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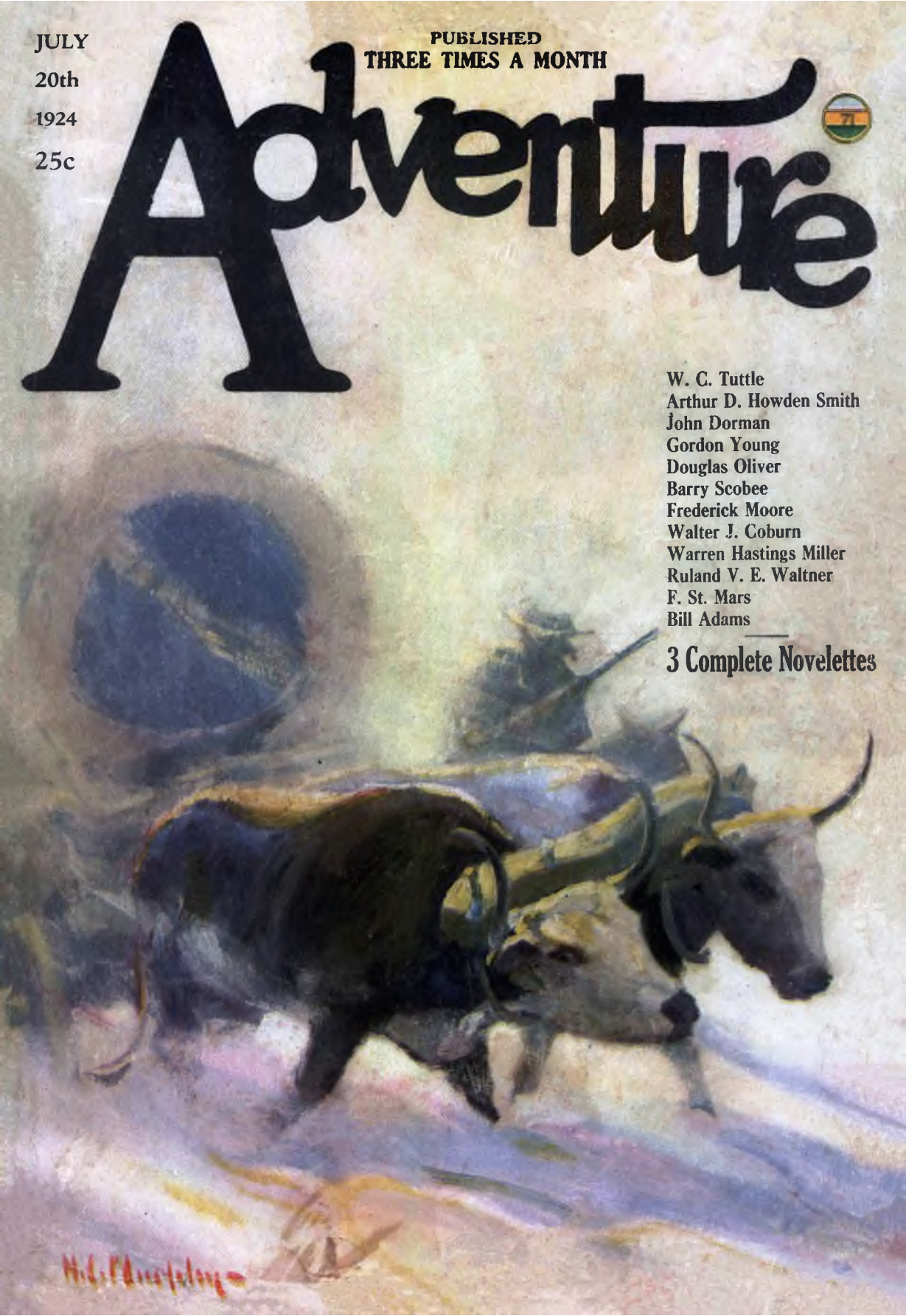
3 Complete Novelettes



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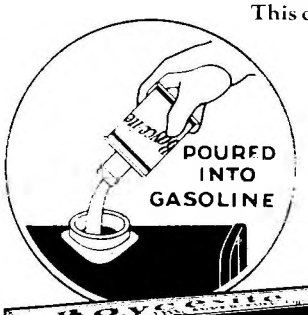

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ADVENTURE
July 20th, 1924

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Volume 17
Number 5

Is Gray Hair Marking You Old?

She Is Getting Gray

He Is Getting Gray

Nothing Says "I'M OLD" So Quickly As GRAY HAIR

Q-ban Hair Color Restorer

Makes Gray Hair DARK

LET'S discuss the subject frankly. Gray hair, however attractive, does denote age. Gray hair marks a woman as getting old at the cost of her popularity. Gray hair does, unjustly, make it hard for a man to get or hold a job.

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Go to your druggist today. Get from him a full size 75-cent bottle of Q-ban Hair Color Restorer; use it according to simple directions, but don't get discouraged; you may possibly have to use the entire bottle before the desired result is obtained. That is why we do not put up sample or trial size bottles of this Q-ban product, although we have many requests. During the past 20 years millions of bottles have been sold. Only in isolated instances has Q-ban ever failed.

75 cents per Bottle
Try the Drug Store First

Your Druggist Guarantees Q-ban

Q ban Hair Color Restorer is covered by the broadest kind of a guarantee. We authorize your druggist to refund your money if you are not entirely satisfied —and you are to be the judge.

Special Offer

This Coupon and 10 cents

Send this coupon today for MINIATURE BOTTLES Q-ban Liquid Green Soap Shampoo and Q-ban Hair Tonic, and "BOOK OF SEVEN Q-BANS," containing valuable information on care of hair and scalp. Print name and address plainly and send coupon to HESSIG-ELLIS, Chemists, 151S. Front St., Memphis, Tenn.

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151 South Front St., Memphis, Tenn.

Enclosed find ten cents (stamps) for which please send me miniature bottles Q-ban Liquid Green Soap Shampoo and Q-ban Tonic and your "Book of Seven Q-bans."

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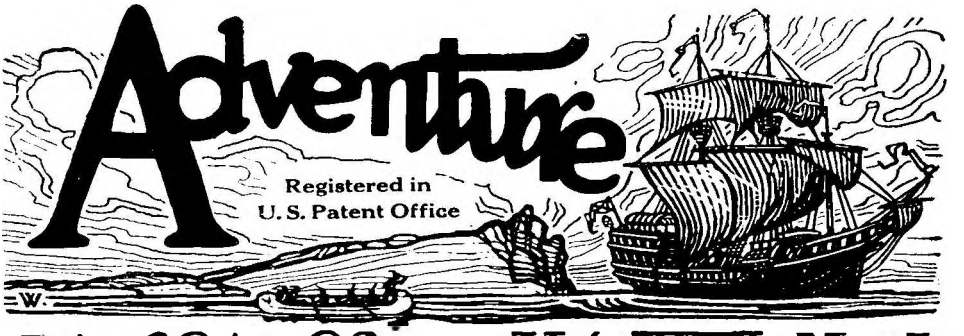

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Contents for July 20th, 1924, Issue

**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

(Continued on next page)

(*Continued from preceding page*)

Three Complete Novelettes

HE LONGED to use a sword. "THE FRESH YANK," by Leonard H. Nason, a complete novelette of an American in the British cavalry during the World War.

BURDETTE was a law unto himself in the Australian cattle country, but *Rushton*, the "curiosity," took a chance and broke the law. "THE LORD OF THE STONY RISES," a complete novelette, by J. D. Newsom, in the next issue.

FOR the peace of Abyssinia. "THE EDGE OF THE SIMITAR," a complete novelette of the Red Sea, by William Ashley Anderson, in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

***Adventure* is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

How three million more men discovered the "Priceless" Comfort of a Durham-Duplex shave

MARK any DURHAM-DUPLEX user—at any time. His crisp, clean-shaven appearance under all circumstances speaks volumes for the long DURHAM-DUPLEX Blades. More than *twelve million* such men today!

None appreciate this "Priceless" shave more than the men who have been introduced to it through the famous DURHAM-DUPLEX "Name-your-own-price" sale.*

The very first trial showed new smoothness—new *comfort*. The next, a great increase in *speed*. Each succeeding shave has served to make these three million men more enthusiastic in their praise for the extra-long, extra-keen DURHAM-DUPLEX Blades.

*"The "Priceless" Sale—allowing the Shaving Men of America to purchase a genuine DURHAM-DUPLEX Razor and Blade at their own price. This sale is being extended throughout the country.

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Interchangeable Blades
50c for package of 5

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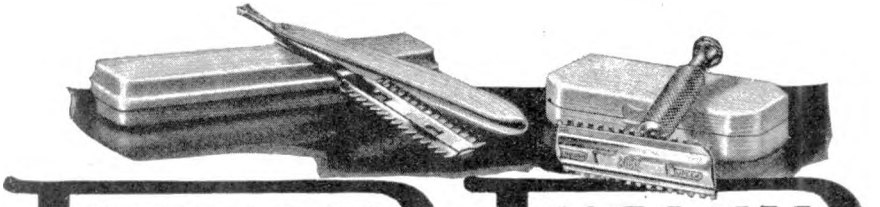
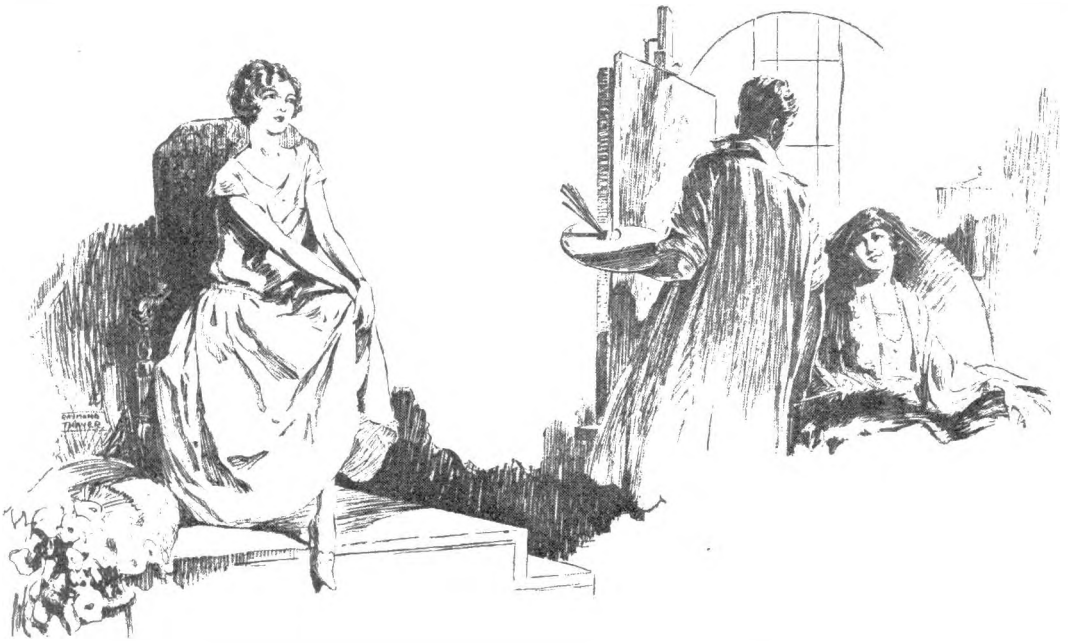


DURHAM-DUPLEX

The Razor of "Priceless" Comfort



Let this simple truth guide you to natural beauty

WE urge you not to overlook one simple truth—soap's function is to *cleanse*, not to cure or to transform.

Dermatologists agree on this additional important point, too; only by cleansing the skin thoroughly, yet gently and safely, can any soap help to promote beauty. And only pure soap can cleanse thoroughly and safely.

You know already that Ivory Soap is pure—that it contains no medicaments, no coloring matter, no strong perfumes. If we had felt that any additional ingredients would improve Ivory, you may be sure we would have used them long ago.

But perhaps it may surprise you to know that simple washing with Ivory is the very finest treatment you can give to your skin.

A face bath of Ivory and warm water, once or twice daily, followed by a cold rinse, gently removes the film of dust, oil or powder, thoroughly cleanses the pores, and brings a fresh, lovely, natural color. Unusually dry skins often need a small amount of pure cold cream.

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The millions of friends of Ivory and the multitude of women who have been using much more costly soaps, have welcomed the new, graceful cake of Guest Ivory. Fashioned for slim fingers, this dainty white cake is genuine Ivory Soap—with all of Ivory's traditional purity and mildness—as fine as soap can be. Yet Guest Ivory costs but five cents.

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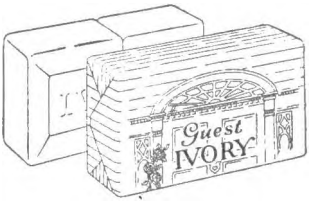

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Adventure

July 20th 1924

Vol. XLVII No. 5

SWAIN'S VENTURE

A Complete Novelette by Arthur D. Howden Smith

Author of "Swain's Chase," "Swain's Honor" etc.

EVERY bench in Swain Olaf's son's skalli was crowded with burly housecarls, and at the high table the chieftains were seated elbow to elbow, for Jarl Harald had stopped off on Isle Gairsey to pay Swain a visit in the course of his Spring progress through the Orkneys. The clattering of knives and cups and alehorns, the rumbling of hoarse voices, snatches of song, jeers betwixt old oarmates, disputes, the constant passage to and fro of the servants, all combined in an uproar which drowned out the thundering of the tempest that beat upon the skalli-walls and sent the raindrops hissing through the chimney-vent into the vast fire which roared upon the long hearth.

Torches flared in iron brackets at intervals upon the walls and on the pillars which supported the high-swung nave of the roof; candles were blobs of yellow radiance all along the tables. And the light was reflected from many a vessel of gold and silver, spoil of southern castle and abbey, from broidered baldric and belt and crinkling mail shirt and sword-hilt starry with gems. Yes, and from fierce eyes in tanned and bearded faces, eyes that held a threat even when they smiled acknowledgment of rough jest or kindly toast.

Jarl Harald surveyed the spectacle with kindling gaze from his seat at Swain's right.

"Ho, Swain," he cried, "there are not many men in the North countries who could take in a hundred guests and feed and bed them under the one roof—and that without notice given!"

"I do what I may," returned Swain

calmly. "As you know, it is my policy to keep a goodly number of stout fellows by me, and all strangers who come to these parts stop off at Gairsey."

This Swain was noted far and wide for his prowess and wealth. He owned valuable properties in the Orkneys and Caithness on the Scots Main, and when he was not cultivating his lands he passed his time profitably in viking-faring. It was said of him that he was the most powerful man in the North of those who held no title, and indeed, many folk held him to be greater than any Jarl. The Orkneyfolk dubbed him Jarlmaker by reason of the part he had played in seating and unseating Jarls to accommodate his personal ambitions. In appearance he was middling large, but very stalwart and thick-thewed, heavily-muscled, with ruddy hair and beard and blue eyes that burned with a frosty fire. He was unsurpassed in quick-wittedness, and no man ever withstood him.

"I wish I might enjoy such a drinking-hall as this," continued Jarl Harald. "But then, Swain, I am only a Jarl, and I must bide at home and govern the islands the while you fare southward and plunder as much wealth in a month as the *boendr* can pay me in taxes in a year."

He spoke good-humoredly, and Swain laughed, for the two were close friends, in that Swain had fostered Harald in his youth.

"There was a time I had not expected to hear you take your rule so seriously," rejoined Swain. "Yet of this you may be certain: Nothing would please me more than to have you *boun* * your ships in company with me. This storm will blow away the last trace of Winter. In a few weeks we shall have the crops planted, and the oar-fever will be itching our palms. Do you——"

A great gust of wind blew into the skalli, so that all the lights flickered desperately and the smoke swirled over the tables.

"Who enters so unceremoniously?" demanded Swain with an edge to his voice.

But his manner softened, as a little, bow-legged man in a rain-spattered cloak and hood trotted up the length of the hall. This man had a face as brown and wrinkled as a nut, in which sparkled a pair of beady, black eyes, with an effect of uncanny shrewdness. He was Erik Skallagrim's son, known as Bitling—Little Bit—or Crooked-legs, and he was Swain's forecastleman.

"Ho, it is you, Erik? I wondered where you were when the ale-drinking was toward."

Jarl Harald and the other chiefs smiled, and the housecarls growled their laughter.

"It is a wise man who knows when there is more to do than drink ale," replied Erik, unabashed. "I have been seeing to roofs and doors of out-buildings, Swain, and in so doing I saw a strange ship beating in from the Aurridafirth."

Swain's hand leaped to his sword-hilt.

"A longship? In this weather?"

"No longship. A Bergen merchant. She will be in the cove by now."

Swain knitted his brow in thought.

"*Humph!* Best take a score of men and see who mans her and what she seeks."

"Well-spoken," assented Erik. "He who watches is not surprized. But save me a horn or two from the swizzlers who hug the straw."

And with a second bellow of laughter pursuing him, the little man swaggered out into the rain, a knot of Swain's housecarls at his back.

Jarl Harald looked questioningly to his host.

"Why do you receive a Bergen ship with armed men, Swain! Surely, you——"

"I harm no honest Northman, Lord Jarl, if that is what you mean," answered Swain. "But I have enemies, as you know, and I must always be prepared."

"Olvir Rosta?"

"Yes, Olvir Rosta," snarled Swain. "He who slew my father and my mother and my two brothers, as foul a servant of Loke as the White Christ permits to go unpunished."

Jarl Harald caressed his chin thoughtfully.

"Much harm has flowed from this feud of yours with Olvir," he remarked. "Hundreds of men have had their bane of it. And you, yourself, burned Olvir's grandmother, Witch Frakork, and——"

"Yes, and I shall yet be the death of Olvir," interrupted Swain coldly.

The Jarl still rubbed his chin.

"It was in my mind, Swain, that you have probably been his death. You pursued him to Mikligard * last Summer and drove him from the service of the Greek emperor, and men have said that although he escaped your sword he was last seen driving before such a storm as this into the wastes of the Western Ocean, with the Winter at hand."

* Equip.

* Constantinople.

Swain laughed, and his laugh was like the trickle of icewater over the lip of a glacier.

"You do not know Olvir as I do, Lord Jarl. His grandmother was a witch, as all men have held, and he is not as you and I. All the powers of evil fight for him. What would he make of a Winter on the Western Ocean! No, no! Where he is I cannot say, but somewhere he lives, and he will live until my sword hews his head from his neck."

"If you are so sure of that, why did you send Erik to challenge the Bergen men? Do you think Olvir could harm you while I am here!"

"I leave nothing to thought, Lord Jarl. And however sure I am, it is true that success comes only to the man who always guards his own head. Also, I do not know where Olvir is. Therefore I suspect that he may be in any place or come upon me from any quarter."

Jarl Harald shook his head dubiously.

"This is a bad business, Swain," he deplored. "If you had expended upon the Orkneyfolk the energy you have spent in this feud with Olvir we should be as powerful as any kingdom."

"I am not so sure of that," denied Swain. "In any case, a man lives as the gods direct him. The Norns spin the warp and the woof of his fate, and it is for him to be diligent and see that he trips not on the threads of their weaving."

The Jarl crossed himself.

"Let not Bishop William hear you speak so easily of the Old Gods," he adjured. "Men have burned for less."

Swain shrugged his shoulders.

"I am one who serves any god who will aid him," he answered frankly. "As to Bishop William, he is a stout warrior, but most of his priests are women. And they are forever prating against viking-faring and bloodshed, by which I gain my livelihood. Bah, I say! The Old Gods are no more, but they often feel nearer to me than the——"

"Enough, enough," protested Jarl Harald, horrified. "This is blasphemy, and I do ill to listen to you. But once again I ask you, Swain: Must you leave us this Summer as you did last? Consider well before you do. As you, yourself, have said, you know not whither Olvir is gone—if, indeed, he be alive. And what will it avail for you to go hither and yon, all to no purpose, when you might better be with me at Orphir, dispensing justice and keeping the folk satisfied?"

Now at this Swain laughed shortly.

"I am not of those who could ever sit home quietly. When Spring comes my ear is aching to hear the whistle of wind in the cordage, and my nostrils search for the salt-spray and my heart is hungry for the clang of steel and the battle-cry. If Olvir was not I should still go viking-faring."

Jarl Harald sighed.

"It is the answer I expected from you," he admitted. "But tell me at least where you purpose to cruise."

"I shall cruise wherever Olvir is."

"But you do not know."

"I shall find out."

"How?"

"If he is in the known world men will see him and friends will carry me report of his presence—for I have friends in every port."

"Ah, but if he is not in the known world?"

Swain reflected a moment.

"Then I shall go to the unknown world."

There was a stir of interest at the high table, where the chieftains and *boandr* were all listening to the debate betwixt Swain and the Jarl.

"You mean westward to the new lands?" queried Jarl Harald. "To Greenland?"

"To Greenland," answered Swain. "And if necessary, to Wineland the Good or Irland Mikla."

Jarl Harald drained a horn of ale.

"I begin to think that Satan has plucked your wits!" he exclaimed.

Swain opened his mouth to reply, but the words were clipped from his tongue by a very tall, lean man, with a whimsical face and dark eyes that held the look of far-off things.

"Not so, Lord Jarl," he said in a low-pitched, drawling voice. "I am only a scald, to be sure, but——"

"Armod the Scald can claim the right to speak anywhere in any company," pronounced a little man who sat beyond the tall man.

The Jarl turned to both of them with a pleasant smile.

"What is right for Armod the Scald is right likewise for Oddi the Little," he declared. "Any man is honored to have two such scalds to attend him, and it is a sign of the estimation in which Swain is held that men of your position accept his protection."

The little man bowed very low, with a

kind of eager restlessness that went with the bird-like poise of his head and his quick, emphatic gestures.

"It is we who are honored by serving Swain, Lord Jarl," he returned. "We have attended at many courts, but we have never yet served a man who provided skalds with more opportunities for exerting that skill which is the essence of their craft than Swain."

"And it is touching those same opportunities that I had a mind to speak to you, Lord Jarl," put in the tall scald languidly. "You were pleased to comment that Satan must have plucked Swain's wits, because he is for voyaging the Western Ocean, but I beseech you to consider the honor and merit to all Orkneyfolk if Swain accomplishes such a feat. Moreover, it would be highly dishonorable for all concerned did we suffer Olvir Rosta—supposing he had made the voyage—to retain the accomplishment unchallenged."

"Also, it is not as if the undertaking was to be considered utterly reckless," added Oddi. "Bethink you, Lord Jarl, that other men have ventured it, as the sagas tell us, among them Leif Erikson and Thorfinn Karlsefne, both highly honorable men."

"All this is true," agreed the Jarl. "But I ask you one question, my friends: Are you not moved to favor Swain's venture by the prospect of the lays and drapas you might hew out of it with your wits?"

"Yes and no," replied Armod. "What you say is true. And it is true, too, that it would prosper Swain's honor much more than it would ours."

"It is not by sitting idly in his skalli while the Summer winds blow that Swain has made his name feared from Mikligard to Lapland," said Oddi. "He has sworn to carry his vengeance remorselessly against Olvir Rosta so long as Olvir lives. What else can he do but pursue Olvir until the end comes, even though the object he pursues is no more than a ghost?"

Swain had leaned forward in his seat throughout this debate, toying with the cup of water which was all his drink, but now he sprang erect and brought down his hand upon the little scald's shoulder with a vehemence that flattened him upon the board.

"Well-spoken, Oddi!" he cried. "You are different from other wordsmiths, you two. Where they can do little save spin their lays and tales, you are as forward in the wet-work and the fighting as any berserk who ever leaped a shieldwall. Yes, and you can thrust your way to the meat of a problem. For what you say is the essence of all. While Olvir lives I pursue him. An oath I have taken to do so. Let come what will, I will uphold that oath. And if I cannot find him living I will make what bargain I can with any gods there be—Ho, who comes now?"

And men who had been in the act of crossing themselves against Swain's wild words turned their heads involuntarily toward the door which had just let in another rainy blast to rustle the wall-hangings and send the smoke swirling to the rafters.

II

TWO men tramped into the hall behind Erik, one a giant in stature, whose bullneck was crowned by a round head in which were set ridiculously little pigeyes that shone with a furtive gleam. The other was stout and lusty of his body, and seemed small only by comparison with his companion; his face was singularly open, and as he advanced into the light of the torches a number of the housecarls at the tables called out to him.

"By the Rood, but I have seen that fellow before!" exclaimed Jarl Harald.

"You have, Lord Jarl," agreed Swain. "He is Kolbiorn Jon's son, of Hrossey, who has been overseas in the Iceland trade. It must have been his ship Erik saw."

And Swain stood down from the high table and offered the newcomers his hand.

"Welcome to you, Kolbiorn," he said. "You are come on a good wind, if it blew you home to the Orkneyar. We have not seen you in these parts for many years."

"I owe no thanks to that wind, Swain," returned the man of the open face, "for I was in haste to return to Bergen, having perforce spent the Winter in Iceland. And the same is to be said for Ulf Liod's son here, aboard whose ship I sail. We were belated in leaving the Greenland settlements in the Summer, were blown south out of our track and barely made the Faxafirth in the teeth of the winter gales."

"Ill-luck befalls all of us," answered Swain. "I am pleased that two such far-traveled men should visit me, even though it be by accident. Sit with us here, and when you have dulled your hunger we will

ask you to tell us of your experiences. I have heard that no two men have sailed farther than you and Ulf, whom I have never before met."

"Whoever told you that was ignorant of your own cruises, Swain," rejoined Kolbiorn.

"No, no," denied Swain. "Eastward I have sailed, but never far west—although perhaps I shall try my hand at it. But sit, the two of you! Here is Jarl Harald, waiting also to question you."

"This is rare hospitality," said Kolbiorn. "You bid us to sit with a Jarl."

And he and Ulf bowed their heads to Jarl Harald, and Kolbiorn wished the Jarl well; but Ulf was as silent as he had been since he entered the hall. Only his little, twinkling eyes moved in his face, although as soon as food and drink were placed before him he fell upon it with an energy which kept a serving-varlet trotting back and forth between the high table and the kitchens and a second one occupied in refilling his ale-horn from the barrels by the entrance door.

Jarl Harald presently began to talk with Armod and Oddi and several island chiefs of his retinue, and Swain alone sat idly with his new visitors. He said nothing now, in respect to the law of hospitality, which forbids questioning a hungry guest; but his glance shifted rapidly from one face to the other, examining, estimating. Erik, who was gobbling a hasty meal close by, recognized the look in his chief's eye, and knew that Swain was unusually interested. Nor was he surprised, after Kolbiorn pushed back his stool, wiped his moustaches and drained a last horn—Ulf was still shoveling food into his enormous mouth—when Swain challenged the Hrossey man direct.

"You said that you were blown south of the Iceland track, Kolbiorn. Tell me: Did you sight other vessels in the ocean wastes?"

Kolbiorn nodded with evidence of surprize.

"Yes, one. A dragon, wind-worn and weather-beaten. But Ulf is the man to tell you of her, for she came upon us out of a mist when I was asleep in the poop, having stood by the steering-oar throughout the night."

Ulf blinked his eyes rapidly under Swain's sudden scrutiny.

"Oh, yes," he said thickly, chewing as he spoke, "she was sore pounded, that dragon. Her sail was in ribbons."

"Was she Olvir Rosta's?" demanded Swain.

The blinking eyes were turned up toward the rafters. Ulf's jaws ground steadily on.

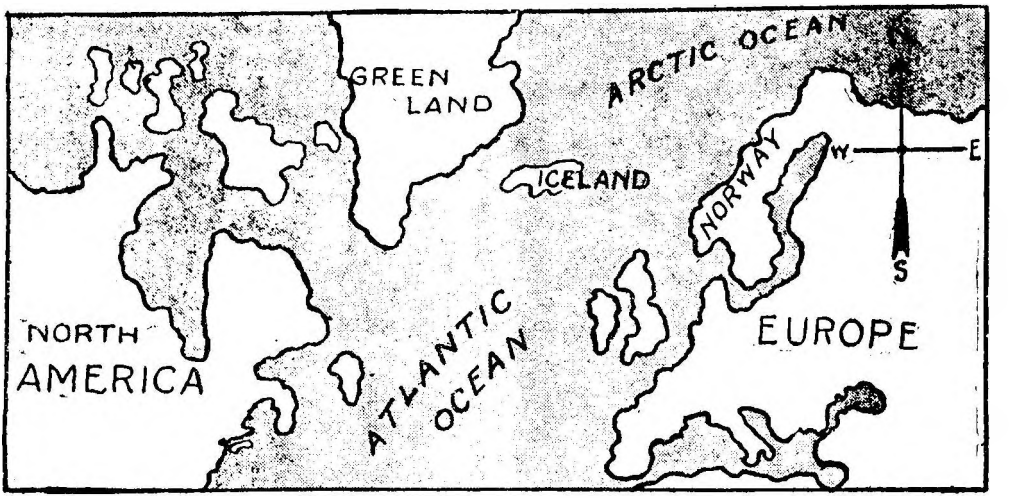
"Olvir Rosta?" repeated the trader uncertainly. "Olvir Rosta?"

Kolbiorn thudded his fist upon the table-top.

"St. Magnus aid me! Could it have been he, Swain?"

"I deem it so," assented Swain. "I last had word of him from a Bretlander who saw him heading south of west off Irland."*

"But if Olvir was aboard her Ulf would have known him," protested Kolbiorn. "Many is the time we have seen him broiling and roistering, as his name declares, in



*Ireland.

Bergen and elsewhere. May the Fiend take him! I have heard often and oft of your feud with him, Swain."

"Well, Ulf, what have you to say to this?" inquired Swain, perceiving the trader's pig-eyes continued to study the rafters.

"Why, there was a heavy mist, Swain," returned Ulf. "This dragon rolled out of it like a sea-monster, and what with the spray dripping over the shieldwall the best we could make out was a beard now and then or the heft of a man's shoulder."

Swain frowned.

"If you know Olvir you could never——"

"I tell you there was little enough to see," insisted Ulf. "And we were sailing east the while they bore up toward the west."

"But you held speech with them!" remonstrated Kolbiorn.

Ulf's little eyes flecked down from the rafters and darted from face to face.

"Yes, they wanted a course," he admitted.

"What course?" questioned Swain. "Who asked it? What manner of dragon was this?"

"No, no, a question at a time, by your leave!" pleaded Ulf.

And the Jarl interceded—

"A man can think only so fast, Swain."

No man at the high table now pretended to do anything except listen to the debate between Swain and the two strangers. Even the cup-boys and the housecarls at the nearby long-tables were straining their ears to catch whatever was said.

Swain made a gesture of impatience.

"True enough, Lord Jarl, true enough. But Ulf is slower than most. Come, man, think! What manner of dragon was this that came out of the mist?"

Ulf scratched his head.

"A big ship, a dragon, do you see? A——"

"Was she uncommonly elaborate in her paintwork and gilding? Was she tricked out like a town-wench in Bergen?"

Kolbiorn answered before his companion's lips were open.

"So the men on deck described her, Swain! Do you remember, Ulf? But you must, for it was you who held speech with her people."

"She had once been painted like a King's dragon," agreed Ulf slowly. "But there was little to show for it when I saw her. The salt-rime was white on her sides."

"That would be Eindridi Ungi's *Sea-maiden*, that Olvir stole when he fled from Mikligard," cried Swain. "Yes, yes, there is no doubt of it, Erik."

"No doubt at all," growled Erik, and he fixed his gimlet eyes upon the trader's face.

"On, Ulf, on!" urged Swain. "You talked with her people. Who spoke with you? You have seen Olvir. Surely you could never forget his black beard and chest like an ale-barrel and the reach of his arms!"

"There were several that talked," returned Ulf vaguely. "Black beard? Yes, I saw more than one. Black beards and brown beards and red beards—they all looked alike in the mist."

This time Kolbiorn came to Ulf's assistance.

"No man has said aught to me of Olvir Rosta's being on the dragon, Swain. We talked of it frequently in after-days, for who would have thought to speak another ship in those seas that no ship sails, unless by ill-luck? And always we wondered what had fetched them so far."

"You did not ask?"

"There was no time. Eh, Ulf?"

"No time," agreed Ulf.

"But you said they asked for a course?" pressed Swain.

"A course?" repeated Ulf dully. "Yes, a course."

"What course, man? Has Fafnir devoured your brain?"

Ulf's little eyes focussed upon a smokey torch, and he scratched his head again.

"It was Garda he wanted," he said, "Garda in the Eystribygd.*"

"You gave it to him?"

"I shouted to him to hold more north of west, and to keep the Pole Star over his gunwale."

Swain's fingers clutched at the hilt of the sword he wore at his belt.

"What said I two horns since, Lord Jarl?" he exlaimed. "Olvir can not escape me! The Norns have woven our lives so tight together that if we desired to divide ourselves we might not. It is written that I shall slay him."

"It is in my mind that you are reckoning your rents before your lands are won," commented the Jarl. "All that you have to go upon is that a dragon, like that in which Olvir escaped you, was sighted and spoken, making heavy weather in the Western Ocean. And if it was Olvir whom Ulf saw, nonetheless I do not see that you have any certainty

*The eastern settlement in Greenland.

of overtaking him. He was for Greenland, he told Ulf, yet the tempests may have visited him with the punishment he merited; and, if he kept afloat, who can say that he is in Greenland now or will be there by the time you have crossed the seas?'

Swain laughed a laugh that held no mirth in it.

"I tell you it is fate, Lord Jarl," he replied. "No two dragons of that size sailed out into the Western Ocean beyond Irland's Haf* when Winter was already begun. As for Olvir's reaching Greenland, why, he is Olvir—and as you know, this last Winter was both mild and slow in starting, which is the one reason that I won home to the Orkneys after Olvir escaped me.

"No, no, to Greenland Olvir sailed. He may not bide there long, but from there I can follow him. Wherever his keel has furrowed the waters *Deathbringer* can drive after him."

A shout went up from the housecarls, and men clattered on the tables with sword-hilts and ax-helves.

Ulf continued to study the smoke-wreaths among the rafters, but Kolbiorn leaned closer to Swain.

"Go after Olvir, by all means, if your honor demands it," he said. "I counsel you, though, not to trust yourself to a long-ship on such a venture."

"On longships I have always cruised," returned Swain. "Why should I not fare for Greenland aboard *Deathbringer* "

"You do not know the Western Ocean," answered Kolbiorn emphatically. "Wherever you have sailed, Swain, the land has not been far away. At need you could run for shelter into some harbor. But on the Western Ocean you must battle the seas perhaps for weeks, with no help but your own skill and the staunchness of your vessel. And for this you require such a bluff, high-sided craft as that in which we came into your cove."

"I have seen the Greenland-farers and Iceland merchants in Bergen harbor," admitted Swain. "But I thought——"

"That we traders built them to coddle our fears?" laughed Kolbiorn. "Not so! It is well-known of all men who have fared far west that in those seas the long-ship is of no more use than a barge."

"Olvir has traversed them in *Seamaiden*."

"If he has he has wished many times for a cargo-ship. Depend upon it, Swain, I am right. I——"

"He is," spoke up Erik gruffly. "I was Iceland-born, and I know. In those seas you need beam, not length."

Swain pondered with scowling brows the problem thus forced upon him.

"We have no such craft in these parts," he ruminated. "And I lack time to send to Bergen for one. But hold! I have it. I will purchase your vessel."

Kolbiorn looked startled.

"It is not mine, Swain," he said, "or I would lend it to you gladly. But while I have a two-thirds venture in the cargo, the *St. Olaf* belongs to Ulf here."

"Ulf or you, it matters not," rejoined Swain carelessly. "I will buy it from either one of you."

Ulf's pig eyes abandoned the rafters and focussed abruptly upon Swain's face.

"I have a good ship which pleases me," he announced. "Why should I sell her off-hand?"

"Because I shall pay you a good price for her," answered Swain coldly.

Ulf sucked in his lips, and glanced sidewise at Swain.

"It would have to be a good price," he declared. "But beyond that I have my cargo to deliver in Bergen, and——"

"I will lend you two longships to transport the cargo," interrupted Swain. "And the Jarl shall fix your price."

Men said that this was a very handsome offer, and the upshot of it was that Swain completed the deal before they rose from the table.

III

SWAIN stood on the shore of the cove watching Ulf's crew transferring the cargo from the trader to the two longships which had been drawn out from under their Winter sheds and now lay on either side of the bluff-bowed last-ship. Kolbiorn's voice could be heard distinctly as he directed the workers in the handling of the packages of furs and bundles of walrus tusks and whalebone. Nearer at hand, on the verge of the beach, Ulf, himself, was deep in converse with a shaggy, fox-faced man whose legs were as bowed as Erik's and whose shrill, whistling speech was accompanied by frantic gestures and constant chin-waggings. But Swain was heedless of any man at that moment; his

* Norsemen's name for seas around Ireland.

gaze was concentrated upon the *St. Olaf*, and his seaman's eye was estimating her capacity and her failings. Erik spoke twice before he captured his chief's attention.

"Yes, yes, little man," answered Swain at last. "Did you make certain we had the oars of sufficient length for her?"

"I said naught of oars," snapped Erik.

For the first time Swain peered down into the Icelander's gnarled brown face.

"What, then?" he questioned blankly.

"I said that I misliked that Bergen pelt-trader, and all the more since he has been talking with as unscoured a rascal as Finn of Uist."

"The ale has soured on your stomach, Erik," returned Swain gruffly. "What harm could Ulf do me, if he wished to? And who is Finn of Uist?"

Erik pointed bluntly at the fox-faced man.

"As treacherous a scoundrel of a trader as ever hailed from the Sudreyar*," he growled. "A wolf, if there ever was one! As for the harm Ulf might do us, I know not; but I would have you remember, Swain, that folk of his kind—yes, and of Finn's—have always been intimate with Olvir. They have been his spies and sold for him the plunder of his expeditions when he dared not venture to a market."

Swain chuckled.

"There is more than ale the matter with you, little man! What you say is as solid as oar-spume, for Olvir is the other side of the world, and his friends can reach him no easier than I."

"Be not too sure. If you are wise you will keep Ulf under watch, and Finn, too. Yes, send them to Bergen under guard, at need."

"No, no," denied Swain. "You are unreasonable. Here has Ulf been at pains to aid me——"

"For a good, round price—and he was not willing."

"Any man is reluctant to part with a good ship, Erik. Be reasonable, I say. What is there strange in two traders haggling together?"

Erik planted wide his bandy legs and squared his jaw.

"I like it not, whatever you say," he persisted. "I would mistrust Ulf anywhere, and when he consorts with Finn——"

"You will be charging Kolbiorn next with being Olvir's emissary!" Swain jeered.

"I will not! Well I know neither of them came here wittingly. Nor, for that matter, did Finn. He made the cove this morning by chance on his way east on a trading voyage. That is his snekke* farthest out. But we have to meet bad-luck as well as good, Swain. It was good-luck for you to hear of Olvir. It may be bad-luck can come at you as easily, and——"

"You talk like an old witch-woman," barked Swain. "Be off with you, and see to the tale of the stores we must ship as soon as the *St. Olaf* is unloaded."

That night Kolbiorn came up to the skalli to announce that the last-ship was cleared and ready for Swain's purpose.

"But if you will be guided again by me," he went on, "you will give her a thorough overhauling. Any ship of Ulf's is a stout vessel, be sure of that, but the *St. Olaf* has gone two years in the water, in hard weather and mild, and in days to come you will be sorry if you overlooked any strain."

"You speak sensibly," said Swain.

"Where is Ulf tonight?" thrust in Erik.

Kolbiorn fingered his ale-horn.

"He has fallen in with an old venture-farer from the Sudreyar," he said at last. "They are cracking stories together."

"The sea makes strange companions," observed Erik. "You will not misunderstand me, Kolbiorn, if I say that it surprises me to find you so intimate with a man like Ulf, who is no better than a trader and can number no honorable men among his ancestors—let alone, that he takes up with a hairy Sudreyarman, who is widely known for——"

"Let be, let be, little man," adjured Swain angrily. "Kolbiorn is our guest. It is not for us to question his companions, more especially when we have no cause of complaint against them."

"Where no offense is meant, no offense need be taken," retorted Erik.

And Kolbiorn cried assent.

"It would not be befitting for me to comment upon a venture-farer of mine, against whom, as Swain has said, I have no cause to complain. But I will say this much. Ulf and I are not well-mated, and we do not sail in company again. But this is not a criticism of him. It is simply that we do not think alike. Indeed, if I had my way and was free of the obligation to discharge my cargo in Bergen I should prefer to sail with Swain in pursuit of Olvir. I am weary

* The Hebrides.

* Cutter.

of trading, and the day comes I shall return to the Orkneys and set up as becomes my family."

"That is good hearing," said Swain. "And as Erik has brought up the subject and you have approved it, I will add that I, too, was surprized that a man of your position should be companion to Ulf, who is all very well in his way, but is not as well-bred as many traders I have known. When the time comes for your return to the Islands I shall be pleased to take you into my service, if you have no other plans."

"I would ask no better," said Kolbiorn. "And now can I tell you aught to aid you on your voyage?"

"Anything you tell must prove useful to us, who fare into seas unknown," replied Swain.

Jarl Harald and his folk had departed that morning, so that the only men at the high table with the chief were Erik and the two skalds, Armod and Oddi, who dwelt in Swain's household. It was Oddi who spoke next.

"I have listened often to the Sagas of Erik the Red and his son Leif and Thorfinn Karlsefne that recite the deeds of those venture-farers who first visited Markland and Wineland the Good. Have you ever crossed the seas beyond Greenland, Kolbiorn?"

Kolbiorn crossed himself.

"The Ginnungagap,* as men call it? That have I! And the Saints aid all who trust themselves to its mighty winds and currents."

"Ho, here is one who can tell us rare tales," exclaimed Oddi. "And have you in truth seen Markland and——"

"Skalds' tales are well enough," growled Swain. "But I am concerned here with facts that will aid me to keep my ship together."

"Facts and skalds' tales in this business are all one, Swain," rejoined Kolbiorn. "For the truths I can tell you are more wonderful than the tales the best scald ever told."

"Tell, then," rapped Swain.

And he and the others, including Erik, hunched forward in their seats like boys by the hearth when the saga talk is running.

"Where to begin?" answered Kolbiorn. "Is it of Markland you would know? Or Wineland? Or Helluland? Or, perhaps, Irland Mikla, which lies beyond all. But if it is of this last you inquire I will abide by the truth, and say to you that I have never seen it—nor, I believe, has any other man now living."

"Tell all, tell all," clamored Oddi.

"How do I know where to tell you to begin?" growled Swain.

And Erik added with a grin—

"Begin at the beginning, Kolbiorn, for know that there are no men to give more heed to a stirring tale than those who are accustomed to live such tales in their own farings and doings."

"Well said," applauded Armod in his drawling voice. "But it occurs to me that Kolbiorn exaggerates the interest of his tale, for like Oddi I have listened many a time to the Icelandic skalds who recite how Erik Thorvald's son—whom men called the Red for his quarrelsomeness and the color of his hair—discovered Greenland after he was outlawed from the Breidafjord Isles; and how Bjarne Herjulf's son, going to join Erik's settlements, was carried west by contrary winds and first saw the shores of Wineland and Markland and Helluland, which Leif Erik's son first landed upon. As also, the tale of Thorfinn Karlsefne, who dwelt longer in Wineland than any other man and confirmed all that Leif and his folk reported concerning it. Nor should we forget Freydis Erik's daughter, who voyaged thither after Thorfinn. All of these folk have left accounts of what they saw."

"Of that there is no gainsaying," admitted Kolbiorn. "Yet I would not seem to boast when I say and claim that they died more years ago than I can count. And surely, there is fresher interest in the report of a man who is living than in the sayings of dead folks?"

"Past doubt," replied Swain impatiently. "I suspect these skalds are jealous of the spectacle of one who is not another skald and who surpasses them at their own art."

"Not I," asserted Armod.

"Nor I," said Oddi. "Although I subscribe to what Armod has said."

Kolbiorn laughed good-naturedly.

"Once more I assent to all your objections," he said. "But I ask you a question in my turn: Have you never wondered how much of what the sagas told was true?"

Both skalds cried assent.

"Good!" exclaimed Kolbiorn. "And I

* In the Norse mythology the yawning gap of chaos in which the supreme beings dwelt before creation.

answer: All is true, and yet they have not told a tithe of the truth."

"I am not good at guessing riddles," rumbled Swain. "What might that mean?"

"This, Swain: That the first voyagers deserve the credit for what they found, but that we who followed them saw all that they did and more."

Swain nodded.

"That is reasonable," he agreed. "Well, what have you seen?"

Kolbiorn drew his dagger and scratched an irregular line along the table-top. Then dipped his finger into a pool of ale-leas and made puddles and streaks of moisture beside the line.

"Here is the Skraelings' Coast. And here opposite is Greenland. In Greenland the folk have a harsh Winter and little earth for growing food, but the fisheries are good and the game plentiful, and best of all, the Skraelings are few in number and peaceful. In Helluland, which is the northermost part of the Skraelings' Coast opposite, there are no Skraelings—and that is not to be wondered at, seeing that, as the name denotes, the land contains naught but rocks and ice. Southward it is different. In Markland the forests spread wide and thick, such forests as you find in Bretland* and they stretch from the shore cliffs as far as the eye can see. It is a good country, but the Winter is severe.

"South of Markland is Wineland, which Leif and Karlsefne called the Good. Well they might! Where shall you find such another land? The grapes grow wild for the plucking, as does the corn. The forests are limitless. The meadows would support all the cattle in the world. The deer are as plentiful as pigs in the Bergen streets. Wild fowl and wild beasts of all kind abound. Furs are to be had for the taking. And the beaches! Ah, the silver sheen——"

"Furderstrandi?" murmured Armod softly.

"Yes, Furderstrandi!" Kolbiorn swept a damp finger down the line of his imaginary coast. "The Long and Wonderful Beaches! He has not lived in vain who has seen them, the silver sheen of their sands, the roar of their surf, the rollers tumbling ashore from horizon to horizon."

"But the harbors?" interrupted Swain practically.

"There are the best harbors man could wish, and they are to be found at intervals of a doegr's* sail, with sweet water and timber in easy reach."

"Then why do our people bide in Greenland?" demanded Swain.

"Because of the Skraelings. They are a wild folk, and indeed, from what I have seen of them I do not think they are the same race as the Skraelings of Greenland. They are larger, and red in color——"

"Red of their skins?" inquired Oddi, fascinated.

"Yes, red as—as—" Kolbiorn seized a copper platter which Swain had ravaged from some Italian coast-town— "as this thing. With long, black hair in which they twist the feathers of the hawk or the eagle."

"But are they good warriors?" questioned Swain. "Can they stand against the Norsemen?"

"Not if the numbers were near equal. But the forests spew them forth as thick as the falling leaves in Autumn. And their stone knives and hammers and shell-tipped arrows can slay as surely as a sword or ax, if they find a chink in a man's mail. The sagas tell much of the first travelers, Swain, but little is said of those who have followed them and tried to find what lies beyond the Wineland forests. Few of these last ever returned."

"Then none of our folk dwell on the Skraelings' Coast?" asked Erik.

"Not for long. A ship or two go over every other season, perhaps, to fetch massurwood† for furniture or spear-shafts, and to trade with the Skraelings for furs. But if they seek to remain the Skraelings fall upon them in the night, and lucky are they who die a swift death—for the Skraelings practise upon their prisoners tortures that would make the heathen Lapps envious."

"*Humph*," said Swain. "I wish I had been tempted toward this land before now. I see plainly that it affords an opportunity for a worthwhile venture. But at the same time I must point out to you that what you have told us has naught to do with Olvir Rosta or with our pursuit of him."

Kolbiorn drained his ale-horn, laughing.

"Be not so sure, Swain. For if Olvir is the man I deem him to be, and he ever has the opportunity to escape you in Greenland he will point his ship for Furderstrandi. Better the Skraelings, he would think, than Swain's wrath. And he would be right."

* Britain, England.

*Twelve Hours. †Bird's-eye maple, probably.

"He would," agreed Swain grimly. "And now tell us somewhat of Greenland, and the landfalls we must seek."

"For the first," replied Kolbiorn, "there is a mountain which men call Blackserk or Whiteserk, depending upon the time of the year and the degree of cold, for when it is white it is snow-covered, but if the snow has melted its rocks show black. From this you bear south of west until you sight a rocky cape, with an outer line of skerries—and beware of these, yes, stand out to sea until it is barely within sight. But after you have doubled it you should have the steeple of Garda cathedral over your prow, and thereafter it is a fair run in if the wind be favorable."

They talked late into the night, and Kolbiorn parted from Swain and his folk, swearing eternal friendship. Erik and the two skalds companied the Hrossey man to his ship because he was far gone from the ale he had drunk. And in the morning, with the first flush of dawn the two longships rowed to sea and Finn's snekke after them. They had scarce gained the waters of the Aurrida Firth when the mallets of Swain's shipmen commenced to drum aboard the *St. Olaf* an answering tune to the ringing hammers in the shore smithy, where mailed shirt and pantzer suit*, spear-head and sword-blade, were riveted, tempered or sharpened to suit their owners' wants. In a field close by the younger housecarls cast spears at a mark or shot at the seabirds overhead with whoops of joy for the venture ahead of them.

Swain stifled a yawn as he watched the dwindling hulls from the skalli door.

"Well, well, little man," he growled as Erik ducked out under his arm, "are you satisfied that Ulf has gone without spelling us?"

"When the fox and the wolf put heads together the honest *boendr* watches the stead yard," replied Erik, shading his eyes with his hand. "And a good riddance is not always a clear gain."

Swain laughed and bade him clear the ale-mist from his wits and they turned to discussing the lading of the last-ship, the stores and the weapons they should put in her hold.

"Oh, and one thing more," said Swain when the Icelander was on the point of leaving him, "I sail in no ship with a saint's name."

* Plate armor.

"Why?" answered Erik. "Olaf was a warrior-king as well as a saint."

"No saintly name for ship of mine that is consecrated to vengeance," replied Swain.

"What will you call her then?"

Swain reflected.

"I had thought of *Mjolner*—for Thor's hammer. But no! She shall be *Vidforla*—Far-traveler—since that is her destiny."

"It is ill-luck to change a ship's name," objected Erik.

"Not for ship of mine," said Swain. "As the Norns weave, the cloth will show."

Erik looked at him curiously.

"Are you Christian, Swain?"

"Why, I do not know. By times, yes. By times, no. And when I am for the sea the Old Gods call strongest."

"I have heard that call myself," acknowledged Erik.

IV

FAR-TRAVELER rode at anchor, with all her stores stowed and most of her crew aboard. Boatloads of housecarls were rowing out to her to add their complements to the lusty array of men that crowded forecastle, waist and poop. On the strand hundreds of others, including Jarl Harald and his older cousin, Jarl Rognvald, who shared with him the dominion of the Orkneys, were gathered to drink a last horn with Swain and wish him well. Indeed, the ale was foaming under every man's mustache when Erik came running into their midst.

"See! See!" he shouted. "One of Ulf's longships is returned."

The Icelander's outstretched arm was leveled toward a low, black craft, tearing the Firth to foam with the ash-breeze of her oars as she headed in for Gairsey cove. A sudden silence possessed the babbling mob on the strand, and all turned from the incoming longship to Swain. He nodded slowly.

"It is *Fafnirsbane*. I would know her amongst a score of hulls."

A shrewd light flickered in Erik's eyes.

"*Fafnirsbane!* Kolbiorn took her."

"Whoever took her, this betokens trouble," replied Swain.

"I said there would be trouble the moment my eyes fell upon Ulf," boasted Erik. "And when that Sudreyar fox——"

"Be silent, little man," commanded Swain, his brows knit in thought.

And Jarl Rognvald, tugging at his graying beard, observed:

"Whoever comes is in haste, Swain. They must be friendly."

"Bad news comes in haste, as well as good," growled Erik.

"It may be Ulf is in trouble," suggested Jarl Harald. "There was a strong wind from the northeast three days since."

"Trouble or no," spoke up Jarl Rognvald, "I charge you to drink with me to Swain's venture."

They answered him with a shout, and horn-rims clicked on strong, white teeth.

"Hah," cried Jarl Harald. "It should do no man harm to have so many well-wishers, Swain."

Swain, glowering at the rushing longship, made no answer. Erik tossed his horn into an empty ale-barrel, and spoke for him with the independence gained through long service.

"A thousand well-wishers are futile when one warlock finds the right spell. Bah! If Kolbiorn cannot tell a straight tale I am for teasing him with a pan of coals and a dagger's point."

Jarl Rognvald shook his head.

"You suspect this man unduly, Erik. He would not dare to return to Swain unless his conscience was clear."

"Whatever he is I will say that he is a seaman," declared Jarl Harald.

But Swain remained silent, even when all about him burst into shouts of applause and clattered spear-shaft on shield as *Fafnirsbane* tore across the cove, forty oars dipping as one, checked as she took shallow water and then, riding easy on the swell, came gently up the incline of the beach until her keel was bedded firm in the shingle.

Kolbiorn, clutching the dragon figurehead on the prow, leaped from the gunwale before the longship had come to rest. He splashed through the water to the beach and ran to where Swain stood.

"Ulf!" he gasped. "The knave—niddering—gone—Olvir!"

Swain caught the Hrossey man by the shoulder.

"What? Where are they? Gather your wits, man! Take breath! Speak!"

And the Orkneyfolk gathered close while Kolbiorn panted out his story:

"Three days since we lay at Sandvik in the Hjaltlands*, biding a turn in the wind. Finn of Uist was with us. The next morning when I came from the poop Finn's snekke was gone, and I got out our small boat to row across to Ulf's ship to concert with him our course for Bergen. But when I reached the longship's side what should I see but Finn's shaggy head peering over the shields and his red Sudreyar crew swarming the decks. I asked him for Ulf, and he grinned down at me and answered that Ulf had gone west in the snekke, leaving him to sail the longship to Bergen. I asked him where in the west Ulf was bound, but more he would not say; and then, Swain, I began to suspect.

"So I rowed back to *Fafnirsbane*, and put to sea with the tide, Finn yelling threats and curses after me. It was his threats that told me I was right in my suspicions, for as we pulled past him he shouted that I had best hold for Bergen or I would bring upon myself a sore vengeance. No man threatens me unchallenged, and I backed oars under his poop and bade him exchange spears with me then and there if he dared. But he ducked behind a shield and called that Ulf and Olvir Rosta would blood-eagle my back when the time came."

"So you believe that Ulf is gone to warn Olvir that I am on his track?" said Swain.

"What else?" rejoined Kolbiorn. "He left his goods aboard the longship. So much I saw as I lay alongside her. And they might not have transferred the cargo in the night without my knowing it, for all three ships lay within hail. No, Swain, Ulf is for Greenland, you may depend upon it. Finn's snekke is one of the fastest crafts in the Northern seas. If she can stand the Western Ocean gales she will make a run the old people will talk about in years to come. Long before you can reach Greenland Olvir will be warned."

"But why does Ulf serve Olvir?" demanded Swain. "Why does he sacrifice the cargo he had worked so hard for?"

"He serves Olvir, I suppose, in hope of gain; Ulf has many strange friends, and that is one reason I had planned to part company with him. As to sacrificing the cargo, he and Finn have worked together before now. Finn will carry the goods to Bergen and market them in Ulf's stead."

"So I contended," snarled Erik. "From the beginning I warned you, Swain. Olvir has an attraction for Ulf's sort. The wolf pack howl when Fenris-wolf runs across the sky."

* Shetlands.

"But who would expect a man who has just completed the Greenland voyage to fare Westward again for no other purpose than the warning of a friend?" protested Jarl Rognvald.

"And what gain can Ulf expect from Olvir, who is hunted beyond the known world?" exclaimed Jarl Harald.

Kolbiorn shrugged his shoulders.

"It is probable that Olvir still musters a notable company of raven-feeders, and with his name can raise more. Ulf has always sought to develop a wider trade in Wineland, for he believes the Skraelings know of deposits of gold in the forest-depths. With Olvir's aid——"

"I see," said Swain. "But what of yourself, Kolbiorn? You have returned here with these ill-tidings at considerable expense, and I am under obligation to you for doing so. What can I offer in payment?"

The Hrossey man flushed.

"There is but one boon I would ask of you, Swain," he replied. "And that is that you permit me to enter your company for this venture and fare Westward with you."

"But I sail at once, on the next tide," explained Swain.

"I am ready."

"Your cargo——"

"Perhaps you can recommend some honest man who will conduct it to Bergen for me, or, failing that, it may be stored against my return."

"No, no," cried Swain, "you are a man who might well be invaluable to us, but I cannot allow you to sacrifice your profits in this way."

"Although I am a trader and not a viking-farer," answered Kolbiorn with dignity, "I do not measure my honor in terms of profit. I feel that I have been at least partially responsible for the trick Ulf played upon you, seeing that I sailed in company with him. Also, I am an Orkneyman born, and it would not become an Orkneyman to countenance such treachery to one of the first chieftains in the Islands."

"It is evident that you are an honorable man, Kolbiorn," said Swain.

The others present all murmured assent.

"My steward must travel to Bergen with tribute-money for the king," said Jarl Rognvald. "How if he was entrusted with the delivery of Kolbiorn's goods?"

"I will be satisfied with that arrangement," answered Kolbiorn, "if Swain will take me."

Swain jerked the point of his sword-scabbard into Erik's ribs.

"How say you, little man," he cried, "have we room for another?"

"There is always room for another mackerel in the salt-barrel," grumbled Erik.

"Another riddle?" rasped Swain. "I will have a frank answer. Shall we take Kolbiorn or no?"

The Icelander perched his head on one side like a bird that sees a fat worm.

"An hour ago I would have said no," he decided. "But I should be unreasonable now if I did not admit that Kolbiorn has proved himself trustworthy, and with his skill to guide us, we should navigate the Western Ocean without difficulty."

Swain's craggy features split in a smile.

"I intended to take Kolbiorn in any event," he returned, "but if you had answered otherwise than you did I should have left you behind. Conduct him aboard *Far-traveler* and lodge him with us in the poop. And see if you can avoid forelooking our future again until we have sailed."

"Yet it fell out as Erik said it would, and Ulf's coming was ill-luck to you," Jarl Harald reminded him.

"It was established that it should be so," retorted Swain. "And if Olvir secures a warning of my coming I have a sure hand to steer me after him. I do not complain."

V

SEVEN days' sail westward of the Orkneys *Far-traveler* ran into the first storm, and her company were hard put to it to keep her from being swamped by the huge rollers. On the tenth day the storm abated, but the ship had been blown north of her course into a region of bergs and pack-ice. From horizon to horizon the sea glittered snow-white, and Swain and Kolbiorn were at pains to con their way in and out of the floes, without suffering the ice to close upon them. But they had this advantage: That because of the unusual number of their company—no less than six-score—they never lacked for untired arms to man the sweeps, and so made progress whenever the icelanes opened for them.

It was at this time that Armod made his "Icemaiden's Song" which men still sing:

What maid is this who dwarfs the sky
In shining silver mail?
Is she a Valkyr flying by
Burdened with heroes pale?
Or is she Freyja's lovely ghost
Come stooping to entice
Out from our battered, sea-stained host
Youths to her breast of ice?

The next day they came to a considerable field of ice on which was a great white bear, the largest bear any man had ever seen. He had caught a seal and was making a meal on it, and the younger men, in watching him, fell to discussing whether he could most easily be slain by spear or sword; and as their debate increased in temper one whose name was Haldor Ivar's son—he came from Borgarey—challenged Sigurd Einar's son of Deerness that they should cast lots which was to slay the bear, and whether with spear or sword. Erik, who was standing by, called to them that they were both mad.

"He who would slay that bear must use bow and arrow," he said. "It would require a mightier warrior than either of you two to put spear or sword into his vitals before his claws ripped out your bellies."

"If you are afraid we are not, Erik," replied Haldor.

And Sigurd said—

"Not all the best warriors were born in Iceland."

Erik shrugged his shoulders.

"A fool's death is no loss," he remarked. "Yet it may be Swain would rather you died under Olvir's ax than a bear's claws."

But the ship was making no progress at the moment, and Swain refused to interfere.

"We shall be the better for fresh meat," he said, "and it will amuse the rest of us."

Nevertheless he quietly bade Erik fetch a bow and arrows and conceal them at his feet where he stood on the poop by the steersman's place.

When the two bear-baiters cast lots it happened that the weapon chosen was the spear, and at the next cast Haldor won, so that it was for him to go against the bear. Swain nosed the ship up alongside the ice-field, and Haldor leaped confidently to its surface.

At first the bear showed no desire to fight. He growled as Haldor approached him and dragged the seal's half-devoured carcass to the farthermost verge of the pan; but as Haldor continued to pursue him he suddenly dropped the seal and galloped forward at a speed that surprised the onlookers.

Haldor stood his ground, and thrust with the spear the instant the bear came within range, but the beast warded the blow with a powerful fore-paw, and lunged at the man so quickly that Haldor must have been knocked down if he had not sprung backwards. And now the bear reared up on his hindlegs, and lurched after Haldor, who dodged this way and that, seeking an opportunity to drive home his spear. Yet when the opportunity came the bear broke the spear-shaft before the head had penetrated his tough hide, and Haldor was left defenseless. He turned and ran, with the bear hot after him, and all the men on *Far-traveler* roared with laughter at the spectacle of the hunter hunted. But when Haldor began to tire and the bear was on the point of overtaking him Swain lifted the hidden bow from the deck and fitted arrow to string.

"It seems that Haldor has failed us," he said, "so another must do his work for him."

The bowstrng twanged, and the arrow sank to the feathers in the bear's breast. The beast staggered, wrenching at the arrow with its paws, sank upon its side and presently died.

Haldor was named "Bearbaiter" ever afterward, and of this incident Oddi sang:

"Any fool can slay the white bear."
Thus quoth Haldor in his folly.
And he took a spear and hastened
Out upon the icepan's surface.
"Stand my thrust, oh, bear," he shouted.
"*Hoo, hoo, hoo*," the bear said gruffly.
"*Hoo, hoo, hoo!*" And "*Wah-wah-wah-wah!*"
Round they circled, man and white bear,
Charging, leaping, prancing, rushing.
"Hah, I have him!" shouted Haldor.
Click of paws on spear-shaft answers;
Wood is broken, spearhead sundered.
"Help me! Help me!" pleaded Haldor.
"On my neck the bear's breath hisses."
Swain then reached beneath the bulwarks,
Fitted arrow to his bowstring.
"Haldor fails us," said the chieftain.
"But we cannot see him eaten."
Sang the arrow to its target,
And as Haldor tottered toward us
Loud we hailed him from the shieldrail.
"Haldor comes, the mighty slayer!
He shall now be dubbed Bearbaiter!"

MEN had a saying in those times that he who sailed with Swain was lucky in two ways. First, because Swain's expeditions usually won rich plunder, and secondly, because if any man

performed a notable deed or exploit it was certain to be remembered by reason of the two skalds, Armod and Oddi, who were famous all through the North countries and had even accompanied Swain when he journeyed with Erling Skakki—Wrynecked—and Eindridi Ungi—the Younger—to Mikligard, where they had sung their lays and recited sagas before the Emperor Manuel and won valuable presents from him.

Armod and Oddi were inseparable friends, as valiant warriors as skilful skalds, but they might never agree upon matters relating to their craft. For Armod was fain to model his verses upon the rhymed lays of the Franks, while Oddi held by the unrhymed line of the older skalds. But on occasion either could imitate the other, and it is the mere truth that no two men could surpass them in the excellence of their performances, as was attested by Jarl Rognvald, who was a famous skald himself, and who, with Hall, an Icelander who was son to Thorarinn Breidmagi—Broadwaisted—composed "The Old Metrekey," which contains all the different metres ever used, with five verses for each metre to show how they should be handled*.

Swain's folk labored all the more diligently at the sweeps and laughed at the pinching cold in the nights because of the gay quips which Oddi tossed about like fire-arrows and the brave tales which Armod told and the lays which the two sang in company, beating time with scabbarded swords on shields. What men could not endure fatigue and cold when their hearts were strengthened by the Banda-drapa or the Glum-drapa or the songs of Sigvat Olafskald or Arnor Jarlaskald? Olaf the Saint and Olaf the Glorious, Harald Fairhair and Harald the Tyrant, Magnus Barelegs and the Blessed Jarl Magnus, all companied with *Far-traveler's* folk. They would not be discouraged.

So in time they won out of the icefields, which Kolbiorn said were of unusually wide extent because of the mild Winter and early Spring, and regained their proper course, which they determined by calculating the position of the sun, moon and stars, as is prescribed in the Rimbegla. Here they encountered an Iceland trader eastbound, who had been driven north like themselves; but he could tell them naught of interest, for they were the first people he had seen since he sailed from the Eastfirths—and he and his men were the last folk they of *Far-traveler* beheld until they came to Gardar. But that was still far away.

A second storm hurled them southwards, where the heat was so severe that they stripped off their skin jackets and swam in the water alongside—until a fish as long as their ship bit in two a Strionsey man named Raud Paul's son. A week's sail north of this spot they came upon a myriad of whales that dived about them as though believing the ship to be a kindred sea-monster, and Kolbiorn was in fear lest *Far-traveler* should be destroyed by the flirt of a giant tail. But Swain cast a spear at the nearest whale, and the creatures flailed the sea to foam in the energy of their desire to escape.

On the heels of this they encountered a fog so dense that the forecastle was invisible from the poop. Three days they sailed through it, and on the third day it was denser than ever. But in the middle of the day when it would have been noon had the sun been shining, they began to perceive a chill in the air.

"Does it seem to you to be growing colder, Swain?" asked Kolbiorn.

"I could wish for my wolfskin jacket," replied Swain. "My teeth chatter like a bower-maiden's."

"I do not like it," said Kolbiorn. "Ho, Erik," he hailed the forecastle, "what do you see?"

"The mist before my face," returned Erik.

But Kolbiorn did not join in the laughter which all men accorded the Icelander's dry sayings.

"Drop a bucket overside," he called to one of the two steersmen.

And when the bucket came up he dipped his hand in the green seawater.

"Colder it might not be without freezing," he muttered between teeth that rattled louder than Swain's. "Heed me, now, Swain: My counsel is that we go about."

"Go about!" protested Swain. "When we have already lost so many days? It will be only to delay us further."

"Yet I say go about," persisted Kolbiorn. "By this coldness in the air and water I read that there is ice ahead of us."

"How could that be?" scoffed Swain.

"It is your ship and your company," rejoined Kolbiorn. "I have given you the counsel I should follow if I were in your

*A fact. It is in the library at Upsala.

shoes. Also, I should alter the course to larboard or starboard."

Swain was impressed, despite himself.

"Which board?" he demanded. "You——"

"I cannot say. It is all a gamble, one way or the other. The ice is ahead of us. drifting this way. Perhaps we shall escape, Perhaps——"

"We will go about," decided Swain.

They swung the sail and got out the sweeps, fifteen a side, to aid her, then headed back on their track, bearing more to larboard. They had sailed so for as long as a man requires to kindle a fire unsheltered when Swain shivered anew as an icy breath of piercing intensity smote his right shoulder.

"By the Hammer!" he swore. "Fafnir has left his bed on Gnitaheath. That was dragon's nose-wind."

"A dragon's breath is hot," answered Kolbiorn. "You felt the breath of Niflheim, the nethermost frost world of Hell. See!"

"A ship! A ship!" called Erik from the forecastle. "Hark! You can hear the swash of her oars."

"It is no ship," shouted Kolbiorn; "but death. The White Death!"

And he pointed overside to starboard where an immense white wall towered through the shredding mist, a wall whose marble front was streaked with green and blue and sapphire tints. Against its base purled a succession of wavelets, and it was their clashing had made the noise Erik mistook for oars.

"Row! Row!" screamed Kolbiorn to the men at the sweeps. "For your lives, Orkney-men! She has treacherous fangs that stretch far below the water's surface. Away from her! Her touch is death!"

The oars clattered confusedly in the holes betwixt the shield-slots; voices murmured back and forth panic-struck, fearful. Then Armod rapped his shield.

"Steady, Swain's men," he called. "Stout viking-farers may flee ice, but they need not fear it. I begin for you Thorkel Fostri's son's 'Oar Song.' With me, now, every man—and two to the oar:

"Salt spray over the gunwale,
Oarbite gnawing your hand—
You that have known the hate of the sea,
What shall you fear from these?
Spume that drifts through the oarhole,
Feet that ache when you stand—
You that have dared the fate of the sea,
What shall you fear from these?"

The white specter swayed above them, high overhead, high, high up where there was sunlight in the world. An ominous *Craaa-aa-ack!* came from the heart of its bulk, followed by a splash that sent a curling wave to lap over *Far-traveler's* stern.

Swain wiped the water from hair and mustache and peered back along the foam of their wake.

"Blessed Olaf guard us!" whispered Kolbiorn at his side. "She crumbles."

Another rending noise, sharper, more profound. Kolbiorn, with his hand on the steering-oar, snatched a glance over his shoulder.

"We may be too late. Oh, holy Saints!"

The second wave struck them, actually impelling the last-ship on her course. And again Swain wiped clear his eyes. It seemed to him now that the berg had receded.

"We gain on it," he said briefly.

Kolbiorn shook his head.

"It is too much to hope, Swain. We were all but aground upon its base, and now—and now—I think the disturbance we created in going about and the working of our oars have upset its balance. Hark! There goes another piece of it."

But this time the wave set up by the impact of the fragment of ice upon the water's surface barely sufficed to lave the ship's stern; and Swain was no longer able to identify the glittering pinnacles that had loomed mountainous over hull and mast. The rowers had settled to their task, with Armod and Oddi chanting the time for them, the long ash sweeps—half as long again as a longship's oars—grinding and gritting under the strain upon them, taking water with a gentle whispering note, coming up for the feathering before the stroke with a *drip-drip-drip* that ran the length of the waist. The rowers, laboring in unison, grunted the age-old chorus to the song the skalds sung—

"*Ha-hee-ho-hah! Huh!*"

Then, without warning, chaos! A roar that shook the universe, that made the last-ship quiver from end to end. A sea that seemed lashed by a tempest of gigantic power. Waves that tumbled mast-high. Men bowled over, sweeps broken. But Kolbiorn, with Swain to help him, clung to the steering-oar. The waves subsided as suddenly as they had arisen. The silence of the fog was restored again.

"Did Loke or the Christian's devil strike

at us?" rasped Swain, shaking an angry fist at the unseen menace.

Kolbiorn crossed himself.

"It was the berg. It overturned. Give thanks to the Saints that we were where we were, Swain."

"*Humph*," growled Swain. "I see nothing to be thankful for, except that you had the intelligence to perceive our peril. Ho, Erik! Haul in oars and bale out the waist with all hands. We will get back on the proper course. Whatever gods there are, I curse them for this fog!"

"You do ill to speak so of holy things," rebuked Kolbiorn, much disturbed.

"*Humph*," said Erik, who had run aft with the agility of a cat. "What are the gods to Swain?"

"It is ill-luck to speak so," insisted Kolbiorn.

Swain turned, snarling, upon both of them.

"Let be, let be! You talk too much of gods. Any god worth a sacrifice would have a man work for himself."

VI

SWAIN braced himself on *Far-traveler's* gunwale as the sweeps urged the last-ship into the haven in the teeth of a keen west wind; his slitted eyes stared, not at the huddle of houses surrounding the timber cathedral, but at the meager array of shipping lying off the strand. There was disappointment in his face.

"He is gone," he said.

"If Olvir came hither in *Seamaiden*, wherein he fled from Mikligard, then here he is not," agreed Erik, beside him.

"Nor do I see Ulf's snekke," added Kolbiorn, who was with them. "But I would remind you, Swain, that we could scarce have expected to surprize them so. Ulf must have suffered storms far worse than we encountered to have made a slower passage."

Swain nodded.

"It does not matter," he said. "I expected he would escape us this time, but—Well, what do we do next? Who rules in Gardar, Kolbiorn?"

"Sigmund Istromaga—Big Belly—is Lawman," replied the Hrossey man. "I am friendly with him, and I am sure he will tell us whatever he knows. Perhaps from him we can learn——"

"We go ashore," Swain decided. "Erik, make ready the smallboat."

"Who goes with you?" asked the Icelander.

Swain thought a moment.

"You had best bide on shipboard, little man, and keep the crew in order. I will have with me Kolbiorn and Armod and Oddi, who are used to finding their way around and may be able to aid us in seeking information."

A crowd of men had gathered by the strand, watching the incoming vessel, and as the smallboat left *Far-traveler's* side other folk poured from the streets of the town until they made a fringe along the waterfront. Swain, crouching in the boat's stern, paid no attention to what went on ashore. His gaze was fastened upon the worn mountain-tops which barred the distant skyline, with here and there a patch of snow white against the black rock; but Armod and Oddi, who knew his moods, were aware that he was not looking at the mountains. His eyes were striving to see over and beyond whatever barriers of time and space lay betwixt him and his enemy.

Oddi, who was a cheerful man and a talkative, grew restive under the silence broken only by the clicking of the oars.

"This is a considerable town, Kolbiorn," he said at last. "I am amazed by its size."

"It is the largest in Greenland," assented Kolbiorn, "and the center of the Eystribygd."

"How numerous are the Greenland folk?" inquired Armod.

"I cannot say for certain," Kolbiorn returned doubtfully; "but I remember now that a priest I met last Summer told me there were one hundred and ninety steads in the East Settlements, with twelve churches and the cathedral here at Gardar, where the bishop dwells. And in the West Settlements, which they reckon as all those west of Hvarf Cape,* are ninety steads and four churches. The colony is prosperous, of that there is no gainsaying. It does as well as Iceland."

"And that is somewhat to think upon," answered Armod. "Iceland, men say, was settled by folk who fled Norway in the time of Harald the Tyrant, either because they liked not to be ruled by one King or to escape manbote and other penalties for slayings, just and unjust. More and more folk passed overseas to join them, and in years to come it chanced that certain of the Iceland folk rebelled against the rule of the

*Cape Farewell.

Things and the Lawmen or held that judgments against them were unfair, and so passed overseas westward farther to Greenland. It is a rare gift, discontent. Without it few men would stir abroad from their own hearths."

"Who knows?" spoke up Oddi. "Perhaps in time some of the Greenland folk will rebel against their brethren and fare on west of this Wineland of which Kolbiorn tells."

"They must be a numerous company, then," retorted Kolbiorn. "Else they will not cling to life on the Skraelings' Coast. Many men have beheld the wonders of Furdurstrandi, but few have dwelt for long in those parts since Karlsefni's day."

They were so close inshore now that they could see the houses quite distinctly, and Armod exclaimed at the size of the dwellings.

"Never saw I such skallis," he protested. "Everyone would do for the king's drinking-hall. Are all the Greenland folk wealthy—or does each one support a dozen wives, after the fashion of the heathen of Serkland?"*

Kolbiorn laughed.

"Not so. But you must know that the Winters here are more severe even than in Iceland, and so for the sake of the greater warmth, three or four families dwell together in the one house, yes, and sometimes more."

"A man always learns," commented Oddi.

The keel took bottom as he spoke, and Swain leaped first ashore. He looked around him while the others were scrambling at his heels.

"Where shall we find this Sigurd?" he called shortly over his shoulder to Kolbiorn.

"He comes," replied Kolbiorn, and pointed to an enormously fat man with a hanging paunch who was striding in their direction.

This man began talking as soon as he came near enough to identify Kolbiorn.

"*Hut-tut-tut*," he exclaimed very fussily. "What is this? What is this, Kolbiorn? I was aware that you and Ulf had parted company, to be sure, but who would have expected to see you back so soon in Ulf's last-ship? I trust you are friends. Yes, yes, I trust you are friends. We cannot allow viking-farers to come and go here in Greenland. Oh, no, no! It would never do. Here we are law-abiding and peaceful, each working to——"

"It is to me you should address yourself, not to Kolbiorn," interrupted Swain.

"And who are you?" answered the Lawman.

"My name is Swain Olaf's son. I am a *boendi* of the Orkneyar."

Sigurd's jaw gaped. He was an ignorant man, indeed, who had not heard of Swain.

"Ah!" he gasped. "*Huh-huh-huh! Tut-a-tut-tut!* Blessed Virgin—*Humph!* Well, as I was saying—ah—yes, yes—to be sure! I mean, of course!"

Swain's cold blue eyes bored into the fat man's watery pupils.

"You have been entertaining an enemy of mine," he said.

"An enemy! Oh, never, never, never, Swain! Why, I would——"

"Ulf was here not long since?"

"He is gone but nine days."

"And one Olvir Rosta with him?"

Sigurd twisted uneasily.

"Yes, but who would have expected to have you here on his trail, Swain—and in Ulf's last-ship?"

"In my last-ship," amended Swain. "I purchased it from him. As to my being upon Olvir's trail, you know very little if you have never heard that Olvir's one concern is to keep a week's journey ahead of me."

Sigurd wagged his head and wiggled his eyebrows.

"Yes, yes, yes! Who has not heard of it? But here in Greenland, Swain? We cannot have you fighting in our stead yards, burning skallis, perhaps, or ruining crops. It is not easy to build a house here or to reap a crop. We must fetch our wood many *doegrs'* journey, and crops are a gamble, what with the cold and the long Winter, and——"

"There has been naught said of burning or destroying," Swain cut him off. "What I do here will be governed by what you do or have done. Answer me now this question: Is Olvir in your midst?"

Sigurd gulped hard.

"Why—no."

"Where is he?"

"I—I—I— How should I know, Swain?"

"Is he in Greenland?" pursued Swain.

"He is not here. And he was not in the West Settlements three days since when a runner crossed the land hither."

"He is fared for Wineland," called a voice from the crowd of people at the Lawman's back.

"So!" said Swain. "At last, we have some information. You seem loath to tell what you know, Sigurd Istromaga."

* Norse name for Sarallu countries.

The Lawman gulped again, and when he spoke the words came in a rush.

"Loath?" And why should I not be? We are peaceful folk, we Greenlanders—no swaggering, viking-faring half-heathens, such as you of the Islands! And it has been bad enough to have one set of lawless fellows carousing and rioting in our midst, flouting the holy bishop and his priests, molesting our women and beating our men, burning our fuel, drinking our ale and eating our food. Ill-will be our fate if, having but just rid ourselves of the first lot, we discover a second band in our midst!"

Swain listened to this harangue with a frown which finally became as much of a smile as often crossed his grim face.

"I see," he returned briefly. "Olvir has been living up to his reputation. Has he wrought much damage?"

"More than he would pay for," fumed Sigurd. "And he enticed away a score of our likeliest youths."

"It is likely that you will never see them again," Swain comforted him. "Olvir is a great one for leading others to slaughter. It is in my mind that you were fortunate, though, to escape as easily as you did."

"Fortunate!" The Lawman lifted his hands in an involuntary appeal. "Blessed Saints, hark to him! The scoundrel cost me—me, the Lawman of the Greenland Thing!—all of five gold marks!"

"Did he slay any of your folk?"

"No."

And again a voice spoke from the throng—

"He did not because Sigurd gave him whatever he asked for."

"Only for the welfare of the people, Swain," exclaimed the Lawman hastily. "I went to great lengths to guard them. Yes, yes, yes!"

"Speaking of gold," said Kolbiorn, "was anything said as to why Olvir and Ulf sailed for Wineland?"

Sigurd shook his head, manifestly puzzled.

"I did not know that they sailed for Wineland, Kolbiorn," he denied. "It was not I said so."

"That may be," shouted half a dozen men from the crowd. "But for Wineland they fared."

"Was there talk of Wineland before Ulf came?" asked Kolbion.

"No," answered the Lawman. "For Olvir told me he was planning to try his luck in Iceland, where he said he had lands from of old."

Others corroborated this statement, and a score of men thrust their way to the front of the crowd to repeat conversations overheard in taverns between Olvir, Ulf and others, which bore upon the two plans for his future which Olvir had discussed. When all had spoken Kolbiorn turned to Swain.

"It is as I expected it would be, Swain," he said. "Ulf's thought is to try for the gold he believes to lie in the forests behind the Skraelings' Coast. He has hungered for it these many years, and in Olvir he has one as desperate as himself. Between them, they are ripe for such a venture."

"Then am I ripe to venture after them," returned Swain. "But tell me, Kolbiorn: Have you any inkling where on the Skraelings' Coast Ulf would search for his gold?"

"I have," answered Kolbiorn. "But we had best——"

He glanced significantly at the crowd surrounding them.

"We will return aboard," said Swain.

The Lawman bustled forward.

"What? Return aboard? This will never do—never do—never do! Why, Swain, it would be greatly to our discredit if we permitted a famous man like you to leave us without exhibiting our hospitality."

Swain grinned in a way he had.

"I can never question your hospitality, Sigurd, after hearing how you lavished it upon Olvir. Be content! I shall always credit you with it, wherever I go."

Sigurd puffed out his chest in a vain attempt to advance it as far as his belly, and he frowned indignantly at those around him who chuckled at Swain's promise.

"It is well-spoken, Swain," he affirmed. "I shall rely upon you to do me justice."

VII

ERIK met the landing party when they returned aboard.

"Our birds have flown, eh?" he remarked before anyone had spoken.

"Yes, and we fly after them," rejoined Swain. "Up anchor, little man."

Erik squinted sidewise at his chief.

"Am I to be denied the right to boast in my cups that I have set foot on Greenland?" he asked.

"No, for you shall yet have the chance," replied Swain.

"Good," quoth Erik. "I will even take a party ashore in the boat you have just used and refill the water-barrels."

"That you will not," denied Swain. "But up-anchor, as I bade you. We steer south and west to the Western Settlements. For before I leave Greenland I must be more certain than any fat Lawman can make me that Olvir does not lurk within easy range."

"No man will gainsay the wisdom of that," agreed Erik.

And the forecastleman hallooed the crew to the sweeps and the anchor-rope.

"Yes, you are well-advised in trying Erik's Fjord steads before you turn your prow toward Wineland," said Kolbiorn. "Better to lose a few more days, and be sure of what we are doing."

"That is my opinion," answered Swain. "Now, tell me of this gold-hunt which you say Ulf has in his mind. Is it fairy gold? A dream to canker his brain? Or has he reason for his beliefs?"

The two skalds leaned forward eagerly to catch every word of Kolbiorn's reply. This was the stuff of which rousing lays and drapas might be forged. As for Kolbiorn, he plucked at his beard and spoke slowly, like a man who is endeavoring to weigh his judgment.

"For myself, Swain, Ulf's tale never appealed to me. He had no gold to show in proof of it. Only a few words spoken by a drunken old Icelander, who claimed to have been swept farther south than any other man had fared, into a mighty river, beyond which dwelt a nation of the Skraelings, who had much gold. Yet Ulf was persuaded that we came to the mouth of the Gold River on our next voyage after this.

"It happened that we were blown past Furdurstrandi in a sudden storm, and found ourselves off another series of beaches, much the same as Furdurstrandi. And it was then for the first time Ulf, in his joy, told me the old Icelander's tale.

" 'Past Furdurstrandi, the old carl said,' he would cry. 'And past another Furdurstrandi. And so to a river the like of which you seldom saw. Long, long beaches, and a mighty river. And beyond live the Skraelings who dig gold from the ground.'

"I thought little enough of it all, Swain, but I was willing to sail on a ways, seeing we had already sailed so far. And in truth we came at last to a great bay, a bay as large as a lake, and into this bay emptied a mighty river, three thousand ells and more across at the mouth. Ulf was persuaded that this was the river of the Icelander's tale, and he was for sailing up it to find the gold. But when I pointed out to him the number of the Skraelings who showed upon the banks or in their paddle boats he agreed we lacked sufficient men for the enterprise.

"We sailed off with the experience for pay, and I would swear that Ulf and Olvir will head for that river as fast as wind and oar can move them."

"You would know how to carry us there?" asked Swain.

"If Ulf can find it, I can," returned Kolbiorn proudly. "But there is no feat of seamanship required. Let us once come to Furdurstrandi, and the rest is simple. Moreover, west of Furdurstrandi is Straum Firth, whereon is the settlement men call Leif's Booths, by reason that Leif Eric's son first built on that spot. In the Summer season there are always Greenland ships in the Firth cutting massur-wood, and from them we can learn tidings of Ulf and Olvir."

"Why?" demanded Swain. "If they are wise they will avoid all folk. They have me to fear—and aside from that, he who hunts gold does not proclaim his road."

"True," assented Kolbiorn. "But you do not know the Skraelings' Coast. There, over the rim of the world, men forget to be afraid—except of the Skraelings when they howl at night. And another thing, Swain. Men on the Skraelings' Coast, Norsemen, seek one another. It is so lonely, so far from the life we know. By the time Olvir and Ulf have reached Furdurstrandi they will be short of water, their men will want to stretch their legs ashore. Ulf's men will have heard of Gaut the Deaf who carries ale-barrels in his ship when he fares to Wineland, and sells a horn to whoever can buy. Ulf's men will tell Olvir's, and well you know the thirst in such companies."

"Not my men," Swain thrust in gruffly.

"Perhaps. But your men are not Ulf's or Olvir's. I never heard of the ship that kept out of Straum Firth if the wind was fair. And there are practical reasons for stopping at the Booths. The wood-cutters and Gaut's folk, who gather grapes to carry home in his scoured ale-barrels, pick up all the gossip of the Coast. They know what ships are abroad, how the Skraelings are conducting, where the fish are running. Oh, there are many reasons why we, as well as

Olvir, should tarry a tide in Straum Firth."

Swain clapped a heavy hand on the Hrossey man's shoulder.

"It is an excellent thing that I have you with me," he said. "What you say is true. And it is also true that he who hastes unduly is in danger of tripping himself in his stride. We will search carefully, first, the East Settlements, then Erik's Booths in Wineland—and any other places you can think of."

"There are no other places where men dwell this side of the world," replied Kolbiorn. "Or if any have sprung up since I was here last, we shall hear of them at the Booths."

"So be it. Now do you con us out of this nest of rocks. By the Old Gods, I think Hel, herself, must have strewn them here in a rage against men!"

When Swain and Kolbiorn had gone up on the poop the two skalds stared after them for many breaths in silence.

"Such an opportunity never came to any other singer," said Armod dreamily at last.

"To think that I of all skalds in the North should be here to sing these deeds!" exclaimed Oddi.

Then each became aware of what the other had said, and they exchanged bitter looks.

"Who are you to consider that men will heed whatever crude verses you may compose on this venture?" cried Armod.

"Is it your thought that a singer of love rhymes can record such deeds as I shall have to celebrate?" sneered Oddi.

Each laid hand on sword.

"You are insolent!" exclaimed Armod.

"In your teeth!" snarled Oddi.

Swain's ruddy beard dropped between them as he swung down from the poop.

"What?" he roared. "Skalds fighting? Do you know that the man I catch drawing steel upon his mate will go overboard the moment I can lay hands on him? You may die, skalds, but if you die it must be by Olvir's folk. I cannot spare you else."

Men called that the "Skald's Lessoning," and afterward, whenever there was quarreling in the ship, it was only necessary for the cooler heads to shout:

"Down swords! Will you have a Skald's Lessoning?"

They had fair winds around Hvarfness, and so came to the Vestribygd settlements on Erik's Fjord, where Erik Rauda had planted the first colony in Greenland. But the Vestribygd folk had seen naught of Ulf and Olvir, and the only reward Swain had from the visit was a renewed supply of fresh water and the information that an unusual number of Greenland ships had taken advantage of the mild season to sail for Wineland.

Far-traveler entered the fjord in the morning of one day, and in the afternoon of the second Kolbiorn steered her out to sea. Before sundown the land astern was swallowed up in the gray maw of the Ginnungagap.

West they held until a harsh, rocky coast loomed ahead of them. This, Kolbiorn said, was Helluland,* and he went about with great celerity, so soon as he had made his landfall, and stood south by east, with all his sweeps out and double-manned. For, he told Swain, this was a coast noted for its treacherous reefs and currents, and the ship that was cast upon it might not escape destruction, while its barren uplands of rock and snow afforded no food or shelter for men.

When they had sailed three days on this course the wind veered to the northwest and blew them out to sea, and on the second day there arose a storm such as none aboard the ship had seen, says Kolbiorn. It was as if the waves were thrown at them from every side, and it is sober truth that Erik counted no less than three separate series of waves assailing the ship from the north, the south and the east, and all at the same moment.

"This is what the Greenland folk call the Searollers," Kolbiorn shouted to Swain above the tumult. "And we shall be fortunate if we survive it."

"I do not dispute you," Swain shouted back. "I think Ymir, the giant who is said to sleep beneath the Ginnungagap, has had his belly turn sour and rolls in his bed. If I had a horse aboard or a man I hated I would give him a sacrifice."

Kolbiorn crossed himself.

"Rather let us pray to the Blessed Saints to intercede for us!" he expostulated.

"*Humph*," growled Swain. The best plan will be to put extra men at the helm."

They adopted this suggestion, and while those on the poop labored to keep the vessel's head before the wind the remainder of the crew bailed in the waist, which was flooded by the waves which threatened to bury them gunwale under. And it is a fact that the Searollers did not moderate until a Gairsey man named Vagn Arne's

*Labrador.

son was snatched over the shieldwall and borne away on the breast of a slaty sea.

The crew set up a wail at this, but Swain quieted them.

"Ymir desired a sacrifice," he said. "It is unlucky for Vagn that the lot fell upon him, but the rest of us cannot be otherwise than grateful we escaped. Keep at your duties, and you will see an end to our troubles."

And it happened exactly as he had foretold. The Searollers lessened in size and ferocity; the wind decreased, and in the night hauled around to the south, and by the following day they were able to proceed upon their proper course, after Swain and Kolbiorn had reckoned their position according to the morning-star and the sun.

VIII

KOLBIORN made his second landfall on a line of cliffs topped by sparse forest growths. This he called Little Helluland,* and by his direction they followed its contour, well out to sea, steering west of south, until they entered a region of fogs as baffling as those which had beset them on the voyage to Greenland. Moreover, the water hereabouts was quite shallow, and because of this the waves had a short, choppy motion which was both uncomfortable and dangerous. But to make up for the fogs and the rough sea there was an extraordinary abundance of fish. They had only to put a bit of cloth on a hook and cast it overside, and the fish would bite, while with a net half a dozen men might haul in a catch sufficient for several days.

Indeed, it was in these seas that they encountered two small Greenland snekkes fishing for the Iceland trade. The Greenlanders stared with amazement at the bristle of weapons over *Far-traveler's* shield-rail, but they could give Swain no additional information concerning Olvir, since they had sailed from the Vestribygd some three or four days before the Orkneymen had visited Erik's Fjord. A few shouted questions and answers, and the last-ship bore away on her course, leaving the fishermen to gabble excitedly of affairs they had never thought to touch at first hand and to carry home with them a tale of fierce viking-farers and a vengeance that knew no bounds. There would be plenty of chance for gossip around the skalli fires this coming Winter.

"He is no man to cross, Swain of the Orkneyar. To Wineland he was following his enemy! They breed few like him in these days."

And now Kolbiorn bade steer more to the westward still, and they sailed with a favoring wind for two weeks, when Erik started up on the forecastle one night and shouted a warning to the poop.

" 'Ware shoal! I heard thunder of surf ahead!"

"Larboard, helm!" called Kolbiorn. "Out sweeps!"

Swain rose from the deck-planks where he lay in his sleeping-bag, ready to respond to any emergency.

"What befalls us?" he asked.

Kolbiorn leaned over the poop bulwark, hand cupped to ear.

"Hark!" he answered. "You may hear, although the wind be contrary."

Swain, too, inclined his head and listened. A low, rhythmic roar of sound came to him faintly.

"What is it?"

"Furdurstrandi."*

"You are sure?"

"My head on it," replied Kolbiorn confidently. "No man who has heard Furdurstrandi muttering through the night can ever forget it."

They stood off until the dawn burst over the ocean's rim, and far to starboard stretched the glittering sheen of the sands which the sagaman of old had sung of as the Long and Wonderful Beaches—beaches which had come to assume almost a fabulous importance in saga lore. Men had dared the Western Ocean and the terrors of the Ginnungagap, the icy death that lurked in the fog's shadowy depths, for no other reason than to be able to say to their sons that they had furrowed the path of Leif's and Thorfinn Karlsefni's keels, that they had seen the shining marvel of Furdurstrandi.

How many had died in risking attainment of the right to boast of having voyaged so far as this utmost edge of man's knowledge! How many had been discouraged, had been satisfied with the lesser achievement of gaining Iceland or the rock-belted fjords of Greenland! How few even of those who had heard the thunder of the

* Newfoundland.

* Cape Cod.

surf and seen the sunlight silvery on the sands had ever set foot upon the magic goal!

Far-traveler's crew crowded the starboard rail, drinking in with eager eyes the spectacle that bound the landward horizon. Green combers surging over the outer bars; white-topped breakers creaming up the yellow sands; and beyond all a second barrier of green, the vegetation that stiffened the resistance of the dunes to the sea's monotonous assault.

"Take heart, Swain's men," cried Armod the Skald. "If Hel claims you tomorrow you have not lived in vain!"

"Kings and great warriors have craved this sight without avail," exclaimed Oddi the Little. "Harald Haardrade and Sigurd the Jeruselam-farer would have exchanged lots with you who toil on the rowing-benches —and held themselves lucky."

And the ship trembled under the answering stamp of feet and rattle of swords on shields; the sea-birds, swooping down upon these strange visitors, veered headlong from them in fear of the hoarse bellow of exultant voices.

That evening they rounded the southern tip of Furdurstrandi, and anchored for the night in a cove. In the morning they rowed through a sound past a large island,[1] and lay to off a second island[2] when the approaching darkness made navigating precarious. The third day saw them by the second island; they crossed a narrow arm of the sound and worked through a channel between the main land and a third island into another sound, which Kolbiorn declared was Straumfjord.[3] This, too, they crossed, steering slightly south of west, and so came to a ragged coast of shallow bays and inlets, where they had ample choice of safe anchorages for the night.

Kolbiorn was certain of his position, having sailed this course with Ulf on several occasions, and he made no difficulty of following the coastline another day to the mouth of an inlet which ran deep into the land. A day's sail up the inlet[4] brought them to a bay[5] which opened in the forestlined shores to starboard, and from the scanty gut of the entrance the forecastle lookouts could see a huddle of masts and shipping berthed opposite a wide slash in the wood-growth.

"Leif's Booths,"[6] said Kolbiorn with pardonable triumph.

[1] Nantucket. [2] Martha's Vinyard. [3] Buzzard's Bay. [4] Narragansett Bay. [5] Mount Hope Bay. [6] Near present site of Fall River, Mass.

Swain heard him with knitted brows.

"I see four craft there," commented the chief. "It may be Olvir is— Ho, Erik, open the arms-chests! Fetch up stones from the ballast. If the wolf is cornered it behooves us to have swords unsheathed."

But as they drew nearer the group of vessels it became apparent that their prey had eluded them again. Two of the four were last-ships similiar in build to *Far-traveler;* the other pair were snekkes of twenty oars, but neither was Ulf's, as Kolbiorn swore with entire confidence. Yet if Olvir and Ulf were not at hand, nonetheless was there evidence of vast stir and perturbation, both aship and ashore, as *Far-traveler* sailed up the bay.

The braying of ludr-horns echoed faintly from the forest. Boatloads of men hastily shoved off and boarded the snekkes, and other bands of men in arms appeared upon the shore and stood with shields dressed, as if in expectation of an attack.

"Now, what does this betide?" exclaimed Kolbiorn, disturbed. "Three times have I visited Leif's Booths, and never yet was there display of aught more hostile than alehorns."

Swain smiled quietly.

"Be at your ease," he replied. "This is sure proof that Olvir has preceded us here. Well I know the signs of his visits."

And he called to Erik again, bidding the Icelander show a peace-shield from the forecastle. But this move had no effect upon the suspicious attitude of the snekkes' crews and the folk ashore. The snekkes pulled up on either side of *Far-traveler* and followed her in until Erik cast over the anchor. Then they lay-to an arrowflight distant, oars poised to dash closer, bowmen and spear-casters ready.

The men on the strand simultaneously moved down to the water's edge, and one of their number stood forward alone, a scrawny, lop-eared fellow, with wispy hair and beard, who had a cloth around his head and walked with a limp.

"That is Gaut," said Kolbiorn. "But he did not limp when I saw him last, and why should he wear a cloth instead of a helmet?"

"That is a question which Olvir can answer," returned Swain. "Call to Gaut, and acquaint him who we are."

"He is deaf and would not hear at this distance," said Kolbiorn. "My counsel is that you and I should go and have speech with him."

Swain agreed, and he and Kolbiorn went into the smallboat, with two housecarls to row them. And all this time the crews of the two snekkes and the men ashore stood quietly watching the newcomers with uncompromising hostility. It wanted but a shout or the swift baring of a blade to set the arrows singing and spearshafts whistling in air. Yet Swain ordered things so that there was no excuse for the other party to strike the first blow, and the only sounds which broke the stillness of the bay were the lapping of the water, the click of the oars and the wind rustling the trees ashore.

The smallboat's keel drove up the beach, and Swain and Kolbiorn leaped out. They carried swords, but no shields; and when Gaut made sure of this he summoned another man from the ranks behind him and the pair of them advanced to meet Swain and Kolbiorn.

It was Gaut, who spoke first.

"You know now you cannot surprize us, Kolbiorn," he screamed in a harsh, singsong voice. "So you had best be off after your friends. This time we are ready for you, and numerous though you be, we shall——"

"You are talking foolishness," interrupted Kolbiorn, shouting at the deaf man through cupped hands, trumpetwise. "We are not enemies."

"Eh?" repeated Gaut.

" 'Not enemies,' I said."

" 'Not enemies?' " *Humph!* You are Kolbiorn, and you sail in here in Ulf's lastship. Not enemies! I am no fool."

"I begin to think you are," replied Kolbiorn impatiently.

Gaut's eyes flamed. His fingers closed around his sword-hilt.

"Be careful lest I slay you where you stand," he rasped in his voice that was like a gull's screeching.

Swain, who had been watching him since he first spoke, touched Kolbiorn on the arm.

"This man is no more deaf than I," he said quietly.

Gaut started somewhat.

"Eh?" he asked feebly.

"I said you were no more deaf than I," repeated Swain without raising his voice, and his cold blue eyes drilled into Gaut's watery gray ones like dagger points. "You cannot blind me, fellow."

Kolbiorn regarded the two men with dismay.

"But he has always been deaf, Swain," he expostulated. "I have known him years, and unless you howl at him like a wolf he——"

"Bah," snapped Swain. "That is his stock in trade. For reasons of his own he pretends deafness. I watched him, and I could tell by his eyes that he heard you the first time you spoke, although he pretended otherwise. And again, he made no pretense of not hearing you when you told him you thought he was a fool."

Gaut's eyes blinked rapidly; an uncertain look clouded his features.

"They say Olvir's grandmother was a witch," he muttered in tones very different from his ordinary ones. "Perhaps this man is one of his familiars."

"No, fellow, I am no familiar of Olvir's," replied Swain in the same quiet voice he had used before. "It was I who burned Frakork."

Gaut fell back a step.

"Ho!" he exclaimed. "You are Swain Olaf's son! Swain of the Orkneyar!"

"Yes."

"And why did you not say so in the beginning?" Gaut turned upon Kolbiorn. "All men know Swain. But how was I to expect a warrior like him to appear here in your company, hard on the heels of your partner, Ulf, and all his wicked crew?"

The screech returned to Gaut's speech.

"Trouble enough he has been to us, he and Olvir and their fellow roisterers, drinking and slaying and breeding annoy! And when men cried out that Ulf's old ship was heading inshore, and it came nearer and we spied you upon the poop what should we think but that——"

"Peace! Peace!" commanded Swain.

And Kolbiorn flared in his turn.

"Who are you to upbraid me, you who have pretended to deafness to cover up I know not what foul deeds?"

Gaut flushed and dug at one toe with his sword-tip.

"Nothing of the kind," he denied. "I had a reason. I——"

For the first time Swain's iron face crinkled into a grin.

"So you admit it, Gaut?" he demanded.

"Why, as to hearing," replied the "deaf" man uneasily. "I— No, it is true—I mean——"

"The fellow speaks like Sigurd Istromaga," exclaimed Swain to nobody in particular.

"Untrue!" flamed Gaut. "I am no cowardly belly-feeder, as any man can tell you who knows me! Would you see Sigurd Wineland-faring, year by year? I tell you I know more of this coast than any other, yes, and of the Skraelings and——"

"It is true," Kolbiorn broke in. "And I will go upon my bond for you to that extent, Gaut. But you cannot blame Swain, who does not know your reputation, for suspecting you when he discovers that you pretend falsely to be deaf, so that men call you the Deaf in speaking of you."

"How else would I acquire my information?" answered Gaut angrily. "Do you suppose that every carl who drinks my ale spills his fund of gossip willingly? No, no! They all believe Gaut to be deaf, and say fearlessly before him what they would prefer strangers not to know."

Now, at this both Swain and Kolbiorn fell a-laughing, as did the man who had come forward with Gaut, who, after first glaring at the three of them, presently joined in as heartily as they, so that all those others on the ships and ashore who beheld what was going on, likewise at first stared with goggle eyes and then yielded to the spell of the merriment. The forest reechoed the laughter of a host.

But presently Gaut gave over laughing, and shook his head mournfully.

"It is all very well for you to be mirthful," he said; "but this leaves me in bad case, for men will mock my deafness and be wary of what they say in front of me, and I shall not know the gossip of the coast, and folk will no longer come willingly to drink my ale and I shall be short of entertainment during the Winters at home. You may not be enemies, but nevertheless it was an ill day for me that Swain came here."

"Say, rather it was an ill day for you when you first took thought to pretend deafness," rejoined Swain. "The man who practises dishonesty is sooner or later discovered. But I refuse to be concerned for your future, Gaut. If you could devise such a trick as to make all folk believe you deaf you will fool them again in some other way."

"Perhaps it is just that you should rebuke me, Swain," answered Gaut. "But deaf or hearing, I am not one to accept a slight from any man. My head on that!"

Swain shrugged his shoulders.

"And I am one who can afford to say whether he will fight or not, and I do not choose to fight you. Also, if you employ your wits, you will realize that through me you can secure revenge upon Olvir and Ulf, for it is my purpose to pursue both of them until I bring them under my sword's edge."

Gaut muttered that he did not dispute this.

"Yet you have made me look ridiculous," he added; "and you owe me an opportunity to present myself in better light before my friends and followers."

"Here is another case of a man whose self-pride irks him sore," remarked Swain. "I am in two minds as to the rightness of your claim, Gaut, but it occurs to me you might discover a way to soothe your vanity."

"Your words prick me," answered Gaut; "but they do not convey any sense to me."

"I am not surprized," said Swain.

Kolbiorn, who had been shifting about uncomfortably during this debate betwixt his friends, decided that it was time for him to take a hand in it.

"Bethink you, Gaut," he said, "what Swain means is that if you can give him any information which will justify your deceit he will not be slow to applaud the guile which served him."

"Ho, ho," cried Gaut, scratching his head above the bandage. "Now, I see! Well, Swain, what would you know?"

"Aught that concerns Olvir, and will aid me to come at him."

"Why, as to Olvir, he and Ulf have gone on a fool's errand. Ulf has been listening to old Ketel Slettmali—Smoothtalker—who has drunk so much ale and mead that he believes the lies that grow from their fumes. Kolbiorn knows *him*."

Swain nodded.

"And has told me the tale Ketel told Ulf."

"*Humph!* Then you know all."

"Perhaps," thrust in Kolbiorn. "Perhaps not. Have Olvir and Ulf, in truth, gone after this gold which Ketel claimed the Skraelings hid?"

"They hid it or knew of it, something like that," rasped Gaut. "And my advice to you, Swain, is to leave Olvir and Ulf alone. If you do, the Skraelings will take care of them, for the fools are headed for the great river which flows into the sea beyond the Long Strands which come after Furdurstrandi—you have seen it, Kolbiorn; you and Ulf sailed into it once—and the Skraelings along the shores of that river are a

fiercer people than we have around here. Let Olvir once become entangled in the forest, and it will be the last any one shall ever hear of him."

"You do not understand," said Swain coldly. "I, myself, shall slay Olvir. I have sworn it, whether the gods are willing or no."

Gaut shuddered as though icy water had trickled down his back, and made the sign of the cross.

"Ill words," he mumbled. "Ill words. Still——"

"They are to fare up this river," Swain cut him off. "So much we knew already—or had guessed. But how far do they go? What of their ship?"

Gaut's face stiffened; his face brightened.

"Ha, there I can help you! For after Olvir had struck me down—with the flat of his ax, no less! And all because I would have him pay for what his men took—they paid no heed to me, lying in the corner, so long as I did not groan too loud, and I heard him and Ulf discussing their plans. Yes, and I laughed to myself when I understood what they were up to, for know this, Swain, I heard the man who first told this tale of the Skraeling's gold—he was a Daneman whose name I forget, but a brother drunkard to Ketel. And many is the time I heard Ketel telling it again to others. Ho, ho, ho! I was put to it not to laugh aloud as I lay in the corner, and Ulf talked and Olvir questioned, never thinking, the pair of them, that Gaut the Deaf had ears!"

"Yours is a peculiar idea of honor," commented Swain. "Well, what did they tell? You are long-winded, Gaut."

The ale-dealer's self-assurance lessened.

"But be sure I can aid you, Swain. I can aid any who voyage on the Skraelings' Coast. For who has been here longer than I? Who has heard more tales and had more opportunity to thresh the true from the false? Yes, yes, I will tell what you wish. They were discussing, Olvir and Ulf, this question of how far they should go up the river, and Ulf said that five days' rowing would be sufficient. And when they debated what they should do with the ship they decided to anchor it off shore with ten men. 'For,' says Olvir, 'that will be ample to hold her against the Skraelings, and other foes we have none.' "

Swain's lips parted in a snarl of satisfaction.

"Gaut," he said, "you have done well! Yes, you have justified your deceit. But see that you never attempt to employ your tricks against me. I am not one to smite any man with the flat of a blade."

Gaut moistened his lips.

"You—you—somewhat was said that you would—would——"

Swain clapped a weighty hand to his shoulder, spinning him around so that he faced his own folk.

"Take heed, Gaut's folk," cried the Orkneyman. "I am in debt to your chief. He has done me a service that I shall not forget. Here!"

He stripped off a massive golden arm-ring, set with a huge ruby, which the Greek emperor had given him in Mikligard.

"This is a sign of my obligation to Gaut, who is called the Deaf. Let no man mock him because he feigned to be what he is not, for he has justified the deceit he practised. It is an excellent thing that the wicked be not allowed to plot undisturbed."

IX

SWAIN sent Kolbiorn back aboard *Far-traveler* to bid Erik set the crew ashore that they might stretch their legs, for all were cramped from the long sea-voyage, and afterward he accompanied Gaut to the huts of the settlement, which was situated in the midst of the slash in the forest on the brow of a slight ascent from the water. The buildings were lightly constructed of logs, with a thatch of boughs for roof, and there was no palisade around them. Swain commented upon this as they climbed the hillock, and Gaut answered in his harsh screech:

"Long years ago the Wineland-farers were used to build skallis as solid as you will find in Iceland or your islands, with a outer wall and ditch; but by times in the Winters when the folk had all sailed homeward the Skraelings would descend upon the settlement and destroy it. So we who came after them never sought to build too solidly, and by reason that we do not the Skraelings leave us alone."

"Then they do not attack you?" asked Swain.

"Not in my time," returned Gaut. "In truth, they are a poor sort hereabouts. And for another thing, they esteem their trade with us, and have come to look

forward to it and to depend upon us for cloths and trinketry. But as I have said, the folk southward of here, and especially those beyond the great river for which you are headed, are more desperate warriors. I give you good counsel, Swain, when I say that they are like to finish Olvir, if you give them the chance—and you, too."

Swain ignored the ale-dealer's last remark, peering around him with curious eyes. The men of the settlement had broken up their shieldwall as soon as the peaceable character of their visitors was assured, and were busy about their various occupations, those who were not down by the shore watching the crew of *Far-traveler* disembarking with the aid of several small boats from the other ships. Some were hewing at long logs of wood, splitting them into planks, with chisel, wedges and mallet. Others were dressing the hides of animals stretched upon frames. A dozen or so were stacking vast heaps of grapes upon other frames to dry in the sun.

"You are not short-handed for labor," he observed, "so I gather that you did not suffer sore scathe at Olvir's hands."

"He slew seven of ours in the fray," replied Gaut ruefully, "and we but three of his folk."

"How many had he in his ships?" queried Swain with interest.

"We made it upwards of five-score in the dragon and two-score and ten in the snekke."

"One hundred and fifty," ruminated Swain. "Odds against us. *Humph!*"

"The Skraelings will attend to him if——"

Swain made an impatient gesture with his hand.

"How do the Skraelings fight? Will they break a shieldwall?" he demanded.

Gaut laughed. Then spoke hastily to placate Swain's menacing frown.

"But wait until you have fared into the forest, Swain, and you will know why I laughed. The best warriors might not dress a shieldwall in the wilderness of trees and brush. You can not see a man a spear's length from you. So the method of the Skraelings is to creep close under cover of the thickets and slay by stealth."

"Such fighting is not to be feared," said Swain scornfully.

"Ah, but it is," remonstrated Gaut. "For of what use are order and discipline when the enemy never remain still to be hewed down, but creep and crawl to come at you in the back?"

Swain knitted his brows at this.

"*Humph*, there is something in what you say," he admitted. "I perceive we must arrange our order to confound such foes. Well, well, that is something to be attended to when the time comes."

Gaut stood aside at the door of one of the log-huts they had come to.

"This is my booth, Swain," he said with a kind of awkward courtesy. "I pray you to enter. There is ale still left, despite Olvir's——"

"I am no ale-drinker," snapped Swain, stooping his head to pass the lintel. "Cold water will do for me. And see that you do not fuddle my men. My hand will be heavy upon any one who makes trouble for me."

Gaut grinned good-temperedly.

"Eh, but you have the rough tongue," he replied. "But that is your reputation. I could wish to fare with you after Olvir, if it were not for my obligations here."

"I want no man who has obligations other than to me," said Swain curtly.

"There are odds against you, you said——"

"I am used to such odds. Olvir has never dared to face me unless the odds were heavy in his favor—although I am the first to say that he is a stout man of his hands. But what is this?"

He pointed sternly to several spots in the earthen floor where the dirt showed fresh turned.

"They have the look of graves to me, Gaut. Must you conceal your deeds?"

Gaut's angular features went crimson.

"Not my deeds, but Olvir's," he rasped as angrily as Swain.

"But why——"

Gaut cast himself down upon a crude bench beside an ale-barrel on struts, and filled a horn from the bung.

"It is in my mind that you have much to learn concerning what is before you," he snarled. "Know, Swain, that in this country the Skraelings reckon much honor from taking the heads of their enemies. We soon learned that whenever we buried a man they dug up the body and hewed off the head to dry and set up in their huts."

Swain started to cross himself, but stopped in the middle of the rite and signed the Hammer on his chest.

"They must be Loke's fiends! Ho, Fenris-wolf is not more voracious."

Gaut drained the ale-horn and flung it into a corner with a saturnine grimace.

"That touches you, eh? Well, be at your ease, my friend. The Skraelings you will visit have a different trick. They have no use for your head, but your hair they will tear from your skull and use to drape the edges of their skin shirts and moccasins."

"Is this truth?" demanded Swain, his eyes boring into Gaut's. "If you think to play with me, knave——"

The "deaf" man wagged his head in dissent.

"Not I, Swain! Olaf knows you are none to play with. What I say is so, as any of my folk could assure you. Indeed, I marvel you heard naught of this from Kolbiorn."

"Of what?" cried Kolbiorn from the door, which he had just entered, followed by Armod and Oddi.

"This trick of the Skraelings, of which Gaut speaks," answered Swain. "Certain of them, he claims, will hew off every dead man's head, and the others tear the hair from your skull."

The eyes of the two skalds, accustomed though they were to the savagery of Norse warfare, popped open wide.

"Here are dreadful fiends!" exclaimed Oddi.

Armod curled a long lock of hair on one finger, eyeing it meditatively.

"I should be popular with such folk," he drawled.

"Yes, something of this I had heard," assented Kolbiorn. "It is their way, also, to burn and torment their captives to death. But after all, Swain, I would as soon be burned as have the blood-eagle carved upon my back and my ribs severed from my spine until my lungs were torn out. And it is well known of all men how King Olaf Trygvi's son caused an adder to be thrust down a horn into the throat of Raud the Strong."

"That is so," agreed Swain thoughtfully. "I have never been one to concern myself over death or how it came. One way or the other, it is all the same. And in Valhalla or Heaven or Hell or wherever a brave warrior goes it can not matter whether he enters headless or hairless. But I see clearly that we should take this opportunity to learn all that we may from Gaut and his folk as to the Skraelings and the course we steer. He who sails strange seas must keep a steady lookout."

And he and Kolbiorn and the two skalds maintained a steady hail of questions at Gaut until the night was far advanced. Presently Erik joined them and others of the Leif's Booths folk were bidden in, and those who knew what Gaut did not were examined in turn. A number of these men volunteered to join Swain, but he would have none of them.

"I say naught against you," he told one and all; "but I know you not, and on a venture such as this I must be at ease concerning every man in my following."

The end of it was that he purchased from Gaut a quantity of fresh meat and ale, and made arrangements for the refilling of his water-casks. In the morning he ordered all his crew to return to *Far-traveler*, and sailed out of the fjord on the ebb.

"Why should you not have accepted those men who desired to come with us?" asked Kolbiorn.

"I told them my reason," replied Swain shortly.

"Nevertheless, I believe Gaut would have come with us if you had offered him an invitation," persisted the Hrossey man.

"I did not want him," said Swain.

"He would have helped us in passing through the Skraelings' country. A boaster he may be, and deceiving for his own ends; but it is the sober truth none knows better than he——"

"I do not need him," rejoined Swain. "We have seen the last of him, and for that I am glad. If Olvir is a wolf, he is a crow to pick the wolf's carrion."

Afterward men remembered this that Swain said of Gaut.

X

NOW, Kolbiorn steered *Far-traveler* out to sea, and the course was southwest from the mouth of the fjord whereon Leif's Booths lay. The first night they beached in a cove of a large, round island, which rose all by itself from the waters, covered by a tangle of forest and inhabited—so Kolbiorn assured Swain—by naught but seabirds.* So far they had had a favorable wind, but in the morning it turned contrary and blew up a tempest, and they remained in the cove during the

* Block Island.

three days it lasted, snug beneath the waist-awning.

The fourth day they backed out of the cove, and rowed and sailed as the wind served until Erik sighted over the starboard bow the sheen of a beach which outrivaled Furdurstrandi. Beyond it low shores were draped in thickets of dwarf foliage, and the roar of the surf was like the doom sounds at Ragnarok. Three days they coasted these strands before they came to an inlet, and beyond the inlet they passed a succession of small islands and sandbars and wonder beaches during a fourth day's sail, and Erik observed that the sea-water was becoming discolored.

"This shows that you have sharp eyes," answered Kolbiorn, "for we are coming to the mouth of the Great River*, which discharges into the fjord we are about to enter."

And as he said, so it was. On the morning of the fifth day they entered a harbor with a mouth so wide that the enclosing capes could scarce be seen in the bright sunlight of noon. But the shores soon became constricted and presently all sighted a narrow opening ahead, which was hailed as the river's mouth; but Kolbiorn said no.

"Beyond this gut is a second fjord," he explained, "and it is into this second fjord that the river empties. You shall see."

All men marveled at the spectacle, even Swain, and there was universal agreement that this was a fairer country than any man had ever seen. The forests were full of mighty trees; the air was clouded with the flights of birds; as they sailed close under one side of the gut they caught a glimpse of a herd of deer pelting through the undergrowth; the air was like wine in the nostrils. To right and left, beyond the gut, the land swelled out, then drew together again to a point where two huge rivers poured into the fjord, one to starboard as they advanced and one straight ahead. Of these rivers the greatest was the second, and it was this which concerned them, Kolbiorn said.

A boatload of Skraelings darted under *Far-traveler's* bows as they passed an islet in the fjord, and the Norsemen's shouts of surprize drove the paddlers to frantic speed. Swain would not suffer an arrow to be loosed at them.

"We need our arrows for whoever assails us," he said grimly.

* The Hudson.

At two places on the shores groups of feather-tufted folk stood forth of the trees and stared curiously as the last-ship lumbered by with sweeps laboring to aid the sails. They were lean men of good stature, mostly naked, except for a skin about the loins or hide breeches, and all wore the feather head-dress. And at three other places the roofs of bark huts showed through the trees near the river-bank.

That night Kolbiorn anchored in a shallow indentation of the west bank, where towering cliffs barred the Skraelings from coming upon them from the land. Yet notwithstanding this precaution, in the darkest hours which came after moonset the watchmen heard a stirring in the water which aroused their suspicions, and when they awakened Swain and Kolbiorn the Hrossey man declared that it was the small-boats of the red people attempting to steal up on them.

Kolbiorn kindled a torch in the poop where his preparations might not be seen, then rushed out into the waist, circling it around his head, and as the flames flared upward a wide circle of boats was revealed and a howl of fear arose from their occupants. The water was dashed to foam by hundreds of paddles, and the Skraelings melted into the night.

This was the only attempt to attack *Far-traveler* during the voyage up the river, but her crew were made to feel that they were under constant observation. Columns of smoke towered above the tree-tops, and often a shrill yelping of voices echoed from the forest. Occasional groups of the Skraelings ran along the banks, brandishing weapons and shouting guttural threats; the slim log boats slipped from cove to cove, their paddlers keeping a wary eye upon the last-ship's ponderous hull.

The third day of the river voyage fetched the Norsemen into a land of mountains, and on the fourth day they traversed a stretch of water as broad as a lake, where the breezes blew fitfully and errantly from the gorges of the surrounding heights. Every man of the crew was now on watch for Olvir's craft, but they anchored that night without having sight of aught larger than the Skraelings' boats. On the fifth day they ran over to the west bank, as close in as they dared come, and rowed slowly, searching each cove and shallow inlet for sign of their quarry. But it was

on the verge of sunset and the light was dimming when Swain, himself, raised a mighty shout:

"Ho, Kolbiorn, Erik! Inshore, inshore! There they lie!"

Ahead of them a small river emptied into that which they sailed, and in the midst of the recess which it formed was a tiny island, forming a bulwark for a sheltered roadstead. A pair of masts, dark threads against the sunset glow, towered above the scrawny tree-tops.

Men opened their mouths to shout, but Swain checked them with a word. The sweeps were double-manned, Kolbiorn sprang to the helm, and with Erik in the bows conning a path through submerged rock and sandbar, *Far-traveler* surged forward. They had rounded the tip of the island before a yell from the outermost of the two hidden ships, Ulf's snekke, announced their discovery.

A dozen men scampered about the decks of the snekke and the long, battered hull of the dragon that had been Eindridi Ungi's and that Olvir had stolen from Eindridi what time he fled from Mikligard, with Swain swift on his heels. There was still a trace of the brilliant paintwork and gilding which had made it the most gorgeous craft in Bergen haven. But the colors were faded and cracked, the shield-rail was split and salt-stained and the rigging was patched. Eindridi would have wept at the plight of the ship that had been his pride.

The shipkeepers grasped their weapons and presented a brave enough front, and a wise man amongst them summoned those on the snekke to the dragon's poop; but they had no chance. Swain bade Kolbiorn nurse *Far-traveler* in to the dragon's quarter, and drew two-score men along the starboard rail ready to board. The moment the two hulls touched he gave the word, and they leaped to the dragon's waist and followed him aft along the gangway to where the shipkeepers stood, with shields dressed. But Swain would not permit his folk to come to blows then. He stood forward alone, bared sword in hand, shield on arm.

"The Gods have abandoned you twelve," he said coldly. "It is my counsel that you yield yourselves to me."

One of the twelve was a Hjaltlander named Orm, who came from Meignland. He was one of Ulf's crew, and he answered Swain.

"It is certainly true that you have performed an honorable deed in following us to this place, Swain," he said. "But what will it serve you to compass harm to us, who have not harmed you?"

"You have served Olvir, who is my enemy," replied Swain. "That is enough for me."

"But none of us has ever fought against you before now," cried the Hjaltlander. "We are of Ulf's crew or of those men who joined Olvir in Greenland."

This was true. Olvir had not been willing to spare any of his own housecarls, who were all redoubtable warriors, for the duty of shipkeeping.

"It is all one to me," answered Swain. "You have served Olvir, and the man who serves Olvir becomes my enemy. I have sworn the death of all such."

And now Orm tried again.

"How could we have expected to find ourselves opposed to you?" he appealed. "Who would have supposed that you would have——"

"Olvir feared I would come after him or he would not have left you here," said Swain.

"No, no," denied Orm.

And others echoed his words.

"He left us here to keep the ships against the Skraelings. He never dreamed that you would come here. The night before he left I heard him discussing you with Ulf, and he said: 'It remains to be seen whether I shall find this gold, but at any rate I have found a fair land where Swain cannot come after me.'"

Swain grinned as though he had been paid a king's compliment.

"If anything could save your lives, it would be what you have just said," he returned. "I have never heard aught more pleasing. But alive I might not trust you, and I can not spare men to guard prisoners. Therefore, make an end of this talk, and tell me how you will die."

A man next to Orm—he was a Greenlander named Gissur Grim's son—heaved back a spear he held in his right arm.

"Death to you, Swain, if you will show no mercy!" he cried.

And he hurled the spear at Swain, who was perhaps four spears' lengths distant. But Swain stooped and reached up his arm as the spear passed, letting fall his sword to the deck, clutched the spear, reversed it and cast it back, and it smote the man

between Orm and Gissur and was his bane. Then Swain snatched up his sword from the deck and leaped forward.

"Let us make an end of these men," he shouted.

His folk came after him, and Orm and the remainder of the ship-keepers, perceiving the fate that was designed for them, resolved to make their deaths as costly as possible. So they leaped down from the poop into the waist, preserving their array and charged to meet Swain's men. Yet they were beaten before the shields clashed, for from forecastle and poop of *Far-traveler* poured a shower of arrows, which slew six of the eleven in their tracks. Three of the last five were slain by Swain and those nearest to him in the first rush. But Orm killed Lod Haleg—Highleg—and Gissur wounded a man named Egil from Caithness; and then they two retreated into the poop cabin, where Swain and the others might not come after them by reason of the straitness of the door.

"This is a foolish business, Swain," shouted Orm from the cabin. "Here we have been the bane of two of your men——"

"Of one," returned Swain.

"Well, of one. But another is lost to you as a fighting man. And if you are to fight Olvir you must have every man of your company, for he has more men than you."

"I have enough for my purpose," answered Swain. "Ho, carls, break up those rowing benches. Fetch cables and pile them here by the poop."

"What are you doing?" cried Gissur now. "We ask peace of you, Swain. We will be thralls to you. We will pay manbote——"

"Those who fear death by steel may die by fire," Swain cut him off.

And the broken rowing benches and coils of rope rapped on the deck, against the wall of the poop.

"This is an ill deed you do," shouted Orm. "How should we have known that we would harm you?"

"You and your chief knew that I would pursue Olvir to Greenland, and you went to give him warning. That alone would have earned you your death, if you had not also cast in your fortunes with him. All men who know me know that I show no mercy to Olvir's folk."

"It is an ill deed that you do!" babbled Gissur.

But Swain bade kindle the fire, and the dry wood and rope blazed up so fiercely that he and his men must leap backward or be burned.

Orm and Gissur heard the roar with which the fire burst into flame, and Orm, who was a very brave man, called to Gissur to break through it and try if they might not escape by leaping overboard. But Gissur was so paralyzed by fright that he could not move. He wrung his hands as the smoke writhed into the cabin, and the tears trickled from his eyes.

"Sigurd Istromagi called me a fool, and a fool am I!" he wailed.

"You will be a baked fool soon," replied Orm. "And that I am no mind to be."

So Orm put his shield before him, bent his head, gripped his sword firmly in his right hand and leaped from the cabin door through the flames. His clothing caught and he emerged through the smoke-clouds half-strangled and dazed; but he slew a young Haey man named Thorgil Harald's son, and gained the rail, whence he sprang to the deck of the snekke.

"This is a warrior worth fighting," exclaimed Swain. "Back, men! I will go after him."

Orm ran forward along the snekke's gangway, planning to gain the island and cross to its farther side, but Swain, whose eyes were clear of smoke sprang across a gap seven ells wide and intercepted him.

"I am sorry that I must slay you, Orm," he said. "You are the kind of fighter I admire."

"Tongue-work is not sword-work," growled Orm, hewing low at Swain's knees beneath the shield, and running in as he did so.

But Swain leaped high in air, and slashed down with his sword, splitting the Hjaltland man's helm and skull in the one blow.

"An oath is sometimes inconvenient," remarked Swain as he peered down at Orm. "I would have spared him if I might."

Then he picked up the body and slung it back aboard the burning dragon.

"Give the dead viking burial," he said. "We have no priest to patter prayers."

So they hauled *Seamaiden* clear of the other ships and thrust her out into the current, and she disappeared downstream, vomiting smoke and flame, and that was the last of her and her cargo of corpses.

XI

"IT IS well said that you are sudden," remarked Erik drily as Swain leaped into *Far-traveler's* waist after the last-ship had been pulled in beside the snekke under the island's lee.

"What is in your mind, little man?" answered Swain absently, his eyes studying the green wall of the forest as if he hoped to see through the leafy barrier to his enemy's lair.

"This! Did it never occur to you that instead of slaying all Olvir's folk outright we might better have taken one or two and examined them concerning his path and how long he had been gone?"

"For his path, it is plain to be seen," Swain retorted.

He leveled a bloody hand toward a gap in the vegetation perhaps two hundred ells up-stream on the right bank of the tributary river.

"As to the rest, I know that he has not been gone long, for he could not have been many days ahead of us—and I think that we are likely to make better time on his track than he, since it will be for him to hew the path we both shall follow. How say you, Kolbiorn?"

The Hrossey man nodded.

"It is so, Swain."

Swain's fist hammered on the oaken gunwale.

"A few days more!" he snarled. "Ha, Gods! For a sight of Olvir's face when he sees our shields through the trees!"

"He must outnumber us by close on a score," suggested Erik. "Short odds, I know, yet this is a treacherous country."

"Treacherous it is," exclaimed Kolbiorn. "But I fear the Skraelings more than Olvir, Swain."

Swain turned to the two men, and his gaze swept both their faces reflectively.

"What harm can those naked folk do us in our armor, Kolbiorn?" he demanded. "And you, Erik; it comes strange to my ears to hear you debate odds against us, you who have stood back to back with me, when there were ten blades to our two."

"I fear odds no more than you," returned Erik sturdily. "But I say again we know not this country nor are we accustomed to fighting on land, and how if Olvir catches us by surprize in the forest? His score of extra carls might turn the balance."

"No, no," spoke up Kolbiorn before Swain could speak again. "Olvir has less chance of taking us by surprize than we him, Erik, for we know he is near and he can not have knowledge of us. But what we may all fear is that the Skraelings will trap us in the wilderness of trees and brush. You ask what harm such naked folk can do to us in our armor, Swain. Well, I answer that a shell-tipped arrow can find a chink in mail or a joint betwixt arm and shoulder or slip under a vizor's rim. And I would rather take the slash of Erik's ax on my shield than a blow from one of their stone hatchets. Remember, they are accustomed to fighting in the forest. Our men spend most of their time on a ship's deck. Or if we do fight ashore it is in solid array behind a shield-wall in the open where an enemy can be watched. But how shall you form a shield-wall in this wilderness and keep watch on an enemy who will be invisible a spearcast distant, yes, or within the length of a spear in many places?"

Swain tugged thoughtfully at the ruddy beard that swept down over the breast of his mail shirt.

"*Humph*," he said in his dour, blunt way. "You both speak sense. I shall not forget it. But my answer to both of you is the same. Upon this venture we have come, and finish this venture we shall. If it calls for craft and knowledge we have not practised before, let us move carefully and adjust ourselves to meet whatever may be foreseen. That is all we can do, and I believe it will be enough."

That was a night of toil aboard *Far-traveler*. There was much hammering of armor, and honing of swords and axes, and tightening of spear-heads, and feathering of arrows. Swain decreed that one man in two should carry bow, as Kolbiorn declared the Skraelings fought principally with that weapon, seldom coming to close range unless their numbers were overwhelming. He also saw to it that each man carried a bag of meal and salt. For meat they must rely upon what they could shoot as they traveled. And the last thing he did was to tell off ten of the older hands, together with that Egil whom Gissur had wounded, to be ship-keepers and watch over *Far-traveler* and the snekke during their absence.

In the morning, so soon as the sun was up above the opposite bank of the Great River, the expedition was set ashore in the small-boats, employing those of the dragon and

snekke as well as the last-ship. They were five-score and seven, all strong, tall carls, and all but Erik and the two skalds Orkney-born—for it was a habit of Swain's to insist that his following should be from the dominions of the Two Jarls. If he honored men who were outborn it said much for their characters. "Orkney-born is well-born" was a saying of his.

When they came to the place on the bank of the tributary where was the gap in the forest it was plain for all to see that folk had passed. Here had been built a fire, and there were scraps of bones and refuse, and a rag of green cloth on a twig that had been torn from some man's overjerkin. The gap was like a funnel; it was broad upon the river bank, but it grew narrower as it penetrated the forest, and presently it became no more than a passage the width of two men, with quivering leafen walls and roof through which the early sunlight filtered and the dawn-wind rustled gently.

But the most amazing feature of the gap was the trench that floored it. The ground was grooved to the depth of half an ell, and this groove was a full ell in width. And it had not been done recently, for the earth was beaten hard as a skalli floor. Men stood around and marveled at it until Kolbiorn joined them, but he made short work of their speculations.

"This is one of the paths the Skraelings drive through the forests in their travels," he said. "I doubt not Ulf has recommended to Olvir that they follow it for greater ease and speed."

"It was not wide enough to suit Olvir, though," answered Swain, indicating the lopped branches which strewed the groove.

"For that let us be thankful," returned Kolbiorn, smiling. "It is not in nature for us to slink along so narrow a way as the red folk would follow without thinking. And the wider the way the better the opportunity for us to guard against surprizes close at hand."

Swain poked his head into the tangled wall of the forest to one side of the path, and peered wonderingly at the vista of half-seen trunks and ghostly branches and the network of vines and brambles and spreading bushes that wove all together.

"Never saw I such a place," he pronounced. "It is naught like our forests. The sea itself is not more impenetrable below the waves' tops."

"And it is like the sea in that death lurks hidden in every ell of it," said Kolbiorn.

"What must be, will be," replied Swain. "But the man who is vigilant seldom has cause for regret. Forward, Swain's men!"

Two by two they followed him, shields on arms, arrows on strings, ax, spear or sword in hand, so that they were prepared to strike at any enemy who came at them. Swain led with Kolbiorn, and next walked Armod and Oddi. Erik brought up the rear of the column by himself and his eyes were never still, flitting from tree to tree and from branch to branch, up the trail and down the trail, on either side and behind.

At first they walked in silence. That is, no man spoke. All were hushed by the spell of the forest, and the only sounds to mingle with the fluttering of the breeze were the thudding of feet on the packed earth and the jingle and clank of harness. But presently Oddi began to sing, as if in challenge to the forest's power:

> The shields we brought from home were white,
> Now they are red-stained in the fight;
> This work was fit for those who wore
> Ringed coats of mail their breasts before.
> Where the foe blunted the best sword
> I saw our chieftain climb aboard
> Black Olvir's ship; we followed him—
> The ravens now in blood may swim!

"Well sung, Oddi," drawled Armod. "But you owe somewhat of your lay to Sigvat Olaf's skald. Now I——"

Kolbiorn halted in his tracks.

"By your leave, Swain," he said, "this is no way to wander through a wood which may be crammed with hidden enemies. Skalds' music is right in its place, but——"

"I will gladly dispute the point with you, Kolbiorn," protested Armod languidly. "With sword or ax or spear or——"

"Be silent!" growled Swain. "How often have I said that on this expedition men shall die only for me? Moreover, Kolbiorn is right. Heed what he has said, skalds. You others, behind, too. How shall we be watchful if our ears are full of chattering and song, and our thoughts wandering? Hereafter on the march no man speaks."

"Having sung, I am content," said Oddi merrily.

"Blessed Virgin!" sighed Armod. "This is an ill venture for skalds."

But there was silence again except when Swain muttered an order, and it was passed down the column, or when Erik from the

rear reported a suspicious movement in the greenery. Suspicions they had in plenty, but in each case the stirring in the trees was produced by a wild beast. Of men they saw and heard nothing. Indeed, they had seen no signs of the Skraelings since the preceding afternoon, and Kolbiorn said that it was probable all the red folk had abandoned this neighborhood, either in fear of Olvir or to pursue him.

They came to Olvir's first camping place early in the afternoon, a circular clearing hacked out of the forest and scarred by the litter of dead fires. Swain was pleased at the evidence that they were making so much more rapid progress than the pursued, and he kept on until the sunlight commenced to fail. Then they halted where they stood, and hewed themselves a similar clearing, piling small trees in a bulwark around it, while Kolbiorn and a dozen others were sent out to kill a brace of deer.

This last was no task, and the blazing fires and fresh venison dispersed the feeling of depression which had sprung from the enforced silence, the smothering mass of the forest and the utter loneliness of their situation. And now that it was night the forest spoke with a myriad voices. The trees rustled and murmured louder, wolves howled, bears growled, deer bleated and moose bellowed, and smaller beasts nearby squealed and squeeked and snarled, fighting, plundering and making love together.

By Swain's order the Orkneymen stood watch and watch, as on shipboard, so many awake, so many sleeping beneath their shields, every man, awake and sleeping, lying outside the circles of radiance cast by the smoldering coals of the fires. The night was eventless, but when the false dawn was paling in the east Erik, who commanded the last watch, roused Swain and Kolbiorn.

"I have been listening to a wolf," he said. "I would have you hear him, too."

Swain yawned.

"I heard wolves throughout my watch. Why should I——"

But the Icelander checked him with a gesture.

"There!" he said as a longdrawn howl shrilled on the dying breeze.

"It is a wolf. That I agree," answered Swain.

But Kolbiorn looked puzzled.

"A wolf? What do you say, Erik?"

"I say: Listen again!" bade Erik.

And presently another howl came from another quarter, and was answered several times with short yelping barks.

"Those were wolves," declared Kolbiorn instantly.

"Yes," assented Erik. "And that?"

The howl to which he had first drawn their attention echoed from the original direction. A pause, and it was replied to—from the opposite quarter of the compass. One howl was from one side of the camp, the second opposite.

"What is there strange about that?" asked Swain impatiently.

"Why should two wolves howl back and forth at each other across a forest without moving nearer?" countered Erik. "I am no wolf-master, but it has an ill sound to me."

As he spoke the chorus of short, yelping barks was raised again, tailing off as though the beasts were running.

"Now, those are wolves running in pack, as wolves run," said Erik. "I have heard them do so in many lands. But those others—I miss my guess, Swain, if they are not two-footed wolves."

Kolbiorn nodded.

"He speaks truth," indorsed the Hrossey man. "It is a trick of the Skraelings to let their brethren know where they are."

"Then they are watching us," said Swain.

"So I read it."

Swain shrugged his shoulders.

"It was to be expected. We shall know what to look for."

They resumed the march as soon as it was light, and the morning was half-spent when they stumbled upon what had been a human body lying beside the slot in the earth. The beasts had worried it and torn the flesh, wherever the rusty mail permitted the limbs were worn bare; the cheeks were gone. But the head was still distinct, with shreads of flesh here and there, except that the top of the skull was pared off in a festering circle.

Kolbiorn pointed the butt of his spear at the pitiful thing.

"Skraelings' work," he said.

Men clustered about and stared with awe and a faint tinge of fear. There was something eerie in finding this poor corpse in such a plight in this land where their kind had never dwelt. Hard, seasoned viking-farers though they were, a shiver ran along the ranks.

Swain sensed it, and dragged them back to their customary self-reliance.

"One less of Olvir's carls to reckon with," he said curtly. "Come, Swain's men, we have a long road. Who will cower at a dead man with his hair gone? If I take a foeman's hair I take beard, yes, and head, too."

A laugh answered him, and they tramped on.

They entered the clearing of Olvir's second camp about noon, and Swain gave the command to halt for rest and food. As the men scattered to collect wood and water a shout came from the clearing's far side, where the slit of the path was a dark shadow in the green walls.

"Swain! Oh, Swain!" men cried.

Swain ran forward and the group split to make way for him. In the center of the path's vent a long arrow was thrust diagonally, point upward and pointing in the direction whence they had come. The head of the arrow was a fragment of flint, deftly-shaped and bound with sinews to a shaft stained red with ochre; the feathers, also, were red.

Kolbiorn came up at that moment, and Swain turned to him.

"What means this?" demanded Swain. "It is man's work, and no accident. And be sure no Norseman fletched or shaped that shaft, let alone used a head of stone."

Kolbiorn got down on his knees and examined the arrow from every angle, finally plucking it from the earth in which it had been embedded.

"It is an arrow of the Skraelings," he answered. "Of that there is no doubt. My guess is that it was put here as a message to you to turn back."

Swain's jaw tightened.

"Turn back because of an arrow in the earth? They do not know me, Kolbiorn!"

"It is not my counsel to turn back," replied Kolbiorn. "But I do say that it is as good as a declaration of war."

"Let it be," said Swain. "If they fight me, they must be fighting Olvir. Well, we will not slight their warning. We have been cautious. We will be more cautious."

That night when they camped he sent patrols of men in every direction to examine their surroundings and look for enemies, but with instructions not to venture out of earshot of the ludr-horn which was blown in the clearing every few moments. The patrols returned at dusk without having seen a trace of men of any kind, and the spell of the forest settled more heavily on the camp than it had the night before. Men huddled in their cloaks around the fires; there was no talking and jesting.

So presently Armod went to where Swain was engaged in low-voiced conversation with Erik and Kolbiorn.

"Here is no healthy spirit, Swain," said the skald. "Let me rouse the carls or their blood will be turning to water."

"They will be all right so soon as a blow is struck," answered Swain. "It is the waiting which tries men."

"Nevertheless, I advise that you do as Armod suggests," struck in Erik. "Cheerful men fight better than gloomy men."

"I have no objection," said Swain.

With that Armod returned to the fires, and began to sing Sigvat Olaf's skald's song of "The Travelers to the East:"

> A hundred miles through Eida wood,
> And devil an alehouse, bad or good—
> A hundred miles, and tree and sky
> Were all that met the weary eye.
> With many a grumble, many a groan,
> A hundred miles we trudged right on;
> And every king's man of us bore
> On each foot-sole a bleeding sore.

The men laughed because of the song's aptness to their own case, and Oddi led a round of applause. Armod was beginning the second stanza when "*sss-ssswhissh*" an arrow hissed across the clearing and rapped on the skald's mail.

Men tumbled right and left. Archers snatched their bows, and loosed haphazard into the trees. Spearmen cast their weapons at the shadows. The confusion was subdued only when Swain waded into their midst, sword in hand.

"Quench those fires," he shouted. "Hold your arrows, bowmen! Fools, would you cast your spears blindly into an enemy's hands? Hug the ground and bide the attack. They cannot harm you."

The danger acted like a draught of heady mead upon all, and scores shouted to be led into the wood; but Swain refused.

"If it was a Skraeling's arrow——"

"It was," answered Armod. "Own brother to that we found in the trail."

"Then be sure what they seek is to lure us after them in disorder in the darkness," replied Swain. "Our strength is in holding together. Shield to shield they cannot overcome us. Alone and blind we can do less than they."

"Well-said," cried Kolbiorn. "But if only the one arrow was fired it must have been the act of some lone warrior, who crept close to spy upon us."

"Very likely," agreed Swain. "Time will show."

They waited under arms a long time. Then Swain bade half of them sleep, and the rest keep watch. And so they took turns during the night, but Swain never closed his eyes. With Kolbiorn and Erik he crouched in a pool of shadows beneath a felled tree, and swept the circuit of the clearing with hot, eager eyes. Yet when morning came he was up without a trace of fatigue, and jeered his companions for their weariness.

"Ho, Kolbiorn, you have been too long a trader; it was time you stiffened your backbone. What, little man, you grow old! Gods pity the two of you. You should have a padded bench in a warm skalli, with the ale-barrel at hand and the cross-bench fillies to wait on you."

He pretended to limp on his spear as though it was a crutch.

"*Hoop! Hut-a-tut!* My poor back! Ah, when I was young!"

Erik straddled his bow-legs and regarded his chief with amazement.

"When Swain jests there is death on the wind, Kolbiorn," declared the Icelander. "Look to your mail."

XII

THAT day they came upon a trace of Olvir's handiwork, a village of the Skraelings which had been laid in ashes, and all about the clearing were scattered the gnawed bodies and skeletons of the red folk, mostly women and children. And beyond this clearing they found two bodies in Norse armor beside the path, each with the scalp slashed from the skull. They became conscious, too, that there were other men abroad in the forest. The peculiar signal-cries of the Skraelings resounded amongst the trees on every side, and once during the noon halt a half-dozen arrows slipped out of the shadows, wounding two men slightly.

There was an instant rush at the enemy, and all Swain's authority could not restrain the Orkneymen; but they had their lesson when a death-scream pierced the excited yelling, and the foremost stumbled upon the bleeding corpse of one of their comrades, Freyvid Hunde of Westrey. They did not see so much as the shadow of the Skraeling who had slain him, and after Swain finally had herded all back into the path they listened humbly to the tongue-lashing he gave them.

But Swain had vengeance for Freyvid's death, for that night he and Kolbiorn hid in a thicket outside the camp, and as three of the Skraelings stole by to observe what the Orkneyfolk did they leaped upon them and slew one before he could flee. They had a peaceful night thereafter, save for the continual howling by which the red folk communicated one with another.

The next day the path emerged suddenly from the forest into a vast natural meadow, which it crossed half-way, then trended north, following a little river. But Olvir plainly had not turned with the Skraelings' path. For a few ells his heavy-footed carls had stayed in the shallow groove, but in the midst of the meadow they had climbed out of it, crumbling its earthen wall, and tramped straight across to the meadow's western rim, where the Norse axes had hacked a gap in the underbrush and scarred the trees in evident intent to mark the way for the outlaws' return.

"From now on Olvir must make his own path, step by step," said Kolbiorn, pointing to the blazes on the tree-trunks and the severed vines and bushes. "We shall soon be up with him."

Swain's brooding eyes gazed down the forest aisles where the green light danced and shifted on the leaf-mould.

"I smell blood," he answered. "Let us get forward."

That night they were attacked as they squatted around their cooking-fires. Lithe figures darted in and out of the trees, shrieking like Loki's fiends, and the first rush overran the meager clearing in which they lay. Three men were slain by arrows, and four more by blows of war-clubs and stone hatchets, all before the Orkneymen had opportunity to form the shield-wall. And when the shields were joined and they advanced to attack their foes the Skraelings disappeared as completely as though they were disembodied. One moment the faint light shone upon their naked, bounding shapes; the next the only evidence of them was a faint whooping in the distance.

The Orkneymen had done more than

take even toll, for eleven of the red folk lay dead in the clearing, yet Swain was far from satisfied.

"It was my thought that the Skraelings would aid us by weeding Olvir's array," he said. "But they do greater scathe to us than to him."

Nor was he heartened when the following day's march revealed no less than twelve bodies in armor at intervals along the path.

"Ha, Swain," quoth Kolbiorn, "it seems, after all, that it is Olvir who has suffered the sorest scathe."

"It is well-said that he is a wise traveler who acclaims his journey's end when the road is behind him," rejoined Swain.

And indeed, the Skraelings attempted that afternoon such an attack as must have been launched against Olvir, an abrupt rush in strength from either side through the trees, preceded by a hail of arrows; but this time Swain gave them a stark reception. Marching two-and-two, it was the work of a second for his folk to throw themselves back to back, with shields dressed, and in this posture it was impossible for the red people to harm them, short of attempting to drag them from their ranks.

A few stone hatchets clattered on shields and helms, two or three carls were wounded in arm or leg by the arrow flights, and then the Skraelings melted away as they had after the night attack. Red shadows flitted betwixt the tree-trunks; guttural voices whooped and howled; and the forest became silent again. Swain's men bound up their wounds and marched on.

This day they passed two of Olvir's camping-places, proving how much faster they were able to move than the men they pursued, who perforce must whittle themselves a path through the forest at every step of the way. And pressing on with undiminished determination, nightfall fetched them to a second Skraeling village which Olvir had destroyed with the grim thoroughness that had made his name feared on every viking-haunted coast from Bretland to Serkland on the other side of the world.

"Raven and wolf can never complain of Olvir," said Erik, prodding with his spear at the charred bones beneath what had been a long bark house. "Wherever he goes he feeds them well."

"Yes," answered Kolbiorn, "and wherever he goes he is hated."

"What matters that?" asked Swain bruskly.

"Why, hatred is a fire that burns all it touches," returned Kolbiorn.

"So it burns Olvir I care not how it rages," said Swain.

That night they heard the Skraelings calling only occasionally, and the next day they marched entirely undisturbed, without sight or sound of the red folk. The country they were now in was quite high, with hills that rolled to the uttermost horizon. Sometimes the path that Olvir had cleared followed the valleys, and again it would climb to the hilltops. The undergrowth became sparser, and they made even better time than the previous day again passing two of Olvir's camp-sites before dusk overtook them.

They camped on a bare summit, practically in the open, with more of a feeling of safety than they had yet known. The air was very crisp, and they were glad to escape the heat of the river bottoms that had made them sweat under their armor. The sky overhead was a purple vault decked with silver stars. The camp-fires were yellow blotches in the darkness, and the warmth was good. For the first time men sat in idle groups and talked as carefree as though they were braced on the rowing-benches with a fair wind working for them. The two skalds sang and told sagas. All were happy, except Swain, who sat by himself, moody and sullen, honing a sharper edge on his sword Hausakliufr—Skull-splitter.

This was the sixth night since they had left *Far-traveler* on the shore of the Great River. It was notable in their memories afterward because they heard naught of the Skraelings. There was such a silence as if no other living things remained in the land.

XIII

FROM the height on which they had camped the Orkneyfolk followed Olvir's path down-hill and across a valley and over another ridge, thick with pine trees. Noontide found them on the far side of the ridge, and they were not sorry to rest beside a natural spring that bubbled up from beneath a mossy boulder.

"Does it seem strange to you, Swain, that even the birds and the beasts are still today?" asked Erik, tearing at a meaty bone as they squatted on the carpet of pine-needles.

Kolbiorn looked up quickly.

"So you noticed it, Erik," he exclaimed. "I wondered if my imagination was playing tricks with me. Never have I heard such a silence in any forest on the Skraelings' Coast."

Swain stooped over to scoop a mouthful of water.

"Bah!" he snorted, sitting up. "If the wild things know that we are here is it not their instinct to flee our neighborhood?"

"Perhaps," admitted Erik doubtfully. "But the Skraelings, too——"

"We have trounced them sufficiently. They perceive that if they leave us to ourselves we do not harm them."

"That is not their habit," denied Kolbiorn. "More especially, those we have encountered. All men say that they are bitter enemies to——"

"Hark!" snapped Erik.

Faint, but distinctly audible, a rumbling blast drifted toward them on the wings of the breeze that blew out of the west. The three looked at each other, startled, wondering. All the Orkneyfolk dropped their food or the weapons they were polishing, and stared into each other's faces. For any man of the North must recognize that sound. They had heard it all their lives, heard it from tossing fishing-boats that blindly sought a haven through fog and mist, heard it on the hillsides in Caithness when the reindeer hunt was on, heard it from longship to longship in the midst of the fighting: the hoarse, growling voice of the ludr-horn.

As they listened, it sounded again.

"It is he!" cried Swain. "Up, carls! Olvir is within reach."

"Out, swords!" came the answering roar. "Forward, Swain's men!"

The column was formed, two-and-two, and away they trotted along the blazed path, feet going "*pad-pad*" in unison, mail jingling, shields clashing.

On this side of the ridge was a considerable valley, and so soon as Olvir had gained its floor he had taken advantage of one of the Skraelings' paths which ran lengthwise of it to facilitate his own progess. The foliage on either side of the slot had been lopped away by his carls in passing, exactly as in the case of the first path they had followed from the shore of the Great River, but in this region of pine-trees the underbrush was not so dense as it had been beyond the ridge. The forest was like an enormous building, roofed and hung with swaying green tapestries and dotted with round, pitchy roof-posts.

Swain and Kolbiorn, leading the column, could see ahead and either side for two arrow-flights, and sometimes more.

It was Swain who first saw the glint of mail in front, and shouted a warning. But it was Kolbiorn who halted him as he was about to throw the carls into the shieldwall across the path.

"That is not a live man, Swain. He does not move."

Swain peered closer under a shading palm, for the quirky light, tinged green in its passage through the rustling foliage, played odd tricks with vision.

"He stands motionless," agreed Swain presently. "But——"

"There is another to his right," said Oddi.

"Yes, and I see two more over here to the left," added Armod.

"Humph," said Swain. "Dead or living, they can not pin us here, and if we know where they are—On! On!"

They proceeded cautiously, but they were not long in doubt regarding the men they had glimpsed so uncannily. The path emerged into a tiny glade in the forest, an empty expanse, dotted with big rocks. Directly opposite them five Norsemen were bound to the trunks of five giant pines, and each of the five was a bristle of arrows in every part of his body that was not covered with steel.

"Those carls are not long dead," proclaimed Kolbiorn.

"You say truth," assented Swain, crossing to the nearest body.

He fingered hand and face, on which the blood from the scalp wound was still fresh.

"They are not cold," he said.

His blue eyes flashed with satisfaction.

"Here has been ill fortune for Olvir. Well, it is all grist to our mill. Let the Skraelings slay his folk, so they leave him to me."

But Kolbiorn looked worried, and the rest of the Orkneyfolk, filing into the glade, were shaken by the horror of the scene, the five tortured bodies, faces knotted in agony, the jade-green wall of the pines, the murmurous whisper of the breeze overhead.

"I do not like this, Swain," said Kolbiorn. "Here we have gone these last two days with never a sight or sound of the red people

—and yet we find traces of them in our path, and more recent than is pleasant."

"What would you have?" returned Swain, shrugging his shoulders. "It is Olvir's folk they have slain, not——"

"What do they care whether they slay Olvir's folk or us? It is true Olvir has ravaged them, and we have not; but will that mean aught to them? I say no. They will consider us so many allies of his."

"Talking will not mend matters," rejoined Swain shortly. "We must go backward or forward. And I do not think it is your idea that we should turn back."

"It is not," said Kolbiorn as shortly.

Like all men, he accepted much from Swain that he would not have tolerated at the hands of another, but there were limits to his patience.

"I mean simply that you are foolish to reckon the Skraelings foes to Olvir, and not to us."

"Wise or foolish, I can not mend what has happened or forecast what is to come," answered Swain more gently. "I am no forelooker, Kolbiorn, but I can tell this: That when the shields crash your blade will be amongst the reddest."

"Let us at the least be careful," urged Kolbiorn.

"That is good sense, and I am at one with you there."

They reformed the column, and continued along the groove of the path, every man vigilant against attack from any quarter and enemies white or red. But for some time all they saw were trees and dead men. It was evident that Olvir or some of his folk had had a running fight with the Skraelings that very morning, for at intervals of a few bow-shots they came upon single corpses or bodies by twos and threes, in all, nine men—and every one bore the mutilation the Orkneymen had come to expect: The raw circle atop the skull where the scalp had been torn loose.

The sun was half-way down the western sky when they opened a clearing larger than any they had yet traversed. Around the edges of the forest were gardens, and in the middle was a village of the bark huts in which the Skraelings dwelt. No harm had been done to these structures, and the smoke of cooking fires lifted lazily above them. There was a perceptible movement, a bustling back and forth; but it was not of naked, red Skraelings. No, Swain and his men could see plainly the flash and twinkle of steel.

Swain's features were diabolical in their concentration of hatred as he ordered his folk under cover of the trees.

"Keep shield-to-shield, no matter what happens," he instructed. "If you must die, die in ranks. Unstring your bows, archers; we fight with point and edge today. No prisoners, and if any man save me slays Olvir, that man will I slay.

"Forward!"

A ludr-horn snarled harshly as the Orkneymen burst from the forest, and the Norsemen in the village could be seen running to and fro; but they did not fall into a panic. Swain, at the point of the V-shaped wedge in which his men were formed, had covered only a third of the distance between trees and village when Olvir's shieldwall surged out to meet him. The outlaws were not so numerous now as Swain's folk, but any warrior could have recognized their quality by the smart alertness with which they advanced, every man in step, shield dressed to shield, Olvir, himself, inside the point of the wedge.

For there was this difference in the fighting methods of Swain and Olvir, a difference as radical as any which marked their physical appearances and ways of life; where Swain fought always in the forefront of battle, and yielded place to no man, Olvir lurked behind the shieldwall, quick to leap out and strike shrewd blows at need, but never risking himself more than occasion required. He was no coward. Indeed, it was said often that after Swain he was the greatest man of his hands in the North, and the most feared, of those who held no title. And many skalds have sung that if he had turned his abilities to good purpose, instead of making of himself an outlaw and a scourge for all folk who bided within the law, he might have become as great and powerful as Swain.

Yet be this however it may, nonetheless it is true that he would never risk himself as Swain was wont to do, particularly when he was pitched against Swain. Many was the time in the years of their feud when they fought, and Swain would challenge Olvir to stand forth of his men and settle their quarrel personally; but Olvir would not, and it was in part for this reason that Swain would not give quarter to Olvir's men.

Swain had so arranged his line that he

was to command the center, with Armod and Oddi on either side of him, while Erik was to lead the left and Kolbiorn the right; and as soon as he perceived that Olvir was coming to meet him he called to the chiefs to bid them slacken pace, as it was no part of his plan to fling blown men at enemies who were fresh. So the two shieldwalls approached each other warily, both sides on the watch for some trick or device.

"Stand out, Olvir," Swain shouted the instant they were within hearing, for he could see Olvir's swart visage and black spade beard above the joined shields.

Olvir was not a small man or short in stature, but he was so broad across the shoulders and he had such long arms that he seemed almost a dwarf. His face was so hideous that women were said to faint at the sight of him, and whether this be true or not, it is certain he was very ugly, and to natural repulsiveness was added the stamp of a life which had practised joyfully every kind of evil and exulted in causing pain and suffering.

"Ho, Swain," he retorted now. "I see that I boasted without warrant when I said that I had found a land beyond your ken. I am grieved that I must slay you so far from home; but I will promise to carry your head to Bergen and put it on a stake in front of Unna's Tavern. Yes, and after that, I think, I will sail to the Orkneyar and burn your stead at Gairsey, and build me a pile of dead for your head to sleep on."

"Talking is not slaying," answered Swain. "You have not answered me."

"All in good time," jeered Olvir. "But tell me, first: Was it you who slew Dag and his party? When they did not return we blew the horn, and I began to think the Skraelings were upon us again."

"The Skraelings you must thank," returned Swain. "I, too, owe them somewhat, seeing that they made my task the easier."

"That is to be proved," said Olvir. "Ho, Ulf, I shall have a bone to pick with you after we have fed the wolves with these folk. You have led me on a fool's errand into a land where death lurks in every tree."

Ulf Liod's son's pig eyes scowled furtively across his shield on Olvir's left-hand.

"How was I to know Swain would follow us where no Norseman had been before?" he growled.

"You did not know Swain," answered Olvir. "But I blame you not for that, but for your tale of gold in a country fit for Lap sorcerers and naught else. Ho, Swain, shall we take a moment, you and I, before the shields crash, to hew down this Ulf, who——"

"Charge, Swain's men!" rasped Swain behind his shield.

But if he thought to surprize Olvir he was disappointed; the outlaw's line sprang forward one moment after his own: and the two V's smashed together with equal impact.

Swain and his two skalds slew the men in front of Olvir and on each side of him, and for a moment Olvir was left unprotected, and must leap and dodge and fend and strike with the diligence of four warriors to ward off the blows that rained upon him. Yet he succeeded; his line was restored, and he retired behind its shelter to race up and down the length of it, aiding a man who was beaten to the knee, running in where a gap yawned, encouraging, cursing, retreating, advancing.

Kolbiorn slew Ulf at the first encounter, but otherwise the struggle seemed even, for Swain's slight superiority in numbers was offset by the greater freshness of Olvir's folk, who, moreover, fought with the berserk courage of despair. Outlaws to a man, hopeless of mercy if the issue went against them, they could be depended upon to fight as long as they had legs to stand on or arms whole to wield their weapons.

Hew and thrust, hew and thrust, the two lines hacked away. One retreated, the other advanced. Then back again. Fortune swayed this way, that way. The ranks shook themselves free of the dead, and sloshed over the bloody pools that formed on the ground. Wounded men clinched teeth on groans, and crawled to finish an enemy in worse case.

But presently the see-saw of fortune was suspended. The two lines swayed locked in the embrace of annihilation. Toe to toe, they battered each other across cracked and riven shields. The shouting became low-voiced snarls and grunts. Mail shirts were split, helms dented, swords and axes dripped redly. It was more than human endurance could bear.

Olvir's line sagged back, held, sagged back, advanced a step by a mighty effort, then back again, back, back!

"At last!" croaked Swain, and with his skalds he threw himself at the barrier of flesh and steel that still protected Olvir.

He cut the leg off the first man who opposed him, and split the second from shoulder to waist, so deep a wound that Hausaliufr was pinched between spine and ribs, and in the time required to wrench it loose, Olvir stepped out of reach. But Swain refused to be discouraged. His hour was at hand, the moment he had struggled years to attain; and he leaped through the gap in the opposing ranks, heedless of what went on elsewhere in the field.

He did not hear the sudden shout of dismay from Erik, the babble of fear and surprize from Olvir's men who surrounded him. His ears ignored the significance of the hideous uproar which quenched the clamor of the Northmen's strife, He did not realize what had happened until he came face to face with Olvir again, and his enemy shouted above the din:

"Are you a fool, Swain? What does our quarrel signify now? It is not your life or mine, but the lives of all our men we lose if we do not make a shield-ring. I tell you all the fiends from hell are unleashed against us!"

Hausakliufr was raised to strike, Swain's eyes were twin pools of icy fire, every muscle was tense with the flood of hate that poured through his limbs—and the sword sank harmless by his side.

Across Olvir's shoulder he had seen one billow of the red horde that was hiving from the trees.

The Skraelings! They were streaming into the clearing by thousands. Some of them already had gained the village in the rear of Olvir's men. Others were swarming behind Swain's shieldwall that had been arrested in the full tide of victory.

The Norsemen had ceased their fighting, and stood together in groups of friends and foes, dazed by this turn in the day's fortunes. Kolbiorn ran up to Swain as he watched, regardless of Olvir.

"Quick, Swain! Bid them make a shield-ring. See! The sunset is upon us. If the red folk catch us in the open after dusk not one of us will live to morning."

Swain's eyes bored into Olvir's.

"I cannot trust you, on oath or on honor," he said. "But if we are to live to fight out this quarrel we must cast our fortunes in common. Call your men to us!"

"Wise counsel," approved Olvir. "This is no day for our enmity, Swain. As to trusting——"

"Every moment wasted now means a Norseman's life," cut in Kolbiorn.

Olvir raised his bull's voice in a mighty roar:

"To me, Olvir's men! We stand with Swain's folk in this fight. Shield-ring, carls, shield-ring!"

Swain echoed him.

"Shield to shield, Orkneymen! Swain's men and Olvir's men! Norsemen all, carls! The war-birds are hungry."

The answering shout stayed the Skraelings' rush.

"Skoal, Norsemen, skoal! Red edges, carls!"

One hundred and fifty men gathered in a solid clump of steel, Olvir's viking outlaws, natives of every Northern land, and Swain's Orkneyfolk, ranked helter-skelter, wherever they happened to be.

The Skraelings set up a shrill yelping, as if to encourage themselves, and pounced like an army of wildcats, bounding and leaping to the attack. They covered the surface of the clearing, a jostling, undisciplined mass, waving weapons and making faces. A rank, kennel smell smote the Norsemen's noses.

"*Phaugh!*" exclaimed Erik, settling himself by one of Olvir's vikings. "They stink like the beast-cages under the hippodrome of the Greek emperor in Mikligard."

"So you were there, little man!" cried the viking, a tall Dane. "I do not remember you."

"Little man, yourself!" retorted Erik. "It is to be seen that you have never come opposite me or within eyesight, indeed, before this—or you would not be here."

"I will wager arm-rings with you on the first kill," proffered the Dane good-humoredly.

"Done!" snapped Erik.

Swish! went the Dane's sword. *Glup!* as Erik's ax pecked home through a feathered head.

"Head off and head ruined, they died alike," remarked the Dane, slashing at another foe. "On the day's bag, little man, eh?"

"On the day's bag or your life's bag, carl!" rejoined Erik. "Ha, do that!"

He had slain two with the one stroke, forehand and backhand, in the stinking press of naked bodies which, in the short time, had risen high enough to jam against the shield wall.

XIV

THE red waves lapped the shield wall, and broke. And under the Norsemen's ruddied blades a second wall began to climb upward. Knee-high the corpses piled, thigh-high and above the waist, and in places the defenders must push away the bodies that clogged their movements.

The valor of the wild folk could not support the toll that was reaped by ax and sword, and as the twilight deepened the Skraelings drew off from the terrible ring, howling and shrieking their hate, brandishing rude stone weapons, beaten but not dismayed.

Shout for shout the Norsemen answered, and Armod and Oddi raised cracked voices in celebration of the deeds they had witnessed. It was of this fight that Armod told in his "Song of The Two Enemies," and Oddi made a lay he called "Swain's Harvest." And as they sang the ring-keepers beat an accompaniment upon their shields until Swain cried above the din—

"How many of us have the Valkyrs won?"

They counted helms on the ground, and reckoned thirteen men slain and a few wounded.

"We have done well," said Swain. "But I think this is not the end of our efforts."

"No, no," agreed Olvir, wiping his sword on his beard. "And it is my counsel that we return to the houses yonder, where we shall have shelter from the arrow-hail."

Both Kolbiorn and Erik approved this advice, and they disencumbered themselves from the circle of the dead and marched in column through the dusk into the village, driving before them a handful of the Skraelings, who had lingered there after the collapse of the attack.

Here were food and water in plenty, and both parties lost no time in refreshing themselves and binding up such wounds as were left from the two frays. But they had scant opportunity for rest, for as soon as darkness came the Skraelings stole up close to the village and shot their arrows into the houses, and there were continual alarms and outcries.

Yet the Norsemen were so weary from the slaughter that they must have sleep, and Swain and Olvir concerted that half of each party should stand watch the while the remainder slept; and so they passed the night until nigh the end of the second watch, when the Skraelings loosed a cloud of fire arrows into the village and attacked in masses as dense as those they had hurled against the shieldring.

That was a fight! Three of the bark houses flamed up, and the lurid glare played hide-and-seek with the shifting fortunes of Skraelings and Norsemen. Here was no opportunity to form the shield-ring again. The area to be defended was too great, and the best that could be done was to divide into four equal bands, led by Swain, Olvir, Kolbiorn and Erik. Arrayed in this order they sallied out to meet the assault, fighting in square formation, so that they could turn in any direction, or all facing outward, withstand a battering from every side.

Grimly silent were the Norsemen; they needed their breath for the work they had to do. The Skraelings, after their own fashion, screeched and howled continuously, screeching in triumph whenever a mailed body collapsed beneath a shower of blows, howling their affliction as the long swords and the broad-bladed axes sheared home.

The dawn saw them still at it, four little clumps of men that wove in and out of the red mass, wellnigh indistinguishable from it now because the Norsemen were dyed with gore from helm to buskin. Only an occasional twinkle of steel revealed their identity.

Their arms ached from the weapon-play, and Swain perceived that they must strike some mighty blow to shake off their persistent enemies. It seemed that the Skraelings were weary of life or else convinced that life was no longer worth while if it must be lived under the menace of such a ravisher as Olvir. For the red folk threw themselves upon the Norsemen's steel with a ferocity which sought only to achieve an enemy's death, and already they had slain a fifth of Swain's and Olvir's men.

"We must come together, all of us," Swain panted to his following. "Together we may prevail, but in four parts as we are they will cut us down, one by one."

So he drove headlong into the Skraelings masses, and gradually fought his way to Olvir's side. The two enemies combined forces, bored into the red whirlpool again, and picked up, first, Erik, and last, Kolbiorn. But there were now only five-score men in mail, and despite the hundreds of dead Skraelings the red people outnumbered them twenty to one. They could not

slay enough of their enemies to offset their own losses.

"All the folk of the Skraelings' Coast are upon us," gasped Kolbiorn, when the others reached him. "I think we can do no more than sell our lives dearly, Swain."

"Not so," grunted Olvir, eyes like coals in the red-splashed mask of his awful face. "We must trick them. I have a plan. Back to the village, carls! Open out, open out! Flee in disorder as if we were beaten—in amongst the huts."

They obeyed him because no man knew what else to do, and so desperate was their plight that anything was worth the risking. One final burst of energy to work loose of the Skraelings who beset them, and they abandoned their ranks and pelted across the clearing; but in their flight there was more of craft than appeared on the surface, as those Skraelings discovered who thought to run in and butcher the outermost fugitives.

As they reached the first of the houses, Olvir snatched a brand from a smoldering fire and kindled the dry bark walls and grass-strewn floor.

"Burn all on this side," he shouted to Swain.

A barrier of flame shot up across the line of the Norsemen's retreat, and their pursuers halted involuntarily. Dense clouds of smoke bellied and distended over the village. The Skraelings who had worked around the rearmost houses, intending to come at the Norsemen as they fled out into the open, saw only this blanket of smoke; but they plunged into it recklessly, hungry for the victory they believed to be in their grasp.

Instead of victory they encountered a grey line of armored specters, instinct with a new determination, moving with the supple precision which had carried the Norsemen to success in combat with every race the world wide. Wheeling right and left, the steel line deftly split the red attack in halves, and profiting by the unexpectedness of the maneuver, pounded these halves into fragments, which were rent into individual groups and scattered under the compulsion of a fear which credited the bearded white men with supernatural powers.

The Skraelings ran for the forest, all hope of victory forgotten; and at Olvir's command, the Norsemen promptly countermarched and tramped back into the smoke-draped village.

"We must take the red swine on the far side," he yelled. "Through the fire, carls! A race, Swain! Who passes first?"

The whole eastern half of the village was in flames now, but the intervals between the huts were passable, and for these the Norsemen made. Olvir caught a blazing end-post from the wreck of one structure he passed, and others followed his example. The first the Skraelings eastward of the village knew, a singed wedge of steel-clad vikings lurched out of the fire-swept area and attacked them with burning torches in one hand and dripping blades in the other.

Blind terror seized the red people. These awful figures could not be human. Their bodies were cased in stone shells, their faces were covered with hair, they were giants in stature, they were white of skin, they passed unharmed through fire. And in the swirling smoke the numbers of the Norsemen seemed to have increased. In an instant the cry was born that their dead had come to life; yes, that the dead red men had been raised, up into white stone giants.

No man lifted an arm to defend himself. Those who could escape cast away their weapons and ran for the trees. Those who could not huddled beneath the blow, utterly hopeless. The Norsemen slew until the clearing was empty, and afar in the forest they heard the crashing of boughs and underbrush as the surviving Skraelings fled with the blindness of despair.

"The Hewing of the Skraelings" men called this fight in after years. It became famous for that fewer men slew more men than in any other fight that was remembered in the North countries.

XV

OLVIR swaggered up to where Swain sat on a tree-stump, binding a gash in his shield-arm.

"We fight well together, it seems," said the Roisterer, grinning.

Swain eyed him coolly.

"I have never been one to deny that you were a good warrior—when you would fight."

"Ho," jeered Olvir. "When I would fight! I fight when I am ready, Swain, not when you or any other desires."

Now, at this Swain arose, and his sword was in his hand.

"Be ready," he snarled. "We have put off our quarrel too long to suit me."

Whether Olvir had been prepared for this or not, he backed away a pace or two, with his red ax lifted on guard.

"Your blood still runs hot," he gibed. "Many men would have had their fill of slaughter after this day, but your hunger is unappeased."

"My hunger will be unappeased until I slay you," returned Swain.

"Then shall you die hungry," mocked Olvir.

Swain's sword sang in the air as he sprang forward, and again Olvir retired.

But before their weapons clashed Kolbiorn and Erik ran up, followed by all the Norsemen, Olvir's carls as well as the Orkney folk.

"You are mad, the two of you!" cried Kolbiorn. "What? With the Skraelings scarce fled, you go to fighting one another as though there was naught else to concern you!"

"Well is it said that 'the hasty striker loses his head,'" said Erik. "If you two chiefs fall out, then must the rest of us start the sword music. And how do we know that the red people will not return while we are in the midst of it?"

"This land is not wide enough for Olvir and me to dwell in it in peace," answered Swain.

"Ha, we have one point in common!" exclaimed Olvir. "That is my thought, Swain."

And certain of his vikings thronged up to his back, with the blood-lust hot in their eyes.

"They are more than we," cried the Dane who had bickered with Erik. "But we are the better men, Olvir."

Clink of steel answered as the Orkney-folk lined together.

"Make an end, Swain," shouted one of them. And others called—

"We have always had the backs of Olvir's men."

"It is madness," reiterated Kolbiorn. "The Skraelings are a wily folk. If they discover us fighting amongst ourselves, they will return and slay us, every one.

"And bethink you," added Erik, "whoever wins our bout, it is scarce likely that many of his men will outlive the beaten side, and the Skraelings will destroy them in the forest as they march to the ships."

"It is all one to me," snarled Swain. "If I may slay Olvir I shall die content. I have sons to carry on my name."

But Olvir was not so ready for the fray, and he perceived that the most of the carls on both sides felt as he did. So he cast his lot with the majority.

"It is foolish for men of our reputations to fight when to do so would mean only that no matter who won, all of us must perish, and the winners at the hands of the red people," he said. "No man has the right to call me coward or niddering. I am like Swain in that I can say without fear whether I will fight or not——"

"I have never said I would not fight you at any time or place," barked Swain.

"No, then, Swain, I say in your teeth that is not so, for no longer ago than yesterday——"

Swain started to leap at Olvir, but Kolbiorn and Erik caught his arms and besought him not to strike.

"What he says is true, Swain," said Erik.

"This quarrel will benefit no man, except the red people," protested Kolbiorn. "Be reasonable, Swain. I am willing to die if you insist, but it is my belief that the gain in view is not worth the price to be paid for it."

"Then do you see to it that Olvir holds his tongue," gritted Swain. "He is one who shall not taunt me."

"I did not taunt you," denied Olvir. "I but said that we had concluded a truce yesterday for reasons that shed no discredit upon either of us. You will admit that, will you not?"

"I will," said Swain.

"Let us wait to settle this issue until we have regained the Great River," suggested Erik. "Then those who live out the fray can take ship and escape and carry home the tidings."

"I will consent to that," answered Swain. "If Olvir will agree."

"If you are there you shall feel the edge of Bonebreaker," rejoined Olvir, thumbing the blade of his great ax. "It is a promise."

"*Humph*," said Swain. "That is to be seen. I do not trust you in any matter, least of all in your promise that you will be the bane of me."

And at this men laughed, and a better humor prevailed; but many ugly looks were interchanged between the carls of the two parties, and Erik and the Dane who had bet with him had a disagreement as to which had slain the most Skraelings. The end of it was that Swain and Olvir came between the pair, and separated them.

"I see plainly," said Olvir, his wolf's grin parting the black brush of his beard that was still clotted with the blood of those Bonebreaker had slain, "that our folk can be kept peaceful only when they have fighting to do. Therefore it is my counsel, Swain, that we separate them."

"I am satisfied," returned Swain briefly. "Outlaw and inlaw can never agree."

The conclusion was that they divided what remained of the village between the two parties. Four-score and fourteen men remained alive, and of these fifty were Swain's and forty-four Olvir's. And when they had settled upon the huts and the ground which each side was to occupy and guard they posted sentries and took their rest, for all were exhausted by the toil and peril of the past two days.

So passed the daylight hours, and on the verge of dusk, at Kolbiorn's suggestion, they dispatched two parties to scour the woods nearby for traces of the Skraelings. Both parties reported that they had seen or heard naught save the yelping of the wolves which were coming in packs to feast on the slain in the clearing. But Kolbiorn said, and in this all agreed, that they would be foolish, after all that had gone before, to take it for granted that they were free of the red people.

"It is their chief strength in fighting," he said, "that they move with such swiftness and secrecy that they are upon you before you have heard the patter of their feet. The best reason for us to be careful tonight is that they are not to be discovered. For that means that we do not know where they are."

"True," acknowledged Swain. "But if we find the forest clear of them in the morning, let us retire to the Great River, and settle what we came hither to accomplish."

"*Humph*," grunted Olvir, with an evil grimace. "What you came hither to accomplish and what I seek are two different things. But I will not dispute with you about it. Perhaps sleep will bring both of us better counsel."

The night was dark and sultry, with a heavy stacking of clouds in the west, whence rumbled sonorous blasts of thunder —as if in Jotunheim the giants battled in mighty mimicry of the men of earth. Moon and stars vanished in the seething wrack; for a while a light rain fell. And mingled with the crash of the thunder and the soft, insistent voice of the rain was the vicious snarling and hissing of the wolves and cat-beasts that prowled the charnel-heaped clearing, disputing the feast the Norsemen had spread for them.

Swain took turns with Erik and Kolbiorn in making the rounds of their guards, but all kept away from the section of the village allotted to Olvir's folk. As Erik grimly said—

"In the dark who can blame a carl who drops an ax on white man instead of red?"

But towards morning Erik, himself, whose watch it was, came to the hut in which Swain lay, and roused the chief.

"There are wolves in Olvir's half of the stead, Swain," said the Icelander without preface.

"And what of that?" answered Swain, yawning. "I hear them all around us, too."

"But you do not hear them in our midst," replied Erik. "It was I who said that an excuse could be found for mistaking white man for red in the dark, but I believe the hour has come for me to eat my words and try if the Gods intend me to live."

"*Humph*," growled Swain in his dour way. "You make much out of little. It is probable that Olvir's carls are asleep, and the wolves——"

"Olvir would have died under your sword years past if he had not trained his men to keep awake when he bade them," rapped Erik.

"True talk," admitted Swain. "Well, I will go with you, little man. If there is trouble in the night, I care not how soon it comes."

They waked Kolbiorn, and the three of them stole cautiously into the group of huts which had been set aside for the outlaw vikings.

"Olvir will suspect that we plan treachery," said Swain when they were so far. "I am not of a mind to give him an excuse for a blind struggle in which friend would hew friend. Call out to him, Kolbiorn."

So Kolbiorn hailed Olvir. But there was no answer. Then Erik tried.

"Ho, carls, do you all sleep?"

And finally Swain shouted aloud, waking his own folk who still slumbered:

"Your folk are niddering, Olvir. There is not one on watch. Rouse, man, rouse!"

Still there was no answer.

"I do not like this," said Kolbiorn gravely. "It has an ill look."

Silent, Swain led the way to the nearest hut, and felt his way inside with drawn sword. It was empty.

"Make a light," he ordered.

Erik clicked flint and steel, and kindled a pine torch. The light revealed four bare walls. No more.

"They must be creeping upon our folk, intending to cut our throats as we sleep," exclaimed Kolbiorn.

"If such was their plan we would have been dead by now," replied Swain harshly. "You talk nonsense. I tell you Olvir has fled."

Erik nodded assent.

"It is so, Swain."

They searched swiftly through all the huts that Olvir had occupied. There was not a trace remaining of the outlaws. They were gone. Only a pair of wolves and a solitary wild cat skulked from the light of Erik's torch.

Swain gritted his teeth with rage.

"Gods, but I should have known! Fool that I was! To trust Olvir unwatched a—Muster the men, Erik! Haste, little man, haste! At the least, we know the path he took, and he cannot have a long start on us."

"The Skraelings—" Kolbiorn started to say as Erik sped to obey.

"I care not for the Skraelings! I would as soon they slew me, if they slay Olvir. Oh, I have been a fool, a lack-wit! Better that we had all perished, and rid the world of the scoundrel!"

Kolbiorn shook his head.

"For what has happened you need not reproach yourself, Swain," declared the Hrossey man. "You have acted wisely, as becomes a prudent chief, and if Olvir has eluded you for the time being it was by the practise of a guile which few men could match. But do not be discouraged. We may yet overtake him. It is a long journey from this place to the Great River."

"I am not discouraged," said Swain gruffly. "But I shall not rest easy until I am sure he has escaped the Skraelings, for I have sworn that I, and I alone, shall be Olvir's death. And I keep my oaths."

XVI

IF THERE were Skraelings lurking along the Norsemen's trail they fled at hearing the first clink of harness. The Orkneyfolk passed through the forest wilderness like wan ghosts evoked by some forgotten spell of Odin magic. Weary beyond the power of words to express, bleeding from roughly stanched wounds, half-starved, staggering under the weight of harness and weapons in the waxing Summer heat, their clothes briar-torn, their feet scarred, Swain's indomitable will kept the whole fifty in the slot of the trail until the gloom of night made it impossible for him to see the way.

Day after day he held them to it, and in the afternoon of the sixth day he led them out of the trees on to the bank of the rivulet that flowed into the Great River. Too weary, himself, to shout or even to feel exultation, he staggered down the bank, with the two skalds behind him—Kolbiorn and Erik were far in the rear, whipping on the laggards—and sank gainst a tree-trunk.

"Gone!" he muttered.

"The snekke is aground," cried Oddi.

"Yes, he went in the last-ship," Swain answered dully. "And doubt not he tore the bottom out of the snekke."

Armod clapped an encouraging hand upon his chief's shoulder. Who would have recognized in this tangle-bearded, gaunt-faced, blood-crusted figure the skald whose elegance was a byword in all the Northern courts?

"Heart up, Swain!" he urged. "We have failed, it is true, but we have wrought great deeds."

"And men shall hear of them, if Armod and I ever pass the sea," added Oddi.

Swain straightened his shoulders, and the veil of misery dropped off his rugged features.

"I am well-rebuked, skalds. Yes, we have done great deeds together, and if we can win eastward with whole skins I doubt not we shall accomplish greater. Olvir has escaped us this venture, as he has before, but he escaped by flight—as he ever did in the past—and the day comes when I shall corner him so that there will be no escape.

"And now we will forget what we have done. For us it is to do! Doff mail, carls, and swim out with me to the snekke. If she can be made to hold water, well enough. If not, why, we can hew us a longship from these trees. The gods know there are plenty of them!"

They found ample evidence on the bank that Olvir had departed not many hours past, perhaps that very morning; and in his haste he had not damaged the snekke effectively. An attempt had been made to crush

her bottom with ballast rocks, and this not proving sufficiently destructive, some one—probably Olvir, himself—had hacked a yawning hole in her strakes with an ax. But he and his folk had lacked the time to tow her out into deep water, and the result was that she had sunk on a sandbar under the lee of the inlet that blocked the mouth of the tributary river.

The ship-keepers Swain had left behind him were corpses, caught in the driftwood of the islet's shores or bobbing in the current.

Swain gave his men the night to rest in. In truth, they were so tired that they were incapable of inteligent labor. But in the morning he mustered them all, stationed half ashore under arms to guard against a possible attack by the Skraelings and with the remainder swam out to the sunken snekke.

It was no easy task to cobble her shattered bottom, but between them, he and Kolbiorn and Erik contrived it. They took timber from the cabins and nails wherever they dared to draw them, and with these they built a box over the hole, and calked it with lint they unraveled from the rags of their garments and pitch from the pine-trees which were frequent ashore. And then they bailed her out, but just when they were believing that the worst of their troubles were over and that they had a seaworthy craft, they discovered that the battering of the ballast-stones on her bottom had started numerous minor leaks. It was a week before she was fit to shove out into the river, and she required constant bailing, at that, for her whole framework was strained from the keel to the bracing of the planks which were the footing for the rowers.

"He who ventured the Guinungagap in this sieve would not sight Helluland," said Erik.

"One storm would finish her," agreed Swain gloomily. "Perhaps if we hauled her up on the shore and hewed fresh planks——"

"That would require the balance of the Summer, and we should be obliged to Winter here," objected Kolbiorn. "My advice is that we should make the best of our way to Leif's Booths, and secure a ship there."

Swain gripped the Hrossey man's hand.

"What should we do without Kolbiorn, Erik? He is not one of whom it can be said that he is dead wood in the boat."

"He is a good comrade, and a wise," assented Erik. "I counsel that you accept his suggestion."

They had fair weather on the voyage down the Great River, and most of the way northward along the Shining Beaches; but one mild storm nearly wrecked their cranky vessel, and they were all glad when Kolbiorn nursed her into the fjord whereon Leif's Booths lay, and ran her prow aground in front of the cluster of log huts.

The last-ships and snekkes still rode at anchor in the haven, and the same crowd of men attended Gaut on the strand—with this difference: That they received Swain's venturers this time with derision rather than fear as soon as they perceived how few were the Orkneyfolk and how sorry was their plight, what with wounds and bitter effort and shortage of food.

"Ho," cried Gaut, laughing, as Swain leaped to the beach from the snekke's prow.

"You came here first in Ulf's last-ship, and now you return in the cutter in which he fared hither with Olvir Rosta. And yet you tell us you are not of his company!"

Swain eyed him sharply.

"Do you doubt that?" demanded the Orkney man.

"No," jeered Gaut, "nor do I doubt that you have had sore scathe at the hands of Olvir and Ulf."

"You say truth," replied Swain. "And Ulf is dead of that scathe, and Olvir is fled—in the last-ship you spoke of."

"Then he took it from you?"

"By stealth, yes."

"Having slain better than the half of your company!" mocked Gaut.

"We suffered more at the hands of the Skraelings than his," answered Swain patiently.

"A blind man could tell as much! Well, well, it is truly said that 'the boaster and the swaggerer are the most like to come to grief!' You would have naught of my humble counsel when you were here first, Swain, and perhaps it would have been better for you if you had heeded me."

Kolbiorn had joined Swain during this debate, and he saw the veins pulsing angrily in his chief's forehead, although not otherwise did Swain reveal his feelings.

"It is an ill thing to mock brave men in adversity, Gaut," exclaimed Kolbiorn now. "We have not harmed you nor do we seek aught from you in gift or by favor."

"That is to be seen," replied Gaut disagreeably. "You come here in bad case, and I can only suppose that you expect me to feed you and give you quarters on my ship or my friend's."

"What I expect of you I will pay for," said Swain briefly.

"Ha! And what do you expect?"

"Even what you, yourself, have mentioned: Food, drink, quarters and a ship to fare eastward in."

"You want little," commented Gaut. "And since your wants are so few, you will not object if I ask you to show me what you intend to offer me in payment for these trifles."

Swain spread out his empty hands.

"It is easily seen that I can not satisfy you here, but I have a reputation for doing what I engaged myself to, and you need not be concerned for whatever I purchase from you."

"Words are not wealth," sneered Gaut.

"No man has ever been able to say that I broke a promise or failed to pay him what was due," said Swain proudly.

"So you say!"

The icy fire of wrath flared up in Swain's blue eyes.

"Ha, you doubt me!"

Gaut shrugged his shoulders, ill at ease, but rakishly confident.

"I doubt any man who talks much and achieves little. You came here with your six-score carls and your rough tongue and your hard ways, and told us what you would do—which you have not done! And now, when we outnumber you and have what you require, you think to wheedle it from me; but you shall not.

"I am a hard man, myself, Swain, and no man can jest with me as you did and endeavor to belittle me, and not pay me heavily in the end. The time has come for your payment, and I counsel you to cry small."

Not a muscle moved in Swain's face, but his ruddy beard bristled out from the skin.

"You counsel me to cry small," he repeated gently. "This is good counsel, Gaut—who was called 'the Deaf.' You speak fluently like a clerk. Some men might call you 'the Talker.' But if they do, they will wrong you."

There was that in Swain's tone which impelled Gaut to draw back a pace, but one of Swain's powerful arms reached out and caught the trader by the neck. The next moment Gaut was pinioned in Swain's embrace.

"Help!" he gasped. "This thief——"

But Swain's shout drowned his clamor.

"To me, Swain's men! Overside, Orkneyfolk!"

They dropped from the snekke's hull by dozens, the entire fifty of them, and were ranked about Swain before the Leif's Booths folk had recovered from their astonishment and commenced to edge forward, a step or two at a time, reluctantly, as is the habit of men unaccustomed to fighting.

"Back, you!" snarled Swain at them.

They recoiled from the cold flame in his eyes, the implacable cruelty which drenched his speech.

"Gaut pays for too glib a tongue," Swain rasped on. "If you are wise, you will let him pay alone. We are few, we Orkneyfolk, but we are used to fighting odds. Yes, and few though we be, I think we could sweep clean this strand of all the ship-lice on it.

"Here, Erik, your knife between this swine's teeth."

Erik pried Gaut's jaws apart, and Swain inserted his own knife and slit a wide gash down the middle of the trader's tongue.

"Now, Gaut shall be called 'the Lisper,' " said Swain. "Let him go, Erik. He can do no harm. Are there others who feel tempted to offer me Gaut's counsel?"

The traders flinched away from him, their courage turning to water in face of this exhibition of ruthlessness, which recalled to their minds all the stories of Swain's prowess which were household traditions in the North.

"So!" resumed Swain, as Gaut tottered, moaning, from the strand. "You are wiser than Gaut, for you know that the best counsel is frequently silence."

He stabbed his bloody knife at their faces, and they cringed back a step, three times as numerous as the Orkneymen though they were.

"Which is Gaut's ship?" he demanded.

A score of fingers pointed to one of the last-ships. Swain scrutinized her.

"Are her stores aboard?"

They told him yes.

"I shall take her. She is spoil. But I will not plunder you others if you bide quietly ashore and do not annoy me."

"Is it not your purpose to pay for her,

Swain?" quavered Gaut's forecastleman, a gingery Swede, named Uni Sneis.

"It is not. If Gaut had conducted himself reasonably I would have permitted him to fix his own price. As it is, he must be content with a slit tongue—and if I hear aught of complaint from him or any of you, I will take his life."

The trading folk had no more to say, and Swain bade his men push off their leaky snekke and rowed across the haven to the last-ship's side.

"What of the snekke, Swain?" asked Erik as they climbed over the high gunwale of Gaut's ship. "Shall we leave it for him in lieu of what we take?"

"No, little man," growled Swain. "He shall have naught from me he can boast of. The snekke has served us to good purposes. Let Ran have her."

So they staved in her bottom more thoroughly than Olvir had, and she sank alongside of them. And when this had been done, they hoisted sail without more ado and steered south and east out of the fjord and into the open sea.

XVII

WINTER was at hand when Swain steered Gaut's last-ship into the Efjusund, between Hrossey and Hrolfsey, and passing the islet of Eyinhelga to larboard, bore up under Vigr and so came to the home-cove in Gairsey. There was great scurrying to and fro of vessels thereafter, and horsemen mounting in Rennadale of Hrossey to cross the island to Kirkiuvag and Orphir, where the Two Jarls had their steads. All the chiefs and *boendr* of the Islands took horse or boat, as occasion demanded, and headed for Gairsey. Within a day's time the word had passed the Pentland Fjord and was winging over the hills of Caithness—

"Swain is home!"

And the Orkneyfolk ceased from the threshing or the cattle-tending, put down the ale-horn and the mead-cup, hauled in their nets, put off their quarrels and came together wherever men debated in common.

"Ho," they said, "Swain is returned again. To Wineland he fared, men say; but he has no plunder and more than half his company are dead."

This much of his story reached the ears of Jarl Rognvald and Jarl Harald before they took boat to cross the Aurrida Fjord to Gairsay.

"It is seldom Swain has bad luck," said Jarl Rognvald as their boat's keel grated on Gairsey strand.

"Yes, this is an ill turn against him," agreed Jarl Harald. "I hope he takes it in good part."

"If he speaks us harshly do not be offended," advised Jarl Rognvald. "He is rough-tongued when his pride is at stake."

But when they reached the skalli they found Swain tumbling his twin bear-cubs of sons on the floor-rushes.

"Ho, younglings," he cried, "the Lord Jarls are come. Off with you, and leave us in peace."

And he went up to the Jarls with a smile on his face and both hands outstretched.

"I see you both well," he greeted them. "And that is excellent."

"And we have great joy that you are returned whole from so perilous a venture, Swain," answered Jarl Rognvald.

"Yes, and we wish to offer you any aid that we can render, since we hear that you suffered a sore man-scathe and won no plunder," added Jarl Harald.

"I need no aid, Lord Jarls," replied Swain. "It is true that I lost three-score and ten stout carls, and for that I grieve as any man would, and I must pay man-bote to their families. Also, we won no plunder, for in Wineland are only the Skraelings and wild beasts and trees. And worse than that, Olvir escaped me. But I proved a new friend—"

"Who?" asked Jarl Harald.

"That Kolbiorn, who returned to acquaint me that Ulf had sailed to warn Olvir of my coming. He is a rare man of his hands, and whenever I can put more than one longship in the water he shall command the other. Yes, and in the shieldwall I will have him on one wing and Erik on the other."

"A new friend's worth is not to be reckoned in gold or in silver, Swain," rejoined Jarl Rognvald. "But it seems to me that you purchased confidence in one man, however capable, very dearly at a cost of seventy——"

"I have more than Kolbiorn to offset my losses," interrupted Swain. "I have gone upon a venture such as no other man has ever performed, for I fared wider in Wineland than ever did Thorfin Karlsefni or

Erik the Red or any of the Greenland folk. Bethink you, Lord Jarls, it is some thing to have passed Furdurstrandi, to have slain more men in a day than was ever done before."

"That is a very honorable way to look at it," exclaimed Jarl Harald.

"Beyond a doubt, you merit all men's applause," agreed Jarl Rognvald. "But if you required money I still say——"

"I thank you, Lord Jarl," said Swain; "but I have ample means to pay my debts, for I have never spent the gold the Greek emperior gave me in Mikligard. And if I won no plunder this past Summer, why, next year I shall voyage where property is to be won."

A twinkle gleamed in his frosty eyes.

"But I deceive you if I say I won no plunder," he went on. "I have a strong lastship which I will sell to the first merchant who can pay me my price for it."

"Here is a story worth listening to," cried Jarl Rognvald.

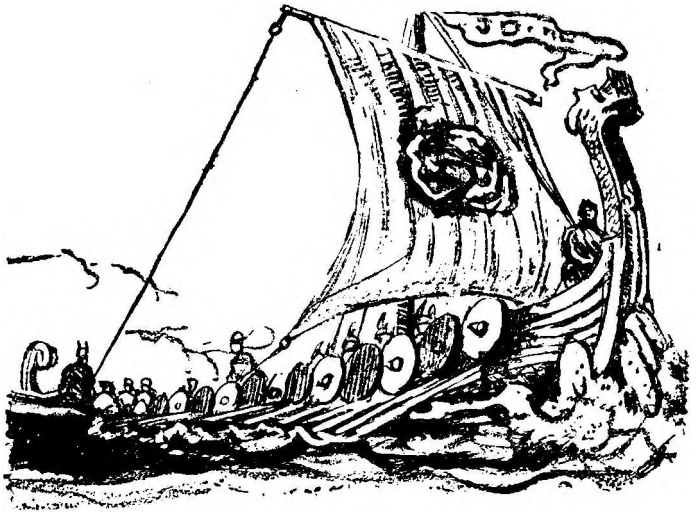
"Yes, yes, tell us, Swain," said Jarl Harald.

"Story-telling is skald's work," answered Swain, grinning. "Let Armod and Oddi please themselves and you."

And all that Winter Swain's drinking-hall was crowded with men from one week to the next, giving ear to the lays and sagas the skalds composed of Swain's venture, and Swain was put to it to keep himself in ale and mead. After Yule a Hjaltlands trader brought word that Olvir had reached Norway and taken service with King Hakon Herdabried — The Broadshouldered — and was ranked high amongst the young King's courtmen.

"Well," said Swain when this was told to him, "if I can not come at him in a king's court, at least he is so much nearer and I can keep a watch upon him. He is as slippery to catch as an eel, but well I know I shall yet trap him in a pot he can not wiggle from."

But it was to be many years, and men were to die who were than scarce born, before Swain and Olvir had their last great fight on the jokul's flank in faraway Iceland. A red path they trod, and he who stepped in it and came to the end alive was counted lucky.



THE COMEBACK

By Douglas Oliver

Author of "To 'Bugs'—and Butterflies."

HENRY DREW was big for his age which was fifteen. And he had big ideas. Neighbor folks called them silly notions.

Henry used to steal away to the docks on the river-front and sprawl there in the sunshine, watching the long black freighters plying up and down. For it was there that he was drawn closest to the ever-beckoning hand of adventure; there that the sleepy cries of wheeling gulls and the musical *lap-lap-lap-lap* of the cold green waters against the piling lulled his senses into a drowsiness of belief that romance and he would walk, some day, hand in hand.

Henry had often stolen away from his studies for the warm sun of the river-front, and one day, when a cargo of barrels was being run to the Canadian shore, he seized the opportunity by hopping the boat at the last moment, to lift, if only momentarily—as he had figured—the curtain of fascination that hung upon this neighbor country, where khakied bands played stirring music along the streets and where men talked quietly over their newspapers and went about their business with a steadfastness of purpose that even young eyes could not miss.

Henry had not informed his father of his going. His father, he was sure, would have told him very seriously, as he always had done, that no good could possibly result from his rubbing elbows with dock-wasters; that the hour for romancing, if such a thing was essential to youth's curriculum, was after he had done with school; that one blot on the family name was sufficient, anyway.

It was only on occasions of scoldings of this sort that the blot was ever referred to. At home they preferred to live the thing down. Some things, they said, were better forgotten. Henry's uncle—the boy scarcely recalled him—had been the waster, the blot, the "no good," the thing they were trying to forget.

"You're traveling the same kind of road he took. You've got a lot of silly notions in your head. Drop them—or you'll trip up too."

Invariably, Henry's father ended his scoldings this way. But the boy gave little heed to the warnings. For somehow or other he just couldn't keep his mind off the sun-swept docks and the green river where the black freighters plied up and down, gulls wheeling in their wake; where adventure beckoned from the far shore.

So, unmindful of parental persuasion and prayer, Henry had stolen across in a barrel-boat and had climbed the cobble-stone road to the top of the hill, where a band played stirringly and some men scuffled playfully about an open door. Above the door a gaudy poster screamed its appeal at the boy.

IT'S YOU WE WANT

And while Henry stood there, puzzling, a big, strapping fellow with white chevrons on his sleeves took him by the shoulder.

"It's the life, kid," he said. "Better come 'long."

Henry's heart fluttered responsively. He glanced down the slope to the river. Across the green waters he saw the great city with its smoke of factories and roar and bustle of traffic. Above all he saw his grind of studies and his father's continual scolding. He'd had enough of that, he told himself. So he shrugged his shoulders, turned about, and went along with the chevroned chap.

"How old are you?" asked a man from behind a desk.

"Fifteen," said Henry promptly.

"Guess again," said the desk fellow, winking rather deliberately at him.

Henry was stumped until some one in the rear whispered loudly—

"Seventeen."

Then Henry caught on to the little game.

"Seventeen," he grinned.

"Place of residence?" asked the desk fellow.

"Detroit," replied Henry.

"Are you certain?" cautioned his questioner.

The latter's left eye again twitched perceptibly.

Henry felt the chevroned chap poke him in the back; heard him prompt—

"Toronto."

So he sang out "Toronto," and felt his muscles tighten with the thrill of doing the right thing. The desk chap leaned over and shook his hand, declaring—

"Trot inside there and strip, kid. You'll do."

AND now—well now—Henry realized he would not do.

He wished he had never seen the confounded barrel-boat. The soft, plushy future he had dreamed was horribly pinny and needly. Romance was but a faded print—a pricked bubble. There never was any sunshine. Everything had gone a drab color before his disillusioned eyes.

Henry's musings were abruptly disturbed by the sudden rush of great wings down the blackness of the night. The oncoming rush of the thing seemed to suck him upward off his feet. He seemed paralyzed. At the last minute he managed to flop in the muck. There was a nerve-wracking explosion—danger had passed. The shell had been very close. Henry struggled to his feet and tried to use the shovel with which he had been digging futilely. Out of the darkness came the whip-like voice of the captain—old "Hardhead."

"Get on with that work, you birds. Fritz has every foot of this trench registered. He's after us. Get a move on now."

Get a move on! That was it. Always get a move on. Henry was sick of it all. Two hours—every minute of that—he'd been floundering around the top of this sap, dripping sweat and never resting—never. It was: Get a move on—always get a move on. Henry's cup of bitterness spilled over.

"Not another shovelful," he snarled—and he did not hear the whistle of the whizz-bang.

It was right on top of him — almost. Something flared before his eyes and he got a rap on the head that drove him to his knees, dazed. Recovering his senses, he found himself partly buried in mud and chalk. He dragged himself away from the mess, his head throbbing. From somewhere on the right went up the despairing cry of—

"Stretcher bearer—stretcher bearer on the double."

Two other whizz-bangs pitched into the working-party farther down the line. Things were getting beastly hot. Old Hardhead was bawling at the top of his lungs:

"Get back there on that job! Get back there, I tell you!"

Henry crouched lower, desperately afraid. He felt some one tug at his entrenching tool.

"Let's beat it!" coaxed the tugger. "Everything's in a jam. They'll never miss us. We'll sneak it down the sunken road to the old mill—then across country."

Momentarily Henry debated. They might be seen beating it. Old Hardhead, he knew, was death on quitters. He had seen old Hardhead, sitting in his dug-out, snuff the candle, thirty feet away, with a snap-shot from his long-barreled Webly. Old Hardhead and the *spat* of his gat were things to be afraid of; things to be reckoned with unquestionably. Henry shivered. Beat it? It was risky business. And yet——

"Hustle," urged the man at his side. High overhead a great crump droned its way to the back-country.

"Come on—the next may blow us to bits."

It was the needed urge. Henry flung his shovel to the bottom of the sap and dropped in after it.

"I'm on," he said. "Let's go."

Stretched beneath his blanket on the

hard flooring of the hut, Henry heard the working-party return; heard them stacking equipment outside.

"Pile those shovels," he heard old Hardhead order. "And not a move till I go through these huts. Somebody's going to get —— tonight."

Came a rattle at the latch. The door swung open. The captain stepped in noisily. He had a flashlight in his hand. There were a dozen or more sleepers in the hut. There should have been none. Henry and his friend had not been the only ones, as they had fancied, to take the easy way out of the mess up forward.

Henry heard old Hardhead swear; felt the blanket jerked away from him. Then he sat up, a-tremble, blinking at the flashlight.

"You dirty little quitter," said old Hardhead. "Here, sergeant," he called. "Throw this fellow in the clink."

HENRY'S name was at last called. He was going up on the mat: would probably get the same dose as the rest. Old Hardhead hadn't given the others a chance, so he'd been informed; had just turned them over with a remand slip to the C. O., recommending immediate court martial. And Henry knew what court martial meant—five or six years in a Rouen prison camp if the court chanced to see things in a kindly light; if not, maybe a stone wall and a dozen Enfields some gray morning. He had heard of things like that. Hadn't old Hardhead been mixed up in some shooting business or other?

"Private Drew!" snapped the sergeant-major as he halted Henry before old Hardhead's table.

"Right," ejaculated old Hardhead, looking up from the scribbled pages of a letter he'd been reading. He cleared his throat, then added, "You may dismiss the escort, sergeant-major. I shall deal with this case privately."

The escort about-turned, left-turned, and left-wheel-quick-marched through the doorway with unnecessary stamping of square heels on the stone floor.

"And sergeant-major," old Hardhead asserted, with an odd ring to his words, "some of the escort may feel inclined to discuss my peculiar attitude in this Drew case. You might remind them, before they do any talking, to first consider other peculiarities of mine."

And he laughed a hard laugh and gave a significant pat to the butt of his gun which lay on the table near his elbow.

"You understand, perfectly, sergeant-major?" he concluded.

"Perfectly, sir," returned the S. M., saluting with a flourish and shutting the door discreetly behind him.

Henry, who had been wracking his brains for some excuse for the offense with which he'd been charged, stiffened and clicked heels as old Hardhead addressed him.

"What I'm about to do, Drew, is not attributable to any personal regard I may have for you. Get that straight. You deserve the same medicine as the others, but thanks to this letter, here, you'll escape it. I know your story. This letter explains everything. You let that recruiting office, back in Canada, put it over you, even to camouflaging your age and citizenship. Like other youths I've known, you wanted excitement, I suppose; were sick to death of home life and its ties; wanted action. It's the old case of biting off more than you can swallow. Now you've got action, you don't want it. You don't like it. But you will. I'll make you like it. That's another peculiarity of mine—making people like things. Yes! And making people over. I'll make you over. I'll teach you to respect the code of honor we swear to here in France. You'll learn it before I'm through with you. I'll hammer it into you night and day. You bet! I'll make you over. And when I get through—your mother will be a —— sight prouder of you than she is now. Here! Take her letter and read it through."

Old Hardhead threw the scribbled pages Henry's way.

"And you get busy today and write her. You owe her a lot more than merely writing her, Drew. Yet you've been indifferent enough to neglect that. You get out and do that letter. After that you report to me as my batman. From now on you're going to be my pet pupil. I'll be the teacher, and if I may add, there'll be no more skipping school. Now get out."

HENRY felt that he would never get over the humiliation of the tasks that were forced upon him. He polished the buttons of old Hardhead's tunics at least twice a day. He mended soiled, smelly garments till his fingers

ached. He bent over old Hardhead's feet, trying to bring luster to boots that had seen their best days. He ran here and there for this and that. If coal for the early morning hut-fire had to be pilfered from some engineers' dump it was Henry of all the company batmen who had to run the chance of a sentry's bullet to get it.

Disagreeable jobs seemed to crop up at the most inopportune moments. There was no breathing space, it seemed, in which to enjoy the few pleasures life held out. It was:

"Drew, dump that shaving-water and hustle some that's hotter," or "Rustle me a bit of grub, Drew, and make it snappy," or "Drew, for ——'s sake, get the bumps out of that bed of mine," or "You'd better stick with my horse at transport, tonight—Fritz is liable to bomb again."

A rotten job? Yes! And old Hardhead was rubbing it in with a vengeance. Henry told himself he would have to put up with it for a while—but just wait—the time would come when he'd even things with the big bully. He certainly would even things if he got the chance.

"Stop that grouching—you," old Hardhead flung at him one day when he'd been overheard venting his long pent-up indignation on a bed-roll that wouldn't stay rolled.

Henry only grunted.

Old Hardhead came closer. His steely fingers fastened on Henry's arm. "Don't like it a bit, do you? No? Well—I didn't exactly expect you to, although—" and he grinned sarcastically—"the best medicine is sometimes the bitterest."

He stroked the bristles of his chin thoughtfully.

"Still we might vary the treatment some."

He gave the stubborn bed-roll a critical eying, then remarked:

"It's rather a warm section of the line we're taking over tonight. And the Boche, so they tell me, have got the run of No Man's Land. That won't do. I think, Drew, you and I will take a look around tonight after the moon's gone down. Suit you? Nothing like a little holiday now and then to relieve the monotony of school. Mighty good tonic, you know."

And out he went, chuckling to himself.

The moon had long since gone down. The night was oppressively quiet.

They had been moving slowly along an old cross-country track when a big, long-coated figure popped up before them like a Jack-in-the-box. Henry was too flabbergasted to say or do anything. But it was different with old Hardhead, who closed the intervening space between him and the German with the leap of a panther. There was a thud as the butt of Hardhead's revolver took the German behind the ear—one inarticulate cry from him before his body slithered down at their feet. Then momentary quiet. But somewhere ahead—and not far distant, either—sounded a peculiar swishing. Befuddled though he was by the situation, Henry grasped the import of that odd swishing. In a weak voice he called to old Hardhead, who was ripping the numbered shouldered straps from the prostrate foe.

"They're coming through the grass—they're coming this way——"

Up the track a Mauser spat and a bullet whined past them. Another crack—a little jet of yellow flame just ahead. Henry, who cowered in the grass, felt old Hardhead lurch against him.

"Are you hit? Are you?" he whimpered

"Never mind me," came the sharp rebuke. "Throw your bombs—throw them, you idiot——"

Old Hardhead's command trailed off indistinctly.

Henry threw back his arm and heaved his Mills blindly. Thirty yards away they went off with a *whang—whang* and a *zoom* of ragged metal, back, whirring through the air came a Hun potato-masher, another—and yet another. They detonated with terrific concussion not far off. Henry crouched lower. He felt as if he'd been drenched with ice water. He was twiddling his fingers; even clawing at his lips. What should he do? What could he do? He felt like running. If he only knew the way back to his own line. If he could only get out of the mess.

Of a sudden the clatter of a machine gun broke upon the night. Henry shoved his face in the dirt as little bees sang their way through the coarse grass about him. The Hun Vickers was shooting terribly close. As through a haze Henry saw the flash—heard the bark of old Hardhead's gat—again and again.

Then terror struck home. Henry staggered to his feet.

"They won't get me—they shan't get me" he whimpered. He swung 'round; saw old Hardhead on his knees; heard his entreaty: "Stick close, Drew. I'm afraid we're in for it—we're——"

But Henry was slinking away like a snake, belly to the ground—crawling out of the mess. Presently he slid into a deep shell-hole. He lay there for a long time trying to get a grip on himself. He lay there for hours hunching lower when nodding white flares bathed his hiding place with light. He lay there, cringing, until the morning dawned. A heavy mist hung over No Man's land. Thank God for that! He could just make out his own wire and behind it the white-chalk lip of his own trench.

He half-tumbled into it.

He was told later—one of the company runners told him—how old Hardhead had dragged himself in a little after midnight, a bullet through the leg and another through the lungs. How he'd collapsed on the stretcher with one chance in ten of pulling through. How the very last minute before he went under he had said—

"Tell Drew—if he gets in—I'll square things with him later."

"Wonder what he meant." Henry managed to force the words to his lips.

Deep down in his heart he was certain he understood what old Hardhead meant. The company runner—who didn't like Henry—seemed to have divined Henry's conviction, for he said with a sneer—

"Oh, I guess he intends doing what he should have done that first time you ran away—you yellow-belly."

And he thrust a leering face close to Henry's. But Henry backed up and said nothing.

Going over old Hardhead's effects later—getting them ready to send down to hospital—Henry came across the document. A time-worn D. R. O. it was—nothing important—but curiosity prompted Henry to take a peek. He read and even as he read his grip on the paper tightened and a dash of color went to his face.

Therefore it will be the duty of every officer to report without fail to the commanding officer of his unit any cases where other ranks serving under him have not attained the enlistment age of seventeen years. A Boys' Battalion is now being formed in England. All O. R. under the prescribed age will be transferred to this new unit as soon as transportation can be arranged.

A way out! Henry's heart leaped. He had the way out. He wasn't seventeen—wouldn't be for five months yet. He'd show them. He'd get paraded before the colonel straight off, state his case and be sent to England. Proof of his age? Why—his mother's letter would establish that. It tickled him to reflect that he would put it over old Hardhead. The big bully wouldn't get the chance to square things after all. Here, he'd been rubbing it into him with a vengeance—hounding him unmercifully—when, all the time, he'd known how old he was and that he should be sent to England. The big brute!

The seeming injustice of it all cut Henry to the quick. He threw back his head and cried out contemptuously—

"Good-by, you —— teacher you."

OLD Hardhead's letter reached Henry the evening the news went around the South Coast camp that the Iron Sixth had been badly cut up.

Up and down the tented rows bugles were blowing. Orderlies were scampering here and there, like chickens with their heads lopped. Henry understood the significance of the bugling and scampering. Just across the square from the Boys' Battalion were the lines of a casualty crowd, many of whom, for weeks, had been posted for draft. Things were moving again in France. The Iron Sixth had been badly cut up. Reinforcements had been asked for. A lot of familiar faces in the casualty crowd would be missing tomorrow or the next day or the day after.

Old Hardhead's letter ran:

DEAR HENRY:

My long-promised squaring of things. Would have written you sooner but for my wounds which did not heal as rapidly as I expected. On the eve of my return to the old batt. I wish to apolgize for my absolute failure as a tutor—for my inability to get out of you some of the decency and honor I imagine can yet be brought to the surface with the right kind of coaching.

Years ago, Henry, when you were a whole lot younger, I did irreparable wrong to my two best friends. In attempting to school you to your responsibilities as a man in a man's game, my sole motive, I assure you, was to bring (if but indirectly) a bit of pride and happiness to those two best friends, and, by doing so, to atone in some slight measure for the sorrow and unhappiness I caused them years ago—when you were a whole lot younger, Henry.

You, and you, only, can now deliver your soul from bondage. Your uncle,

JACK DREW

After a while Henry went outside.

In the darkness he stood fighting his battle. A storm was piling up from Beachy Head way. The roll of the thunder seemed feeble compared to the gale of indecision that raged within his soul.

Old Hardhead—his Uncle Jack—the "no good."

Some imp of torment seemed to dance up and down the avenues of Henry's troubled conscience. Minute after minute the imp maintained his chant of:

The "no good." Who's no good? Why—*you* are no good.

Over and over, and on and on, it went like that till Henry, at last, dropped to his knees on the parade ground and lifted his eyes to the storm-tossed skies.

"O God," he said, simply, "help me."

An hour later, when the rain was pelting down, the door of the camp orderly room was thrust open. A pale-faced youth, hat missing, uniform soaked, hurled himself in. He forgot the customary salute; brought himself up with a jerk as some voice bawled out:

"What the —— are you gawpin' at? What d'you want?"

"I want—I want"—and his voice grew clearer—"I want to go with that casualty crowd draft. I want to go to the Iron Sixth. I'm old enough. Was seventeen last week—and I'm going."

HENRY DREW rejoined the batt. that day of days when Hun tanks cut off old Hardhead's company in the marsh beyond the Iwuy railway.

It was well into the afternoon of that day when the C. O. of the Iron Sixth poked his head from his rude shelter of a headquarters on the side of the railway cutting and yelled lustily for runners. But there was no response. Hun shells had churned the crumbling banks of the cutting into a pudding; had pitched in so fast at times that the ground had been whipped and beaten to the appearance of a Niagara rapids, carrying all life down with it. Those few runners who remained alive hugged the ground in a pitiful state, gaping at the blue sky and wondering what it was all about.

"Get me five men," bellowed the C. O. to his adjutant, "and get them in a hurry. Take them if necessary from that bunch of reinforcements—those fellows who came up this morning. They're back there in a ditch somewhere."

"Five men—in a hurry" demanded the adjutant of the subaltern whose platoon occupied the ditch.

The five men were given. Rather reluctantly they climbed out of the ditch, ducked low as a machine gun, firing from Iwuy village, clipped up the berry bushes around them, and then sprinted single file for the cutting.

"We've got to get through to Captain Hardhead," explained the C. O. "He's up there in that —— marsh with five tanks on top of him like a bunch of hornets.

"Things stand this way: Hardhead's simply got to advance. Should he fall down the whole divisional line will have to be readjusted. Which would mean a black mark for the Sixth—the first in the battalion's fighting history. Hardhead can't advance under the circumstances. It would be folly for him to try it. Consequently the tanks have got to go. Our artillery is back there some place, —— 'em, stuck in the mud. Can't fire a shot. So it'll have to be done from the air. Brigade's already arranged for five bombers to do the trick.

"Now, here's where you chaps come in. You've got about twenty minutes to make that marsh. It'll be almost dark when you get there. Each of you will take five ground flares. When the bombers are approximately over the location I want you chaps to make a dash from the railway line, get as close as possible to the tanks, and set off your flares as aiming marks." The C. O. paused to let his words sink in. "Of course you'll have to take your chances. It's simply a case of your lives against Hardhead's company, and at the present time, if I must speak frankly, Hardhead's crowd mean the most to the battalion. Let Hardhead out of that marsh and the honor of the Iron Sixth will have come through unsullied.

"And—who knows—your job may be easier than it looks, now. But—" and his voice went hard as flint—"the tanks must go. Hang the cost!"

Henry Drew was the last of the little party, led by the adjutant, to tumble down the side of the cutting to the twisted tracks below. They hadn't gone a hundred yards when the shell got them. Henry, who had ducked unconsciously before the crash, felt the ground lift beneath him. He was

hurled a goodly distance, rolling over and over like a Jack and Jill. The adjutant had been chucked against a clump of rocks like a bundle of rags—stone dead. The other four who had climbed out of the ditch and comparative safety would not go back that way again.

Henry's heart was thumping as he gazed upon the sickening sight. But he wasted little time in transferring from their bodies to his own person every flare he could carry. Then, head down, he started up the track. Smoke lay up there over the marsh. Indistinctly there was borne to his ears the *rat-tat-tat-tat* of machine guns.

"Who knows?" the C. O. had said.

"O God, help me," prayed Henry as he tore along.

He was not thinking, however, of his own safety. Rather that he might get there in time.

OLD Hardhead had drawn in the fragments of his command to the shelter of an old peatworks. Though possibly a fine target for German gunnery, it offered decidedly more protection than the short marsh grass over which lead from the plagued tanks sang like insects.

There they were—five square-faced things—square-faced like the crews within them—crawling about the edge of the marsh like ponderous grubs, not daring to enter for fear of miring, but content to creep and creak about on the outside, satisfied that no one would dare come out.

And no one would come out, old Hardhead told himself, unless relief in some shape came soon. The machine-gun fire was taking toll of some fellow every few minutes. There was no cover—absolutely none under which they might advance. Old Hardhead cursed bitterly the going wrong of attack orders which had given the tanks with their skull-and-crossbones decorations the chance to work in behind him.

Dusk was falling fast when the hum of great wings sounded overhead. Old Hardhead looked up; saw five great bombers in flight formation and high above them a covering patrol of fast-flying Camels. The bombers soared like monster butterflies, wings gleaming gold in the last rays of the sinking sun. Little by little they droned closer, dropped lower, shut off their engines, dived earthward.

Old Hardhead made out the circles on their underpinning — the familiar white streamers trailing from their wing-ends.

"Our planes" he mused. "But what's up?"

Even as he debated the question his keen eye made out a khakied figure skirting the edge of the marsh. The figure stopped, went on, leaving in its wake a sudden spout of brilliant red flame. Some distance from the man the snout of one of the square-faced tanks came to life with a rattle of *rat-tat-rat-tat.* Down went the man. Up again he was—had the tank missed him in the failing light?—and now a second red flare went up like a boiling-over kettle.

Then from out the heavens the first bomb fell with an unmistakable crunching crash and scattering of pig iron.

"Good lord!" exclaimed old Hardhead as he observed the man moving like an automaton straight for another tank that had clumsily swung about and was heading for the shelter of a sunken road.

Another red ground flare lit up the scene. Another bomb crashed—and another. The planes were dropping lower to make certain of the kill.

Crash—crash—crash—went the bombs. One tank turned up on its back like a sunning turtle. It lay there wriggling. Smoke shortly issued from its vitals to be replaced as quickly with tongues of flame of different hues. Inside the oils and grease were burning merrily. And the tank crew to a man were simmering like bacon in the oils.

Old Hardhead's men raised a cheer as they saw the tank get its death blow. But old Hardhead, himself, did not cheer.

"Either crazy-mad—or brave as ——" he exclaimed as he saw, to his amazement, the flare-lighter running in another direction.

Came a sharp rattle from a tank. The flare-lighter went down in a huddle. This time he did not get up.

"CAN they save him, doc?" asked old Hardhead anxiously as he elbowed his way into the dressing-station late that night when the relief had been completed.

"I think so," said the doc, "but it will take a long time. Pretty well shot up—and a few bits of bomb for good measure."

Old Hardhead moved over to Henry's stretcher.

"Good boy," he said with a noticeable choke. "Good boy. The C. O. says you'll get something pretty fine for your work today. But—best of all, boy, you'll be going home."

The bandaged form moved slightly. A small, weary voice—tired and pathetically weak—whispered:

"I'll wait for you in Blighty, Uncle Jack. And we'll go home together."

There was a mist in old Hardhead's eyes when he straightened up.

"Plucky beggar," enjoined the medical officer. "Did you know him?"

"Not until this afternoon," said old Hardhead quietly.

Glints on LIFE

by Bill Adams

Brother o' Mine

THIS afternoon, after long absence, the sun came out. Impelled by the beauty of the warm green hills, as by the glory in the sky, I took my hat and departed up the railway track for a walk. Leaving the track at the foot of a hill, I went to that hill-top, to sit there, alone, in a little hollow, hidden from the world amongst wild-flowers, the air sweet with a sweetness indescribable, larks singing near me, beauty all about.

Presently many children arrived, noisily calling to one another, in search of flowers.

Two little boys, uninvited, sat beside me.

"I wish it was always this way," said one of them to me.

"A day of Spring?" said I.

"Yes. I wish it was always Spring," said he.

"So do I," I replied.

By and by, arising, descending the hill, I took my way townward; coming presently upon a man who sat upon the ties, a large bundle at his feet, a long stick beside him.

"What do you say, old-timer?" I asked as I came up to him.

"Well," said he, smiling a little, but smiling as if to hide some other mood, "I say, —— it. What do you say?"

"If you say —— it, then I say —— it, too," said I, seating myself beside him.

His eyes were fixed upon the children who now ran laughing down the hill slope garlanded with flowers.

"Them little kids is tickled, ain't they?" said he.

He wore old denim pants, ragged, above yet another pair of old denim pants, his ragged shirt partly hidden by a ragged sweater, his brimless hat utterly despondent, his shoes worn thin, gray hairs plentiful in a dense black beard, his deep eyes most patient.

"It's a fine day, ain't it," said he, as if in quiet content.

"What do you carry that stick for?" I asked him.

"I can't walk without it," said he.

"What's the trouble?" said I.

"Paralysis," said he.

"Paralysis?" said I.

"Don't eat reg'lar enough. Sometimes I goes hungry an' then sometimes I gets food an' eats hearty. My insides is given out from it, an' it's fixed my legs—that's what a doctor tol' me, anyway. Anyway, I can't walk without a stick," said he.

"I was run out o' the last town for askin' in a drug-store for a sample packet o' medicine," he added.

"'You git out o' here, an' git out quick,' says ol' John Law, 'we don't allow no beggars here.'"

"Had any grub today?" I asked.

"There's hundreds o' men on the road wi' good legs," said he, "an' ol' men don't have much show."

He stared at the children, strange lights in his old eyes.

"Them kids has great times," said he. "I wish I was a kid, an' it was always Spring."

Presently, hobbling into my kitchen he said—

"I'm ashamed o' myself, lady."

My wife did not reply. I looked out of the window.

"Folks," said the old man, crying apologetically, "I'm ashamed of myself."

"So are we ashamed," said we, together.

WORKED BRANDS

A Complete Novelette

by Walter J. Coburn

"DIAMOND CROSS!" called "Shorty" Carroway, as he dragged a big spotted calf up to the fire. "Diamond Cross on the left ribs! Crop the right ear and swaller-fork the left!"

He grinned widely as a Rafter T puncher went down the taut rope toward the head of the struggling calf. A few minutes of sweaty, grunting struggle and the calf was thrown. A second puncher grabbed the tail, slid in behind the kicking animal and stretched him out, a left hind leg in both sinewy hands, a high heel braced against the calf's right hock.

"Tarnation, Shorty, what yuh-all tryin' tuh do—wear a waddie out? Why don't yuh heel them big 'uns?"

"Th'owed a figger 8, figgerin' on pickin' up a front foot with the head, Tad. Yo're a gettin' plumb spoiled. Young feller like you orter be glad of a chance to bull-dog one now and then," Shorty called over a jumper-clad shoulder as he flipped his rope into a loop and started back for the herd.

Big Jim Kinkaid, owner and wagon-boss of the Rafter T, handed his tally book to the youth who was tending fire.

"Tally fer me a spell, son," he drawled. "I'm goin' to give the boys a hand at the herd. They done spilled three-four wild ones a'ready, settin' around augerin' like a bunch o' school girls at a tea-party."

He swung into the saddle and rode toward the herd at a trot.

"What's bitin' Jim?" asked the man handling the irons, who worked for the Diamond Cross and was representing that outfit.

"Bee stung him, I reckon," grinned the boy with the tally book. "Mebby so he wanted to see the mammy o' that spotted calf Shorty drug up. You reps is shore inquisitive."

"Hot iron here!" bawled the second brander. "Better shake a leg, rep, if you don't want this critter turned loose half-branded! Tad here is gettin' weak a-holdin' him down!"

The angry exclamation that had risen to the Diamond Cross rep's lips at the tally boy's chiding insinuation concerning the calf's ownership, died unspoken as he grabbed a hot iron and ran toward the calf.

The youth with the tally book grinned. Barely out of his teens, none too keen-witted, he had not sensed the tension that during the past week had existed between Jim Kinkaid and "Pecos" Trent, the Diamond Cross man. He would have been surprized indeed to know that Big Jim and Shorty Carroway were at that moment examining the calf's mother with more than casual glances.

"I got yore signal, Shorty," said the soft-spoken Jim. "I'm obliged. That cow's a dead ringer fer the one we throwed in on the lower range this Spring. A dead ringer, Shorty, even to that busted horn. She had the Rafter T on her when we turned her loose."

Shorty nodded gravely.

"And she's packin' the Diamond Cross now, big as life. I mind the cow, Jimmer.

Onery ole cuss tuh drive. I'd swear to it that this ole ranny is the same critter we moved from the upper range last March. And yet this here Diamond Cross she's a-wearin' looks a year old. Scabbed over with a big welt like it'd bin put on a mite hot."

"I'd like to throw her and hand-examine that brand, Shorty."

"Me'n Tad throwed her this mornin', Jim. She was in our drive."

"Good work, Shorty. Yo're a shore good hand, boy. Tad, too. None better. What was the brand like?"

"Plumb old, Jimmer. It's got me beat. That's yore cow, I'd bet a red blanket on it. Yet she's packin' a five-year-old Diamond Cross. What yuh aim to do, boss? Yore outfit backs yore play to the limit. If Pecos Trent and that cow-thievin' wolf that hires him thinks they kin run a whizzer on the Rafter T spread, they're loco. Gimme leave, Jimmer, and I'll throw that Pecos gent in the brandin'- fire, gun and all!"

Shorty's usually mild blue eyes were twin balls of flame.

"Take 'er easy, Shorty. They got us hog-tied. We'll git 'em when the play comes up right. Gun-scrappin' ain't goin, to help, leastways not yet. Tell Tad tuh go easy, too. I'm goin' tuh beat this Diamond Cross at their own game, son. I got a trick or two under my hat. Call all the brands keerful, grit yore teeth, and grin' like yuh liked it; savvy? I'm goin' back to the fire now."

His level brows knotted in a puzzled frown, the big cow-man rode slowly back to the branding-fire, slid from the saddle and again took over the tally book.

"Gosh, that Diamond Cross rep gits on the prod easy," chuckled the boy. "I was funnin' him about that spotted calf's mammy and he looked like he'd sat on a cactus and I was tuh blame. Never said nothin' but there was powder smoke in the look he give me."

"And there'll be powder smoke in the air if yuh don't quit runnin' off at the head like a magpie. Men ain't noways fond o' havin' a bald-faced button of a kid joshin' them. You'll learn some day that men in this country don't josh one another about some things, brand-changin', fer instance. You'll learn that, son, if some cow don't kick that white head o' yourn offen that thing yuh claim is yore neck. Better feed that fire afore it dies plumb out."

"Gee, what a bunch o' ring-tails in this spread," grumbled the youth as he slapped some dust from his checked California pants and hobbled forth on his extremely high-heeled boots to obey the half-joking, half-serious wagon-boss.

"Button," as he was called by the cowhands, hated this menial fire-tending task. If he could only rope with Shorty Carroway or wrestle calves with Tad Ladd he'd show 'em both up, he thought as he built his fire. He shoved an iron far into the fire. Pecos would grab that iron next and when he did, he'd know it was hot. The boy chuckled softly as he anticipated the Diamond Cross man's wrath when his hand clutched the hot handle.

He had not long to wait. Shorty dragged up another calf calling in a monotonous drawl:

"Rafter T. One of ourn. Take three like this tuh hold one brand, he's so little. I heeled 'im for yuh, Tad! Fall on 'im! Gosh, it must be grand tuh be big and strong like you are, Taddie. Bet that schoolmarm over on Sycamore Crick jest sets around plumb speechless admirin' that manly figger uh yourn, I bet——"

"Yuh don't own nothin' tuh bet, yuh bow-legged runt," called the red-faced Tad as he cast off the rope. "Yuh done give all yuh had to that pore and needy tin-horn gambler last month. Go earn somethin' afore yuh go to bettin'. Hot iron, Pecos!"

Pecos Trent grabbed an iron, then dropped it with an angry grunt. His glance fell on the grinning Button. Two strides and he was at the boy's side. His fist crashed against the unsuspecting boy's jaw with a dull crack. Button dropped in his tracks.

Jim Kinkaid, squatted some distance away, heard the crack and looked up, then jumped to his feet.

Tad Ladd, big as a grizzly, lithe as a cat, let go the calf and leaped forward.

Pecos, white about the lips, whirled, gun in hand, a fraction of a second too late to avoid the clutching hand of the giant Tad. A downward slap sent the rep's gun spinning. Then Tad shook the offender like a terrier shaking a rat.

"Hit a kid, would yuh," growled the big puncher. "Hit a kid, eh? Jest about yore caliber, yuh coyote. If you was a man

'stead of a gun-totin,' fancy-dressin,' would-be-mail-order-dude tryin' to pass fer a bad-man, I'd lick yuh with my fists. As it is, I'm goin' tuh spank yuh and send yuh to camp."

He proceeded to put the spanking threat into execution, to the amusement of Button, who was dancing about, shouting wildly.

Big Jim deftly tripped the youth and as he rose to his feet, somewhat out of wind, the wagon-boss silenced him with a few curt words.

"Yuh jest nacherally started more than ten men kin stop, yuh loco little yearlin'," Jim told him. "Go off somewheres and bush-up. Hey, Tad, turn the Pecos gent loose!"

Tad obeyed with a good-natured shrug.

"Doggone, Jim! I done it now, I reckon! Shucks! No hard feelin's, Pecos. I reckon it was all a mistake. Call it a joke and shake." He held out a sun-browned paw.

"I'm goin' to get yuh fer this, Ladd," snarled the white-faced Pecos, his bruised lips twitching and bloodless. "Mind me, I'm goin' to kill you fer what yuh jest done."

"Yonder's yore gun, Pecos. Get it. We'll draw when Jim gives the word. If yuh hired out fer a tough hand, play yore string out. I'm waitin', Pecos."

"I ain't fool encugh to make a play like that here. I'll git you when I'll have a chance. Yo're in yore own back yard now, big 'un, with yore friends backin' yuh. The best I'd git in this spread would be the loser's end. My turn's comin' later."

"Make it easy on yorese'f, mister. Any time, any place."

"Let's git back to work, boys," suggested Jim in a soothing tone. "We got a heap o' calves tuh brand."

"I'm through here," snarled Pecos, picking up his gun and shoving it in his waistband. "I'm cuttin' my string now. This play didn't win *you* no chips, Kinkaid. 'Bud' Tolliver ain't goin' to be noways tickled when he hears how you treat his reps. Wait till I tell him how yuh bin raw-hidin' me."

"Looks like we ain't got long tuh wait, Trent. Yonder comes Tolliver and one of his men."

THEY all turned to watch in silence the approach of the two riders. Shorty, who had dragged up another calf and was sitting his horse a few feet distant, let his rope slack and, as the calf kicked loose, he quickly coiled his rope and his hand dropped to the .45 in his chaps' pocket. He had ridden up with his calf too late to see the row, but the attitude of the men at the branding-fire told him that something was wrong. Whistling through clenched teeth, a habit of his when his nerves were tense, he waited.

Bud Tolliver, tall, unshaved, beady-eyed, let his coarse lips spread in a one-sided smile as he drew rein. He shot Trent a sharp look, then turned to the Rafter T boss.

"Anything wrong, Kinkaid?" he asked, his harsh, unmusical voice seeming to carry a veiled threat.

Jim's glance traveled to Tolliver's gun-hand, a bare six inches from the weapon that swung in a low-hung holster. Then his eyes flitted toward Shorty. Shorty's white teeth flashed in a quick grin and the cow-man caught the glint of the puncher's drawn gun. Shorty had Tolliver covered.

"Nothin' to git riled about, Tolliver," drawled Jim, his steady hands busy with a cigaret. "Pecos and Tad had a run-in, but I don't reckon it's so all-fired serious. Pecos 'lows he's goin' to cut his string, but he's kinder warm under the collar and will mebbyso change his mind. Tad's taken a fall outa him and mussed up his purty clothes a mite. No need fer the Rafter T and Diamond Cross to go splittin' the blankets 'count o' two o' their cow-hands lockin' horns."

Tolliver shot Trent another sharp look.

"What's the idee in messin' up in a row, Pecos?" he asked hotly. "I sent you over to the T wagon tuh look after my interests, not go rowin' with Kinkaid's boys. How come yuh fergot yore orders, eh?"

Trent's face darkened with anger.

"All I bin gettin' at this spread is dirt! I'm white and twenty-one and don't aim tuh take nothin' off no man! No *hombre* livin' kin do what Ladd did and get away with it! They all got it in fer me, Bud. Like as not the cook 'ud poison my grub if I stayed. I'm through!"

Trent scowled darkly as he met Tad Ladd's derisive gaze.

"Looks like I'd have to send over another rep, Kinkaid," grumbled Tolliver. "Pecos seems to figger he ain't got a square deal here."

There was a dangerous glint in the speaker's eyes and his hand had edged a trifle closer toward his .45.

"Pecos Trent lied, Tolliver." Jim's voice had lost none of its soft drawl but Tad and Shorty read the danger signal in their employer's gray eyes.

The youthful Button, crouched behind a big mesquite bush, eased a long-barreled six-shooter from beneath his shirt. His saucer-round eyes were staring and his hand trembled. He clamped his jaws tight to keep his teeth from chattering. The long-barreled gun came to full cock with a click that sounded horribly loud to the boy. Then its wavering muzzle swung in the general direction of Pecos Trent.

"Pecos lied, eh?" Tolliver's harsh voice broke a tense stillness. "I reckon not, Kinkaid. My men know better than to lie to me. What started this row?"

"That mouthy kid claimed we was stealin' calves and the T men backs the kid's play!"

The gauntlet had been thrown. Pecos was talking on a subject that means fight in the cow-country. Every man present, even Tad's helper, a new man in the outfit, felt the tension. Tolliver and Kinkaid eyed each other, each waiting for the other to speak.

"I'm backin' my man's play," Tolliver said slowly.

The man who had ridden up with the Diamond Cross owner had slipped sidewise in his saddle, his hand on his gun. Pecos was smiling thinly, his gun half-drawn.

Tad and Shorty, no longer smiling, waited for the word of their boss. A nod from Jim and blood would be spilled.

A hoarse yell from the brush, the loud explosion of a gun, and Button leaped into view, tripped on a stout branch and fell headlong, his gun spinning through the air and lodging against Jim's boot. The Rafter T boss picked up the weapon.

"Like a gift from heaven," he breathed. "I left my gun in my bed this mornin'."

All eyes were turned toward the struggling Button, who was wildly beating the air with both hands.

"Yaller-jackets!" he yelled. "Whole nest of 'em! Wow! Ouch! I done sat on their nest! Help!"

Gaining his feet, he headed toward the little group, a swarm of angry hornets darkening the air about his head. A moment and he was among them. The men who but a moment before had been about to kill one another scattered like chaff before a gust of wind. Every man for himself, slapping the air and yelling at the shrieking youth to head for the creek. A hornet stung Tolliver's horse and the animal sank his head in a fit of pitching. Shorty, apart from the group, was doubling up with mirth.

It was Shorty who stepped into the the breach. Sheathing his gun, he grabbed his rope, flipping it into a loop as he spurred toward Button. The loop swung aloft, shot out and settled about the boy's shoulders. Another instant and Shorty was riding up the middle of the shallow creek with Button, sputtering and choking, at the end of the rope. Casting off his rope, Shorty loped back to the branding-fire. Tolliver had jerked his horse's head up and was riding back, tenderly caressing a rapidly swelling lump on his nose.

Jim and Tad were nursing similar bumps and Pecos was cursing feelingly as he touched a lump that threatened to close his left eye. Bill, the new man, and the Diamond Cross man were grinning ruefully at each other. Shorty surveyed the group, then burst into a gale of laughter.

"Bawl, yuh bow-legged little idjit!" called Tad. "Bawl yore fool head off! Pecos, I wish I'd let yuh kill that danged fool kid."

"There's sody at the wagon, gents," Jim volunteered. "Reckon we'd better doctor these here welts. Button, come outa that crick if yuh done lost that herd o' hornets. If yuh still got 'em, stay in the crick and die a-fightin'. Come on, gents. Time fer chuck, too."

"Kinkaid," said Tolliver with a twist on his lips that was meant to be a smile, "suppose we call this here scrap a draw and let it go at that. I'll take Pecos back to the Cross wagon and leave this boy I brung over. He ain't so hot-headed as Pecos."

"It's Jake with me, Tolliver. Pecos didn't have no call to say what he did. It was that loco Button that begun the thing. Thought he was bein' funny, I reckon. Pecos slapped him fer heatin' a iron too close to the handle and Tad took it up fer the kid. All danged foolishness. Nobody accused yuh of stealin', Tolliver. When I git ready to accuse a man o' that, I'll do it to his face. I reckon yuh know that."

Tolliver's eyes narrowed slightly, then he laughed harshly.

"And when yuh do, I'll play yuh ace fer ace, Kinkaid. Reckon that sody'll take the sting outa these lumps?"

THE horse-wrangler was corraling the remuda when they got to camp. Pecos caught out his horses, loaded his bed, and as soon as dinner was over, he and Tolliver rode away.

"Kinkaid's on to us, Bud," Pecos broke an uneasy silence.

"Is that any call fer you to make a fool play like yuh done? I thought yuh had some sense, Trent. Now I gotta leave a green man with the T wagon. How come yuh think Kinkaid's wise?"

"He had Shorty Carroway do all the ropin', savvy? Carroway's a top hand with cattle and helped throw that T stuff in on their lower range this Spring. He knows them cows like a man knows his kin-folks. Whenever he throwed his rope on a calf that he was suspicious of, he'd head rope it and drag it up so's Kinkaid could git a good look at it. And instead uh callin out jest 'Diamond Cross,' he'd beller 'Diamond Cross on the left ribs' and call the ear-mark. Whenever he done that, Jim would ride out to the herd and him and Shorty would take a look at the calf's mammy."

"Uh-huh, and what good does it do 'em? Pecos, I've seen more than one brand-inspector, good 'uns too, pass up one o' them brands. Until that scab sheds off, the best hand in Arizona can't tell it from the real thing. And by the time that brand peels, the calf'll be weaned. That's why I picked the cows with big calves. We're as safe as if we was in church."

"Or in jail," finished Pecos with a wry smile. "I'm a goner if they grab me, Bud. They'll go over my record and all the law sharps in Arizona wouldn't be able tuh clear me. I'm gettin' leary, plumb leary. The Rafter T is a tough spread tuh tangle with."

"I've knowed worse. Yuh gone too fur tuh weaken now, Trent." Bud Tolliver gave Pecos a meaning look that was not lost on the cow-puncher.

"I ain't goin' tuh weaken, Bud. I'm playin' my string out. I'll git that Ladd gent, too. He's my meat."

"Better throw that gun o' yourn in the crick or keep it in yore bed. You ain't in no shape to go shootin' folks. Yuh like tuh got me into it today with yore danged fool gun-plays. I thought Kinkaid had got wise fer shore and was callin' fer a showdown. There's a nice stake here if we hang on to our bushy tails and play it keerful. But a shootin' scrape will plumb ruin us, even if we win out, which I ain't so sure we'd do. Kinkaid's bad medicine with a gun if yuh crowd him."

"He'd 'a' bin' pickin's today," chuckled Pecos. "I seen him get his gun outa his bed when we went to camp fer chuck."

"But he won't be pickin' from now on. You left Texas with a posse crowdin' yuh clost. You'll leave Arizona the same way if yuh ain't keerful."

"Who's the gent that took my place at the T? Stranger, ain't he?"

"Yeah. Says his name is Jones, but I reckon he lied. Sleeps close to his gun and wakes easy. Bad conscience, if I read the sign right. But I ain't tellin' him nothin', savvy? Two of us is a plenty fer this little job. He ain't the only Cross man with a shady trail behind him but I ain't confidin' in none of 'em. I pay 'em fightin wages, that's all. I'd 'a' played a lone hand only you rode up when I was workin' a T cow over into the Cross iron. I don't know why I didn't kill yuh then, Trent. Mebbyso I'll be sorry some day that I didn't."

He gave Pecos a sharp look.

They rode on in silence toward the ridge that marked the boundary between the Rafter T lower range and the Diamond Cross range.

Back at camp Kinkaid, Shorty and Tad squatted in the shade of the bed wagon. Jim was drawing brands in the dirt with a sharp stick. First he would make a Rafter T, then, by adding a few strokes, change the Rafter or half-diamond into a Diamond. Another stroke and the T became a Cross.

"Easy as shootin' fish, eh boys?" Jim grinned a bit sadly.

"And Tolliver's swaller-fork and crop cuts out our slit and underbit ear-marks," nodded Tad. "We've knowed that fer a year or more."

"I've seen a heap o' brand-workin'," agreed Shorty, "but this is the slickest thing I ever seen. I've seen a cow wearin' the T and two weeks later would run acrost that same cow with a Cross that any cow-hand livin' would swear was five years old. Me'n Tad has roped a dozen critters and hand-examined 'em. No go. The Diamond Cross is there, that's all, and a stock-inspector would say we'd gone loco if we

told him the brand was less than two months old. Bud Tolliver's a slick 'un, I'd tell a man. As fer the Pecos skunk, watch him like a hawk, Tad. Yuh shore made a bad enemy when yuh riled that feller."

"Fool thing tuh do," said Tad mournfully. "Makes hard feelin's all around. It ain't my hide I'm thinkin' of, Jim. It's the outfit and you that'll pay."

"Fergit it, pardner." Jim laid a hand on the big fellow's shoulder. "It done me good to see yuh show him up. Either o' you boys ever see that feller Jones afore?"

"Onct," said Shorty in a low tone. "Tad, you orter mind him. Recollect the night we was camped on the Rio with the Wine Glass horse outfit? Feller swum the river from the Mex side. Bunch o' Pisanos foggin' him up. He got bogged in the quicksand and we drug him out. He hit the trail again at daybreak, but I got a look at his face. It was this feller Jones. Does yore feeble mind carry that fur back, Taddie?"

"I knowed I'd seen him somewheres," replied Tad solemnly. "Bein' as how it was a dark night and no moon and I was on guard and it was that slim Texican and you that snaked the gent outa the bog, I'd shore orter remember that gent's face. Admittin' the fact that my eyes is as good as the next feller's, I don't lay no claim to seein' a man's face a mile off on a dark night with the brush so thick that a rabbit couldn't make a mile an hour through it. No, I don't recall the Jones boy's face, but I recollect the evenin' it happened. You got yore hackamore rope under yore night horse's tail and he throwed yuh in the cactus. I mind puttin' in the rest o' the night strikin' matches so's you could pick the spines outa yore laigs. Yuh traded the hoss to——"

"Oh, dry up; yuh ain't drawin' wages tuh entertain folks with yore fool talk. Jimmer, it takes a man with a heap a patience tuh put up with this big elephant's chatter year in and year out like I bin doin'. Many a man woulda knocked him on the head to —— Look, boys, here comes the Jones feller."

JONES approached leisurely, his heavy Chihuahua spurs chiming like bells. One thing claimed the attention of the three Rafter T men. Jones wore his gun in a shoulder holster, a bit more openly than was the custom since cow-country vogue had discarded belts and scabbards save in a few cases where the gun-wearer was either an officer or an outlaw. Most cow-hands wore their guns in their trousers' waist-band or in the spacious pocket of their chaps.

The breadth of brim and height of crown of the Cross rep's hat hinted of Mexico, as did the silver-crusted and huge roweled spurs.

"Wanted on both sides o' the Border, I bet a spotted pony," said Shorty in an undertone.

"Take the bet," grinned Tad as he sized up the newcomer. "That there memory o' mine is beginnin' to wind itself up."

"Savvy his brand, Tad?" whispered Jim.

"Dunno, Jim, Dunno. Mebby. See later."

Jones greeted them with a pleasant grin. Unshaven and a bit out the elbows, there was a straightforward look in his dark eyes that is not usually seen in the eyes of a hunted man.

"Come to powwow with yuh-all," he said in a quiet voice. "I'm a stranger in a strange land and I'd like tuh git a line on a thing er two that I ain't got straight. I drifted on to this range to work, not tangle up in no cow-man's war. I don't travel on no rep as a gunman and I don't shoot lessen I'm crowded. I'm reppin' fer Tolliver, but I ain't doin' his fightin' fer him. I told him that and I'm a-tellin' yuh-all now. I'm peaceable; savvy?"

"As peaceful as a rattler," was Shorty's inward comment. Aloud he said with a grin, "Got in any quicksand lately, Jones?"

Jones grinned in return. "Thought I recognized you. Small world, ain't it? You saved my bacon that night, pardner. I'm obliged."

"Yeah. 'Sall right, Jones. Yore remark about bein' peaceful kinda recalled that evenin' on the Rio."

Jones joined unrestrainedly in the laughter.

"They was crowdin' me that time. Yuh told these boys about it?"

Shorty nodded.

"Didn't think it was a secret, Jones."

"No, not exactly, boys. Still, I'd jest as soon it didn't git all around camp."

"Didn't aim it should, Jones. A man's past is his own business. Tad here's my pardner. Jimmer's my boss. Outside o' them, I don't tell nobody much of anything. It don't pay."

Jones nodded understandingly and turned to Jim.

"We're startin' as friends, Kinkaid?"

"Reckon so, Jones. Pecos ribbed his own quarrel. The Rafter T treats the reps like white men."

"Then that's settled."

He turned and walked away.

"Better start lookin' around fer that spotted pony, Shorty," Tad broke the silence when Jones was beyond earshot.

"Yuh think he's not a outlaw, Tad?" questioned Shorty. "Then why does he pack his gun like he might be needin' it sudden?"

"Hard tuh tell. Man's got a right tuh pack a machine gun if he's a mind to and pack it around his neck. I seen a good-lookin' spotted pony over at Fort Apache last month. I'll take him when the time comes to pay that bet."

Tad rose, stretched, inadvertently knocking off his partner's hat, and strolled away, followed by a good-natured tirade of somewhat profane abuse.

"Yonder goes the orn'ariest *hombre* this side uh the Big Divide, Jimmer," announced Shorty as he heaved a tent stake at Tad's departing figure. "He's got one uh them know-it-all spells on. Thinks he knows that Jones person and no man livin' can get it outa him till he wants to tell what he knows. He'll put in the next week rawhidin' me I reckon."

"Mebbyso Tad does savvy this Jones boy, Shorty?"

A disgusted snort was the little puncher's answer. "He's jest tryin' tuh be orn'ary, that's all. Jimmer, whenever a gent hits the Rio Grande with his pony in a run and his gun-barrel hot, that gent has bin over on the yonder side o' the Border pickin' up slick-ear cattle or runnin' guns er some such or'naryness. Jones had done slipped across the river and was maverickin' a few head fer hisse'f, that's all. I fergot tuh tell yuh that when Jones pulled out from the Wine Glass camp afore daybreak that mornin', he headed back across the Border. Peaceful? That gent's as peaceful as a wounded grizzly. I'm keepin' my eye on Mister Jones."

SHORTY was as good as his word. The following week he managed to keep the Diamond Cross rep in sight most of the time. They were working a rough country now. Small arroyos choked with manzanita, piñon, cat-claw and mesquite thickets, crisscrossed by twisting trails that led nowhere. Short steep-sloped ridges with treacherous shale cut-banks. This strip of rough country was known as the Short Chops, and here dwelt the renegade cattle, wild as deer.

Mavericks two and three years old, gaunt old cows that bushed-up with uncanny cunning while a rider passed within ten feet of them, spotted and dun-colored Mexican steers with immense horns, remnants of the old Rafter T herd that had come from Sonora fifteen years before. Time after time these old renegades had been rounded-up for shipment and always they escaped from the herd.

But a handful of these lean-flanked, fleet-footed outlaws remained and each one had a history. The cow-punchers had them all named and each year when the Rafter T worked the Short Chops every man carefully tested his catch-rope, looked to his saddle-cinches, and caught up his top horse. Late into the night the overall and jumper clad cow-hands sat about the camp-fire swapping yarns of "wasted loops," ropes that snapped when one of the outlaws hit the end of it, hogging strings that had failed to hold the captured animal, wild races through the rocks and brush, broken bones and crippled mounts that had limped into camp. Each man had his tale to tell and forwith "told it scary" to his cigaret-smoking audience.

Shorty Carroway, Tad Ladd, and various other old hands related their experiences with the long-horned renegades. Bit by bit the strenuous and lurid past of Rock Creek Whitey, Cibicu Dun, Sycamore Roan, and last and most elusive of all, Calico Jack, were unfolded.

Jones, listening attentively, smiled as he plaited a long hogging-string.

"What sorta lookin' critter is this Calico Jack, Shorty?" he asked during a lull in the conversation.

"Black and white spotted ole rannyhan. Horns longer'n Tad's laigs. He's the only steer outa that old Sonora herd that ain't got his horns sawed. "Figger on snarin' him, Jones?" Shorty's tone was an edge patronizing.

"I'd like tuh try him a whirl," admitted Jones, flushing a bit at the other's tone. "I'm forkin' my top horse in the mornin'."

"You'll need him," was Shorty's comment.

Tad chuckled softly to himself. Shorty was from the Tonto Basin, which boasted of being the home of some of the best ropers in Arizona, and the little cow-puncher was a bit jealous of his prowess with the hemp.

"You kin put a Diamond Cross on Calico Jack if yuh ketch him, Jones," grinned Kinkaid.

"Shore kind of yuh, Jim," laughed Jones. "I'll shore dab a Diamond Cross on Calico Jack if I'm lucky enough tuh snare him."

"My string's rode down," whined Button. "All I got that's fit to ride is a box-ankled mare and the Windy mule. Reckon I'll ride Windy with a breast-strap and breechin'. I got a new rope, anyhow."

"It orter be stout, Button; yuh ain't never stretched it on nothin' but yore saddle-horses," grinned Tad. "If I was you, I'd foller Jones or Shorty in the mornin'. Whip Windy into a lope and cold-trail 'em. They'll have ole Calico run down by the time they waste a few loops and spill him. Then he'll be pickin' fer you and Windy. Slam it on him, go south till yuh hear him flop, then slide off that hunk o' cactus yuh call a saddle and hog-tie him. Easy as shootin' fish and not near as dangerous. Better pack yore dehornin' saw so's yuh kin saw his horns and save the tips fer yore grandchildren. Of a night when yo're settin' aroun' you kin' tell 'em about the famous race when yuh captured Calico Jack in the Short Chops. You kin——"

"Aw, dry up Tad and let the kid alone," growled Shorty. "Yo're allers ribbin' him up to some fool thing."

Tad rose, grinning, purposely stumbled over his partner's legs, and headed for bed. Shorty followed, grumbling. The circle around the fire dwindled to Jim and Jones.

"Jones," said Jim quietly, "tomorrow ends the work on this range. We throw our herd in with the Diamond Cross and start fer the shippin-point. I wanted to pow-wow with yuh afore Tolliver and his spread got here."

Jones nodded.

"Fire away, Kinkaid," he said with a smile.

"I'm goin' to ask you a few questions. You don't need to answer lessen yuh want to. First, how long you bin workin' fer Tolliver?"

"I hired to him two days afore I came here as a rep."

"Ever bin in these Short Chops afore?"

"Yes," came the answer after a brief pause.

"I figgered you'd lie about that, Jones."

"But I didn't, did I?" smiled the puncher.

"No, Jones, yuh didn't lie. You was in these hills alone with a pack outfit fer about two weeks. I found yore camp and I seen yuh a time er two from a distance. I knowed it was you the first time you took yore rope off yore saddle the other day. Yo're handier with that line o' yourn than Shorty or the boys figger, Jones. A mite *too* handy, a man might say."

"Meanin' what, Kinkaid?" asked Jones evenly.

"You was stretchin' that line o' yours frequent when yuh was here in the Short Chops. I seen yuh runnin' my cattle several times."

"Ever find any worked brands on the cattle I chased, Kinkaid?" Jones was smiling oddly.

"No, don't know as I did, Jones. This is wild stuff in here. Some may turn up when we work tomorrow."

"Mebby," smiled Jones. "Shorty's bin trailin' me like a coon-hound fer a week. I'm afraid he was kinda disappointed when he didn't ketch me doin' any crooked work. Shorty Carroway's a good hand, Kinkaid. A good cow-hand and a darned fine feller. I wisht he liked me better. Any more questions?"

"Reckon not, Jones. Reckon not. Yeah, Shorty's a good boy. Him and Tad 'ud go the limit fer me. I don't mind tellin' you that accordin' to the sign yo're a rustler. Honest men don't go onto another man's range and chase his stock. Shorty says you was mixed up in some sort of crooked work down on the Border. Yet I'll have to admit that you seem like a decent enough sorta feller, Jones."

"Thanks," grinned Jones. "What was you aimin' to do about it?"

The big cow-man scowled thoughtfully.

"Hanged if I know, yet. Mebbyso something will turn up in the work tomorrow."

"Mebby," agreed Jones, an enigmatic smile playing about the corners of his mouth. "Supposin' I showed you I was on the square, Kinkaid?"

"You'd have to do some tall talkin', Jones. Appearances are ag'in' yuh. Yet, somehow, I shore wisht yuh could do that very thing, Jones."

Jim rose and stretched.

"Mebbyso you'll git yore wish," said Jones as he started for bed, "tomorrow."

"Hope so, Jones. I never said nothin' to Shorty or Tad about seein' you workin' here in the Short Chops a few weeks ago. They're kinda hot-tempered, both of 'em. I bin holdin' back the information, waitin' to see what happened. The show may tighten when we throw in with Tolliver's outfit to work the herds. Aim to stay till the finish, Jones?"

"Till the last steer is cut, Kinkaid. I'm playin' my string out."

"Figgered yuh would, Jones. Good night."

Jones watched the big cattle man's figure fade into the shadow. Then the Diamond Cross rep pinched out the glowing coal of his cigaret and with that same odd smile twitching at his lips prepared for bed.

II

AS THE Rafter T remuda milled in the rope corral, one puncher after another threw his rope on the fastest horse in his string. Tad grinned widely as he watched Shorty toss his line on the Skewball black, the best rope-horse in the country and private property of the little cow-hand who was saddling him.

"Good-lookin' horse yore forkin', Shorty," called Jones as he tossed his saddle on a raw-boned sorrel whose legs bore innumerable scars, mute evidence of many a wild race in the rough hills.

The "open sesame" of Shorty's heart was praise of his horse. He surveyed Skewball with just pride as he replied:

"None better, Jones. Broke him myse'f. Honest as the day is long, Skewball is. Yes, sir." Then, catching the derisive grin on Tad's face, he added. "A heap more honest than some men I've run acrost."

Jones, reaching under the sorrel's belly for the saddle-cinch, suddenly straightened. The hand that had reached for the cinch shifted toward the shoulder holster that held his gun. For a second he and Shorty stood tense, each waiting for that lightning-like move that was the forerunner of death.

Button, emerging from the corral with Windy in tow, unaware of the tension that gripped the two men, walked calmly in between, leading the mouse-colored mule who was stubbornly contesting every foot of ground between the corral and Button's waiting saddle. Directly in the line of fire, Windy balked.

"Will yuh prod that long-eared idjit from behind, Shorty?" called the panting Button.

"Yeah, prod him along, Shorty," called Tad, breathing a sigh of relief. "Unless my memory's shootin' blanks, it was you that broke Windy. I mind yuh sayin' at the time that yuh taught him all you knowed and I believe you fer oncet. You'd orter try backin' him, Button. Mebby he's one o' these here trick mules. You'd save time if yuh throwed and drug him to yore saddle, Button. Or if yo're in a hurry, yuh better leave him where he is and pack the saddle to him. Shorty'll help yuh ear him down so's yuh kin saddle him. Shorty learned him to jump around while a man was saddlin' him. Yeah, Windy shore is a trick mule."

Ignoring Shorty's grumbling answer, Tad turned to Jones. "Jim says me and you is to take the outside circle, Jones. Let's go."

The Diamond Cross rep mounted and followed Tad up a steep trail that rimmed out on a narrow ridge. The narrow trail prevented them riding abreast and thus prevented conversation until the two men gained the ridge and stopped to wind their horses.

"I wisht you'd kinda excuse Shorty, Jones," said Tad earnestly. "The little cuss has it in fer you because he figgers yore tryin' to maverick Kinkaid's stock."

"I shouldn't 'a' paid no attention to him," nodded Jones. "How come you don't share Shorty's opinion of me, Ladd?"

"Me and Shorty has bin partners fer a good many years, Jones," was the big puncher's solemn reply, "and we ain't never agreed about nothin' yet. Yonder goes Jim and the rest uh the boys. They're goin' to scatter out in the washes and draws. Me and you is to keep along the ridge and spook them wild 'uns toward 'em, then foller on down to jump out the ones that bush up along the way. We'd orter git some good loopin' today."

Leading the way, Tad rode along the ridge. Occasionally a small bunch of cattle, feeding along the ridge, would catch sight of the riders. A crash of brush and flying shale, and the animals would stampede into the cañons below where riders waited to pick them up.

"See that bunch in the saddle yonder,

Jones? Well, when we jump them out, you foller 'em down; savvy? Keep 'em foggin' er they'll rim out on the other side uh the wash. Them rannyhans is shore snaky. You'd orter git a chance tuh stretch yore rope afore yuh hit the mouth uh the wash. Great gosh!"

Tad stood in his stirrups as the cattle sighted them and scrambled down the steep slope.

"Yo're a fool fer luck, Jones," he called as he spurred to a lope. "Foller 'em, cowhand! Calico Jack is leadin' the bunch!"

But apparently Jones had already sighted the big-horned black-and-white steer, for he had swerved his mount to the left and headed him down the slope on a run.

"Good luck!" called Tad, then rode on at a slower pace, chuckling to himself as he pictured Shorty's crestfallen face when *that* rope-manipulator was informed that Jones had caught Calico Jack.

Heedless of danger, sliding, jumping boulders, dodging brush, Jones followed the cattle that were charging down the steep slope ahead of him. Mechanically the rider undid his rope strap and flipped a loop into shape. With only enough pull on the reins to keep the sorrel from falling, the Diamond Cross man watched the space between himself and the steer lessen gradually.

A strip of treacherous shale sent horse and rider down the slope in a kicking, struggling tangle. Jones kicked his feet free and quit the saddle. Bruised, shaken, he stumbled to his feet. The horse was standing at the foot of the slope unhurt. Jones was in the saddle like a flash and the sorrel, game animal that he was, was off without touch of a spur. But Calico Jack was kicking gravel a hundred yards down the wash.

Cursing fervently at the delay, the fever of the chase hot in his blood, Jones flipped his loop over his shoulder to free it from the brush, clamped his jaws as a huge limb scraped his hat off and scratched his face, and kept on.

Two hundred yards down the wash, waiting high up on the slope, Shorty Carroway's keen gaze picked up a swiftly moving black-and-white object that came down the wash below him.

Suppressing a cry of exultation, Shorty gave the impatient Skewball his head. A black streak and they hit the foot of the slope, faltered at the abrupt cut bank that yawned before them, then cleared it like a swallow, landing sure-footed and with running stride on firm soil beyond.

"Good boy, Skewball," whispered Shorty, bending low as he dodged raking cat-claw limbs that tore his jumper to ribbons.

With close-held loop, he sat low in the saddle as the all-wise Skewball negotiated the twisting trail without once slacking speed.

An open strip of soft sand, huge boulders and arrow weed. Skewball slid to a halt, then gathered himself and leaped forward as the wide-horned, red-eyed Calico Jack burst suddenly into view.

Shorty's loop swung overhead once, twice, then with unerring accuracy shot out and settled about those wide horns. Then as the faultlessly trained Skewball turned to meet the impact of the taut rope, Shorty groaned aloud. Three feet away, unseen by the horse, was a ten-foot cut bank partially hidden by the weeds! Skewball saw it too late. A fear maddened steer at the end of the tied rope, on the other side a cut bank! Shorty grit his teeth as he felt the horse sink under him.

Down! Down! It seemed a mile! Then a crash as they hit the creek bed below, close followed by another crash as the steer was dragged down on top of them.

Hoofs, kicking and threshing about! Swinging, needle-sharp horns that hooked at any moving thing as the bellowing, red-eyed steer fought to free himself from the tangled mass. Pinned beneath the fallen horse, silent, grim-lipped, desperate, Shorty groped for his gun. It was gone, jolted out no doubt. A bellowing roar in his ear, hot breath in his face and he ducked just in time to avoid a terrific swing of the wicked horns that would have gone clear through him. Twisting upward, Shorty grabbed at the horns. His hands gripped, then slid free as the steer lurched to his feet.

Bellowing with fear and rage, the steer leaped free and charged across the wash, then pivoted about, flopping heavily as the rope brought him up short.

Shorty, helpless beneath the struggling horse, watched the steer scramble to his feet, shaking his head angrily as he got slack. Then he charged and the helpless cowpuncher closed his eyes and, without knowing that he did so, prayed.

A flash of sunburned sorrel horse across the gravel, the hiss of a swiftly swung rope, then a crash. Jones was on the ground and

running toward the fallen steer, his hogging-string in his hand. The sorrel braced back on his haunches, keeping taut the rope that held Calico Jack.

Shorty, dazed and unbelieving, blinked his eyes. Like a man in a dream he watched Jones deftly jerk tight his hogging-string, then straighten.

"Hurt bad, Shorty?" he called as he ran toward the fallen man.

"I—I reckon not," stammered Shorty.

His face was bleeding from a dozen deep scratches and he was badly bruised. His right leg, pinned beneath the horse, felt numb and cold. But he was not thinking of that. His eyes were on Skewball.

Jones cut the catch-rope free from Shorty's saddle-horn, severed the latigo strap thus freeing the saddle, and helped Skewball to his feet. The horse, snorting with fright, started off, then halted. His off fore leg hung stiff and awkward.

"Look, Jones!" cried Shorty hoarsely. "Look! His leg's broke! Skewball's leg is shore busted!" Tears welled to the little cow-puncher's eyes as he limped to his feet and approached his beloved horse.

Sobbing brokenly, tears coursing down his bruised cheeks unashamed, Shorty put his arms around the animal's neck and lay his cheek against the sweaty, dirt-grimed hair.

Jones, awkward and ill at ease, had to swallow hard several times before he could speak.

"Better get on my horse and ride away fer a spell, pardner," he said gently as he placed an arm about the other man's shoulder. "I'll do it fer yuh. It'll be over in a second and that's better than lettin' him suffer."

Shorty, dazed and his shoulders quivering with the dry sobs that racked him, submissively let himself be led away.

"You—you'll do it as easy as you kin, Jones?" he asked as he mounted the sorrel.

Jones nodded. "Come back after yuh hear me shoot, pardner. I savvy how yuh feel."

Shorty rode down the way, listening for the shot that would mean the end of Skewball. Suddenly a shout brought him up short. Jones was yelling at the top of his voice.

"Come on back! Hurry, Shorty! It ain't busted! It ain't busted, Shorty! Shoulder hurt, that's all! He jest walked on it, Shorty! Hurry!"

Excited as two schoolboys, they examined the hurt shoulder.

"He's done run his last race fer a long time, Shorty. Mebbyso he won't never be fit to ride in rough country again."

"Makes no difference, Jones," grinned Shorty, a ludicrous little figure with his tear-stained, blood-smeared face and torn clothes. "Makes no difference. We don't have to shoot him. He kin still eat biscuits and— Say!"

For the first time it dawned on Shorty that Jones had saved his life. The little puncher shifted his weight to his good leg, a shamefaced look in his eyes.

"Jones," he began, the words coming with difficulty. "I'm right sory fer the orn'ary way I bin treatin' you. Mebby you are a rustler. I don't know. But yo're a man and I'll lick ary gent that says you ain't. I'd— I wish you'd shake hands and call it off."

He held out a hand toward the Diamond Cross rep.

Jones, grinning good-naturedly, mumbled something in an embarrassed manner as their hands met. Habitually undemonstrative, it was an awkward moment for them both.

"Let's take a look at ole Calico," Shorty broke the silence.

Both men walked to the hog-tied steer.

Suddenly Shorty gasped. His jaw sagged in amazement as he bent closer.

"Calico Jack," he muttered aloud. "Calico Jack and he's wearin' the Diamond Cross brand! One uh them scabby brands that looks like it had bin put there a year ago! Sufferin' rattlesnakes!"

The crashing of brush called their attention to a spot behind them. A moment later and Button, sweat streaked, dishevelled and excited, broke into view. Windy slacked his slow lope, halted and, jerking his head free, commenced grazing.

"Shucks! Jest my darned luck," grunted the youth disgustedly as he perceived the hog-tied steer. "Me and Windy was shore a-bustin' brush, too."

Button disentangled a huge mesquite bough from his tangled rope while the amused cow-punchers gave him advice about destroying shrubbery.

"Better pack that loop o' yorn in yore pocket, Button. Yuh got that Windy mule plumb wore out jerkin' off tree-limbs," grinned Shorty who now turned to again examine the worked brand on Calico Jack's ribs.

Jones reached for tobacco and papers, smiling to himself as he watched the Rafter T puncher at work.

At last Shorty rose to his feet and faced Jones. The little cow-hand looked worried.

"I reckon you know what this means, Jones?" he finally asked.

The Diamond Cross man nodded.

"Means trouble, I reckon."

"I'll tell a man it means trouble. Jim Kinkaid kin prove ownership this time. Every cow-hand on this range knows Calico Jack. This here brand has bin worked recent. It looks like an old brand but it ain't. Bud Tolliver and Pecos musta bin drunk when they branded this steer. They ain't got a chance o' provin' ownership. I can't figger out why they did it."

"Supposin' they didn't do it?" smiled Jones. "Looks to me like somebody was jobbin' Tolliver."

"You mean the Rafter T outfit did it to git somethin' on the Cross spread?"

"I ain't mentionin' no names, Shorty. But it don't look reasonable that old hands like Tolliver and Pecos would work a brand on a critter that every man in the country knowed. No, sir, Bud Tolliver ner Pecos Trent never made that brand."

"Then who did?" asked Shorty warmly.

"You'll find out when we work the herd, Shorty. Yo're shore goin' to learn something about brand-workin' afore many hours. Reckon you kin lead Calico Jack with the Windy mule?"

"Lead Jack on Windy? I'd hope to tell yuh I kin. I used Windy fer leadin' more than onct."

"Good. We'll have to set Button afoot, I reckon. Turn Skewball loose and let him start fer camp. Then take Windy and lead Calico Jack to the mouth uh the wash and throw him into the hold-up. And say, I noticed yore six-gun back by the cut bank. Better git it. You may need it when the show opens. Unless I'm bad mistook, there'll be a scrap when we work the big herd."

Not until Jones was far down the wash did it occur to Shorty that the Diamond Cross man had been acting strangely.

"Doggone," he muttered. "That feller shore was gally, tellin' *me* what to do. Hmm. Git my gun? I'd tell a man I'll git it. Fall offen that mule, Button. You go back to camp travelin' by hand. No use sulkin' about it neither. For onct you come in handy. You'll find my .45 under that bank yonder. Fetch it to me afore yuh drag it fer camp. My off laig is all stove up."

III

BAWLING, milling cattle, close-herded by a score of riders, filled the wide mouth of the wash. As calves found their mothers the bawling lessened and out of the chaos came order of a sort.

Bud Tolliver and Pecos Trent never separated as they rode around the herd, talking in low tones. The Diamond Cross punchers were all wearing their guns in plain sight.

"Jim," said Tad Ladd as he met his boss, "Tolliver's huntin' trouble. He's got more men than we have and they're all wearin' their shootin'-irons where they kin grab 'em handy. I passed the word to our boys and they're all willin' to go through to the finish with you. Wisht Shorty'd show up. Yonder comes Jones."

"Shorty done had some hard luck, Kinkaid," announced Jones as he rode up. "He'll be along directly. He's leadin' Calico Jack. Don't start workin' the herd till Shorty gits here. Another thing. It's customary fer a T man and a Cross man to work together when they cut the herd, ain't it?"

Kinkaid nodded. "I was thinkin' I'd ask you to ride with me."

"If it's the same to you, Kinkaid, me and Tad Ladd will cut the Rafter T stuff. You and Tolliver kin cut Diamond Cross. But don't start that Diamond Cross cut till me and Tad has cut five head o' T's. I got a reason fer askin' that favor."

"Better do as Jones says," grinned Tad. "He's got the idee, Jim. Any further orders, Jones?"

"Yes. Watcht Tolliver and Pecos clost, Kinkaid. Shoot if yuh have to. They're goin' to shore fight their heads when me and Tad cuts them first five head o' T cattle."

Jim Kinkaid eyed Jones curiously.

"Recollect that powwow me and you had last night, Jones?"

"Shore do, Kinkaid."

"I told you somethin' might turn up in today's work, didn't I?"

Jones nodded, smiling.

"And something did?" he asked quietly.

"Yeah. Three head. Rock Creek Whitey, Sycamore Roan, and Cibicu Dun are here

in the herd. Every one uh them steers has a Diamond Cross on his ribs. Worked brands, Jones. Look like old brands but they ain't. Only one man has bin in the Short Chops except me. That man is you; savvy?"

"And it was me that branded them steers, Kinkaid. Shorty will be in directly with Calico Jack. Jack's packin' one uh them Crosses too.

"What's the idee?" gasped Jim, astonished at the man's admission.

"Well, I'd say it looked as if a feller named Jones was about to show up another feller named Tolliver. If you don't believe me, watch Bud Tolliver's face when he sees me cut them steers into the T herd fer a start. Fer unless I'm guessin' wrong, Tolliver and Trent figgered they was the only cow-hands in this part uh the country that knowed how to make a new brand look old."

"Make a new brand look old, eh? I'll tell a hand it looks old. How's it done?"

"Tell you later," smiled Jones. "Yonder comes Shorty with Calico Jack. Help him turn the steer into the herd, Kinkaid. Then you and him watch Tolliver and Trent. Come on, Tad."

"Do as Jones says," cautioned the grinning Tad. "And tell Shorty I'm claimin' that spotted pony when the herd's worked."

"What's that about a spotted pony?" asked Jones as he and Tad rode toward Tolliver and Pecos Trent.

"I bet Shorty a spotted pony that you wasn't a rustler, Jones."

"How do you know I ain't, Tad?"

"Because I stayed at a Arizona Ranger camp one night with a old friend o' mine that was one o' the force. Feller rode up and talked to my ranger friend, then rode away. I asked him who this rider was and he told me it was his captain, the best brand-man in the world, bar none. Glad to meet yuh, Captain Jones."

"You win, Tad," grinned Jones. "You was shore close-mouthed about it. I'm obliged. I have to be kinda keerful in my business er my man might git leary and quit the flats on me. Couldn't tell even Kinkaid. News travels. I come here to git Tolliver and Pecos Trent. Them two gents was back uh the Mexicans that run me across the Rio that night. I slipped back across the river again but they was too slick. They'd crossed their herd to this side and was lost in the hills. Neither of 'em ever seen my face so I come up here to their range and hired out to 'em."

The ranger and Tad had come abreast with Tolliver and Pecos now. The Diamond Cross owner and his henchman eyed Jones a bit suspiciously.

"Me and Ladd's goin' to cut the Rafter T stuff, Tolliver," said Jones. "Jim Kinkaid's orders."

Tolliver and Pecos exchanged a quick look.

"Since when have you started takin' orders from Kinkaid?" snapped Tolliver.

"I'm reppin' with the T wagon, ain't I? And as long as my string of horses is still in the T remuda, I take my orders from the T boss."

Tolliver scowled. Jones was right. The unwritten law of the range demanded that a rep with any outfit take his orders from that outfit's boss.

"All right, Jones. Hop to it. But don't let yorese'f forget that you draw Diamond Cross wages. Big wages too."

"But not fightin' wages, Tolliver," smiled Jones. "By the way, Mister Tolliver, *have you got any piñon pitch handy?*"

Tolliver recoiled as if from a blow. His hand started for his gun, but he stopped short when he saw that Jones was holding a .45 carelessly in his right hand.

Pecos Trent seemed stunned for a second. During that second Tad Ladd had eased his gun from his chaps pocket.

At that juncture Shorty and Jim Kinkaid rode up.

"Me and Tad is goin' into the herd now, Tolliver," said Jones calmly. "Better stick around fer a few minutes so's you kin take a look at the stuff we're cuttin' and govern yore cut accordin'. Come on, Tad."

Without another word the ranger captain and the big cowpuncher rode into the herd.

Pecos and Tolliver were visibly upset. They exchanged quick, furtive glances. Shorty and Jim sat in their saddles calmly enough, but their eyes were not on the herd. They were both watching the Diamond Cross owner and Pecos.

A moment and the two cutters worked a gentle cow to the edge of the herd and shot her out for the pick-up men to hold. Tolliver breathed a sigh of relief when he saw it was a Rafter T cow.

His relief was short-lived, however. The

two men again approached the edge of the herd piloting a sawed-horned white steer.

"Rock Creek Whitey," called Tad. "Rock Creek Whitey wearin' the Diamond Cross! Look him over, gents!"

"What kind of a fool play is this, Kinkaid?" roared Tolliver. "I never branded that steer!"

"Yuh might ask the Pecos feller," suggested Tad as he and Jones shot the steer to the hold-up men and rode up to the group.

"Somebody's framin' up on me," growled Tolliver, his narrowed eyes glittering with hate. "What's the meanin' uh this?"

"Piñon pitch, Tolliver," smiled Jones. "Get my meanin'?"

"Who are you, anyhow, you double-crossin' smart Alec?" snarled Pecos.

"I'm the gent you and yore Pisanos run into the Rio Grande one night, Trent," came the even reply. "Twenty to one is mighty big odds, even fer a Arizona Ranger. I took to the river. The odds ain't piled up so high this trip, gents."

Jones turned to Kinkaid.

"There's four big steers in the herd all wearin' the Diamond Cross, Jim. They're yore steers. Ary man in this country will swear to it. There's a lot more stuff wearin' the same kinda brand. I don't think this feller Tolliver ner his Pecos helper will dispute ownership of anything you want to cut into the T herd. Will you, Tolliver?"

The Diamond Cross owner was black with rage. His loose lips worked convulsively but no words came.

"I branded them four steers myself, Kinkaid," Jones went on. "Branded 'em without buildin' a fire or heatin' a iron. I used the same method as Tolliver and Trent used. Piñon pitch."

"Piñon pitch?" echoed Jim incredulously.

"Yeah. First you pick the brand yuh aim to run. Pick the hair plumb to the hide. Then with the handle of yore jackknife, yuh rub that picked brand till the blood comes. When it's rubbed raw—a danged cruel practise and I shore hated to do it, even when it meant big results fer the law—when it's rubbed raw, you take some pitch from a piñon tree and warm it with a match. Smear the pitch on the raw brand. In a week that pitch brand will pass any inspection yuh want to try. It looks like the scab of a year-old brand. The welt is there too. Not one man in a hundred would guess it wasn't the real goods. Tolliver, I'm arrestin' you and Trent. Throw up yore hands!"

Tolliver, his yellow teeth bared in a snarl, whirled his horse into Kinkaid's and with the T man for a shield, fired. The bullet missed Jones' head by a scant inch. Then the gun in Kinkaid's hand belched flame and Tolliver sagged in his saddle, falling clear as his horse reared.

Trent, white about the lips, his face twitching with pain, was staring stupidly at a bloody, useless right hand that a moment before had held a gun. Tad grinned as he held his smoking gun ready for a second shot.

The herd, now a bawling, running mass of frightened cattle, tore down the wash, and the *pop-popping* of guns told of half a dozen fights in progress as Rafter T men held their own against Tolliver's gunmen.

Tolliver, wounded in the shoulder, cursed wildly as he crawled about on the ground hunting for his gun. Shorty swung to the ground, rope in hand. A moment of futile struggling and the Diamond Cross owner was bound. Trent was begging for mercy.

That evening Jones left camp with half a dozen prisoners guarded by Rafter T men, among them Button, who was doing his best to look desperate.

Shorty and Tad, riding herd on the restless cattle, paused for a moment to "augur."

"Wise, wasn't yuh, yuh long-legged shikepoke," grinned Shorty. "All the time yuh knowed Jones was a ranger. It's worth a spotted pony to spend a week durin' which yuh didn't tell everything yuh knowed. I'll give you that spotted pony on one condition, Taddie."

"Name it, yuh runt."

"That you'll give it to the school-marm."

"Jest what I aimed to do. I promise," grinned Tad.

"Good. And if yuh ride hard yuh kin git that pony to her in time."

"In time? In time fer what?"

"For her weddin', yuh bonehead. She's goin' to marry that high-collared drug-store gent tomorrow. She done told me the secret the last time I proposed to her."

Whistling tunelessly, Shorty rode on his way, leaving his partner to ponder in solitude.

POSITION DOUBTFUL

by

Warren Hastings Miller

Author of "Blaze."

"THE point is, Captain Robbins, *are* we going to get into Hwan Chow tonight, or are we not?" The owner of the Green Funnel Line, Cyrus Holborn, was asking that question, asking it with rising impatience in his tones.

Three men stood around the chart of Formosa Straits spread out in the *Port Sydney's* chart-house, while great swirls of spray lashed on the plateglass front windows and ran down the panes in ceaseless rivulets. Blown clear aft a hundred feet from where the steamer was burying her clipper bows to the eyes at every dip, the whole Yellow Sea seemed trying to get in here, where these three stood in consultation about the chart.

Captain Robbins balanced against the roll and pitch of the ship as he faced Cyrus Holborn sturdily. An exasperating thing this, having the owner of the line on board! His mere presence in the chart-house was an offense against the discipline of the sea; and his insistence upon the importance of his business affairs introduced complications which had nothing to do with this storm. Robbins' black eyes burned fiercely in his round face, all seamed and tanned with the pickling of innumerable voyages. His left eye, which drooped with a habitual squint, was closed tight in the intensity with which he replied.

"*Ba-ber*— by ——, sir, we are *not!*" he exploded with that blab of the lips preceding all of his emphatic utterances that his shipmates had come to know so well. "I'm running into Hingwa Bight tonight, sir, to get out of this and lie to."

The deep boom of a wave smote the iron bows of the ship and almost stopped her dead. It was immediately followed by the swish of tons of salt water hurtling aft. No one noticed it in the least, as the ship rose giddily and gathered way again—no one but the first officer, Mr. Wehal, who was nervous and somewhat uneasy and impressed. He could not help glancing out the gray square of window to the wet bridge outside, where young Hoag, the second officer, paced across and across. Hoag passed by at that moment behind the canvas screen, wet and dripping spray-drops from his fluttering oilskins. He grinned in at them an instant and winked cheerily at the perturbed Wehal.

But the other two were eying each other hostilely, totally ignoring the storm outside. Cyrus Holborn towered over his stocky captain, bending down upon him the fierce blue eyes under his bushy white brows. Tall, lean, and wolfish in aspect, his face suggested the wolf by his gray and pointed Van Dyke beard which extended in frizzly chops out around his wide jaws.

"But you *must* get me into Hwan Chow tonight, captain," his harsh voice insisted. "The Min Kiang camphor, man! Have you any idea of the freight rates on camphor right now? The point is, if I don't make Foo Chow the Japs will get it all. There's a Shosen boat coming down after it from

Nagasaki. She'll blow in tonight, sure, riding down on this northeast gale."

"*Ba-ber*—do I understand that I am to risk this ship for your infernal camphor?" demanded Robbins bluntly and without tact.

"Certainly!" retorted Holborn with an equal lack of feeling for the other's problems as a seaman. "Any risk, within reason! Keep going! I don't care how you do it, but *do* something!"

Holborn was speaking with that forceful get-busy——-you tone that had always brought him results with his factors and engineers. His tones implied that you lost your job if you didn't. As for the technical difficulties, those were for the luckless employee to surmount as best he could. Holborn was boss, owner, the king of ships and godowns and feeder-railroads, and what did he hire you for anyway!

But Captain Robbins' fierce right eye continued to bore into the angry ones of the owner while his left eye squinted itself quite shut.

"The orders of a fool, sir!" he told Holborn bluntly. "We can't run broadside-to in these seas into Hwan Chow, with the ship light and tender as she is, in ballast only. And we can't run the Ho Kang passage in this weather—it's a mill-race in there, with the whole Gulf of Hwan Chow swashing through it. I'll not risk my ship in there tonight."

"You mean *my* ship," corrected Holborn without smiling. "All right; do something else, then."

Robbins knew his legal rights as captain. That "my ship" was true, in a way. Holborn owned her, as he did the *Port Shanghai* and the rest of the fleet; big ten-thousand-ton freighters whose distinctive features in the eastern seas where their green funnels, their clipper bows and their house cognomen, "port" this and that. Also he owned godowns in Hwan Chow and Hongkong, and warehouses in Sydney and Melbourne, and feeder-railroads spurring up country to fetch exports to fill them for his steamers. But all that did not give him one iota of actual command here. Robbins was legally responsible for his ship and all on board her.

"Very well, sir," he replied shortly, "I *will* do something else—run into Hingwa Bight. It's the only thing left to do."

He stepped to a speaking-tube to call in young Hoag out on the bridge.

"Here! Don't do that, captain!" cried Holborn. "Just a minute—here—can't we just run up the Straits——"

He turned hurriedly to the chart again, studying it as a landsman striving to find some way out of the dilemma. Holborn died hard! He always maintained that people took "no" for the answer too easily. If "no" meant everything you wanted denied you, don't accept it! was one of his maxims.

Captain Robbins came over and put a stubby finger on the chart.

"No, we can not," he said positively, "I told you once before that the ship is too high and tender to turn her broadside to these seas. We'd carry away everything. Probably turn turtle."

Holborn peered out of a chart-house window and out over their pitching bows far below. It looked as if Robbins was right. The whole Yellow Sea, driven by this northeast gale, was pouring down into Formosa Straits as into a vast funnel seventy-five miles wide. Land was nowhere in sight, but ahead of them to the far horizon stretched line upon line of white-capped combers thirty feet high, whipped up by the monstrous wind. They rolled down endlessly out of the inexhaustible northeast, serried rank upon rank, each of them picking up the *Port Sydney* like a toy boat. They shot her bows up, up, pointing at the dull clouds racing overhead. They passed under, dipping her clipper cutwater deep into the breast of the wave behind, raising the screw astern high out of water until it shook the ship like an earthquake. Then would come the boom of tons of salt water striking her bow plates and a blinding shower of spray pelting aft in one white blizzard. As a landsman Holborn considered it a terrible storm—unimpressed by it as his officers seemed. To them it was all part of the day's work; but even Holborn could see that to attempt to run across these seas for fifty miles into Hwan Chow would be foolhardy.

"Why can't we creep up by *here*, and then either make a short turn or just drift back into Hwan Chow Gulf until out of the worst of it?" he argued, pointing at the cape of Ho Kang Island.

"*Ba—ber*—because of *that*, Mr. Holborn."

Robbins had put his thumb on a dotted area on the chart extending out some distance from the cape. It filled a small corner

of the Straits and made necessary a detour of some twenty miles out from shore to steam around it. Engraved on the area in fine script were the words:

"Chinese cruiser, 1892. P. D."

"That's a reef, isn't it?" asked Holborn. "What does P. D. mean?"

"Position Doubtful," explained Robbins wearily, "Chinese cruiser lost here in '92."

What a kindergarten of navigation one did have to hold with this man to win one's point!

"Position Doubtful!" echoed Holborn, at once losing confidence. *He* dealt in sure things, money transactions in which no chances were ever taken. Doubtful, indeed! Why didn't they *know!* Anyway, a reef was a reef, a thing to be treated with respect and given a wide berth—as wide as possible if its position was doubtful.

"To steam around it will send us way out into the Straits," explained Robbins technically. "It will mean a long run across these seas into Foo Chow. But, d'you know, Mr. Holborn—" he looked up, his eyes glinting with confidence into the owner's—"*ba-ber*—for one, *I* don't believe that reef *exists!*" Robbins had emphasized this astounding declaration in the face of the chart with that forceful shooting out of his lips and his inevitable explosion into words.

"Doesn't exist!" echoed Holborn amazed. "But our own Hydrographic Office says it *does!* You can't go back of *that*, captain!"

"No one in the China merchant service believes it, sir," retorted Robbins. "There is a story about that reef——"

"Story!" snorted Holborn. "Are you talking of risking this ship on the strength of a fool story——"

"*Will* you listen, Mr. Holborn!" cut in the captain with savage exasperation. "I'm willing to take the ship over it and get you into Hwan Chow tonight. You'll agree, if you'll hear me out——"

"Not in ten thousand years!" Holborn cut in short. "Not on *any* story. The Hydrographic Office is enough for *me*, thank you! How about trying the Ho Kang passage?"

"*Ba-ber*—but that's a real danger, sir!" objected the captain at once and forcibly. "This other's mythical. I'd rather chance it, if we must."

The negative shake of Holborn's grizzly head and the shrug of his big shoulders told the captain that he was totally deaf to any such suggestion, would not even listen to it, did not *want* to hear the story concerning the reef which made merchant captains skeptical as to its existence. He could not get beyond that printed chart.

"But if you think I'm the man to take 'no' to all this, captain, you're much mistaken," his heavy voice growled. "No Hingwa Bight tonight! I order you, here and now, to try this Ho Kang Passage."

"That I'll not!" retorted Robbins. "She'll pile up in there, sure! Never, while I am responsible for this ship."

"Obey orders if you break owners, captain!" spoke up Mr. Wehal, the first officer, with an obsequious glance at Holborn and an oily smirk.

He had paced the chart-house, neglected and unconsulted, during all this. Portly and pompous, his thin legs and overfed belly making him resemble some breed of rooster, Mr. Wehal had been fuming in silence, his vanity immeasurably hurt by their ignoring any possible opinions of his in this discussion. His long and sensual face, sleek with the fleshy chin and jowl of good living, was wrinkled in a confident smirk as his handsome brown eyes telegraphed Holborn, "I'm your man, sir!" over a pair of soft black mustaches.

Robbins turned on him fiercely.

"*Ba-ber*—" blabbed his lips, warming up; then the explosion— "I'll trouble you *not* to speak until you are spoken to, Mr. Wehal!"

"On the contrary he *shall* speak!" interposed Holborn with angry energy, "Wehal, what do *you* think? Is the Ho Kang safe in this blow?"

"Safe and sane, sir, if you ask *me!*" smiled Wehal, who always spoke in familiar old saws, imagining that it gave him a reputation for conservatism and reliability. The wonder in his service always was how he managed to hold the job of first officer, in that hard-bitten crowd who officered the China freighters.

An exploit, managed entirely by his second and for which he had taken all the credit, had got him his promotion fourteen years ago. Since then he had managed to keep out of trouble under the wings of various captains, pompous and full of wise saws, but never entrusted with command by any owner. Command was however the unfulfilled ambition of his life. Now he saw his chance to run with the ball and was quite

willing to take it, for he had no conception of the dangers of the Ho Kang to a big ship, with this gale piling down through it out of the Gulf of Hwan Chow.

"Mr. Wehal!"

Robbins silenced him with a look. For the time he ignored Holborn's high-handed assumption of authority in his own chart-house, conceeding something to the owner's habits of bossing every one with whom he came in contact. He still relied on argument.

"It's a fool's courage, Mr. Holborn," he said earnestly. "The Ho Kang is a mill-race now. For her to even mind her helm we should have to steam through there at full speed. She'd pile up; some current swinging her in spite of all we could do. Never, so long as I am captain of this ship!"

But Holborn was bent on reaching Hwan Chow that night. These technical dangers could not be very impressive if experts disagreed over them. *One* officer of his at least seemed brave enough to try the Passage.

"Very well, Captain Robbins: you are no longer in command of this boat. I discharge you, here and now!" he said harshly. "Mr. Wehal, take the ship!"

The merchant service are a hard-boiled lot! What they want they go for with a ruthlessness which rides roughshod over legal technicalities. Owners and captains alike, each was headstrong in the pursuit of his own aims. Captain Robbins took this outrageous discharge as would any of his breed. For an instant he stared at Mr. Holborn, fury in his eyes. He knew very well that Holborn had no right to discharge his captain on the high seas; that the captain alone is legally responsible for the safety of his ship and all on board until the voyage is done. And he knew that Holborn knew it. This high-handedness had gone far enough!

His lips shot out.

"*Ba-ber*—out of my chart-house, both of you!" he roared. "I'll teach you the meaning of the word mutiny!"

He reached for the brass pull-handle of the general alarm signal. But he did not need to. There is a power in certain words which transcends all physical force. Mutiny is one of them. The very idea shot caution into Holborn's truculent spirit. The glare died out in his eyes. Here was something that no man could fight! There was big money in reaching Hwan Chow tonight—but there was imprisonment and even death in opposing his captain's orders on the high seas.

"Oh, *very* well! Come along, Wehal—he's mad!" he growled, his voice thick with rage as he seized the open-mouthed and irresolute first officer's arm. At the chart-house door he turned for a last snarl:

"We obey, Captain Robbins. But it's your last voyage. Consider yourself discharged the instant we reach port. You are too expensive a man for *me!* A coward, who won't take a chance in his firm's interest."

Robbins held in firm control the impulse to dash for him at that word "coward" and stonily ignored them both as the door closed. The owner was a most incontinent man! How did such as he manage to hold on to their vast wealth and continually increase it, while old captains, grown gray in their service, still plugged on at one-fifty per? The utter injustice and futility of all things swept over the captain in a storm of indignation. Men of brains, courage, professional ability, got nothing; men of money made yet more money. They knew nothing that any man could discover, yet got rich on the brains of others. Take a chance indeed! Hadn't he offered him the only good chance, going over a reef that no merchant captain believed existed? He would not even hear and judge for himself the story about it which had been going the rounds of the shipping offices.

An incredible yarn; a typically Chinese business, evolved out of the rotten politics of that country, but so far no government had ventured the delicate business of approaching the Chinese Government about it to get permission to send a gunboat and take soundings and either prove or disprove the story. And, while the merchant service all believed it, since it rang true, being so typically Chinese, no captain as yet had ventured his ship over the reef. It was perfectly simple, and safer, to just give the whole thing a wide berth as shown on the chart. The Straits were seventy-five miles wide here. But, now that there *was* an emergency and a perfectly good reason for crossing the mythical reef, Captain Robbins could see no reason for balking at it, chart or no chart.

The captain's ire cooled down somewhat after a time, and mechanically he stopped to bend over the chart. The ship's business

had to go on, and it was high time to change course for Hingwa Bight. Mechanically he picked up the dividers and parallel rulers to lay off the new course from the big rose compass on the chart. The pencilled course-line lay under his eyes, running up the middle of the Straits. Robbins took out the distance run from the log and added it mechanically to the last dead reckoning. Then he marked the point of departure and brought down the new course with the parallel rulers. Without conscious effort—the back of his mind still ruffled over that encounter with his strong-headed owner and a new worry beginning to take shape, the worry of getting another ship—he corrected the course for deviation and the ship's error. When the calculations were done he started out of the bridge ward door to give young Hoag his orders.

The gale met him outside with a swirl of solid water as if thrown from a bucket. Thick weather! The captain recoiled from it a little, raising his elbow to protect his eyes, groping with the other hand for a grab-rail to steady himself against the roll. The full force of the wind smote him like a blow as he dragged himself to the chart-house corner. Robbins waited there until the second officer should come over to the port side of the bridge on his regular beat. There was no sense in venturing up that slant and slippery passage and risking a limb at his age. The enormous shout of the wind through all the superstructure and standing rigging made it futile to call out for Hoag. The captain retreated a little behind the chart-house corner and waited.

And then suddenly a stout cloth was being whipped across his face, covering eyes, nose, and mouth. It was being tied strongly and swiftly behind his neck, at the same instant that iron hands were grabbing his wrists and forcing them violently behind his back. Robbins struggled silently, in a concentrated fury of resistance. In a flash he knew exactly what was being done but could see nothing because of the bandage. That vainglorious ass, Wehal, had pursuaded Holborn to forcibly seize the captain and then put *him* in command of the ship! They had waited for him outside the chart-house. Holborn would do anything rather than take "no" for the answer when he wanted his way! The two were alone in this, but he could not legally identify either of them for neither was saying a word.

THEY hustled him swiftly and unceremoniously down the ladder to the main deck, the ship aiding with her regular roll. There Captain Robbins attempted to shout for help, on the hope that some steward or seaman would overhear his muffled cry, but the wind bellowed through the empty deckways down here louder than above. A handkerchief gag was forced into his mouth; he felt a rope being wrapped around his ankles and tying them firmly together in spite of his kicks and struggles. Then his silent abductors carried him around a passageway, where the smell of the boiler ventilators came to him in a hot swirl. A door was flung open, and he was cast into a room that he knew must be somewhere in the officers' quarters.

Robbins recognized the familiar clean smell of tobacco as the door was closed and locked outside. He was in his own room, the natural place for the captain to be—and who could tell if he had not just locked himself in for a nap while off duty? Fairly ingenious of them, thought the captain—but he was skeptical over their ability to keep him here long! His immediate necessity was to regain command of the ship, before that preposterous ass Wehal could get her into any real trouble.

His first act was to manage to squirm to a sitting posture, braced in the corner made by the berth drawers and the paneling of the stateroom wall; that much for the protection of his helpless body rolling about in the reeling stateroom. All was yet pitchy blackness, and that tight bandage about his eyes was hurting intolerably. The stateroom switch was above him on the panel, Robbins knew, handy to the berth. He shoved himself upright; then turned and found the switch with his head. His teeth bit the handle and a twist of his head turned it on.

No difference was apparent, save illumined cracks above and below his eyes. These gave hope; and the captain began fiercely to rub at the bandage, scraping his head over the edge of the berth board. A technique of bandage-removal began to develop as he worked at it with eager interest. It seemed that a downward drag on the knot at the back of his head was accomplishing something! Scraping it upward only tightened the thing. But now it was becoming distinctly less irksome and exasperating. Robbins redoubled his efforts;

dragged the bandage little by little downward back of his neck; over one ear; exposed one eye; and finally worked it utterly loose and hanging in a limp loop over his nose.

He could see now; but the gag was equally intolerable, so he started dislodging it. What a remarkable member one's tongue was! He had never before become acquainted with it in precisely this fashion, but it amazed him how it could worm around that soggy wad stuffing his mouth, and what strength it developed in pushing at the outside handkerchief of which crossed his mouth tight between his teeth. Only a trifle could his tongue budge it, but that trifle was enough to get it over the row of teeth in his upper jaw. Then the captain learned how a handkerchief knot can "give" when one braces against it the full force developed by the powerful muscles at the back of one's neck, resisted by the immovable solidity of one's teeth! The thing became measurably looser. He could push out the gag under it; his lower teeth got behind it and transferred the outer bandage down in front of them, and now he could speak.

The captain considered awhile. This little affair required finesse. Only two men were involved, the owner and the first officer. Therefore the part of a gentleman in managing it required that no person of the crew should gain any inkling of what was going on. Therefore, no untoward shout for help of his!

What were they at now? Robbins looked at the compass over his berth, that compass which gave him the course of the ship at all times, day or night. It still stood N. N. E. They had not changed course yet to run for the Ho Kang Passage. Why?

Because of young Hoag, he reflected. It will still his watch, but it would not be long. A glance at the chronometer screwed to the stateroom panels showed the time to be five minutes of four. They were simply waiting until he went off watch, when Wehal would normally come on. The first officer was already in the chart-house, familiarizing himself with the log to date, looking to his lights and lookouts, seeing that the new watch was mustered.

The captain smiled as these homely details of the ship's routine rose before him. How easy it was for the first officer to take command without arousing any suspicion in young Hoag's mind! But when it came to his actually doing something so risky as attempting the Ho Kang Passage—Robbins groaned with anxiety for his ship. Wehal had not near nerve enough for it! Of course he would run there, and perhaps poke her nose into it; then try to back out, for even Holborn would be convinced of the futility of it. But even that much spelled almost certain disaster to his ship. Big and unwieldy, to maneuver her among those rocks guarding the entrance required a firm hand on the engine telegraph—full speed ahead, full speed astern, no half-measures. It required also sound judgment and knowledge of the ship as to just when to give her the engine. Robbins had watched Wehal at the telegraph—half-speeds, quarter-speeds, anything but full and firm control, the ship herself not knowing where to go, not getting engine-power enough at any one time; that was Wehal's way.

No; he must regain command of the ship and that right soon, the captain decided. How to get in touch with Hoag? The chronometer now stood two minutes to four. Hoag would be going off watch now. He would suspect nothing; hand over the bridge to Wehal with a grin of relief and a caustic jibe at the weather, and then go to his room and turn in, for he came on again at the midnight watch. The captain smiled as he thought of young Hoag. Here was the stuff of which captains are made! He liked that earnest young fellow, serious as youth only can be about getting on in his profession, up to the minute in his navigation, his instruments, his books. Wehal scorned books.

"Experience is the only teacher, sir!" he would declare pompously, being too lazy-minded to read the latest technicalities written by the men of his profession. To which Robbins would reply—"But she keeps a hard school, Mr. Wehal, attended mostly by fools." But Hoag followed progress assiduously in everything pertaining to his job, kept after errors in the China charts, was up on the latest gossip of pilots and of the youngsters on other ships trading in these seas. The long process of hard-boiling him had only just begun, but he was the raw material of which captains are made.

Robbins looked about him for ways and means of getting in touch with Hoag, bound hand and foot as he was. Then he gave a downright chuckle, a low and throaty laugh. How easy it was to seize and bind

a man and throw him into his own stateroom—and how hard it was to keep him there! These amateurs at blindfolding and gagging a man! They had foozled in another thing too, forgotten it! The captain lurched over to the paneling again and dug his elbow into the knob of the push-button of the steward's bell, also handy to his berth.

Presently there came light footsteps outside and some one tried the door-handle.

"That you, Blivens?" called out the captain over his gag.

"Aye, sir! Any orders, sir?"

"Ask Mr. Hoag to step to my room directly he comes off watch, Blivens," said the captain.

Footsteps went away. The thing was done! Shortly after, a rapid and heavy tread stamped along the corridor and a firm knock rapped on the door panel.

Robbins bent down to the keyhole.

"Are you there, Hoag?" he called out cheerily. "Will you be good enough, Mr. Hoag, to get the master key from the head steward? I've locked myself in with this confounded door—somehow."

"Very good, sir," came Hoag's fresh young voice laconically and he went away.

The captain turned to his compass while he was gone. Its card had swung to N. N. W. on the rhumbline. Already those two had changed course for Ho Kang Passage. In half an hour's time——

HOAG'S returning footsteps sounded outside. The lock was turning; then the door swung open and he entered. "Beet Root" was his ship nickname, and he looked it with the deep weathering on his handsome and regular young features, pickled a beet-red by that sea which was molding him to her service. The stamp of energy and command, and above all of enthusiasm sat normally on his face, but just now his fine blue eyes were regarding the captain with unmixed wonder. For that man, whom Hoag in his boyish way had idealized as the personification of all good seamanship and absolute authority, now stood before him braced against his berth, a handkerchief gag tight across his lower lip, another loose over his nose, and a glance at his feet showed the captain's ankles firmly bound with a rope.

"Close the door and lock it, Hoag," ordered the captain before the amazed second officer could utter a word, "and take these things off me."

Hoag whistled low; then stooped to the rope. Its knot was wet and obstinate, a "granny" tied by Holborn. In a second Hoag had got out his pocket-knife and cut the cords, following with quick slashes which freed wrists and mouth.

"There, sir!" he exclaimed. "What's up?"

His eyes were excited and his young face eager over this extraordinary thing. Robbins' own eyes twinkled. For Hoag's sake he would have loved to indulge in heroics, but his man's common sense forbade.

"Nothing, Mr. Hoag. Little mutiny. All foolishness," he grunted while stretching his arms and wringing his wrists to restore circulation. "A bit of chafing wouldn't be bad, Mr. Hoag," hinted the captain, stretching out his red-circled wrists to him.

"Mutiny!" questioned Hoag, his voice lowered with excitement as he went at the wrists. It was his first experience with that dread word.

"Wehal and Holborn," explained the captain. "They are running for Ho Kang Passage now against my orders."

"*Ho Kang?* My ——!" ejaculated young Hoag. His tone was a comprehensive and contemptuous comment.

"They managed to nab me as I was coming out on the bridge to tell you to change course for Hingwa Bight. Tied and gagged me, and locked me in here."

"Phew!" said young Hoag. Again he managed to make one word give his whole attitude toward that act of mutiny and outrage.

Robbins looked at him appreciatively.

"Our owner is bent on reaching Hwan Chow tonight," he went on. "He'll take *any* chance, even Ho Kang. But that preposterous ass Wehal, who now has the ship——"

"But he won't long, sir!" interrupted Hoag belligerently.

Robbins nodded.

"*Ba-ber—chance*, sir!" he burst out forcefully, his emotions aroused. "I offered Holborn the only good chance—running over that mythical reef off Ho Kang Island! You know the story, Hoag. But the H. O. chart says it's there, confound it!" he interjected exasperately. "Funny how a man like Holborn will worship a piece of paper! That was enough for him, though I tried to tell him about it. *I* don't believe it's there—nobody does——"

"I *know* it isn't there!" cut in Hoag. "I got the story straight from a Chinese naval officer last trip. They've notified the various governments about it, at last. Next year's chart won't show it."

"Sure about that?" questioned the captain, eying his second fixedly. He always doubted a man's word and questioned his statement in any matter of the first importance. If the man knew what he was talking about he would neither waver nor back down. "I think so" does not go on the sea!

"Yes, sir!" replied Hoag positively. "I thought of running over it this morning, anyhow, if we were ever to get in. Was going to ask you how about it. Seemed to me the thing to do in this blow was to run by that point over the west end of the fool reef, run her up into Hwan Chow Gulf, and then drift her back, with the engines just keeping way on her, until we got where we could turn her broadside-to safely."

"Precisely what I was going to do! Come along, Mr. Hoag!" said the captain with energy and leading the way out of his stateroom.

Mr. Hoag followed him with stern and set face and his big red fists clenched. Robbins took in that attitude in one backward glance, and knew also that the boy's heart was pounding with excitement and his soul set with resolve. Pity to spoil all that with no heroics whatever! But this little mutiny was a delicate matter involving the first officer and the owner. The part of a gentleman in managing it——

Together they went up the ladder, forced their way through the gusts of wind whipping around the chart-house corner, and came out on the bridge. Three figures stood bending over the binnacle there, muffled in oilskins in the blinding sheets of spray, the first officer, the owner, and the helmsman of the watch. The captain walked rapidly to them unobserved:

"Jackson, go into the chart-house, lad, and get me my binoculars," he said in his ordinary voice as he touched the helmsman on the shoulder.

He took the wheel-spokes as the man relinquished them. The other two had started back at the familiar tones, and both now stood motionless in attitudes of startled astonishment, Wehal already cringing before his captain, Holborn taken utterly aback. One look into the glinting eyes of the captain at the wheel, at the lowering face of young Hoag towering back of him threateningly and bent forward with clenched fists, ready to jump at the word, told Holborn the utter futility of any further resistance. For once he could not trust himself even to speak.

"Mr. Wehal, you are suspended from duty," said the captain icily. "Leave the bridge, sir, at once."

When he was gone Robbins turned to the owner.

"Mr. Holborn, I'll trouble you to go to your stateroom and stay there."

He turned to the wheel, his attention entirely on the binnacle and its compass card. Holborn went off without a word. It was all over, the little mutiny on the *Port Sydney!*

Young Mr. Hoag felt justly disappointed. No heroics, not even a "scrap." He had been deprived of all those thrills and those delightful violences that a fellow has a right to expect from the word mutiny! His face told Robbins that, as he hovered around, even after the helmsman had come back to relieve the captain. They went into the chart-house together to get out of the weather and correct the course.

"Hadn't you better go below now, Mr. Hoag?" asked the captain, almost caressingly for a hard-boiled merchantman of his type. "You have the twelve-to-four. I thank you for your help in this little matter," he added, remembering that the usual amenities had been forgotten.

"I'd rather stand by, sir, if you don't mind," offered young Hoag. "If we're wrong about this reef we'll take the blame together."

"We're *not* wrong," said the captain steadily, but he did not refuse young Hoag permission to stay.

Both stopped to look at the chart, where the line of course now ran right over the dotted area of that Chinese reef off Ho Kang.

"Can you beat it!" laughed Hoag. "Twenty years of dodging that thing! But the story only came out last year. Big changes in China since the Republic, for all we laugh at it. And yet the owner wouldn't listen to you, sir?"

Captain Robbins seemed in no conversational mood and only nodded moodily. Mr. Hoag pondered, wondering what was the matter now, trying bashfully to offer

some of the human sympathy which overflowed from him.

"Seems to me, sir, you've been a gentleman all through this," he ventured.

"The whole thing kept absolutely quiet, no one but us knowing what's been done—The owner will thank you for it, when he gets over his mad."

He stopped, for that didn't seem to be it either. The captain had not appeared to listen and only answered with an abstracted—

"Yes, yes!"

Young Mr. Hoag thought again.

"You don't mean to say that he *fired* you and put Wehal in charge before trying that kidnaping stunt?" he blurted out suddenly as the idea struck him red-hot.

Robbins nodded somberly.

"Fine reward, after twenty-two years in his service, wasn't it?" he inquired with irony. "*Ba-ber* — but that's not it Mr. Hoag!" broke out the captain passionately. "He called me a coward, because I would not risk the ship in the Ho Kang!" His eyes were flashing now over the utter injustice of all pig-headed owners when they wanted their way.

"Nobody but a fool would!" said Hoag warmly. "If this is your last voyage with him, captain, it's my last. Please take me with you, sir, at Hwan Chow."

Robbins laughed indulgently, yet his heart warmed at the boy's loyalty. There were grand young chaps in the world yet! He took Hoag by the shoulders.

"Good lad! But it's not for you. Stick here. I leave when we reach Hwan Chow. Maybe, some day—it's not easy for even one man to find a ship nowadays," he sighed.

A messenger coming in stopped the second officer's reply.

"Land on the port bow, sir!" he announced and withdrew.

The two men glanced at each other. The time to try the Position Doubtful reef had come!

"Land, as seen from the lookout's cage," Robbins mused, "In this wrack, about seven miles off. Half an hour and we'll know something, Hoag!"

THEY checked up position on the course and then both went out on the bridge. In the long Winter twilight of North China a gray visibility still prevailed over all the sea. The horizon was just the same, a distant circle of tumbling whitecaps edging a glowering sea. Line upon line of great waves still hurled themselves endlessly at the advancing bows of the ship. Spray still swished aft in white sheets. Jackson, behind the wall of bridge canvas, bent over the binnacle, shivering, the wheel under his hands moving a spoke or so, port or starboard.

After some space of time:

"Land, ho, captain!" sang out Hoag from the port bridge-end.

Robbins stumped over to look, squinting his eyes nearly shut.

"Right, lad! That's Ho Kang peak, sure enough.

He was identifying the lone peak supported by lesser flanks, rising out of rocky headlands that were faintly distinguishable through the wrack. Then came his order:

"Stand by the engine telegraphs, Mr. Hoag. We'll be the first to try this!"

Both were somewhat nervous as they peered ahead at the waters over the alleged reef, searching with experienced eye for any break in the waves, any difference in formation, any change in sea color that might suggest shallow bottom underneath. That incredible Chinese story! It rang true; yet who could believe anything that the mandarins chose to say and do? Yet they had the word of a Chinese naval officer of the new Republic that it *was* true, as was generally believed throughout all Eastern shipping offices.

But this risk was very real; for the ship was real and would strike hard if the reef *was* there! Robbins sent for a leadsman, determined to take no risk that he didn't have to, even for the sake of a fool owner who was bent on getting into Hwan Chow that night. At four knots speed it was possible that a good leadsman could get bottom if there were any.

Slowly the minutes went by, as Ho Kang Peak passed them distantly to port. The leadsman lashed in his cage whirled his plummet in great circles, while Hoag stood by the telegraph, ready to signal instant reversal of the engines in case the lead gave warning. Captain Robbins paced up and down, watching the waters ahead. The psychology of imagination! All his marine world believed that that reef did not exist, yet every captain had given it a wide berth because of the charts. Robbins *knew* that it did not exist; yet here he was going ahead

with extreme caution, so powerful is the influence of imagination. It *might* be there, after all. The chart said so. Against that, only the word of a modern Chinese naval officer, confirming a story so preposterous as hardly to be believable in the first place.

Robbins stopped and sighted a bearing of the peak on the mainland. Then he turned to Hoag, rubbing his hands with vast satisfaction.

"We're over, Mr. Hoag! Mind the bearing of Ho Kang peak! I told you the thing didn't exist! That's well, leadsman; coil up and go below," he turned to hail the man in the cage.

"*Yeeaay!*" yelled Hoag, relieving his feelings boyishly; then stopped with a sudden sternness in his eyes, for a man, Mr. Holborn himself, was rushing at them frantically from around the chart-house corner.

"*Stop her! Stop her*, captain!" he was screaming with terror. "You're on the *reef!* For God's sake stop her——"

Robbins cut him short.

"There *is* no reef, Mr. Holborn! We've passed clear over it, without bottom. I told you the story was true. See—there's the old bearing of the peak, where we always come in."

He pointed it out to the owner to reassure him. The latter still doubted his senses.

"I saw the whole thing from my porthole and came up, captain—I couldn't help it!" his voice still trembled. "And now you're over?—*I* wouldn't have done it for a million! Not on any fool story!"

"Wouldn't you?" inquired the captain sweetly. "Listen—" and then he launched the immortal story of Ho Kang Reef—"A couple of mandarins needed the money," he began, while young Hoag at once started to grin. "They conceived the grand idea of building a whole cruiser—on paper—and pocketing the appropriation for it themselves. They sent in the plans to Pekin, to somebody high up, who had just grabbed the appropriation for China's two new battleships and built a summer palace with it. This person saw the point, took his rake-off, and steered the money their way. The mandarins went on building her, reporting progress from time to time, and finally had the nerve to report her launched! Can you beat it? A ship that was still nothing but a set of paper plans!"

Robbins himself was laughing by this time and young Hoag cackling unrestrainedly. Holborn looked at them both, his ears refusing to believe anything so monumental as this example of graft.

"Orders then came to put her in commission and send her over to Formosa on some mission," went on Robbins while Hoag exploded in a youthful guffaw. "That didn't trouble those mandarins one bit, sir! They got another appropriation for *that*, pocketed the money, and reported her sailed for Formosa. Then they sent a long letter, full of lamentations, telling the person higher up that she had been wrecked, lost with all on board, on an uncharted reef —a paper ship, mind you, that did not exist, wrecked on a paper reef invented for the occasion!"

Holborn exploded then. The whole thing was preposterous—so typically Chinese! He rocked from side to side, almost hysterical with the reaction from that intense fear of only a few moments ago.

"Well?" he finally gasped out.

"This here is that very reef!" guffawed the captain. "It don't exist and never *did* exist!"

Holborn doubled up. He that had been willing to risk even Ho Kang Passage sooner than chance it!

"But our Hydrographic Office!" he gulped, aghast, when he found breath again.

"For twenty years all that the world has ever known about that cruiser is an obscure clipping about her loss that got into the Pekin *Times*, somehow. Our good H. O. promptly noted the "uncharted reef" on the chart, marking it P. D. because the details as to location were—naturally—rather vague."

They all went off into shrieks again. In no nation but China, and in no port but Hwan Chow, far from Pekin, could any such superb example of graft have been shown the world as getting two million *taels* for a paper cruiser that never *was* built, and then "losing" her on a fake reef!

"The story came out last year," put in Mr. Hoag. "I got confirmation of it, straight, from a naval officer of the new Republic. You won't find that reef on next year's charts, sir."

Holborn straightened himself up and became serious again.

"Robbins," he said appealingly, "I've

been a —— old fool, but I'm not going to be a worse one—just forget anything I may have said about your leaving us, please—and as for your Mr. Wehal, take my advice and throw him overboard! I—I don't *want* to make any more suggestions, captain, but—" he hesitated as he eyed young Mr. Hoag, whose own eyes stood level with his— "but wouldn't this young man do in his place as first?"

Robbins looked at his owner, all animosity buried, their old friendship and confidence completely restored.

"I think so, sir!" he chortled. "*I* think so! Mr. Hoag, take the ship, as first officer. Call me when you are ready to make the turn.

And he and Holborn left him staring at them open-mouthed, as they went below to discuss a bottle of hearty old ale of the brand that the head steward always kept under lock and key.

THE GIPSY LANGUAGE

by George Gatlin

"LISTEN," said Chaney Lee, an American Gipsy of the old sort, "I dont *jin* to *rokkra bute* in the *Romani jib*—I dont know how to talk much Gipsy. But I talks it to the *chaves*—children—like my *folkies* talked it to me. It ain't proper for a *Romanichal* not to *rokkra Romanes*. It ain't religious."

Chaney speaks *Romanes* like other descendants of the English Gipsy, with little regard for the conjugation of verbs and with a rich alloy of English words. His vocabulary is not so copious as that of his cousins in certain other countries, but he knows enough original words and forms to make himself understood after a fashion among the Romani of Hungary, Russia and even Turkey. If he has difficulty in conversing with foreign Gipsies it is because of dialectic variations. The language is basically the same.

Romanes is not thieves' slang or robber jargon, as many suppose, but an original and distinct language. It resembles Sanskrit. How ancient it is, no one knows. During centuries of wandering, many Persian, Armenian, Greek, Wallachian and Magyar words became incorporated in it, but enough original words remain in all *Romani* dialects to prove it an Indian tongue. It has not only enabled scholars to identify the Gipsies as Hindus, but also to trace their wanderings by means of the loan words.

Of the four or five thousand words that comprise *Romanes*, the average Gipsy knows only a few hundred. It is remarkable that he knows any—that even a remnant of the tongue remains. It is not a written language. But Chaney Lee's sentiment is deep-rooted in the race:

"How did I learn my *Romanes?*" asked a Spanish Gipsy.

"By hearing my *folkies* talk it to me, of course."

Ask a Gipsy about his language and he may deny that it exists. If he is heard speaking it he will claim that it is Italian, Portuguese, or "Brazil." He guards it jealously and prizes every word he knows. It has ever been a secret tongue. Indeed, it was against the old Gipsy law to teach it to a non-Gipsy, and the law has been scrupulously observed.

JUST FOR A LAUGH

By

W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Out of the Flood," "Rustler's Roost," etc.

"I'M TELL you she's all wrong, Blackie; all wrong. You got de ver' poor system."

"Wolf" Timmons, a great bearded trapper, waved his arms until the smoke haze of "Frenchy" Beaupré's barroom danced with the breeze.

"Blackie" Breen, a great hulking, sour-faced trapper, leaned against the rough bar, holding a steaming tin cup in his hand, and glared at Timmons. By the little box-stove, as red as a cherry from the fire within, sat Jud Harper, Blackie's partner, and Frenchy Beaupré.

Harper clutched a short pipe between his bearded lips, and his strong teeth showed a white line, grinning. Timmons was baiting Blackie, and all of them, except Blackie, knew it. They had all been drinking heavily of hot rum.

"Wrong system, eh?" growled Blackie. "It works better than your system, Wolf."

"So?"

Timmons spread his hands deploringly.

"Work better? Ha, ha, ha, ha! How many wolf you get las' week, Blackie?"

"Six!" snapped Blackie angrily, half-triumphantly.

"Seex? Only seex. ——, so few? I'm get nine."

"Must have been a lot of sick pups."

Timmons laughed raucously and hammered on the bar with his tin cup.

"Ho, Frenchy! Fill up de cup. Come on—mak' fas'. By gosh, I'm feel pretty good—me. Everybody drink to Wolf Timmon', de ver' bes' wolf poisoner in de Rocky Mountain, by gosh!"

Blackie sneered openly, but handed his cup across the bar for another drink, which Frenchy mixed from boiling water and a bottle of rum.

"What system you got, Wolf?" asked Frenchy.

"Me? I'm use de arrow, by gosh. I'm mak' arrow, cut de little gouge-out place un upper end, where I'm put de lard and strychnin. Den I'm walk t'rough de hill, fling de arrow away out and she stick up in de snow. No man track around de arrows so Meester Wolf or de coyote not be scare to eat de bait."

"That's a —— of a way to poison wolves!" snorted Blackie. "I hollow my sticks, pack in the poisoned lard, and drop 'em behind the trail I make by draggin' a hunk of meat on a rope. When a wolf or a coyote strikes that trail he follows it; and when he finds one of them sticks he investigates the lard. And they don't go far after they eat the first one."

"And she don' work ver' good, eh?" grinned Wolf. "Only seex in a week. You never mak' much money, Blackie. You better quit de poison job and go trap de mink and martin with Harper. By gosh, he's get de leetle fur pretty good, eh, Harper?"

"I'm gettin' a few, Wolf," smiled Harper. "I ain't gettin' so awful rich, but it pays pretty well. Anyway, I'd rather take mine in a steel-trap than to use poison. I hate the stuff."

"You never see de expert work," said Wolf. "I'm make de poison ver' artistic. I'm give jus' de right amount—*pouf!*"

They continued to drink heavily and Wolf did not let up on his bantering of Blackie. They were working practically the same range, and once a week they met at Frenchy's place, which was not over seven miles from where Blackie and Jud lived in a little cabin, now almost snowed out of sight. Wolf lived about a mile beyond them, in an old dug-out.

It was a bitter, hard life on those blizzard-swept hills, and they earned every cent they got in bounty and in the sale of their furs. Harper confined his trapping to mink and martin; working back into the timbered streams, while Blackie's operations were carried on in the open slopes of the hills, where the wolves and coyotes ran in packs into the lower valleys and harried the herds of the stockmen.

Blackie suddenly flung down his cup and whirled on Wolf.

"Money talks with me, —— yuh, Wolf!"

He dug into his pocket and drew out a buckskin sack.

"You brag about yore system, do yuh? Well, I'll bet yuh a hundred dollars that I can kill more wolves in a week than you can. Now, put up or shut up."

Wolf laughed mockingly and flicked the dregs of his drink into the smoky air.

"You wish for de bet? Ver' well, we mak' de bet. One hundred dollar, eh? We put up de money wit' Frenchy, and in one week we come back here."

He turned to Harper.

"How many pelt has Blackie got now?"

After a moment of rather difficult concentration, Harper said—

"He's got thirty-seven."

"T'irty-seven, eh? Good! I'm got feefty-one. Frenchy, mak' de mark to show how many each man got. One week from to-night we mak' de count. Ho, ho, ho, ho! I'm mak' one hundred dollar ver' easy."

BACK in their own cabin that night, Blackie swore he would beat Wolf Timmons or die in the attempt. In his heart had grown a mighty hatred for this big, laughing French-Canadian and, he did not try to conceal it. Harper was mild of manner, inoffensive; and he knew that Wolf Timmons was doing it all in a spirit of fun; so he remonstrated with Blackie.

"—— you, you're stickin' up for him, eh?" roared Blackie. "You're a —— of a partner, you are! Well, you can both go to —— as far as I'm concerned."

"No, it isn't that, Blackie," soothed Harper. "Wolf is only fooling with you. He ain't such a bad feller."

"Ain't he? Well, you better trap with him then. I'll show yuh both what I can do."

Early the next morning Blackie mixed his baits and went out on his line, without a word to Harper. He was sullen, bitter; still half-drunk. Harper watched him leave, and then went out on his own trap-line, back into the timber. It was bitter cold. Harper would not be back for three days, as it took him that long to cover his trap-line.

His own work kept him fairly busy, and he forgot the bet between Blackie and Wolf until he came back to the open country and ran into Wolf, who was carrying the pelts of three wolves.

Wolf dropped his pelts and waved both arms at Harper, while his big voice came booming down the breeze.

"By gosh, Harper! How goes every-t'ing?"

"Fair catch," smiled Harper, as they shook hands. "Martin running a little better. How is the system workin', Wolf?"

"Jus' like I'm say. I'm have twelve pelt now. Seven coyote and five wolf."

"How is Blackie comin' on?"

Wolf shrugged his shoulders.

"By gosh, I'm dunno. I'm 'fraid to ask him. She's so —— mad at me. Ho, ho, ho, ho! I'm joke him and she's get mad. Good joke, too. By gosh, she'd good joke. Mebbe I'm go wit' you and see how Blackie come out, eh? Mebbe she's give me drink of whisky—mebbe."

He shouldered their hides and went on to Harper's cabin, where they found Blackie in a sullen mood. He glared at Wolf and did not even welcome Harper, who gave Wolf a drink out of their jug.

Wolf did not stay long. He knew that he was not welcome, and did not want to antagonize Blackie any further. Harper did not drink from the jug, but there were no comments, as they knew that Harper confined his drinking to Frenchy's place. He had never been known to take a drink from that jug, although Blackie sampled it often.

As soon as Wolf had gone, Blackie swore viciously, almost incoherently.

"What's the matter?" asked Harper, as he stripped off his heavy moccasins and held his feet out to the little stove.

"Matter?" roared Blackie. "That —— Timmons is a thief!"

"A thief? Oh, I don't think he's a thief, Blackie."

"That's right—back him up in it! I tell you he's a thief. He's stealin' my baits in order to win that bet."

"No!"

"Yes! Listen." Blackie spat viciously. "The first day I got two coyotes and a wolf; the next day I got one coyote, and today I got nothin'. It blew like —— last night and covered my trail, but I managed to find several bait-sticks—empty!"

"Bait eaten out, Blackie?"

"Eaten out,——! Any animal that would eat out one of my baits won't go a hundred yards. No, I tell you, they wasn't eaten out. That —— Timmons has follered me and scraped out my bait. He's probably kept 'em for himself, —— his heart!"

Harper made no further comment as he filled his pipe. Wolf had said it was a good joke, and Harper wondered if that was Wolf's idea of a good joke.

"From now on I pack a Winchester," said Blackie meaningly.

"Better make sure," advised Harper. "I can't imagine Wolf doin' that, Blackie."

"Mebbe yuh can't—but I can. How many has he got?"

"Seven coyotes and five wolves."

"The dirty sneak! Twelve to my four."

Blackie took a rifle from between his blankets and sat down to clean it. He was in a killing mood. But Harper offered no more advice. Blackie finished with the rifle and took a deep drink from the jug.

"If he monkeys with my baits once more, he'll never collect that money," he declared. "And you keep yore —— nose out of it, Harper. This is between me and Wolf Timmons."

"Don't do anythin' foolish, Blackie," advised Harper. "Think twice before yuh act."

THE following morning Harper left early, but Blackie was already gone on his rounds. Blackie carried a Winchester, and was in just the right mood to use it on Wolf Timmons. The wind had drifted his meat-trail full of snow, and it was difficult for him to find his bait-sticks; but what he did find were empty of the poison bait. There were so signs of Timmons' snowshoes, but the wind would have covered them with snow in a few minutes.

Blackie got no pelts that day, nor did he catch sight of Timmons. The next two days were but repetitions of the first. He could find plenty of bait-sticks—empty. And with each empty stick he swore an oath to repay Timmons in full for his deviltry.

A heavy blizzard detained Harper, who did not get back until the seven-day bet was finished. It was late in the afternoon, when he mushed past Wolf Timmons' cabin and found him preparing to carry his pelts to Frenchy's place and settle the bet. He had a small bottle of whisky, and wanted Harper to take a drink, but it was refused; so he put it back on the shelf, and they pulled out for Harper's cabin, drawing Wolf's pelts on a sled.

Blackie met them at the door, but offered no greeting. In fact, he had nothing to say. Harper noticed the insane glitter in his eyes and grew afraid that Blackie might attempt violence.

But Blackie said nothing, until Wolf jokingly asked him if he wanted to pile his pelts on the sled and help take them all to Frenchy's place. It was then that Blackie opened up the vials of his wrath. He cursed Wolf Timmons with every curse known to any one of them; cursed him for a thief, a crook. In fact, he covered about all the sins of mankind; but Wolf Timmons did not take offense. He grinned, that was all.

"I'm got t'irty-one pelt," he said softly. "How much have you got, Blackie?"

"Four, —— yuh! Just four! I dunno how yuh let me get that many, unless it was before yuh got to stealin' my baits."

"Oh, ho!" Wolf sucked on his pipe. "You count de ones you tak' from de bait you set before we mak' de bet, eh?"

"I counted from the first day."

"Ho, ho, ho, ho! Too bad, Blackie. I'm not count dem. I'm only count on de bait I put out de next day from de bet."

"Then," said Blackie coldly, "I don't have a —— one to count!"

"By gosh, dat's so. Hm-m-m! You got —— bad system, Blackie."

"Well, let's go to Frenchy's place," suggested Harper. "What do we care about the bets, anyway. C'mon, Blackie."

"You can both go to ——!" snorted

Blackie. "I'm not goin' down there. You've played a dirty trick on me."

"Ho, ho, ho, ho!" laughed Wolf. "De good system win, Blackie. Come down to Frenchy, and while we drink de hot rum, I'm tell you what de good joke is."

But Blackie merely cursed them both impartially and refused to go; so they went away alone, not bothering even to take Wolf's pelts. Blackie sat down by the stove and drank heavily from their jug. He cursed Wolf Timmons aloud; he cursed Harper for going with Wolf, and he cursed Frenchy Beaupré for merely being on earth.

Then his eyes narrowed, as a scheme entered his twisted brain, and he got slowly to his feet, a grim grin on his lips. From beneath his bunk he took out a large-mouthed bottle. It was unlabeled, but Blackie knew it contained enough strychnin crystals to last him through a Winter of poisoning varmints.

He shook it until the white crystals of death danced, and then he slipped into his heavy clothes, strapped on his snowshoes and put the bottle inside his shirt. It was blowing a gale, and the snow swirled like dry sand; but Blackie bowed his head and strode in the direction of Timmons' dug-out. He was glad of the wind, which would wipe out all evidences of his passing.

The door of the dug-out was unfastened. He lighted a candle and looked around, until the bottle on the shelf caught his eye. He took it to the light, placed it on the table, while he took the poison bottle from inside his shirt. And with a steady hand he sifted a certain amount of the crystals into the whisky, corked the liquor and gave it a quick shake. Then he placed it back on the shelf, blew out the candle and sneaked out into the storm.

All the way back he alternately cursed Wolf Timmons and assured himself that no one would ever know. No one would ever suspect that he had placed the strychnin in Timmons' whisky, he told himself.

Back in his own cabin he sat down to enjoy a smoke. But the enjoyment was not for Blackie. He jumped nervously at every sound. The whistling of the wind made him shiver in spite of the fact that it was suffocatingly hot in the little cabin. He drank more whisky and it bolstered his spirits. He even got to a point where he could curse Wolf Timmons and enjoy his own profanity. Finally he decided to go to bed. It would be better for Harper to find him in bed, he thought. Anyway, it was almost time for them to be coming back.

He went to the door and looked out. The snow was not drifting so badly now, and he could see Timmons and Harper coming. Quickly he shut the door. The two men came to the front of the cabin and talked loud enough for him to catch the drift of their conversation.

"Blackie, she's gone to bed by now," said Timmons. "You come and sleep wit' me, Harper. No use stay in cabin wit' crazy man. We mak' de hot water and have big drink before we go to bed, eh?"

"Well, I suppose that's best," said Harper, a trifle thickly. "Blackie's sore as a badger right now. He'll be all right tomorrow. C'mon."

Blackie leaned against the wall, trying to get things straight in his mind. Harper was going to stay with Timmons tonight. They would heat some water and have a big drink. Blackie tried to laugh, but it froze his face into a leer. If they both drank from that bottle they would both surely die. He tried to think of something to do.

If he stopped them now, it would mean explanations. It would make him a potential murderer—he was one already—but no one, except himself knew this. He struggled into his coat and went out into the storm. His moccasins were beside the fire, but he forgot that they were not on his feet. He did not even miss them when he strapped on his web snowshoes.

Half-way to Wolf Timmons' cabin he became aware that he wore no cap, no mittens. The blizzard was getting worse, and he was just a trifle bewildered as to direction. Just what he was going to do when he reached the cabin was still a problem in his mind. In spite of the cutting wind, the perspiration trickled down his nose and froze into icicles on his beard.

Then he found the dug-out. On the right hand side was a tiny window, with only a few inches of the pane showing above the snow, through which glowed a weak, yellow light. He realized that it had taken him a long time to reach the cabin. Sparks flicked out of the rusty stove-pipe, only a few inches above the snow.

He staggered up to the door and tried to grasp the latch, but his hands were as clubs —hard, unfeeling things. Then he hesitated, stumbled sidewise and clawed his

way around to the window, where he sprawled in the snow, shoving his face almost against the pane.

Things inside that dug-out were indistinct, but he could see the two men in the candle-light. The bottle was on the table, and Wolf Timmons was pouring hot water out of a kettle into tin cups. He watched them, fascinated. Then Wolf Timmons uncorked the bottle and divided the contents.

As the two men picked up the cups Blackie tried to cry out at them to stop it; but his voice was only a wheezing grunt. They were drinking now. He heard one of them, it was probably Harper's voice, say—

"What in —— makes this taste so funny?"

Then Blackie Breen rolled away from the window, struggled back to his feet and went running blindly away in the blizzard, his frozen hands shoved out ahead of him, as if trying to blot out the thoughts of those two men in the little dug-out.

It was the worst blizzard in years, and for four days it raged mightily. Frenchy Beaupré sat alone in his little barroom and wondered if all was well with the men of the mountains. On the fifth day they came —Wolf Timmons and Jud Harper—dragging a sled, on which was a blanket-covered object.

Frenchy greeted them jovially, but they did not smile. It was still many degrees below zero. Frenchy stacked the little stove with wood and made steaming-hot drinks, while the two men sat silently near the stove, picking the ice out of their beards.

"Blackie don't come?" queried Frenchy.

Wolf looked up. In his eyes was a great sorrow. He started to shake his head, but changed it to a short nod.

"Blackie she's come, Frenchy. On de sled is Blackie. Four days she's los' in de storm. She's fall on de slope, where de snow not stay deep; so las' night we find her."

Frenchy shook his head sadly.

"Too bad, by gosh! Froze to death. What a storm. Mebbe Blackie get caught, eh? Can't go by de cabin?"

"That's it," said Harper slowly.

Frenchy went to his little cache under the log and came back with the two hundred dollars.

"Here is de bet, Wolf. I'm suppose you win, eh?"

Wolf shook his head sadly and shoved the money aside.

"De joke she's no good," he said sadly. "I'm laugh at poor ol' Blackie. I'm want to make him foolish—me. I'm jus' want to play good joke and den give him back de money; but now she's dead and de joke is not joke now."

"Joke?" Harper lowered his steaming cup. "What joke, Wolf?"

The big French-Canadian shook his beard sadly.

"I'm laugh at Blackie biccause he use different way to kill de wolf and coyote. She's jus' as good as my way, but I like to mak' laugh. I say to me: 'I'm play good joke on Blackie, and we all get big laugh at Frenchy's place. And den I give him back de money he lose on de joke, and bimeby I divide up my pelts.'

"'De nex' day after de bet is made, I mak' sneak to your cabin and I find Blackie's bottle of strychnin. I'm tak' out all de poison, put in another bottle, and into his bottle I'm pour 'bout de same size of what you call de Epsom salt. She's de w'ite crystal—look lak' de poison, by gosh!"

'Just like it," said Harper thoughtfully.

He remembered the queer taste of the liquor he drank that night in Timmons' dug-out, and shivered slightly.

"By gosh, she's too bad," said Frenchy sadly. "Poor Blackie she's never know it's a joke; she's never appreciate."

"Never appreciate it," echoed Harper. "I reckon that's right."

He spat thoughtfully and handed his cup to Frenchy for a fresh drink. He still had that queer taste in his mouth, and he wondered why Blackie had run away in the storm, without cap, moccasins or mittens unless— Still, Blackie had been his partner; so he agreed that it was a good joke, and let it go at that.

THE HOUSE OF THE BROKEN PONIARD

By

John Dorman

WHAT! You say that I cheat? That these two dice are not the ones you cast for point? *Caballero,* have a care! Are you not in the House of the Broken Poniard, where no man may cheat, least of all I, the master, a don and the son of dons? See you above the bar the poniard itself, twice broken on the bones of men who knew not honor? Think you it hangs in the house of a shameless man, that he should put dishonest dice in the hands of a gentleman—even a *Yanqui* gentleman? For there are true men among all nations, except the Portuguese.

Am I a scatterbeard half-breed, that you should call shame on me? I am an old man, *caballero;* peace is my proper mantle. But there have been years, *señor,* when the insult would not have been appeased in bloodless words! *Nom d'un chien!* I have known a man who wore spurs in the *sala* of his prospective father-in-law, which is surely a gross impertinence, but never one to pass the lie in the beard of a Don! You start that I swear in French? Ah, *señor,* I have spoken many languages, but of most of them I can now tongue but the curses and the blasphemy!

Do you say that the dice are *shapes?* What a word! Fitter for geese is the hissing and clacking of you English speakers! And that there is a very little quicksilver in the pips of the two on one of them, and the five on the other? Can it be so? Yes, I see it now! But it is all a game of the devils, this craps! It is in my house only because those swine from your mines will play naught else. Even *les caballeros* turn from the wheel and the bank to toss them.

By ——, but it is a game of infamy! The *señor* will look at my wheel? His eyes are as the falcons, for many men have thrown those dice and seen no fault in them. He will see that the wheel is an honest one, and the faro bank the same. In this house, sir, luck decides upon the winners, but there is in the end a very small percentage for the master. And of that the government takes the most, as is the way of all governments! But from that little I live, that little which is left.

But of the craps, *señor,* what is there? When many play, a beggerly peso from each pot. When few play, I must still live! And I must see that never a bet lacks a taker—could I have it said of Ramon del Valle that he dared not to bet against his own dice? My sainted father, these many years in paradise, would return to speak with me!

At baccarat, at poker, and even at the game of fools which men call the stud poker, a man may gain an advantage with his brains. But the craps! The dice must strike the board sharply—thus! I am an old man, and my fingers are not cunning, but I must live. Even a dog must live, for do not the fleas depend upon him?

So if it is not for the little drop of quicksilver, and the very little rubbing off in places—hardly worth mentioning, *señor,* it is so little—how may the house be protected when fools who would drink wine in their father's face and blow insolent smoke in his beard will play naught else? I do

not ask that I win much, but there must be a little for the —— government, and yet a little for me.

The *señor* regrets that he misunderstood? It is well! I have known enough blood-letting—soft words are fairer to my ears than the ring of steel. He knows that a Don del Valle does not cheat? Ha, *señor*, even the insulting brutes from your mines believe that if one were to cheat in this house the poniard would fly straight to his throat! Aye, and it would pierce the stoutest armor, too, for what is a broken point to keep the saints from their holy ends?

Here, take it, *señor*. See, it is made of the point of a sword of old Toledo, finest of blades. My sainted father wrought it as it is now. It was a sword of our family, *caballero*, and my father was very proud to wear it when he was a captain of cavalry under Santa Anna. It was broken when he passed it through the breast-bone and spine of a man who had cheated at cards. So fierce was the thrust that the hilt came near the breast, and could not be moved in or out afterward. For my father, who is with the saints, was a very strong man and the fellow was leaping at him as he drew.

But he went back, *señor*, faster than he had come, and with never a sound, for the blade had split the great cord of the spine. Out behind him stood the point a full three hands. As he fell it caught against the table, the sharp point setting firmly in the wood, and it broke off where it protruded from the bones of the man. My father drew the point out of the table and put it in his girdle, for he was without dirk or pistol, and in Mexico City, where thieves are ever thick as flies about a stable.

Afterward he drove the double eagle on for a guard, as you see it now, and wrapped the end of the steel in leather to make a hilt. The gold piece he gained from the sacking of the Alamo. It was a very pretty toy then, *señor*, as long as the span of three hands exactly, with the two hand-breadths of blade.

When he was very old he gave it to me. Which was a great good fortune as I, the son of a second wife, was still very young when he died, and my brothers divided the estate between them. I would have bought a requiem for his soul with the coin, but the priest thought that the hole in it made it of no value! Never since have I seen a priest who did not know good gold! But it was better so, for the poniard has proved a better heritage than the lands and cattle my brothers gained and dissipated.

So I drove the coin back over the point and up against the hard leather. Nor has it since been off, though I have walked the streets of many cities in want of bread. Who lives by chance, *señor*, finds many a bed without blankets. Yes, all my life I have been a gambler, except that twice I have been a soldier, and once I owned a *rancho*. I won it at écarté, and lost it at the same game to my majordomo. What you *Yanquis* call poetical justices, for a gentleman should not game with a beardless *vaquero*.

So all my life I have carried it, and now it hangs over my bar, that all men may know I am a man of honor. Once, *señor*, I knew a very dishonest gambler who called himself "Honest John." He was most thieving, but very clever. He marked cards with red and blue and green crayons, which he kept in his vest pocket, so that no eye could find the markings but his own.

You thought that a new trick of gamblers, who are nowadays all dishonest? Ha, when you are as old as I you will know that there never are any new tricks! He was very shrewd, but presently there came a man—first I must tell you of his name. Always he said "Honest John." He said it so much that other men said it too, and all men believe their own words to be true. The *Americanos* are very clever about matters of this kind, but very crude. I—I only hang up the poniard! But I am an honest man, *señor*, who could very well get along without even this.

Then one day Honest John played while he was very drunk, which is not a good thing to do. He marked too heavily, and a man saw the little smudges on the cards. *Poof*—and that was all of Honest John.

Ignorant people will tell you of as many as ten men whom the poniard has punished for cheating, but of a truth it is only two. I say nothing to their stories, for they do no harm. Only twice has it struck the bones of soulless men, and each time it has been broken. Once from a sword to a poniard, when my father was very young, and once from a poniard to this, when I was very young.

YOU have heard, without doubt, that for many years after San Francisco became a gold town it was cheaper and easier to bring a boat around the continents and ground it in the mud of the bay than to build a house on shore. And, of course, all crews deserted as soon as the anchor was sunk. And you have heard that the city was made mostly of these boats, with piers for streets? I did not see it then, of course, but for many years after those boats were there, a few of them, and they were places of infamy and unfair players.

I was there, in this after-time, as I have been many places. I was only a boy, *señor*, and spun the wheel in a house called the Laughing Palace. It was not a palace, of course, but many laughed there, although others wept. I was handsome then, and more popular among your countrymen than Spaniards usually are— I have been told that I have a more cosmopolitan sense of humor than most Latins. Croupiers in those days, *mio amigo*, were not the lifeless sticks that they are now.

I breakfasted about noon, and often strolled about the town for a space, until it was time to go to my wheel. One afternoon, just before dusk, I wandered down to the harbor and the rotting hulls of iniquity. I know not to this day exactly where I was, as I came upon the place aimlessly and left in a very great hurry. I remember that the name on the bows of the boat was *Carmina*, which is a pretty name, but full of deceit.

Had it been night I would not have walked so boldly, for my only weapon was the poniard in my sash, and I was richly dressed. I am not a coward, *caballero*, but the harbor front was like a cow with ticks, so full it was of the scum of all nations who would strike down a man with a bag of sand, strip his body of the very shoes from his feet, then toss it into the foul water. It is not the part of even a brave man to allow a coward to hit him from behind. But it was early evening, and I was not afraid.

In this place was a bar and a few tables. Very poor, and the bar was only a plank on two whisky barrels. But one of the tables was heavy and solid, with a top as thick as three fingers. I suppose it had been part of the ship's fittings.

Here was a man playing a game by himself with only three cards. He would pick them up from the table, then throw them down again. Sometimes he flexed his wrists and limbered his fingers; sometimes he swore, but I could not see why. He was a very evil-looking man, even for the place he was in. Little, lean and darker by far than I am—he put in my mind the thought of those huge rats which bring the plague from Asia. He was an *Americano*, and he spoke through his nose, although differently from the French. His hands were very large, large as the two of mine, and he was long-armed and hairy. I did not like him, but his game interested me.

So I approached him.

"Your pardon, *señor;* I have seen many games, but not this one. Would the *señor* tell me of it?"

Perhaps the *caballero* has seen the game? It was called monte, and is no longer played, although once it was very popular. It too was a game of the devils, and only fools would play it, for all men who turned the three cards were dishonest, as are the gamblers of today.

He explained to me, did that rat-man, that the game was to pick one of the three cards as he spread them face upward, then bet that the card could be found when he turned them over. It seemed only child's play to one accustomed to other games, but I was not so young that I thought any new game easy. But my pockets were well lined with good gold in coin, and I drew forth a half-eagle.

He selected three aces—the black ones and the ace of hearts—and studied their backs to be sure that there were no marks on them. It was an old deck, and cards were not then so cheap that one might have a pack for the asking.

The very first time I named the red ace, and he spread the cards. But he was clumsy, and swore foully at himself, and I won. So I played again, and again, losing and winning, until I had gained perhaps a hundred dollars, never risking more than half an eagle. I would not have gained so much, of course, but at the very first I displayed a handful of gold, as boys will.

When he lost he rubbed his wrists and fingers, and when he won he grinned evilly, like a rat who is alone and cornered. He was not a man, *señor*, as I would name one.

Men came to the table, for there were no other games in progress, and men do not drink seriously before nightfall. Soon there

were many around, and one among them was a very huge man, greater than the *señor* by many kilograms of weight, and so tall that I came not more than to his chin. Castillians are not dwarfs, nor am I the smallest of the Castillians.

He was very blond, with a beard of gold, and rough hands like a man who had just come down from the hills. He wore a buckskin shirt and a beaver cap, I remember. Some of the watchers made remarks, but he said nothing.

Perhaps if the crowd had not gathered I should have calmly pocketed my winnings and laughed at the little rat-man. Often I have made a dollar or two from those who thought me very simple, and thought to bait me on by allowing me to win a little at first. But I was well known, and it does not seem well for a croupier to win much and risk only little gold pieces of a value of five dollars *Americano*. So I played eagles and double eagles, and also those clumsy, eight-sided pieces which were minted in California in the early days. Pure, soft gold they were, of a value of fifty dollars, but I do not now recall how they were named.

Then I began to lose, of course, and after a little while my money was almost gone.

I staked my last double eagle, and won—it has occurred to me since, *señor*, that he thought I had not placed everything on the table, and he would encourage me to lose the rest of my poke. Soulless gamblers are often very good judges of men. So I left both pieces lie, and played again, naming the ace of hearts.

The little black man spread the cards, and I placed the money on the center one. He grinned vilely, *señor*, and opened his mouth so wide that I could see his teeth were long and yellowed.

"You lose, brother," he said, and reached out to turn the card which I had picked. A rat to call a don brother!

"He wins," said the huge blond man with the golden beard, and he moved so quickly to the table edge that it seemed he leaped.

One hand he placed on the lean paw of the rat man, holding it down very lightly, it seemed, yet the owner could not withdraw it. Then with the other hand the great miner turned over the two end cards. They were the black aces—of a certainty I had won.

Even yet I suspected nothing but that the monte man had been mistaken, accustomed though I was to men who did not play honestly. Then my friend—his name was very peculiar and hard to say, being Smithworth—laughed very pleasantly and twisted the gambler's hand over.

AT ONCE I saw it all, saw why I must name the card I wished to bet on before he turned them over, saw why he never faced but the one I had bet upon. For in that dirty hand was another ace of clubs! Yes, *señor*, the red ace upon which I had bet was not even in the three! Played with me, did that very heartless *Yanqui*, as a dog plays with a frijole!

I was very angry, *caballero*, swearing great oaths for which I have since paid many pieces of gold, and said many *paternosters*. Those, and the oaths of other times, of course, for a man thinks more of the saints when his beard becomes strewn with the ashes of the years. Youth, *señor*, is very full of the illusion of self-strength, and age with the delusion of dependence.

I drew my poniard from my sash, but it was no more than out when the rat-man, quick as any rat, arose and plucked it from my hand. He could very easily have plunged it in my side, but he thrust instead at the huge breast of Smithworth—name of names! But he knew little of making the fight with knives, *señor*, and the great man caught his wrist. He held the poniard as do the very bad-men in the shadow show the *señor* has for his dogs of the mine. The poniard is a piercing weapon, not a slashing one, and must be presented as a sword is thrust, else a clever man will easily ward it off.

So the great man caught his wrist with his right hand, still with the other pressing down to the table the hand which held the very damning card.

He laughed very sweetly, *señor*, but it was not sweet to hear. It was the laugh like bubbling water in a very treacherous whirlpool in the rocks.

The little man swore some great oaths, and wrinkled up his lips like a cur dog. He wrenched quickly with both arms at once. As well struggle with a bear trap! The *señor* has seen the great machines with which men trap the mountain bears? Yes? They are so strong that no man or beast may withdraw from them without aid.

So he struggled and named the large man who held him with many foul words,

but Smithworth only laughed and laughed. Sweet mirth, *señor*, ringing and soft, as a man laughs with his sweetheart. But it was a prophecy of punishment; even the most dull of the crowd felt it—felt that presently the great man would hurt the little one.

But he was not without courage of a sort, that rat, for even his kind will fight boldly at times. His tongue was his only weapon, and a cutting one. After a little space he named the miner a most unspeakable thing—repeated it over and over. My friend's eyes became very small-pupiled, and he closed them a little after the fashion of one who looks against a light.

Not a word did Smithworth say, ever. Just laughed and laughed; for a minute I thought perhaps he would overlook the name the rat called him, although it is an insult few of your countrymen will stand in anger.

The room was very, very quiet, so that I could hear the little waves lapping against the old hull; hear the rat-man's hard breathing. For he too was silent, thinking. Then his foul mouth opened wide, and he darted his head at Smithworth's right wrist to bite.

He met the point of the poniard, but it only scratched his forehead. Then began the punishment—punishment for the infamy of his game, his murderous thrust with the little beauty, his vituperation.

Punished him, did the miner, with one tremendous twist of the arm which held the poniard, so that there was a dry little sound within the bones, and the arm coiled up as a rope is twisted. Yes! he had snapped the arm at the elbow, simply with the strength of his hand on the man's wrist!

Very bad treatment, *señor*, but he was a very bad man. Yet I shrank back, and so did all the other watchers. We were like the little runner-bird looking at a rattlesnake, too weak to move.

Smithworth dropped the wrist—the yellow rat-teeth ground, and the black little man gasped one very great dry sob. But he was of a little courage, and his tongue was not yet stilled, and his eyes ever sought the poniard which lay on the table where it had fallen from his powerless hand.

Then the man of the golden beard changed his hold on the hand with the upturned card, so that by only the fingers he held it to the table. Exactly on the palm lay the ace of clubs. He picked up the poniard, did Smithworth, and played with it—and laughed. Always that horrible sweet laughter! I think the black man knew what was coming, for he strove again to draw his fingers from that iron grip.

Futile! The poniard swung high, poised at the very end of the great arm's reach, so high that not another man there could have touched it; poised as an axeman holds his tool for a fraction of a second before it strikes the wood. Poised—then drove downward with the speed of a falling stone.

Straight it went through the pip of that ace of clubs, straight through the claw-fingered, lean-palmed hand beneath the card, and even through the thick table top of hardwood.

God! I have seen many bleed and die, but I have not seen suffering like that of the rat-faced man whose one arm was broken and whose other hand was pinned down. Only once he made a sound—just as the poniard bit through his hand and ground against his bones.

The *señor* is a horseman; he has heard a horse scream when death gnawed at his vitals. There is no more horrible sound, he will admit. Like that, just like that, the gambler screamed.

We stood back, *señor*, you will believe that we stood back. There are things which are not pleasant, even to a man who is hard with the hardest, and it was no meek company which was there.

But Smithworth did not stand back. He laughed, and held his hands on his hips, as one who watches a most agreeable sight. But, it was not agreeable! That laugh was ——. Well, perhaps the *señor* can imagine a vast horde of little devils plunging white hot tridents into a sinner's flesh, and laughing. They would laugh shrilly, I think, as children at times may laugh, but the miner laughed low and sweetly. Yet it was the same, the very same, to hear.

It may well have been minutes that the rat crouched there, helpless and pinioned. Then he gasped, like two dry sticks squeaking against each other, and lunged his body back against the knife. It was his purpose to break off the point, I think. But he only moved the great table a little way. So Smithworth sat on the edge of it, *señor*, to hold it for him! And laughed!

Once there was deathly silence, as the player of the three cards crouched over the table, peering insanely at the face of my

friend, who only smiled and did not laugh for the moment. It was very bad, *caballero*, to have so much silence—only it emphasized the memory of that laugh, as a well long echoes the calls of a man who has fallen in, and knows there will be no help.

For a time the little black-faced man went mad, mad with the way of one caught in quicksand. Again and again he threw all his weight against the poniard, while Smithworth *chuckled* and held the table for him. Chuckled—I have been seeking the word! The smoky, thin-drawn features went gray; then the livid white of an old, old scar; then red as the blood which dripped, dripped, dripped on the stained old planks.

Never a sound from his lips since that first great wail. I could not look away, and I felt my face grow wan and white—felt as I did when I first saw my father's *vaqueros* brand a calf. After a while the man stopped, and I could hear his breath like the whistling of burros in the thin air of the mountains. The *señor* has heard them, of course. Then his lips writhed most horribly, his teeth ground, and he pushed his hand up the poniard to the hilt. Very great courage for a rat, very great!

Yes, he pushed his hand slowly up the blade, until it came to the coin. And he tried to draw the poniard from the table, but it was too deeply set, and he had not so very much strength. How could he have? Pushed and pulled upward. Sometimes Smithworth laughed so softly. But I assure you, *caballero*, there was none other who laughed at all. Perhaps some would have helped him, but they feared to move—and it was too fascinating a game to stop. Never was bull fight like it!

The rat leaned over the prisoned hand; stooped far over the table. Then he cast himself backward with all the force of his weazened body. Even the good Toledo blade could not stand that weight, since his raised hand had increased the leverage. The poniard broke off at the table top, and the gambler of the three cards fell all in a very little heap on the floor, with the ace of clubs and the blade flung over his head, still fast to the dirty hand.

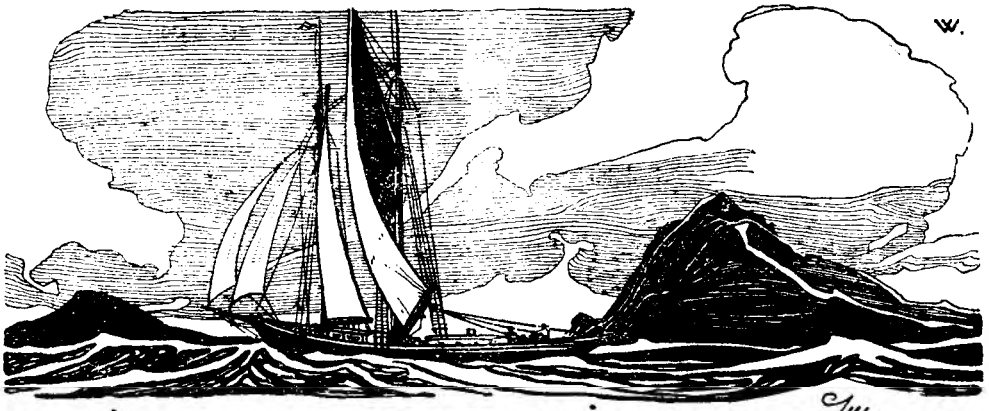
But he was a very brave coward, *señor*, and he arose again. Yes, he even sneered at Smithworth and all of us. See these marks on the leather of the hilt? They are the places where he set his teeth to draw the blade from his palm. Of a truth, he clasped that hilt in his mouth and drew the poniard out as one would draw an awl from leather. I remember that his lips snarled back from the handle, and his teeth were long and yellowed, like those of a very old rat.

Smithworth did not laugh any more and did not move from his perch on the table top. The little black man edged around the crowd, then scurried out of the door exactly like a rat which had got free from a trap. He did not say a word, *señor*, not a word. I think he had been beyond himself to have had so very much strength and courage.

So I picked up my poniard and put it in my girdle. And I took the gold, too, since a man is always entitled to his money when he catches a gambler without honor in the midst of his crime. After counting, there was just one eagle to spare, so I bought a round of very poor whisky.

What? The *señor* wishes back the five dollars he lost a moment ago, since I have said it was the law that a man might take back money unfairly lost? Have I not explained to him? Does he not understand that in this house all men receive fair play, but that the master must live? And was the tale not worth the money? Even five dollars *Americano?*

Many, many thanks, *señor*. And the *señor* will return *mañana?* No? Then may he go with God, and long remember the House of the Broken Poniard.



PEARL-HUNGER

A Five-Part Story

Part III

By Gordon Young

Author of "Everhard and the Russian," "Ointment Pots," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

CAPTAIN BENNINGS, owner of the pearling schooner the *Gloria*, died as hard as he had lived. He had been cheated by Fate, bowled over by a poisoned arrow just as he was about to put the *Gloria* about and make for the harbor of a Christian port.

His wife had left him years before, her pretty empty head turned by the flatteries of a rich youngster. She had taken one of her children—the golden haired Margaret—with her, leaving him to bring up the other girl. And for that daughter Bennings had lived and worked, making his name to be feared in the South Seas, reaping a rich harvest of pearls.

He kept good men about him—they were all intensely loyal; specially Heddon, a big powerful man who feared no one—not even "Black" McCree.

It was to Heddon that Bennings entrusted his girl—the schooner was named for her.

"Take her to Lianfo, Will," he said just before he died. "Let the consul take care of her. You'll promise, Will?"

And Heddon had promised.

So to Lianfo they sailed after giving Bennings a sailor's funeral. The *Gloria* carried a native crew of twelve. Heddon, now, was captain; Raeburn, nothing much, and old Wateman, the other white man on the vessel, was an odd piece of flotsam who was always sober at sea and always drunk on shore.

Lianfo was a copra port, south of the Samoans. It was settled by rich planters who drank and gambled while their women gossiped and danced.

There was a seamy district to Lianfo; a collection of gin shanties where beachcombers, half-castes and Chinamen—broken down, vicious fellows, clustered like chilled flies.

Most notorious of the gin shanties was the *Gallows*—the rotted hulk of a wrecked bark—run by Duclos, a mean vindictive Frenchman.

After coming to anchor at Lianfo, Wateman and Heddon went ashore, although it was past midnight, Heddon wishing to be on hand to make a call on the consul first thing in the morning. He also planned to see Oxenham, a distant cousin of his. Heddon had always regarded Oxenham as "a fine fellow, but rather a bore; a man to be admired, but hardly liked."

Old Tom Wateman went ashore but for one thing—whisky!

And so, presently, the two found themselves in the *Gallows*.

They arrived just in time to hear the beachcombers plan to marry "Shanghai Ann"—a slovenly woman of the beach—to a young planter who was drunkenly announcing his intention to marry, "The wors' woman on Lianfo."

IT WAS their plan to take the man and the woman out to one of the ships and have them married by the ship's captain.

But Heddon interfered.

"You fellows can't take a drunken man and marry him to that," he said.

"Who in —— are you?" demanded one of the men, Buxton by name.

"You heard all I have to say," Heddon answered.

And then Duclos took a hand in the game. He pulled out a knife, double-edged, and held it ready to throw.

"You'll meddle now?" he asked Heddon with insolent softness.

A hurtling stool came through the air and knocked Duclos over. Right after the stool came Wateman; he pounced on Duclos and snatched away the knife.

Then the fight was on—Heddon and Wateman against the crowd.

"Come on!" old Tom bawled. Then somebody clouted him on the back of the head with a bottle and he went down and, for a time, was motionless.

Lights went out. When they were restored again the bartender yelled triumphantly:

"Duclos has carried them off to be married. He wants us to save this fellow until morning."

"That's a —— of a trick," grumbled Buxton. "Mate—" he turned to Heddon—"you was right anyhow. It was a blasted trick to do to any man."

"Who was that feller?" asked Wateman. "Him the row started over?"

"Him? He was going to marry Peg Cardan, but

she threw him over for ol' Jeffries. And so this chap Ox'ham took it hard and——"

Buxton went off, swaying.

"Ox'ham," muttered ol' Tom. "Ain't that him?"

"Yes," said Heddon broodingly. "Peg Cardan is old Bennings' first-born. The last thing he said to me was, 'If daughter of mine ever plays with a man, I'll——'

"And if she brought Oxenham to this, by ——, I'll—I don't know what'll I do."

Heddon and Wateman then left the *Gallows* and went to the house of the consul, finding Mr. Sanborn dead and Roland, son of one of the wealthy planters, acting in his stead. To him Heddon reported the affair of Oxenham and Shanghai Ann. As nothing could be done until the return of the wedding party, Sanborn and Heddon went to the club where the news was broadcast. All seemed to think it a great joke and, later, went down to the beach with rice and pans that they might properly welcome the couple on their arrival.

Heddon and Wateman were on hand, too, and taking possession of a gig drove off with Oxenham and the woman to Oxenham's plantation.

There Heddon endeavored to send the woman away.

"I'll shoot myself if you make me leave him," she screamed, snatching a revolver from a near-by holster. "I'll make him a good wife! I won't go back to the beach!"

"Tell her to do it," Heddon said coolly. "I'm going out on the veranda until her little scene's over. Shoot yourself if you want, too."

He went out and again the woman threatened herself.

"Don't," Oxenham pleaded. "You'll be taken care of. Give me the gun—it has a hair-trigger—it——"

He took a step forward. She lurched backward to keep out of his reach and was half-falling when the gun went off.

Oxenham was held for trial, accused of the murder of the woman, but was released the next day on the evidence of Wateman.

"You'd better come with me," Heddon advised Oxenham.

"I wish I could, but——"

Heddon turned impatiently away and with Wateman left the plantation, taking the winding path which led to the beach.

On the way they met a woman on horseback. She tried to ride Heddon down but he pulled her off her horse.

"So, Peg Cardan," he cried, "you think you can trample any man underfoot! I'm going to take you with me—to the ship."

He lifted her up in his arms.

"Let me go," she pleaded. "What can I do?"

"Nothing," said Heddon, stepping off the trail and making a sliding drop down through a mass of ferns.

X

THE night before, after Heddon and Wateman had gone ashore, young Raeburn turned into his bunk, slept well, but was up early. He had got so used to having a foot half twisted off by Heddon, who came to rouse him for the third watch, that he had grown into the precautionary habit of awakening before Heddon's fingers got hold of his foot. And, sailor-fashion, he was awake as soon as his eyes were open; there were no yawning stretches, no sitting up with drowsy nods and poking of his eye-sockets with knuckles. He dressed in two jumps and went on deck for a smoke and look about.

It was still dark. The moon had gone down behind the ragged hills that gave Lianfo its mountainous backbone.

Raeburn went forward, expecting just by way of having something to do to prod the anchor watch into wakefulness, but could not find the fellow.

He went below, into the crew's quarters. Every bunk was empty, as if the crew to a man had grown wings and flown ashore. The men who had rowed Heddon and Wateman to the beach had probably sent a canoe to give their mates a chance to jump ship. Most of them could have gone ashore for the asking. They preferred to go without, being just a little contemptuous of young Raeburn as an officer.

A GLEAM in the east, a puff of light, and dawn came.

Raeburn sat on the rail, smoked and stared about, noting the ships and their rig. He stiffened suddenly and looked particularly hard toward a low-lying brigantine a half-mile off. He went below for the telescope the better to make out what might be going on about her deck; and when he came up, Gloria, always an early riser, was on deck, looking away to the shore, ranging her glance back and forth along the line of houses that peeped through foliage.

"I wonder what those people think about?" she said eagerly, pointing toward the town. "I wonder what they do? I should like to know them, know how they live. I would like to know some woman of them. They ought to be wonderful, those women there."

She spoke all in a breath, darting her eyes from the shore-line toward him and back again.

"It'll be easy to find out, and you'll like it better than on a pearler."

"No," she said, regarding him steadily, as if suspicious.

"You're here, and you want to go. Why

not make ready and let's be off ashore?"

"I'll not put my foot on this island!" she said quietly, looking straight at him with enigmatic stubbornness.

He sensed that there was something more than mere stubbornness or even love of the sea behind her determination. He had felt it for days, every time she looked at him in just that way. He knew that look of half suspicion and stubbornness; he did not know its meaning, but there was in it the poise of a woman who knew her secret reasons.

"Well, just why not?" he questioned. "You're a girl, you're rich—" he was repeating familiar arguments—"the sea's no place for you, now. With your father it was different. There's nothing for you on a ship like this, and the places a pearler goes. Ashore there are people of your own kind, pretty clothes, music, parties, lot of fun and play. I don't mean merely on this little rock-pile of Lianfo. But there are big cities you know nothing about."

"I have read. I do not want to go. I've been to Sydney. Honolulu, too. I do not want to go."

"But you *did* want to go."

"That now seems a long time off. Will Heddon, he has gone ashore?"

"Last night," said Raeburn.

"Was he in such a hurry as that? Did he mean to get the consul out of sleep to tell him of me?"

"I don't know what he meant to do. Anyhow, Heddon can never be still—if the ship stops he has to get off and keep moving. And Wateman smelled whisky. You know how it is with him. But here, take a look across there. See?"

He held out the glass to her, but she did not need it. Ships were as familiar to her as flowers to a gardener's child.

After a long glance at the brigantine she looked toward Raeburn, and, breathlessly—

"Black McGree!"

"And this is Lianfo!"

"What do you mean?"

"That we can do nothing better than let him alone—here. If we tried to board him all the shipping in the bay would put in an oar. Besides, he's got a deck full of men."

"What do you think Will can do? What will he do?" she asked quickly.

Her cheeks had flushed and points of fire were dancing in her gray eyes. She had more than once heard the crack of guns from the *Gloria's* deck, the thud of clenched bodies as they fell when hand-to-hand work was being done, for Bennings had fought with many men on the pearling grounds.

"I don't know what Will'll do. They've fought twice, and though McGree's bigger, Will gave him all he wanted! But it won't be with fists next time—not after your father. McGree 'd better look out!" Raeburn cried youthfully, proudly confident in Heddon. "That black Spanish pirate knows there's *one* man that's not afraid of him! Will Heddon's not afraid of anything!"

"I know it!" she said proudly too.

Chang came far enough up the ladder to show his withered head, and said that breakfast was ready.

"Come, too," she told Raeburn. "We'll have breakfast together."

THE stern stateroom was very large, with wide ports, low lockers following the bend of the stern. The heavy teak table was fastened to the deck, and the chairs had slots for their feet, for when the *Gloria* got into a heavy sea, if anything went adrift it would clatter about like dice in a box. Bennings had been crudely prodigal in buying whatever might give her pleasure; and some of the shop-keepers of Sydney blessed their god Mammon on the day that a gaunt, broad, bearded seaman, led by a child, bought whatever she exclaimed at and paid down gold. Swinging trays that could be let down in heavy weather were over the table. There was much furniture, but little cloth and no hangings in the cabin, the deck being covered with native mats, soft as blankets, and intricately colored and woven; these were also piled for cushions on the lockers. Many mirrors were about. In her love of them the woman had shown through the child, and perhaps partly eased her loneliness by giving the unreal presence of herself for a companion.

They sat down at the table and Chang, moving with shuffle of feet, brought in smoking biscuits, coffee and some sort of patties made of canned fish, prettily made with a coating of crisp crust. Raeburn knew that when there were patties served in the cabin Chang offered merely fish-hash to him and Wateman and Heddon.

Raeburn hardly knew how to talk to her easily except of one thing, so again he

touched the subject of her leaving the ship.

"You're a lucky girl and don't know what use to make of your luck. Your pearls might as well be back on the bottom of the ocean if you aren't going to get something out of them."

"What could I get with them—that I want?" she asked, lifting her eyes with the peculiar steadiness that was baffling.

"That you want? What is it you want? Why, don't you know that all over the world men are wearing their fingers to the knuckle-bones, scratching for money? There's magic in money. When you have it in your hand you can make a wish, 'most any old wish, and it comes true. Isn't there anything you want?"

She nodded soberly—

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"And with my pearls I could get that too?"

"I don't know of anything that isn't for sale. I don't know of anything I wouldn't do for a pearl or two, such as I've seen your father have. And other men are the same. Why, you could have half the queens of the world following you about on their knees!"

"What fun would there be in that?" she asked as if quite serious.

"Well, anyhow, you could get whatever the queens had that you did want!"

"They," she said quietly, "have nothing that I want."

"Do you know what pearls are worth?" he demanded, exasperated.

"Yes, my father often told me. One, so big—" she marked off the tip of her little finger—"would buy a ship like this. Two, just like it, would buy three ships. I have many, some bigger. You have seen them. I do not want ships."

"Look here. It isn't merely ships or pearls—it's money. They're worth money. With money you get anything. Go anywhere. Have people wait on you. Bring you pretty clothes—"

"I like my clothes. Why should I want more, or others?"

Her clothes were badly fitting ready-to-wear garments. But Bennings had bought them, usually having them sent out, as if he had three daughters.

"How many white women, all dressed up, have you seen?" Raeburn demanded.

"In Honolulu twice. In Sydney once, a long time ago. I thought their clothes ugly."

"You were a child then. If you ever ran your hand over a piece of satin——"

"I have silk," she said quickly. "And I know how pretty women look—I'll show you. And some pearls, too!"

She got up hurriedly, tumbled some mats from a locker to the deck, opened it, took out a sandalwood casket which she laid aside, then lifted from the locker a bolt of brocaded satin, woven of peacock colors.

"See?" She held out the cloth. "Isn't it pretty. I've wrapped myself in at times. It feels so good!"

Raeburn put out his hand to feel the cloth, but did not touch it. The beauty seemed evanescent, perishable. His hands were calloused, tar-stained.

She replaced the wrapping about the cloth and returned it to the locker.

"This is what I wanted to show you," she said, and, opening the casket, took out a miniature portrait, painted on ivory; the picture was no bigger than the palm of her hand. It was framed with carved wood, studded with a chaplet of pearls, large as small peas.

"My mother. Isn't she beautiful? But I do not like the dress there on her shoulders. She died when I was a baby. There was hardly a day my father did not take out the picture and look at it. You see, her hair is yellow and her cheeks like a pearl's color. He wished that I looked like her, but said that no other woman in the world ever did."

Raeburn, holding his breath, not because of the woman's pretty face, but because of the emperor's wealth in pearls that circled the portrait, took the picture into his hands and stared. They were perfect, those pearls, every one of them, yet—he stared closer. Something seemed wrong. It was as if the woman they enshrined had vampirishly drawn off their luster for her cheeks and deadened them. He peered more closely—then sank back in his chair as if falling, put the portrait on the table before him, and stared across at the girl.

She did not know, did not suspect; but the chaplet was of imitation pearls—false as the woman herself. Bennings, in the depth of his irony, had taken a revenge that satisfied his bitterness.

"Isn't she beautiful?" said Gloria. "And for pearls like those, you say people would do anything?"

"No—but for a woman like this, yes!"

She looked questioningly, not understanding.

At that moment there was the sound of feet outside the room.

"Will has come," said Gloria eagerly.

Chang's voice rose sharply in a squealing protest, and became abruptly silent.

"That's not Heddon!" Raeburn cried, standing up, starting for the doorway.

A man's body filled it, stooping a little because his body was taller than the door. He peered through with quick glances all about, and after a sharp look at Raeburn his dark eyes rested on the girl. He smiled broadly, doffed his hat low with a bow, entered and, straightening to his full height, said cheerfully in a deep rich smooth voice:

"Pardon me if it is that I intrude. So?"

"You—*you!* What do you mean coming here!" Gloria cried, taking a step backward, staring fixedly.

"Oh ho, do not be alarmed, *señorita.* True, it is that —— scoundrel Salvador McGree, but in the presence of beauty he is humble!"

BLACK McGREE was an operatic sort of scoundrel, but in the minds of all who knew of him there was no doubt as to his being a scoundrel. He was huge of body and built like a bull, swarthy, with black mustache and gold loops in his ears, silk cloth bound over his head, a velvet sash about his waist. A man of less size, or less dangerous, would have been hooted and jeered ashore for his trappings by rough men in rough dungarees and cotton; but this giant Spaniard with the Irish name was not jeered, though he went about unarmed. He was proud to vanity of his strength; his two great fists were all he needed; and, perhaps because of the Irish father, he had a perverse zest in using them. It pleased him to dress as he did, and he did just about whatever pleased him.

He was sentimental and brutal. Women were his weakness. Countless stories, vague as to authenticity, were told of him. It was said that some of the women who had loved him—and many did, for he was a picturesque dominant fellow—were sent away with presents—others were choked. As if he really believed it himself, he talked of being just about ready to go to South America and leave the sea—if he could find a woman worthy to be the great lady he would there make of her.

His father had been an Irish sea-captain, his mother a Spanish woman—some said that she had been a Spanish lady of title. As a boy he had lived among Spaniards and he spoke of himself as a Spaniard.

Men were afraid of him, particularly such as gathered on the Kulicos, and it pleased him that they were, though openly, with mockery, he scorned them for it. In a frankness more naive than cynical he called himself a "—— scoundrel"; and he seemed to think the world was a great playground, made for roisterers. No one could foretell what he would do; he did everything by impulse, was cruel or generous, mocking, or savage, or agreeable as if a changing wind blew his passions about. The very times when one expected him to break his word he might keep it—whatever the cost; and men that he might be expected to hate with Spanish relentlessness, he would generously praise; and though he was known to have killed more than one man, it was said that he always did it in a rage; and, physically, he was afraid of nothing. Some said that his word was good; others that he could not be trusted on a stack of Bibles ten feet high.

Whether he lied no one knew, but he claimed to have a fortune piled up in South America against the day when he would retire to be a great man in the country. The principal way that he had got that fortune, if he had it, was by compelling pearlers and traders to share with him in return for the protection he would give them from other and less picturesque thieves.

NOW with insolent swing of massive shoulders he stepped well into the *Gloria's* cabin and threw up his head in a way that set the loop earrings trembling, and pulled at his black mustache, smiling, showing his broad white even teeth.

Two hard faces, one dark, the other black, peered through the doorway behind, both tense, curious, expectant—one roughly bearded, the other a negro's.

"So? I see I come a little late for breakfast," he said with a full-throated smoothness, hat in hand and hands on hips.

"You're just as welcome now as any time," said Raeburn, who was too young to have learned to hold his tongue.

McGree laughed a little and cast his dark eyes aslant at Raeburn.

"But I come as I please, let welcome be as it may. So?"

"And I've seen you go before you were ready!" Raeburn blurted.

McGree frowned, drawing down his heavy brows in a dangerous scowl; then the brows lifted, his mouth broke open with a short laugh:

"Ah! When you scoundrels unshackled the only anchor I had over on the Glossary Banks. That was Wateman's work, yes? It is for that trick that I come now!"

And he laughed, pleased.

A fine trick it had been in a way, and not long before. McGree's brigantine, the *Loftus Mark*, formerly an Englishman's craft, had lost one anchor in a crevice of coral and slipped her cable to be free from it. A few days later she put down her last hook over on the Glossary Banks, rich with shell and known only to McGree and Bennings. Known to McGree only because he had once come upon Bennings fishing there. Bennings always felt that the banks belonged exclusively to him, by right of discovery.

It happened that this day the *Gloria* hove in sight when the *Loftus Mark* was busy as an ant in a sugar-bowl, but knocked off work on seeing the *Gloria*, more by current than wind, drift down on her.

What those on board the *Loftus Mark* did not see was old Wateman, in his diving-suit, hanging on a sea-ladder to windward. Raeburn was in the cabin working the pump, the air-line having been passed out through a port. The *Gloria* swung down almost bow to bow with the *Loftus Mark* and her hook went over. And while Bennings and McGree jawed with threats from their decks, old Wateman went below, unshackled the brigantine's anchor, and Salvador McGree presently found himself adrift.

Laughter and high jeers answered his rage as he floated off. The wind was not strong enough for him to beat back and the current bore him away, leaving the banks to the *Gloria* and also a fine anchor that she fished out.

"I promised something that day for that trick," said Black McGree, "and what I promise comes true. My men ashore last night hear that Bennings is dead, and with my debt unpaid. I have no need for anchors now, but I take other things. Hear me, you!"

He scowled ferociously at Raeburn. McGree had a way of trying to make a man think that he was about to eat him alive; and, if worked up, he would very nearly eat him.

Behind him in the doorway the two hard men, the bearded white and bullet-headed negro, grinned. Overhead there was the barefooted tread of feet.

"How dare you come on my ship!" Gloria said angrily, as if not afraid.

He gazed at her unsmilingly, looking at her beauty, her youth, her odd poise.

"And have you heard of anything Salvador McGree dared not do!" he demanded.

"You had my father killed!" she cried, drawing back a little before his searching stare.

He gazed down at her soberly as if a little doubtful of what she meant.

"So?" he asked guardedly.

"You got the natives to attack our men when they went ashore for water—your ship was just a few miles down the coast. You made them attack, and my father died from an arrow in his breast!"

"I know nothing of that," he said, shaking his head a little. "My men they brought back word to me this morning from what they had heard your crew tell. Oh, *señorita*, I kill your father? No, no. I did not do that. No."

"That is not so, Black McGree! Will Heddon saw men off your ship among the natives during that fight!"

"Oh," he said explosively, understanding at last. "Malaita boys, eh? They jumped to the beach when that near home. Vamosed! Ran away from me. They tried to cut out my ship, too, but—" proudly—"they did not have ten thousan' natives in the attack, so—" in a matter of fact tone—"they could not do it. Your father, no, *señorita*. My shoulders, they are big. They will bear all I pile on them. But I do not want what other people do piled on me. It is why our good God has made shoulders, for each man to bear his own load. You believe me, *señorita?*"

"I do not!" she said with stubborn boldness and no flutter of gaze.

"Ask Bill White here——"

He pointed at the bearded man, grinning expectantly in the doorway beside the negro.

"It is as the cap'n says," White answered.

The negro grinned broadly and also answered:

"Yes, sah, that so. Them boys done sk—addled foh the bush an' make trouble."

"Your men can lie as well as you!" Gloria cried. "Leave my ship!" and she pointed, peremptorily.

At that, McGree laughed. With thumbs in sash, feet wide apart, head cocked to one side, he laughed, amused, insolent, half-pleased.

"I came for pearls," he answered, "but maybe it is you I will take. Ah, Salvador McGree has had two eyes on you—seen you grow. He likes children, that scoundrel. He likes women better! Ha!

"Listen, *señorita*. That day you stole my anchor there on the Glossary—know why I didn't shoot somebody when I found myself adrift, eh? You were on deck an' look —— pretty. I sent Dott below for a rifle. Then when it was in my hands, I didn't use it."

"Dat's right. Dat's shore right," said the negro, Dott.

"You remember, *señorita?* You saw?"

"No," said Gloria, "I did not see."

"You—" he turned toward Raeburn—"you saw I had a rifle——"

"We had 'em too!" said Raeburn.

"So? Put it that way, do you?"

McGree lifted a fist and turned on Raeburn:

"You are no more than a fly. If a fly buzz too much, I slap it—so!"

McGree drew back his hand, advancing slowly as Raeburn backed away.

Then the coffee-pot flew past McGree's head as both the men at his back shouted warningly. It missed and struck the bulkhead, splattering grounds and coffee. Then Gloria with a whirling rush turned and flew to a drawer, pulling at it, reaching in.

Dott and Bill White were upon her, and jerked her back, pinning her arms, snatching away the gun she had grasped.

"Careful, my boys," McGree rumbled softly, watching them. "Don't hurt her much. The woman that does not fight is not worth one ——!"

He stood huge, grinning, amused, with a kind of evil good-nature, as Gloria's gray eyes blazed at him. She did not struggle against the hard hands that held her—Dott gripping wrist and shoulder, Bill White holding her arm twisted behind her back—but with her head thrown up she looked with an air of challenge.

"——!" said Salvador McGree admiringly. "Bennings he has made a woman of you! And is this the man you love?" He turned and looked scornfully at the thin body of young Raeburn. "Fly—misquit'—insect! Such things as you have no right to live. Use up the air better men—" he struck his own great breast—"need for their lungs. Your neck, I will break it now like one little pipe-stem between thumb and finger, so!"

He reached toward Raeburn with slow, tormenting menace, a thick arm half-out, and fingers claw-like, grinning as he came, playing but hardly playful.

Raeburn was trapped. There was no way to dodge. The bulkhead was behind him and his hands were empty. Raeburn was a worthless young fellow, but not the sort to try a softening word or beg off. His eyes shifted to the right and left, looking for something he could snatch that would be a club. There was nothing. McGree laughed and slowly came nearer. Raeburn crouched and lunged, head lowered, aiming his head at McGree's belly; and with the quick side slap of a bear, McGree hit him as he came, and Raeburn was knocked aside and went down, blindly dazed, but instinctively huddling himself into a knot, arms folded over his head, knees drawn against his stomach, expecting to be kicked and trampled.

"A-ha-a!" said McGree, resting his hand on the table to balance himself as he drew back a foot to swing it; then, his hand touching something on the table, he glanced down.

"Breath of the ——!" he muttered, amazed, forgetting Raeburn, picking up the pearl-encircled portrait, staring hungrily at the beauty of the woman's face, lifting the miniature, holding it up. "What luck that shark Bennings had to find pearls like these, a woman like this—though he couldn't keep her! Your mother, *señorita?*"

"My mother," said Gloria. "Put it down!"

"This pays my debt," he answered, thrusting it inside his silk shirt. "Salvador McGree came for as much as he could get, but this is enough for any man. More would be robbery!"

He laughed softly, drew out the picture, then his fingers followed it back inside of the yellow shirt, holding to it as if afraid the treasure would somehow get away. Then with a sort of brutal matter-of-factness:

"You do not look like your mother, *señorita*. It is too bad." He seemed to sigh. "If so, I would take you with me. Ah, to South America. Ah—" again he drew out the picture—"if such were Saints, Salvador McGree would pray more than he does. They never are, the women like this one. No!"

"Put down my mother's picture!" Gloria cried. "Oh, please—don't take it, please!"

"You are whining now," said Black McGree coldly. "I do not like whining women. Tie them, my boys. Tie all the whines in her throat. We have been here too long now. The tide it is going out. We go too."

"Oh, if Will Heddon would come!" she cried tensely, as if evoking his coming.

"Ho, he's drunk ashore with a woman on his arm!" McGree said carelessly.

"You lie! You lie! Black McGree, you lie!" she stormed in sudden passion. "He is ashore—you knew that or you would not have——"

He looked at her inquiringly, with renewed interest. Her anger pleased him—

"So?"

Then as if to see just what it was that had angered her he repeated, experimentally—

"Will Heddon he is drunk ashore with a woman."

"That is not so! You lie, you know you lie!"

"Sure I lie," he admitted indifferently, watching her curiously. Then, half-convinced: "It is not this insect Raeburn—it is Will Heddon. Eh? So? You love Will Heddon? Ah, that is better!"

"You are afraid of him! You knew he was not here! He will catch you! You wouldn't dare if he was here! You killed my father! Put down my mother's picture!"

The words came in a storm. McGree ironically put his hands to his ears.

"Stuff that mouth of hers!" he ordered carelessly; and as he spoke again drew out the picture and looked, fascinated by the face, satisfied by the loot encircling it. Hunger for the woman's beauty glistened in his black eyes. And as he gazed he cursed softly when what he meant was praise.

Black McGree knew pearls, but now he was too hotly greedy to notice that these had only a fantom value, too absorbed in the picture's beauty to be critical of its ornaments.

Bill White held the girl tightly by her arms, which were drawn behind her. She stood without struggling, but without weakness. The negro tore a sleeve from his shirt, then, forcing a thumb between her lips, gripped her cheek with one hand and presented a knife's point with the other. Pricking her gums until she opened her mouth, he slipped the blade between her teeth, took the rag and drawing it tightly across her mouth, tied the ends behind her head. He then tied her hands and feet with tarred twine, over and over, and the two men sat her in a chair.

McGree hardly looked toward her. He had lost all interest in her and indifferently turned about in the cabin, examining this and that idly.

They bound Raeburn, mouth, arms and legs, and left him lying on the deck.

What McGree wanted was time enough to be well out of the bay. After that he would take his chance. He had taken many like it.

"All hard an' fast, cap'n," said Bill White.

McGree glanced critically toward Raeburn, then at Gloria.

"Ah, *señorita*, that scoundrel Salvador McGree he is a bad one. He ought to have his —— neck broke to treat you like this. That Will Heddon of yours, he will fix him!"

He smiled in his evilly good-natured way, then turned and, striding heavily, went from the cabin, hurrying.

White followed with stumbling stride; the negro, grinning back across his shoulder, went out quickly, his bare feet pattering on the mat-covered deck.

McGREE was no sooner out of sight than Raeburn with writhing twists and jerks pulled to free his hands; but they were tightly bound and struggle as he might he could not pull them free, or his ankles either. For a gag a thick strip of cloth had been passed across his open mouth and tied tightly at the back of his head; so tightly that it set the blood throbbing with pounding aches. He worked his lower teeth in under the rag, and, rolling across the deck, he got on his knees beside the table, and pushed his gag against a corner of the table, trying to force it down over his chin. The cloth was so tight that he scraped his gums, doubled back and painfully pinched his lower lip, bruised his cheek

against the table's corner, but determinedly forced the gag down over his chin.

"Don't struggle," he said. "If they tied you like me, it's useless. Get your teeth in under the rag——"

After a time, in the same way that he had freed his mouth, Gloria got her gag loose. Her mouth was bleeding, her teeth ached, and she was partly sickened by the dirty sleeve from off the negro's shoulder.

Time dragged itself by as they waited helplessly, their bound muscles stinging as if pierced by needles, then growing numb, after a time again awakening to pain. Now and then Gloria struggled suddenly with sharp jerks, clenching her teeth and pulling as if to pull the flesh from her wrists to have them free.

"You stop ashore—let Heddon have the ship. He'll hunt that black —— down!" said Raeburn.

"I will not leave this ship!"

"He lied, I know he lied in saying he had no part in stirring up the natives to attack your father!"

"He lied about Will Heddon!" she said, jerking angrily against the knots.

"Yes. And it is him—you—that is why you won't leave the ship—you do love Will?"

"I do," she said in a kind of anger. "The way he was good to my father—after that I loved him. He is not with a woman. He is not drunk. But where is he? Why doesn't he come?"

"Something's up, but it isn't that. McGree says anything."

Hour after hour they sat in the agony of bound, tortured muscles, swollen under the tight lashings, aching with the pain of burns; and the tedious clock hammered away at its seconds with the monotony of something that drips. The pain was torture, the futility maddening; they could talk, but neither had much to say.

Dim shadows, as if the air were filling with impalpable dust, came into the cabin, grew heavier, and darkness filled the room, became thick as lamp-black, and nothing could be seen. Night had come; and with it came a more lonely helplessness.

"He is with a woman," she said, convinced by her torture. Jealousy gave her the only explanation that seemed reasonable. "I hate him!"

"It's not like Heddon. There's a reason and a good one. You'll see. He'll come—somebody'll come. Something's happened ashore."

THE first they heard was the click of oars, then a woman's shrill sharp fearful cry, cut short as if with clap of hand to mouth.

"What's that?" Gloria cried breathlessly. "What the —— is it?"

They heard the thump of the boat against the ship.

"Coming on board—who can it be?" she said, low-voiced.

"Somebody laying aboard the wrong ship—it happens in the dark when there's been too much to drink ashore. But they can cut us loose. Ahoy——"

"Don't! Wait — I hear — that's Will's voice—that was a woman's cry——"

"My lord, what's up?"

"Don't call—wait! Don't make a sound!"

"But I want to get out of this!"

"Be quiet!" she said angrily.

The cabin skylight was raised. They could hear confused voices. Old Wateman, rasping, truculent, half-drunken, bawled orders. There was the clattering jabber of sailors. Then again the piercing cry, quickly ended.

"Ho, Jack!" That was Heddon, shouting down the 'midship quarters.

"Don't answer!" Gloria ordered. "Wait!"

"Ahoy down there! Jack! Gloria!" Heddon thundered down the companion.

"Shh-h," said Gloria between clenched teeth, furious.

They could hear Heddon saying:

"Where the —— can they have got to! Give me that lantern. Here—it's below with you. Don't bother with that anchor, Tom. We'll slip our cable as soon as ever I find out what's become of that fool girl and Jack. Oh yes, you *are* going below—you're going to do a lot of things before I am through with you——"

They heard his feet on the stairs and caught the wavering reflection of the lantern against the woodwork in the passageway. Then, carrying something across his shoulder, and swinging the lantern low beside him, he entered the cabin, and, without a look about, placed the lantern on the table and half threw his burden into a chair.

"How dare you—*dare* you bring a woman on my ship!" Gloria cried, half-rising from her chair, flaming with anger, glaring at the girl who lay back weakly, breathing

with short quick gasps, weak, exhausted, terrified.

Heddon turned quickly, facing Gloria as if she had magically appeared. Then:

"What's the matter with you? I shouted——"

"I heard her cry, Will Heddon. At first I did not think it could be you—then I waited to see——"

"You, Jack, what's the matter with *you*—here in the dark?"

"Black McGree laid aboard us this morning—said you were busy ashore with a woman—took what he wanted—tied us up!"

"Yes," said Heddon harshly, pointing, "*that*—I don't see how he could know—but *that* is the woman! And we have to get out of this bay in a hurry——"

Heddon took a knife from his pocket and hurriedly cut at Gloria's tied wrists and ankles.

"This is my ship!" she cried. "I'm not going out to sea. I am going to stay here—with the consul! I want to see the consul!"

"The consul is dead!" said Heddon, twisting her forcibly about so that he could get at her wrists. "There's no one on this jungle spot to leave you with or——"

"I'm going ashore!" she said defiantly, standing up, but instantly sinking back into the chair. Her legs were numb. She could not stand. With the rush of freed blood her wrists and ankles awakened to new pain. "I *am* going ashore!"

"Oh, I'd be glad enough to be rid of you, but we slip our cable to be out of here. And when I'm done with her, I'll see you stowed somewhere."

"But her—" Raeburn pointed excitedly at Peggy Cardan, now pale as a ghost in the lantern light.

Her darkly-blue eyes stared fixedly at Heddon; her hair, as reddishly yellow as burned gold, fell in disheveled curls about her shoulders. She shrank back in her chair, incredulous, shocked, helpless, but with the nervous motionlessness of a frightened animal about to spring and dodge blindly into a corner, out of the room, overboard, anywhere.

"But her—what are you doing with her?"

"Her? Look at her close, Jack. She's a perfect beauty and knows it—knows it makes men fools to look at her. She wants to sell herself—I'll take her to the Kulicos. They buy women at auction there!"

Heddon glared at her, then swung on his heel and hurried out; and Raeburn, stumbling like a cripple, followed.

THE lantern was on the table between them. They stared at each other through its yellowish light.

"What does he mean—that terrible man! Where are we going? I—oh—I must get off this ship! Help me! Please help me!" Peggy Cardan cried imploringly at Gloria.

Gloria was bewildered, motionless. She had no understanding at all of what Heddon had meant by what he said, but felt an instinctive dread of this woman. The stirrings of jealousy troubled her without at all revealing themselves for what they were; *jealousy* was but a word, never before an experience, and she did not at all understand the tremulous confusion of her impulses, now concealed behind a searching gray-eyed steadiness.

"Who is he—that madman! I don't know why he did it—who is he? Who are you?"

"Gloria Bennings. This is my ship."

"Your ship? Oh? Why am I here? What does he mean? Who is he? Don't take me—don't let him take me! I'll give you anything! Help me—please—what can I do! I can't stand this! Why—*why* don't you help me?"

"I do not want you on my ship," said Gloria. Then, accusingly—"What have you done?"

"Done? I have done nothing! I swear, nothing!"

"Then why did he bring you? He looked angry. You have done something."

"Nothing—I did nothing! I was on my horse—I tried to ride by him—he caught the bridle — I struck at him — he jerked the horse back and seized me—I tried to scream—he struck me on the mouth! Who is he, that beast?"

"Don't you say that!" Gloria cried, half-rising, moved unexpectedly by much the same sort of impulse that had made her throw the coffee-pot at Black McGree's head.

Peggy Cardan stiffened, a moment's frightened questioning intensity in her tear-glistening eyes; then again she pleaded:

"Make him let me go! Let me go—please, please! You are a woman, think how it would be! What is it he wants of me? Sell me, he said—that can't be—please. What can I do! What can I do!"

"I can't do anything," said Gloria helplessly.

AMID the bustle of preparing to slip the cable and get the crew over the side with a towing-hawser fast to the capstan, there came a hail off the water astern the *Gloria*.

"I knowed it! I knowed it," said old Wateman drunkenly. "We're overhauled right here in the bay! I knowed no good 'd come of it!"

"Who the —— are you?" Heddon boomed between cupped hands at the approaching boat.

A thin voice, straining itself in the shout, came back—

"It's I, Will—Oxenham!"

"What do you want? What are you after?" Heddon answered suspiciously.

"I'm coming on board to tell you——"

Heddon turned to the men on deck near him, and warningly—

"Keep a still tongue in your head—all you fellows." Then over the side— "Who's with you?"

"Just two boatmen."

"An' if I hear of any of yer monkey jabber to them fellers down there, tellin' 'em things," said Watemen to the natives near him, "it's over the side I'll knock the lot of ye. We're all in a way to be hung for this night's work," he added savagely, the better to strike them with fear.

The boat was alongside.

"What did you come for?" Heddon asked with a shade of distrust.

Oxenham, with unseamanly scrambling, came over the bulwark before answering—

"I wanted to tell you—I was afraid you might get away first thing in the morning—I'm going with you—in the morning!"

He said it eagerly, half-bracing himself against a boisterous welcome.

"Oh, you are?"

"Yes. I want to go out to the plantation tonight and get some things—I'll be back early in the morning——"

"When did this idea get you? How'd you come to change your mind?"

In the dim light of the deck Heddon regarded him with much the same uncertainty that he would have looked on a stranger who was trying to get a passage; but Oxenham, being of an unsuspicious nature, knowing that Heddon was moody, erratic, often given to cynical harshness, did not really sense his unwelcome. Besides, he was rather excited in his eagerness to go, and explained:

"Right after you left, Bobby Rolland, Judge Davies, and some of the other men came out. They felt awfully bad. Judge Davies apologized—he really did. He said everybody on the island was going to join in hushing the matter up. Said he knew how I felt about not having it reach my people in Washington——"

"Thoughtful of him," Heddon growled.

"Yes, wasn't it!"

"Not to want people in Washington to learn what a blazing fool he had been," Heddon added.

"He was really sorry, Will — he was, really. Right there and then I told him that I would like to go out with you, but my affairs were all in a tangle, and he said that he would attend to them for me. Be glad to. That a sea trip would do me good. So I came off to tell you—I was afraid you'd go out too early——"

A hammer had been pounding forward. The blows stopped. There was a rasping clank of iron and a splash.

"Sorry. We're going out tonight. We've just slipped our cable," said Heddon. "Wait a minute."

He hurried forward to make sure that the hawser was properly bent to the capstan, and that the crew was getting away in the boat. Old Wateman was too far gone in whisky to be much trusted.

There was a glow under the cabin skylight. Oxenham, half-idly, stepped to it and glanced down; then he stooped and peered, incredulous, shocked. He stood up, looking anxiously about for Heddon, then stared down again, trying to listen. He turned from the skylight and started to run forward, but Heddon had come back.

"Will! Will, that's Peggy Cardan down there!"

"Is it?" said Heddon.

"What's she doing here, Will? She's crying—how did she——"

"She's taking a little sea trip, too, to do her good."

"But she's crying! I couldn't believe my eyes! How does she come to be on *your* ship?"

"Oh, we just happened to meet after I left you. I told her I thought it would do her good."

"I'm not going! I wouldn't go for anything!"

Oxenham ran to the side and shouted at the boat which had brought him—

"Here—ho there, you men——"

Heddon stepped beside him and boomed—"You fellows, there!"

An answer came up.

"Shove off!" Heddon shouted.

"No—wait!" Oxenham cried vaguely. Then: "What do you mean, Will? Let me go! I wouldn't be on this ship now for anything!"

Heddon turned him about, half-shoved him inboard:

"You can't go ashore now. You'd have the whole town coming out here in boats and canoes before I got out of the harbor. I don't want you any more than you want to be here—but you stay!"

"What are you doing? What have you done?"

"You're just about the unluckiest man alive, you are. Everybody'll think you had a part in stealing Peg Cardan—well, make *her* think so! Perhaps she'll love you then. Women are like that!"

"Stealing her? Will! You're not doing that? It can't be— Let me off this ship! I won't go. You are not carrying her off?"

"Yes, in a way. But you'll find out it's not as bad as it looks. If I can help it she'll never be glad I brought her, though, at that, I'm doing it for her own good. I've just told her I was going to take her to the Kulicos and sell her to the highest bidder. And maybe I am, at that. I can never tell just what I am going to do."

"Will Heddon—*no!*"

"Go down and ask her if you like."

"But you didn't—you couldn't mean that!" Oxenham cried.

Heddon did not answer, but grinned with satiric composure, looming above the slight Oxenham who gaped, shocked, astounded, yet unbelieving.

XI

THE *Gloria*, with no lights showing except the dim blur of a lantern through her stern ports, no sail set though a faint wind was astir, was stealthily drifting on the outbound tide behind the boat of rowers that had her in tow, for it was safer in the dark to lead her through the coral-lined channel than to let the breeze spank her through on a tack. The moon would not be up for an hour or more, but the sky gleamed with freckled brilliancy. The mountainous background was a towering blur; the sheltering horn-like arm of the bay a streak of black. A rippling shimmer, vague, shadowy, changing from a silver glint to ink, lay over the water through which the *Gloria* like a guilty thing was hurrying out, furtively.

Heddon, with hand to wheel and face turned behind him, watched the shore-line for the bobbing gleam of lanterns which would show that the search had worked down to the water.

"What's got into you, Will?" Raeburn demanded with an edge of anger. Oxenham was standing dejectedly by. "You—what's got into you, I said!"

Heddon looked around. His knotted face, ugly, bold, shadowed with starlight, was like a weary, fierce, jeering satyr's.

"Watch out for her, Jack. There's madness for you in such as her. Oxenham here even went off his head over her. What'd you think of her? There's a *real* pearl for you!"

"She's put you off your head, too!"

"Right, Jack! I've been a fool with other women of her kind—this one has a lesson. You haven't seen her yet. Wait till she stops crying. The —— never made a prettier one—nor more greedy. —— such women. I'll show this one!"

"But the Kulicos," Oxenham begged. "You'll not do that?"

"What's to stop me? She had herself at auction. You bid and bought her, then she broke the bargain!"

"Who is she, Will?" Raeburn asked. "What's she had to do with you?"

"Not a —— thing!"

"Then let her go!"

"Aye, that's the way they go through life. No man will hurt 'em. They're too pretty. She's the kind that strip men, and give nothing. No heart in her. No passion. Wants jewels, clothes, and to make men giddy. A dirty little beach-girl that any sailor can have is the better woman."

"Don't say that. No!" Oxenham protested in futile anger.

"Will," Raeburn begged, "send her ashore. Drop her off the point here. She'll have had her scare. That'll be lesson enough!"

"She's got to you already, eh? You and Oxenham, with your gallantry!"

"You are crazy!" Raeburn cried, meaning just that, and he went away forward.

Old Wateman, up in the bows, leaning over the foot of the bowsprit, unsteady of bandy legs but with no twist in his tongue, shouted repeatedly at the rowers, who were as many of the crew as he had been able to scrape together hurriedly when Heddon had sent him into the village. Raeburn went up beside him and peered ahead to where less than half a cable's length off the boat, with whining creak of tholes as if bemoaning its labor, tugged at the schooner.

"Well, Tom, we are in for it, now."

"Nay, it's gittin' out of it we are"; then hoarsely: "Pull away there, ye larrikins! Blast my eyes if ye ain't got the slack of a hammock in that bight! Lettin' the tide do yer work, are ye!"

"Did you have a good look at that girl, Tom? She's nothing but a child."

"As much woman as ye are fool. Shut up, now. Ahoy there! Lay back on them oars, ye smoked up sons o' Satan!"

"When did *you* turn woman-stealer?"

"Go to ——, you Red Raeburn! Ye or no other's the man to tell Tom Wateman what's what!"

"But there's a gunboat—that fellow that just come on board said so—on the other side of the island, Tom. She'll be up an' after us tomorrow. You know that, don't you?"

"I hate them craft as use shovels for sails. There's no good in 'em."

"But there's *speed* in 'em!"

"Aye, there's fire in ——, too, but I'm too much a Christian not to freeze than go there. Ahoy, ye swabs, don't be afeard ye'll start the capstan! Ye're as fine a lot of muckers as ever went into the ——'s dustpan!"

"She'll be up and after us, Tom."

"Let 'er! How's she to know where we goin', eh? Now git away from here. I'll be up an' after ye with a capstan pawl. Them womin that play with us men is fair loot, an'——"

"How many women have ever played with you!"

"'Nough to git all my wage when I stop ashore. I hate womin. Haven't ye known that of me all the while? Ye're blind, Jack. I'm proud of Will Heddon. He's a proper man with womin, blast 'em! Ol' Bennings, he were too soft. I'm proud o' Will Heddon."

"Yes, and you're drunk too."

"'T is the last time, Jack. Aye, I'll never touch it again. Ho, ye black sons o' Satan's mother——"

At that moment mellow laughter rose from the water, a quick, many-voiced merriment, half-suppressed like secret joking. There was a quick rattle of oars in their locks, and the hawser that had swayed out ahead slowly sank downward.

"Ahoy there!" Wateman bawled. "Wait till I git ye on deck. Take the slack out o' that—what the ——!"

Voices, good-naturedly insolent, bah-ed and laughed. Oars splashed. Through the misty darkness a man shouted—

"We go on no shippee this night!"

Wateman answered with impotent curses.

The men in the boat had cast off the line, were circling and heading back for the distant beach, deserting, openly running away, returning to the laughing brown girls that would dance for them in the moonlight. They had their impudence out of the knowledge that a white girl was being carried off, that the *Gloria* could not put back after them and have police search them out for deserting.

"Lay aboard here! Come back with that boat!" Wateman roared.

"You stop along beach an' get him!" a voice answered and other voices laughed.

Heddon, peering over the side, called from aft to know what was going on.

"They've cast off our tow-line—are making for the beach!" Raeburn shouted, adding needlessly, "We're adrift!"

Drifting with the tide, the *Gloria*, without sail set, would not respond to her helm, and might float inshore and stick, high and dry, helpless as a turtle on its back; then men could come out as they pleased from the town and find all they wanted to know.

But Wateman, drunk though he was, was still a sailor; and he bawled as if to a crowded deck—

"Git the jib on 'er, ye lubbers!"

Then, unsteady, but with a sort of fumbling sureness, knowing what he was about, he began casting off the gaskets.

Raeburn, in answer to Heddon's shout, ran aft to where Heddon was hurriedly overhauling the mainsail running-gear; and with yank and heave, the three of them—Oxenham helping—swung the boom clear of the crutch.

"Jack, get Gloria on deck to take the wheel—and kick that Chinaman up here. We'll be aground in twenty minutes if——"

Raeburn, with a flying jump, landed half-way down the stairs and clattered as if falling into the passageway. With a lunge he passed through the pantry door.

"On deck, Chang! Heddon wants you. Crew's made off in the only boat we've got. We're adrift!"

The Chinaman sat on a stool with a long-stemmed pipe in his slit of a mouth. The pipe had a conical bowl about half as big as a child's thimble; two hard puffs, or three at most, and it would be empty; but Chang did not use hard puffs, and for a half-hour at a time could nurse smoke out of the toy-like bowl.

The pantry was small, always in order, as if the woodwork was scrubbed and scoured daily. A wick now burned evenly as a knife's edge under the polished chimney of a lantern that swung from a beam.

Chang stared at Raeburn from under lids inscrutably adroop—

"Me cook."

"You'll be fish-meat if Heddon comes after you! On deck an' bear a hand!"

"What for he bling that woman?" Chang asked, then blew the smoke in a slow, thin thread-like stream between his pursed lips.

"Come out of it, Chang! That's none of your business—or mine. We're adrift!"

"Me stay here. Ship go —— awlite. Me no clare."

"On deck with you!" said Raeburn angrily, with a step nearer, bracing his feet and lowering his shoulders as if about to jerk Chang from the stool.

Chang, holding a steady look, laid down his pipe on the table at one side, then quietly, quickly reached behind him, and when his thin claw-like hand reappeared it held a long, silvery bright butcher-knife.

"Me cook," said Chang softly. "No —— sailo'man!"

Fire glinted and vanished in Raeburn's eyes. Half-amused in spite of his anger, he answered readily:

"You win, you yellow scoundrel. But lord help you if we go aground!"

Chang stared immobily through his wrinkles and said nothing more.

Raeburn turned from the pantry and hurried into the cabin, saying as he came:

"The crew's made off—we're adrift. Heddon wants you to take the wheel while we get sail on her!"

Gloria was used to the bustle and clamor of emergency in shipwork. She stood up quickly—

"The crew—what has happened to our crew?"

"Cast off the tow-line and made for the beach. Know we don't dare come after them because of her——"

He pointed with a back-handed gesture at Peggy Cardan, who stared anxiously from her chair, hoping that in this stir and excitement something fortunate for her had come.

"We may go aground—then they'd have Heddon for stealing her!"

Gloria rushed passed him and from the room. He turned after her. Peggy Cardan sprang up and in a groping eagerness caught his arms:

"Please—oh, you help me! Help me—help me!"

He stared across his shoulder, pushing at her hands on his arm. She was unreal and poignant. Her delicate white face, tear-stained, was thrust up at him out of the shadows like something ghostly, almost unnerving in its beseeching misery and fear.

"I can do nothing. Let go!"

He jerked away, paused in the doorway and looked back. She threw her arms up as if pleading for heaven's help, then, hopeless, gave way, fell to the deck and sobbed.

"—— him!" said Raeburn, and went clattering up the ladder, springing out on deck where Heddon and old Wateman were yanking at the halliards, inching up the heavy mainsail.

"Look here, Heddon!" Raeburn shouted. "Get that girl off this ship! Blast it, man, you are crazy——"

"So soon?" Heddon answered, not stopping in his work. "Save up your money, Jack—maybe you can buy her when we get to the Kulicos!"

"But —— it, what's got into you!" Raeburn cried, still shocked by the white face he had seen across his shoulder. "You're killing that girl—let her go! She hasn't hurt you—you said so—let her go!"

"Aye, 'Let her go!' That's the cry that always gets them off. Don't be a fool. I know what I'm about. Lay hold here!"

With throbbing jerks they hoisted until the hanks jammed on the mast; then in silence, seeing what to do, Gloria seized the peak halliards from Wateman's unsteady hands, trying to sway up the gaff.

"There's a sailor for you!" said Heddon

with rallying cheerfulness. "But where's that Chinaman? We need his weight."

"Down in the pantry with a three-foot knife! Means to stay there—says he's cook—no sailor."

"Does, does he? Wait till we get under way, I'll—you'll be the cook, Jack. There won't be any Chinaman left."

They went at the jib, clapping on halliards and down-haul. Heddon worked powerfully, moving with a springy lightness, shouting, swearing without anger, excited but hardly anxious, throwing the jerk of his great weight into the pull on halliards and tack, and finally getting the jib hauled out to windward so that the *Gloria*, with helm to port, began to pay off.

Then the light wind seemed to die, as if with sudden malice holding its breath.

Heddon leaned over the bows, looking out and across at the scythe-shaped black streak, curving inward as if to close on the schooner.

"We'll make it," said Heddon, "but —— if I see how!"

"Never go 'shore 'gain—never—'gain," Wateman gravely growled to himself, bracing an arm around the mast, swaying, half-helpless, pathetic, ashamed.

"And what if we don't make it?" Raeburn asked, lowering a wet finger which he had lifted to detect any trace of a breeze's veering.

"It won't be more than thirty or forty years—with *you* for company in prison. I'll see to that when I tell my story. I couldn't get along without your company, Jack. Let's get the foresail on her—so she'll look pretty anyhow! And that Chinaman—cook, is he! We'll use him right now!"

Heddon hurried away aft, popping fist to palm as he went, as if warming his knuckles for their work. Raeburn would have followed, but Wateman unsteadily came before him and stood swaying with little wabbly jerks, his head cocked sagely, looking up, holding Raeburn as the *Ancient Mariner* held his listener. He poked an unsteady finger toward Raeburn's breast:

"I tell ye, 'tis womin—I'm ol' man—seen the world'—all th' worl'—I'm ol' man an'——"

"And drunk!"

"Not 'nother drop—never—you hear me? Never!"

"Oh, yes. I've heard you before."

"No, yer ain't. Not what I'm tellin'. Never tol' nobody 'fore. I'll tell ye, Jack. Young feller, need warnin' ye do. An' I like ye—you know I like ye, an' I'll tell ye somethin'. Lis'en——"

With tipsy swaying he leaned at a more confidential angle:

"Womin—don't never love no fool woman—ol' man's advice. She'll leave yer—like she done me—she'll leave best man 'live——"

"Did she really leave a fine man like you, Tom?"

"Aye. But I fixed 'er—aye—nothin' soft 'bout me like ol' Bennings. Know what I done? Hunh? Want know what I done, hunh?"

He peered up, head jerky, small deep eyes aglitter; his drunken voice became more rasping, savage, with a brutal throat sound. In swaying bandy-legged shortness of body, with vague night shadows and star-glint lying about him and on him, he looked like some half-world gnomic creature that had broken up through the earth's crust—grotesque and sinister.

"Pretty thing she were—I was young like yerself them days—an' when I come off my ship an' found out 'bout her doin's—know what I done? Hunh? Want know what I done, hunh?"

"No, I don't!"

"I took a club an——"

"Shut up, Tom! Stop it!"

Raeburn tried to push him away. It was like indecent nakedness, this drunken confession of the secretive, tight-lipped old fellow.

Ugly, nearly misshapen in his shortness, half-grayed of head, oddly faced, almost a monkey-faced man, yet he too had known youth, love, and the poisonous teeth of a false woman. The club he had raised against her had cast a shadow that for thirty years or more lay across him, urged him into a drunken forgetfulness when he came to a shore where white man were. Women—there was no escaping them. Even a queer, fierce half-dwarf like old Wateman had felt their blight.

Heddon came slowly up out of the companionway, walking backward, pulling; and Chang, head down, led by his queue, followed, jabbering in outrage.

"Ship go ——, you no clare, eh?" said Heddon. "You go —— without ship—how you like that?"

Gloria came at him, demanding what

he meant, what had Chang done, why this?

"I thought he might be lonely down there by himself."

"But you're hurting him!"

"Listen," said Heddon, thrusting Chang before him and wrapping long fingers around the withered yellow neck, "when I send word for you to come on deck and bear a hand, you come. Understand?"

"Don't hurt him! Let him go!" cried Gloria, pulling at Heddon's arm.

But if she had been ten women in one she could not have loosened his grip, so she dropped her hand and stamped her foot!

"How dare you, Will Heddon! Just because you are big and strong, you hurt people! Let him go!"

"Yes, so he can get another and longer knife. If we didn't need men, I'd heave him overboard!"

"This is my ship!" she said angrily.

"No, you're merely the owner. I'm captain, and I'm going to be captain for sometime."

"Put me ashore, Will Heddon! My father wanted me left at Lianfo! Put me ashore—and that woman in the cabin, put us ashore and take the ship if you want it!"

"Chang—" Heddon gave him a shake that made his head bob—"get forward and stand by to bear a hand."

He released the Chinaman and eyed him a moment while Chang, feeling his neck carefully, glowered under drooping lids and stepped backward—but forward.

"You would not have dared do that, not *dared*, if my father were alive! You coward!"

"That's right," said Heddon indifferently. Then he glanced at her from feet to loose hair, and said grimly: "And if the consul hadn't been dead, you would have gone ashore, too. But about some things I know more of what your father wanted than you do. That woman in the cabin, for instance! And I'm going through with this—clear to the Kulicos."

Heddon walked to the rail, looking now at the sinister streak of land hardly more than two throws of a stone away, now backward toward the Lianfo beach as if across the mile and more of night-covered water he could watch the gathering of excited men when the deserters told what they had to say.

There was only the lightest of a wind's touch in the air; but he said—

"Gloria, keep a hand on the wheel."

"I'll not touch the wheel! Not a spoke!"

"Then—" he said it fiercely—"I'll lash you to it—and steer it or not as you please!"

Her face blazed with anger. Her feeling nearest the surface was one of outrage, as if she would die rather than do what he told her to do; but something deep within her, the very woman's heart of her, liked it, liked his anger, liked having provoked his menace. She knew too that he would do just that, or something of the kind; and the thrill of being dominated mingled with the outrage of being dominated. With a kind of sullen humbleness she did go to the wheel, both hands to its spokes, and waited.

A sail flapped. A light breeze with almost coquettish hesitancy touched the *Gloria*, dropped away, returned, died. Wateman swore at it, staring about as if to tell the wind to its face what he thought of it. Chang waited inscrutably, arms folded across his stomach, hands in sleeves, seeming to notice nothing, just as if all this was no concern of his.

"She's the Jonah," said Raeburn dispiritedly, meaning Peggy Cardan. "Drop her on the shore there, and we'll get wind."

"Drop her—how? And Jonahs have to be thrown overboard—not put ashore. If you want to do that with ours, go ahead!"

There was a flap, a slap, a creaking rattle of blocks, then the jar and snap of sails badly trimmed to the wind.

"She's come!" cried Wateman.

At once began a bustle of running and hauling on sheets and tacks, quick shouts. The sails filled. The schooner gave answer to her skilful helm.

Then, a mile away, behind them a rocket went up, another, still another, rising like the upward stroke of a fire-pointed pencil. They were signals to the men of ships, whether afloat or ashore, of extreme urgency. There would be talk and arguments, a hauling and pulling of plans—disagreement.

Heddon said to Raeburn:

"We've got the start of any of them—can outsail 'em. Go take that wheel. We may hit something going out, but if we do I'll blame you for it. Get away aft!"

AS THE *Gloria* went near the coral-studded tip of Lianfo's horn, there was the watery thud of a falling body.

Raeburn cried out from behind the wheel:

"Chang—overboard! He jumped overboard!"

Nothing could be done. The *Gloria* could not be checked; besides, there was no boat to lower away. Chang could swim, and anyhow Heddon did not care whether he could or not. The schooner hurried on.

HOURS later the *Gloria* was running like a frightened ghost under the moon, and there was nobody to care what her course as long as plenty of wind poured over her and Lianfo lay behind.

Old Wateman, in the lee of the skylight, lay on his back and snored. At times he stopped snoring and quarreled aloud in dreams.

Heddon was now steering. Raeburn, on the deck, nodded and dozed, but sometimes feeling suddenly wakeful he cocked his eyes in long searching glances toward Heddon, who stood with inattentive sureness of skill, his eyes going carelessly to the sails, then with long searching gaze peering in all directions over the leaping water. Nothing was in sight but the silver of the moon and the ever-changing, never-changing roll of waves, splotched with black shadows, edged with foam, shimmering with movement and the iridescent glint that moonlight gave. The *Gloria* rolled through slow plunging leaps; water went *thump-k-thump* against her bows and sizzled along her sides.

"Hi, Jack, wake up!" Heddon called. "Get up and take a look below."

Raeburn got up and peered through the skylight.

"Mutiny, Jack. Mutiny is being brewed."

"If I thought that I'd join in with it," said Raeburn, continuing to stare down into the cabin.

Peggy Cardan sat in a chair, hand against her forehead, elbow to table, but she looked watchfully back and forth from Oxenham to Gloria as they talked.

"He's explaining that he had nothing to do with it," said Heddon. "He ought to tell Peg Cardan he did it for love of her. She'd like him then."

"Think she 'll like you, do you, Will?"

"It wasn't for love I did it. That makes the difference in every woman's forgiveness."

"You know women so well as all that, do you?" asked Raeburn, giving him an odd look.

"Now what's up your sleeve?"

"Know why Gloria wouldn't go ashore?"

"Yes. She wanted somebody to *make* her go."

"She's in love with you—that's why!"

"Is it?" asked Heddon, carelessly, and began humming:

> *"When a sailorman he goes to sea*
> *He works like hell and'll drown maybe—*
> *That sail-or-man."*

"You don't believe it?" said Raeburn.

"Believe what?"

"That she loves you?"

> *"And the devil says to Davy Jones*
> *'Give me the soul, you take the bones*
> *Of sail-or-men!*

"That who loves me?"

"Gloria Bennings!"

"Now what's got into you? Why should I believe that?"

"She said so."

"You're a liar!"

"Yes, she said it, or as much as said it," Raeburn affirmed.

"Then I'll auction 'em both off," Heddon answered, unconcerned. Then, hotly: "What the —— does she know of love! Stupid cow-eyed native-raised gawk! Black McGee—if he hadn't killed her father, I'd let him have her, have both of 'em!"

"Why *did* you bring that woman? Who is she—what'd she do?"

"Why? Don't you know yet? You heard what Bennings said the night he died—she played with men. Besides, I wanted my hands on a woman like that! And when I jerked her—or she fell—I don't know which—off that horse, what Bennings said came boiling up. I don't know how much the dead have to do with what happens to the living, but for half a moment I was superstitious."

"Superstitious? What the —— are you talking about?"

"Why, you blockhead, don't you see——"

He broke off. Oxenham had come on deck. With him was Gloria. Behind them, Peggy Cardan.

"The mutiny is out! Take this wheel, Jack."

IN THE moonlight the three of them looked at Heddon and no one spoke, for Oxenham, who had come to do the talking, was nervous, with his fingers pulling at one another, and his lips were too dry for easy speaking. Slight of

build, haggard, determined, but baffled for a beginning, he swayed with shifting stagger of feet under the heaving deck. Gloria, at his side, stared with full, gray-eyed steadiness, with something of amazement and a girl's pained wonder that comes with the first disillusionment in men. Margaret Cardan stared at Heddon as if searching for the motive in his madness and a little afraid of what it would be when found. She stood slightly behind the others, seeming to keep watchfully out of his reach; yet, in a way, appearing now more baffled than afraid. Oxenham, whom she did trust, had assured her that his cousin was really a fine man. There was about her, even at such a time, a strange sense of delicacy, the daintiness that fragile things have, and the beauty that is like a subdued flame, such as seems to burn within a pearl.

In the silence old Wateman's drunken snoring came up to them from beside the skylight, and the waves, with intermittent *thump-k-thump* struck the plunging bows with a kind of boisterous affection.

"Will, I want—I want to bring you to your—your senses," said Oxenham, groping earnestly for words. "You know, Will, there's nothing I wouldn't do for you—but—but for God's sake turn this ship around and go back!"

"Why?"

"Don't talk that way! Don't act that way! You know why—you must, you simply must go back!"

"I don't know anything of the kind," said Heddon.

"This is Miss Bennings's ship!" Oxenham answered angrily, but with an exasperated consciousness of futility. "She wants you to go back to Lianfo—if you go back now, it will be all right. Miss Cardan has said that——"

"Who?"

"Miss Cardan," he repeated before realizing that Heddon was playing with him. Then in a trembling voice, angrily: "You must be crazy! I don't understand you. This is serious, Will Heddon. But Miss Cardan has said that she will not let any charge be made against you if you go back now. You are practically stealing a ship. You are taking three people off against their will—I don't want to go either. It is serious, I tell you. You must go back, at once! This is Miss Bennings's ship, and you must, Will. You must!"

"You wanted to come, didn't you?"

"No—no! Not when I found out what you had done! No I didn't. And this is Miss Bennings's ship. You have no right——"

"Oh, yes, I have," Heddon cut in, mingling sarcasm and tolerance. "Gloria may not know it—she doesn't know much about such things—but she is a minor. Her father as much as appointed me her guardian until she was in the hands of a man that's now dead. I'm still, in a way, her guardian. As long as I take care of her and her property I can do as I please. And I please to go to the Kulico Reefs."

Gloria did not know of what he was talking, but she felt his assurance and looked inquiringly toward Oxenham, who was quite taken aback.

"That may be. I don't know—but I believe you, Will. I believe anything you say—I mean when you really mean it. But Miss Cardan, you have no right to——"

"Wrong again!" Heddon said with good-natured mockery. "Haven't I told you you are always wrong when you talk about 'right' and such stuff. Miss Cardan may not be a minor—" a long glance toward her— "No, she isn't a minor. She's old as the Serpent of Eden. But following out *her* father's instructions regarding his estate and her conduct, it was convenient, even necessary to do as I did!"

"My father!" she cried.

"Aye, your father. Old Sam Bennings of the Carolines. You know it, don't you?"

"No!—No!—Oh, no!" she cried, each repetition growing weaker as forgotten, dim and nearly unrecallable memories that gathered dream-like about a babyhood association of water, beach and sunlight, a dark-skinned nurse, a broad-bearded man, came up nearly formlessly and filled her mind. "It can't be!" she begged, protesting, half-convinced.

"What do you think, Gloria? Look at her—and your mother's picture—look at her. What do you think? This is your sister!"

"I do not know," said Gloria, regarding her sister steadily. "There is something—I do not know. Are you sure?"

"I am that! Don't you know your father's name?" he demanded of Peggy Cardan. "You are Margaret Bennings—don't you know that?"

"No—no," she said confusedly, "but I knew—I never knew his name—but I

knew Mr. Cardan was not my father. And you—you meant to do this when you first saw me there on the veranda!"

"No, I merely wanted to. Tell her, Jack—tell her what Bennings said to do with daughter of his that played with men. Tell her."

"No!" Raeburn answered hastily.

"Well, your father said that if daughter of his ever played with men he would come up out of his grave and—well, I guess his ghost took hold of me there on that jungle path this afternoon. Anyhow, I'm taking you to the Kulicos. Who'll buy you, I don't know. Oxenham here, most likely—and turn you loose. He's that sort of a fool. Now you'd better go below and talk it over some more. And don't forget, this ship's haunted. Old Bennings sits up there on the main truck, grinning!"

Heddon pointed, and every one of them, Raeburn too, turned and peered up expectantly. Heddon laughed.

They went below, the two women first, with Oxenham stumbling dejectedly along behind them.

Heddon turned about slowly, watchfully, peering all around the watery disk of blobbing froth and moonlight. Nothing was in sight but the blurred rim of the horizon. Moonlight flattened its glow on the waves that were unappeasably restless, tossing themselves as if in futile reaching toward the great pearl that maddened them, stirred their ocean to its deepest depth, and swayed them in their tides.

"Now, how about it, Jack? Does Bennings lie at fathoms five—or is he pulling the wires behind the scenes of this Punch and Judy show?"

XII

A WEEK later life on the *Gloria* was still uncomfortable for everybody.

Heddon lapsed into moods of sullen aloofness which old Wateman described as being "Shamed of hisself, proper—as I am too. I'm alus an idjit when I'm drinkin'. Never another drop, Jack. Never."

But Heddon was likely to emerge from his brooding silences in a way that hardly bore out Wateman's conclusion.

The weather was fine. The wind held on. For half-days at a time a sheet or track was hardly touched.

Old Wateman's red-rimmed eyes were redder than ever, and bloodshot for days; but after getting back to strong tea his hand grew steady enough for him to take up work on the inlay of his teak-wood box, which, after more than a year's labor, was almost done. In the afternoon he would go up in the bows to be by himself, and saw and scrape and gouge, muttering cryptically to the fancies that floated through his head.

Sometimes Raeburn would come up and sit by him.

"Ye've seen how he watches 'er, Jack?"

"Yes, and she watches him, too."

"She don't 'pear 'fraid much, either."

"No."

"What's to come of it, Jack?"

"The —— knows."

"I wish I hadn't nothin' to do with it. I'll never touch another drop, Jack. An' he's sorry he done it. I can see by the look o' him he's not proud of hisself. If 't had been him she played false, 'twould have been diff'rent. But 'twas that Oxey-feller. No woman c'd be expected to love a skinny, sickly thing like him—no woman like her, no how. Will Heddon, he done wrong."

OXENHAM was the most uncomfortable. He tried to keep from being near Margaret Bennings, as Heddon insisted upon calling her. He thought that he hated her, when he couldn't have hated anything; knew that he did not understand her, believed her incomprehensible. But she, without any noticeable strain, accepted him simply as an acquaintance who was neither pleasing nor displeasing, and ignored what had passed between them on Lianfo as if she had entirely forgotten.

One day Oxenham and Heddon sat together on a sea-chest, amidships, and they talked of her.

"You're still in love. That's what's the matter with you," said Heddon.

"That is not so! You know it is not so. How could I, after what happened?"

"You never saw a moth come back to the flame?"

"A moth?"

"A man either. They're all the same. A woman like that puts poison in your blood. You're a moth."

"Will—" Oxenham was very serious—

"there are times when, honestly, Will, when I think you aren't just right."

"'Right?' Can't you forget that word!"

"You know what I mean. You seem queer, unreasonable. You know, not rational."

"You mean crazy?"

"No, Will, I don't want to say *that*, but——"

"You think it anyhow. Maybe you're not far wrong," Heddon admitted with no interest.

"But you have done such a wild thing. You ought now to do something."

"What?"

"Will, you ought to go back to Lianfo!"

"I'm not crazy enough for that—yet. But what about you?"

"About me?"

"Being still in love with this Margaret Bennings Cardan? You're a lunatic!"

"That is not so! That is *not* so!"

"No?" Heddon was tormenting him. "You can't fool me. You are still in love with her."

"No!" Oxenham protested, exasperated, confused. "I see clear through her. I see her artificiality. She isn't even beautiful to me any more!"

"You're going blind."

"I don't like her. I don't see how I ever did like her. As a woman—just as a woman, Will, I don't think her nearly as admirable as her sister!"

Heddon gave him a long searching look: "Again? Already? You are a moth! —— me, I am getting superstitious!"

"What do you mean—superstitious?"

"You have been talking to her rather steadily for days," said Heddon. "Unhunh, helping her with dish-washing. Looking at books together. On deck when she is——"

"That is not so!"

"—below when she is. I see it now." Laying a hand on Oxenham's shoulder: "Just the woman for you, too! Doesn't know a thing about life and the world. Fine pair of Edenic children, you two—though the Serpent of Wisdom has taken a little nibble out of your heart. By heaven, I almost do believe that old Bennings is pulling the wires! Anyhow, as her guardian—as yours, too—you need one as much as she does—as the guardian of both you, I agree to it! I command it! I'm going to see that it is done!"

"Of what are you talking?" Oxenham demanded, guessing, but too amazed to be quite sure.

"Marriage!"

"Marriage—you are crazy!"

"Her father wanted it—insisted on it—you're the very man he had in mind. Spoke of you. Was his death-bed request."

"Will!"

"It's the best thing I can do for you—both of you."

Oxenham jumped up and stared in vague alarm, slightly backing off, but Heddon's hand held him, and Heddon's black eyes gleamed piercingly. It was the gleam that Oxenham saw, not the sardonic, jeering grin.

"Gloria is a fine girl, and rich. Congratulations, my boy!"

Heddon released his hand, and Oxenham, after stammering confusedly for a moment and saying nothing, hurried off, disconcerted, excited, a little frightened. Behind him he heard Heddon laugh. He was sure that it was the laugh of a madman. He knew as well as he knew anything that he has been listening to words of sheer madness —such as—

"Her father wanted it—you're the very man he had in mind—was his death-bed request."

A DAY or two later Margaret Cardan sat on the stern locker, alone in the cabin, and peered aimlessly out of the window, watching but hardly noticing the wake of the *Gloria*. Its mark lay like a scrawl that the waves were ever washing out, erasing with a hurried, frantic bobbing of crests, as if fearful of what the ramping schooner might write.

The sea was up, the wind gusty, the *Gloria* heaved and rolled with toppling downward fall as if to strike on her beams' end.

Margaret got up, and, moving unsteadily because of the deck's roll, reaching from a chair, that was secured in slots, to the table that was made fast to the deck, got to the mirror in the bulkhead at the end of the bookcase. She braced herself and peered with scrutinizing appraisal into the glass.

Presently she looked around. Gloria was motionless in the doorway, watching her with a strange steady calmness.

To Gloria "sister" was merely a name, without the faintest affectionate association. She did not like this woman. She

could not have told why. She did not try to show dislike, but she did not know how to pretend a liking even had she wished; and she did not wish. Heddon had brought her, and Gloria jealously felt that he would not have brought her if he had not wanted her, no matter what he said about why he had done it.

"You do look like my mother's picture," said Gloria, simply speaking just what she had been thinking. "Tell me of her."

"Mother is a tired old woman," Margaret answered wearily. "She smiles before friends and pretends to be easily amused."

"Why?"

"Why? Because if the world sees your real feeling it might as well see you naked. You are just as helpless."

"I don't understand you."

"You are fortunate," said Margaret a little caustic of tone. "If you had suffered, you would."

"You mean my mother is not happy?"

"Happy? Happy! No. She has very little money."

Gloria sensed the sharpness in the things that Margaret said almost every time she spoke, but did not understand them; and Margaret did not understand, and nearly doubted, the simplicity and frankness of Gloria. To Margaret, who believed in no one excepting her mother, this staring earnestness and simpleness of speech was like a unique affectation; it exasperated her.

"But my father said my mother was dead."

"A woman dies many times."

"I don't understand you."

"You will, after that man marries you. A wedding and a burial are very much alike."

"What man?" asked Gloria.

"Heddon. Don't you love him?"

"He is not the same man since you came. And you don't seem afraid of him any more."

"I *am* afraid of him. But a man is like any other brute. It is dangerous to show your fear."

Margaret might as well have been talking in a strange tongue.

Gloria looked with the mild displeasure of an unaffected longing at her sister's golden hair, tangled in a cloud of curls; at the skin, as soft with color as a pear, at the thin nose, and eyes like those of a blue-eyed hawk.

"Will Heddon will not sell you," said Gloria thoughtfully. "He will keep you, as my father always kept the most beautiful pearls."

Margaret glanced again for a lingering moment into the mirror. She was beautiful. She knew it. At times this knowledge gave her pleasure. At other times it made her bitter.

She made her way gropingly against the roll of the deck to a big chair and sat down wearily. She had been relieved, though hardly reassured, to find that there was more of a reason than sheer brutal madness in Heddon's carrying her off. Even in her moments of deepest uneasiness she did not believe that he had any real intention of selling her. What he might do, she did not know. But she had watched him, penetratively. He was towering, splendid of body, with a cryptic ugliness of feature, half-satyrish, that, however, under repeated glances hardly seemed to be ugliness at all; there was something nearly tragic about his knotted, muscular face, the long black hair, black eyes, hard and restless, the long fingers with their scarred and blackened knuckles, the bitter jeering that seemed half-play, the nearly merry play of words that were half-bitter. On deck she had repeatedly looked at him with a gaze as unwavering as his own stare when he watched her moodily from a distance. It was as if each searched the other for something neither expected to find.

Margaret had grown up under the sheltering hand of a mother who had become embittered but would not show to the world any sign of her pain. Too late she had learned that a runaway wife, in the very act of running, gives to her lover reason to be contemptuous when he is merely bored. Bennings having the ill-grace to stay alive, there had been no marriage with Cardan; but she, when discarded, held to his name, to her daughter, and to what respectability a rigidly scrupulous life and brave face would afford. But in the shadows within her home, she, meaning to be protective, had taught her daughter to regard the world with cynical hypocrisy: all men were equally unscrupulous, or stupid; no one was much better than another except in what he could buy; all were after the same thing—to own the woman, body and soul; and that the best a woman could hope for was to be well-paid for herself. Love was folly: twice Mrs. Cardan had gone with

men she loved, and each time disappointment followed; the best to be hoped for was marriage to a man with money. It was not happiness, but it was at least respectability and, possibly, comfort.

Under such watchful tutelage, Margaret had come to know a great deal about men and to be contemptuous of what she knew.

Gloria now also sat down, and looked at her in a steady searching way that made Margaret uncomfortable. It was as if the sea-born, ship-raised girl was jealously trying to stare into the secrets of beauty that this woman had learned in the mysterious world that lay beyond the watery horizon-circle in which Gloria, like a maiden in old-time fables, had been imprisoned by magic.

There was an instinctive antagonism between them. The rude frankness of Gloria was almost disconcerting to the older, wiser girl. In the presence of those level gray eyes, enigmatically calm, Margaret hardly knew how to act. She was irritated by a sense of being at a disadvantage.

"Jack Raeburn," Gloria remarked slowly, more as if thinking than speaking, "said you are a pearl-woman—the kind Will Heddon used to talk about."

Margaret rubbed her fingernails against her palm inattentively, as if not listening.

"Old Tom," Gloria went on, "said you are the prettiest woman he ever saw."

Margaret put the back of her hand against her mouth and tried to yawn as she gazed with forced indifference toward the window. She knew that her face was growing red.

"My father said my mother was the most beautiful woman in the world, and her picture is your picture," Gloria continued in as level a voice as if reading something she did not quite understand.

Margaret started to rise, but the roll of the ship jarred her back into the chair, and she sat there, pretending a faint interest in the grotesque carving of the chair's arm.

"Just a few minutes ago I asked Mr. Oxenham if you were beautiful——"

Margaret glanced up under lowered lids.

"—and he said, 'No!' 'No!' Just like that, 'No!' Why would he say, 'No!'?"

Margaret arose and stood balancing herself by holding to the table:

"I am going on deck—fresh air. I have been here all day. You ask why he said, 'No!' It is because of you. He thinks *you* are very beautiful. He is very devoted—you ought to like him, too. He is the only really fine man I ever knew!"

She left the cabin quickly, nearly falling a time or two for the sea was quite rough, and with half a chance the *Gloria* rolled like a barrel.

On the ladder at the companion scuttle she paused, out of sight from the deck, and listened. Heddon was talking of her to Oxenham.

"What the —— makes you think I won't do as I say? I always do as I say—unless I change my mind. Anything at all can be done at the Kulicos. I'll sell you too, you keep on bothering me!"

"But now you aren't talking seriously. And I don't believe you really mean to—to sell her."

"Why not?"

"You can't be—a young girl like that."

"You mean a pretty girl like that," Heddon jeered. "If she were ugly you wouldn't be nearly as concerned. She is pretty, yes. But that's all, and that's nothing—nothing but a kind of diabolism. Makes men mad. That's why women prize it so, this beauty of theirs. Just a glint of color on the skin, a curve of the cheek, a shine in the eye. That's all it is. But Adam, the blasted fool, gave up Paradise for it, and it has kept men a race of savages ever since. Somewhere behind whatever any man does there is the thought of a woman. The bigger the folly in what he does, the prettier the woman that made him do it. Why, one glimpse of beauty in the Lianfo sunlight and even a saint like you went mad!"

"Then why," said Oxenham with wrinkled brow, puzzling a bit to get the words in order," then why, if you see through beauty—feel that way about it, and all—why do you let it make *you* mad?"

"I'm sane. That's what's the matter with me. I'm the only sane man on this ship. Jack Raeburn has a moonstruck look in his eyes for an hour after he has seen her. Old Tom's worked a year inlaying that box of his, and yesterday he said it was for *her*. You—you are more than half in love with another woman, and yet you can't get the poison of her beauty out of your blood. You wait till we get to the Kulicos. I'll show you, and her too!"

"But you won't—you can't do that! Some brute would get her!"

"None worse than Jeffries."

"I half-believe you do mean to do it!" said Oxenham anxiously.

"I've seen a woman auctioned there. Not the first either, they said. Nearly caused a riot—so many bidders. All cash."

"A white woman?" Oxenham asked in horror.

"White? What's the color of skin to do with a woman? But none of the men there have ever seen one like this one'll be."

"Will, you won't do that! I know you won't!"

"Oh I don't know. I've planned it all out. You'll be there. You'll buy her yourself to keep anybody else from getting her."

"I? I don't want her—I mean—I mean, how could I?"

"Oh, yes, you'll try to buy her. Why, you simpleton, think of the revenge after what she did to you! Other men will have to put up cash. I'll take your I. O. U's. She'll learn the lesson of the auction block—that's all I really care about. And think how grateful she'll be," said Heddon mockingly, "to you for saving her. Fall on your neck in gratitude!"

"Don't! Don't say that! Don't think of a thing like that. I—I—you are out of your head. I believe you mean it!"

"Almost believe I mean it myself."

Margaret stepped into view. Her cheeks were hot as coals. Her eyes blazed.

"Mr. Oxenham," she said, but she was looking straight at Heddon, "there will be no such arrangement at Kulico! If I am to be sold, I will be sold—for cash!"

For a moment she held the look that was like a challenge; then she turned her back on them and with an air of dignity went along the deck, as if indifferent to what might happen.

"Now you can't do that, Will!" Oxenham cried. "You know you can't!"

"Don't you know," said Heddon, scowling, "you ought to keep still! There's something about you that makes me want to do the other thing—just whatever it is you don't want done."

Then Heddon looked with angered perplexity toward where she stood holding to a forestay, and, with the wind whipping ends of yellow hair about her face, watching the ocean.

Oxenham, for once nearly offended, went below; and presently through the skylight Heddon could see him talking across the table to Gloria, who sat motionless, listening.

RAEBURN and Wateman were in the bows, smoking and muttering back and forth to each other as Wateman daubed his fingers in glue and pressed splinters of shell into the watery splash of a mermaid that leaped just beyond a sea monster's out-reaching claws.

"O' course, he'll git her, that feller," said old Wateman, eying the monster. "But it 'ud be cruel to show it like I first meant. I hadn't the heart. Things sort o' come to life when ye work on 'em long as I been on this. There's times too when I seen mermaids, Jack. Really seen 'em, down there b'low. I've been stumblin' along down there un'er water, not thinkin' o' much, then look round quick—sudden like y'know—an' jest see a twinklin' shape whiskin' away, scared. If I was a liar like some, I might tell yer more an' you'd believe it.

"No—no, I ain't never *seen* a sea-monster, like this feller. But there been times I *felt* 'em, an' knowed they were about some'eres near, watchin' me. You *feel* things stronger than y'see 'em anyhow—an' they're jest as much so!"

It was the middle of the afternoon.

Raeburn listened with less than one ear. He puffed idly on his pipe and looked along the deck to where Margaret stood, staring away to windward, nearly as if she were a figurehead, misplaced amidships. He saw her turn and letting go of the forestay, start across the deck.

The *Gloria* reeled, dropped, then over the back of a swelling comber rose in a heaving roll.

Margaret snatched out frantically, missed the stay, fell against the bulwark, hung knees and hands at the top of the rail. The *Gloria* gave another barrel-like roll. The girl lost her balance and went over the side.

Raeburn had sprung up to run to her, but before he could take a step she had gone. Then, as he leaped along the deck, making for a coil of rope to sling as a lifeline, he shouted—

"Man overboard!"

He caught up the rope and dashed to the side, shouted and flung it; but already the schooner had passed her. She was beyond reach, floundering blindly in a rough sea.

Heddon too had seen. He let go the wheel, turned, stooped by the taffrail to kick off his shoes; then, his eyes on a drifting bit of cloth and yellow hair far astern,

he drove headlong into a smother of high-crested waves. On the rise of each wave he raised up, searching for the struggling form hidden in the rough water. Again and again he looked back at the fleeing ship and caught the frantic semaphoric signal of Raeburn and Wateman who, from the deck's elevation, could better keep sight of her.

Then Heddon caught sight of her dress as she was turned over in the curling break of a comber. He dived through the body of one wave after another; then, rising searchingly on the swelling hill of water, he slid as if dropping down the steep side and grasped a fluttering hand as Margaret was going down under the toppling weight of a comber that broke over them. They went down together, as into a watery night—submerged for seconds that, while they lasted, had all the frustration and pain of finality.

Then Heddon broke water, gasping like a porpoise, trying to thrust up the girl's head to give her air. She was more than a dead weight, for, half-strangled, she was in the throes of the senseless struggling that the drowning make.

"Stop that! I'll let you go if you don't stop that!" he shouted at her, holding the more tightly, pushing her from him at arm's length, forcing her head as well out of water as he could.

For a time he had to fight with her, yet keep both her and himself above water. The sea was rough.

She became quiet, and when quietness came it was if she had drowned; then he seized her by the back of the head and held her face up, and turned about to sight the schooner.

The *Gloria* for a time had dashed on as if unaware of her freed helm, and those about the deck in excitement and anxiety had stared, just stared, excepting old Wateman, who cursed, for they had no boat to lower away and go to Heddon's rescue. Then with a kind of nervous veering the *Gloria* trembled on her course, swung wildly, yawed, and with pound and throbbing jar came aback, and lay rolling like a dead thing in the trough of the sea a good half mile from where Heddon had peered over the crest of a wave at her. She lay in the trough, rolling like a rickety rocker, with canvas slating and cracking. Her drift was fast under the pound of wind and the sway of the water, faster than Heddon could swim with the girl's dead weight in his hand.

Gloria, from the top of the skylight, watched through the telescope.

Wateman cast his red-rimmed eyes up and down the rigging and along the deck:

"We can't do it, but we got to try! If we can git her before the wind an' double back—throw a line to him. All hands here! Ye too, Gloria!"

Wateman and Raeburn, with Oxenham eager and futile, for he was no sailorman, and Gloria, too, fighting the canvas like a man—all of them struggled desperately, hopelessly, pulling and heaving, hauling the head sails out, hauling the booms in board and outboard. But the *Gloria* rocked and rolled spitefully and would not come before the wind, but continued to lie in the trough of the sea like a barrel adrift.

They knew that Heddon could come up with the schooner, for he was a powerful swimmer, if he abandoned the girl before he was exhausted; they knew too that at the end of two hours, though he was losing distance, he had not abandoned her.

The afternoon was wearing out. In another hour darkness would gather.

Old Wateman swore furiously. He paid out a cable's length of hawser bent to a grating in the hope that the schooner would at least head into the wind and check her drift; but the *Gloria* took it as a horse stumbles sidewise, dragging a halter rope.

"What can we do? We must do something!" cried Oxenham, looking about, moving his arms in a kind of jiggling anxiety. "We must do something!"

"Do it then!" snapped Wateman. "An' miss, how does he make out?"

Gloria was again balanced on the skylight, with the telescope in her hands.

"Half the time I can't see him, Tom. But he keeps stroking." She unconsciously swung her arm around and around to illustrate. "But he is losing, Tom. He's way off!"

Raeburn had taken off his shoes and was stripping to the waist.

"Now what the —— are ye up to?" demanded Wateman angrily.

"Break out all the line we've got. I'll take it at a slant across there. He can take the drift of the sea and come at an angle for me."

"Ow, yer crazy! Try pullin' a cable's length o' line through the water! An' he

couldn't see ye nohow. The bight o' it 'ud be ten fathoms down—an' you with it! 'T is the bad luck o' what me an' Heddon done in bringin' her on this ship!"

"I'm a good swimmer," said Oxenham hopefully. "I've swum lots of times. Isn't there anything I can try to do?"

"Ow, shut up!" Wateman snarled at him. "Yer the one that brought some o' that bad luck too. Go swimmin' out there—idjit!"

"Let 's put a boom adrift with a line!" said Raeburn.

"He couldn't see it. All we can do is git over a sea-anchor to stay her drift. Then maybe he can come up with us. We ort ha' been doin' that first off!"

He swore at himself for not having done that instead of struggling so long in trying to get the *Gloria* before the wind. But the seamanly thing had been to try to go about and pick Heddon up by tacking; now the only thing was to try to make the *Gloria* as nearly stationary as possible so that he could come up to her. But if he should let himself drift to leeward of her they knew that he would never through that sea fight his way up to them. They could tell that he knew it too.

"Unship the foreboom!" cried Wateman. "We'll git an anchor over that'll hold 'er, blast her!"

The four of them struggled with the boom. They lashed the after leach of a staysail around it so that the sail came to a triangular point; and to this point they made fast heavy pieces of iron. Then from the three corners—the point of the sail, the two ends of the boom—heavy lines were made fast and brought together, just about as if the sea-anchor were a kite, then bent on the hawser.

It was the hardest of struggling work to get the heavy and clumsy sea-anchor outboard; but at last they dumped it over the side—with the lines fouling at that; but the iron at the point of the sail sank, stretching the canvas out in the water, and the boom floated.

Presently they felt the trembling jerks of the schooner as she tautened the hawser, pulling against the nearly stationary sea-anchor; then a wave broke over the bows, another and another; and when the deck cleared of water, the *Gloria* rode head on to the sea. Her drift was checked.

But darkness had begun to settle over the water.

Gloria, her hands raw and torn with rough work, went into the rigging with the glass; but already the night mists had thickened until she could see nothing but the blur of restless, black, foam-splotched water.

"We ort ha' done this first off," Wateman grumbled. "But he's not the lad to quit. He never quits. Too —— stubborn, he is. I seen him in too many fights. We've stayed the drift o' her. He'll make it if he ain't too tired, but——"

He shook his old head doubtfully, thinking of Margaret Cardan, as he looked up at the lanterns that Raeburn was putting in the rigging as a beacon light to Heddon—somewhere out there. "— but," old Wateman added in a mutter, "she's gone. He couldn't pull her too."

Then those on deck settled down to a moody, restless, nearly silent watch.

Old Wateman, puffing on an empty pipe, paced up and down the taffrail, staring at the blackness of the water, mumbling and muttering; and from time to time, as something startled him into hope, he would bend forward, hands cupped to mouth, and shout eagerly:

"Hi Will! Oh Will! That you, Will?"

Raeburn walked about barefooted, still half-undressed, shivering from nervousness. His thoughts played over the many things that Heddon had said, his many moods, the terrific strength of the man, and his nearly bitter, but at times almost riotous enjoyment of life. For all of his bitterness, Heddon did love life, and in a way that was half-mockery got fun out of it.

Gloria and Oxenham stood together, most of the time tense in silence, watching the darkness, waiting, getting a spasm of hope as some white cap broke with a flashing curl that touched their eager imagination into an instant's belief that a man's form had been glimpsed.

They had no way of even beginning to guess how far he might have been carried adrift. If he had gone to leeward in that heavy sea there was hardly a chance that he could fight his way back. He would grow tired and when he rested, the drift would carry him farther off. Each of them thought the same thing, yet they did not talk of it. If he had let the girl go at first he could have made his way back. Long before this, most certainly, he had been forced to let her go; but perhaps had waited too long, and, exhausted, could not make it.

IT WAS black on the water. The wind was still up. The sea tossed and smote the *Gloria* with reverberant thumps. Thin clouds lay before the stars, like a ragged mantle through which the night sky gleamed where the mantle was torn and moth-eaten.

"Hi, Will—Will!"

No answer.

"What did you see, Tom?" Gloria asked eagerly, again forcing her hopes to leap up, though she was tired and nearly hopeless.

"I seen somethin'! Hi, Will—oh, Will!"

A voice came up from the water like a weary echo—

"Get a line over—quick!"

The line lay coiled in readiness, with a running bowline in it.

Raeburn bent low over the side, lantern in hand and peered a moment, then straightened up, yelling:

"He's got her! My God, he's still got her!"

"O' course," said old Wateman, excitedly taking up the line. "He never lets go o' nothin'. Hold that lantern down!"

Raeburn leaned low over the side of the ship, the lantern dangling; and in its swaying light, Heddon passed the bowline over the unconscious girl's head and under her arm-pits. Old Wateman came over the side on the sea-ladder to get hold of her and lift as those on deck pulled.

Heddon, with slow weariness, and Wateman's eager hands pulling at his shoulders to help, came up the ladder and on deck. He stood drunkenly, looking about, worn out, indifferent. Raeburn held up the lantern to his face, staring admiringly.

"Jack—" there was a weary echo of mockery in Heddon's voice—"you said *man* overboard!"

With a tired blow he reached out and pushed Raeburn aside. He went to where Margaret lay, with Gloria and Oxenham kneeling beside her in clumsy agitation working her arms as Oxenham vaguely knew should be done to the drowned.

"She's dead!" he said. "She's drowned!"

"She wasn't an hour ago—had hold of my neck—slipped off. I nearly not found her. Here—this way—lift her up, face down."

Heddon himself turned her over, raised her at the waist so that her head hung down. He shook her slightly, jarring the water from her throat and lungs. She hung limp as a bundle of wilted plaintain-leaves, her wet hair falling over her head and on the deck. In the lantern light the wet hair looked like a heap of nearly molten gold.

Heddon then lifted her on his arm, face down, and wearily, as if uninterested, he carried her down into the cabin and laid her on the deck. They stood about, watching, excited, silent. Heddon was so unhurried that he seemed indifferent. He turned her face to one side, lifted an eyelid, peered, and said nothing. Then he turned her over, face down, and stretched her arms out above her head, and kneeling across her pressed against her ribs, then released his hands. He did this many times; then, to Oxenham:

"You do that. Press down slowly, count three—let go—press again. Not fast, now. When you get tired let somebody else try it."

He got up and went from the cabin into his quarters.

A half-hour later, when Wateman came with hot tea, Heddon lay back in his bunk, staring at nothing overhead.

"I'm 'feard she's gone, Will. No sign o' life. Jack, he's pumpin' at her now."

Heddon drank the tea, and lay back, arms under his head. He scowled vaguely at the beams.

Later, Raeburn came in:

"She's done for, Will. Not a sign o' life. Oxey's tryin' again. No use."

Twenty minutes later Oxenham, pale, tired, dejected, came in:

"No use, Will. We've tried. Gloria's working with her now. But it's no use. She's dead."

Heddon eyed him sullenly, then slowly sat up. He hesitated, then got to his feet. Without a word, he reentered the cabin.

Gloria knelt by her sister, gazing down at her still beauty, staring with a sort of sad curiosity.

"She is dead," said Gloria. "Dead."

"Get out," Heddon growled, not speaking to any one, speaking to all. "Clear out—shut the door. Stay out!"

He did not look to see when they went, but kneeling across the limp cold body put his hands against her sides, pressed slowly, relaxed, pressed slowly, relaxed, working with that same stubbornness, and for hardly more of a reason than stubbornness, which had made him for hours drag her body through water.

Another hour went by, then the chilled lungs sighed; five minutes more and one of the hands stretched out on the deck was slowly, gropingly, drawn down toward her face. Presently she moved her head, coughed weakly, opened her eyes, closed them, opened them again and stared.

"Cold—cold," she said, not knowing what she said.

He tore off her wet waist, and his hard palms chaffed her arms and neck. She lay trance-like, watching him, wonder deepening in her eyes as her senses pieced together nightmarish fancies.

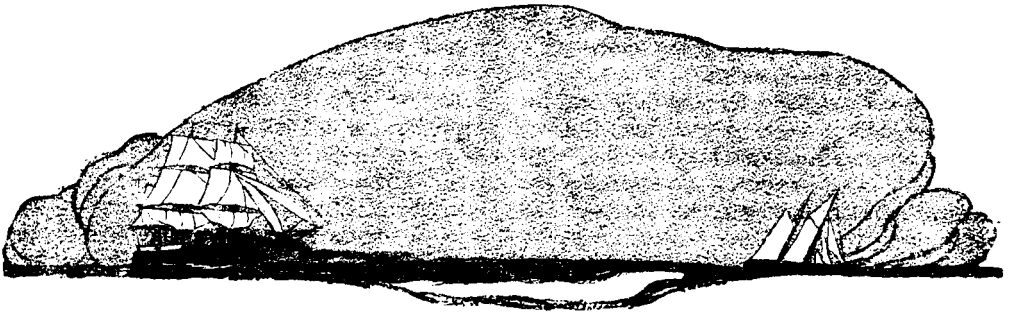
She was put into bed, wrapped in blankets. Old Wateman made some of his tea for her. Hot sugar, poured in a flour sack, was put at her feet to help get her warm. Raeburn rubbed at her hair with towels. Oxenham, forgetful that he hated her, tried to tell of what a time they had been through from the moment she went overboard.

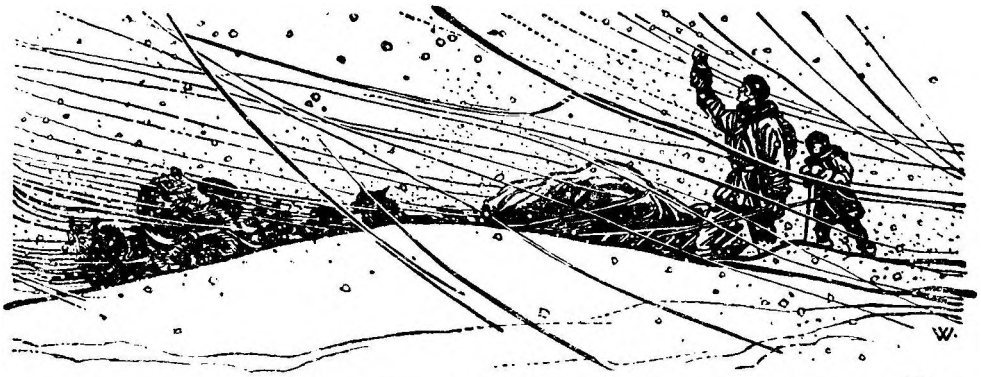
Gloria looked searchingly at her, at old Wateman's fretting eagerness to fill her with tea, brewed to bitterness; at Raeburn, anxiously drying her hair, and letting the fluffed yellow strands lie on his palm as if he handled treasure; at Oxenham, flushed with excitement, talking eagerly. Through the skylight, too, she had seen Heddon tirelessly laboring to force the breath back into this woman's body.

Gloria tried with puzzled groping of thought to understand. In the nearly sad reflection of child-like envy, she wondered if they would have been as eager over her. Vaguely, with womanish longing and jealousy, she did understand that it was beauty, such beauty as this—rare and unattainable, except as a gift, such as is given the pearl. She knew nothing, or little, of the pearl's value, for facts in terms of money were meaningless to her; but she did know what her father's passion for pearls had been, and how he would gaze by the hour at some new lustrous pearl placed before him on a black cloth. And the look she caught passing fitfully through the eyes of these men was the same look she had seen and wondered about in the eyes of her father when he gazed at a pearl—or at the pearl-enshrined picture of her mother, which too was like the picture of this woman, rich with beauty.

HEDDON, again in his bunk, with hands behind his head, scowled steadily at the beams, but all that he could see was the slack-jawed face of an old man, chin studded with whiskers, eyes thin, watery, cold; and all that he could think was of how like the disease in the core of a pearl must be the heart of a woman who would sell herself to a such a man.

TO BE CONTINUED





NORTHLAND TREASURE

Ruland V. E. Waltner

Author of "Foils of Fate."

OPEGWAY, the North, where the fruitless earth holds a promise of gold, the frozen skies a threat of death, and the air carries a tinge of uncertainty—"Curly" Halrohan and the professor knew it all, the promise, the threat, the uncertainty a black ache in their hearts.

With the first swirling flakes the nervousness of the dogs had quickened to flight; and they had taken with them on the sled practically all of the provisions, leaving the two men to flounder blindly through the snow.

It fell so thick that Curly, limping painfully on his strained ankle, lifted his hand against the smothering curtain; and as the miles straggled behind them and still they were shut in from hill and plain and sky, he struck out with clenched fist, goaded by the idea that if he could break through he would emerge into clear air.

Curly was puzzled. His strength and his instincts had always kept him out of Nature's traps; but those had been the traps of desert and sun country, not of the great inscrutible Northwest with its darkness and treachery.

Behind him, like a jerky automaton, trudged the little professor. The North was strange to him, too; but he knew what to expect. Besides, he knew men and after a Summer at the Circle Bar he had chosen good-natured Curly Halrohan to go with him on his search for gold. He was as sure of the younger man's brawn and instincts as he was of his own keen brain and superlative self-control; and when they made the great find that broke weaker men, his control would be enough for both.

"Going east," he prompted, but Curly did not answer.

His head was thrown back, nostrils dilating slowly to the heavy air. His hand was raised against the snow barrier, thrusting belligerently; but it closed back like water.

The professor smiled.

"No use, Curly. We're up against nature."

"Nature, nothing! It's our own blame foolishness. Two tenderfeet thinking they could come through alone! Even the dogs knew better. Wouldn't stick. Wise critters, I'll say. Almost got horse sense."

He limped on while the professor trod briskly after him, his eyes sweeping Curly's magnificent physique pityingly. Little men, he told himself, were more highly organized, and their nervous systems knew the nicer co-ordinations. He did not consider the heavier load his companion carried nor the difficulties of breaking trail. He saw only the sagging shoulders, the uncertain gait, and the dogged thrust of the head.

"If I could just burst through, I'd find something sure," Curly mumbled. "We're not more'n a section or two from humans. Blast it! If I was a horse, I'd find 'em."

They struggled on, their packs bearing heavier upon them. Then, without warning, Curly stumbled. He fell to his knees;

and as he reached for support, his hand struck a wall and he shouted, "Told you there was a human smell. People, doc. Heat and grub."

He scrambled up and felt swiftly over the rough wall until his eager hands found the break. With a cry, he flung himself forward, and the door swung open with a thud.

Curly floundered into the room. It was dark, with shadows heaping the corners and botching the floor and its small square of window showing muggy gray like the unseeing eye of a dead fish. From the shadows, a questioning growl rolled out to meet them.

Curly's gaze, narrow and intent, plumbed the room. Slowly he crossed the floor, light-footed and sure in spite of his twinging ankle. Behind him in the doorway, the professor watched, a curious smile on his thin lips. Curly's instincts were true. He stepped in and closed the door behind him.

The younger man was bending over a bunk, heedless of the dog that had deserted his post at the foot of the bunk and was sniffing tentatively at his ankles.

"Come here, doc," he whispered, "we're just in time. He's flickering out."

"Nonsense," said the professor and swung his pack to the floor. He was thoroughly civilized, and civilization denies an evil as long as it may be denied.

Not so with Curly Halrohan. He sensed danger and avoided it or crouched for the fight.

"Nonsense, nothing!" he answered and began stripping off his gloves and unbuttoning his coat. "We'll have to move fast."

The professor came to his side and peered down into a shrunken face from which sapphire eyes, cold with approaching death and bright with sardonic humor, stared back at him.

He reached for the man's wrist but the dog, suddenly antagonistic, moved forward, bristling, his fangs gleaming white from the dark blur of his head. Curly dropped his hand to the rough coat with an unconscious word of command, and the dog stiffened, quiet and watchful.

The professor laughed shortly. Curly had a way with animals. Again he lifted the thin wrist. Under his fingers the pulse hardly fluttered.

Curly turned toward the fireplace, but a gurgle rising in the man's throat, brought him back. The sapphire eyes were upon him, pityingly; they shifted to the professor and became amused, almost taunting. His lips formed words that gasped voiceless. Curly bent nearer.

"States?" the man breathed.

"Yes," Curly answered. "We'll fix you up."

A smile touched the pallid lips.

"Can't. Done for. Gold?"

Curly nodded.

"It's what men fight and die for," he said grimly. "But we'll fix you up," and again he turned to the fireplace.

"No." The man found voice, hoarse, cracked, but the voice of authority. "I'm done for."

His eyes swept past them. Against the wall at the foot of his bunk, half-hidden in the gloom, they found a box and lingered on it. Thought dulled their cold glitter.

"Fight and die for," he repeated. "Fools! What fools we are!"

His shaking hand lifted to fall back on the dirty blanket.

"If you knew as much about it as I do—" he broke off. "I'll give you boys that."

A long finger trembled toward the box.

"The greatest treasure in the northland. More men have fought and died for it, will fight and die for it——"

The words gurgled out. The thin chest rose and fell convulsively. The stiffening lips curled. With a mighty effort, one bony arm reached toward the dog and the animal leaped on him in a frenzy of love.

"Divide with Pedro," he said, his voice harsh with the difficulty of speech. "Share and share alike. Don't fight over it, boys. There's enough for all."

The lips lifted, the eyes glittered, dulled, and filmed over. The light went out.

The professor and Curly Halrohan looked at each other. They looked at the box. The room was still. The shadows crowded, crowded closer and receded, thicker, grimmer. Curly's eyes turned to the form on the bunk.

"Poor ——," he whispered. "Found it and then had to leave it like this."

He called the dog from the shelter of the nerveless arm, and with fingers that shook in awkward tenderness, drew the blanket over the gray face.

The professor went to the box. It was large—very large for treasure. He pulled a little at one end. It did not move. He

straightened. His eyes burned, his breath came fast, but he spoke firmly.

"It's treasure, Curly, our treasure, sacked and ready to go out; but we are going to keep our heads. We don't want gold fever. We'll just forget it's here until the weather opens and we can get out."

"Forget! Nothing!" Curly snorted, eagerness and curiosity pulsing through him. "Let's have a look."

He moved forward, but the little man's eyes held him with a strange intensity. He hesitated. He rather liked the professor; but more than this, he felt an unknown quality in him, something that might become as dangerous as the northland. Besides, they would be shut up a long time together and there was no use in making a fight pit of the shack.

"What's the idea, doc?" he demanded, but his big body relaxed. As long as the treasure was there, and he was there, everything was all right.

The professor smiled. He had control enough for both. He put forth one hand, engagingly.

"You see, Curly, the history of treasure is this: When men, the best of friends, make a find, they get jealous, crazy with gold-lust and blood-lust; and usually some stranger gets the benefit. In other words, my boy, let's leave the treasure, just as she stands, without a look or a touch, and maybe we'll keep sane enough to get back to civilization with it and not leave it and our bodies for the next gold-hunters to find."

He crossed the tiny shack to the straggling heap of wood about the fireplace, then turned to the neatly arranged store of provisions.

"Rather low on foodstuffs," he commented, and a small furrow traced itself down his forehead. "If the weather doesn't break sooner than they said at the Reload, we're going to have a bad time of it."

"—— those dogs," grunted Curly, and then his face burst into smiles. "Guess we ain't got nothing to kick about, doc. The dogs run off with our grub; but we've found more. Our chances for gold was slim, but we've got a load ready to tote out. Guess we can stand to famine a little. Might just as well take a hitch in the old belt and start rationing now."

"Might just," the professor agreed, but he went on cutting the salt meat thick.

THE provisions were indeed low. As the days slipped into weeks and contrary to their fondest hopes, the weather did not break, the fact bore in on them grimly. Food, under all circumstances, is a vital factor; and when men have an inadequate supply with no chance of getting more, it looms to gigantic proportions. The box of treasure that had been their lodestone gave ground to the slender store of food; and more than once in the long, prisoned evenings, Curly caught the professor studying Pedro's shaggy form with unconcealed dislike, for the brown dog took daily toll of their diminishing supply.

True, more than any of the partnership, he earned his way in the North. He it was who led Curly's limping feet from one trap to another, hidden with all the skill of his dead master, where chances for game were the greatest. He it was who caught a snowshoe rabbit, lean and stringy with the hard Winter, and, disdaining devouring his prize alone, brought it to the cabin to share with his companions. He it was who chaperoned Curly's awkward attempts at transplanting his southern lore to the unfriendly North and returned with him, undismayed by their failure. He it was, who, morning and night, received a third of the meager ration they now permitted themselves.

"Dogs, like horses," the professor remarked sententiously, shading his eyes from the sight of Pedro, stretched before the fire, his coat crisp and shining with health, "are relics of savagery, and doomed to disappear."

Curly, sleepy and almost content in the warm room after his day in the open, stretched and grinned, remembering the desertion of their dog-team.

"I'll say they disappear," he agreed, "but I'd not call them relics—not in this country. Gee, if we only had dogs right now, we'd not sit here starving and waiting for the weather to break. I'd be just fool enough to make a try for it."

"Yes, if," the professor snapped, "but while we're sitting here, we'd not be so near starving if we didn't share our every bite with that worthless mongrel."

Something in his tone brought Curly wide awake; but when he spoke his voice was unchanged, lazy and drawling.

"Yeah," he again agreed, "but come to think of it, it ain't 'our' every bite. By

rights it's all his—sort of heir to his master's grub—but he don't snarl none over divvying with us."

The professor caught his breath sharply. For days this thing had stood between him and Curly and because it had stood between them, unmentioned and avoided, it had clouded their every act with suspicion.

"Curly," he said earnestly, "the Lord made the dog the servant of man."

Curly grunted—

"And friend."

"Servant and friend," the professor amended. "But He never meant to sacrifice the greater for the less. We are of use to the world—can do a great deal of good when we return to it with the box—but unless things change, we'll never return. The time has come to choose. On the one hand—wealth, position, power; on the other—a mangy cur."

"Pete ain't got a sign of mange," Curly protested, aggrieved. "Healthiest critter I ever saw."

The professor waived the objection wearily. He was accustomed to Curly's childish exception to some insignificant detail. It was to him only another mark of his partner's undeveloped mind, but in the closeness of their enforced companionship, it was becoming increasingly hard to bear. With an effort, he maintained his boasted self-control.

"It was only a way of speaking, Curly," he explained carefully. "I'll admit that Pedro is a perfect specimen of his kind—but the best of his kind should not be preserved at the cost of the worst of our kind. After all, he's only a dog. Can't you get my point of view?"

Curly stared at him curiously and his look was the harder to bear because its contempt was tinged with pity. None knew better than he that the canker of isolation and fear was boring into the little man's marrow. Shrugging his great shoulders as if to rid them of an uncomfortable weight, he rose and towered over his little partner who watched him tense and antagonistic.

"I reckon this thing had to come to a showdown, doc," he said and paused, fumbling for words.

His thoughts were simple; but it was harder for him to translate their brevity than it was for the professor to express his most complicated idea. Besides he did not want to hurt the little man.

"We might as well understand each other first as last, doc. As long as there's a bite to eat, Pete gets his third, and that's all there is to it. We didn't make no bones about accepting the treasure—and Pete went with it. There ain't no call to talk about doing away with him 'less you're willing to do 'way with it, too."

The professor recognized Curly's finality, but the time had passed when he could accept it with the imperturbability of civilization.

"You're crazy, Curly, crazy," he spluttered. "Your sentiments may be noble, but this is not a matter of sentiment. It's a matter of life and death. Maybe, with what Pedro eats, we could hang on until the weather breaks. And as to the treasure—life's not worth living without gold and after all we've suffered—it's ours."

Stubbornness came over the little man and with it a hardness of the soul that denied the pliancy of flesh. Curly recognized it instinctively, and instinctively sought the only weapon to combat it.

"Treasure!" he sneered, an ugly light flaring in his eyes and the corners of his good-natured mouth dragging down. "I'd give it all for a hunk of beef and a pan of hot biscuits. A full belly's better'n a heavy pocket every time. Gold! How do we know we got any? Never a look, never the feel of it in our hands. Here, let's have her open."

He seized the ax from its hook and advanced on the box. With a shrill cry the professor sprang before him. He had goaded him too far, he had unloosed a monster that would destroy him. One look at the treasure securely hiding its Gorgon charms behind the plain face of pine; and the gold-lust, the blood-lust that history has recorded hidden in every man, would carry this giant like a leaf on the current of his passion.

"No, Curly," he begged thinly. "I was wrong about Pete, but you're wrong now. Once we see that treasure, we'll never know peace again. We'll be at each others' throats like wolves. Don't, Curly."

The ax dropped slowly to the floor. Curly passed a big hand over his forehead, surprized at the passion that had gripped him. He had meant only to frighten the professor, but something had caught him and swept him almost beyond himself.

"All right," he said gruffly. "You lay

off Pete and I'll lay off the box. It's food I want anyway."

The professor looked at the young fellow sharply. Clean cut, Gargantuan in his strength, if Curly wanted food with half the passion he wanted gold—Curly must have self-control, too. Or more probably he was just plain fool, dividing share for share with him and Pedro. He shrugged. Big and strong and handsome—but plain fool!

In ungracious truce, the gray days dragged in desolation.

THE food was divided and subdivided until the ration barely kept life in their veins, life that was meager and bitter with the hatred each felt for the object of his unwilling surrender.

Whenever Curly's eye fell on the box for which he had traded the rich, fair life of the southland, anger shook him and contempt for his folly flowed in easy profanity from his lips. Not all the hidden wealth of the north could compensate him for a day of the warm, free south, with the sun in his face and the long reaches of growing things fresh under his starved eyes. And whenever the professor glanced at Pedro, lean-ribbed and sad-eyed under the famine that rode them all, his nostrils hardened with suspended breath and his lips set in a cold line. There was no profanity in the little man, but there were depths of hatred Curly could never know.

As if guided by that hatred, Pedro chose the box as his favorite resting-place where he would lie for hours on end, his brown eyes fixed on Curly, anxious and pleading.

It tore at their worn nerves, these objects of their love and their hate so constantly together. Hot words pressed against their lips, violence tugged against the single barrier of their pact.

And then, just when they hoped for Spring, came the blizzard. For three days the snow fell as if to blot out the land and every living creature upon it.

Curly brooded by the fire while the professor stood at the window, staring at the flake curtain and watching the slow drifts crawl to the window-ledge. When they touched it and still the snow fell, he swung upon Pedro with something struggling in his pinched face that brought Curly alert and glowering. Then, without a word, he crawled into his bunk and turned his face to the wall.

As the gray day blurred into night he moaned and tossed with fever; and Curly, his anger swallowed in pity and sudden fear, hovered over him, bathing his temples, smoothing his blankets, finding unfamiliar words to soothe him to sleep. The hours dragged. The professor slept, heavily, deadly. Fear-driven, Curly walked the floor. The darkness crowded in upon them, colder and more penetrating. Pedro, motionless on the pine box, growled in his sleep.

At the sound, the professor sprang bolt upright, his hot, bony hands boring into Curly's flesh.

"That dog," he muttered, "The glutton! I'll kill him!"

Curly soothed him back to his blankets, but as the thin body relaxed the lines bit deeper into Curly's troubled face. He had not realized that starvation had taken such toll of his partner's strength. And food, only food, would bring it back.

Something brushed against his knee and his fingers locked in Pedro's shaggy coat. The dog twisted under his hand, touching him briefly with a warm, wet tongue that burned Curly's flesh. Pedro or the professor—must he betray the dog and his dead master or must he sacrifice his partner?

He turned hastily back to the bunk where the professor tossed and muttered in his delirium. Tenderly he ministered to him until he fell again into restless sleep, his hand clutching Curly's in a hold that deepened the mists in the young man's puzzled eyes.

The hours dragged to midnight as, racked by indecision, Curly fumbled with his problems. Pedro—his word—his partner—each struggled to momentary ascendency and each gave before the others. The fire burned lower. The only sound in the little room was the professor's labored breathing. Curly rested his tired head against the side of the bunk. The dogged courage that had bolstered him was slipping. His partner—Pedro—his word——

A deafening crash brought him wide awake.

The professor's bunk was empty; Pedro was gone; and where the dog was accustomed to lie a shot had splintered through the box.

"Pete!" he cried hoarsely. "Doc!"

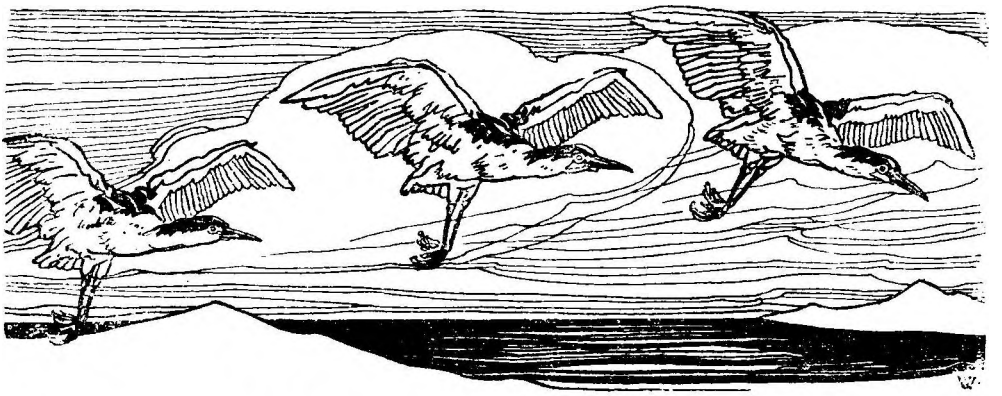
From the shadows behind the box, a brown avalanche catapulted upon him, an avalanche that greeted him with staccato

barking and Pedro hurtled back into the shadows.

Dazed, Curly followed him. The professor, wild and disheveled, crouched on the floor above a drifting white stain that Pedro was even now blotting out with his tongue. Eagerly he dipped his shaking fingers into the liquid and laughed uncertainly, wholly forgetful of gold and treasure. His bullet had missed Pedro and punctured what lay within the box, but he was happy.

"Cow!" Curly muttered, incredulous. "Canned cow!"

True to his instincts, he sprang forward and seized his ax, eager to explore the treasure that had been only gold—the greatest treasure of all times and all places—food.



THE JOURNEY

by F. St. Mars

We must go—go—go away from here!
On the other side the world we're overdue.—
Kipling.

THERE was a broadish shallow lagoon on which water lilies, white and yellow, floated on leaves like plates, over which lily-trotters — resembling moorhens on stilts—ran with spidery feet; there were storks black and white, and storks white, and storks with dark-green backs and light underparts and beaks of awful size, who stared at their own feet for the hour-long and looked at a distance like old gentlemen with their hands under their coat-tails; and herons white and herons gray, and herons purple, and geese with spurs on their wings and without, and ducks of metallic green, and of burnished copper, gray ducks, and ducks of color of a pale dawn penciled with white clouds; there were white-headed, white-tailed, dark-mantled eagles, shining like chalk lumps and as motionless, and eagles with crests like cockatoos and fiendish red eyes, and hawks that sang in a minor key at forty-second intervals, and hornbill with legs long as turkeys and beaks like halberds; and on the mud-spurs lay logs of wood upon which small plovers fed—but the logs slid into the water and became crocodiles instead.

Around the shore, like a great white frill round the neck of the lagoon, grew the tall, swaying papyrus breaks—each white feathery blossom on a twelve-foot lance—and beyond the shore trees of fleshy mien and shaped like elaborate candelabra, and fig-trees of enormous girth which had grown on to and over lesser trees, so that only here and there half-dead, twisted branches of the lesser ones were to be seen sticking out like the arms of a strangling man; and mimosa-trees of a myriad spikes, ablaze in canary blossom, and other trees smothered in blood-red and purple, over, and on, and under which danced in an eye-aching, ceaseless sun-dance butterflies black and pale blue, butterflies ivory and brown, sulfur butterflies and tawny wonders, and butterflies shot with purple, saffron gems, and tiny

butterflies like flecks of blood; and in the shadows, huge moths, five inches from tip to tip of wing, colored like the bark of trees, but with great "eyes" on each wing, of chocolate, yellow, red, and black; and over all—over flurrying "heat dance," over still and glassy water, over thorn thicket and papyrus waste and simmering mud-banks, pitiless and unwinking in a glowing copper sky, shone the brassy, burning African sun.

"*Tweet! Tweet!*"

The soft, plaintive whistle came from that awful sky. It was repeated twice. A tiny cloud of specks seemed to be shooting down out of the intolerable glare—down, down, till they wheeled, returned, swept low over the water, curved and slanted once more, and with a folding of long hooked wings came to a sudden rest on a mud-spur.

And then, and not till then, did one realize that the specks were separate units, birds in fact—four and twenty little, softly penciled, mottled brown-backed pigmy curlew, with chestnut-red breasts and beaks like a fairy's scythe turned downward. Till then, so precisely did they move in unison, they had looked like part and parcel of one whole flickering cloud.

They were only little birds, this flock of travelers, little birds just seven and a half inches long from tip of soft, sensitive beak to tip of short tail; but their wings were very long and hooked, marking great powers of flight. And yesterday they had been in Natal, or somewhere thereabouts, and today they were—asleep, by Jove! Every head under every neat wing, each bird standing on one slender, dusky leg, and a very long way from Natal—Mozambique, or somewhere, possibly. And tomorrow they would be— Ah! In a crocodile's stomach, by the look of it.

Far out on the lagoon a knob had appeared—two knobs. That was the eyes of a crocodile, a young one not five feet long. He was reckoning things up; judging his chances. Then he sank, and with the aim of an expert rifleman shot along under water, straight as a bullet, toward the pigmy curlew.

But that croc had reckoned without his tiny hosts, it seemed. Ten yards away from them the bottom shelved up sharply, and the croc, his belly plowing mud, ran hard aground. What was worse—in his estimation at any rate—the upper half of him showed in ugly lumps above the water, suddenly.

Promptly four and twenty little heads poked erect from under four and twenty little wings, and stared at him. They said nothing at all. There was no need to. But they ought to have winked all the same, because it was evident to even the most casual observer that they had not chosen their position haphazard as would at first appear.

But it was the crocodile who winked. He also sighed—yes, he did!—and sank backward with a gurgling of waters; and a fly of blackish hue, who had taken the opportunity to settle upon him, went off with a *z-zsp!* as if it had been a red-hot needle.

Thereafter for two hours the little flock slept. Of course there were interruptions, but only momentary ones. Once a falcon—a hobby-falcon, it is styled officially—winnowing the swift falcon winnow over the lagoon, saw the small band of sleepers right out in the open—purposely in the open, for there was no security in cover in this land—and let himself down as if draped on a string as he passed over them, only to rise again with a scream of contempt as twenty-four heads bobbed up and regarded him sleepily, as much as to say:

"Off! Hold off, you fool! Can't you see that if you 'stoop' at us here, and we dodge, you'll get stuck in the mud?"

He did see it apparently, and dwindled into the heat haze and a mirage of vast lakes which weren't there, as one looked.

Once, also, one of the big adjutant-storks, whose other name is marabou, came walking his stilt-walk toward them, hands tucked back under coat-tails as usual, trying to look religious and making all the wild folk forget that only a few hours back he was fighting with the vultures over a putrid carcass, and that the day before they had eaten two drowned jackal puppies. He was out for what he could get really; but it wasn't going to be pigmy curlew, because he forgot that even four-toed, skinny feet make a sucking sound on very soft mud, and even little birds have quick ears! Before he had got within eight yards of them, he found himself staring foolishly at twenty-four very alert heads, and any nearer approach was met by half-unfolded wings ready for—eventualities in the shape of a marabou's beak, shall we say?

After that the hypocrite went away, and nothing happened except that the sun sank, until at last the little flock woke up, and in the cool of, or rather the lesser heat of, the

evening fed on the minutest of minute mud and water life, spreading out allwhither as they did so, while the bats came out like a thin gauze cloud, and a lion, half a mile away on a rocky hill, awoke to argue nerve-shatteringly with the distant thunder.

Strings of antelope came down to drink, and zebras shouted "Qua-ha-ha!" at each other somewhere out behind the trees, and once a crocodile shut his jaws with a snap that made everybody jump.

THE surface of the lake had begun to darken over and the Southern Cross was already flaming in the sky when, as if at a wireless signal—there was no visible one—each of the little pigmy curlew, who had wandered far from each other in their search for food, ducked forward his body, raised his wings, and—*pff!* They were off; were, in fact, sweeping away over the lagoon like a smoke-puff suddenly imbued with life, and in such compact formation that the margin of room between each bird's beating wings and its neighbor's seemed fractional. It was a beautifully judged maneuver, but how in the world did they do it? It was as if one brain did the work of the whole lot.

They had not been frightened; no enemy crept near. They simply went because—oh, well, because they did. Two swift curves round the lagoon they made, then up on a turn, up on another, and then, rising still up and up and up, away they beat into the northeast and the night sky, and the lagoon knew them no more. It had been but a hotel, a *dak*-bungalow, a place of call on their world-journey; that was all.

It was nothing to them, these little seven-and-a-half-inch birds, this wonderful journey across the velvet night, with the vast continent of Africa sliding by beneath in slow time. Black stretches of forest there were, like plush table-cloths flung abroad; mighty wastes of stark, naked hills washed with moonlight; silver snakes where the rivers ran, and once in a way—that was when for some reason of air-current, wind or desire to see some landmark best known to themselves they sank to a low altitude—the sounds of the night came up to them from the land of mystery which always seemed to be dreaming in its sleep.

Now it was the dry, coughing grunt of a lion, now the diabolical yell of a hyena; the unoiled screeching trumpet of an elephant or the lost-soul wail of an owl.

And always at the regulation wing-beat of so many to the ten seconds, always in exact order, each bird just so far spaced from his neighbor, always with twenty-four little, long, curved beaks pointing the same way and forty-eight telescopic small eyes staring in the same direction straight ahead, they swept on, hour after unutterably lonely hour, till the brain ached to think of them. And so they passed into the night and the silence of the night sky.

Then upon a day the pigmy curlew flock showed suddenly coming down out of the burnished copper heavens. There was no graceful descent this time. They fell frankly on a slight slant and stone-fashion—you could hear the hissing of wings before they came—and they were not alone.

There was another who accompanied them. Larger he was, and a little behind. He might have been tied to their short tails, this fork-tailed one, by the look of it. But he wasn't. Fact says he was merely a kite, who, having hung himself up in the infinite to spy for carrion, saw the flock of little waders pass beneath, and thought they might do instead of carrion. Anything is fish that comes to friend kite's net.

It looked a near thing, and it was; but when within fifty yards of the shore of the lake for which they were making, the bird of prey suddenly seemed to change his mind and invited himself away. There was a reason, a big one; a fine, bold, warlike crested eagle—that's its name, warlike—was shooting over the lake like some living meteor, and it is sometimes unhealthful for kites to forget to leave the bird of Mars all heaven and earth to fly in.

The pigmy curlew settled on a sand-spit and—went to sleep at once. Of course, being birds, they would. Most odd beggars! Just as if they hadn't escaped death by inches a moment ago—and then to go to sleep like that, as if they had known nothing more exciting than catching a water insect for months! And just as if there weren't enough wonders in this new resting-place of theirs to keep the dullest awake for half a week, too! But they were flyers by profession, and anyhow like all aeronauts knew to the full the imperative value of sleep, and acted upon that knowledge forthwith.

From their feet for a full mile the water was a blazing green carpet starred with

purple, yellow and white water-lilies by the thousand. There were birds on the water-lilies; black-and-white birds, quartered after the fashion of an heraldic shield, with long, spidery legs and long beaks which turned up, and avocet was their name; there were kingfishers mimicking jewels, who dropped continually with a splash like shattering glass; there were reptilian-looking cormorants, who sat about on low trees with their wings hung out to dry, and darters, resembling birds with a snake for a head, and along the shore great blue-gray cranes with buff top-knots and red wattles, posed in picturesque attitudes; and last, but by no means least, arose and floated on the horizon a cloud like unto the pink clouds of sunset; but it parted instead, and with a mighty roar came rushing by in two sections overhead, only to join and, sucking down after the manner of a water-spout and with almost as much noise, settle and become, rank upon rank, in serried phalanxes, crimson and rose and white, a mighty flock of flamingoes.

Came then at the end of half an hour a faint, faint ripple on the water, as if something unseen moved just beneath the lilies. The little flock of travelers slept on—all pointing up-wind, mostly on one leg, and all with heads tucked under wings.

Slowly the ripple approached. Once it seemed as if for half an instant something lifted perhaps an inch out of the water to take stock, as it were, but a water-lily leaf obligingly plastered it and hid from view the identity of that thing.

And next instant—*whrrp!* There had come a rush; the water fairly seethed; something long and sinister, shaped like unto a whip but much thicker than any whip, shot along the surface, and—a beastly, glistening, bluish-black water-snake with a red mouth was lying full length across the sand-spit—exactly over the spot where the pigmy curlew had been asleep. And the pigmy curlew? Oh, they? They were a hundred yards away, circling out over the lake with that odd, rapid flight of theirs and looking as much like a thin wisp of smoke as ever. But by what magic they had managed to awake all together and invite themselves into full flight a hundred yards away, all in the margin of time—quicker than a wink, it was—that a water-snake takes to strike, is one of those things naturalists are at liberty to explain if they can.

Anon the curlew were settled on the main shore a quarter of a mile away, scattered and running gaily about in the shallows, probing with their demi-semisensitive beaks and giving the water-grubs a bad time of it. From time to time one spoke to the other in a soft whistle, but for the most part they were silent, which was a very good plan of theirs, too, in a land like that, of ten thousand and one kinds of death, seeing that at fifty yards the color of their livery made them practically invisible on the mud.

But for all the beauty of this land—and by any comparison of beauty it was beautiful—there was no peace in it. There was, for instance, the waving of the long grass which grew nearly down to the water's edge, though no wind blew it, and the streaking, lightning-like treble bound of a spotted beast with long legs and a short tail that followed, which only just missed hooking down one of the pigmy curlew with its curving paw as they rose. That beast was a serval cat.

There was the eagle that soared and soared and never flapped its wings till it dropped upon the flock without warning from on high, and almost before you knew what had happened was sailing away again, a dim speck, into the distance, leaving only twenty-three pigmy curlew behind; and that was a bateleur eagle; and there was the lithe, long, brindled thing that slid noiselessly out at them from a bush what time they investigated an inlet where the water was packed nearly solid with leaping, struggling baby fish; and he, though he missed them by a hair's breath, turned out to be a civet.

THAT evening, as at a prearranged signal, they rose and passed away from that lake of beautiful death upon their journey. They flew north as before—always north or northeast. The lake drew out beneath them and gave way to rainbow, gold and frothing rapids, and the rapids smoothed down into a mighty, placid river, miles wide, flowing, flowing as they flew north, always north.

Once they passed canoes on that lake with black men paddling in them, and once the setting sun gleamed upon spears in the bushes, and once—that was long after darkness had closed down, and the river far below ran out ahead and behind like a far-flung silver ribbon—the steady beat, beat,

beat of war-drums far away floated on the air.

The hippopotami in the river took up the challenge with their far-reaching tooting, and a lion who was full-fed wrenched out a hard, coughing "*Aaoough!*" Then the mysterious silence of the African night shut down, and nothing was to be heard save the steady swish of the little birds' wings as they winnowed unfalteringly across the star-stabbed sky—north, north, and again north.

Next morning found the little flock again at rest; but the place of call was different from the last. It was the land of the *sudd*—mile upon mile, far as the eye could reach, nothing but interminable, tall, feathery papyrus, and water between. The river appeared to have lost itself in this place among the matted sedge and waving ten- to fifteen-foot myriad stems so thick that it was hard to tell which was the main stream and which was one of the thousands of blind waterways that led nowhere.

The flock had settled on a floating raft of decaying, smelly vegetation, but they were not all asleep as usual. They were unhappy. For eyes accustomed to wide horizons this being hemmed in and half-stifled by forests of whispering, swaying mystery was terrifying.

Moreover, things moved in the dark tangle, and horrors of unknown and sinister import were on every hand. Water-snakes swarmed, and everywhere glimpses of a horribly scaly patch marked the crocodiles; and there were hollow, dark and dripping tunnels that ran into the papyrus swamp and fat mud-ooze goodness knows how far; and from time to time mighty snorts and thunderous grunts emanated from out of the mouths of these tunnels, which were the lairs of the hippopotami people.

Pelicans, like great white boats, floated on the open reaches, and there were biting insects of innumerable and beastly kinds—like ten thousand animated needles filling the air.

Death came to one of the pigmy curlew here in the shape of a long mailed tail, hard as horn and with a cutting edge almost like a blunt knife, that swished up over the edge of their floating raft on a sudden and without warning given and knocked the unfortunate one in one clean sweep two feet away into the water. Came then a swirl, a clash as if a steel trap had chosen that moment to go off in that spot suddenly, and — the flock numbered twenty-two! From which it will be seen that, unlike most hunting beasts, the crocodile is doubly armed in being able to use both extremities as his business end.

This settled it so far as the survivors were concerned. They rose and flew northward down the stream—however they knew it was the stream—keeping low and almost touching the turgid black surface at first, till a fish about five feet long and with a head that looked as if it had been submitted to treatment under a steam-hammer, and more than half of its body composed of mouth, jumped with a crash and swirl of spray right under their little sickle-shaped beaks, when they flew higher.

Twice they had to drop like stones in among the papyrus to avoid the inquisitive dive of a white-headed, white-tailed eagle with a rancorous voice—they seemed to be plentiful in these parts—and once they were kept squatting for half an hour on a floating, sedgy island, motionless as clods, while a blinking, yellow-eyed kite sat on a ten-foot, swaying stem waiting for them to fly. But for the most part their flight through the *sudd* was uneventful till they left that abode of decay and damp and desolation behind them and the river found itself again between banks of sand girt by forest.

Along this route they tarried a while to skip daintily in and out between the feet of forty-one drinking elephants, and to capture the small water-life that drained into the deep, round holes made by the ponderous feet. It sounds like a strange and lively experience to take lunch with an eleven-foot tusker towering overhead with his trunk breathing down one's back! Birds' nerves must be made differently from ours, however, for the gallant little flock of waders appeared not to mind it in the least, and suffered no indigestion from too hurried eating afterward.

Moreover, if anything was needed to make the escapade more lively, it was supplied in the shape of a tropical thunderstorm, dark as night, when the lightning ran about the sky and earth like spilled liquid fire and the rain came down in straight sheets and ran off the mighty backs of the herd in streams and the thunder put out every other sound. Then in a pause an elephant trumpeted shrilly, and in another pause the heavy, butting report of a .577

express rifle broke into the sound of streaming, splashing waters; and the herd, swaying together as mountains sway in an earthquake, went off crashing and pounding and smashing through the forest like the passing of a tornado.

And as the flock, startled by the report, which they probably thought was meant for them, streaked away once more downstream, they could see, quite a long time after the elephants had vanished from view, the great trees heaving and snapping right and left, marking the path of the stampeding behemoths.

Ten miles or so farther down the river they stopped at the invitation of a clean spit of sand running out into shallow water and inhabited by one wart-hog and a crow which slept. The wart-hog went away with a startled grunt as they settled—though he looked ferocious enough to eat 'em—and the crow opened one eye.

Then the crow opened both eyes and got up as a shadow fell on the sandspit; and with many a rustle of big wings and dusting of whirled sand down came a great, gray bird with a beak like a clog. He was *abu markub*, the father of a shoe.

Now the father of a shoe is not a terrible person, being but a stork of a sort with a magnified beak; but he came in usefully that day; for a monitor lizard—who, by the way, was many feet long, most of it being whip-like tail—came strolling down to the sandspit to investigate a crocodile's nest there, which latter showed half-exposed, where he had but lately been digging at the eggs.

The glassy, expressionless reptilian eye caught the reflection of the little pigmy curlew tripping along the water's edge, and in a jerk he had thrown himself into one of those polished-bronze-ornament attitudes so beloved of his tribe. For the next fifteen minutes he moved about as much as a lump of stone. But the *abu markub* saw him—blessings on his amazing beak, he did—and danced forthwith a mad dance, his wings half-open and lifted and his funny little crest all perked up, clapping the while his amazing bill to say so.

The pigmy curlew stopped feeding and gathered together. Next moment they would fly. The great lizard beast knew it, or seemed to. There was the sound, a clear whistle, as if a whip had that moment been whirled quickly, and the long tail of the monitor came down with a vicious "*s-i-u-u,*" sweeping all along where the pigmy curlew might have been if *abu markub* had not given warning. They were three inches above it, however, flying, and the long tail that cuts like any whip went singing by beneath their slender legs.

THEY left that sandy spot in a hurry, and so did the monitor. The father of a shoe made him. This time, though, they did not fly far, but settled just across the river; and here, half an hour later, as they wandered devious, there came unto them suddenly a sound, and straightway they one and all went mad.

It was an odd sight. They stood on tiptoe and craned their necks; they flapped their narrow, hooked wings; they opened wide their strange curved beaks; they danced; they pranced; they chased each other round and round, and they called repeatedly.

And all the time the sound grew, and grew, and grew, from a murmur to the mutter as of a waterfall very far away, to a steady growl, to a dull grumble, to a thunderous roar—a roar sweeping on, leaping on, eating up the miles down the course of the river, as if the great river itself had burst all bounds and was coming down-stream in one thundering wall of water.

But there was no more water; far away on the southern horizon, a cloud which rose and uprose and grew and grew, sweeping on and on and on down toward the place where the little feathered travelers stood, and the speed of it was the speed of a fast train.

Black was that cloud, and of terrible import; and as it came near, following always with incredible swiftness the course of the great river, a rushing noise could be heard as of the rushing of a mighty wind and rain that ran with it. But no rain fell; nor was there any wind.

So fast it came, that roaring, rushing phenomenon, that almost before one could run it was overhead, was sweeping by, and—oh help!—the flock of pigmy curlew, each bird calling like a thing demented, was rising to meet it. And then—and then! Well, there was no reason to fear for the small travelers at all because the fact is, that terrible, mighty, roaring cloud which put out the sun was composed of birds.

Yes, birds—hundreds of birds, thousands of feathered ones, millions of two-legged

winged travelers; big birds, little birds—mostly little—tall birds, short birds, fat birds, thin birds; birds who had stolen bits of rainbows for a garment, and birds who dressed in the dye from old leaves or bark or mother earth; birds with songs that were heavenly, and birds with notes that were the discords of ——; birds with long beaks and short beaks, sharp beaks and blunt beaks, slender beaks, thick beaks, upcurved beaks and downcurved bills, and many straight as a skewer; long-tailed birds and stump-tailed flyers; bar-tailed, fan-tailed, narrow-tailed birds; birds, birds, birds, and again birds of all descriptions, varieties, sub-species, species, families, sub-orders, orders and tribes each after their kind; and the rush of the wings was like the voice of a typhoon romping through a forest—all flying north, north along the great river, north to the sea.

Here were ring-ouzels, cuckoos and wheat-ears, turtle doves, plovers gray and godwits, chiff-chaffs, willow and wood, sedge and reed, garden and marsh warblers; wagtails yellow and gray, white and pied and blue-headed; nightingales and swifts; swallows and martins; red-backed and woodchat shrikes; sandpipers, white-throats, fly-catchers and nightjars; after their kind flew they on. And in a trice the flock of twenty-two pigmy curlew were with them, of them, swallowed up beyond all hope of finding in that host, and for the time being lost to view completely.

That night men say the great concourse was heard passing over Khartum; and it is on record that, still following the great river, they saw Cairo behind and beneath them, also at night, and so to the sea, the Mediterranean Sea. Thereafter the main body split. Some went north and north-east to Greece, thence to spread and dwindle fanwise; some, turning, went along the coast and then north, struck Sicily, and so up the "leg" of Italy; others again, keeping the coast-line farther, crossed by way of Corsica and Sardinia; and the remnant, with which were the little flock of curlew, held on, halting of course along the shore from time to time to feed, passed Tunis and Algiers, and so to the Gibraltar Straits, which they crossed, and swung, still going north, into Spain.

It was on a morning quiet, calm and lighted with gold and saffron of the rising sun that nineteen pigmy curlew began to sink in a close-flying flock out of the sky. One had been "lifted" by a lesser kestrel falcon, one vanished at the hands of a caracul-cat thing and one perished crossing the sea when a sudden rain-squall had caught them—they don't mind wind so much—sopping and making heavy their plumage and chilling them to the bone and all but polishing off half the flock out of hand forever—nineteen little pigmy curlew sweeping down to Spain.

This was an odd place they had dropped to—wet and lugubrious; and where, oh where, could a party of tired little birds find a place to settle upon? Mile after steely, glittering mile, red and gold where the sun caught it, steaming with mist as if ten towns were on fire, stretched the endless desolation of water where no tide ever flowed. There was no stream, nor any depth to the water—six inches to two feet mostly—there seemed to be no end to it also; and all the water-birds of half the continent appeared to be gathered there. There were regiments of flamingoes—rose-and-white masses of color against the gray—curlew-like giant editions of the small travelers, and their twin brothers, the tittering whimbrel; gray plover with frosted backs and jet waistcoats whizzed about like flights of masterless arrows on long, hooked wings—they had been nigh round the world since last Summer—ducks of half a dozen kinds went whistling to and fro, and black-and-white stilt plover strode over the stagnant pools like great fairy spiders; whilst everywhere, filling the gaps between, jerked cock-tailed, insolent, quarreling, vulgar black coots.

AT LAST the little flock found a mud-bank two feet square, and straightway went to sleep upon it. And the day strode on with its clash and its glare, and the heat grew hotter and hotter, and birds came in, and birds departed, and once a herd of red deer daintily finicked down from a rising bit of ground afar off, where was a wood, and drank along the shore; and once an old villain of a boar, bristling and champing the foam from his tusks, strode to the water and quenched his thirst; and twice a griffon vulture sailed on mighty still wings overhead, wheeling himself slowly out of sight in the infinite; and once a fox barked somewhere far away with a sudden melancholy guttural yap.

The flock slept on.

Twelve o'clock it must have been, and the sun floating high in a red-hot copper heaven. A ripple in the water; a *lap, lap* as the ripple spread; a black nose floating rapidly.

Then—a parting of the waters, a head flat and bewhiskered, a rush of a long, lithe body, and the flock of pigmy curlew tumbling all ways, squawking, with the dripping, shining body of a dog otter in the midst of them. And next moment they were gone, shooting away as much like a smoke-puff as ever, low over the glassy surface; and the otter, with his head up, was watching them. But under his right-hand, sturdy, short paw, on its back, blood-stained and still, lay a pigmy curlew motionless; and in the flock, fast vanishing in the heat flurry of the distance, there were now only eighteen little, frightened birds.

The day was hot, and this vast expanse of water and the mud swarmed with food that might be probed for and detected by a delicately sensitive beak. This explains why the flock stayed all day, till just at sunset, from round a patch of bushes on the little island on which they then fed, came the sound of heavily splashing feet. Every little head was up in an instant.

Big shapes loomed up, humped, grotesque, great masses of uncouth shagginess against the setting sun—nine big shapes in all, plowing, grumbling, plunging and bubbling in horrible discord as they passed. They were camels, wild camels, camels which rarely if ever set foot on dry ground from year's end to year's end, or probably from the night of their birth to the day of their death. It was a weird sight, and in keeping with the appalling desolation of the place. Who would have expected camels of all beasts here?

Then the flock rose, and, sweeping out over the water, wheeled and began to climb the heavens as a man climbs a hill to get his bearings in a wild land. But they should have waited till darkness fell. It would have been better so, for though there be so many kinds of prowling death for little birds in that wet land by night, there be also many winged deaths waiting for them in the air while daylight lasts.

The flock had taken, it may be, a turn and a half, and things began to look small beneath them, and the water ran out into the horizon and the gathering mist like spilled port wine enveloped in tobacco-smoke, when from above came a hissing sound. It was as if a sword were being whirled through the air by a mighty Hand; and upon them it fell.

The pigmy curlew fell too on the instant, and the flock fell apart also, scattering like a handful of brown leaves cast earthward in a gale. But they were too late. There was the vision of a huge, brownish bird with a dark-slashed, light breast, shooting by like a falling meteorite, of an enormous, powerful leg and talons stuck straight out like a lance in rest; there was a puff of feathers and a soft *plop*, and that was all.

Next moment seventeen pigmy curlew were hurrying northward across the darkening sky, and a mighty Bonelli's hawk eagle, the bird that fears no feathered thing that flies the sky, and few furred ones that walk the earth, and attacks all impartially, was shooting out great, shadowing pinions below, checking its mad descent and clutching in one murderous claw the limp body of a little pigmy curlew.

The sun had been up it may be an hour some mornings later, touching the backs of the wheeling gulls and magicking them to silver; the boats had been out some time, dotted all down the harbor where the marshmen fished. The wind was whistling briskly through the clean, spiky glumes of the stiff marram grass, and the air was full of the soft "*Seeing! Seeing! Seeing!*" of the meadow pitpits' love-song as the little birds rose and fell out over the sunny marshes, as if jerked up and down on an invisible wire.

Then the pigmy curlew appeared. One moment, they were not dreamed of—the next they were running about, scattered in that self-effacing, deprecating way of theirs on the mud-flats. They trusted to their plumage to see them through; knew its harmony with the mud. At fifty yards they were invisible at first, even when moving. When not moving, the eye overlooked them completely.

A battle-cruiser, threading her way out of harbor through the coastwise shipping, moaned a deep, malignant moan not five miles away; the reverberating *thrup, lump, rump-a lump* of a training-ship teaching the young idea to shoot straight for the King's Navee came booming in from time to time from the sea; a whimbrel rose and with a trembling "*Lililililil!*" repeated very quickly

floated to a fresh pool; and a ringed plover, snugly complaisant in the knowledge of a fine, clean, white waistcoat and a brand-new black "stock," ran about and paused in statuesque plover poses among the feeding flock.

"*Ha-a-ank!*" grated a heron, sailing up lazily in front of a drifting fisherman's boat, and the echoing *sludge-sludge* of mud-shoes, as some marshman moved out over the mud to spear the elusive eel, came to them plainly on the wind from half a mile away. Oh, it was a clean morning to be alive in England!

Then up from the south swift, clipper-built and impetuous, shot a long-tailed hawk. It was a sparrow-hawk, the same as had hung on the heels of the third section of the dwindling host of migrating birds ever since they had left Spain. He did not see the pigmy curlew, though he passed right over them, and would not have seen the jolly fat little ringed plover if that small gentleman had not allowed his feelings to get the upper hand of him and risen with a whistled mellow "*Tu-lip!*" Hawk and ringed-plover vanished up the harbor in a flickering streak, and the pigmy curlew—went on feeding.

Then down floated a great, white-and-gray, cunning old herring gull. "*He-oh!*" said he and, folding his long, narrow wings, straightway turned into a marble image. He might have in that instant fallen asleep, but he hadn't; his eyes shone brightly as a—as a gull's.

The pigmy curlew ceased for two minutes and twenty-one seconds to move. Seventeen little clear eyes—they seemed to look at him with only one eye at a time; the other was roving the horizon—fixed on him intently. He knew it; would, if low rascality had not been written all over him, have assumed a deprecating "pray-don't-let-me-disturb-you" sort of air. As it was, he froze and—waited on chance. The gull, by the way, always waits on chance. It is his profession.

Finally the flock fed on, and—the chance came. Thirty-eight minutes, nine seconds afterward—during which the gull had not moved an inch—one of the pigmy curlew found occasion to rise and fly to a more promising—a more lob-worm-pitted—piece of mud twenty yards distant.

That was the chance. Quick as an angry thought the gull was up; his long wings shivered—you could scarcely call it flapping—and he fairly shot after the little, twinkling pinions of the rash one. Then—well, then they moved. Yes, that's all about it; they moved. Words can't pretend to picture it adequately; how they swept and wheeled and canted and turned and shot and darted and swung and streaked in and out half over the harbor—the gull like a silver streak, the pigmy curlew like a dark line. Twice the murderous straight beak with the hook at tip snapped within half an inch of the little, terrified wader's tail; once it was rewarded by a pretty little tail-feather.

But in the end a thousand-times-blessed clump of sedgy stuff about a foot long took the pigmy curlew into its muddy, wet bosom—he fell into it like a stone—and the gull, with one angry, ringing "*He-oh!*" slid off on rigid wings a mile down-wind, to repeat the maneuver on some one else. In ten minutes the hunted one was back with the flock again as if nothing had happened, and they—little fatalistic traitors that they were—had, once the victim was selected, been feeding all the time as if nothing had happened either.

THAT night soon after dark a big flight of waders was heard passing over Brighton; whimbrel could be heard calling to each other to keep touch in the dark; and an aeroplane, flying hard in the opposite direction to make Shoreham, reported passing hundreds of birds, one of which struck the plane and was found next morning dead and limp up in the angle of a stay. It was a pigmy curlew.

On the day that followed a small flock of long, skewer-beaked godwits, standing huddled pessimistically on an Essex salting across which the rain and wind hissed in successive rushes, put their heads up suddenly at the sound of a soft, plaintive whistle above. Followed a whiz of wings, and there dropped beside them the flock of pigmy curlew.

Here in the gullies were swarms of shrimps and there were holes where the succulent clam hid. It is an art, investigating these holes with a long, curved beak which a far-seeing Nature has given for the purpose, to jump back with great nimbleness after giving the presumably fatal probe, because the probe may not be fatal. The clam may be very wide awake; and then— Well, one of the hungry little travelers was not quite

quick enough. He jumped too late. Came instantly a squirt of liquid mud, and for the rest of that morning that pigmy curlew went about with his head looking as if some one had wiped it in mud. It was much to his annoyance, for curlew are scrupulously clean birds.

A liner, bound for the very sunny clime they had come from, loomed up suddenly, blaring her way out to sea, and a squat tug like a busy crab came hurrying by. Then all was blotted out in treble sheets of hissing rain, and for two hours the little birds slept and fed in peace.

But they could not have stayed long there, for on the following day I was lying among the bents on the wall that hems in Breydon Water at Yarmouth, watching carefully a princely peregrine falcon who had just succeeded in frightening the senses out of a wild duck and missing it clean, when I saw the bird swerve suddenly and begin to circle upward.

What he had seen I knew not except that it was something alive, and that it flew; else why should he climb the heavens in that fashion on his invisible spiral staircase till he became no larger than a Summer midge?

Then suddenly he began to grow, and I knew he was coming down, shooting down, a hissing, steel-blue wedge, with his wings shut. And as he fell I became aware of something which looked at first like a puff of thin smoke falling with, and in front of, the falcon. But the smoke was a flock of birds instead, for they grew to dots even as I looked.

Then, almost before one could think, came a burst of feathers in the air close above; small birds were pelting down pell-mell into the sedges all about, the peregrine was shooting on and up again on a grand inverted arch, and a limp little bird, all torn, half-naked and blasted from life by the tined claw of the peregrine, had fallen at my feet.

The peregrine had seen me and retired precipitantly into the distant smoke-haze that shrouded noisy, swarming Yarmouth. The little bird remained because it had finished its journey—forever. It was a pigmy curlew.

And among the rushes I, splashing laboriously, found the others. Some remained squatting motionless and panting as if their little hearts would burst the frail fabric of skin and feathers apart; some rose from my very feet, and after a bit they collected together and stood, half-dazed on the sand three hundred yards away.

They remained all that afternoon, sleeping or feeding about, those sixteen tiny world-spanners, and would have remained longer, I think, only just as it was growing dark a flock of gray plover came swinging past overhead and giving the Call of the North as they came.

Now there is a magic in the Call of the North, which, if you have never been an exile from your own land, you would never understand. There are all sorts of calls, and I sometimes think they must be the voice of Nature speaking. There is the Call of the Wild to the wild creature and to the hunter; there is the Call of the Sea, which the fisherman knows; the Call of the Hills comes to the hillman, and I have heard tell how there is the Call of the Town, which comes to the street-bred Arab and the city merchant alike; but this is a bad Call, and don't you ever listen to it, for it has nothing at all to do with anything so innocent as Nature.

The flock of pigmy curlew heard the Call of the North which the big gray plover had given—they, too, were world-spanners and were passing on a journey of I dare not say how many thousands of miles—and they answered it in their own plaintive way. Not only that, but they followed it. They rose and vanished, flying high and higher into the iron North, and in a few seconds were gone.

A week later far, far in the gloomy, desolate, unmapped tundra of the far North, where no day comes for half a year at a time or more, and where in the Winter "the Northern Lights come down to dance on the houseless snow" among the wet and the flowers, the water-plants and the mosquitoes, and within sound of the bark of the little Arctic fox and the roar of the breeding seals, eight little hen pigmy curlew sat contentedly on eight little apologies for nests, dotted here and there over the bare expanse, while eight cock pigmy curlew, very proud of their black skull-caps picked out in red and their chestnut nuptial waistcoats, stood guard somewhere near.

Far away the great white nesting wild swans trumpeted, and there was the bugle-like clamor of nesting wild geese; a proud

white-tailed sea-eagle of the North, much larger than he of Africa, passed high over, circling on mighty pinions, and near at hand the call of the nesting diving ducks sounded throughout the day. A beautiful ivory gull of the Arctic went tacking past on long, thin wings, and the ghostly, huge, swathed form of a snowy owl slipped away into the interminable.

This was the home of the pigmy curlew, the land that had given them birth, the cradle of half the water and shore birds of two continents, and—the end of "The Journey."

SAN JACINTO CORN

***by* Lewis Appleton Barker**

AFTER the Battle of San Jacinto, where Texas won her independence from Mexico in April of 1836, the commander of the Texan forces, General Sam Houston, who was completely exhausted from fatigue and loss of blood, fell from his horse. He was caught by Colonel Hockley, and laid at the foot of an oak tree.

It was near this same oak that he received the Mexican dictator, General Santa Anna, when the latter was brought in a prisoner by Lieutenant Sylvester. Colonel Almonte acting as interpreter, considerable conversation ensued between the victor and the vanquished. After some remark of Almonte which irritated Houston, the latter said—

"You have come a great way to give us a great deal of trouble, and you have made the sacrifice of the lives of a great many brave men necessary."

"Oh," flippantly replied Almonte, "what of six or eight hundred men! And from all accounts, only half a dozen of your *brave* men have fallen."

Said Houston, raising himself up:

"We estimate the lives of our men, I perceive, somewhat higher than you do. You talk about reenforcements, sir; it matters not how many reenforcements you have, you never can conquer freemen."

Thereupon, he took from his pocket an ear of corn, but partly consumed, which he had carried for four days, and holding it up in view of his prisoners, continued—

"Sir, do you ever expect to conquer men who fight for freedom, when their general can march four days with one ear of corn for his rations?"

These words and the sight of the ear of corn very naturally stirred up to the highest pitch of enthusiasm the surrounding Texans, who, with the free and easy discipline of a volunteer and ununiformed army, had crowded about the two generals. Pressing nearer, they begged of their commander that they be allowed to divide the corn among them.

"We'll plant it," they averred, "and call it Houston corn."

"Oh yes, take it along," said Houston, "and if you care anything about it, give each one a kernel as far as it will go round, and take it home to your own fields, where I hope you may long cultivate the arts of peace as nobly as you have shown yourselves masters of the art of war. You have achieved your independence, now see if you can make as good farmers as you have soldiers. Do not call it Houston corn, but San Jacinto corn, for then it will serve to remind you of your own bravery."

The soldiers distributed their corn, followed his instructions and today it waves over thousands of green fields in Texas.

Judging that something of import was taking place, Santa Anna requested Colonel Almonte to translate what had been said. This being done, it only added to the mortification of the self-styled Napoleon of the West, that his large army, perfectly equipped, armed and munitioned, whose camp was filled with every luxury, should have been conquered by an undisciplined band of raw troops, incompletely armed, whose very officers were almost destitute of even the necessaries of life. It is worth noting, that he afterward stated that "this was the first moment he had ever thoroughly understood the American character; and that what he had there witnessed, convinced him that Americans never could be conquered."

"POISON" PETERS WRASSLES WITH REMORSE

by **Earl H. Emmons**

I HAVE seen some mighty actors in some great and grippin' parts,
Which could drive you dang near loco with their mellerdramic arts;
But for wranglin' men's emotions to the ultimate degree
None could touch old "Sandy" Hanson, singin' "You'll Remember Me."

It was out in Custer City at the bar of "Faro" Joe
That I first met Sandy Hanson in the days of long ago;
He was big and rough and dirty, but his voice was sweet and strong,
And he sure could wrench your feelin's with that sad and touchin' song.

It was all the song he warbled, but he sure could do it right,
And with proper irrigation he would keep it up all night;
And the thing would sort o' hit you and get underneath your hide,
Till you'd feel a lot of sentyments stampedin' round inside.

Then your soul would start to buckin' and your diaphragm get hot;
You would think of home and mother if you had them things or not;
And your past would slip its hobbles and your sins would bust their roots,
While your morals kicked your conscience with a pair of hob-nailed boots.

And I recollect an evenin' when the wicked licker flowed,
With old Sandy there a-warblin' of the only song he knowed;
While the boys set round remorsin' and a-writhin' in their sin,
Through the door that hardened sinner, "Poison" Peters, drifted in.

For a spell he stopped to listen, then we seen him sort o' blink,
And a couple tears come oozlin' and kersplashed into his drink;
Then he shut his eyes and mumbled like a feller in a trance,
While his Adam's apple jiggled like it had St. Vitus dance.

You could see his sins a-slippin' and a-clutchin' at the horn,
While his conscience spurred his morals till he wished he wasn't born;
And we 'lowed a herd of anguishes was chawin' at his soul
And a-pilin' up remorses like a ton of burnin' coal.

For he knowed that he was wicked and his heart was full of wo,
'Cause to realize it sudden-like was sure an awful blow;
And I guess that Poison Peters was a-seethin' some inside,
For he stood off by his lonesome, and he cried and cried and cried.

Till in staggers "Loco" Landers, who pursues the primrose trail,
And invites us plumb facetious to lay up against the rail.
"Who the hell is this," says Poison, "interferrin' with our grief?"
So he drawed and potted Loco in the gizzard neat and brief.

Then the Swede went on a-carolin' and Poison Peters sat
And continued his remorsin' from the place he left off at;
And the moral's plain as shootin', as you've maybe taken note:
Never monkey with a feller when he's yearnin' to emote.

THE PRICE OF A HORSE

By Barry Scobee

Author of "Bandit's Glory," "'Red' Pig of the North," etc.

DONNEGAN, following the trail of the itching foot, going the way the wind blew or his horse smelled grass and water, followed a leisurely course northward, crossing mountains and mesas and valleys back and forth in northwestern Mexico.

Occasionally he traded horses. From boyhood he had been trading horses, hoping sometime to find The Horse just as many a youth hopes sometime to find The Girl.

Riding down the sunny hills with a laugh and a quip for the country people and deep reverence for the open spaces and the rocky temples o' God, he got to hankering to hear again the American tongue and see frank blue-eyed women of his own breed, and to behold the Flag larking on a high staff, and buy fresh inky-smelling magazines at newsstands—the sort of hankering Northmen gone away to hot climes feel now and then for the smell of new-mown hay, or frost-reddened acidy apples, or the crunch of dry snow.

One night he camped in bare dun hills not far from the border at an *ojo de agua*—the "eye of water" of the Mexicans—and saw a glow on the northwest horizon that he whimsically called the *aurora electro* of an American town.

And as he squatted beside his crackling mesquite-twig fire boiling jerked goat and brown beans with a chili pepper, he heard a horse neigh off in the darkness. His own drooping mount threw up its head and whinnied inquiringly.

Presently Donnegan's keen ears, used to the sounds of out-of-doors, caught the steady beat of hoofs. He piled wood on the fire for more light, and in a few minutes a gruff voice, quite near, called out—

"Hello, there?"

"Ride in, stranger," responded Donnegan amiably. "Water and bedground here that don't belong to anybody—just the republic of Mexico."

A bald-face horse appeared within the circle of the firelight, a tall man astride, who sat there taking in the fire and the cooking, and Donnegan and his horse, with hard and narrow eyes.

"What's chances for supper with yuh?" asked the stranger.

Donnegan did not hear, for he was staring at the horse—a sturdy, up-standing sorrel with dainty lines and the haughty liveliness of a princess.

"Say, that's some mare you've got there!" he exclaimed.

"She's a hellion," flared the man. "A biting fool."

He took a holster and revolver from the saddle-horn and dismounted, springing back quickly to avoid the mare's viciously bared teeth. She missed by an inch, nipping his arm.

The man kicked her spitefully in the belly. With a squeal she reared straight up and tried to club him with her fore-hoofs. The loose manner in which he had dismounted, not holding up the reins short, told Donnegan in sign language that the fellow was

not a horseman. His next act was added evidence, for he dropped the rein that he held and fled from the threatening hoofs overhead. But simultaneously with her feet coming down, Donnegan was at her head, hands on the bit.

"Steady, girl, steady," he commanded and soothed, getting his fingers into her shaggy forelock. "Take it easy, girl."

She pulled back, and blew out her breath in surprize from widened nostrils, and looked at him as if to say—

"Well, who'n the world are you?"

She drew in her breath, smelling his fearlessness, her delicate nostrils quivering; and she allowed him to come near and pat her and say reassuring words.

"I'll be hanged!" ejaculated the stranger. "She's done nothing but fight me."

"Lord, but she's a beauty," Donnegan raved. "Come on, girl, let's get the saddle off and find a drink at the spring."

The owner helped with the saddle and saddle-bags while Donnegan got a saddle-rope about her neck. As she drank Donnegan rubbed her down with his bare hands. What a piece of horse-flesh she was! Already he coveted her, wondering how this man who knew nothing about horses happened to possess her, wondering if he could rig up a trade.

The mare was warm from hard riding. The night air was sliding down the slopes, biting cold. Fondly, back at the fire, he covered her with one of his two blankets, fastening it with big blanket pins. He stood off and admired her, pondering her breed and looks. She stood quietly, waiting intelligently. He fumbled among his pack articles and brought out some bits of hard Mexican candy he had been using in lieu of sugar, and gave them to her from his palm. All the while the stranger sat on his saddle-bags and looked on in silence.

"You act like you like her," he said at last.

"Oh, I don't like to see a horse mistreated," Donnegan replied noncommitally.

"What kind of brute have you got?"

"First class." The trading instincts in Donnegan stepped to the fore. He flicked a thumb at his strawberry roan. "Good traveler, sturdy climber. Go and look him over."

The man did not budge from his pack, but asked one question.

"Gentle?"

"Say, the little lamb that followed Mary to school one day was an outlaw mustang in comparison to that strawberry roan."

"How'll you swap?"

It came bluntly and unexpectedly like that—the opportunity to possess the finest horse he believed he had ever seen. Donnegan lived in the belief that nothing was too good to be true, but he was no irresponsible optimist. He asked himself if this stranger with the narrow eyes was on the level; wondered whether the mare was his to trade. But in the same thought he swept these considerations aside, knowing in his heart that he would get the mare for his own at almost any cost.

The stranger may have sensed doubt in Donnegan and concluded that an explanation was in order.

"Yesterday," he began, "I got word that my brother, working in the Night Star Mine down below, had got hurt. Thought the quickest way to get to him was to buy a horse and ride through, seein' as how after going as far as I could on the train I'd have to travel by horse and motor-truck anyhow."

This was reasonable, Donnegan saw, fitting in with possibilities and facts.

"But look what kind of a horse I got stuck with," the stranger complained bitterly. "Makes me wisht I'd kept to the railroads, that don't bite and ra'r and kick like a horse. How'll yuh trade?"

Was this man meaning that he would swap even? Donnegan seemed to thrill and twitch in the stomach from uncertainty and hope. He looked the camp guest up and down curiously.

"Whatcha lookin' at?" asked the other. "How much alike we are?"

"Say, we do resemble, don't we?"

"I'll say! Both tall and hungry lookin'. Both wearin' laced boots and cord'roy pants. Both got woolen shirts. But my Stetson's black and yours is gray. Well, how'll ye swap steeds?"

Donnegan gathered himself for the test. The other man's big ears were waiting. Donnegan squeaked out one word from a pinched throat—

"Even."

"It's a go!" the stranger agreed almost too quickly. "I couldn't ask boot for that or'nary hellion."

DONNEGAN did not sleep well. His elation over getting the mare and the prospect of reaching an American town after two years away kept him planning and anticipating like a boy on Christmas Eve. He was half of a mind to ride on in the darkness and arrive at the town by sunrise but gave up the idea. Once he got up to move the sorrel to fresh grass and to see that she was faring well, and again to move her to the leeward of the chaparral, where he was bedded down, out of the cutting wind.

Donnegan believed that the stranger did not sleep at all. He lay wrapped in his blanket with his head on the saddle-bags and smoked cigarets.

Toward morning, with the first hint of grayness, Donnegan awakened from a doze to hear the stranger stumbling about getting ready to leave. The new owner of the mare lay with watchful eye—for why, he could not have said, unless it was that the man was acting stealthily—to see that the traveler did not change his mind about the trade and ride the wrong horse off. The man mounted and started away without a word, whereupon Donnegan called out with a touch of resentment at such conduct.

"Hey, you forgot to introduce yourself er say good-by."

"Smith," the man flung back, heading southeastward. "Good-by."

Donnegan went back to sleep, to be awakened at about sunrise by the mare close at hand making a noise. Sitting up he saw that she was nosing the tin-can that contained the bits of Mexican candy. One glance around told Donnegan that the early rising stranger had looted his camp.

His rifle, that had been close at hand, was gone, as were the frying-pan and aluminum boiling-pot, and jerked meat and bag of rice. His saddle too, though in place of it "Smith" had left his own. Donnegan had the better of this trade however.

But the crowning indignity was that Smith, self-styled, had traded his peaked black Stetson with its rattlesnake-skin band for Donnegan's gray Stetson.

So the fellow was not on the level. Was he something worse than a petty thief? Was he a bandit, perhaps, escaping into Mexico? Had he stolen the mare?

Donnegan regarded the sorrel covetously, and looked longingly northwestward where he had seen the dim glow of the town.

"Well," he concluded in slow words, spoken aloud, "I'm certain of one thing. Looking like this man, and his saddle and hat, and suspicious of him, ain't going to turn me into a fugitive afraid to go home—back into the old U. S. A. And if the mare's stolen, why, I'll earn money to buy her. Hey, how about it, Horse? We'll stand together, what?"

"Horse" whinnied. And since there was nothing left to prepare for breakfast, Donnegan saddled, mounted, and headed the best horse he had ever forked into the hazy northwest.

DONNEGAN knew something about horses. His picked-up knowledge told him that the mare was of the American Saddle Horse development, with some Thoroughbred blood. But she was more than this, though what it was he could not say. She put *life* into her traveling, took an interest, with perked ears, in the surrounding country; had a force in her that could be likened almost to something spiritual. Within an hour he was well aware that he had never happened upon anything like her before.

Some horse! She displayed three admirable gaits—a good fast walk, single-foot, and easy canter. They covered ground swiftly.

As Donnegan rode, his thoughts kept going back to the man who had traded the mare to him, or going on ahead doubtfully to the reception that awaited him, if the horse were stolen, or the man had committed some crime. Once, half-scared by his forecasting of danger, he was tempted to turn and travel eastward along the border and enter the States at some remote point. But he shook his head and kept on northwest. He possessed a desire—and a steadily mounting desire at that—to own this mare free of all doubts and entanglements so that there could not be constantly hanging over his head the threat of having her legally seized and taken from him. Judging by the scrappy talk of Smith, Donnegan considered it probable that the mare had come from this section of the country, on the American side. So it was here, likely, that the title of ownership could be established.

The uninhabited country over which he rode became broken. He entered a stretch of *malpais*—badlands—and followed

a tortuous, trailless course. There were countless *arroyos* running parallel or breaking into one another, like the fine lines on the back of the hand. The rocky channels afforded rainy-season drainage for a vast stretch of country.

Some of the banks, or buttes, were rocky and tough, supplying footing for the mare to climb to their summits so that Donnegan could pick out his course farther ahead. The land was hot and empty. A wisp of smoke northwestward told him where the town was.

Then without the slightest warning he came face to face with two men on horseback. Each had a revolver ready, as if they had been expecting to open up on him. Donnegan's hands went up peacefully, ear-high. His rifle having been stolen, he was unarmed.

The three sat there looking, weighing. One man was fat, the other lean. In a moment Fat spoke derisively and triumphantly.

"Got lost in the badlands, hey?" His gesture took in the *malpais*. "The sheriff'll be glad to get back his mare and saddle."

So the sorrel belonged to the sheriff! Evidently Smith was wanted. Evidently the mare had been stolen. Evidently——

"He's got everything," spoke Lean judiciously, "but the saddle-bags he stuffed the money into."

"He ain't got his gun."

"That's so."

The two officers—for metal badges on their unbuttoned vests showed them to be deputy sheriffs—gazed at Donnegan in puzzlement.

"Mister," said Lean, "will ye kindly tell us where the loot is so's to save us the bother o' lookin'?"

"You'll never be able to put it to use," added Fat. "You're done fur, from a legal status. Your three shots sure spoiled the cashier's future. They're buryin' him this afternoon."

"The feller," answered Donnegan, "that traded me this mare and saddle and hat has the saddle-bags, an' the last time I saw him he was heading southeast in Mexico at daybreak."

There was something honest-sounding and attention-catching in his speech. The deputies stared at him startled for a moment, and the lean one put a question.

"You think it's likely, Fat?"

"No!" Fat denied. "He's the very same exact, identical road-runner that held up the bank at four o'clock yesterday afternoon and got away in the rough country where autos couldn't foller. Same lace boots, same long legs, same gant and hongry look, same hat. Same man."

"He's slick too," allowed Lean. "Got lost and made up a scheme to act innocent like a pink-toed baby. Hides his shoot-gun and the loot and goes wanderin' around pretendin' he's a harmless stranger, tellin' a tale about a stranger swappin' with him."

"Don't let his talkin' cheat you out o' sleep," Fat advised. "The thousand-dollar reward for his capture is ours, an' no mistake."

"Where's the loot, mister?" Lean pleaded. "We git a thousand more bucks if we *re*cover that."

"Say, look here, men," pleaded Donnegan earnestly, "the man you want is heading into the rough country there. And he's got stuffed saddle-bags which I reckon contain money. I'll ride back with you and show you where we camped last night. He's got my horse and rifle and hat.'

"Fairy stories is for bedtime," said the fat officer harshly. "It's a long ways from bedtime yet."

He nudged his horse over. The sorrel mare bared her teeth and nipped at his leg. The deputy drew back hastily. He said, "Here!" and tossed a pair of "saw-grip" handcuffs to Donnegan.

"Put 'em on!" he barked.

Donnegan thought of begging off from this. He looked at the deputies. Their eyes were hard and waiting. Donnegan grinned ruefully and slipped the nickle-steel circlets over his wrists with deliberate little flips.

"Let's go," he said. "Show me the sheriff. I want to buy this mare from him."

THE town that the two deputies and the prisoner approached along toward noontime boasted of two red brick structures—the bank and the Masonic Building. The other business structures, some two stories high, and the residences, scattered over the bleak landscape, were of adobe. It was the kind of town about which travelers from the East wondered why it existed, shuddered at the thought of living there, and were glad when the train pulled on through.

A two-story adobe building that was

used for the court-house stood off to one side. The deputies, with Donnegan between them, rode in silence up to its front door where a tubby man in high-heel boots and peaked hat, with a Mexican cast of countenance and a star on his vest lettered "Sheriff," sat waiting on the steps.

"We got him," Fat announced.

"Sev'ral posses'll be glad of that," answered the sheriff imperturbably. "Where's the loot?"

"Reckon that's hid in the *malpais*. He didn't have it."

The deputies dismounted. Donnegan slid down, clumsily because of the handcuffs. The sheriff took him in from head to boots, neither kindly nor unkindly. The deputies proceeded to tell the story of the capture in their droll, unexaggerated way, finishing with Donnegan's statement that the man really wanted was riding southward in Mexico with the loot. The sheriff grinned slightly in appreciation of that.

"But it's a fact, sheriff," reiterated Donnegan. "I want you to remember that I'm telling you. I never was in this town before. If you want that fellow you'd better ride after him. I'll show you where we camped last night."

"Take the cuffs off," directed the sheriff, "an' we'll get him locked up safe."

Fat turned to Donnegan with the little key. The mare snipped at him. Donnegan obligingly stepped away from her, where the deputy unlocked the cuffs in safety. His arms free, Donnegan stepped back to the sorrel and patted her. She nuzzled his arm. The sheriff's eyes gleamed. With an affection shining from him he rose with a kind of exclamation.

"What! You've tamed her?"

He reached out to her. She snapped at him like a dog. The glad light went out. The fat round face became sad. He sat down.

"Looks like you made friends with her," he said. "I been trying to do that for eight months, and she despises me. That's why she's so shaggy, we haven't took pains to clip her."

"What'll you take for her, sheriff?" Donnegan asked eagerly.

The officer gave him a quick, amused look. The deputies snickered. Two young women and an old man with a pen behind his ear had come to the door from inside to listen to the talk and see the prisoner. Quick smiles flitted across their faces. Donnegan comprehended.

"Oh, I'll be here to buy her," he declared. "Y'aint going to hang me, nor send me up either."

Two other curious persons came puffing up from the rear. Faces in the business part of town were turning toward the court house.

"Let's get him locked up," said the sheriff with quiet significance. "The people's pretty hostile."

He led around the court-house and in the back yard came to a little low-set, two-room adobe structure with barred windows. Before the door could be unlocked an excited little crowd was on hand, and it was being augmented by new arrivals.

These things gave Donnegan a thrill in the region of the stomach. One more adventure to add to his list. He was more curious than alarmed. The mare was beside him. He gave her bits of candy, while he looked at the dozens of eyes staring at him, or dropping before his gaze. The sheriff searched for a key in a huge bunch to unlock the jail. The two deputies remembered to search Donnegan, going through his clothing with practiced hands, taking his knife, note-book, everything but a handkerchief. When they finished they shoved him unceremoniously through the door that the sheriff swung open and on into an inner room, clanging a steel door behind him. As he was locked inside Donnegan heard the sheriff laying down the law outside.

"You people," he warned, "don't get yourselves all worked up."

"Hey, Sanchez, we're going to hang that bird!" a voice retorted.

"You bet! String him up! The murderer!" came the shouts.

"Not while I'm sheriff o' this county you don't hang him! No lynchin' parties here. First man to get too frisky gets some lead sinkers in his carcass, *sabe?*"

Some one started to argue.

"Shut up!" bellowed the half-breed American-Mexican duly-elected sheriff. "You people disperse or I'll make queek trouble."

Within the jail, listening tautly, Donnegan felt the sudden silence out there under the noon sun. The sorrel stamped off a fly, loudly. Light steps, as of a timid girl shrinking away, sounded on the hard ground. Then other steps. Donnegan moved to the barred window. The crowd

was moving away by twos and threes and bunches. The sheriff had bluffed them, this time.

Donnegan was not afraid. Without a sense of guilt, all this seemed detached from him. He saw Sanchez and the deputies leave, leading the mare at the end of a long saddle rope, while she shook her head in an irritated manner.

DONNEGAN sized up his jail. He was the only inmate. It was a thick-walled adobe structure. The room that he was in had a cot with a dirty mattress and two fresh-washed blankets. The door, giving to the outer room, was of steel plate, and it was locked, or fastened, on the other side. The one window, about a yardstick square, was barred with half-inch malleable iron rods set sheerly into the raw adobe. He tried them tentatively. They seemed as solid as steel in stone. The window gave him ample room to see out.

The court-house barred a fair open view of the town, but adobe residences were visible off to one side. From the direction of these presently came a middle-aged woman with a tray of well-cooked food, accompanied by the fat deputy who said something sullenly about having to stay on watch.

Having gone without breakfast, the American-cooked meal tasted doubly good to Donnegan. He tried to talk with the deputy in the next room, but the officer, after a grunt or two, was snoring.

Donnegan slept a while. Restless, however, he got up to pace the floor. He was confident that he could clear himself of the mean situation if it came to court proceedings, but the thought of confinement in jail was soreness to his active mind and body.

The temper of the crowd at noontime too was an unpleasant thing to think about. He tried the perpendicular window bars again, with the thought of escape when night should come, but without some digging-implement to gouge the adobe away from the rods there seemed not the slightest chance. And there was no implement inside the room, unless he counted his insignificant belt-buckle.

The afternoon wore on. The members of two posses, riding in from the badlands that begun just beyond the southward edge of town, rode to the calaboose to see him. He was disgusted at being gazed upon like an animal in a cage but he tried to be pleasant so as not to rouse antagonism. But at some pleasantry of his a posseman hissed through the bars—

"You'd better be sayin' your prayers 'stead o' grinnin', you candidate for a slip-noose party!"

The same woman brought supper on a tray, accompanied by the lean deputy, who relieved the disgruntled fat one. Lean, with a toothpick between his jaws, walked back and forth outside in the cool of the evening like a soldier on post, and he unbent to Donnegan's talk.

"I'm here by the sheriff's orders," he said. "We're half-way expectin' a mob to slip up on us to take ye out."

"Pleasant outlook," derided Donnegan.

"Yeah, helps a man in your fix to get a good night's sleep. Sheriff Sanchez will be comin' on at eleven o'clock. He sho' is inter-rested the way you got that mare tamed down."

SHERIFF SANCHEZ expressed a sort of neutral kindliness in his dumpy figure. He was not aloof. He sat himself down on the window ledge outside the yard-long, straight-up-and-down bars, so that he could hear and talk conveniently.

"Have a good supper?" he asked.

"Tip-top."

"I'm keeping a guard on because this old jail is so rotten and easy broken out of—or into," he added significantly.

Donnegan had taken his cue from Lean's remark about the sheriff being sho' inter-rested in the way he had got the mare tamed. He meant to reach Sanchez's inner ear by approaching with horse talk.

"Well, how's the mare?" he asked.

"You sho' made friends with her," allowed the officer. "Ain't been a soul in town able to do what you've done over night."

"She never bared her teeth at me once."

"What! I thought she snapped at you when you jumped in the saddle, there in front o' the bank—er when you was stuffing the money into the bags?"

"Sheriff, I wasn't at the bank, and I didn't——"

"You'll have a fair chance to prove all that in court, I reckon," Sanchez broke in. "We don't want to hang an innocent man. In the meantime we'd like to know where you hid the money. Prosecuting attorney

will likely get home tomorrow. You'll be getting the third degree then."

"And while you-all are fussing here the bird that swapped me the mare will be getting farther away." Donnegan saw the uselessness of this talk and reverted to the mare. "Where'd you get the sorrel?" he asked.

"Kentucky."

"American Saddle Horse breed?"

"Yep. With some thoroughbred, an' something I can't name."

"That something," offered Donnegan, "might be a throw-back to her ancestors."

"English stock, you mean?"

"Yes, yes. Only farther back. The English stuff came away back from North African stock—Arabians and Barbs, as I understand it. Look at this mare, untamed and shaggy. Makes me think o' pictures of the wild and shaggy horses of the Barbarians invading Rome. But nobody can trace that far back. Makes me think, and I don't know why, about 'spirit of the desert' and all that stuff, an' it's the desert breed I think she might be a throw-back to. I never saw anything like her before."

"You touched the button, I think, boy," acknowledged Sanchez, brightening. "'Spirit of the desert'—that's it. She's got it, boy. She sho' can travel this semi-barren country out here. I've rode 'er some, though it was a fight. She can out-go our mustangs. I ain't been able to ride her far enough yet to tire her down."

"You love horses, and that's plain," said Donnegan, appreciating the man's enthusiasm and sincerity. "It's almost an insult to ask, but—would you sell that mare, Sheriff Sanchez?"

The man did not deride the suggestion this time. He peered through the bars in the dim glow of the moon as if trying to read Donnegan's mind. And Donnegan knew that now he could reach the sheriff's inner ear with his story of the bank robber traveling southward.

Sanchez did listen, as Donnegan walked back and forth in his cell, pausing close to the window in the high moments of the narrative. He told of his two years in Panama and Mexico, of his longing to get back among Americans; of his meeting with the man the night before; of how in the morning he had found himself left with the man's saddle and hat, and suspicious, yet how he had come on across the international boundary, refusing to let himself be made a fugitive.

Toward the end, Donnegan saw that the sheriff's attention had wandered, saw that he was listening off into the night. Donnegan went close to the bars, listening also.

"Hear that?" half-whispered Sanchez.

The sounds of two or three automobiles, perhaps more, getting engines started with explosive poppings, sounded in the town.

"Cars leaving the garage," said the sheriff, in a way that sent sudden alarm through the young man. "Something's up, but don't get scared, Don. We'll do our best by ye."

He jumped to his feet and strode off into the darkness.

DONNEGAN'S heart warmed at the man's friendliness. Sanchez would stand by, but he, nor a half-dozen like him, could stand off a mob of these sturdy, determined people. For the first time in this affair Donnegan was afraid.

Listening at the window he heard a horse approaching at a lively gait—five minutes after Sanchez disappeared. A horse came vaguely into sight, without a rider. Came nearer, whinnied.

The sorrel mare!

She stopped, a saddle-rope's length away, looking around.

"Horse!" called Donnegan. "Come here, Horse!"

With outstretched neck she moved swiftly to the window, ears cocked forward. He reached out and stroked her nose and cheek. His hands came in contact with a rope about her neck. He drew it in—a saddle-rope that evidently she had been staked out with. The loose end was spirally twisted as if it had been tight around a peg.

Abruptly he longed to be free, to ride away under the starlit sky on the back of this great traveler, away from the danger of an unthinking mob, away from the tightness of a jail. He shook the bars with his hands. The mare jerked back.

Unwittingly he had got the rope in a sort of half-hitch about one of the yard-long rods. Her sudden smart jerk made the rod quiver.

An idea popped into Donnegan's mind. Why not let the mare yank the bars out!

With fingers that trembled he knotted the rope in a clove-hitch about the middle of an upright rod, retaining the loose end in his

hands so that the mare could not get clear away if she chose to.

"Horse," he hissed, "pull! Get up! Clear out!" He clucked. *"Ghk-ghk!"*

She threw up her head, stepped back, looked at him. He found a pea-sized pebble in the disintegrating adobe window ledge and flicked it at her. She moved back until the rope was almost straight.

"Get up, Horse!" he urged. *"Ghk-ghk!"*

She moved, and felt the rope tighten. He clucked again. She put strain on the rope, seemed to understand—perhaps from saddle-horn pulling she had been taught. She set her weight forward, he flicked another pebble, She jumped a little, and the rod bent, the lower end slithering and scraping out of the pebbly adobe with a shower of dust.

One rod out! He called her back, she responding eagerly. He slipped a clove-hitch about the next rod and sent her out again with clucking and urgent words. With her weight going against the rope again he smacked his hands together sharply—and another rod went out. They seemed to be set in only about four inches. A chunk of the sill gave way with it.

Once more he hitched her to an iron upright, and this time she acted quickly, as if having learned already what was wanted. With three bars bent outward, Donnegan put on his hat and coat and, shoving himself across the sill, commanded her until she dragged him through. Outside he rewarded her with two or three scraps of candy that had stuck to his pocket lining.

He did not stop to think about it; his impulse was to escape. He noosed the rope to answer for a bridle, mounted bareback, and rode out south of the town to the broken ground beginning there, then headed into the southeast.

WATCHING back over his shoulder for pursuit that did not come, listening over the purr of the wind, and pushing on steadily, Donnegan thought of many things. For one thing, riding another man's horse away, he was a horse thief in the eyes of the law.

Should he turn back and prove by so doing that he was not guilty of the robbery and killing? If not, where best go?

Running such questions over in his mind he remembered what the lean deputy had told him in some detail about the reward for the bank robber and slayer. The county and the citizens had offered one thousand dollars for the man and the bank one thousand more for the stolen money, which amounted to twenty thousand.

It came to Don more and more forcibly to ride into Mexico after the man calling himself Smith, but he had always looked askance upon collecting rewards for the capture of men. Such money was too near to blood money he had felt. Yet the capture of Smith would be an act to clear his own name, possibly to save himself from prison or the scaffold. Also the capture and return would mean money with which to buy the sorrel mare. This was wholly selfish. But over and above all these things, Smith was a murderer, having shot the cashier without provocation, it appeared. And Donnegan had no sympathy for a cold-blooded killer.

Mulling these things back and forth Donnegan, when daylight came and he found himself at the site of the night camp with Smith, resolved, from whatever motive in his now muddled mind, to go on after Smith.

He rested an hour, catnapping with the mare's saddle-rope tied around his waist. She grazed at the thin grass, not greatly wearied by the night's riding. At sunrise he rode on.

So that he might be able to guess out the hidden trail of the fugitive, stretching off unseen there in the dun waste, Donnegan tried to put himself in the other man's place. A town youth, likely, turned prospector, or miner of sorts, or a railroad man, familiar enough now with being out in the open alone to undertake a robbery and escape through this thinly settled region of northwest Mexico.

What would such a man do? Well, he'd try to find settlements. Would likely know where to find one at once to get food and water. He would pick a small and remote settlement where he would be the dominant figure and force rather than large villages where officious officers might search his saddle-bags, and seize, and keep them.

So Donnegan headed for the collection of goat-herders' adobe huts to the southeastward where he had stopped over night *en route* north. That he had no gun or saddle worried him.

Toward midforenoon he reached the huts—five squat, square, one-room mud houses inhabited by families scarcely above savages in ambitions or culture, yet kindly.

They welcomed him, for northward-bound he had entertained them with stories of the big worlds beyond the mountains, and had been kind to the old women.

Yes, another *Americano* had been there, a full day before, the patriarch of the tribe vouchsafed. He had rested till noontime, sleeping with his head on his saddle-bags, like a cat—awake every time a footstep went near him. Eating at noon, he had ridden onward.

Don was elated with himself, for he had guessed his man right the first time.

Where had the gringo gone? Well, sir, he had asked about places to the south, and had been informed about Santa Clara, which had five houses and a well like this place here; and also about Martinez's, which was a single house where the well sometimes went dry. Whereupon the traveler had said he would go to Santa Clara. How far? Well, both places were as far as goats could be driven in two days. Yes, sir, the old man had tried it and knew.

Donnegan said *adios* and rode on in a hurry. The quarry was nearly a day ahead. Though Smith had said he would go to Santa Clara Donnegan chose Martinez's shack. Guessing at his man's mind again. He expected to reach it by late afternoon. The mare's splendid traveling made him proud, but because he missed his way and had to refind himself he did not arrive until it was so dark that old Martinez and his wife came to the door with a candle, and the dogs prowled out to sniff and growl.

Yes, an *Americano* had been, and had slept on the floor on his saddle-bags all night, and breakfasting at daybreak, and complaining because there was only eggs and beans, had ridden on, thank ——!

While Don appreciatively wolfed a supper of what Smith complained of he listened to the old herder's talk. The other American had inquired about settlements, and had been told of a half-dozen, including a two-shack place southeast and a village to the south, to which he said he was going.

Donnegan had a five dollar gold-piece sewed for emergency in the flap of his woolen shirt pocket. It was all that he had. An old saddle was hanging on the wall. Martinez said that one of Villa's men had left it years before. It was warped and cracked but usable. For it and a quarter of a thin blanket, an old canteen, and twelve small ears of corn, Dan gave the five dollars. He fed the corn to Horse and staked her out, but she refused to graze, for the goat smell was on the grass.

In the darkest hour before the dawn the American was riding again. Smith was twenty-four hours ahead. Having guessed his destination twice, Donnegan guessed again—the two-shack place southeast.

The sorrel mare, only half-fed, responded gallantly. At noon they reached the two shacks—and Smith had not been there. A miss-guess this time.

Donnegan back-trailed out of the cañon and turned sharply to the east, guessing that Smith had gone that way. By evening he had not seen a trace of Smith or any human being. The mare was tired, though good for endless miles yet. He gloried in her.

He was so weary himself that he could not tell why he was riding after Smith—whether it was to get the reward, or to clear himself, or to raise money to buy the mare, or to catch and punish a murderer. All these things were run together in his thought. He only felt dully that it was victory to find Smith and loss to miss him.

In the fag end of the day he picked out a green-looking cañon on the mountain-slope and turned in to give the horse pasture and water, and he remained there until the next morning.

Through an entire day Donnegan drove himself in the search for Smith without getting the slightest trace of him. He rode half the night too. And when another morning came and he bestirred himself dully from a hasty camp, breakfasting on boiled brown beans that he had traded his red bandanna for, he discovered the remains of another camp ten yards away and knew that it had been Smith's by finding his own aluminum-pot there, where the fugitive had probably overlooked it.

He was now at the eastward edge of a mesa. He discovered also a dim trail coming from the south and turning east here, and found where Smith's horse had entered it.

Donnegan pushed out on the trail in the face of the rising sun, one thought in his mind like a hard knot—to overtake Smith. He was tired and dull, but the sense persisted that to find Smith was victory and to miss him was to lose.

Toward noon he reached a settlement of half a dozen adobe huts and a small store. Supplies came in over the dim trail. The Mexicans here were used to travelers and

lacked the simplicity and kindliness of the mountain folk. Don traded a silver serpent finger-ring for dinner for himself and Horse, and while he ate he made inquiries.

Yes, a man as he described had passed through. In fact, he had stayed all night, sleeping in jumps and starts. His horse was about to fall down from hard riding. When had he left? Oh, about the time the sun rose. Which way? Due east.

Donnegan came into a new lease of energy. If these Mexicans told the truth he was within half a day of the man he pursued. They told him that there were numerous settlements and ranches on ahead within a day's ride. Swallowing his last bite, he set out again, moved by one thought—

"Get Smith."

He must get Smith or lose the fight of his lifetime. It was in his mind like that.

The mare proved herself. She was weary but she forged ahead. She drooped but she never stopped. Donnegan longed to crawl out of the hard and merciless saddle and lie down in the narrow shade of a *sotol* and rest forever. But——

"Get Smith!"

He forgot that he had no gun. The sun beat upon his back until he cringed. In the late afternoon he saw a ranch headquarters miles off to the south. Never in all his life had his body so longed to do a thing as it longed to turn off for food and rest. But reason told him that Smith had kept on. So he kept on.

At dusk he came to a goat-herder's shack. The man said that an *Americano* had ridden by without stopping about the time his family was rousing from the *siesta*, his strawberry roan hardly able to stumble along.

At *siesta* time! Don felt elation. He was gaining. He was less than half a day behind now; in fact, only three or four hours. He talked with the man a little while longer, with the result that he traded the saddle for an old thirty-two caliber pistol and a few cartridges. The peon explained honestly that sometimes the gun fired and sometimes it did not.

Don rode on in the darkness.

"Get Smith!"

A YELLOW, waning moon rose out of the eastward haze. Donnegan shivered now and then under the cold wind that swept the monotonous flat country. Sometimes he started from his drooping, thinking that a yucca was a man, or an ocatilla-clump a horse. Once he passed a herd of cattle bedded down. Infrequently he realized the splendidness of the mare and mumbled some word of encouragement to the wagging, swaying head out there before his eyes.

Occasionally the mare flung up her head in a snatch at new energy, and stretched her nostrils, trying to catch the scent of a human abiding-place for the night.

Once the mare stopped stock-still, all but unseating the dozing rider, and lifted her head and with all the energy of her magnificent lungs trumpeted a signal call of distress—the *S.O.S.* of the lonely, weary and uneasy horse—far and wide over the empty land. But no answer came to her listening ears.

An hour or so after this both man and horse at the same time caught sight of a light on ahead—a vague light, a sort of will-o'-the-wisp. Then there was another glow-worm blotch, as if a candle had been lighted in a house. The first light was sometimes dim, sometimes brighter, sometimes in a beam, sometimes a bunch, like the headlights of an automobile moving away from the horse and rider, turning this way and that, yet keeping to the east.

"It's an auto," Donnegan told himself incredulously. "Where on earth did it come from?"

Of her own accord the mare mended her gait. More lights appeared at what must be the house. In a few minutes, as he approached, Don heard gabbling as from an assemblage of excited crows. He made out a bunch of half-clad people—men and women, and children with half-naked bodies—ganged before a lighted doorway, all looking to the east where the lights of the car had now disappeared. At sight of Don, right at hand, a howl went up. A flashlight was turned on him dazzlingly. Maledictions on *Americanos* were flung out. But when they saw that he was only puzzled they quieted and a man who was obviously not a herder explained hotly that his car had just been driven away, stolen by another American.

"We didn't know he was up and prowling," added the well-dressed Mexican, "until he started the engine. When I got out he was a hundred yards away."

Where was the thief's horse, the strawberry roan? At the question from Donnegan

men, women and children went streaming to the corral, Donnegan with them, to see if the animal was still there. It was, a hard-ridden rack of bones.

As they stared at the drooping horse there were explanations. Two Mexican travelers had stopped at the settlement for the night, leaving their automoble at the door. An *Americano* on this lean beast had arrived later, and now he was gone with the car of the paying guests, without himself having paid for his supper or the horse's feed. Curses descend on *Americanos!*

"He is the same man I've been hunting," said Donnegan. "This horse that he has left is mine, and the saddle too. I'll take them with me."

"Oh no you won't!" denied the owner of the car. "I'll keep them until my auto is found."

Donnegan had seen at the first glance that the saddle-bags and his rifle were missing. While he pondered drearily what to do next he heard Mexicans off to one side commenting that the white-face sorrel mare was a beauty, and why not seize her also, since likely the two *Americanos* were friends anyhow and both scoundrels.

Panicky with the thought of these people getting hold of the precious mare, Donnegan slipped away in the darkness. Stealthily he reached Horse's side, and mounted, and rode away as a cry started up after him.

He rode eastward, as the car had gone. A railroad lay somewhere in that direction. Without doubt Smith was aiming for it.

To ride a horse after a car was foolishness—but the car *might* be broken down out there a few miles. On such a slender hope Donnegan continued, with his last muster of energy. Daylight came, and no car. At sunrise he climbed a knoll for a wide look-see. From its summit he took in a vast circle of the semidesert. No car was in sight, nothing. He had lost.

With an oppressive sense of calamity on him, Donnegan lay down on the stony ground to instant sleep in the thin cold wind of morning; and Horse moved over a few feet to stand by him with braced legs and hanging head.

NEARLY two weeks from the time he had escaped from the old adobe jail, Donnegan once more approached the American town whose *aurora electro* he had seen first that night that he discovered the Horse. He was tired and unshaven, and rode a dilapidated saddle that an American ranchman south of the border had given him, but he was not so badly off as at the end of the chase for Smith.

"An hour more of this, old girl," he said to Horse, "and we'll be in town—and in jail again, maybe."

Donnegan had worked the matter out back there while resting at the American's ranch. It had not been simple, but harder in a way than all the riding that he did.

He had put it up to himself pointedly: If he kept the mare, he was a thief. If he remained on the Mexican side, obviously he was not in the United States, where he wished to be. If he entered the United States and went somewhere other than where he had escaped from, he was still a horse-thief and a fugitive with a warrant of arrest forever hanging over his head. He might be picked up at any time—El Paso, Roswell, San Antonio, even Los Angeles.

If he went back to Sheriff Sanchez he might be hanged or imprisoned. Anyhow he wouldn't be a horse-thief. And he might become the legal owner of the sorrel mare. To go back was a price to pay—and he decided finally to pay it.

So he approached the town toward the middle of a sunny forenoon, and reached it, and rode up to the court-house door. Inside, he found the sheriff in his office. Sanchez's round face took on the look of an absurd, surprized moon. After a minute of staring he asked—

"Where are the deputies?"

"I don't know," answered Don.

"But you saw 'em—they saw you in El Paso."

"Not I. I haven't been there.

Sanchez continued to stare, pondering. Then:

"Didn't the El Paso police arrest you? They wired us they had."

"Nope."

"Where's the swag?"

"Smith has it, I reckon. The mare's out by the door."

"*Umm.*"

The shrill whistle of an approaching train sounded.

"Take a chair," said Sanchez. "The deputies will be in on that train—er they wired they were coming on it, but maybe

they were deluded too. My head's whirling. Maybe it'll stop when they get here and line things out for me."

They didn't actually sit down and wait in the office. Donnegan drew out the old thirty-eight caliber revolver he had traded for and laid it on the desk, just to show he was on the level. Then they went out to look at the mare. She was as gaunt as a thoroughbred ready for the track, but upstanding and priceless-looking. As they talked Sanchez asked Donnegan why he had come back, asked it curiously, like a man in a mental fog. Donnegan shrugged, and grinned, and made answer:

"To buy the sorrel mare from you."

Sanchez said not a word.

Presently the fat and the lean deputy hove into sight. At the door they looked at Donnegan and grinned. The four went back to the sheriff's office.

"Well," said Fat, "we done what you told us—left the prisoner in the El Paso jail and turned the swag over to the bank man."

"This ain't him, then?" asked Sanchez, nodding to Donnegan.

"Reckon this is a case of optical illusion," admitted Lean. "They sho' do look alike though."

"Ready to set a price on the mare now?" asked Don.

"Yep," answered Sanchez. "If you'll promise to be a deputy on my staff for a year at half pay I'll give you the sorrel right now for keeps."

Donnegan saw that the sheriff meant it. There was a tickle and surge of satisfaction in the region of his stomach. He remembered how he had striven to make up his mind to return. He remembered the mare's fine endurance and honest effort. Greatest horse in the country!

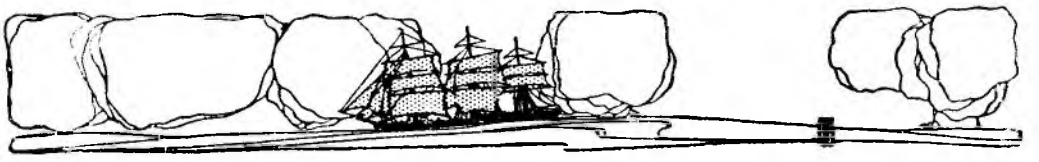
"I'll do it, sheriff," he answered. "She's cheap at three times the price."

IRONY

***by* Helen A. Rogers**

A MAN of roving heart but steady feet died in his bed the other day.
They took his ashes to the loftiest height and gave them to the winds.
Who knows but what a bit of human dust rests on the wind-taut sheet
Of some God-loved clipper sailing south?

Another, many years a rover, died
The very hour his feet touched homeland soil,
And he lies buried on a quiet knoll,
Beneath an elm,
And lives again in grass and buttercups.



GOD OF THE SAKAI

A Complete Novelette

by

Frederick Moore

Author of "Three Passengers for Lantu-Vauna," "The Taker of Sharks," etc.

CANTRELL, all in white duck and wearing a big sun-helmet, stood on the beach at the rim of the jungle of Kroon's Island surrounded by baggage and bundled camp-gear. He was waiting for the other white man to come near—a man coming from the settlement, which was out of sight around a bend in the shore-line.

"He'll try to pull my price down—and that's where I'll fool him," mused Cantrell as he lighted a cigaret.

The brig which had dropped Cantrell was now hull-down on the horizon, bound north for a port in Borneo. The nature of his business was such that he found it advisable to be put on land without observation from the native settlement. It was not so much that Kroon's Island was dangerous in itself, being populated by natives and Chinese—but government officials were always dropping in, and Cantrell had to be careful.

The man trudging up the beach was close enough now to be seen in detail. He was clad in dirty duck, with threads falling from the edges of his coat-cuffs, from the bottoms of his trousers and from the button-holes of his open coat—like a ship which has not been docked for months and has a bottom covered with whiskers of sea-weed.

His shoes were topped with brown cloth—dry, but stained by sea-water. They were soled with *carabao*-hide. He wore a battered and finger-stained helmet, and the open collar of his shirt was discolored with dust and dried sweat. He needed a shave, for his face was covered with a brown stubble. A short man, he was made to appear shorter by his bent shoulders and his shambling way of walking.

"Hello, Cantrell," he called as he drew near the other. "I guess you got somethin' for me, eh?"

He grinned, revealing unclean teeth. His brown eyes had a look of infinite shrewdness, and wavered from the straight gaze of Cantrell, who, without doubt, held himself superior. For Cantrell, by contrast with this man, might have been mistaken for a district commissioner or some other agent of the government—clean in person and clothing, tall and straight, tanned about the lower part of his face, and having the look of somebody accustomed to authority. He was not yet thirty, while the short man was well past forty.

"Yes, I've picked up a couple of good ones, Janney," said Cantrell. "Glad you're here—as you said you'd be."

"Always keep my word," said Janney, coming to a stop and taking off his helmet to rub his forehead.

"Anybody in the settlement—coast guards, or any wandering government men?"

"Not a soul around," said Janney. "Mee Cheung's place is dead—has been for a couple of weeks. Not a trader in, or anybody to give us trouble. My schooner, the *Messenger*, she's dropped down to the other end of the bay to load some stuff I told a friend of mine I'd pick up for him. She'll be back, and off the reef before daylight."

His eyes wandered to the jungle, and he peered in questioningly.

"Got 'em in there?" he asked.

"I'm keeping them out of sight, yes," said Cantrell. "You never know, in my business, when somebody's eyes are on you."

"Sure, that's right," agreed Janney. "How many you got?"

"Two," said Cantrell. "And hard as nails—slim, but all muscle."

"What are they?" asked Janney.

"Don't just know," replied Cantrell. "I'd say they're Sakai tribe, crossed with Malay."

"Where they from?"

"That's something you'll have to find out for yourself," retorted Cantrell. "I'm not telling you that. You know, too much information isn't healthy for me, and I deliver the goods as offered."

"Oh, I guess you can trust me," said Janney.

He stooped and picked up a bit of palm-fiber and began picking his teeth with it, his shrewd eyes on the soft, dry sand.

"If I've got what you can use—and can pay for—that's all you need to bother about," said Cantrell curtly.

"How much you askin' for 'em?" inquired Janney.

"That's to be settled finally a little later," said Cantrell. "First, I want to get your idea of price on a couple of husky chaps—quick and strong."

Janney lifted his crinkled eyes to Cantrell. They carried a peculiar light—as if Janney had a joke which he preferred to keep to himself.

"Oh, I dunno, Cantrell," he said. "I've always played fair with you. I could use 'em, of course, at my place—and nobody be the wiser. That is, of course, if I git 'em there safe—and don't get in a mess with the government on the way. But I——"

He hesitated, and his eyes dropped to the butts of the automatic pistols in Cantrell's belt, now revealed as Cantrell casually threw back the sides of his coat and thrust the ends of his fingers into his trousers pockets.

"I guess," went on Janney, "that there ain't much of a market for a couple of wild natives—that is, as a sellin' proposition."

He ventured a mild grin, as if he expected Cantrell to understand just what was behind the veiled objection.

"No," agreed Cantrell calmly, but with a slight tightening of the muscles of his jaws, "there's not much of a market for what the government might call—slaves. But I'll tell you this, Janney: If you can't offer a price to me that's fair, I can turn these men loose."

"Oh, sure, you can do that—to avoid bein' arrested for—well, slavin', or blackbirdin', or whatever the district commissioner might call it, if you happened to be brought before him."

Again his eyes turned slowly to the pistol-butts.

Cantrell puffed his cigaret a minute, then opened a folding camp-chair and sat down, throwing off his helmet to the sand.

"I know what you're driving at, Janney," he said tartly. "But don't think I'm here to be bluffed. You can't get native help under government supervision — and no schooner skipper'll take on the job of recruiting labor for you."

"I guess it ain't as bad as that," said Janney mildly.

"I happen to know just how bad it is," went on Cantrell. "Your plantation is in bad odor with the authorities. And so far as the natives of these islands go, they express their idea of your island plantation something like this—'On Janney's island, all the footprints on the beach are going in, but we never find any coming out.' You know what that means — and I know. You've got to buy under cover—and if your natives make trouble for you, after being slaved into your plantation, and slaved in your fields, they just naturally die off—fever, or something like that."

"Don't natives die anywhere else but at my place?" asked Janney.

"Oh, yes—but you drive your men to death."

"I can't bother my head with loose talk, and the gossip of the island gin-shops. I have to make my place pay—and to do that I use my own methods.'

"Yes, and I know your methods," retorted Cantrell. "You want me to take the chances to get natives for you, to carry to your island in your schooner—and no questions asked. Now that I've picked up another pair for you, you think you can bluff me on the price by hinting at what a commissioner'll do to me if I'm caught with 'em on my hands. But don't try to beat the price that way—it won't work, Janney."

The planter stared to seaward, a sneering grin on his face while Cantrell talked.

"I'll give you three hundred a man," he said when Cantrell finished. "And that's

final—I ain't goin' to stand here in the sun all day and argue with you."

"You'll give me five hundred a man," replied Cantrell. "It's little enough. And the money'll come to me as change for what I pay for my passage to your island in your schooner — myself, and my two native servants."

"You mean you're comin' along to my——"

"I mean nothing of the kind. I won't go, but the two natives will. I'll miss the schooner—or decide to wait here till you come again—anything to keep myself inside the law, and give both of us an alibi if you're overhauled on the way home and have to say how you come with strange natives aboard."

Janney gave a scornful laugh that ended in a contemptuous snort.

"Yeh!" he exclaimed. "You've got your tricks—to keep yourself inside the law! Smooth, you be! But me—and my methods——"

"I know who I'm dealing with," broke in Cantrell quietly. "Do you think I'm going to get myself into such a jam with you that you can give information against me—and keep clear yourself? Not much, Janney! I take no chances with any of my customers. If I did, my business'd come to an end mighty quick, and I'd be wearing a ball and chain for jewelry!"

"PRETTY smooth game you play," sneered Janney, evidently anxious to relieve himself of all the meanness he could. "You're thick with the missionaries—playing yourself off as a prospector for a big oil company, so you can go where you like, and swank it with a dude camp-kit and fine duds! You even make complaints to the missionaries about the way natives are treated on certain plantations. That makes you strong with the sky-pilots—and they don't suspect what you're up to. Me—I'm what I am, and I don't handshake and pray and look pious and play the hypocrite!"

"Oh, chuck such talk!" said Cantrell with a good-natured grin. "If I didn't keep strong with the missionaries, what chance would I have to pick up natives for you and your ilk—so you can get rich on forced labor without paying wages. I'm a slaver, yes, if you want to use plain language, but don't go after me because I have to use my own methods. And—" there was now a snappish quality in the words and tones—"don't try to double-cross me, or hold any whip over me to force down my price."

"Don't try to hold me up, neither," said Janney, still in ill-temper. "Just because you can pull the wool over the eyes of the missionaries with goody-goody stuff, don't think you can force me to pay your price—all the time."

"We're on dangerous ground," warned Cantrell. "You know as well as I do why I fool the missionaries. Why does it get under your hide because I manage to keep on good terms with the island parsons?"

"Because it makes me sick, that's why," said Janney. "I don't see why I should be in wrong all the time, and you playin' the gent—and the straight man in these waters! We all know the missionaries have their own game—they make money out of it, what with a lot of converts on their records that ain't converted at all! They send home reports of thousands of natives who've turned Christian—sure! That keeps the money comin' from home. It's graft—and just as much graft as you and me are out for—and git! The missionaries they sell a list of names and big numbers to the folks at home, who think the gospel'll be spread among the heathens! They sell names—and you sell bodies—and I make the lazy natives work! What's the difference? We're all at the same game—gittin' rich out of a lot of blacks that'd be killin' one another if we wasn't keepin' 'em straight and makin' 'em do a honest day's work for their grub and medicine and all!"

Cantrell stood up and walked over to Janney.

"Look here, Janney! You're making a mistake to beef like this about the missionaries. Just think a little on practical lines. Don't you see that if there were no missionaries keeping an eye on things in these islands, there'd be government men here looking over things. We can fool the missionaries with a little pious stuff—but we couldn't fool government officials, nor cold-eyed coast-guard officers, nor gunboat commanders. You and your kind—and myself, come to that—would be out of business in a month if the missionaries were called off, and trained government men got on the job of supervising these islands."

"What's all that got to do with me, anyhow?" demanded Janney.

"Play the game—and don't keep the missionaries down on you. We all know that there isn't one native in a thousand reported converted who's really converted—or knows what Christianity is all about. The natives, too—they're in religion for what they can get out of it, just as the missionaries are—and it all works out right for us. Don't spoil things by picking on the missionaries—we're all in the same game—a game for profits. Just you have a little sense, man!"

"Well, mebbe you're right," admitted Janney. "I ain't never had it handed to me just that way before—as you say, it's practical."

"Glad you see it that way."

"But I ain't got no stomach for makin' up with the sky-pilots," went on Janney. "Sure, you know how to play a smooth game with 'em—but I don't like to hear you jab me on *my* methods. They're as good as yours, even if I can't be so smooth."

He was somewhat mollified, and lighted a cigaret.

"Then we do business at my price?" asked Cantrell.

"Yes, I'll pay what you ask—this time," said Janney. "But not until the men are aboard the *Messenger*. At dark, we'll move down the beach and hide 'em in the back of Mee Cheung's place, so they'll be safe and——"

"I'm not so sure of that," objected Cantrell. "That slick old Chink may sell us out to some of the officers after we're gone. I'd rather put em aboard your schooner here—during the night."

"Oh, Mee Cheung, he's all right," said Janney. "I've done business with him for more'n five years. He's the boss of the settlement—and the island. Has the only store, and does all the tradin', makes scads of money out of opium with the chinks, and has the whole place bottled up. He's safe for us."

A SUSPICION crossed Cantrell's mind—a doubt of just what Janney was up to with his insistence that they should go on to Mee Cheung's place. There might be a trap—and Cantrell knew he was taking chances to put himself into the hands of the boss of Kroon's Island. Janney might have a trick planned with the Chinese merchant to take Cantrell's natives and get out with them, leaving Cantrell in such a position that it would be of no avail to make complaint. In fact, if robbed, Cantrell knew that he would have to keep quiet, for if he told the truth he would only be incriminating himself.

"I don't trust Mee Cheung, just the same," said Cantrell after a moment's thought. "It's dangerous—to put ourselves in his hands."

"I don't see why," said Janney. "He'd be in wrong himself if he kept the natives hidden in his place durin' the night—it'd make him a party to the business."

"But I've heard he's selling out," went on Cantrell. "And if he's quitting the place, he might give information against us after he's clear away from here—and both of us be arrested——"

"Oh, that talk of sellin' out!" said Janney. "I've heard it for the last two-three years. We don't have to trust him, anyway. I'm buyin' a big bill of goods off him this trip, and that'll keep him mum, even if he knows flat out what's goin' on between us. So we'll push on to the settlement after dark."

Cantrell held out a hand.

"Then if we do, I'll take the cash now," he declared.

"What's the rush?" demanded Janney in surprize. "Can't you trust me from here to Mee Cheung's place?"

"Trust you, yes," said Cantrell. "But by the time we're at Mee Cheung's place, I want all the risk on your side. I don't intend to hold the sack, or bother my head if this pair of natives manage to slip away from you. If you want to hide 'em at Mee Cheung's, you'll have to do what chasing there is to be done, that's all. I'll make delivery here and now—and they're off my hands for good."

"I'll have to look 'em over first," said Janney. "I can't buy any pig in a poke, you know."

He started for the jungle.

Cantrell followed, and pointed to the way in as they got to the edge of the brush. They entered a tiny glade, embowered by heavy leaves, and pushing the thick foliage aside, twenty feet from the beach, came to an open place.

Janney's eyes fell upon two brown men, sitting back to back at the base of a small tree. They were naked, but for loin-cloths. Their hands were secured behind their backs by manacles on the wrists, and small

chains wrapped about the tree ran to the manacles, securing the prisoners.

"Here we are," said Cantrell, pausing and looking down.

Janney waited until his eyes had become accustomed to the gloom of the place. He peered at the two men, who turned their eyes on Cantrell, sidewise—scared, yet hopeful, perhaps wondering if this visit meant their deliverance from the hateful inactivity of sitting for hours in the same position. There was a pleading look in their eyes—the same expression that dogs chained up might have when their master came near them with some promise of freeing them.

Janney's trained eye knew at once that they were jungle-men. This fact was obvious in the lithe bodies, the long straight black hair bound across the forehead with a loop of polished rattan, and the bracelets of brass wire bound on their arms. They had none of the muscularity about their shoulders which is seen in men who bear the burdens of white men.

"They sure are wild 'uns," pronounced Janney. "As I said before, I can use 'em—but they ain't got weight. Look at them arms! And teeth! And tribe-marks cut in their chests! Only good for light work—just a couple o' junglers."

"They're stronger than they look," argued Cantrell. "All sinews—limber and quick—and worth a dozen of the big lazy natives found hereabouts."

"They'll be wild as deer," said Janney. "It'll take a couple of men to watch 'em, or they'll skip into the brush on me, and I'll lose the time of my regular workers in catchin' 'em up again."

"I rather think your methods'll tame 'em," said Cantrell with a grin.

"What'd you say they was?" asked Janney, bending forward with critical eyes.

"Sakai," said Cantrell. "And not so wild as you'd think. They've done a lot of trading with the coast Malays—and the missionaries have monkeyed with them—at least one."

"They look awful worried to have us look 'em over," said Janney, a trifle amused. "Mebbe they think we're goin' to cook 'em and eat 'em."

"Oh, they know something's going to happen that they can't figure out—so, naturally, they're a little upset. You see, I've had the whip on their backs, and that's made 'em understand I won't have any foolishness. They're broken already, Janney—I've tamed 'em for you before delivery."

He laughed.

"Yeah, I can see the welts on 'em. And that nearest one—he looks the meanest of the pair. Look at the way he looks at you—he certainly'd like to git at you with a jungle-knife! He's packin' a grudge ag'in' you."

"He's the bad one of the pair, as badness goes," agreed Cantrell. "Never could get a name out of him, so I call him 'Aleck'—he's so smart. Of course, he's sore on me. I've made him jump when I wanted him to do anything."

"The other ain't so cross-lookin'," went on Janney. "Looks like he might do what he's told without tearin' things up any."

"He's civilized," said Cantrell. "He's been a missionary's pet.'

Janney turned on Cantrell with surprized eyes.

"Civilized! That, civilized! What you tryin' to do? Cod me?"

"No, I'm talking straight," insisted Cantrell. "That one—Rikki's his name—was a house-boy for a missionary in a coast settlement while he was growin' up. But he soured on religion and went back to the jungles—three or four years back. He's told me something about it."

"You mean he can talk? Our lingo?"

"Sure! I told you I'm not putting anything over on you."

Then, to the milder of the two natives, Cantrell said. "You talk this fella, Rikki—pretty soon we go along from this side."

Rikki swung his eyes from Janney, and then, in a voice that was filled with pleading yet without a trace of whining, he spoke gently—

"Master, bimeby you take us other side—where we come over?"

"He wants to go home," Cantrell explained to Janney. "Thinks we're on the way back now."

"Let him think it," said Janney.

"All right, Rikki," said Cantrell reassuringly. "Two nights we be your side—bimeby you see big boat to take you fellas."

Rikki muttered something in his own tongue to Aleck, who drew in his breath sharply, and showed his teeth to Cantrell, like a menacing dog.

"They're out of the same pod," reflected Janney. "Yes, and a cross of Malay there."

He bent down and felt the shoulders of

Rikki, pinchingly and appraisingly, to make sure that what he was buying was sound and worth his money.

"No doubt of it," said Cantrell. "And the Malay blood gives 'em brains—improves the jungle stock, though it makes 'em a little more tricky. But you've got a bargain, Janney—and you'll find they're worth more than I'm asking. Not too easy to catch, these jungle birds."

Janney unbuckled a belt under his shirt and brought out a packet of notes. He counted them, bending low and holding them close to his eyes.

"Here you are," he said. "When it's near dark, we'll pole off to the settlement, and I'll write out the papers or receipts to make it look like you've paid me passage money."

"All right," said Cantrell and took the money.

"But we can't take 'em shackled like this," said Janney.

"Easy enough to get around the shackles," explained Cantrell. "I'll chain their hands to the bundles they carry—then when we go up to Mee Cheung's place, they'll look like bearers, and the chains won't be in sight. You do the same when you take 'em aboard the *Messenger*."

Rikki's eyes were wide with troubled amazement as he saw the money pass between the two white men, and Aleck began to jabber excitedly under his breath. But Rikki quieted him with some cautionary phrases.

"That'll be a good scheme to move 'em without anybody bein' wise," agreed Janney, and led the way back to the beach.

"Will the *Messenger* be back before dark?" asked Cantrell.

"No, but back before daylight in the mornin'," said Janney. "I told my mate to manage it. So that'll give us a chance to sneak these chaps out of Mee Cheung's back veranda without anybody havin' a look at 'em. You see, Mee Cheung's place runs right down over the water, and we can boat out."

THEY sat and smoked for a time, until the sun was low. And when they started for the settlement, timed their departure so that it would bring them to Mee Cheung's just after the swift tropical darkness would be over the native village.

Rikki and his mate, bundles of Cantrell's camp-stuff on their shoulders, led the group that began the march down the beach. Their hands were bound into the bundles. They walked, in spite of their burdens, with the high-stepping strides of all jungle folk—a characteristic gait acquired by years of walking through the vine-tangles of their jungles.

Cantrell, his automatic pushed well forward, also carried a short-stocked whip. By taking off the lash, it became a sort of walking-stick. But the lash was fast to its end now—and he had no trouble in making his prisoners do his bidding.

It was dark enough when they reached the outskirts of the settlement. It was the time when the natives and Chinese were at home by their cooking-fires. Only a few children who played near the tumble-down wharf near Mee Cheung's, and a few mongrel dogs were about.

From the veranda of Mee Cheung's great rambling collection of buildings joined together, a stooping figure stood peering out at the newcomers. As Janney and Cantrell drew near, and brought the light from an open door to bear just beyond the figure, Janney remarked:

"That's old Mee himself—you let me handle him. He's one of these educated chinks that's had a high-up job in the old government, but went broke after the revolution—or got caught at graftin' and had to change his climate."

"I hear he's even been to college in the United States," said Cantrell.

"So they say—but that was years ago. He ain't one of the new crop of chinks that's at home these days, gittin' so educated they want to run China on new lines. No, Mee Cheung, he's an old-timer—and he's so smooth he just swims in oil."

"Oh, you have returned, Mr. Janney," said the old Chinese, as he recognized Janney in the yellow light spilling out across the veranda. "And it appears that you have found some of your friends."

The boss of Kroon's Island smoked a long-stemmed iron pipe. He wore a black skull-cap with a button on top, a blouse of white silk frogged with embroidered loops, blue trousers that were loose except wher tightly wrapped about his thin ankles. His brocaded felt shoes padded softly over the veranda flooring as he stepped aside to make way for his visitors.

"Yes, I'm back, Mee," said Janney.

"Mr. Cantrell here—a friend of mine. He's all right—goin' back to my island in the *Messenger* with these servants of his."

"The servants should go round to the back," said Mee Cheung. "They can have supper there, and——"

"Let 'em go right in the front way, Mee," said Janney. "It's a favor to me—not on exhibition with these boys, even with your pantry-help."

Mee Cheung turned and gave attention to the natives with the burdens, as they halted before the open door. He sensed something covert in Janney's words—and knew at once that secrecy was wanted with these strange natives.

"Ah!" said Mee Cheung. "Where did you catch these new boys?"

Janney winced at the question. He put a hand on Mee Cheung's arm and drew him aside into the darkness. For a few minutes they whispered. Mee Cheung came back to the door, nodding, and led the way inside. Cantrell gestured to his natives to follow, and they passed inside and the door closed after them.

Cantrell found himself in a great barn-like structure, lighted dimly by an oil lamp that swung from the exposed rafters. The place had not been built at one time, but had actually grown up section by section, spreading itself out from the center to sides and ends with new roofs. Original walls of *attap* had been torn out, the supporting bamboo pillars being left in place to hold up the ends of the new roofs. And the flooring, here of split bamboo laid down unevenly, there of rough boards nailed on the beams, made a queer, chess-board pattern, new and older spots revealing the growth of the building.

"This looks more like a convention-hall than a store," remarked the amazed Cantrell as he walked along with Janney.

"It's a little of everything," said the planter. "You can get chow here—see them tables over there—and a bed up in the half-decks. Oh, Mee's got a swell resort here—ought to see the place when it's full of the crews of twenty tradin' schooners in the bay—and the lot of the gang roarin' drunk."

"Why, it's a town in itself—under a roof," said Cantrell. "A town of hidden alleys, and by-ways, and dark corridors—I—I never saw the like of——"

"Don't show too much interest, if you're wise," whispered Janney. "Of course, compliment him when the chance comes, but don't hint that it's a good place for hidin' away—or anything mysterious like that. Business—that's what it is—" and Janney winked.

Cantrell nodded, but his eyes continued to rove about. From the various gables overhead, joining together at crazy angles, big bamboo poles came down, so that the great central room, some two hundred feet from wall to wall both ways, was a forest of pillars. In fact, it was difficult to tell just where the actual walls were, for between various partitions that jutted out into the room, there were shelves loaded with bolts of cloth and trade goods of all descriptions. Then, above these shelves, running all around, there were platforms that overhung the big room, forming balconies on all sides, these balconies supported by their lines of baboo poles going through the flooring. And up on these balconies there were squared walls of split bamboo that were protected by a rude railing. Under the balconies there were bamboo ladders leading up — Cantrell judged that the squared places were rooms of a sort and that each had its own ladder.

As they drew near the back of the place, this on the sea-side of the room, Cantrell saw curtains of trade-cloth of various tints hanging down—some faded and mottled at their bottoms, where they absorbed the moisture from the tides that played under the flooring at that end of the building. He heard a soft murmur of washing water, and through it a scratching sound that puzzled him—until he recognized it as the claws of crabs and other sea-scavengers, running and crawling over the coral under the rough boards.

NOW there came the subdued chatter of Chinese voices from the back. Mee Cheung sang out something in Chinese, and the chattering ceased abruptly. These men, Cantrell was sure, would be the cooks and other servants, dallying over their supper in the cook-houses out over the water, stuck up on piles. He caught the aroma of queer dishes being cooked—and the reek of rotting kitchen waste and tidal mud.

Mee Cheung brought them to a wall of latticed bamboo, and opened a door that swung gratingly against the floor as it was opened. It hung on rattan hinges. Cantrell looked in—there was no other way out,

but the partitions did not go up to the rafters. There were a few native mats inside, and a brass chest.

"This will make a suitable place for your servants," said Mee Cheung, stepping aside.

Janney pushed Rikki in, and Aleck, with a startled glance over his shoulder, followed. Cantrell went inside, and unlocked the chains so that the bundles might be put down.

"Master," said Rikki, when his hands were free, and he chafed them together, "more better you not sell us this fella."

He pointed to Janney.

"Now listen to the blasted fool shoot off his mouth!" said Janney under his breath to Cantrell. "That was a fine remark to make—here and now!"

Mee Cheung, who stood in the doorway, a trifle to one side, opened his eyes, and the trace of a smile haunted the corners of his old lips.

Cantrell laughed.

"I'm not selling you, Rikki. Where'd you get that idea? Just because you saw me give Janney change for our passage in his schooner? Don't be foolish."

He was talking now mostly for the benefit of the wise old yellow man.

"I hear two fella you talk back in jungle," insisted Rikki. "Me know—you sell for plenty cash, this fella give you."

"Don't be fool boy—like woman!" said Cantrell sharply. "We all go everybody in boat to your place one more night come."

Rikki reached to his loin-cloth and drew something out.

"I same kind fella-man you," he said soberly, fingering the object he held in his hand.

"Oh, shut your face!" growled Janney. "What you talk it you be white man master!"

Rikki paid no attention to Janney, but went on to Cantrell.

"For me, same God you got all time—we brother-man—and not so good you sell us. Nobody like that—and God for both of us be make mad to you."

"What's he talkin' about, anyway?" demanded the infuriated Janney. "Give him a belt across the mouth—and shut it up *for* him—for keeps!"

"No talk-it more!" urged Cantrell to Rikki. "One more night, we go place to stay— your place, where come from, and——"

"Look-see!" said Rikki, excitedly, thrusting his hand forward. "I know your God—long time I pray at Him—and he save my soul plenty. For die good, I make myself Christian—all same God you have got!"

He held up a shining metallic object—and Cantrell saw now what it was—a small crucifix.

"Wow!" cried Janney, bursting into derisive laughter as he understood now what Rikki was pleading.

Slapping the amazed Cantrell on the back, the planter went on:

"Civilized, eh? Converted, eh? Well, I'll say one thing for you—your goods are up to your claims! Civilized! I'll say he is! With that thing there—stole it off a missionary, or bought it at a thousand per cent. profit! Why, man, he thinks it's a charm! Now, that's what I call civilized—so civilized he wants to stop a business deal with a piece of pewter! Ho, ho, ho! The joke's on you, Cantrell!" and he threw back his head and hooted derision to the rafters, causing the wall-lizards to scurry for cover and send down upon the men a shower of sooty dust.

"What is this that fills Mr. Janney with so much glee?" asked Mee Cheung, leaning forward and peering into the room. The glinting light over his shoulders struck upon the crucifix, and he knew it for what it was. "Ah! I see! These men you buy and sell, are like yourselves, Christians. That is something for a philosopher to think about. Myself, being a heathen, as your missionaries put it, would be proud if they could witness what is before our eyes—and to test the potency of this sacred object in the hands of a savage — to test its strength, man to man, Christian to Christian."

And he allowed himself the luxury of a gurgling chuckle that shook the pouch-pocket hanging from the front of his belt.

"You might have some chow sent in to them," said Cantrell to the Chinese. "I'm not selling these men—that's a silly notion Rikki got into his head. You know how these wild people are. This chap—he's worked for missionaries, and because he can talk a little English they try to take advantage of me in a strange place, before strangers. They'd like a chance to run away from me, now that I've paid 'em their wages in advance. So I have to keep them tied up in a settlement like this, or they'd be into the jungle like cats. It's all bosh, this idea of

my selling them—you understand, Mee Cheung?"

"Oh, I understand fully," said Mee Cheeung. "Give it not a second thought, my guest—and I never interfere in matters pertaining to—what might be called religion."

Again he chuckled, and his thin shoulders shook under his loose blouse.

Cantrell came out, and Janney, eager to have the discussion ended, pressed shut the rasping door upon the prisoners.

"Send 'em in some chow, and cut this foolishness," he growled to Mee Cheung. "I've got a bill of goods to go over with you—to have loaded early in the mornin'."

"Not sell us, master!" came the cry from Rikki. "You not sell us this fella——!"

Cantrell cracked his whip.

"No more talk!" he commanded loudly, "or I'll civilize you proper!" and Rikki fell silent.

"We need a bite of supper," said Janney, as he moved back toward the tables under the lamp.

Mee Cheung called an order in Chinese to the back of the building, and was answered in the same tongue.

CANTRELL, following the merchant and the planter, looked about him as he proceeded. There was a big teak bar at the back of the room, and behind it a mirror with a shattered hole in the corner of the glass. Evidently some of Mee Cheung's patrons had made a "bull's-eye" with an object hurled at his dispenser of drinks. On the shelves behind this bar there were rows of square-shouldered green bottles of trade-gin, and various other kinds of liquors.

Janney brought up at a table and sat down in a wicker chair. Cantrell threw his whip on the floor at his feet, pulled off his helmet and sat down across from the planter.

"My servants will be here presently with the best food in the poor house of mine," said Mee Cheung, as he stood rubbing his thin, long-nailed fingers.

"Oh, sit down along with us," said Janney, in hearty good fellowship. "You're a good old sport, Mee—I'd do anything for you, just as you'd do the same for me? Ain't that right? You're chink, but you're a gent."

Mee Cheung's eyes smiled—only his eyes. He pulled reflectively at the long hairs at the ends of his upper lip—drooping hairs, that formed an infinitesimal feeler-like pair of mustaches at each side of his mouth.

"I am flattered to be made a guest in my own house," said Mee Cheung, and Cantrell caught that amused twinkle once more as the Chinese bowed and took a chair.

"You have an excellent place for business here," commented Cantrell. "Ought to be profitable—when things are humming."

"The business is not so good as one might think," said the merchant. "There are losses not to be found in more law-protected communities."

"Aw, you make good money," said Janney. "I'll bet you show a thousand per cent. a year!"

Mee Cheung permitted himself the ghost of a smile.

"If that were true Mr. Janney, I should not be retiring."

"Huh! You been sellin' out for the last four years!" said the planter. "You got a good graft here, and you'll keep it, or I miss my guess."

"It is true that I am selling," persisted Mee Cheung. "I have enough money for my jade years. As my people say—'Cash strings rotting and grain becoming musty,' which signifies great wealth. I have not yet attained to such position, but I have enough for my simple needs. And why should I remain in this hole, when the duration of a man's life is fixed, and there are joys waiting for me in the land of my ancestors?"

"Couldn't drive you back to China with a field-battery," remarked Janney as he lighted a cigar.

"Without attempting to contradict you, nevertheless what I say is true," replied Mee Cheung, with his habitual mildness. "I have grown tired of remaining here, and risking the perils of no proper protection against the rude characters who come here in ships."

Janney laughed.

"Why, you police the place yourself with a lot of husky chinks. If I thought you meant business in this sell-out talk, I'd think of buyin' myself, and——"

"The cash to pay me is already in the settlement—the man arrived with it three days back. He is living up at the far end of the settlement, in a new house he has already bought. And only today he was going over the stock."

"You mean there is a white man in the place?" asked Cantrell, with a quick glance at Janney.

"A white man, yes," said Mee Cheung. "He might be called that, I presume, though he is dark. From Java he has come, where he has been long in business, and has prospered. Dutch—but he has some native blood."

"Oh, a half-caste," said Cantrell. "And from the Dutch colonies."

He was relieved at knowledge that he did not have to consider seriously the presence of a white man who might ask questions or hear dangerous gossip.

"So he brought a lot of cash, eh?" said Janney.

"Enough to buy—or so he represents," said Mee Cheung. "He already knew my price. This time I shall sell—and in a week I shall be waiting for a boat to take me to Hongkong."

"You'd better go in a coast-guard cutter—or a gun-boat," suggested Janney. "With all that money——"

"Your advice is precious," said Mee Cheung with a respectful nod. "A coast-guard cutter will be here before long."

Janney shot a look at Cantrell.

"Why, Mee Cheung, there ain't a cutter due for two months, in the regular run of things!"

"The regular time is two months in the future, yes," admitted the merchant gravely. "But I have sent word for it to come myself—as a matter of protection."

"Protection from what?" asked Cantrell, sensing something more behind the words of the Chinese than Janney had yet grasped.

"From Tai Lok, the Chinese pirate—he has been raiding again, at nearby islands."

"Tai Lok!" exclaimed Janney. "No! Is he at it again?"

"What have you heard?" pressed Cantrell, leaning over the table toward the Chinese. "Why, the last I heard, months ago, was that Tai Lok had been killed in a fight off Hongkong—his crew against a British sloop-of-war!"

"That was the report, yes," assented Mee Cheung. "But Tai Lok has been killed many times. Still, it appears that he remains alive, and we merchants must have some protection—and also, gentlemen like you, and Mr. Janney—schooners, plantations, and, at times—native servants."

He chuckled at his sly joke.

"But why should Tai Lok raid a poor settlement like this?" asked Janney. "Nothing much to loot, but your place!"

"These trade-goods are a heavy investment," said Mee Cheung, waving a hand toward his loaded shelves. "And, you, Mr. Janney—have a schooner. You know that Tai Lok needs schooners in his business. So it is always the poor places that suffer the most from these pirates—we have the least protection from the government."

"Seems to me Kroon's Island would be pretty poor picking, at that," remarked Cantrell. "Not that I mean to belittle your stock, Mee Cheung—but a pirate like Tai Lok—he ought to strike for bigger hauls."

"The wall of China was built a stone at a time," said Mee Cheung sententiously. "A raid here, and a raid there—it is better to raid and get away with small loot, to raid again, than to try for bigger hauls. Too much ambition is not good for a pirate—it is in such ways that he risks most the possibility of meeting his ancestors at the execution grounds."

"Where'd you git this word about Tai Lok?" asked Janney. "It's all news to me—and you never said a word while I was here today. This stuff about a cutter comin', too. Why didn't you let me know sooner?"

"I did not wish to alarm you unduly. As to the source of my information, I must keep that to myself. We Chinese have ways of learning things—and you must credit me with some ability to outwit a barbarous man like Tai Lok. Even though this countryman of mine is so near to being a snake that it is said of him that when he is not under human observation he crawls on his belly, he has not all the wisdom under his cap. I have not made my poor fortune by gazing at the stars. And as it was myself that sent word for the cutter to keep watch of this place, I am sure of my safety."

"You're a wise old bird, I'll say!" said Janney. "You know, Mee Cheung, I'll bet there ain't a cutter due at all—and you ain't sent for one. You just passed out the word that a cutter's on the way so you can slip out with your cash—after sellin' out to this Dutchy from Java."

"My riches will not be so great," said Mee Cheung, now smiling openly. "Still, as they say in my country of a man who is in dire poverty, there is something in my stove besides frogs."

"You are more than a merchant. You

are a philosopher," said Cantrell, observing that bowls of rice and bottles of water were being taken to the room which held his prisoners.

MEE CHEUNG refilled the bowl of his iron pipe. His gaze now was in the rafters.

"Mr. Cantrell, I have spent long years studying the classics of my country with my simple brain. I am not a man of learning—and with your missionaries, I am only a heathen."

"Oh, don't take our missionaries too seriously," laughed Cantrell. "A lot of holier-than-thou folks. Really, Mee Cheung, with your knowledge of our civilization, and the men you have met in my country, you must know that our missionaries are a poor lot to represent us. We laugh at them—and know them for what they are out here—a lot of grafters!"

"What we should call *cumshaw*—that is what they want, eh?" said Mee Cheung as he set his pipe going with a match. "Yes, Mr. Cantrell—I have seen many of your people in their home-land. And I have seen many Christians in these islands. I have had ample opportunity for observation. And without any slight on your people, or your religion—" he bowed his head forward until the button on the top of his cap glinted in the light of the swinging lamp over them —"I am satisfied to remain a heathen."

Janney laughed uproariously.

"You'll git along all right, Mee. But, now that we've settled this matter of religion, and agree on missionaries, here comes the chow. I'm ready to eat."

Two big Chinese advanced from the back of the building with trays of food and placed them before Cantrell and Janney.

"If these husky chaps are a sample of your servants, Mee Cheung," said Cantrell with a laugh, "you manage to keep order pretty well, I'd say, no matter how many rude sailors may come to your place."

"It is necessary that I do not have weaklings in my castle," said Mee Cheung. "My men are loyal, and do nothing to deceive me—as we say in China of truthful servants, these do not point out a deer as a horse."

"And I'd say they can fight, as well as serve a table," said Cantrell, observing the powerful build of the two men, who wore their cues respectfully down their backs.

"Yes," said Mee Cheung, laughing gently, "if turbulent men come here expecting to have their way, they had better climb up a tree to look for fish."

"Ain't you the kidder!" laughed Janney as he attacked his soup of bamboo-shoots with a brass spoon. "Say, you know, Cantrell, we folks don't always understand just what jokers a lot of chinks can be—when you git to know 'em intimate, like you and myself know Mee Cheung. Lot o' savvy, that's what a educated chink has!"

Mee Cheung smiled at Cantrell, a knowing gleam in his old eyes.

"You are full of compliments, Mr. Janney. But you flatter me—after all, I am only a heathen engaged in trade. And while you gentlemen eat of my poor fare, I might be busy over the list of goods you'll want to take away."

"All right—that's a good idea," said Janney, and extracting a folded paper from his inside coat pocket, handed it over.

Mee Cheung studied the list through iron-rimmed spectacles.

"It is a lot of goods," he remarked. "You will be late getting away with your schooner—unless you load early in the morning."

"That's just what I'll do. And," he added, with a look to Cantrell, "I'll be away before the cutter comes."

"Your schooner, then—it comes back by daylight tomorrow?"

"She'll be off the reef a little after midnight—to come in with the first light," said Janney.

"Oh, that is good," said Mee Cheung. "Surely, you ought to be well away before the cutter comes."

"I ain't afraid of the cutter," said Janney curtly.

"No—but it would be awkward for all of us if the cutter should come before these men in the back room are gone," said Mee Cheung. "If these natives should make trouble—that was what I was thinking of—with the cutter people in port. I, for my part, should not want to be scandalized before the cutter officers, and have them think I had a hand in hiding the men for you. It would be hard to explain, these——"

And he jerked a hand toward the door at the back.

"Ain't I told you not to worry about them natives?" demanded Janney. "They ain't

mine -- and they're goin' along with Cantrell."

"I trust you take no offense because I consider your interests," said Mee Cheung gently.

"Offense, no!" retorted Janney irritably through a mouthful of food, his knife and fork poised over his plate. "But what you want to keep harpin' on this thing? I'm sick of it—all because a couple of jungle savages can shoot off their mouths in English! I ain't responsible for what they say—and I'd just as soon say that to the cutter officers, too!"

"Certainly, you are not responsible, my friend," said the merchant, and getting up, he left the table for one in the corner which served him for a desk. He began clicking his abacus board, totaling up the sums called for in Janney's list of supplies.

"Some folks git an idea in their heads, and can't git it out," Janney grumbled to Cantrell. Then, he added in a cautious whisper, "But don't worry about the chink. Look at the cash I'm puttin' his way. He's safe enough."

"He's right about the cutter, though," said Cantrell. "You ought to be clear away with your men before the cutter's here."

"Oh, I can load in two hours. And come to that, if the cutter's in sight at daylight, I can slip away, even if I have to come back. In that case, I'll leave the natives hidden in the jungle ——"

"Master, you not sell us!" broke in the piping voice of Rikki through the lattice door.

"Do you want the whip?" cried Cantrell.

"Must we sleep through the night with the clacking of these wild men?" asked Mee Cheung.

"I'll guarantee to keep 'em still," said Cantrell.

"It is luck that my poor house harbors no other guests tonight, otherwise somebody would sleep in the jungle. This is something new to me—turning my house into a cage for jungle animals."

Cantrell laughed.

"You're accustomed to more racket than the pair of natives'll make, Mee Cheung."

"True," admitted the merchant. "But one can stand the rattle of a bottle on the bar all night, when with it is the rattle of falling cash. What man can seek sleep when he is being made rich by the clatter of coin?"

The abacus resumed its clicking.

"You'll git yours, all right," laughed Janney. "Right now, you're tackin' on an extra profit for the use of the back room."

But Mee Cheung was bent too far over his abacus to hear—or reply. And while Cantrell and Janney, their meal finished, sat and smoked, the merchant continued his noisy figuring.

THEY were ready for bed early, and Mee Cheung conducted them up a ladder to one of the little square rooms on the balcony, where he lighted a chimneyless brass lamp. The place was cell-like, with only a rude cot, a table, and pegs driven into the bamboo joists that held the *swale* walls in place. A narrow little door led to the balcony-edge, and the only other way in or out was through the hatch which held the ladder-top.

This first room was given to Janney, and the one adjoining, furnished with the same crude simplicity, was given to Cantrell. Mee Cheung left when he had apologized for the poor quarters, assuring his guests that he would see to it that the prisoners below were carefully guarded.

Cantrell undressed and got to bed. He was well satisfied with the results of the day; he had his natives off his hands, and the profit they had made for him in his pockets.

"Janney'll be away in the morning in his schooner, and I'll loaf it here until some vessel comes along to pick me up for a suitable port. Then I'll get another pair like those below," he told himself, as he laid his automatic close at hand on the little table, and put a pocket battery-light under the mat pillow.

He had no trouble in getting to sleep at once. But it did not seem to him that he had been asleep long when he was disturbed by the creaking of a ladder—not his own, he judged, but one beyond.

"That's Janney, fussing around to make sure his natives are not loose," he reasoned. He turned over and went back to sleep.

Some time later the creaking of a ladder again roused Cantrell. He listened carefully this time, for it seemed he had not been back asleep more than ten minutes since Janney's last descent of the ladder.

"That fool!" he muttered. "He'll fret all night! Is he going to keep me awake trotting up and down his ladder? Why, only a few minutes ago he was down—or I sleep an hour and think it's a few minutes."

He heard cautious footsteps cross the rickety boards of the flooring below.

"Bare feet—or stockings," he decided, and waited to hear the door open to the room where Rikki and Aleck were confined. That, Cantrell knew, would make a racket in spite of all caution, for the door was badly hung, and was made fast with rattans tied about a primitive latch.

But he heard nothing of an attempt to enter the prison-room. All that came to his straining ears was the sound of cautious footfalls below—and then silence.

Turning quietly in his bed, Cantrell got his hand on his watch under his pillow. Then he drew out his battery-lamp and turned it on the dial of the watch. He saw that it was a quarter after three.

"Later than I thought," he mused. "But I'll check the time on him if he goes down again, and see how often he makes the trip below."

Then, as he waited in the dark for Janney to come up again, fell into a drowse.

The third time—and in what seemed to Cantrell but a few minutes—he was awakened by the same faint creaking of a ladder.

"That'll be Janney coming back," he told himself, and once more put the glow of his battery-lamp on his watch.

"Nearly a quarter to four!" he gasped. "Oh, well, it's not so bad, his running around, so——"

The thought ended abruptly and shifted to a new phase—and something that brought him awake in earnest now. For Cantrell felt a sudden alarm at this new idea which had come to him.

"How's this?" he asked himself mentally. "Has Janney been below all this time—since I heard him go below half an hour ago?"

He snapped out the lamp and sat up in bed, chills running up and down his spine as he realized at last that the secret ramblings of Janney might have more meaning in them than a mere worry about the security of the imprisoned natives.

'Janney's up to something!" he decided, keeping on the alert as he heard the rounds of the ladder creak under the pressure of feet—a round at a time, with a pause between each step that revealed extreme care against being discovered.

Presently the split-bamboo flooring of the outside balcony responded to the pressure of a man walking over it with careful steps. What was Janney doing outside his room? If he had come up through his own hatch, on his own ladder, what was he doing out on the narrow rim of balcony.

"Maybe he's coming in here—to rob me and kill——"

But Cantrell abandoned that theory at once, for he heard Janney's bed creak as the planter sank down upon it.

Cantrell waited a few minutes while he turned the situation over in his mind. He knew that it was natural for him to be a trifle nervous in such a strange place.

"But I'm not nervous," he reasoned. "And there's no excuse for Janney running up and down so much. What's more—I've heard him go down three times, but *I've only heard him come back once!*"

He determined to let Janney know that something needed explaining. "Oh, Janney!" he called, in a raucous whisper.

"What is it?" came the prompt response in a low tone. It was obvious that Janney, too, was awake.

"Come over to my room—and keep quiet—without a light."

"Why, what's up with you?"

"Never mind—keep quiet—but come along. I'll open my door for you—to the balcony."

There was a sound of furtive movements in the next room. Cantrell got up and opened the door. In a minute Janney came feeling his way along the narrow runway on the outside of the railed balcony.

Cantrell put out a hand, and seizing Janney's arm in the blackness, drew him inside.

"Don't peep!" cautioned the slave-dealer. "There's something I don't understand about this place—and I want to ask you some questions."

"Everything seems all right to me," said Janney sleepily. "What you want to chew the rag about?"

But he kept his voice down to a whisper.

"You've just been down below, haven't you?"

"Sure. Had a look round to make sure the natives're all safe."

"I heard you go and come back. But you were gone a long time—more than half an hour."

Janney was silent for a couple of minutes.

"I don't git you," he protested. "You must be balmy. I wa'n't gone more'n five—no, I'd swear—not three minutes."

"I timed you with my watch—and you're not telling the truth."

CANTRELL heard the planter catch his breath—whether in surprize or anger, Cantrell had no way of knowing. He wished now that he had not told Janney so much—and had not accused Janney of untruth. For if Janney were really telling a lie, there was some object behind it, and if Janney was not playing fair he would have an opportunity to lie himself out of a hole.

"Now that he knows I suspect him, he'll cut the cloth to fit the coat of a new story," reasoned Cantrell to himself.

"What's the matter with you, anyway?" grumbled the planter. "Have you got the jumps?"

"Keep your voice low, please," warned Cantrell.

He glided back into the darkness and got his hand on an automatic.

"No, I haven't got the jumps—I've been sleeping soundly enough, except when you ran up and down your ladder all night. It's you that's got the jumps, I'd say—in and out of your room half a dozen times."

Cantrell purposely exaggerated, just to see how the planter would react—and what kind of excuse he would offer.

"That's a funny thing for you to say at me," whispered Janney promptly.

He seemed suddenly awake, and very much on the alert.

"Nothing funny about it," went on Cantrell. "The funny part is, you've spent the night on the ladder."

"Why—I don't git you at all! I—I only been down once—and I just got back. I stepped out on the balcony to see if I could make out that room in the dark. But I ain't been runnin' up and down at all. Say, what's eatin' of you, anyway?"

It was Cantrell's turn to keep silent for a time. It had struck him that if Janney could lie with such apparent frankness, Janney was really dangerous—and that if Janney happened to be telling the truth there was some covert danger threatening both of them.

"Well, maybe I've been dreaming," said Cantrell.

He knew better, but he wanted more time to deal with the situation. It was possible that, after all, Janney was up to some mischief.

"Somebody's dreamin'," agreed the planter. "I ain't lost a wink of sleep since I turned in. I thought, just a while back, that I heard somethin' movin' around on the floor below, and thinkin' our two birds might try to fly the coop, I took a look—or rather, a listen. I didn't do nothin' but go to their door—and heard both of 'em snoozin' like Turks. So they ain't gone."

"So you heard something below, eh? Maybe *you* were dreaming. What I want to know is what did you hear in the first place—that made you go below?"

"Oh, I don't know exactly what it was," said the planter. "Now that you ask, I'd say it sounded like somebody goin' down a ladder. Thought at first it might be you, and didn't think much of it—y' see, I ain't watchin' you, like you're watchin' me."

"I'm not watching you," asserted Cantrell. "I'm not a bit concerned about you—or afraid of you, Janney. Just bear that in mind. But there's something going on—and too many people moving around. And the more I think of it, the more——"

He checked his words, not being sure he could trust Janney fully.

"Go ahead," said the planter. "What was you goin' to say?"

Cantrell had a sudden feeling that Janney was honest with him, even though a trifle irritated with the suspicions of his companion.

"I was going to say," resumed the younger man, "that all the ladder-noises I've heard, were all going down, and none coming back—except this last time, when it was you. We've both heard noises—and each thought it was the other. Does that strike you as a little strange?"

"Gosh!" breathed Janney, really startled, and now most careful not to be heard outside the room. "That gives me the creeps! Why, there ain't only two of us up here on this half-deck!"

"But you say you've only been down once."

"Sure, it was only once. I'm on the dead level about this, Cantrell—and I don't like this stuff you're tellin' me no more'n you do. One white man to another, we got to have confidence, man to man, or we'll run into somethin' that'll put both of us against the wall!"

Cantrell was convinced now that Janney was honestly alarmed.

"All right—I'll take your word—even if

it did look queer. And unless I'm over-nervous from the Chink's tea last night, we're in for something."

"What you think it is?"

"Don't know. But I do know this—*there's more than two of us in these sleeping rooms!*"

"Gosh!" breathed Janney. "I guess——"

"Listen a minute!" warned Cantrell.

They checked their breathing and stood silent in the unbroken blackness, attempting to analyze the night-noises of the great building.

ABOVE the low murmur of the surf on the reef outside, and the rustlings of the nearby palms—tiny frettings of the thatch-leaves of the roof lifted by the first of the stirring of the morning breeze—they caught other sounds which they could not identify. They knew the intermittent rasping of the feet of wall-lizards, and the soft whirring now and then of gauzy wings which marked the movements of fly-hunting bats far up in the rafters. At times a board creaked in response to the movement of water under the cook-houses attached to the rear of the place. All these sounds they heard—and knew for what they were. But the others held a subtle menace.

Cantrell shivered. It seemed to him that many feet were moving about below almost soundlessly. They could not actually be heard, yet with the peculiar pattering that goes with bare feet and the soft breathing of human beings in movement, there came to Cantrell's ears a peculiarly queer series of bumpings against the bamboo pillars. He seemed to get it by a vibration of the building, downward from the rafters rather than upward from the flooring. Yet through it all there was no creaking of the boards such as would normally betray people moving over them, no proper volume of noise to be expected of several persons groping about in the dark. But he could swear that the place swarmed with moving bodies.

"Do you hear anything?" he whispered in Janney's ear.

"Can't say that I do—and I'd just as soon say I can," replied the puzzled planter. "It ain't so much that I *hear* anything goin' around, but I kind o' *feel* it."

"That's the way I get it," agreed Cantrell.

"This old barracks just shakes in the wind, that's all," said Janney in a thin whisper, eager to explain away his fears. "I guess that's what lifts our hair—and you started me off by givin' me a jolt by diggin' me out of my bunk when I was half-asleep. Looks to me as if I've caught what ails you, and you're jumpy."

Cantrell gave Janney's arm a quick squeeze.

"Now!" breathed the young man. "It's gone! Nothing more of it below—but the breeze outside—it's just the same. But *that* which we felt—I don't get it any more!"

"I guess we're a pair of fools," whispered Janney after he had listened a few minutes. "Yes, whatever it was we got, it's gone."

"And I'd take my oath that at least fifty men have been stirring around this place all night," said Cantrell after another minute of listening. "I don't sense them here any more, but something was here all around us."

"I'll git back to bed," said Janney, "or I won't want to rouse out in the mornin'——"

He broke off, for at that instant the musical tinkle of a bell, faint and in the distance, reached them.

"That's the *Messenger* back!" whispered Janney. "Her eight bells. Good! She's on time—and probably at anchor already. So don't you worry, it'll be daylight in two hours. I guess we ain't got anything to bother about, but if you hear anything again, give me a call. Soper, my mate, he's where we could git him if there was any need to git help."

He moved away from Cantrell, and the latter groped his way back to bed.

Cantrell could not get back to sleep. His senses were so highly strung now that he found himself unnaturally on the alert, hearing every little sound, and either attempting to define its meaning, or investing it with meanings which probably did not belong to it. He heard nothing more of the ladder-creakings, but at one time he thought he felt again that strange inner knowledge that people were moving about below in the dark.

"I certainly am lit up," he told himself wearily. "I wish I'd slept without hearing anything at all. It's quite likely that what I've heard—and hear—is natural enough. This rambling, ramshackle old building, tied together with rattans and spiked together with bamboo pins, just naturally

shakes like a jelly and breeds noises. Perhaps it was the wind, after all. Confound the place! Never got into such a spooky joint in all my wandering around in these islands! I'll be glad to get away."

He turned over and tried to dismiss from his mind his intangible fears. But he remained as wide awake as if it were midday. Finally, satisfied that he needed something to soothe his jangled nerves, he struck a match as quietly as he could and lighted a cigaret.

As he smoked in the darkness, his eyes on the glowing and waning fire of his cigaret, he heard something which startled him anew. Not inside the building this time, but outside—and, so far as he could judge, at some distance up the straggling single street of the native town.

It was a sharp, but careful whistle, prolonged, and to Cantrell's worried mind fraught with something akin to a secret message for ears which could alone understand it.

"Doggone it!" he whispered. "I rather think Janney's right: I've got a fine case of the jumps! That was probably the call of a bird, and I make a signal out of it! Anyway, one thing to be thankful for—it's getting on to daylight, and maybe I'll have some rest then."

But that whistle came again—low, insinuating, cautioning—and charged with a kind of assurance as might be found in the "All's well" of a distant sentry calling the hours through the night.

And again another whistle—this time, strangely enough, from seaward.

"By George!" muttered Cantrell. "I believe I'm right! That sounds like an answer to the others—it is an answer!"

He sat up in bed, conscious of Janney's breathing in the next room. He was thoroughly on the alert again, and careless now of the creaking of his own bed.

A fourth whistle came—this time from another direction.

"That's a conversation in a secret code!" exclaimed Cantrell under his breath. "The natives are up to something that's under cover. I know well enough when I hear that kind of hidden talk being started before daylight! Whatever it is that's stirring, it's something that's not healthy for white men—and strangers, at that!"

There followed a period of normal silence. Cantrell, waiting for just one more whistle before waking Janney, smoked his cigaret and listened to catch the next mysterious signal.

But there was no more whistling. Instead, Cantrell gave a sudden jump in bed, for what he heard now was something that made him hold his breath in a panic of sudden fear.

It was a gunshot—in the distance.

"And from the sea!" breathed Cantrell. "What can that mean? Oh, Janney! Wake up!"

He called now openly, though he kept his voice low.

"It's all right! It's all right!" cried Janney, in a loud tone, and his bunk rattled as he shook himself. Then, grumblingly, "Is that you, Cantrell? Did you sing out?"

"Yes!" said Cantrell. "Don't make a racket—but listen!"

CANTRELL expected that he would hear some evidence from Mee Cheung as a result of Janney's waking yell, or the sound of the distant gunshot. But nothing from below indicated that the merchant or any of his servants had been aroused.

"You give me a start," came Janney's grumbling voice. "I thought I was dreamin' about a row in some place! Say! What's got you stirred up *this* time?"

"Whistles—and a shot—from seaward. Just you stop talking and listen yourself," urged Cantrell.

"Oh, you sure give me a pain," growled Janney. "You been hearin' things all night, like some old woman in a strange garret. I wish you'd cut out ——"

"If you'll only keep quiet!" pleaded Cantrell. "I tell you I'm not imagining what I've heard, so ——"

He was interrupted by a dozen shots from seaward; an irregular volley from various weapons, for the sharp cracks of a couple of rifles stood out above the duller reports of what must have been revolvers. And this ragged firing was followed immediately by a great chorus of yells, punctuated at intervals by more shots fired regularly but rapidly, as if some one had emptied a revolver without the trouble of taking aim.

Janney bounded from his bed.

"Why, that's the *Messenger!*" he cried, aghast at what he heard.

"That's the voice of Soper, my mate, we

heard! I'd know it in a million, and I heard him yell to the bo'sun to hold on where he was, so ——"

Cantrell heard him wildly scratching matches on the flooring. But the match sticks probably broke under his frantic fingers, for he fell to cursing because he could not get a light.

Cantrell turned on his battery-lamp, and finding his own box of safety matches, lighted the primitive brass lamp on the tiny table. In the light of the wavering flame he began to dress rapidly, while the racket from seaward went on. But before he had put on his shoes the sounds of firing had ceased, and the yelling slowly died out.

Now from below there came a great clamor. Mee Cheung's strident voice was raised in alarm and calling out in an excited cackle of Chinese to the cooks and other servants at the rear of the building. Their sleepy and startled shouts in reply lifted over the clattering of loose boards and the rattle of dislodged tins and kettles as the servants scrambled about in the darkness.

Cantrell, a pistol in each hand, hastened in to Janney's room. The planter had his own brass lamp burning now, and was in a frantic haste to get on his shoes and gather up his money-belt and revolvers.

"Don't tell old Mee we heard anything—before this!" whispered Cantrell. "Let him do the most of the talking—we don't know what's happened yet—so keep a close lip about the strange movements——"

"That shootin' was off my schooner!" cried Janney, in agonized tones as he furiously tied the laces of his shoes without waiting to run the ends through the holes. Sweat fell from his face and ran down on his collar. "I'd say Tai Lok has jumped the place!"

He pulled on his coat and broke open a packet of cartridges, stuffing them into his pockets loosely and totally disregarding the fact that he was smearing his coat with grease from the ammunition, and that as he pawed at his face to brush the perspiration out of his eyes, he was leaving black stripes over his countenance.

Cantrell, standing in the doorway of Janney's room, saw a match flickering in the darkness below, and then Mee Cheung's yellow old face in the glare. The merchant was chattering away in his sing-song Chinese, his thin face contorted in the shaking illumination of the hanging lamp—a face that was a mask of terror.

"What was all that racket outside, Mee?" called Cantrell.

"Tai Lok is upon us!" cried Mee Cheung. "We are lost! And the pirates have taken Mr. Janney's schooner. Now they'll strike the settlement, and burn and slay! Hurry below, and if you have arms, bring them, so you can fight for——"

He broke off to yell orders to half a dozen figures which had drawn near him. The lamp shot upward crazily on its chain, like a great bulbous rocket on a zigzag course as Mee Cheung hastily hauled on the cord that served as a halyard.

While the lamp swung to and fro, Mee Cheung danced about and uttered shrill commands, waving his hands in the air, his cue swinging loose from his head. He was clad in silk pajamas of pale blue, the loose trousers fluttering about his thin stockingless ankles above his embroidered felt shoes.

Cantrell and Janney dropped down the ladder, pistols and revolvers in their hands. With all the Chinese servants yelling, and Mee Cheung's excited voice shrieking out a gabble of orders, the place was a bedlam.

Then, above all this confused babble, Cantrell heard the rattle of gunfire again, this time close at hand, and without doubt up the street.

"They've landed and are shooting up the settlement!" he cried to Janney.

"We'll have to get into the mess!" said Janney grimly, caressing one of his revolvers to make sure it worked perfectly. "We'll give 'em more'n they looked for when they hit this dump!"

A great burst of yelling came from the native street. It was plainly the despairing cries of natives. The Chinese servants of Mee Cheung stopped in their tracks and listened an instant, their eyes wide with terror. They gave no heed now to what Mee Cheung was yelling at them, but, like a covey of birds taking alarm at the same time, bolted for the side doors and disappeared into the outside darkness.

Mee Cheung, with a wail of despair, collapsed into a chair.

"We can not fight now!" he cried, twisting his slender fingers in a frenzy of fear. "My men have deserted us! You must hide your weapons, and not resist, or we shall all be slain! I am ruined! Everything

will be taken by that fiendish Tai Lok—may his body be food for blackbirds!"

"Blast chinks, anyway!" said Janney. "Don't listen to the old clacker! I'll git my share of the pirates, I'll tell you that!" he added. "This is my party as much as it's Mee's. They've got my schooner, and maybe Soper's cashed in, and somebody'll pay off the score while I can hold a gun and draw a trigger!"

"I beg of you—do not fight!" pleaded Mee Cheung. "You do not know Tai Lok—he revenges——"

"Blasted good time to know him!" retorted Janney, making toward one of the doors. "I got a callin'-card in both hands, and what it spells you can read in the dark! What old Tai Lok can do is walk up this gangway in front of me—and under his feet he'll find yeller meat!"

CANTRELL moved to one of the doors which had swung open behind the fleeing servants. Against the blackness of the morning, he could see the blossom-like flashes from guns. Now a burning shack flared up, and in the light of the flaming thatch he could see dancing figures running about and screaming. The guns spoke at intervals, and other fires sprang up, pitted with black spots where open *kajangs* showed through to the edge of the jungle. In a few minutes the whole street on that side was illuminated, filled with naked figures in flight, while other bigger figures moved about, hacking at the fugitives or firing at them as hunters might shoot at running rabbits.

Suddenly Cantrell saw a group of the bigger men detach itself from the mêlée and race from the fires toward Mee Cheung's place. The young man pulled at a door to slam it shut, but Janney leaped to his side and restrained him, a revolver up for action.

"Give it to 'em as they come!" cried the planter. "And, Mee, haul down that blasted lamp so we won't have light at our backs! We want to croak slow—and shootin' with——"

Cantrell heard Janney's voice end in a series of muffled gasps, and was conscious that the planter was falling. As he turned, Cantrell himself was overwhelmed. Gigantic figures had jumped from behind a curtain and leaped upon him as they had upon Janney. The young man had a fleeting glimpse, before he was struck down, of powerful Chinese, naked to their waists, clad only in clouts of cloth and straw sandals tied to their bare feet.

"The gang that was inside!" gasped Cantrell, as his face struck the floor, and his hands were pinioned under big knees. He knew now that these were the men he had heard moving about in the night.

There was no chance to struggle. It seemed to Cantrell that every inch of his body was under a pressing weight, a trampling and a wrenching that sickened him. His pistols were torn from his hands with bone-breaking violence. There were words exchanged in Chinese, and the jarring of feet on the flooring. The group that was running toward Mee Cheung's when Cantrell and Janney were struck down, had arrived, and were jabbering at their confederates, gleeful over the success of the attack from ambush within the building.

As Cantrell was dragged to his feet by a dozen pair of hands, he saw Mee Cheung under the lamp, being bound to his chair, unresisting. And Janney, already up and being thrust about by another half-dozen Chinese, was being stripped of his belt by some, while others were lashing him to one of the upright bamboo supports of the roof.

Cantrell was hustled against a pillar, and while he was stripped of everything in his pockets and relieved of the canvas money-belt worn under the belt of his trousers, he was trussed to the big bamboo pole and wrapped round and round with soft hempen ropes. He became the center of a cocoon of hemp, which had for a central upright core the pillar which held him in place. Janney was not six feet away, and both of them were facing toward Mee Cheung.

Janney was spluttering bloodily, his lips cut and his nose streaming. Mee Cheung's black eyes blinked stoically, as he looked up at the Chinese who stood about and chattered, peering out at the doors from time to time to watch the progress of events in the burning settlement, now and then calling outlandish phrases to those who still remained in the street.

Then began a great rummaging at the shelves. Twenty of the pirates were dumping open chests, pulling bolts of cloth to the floor, combing behind the rows of stuff against the walls for hiding places of more valuable stores.

As they worked, they gabbled among themselves, now showing signs of satisfaction with what they found, now with

disgusted guttural cries kicking away from them some of the more despised trash.

But all the time three big fellows, serene and unconcerned, stood beside Mee Cheung, their eyes watching everything going on.

These appeared to be petty officers—leaders of these looting squads of Tai Lok. They were stripped for work like the others, but they had the air of authority and wore in their belts dangling collections of weapons. Revolvers hung from strings tied to their waist-cloths, daggers in sheaths, brass knives with curved ends. These fellows were fringed all round with the tools of their trade.

These three now fell to questioning Mee Cheung sharply, with threatening gestures toward the old man. Judging from his voice and manner, it seemed to Cantrell that the old man was protesting that he had no concealed treasure about the place. He was quiet in his answers, apparently reconciled to the disaster which had befallen him.

"Looks like we're done for!" said Janney thickly. "If them birds hadn't been behind us, I'd ha' drilled a few!"

"We certainly are in for it," said Cantrell, and then, as the three men went away and gabbled to the workers with the loot, he spoke to Mee Cheung cautiously—

"What have they got to say about the lot of us, Mee?"

"They are concerned only with the things of this world and the money that will come from their night's raid," said the merchant.

"Will they kill us?" asked Cantrell.

"What else may we expect?"

"But argue with 'em—scare 'em in some way. Tell 'em we're government officials! Anyway, tell 'em to take what we've got, but there's no necessity for killing us."

Mee Cheung smiled a wise, but sad smile.

"You do not know Tai Lok and his men. For myself, I know that I am already become a man of the past."

"Oh, buck up and show 'em a strong front!" urged Cantrell. "You know how to chin 'em and pull 'em along with some yarn. I didn't think you'd be such a quitter!"

"My name is already entered in the register of ghosts," said the merchant. "Our next sleep—it shall be on earth, with earth for a covering, my friends."

"But what'll they gain if they kill us!" argued Cantrell. "Janney and myself, we can't do anything, can't swear that Tai Lok had anything to do with it—yet. Does one of the big chaps happen to be Tai Lok?"

But the three leaders returned now to Mee Cheung, haranguing him again. He replied to their questioning with the meekness of a willing witness, with nothing of protest in his voice, and no sign of resistance. Though Cantrell and Janney could not understand the words, they were sure that Mee Cheung had given up all hope.

"He gives me the pip!" raged Janney. "If I could sling their lingo, I'd give 'em an earful, you bet!"

The three moved away again, this time to the back of the building, evidently seeking something which Mee Cheung had admitted might be found.

"What'd you say to 'em?" asked Cantrell.

"I asked them to spare us, as you suggested," replied Mee Cheung. "But to this request for mercy, I got no answer. There is a very bad omen for us in their frankness to me on other things. They have freely told of having slain and robbed the man from Java—he who came with cash to buy my property. And they have not killed you and Janney yet, because thinking you both belong to the schooner, they hope to learn something from you of the presence of other vessels in these waters. Only one thing I have told them—and that is of the coast-guard cutter being due here at any moment. Not that it will arrive in time to do us any good, but I have warned them of its coming, and that our deaths may be avenged."

"Lot of fat that'll put on our ribs," grumbled Janney.

"One of the three is Tai Lok?" asked Cantrell.

"No," said the merchant. "Tai Lok never shows himself in work of this kind, but remains in the background, directing the operations. From words they have dropped, I assume that Tai Lok is aboard a vessel outside; either in Mr. Janney's schooner or his own ship."

"They've got the *Messenger*, right enough then?" asked Janney.

"My companion in misery, your schooner is taken, and all on board slain."

"Well, old Soper checked off a few, you can gamble on that," said Janney.

BY THIS time the yelling and tumult up the street had ceased. A strange quietness had come over the settlement, in so far as human sounds were concerned. But there was noise enough of

other kinds; the burning shacks were popping like bunches of fire-crackers as the fire exploded the joints of bamboo in the buildings.

Cantrell now saw that the trio, who had gone away into the gloom of the back of the place, were opening the fastenings of the door which held the native prisoners bought by Janney.

"They'll finish off the poor jungle-men," said Cantrell.

"Maybe not," said Mee Cheung. "These pirates have peculiar whims. They slay, or give life, like very gods."

"I shouldn't think they'd bother their heads with natives," said Cantrell.

"They do not bother," said the merchant. "But every nook and cranny will be searched before the torch is used. I have told them by what occasion these two natives came to be held here—how they have been sold by you to Mr. Janney, and are only harmless folk who do not belong to this island."

"Oh, you did, eh?" said Cantrell. "Well, I don't see the use of telling these pirates our business, if they're set on killing us."

"I knew they would find the men. I told the pirates to give them their freedom, and not burn the place with living creatures in it. In this I told but the truth, and what does it avail a man, who already has the earth of his grave in his mouth, to conceal facts or tell lies?"

"Aw, what's the use of beefin' about it?" growled Janney. "Better be thinkin' up some way to git the upper hand. If we can't, we're gone geese."

"If only one of your missionaries were here to pray for your souls," said Mee Cheung.

"Maybe you'd like a parson of some kind to hold your hand while your throat is cut," sneered Janney.

Mee Cheung smiled.

"I have not forgotten how to pray, though I am a heathen. But you two gentlemen—I can well understand why you do not want a missionary. Your opinions of them, expressed only last evening, assures me that you feel competent to meet your gods without the benefits of your religion."

"I ain't askin' no odds of missionaries," said Janney. "I'd like to hear a gunboat off the reef, and the bark of a four-pounder, and all the prayer-books in the world can stay in the churches."

"And failing the gunboat?" inquired Mee Cheung.

"There ain't nothin' to do but die like a gent," said the planter. "I won't show yeller to a yeller man!"

"That's the ticket!" said Cantrell. "We'll bluff 'em out yet—act as if we've got something up our sleeves and— Now, what's this going on?"

The three leaders were returning with the two natives from the prison-room. The men showed no fear, but walked with heads up, their eyes taking in everything about them with frank curiosity. They acted as if they thought they had been rescued and were to be freed, for the muscles on their hands were being examined by the Chinese, and keys which had been taken from Cantrell were being tried in the tiny locks.

"They're going to turn 'em loose," said Cantrell.

"Yes," said Mee Cheung. "These pirates do not kill just for the joy of killing."

But the manacles were not removed at once. Instead, the two natives were brought close to Mee Cheung, and held while one of the pirates gabbled with Mee Cheung. While this conversation was going on, Rikki and Aleck, now puzzled and beginning to show alarm, blinked at the figures of Cantrell and Janney. As is the way with jungle people, their brows were ruffled as they attempted to think out some reason for the queer turn of events by which white men were bound and helpless.

Having settled some knotty point with Mee Cheung, the pirates now unlocked the steel gyves about the wrists of the two "slaves."

"I have just been informed," said Mee Cheung, "that the pirates have no intention of killing you gentlemen."

"That takes somethin' of a load off my mind," said Janney.

"Well, I'm also glad to hear that you've injected some sense into the heads of these chaps," declared Cantrell. "They ought to know that if we're killed, they'll get theirs until every gunboat on this side of the world has worn-out engines, maybe—but white men have to be protected."

"I would not put too much reliance on your gunboats," advised Mee Cheung. "I have convinced them that it will not be good for them to kill you."

"I guess, along with your arguments, they're a little afraid of the law, too," was Janney's observation.

"I fear that you two Christian gentlemen are not very consistent," said Mee Cheung.

"Both of you are breaking your own laws against slave-training and you are boasting of the protection of your laws. My friends, when Tai Lok is about, the law of the white man is not considered."

The gang that was rummaging through the scattered stock of the store suddenly became silent. At a word from one of the leaders, the pirates drew together in a half-circle just inside the zone of light from the lamp.

Now one of the leaders addressed them. They folded their arms and remained in a waiting attitude, their black eyes on the two white men. Their faces were passive, but Cantrell knew they were keenly interested in something about to happen according to some mysterious plan.

Already the dawn was breaking, and light was filtering in under the openings under the eaves of the thatched roofs. The big lamp's flame began to wane as the vague promise of a rising sun outside began to invade the gloomy old congery of buildings.

Rikki and Aleck were now freed of their steel bracelets, but were held in check by Chinese. The two natives stared about them, trying to understand what was going on.

One of the leaders plucked from his ruffle of weapons a brass dagger and put it into the hand of Aleck.

"What's that?" gasped Cantrell. "What's the meaning——"

"Be patient!" warned Mee Cheung. "Also, be careful! Do not stir the anger of these who are now in control here!"

"But why is this native being armed?"

The ghost of a smile hovered on Mee Cheung's lips.

"It is being done to test the strength of your civilization."

"Don't talk in riddles!" protested Cantrell. "What is——"

"There is no riddle about it," replied Mee Cheung. "Having told the pirates that these natives pleaded with you for freedom and claimed that their gods were your gods, the pirates consider it fair to you to have the matter put to a test."

"Test! Why, how can there be any test?"

"The pirates desire to make sure that your missionaries have converted these natives to your religion."

Cantrell thought his heart had stopped beating. He felt a great weakness come over him and his eyes clung to the brass knife in Aleck's hand.

"The natives are not Christians!" stormed Cantrell. "Because one, to get free, claimed to be converted, I'm not responsible for that! And it was the other who told that lie about being a Christian—Rikki! Use him for the test, if——!"

"Pirates do not draw fine lines in such matters," said Mee Cheung. "They regard the four of you as Christians—two white, two native. If the natives are really Christians, then you and Janney may live."

"You mean that if these savages want to murder us, they'll be allowed to kill us while we're tied, and——"

"Savages!" said Mee Cheung. "Why, they are not savages! If they really were, you'd never have caught them. They would have been too wild. They learned to trust white men—learned from the missionaries. The pirates wish to find out just how well your missionaries did the job of civilizing these two."

"It's not fair!" yelled Cantrell. "It's a trick—a lot of ghastly fooling!"

"Fooling—yes, perhaps," said Mee Cheung. "But not so foolish, as we look upon it. You brought these men here, so if it is foolish, you brought with you, all unknowing, your doom."

"But it's murder!" protested Cantrell, as he saw Aleck, gripping the knife and looking at him, with the killing-lust in his eyes.

"Murder, maybe," admitted Mee Cheung. "But not murder by pirates. If it is what you call it, then your gods and your missionaries are responsible."

Aleck, the dagger held before him, was thrust toward Cantrell by the pirates.

Rikki, held back, began to jabber excitedly to Aleck.

"He'll knife the both of us!" cried Janney, writhing in his rope-wrappings.

Aleck, who had started toward Cantrell, but was really closer to Janney, stopped at sound of the planter's voice, and hesitated. Then he moved toward Janney.

"Call him off!" the planter shouted to Cantrell. "You can stop him! Scare him out of this, and——"

Cantrell opened his mouth to say something — anything — to deflect the native from his course. But Aleck, moving straight for the planter, leaped upon him.

"Rikki! Rikki!" cried Cantrell.

But Rikki was yelling too—a shrill chatter of some sort, which, if it had any meaning, was lost to Cantrell, for

the pirates were restraining the jungle-man.

Aleck was at the planter. There was a gurgling cry of despair, mingled with curses, and then Janney's voice, in a scream that was of a high and uncanny intensity, rent the interior of the place. It changed to a gurgling cough—then a sobbing like the whistling of a breeze through rain-soaked reeds on a river-bank.

Cantrell's head fell forward and he shut his eyes. That arc of yellow faces before him, immobile and impassive, as if they were only watching a dice-game, sickened him. And he expected that Aleck would be upon him.

BUT a scuffling sound, and Chinese voices roused him. He lifted his head and opened his eyes to see Aleck seized and dragged back, arms pinioned by powerful hands. He looked to Mee Cheung, as if hoping to get an explaining glance. But the old merchant's eyes were staring at the bowed head of Janney, a silent figure now, slumped forward against the ropes about his chest. Somewhere, to Cantrell's shocked brain, he knew that there was the steady dripping of some leaking vessel, or perhaps it was the flutter of a bat in the rafters.

Cantrell saw Rikki coming toward him, that same dagger in his hand. Cantrell felt himself waver, and suffered a peculiar shrinking sensation. It seemed to him that there was something he could do, but could not remember what it was. He made an effort to pull himself together, drew apart his dry lips, and suddenly remembered.

"Your God—my God, Rikki!" he whispered. His tongue could not frame the words. He shut his teeth upon it, and then, in frenzy, cried raspingly, "Your God—my God!"

He heard a chuckling sound from Mee Cheung. Then, the old Chinese, bent forward against his bonds which held him in his chair, said:

"You have learned your lesson well—from your slave. Those were the very words he used to you last night, Mr. Cantrell, the words he spoke to you and you threatened the whip!"

Rikki strode forward, the knife's point aimed for the white man.

Cantrell shut his eyes, and once more tried to utter the phrase, but though he tried, his tongue failed to respond.

The blade went straight to Cantrell's chest.

"Rikki!" whispered Cantrell, in one last effort to ward off his end.

He felt the point of the blade against his shirt-front—and then a sudden tugging and a rending. He felt himself falling forward, and wondered why he felt no pain. Then, as the edge of the weapon grated harshly again and again, he realized that Rikki was using the knife as a hook and cutting away the hempen wrappings.

"Good boy!" cried Cantrell as he opened his eyes and saw Rikki sawing furiously. "Good boy! Now we go home!"

In a minute Cantrell, clear of the stuff about him, stood free of the pillar, staggering for balance on his benumbed knees.

"Your God—Him my God!" said Rikki proudly.

"Good fella you!" declared Cantrell, and swinging round, slapped the native on the back. Then, drawing away from the Chinese, Cantrell began to back toward a door, where he saw the sunlight streaming across the corner of the veranda.

"They say you may go!" cried Mee Cheung. "If you give heed to my words—do not delay——"

Cantrell broke for the door, and as he fled down the street and into the clouds of smoke which hung about the burned buildings, he heard the chattering of Chinese voices, and some one calling loudly from the veranda. He thought at first that the call was an order to pursue him, but as he saw Chinese on guard nearby withdraw to let him pass, he understood vaguely that he was allowed to escape, that the pirates intended to keep their word.

He was aware of the patter of bare feet behind him, and saw Rikki trotting along easily. A pall of smoke hung over the town, through which the red morning sun gave a ghastly light.

Cantrell turned off for the jungle that lifted to the hillside over the bay. He had a confused glimpse of a litter of scattered things through the street, and the bodies of natives in strangely contorted attitudes.

As he reached the brush he gave one fleeting glance over his shoulder, and made sure that no one was in pursuit. He glimpsed Janney's schooner at anchor, with a throng of yellow figures lining the bulwarks and squatting on the roof of the after-house.

Rikki jumped ahead, and with the skill of the born jungle-man, pushed in among the vines, making a way for the white man, who

was now indeed white. Without caring to take an open trail, Cantrell followed his leader, who held apart the vines ahead. With such aid Cantrell made good speed, and did not pause to draw breath until he was well up the slope and well hidden in the enveloping greenery.

They went on again, and at last came to a thin trail that ran athwart their course. Here Cantrell again broke into a run, having but one thought in mind—to put as much distance behind him as possible. And at times, as they proceeded, they heard the quick rustling of bushes as some scared native hidden in the fastness of the jungle, fled again in panic at the sound of unknown persons coming up the slope.

All along this trail there were bits of cloth, or now and then a poor sandal, or a bamboo comb, or some child's trinket, and cooking utensils with bits of cooked rice scattered about. These showed that the natives of the settlement had caught up the first thing that came to hand as they fled from the pirates.

Rikki salvaged food as he went along, and ate it as if he were wolfishly hungry—a common trait with jungle savages, even when well fed. But Cantrell, his panic seeming to grow as he more fully realized how scant had been his chance for life, gave little notice to anything. He was filled with the chilling horror of Janney's death, and so kept going until collapse.

When he had recovered some of his strength, he persisted in going on, and was not content until they had gained to the crest of the mountain and entered a pass which opened down to the other side of the island.

Here, by climbing a block of black lava on the ridge, Cantrell could see also back to the bay of the settlement. Now he decided to remain until he knew better what to do. There was a reasonable chance that the coast-guard cutter which Mee Cheung had told of, would arrive before long; in any event, the pirates would not linger very long. And when the town was rid of them, he would venture down again, in search of proper food and shelter and await a vessel.

The tireless Rikki foraged through the jungle. He found water seeping from a ledge of rocks on the far side of the pass, and brought it to Cantrell in a cup fashioned from a leaf. Then he ranged down into the other valley, hunting fruit. He came back at intervals, and piled up his stock of mangoes or an odorous jack-fruit. He worked as if he intended to remain there for weeks.

Cantrell lay in the shade, staring at the ground like a man in a daze. At times he shook his head, as if unable to believe what he had passed through and what he had witnessed.

It seemed strange that Rikki was with him. He stared at the native with a perplexed expression, as if not sure Rikki was there after all; or the white man ran his fingers along his belt, half-expecting to find his pistols.

Rikki began work on a shelter, having still the brass dagger which had been given him by the pirates. He hacked away, trimming rattans, and fashioning bunches of leaves into what would serve for a primitive thatch.

The sun was aslant for afternoon when the sound of shots came up from the settlement, and then the thundering of bigger guns.

"Four-pounders!" cried Cantrell, leaping up. "A gunboat! Or the cutter that Mee Cheung sent for!"

He sprang up on the lava-block, and Rikki followed him.

Far below, a trim white cutter lay inside the reef, moving slowly. White smoke puffed prettily from her sides, flashes of fire in the puffs. The reports drifted up later, and as the projectiles struck in the town, great bursts of powder, ashes, dust and débris rose lazily from the ground and spread out like paper umbrellas opened with infinite slowness.

Cantrell made out squads of white-clad sailors moving forward along the shore, and firing as they advanced. Their boats lay broadside in the gentle surf, abandoned for the moment for more serious business. There were two parties drawing in on Mee Cheung's place, while behind them sprayed the covering fire from the cutter, making a protective zone in their rears and preventing the escape of any pirates who might be minded to make for the jungles.

Janney's schooner was in flames, and sinking as it drifted on the reef. From it were swimming frantic figures, which were being harassed by rifle-fire from the cutter. From the broken side of the schooner, Cantrell reasoned that the first of the four-pounders had shelled the *Messenger* as she

was trying to make sail in the breezeless midday. While this had been going on the landing-parties were already ashore.

Cantrell scrambled down to the trail. With a reassuring cry, he beckoned Rikki after him, and started down for the settlement.

"That's the safest place now," he told himself as he ran. "If I stay here, some of the chinks may get away and that'll be my finish, if they run across me. I want to get aboard that cutter!"

After a time he was aware that the sound of firing had ceased. There were voices calling from sea to shore, and the merry piping of a bo'sun's whistle set the birds chirping.

"The cutter's cleaned 'em out!" he breathed.

But he did not stop to listen and make out what reports were being called to the commanders of the landing-parties.

PRESENTLY Cantrell was so close to the settlement that the jungle hereabouts was thick with the smoke which had settled down into the close brush. When he got to the edge of the jungle, he stopped, and peered out, wary of showing himself until he was sure the place was safe.

He saw gangs of bound Chinese being herded into the boats. Yellow bodies lay about in front of Mee Cheung's place, and a couple of young officers stood inside the veranda, examining articles which were brought to them by sailors. There was a great bustle going on, men coming and going, and calling out briskly their reports or orders.

Rikki was inclined to remain behind. But Cantrell gestured him along, and the native meekly followed. They pushed out boldly into the street and trotted down to the big store.

"Hello!" called one of the officers from the veranda. "Where in the name of the mighty Nelson did you come from?"

"My name is Cantrell—oil prospector. Was going out this morning in Janney's schooner, with a couple of servants. Slept in the place last night, but got away during the attack, after they'd killed Janney."

"Well, you've had a lively little party," said the officer. "I'm Lieutenant Madden and the skipper'll be glad to have a chin-chin with you. We need witnesses—most of 'em are ruined by gunfire. Come on up and have a cup of tea."

Cantrell, bare-headed and ten years older than he had looked the day before, climbed the steps of the veranda and slumped down into a grass chair. Madden passed the word inside for a petty officer to bring out the tea and anything that might be stimulating.

"Mee Cheung killed by the pirates?" asked Cantrell.

"No, the pirates didn't hurt him a bit," said Madden and there was a twinkle in his eye as he looked at his junior.

"That's good," said Cantrell. "The poor old blighter of a chink! He didn't have a chance. But where is he?"

"Inside, taking a nap."

"You've mopped up pretty well, I'd say," observed Cantrell, with a wave of the hand at dead Chinese in the street.

"Fairly well," said Madden as he lighted a cigaret. "We've put an end to piracy in these waters for some time, because we got Tai Lok."

"Fine! I want to attend the hanging!"

"Hanging nothing!" laughed Madden. "We finished off the job—put a couple of steel-jacketed bullets through his wishbone—which will be a powerful lesson to him."

"Could I have a look-see at him?" asked Cantrell. "Naturally, I'm curious."

"Come on—he looks natural!" said Madden and led the way inside.

Powder smoke still hung in the rafters, and the fumes irritated Cantrell's eyes. But the sides of the building were being torn out at one place near a queer row of prostrate forms ranged along the pillars of the balcony on that end, side by side, and covered by strips of trade-cloth from Mee Cheung's stock.

Madden stepped to one end of the row, and sending the sailors away for a minute where the wrecking operations were being conducted, lifted one of the strips of red cotton.

Cantrell cried out in surprize.

"Why!" he gasped to Madden, "you told me they didn't—you've made a mistake in——"

"No mistake, no complaint," said Madden quietly. "There's our trademark on the front of his pajama-jacket just as I told you, two close together in the best possible spot for sure results. Sudden and remarkable cure of piracy."

"But this isn't Tai Lok! It's Mee Cheung!"

Madden slipped the cloth back over the dead Chinese.

"Call him what you like," he said. "You won't make me mad. Mee Cheung or Tai Lok—it's allee samee."

"What! Mee Cheung is Tai Lok!"

"Either and both. He kept his chink pirates—or most of 'em—here, and operated with Kroon's Island as a base."

Cantrell shook his head and staggered back toward the veranda.

"I don't get you yet," he argued. "It was Mee Cheung who sent you word to come here, wasn't it? Sent word that Tai Lok was expected to strike in this neighborhood!"

"He told you that?"

"Sure he told me! You've got the wires crossed and most likely Tai Lok got away!"

"What Mee Cheung told you was important—if true. He did send word to us that Tai Lok was about to strike. But not here; instead, he informed us that Tai Lok was planning to operate a couple of hundred miles to the south'ard."

"Then how'd you happen to come here?"

"Because Mee Cheung had tipped us off before on where we'd find Tai Lok and the dope was wrong. That dodge worked pretty well while it worked. This time we fooled him. We'd been picking up some information ourselves, and putting two and two together. With what Mee Cheung told us, it added up six. That's rotten mathematics, you know. So this time when Mee Cheung wanted to send us to the south'ard, we put a hundred and twenty turns on our propeller and headed for Kroon's Island. It was the last thing he expected and he got sunk."

Cantrell moved out to the veranda and dropped into a chair. With shaking hands he reached for a bottle and glass put before him and poured himself a drink.

"It looks funny," he remarked, when he had refreshed himself. "But I'd say you're wrong. He was in the hands of the pirates and his place was raided! Why, look at what a mess it was in, when——"

"Oh, no, his place wasn't raided," objected Madden. "Not raided so it suffered any particular damage. I'll tell you who was damaged, and that's the Dutchman who came here to buy the store. He was killed. The money he brought with him was found a few minutes ago in Mee Cheung's money-chest."

"It was?"

"Sure! We know what we're talking about. Tried to get word a couple of weeks back to that half-blood Dutchman, but he was already here. Also, the pirates took Janney's schooner. And robbed both of you. Your money-belt—both yours and Janney's—cropped up in Mee Cheung's grab-bag. You'll be wanting your cash back, of course."

"Of course—and I know now you're right about Mee Cheung."

"Oh, I've got the dope," said Madden. "It was a nifty little night's work for Mee Cheung-Tai Lok. No wonder he made a fortune here! Kept under cover as a merchant, and stocked his place with goods that his gang of chinks pirated all up and down these latitudes. We've been checking up on the stuff and find his shelves loaded with goods that fit the description of what's been taken from every trading-schooner that was boarded by Tai Lok, and lifted from all the small island stores where the pirates struck."

"I see," said Cantrell. "And that gives me the answer to the queer sounds I heard inside during the night before the attack came. The bee-hive of pirates getting out for the night's work! And why Mee Cheung was so calm! Why, this building just swarmed with his men all the——"

"Swarmed is right!" broke in Madden. "It was a regular blooming Summer-resort! Big hotel this—full of Chinks under cover. We found the nests in between walls that were false. That's what we're ripping out for; to get everything that's hid away in this rabbit-warren. And when we burn it! My, but it'll smell like a hop-joint in a livery-stable!"

One of Madden's sailors came and put a plate of biscuits and a pot of tea with a cup and saucer before Cantrell. But the white man, staring out into the street, gave no heed. His inner eye was picturing again that moment when Aleck started for him with the brass knife, to be deflected by Janney's voice. If Aleck, who laid no claim to being converted, had gone straight on to Cantrell— He shivered at the thought, like a man with the first shattering onset of fever.

He was roused when a sailor came out and handed a whip to Madden, the very whip Cantrell had tossed aside at dinner the night before after threatening Rikki.

"That must belong to Janney," said Madden as he took the whip and ran the heavy lash through his fingers. "Cruel customer, Janney. We've heard from the missionaries

that he whipped his natives. I'm not going to lose any sleep over Janney's end."

"There was a native with him like this one of mine," said Cantrell. "Seen anything of him?"

"Found him dead at Janney's feet, stabbed through the back. Pirates settled that native, too."

Cantrell turned to Rikki. The native was streaming with sweat, his eyes red from smoke and ashes. He was huddled on the bottom step of the short stoop, regardless of the heat, and exhausted, for he had worked like a tiger up in the jungle while Cantrell lay still. He seemed to know that his companion was dead, but was satisfied to wait until his white lord gave an order to move. His dry lips were open, and his eyes rested longingly on the dishes at Cantrell's elbow. Rikki's expression suggested a hungry dog wishful for a feast, but restrained by his weariness from begging.

"That's a wild chap you've got along with you," remarked Madden as he waved his cigaret toward Rikki. "Fat chance the missionaries'll have to civilize *him!* All the religion these wild ones know is their bellies. What a confounded waste of time and money to have white parsons out here trying to preach a white man's religion to the likes of that!"

Cantrell stood up.

"I don't agree with you there, lieutenant," he said earnestly. "As I understand it, the missionaries don't expect to convert *all* the natives. From what the parsons tell me, they think that if they convert one now and then, the effort's worth while, and, what's more- *I know they're right!*"

He picked up the plate of biscuits, the tea-pot and cup. Then, before the astonished Madden, Cantrell moved toward that sprawling figure on the lower step.

"What's this?" exclaimed Madden. "I say! You're not—well, I like to see natives treated well but you—you're not really going to play the cabin-boy for *him!*"

Cantrell heard the words, but made no reply. There was a smile on his face as he stepped down.

RIKKI looked up, his breath coming pantingly through his open, parched lips. With that same dog-like expression, he put out a hand and took the plate of biscuits, as Cantrell put the tea-pot and cup beside him.

"Master!" whispered the native. "Now you talk it same like me—your God, my God."

THE CAMP FIRE

A Meeting Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

WANTED, from eye-witnesses, more data on Wounded Knee. The specific case brings to the front the general fact that our Camp-Fire is the best machinery in existence for collecting data on the history of our West before all those who know the facts at first hand have passed beyond the reach of inquirers.

Brooklyn, New York.

I am glad to see that *Adventure* has taken up the question, "What happened at Wounded Knee?" I hope you can get the testimony of actual eye-witnesses. I am interested because I have repeatedly heard accounts of the affair from a man who was there as an active friend of the Indians, for whom he has done much. I should like to call attention to several points in his account that cast light upon questions raised in the letters.

HE TOLD me that the Indians came in and surrendered and that the troops surrounded them, forming a square with the Indians—men, women, and children—in the center. A shot or shots came from among the Indians. (I do not remember whether it did injury to the soldiers, or not.) At this the soldiers, losing their heads, fired into the Indians massed within the square, killing many of the Indians and incidentally *killing a number of their own men on the other sides of the square!*

My informant and his wife went about after the "battle," working among the injured Indian women and children, whose injuries, he tells me, were ghastly and whose pathetic inquiries, "Why are they killing us?" he can never forget. None of the women or children, in spite of horrible lacerations, groaned or made any outcry till they realized that the white man was not going to have them put to death.

If my informant was right, and I have every reason to believe that he was, I should not call this affair a "battle." I understand that an official inquiry by Army officers decided that, at least for purposes of publication, it was *not* a "massacre." It seems now possible, after so long an interval, to look into the facts. Or is official whitewash permanent?

MY INFORMANT has done fighting in the Civil War, and he also knows Indians and their ways better than most white men living. (He is not a missionary.) I am giving his name and address on an accompanying sheet, not for publication but that you may address him directly. He is now elderly and retired from active work, but may be able to give information.

I hope that the facts may be looked into before all eye-witnesses have gone where they can not testify.

Please observe that the account I quote, if accurate, absolutely disposes of the question in your earliest issue: "How, if it wasn't a battle, did the soldiers get killed?" The answer is that they blunderingly shot each other while firing, in excitement, into the mass of prisoners.—B.

SOMETHING from Arthur D. Howden Smith concerning the historical data back of his complete novelette in this issue:

Babylon, Long Island, New York.

"Swain's Venture," aside from carrying on the story of the feud between *Swain* and *Olvir Rosta*—both of whom, perhaps I should say for the benefit of those of you who have not read the earlier stories about *Swain*, were real people—is an attempt to present the little known facts regarding the extent to which the Norsemen were acquainted with the northeastern corner of the United States in the middle of the Twelfth Century. Personally I am convinced, after studying the existing documents, such as the Saga of Erik the Red, the Saga of Thorfinn Karlsefni, the references in the Icelandic Annals and other medieval Norse documents, bolstered as they are by contemporary clerical documents discovered within recent years in the Vatican's Archives, that it is absolutely impossible to ignore the claim of the Scandinavians that they were the first Europeans who can prove that they voyaged to America. It just isn't arguable.

AND when I say this I am making due allowance for the vague Irish claims to prior discovery. It is possibly true that Irish ships had ventured across the Atlantic; the Norsemen, themselves,

seem to have credited it, which is the best evidence, to my way of thinking, infinitely preferable to the above-mentioned shadowy assertions by monkish scribes. But in the Norse sagas and records there is nothing shadowy or uncertain. They mention names and fix dates and give authentic details. The very incidents of supernatural significance introduced in stark historical narratives constitute, in themselves, a stamp of authenticity, for, as Sir Water Scott pointed out, a medieval record which did not contain some incident of supernatural import would thereby establish itself as fishy. In those days people took the supernatural for granted; they saw it happening around them every day. They *wanted* to believe in it.

So I don't think there can be any question that the Norsemen of Iceland and the Greenland colony, both of which places were more or less woodless, made frequent voyages to the coast of the United States and Canada in search of wood, skins and grapes. The sagas say they went to Wineland the Good, and they had every reason to go, for they could obtain what they needed more expeditiously—at least, as to Greenland—and cheaper than in Norway.

THE Greenland colony lasted from about the year 1,000, Erik the Red's time, to about the middle of the Fourteenth Century. The sagas are vague as to what crushed it, but from what they do say and the known facts of the period it seems likely that the terrible plague known as the Black Death so crippled it that the Esquimeaux were able to destroy the surviving inhabitants.

Possibly a change in climate had something to do with it, to the extent, anyhow, of discouraging attempts to reestablish the colony. It seems evident from what the sagas say that the Winters in the northern hemisphere were milder up to the Fourteenth Century than they are now, and it is also true that the coast of Greenland, where the populous Eastern Settlement was located, is now unapproachable because of the ice. Then, too, the Wineland voyagers speak of there being no snow in the region, roughly, of New England and Nova Scotia, during the Winter. Some authorities claim that this is in itself a challenge to the credibility of the Sagas, but I call such a contention ridiculous. The Norsemen were never given to lying in such matters. They recounted their voyages to help one another and preserve for their posterity accounts of brave or worthy deeds. If the saga says there was no snow, it is highly probable there was none—although it should be remembered that this could equally be accounted for (a) by the Winter's having been exceptionally mild or (b) by reading into the statement a degree of comparability. That is, a word or two might have been dropped from the context, and the original narrator might have said that "there was not so much snow" as in Greenland or words to that effect.

ONE of the most interesting proofs of the extent of the familiarity of the Norsemen with the Western World is the statement in the Icelandic annals that Bishop Erik Uppsi went to Wineland in 1121, some thirty odd years before Swain. The Vatican records contain numerous references and instructions to the Bishops of Greenland. And the last reference to a voyage to the American mainland is in the Icelandic Annals of the Flateyjarbok under date of 1347—about the time the Black Death was at its height in western Europe—also in slightly different words in the Skalholt Annals:

"There came also a ship from Greenland, less in size than small Icelandic trading vessels. It came into the outer Stream Firth. It was without an anchor. There were seventeen men on board, and they had sailed to Markland—" the Norse name for the Canadian coast just north of New England and including Nova Scotia and Newfoundland—"but had afterward been driven hither by storms at sea."—A. D. H. S.

ON THE occasion of his first story in our magazine Walter J. Coburn follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce himself. I'm glad he feels he's among "folks." I think he is. Seems to have the habit of talking straight from the shoulder that our kind likes.

Santa Barbara, California.

Howdy, boys. Mebbyso there are some of you who have punched cows. Perhaps you'll read this yarn of mine and say, "I reckon this Coburn gent must have lived in the cow country." And you'll be right.

The old Circle C ranch in Montana, located at the foot of the Little Rockies, is my home range. There'll be more than one old, old hand that recalls that iron. The old log buildings, the corrals and branding-chute are gone now. The long flat across which the bronc twisters used to fan their bad 'uns is no doubt plowed up and planted with grain. The Circle C lives only in the memories of the boys that rode that range before the sheep and barb' wire came to move them on. My fondest hope is that some of those boys (I reckon most of them are kinda gray now) will read my stuff and look me up.

MY DAD hit Montana in '63, was one of the discoverers of Last Chance Gulch where the city of Helena now stands, and helped make history there. He quit prospecting and started in the cow business. His dream was to build up the biggest outfit in the State and this he eventually did, I believe. One of the biggest, anyhow.

I was born in '89 at White Sulphur Springs, Mont. Left there when I was six years old and moved to Great Falls. There I went to school. My vacations were spent on the ranch. There I was turned over to Horace Brewster, the wagon boss, and Horace had instructions to "make a hand out of me." It was Horace who gave me my first pair of shop made boots (alligator with fancy tops). He taught me how to rope, handle a beef herd, read brands, and all the thousand and one things that go to make a cow-hand.

THEN came college and one year was as much as I could stand. I had a pack of hounds and a string of ponies back home that meant more to me than fraternities and books. So back I came, more or less in disgrace, to take up the cow business where I had left off.

Nineteen fifteen found the Circle C sold to the Matador Cattle Co. I put my saddle in a sack and went to Arizona.

A broken ankle, badly set, handicapped me some in the rough country but I gave them the best I had and "made a hand."

Then came the war. Turned down for the cavalry, refused by the draft board on account of my ankle, I at last wiggled into the Aviation. I enlisted at San Diego and put my bid in for Kelly Field, Texas. *No bueno.* I was fated to stay at Rockwell Field, San Diego.

DAD died during the war. I came out of the Army with a month's pay and bonus. When that was gone I hit the trail for Arizona. Two months later I was back in California on crutches. I'd picked up a fall and broken my knee-cap. My cow-punching days were over.

A soft job at Rockwell tided me over until I could walk. Then came a series of jobs that ranged from life-guard on the beach, and garage work, to surveying on the desert. And all the time I was trying to sell stories.

BOYS, it's hard work punching cows but it's a heap harder to write about it—and sell what you write. There were times when I felt like chucking it. Those rejected manuscripts were body blows that hurt. Then I'd cuss myself out for a quitter and start again. I sold a story and I'll admit to you fellows the little twenty-five dollar check I got looked like a million to me. And seeing that story in print more than paid for those months of struggle. I had to borrow the fifteen cents to buy the magazine, but I felt like the president of the U. S. when I left that newsstand. It was months before I sold anything more. But I'd sold one and I knew I'd sell more some day. And I did. And I'm just beginning to find out that I still have a heap to learn about this game.

Hope none of you have gone to sleep on me while I was augurin' here. But the boss man said I was to introduce myself, kind of, and I reared up and did 'er. He made me feel that I'd landed among "folks" and I couldn't seem to find a stopping-place in this story until now. I'm going to send *Adventure* some more yarns of the cow camps. Some of them will most likely come back to me but some will get past the "brand inspector." I hope you boys, cow-punchers and otherwise, will find something in them that's good. For this time, *adios, amigos.*—WALTER J. COBURN.

Santa Barbara, California.

P. S.—A word or two regarding "Worked Brands." Years ago a lot of cattle were stolen in the Southwest by this method of brand changing. I got the story from the puncher that helped change the brands. I won't mention his name but I worked with him in Arizona and he's a sure enough cowhand and was telling it straight. I heard recently that he had been killed in Mexico.

IN THE story I have *Shorty* lead a wild steer. Sounds "scary" but any cow-hand that has worked in the rough country where there are wild cattle will back me up on that. Have led a few myself and it is some sensation the first time or two. I used a *guaya* mule and his name was Windy. Rounding up wild stuff is like trying to ride herd on a lot of mosquitos. A man ropes a steer, saws the tips off his horns, then ties him to a tree by the horns. Leave him there a day or so until the rope has chafed him. Then lead him to the "trap" or tight pasture. A rather cruel method of handling stock but about the only way that they can be gathered. Sometimes the wild steer is "necked" to a gentle one and the gentle animal will eventually bring him to the salt-lick or water-hole in the level country.

Thought perhaps I'd better explain those points about the yarn in case some reader might think I was "telling it scary."—WALTER J. COBURN.

NOW don't do it! Every time a letter about firearms appears in Camp-Fire we get deluged with letters on firearms, more than we can possibly find room for. Makes me afraid to pass any firearms letters on to you, but it's always a temptation and sometimes I fall.

Yonkers, New York.

I have always stayed in the back of the bunch at the Camp-Fire and listened to what others had to say. Good idea, says I, but if a person knows a thing why not let everybody else know if if it's interesting?

MY HOBBY is firearms, any type that throws lead—plain lead or metal cased. Not so with muzzle-loaders. Experience is the best teacher and I have had a lot of learning.

Recently I noticed an argument about using metal-cased automatic ammunition in a revolver. I have had my experience about them too.

About a year ago I purchased a Waffenfabrik Mauser 7.65 M. M. and 200 cartridges for a friend of mine. The cartridges were made by the Rhen-West Cartridge Company of Germany, specially adapted to the Mauser and other pistols of this caliber—(Colt Auto, Savage and numerous others). My friend gave me about 125 cartridges to use as I pleased for testing. The Mauser worked perfectly with this and domestic ammunition. The remainder of the Rhen-West cartridges I took for my own tests. I tried them in a Hopkins and Allen (poor condition) .32 revolver. I fired about 25 in the H. and Allen. Some I kept for my collection and the rest I used in a .32 Colt's New Police (new) and found them very accurate. I have used about 100 pounds of American made ammunition in the Colt. They worked perfect, but I would not advise anybody else to go so far as to make a practise of using automatic pistol ammunition in a revolver. I bear a charmed life when handling guns. I have never shot a person accidentally and have not yet been shot accidentally, although I once had a fellow shoot a long rifle .22 in a 24-inch barrel gun at me. I appropriated said gun.—ANDY.

IN TALKING at Camp-Fire about public affairs you will remember that I have consistently kept out of politics in the ordinary sense of that word. The cause of no political party has been espoused. Loyalty to party at the inevitable cost of loyalty to the country is one of our greatest dangers. No candidate for public office has been advocated. Once William Allen White was held up as the type of man we need for president, because he believes in truth and principle for their own sake instead of

determining action by the probable results to parties and individuals. Several others seemingly of the same type were mentioned, some of them suggested by you. A few definite measures have been advocated or opposed, but only because they forwarded or subverted principles.

On certain principles vital to our nation's future there has been a definite stand through all the years I have talked at Camp-Fire. I believe that the country is the people; that patriotism is loyalty to the people, to their interests as a whole, not to the interests of any party or of any minority; that the people are responsible for any government they install or permit to be installed, that they have the lawful power, if used, to make it responsive to their wishes, to make it an honest government, and that the reason it is not an honest government is that we the people have as individuals failed, through indifference or dishonesty, to do our part as citizens.

FROM the beginning, these talks at Camp-Fire have centered upon this: There can be no real remedy for our political ills, no hope of the splendid future that ought to lie before this country, unless we the citizens come to a real understanding of real democracy, government really by the people, really of the people, really for the people. Only some fifty-four per cent. of us are of white American parentage; even if they understood real democracy, which they as a whole do not, the other half need teaching. The fundamental principles of democracy must be systematically taught in our schools and to us who have left school, leaving us as individuals to apply those principles to specific issues. We teach our children individual morality; there is no reason why we can not teach them civic morality.

Most of all, they and we need teaching that graft in public affairs is treason. Such crime against the interests and property of the people is worse than similar crimes against the interests and property of individuals and merits far severer punishment.

Among the essentials of democracy are individual responsibility, interest and honesty in public affairs, with freedom of speech and assemblage so that the responsible, interested and honest will of the people can be expressed, and with a ballot system, built by the people, making their representatives really responsive to their wishes and welfare so that their will can be enforced. Another essential, possible only when these others exist, is respect for and obedience to the laws they themselves have made or permitted to be made.

I HAVE no loyalty to any party. Party loyalty can not exist side by side with loyalty to the country as a whole. I have no particular man I want to see in any particular public office. I have, God knows, no political ambitions of my own. I am neither conservative nor red radical, yet I am so conservative that many of the beliefs to which I hold are branded loudly as very dangerously radical; because I believe in really applying the democratic principles of the Constitution of the United States to our actual affairs. Who, for example, can in these days stand out openly and consistently for freedom of speech and assemblage, specifically guaranteed to us by the Constitution, and not be cursed as a violent radical for maintaining that the "other fellow" has an equal right to this freedom of speech and assemblage? (The real radicals of this country are those who pose as the ultra-conservatives, for the foundation of their platform is rule by the few over the many, for the interests of the few at the cost of the many, in direct opposition to the Constitution based on majority rule for the benefit of the people as a whole.) Or who can oppose the anti-weapon campaign, the right to have and bear arms being specifically guaranteed to us by the Constitution, without being cursed as an advocate of violence and an ally of criminals?

WHY all this about me and my beliefs? Because I am one of the American people, because I have at Camp-Fire a chance to talk to other Americans in advocacy of clean government and of the real democracy of our Constitution, and because I believe every American should seize on every such chance. And, since I talk, I want my general position to be clear so that there may be no needless misunderstanding concerning it. There is, heaven knows, need for both talk and action. The lid has recently been pried off national politics long enough to give us a real whiff of the rottenness inside. To save the interests of parties, politicians and certain grafting citizens in the face of the coming

election, the lid has been put back on and the usual dust thrown in the people's eyes. If we leave that lid on, we are hopelessly doomed. They count, as usual, upon our "forgetting about it." After what has been shown, we can't afford to forget about it.

SO OUR magazine has been keeping a record of those accused in the Congressional "investigations" that figured so prominently in the newspapers the first part of the year and that suddenly at a word from our political leaders, terrified by the corruption their own party politics was bringing to light, ceased to have prominence in the newspapers. They have shown us some of the rottenness. How much more of it there is we do not yet know, and they propose that we shall never know. The aircraft and shipping board cess-pools have barely been stirred at the surface.

The situation is complicated by the fact that the accusers as a whole seem no better than the accused. It merely happened to be the other fellow who got to the opportunity first. Their charges seem to come not from any impulse of decency or patriotism but only from party politics and personal animus. They want, not the whole truth, but only such of the truth, or of something else, as will ruin the other fellow and put them into a position to betray the same trusts they accuse him of betraying. So we are keeping a list of the accusers as well as of the accused.

PARTICULARLY before election, but after it as well, we shall publish these lists in order to refresh your memories. Things have gone too far. Either those accused care too little for their honor and reputation to demand a real investigation that will clear them, or else they are guilty and have taken to cover. The people need the facts. They need them particularly at election time. Only a few of the facts have been uncovered, but, lacking the facts themselves, there is the very clear inference of guilt or of innocence too cowardly and subservient to clear itself. The accusers have moved on a moral plane no higher than that of the accused.

The Republican party is damned in the sight of every decent citizen not hopelessly blinded by the silly fetish of party loyalty. The Democratic party has yet to show itself any more worthy of trust. Any third party can not have our trust unless it stands forth for country instead of party and for all the people instead of for some part of them. Perhaps that seeming impasse is a blessing in disguise, for it forces us to consider men instead of parties, and, to some degree, principles instead of platforms and politics.

ANYHOW, this much we can do. They have not permitted us to get at the facts, except the one big fact of the existence of widespread and utterly treasonable corruption in national affairs. Only to a small degree and with no great certainty can we discriminate between the guilty and the innocent or comparatively innocent. It is their fault that we have not all the facts. Very well, at election time and at primaries and conventions there is only one logical course to follow, only one path that can lead to even a chance of an ultimate house-cleaning. That course is to work for the defeat of all who have been accused and not cleared and of all who have accused and made of accusation a juggling and a jockeying. Pots and kettles. If satisfied on good grounds of any man's innocence, support him, but remember that this is a case for the surgeon's knife and that it is better a few innocent be turned out of office than that many crooks be left in control.

OR PUT it another way. Since the corruption is so widespread and the investigations so comparatively resultless, the man in the street is left nothing to do except to strike his blow at the whole nest of corruption. That is, at all who have been leaders in the big political machines. The longer they have been in public or party office and either shared in the corruption or failed to make sincere and unrelenting effort to end corruption and punish the guilty, the more unfit must they be deemed to continue in public or party office. Wipe the slate clean. If we can not yet insure ourselves against corrupt Congressmen, Cabinet officers and other public officials, let us at least get new ones, men who have not yet *proved* themselves unfit for office, men who at least have not been long enough in office to become skilled in treasonable corruption or indifferent to it in others. A new slate even if not a clean one. New blood can not be worse than the old. It can not even be so bad until it has had a chance to practise.

Congress is full of professional Senators and professional Representatives. Behold the results. Cabinets have been filled too largely with professional politicians deserving well of their party. The candidacy for President, if some of the testimony of the investigations and the already formed belief of many citizens be sound, has been offered for sale to the highest bidder in cash and patronage. Take it all in all, the works are rotten. If we can't be sure of clean works, at least we can get new ones.—A. S. H.

OUR Camp-Fire Stations are spreading steadily over the map. Help make them grow.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

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143—St. Petersburg. J. G. Barnhill, 10 Third St. N.
158—Crescent City. E. N. Clark, care *Call*.
188—Johnson. Clifford Martin.

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111—Lewiston. Howard N. Lary, 714 Main Street.
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131—North Muskegon. James Fort Forsyth, Forsyth Publisher's Service, Phone 5891.
137—Flint. O'Leary & Livingston, 309 So. Saginaw St.
192—Pickford. Dr. J. A. Cameron, The Grand Theater.
227—Adrian. S. N. Cook, 221 Clinton St.

Minnesota—112—St. Paul. St. Paul *Daily News*, 92 E. Fourth St.
145—Brainerd. F. T. Tracey, care Brainerd Gas & Electric Co.

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99—Picayune. D. E. Jonson.

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Montana—240—Fort Missoula, Company C, 4th Infantry.

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214—Tecumseh. Dr. C. F. Roh.

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107—New York City. Bronx Division, U. S. Junior Naval Reserves, 3132 Webster Ave.
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159—Waynesville. Harry M. Hall, 720 Walnut St.
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206—Fairmount. Frank Kitchener, Richlan I Hotel.

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241—Cincinnati. D. W. Davidson, 1414 Vine St.
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216—Portland. Miss Billie Russell, 532 E. 19th St.

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248—Philadelphia. Carl D. Charles, 214 East St., Wissahickon.

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South Carolina—217—Charleston. J. H. Keener, 346 King St.
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Honduras, C. A.—32—Galeras, Olancho. Dr. Wm. C. Robertson.
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India—197—Calcutta. W. Leishman, 46 Wellesley St.

Mexico—68—Guadalajara, Jal. W. C. Money, Hotel Fenix, Calle Lopez, Cotilla Nos. 269 a 281.
136—Tampico, Tamps. Jack Hester, care of T. D. E. Humpo, Apartado 238.
223—Mazatlan, Sin. Paul L. Horn, Hotel de France, Apartado 102.

Navy—71—U. S. *Arizona.* Elmer E. McLean.
140—U. S. *Shawmut.* J. D. Montgomery.

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QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information, Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

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2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
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BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels ofthe North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. The Sea Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping
HARRY E. RIESENBERG, Apartment 347-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

4. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits
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A.—Radio

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Victor Shaw, Ketchikan, Alaska. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. Gordon, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

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3.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. Lewis Appleton Barker, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

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William R. Barbour, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

G.—Aviation

Lieut.-Col. W. G. Schauffler, Jr., 2940 Newark St., N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

H.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

Fred. F. Fleischer care of *Adventure*. *United States* Military history, military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

I.—American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

Arthur Woodward, 217 W. 125th St., New York. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

J.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write J. Cox, care *Adventure*.

For general information on **U. S.** and its **possessions,** write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S.**, its **possessions and most foreign countries,** the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico,** and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti,** the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska,** the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii,** Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also Dept. of the Interior Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba,** Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.,** Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **Canal Zone,** the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. Morrall, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National Parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

Island of a Thousand Tongues

"WALLACE'S Line," referred to by Mr. Armit in the subjoined answer, is named after Alfred R. Wallace, zoogeographer and spiritualist. It—I'm giving the undigested Webster of it—is an imaginary line separating the Oriental and Australian regions. It passes between Bali and Lombok, between Celebes and Borneo and to the eastward of the Philippines. Recent authors contend—Mr. Webster still speaking—that it should pass east rather than west of Celebes. The faunas on either side of the line are remarkably distinct:

Question:—"I intend to annoy you with a few questions concerning your country. I would like to learn something of the present conditions in New Guinea.

First of all, what country has now control of New Guinea and what is the nature of its government?

What is the climate of this latitude and the nature of the island—hilly or level? To what extent is it inhabited; by what class and race of people, and what language is generally spoken? What are the chief industries of its inhabitants?

Are there many wild animals, game or fish on the island? Lastly, what steamers touch there, and about how often?

I would be extremely grateful if you can supply this and any other information concerning New Guinea and will gladly return any favor at my command. I enclose a self-addressed envelop which is not my present address but which will reach me. Also ten cents in stamps to cover return postage,"—ARTHUR L. SOMMER, Wichita, Kan.

Answer, by Mr. Armit:—You don't annoy me with your queries, for you state clearly what it is you wish to know; if all my correspondents followed your lead I would not have to try to reply to such questions as, "Tell me all about New Guinea." For New Guinea is a hefty bit of the world—312,329 square miles of it—and can not possibly be fully described in the narrow compass of a letter.

New Guinea or Papua—it has two names—is the largest island except Greenland in the world. It is 1,490 miles long from west to east, and its greatest breadth is 410 miles. The western half to the 141st meridian of east longitude is owned by Holland and is known as Dutch New Guinea; the northern part east of the 141st meridian down to the 8th parallel of south latitude is the present Territory of New Guinea, which was formerly the German colony of Kaiser Wilhelm's Land; the southern and eastern portion is the Australian Territory of Papua.

Government. Dutch New Guinea is a province of the Dutch East Indies and is governed by a resident, who is responsible to the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies at Batavia, Java. It has the same government as Java.

Territory of New Guinea is administered by Australia under a mandate from the League of Nations. Australian laws are in force, and its local legislation is much the same as that in force in the other Pacific colonies of Great Britain, except that it is framed by the Executive Council of the Commonwealth of Australia.

Territory of Papua is *owned* by Australia. It has a lieutenant-governor, who is the head of the local executive and legislative councils; it makes its own laws, subject to the veto of the Governor-General of Australia in some instances—labor, liquor, lands, etc. The legislative council is nominated by the lieutenant-governor, and it consists of the permanent heads of the principal departments of Government with three non-official members selected from the civil population. The laws are practically the same as in Australia with some local additions regulating mining, plumage birds, fishing, etc.

Climate. New Guinea being in the tropics is a hot place, but it is not nearly as torrid as one would expect. The mean Summer temperature here in Port Moresby is 82 F. at 9 A.M. Highest reading for last year was 97 F.—during the steamy days of the northwest monsoon: lowest reading in July 63 F. (at night). The rains commence with the advent of the northwest monsoon in December and last until May, when the rest of the year is pleasant and livable with the steady southeast winds.

Malaria is prevalent all the year, but where living conditions are good, food is not wholly out of a tin and housing is comfortable, the residents keep good health. A mosquito net is a necessity always, for it is the only real preventive of malaria; quinin is, of course, much used, but without the former it is not infallible. Newcomers must expect to have a certain amount of malaria before they become acclimatized and able to look after themselves. The latter is most of the battle, for life here is quite different to the highly civilized lands; many folk try to live the same way here that they did in temperate parts of the globe, trot around in the sun without a hat, absorb alcohol in the torrid hours of the day, etc., and sooner or later they get hit up with an old-man go of fever. This usually teaches them a few simple facts about tropical conditions, and they become old hands as this experience is remembered by them.

Physical Features. New Guinea is the most mountainous region in the world. It is a vast upland of pinnacles and domes, some of which in Dutch New Guinea pierce the air over 20,000 feet, and are well supplied with glaciers and other weird articles that one does not expect to get hold of in the neighborhood of the Line. The whole interior is a maze of mighty ranges, from which the rivers race down through their twisted courses to the sea. The Fly, Sepik, Purari and a host of other rivers drain the island; the Sepik is over 1,000 miles long. Some of these streams are navigable for nearly 600 miles from the sea; launches and boats can go many miles farther.

Inhabitants. Melanesian peoples populate the island. No census is possible, but the estimated aboriginal population of the Territory of Papua is 300,000; Dutch New Guinea 260,000; and Territory of New Guinea 260,000. This is only a moderate estimate; the actual numbers may be far in excess of these figures.

No general language. Native languages run to nearly a thousand; the island is a veritable Tower of Babel, owing to the people being divided into innumerable small tribes, each bitterly hostile to the other. English is the language spoken by the white settlers in the British portions; Dutch in the western half.

Industries. Prior to the arrival of the white man there were no industries. Barter of native manufactures existed between tribe and tribe, but there was no regular trading as the term is known amongst civilized folk. I take it you are not interested in the native arts and crafts, consequently I confine my reply on this matter to industries which have been introduced by the white settlers.

The two main staple industries are mining and planting. The former is the older of the two, for Papua was first opened up by the pick of the wandering prospector—the scout of civilization the world over. Most of the gold won is produced by the auriferous deposits on the Gira, Yodda, Murua, Misima and Lakekamu gold-fields, all in the Territory of Papua; quartz reefs exist on Woodlard and St. Aignan (Misima) Islands, and are being worked by companies organized and equipped with the necessary machinery. The mandatory Territory of New Guinea is said to contain a large area that is auriferous, but so far no strikes of any size have been reported from that part of the island.

The planting industry is the main support of the settlers. Rubber, coconuts, cotton, maize, hemp, sugar, tea, coffee, cocoa, tobacco, chinchona and peanuts all grow exceedingly well; in fact, almost any tropical product will grow in the rich jungle lands of the island. Rubber and coconuts are the principal products; cotton is now being experimented with in the belt of land around Port Moresby, which, strange to say, is a dry belt that collects only about fifty inches of rain annually.

Wild Animals. Only the jungle hog; no dangerous animals. Papua is east of Wallace's Line between Asia and Australia, hence none of the beasts of the Malay Archipelago have got so far east. Any number of wallaby similar to the type known in Australia; also a few of the lesser marsupials.

Birds. New Guinea is famed for its plumaged birds, the birds of paradise being the most well known, although many other species are richly feathered. Parrots, hornbills, parrakeets, pigeons, doves, lories, duck, geese, herons, bower-birds, cockatoos and dozens of others make the place interesting for the shooter. All paradise-birds are protected by law, a heavy fine plus imprisonment being the fate of those caught offending in this respect.

Fish. Bonito, king, trevally, whiting, perch, sea-salmon, sea-mackerel, gar, barramundi, sole, skate, etc., in the sea; fresh-water varieties comprise mullet, perch, eel, etc.

Communication. Monthly mail steamer from Sydney to Port Moresby, Samarai and Rabaul (Territory of New Guinea); Batavia to Merauke in Dutch New Guinea every month. Fare, Sydney to Moresby or Samarai, saloon $77.

General. Do not consider coming to New Guinea on the chance of finding employment; all jobs are filled from Australia; the local supply of labor is always much more than the normal demand.

Write again if you feel like it.

San Carlos Indians

FRIENDS of the white sort of white man:

Question:—Please write me about the climate, hunting, camping, etc., of Indians, particularly in the San Carlos district of Arizona."—H. P. McFARLAND, Jr., Chicago, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—Your meaning is a little obscure. I am not sure whether you mean to ask about hunting the San Carlos Indians or what they hunt. I shall assume that you want to learn all you can about these Indians and what they hunt.

The San Carlos or White Mountain Apaches are more civilized than the average Balkan brigand or Italian bandit admitted at Ellis Island. They speak good American-English, wear the same type of clothing as you and I, play baseball and football, raise Hereford cattle and keep gardens. They go to church, behave themselves excellently and work hard. The climate is dry where they live, high enough in the lower parts to be fairly cool and running up to eleven thousand feet elevation.

In the forests of their reservation are deer, bear, grouse, lions, bobcats, wolves, coyotes, foxes, skunks, a few elk. Any number of big, fat trout in the streams.

The Indians live in cabins, shacks, hogans. They watch a strange white man carefully until he has proved himself, since they have suffered much from white crooks. Once they accept a man as a friend he can count on them for life.

Any white man entering the reservation must be vouched for by one whom they know or he is liable to lose everything he has and be turned loose with only his pants on, to walk out. I do not blame them in the slightest degree.

Their chief is a member of the Lutheran Church, a dignified man of handsome face and kindly disposition, one who esteems his pastor as his best friend and is always advising his people to let the fool whites act the idiot if they want to, but let the San Carlos Indians show that they are men.

One must carry a permit to hunt, fish or camp on the land of the San Carlos tribe. It is a beautiful country, and any man who tries to have this tribe moved, ought to be hanged. This tribe furnished many loyal scouts for Crook and other generals.

The full statement of the sections in this department as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Chinchilla-Breeding

RATS:

Question:—"I believe fur-bearin [illegible]chinchillas inhabit that part of South America covered by you, and if so would like you to furnish me with following information:

1. Would chinchillas thrive and multiply (on Mississippi Gulf coast) in captivity?
2. If not, what part of U. S. would be best adapted for them?
3. Does U. S. Government permit them to be brought in?
4. What would be probable cost delivered to this section per male and female?
5. Do they mate in pairs, or does one male serve a number of females?
6. Do you think it advisable to attempt breeding them in this country for profit as fur-bearing animals?
7. What would be proper way of penning or housing and feeding them?

Please omit name and address if you publish and oblige."—S. T. J.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—1. I do not consider that chinchillas would thrive in the Gulf country.
2. Mountains of Colorado.
3. Yes.
4. Possibly five dollars each.
5. They have the habits of rats.
6. No.
7. They live in cracks in rocks in high altitudes.

Note.—The chinchilla is a sort of rat which is trapped in the high Andes by the Indians. A similar country would be the high lands of the Rockies. You could possibly get a pair through the American consul at La Paz, Bolivia, if he felt inclined to get some Indian to trap a pair for you.

Placer and Lode Prospecting

THE subjoined monograph has been printed in leaflet form on hard paper. The leaflet may be obtained free from the "Ask Adventure" expert responsible for it: namely Victor Shaw, Ketchikan, Alaska. Don't expect any response unless you enclose addressed envelop and return postage:

"GO UNTIL you find a country with many rocks of diverse kinds and colors; then start in looking for minerals." That is the advice given once by an old prospector, and it is about as good as any that may be given.

If you are after lode or vein minerals you must get into a country that has the eruptive or volcanic rocks. Placer gold is found in the sands and gravels of volcanic regions, preferably of recent origin, though there has been gold found in such geologically older sections as the Appalachian System.

I've seen gold bedded in sandstone and in slate. This is unusual and was caused by the fact that an eruptive rock intruded into a sedimentary and deposited the gold by infiltration *from* the eruptives when formed.

When you can see the gold in a rock it is not much use to assay it for the value per ton, for it will run up into the thousands generally. Gold can rarely be seen in quartz assaying a few hundreds per ton and under. When in sands and gravels it must be panned down closely and often must be looked for with a strong magnifying-glass. However, I have panned dirt where I could run a half-inch streak of fine dust clear around the pan; this after picking out the nuggets and coarser gold.

Most placer gold came originally from the decay, abrasion, weathering or erosion of auriferous veins. Ice or water may have transported the gold long distances. Gravel deposits are frequently concentrations of enormous quantities of rock, in which the gold may have occurred in small stringers too difficult to mine.

The rapid erosion of fresh rocks by swift streams rarely produces any extensive deposits of placer gold. The richest placers were formed by a deep decay of gold-bearing rocks, according to Robert Peele, School of Mines, Columbia University, in "base-leveled regions of topographic maturity. Under such conditions rocks break down into clay and fine particles which are removed by wind and slow-moving water."

Thus a surface concentration is effected of the heavier minerals (including gold) resulting in an important "residual deposit." These are formed directly over vein droppings or on the gentle slopes beneath, and the gold is not worn or rounded in form, and the richer portion of this gravel is near surface.

Then there are (a) hillside placers; (b) gulch or creek placers; (c) bench placers; (d) river-bar placers; (e) beach placers; and (f) gravel-plain placers.

The territory stream placers of the Sierra Nevada, Calif., were covered by lava flows, sometimes to the depth of 1,500 feet. Volcanic action then elevated the country and the present cañons were eroded by new streams, making these cañons 2,000 to 3,000 feet deep in places. This placed the gold-bearing gravels up near the summits of these modern cañons, with their edges exposed, or perhaps covered with a loose deposit of slide-rock or earth more or less thick. These are known as "buried placers" and are worked much as a coal-mine or mineral vein is worked.

Alaska is an important field for both placer and lode mining. The hills of the Coast Range along southeastern Alaska are an excellent field for quartz veins bearing gold or copper and other minerals of economic value. The known placer districts at present are mostly up in the Peninsula or in the interior.

In the strip called southeastern Alaska the country is too steep and the streams are mostly too rapid for the formation of placer deposits of any size or value. It was in this country, however, that I found the "residual placer" (small), which yielded the rich panning mentioned in the first part of this letter. That ground ran around $100 to the pan, and I found some nuggets as large as your thumb.

Certain minerals are associated with certain kinds of rock, and you must get a few books on geology and mineralogy in order to learn which these are. Coal, for example, is always found in the sedimentary rocks, and you wouldn't look for gold in or near a coal formation; though for that matter there is hardly a variety of rock in which gold has not been found.

The minerals found mostly in the limestones are lead and zinc; in a hornblende rock look for chrome iron, gold, silver, copper, asbestos, soapstone, etc.; in granite you will find gold, silver, tin, molybdenum, etc.; in the shales you may expect coal, gypsum, rock salt, fireclay, etc. The volcanic regions produce gems, sulfur and many of the rarer minerals beside gold and silver. Ancient lake-beds in desert regions are the natural depositories of such soluble minerals as niter, borax, soda, etc.

The crystalline rocks are most favorable for ore deposits, and contacts of sedimentary rocks with eruptive rocks make conditions also favorable for bodies of ore. Another good indication is an intrusive volcanic rock that has tilted the formation to a nearly vertical position. Also the presence of porphyry rocks in or near a vein; or an iron capping (gossan) on the outcrop of a vein.

For testing get Dana's "Manual of Mineralogy" ($3) which gives mechanical tests, such as crystalline form, cleavage, fracture, hardness, specific gravity, color, streak, taste, transparency, odor, chemical composition. As to the chemical composition, there are of course field tests by blowpipe, which are not very difficult; but it is generally easier to mail a sample to some assayer.

For blowpipe tests you'll need your blowpipe, willow charcoal, platinum wire, glass tubing, a small agate mortar, a small hammer, a pair of laboratory forceps, a magnet, a good magnifying-glass, test tubes, a glass funnel and some filter papers. A wash-bottle and some rubber tubing are also convenient to have if you're going to pack this sort of outfit at all.

For reagents you'll need carbonate of soda, borax, micro-cosmic salts, cobalt solution, cyanid of potassium, granulated lead, bone ash and test papers of litmus and turmeric. These are the *dry* reagents, and the *wet* reagents are: Distilled water, hydrochloric acid, nitric acid, sulfuric acid, ammonia and nitrate of cobalt.

I can give you the tests for various minerals, but you'll find this all treated in a book called "The Miner's Guide," by Horace J. West, price $1. Any good bookstore will have it, or they can send to 340 Wilcox Bldg., Los Angeles, Calif. This book also gives all general information a prospector needs, including outfits. It is a mighty fine little handbook at slight cost.

For a prospecting-outfit for one man in most countries two burros and a saddle animal are needed; or you can pack the two burros and walk. For these you need two pack-saddles and a light riding-saddle; two lash-ropes of half-inch manila; two lash-cinches; two "tarps," or pack-covers of 10 oz. duck, preferably paraffined or otherwise waterproofed; two sets of kyacks for the grub, etc.; or you can use waterproofed canvas sacks, which are easier to pack and give no chance for rain to leak in and stand. Don't forget hobbles, either.

In addition you'll need a gold-pan, prospecting-pick with 12-inch handle, a miner's pick and a No. 2 round-point shovel, a tent which is a matter of choice. An A-tent , or a Sibley, with a sectionized center pole, is handy to pack.

An ax, 3-quart canteen, Dutch oven or tin reflector, prospector's magnifying-glass and a good compass are also necessities. Your grub list is another matter of choice, but don't carry canned goods (except milk), and use mostly the dried fruits. Take plenty of pork and beans.

For your bedding use wool; and I've found that a sleeping-bag with adjustable fillers is the cleanest and handiest, beside being the warmest. You should also have a simple first-aid kit and learn how to use it.—VICTOR SHAW.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

"F. M. S."

BRAZIL'S most dangerous rival as a producer of rubber:

Question:—"In a recent communication from Singapore I am referred to the Department of Agriculture of the F. M. S., Kuala Lumpor, F. M. S., for information about the plantation rubber industry of that district. Please give me the words for the abbreviation F. M. S. and any particular information about the rubber industry of that section that you may happen to have.

Please do not print my name and address in *Adventure*."—F. S. Z.

Answer, by Mr. MacCreagh:—F. M. S. mean nothing more cryptic than Federated Malay States.

In speaking of rubber in the States it is not possible to differentiate the Federated States from the rest of the Malay Archipelago. My remarks then may be considered to apply to the whole peninsula.

Within the last fifteen years immense strides have been made in the cultivation of rubber; and a rather unusual and encouraging fact is that there has been no financial failure—except, of course, in those few cases in which cultivation had to be abandoned for some reason.

Kuala Lumpor, the capital of the State of Selangor, is perhaps the center of the rubber industry; though Singapore can claim an almost equal output. Kuala is quite a wide-awake city with real white man's buildings and a railroad which connects it with Perak on the north and Negri Smebilan on the south, and so with the system of the whole peninsula.

A Job in West Africa

TAKE it from a man who's been there, it's no place to be:

Question:—"Would you tell me how I could secure a job in "Africa Part I?" How long would it be before I would be able to secure work? And would like to know if I have to sign for so much of a time and how much? And also please state wages, if possible.

I have a little more time to do in the Navy, and I would like traveling very much. So if I could be sure of securing a job I'll be ready as soon as I get paid off from the Navy."—HOLLIS ALDRICH, care of Postmaster, Seattle, Wash. (Asiatic Station, U. S. N.)

Answer, by Mr. Simpson:—I'm sorry I can not encourage you on the subject of finding work in West Africa. The jobs are few, and the men who are after them are many, the waiting list in the offices of the trading companies being discouragingly long. Also, I have been asked by the firms with which I am most familiar to refrain from giving their names to prospective applicants.

In any event West Africa, while it offers a great deal to the imagination, does not do an awful lot for the pocket or for the health; and my advice, generally speaking, is to stay away.

I'm sorry.

Mimeographed Army Regulations

CONGRESS hasn't appropriated sufficient money to have them printed:

Question:—"I am in quest of material giving information on field-artillery regulations in general; more particularly those concerning the headquarters battery of a '75' gun regiment; and more particularly still, regulations and instructions for figuring firing-data, together with information concerning the care and use of range-finding instruments, aiming-circle, battery commander's telescope and the like.

I am an instrument sergeant in a recently organized H. Q. battery of a National Guard F. A. regiment, and as usual in such cases have suffered from the laxity and procrastination of the 'higher-ups' in the matter of supplying suitable and sufficient

material for instruction work."—JAMES L. FOOTITT, Crawfordsville, Ind.

Answer, by Mr. Fleischer:—Of course I am very glad to supply you with the information you desire, but I am going to be very frank in expressing my opinion about a certain "break" you've made in your letter.

I take it that you are under the impression that the "higher-ups" are lax in supplying suitable and sufficient material for a newly organized National Guard F. A. battery. This impression is wrong, and I certainly am going to take the opportunity of correcting it. If the War Department had to say everything that is to be said concerning the Regulars, the National Guard and the Organized Reserves, you would have all regulations you need. But—our law-makers in Congress are "them" who make appropriations; and, believe me, to eke out even a bill for printing regulations from the niggardly allowances is a hard job. Regulations are now being mimeographed, believe it or not. I know.

I think you have done the General Staff an injustice, and you should not feel so bad about your not having all the dope you need. Of course, you seem to be very conscientious, and I can understand your zeal.

I would suggest that you address the Chief of Field Artillery, War Department, Washington, D. C., for the following Training Regulations:

430— 85 W. D. August 9, 1922.
310— 20 W. D. November 2, 1922.
430— 80
430— 15
430—155 (This is for H. Q. battery)

You'd better have your battery commander write through channels, and I hope that he will get them. They are issued to organizations and not to individuals. Those I mentioned contain all you want to know. I personally, of course, have no F. A. training regulations on hand, being an infantry officer.

By the way, you've sent too many stamps. I am returning same.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

UNCLAIMED MANUSCRIPTS

ATKINS, E. E. S. JR.; Bayless, Dorothy; Banks, Jimmie; Bennett, Thomas T.; Brady, Patrick; Blum, N. A.; Buchanan, James; Breath, Hastlar Gal.; Crafts, H. A.; Chrisholm, Bryon; Cardie, Sinn; Caney, Jack; Cuttriss, C. A.; Cortelli, Fatima; Crafts, L. S.; Currie, Mildred; Colwell, L. Margaret Miss; Coxey, Willard; Cronin, Bernard; Dowson, Edward; Edwards, Henry A.; Emerson, F. S.; Exner, Donald W.; Frandsen, R. M.; Ferguson, C. C.; Gilfillan, Ruth; Gaylord, Alfred; Gene, Frenchie; Gormley, W.; Happy, Il.; Hungerford, G. E.; Hilles, Lieut. Wm., U. S. M. C.; Huntington, C. H.; Hurst, Freda; Holston, S. C.; Irvin, T. W.; King, J. D.; Kelly, D.; Kimsey, R. W.; King, Homer B.; Kahele, Edward Augustine; Lynch, W.; Livingston, J. K.; La Glaire, Peter; Loeck, A. J.; Loschik, S. T.; Marilee, Nelson; Matter, James K.; Miths, B. Radke; Moran, Edward J.; Mosse, James; MacIlrath, W. R.; Murphy, Elisabeth; Madison, Artell; McCravey, E. L.; Mennet, Geo.; Major, Max D.; Merritt, Florence; Morris, Troy; McGinsey, Fred.; Noble, George; O'Farrel, Patrick; Ober, Bertha; Oangham, Rosebud Starr; Pierce, Samuel S.; Perry, James; Paterson, Robert G.; Paradis, A. B.; Patten, Lewis E.; Polowe, David; Presler, Phil.; Roe, Charles; Robinson, Jack P.; Robertson, Mrs. Chester; Rice, Alex.; Roland, Tom; Ringer, Robert Derr; Schmidt, Alex. R.; Sprague, T. R.; Singley, Anton; Seabury, Ralph; Trekell, Mrs. Cynthia; Todd, Homer Eps.; Warner, J. E.; Webber, E. C.; Wetzel, Lewis.

A LIST of unclaimed manuscripts will be published in the January 10th and July 10th issues of Adventure. and a list of unclaimed mail will be published in the last issue of each month.

CONNORS, EUGENE or Gene (Chuck) served as Pvt. in Medical Dept. 2nd Field Artillery at Presidio, San Francisco, Calif., Camp Fremont, Calif., Fort Sill, Okla. during 1917 and 1918. Left U. S. for France from Hoboken in October, 1918. Was discharged at Camp Taylor, Ky., in February, 1919. Have important information for you. Remember Ploermel and Mallestriot, France? Please write.—Address BIDDY, care of *Adventure*.

ABOUT 1902, myself and a relative by the name of Hazel Chreiman were placed in a Children's Boarding School at Hancock, Mich., from where we were later taken to St. Paul, Minnesota and placed with a family by the name of Ollie and Bert Chreiman. I was taken from St. Paul in the early part of 1922. The only information these people have is that she was taken by her father to some place in Texas.

He was thought to be in business in the vicinity of Waco. My mother operated a Hotel at Hancock, Michigan, which was later destroyed by fire. Hazel's mother was employed at this hotel. Any information will be greatly appreciated by her mother.—Address FIRST SERGEANT VERNER ADOLF WILSON, Motor Transport Co., First Brigade, U. S. Marine Corps, Port au Prince, Republic of Haiti, or MRS. ETHEL MAE BISHOP, 806 Carroll Ave., St. Paul, Minn.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

CLARENCE, ROY P. Why don't you write home and let us know where and how you are? If you need money to come home let us know.—Address MOTHER.

BOWMAN, JESSE. Left his home in Zanesville, Ohio during the early Summer of 1913 and who worked on a sheep ranch in Hardin, Montana. Also was in Colorado. Last heard from in Idaho during the Summer of 1917. Some times went by the name of Joe. Any information will be appreciated.—Address EARL SKILER, 1244 Iron St., Zanesville, Ohio.

PARRISH, HARRY. Please write giving your address. I have information to your advantage.—Address C. J. RICHARDSON, Phoenix, Arizona.

DILLMORE, JACK. Last heard of in South California in 1917. Please let me know where you are.—Address WALTER, care of *Adventure*.

ADAMS, JOE. Supposed to be dead, but reported living in Idaho. Worked in rich gold mine in New Mexico. On May 20, 1885 the entire party of eleven started from Wichita Falls, Texas for California. I recognize some parts of the country as being that which I have seen. Any information will be appreciated.—Address T. W. KILMER, Grants, New Mexico.

CONNISTON, ART. Come to Butte, Montana at once. Have news for our trip. Also bought land in Ozarks, Ark. Am going away three months this Summer, so hurry. —Address 'SHORTY" PRIDE, Box 556, Butte, Montana.

COOK, HARVEY LAWRENCE (Shorty), in 62nd or 63rd Infantry, Camp Lee, Petersburg, Va. 1919 and in business with Pat Killean, Petersburg, 1920. Last heard of in Forth Worth, Texas. Write to your old friend the Professor. I have just returned from my third trip to France.—Address E. E. SHATTO, Box 388, Charleston, S. C.

MORGAN, NEWTON A. Age sixty-nine. Carpenter and general mechanic by trade. Left Montana seven years ago. Might be in Canada. Any information will be appreciated by his daughter.—Address MRS. R. B. CUSTER, R. F. D., No. 1, Central Point, Oregon.

REED, CLAUD. Everything is all right. Come home. We want you here.—Address CHESTER REED, Box 4, Herrin, Ill.

Z. T. H. Your five daughters would be glad to hear from you.—Address MRS. V. H. B., 312 Clement St., Houston, Texas.

CASE family. Last heard of in Missoula, Montana, about 1902 or 1904. Are probably still somewhere in the West. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. MILLER CASE, 259 Greenwood Ave., Atlanta, Ga.

THE following have been inquired for in either the June 10 or June 30, 1924 issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine:

BAKER, J. C.; Bernstein, Abe; Burns, Bob or Ralph Scott; Burrough, Stanley; Bushby, Edward T.; Coghlan, C. C.; Costelloe, Jack; Daly, Charles; Dohl, Frank; Dunston, Arnold; Durning, Frank L.; Faries, Cecil R.; Fleisch, Florence; Garrabrandt, Anna B.; Garnier, Martin; Gordon, Frank; Hart, David William; Hines, Hugh W.; Hollis, Clarence C.; Holland, James Arthur; Holly, A. J.; Hooker, Lynn and Jake Archer; Keith, Henry; Kelly, John H.; LeMire, Martha Mrs.; Little, Mary Ann Weston; Little, Thomas; Mann, Herbert Jr.; Margoski or Margowski, David; May, William Sullivan; Nordahl, Thomas; Pruitt, John and Roy; Reger, Andrew (Emdre); Tillman, Albert; Van Marter, Frank E.; Ward, J. C.; Wilcox, A. N.; Woodward, Lee R.

MISCELLANEOUS—Chuck, Harris, Iikwabbe, Slim Hawkensm, Big Clamence, Wild Bill Cody, Ed Larson, Tex Farrel, Kid Reynolds, Charles Warrant, Gus Hughes, Jean Stuarett, Short Murrey, Ed Rice of Dallas, Texas; Jack Kennedy, "Snake Eye Scotty," Troop K Fifth Cavalry Members, Petry Kelly, Thompson, G. O. or any others that were in Mexico in 1919; U. S. S. *Chicago*, members of her crew from April 6, 1917 while in "Rio" and South American ports; Women members of Camp-Fire.

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Fish. You are told how to buy, skin, clean, fillet a fish, how to dress boiled lobster and how to prepare all kinds of fish dishes, including shad roe, frog legs, planked fish, etc.

Stuffings for fish, poultry and game. Bread, sausage, mushroom, celery, oyster and chestnut stuffings.

Sauces for fish, poultry and game. Tartar sauce, hollandaise sauce, horse radish, etc.

Puddings and pudding sauces. All kinds of soufflés, blanc mange, condé, shortcake, dumplings, etc.

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