he started upward, avoiding now the creaking steps. He neared the upper hall. Now he caught a peculiar noise in addition to the faint sounds of moving bones. It was a catchy exhalation of breath, not unlike a subdued giggle. Bob peered inside the room.

Kneeling down beside a burlap sack, into which she was placing the bones of the skeleton, was a girl in overalls with her back toward him! She was in stocking feet, with the overalls turned up almost to her knees. Silk stockings. Her feet and ankles were admirably shaped.

BUT Bob noted this only subconsciously. He was thinking of the footprint. This young woman was one of the band. Perhaps she was the leader of them all!

Bob wondered grimly if she, too, had nerves. Gathering his breath slowly and deeply, he suddenly jammed down his shoulders and ribs, loosing a screeching war-whoop.

And simultaneously he leveled his revolver.

Like a coiled watch spring snapping out, the slender figure leaped clear of the floor and backward, dropping leg bones of the skeleton with a dry crash which went unheard. She half-turned, stumbled and fell, almost hitting her forehead upon the gun which Bob Burdett held.

Her face was convulsed with terror. Bob pinioned her arms which resisted with a wiry strength.

"Get away from me!" she screamed, but he paid no attention beyond a scornful grunt of denial. A tie-rope from his belt looped and tied her wrists in front. The loose end then was bound around her knees, tied in back. This hog-tie enabled the captive to sit, however.

Bob flung her into the corner, with her back against the angle of the wall.

"That'll hold yuh a while, Miz Spook," he sneered.

"Well-ll, what yuh got to say for yoreself?" he demanded somewhat ungraciously, picking up his six-shooter from the floor and holstering it.

"You're an unpleasant young man, aren't you?" was her astonishing reply. "I had guessed rather the reverse. Too bad we can't always be right!"

BOB blinked. Her voice was as pleasant as her eyes—and her face, smudged with what looked like soot, nevertheless was not the battle-ax normally to be expected on the chieftainette of a gang of murderers. It wasn't a bad face at all. She looked young, too. "You ain't very old to get the rope," he said moodily. "Prob'ly less'n forty, ain't yuh? I kinda hates to hang young women, even when they needs it."

"Forty! *Hang me!*" she gasped, and her hazel eyes grew round. "Oh, what in heaven's name—bosh, yo're fooling! I—"

"Fooling, am I?" he snapped. "Like hell I'm fooling! Yore gang has tried to murder me'n my pardner a couple or three times. Now yo're trying to scare us off'n our property. You give us knockout drops in Jimtown, an' throw knives an' shoot at us, an' put arsenic in the wells here to poison us an' our hosses. One of them died. Why d'yuh think I'd fool with yuh?"

Her face became serious.

"Please listen!" she begged. "I have been trying to scare you away from this ranch. That much is true. I have been doing that for a reason I'd have to show you before you'd believe. But I *don't* know a thing in the wide world about all the rest of this you're accusing me of doing! Not a *thing!*"

"Tell it to the King of Denmark!" he said harshly.

"What beats me," she said, "is how on earth you guessed about the skeleton!"

"It happened to be the fust skeleton I ever seen that was part man, an' part cow!" admitted Bob, smiling in spite of himself.

"What?" she cried, astonished.

"Yeah. See there?" He pointed down at the leg bones which had not been articulated, but merely set in position. "A man's got two bones b'low the knee."

"How stupid of me!" she smiled. "Daddy told me—"

Just at that moment, from outside somewhere came a stentorian hail, the hearty voice of a man.

"Hello, the house!"

The effect upon the girl was remarkable. She paled.

"Oh!" she cried. "Hide me! Let me loose! I mustn't let him see me! I—"

"Who is it?" demanded Bob.

"It—it's Hogarth! I recognize his voice. Oh, and I don't like that man at *all!*"

CHAPTER XV

"They've Thrown Him In the River!"

APPROXIMATELY three hours before the discovery of the ghost at the JB ranch house, Pop Argyle came to the dark mouth of the cavern from which Magpie Creek had debouched once.

Pop looked dubiously at the murky opening. It was fifty or sixty feet in width, but only from three to five feet in height. A horse was out of the question. If Pop cared to explore any further, he would have to bend nearly double, and doubtless would have to crawl part of the way.

Stooping cautiously, he felt a way inward three or four yards, and then stopped. The rock bed here was slightly concave and smooth.

He halted while yet he could see the broad mouth of sunlight behind him. An odd feeling came to him through his eardrums. Pop never in his life had been down in a caisson, or dived into water—for he never had learned to swim. The feeling of pressure on his eardrums made him uneasy.

Did he *hear* a far-distant murmur like that of a steady breeze blowing across the crater of a volcanic blow-hole? He grimaced. Somewhere back up this subterranean tunnel, Magpie Creek still flowed!

NINETY minutes had passed, and three of his torches had burned down and been discarded. The fourth was guttering low, but Pop Argyle grimly went on. Except for a couple or three potholes, there had been no dangerous obstacles. The fact that the stream bed wound in and out and around in the fashion of a lazy snake, accounted for the time it took him to traverse a distance no more than a mile and one-quarter.

The hum of the water was plain.

Of a sudden he stopped, dropping to his knees, and thrusting the torch behind. It singed his fingers, so he threw it aside with an oath. It had seemed to him that somewhere ahead had appeared a gleam of light!

It had gone now, and doubtless was nothing but the reflection of his own torch on a scale of mica. Yet Pop did not light another. He went

on slowly. Ah, there it was again, the faint yellowish gleam of lantern light!

A mutter of voices, then *one* surly voice—came to him. The man had said something in Spanish. Maybe it was one of the *jefe's* men.

Pop crawled toward the light swiftly.

He put his hand upon something strange that made him halt for a moment. It had felt like a planed board. It was. A box was set there in a pocket of the rock. It was open. Pop thrust in his hand, and brought forth a coil of what felt like insulated wire. With this was a small pasteboard box.

Inside the box, wrapped in cotton, were small objects. Pop felt of them, and then his spine suddenly prickled. Caps! Then this coil was fuse!

Carefully setting aside both articles, he poked his hand again into the larger box. He encountered some light sticks wrapped in oiled paper. Dynamite! Carefully replacing the articles, he crawled on.

There was a snap like a pistol, and a volley of shouted oaths. Above these rose the shrill, despairing scream of a woman!

POP hurried. Scrambling through the hole, he found himself in a vaulted cavern. A lantern burned there where it had been dropped upon the floor of rock. But that was not what galvanized the veteran into action.

There upon her knees almost in an attitude of supplication, was a woman! She was shielding her face with her arms, while between her and the lantern a heavy-set man slashed her with a length of rope, cursing in Spanish. He was evidently trying to drive her away from the smooth-flowing water, which could be seen at his back.

"Hey, Greaser!" Pop yelled, jerking his gun. Two rapid shots exploded.

The breed Francisco straightened. A screech burst from his lips. Clutching at his chest, he staggered backward.

POP'S gun spoke again. He had no thought of mercy or of even breaks just then.

The third shot was finis. Stumbling, the rope-wielder gasped and fell backward. There was a splash in the ink-black stream, then silence.

The woman had fainted.

As he bathed her face with creek water wrung out in his bandanna, Pop had a good look at the woman by the light of the lantern. She was quietly well-dressed, though not in the manner of range women. Blue frock, silk stockings, slippers with high heels. Straight features finely molded, and an inner kindness, had given her enduring beauty of a sort Pop had never seen.

She awoke, struggling. Almost out of her mind from the horrors of past hours, she seemed to want to cast herself into the underground stream. This Pop prevented, soothing her with gruff tenderness.

"Hogarth's thrown him in the river! They've thrown him in the river!" she cried over and over again.

"Hah!" he exclaimed, startled. "Hogarth done this thing, you say?"

"Yes!" she shuddered. "He murdered my husband! Now he has gone after Molly!"

Of course this was jargon to Pop, but little by little he obtained the sordid story. Doctor Trench had expired from a lung hemorrhage shortly after Molly, the daughter, had departed for the JB ranch the previous evening.

Molly had not come back, but the mother, weakened by grief, had not gone in search of her.

That morning Hogarth and two of his men had come to the old mine residence. Finding the doctor dead, they had made preparations for quick burial. Despite Mrs. Trench's frantic protests, they had carried the body down, and after a burlesque of a funeral service, consigned it to the stream. Hogarth himself had grown impatient over the woman's tears. He and one of the men had left, doubtless in pursuit of Molly. The other man had been left to see that Mrs. Trench came to no harm.

When Mrs. Trench was able to walk, leaning heavily on his arm, he led her back to the dreary stone residence. "Won't you go and help my daughter?" she pleaded.

"D'you know the way out?" queried Pop. "I'd make it back the stream bed, but—"

"Oh, no. There's a quick way—the tunnel!" she answered.

"All right. You can p'int me in the right direction. No, I reckon you better come along, too.

"It won't take us long to get out, you say? All right. I'm goin' back there to that place jest a second. Seems like I might be able to start suthin' with a box I found back that-away. Now le's hurry."

Pop discovered that Hogarth had placed the half-box of dynamite in exactly the position to blow out the dam of rock, throwing Magpie Creek back into its original bed—that is, if the explosion did not bring down the entire roof of the old mine workings!

CHAPTER XVI

"Yuh Jest Can't Be Bad!"

THE hail outside the JB ranch-house, and the girl intruder's panic because she recognized the voice as that of the mysterious Hogarth, unsettled Bob Burdett.

And now this girl quailed at the thought of encountering Hogarth!

"Well, he don't have to know you're here," retorted Bob. "Jest keep still. I'll tend to him."

"Oh, untie me! Please! *Please!* He might kill you—and then—"

"Why in heck should I let you go? Yuh drug me, an' try to kill me, an'—"

"Oh, believe me when I say I know nothing of that—*nothing!* Let me free. I'll hide back of that panel. I'll show you the way down through the empty flue in the chimney. There's an Injun tunnel out to the bunk-house. I'll go—but I'll come back and tell you everything I know!" He gazed at her steadily for a moment, disregarding a banging upon the door downstairs. Her hazel eyes met his squarely, without a trace of guile.

"Wa'al, yuh sure *look* nice," he said soberly. "Darned ef I don't believe yuh, somehow. Yuh jest *can't* be bad!"

AND with that he quickly removed the ropes from her wrists and knees. She sprang erect, and darted to the back of the clothes-press. There she pulled aside a wall panel, showing a dark flue in the wide chimney. A ladder of iron led downward.

"There's my violin. I made the squawks with that." She motioned toward a leather case hanging by its handle.

"Uh-huh."

"Now, Mister—" She halted. "Don't put much trust in this tunnel. Hogarth knows about it, but he's around in front now, so I can get away. Hogarth told me about it when I came over here first."

"I see. The—"

"I must hurry. Good-by—what's your name?"

"Bob," he told her.

"Well, so-long, Bob. I'm Molly." Then, before he could even guess her intention, she bent close, one foot on the ladder.

"I think *you're* nice, too!" she whispered, and kissed him.

THE front door slammed open.

"Hey there! Anybody at home?" It was the voice of Hogarth.

"Yeah," answered Bob briefly. He yawned aloud, as if just awakened from sleep, and clumped out into the upstairs hall. "Who is it?"

"It's me, Gleason Hogarth—a neighbor."

"Oh, yeah? Jest a second. I'll be down." He walked back, and then in a moment came downstairs. "There's so much funny rumpus around this place at night, a fella's gotta sleep daytimes," he explained. He was watching the visitor closely, however, and his right hand was not far from the butt of his gun.

The visitor's well-groomed appearance and strongly handsome face came as a distinct surprise to Bob, who had pictured this man as a fleshy, bloated sort of ogre. Rather dazed, Bob accepted the proffered handclasp, and led the way into the old sitting room.

"Saw smoke over here, last night. Knew the place hadn't been occupied, so I rode over. Are you leasing the place? I see you've got some of Burdett's old furniture out of storage."

"No," replied Bob slowly. "It belongs to me and my partner. Deeded to us. Burdett was my uncle."

He felt morally certain that the man before him knew all this perfectly well, yet speaking of matters that were not news gave him a chance to adapt himself, to gauge the other.

"The water's just gone," elucidated Hogarth. "One day it simply stopped—like *that!*"

"Sounds very bad," said Bob.

"If you've really got the title to the place, though," continued Hogarth in a confidential tone, suddenly puffing with energy upon his cigar, "I can let you in on a little bit of a secret. As pasture, all these sections are worthless. They don't grow grass close enough, or the right kind, to pay to gather as hay, and ship. And there is no water for cattle.

"I've got a bug, though," he added. "It's oil!"

"Oil?" Bob frowned, puzzled.

Hogarth elucidated. Of course there was nothing certain about the matter. It was a huge gamble. Yet over in California, on waste land much like this—and with an identical geological formation below—they had come upon pools of oil.

I'M going to drive a couple of wild-cat wells on my ranch—that's the other side of the hills," said Hogarth. "And I have a hunch down deep in my bones that the chances are even better over here. Of course it costs enormous money—twenty or thirty thousand dollars for just the boring of a single well. And then ten to one it will be dry!"

"Too rich for my blood!" grinned Bob, shaking his head.

"Oh, you'll come around to it in time—if I strike oil!" laughed Hogarth. "They all do. But I'll make you a proposition. I'll buy your land outright, and give you an iron-bound contract for a commission on all the oil that comes out of your property in the next twenty years! How would that be?"

"Why—I—I dunno," Bob was totally unprepared for this. "I'd have to talk any proposition over with my pardner."

"Of course. Of course. But just think of this a second. You haven't much capital, probably. I'll give

you ten thousand cash for the ranch—and also a contract for five per cent on all the oil we find here! How's that?"

Bob knew now this man was far from what he seemed; that he was not to be trusted in any way. Besides, selling the property would be throwing down his uncle, and also forfeiting all chance at the hundred thousand held by the bank in San Francisco.

"No, Mr. Hogarth. I'll tell my pardner what you said, but right now today, the ranch ain't for sale. Sorry."

He rose, as Hogarth nodded understandingly.

"Well, if you change your mind let me know," said the latter, shaking hands once more and going to the doorway.

A scream sounded from two hundred yards away—Molly's voice!

"Duck down, Bob!" she cried.

Bob dropped flat, clawing for his six-shooter.

That instant came a *spat* waist-high on the half-open door against which he had stood, and the almost coincident *crack* of a Winchester rifle, fired from a mesquite clump near the rim of the dry creek.

HOGARTH wheeled with a curse. He dug in a pocket, bringing forth a short double-barreled deringer. Both barrels vomited smoke, and Bob felt himself jarred from shoulder to hip by a searing, red-hot hammer!

He had fired, nevertheless, just a split second later than Hogarth. The rancher staggered, dropping the deringer. Now Bob pulled the trigger again—lifted the hammer—pulled blindly again—and sank into unconsciousness.

But down there below the veranda Plug Hogarth lay with two mortal wounds in his abdomen.

CHAPTER XVII

"Agua! Grat' Agua!"

GRRRRROUUUMMM!" It seemed as though the hills had spoken solemnly from the depths of their throat.

Though it would be a long time before any of them discovered the fact, this blast not only had accomplished its purpose, throwing Magpie Creek back into its old channel, but it had opened a fault in the roof of the mine. Ten hundred thousand tons of granite caved and slumped inward, blotting out the tiny valley, the old residency of the mine, and shutting forever the tunnels which had given access from east to west. No more would the raiders of Gleason Hogarth ride through.

Pop waited a while, but the water did not appear. Grunting his disappointment, the veteran rejoined Mrs. Trench, who waited on the buckskin pony.

"Reckon we better go along," said Pop. "Yo're up higher, Ma'am. Kinda keep yore eyes peeled for this Hogarth fella. I never met him, y'see, an' I'd hate to make a present to the wrong jigger, of what I'm keepin' for him!"

Pop shook his head dolefully, little realizing that on this slight gradient the current of the stream was little swifter than the walk of a horse.

Even as they passed around the lower rampart of the dry lake, the first moisture trickled in from above. The trickle became a rivulet, the rivulet a steady, growing stream. Yet Pop Argyle did not see it. Even when the whole volume of Magpie Creek was chattering into the lake, rapidly filling this reservoir, Pop had given up and failed to hear its welcome sound.

The chinless gunman, whom Ho-

garth called Louie, dropped his rifle to his waist and stared blankly. He had missed, because that girl's shout had made Bob Burdett drop just as the trigger of Louie's deadly Winchester was squeezed.

After watching Bob and Hogarth fire at one another, Louie never even considered the possibility that one or both of these men might have failed to inflict a mortal wound. To him it was just one of those double tragedies, of little concern to him.

Louie grinned. There were just three other men left at the ranch, and the breed Francisco back in the old Spanish mine. By reason of his deadliness, Louie thought he could manage these four. Together they might gather a portion of Hogarth's cattle.

Meanwhile, what about this girl who had shouted? Hogarth was gone. Louie licked his lips, and started toward the point where she had been. He knew she was agreeable to look at. Hogarth had wanted her. Very well, she was part of the spoils, then. He would capture her.

AMOMENTARY distraction drew his gaze away from the empty landscape where the girl had been. A far distant shout made Louie look across the dry creek, to the southeast. There was a dust cloud amid which he could distinguish five or six human figures on horseback.

Louie frowned. These were greasers and breeds from Jimtown, summoned by Hogarth for some purpose of his own. They complicated matters. Well, they would not arrive for half an hour or so. He could catch and hide the girl, then deal with them, though they might be dangerous.

Instead of running, Molly had caught up a rock as large as her own fist, and ran to a boulder within fifteen feet of Louie!

There she waited, expecting to sell her life dearly. Tears streamed down her face at the thought of that young puncher lying on his doorstep, killed by Hogarth.

Then when she saw Louie disappear behind an outcrop to westward, Molly rose from her crouching position and ran for the ranch-house. Stooping, she saw the stains of blood along the back of Bob Burdett. Yet he breathed! As she touched him, he groaned aloud!

"Oh, you mustn't die! You mustn't!" she muttered aloud in a voice choked by sobs.

"Nope," agreed Bob unexpectedly, raising his chin, and looking vaguely about him. "Where's Pop?"

FAILING to catch sight of Molly in five hundred yards, the gunman came to a halt. Out of the tail of his eye, however, he caught a glimpse of something moving. There, approaching the ranch-house from the west, was a woman in dark blue, who rode sidewise on the saddle of a buckskin horse! With her trudged a gaunt man.

This was Mrs. Trench, Louie guessed, but it was not Francisco, certainly. Something must have happened to that worthy!

"De udder hombre, I bet!" mumbled Louie, sliding behind a rock—but not before the quick eyes of Pop Argyle had detected him.

Pop bade Mrs. Trench wait. Six-shooter in hand, he hurried forward.

With an oath Louie yanked at the lever, lifting the rifle muzzle half an inch. But Louie, lazy always, even in cleaning the weapons which were the tools of his trade, had neglected the Winchester once too often. A cartridge jammed.

Cursing, forgetting the six-shooter at his hip, which would have given him at least an even break with Pop Argyle, Louie hurled away the rifle

and took to his heels, making straight for the oncoming horsemen.

To reach them, he had to pass straight across the ranch yard. Knowing he was safe enough, since the man at whom he had fired evidently had only a six-shooter, Louie swerved straight toward the veranda.

One glance told him that Hogarth was not dead but fatally wounded. Louie's lip curled. He did not care.

A revolver exploded. Louie screamed, and half-spun on his heels. Then leaning forward and gripping his left shank with one hand, he hurried away. That damned Burdett was not dead yet!

Pale-faced, Molly fell away from an open window, Bob's six-shooter dangling from her fingers.

Before Pop Argyle could reach the scene, one of the most curious of all incidents occurred. Six breeds who lived in Jimtown approached the creek bed. They recognized Louie, and expected him and Hogarth to lead them in some sort of attack or foray. The heliograph message merely had commanded their presence. Naturally the *jefe* had not accompanied them. He had outgrown his usefulness in the saddle.

At the first moment of spying the creek, however, the breeds shouted and gesticulated in wonderment. Then Louie, scrambling down, saw what they meant. He was bleeding from a wound in his thigh, and was angry. A little frightened, as well. He splashed through the six inches of water in Magpie Creek, ran up to the first of the riders, and yanked out the rifle from saddle scabbard. The water rose steadily.

Louie's shouted commands were lost, however.

"*Agua! Grat' agua!*" rose the shout from six dusty throats. Though it meant nothing to Louie, these other men hailed from Jim-

town. Rising water in Magpie Creek meant everything in the world to them—prosperity, new life for the town, strangers to be plundered—tobacco, marijuana, tequila—women.

They went mad with amazement and joy. Pop reached the veranda. He withheld his fire, as a slow grin came to the corners of his mouth. Dynamite had done the work!

A moment later the horses were drinking. Then when all were satisfied, the breeds mounted and started at a gallop back to Jimtown.

CHAPTER XVIII

"Why Don't You Come Along, Too?"

NINE days later Pop Argyle rode up at a gallop. He had been waiting on the stage road for two days, and had been lucky enough to intercept the stage bound toward Nueces.

"The driver's comin' part way, but he can't make it all the way!" shouted Pop, dismounting and tossing the reins of his chestnut to the ground. "S'pose yuh can stand a poky walk, fella? Yuh oughta get to a hospital soon. That broke shoulder-blade, an' them two deep scrouges through yore hams—"

"Hold up!" bade Bob, coloring and laughing. He had been lying at ease on his stomach on the veranda, with Molly seated on the step beside him. Back in the kitchen a sad-faced woman had been quietly preparing a noon meal.

"I can ride—a little ways, anyhow," said Bob. "You get your things ready, Molly. You and your mother—well, I suppose I'd better go along, and have a doc look this over. An' besides, I've got to notify the bank, and get a gang of cowboys. That bunch from Jimtown's been quiet, but I suppose sooner or later—"

So after dinner they all made ready, and rode away. Mrs. Trench had the bay horse which had belonged to Louie, and which he had left behind. Pop rode the pack horse, while Molly took his chestnut and Bob the buckskin.

The stage driver, luckily with no other passengers on this trip, met them three miles away. The distance to Nueces was accomplished, though Bob was white and shaky by the time they arrived. Molly had sat at his side all the distance, but she said nothing.

Pop rode his horse. He was bathed and duded up with the last of his Jockey Club perfume, and now and then reined close to speak to Mrs. Trench through the open window. At last the long Pullman train drew in. Pop fumbled with his Stetson.

"I sure hate to see yuh go, folks," he said awkwardly. "But I got to see to it the ranch don't walk away by itself. Reckon I'll be busy. Hope I—I—" He floundered.

Bob was grinning as he mounted the platform. Pop noted that his right arm was about Molly's waist—for necessary assistance, of course. Molly smiled.

At the step Mrs. Trench turned back. She looked straight at Pop, and placed her hand in his.

"Au revoir, my good friend," she said. "I am not going to try to thank you—now. But—the next time Bob wants to come to the city to see us, why don't you come along, too?"

Great joy flashed into the veteran's features.

"I will, Ma'am, I will!" he almost shouted, moving along the platform and shaking her hand. He released it with the greatest reluctance.

Then he watched the tail-lights of the train until they faded to a pinpoint in the west.

Those Funny Marines



John Fox, Private, Sets Out to Prove That He's As Good As the Best of 'Em in This Exciting Story of Barahona

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

Author of "The Crimson Blight," "Bare Fists," etc.

SECOND LIEUTENANT Sanders read over again the brief message received in Barahona from Regimental Headquarters in Santo Domingo City. His detachment, with which he had expected to evacuate the Province of Barahona within the next ten days or so, was to remain in this aged stronghold of the pirates and make a military map for future military gunners—just in case.

He stepped out and had the "music" blow assembly. Thirty-five

marines came tumbling out of barracks and fell in. He looked them over, sweltering in the sun, their uniforms touched by dapplings of light and shadow as the sun filtered through the overhanging palm fronds.

He read the orders to them.

They were received in silence; but that didn't matter. Marines did everything without grumbling.

"Corporal Flynn, Corporal Cameron," he said, "you will report to me in the office immediately."

They fell out and trooped back to barracks.

The two corporals were received in the office, standing at attention before Sanders. He studied them for a moment, these men he had known for so many months. They were good men, dependable—and he knew he was sending them into hell for a military map.

"Cameron, Flynn," he said, "I'm going to divide the detachment into two groups. One of you will take charge of one detail, which we'll call the Detail to the South, and will sketch Barahona Peninsula, south of a line drawn from here to the Haitian Border through the center of Lake Enriquillo. The other will sketch the area to the north of that line and will be known as the Detail to the North. Flip a coin to see which has which detail."

THE corporals flipped a *clavao*, a Dominican *peso*, worth twenty cents American—and Cameron was in charge of the Detail to the South, Flynn was in charge of the Detail to the North.

"Now," said Sanders, "some of the men must stay here to form a camp guard. I'll keep the cook, the supply sergeant—and, let me see, I'll keep Private Fox, because he's thin and white and a wind would blow him away and the trail would kill him in a week."

When the corporals had left Sanders stared for a long time through the open door of his office, a two room—one room used as a sickbay and hospital—building with a galvanized iron roof which kept it furnace-hot all the time. Outside the varicolored roofs of Barahona baked in the sun. A timid knock sounded on the door.

"Come in!" he called.

The man who came in was Private Fox, his face whiter than ever.

"Yes, Fox?" said Sanders kindly, staring at the diminutive one.

FOX weighed around a hundred and thirty-five. His shoulders were slightly stooped, his black eyes cavernous. He looked the weakling. His skin was pasty white. He didn't perspire. He always looked cool when everybody else was dying of the heat.

"I just heard," said Fox, "what the lieutenant had to say about me, sir. I don't like it. Naturally, as my superior, you can say what you like; but that doesn't make it right. When I enlisted in the Marine Corps it was presumed that I could carry out the duties of a marine. I expect to do that."

"Maybe I spoke hastily, Fox," said Sanders, who always intended to be fair. "But this mapping is going to be a gruelling task. It'll be ten hours a day, rain or shine, through jungles and mountains, in icy streams and burning sands, and it'll take iron constitutions to stand it. I've only my own judgment to back me, but you don't look as though you could stand it—"

"I can stand it. I want to join one of these details. I don't care which. I insist that I have the chance."

"And if you can't stand it?"

"I'll admit it honestly and return to Barahona at once."

Sanders drummed the desk with his pencil.

Sanders looked up at Fox.

He shook his head dubiously.

"No, Fox," he said, "my judgment is against it and—oh, well, go to it. Join Cameron's detail!"

One week later, after working all hours, to perfect his sketches, Sanders turned the two details loose. He watched them fade away, Cameron down the snaky trail which led to Cabo Beatta and Cabo Mongon, Flynn along the dusty uninspiring

road which would finally lead him to Jimani and Las Lajas on the Haitian Border.

Trudging along in the midst of the Detail to the South, beside Nick Peters, the Iron Man—a huge Bulgarian whose hands hung at his knees—was John Fox, private.

"I'll bet," thought Sanders, "that of them all, Fox is the only one who'll bother to shine his shoes at night before turning in, who'll keep his clothes clean, his hair cut and his face shaved."

Good qualifications in a "parade ground" soldier, but not enough on the gruelling task ahead. Sanders himself was to visit the details every week or so. When they were as far apart as they could get, he knew, his own task would be monumental, for he would almost have to live in a saddle on muleback.

IT was Nick Peters who suggested, while the Detail to the South rested for a few hours in Enriquillo—not to be confused with Lake Enriquillo in another part of the Province—that Private Fox be given the task of sketching the ghastly trail south to Trujin, where the Camino de los Quemados came in from Pedernales on the Haitian Border. The other sketchers had work to do in the southern foothills of the Bahoruco.

Fox grinned when he got his assignment, knowing that it was one that would have given even the Iron Man pause for thought. Besides, southward there was no jungle and no mountain streams, and the deception which he had been practising could not easily be maintained.

He had suffered long and in silence because of his physical incapacity. He suspected that Cameron and the Iron Man, and all the rest of his comrades, secretly regarded him as ineffectual, likely at any moment to

"cave in." Whatever his body might be, he told himself fiercely, his heart was all right.

What other marines could do, he could do; because he was a marine, and as good as they came.

But his efforts required some subterfuge. He never told anyone, for fear of being laughed at, that when he went forth on trails, he picked up in the brush, where he had left it during the darkness of the night past, a small bundle of neatly packed clothing. It contained a complete change from head to neck.

And it was the secret of why he could always return to camp with perfect sketches, and yet with his clothing in good shape and no sign of having suffered any hardship. His clothing never was wet with sweat. His shoes were always shined—and his buddies, who marveled at his tenacity, never guessed what Hell he went through, how he suffered as the next weakest of them never suffered.

That there were times when he rose and fell, stumbled and struggled on; that he kept going when every muscle cried out for surcease from pain. That his legs ached and that all that held him on his feet was his heart.

No, they never knew, and the reason was simple. Coming back to a main trail from a side trail he had mapped, he would doff all his wet clothing, rumped and torn by thorns, and bathe his tortured body in a convenient stream, lying in it, lolling in it, until the coolness brought strength back into him.

Then, rolling up his hardly used clothing in his bundle, he would don fresh clothing and return to camp, leaving the sweat soaked, sodden bundle in the brush, to be washed and spread out on rocks to dry during the night, while his comrades slept.

So he would always enter camp looking as fresh as when he had left it—and his comrades marveled that one could do so much and show so little effects of hardship.

But this trek south would be different. There were no streams. There was no water. Native gossip had it that even the natives of Trujin were like camels, having little or no water—and that the water of cocoanuts, mixed with saline water from pools in the rocks of La Rabiza's wastes, slimy with the droppings of birds.

And the trail was a snake trace of clinging sands.

But Fox whistled blithely as he started out. No guard went with him. Malaria had reduced the ranks of the mappers until there were not enough guards to go around—and Fox's comrades said banteringly that there wasn't enough of him for even cannibals to bother about.

When he was out of sight of Enriquillo, Fox settled down to work, knowing that his task was a race against time. The trail angled in and out, now almost in the sullen waters of the Caribbean, now back from the sea and fifty or a hundred feet above it. It was a series of ups and downs, and this wasteland was known as La Rabiza.

Along the shore in many places, rock formations jutted out into the sea, and there were blowholes in the rocks. And when the waves came roaring in—and Fox wondered why they should roar so lustily and sullenly when there was none but sea gulls and pelicans to hear them—the water cascaded up through the holes in cones of white spume, to pour back through when the waves receded, making sounds as of many women wailing in anguish.

The sound hammered at his nerves—and he was all alone.

But he straightened his shoulders and went on.

His feet buried themselves to the shoetops in the sand at every step. Not even his leggings could keep the sand away from his feet. Ever and anon he stopped to pour the hot stuff out of his shoes. Under his feet on the trail the sand was as hot as the top of the stove.

And by noon Fox had used up most of the water in his canteen, and his tongue was a dry rope in his mouth. His lips were dry, cracked, and he could taste blood on his tongue. Sweat had soaked through his shoes from tortured feet, and the sand was caking on them.

HIS canteen became hot under his hand. He looked back toward Enriquillo and saw a bunch of specks climbing up the foothills of the Bahorucos and knew that his comrades were walking the trails with compass and sketching boards. He promised himself he would be back in Enriquillo when they returned.

He must travel faster, he decided. And scarcely had he made his decision than the trail flew up and hit him in the face, and he coughed painfully into the sand which clogged his nostrils. He managed to rise, grateful that he hadn't marred his sketch. But the lines on his sketch were doing strange things. The lines had become little snakes on the paper, confined on it, and the snakes were fighting, rolling in and around one another.

He flirled the sweat from his forehead, held the sketch tightly until the snakes became lines again, and went on with his work. He tried to force his mind to forget the agony of thirst. Now and again he stared at the land to the right of where he was sketching. Once he saw a dinosaur on a rock, but as he looked it grew smaller and became an indigo-mouthed iguana, dozing in the sun.

Now and again thorn trees floated to him out of the heat haze, and the shade under the thorn trees was hotter than out in the open. He dropped his canteen because it burned his hip where he carried it, and his hand when he touched it.

"I'll get it when I return," he decided, kicking it off the trail. The strength put into the kick all but caused him to collapse. He was literally traveling on his courage. "But I'll show everybody that courage is enough. A man can do anything if he wills to do it."

HE didn't ask himself why he should be called upon to prove anything to anybody, but the marines, it seemed, always had to be proving things, most of all their courage.

More dead than alive, near nightfall he entered the village of Trujin, where, with trembling legs spread wide apart to keep him from falling, he "shot his last traverse." He made the necessary marks on his sketch to indicate where the mapper who did the Camino de los Quemados would have to "tie in" with him, and then asked the first suspicious native where he could find the *alcalde*, or mayor.

He was told.

The *alcalde*, was a barefooted scarecrow of a man. Fox spoke Spanish extremely well.

"I wish food," he said.

"There isn't food enough for my people," said the *alcalde* sullenly.

"I'll pay for it," said Fox.

"What good is money when there is nothing to buy?"

"Water, then?"

The *alcalde*, sweltering in the dubious shade of his own ramshackle hut, lifted his head lazily and stared upward. Fox followed his gaze—to see a huge clump of cocoanuts a hundred feet above his head, separated from him by the smooth bole of a

palm tree which he knew he could never climb.

"Someone to get them for me?" he asked.

"We need them for ourselves."

"I'll pay."

"What good is pay?"

"Won't you let me ask someone to climb up for them for me?"

The *alcalde* called to someone. A dozen men and boys crowded around, but none would essay the climb before the coolness of dusk came over the land.

In most places natives were hospitable, but in most places things of value to them could be exchanged for what they possessed. Here not even money had value. Fox understood at last. They only wished him to begone, back whence he had come.

If he starved and thirsted on the way, well, what he did not take of them, in food and drink, was that much which kept them from starving and thirsting. He was wasting valuable time.

GRUNTING, fearful that he would never make it, wondering if in the end he might not in madness drink of the Caribbean, he made a pack of his duffel, topped it all off with compass and sketching board, tripod folded up, and started back. His narrow shoulders were stooped, his back bowed, and his dripping sweat made little mounds in the trail, which his trudging feet instantly demolished.

The whole world swayed under and around him, and he fought to keep to the trail, knowing that if he wandered from the trail to the left, the west, he would die in La Rabiza, and Spanish moss would be his shroud, where none would ever find him. "Water!" he croaked. "Water! Water!"

But there was no water to drink, though off to his right was blue

water which stretched away to all the corners of the earth. He staggered and all but fell. He wondered if he dared chew on the leaves of various plants he encountered, but was afraid.

JUST after the sun went down, seeming even to increase the heat, so that all his body felt clammy, he thrust forth a hand and plucked some leaves from a plant. He rolled them up with trembling fingers and tucked them into his mouth.

He prayed that his selection would not be poisonous, as the juice, acrid and bitter, poured over his tongue and started into his baked throat. But even as it started down, something warned him, and he closed his throat against the stuff—and plunged to his face in the sand, while the blackness of a starless night closed over him.

His mouth opened as he gasped for breath and the green cud poured out to the sand, saving his life. Fortune was with him in that he did not fall on his back.

The leaves were leaves from the yucca plant!

But he didn't know.

Nor did he know when he rose and staggered on toward Enriquillo, nor that often he left the trail and banged himself against thorn trees, like a bluebottle fly against a windowpane. He didn't know anything. His brain was asleep, save that his last effort of will had sent a command to his body.

"Get back to Enriquillo! Get back to Enriquillo!"

And he would get back.

Enriquillo was a mile ahead when he finally fell, rolled to his side and relaxed.

In Enriquillo, Cameron said to the others: "Wonder where Fox is?"

"Oh, he's got a head. He's staying in Trujin tonight."

But the Iron Man, Nick Peters, said nothing, seemed not to have heard question and answer, and after the others had gone to sleep he rose with all the stealth and silence of a cat and started southward toward Trujin.

He walked fast for a mile—and found Fox. He could not rouse him.

He carried him back to Enriquillo on his back, and when morning came Fox was laughing as he wakened—and he laughed—and laughed—and laughed.

"I got back!" he said. "I got back! Nothing could keep me from getting back. Tell *that* to Sanders!"

He tried hard to stop laughing as the others looked at him queerly, but by the time he had managed to be himself again, the damage had been done, and none would believe he was himself, except Nick Peters, whose face was filled with compassion.

"You're going back to Barahona, and then to the Capital City, Fox," said Cameron grimly. "It takes men to do this work, hard men. I don't doubt your courage and willingness—"

AND Cameron, of course, was boss, so Fox returned to Barahona, bearing a note to Sanders, who telegraphed Santo Domingo City for a DeHaviland. As the white-faced Fox rose over Barahona in the back seat of the plane which was taking him to the Capital City, and some confining desk job, he laughed into the slipstream. And because the roaring of the motor kept the pilot from hearing, that worthy did not look around to see that the propwash was smearing the tears of Private Fox across his wan, pale cheeks.

And for two months Private Fox was missing. And the marines evacuated Barahona Province, bearing a map that was one-half of one per-

cent in error, when four percent was allowed for work done with compass and sketching board.

Back in the Capital City Lieutenant Sanders scarcely had time to get the dust of Barahona out of his clothes and his throat when Intelligence informed him that there were yet other Provinces to be sketched—and with selected men from his erstwhile Barahona Detachment, he proceeded to Las Charcas to map certain portions of Azua Province.

And to him there came a brief note from the Regimental Intelligence Officer.

"The sketch previously made of the trail leading from San Jose de Ocoa to Piedra Blanca—not by your detail—has been found unsatisfactory.

"You are therefore instructed to sketch this trail."

SANDERS thought of the task involved and his heart dropped into his boots, for the trail mentioned led from almost the edge of Ocoa Bay, in the south of Santo Domingo, to the heart of the Cibao, Columbus' Royal Meadow—and it wound like a snake through the Cordillera Centrales.

And the message further went on to state that most of the trail led through the bed of the stream called Banilejo, alongside of which lived natives who had never seen Americans before—for the good and sufficient reason that the party charged hitherto with the task of sketching it had done the map while drinking beer in San Jose de Ocoa, without ever leaving the village.

From which Sanders gathered that Intelligence was very much displeased with the former sketchers, who hadn't, it seemed, played the part of true marines to perfection.

Sanders looked over his men, read them the note.

"Well," he said, "who wants to turn native?"

Nick Peters grinned. The job was made to order for him; but he was always getting the tough jobs, because he did them better than anyone else did—so Sanders called for volunteers.

And Nick Peters got the job anyhow, merely by frowning at all the others, who decided not to volunteer after all, since everyone knew that Peters had a way of taking recalcitrants into the bushes and beating them into agreement—all, of course, with perfect good nature.

"Okay, Peters," said Sanders grinning, "but I want you to come in from Piedra Blanca way and join us again at Bani. Go to the Capital City as soon as you can pick up a passing car. Since I can't spare any more men than I have to, ask the colonel to supply you with a guard—a fellow who must be tough, hard, and ready for anything. He doesn't need to know anything about sketching." Nick Peters went.

ONE week later, while Sanders almost prayed for the safety of Peters and whoever had gone with him into the waste of jungles and mountains, the detail was resting at Bani—and Domzalski, a Polack who had been with Sanders from the beginning of mapping operations, a Polack who backed water for none—except the Iron Man—was cooking up supper.

It was the usual supper—rice, beans and bacon, cooked together in a huge oil can.

"For breakfast," said Domzalski, "we have rice, beans and bacon. For lunch, bacon, beans, rice. And for supper, beans, rice and bacon. Come and get it."

As the detail gathered about the savory mess, rattling their mess tins, in the center of the barracks usually

occupied by a detachment of *Guardia Nacional Dominicana* garrisoning Bani, there sounded from the outer door the thumping tread of heavy feet.

One pair of feet hit the floor with precision, but there was a break in the sound as though the man limped with weariness or sore feet, or both, or as though his feet were covered with layers of thick gauze.

And into the room, cheeks sunken, eyes hollow, with the look of the damned upon him, came Nick Peters, a roll of sketches under his arm.

And right behind him, grinning, his face white as ever, came Private John Fox! Nick Peters had selected the one whom Sanders had regarded as the chief candidate for the morgue, as his "guard!" And Fox had come through!

The clothing of Nick Peters was in rags. He had started, he explained in gasping sentences, with a new pair of shoes. Now his shoes were in shreds of water-scarred, sun-dried leather, over which he had dragged a pair of native sandals to keep his huge feet from the rocks.

"It's the fourth pair of sandals, sir," he said to Sanders.

Nick Peters meant no sacrilege.

Sanders looked at Fox. Fox had been through all that Peters the Iron Man had been through—and the task had almost killed Peters. Peters had lost easily thirty pounds from his great bulk. His long arms trembled with weariness. He reached for a mess tin and scooped great quantities of the stew upon it.

WITH a spoonful of the savory mess almost to his mouth, he spoke to Sanders. "It's the first decent food we've seen in a week of the toughest going I've ever experienced, and, Lieutenant?"

"Yes," said Sanders, wondering what was to happen next.

"If anybody ever says that Fox can't take it like a marine, send him to me. If he'd been big enough, there were times when he might have had to carry me. If you'll look at our sketches, you'll see that exactly half of them were done by Fox!"

Fox reached for a mess pan, grinning wanly.

Peters put out his hand, stopped him—spoke through a mouthful of food to Domzalski.

"Make him do a hornpipe for his grub—the weakling!" he said.

SAUNDERS moved to protest, but Fox rose to his feet. A leather-neck began to whistle. Fox started moving his feet in the rhythm of the dance. Faster and faster they moved. His body seemed to be disjointed. Weariness seemed to have fallen from him. Faster and faster his feet struck the hard dirt floor.

Dust from that floor tickled the nostrils of Lieutenant Sanders as he watched a marine prove himself—a marine he had thought, weeks before, a fit subject for the morgue.

For fifteen minutes, moving faster as the minutes passed, while leather-necks clapped their hands in time to his dancing, Private Fox, fresh from the longest trail of them all and the toughest, with his body crying out for food and water and rest, danced like a madman.

And when he finally stopped, the marines called for an encore and Fox obliged. And nobody noticed when Sanders, a queer lump in his throat, rose and quitted the barracks. He paused at the edge of the village square just outside. In his ears rang the clapping of the hands of the leather-necks, and the spat-spatting of the shoes of white-faced Fox, and Sanders' lips moved.

"Gee!" he said. And again, "Gee! Marines are certainly funny! I wonder what you have to do to kill 'em!"



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The GLOBE-TROTTER



WELL, HERE we are again, adventurers, off on another thrill-packed voyage to strange lands. It isn't spring time in the Rockies, but it is in the Argentine.

And that's one advantage you have, fellows, when signing up for a cruise on the good ship **THRILLING ADVENTURES**. You get what you want when you want it. If you don't like the cold you can have it hot. If you don't like Borneo, you can skip right over to Labrador on the other side of the world just by turning a couple of pages.

You can travel by land, air or sea—and make the circuit of the whole globe for only 10 cents. And *Ye Olde Globe Trotter* rises to exclaim: "You can't beat that with a club—or all the aces in the deck."

And you can't beat the authors **THRILLING ADVENTURES** has lined up to serve you this stuff hot, right off the platter. Every once in awhile one of those birds halts long enough in his travels to stick his nose inside *Ye Olde Globe Trotter's* sanctum.

Captain Kerry McRoberts, who has entertained you with more than one smash-bang, action-packed yarn of the far places, dropped in the other day to cool his feet and tonsils.

As usual, *Ye Olde Globe Trotter* tried to draw him out and get him to gassing about some of his most recent and strangest experiences.

But the captain is always in a hurry. He didn't want to be detained.

"Come on, Cap," I insisted. "You've been places and seen things. Give us home birds a treat—something private, something you haven't even put in your stories yet. Wayne Rogers was in last week and he wasn't so close mouthed. He told us a whole load of strange stuff—"

"Strange things?" the captain repeated, his eyes flashing. "Why, you don't have to go far to find strange things. The strangest thing I ever saw was right here in the States. Believe it or not—"

"Tell it," I said.

"Yes, sir," he said, sitting down and throwing his hat on the editorial desk.

"The strangest thing I've encountered for a long time I ran up against just a few months ago right here in the States. Wild camels."

Ye Olde Globe Trotter was surprised and showed it.

"Yes," the captain went on, seeing that I was somewhat doubtful. "I was down in the Guadalupe Mountains of Texas, down near the Mexican border, when I ran smack into three camels. Two old ones and a youngster. Humps on their backs and everything. I could hardly believe my eyes, and before I could recover from surprise fully, they were off on a canting lope through the sand, and disappeared into a ravine. I didn't see them again, though I

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followed their tracks for hours afterward, hoping to get another look.

"And I know camel tracks when I see them. I have followed plenty of camel paths in the Libyan desert and the Sahara, and believe me, I know what kind of tracks their pads make.

"These were sure-fire camels, just like the camels of Africa. I was sorry I couldn't see them again. But when I came out of that country I made some inquiries among the natives, and found out my eyes hadn't betrayed me. Those animals I saw were camels. And I repeat that's the strangest thing I've encountered for a long time. Wild camels right here in the United States. I'm going to quit adventuring and settle down right here in this country where I can see things."

With that last remark, the big captain broke out in laughter.

"Adventure is more interesting to people who sit in offices and read about it than it is to crazy buckoos like me who go out and do it."

"So," Ye Olde Globe Trotter replied. "I know where you can get a soft job right here in New York. Do you—"

"Hell, no!" he said. "I've just heard of a new gold strike down in British Guiana. I'm going down there and see if there's anything to it."

With a final wave of his hand he was out the door and on his way.

That's the way they all are, these queer birds that write stories for THRILLING ADVENTURES. You couldn't hold them within the bonds of civilization with a million dollars, yet, they all say there's nothing to see or do in the lands they've visited.

But, whether they know it or not, Ye Olde Globe Trotter thinks they are giving the readers a break when they write up their adventures as they do, so we can all enjoy them.

We all know that it is best to get our adventure first hand, like Captain Kerry McRoberts, Lieutenant Scott Morgan and the other authors for this magazine do, but if we can't get it that way, the next best thing is to sit down comfortably in a good soft easy chair and read the stories they write for THRILLING ADVENTURES. And we can do it without getting any poisoned arrows shot at our hearts, or any wavy *krisses* tangled with our gizzards.

Speaking of *krisses* and poisoned arrows reminds me that we've had sort of a controversy about *boloes* and *bolo* throwing going on in the columns of this department. Just had another letter about that from a fellow out in Oregon who claims he knows something about it. It sounds pretty authentic, so it goes in print below.

MORE ABOUT BOLO THROWING

Dear Globe Trotter:

It amuses me to read some stories of the Philippines where the Moro has been described as throwing his *bolo* or *kris* at the enemy. I was out in the Islands for a long time, 17 years to be exact, and I never spent all of my time in Manila, either. Most of those years were served on the other islands—Mindanao, Samar, Cebu, Panay, Jolo, Tawi-Tawi among others, as well as upper Luzon.

The smaller islands rimming the Sulu Sea always have been troublesome and still are, for that matter. I have been in more than one scrap with Moros there and have never seen them throw either a *bolo* or a *kris*. The hilt of the *bolo* does not lend itself well to throwing. They are hard to let loose of, and the *bolo* is just about the last thing the Moro lets get away from him. The handle is really a wooden case that extends the full length of the *bolo*. It is made of two strips of thin wood tied tightly together with strands of split rattan, and is worn thrust through the *sarong* (sash) which also carries the Moro's betel nut box, made either of hammered brass or silver.

When a Moro strikes with his *bolo* he

draws it swiftly from his sash and strikes quickly with it, sheath and all. The keen edges of the *bolo* cut the rattan binding as soon as the sheath meets resistance and the heavy blade keeps right on going. And it sure does go. I have seen a man hit on one shoulder and the heavy blade never stopped even after the man's head fell. It went right on and almost severed his other arm and shoulder.

As for a fighting *bolo* being thrown and having a tendency to return to the thrower in bommerang fashion, why, that's only fiction of the highest degree. It simply isn't so. I not only know that from my own experience, but I have asked other old-timers of the Philippines if they ever saw such a thing. All their answers were in the negative. Neither have I ever read of such a thing in any book or magazine which I could consider authoritative.

Another thing, the *bolo*, is also known as a *barong* in many of the islands, and unless an author knows his subject pretty well, he is almost certain to go wrong on that feature.

On the whole I have found few errors of fact in the stories I have read in *Thrilling Adventures*.

Hoping this helps to straighten out the *bolo* throwing controversy, I remain,

Yours for straight facts,
George C. Bondorff,
Umatilla, Oregon.

Bondorff's letter reads like he knows what he is talking about. He forgot to mention one factor that puts a different slant on the whole controversy, however.

When the Moro gets filled up on native liquor and religious fervor all at the same time, he more often than not goes *juramentado*. Or "off his nut," in good American slang. At that time he is liable to do most anything, even throw his *bolo* or *kris*. At such times he is absolutely fearless. Rifle fire or bayonets can't stop him, for it is his purpose to die and ascend to Heaven where he will get a white horse to ride and seven brown-eyed maidens to serve him.

In the throes of *juramentado*, he throws everything away, even his life, so why not the *bolo* and *kris*? However, I believe the readers who have written in to this department have definitely proven that it is not common, nor good practice to throw the weapons. So the discussion should rest there. What say?

A fellow adventurer out in China sends in a letter.

BACKWARD CHINA

Dear Globe Trotter:

Every one speaks of China as being a strange country. And believe me, they are right in more ways than one. For example, in the Occidental countries of the world it is the men who wear the pants and the women who sport the flowing robes. In China it is just the opposite, the

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22x5.00-19	2.50	30x2.50-28	1.35
22x5.00-20	2.60	30x2.25-28	1.35
22x5.25-19	2.85	30x2.00-28	1.35
22x5.25-20	2.75	30x1.75-28	1.35
22x5.50-19	3.05	30x1.50-28	1.35
22x5.50-20	2.95	30x1.25-28	1.35
22x5.75-19	3.25	30x1.00-28	1.35
22x5.75-20	3.15	30x.75-28	1.35
22x6.00-19	3.55	30x.50-28	1.35
22x6.00-20	3.45		
22x6.25-19	3.85		
22x6.25-20	3.75		
22x6.50-19	4.15		
22x6.50-20	4.05		
22x6.75-19	4.55		
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22x7.50-20	5.65		
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men wear the flowing robes and the women the pants. The scandal mongers and gossip in the Occident are the women. In China the women stay home and mind their own business while it is the men who go about spreading tall tales.

If a sampan loaded with men, women and children ever got wrecked in the China Sea there would be no cry of "Women and children first!" No, sir, not on your life. In shipwreck, fire or panic, it's the men that go for safety first. If there's any left over the women and children can have it. The Chinese women take it easily, as a matter of course. They have bowed to the will of the males for countless centuries, and probably always will.

Even today in the most modern cities of China (which isn't saying much) women and children in the trams get up to give the men their seats.

Is China still backward? Yes, I'll say she is. So much so that I am taking a boat for the States as soon as I can raise the fare.

Yours for more progress,
 Harry L. Kling,
 Hongchau, Hunan, China.

Yes, Kling, China is backward, but think how forward you can be in a country like that.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dear Globe Trotter:

Some time ago a fellow told me that one could make a living collecting rattle snakes for the poison which is useful in curing snake bites, then afterwards selling the skins.

I wonder if you could give me some information on this. If so I would be very thankful. Or maybe you could put me in touch with some one who could tell me about it.

Yours with lots of rattles,
 Charles Patty,
 Menlo Park, Calif.

Answer:

Boy, what an ambition you have! But it isn't so far out of line at that. Florida is about the only state in this country that I know of where anybody makes a living out of catching rattle snakes. I have heard of two or three old-timers

down there in the swamp country who make a living that way. But most of the poison for snake bite cures is procured from snake farms in Central America, Honduras and Guatemala in particular. I imagine it would be pretty tough to compete with those sources of supply. You might, however, write to the State Agricultural agent at Tallahassee for further information on the rattlesnakes of Florida.

Dear Globe Trotter:

Could you send me information as to where I could get a job on either a sugar, coffee, or tobacco plantation in a foreign country; or else information of a job of any kind in a foreign country for a workman of average ability.

Yours truly,
Julian Wood,
Chester, Pa.

Answer:

Wood, I wish I could tell you where you could get a job in a foreign country. Five or six years ago I could have told you plenty of companies that were putting on young men every day of the year. But this depression has changed things plenty. It's pretty hard to get a job here in this country. It is ten times harder getting one in some foreign country. The foreign countries have put restrictions on such incoming workmen and unless you are an expert in some particular line it is almost impossible to get a foreign job now.

I know of nothing in sugar, coffee or tobacco. But Standard Oil Company still has crews working in various parts of the world in oil drilling and prospecting. You might

STOMACH DISORDERS THREATEN HIS LIFE SAYS N. Y. PATROLMAN

"I tried everything," says Officer David R. Caldwell, 2309 Holland Ave., New York City. "I suffered from gas in the stomach and heart-



DAVID R. CALDWELL

burn so bad that I could hardly stand it. My case was diagnosed by one doctor as ulcers, another said I had gall stones. One went so far as to tell my wife that I had cancer and had only a short time to live. I suffered much agony and lost weight until one day I saw an advertisement in the New York Daily News, by the Udga Co., St. Paul, Minn. I wrote for their treatment and thanks be to God I did, for today I am a different man. I have no pain, can eat anything and

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Dear Globe Trotter:

It is difficult to get late and authentic information about conditions in places not four or five hundred miles distant.

I want to go to a part of this country which is beneficial for one with T. B., not too high in altitude and not a bake oven, where there are at least chances or an opportunity for a man thirty years old with a good common school education to get along. I am a hard worker, but because of environment and discouragement, I have spent most of my working days in factories as a machine operator and bench worker.

I like the outdoors and the elements, and want to live a free life where the ghost of losing a job paying forty-five cents an hour for from five to fourteen hours a day won't haunt me.

In the July number of *Thrilling Adventures* I liked Mounty Justice and Dry River Ranch, because they were nearer home and more likely to be within range of similar experiences I expect to have.

Sincerely,

John Welch,
Indianapolis, Ind.

Answer:

Well, Welch, my first advice is not to make any kind of a move until you have saved enough money to keep you for several months without working. The oil fields are possibly your best bet. And I believe all things considered, I would try out the Montana-Wyoming fields that center around Casper, Wyoming, or the fields just out of Los Angeles, California, either at Santa Fe Springs, or Huntington Beach. The altitude is not really high at either place. Of course, the California fields are just above sea level and the altitude is even less than where you are now.

That ends the Questions and Answers for this month. Ye Olde Globe Trotter will meet you next month in the same place with a lot

more. And don't forget the coupons, fellows. Thousands came in last month. That's good stuff. Keep it up. We've got to have lots of those coupons, so we know what kind of stories you like and what you don't like. This is your magazine and the more coupons you send in the better the magazine will be.

So let's have a lot more coupons this month. Or, if you prefer, you may send your comments in on a postcard.

And don't forget the next issue of *THRILLING ADVENTURES*. It's packed from cover to cover with the best assortment of red-blooded, he-man adventure yarns to appear in print since Ye Olde Globe Trotter took off his coat and went to work on the authors.

You noticed how I got that yarn out of Captain Kerry McRoberts. Well, the next issue is a mixture of dynamite and T.N.T., with a little cordite for a chaser. After reading it you'll be able to whip all the natives in Borneo single-handed.

Captain Kerry McRoberts again next month! With *DANGER TRAILS*, a smashing, stirring complete book-length novel packed with thrills and surprises from start to finish.

It'll make you sit up and take notice—what a yarn! The Cap is at his best in this one—and we know you'll like it.

As for next month's short stories—they're knockouts. Written by your old favorites, as well as some authors new to this magazine but famous in the adventure story field, they'll provide many breath-taking thrills and take you to many climes where things *happen*—and *how*!

While waiting for next month's gala number, drop me a postcard or send in the coupon on Page 123—come, be a good feller! Thanks—

—THE GLOBE TROTTER.

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SWORD OF AMORBACH

(Concluded from page 93)

He wondered why Gregory struck not at his body until, through the gleam of the sword's path, he saw the bishop's face.

The spirituality had fled, and in its stead he noted the gloating look of a man bent on blood.

In Gregory's gaze all his thoughts were mirrored. Why should he spare this man, who had done murder all his life?

Suddenly Hartwig felt a sharp pain through his head, and, mad with the pang, he felt for the wound.

God! His ear was gone!

In a flash he knew the bishop's purpose. He meant to disfigure him as Hartwig had Father Anselm.

Again that fearful pain in his head. His other ear was gone!

A bloody film spread across his eyes, and through it he caught sight of the bright red scar on the bishop's face. And then he remembered.

It was the face of Gilbert of Montleon!

His strength was spent, and still that devilish sword-point bit at his face. He dropped his weapon and sought with wandering fingers to clutch that point as it danced before him and bury it in his breast.

But the weapon eluded his grasp, and, with a sob of anguish, he slipped to the floor, to the feet of Gregory, whispering: "I yield to thee, Gilbert of Montleon!"

Gregory was breathing heavily, and his face was shining with grim satisfaction. "I am no longer Gilbert of Montleon," he said finally.

"Then I yield to thee, Gregory," gasped Hartwig, "by the grace of the devil, Bishop of Mannheim."

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