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THE DARK ROAD

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE DARK ROAD

THE GHOST OF HEMLOCK CANYON

THE BROKEN TRAIL

PINE CREEK RANCH

PRAIRIE GOLD

CROSS TRAILS

CARSON OF RED RIVER

GREEN TIMBER

THE WILDERNESS PATROL

THE BUSH-RANCHER

NORTHWEST!

THE MAN FROM THE WILDS

KIT MUSGRAVE'S LUCK

LISTER'S GREAT ADVENTURE

THE WILDERNESS MINE

WYNDHAM'S PAL

THE BUCCANEER FARMER

THE LURE OF THE NORTH

HARDING OF ALLENWOOD

THE INTRIGUERS

A PRAIRIE COURTSHIP

THURSTON OF ORCHARD VALLEY

THE GREATER POWER

THRICE ARMED

DELILAH OF THE SNOWS

THE DUST OF CONFLICT

THE CATTLE BARON'S DAUGHTER

ALTON OF SOMASCO

The
DARK ROAD

BY
HAROLD BINDLOSS

NEW YORK
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MCMXXVII

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THE DARK ROAD

I

WELLAND LOOKS BACK

The sea sparkled in the moonlight; the land was hidden by a long smear of mist. Thin luminous vapor trailed from the *Shenandoah's* funnel, but her powerful engines' stroke was slow. Her bows swung leisurely from the glittering swell, and the Caribbean rolled with a languid splash along her smooth white side. At sunset flags came down, but the yacht's lines and deck gear were typically American.

On a platform outside her bridge a seaman swung the lead, and when, at measured intervals, the plummet splashed, his cry was hoarsely musical. In the dark pilot-house, the captain marked the depth and, studying the luminous compass, felt his way past the shoals that border the Central American coast. Grant was a good seaman, but he did not like his job. The reefs were numerous and he doubted his pilot. He ought to haul off and wait for morning, but his orders were to make the Santa Catalina lagoon as soon as possible.

The night was hot and the saloon skylights were lifted as far as the brass rods allowed. Somebody played the piano, and Welland, in a cane chair under the awning, knew Jack Huysler's touch. He supposed the tune was a Charleston, but Welland was recently from Africa, where white men did not dance. In fact, until he joined the *Shenandoah* at New York, he knew little about the habits and amusements of fashionable society.

For long, enduring fever and sometimes risking poison, he had walked in the shadow, and his life, for the most part, was as ascetic as a monk's. Welland did not claim to be a Puritan, but in the malaria swamps the indulgent die sooner than the rest, and at the beginning he had concentrated, rawly, on getting rich.

The music stopped, and Welland heard glasses rattle, liquor splash, and the tinkle of ice. A girl laughed, and pleasant, cultivated voices floated up from the saloon. Welland liked his hosts, and he liked the men who would presently land with him, but two did not know all the exploring party might be forced to front. The other certainly knew something; Welland, however, wondered how far Carthew's knowledge went.

Although Alan Welland had but a few hours since seen for the first time the Central American coast, in the gulfs of Mexico and Guinea the climate is the same. Moreover, he imagined he knew as much about fever, snakes, and insects as a white man may know and live. Well, his pay, at all events, was safe, and if Jack Huysler made good, he might get a permanent job.

Alan smiled, a rather dreary smile. Not long since he was an important merchant at a large native town far up a West African river. He knew three or four bush languages and some Arabic; black—and brown-skinned traders brought him goods, and for a time he had a useful sum at the Lagos B.W.A. bank. Well, he had paid for all he got; but he looked farther back.

He saw himself ten years since, a raw, ambitious lad starting hopefully for Africa. His skin was smooth and rosy, his muscles were firm; he was something of an athlete and fastidious about his clothes. His pay was small, but the company stated that on the West Coast promotion was rapid, and Welland admitted the statement true.

Sitting under the *Shenandoah's* awning, he pictured the dreary factory, built on piles, round which the mist from the foul river curled at night. By day the house was like a furnace, but all inside was damp, and mildew rotted one's white clothes. For long Welland did not know when the agent was sober; the fellow's skin was like yellow parchment strained across his bones, and he feared the dark. Sometimes Alan wondered whether the fear was not justified. The jaundiced clerk was sick, and the Krooboys presently carried him, in a flintlock gun box, to a hole in the swamp.

Before a fresh clerk arrived some time passed, and Welland knew the agent's vitality, supported alone by alcohol, fast burned out; burned was perhaps the proper word. The factory was old and rotten; the sick man rambled strangely in his talk, and died. But for the Krooboys, Welland was alone, and he slept with a gun across his bed. The agent's strange talk haunted him, but the factory did not close.

By and by the company sent him upriver to a healthier spot. Sometimes he was sick, but his nerves got firm and he trusted his luck. Since indulgence killed, he was ascetic, and he concentrated on his ambitious plans. Although white men cleared plantations near the coast, the greater part of the produce they shipped was yet carried downriver by native

merchants and the important markets were in the hinterland. Alan resolved he would some day follow the river and tap the stream of commerce at its source, and at length he went.

For a time he prospered, although he ran some daunting risks. The African's trading rules are intricate and, to a white man, strange. Moreover, the dark-skinned merchants are powerful, and business goes with politics and Ju-Ju ceremonies. One bribes the bush magicians, and the ghost leopards carry off an obstinate competitor. Welland had grounds to think some tried to poison him, but none knew he was afraid. Although palm-oil is the standard of commerce along the coast, he got precious gums, gold in quills, kola-nuts, and ivory, and pushed his traffic back to the walled cities in the Sudan.

So far, he was the company's servant; but at length, risking all he had got, he broke the tie. His luck turned. Valuable goods had gone by another route to a foreign colony, and when Welland began to divert the stream the traders on the coast resolved his meddling must be stopped. Alan imagined their frontier officers helped, and his suppression cost a useful sum, but the colored merchants with whom he dealt were alarmed and *agents provocateur* got to work. He had risked his skin before, and, going warily, he kept his life. The trouble was, his money melted, and when, after half an hour's sickness, his best customer died he knew he was broke.

Well, it was some time since, and he had got a post nobody was keen to take at a particularly hot and unhealthy spot on the mangrove coast. Then his employers closed the factory, and Welland, having frankly had enough, sailed for Liverpool, and was offered a sort of managing clerk's post by a new African house. The offer yet stood, but the pay was small, and Alan had agreed for three or four months to join the party an American manufacturer sent out to search the forests on the *caliente* coast for a valuable varnish gum.

In point of years, he was not yet old, but his face was lined, and his white clothes hung slackly about his tall, thin figure. He knew men, for he had used, and been used by, white and black and brown, and as a rule he trusted where he was forced to trust. Women he did not know, but he had nothing to do with them. Alan imagined his illusions and the passions that embarrass flesh and blood had melted in Africa. Yet he thought he had kept his nerve, and his judgment was cool and sound.

He turned his head. Steps echoed in the deck-house and a girl laughed. Alan liked Miss Whitney's laugh: one sensed her joyous confidence and sincerity. She stepped across the door-ledge and balanced on the slanted planks, her light, smoothly lined figure black against the glittering sea. Then she touched a young man who followed her and they vanished behind the house. Another girl, an older woman and two or three men came out. One saw Welland and advanced with a seaman's step.

Carthew, the expedition's leader, was not young, but he carried himself well, and although he did not use his title, Welland understood he was, at one time, a British navy officer. His voice was cultivated, and one noticed his easy, rather humorous politeness. Sitting down by Welland, he lighted a cigarette.

"You did not join our celebrations," he remarked.

"I'm rather a dull dog," said Welland. "Then I think I'd sooner wait until we have finished our job."

"The rule is a good rule. Yellow Jack, however, is not all he was, and we know something about *anopheles*, who carries the malaria germs."

"Do you know much about snakes?" Welland inquired.

"I'm a sailor, but I have met *fer-de-lance*. Well, to know the obstacles is something, and I do not expect our companions will be very much daunted when they begin to find out. They are good, raw stuff. You and I, by contrast, so to speak, are salted professionals."

Welland pondered. On the whole, he liked Carthew, and he felt as if the older man asked for his support. That perhaps was all; he did not think Carthew wanted a confederate.

"Yes," he said, "I joined because for a fixed time I get first-class pay. I, however, expect, and am willing, to earn the sum."

The smoke tossed about the yacht's funnel, and angry white ripples splashed along the moon's track. In the distance, the mist rolled back, and a vague dark smear cut the shining sea. The hot land breeze grew fresh, and one smelt spices,

steaming soil, and fermenting mud. Welland knew the smell, and thought it perhaps accounted for Carthew's next remark.

"Oh, well, my engagement is for twelve months, and I stipulated for an all-risk insurance policy. Then, so long as I am occupied by the company's business, the president's family gives my daughter a home—"

He stopped, as if he had not thought to be as frank, but Welland did not know. He imagined Carthew's carelessness sometimes was calculated. He perhaps meant to indicate that he and the other were not, like their companions, gentlemen adventurers.

"I expect to satisfy old man Huysler was not an easy job," Welland remarked.

"In a way, Huysler was willing to be persuaded. I think he began to be bothered about his son and did not approve the boy's ambition to be a fashionable sport. Then Miss Whitney helped. For all her charm, she's something of a Puritan, and she thought Jack ought to go. Her lover must not loaf. A good American's business is to work, and the boy must show all who are interested that he is proper stuff."

"And that was all?" said Welland, rather dryly.

"It was not all. Mr. Huysler is a business man and would not have financed a sporting excursion. Since he's a varnish manufacturer, he was willing to bet on our finding the famous gum."

"The Spaniards landed four hundred years ago, and the queer thing is, nobody has ever exploited the stuff. You actually got a small quantity?"

"The *conquistadores* searched for gold; for the most part, the country is swamp and forest and mountain. There are very few roads on which wheeled transport runs. On the coast, the merchants claim to be Spaniards. In the woods, the people are Indians, negroes, and half-breeds of sorts: a primitive lot. The government is tyrannical; unscrupulous adventurers fight for the president's post. In the circumstances, commercial exploitation is slow, and the merchants are satisfied to ship some fruit and dyewood to the United States. All the same, the *goma-cristal* grows in the wet forests, and when Huysler's chemist experimented with the small quantity I supplied, he admitted he had not yet handled stuff as good for varnish making—"

Carthew lighted a fresh cigarette, and the smoke blew to leeward in a thin gray streak. The land breeze shook the wet awning and big drops splashed the deck. The leadsmen's plummet swung, and when he called the depth the propeller's throb got slow. A flying fish skimmed the shining swell, touched a silver crest, and vanished. Beyond the deck-house, the white clothes of a laughing group shone in the moonlight. They were going north into the gulf for tarpon fishing, and afterwards to the fashionable beaches on the Florida coast. Welland and three others were going into the swamps, and at a time agreed the *Shenandoah* would return and pick them up. Alan wondered— He knew something about mud and mangroves, and, but for Carthew, his companions did not. By and by Carthew looked up, as if he invited his confidence.

"In America I was something like a salesman, and a successful salesman must himself believe his goods are the best. Well, I satisfied Huysler and his technical experts, but if I am to carry out all I engaged to do, I must have your support. Perhaps you'll allow me to tell you all I know about the material I call *crystalium*?"

"Twenty years ago I was detailed for a hydrographical survey along this coast. Our sounding parties rowed about behind the *cays* and up the lagoons. In the navy we study varnishes, and the best gum used in their manufacture is the expensive copal. The Spanish traders get small quantities of copal, and sometimes smaller lots of a particular quality they call *goma-cristal*. Have you at any time handled a Cremona violin?"

"I have not," said Welland, smiling. "The varnish perhaps was good?"

"The *amber* varnish has never been equaled, although modern experts agree that amber was not used. Its color is luminous red-gold, like the sun in wine; the skin is hard like glass, but flexible, although it can be chipped. Well, the secret died with the famous Italian makers; but my conviction is they used a gum carried across Tunis from the Sudan. Moreover, I'm persuaded *crystalium* is the stuff, although it indurates soft wood and cannot be chipped off."

"It's possible," said Welland. "Central America and West Africa have much in common. If you follow a parallel of latitude across the world, where the rainfall is equal I expect the trees are the same—but it's twenty years since you found the gum."

"I went back afterwards. When I was paid off, my means were not large. For some time I inquired along the coast and searched the woods, but exploration is expensive, and I was broke. In fact, until Huysler financed me I could not resume the search. All the same, crystalium grows in the *tierra caliente*, and has long been known to the Indians. So far, however, I think they do not know its value. Anyhow, they're a secretive lot and on the whole antagonistic to commercial exploitation."

Welland pondered. The West African plan was to start a buying agency on the coast; Huysler's was to push inland and search for the material he wanted, and then buy from the government a monopoly concession. Welland saw some drawbacks.

"I'll earn my pay. That's all I can engage to do."

"It is perhaps enough," said Carthew, and looked up.

The lead splashed, and when the seaman called the depth, the rudder-chains rattled and the yacht's bows began to swing. The engine telegraph clanged sharply and the captain strode from the pilot-house.

"*Cuatro brazos!*" he said to the pilot. "*Fuera pronto!* Get off my bridge, you swine!"

The pilot's hand was at his folded red-silk belt, and Welland measured the distance to the bridge ladder; Carthew got up, carelessly but quickly. Both imagined the fellow carried a long Spanish knife. The captain's pose was braced and he clenched his fist.

"Get off my bridge!" he ordered.

For a moment the pilot hesitated, and then went down the ladder. His body was thick and muscular, but his legs were thin; his face and naked feet were coffee-brown. When he reached the deck he spat, expressively, on the planks.

"*Hijos de burras, todos. Mal rayo los come,*" he growled, and stalked scornfully past the group by the companion-house.

"In the *tierra caliente* white men are not popular," Carthew remarked. "I think the skipper ran some risk—but he's coming down."

The engines had nearly stopped, and now the screw beat slackly, one heard a distant rumble, as if the sea broke across a shoal. Captain Grant joined the waiting group.

"The soundings we have got don't agree with the chart, sir. I am going to haul her out and wait for sun-up."

"It's awkward," said one. "We ought to keep the date I gave our friends at Vera Cruz. However, we mustn't risk piling up the yacht. You know the coast, Carthew?"

"Since I helped make the survey, I believe the chart is accurate," Carthew replied. "My notion is, Captain Grant ought to trust his lead."

"I sure don't trust the pilot," Grant declared. "Maybe I'll get a bearing in the morning, sir."

"Then haul her out," said the other, and turned to his companions. "Our exploring friends cannot land as soon as we reckoned and I think we'll go to bed."



II

CARHEW PUSHES OFF

At seven o'clock in the morning Welland went on deck. The engines were stopped and the yacht rolled languidly. Her freshly scrubbed deck began to dry in the rising sun, and Welland, pulling a chair where the bright beams struck, leisurely looked about.

In the west, a level belt of mist cut the sparkling sea. Somewhere behind it was the land, and Welland imagined that was all the captain knew. He himself was content to wait. He liked his American hosts; since he had much to do with cultivated people a number of years had gone, and after the African factories, the *Shenandoah's* cleanness was something fresh. Nickel and brass were polished, the narrow planks that followed the deck's curve were spotless. The ropes were white Manila, and the coils were even on the shining pins. All stood for wealth and calculated efficiency. Welland smiled, a dreary smile. At one time he had thought he might be rich; now he was a broken adventurer whom his hosts had hired.

He heard breathless shouts and saw Huysler and Nilson swim round the ship. Nilson swam like a porpoise, his powerful white body shining in the foam he tossed about. His hair was yellow and sparkled when his swinging arm lifted his head. Nilson's home was in Minnesota and his was the pure Nordic type. Welland understood his main occupation was to hunt Canadian moose and sail a yacht on the Great Lakes.

Twenty yards behind the other Huysler plowed along. Welland admitted the boy could swim, but he had not Nilson's splendid vitality and force. They turned to cross the bows, and Captain Grant jumped on the rail.

"Come on out of it, boys," he ordered. "I don't want to fight a shark for you."

They steered for the ladder and on the top platform Nilson stretched his arms and rubbed the water from his skin. His body was molded like a Greek statue, but his color was Scandinavian white and red. Huysler, climbing the steps, was rather pale-olive and brown. His type was the thick-necked, rather fleshy type that has recently emerged in the Middle Western States, but he was athletic and his look was frank. The captain gave them a dry approving smile.

"If you want to make old bones, you got to use some sense."

"I don't know if I'm keen," said Nilson with a laugh. "So long as you are young, the proper line's to let yourself go all out. When I do get stiff and cautious, I'll look for a skipper's job."

Singing in a full-throated voice, he ran along the deck; Huysler draped himself in a towel and sat down on the planks by Welland's chair.

"If we had thought you were up, we'd have waited for you to join us. Have you got a cigarette?"

Welland gave him a cigarette. "I have spent ten years in hot countries and when I bathe I use hot water. The habit has some advantages you may presently find out. But I don't suppose your object was to talk about your swim."

"Oh, well," said Huysler, with a smile, "after the plunge I like the sun on my skin; but there is another thing—I believe Helen means to talk to you about our excursion. She rather likes you, sir."

"That's something, Mr. Huysler. I have met people who did not like me."

The boy nodded as if he understood. Welland was very thin, his face was lined, and his shoulders were slightly bent. Nothing indicated muscular strength, but somehow his level glance was commanding. Huysler knew he was not the sort one bluffed.

"Among friends, I'm Jack Huysler, Jake for short. Anyhow, the old man kind of took a shine to you, and one can't cheat him. He reckoned if we got up against it and I was in doubt, what you said would go. Carthew, of course, is chief, and a good sort, but he's English, and somehow stands you off."

For all Carthew's charm, Welland had felt something like that, and, since he knew men, he was puzzled. Jack Huysler, by contrast, was boyishly sincere and frank; a good example of fearless, trustful youth.

"I'm rather bucked, Jack; but we will not bother to be polite. Miss Whitney is going to interview me. Well?"

"Now all's ready for us to push off, she begins to be disturbed. I think she feels herself accountable."

"Is Miss Whitney accountable?" Welland inquired.

"To some extent," said Huysler, with a touch of hesitation. "Helen's a sport, but she's serious. If you get me, it's the proper word. There's a type of American girl who doesn't give herself altogether to jazz and extravagance, you know. In fact, her notion is an American ought to work."

"I imagine a large number do work," Welland remarked.

Huysler gave him an apologetic smile. "I mustn't bore you; but I didn't mean to loaf. My plan was to take up car-racing, and when Carthew came along I was weighing an Alaskan aero-exploration stunt. The trouble was, Helen and my father did not approve. At the office, the old man is great, but you could buy for five dollars all the joy he gets from life. He thinks varnish; I guess he dreams varnish; and, but for two or three hours evenings, he lives at the factory. If all you want is an office chair, where's the use in getting rich? Anyhow, he's a good father, and since Helen and he agree, I've got to indulge them. Carthew's scheme is a business proposition."

Welland noticed that Jack did not inquire if he thought Carthew would find the gum. All the young fellow wanted was to persuade the girl he loved he was not a loafer. His ambition, so far as it went, was praiseworthy.

"Then my part is to satisfy Miss Whitney you do not run much risk? You'd sooner she thought our excursion something like a summer camping-trip. Well, although I don't know much about Central America, I doubt if I can honestly undertake the job."

"Helen is not a fool," said Huysler, smiling. "You do know something about swamps and fever. I don't want her to worry; that's all."

Light shoes tapped the planks and a girl's white clothes shone in the dazzling sun. Huysler jumped up and fled, and Welland frowned. If Miss Whitney had seen that they were engaged in confidential talk, he would sooner Jack had gone before. Then he saw the girl was not Miss Whitney. Adela Carthew was frankly English, although she was short and light. Her eyes were blue, her hair was yellow; she was young and not sophisticated, but Welland knew her to be a thoroughbred. He fetched her a chair.

"The engines are stopped," she said. "When does Captain Grant expect to land you?"

"In six or seven hours. We must wait for the mist to lift."

Adela Carthew studied the deck planks, and then gave Welland a hesitating glance.

"Are you keen about going? I expect you, at all events, understand the difficulties."

"I agreed to go. Since I'm not remarkably rash, that is something. But Mr. Carthew has explored the country, and if you want particulars, he is the proper man—"

Adela smiled. "You play up, but I'd like you to be open. My father, a long time since, surveyed the coast and was afterwards in the forests for, I think, two or three months. You have lived among savages in a country where sickness is common."

"The Africans are not altogether savages, and I believe the Central American natives, for the most part, anyhow, are tame and industrious. Then our party is supplied with all the stores and medicines Mr. Carthew and I imagine an expedition ought to carry. I really have no grounds to doubt our making good."

"Some supplies are rifle cartridges," said Adela meaningly. "You are second in command, and Father must consult with you. He is not young, Mr. Welland, and I think he feels to find the gum is the last chance he may get. Then he's something of a gambler and his habit is to trust his luck. Yours, perhaps, is not—"

Welland saw frankness cost her something, for delicate color touched her face. Although he was sympathetic, he felt her trust, in a way, was humorous. By contrast with her fresh youth, she thought him old and wise. Yet he was rather battered

by adverse fortune, and he carried the marks he had got in Africa.

"Oh, well," he said, "on the whole, my luck has not been remarkably good."

"Father's is not good," said Adela impulsively. "I'm afraid he may be rash—and he is all I've got."

It looked as if she loved Carthew, and yet knew his drawbacks. Welland himself acknowledged his leader's charm.

"But you have some relations and friends."

"They are not numerous. My mother is dead, and when I came back from school we lived in France and Belgium—But you cannot be interested and perhaps I ought not to have bothered you. All the same, Father is not very cautious and the others are boys."

Welland admitted he had not Nilson's splendid youth and strength. To envy the young fellow was ridiculous, and the girl's trust moved him. She knew he would not think her disloyal, although she, so to speak, asked him to guard, and perhaps control, his commander. Besides, he rather thought she knew her embarrassed statements told him much. He wanted to soothe and comfort her, but he was neither young nor old enough to do so properly.

"Where Mr. Carthew needs my help, it is his," he said. "Then I'm not at all adventurous, and, so far as my counsel goes, you can reckon on our taking the prudent line."

Adela got up. "Thank you; it's all I want." She gave him a smile. "You don't promise rashly; but I think you're stanch."

Welland let her go and walked about the deck. Queer emotional impulses he had thought he had long since done with bothered him, but he was a broken adventurer and must not be cheated by romantic sentiment. By and by a bell rang and he joined the party in the white-and-gold saloon.

Although they had not known him long, his hosts were kind. The Americans, he knew, were a hospitable lot, and he felt they would be sorry to let their guests go. Welland frankly admitted that if he were as rich as the others, he would stop on board. His breakfast, for example, was skilfully served, and the sunbeams that pierced the skylights sparkled on fine silver and delicate glass. A sweet-potato vine trailed across the spotless beams, and the gilt molding shone behind the leaves.

Carthew rather cleverly steered the talk away from the expedition. The fellow certainly did not want to be thought an intrepid explorer; one felt he stood for the British navy's traditional reserve. Humorously urbane and cultivated, he led the others where he wanted them to go. Yet all were cultivated, and some were keen.

Welland saw that Miss Whitney studied Carthew. Her eyes and hair were brown; she was tall and nobly built, and her look was proud. Welland thought her forceful and keenly intelligent. His social talents, however, were not remarkable, and he concentrated on his breakfast. Before he got another of the sort some time might pass.

When breakfast was over the mist rolled back. The coast was like a low green band, and the *Shenandoah* went ahead. After five or six hours she stopped in an open bay. Dark forest rolled along the beach; in some places it looked as if the trees grew in the water, but one saw yellow sandy belts, bordered by white. The sea breeze blew fresh and the captain came down from his bridge.

"We have made it," he said. "All the same, some surf is running and I can't risk my boats on the bar. Maybe she'll smooth at sunset, when the wind comes off the land."

"I'm afraid we must wait," Carthew agreed. "To ship salt water might damage our stores."

For all the boisterous wind, the afternoon was hot, and the passengers stole away to sleep, if possible, in shady spots. Welland found a cool corner under a lifeboat, and had begun to imagine he was back in the African hinterland when he was mechanically conscious of somebody about. In a moment his body was braced and his brain alert. Helen Whitney, a yard or two off, laughed.

"If I disturbed you, I am sorry."

"I'm not disturbed," said Welland. "If I'd had a moment's warning, I might have known the proper word."

"Sincerity is perhaps as useful as labored politeness. The queer thing is, you did not expect me, although I think you ought to have done so."

"Your keenness is rather remarkable," Welland rejoined.

"I know Jack. A girl does know her lover, and Jack, of course, is mine. Although he's a dear, he's rather obvious; but perhaps all young men are—"

"He declared you were not a fool," Welland observed.

Helen Whitney smiled. "When he gave you your cue? Perhaps it's strange, but I imagine one or two other people have recently given you their confidence. Can you account for it?"

"One must be modest. Besides, if your supposition were accurate, the people, for all you know, might be rash. However, you wanted to talk to me?"

"That is so, Mr. Welland. I wanted a sympathetic audience. I think I wanted to be comforted, and I'm willing for you to persuade me that Mr. Carthew's adventure is as safe as he claims. I do not doubt his honesty, but some men are recklessly hopeful."

Welland agreed. Carthew was hopeful. Although his hair was touched by white, he was marked by a sort of infectious, youthful enthusiasm. Yet two women, one of whom was his daughter, were not carried away.

"He satisfied Mr. Whitney and Mr. Huysler. They are American business men."

Helen turned. Her bantering smile vanished; her look was disturbed but not embarrassed. Welland fronted her calmly. In the worn adventurer she sensed a quiet steadfastness that somehow was comforting.

"Ah," she said, "my father and Huysler risk their money; I risk my lover. Then, in a way, I persuaded them, and but for me Jack would not have gone. Perhaps I wanted our friends to know the stuff he is; but it was not altogether girlish vanity—He ought to have a useful occupation, and, if Carthew did find the gum, I thought Jack might superintend—Where he's interested he's very keen; I feel he has qualities he doesn't yet know he's got. Well, I urged him to go, and now I'm afraid —"

She stopped, and with a rather dreary smile resumed: "For a modern young woman to feel she has foolishly meddled is humiliating; particularly when she is a self-confident American girl. But that's not important. The trouble is, if I have been foolish, Jack must pay."

"All that's worth getting costs something," said Welland quietly. "On the whole, I do not think you ought to be anxious. Carthew is a good leader and we are a pretty strong combine. Then we have used all the caution our knowledge of the tropics indicates; and there's another thing. As a rule, a tenderfoot's luck is extraordinary. Perhaps because he does not see the obstacles, he often gets, without much effort, where sober men hesitate to go. Youth carries one along, and Jack is a hefty fellow."

"You try to be kind," said Helen. "I think I am a little comforted. But you are perhaps not entitled to talk like an aged philosopher."

"Youth does not stand the African sun for long. Mine and all it implied melted ten years since."

"I wonder—" said Helen, and got up. "It's possible you don't yet know yourself, and if you find out you're not as sober as you think, I hope the discovery will not be embarrassing. At all events, you are kind, and I'm happier."

She went off and Welland went to sleep. When he woke, the yacht's anchor was down and she rolled awkwardly. The sea breeze was lighter, and ominous clouds floated about the coast, but the sun pierced the fluttering awnings and the heat was almost insupportable. Under the bridge was the coolest spot, and when a languid party gathered in the shade it looked as if Carthew knew how to wait. His jokes banished the tension and he told humorous tales.

About six o'clock the sun set and mist hid the land. The breeze dropped, and in the calm one smelt the sour mangrove swamps. Then a light wind began to blow from the coast, and the heat got worse. In the distance thunder rumbled, and sometimes lightning flickered across the sea.

"I guess you might chance it," said Captain Grant. "Stand by to see your stores on board and I'll swing out the boats."

The gasoline long-boat splashed in the sea, and two seamen pulled the service-gig round the yacht's stern. Welland was storekeeper, and for a time he was occupied loading his supplies. Then somebody called him to the top of the ladder and people gave him their hands. For the most part, he did not know who they were; the yacht rolled, and when the big hatch-light swung, the gloom was puzzling. All the same, he knew Adela Carthew's touch on his arm.

"You will take care of Father," she said.

Welland went down the ladder, and Carthew jumped on board.

"I suppose you have got everything?" he said. "Make the gig fast, cox'n, and shove off."

He seized the tiller and the engine throbbed. People shouted, the *Shenandoah's* whistle blew, and the boat plunged into the dark.

III

THE VIKING STRAIN

Thunder crashed and for a few moments drowned the sea's turmoil. Fresh lightning glimmered in the spray, and thirty yards ahead Welland saw a spouting roller heave and break. By comparison with the African surf, the roller was small, but the boats were deeply loaded and a bar blocked the entrance to the lagoon. Then the thunder had let loose a hot, savage wind, and the launch, hampered by the gig she towed, did not steer handily. When the rollers lifted the gig, she forged ahead on the slackened rope, and it looked as if she would leap on board.

Carthew, balancing in the stern, touched the man at the engine control.

"Slow, but watch the gig," he said. "So long as she doesn't hit us, I expect the double warp will hold her."

Welland imagined he waited for a smooth, and hoped he knew where he steered. Where the sea breaks angrily its lift is measured, and after three large rollers the next, as a rule, is small. Yet the night was black dark, and when the lightning stopped all one saw was tossing spray.

The launch plunged into a hollow behind a whitetopped sea. The sea forged ahead into the gloom, and crashed. Carthew signed the engineer.

"Let her go!"

Foam leaped about the lifted bows, and she plowed the roller's frothing wake. Then her stern was dragged down and one tow-rope went slack. Carthew swore and pushed the tiller across, for the gig surged forward, obliquely to their course. The sea that followed rolled up and carried both boats along. Water roared and spouted, but when, for a few moments, she steadied, Welland thought the launch had crossed the worst turmoil. The gig, however, had not; the ropes were slack and she had vanished in the dark.

"Stop your engine," shouted Carthew. "Haul the broken warps."

To stop was risky, but a loose rope's habit is to foul a revolving screw, and the gig, with the stores she carried, must not be lost. Lightning dimmed the blue flare in the cox'n's hand, and they saw her, fifty yards off, lurch across a breaking sea.

"We must put a man aboard," said the cox'n. "Who is going?"

It looked as if none was keen. The jump was risky, and in warm seas ground sharks haunt the surf. Nilson laughed.

"The job is ours, cox'n. She carries our supplies. Stand by your heaving line." He turned to Carthew. "Run me alongside, sir."

For a few moments all was dark, but the launch went ahead and somebody lighted another flare. The pulsating blue radiance pierced the spray, and picked out the gig, speeding, four or five yards off, on a crested roller's back. Foam seethed about her, and a fresh curling ridge followed close astern. Then lightning blazed across the turmoil and Nilson jumped on the little rounded deck at the launch's bow. The wind blew his soaked white clothes against his trunk and legs. Braced for the leap from the treacherous platform, he was a splendid, defiant figure.

Then the blue flare sputtered, the engine stopped, and Nilson was gone. When the launch went up on the next roller, his arms were across the gig's gunwale and his legs trailed in the foam. Heaving his body upward, like a rising seal, he rolled on board, and in the dark when the flare burned down his great voice was louder than the sea.

"Wait for a flash. Let me have your line!"

The uncoiling line crossed the lightning's blaze, and a big grass rope was made fast. The launch went ahead and in five or six minutes the roar of tumbling seas got indistinct astern. They had crossed the bar and, if Carthew could keep the channel, would soon reach sheltered water in the Catalina lagoon. The lightning stopped, and in the black dark tremendous rain beat the sea. Carthew concentrated on his glimmering compass and the engine throbbed with a steady beat.

By and by the rain stopped and stars began to shine. Vague trees cut the sky, and one heard the tide gurgle in the channels among the roots. Fish splashed, and when the mangroves were close aboard one heard claws scrape the slimy bark. Welland and Carthew knew the propeller's wash disturbed the swarming crabs and the mud-fish that burrow in the ooze. The air was thick with steam, and the greasy current smelt like decaying flowers, for the rank sourness was pierced by hot, spicy scents. In the gloom of the woods, all was calm and Nilson, his clothes steaming by the engine, tranquilly smoked a cigarette. To picture his Viking's leap in the storm but twenty minutes since was somehow ridiculous. Yet Welland knew the languid calm more ominous than an icy northern gale.

Lights began to twinkle. The engine stopped and the boats gently bumped against a broken wall. Men pushed down the steps, ropes were seized, and one heard uncouth Castilian, Creole French, and waterfront American. At length, the party had arrived; the sea they knew was done with, and Welland wondered whether Carthew knew all that was in front. In the meantime, he was quartermaster and his business was to land the stores. Engaging some dusky porters, he got to work, and when the last package was examined and locked in an iron go-down, he carried the key to the *fonda Malagueña* and went to bed.

The *fonda* was built three hundred years ago, and Welland thought it like the larger houses in the African hinterland; he reflected that the Arabs dominated the Sahara and the Moors for long ruled Spain. The courtyard the building surrounded was, from a Northerner's point of view, unspeakably dirty, and a mule stable adjoined the kitchen. If the sanitary rules that satisfied the Cataliñeros were used by negroes in British Africa, Welland thought the head man would be fined. It, however, was not important, and for the morning he was occupied.

In the afternoon, when *siesta* was over and the fresh sea breeze tempered the heat, Señor Don Francisco Almirer, Carthew's agent, entertained the party in his courtyard. The *patio* was paved; a broken fountain occupied the center, and on one side was an arcade where red oleanders grew in tubs. On the other side, an arch like a tunnel pierced the house. An iron gate, rusty and broken, but yet beautiful, opened to the street, and the outside steps from the *patio* to the first floor were guarded by brass rails. Welland knew the gate was not forged in Central America. The *conquistadores* had carried it across the sea when Spain ruled the Netherlands.

Outside the gate, dazzling sunshine touched dusty palms, baked mud, and the crumbling mole where the caravels and afterwards the brigantines were moored. Now the channel was blocked by silt and the Spaniards' warehouses were tumbled stones. It looked as if Santa Catalina had not prospered since the conquerors' rule was broken, and degenerate freedom bred decay.

For all that, sometimes a steamer stopped outside the bar and Don Pancho's lighters carried off a load of dyewood and brought back American goods. He claimed to be Spanish, but his skin was yellow and his hair was straight. He was lightly built, and it looked as if he, so to speak, had shriveled in the sun. For the most part, he was marked by something of the Indian's inscrutable calm.

Señora Almirer was large, lethargic, and fat, and when she had supplied her guests with fruit and wine and dulces from Cuba, Welland thought she went to sleep. Her daughter Pacienza was short and plump, and on the whole attractive; but Señorita Mariquita Viñoles' charm was marked. Mariquita's skin was warm olive; her hair and eyes were black as ebony. She was light and slender and Welland thought she moved with the grace of an Arab dancing girl.

The señoritas, however, had nothing to do with him; and by and by they and Huysler and Nilson crossed the *patio* to the arcade. Pacienza went for a guitar, and the fumbling notes that pierced the careless laughter implied that she gave one of the young men a music lesson. Sometimes Señora Almirer languidly looked up, and then her veined eyelids drooped.

Welland and Carthew faced Almirer and a dark-skinned priest across the table. Father Sebastian, like his host, was shriveled and his clothes were threadbare. He knew some French; Welland and Carthew knew some Castilian, and Don Pancho had apparently studied wharf-side American.

"To-morrow, or perhaps the next day, I will ask about the canoes and porters you require," he said. "In the *tierras calientes* one does not move fast."

"We must start before the week is out," Carthew rejoined.

Don Pancho shrugged. "Well, there is another thing. You will perhaps pay Señor Galdos for his protection?"

"I think not," said Carthew, firmly. "We have the President Vallon's *vaya*, empowering us to search where we like, and a provisional agreement about a concession should we find the gum."

"To find the *goma-cristal* is hard. Others have searched," Father Sebastian remarked.

"If we bribed Señor Galdos, a fresh subordinate might put in a claim and before we satisfied the lot our money would be gone," Carthew resumed.

Don Pancho seemed to ponder, and Welland imagined he, for some not very obvious reason, approved Carthew's resolve. He knew the Spaniard astute, and, trained in Africa to search beneath the surface for another's point of view, he sensed calculation and intrigue. He thought Father Sebastian understood, but was content to watch the game.

"The President rules at the capital; Señor Galdos rules the forest you must cross, but neither may use his authority for long. In this country, one reaps, as soon as possible, where one has not sown, and the quickest plan is to sell the nation's property to speculating foreigners."

"I have met Vallon," said Carthew carelessly. "The interview was short. What do you think about him?"

"A firm ruler; a great brute, señor!"

Father Sebastian sprang from peasant stock, and he used a vulgar gesture.

"A robber of the church and a man without religion! There are many such, but President Vallon is without shame."

He stopped and Don Pancho glanced about. Since Welland thought his nerve was good, his quick glance was perhaps significant. The other saw he was interested, for he smiled.

"Although we are free republicans, one does not publicly criticize our rulers. When the time is ripe, one uses another plan. Well, I do not know if you will find the *cristal*, and if I were an American merchant I would sooner speculate in cartridges. To find a buyer might be possible."

"No," said Carthew. "We do not meddle with revolutionary politics. Besides, the President is our protector."

Don Pancho shrugged. "Oh, well, if he has promised, his word goes. Still, Galdos is powerful, and if you refuse him his present, he may bother you."

"We must risk it," said Carthew, and Welland, studying his host, thought him satisfied.

"I suppose the people we will meet are half-breed *meztisos*?" he said.

"They are very mixed," Don Pancho agreed with a smile. "At the capital is a small *aristocracia* in whose veins runs nearly pure Iberian blood, and a few American and English merchants have stations along the coast. In the swamp belt you must cross, negroes cultivate patches of dry ground, and if you reach the high, *templadas* belt, you will find Indians, mulattos, and half-breeds of all the races in the West Indies."

"*Pobrecitos!*" said Father Sebastian. "For long they have sweated while their exploiters at the capital got fat, and now the Government thinks to crush their one friend, the Church. We are forbidden to preach; but I, at all events, do not acknowledge the Government's authority."

He drained his *copita* of scented aniseed and, saluting all ceremoniously, crossed the flags. Although his clothes were threadbare and his shoulders bent, he was somehow dignified.

"There goes a man who fears none, and uses all to serve his Church," Don Pancho remarked. "If I were the President, I might think him dangerous. When you start he will go with you. I do not know his errand, but with him I think you might pass where the Government's *vaya* would not carry you."

Welland thought they might find a safer guide, but Carthew was leader, and he looked about. In the shady arcade Mariquita Viñoles daintily fingered the guitar, and talked, for Nilson's instruction, in French. It looked as if she did not know he fastened an oleander blossom in her hair. Mariquita's hair was shining black; Nilson's was yellow, his eyes were sea-blue, and his type was the Viking type. Welland frowned, for he knew Nature's rule. Moreover, in lands where wine is cheap and for a time the sun fires one's blood, the Northerner's habit is rather to let himself go. Welland thought

Huysler and Señorita Almiraz sympathetically amused. Youth called to youth and the picture perhaps had some charm. To meddle, however, was Señora Almiraz's business, and although he thought her interested, she said nothing.

At length Carthew got up, but Huysler and Nilson, invited by the señora, agreed to remain. Welland and Carthew went off, and in the sandy street stopped for a moment or two in front of a ruined house. Broken green shutters hung crookedly across the windows, flakes of plaster had fallen from the walls, and in the dazzling sunshine the house was bleak and forbidding. Across the street an old, ragged peon smoked a cigarette in the shade.

"The house is large," said Carthew in his best Castilian. "Why is it allowed to fall down?"

"At Santa Catalina houses do fall down and nobody bothers," the peon replied. "All the same, the casa Morales is *desgraciada*."

"Unfortunate, unhappy—translation is difficult," Carthew remarked. "But what is the tale, my friend?"

The peon told him. When President Vallon seized command, the last of the constitutionalists barricaded the house. Their defense was stubborn, and when the soldiers broke in all who survived were wounded.

"They were shot, I suppose?" said Carthew, indicating the scarred wall.

"No, señor," said the peon. "They were dragged out, and the guard in the street used the bayonet. One was Don Pancho Almiraz's brother."

Carthew gave him some cigarettes, but when they resumed their walk his look was thoughtful.

"I imagine our friend Vallon is not remarkably popular. Latin Republican politics are bewildering. Factions split and recombine; antagonists unite to pull down former friends, and as a rule the President's worst enemy is his chief officer."

"These folks are not altogether Latin," Welland rejoined.

"There's the trouble. The Peninsular Spaniard's blood is red, and if you annoy him sufficiently, he is frank; to break the Indian's reserve is another thing, and a half-breed is subtler than a white man. However, we have nothing to do with their intrigues, and if a faction tries to use us, our line's a watchful neutrality."

"That is so. All the same, a neutral is nobody's friend, and is apt to get some knocks from both antagonists."

"Both implies two parties," Carthew remarked. "As a rule, in Central American disputes the parties are three or four. Since our employers, so to speak, have bet on the President, we must, as far as possible, refuse to be entangled."



IV

YOUTH FOLLOWS ITS BENT

Dinner was over some time since and the evening was hot. The *Malagueña* courtyard smelt of mules, and when the moon rose Carthew and Welland smoked their pipes on the little balcony fronting the street. But for the arch below them, the wall, as high as the first floor, went up unbroken; and then the windows, closed only by *persiana* shutters, were narrow. The house, in fact, was rather like a fort. It had perhaps been built when Spanish caravels loaded silver at the port, and Welland remarked that the balcony rails were brass. Now the mole was broken and the harbor blocked by sand.

The dreary spot, however, provided entertainment of a sort, and although, for the most part, the housefronts were dark, a yellow glow along the street marked a café, and not far off a small casino occupied a sandy square. On one side of the street, the moonlight touched the colored walls, and Welland languidly watched the strolling groups go by.

He saw young bloods who wore American clothes and straw hats, and some of dark skin whose clothes were white, although their hats and silk belts were large and expensive. Sometimes a sober citizen and his fat señora guarded one or two young women, who went demurely a few yards in front. As a rule, the don's and the lady's clothes were black, and they, no doubt, boasted themselves *Peninsulares*. Welland did not know if the girls were beautiful, but they walked with a queer seductive grace.

By and by the café and the casino absorbed the groups and the street was quiet. On its shadowed side indistinct figures now and then stole along, and one heard a whispered call to somebody at a window overhead. Sometimes a guitar clanged in minor chords and a voice was raised in wailing song.

"The Cataliñeros guard their women," Carthew observed. "Since they are governed by a dictator, I suppose they have gone in one direction as far as up-to-date democracy can go; but they rule their families as families were ruled when Haroun-al-Raschid was caliph at Bagdad. Well, the Moors left their stamp on Spain; but now that the bucks and bloods begin to use the North American model, one might predict some jars."

"Youth rebels," said Welland, smiling. "Youth, however, goes, and, as far as I know the United States, the men who keep control are a sober lot. When a rebel gets a wife and goods, he's a reactionary."

"As a rule, perhaps. Our companions are young, and one is pretty fresh. Do you know where they are?"

"Huysler started for the casino. Nilson thought he'd see the town, and vanished, rather mysteriously, the other way."

"Oh, well," said Carthew, "the boys have loafed about the dreary spot for some days. I hope we may soon get off, but I don't know what to think about Father Sebastian's joining us. Only that he's Don Pancho's friend, I might have refused. Since *Gringos* are not popular, he might be useful, but the man is a fanatic and hates the President."

"A democratic government is apt to get up against the Church. Well, you are leader."

"In a long run, I'd bet on the Church—the martyrs win," said Carthew thoughtfully. "Our run, however, may not be long—Anyhow, since we must get canoes and porters, our line is to indulge Don Pancho—"

He stopped and went to the railing. A disorderly procession escorted a young man along the street. Some in front clapped his shoulders, some shouted, and others sang. Their voices were good, but the music was vaguely like music Welland had known in Africa. By and by the leader stopped. His clothes were white, but his sun hat was the sort New York stores supply. His gestures implied that he would sooner be left alone, and Carthew laughed.

"Jack is modest. It looks as if he does not like his triumphal march."

So far as Welland could distinguish, Huysler's followers were resolved to see him home, but Jack was firm, and when two or three had thrown their hats at his feet the crowd began to melt. Going as fast as possible, he plunged into the *fonda* arch, and after a few moments stopped at the window behind the balcony. Welland saw that he was sober.

"For a minute or two I won't join you," he said. "If the gang see me, they may come back."

"Perhaps you ought to be flattered," Carthew observed. "How did you earn the citizens' respect?"

"I plunged at the casino. Although I didn't know much about the game, a tenderfoot's luck is good. A kind of joint-stock speculation—you all put down your chips, and the winner took the lot. In about twenty minutes, I broke the bank."

"It does not account for your admirers' gratitude."

"So far as I could reckon, the pot was about ten dollars, American. You see, the Cataliñeros are not rich."

"I believe a peon gets two bits a day, although foreigners pay a dollar."

"There's my apology," Huysler resumed. "To pull out with the boys' wad was mean, and I invited the crowd to take a drink. I reckon I bought up the café, but I'm not yet broke. If my pals at home knew, you'd get some recruits. But do you know where Nilson is?"

Carthew said he did not, and they talked about something else. After a time, somebody in the street began to play a guitar. The notes were uncertain and the chords jarred.

"Sounds like Olaf experimenting," Huysler remarked. "I believe he plays the banjo, but he perhaps forgets the stopping's different. Maybe it would go better if he used her like a mandolin. But, *cuidao, señores*, he's going to sing!"

Nilson's voice was powerful, and *Night of Stars and Night of Love* rolled up the street. Welland saw his tall, white figure against a pink wall, and thought the window two or three yards above was occupied. After a few bars, however, the music stopped.

"A string's gone," said Huysler. "Olaf treats 'em rough. Anyhow, the boy's a tryer, and I don't expect he's beat."

"Do you know whose house it is?" Carthew inquired.

"I imagine it's Señor Viñoles y Ybarra's. At all events, Olaf inquired discreetly where Miss Viñoles lived. I believed a serenade's allowed, so long as you are satisfied to remain in the street. Olaf may not be satisfied, but the window's high. In the meantime, he's trying another song."

The guitar clanged discordantly and Nilson began a queer barbaric chant. Welland did not hear the words, but he thought they were not classical English.

"A coon song?" he inquired.

"One on young America!" said Huysler with a laugh. "Since the barcarole beats Olaf, he's trying something he really knows. I expect it's his college's battle march; the sort of tune you sing to scare the other side at a football game—But she's not pulling strong. The boy's run out of gas."

The music stopped, and Huysler, crossing the balcony, resumed: "The d—— fool's trying to climb up! I guess I'll go along. Let me pass, sir; I got to get there soon."

He pushed Carthew back, seized the railing, and swung his legs across. For a moment he hung by his straight arms, and then let go. The balcony was but three or four yards from the pavement and the others heard his light shoes on the stones. He was obviously running fast, and Welland leaned out over the balustrade.

A hundred yards off, a white object, distinct against the colored wall, balanced on the top of a pillar supporting an arch, and seemed to reach for a window-ledge. A few foot passengers had stopped, and Huysler sped along the street. The moon was bright and the white and yellow walls reflected the illumination. Welland, looking out from the dark balcony, thought the picture like a scene on a film. But for the beat of Huysler's feet all was quiet, and the comedy went fast. Then Welland doubted if it were a comedy.

Nilson perhaps found he could not reach the window, for he turned awkwardly, as if he meant to jump for the pavement. A man crossed the street. His white clothes shone; his advance was swift but crouching, and his bent arm was stiff. Nilson dropped from the pillar, and he and the other circled, a yard or two apart.

"Watch out!" Huysler shouted.

The stranger jumped for Nilson, who side-stepped and swung his body over from his hips. When he recovered, very swiftly, the other's arm was extended, and Nilson's hand was on his wrist. Pulling his antagonist to him, he lifted him

from his feet. The Latin reeled across the stones and fell against the wall. Nilson gave Huysler something and took his handkerchief. Then they started for the *fonda*. Welland thought all had happened in two or three minutes.

The landlord met them at the arch and fastened the door.

"I do not think we shall be bothered, but sometimes a thick door is useful," he remarked. "The señor is hurt?"

"A small cut. I reckon the other fellow's hurt much worse. Jack has got his knife," said Nilson in a breathless voice.

They went to the big *salon* and the landlord bandaged Nilson's hand. Don Manuel was muscular but fat. His white clothes were spotted by grease, and rawhide shoes protected his large bare feet, but an expensive sash, five or six yards in length, was rolled about his waist. He looked rather like an operatic brigand, and his efficiency implied that he had dressed a knife-wound before. When the bandage was fixed he brought a small bottle of Vermouth and touched Nilson's glass.

"*Salud, señor!* Your nerve and speed would win you fortune in the bull ring."

"Then you saw the fight?" said Nilson. "Perhaps my luck was good. But do you think the rural guards will get after me?"

Don Manuel thought not. So long as nobody was killed the *justicia* would be satisfied to take a few American dollars and let it go. A flower was dropped from the window, and Don Felipe knew where to be discreet. Nilson said nothing, but Welland noted a crushed sprig of heliotrope in his coat.

"Then you imagine my young friend's exploit accounts for the other's trying to stab him?" Carthew inquired.

Don Manuel knitted his brows. The Viñoles family was important and would hate an *escandalo*, but they were not assassins, he said. Then although jealousy was a strong passion, so far as Don Manuel knew, the señorita had no lover. Anyhow, she had no acknowledged lover. On the whole, the thing was strange.

"Then, if family pride and jealousy had nothing to do with it, what was the fellow's object?"

"*Quién sabe?*" said Don Manuel, and shrugged meaningly. "At all events, I think the *justicia* will not try to find out. But if your friend is attracted, the proper line is for you and him to make apologies and ask Señora Viñoles' permission to visit at the house."

Carthew nodded and turned to Nilson. "Since we start in two or three days, you perhaps had better wait until we are back."

"I don't know if you are ironical, sir; but when we do get back I hope to satisfy Señora Viñoles. Now I think we'll talk about something else," said Nilson quietly, and turned to the landlord. "Can you throw a knife? Give him the one I captured, Jack."

Huysler looked at him rather hard, but Don Manuel took the knife, holding the point between his finger and thumb.

"Many boast, but the trick is difficult," he said, and faced a stain where liquor had splashed the wall.

The narrow blade was about six inches long; the handle was ornamented, and Welland thought the tool expensive and beautifully made.

"*Veremos,*" said the landlord, and flicked out his bent arm.

The knife shone and struck the plaster a foot above the stain. The point had not gone deep, and Don Manuel, with a light touch, freed the blade.

"It is a trick of the theater, and not very dangerous. If one must fight, there is a better plan."

Pushing back the table, he circled round an imaginary antagonist. For all his fatness, he moved like a boxer, sometimes crouching and swinging his body to avoid a supposititious thrust. The pantomime was good: one pictured his maneuvering his antagonist where he wanted him to go. Then his arm went out and his fingers clenched, as if they fastened on the other's hand. Bracing himself, as if he held the fellow, he swung his right shoulder and, in realistic pantomime, drove his knife home.

"Like dat!" he gasped. "*Nosotros*, we know the knife. Mr. Nilson he do not, but he use my trick. *Carrai*, he some fighter!"

Nilson laughed. "You know some English."

"For six month I sell the banana in Chicago, and I think I get rich. Then one day comes an Irlanda man. The d—— bum, he has not the shame, and when he cannot have more banana for twenty-five cent, he call me a wop. *Carrai*. *Yo que soy caballero*; Don Manuel Blas! There is *escandolo*, sir. The Irlanda he is stuck, the patrol arrives, and I depart."

"You might perhaps have held your pitch," said Huysler, smiling. "In Chicago they are not much disturbed by a fight, and I believe five dollars in the right man's hand is a useful argument."

He turned to Carthew. "The evening's been rather strenuous, sir, and I'm going to bed. *Buenos noches*, Don Manuel."

V

SIESTA

For a hundred yards the channel shone like polished glass. The glare was insupportable, but where the canoes were tied a giant cottonwood spread its branches across the creek. Strong buttresses stayed the light-colored trunk, and orchids sprang from the high fork of a rotten bough. The flowers were not at all beautiful, and on the sandy bank the shade was thin.

In front, mangrove roots straddled the hot mud and crawled into deep water. The trunks they carried were thin but numerous; the pale branches met and locked, and the waterway under them was like a dark tunnel. Behind the canoes another muddy channel curved into thick gloom.

The *Rio de la Sombra* was not properly a river. For the most part, it did not run between fixed banks; the water rather oozed from under the arched mangrove roots, and sometimes one did not know which way it went. The trees that grew where firm ground was were witch cottonwoods; the crowding mangroves were blotched white, as if by a leprous disease. In Africa the negroes said the trees were sick. Nothing was fresh to Welland, and he knew the languid heaviness that began to bother him.

For all that, he was not alone. Carthew and Huysler had pushed into the wood, and Father Sebastian slept in the canoe astern. The dark-skinned porters took their siesta where the shade was deepest behind the trunks. Nilson, lying in the bottom of the canoe, smoked a cigarette. The big craft, dug out of a cottonwood log and covered at the waist by a palm-leaf thatch, was like the canoes Welland had used on the Oil Rivers, and he imagined her builder was an African.

By and by Nilson looked up.

"Carthew reckons we have made ten miles since sunrise, and he's satisfied. It's not the sort of country where a white man hustles, and until a breed is hungry he hates to move. In the circumstances, the chief might have struck old man Huysler for a power boat."

"You could not carry a motor-launch across the bars," said Welland, indicating a bank of greasy mud where blind-fish splashed.

"I'm not keen to try. All the same, I have portaged an American canoe and my camp truck for five or six miles across the rocks by the Lake of the Woods. A subaltern's job is not to criticize, but we might perhaps have gone another way. There are roads of a sort, and when we were loading up, an old Ford rolled along the street. To hear Lizzie rattle was homelike."

"If I had had friends and an occupation in Minnesota, I doubt if I'd have joined the excursion," Welland remarked.

"Well, why did you?"

"I was broke. In Africa one soon gets old, and I thought I'd try to mend my fortunes while adventure was possible."

"Sorry," said Nilson. "When I'm interested, I am frank; you may have noted something like that. Anyhow, I don't altogether see why I'm mashing through the swamps with this layout. Urge of youth, perhaps, and Jack's my pal. It's probably not important; but while the superheater runs full blast one cannot sleep."

He threw his cigarette in the creek and Welland brooded. But for the splashing of the mud-fish and the current's dull gurgle in the mangrove roots, all was very quiet. Man and birds and animals must rest until the scorching sun got low.

By and by Nilson resumed:

"The North is fresh and bracing. In the tangled pines across Lake Superior, you can track your canoe against the current and portage across the rocks from sun-up until dusk. In our dry sagebrush wastes, you can front the heat and ride a horse all day. Well, I've shot moose and antelope. For some time, it was all I wanted to do. You see, I don't have to work."

Welland thought Nilson's hunting had given him an Indian's nerve and a splendid body. Stretched across the dugout's floor, the young fellow was a model for an ambitious sculptor. Perhaps one could only in marble copy his long flowing

lines and his muscles' balanced curves.

"I imagined an American's habit was to work, whether he was forced or not."

Nilson laughed. "We have begun to cultivate the sportsman loafer, but, in a way, the type's exotic, and I believe, until recently, we went to England for our model. Anyhow, the traditions of sterner times survive and my Scandinavian relations were a grimly industrious lot. Then, you see, when I had, for three or four weeks, packed my camp gear across the woods and did shoot a moose, all I got was its head, and to smuggle the trophy across the frontier was some job. The old man's object for sweating was to enlarge his bank-roll, and inherited instincts count for more than one thinks. Then, since I hadn't been there, the South called, and, after all, Carthew might find the crystal gum."

He admitted he talked because he could not sleep, but his humorous apology was plausible and he was typically Nordic. Since the Vikings launched their galleys men of his stock had pushed south and west like conquerors. Welland, by comparison, felt himself old and tired. His habit was not to meddle rashly, but he might perhaps warn the other.

"For a few minutes, one evening at Santa Catalina, I doubted if you would help our search," he said. "Another time you run a risk like that your luck might not be as good."

Nilson lifted his head, and Welland saw his carelessness was gone.

"I expect you mean well, but I don't think you and Carthew quite understand. When I climbed the Viñoles porch, I knew the window I tried to reach was *barred*. For all that, the exploit was a fool's exploit, and I sent Señora Viñoles word that if she was willing to receive me, I'd like to offer my apologies."

"Who carried your message?"

"Mariquita. Our meeting was perfectly correct. Mariquita was taking a *pasear* with a fat but very watchful relation. Then Señora Viñoles did receive me."

"I wonder whether you know all your visiting at the house implies?" said Welland with some dryness.

"I do know," said Nilson quietly, but his face got red. "In a way, it's important. If Carthew talks about it, you can put him wise."

Welland hesitated, but the young fellow was impulsive, and perhaps his business was to see that he was not carried away.

"The ground is awkward, but you are an American, from a northern State. Your people are Scandinavian. Señorita Viñoles springs from another stock."

"Iberian stock," said Nilson. "I want you to get that. Cuban and Filipino colonists are Spaniards. Mariquita's folk are *Peninsulares*. There's a difference."

"At all events, she is a Catholic."

"Not long since our lot were Lutheran, but the old man and my mother helped support a Methodist church," said Nilson, smiling. "Anyhow, what has a man like me to do with the intricacies of jarring creeds? Mine is, I love Mariquita. And I believe in splendid adventure that carries you where the cautious never get. And if you hate to be shabby, you must not be afraid. You must trust your luck, and follow the gleam. Well, if we get back from the swamps, I hope to send you and Carthew with a formal proposition to the Viñoles family. One understands it's the rule in Spain."

Welland knew where to stop. He could not move Nilson, and, after all, the boy's philosophy was finer than his.

"You imply you are not altogether sure about our getting back?" he said.

"Oh, well, I begin to think our chief takes some chances. Don't you?"

"I don't know all the obstacles. You, however, are not forced to go and, in the circumstances, you might be justified to start for Catalina when we send back the peons."

"The circumstances are the obstacle," Nilson rejoined. "Do you propose to quit?"

"My pay is pretty good. I need the sum I'll get."

"But I do not need money? Well, before I knew Mariquita, I agreed to see Jack through. Now that it looks as if the job is bigger than I thought, I might cry off and steal back to Mariquita, because she wouldn't like me to get hurt? She's proud. I reckon she would not have much use for that sort of lover."

Welland said nothing. After all, he had not imagined Nilson would quit; moreover, on board the yacht, Miss Whitney had given him her confidence. In a world of jazz and vulgar extravagance, these young people had somehow cultivated a fine chivalrous spirit. The boys had their code; modern youth, at all events, was not shabbily afraid. Perhaps the strange thing was, they felt he would approve.

After a minute or two, Father Sebastian strolled along the bank and, getting on board, lighted a maize-husk cigarette.

"The afternoon is for siesta, but you talk. In Spain they say only dogs and Englishmen do not fear the sun."

"Mr. Nilson is American. However, we were weighing a moral problem and the effort banished our sleepiness. I think his solution was better than mine."

"If you were Catholics, you would not be bothered by problems. You would use the Church's rules."

"Rules get out of date. Then I don't know if mechanical obedience is better than the proper choice you make for yourself."

"Sometimes the choice is not the proper choice," said Father Sebastian dryly. "Stubborn independence may cost one much."

Nilson turned and languidly studied the pair. They were worn by sickness and tropical heat, and their lined faces were ascetic. Welland's look, on the whole, was calmly humorous. Father Sebastian's was brooding; although his skin was yellow and shriveled, Nilson sensed force. By temperament and tradition they were jarring types, but both were men whose influence was felt.

"I suppose your friend yet refuses to pay Señor Galdos's toll?" Father Sebastian resumed.

"I had thought it done with," said Welland carelessly. "If you imply that he will be given a fresh chance, I certainly think he will refuse. Since it cost us a useful sum to negotiate at the capital, we are not going to be robbed by a fresh politician."

"All politicians are robbers," Father Sebastian remarked. "Well, I expect a messenger from Galdos will presently arrive, and if you do not satisfy him, you must bear the consequences."

"Señor Galdos is the President's officer."

"In this country, the President's officers sometimes seize his post. However, the business is not mine, and Vallon yet rules at the capital. When he is dead, Galdos may be President, for a time."

"Then, you reckon on Vallon's dying?"

Father Sebastian shrugged. "All are mortal, and the President's enemies are numerous. In a republic of equal opportunities, one ruler is as good as another, so long as he has bribes to give and gets there first. When his supporters begin to grumble he robs the Church. Then, if one can divide the citizens, to rule is easier. Ours are *meztisos*, Indians and negroes; but there is another party, the persecuted Catholics, whose strength the President does not know."

"You are on your way to join them?"

"I was banished and the others think my road from the coast is closed," Father Sebastian replied. "There are many ways to stop an obstinate traveler, and the negroes believe that devils haunt the swamps. The belief perhaps is not altogether ridiculous—" He shrugged and resumed: "Well, one must not bore you. I am wanted, and I go."

He threw his cigarette in the creek, stretched his thin legs across the palm mat, and in a few minutes was asleep.

"The padre's hard stuff," said Nilson in a thoughtful voice. "Not the sort you can bluff and bully; he puts across his job."

All the same, I'd sooner he had not joined up with us."



VI

CARTHEW'S OBSTINACY

A puff of wind touched the cottonwood leaves and Welland looked about. He hardly thought he had slept, but the belt of shade was wider and slow ripples rolled up the yellow creek. Carthew and Huysler advanced along the bank, and the porters got up from their resting-places behind the buttress roots. Their white cotton clothes were ragged, and their leaf hats were thick and large. They did not bother about stockings, but their rawhide shoes were good, for in the swamps one guards one's feet.

When the party got on board, Huysler's look was excited and Carthew put a folded palm-leaf on the mat. Two peons in the stern seized their poles, two more swung the paddles, and the rocking dugout crawled ahead. Another canoe followed her muddy wake, and where the poles disturbed the slime, marsh gas bubbled.

"You might show them our find, sir," said Huysler presently.

Carthew opened the leaf packet, and the others saw six or seven rather large beads of gum. While Nilson looked over his shoulder, Welland picked up one or two. The stuff was nearly transparent, but seemed to hold and liquefy the light; the color was pale, rosy orange. But that the beads were smoothly globular, he imagined the surface would sparkle like a diamond, and although he had in Africa bought and studied gum, he had not handled stuff like that before. The queer thing was, it did not look as if the peons were interested. Seeing the others waited, he declared his satisfaction.

"After our experiments at the Huysler laboratories, I believe no other gum combines crystalium's useful qualities," said Carthew in a quiet voice. "The beads stick to the branches and the trees are small, but there was not much use in stopping to search the island. I do not expect to get a large quantity until we are some distance from the town."

"Crystalium's great stuff and we are on the proper track," said Huysler excitedly. "When you begin to exploit a tropical product, I suppose you hire up natives to gather it in the bush?"

"Something like that," Carthew agreed. "Another plan is to build a buying factory at a railhead or a river-mouth, and pay in goods or money for all your customers bring. I believe both plans are wasteful, because the native collector destroys the trees. But Welland, no doubt, knows."

"In Africa, British companies now cultivate the oil palm. Rubber, of course, has been cultivated for some time."

"There's our line," said Huysler with boyish enthusiasm. "When we hit the proper stuff, we'll plant crystalium. The old man will put up the money and the President's our friend. In a few years, when our plantations are producing, the Huysler Company will control the article. We'll cut motor roads and build a fleet of gasoline boats. At length, I reckon I've got a useful job."

Welland looked up. Close in front the mangrove branches locked across the creek. Slimy roots arched above the water; the pale-colored trunks were blurred and indistinct along the shadowy tunnel.

"There's a drawback," he said dryly. "Where the trees that love a hot soil thrive and the *anopheles* mosquito swarms, the white man dies."

Huysler turned to Carthew, as if for his support, but the dugout slid into the shadow and the boy said nothing. Under the blotched, sickly foliage, the gloom somehow was daunting; the air was hot and damp like steam, and carried a strange, sour smell.

At sunset the mangroves got thin, and where big cottonwoods sprang from firm soil the dugout was moored a yard or two from the bank. The party carried ground-sheets and tents, but nobody was keen to camp under the trees, and the peons stopped on board their canoe. Although a half-moon rose behind the high, black cottonwoods, mist floated about the creek, and when dinner was over Welland threw fresh wood on the fire the cook had used. A hearth of sand and stones occupied the dugout's waist, and the curling smoke kept off the mosquitoes.

Nobody but the peons had used much muscular effort, but all were dull and slack. Huysler talked, rather languidly, about cultivating gum, and Nilson about his hunting excursions in the North. Father Sebastian drowsed and brooded, and

Carthew smoked his pipe. Welland smelt musk, and by and by water swirled across the creek and the canoe rocked.

"A sharp-nosed crocodile," said Carthew. "I don't know if the brutes are dangerous, but I'd sooner not experiment. Anyhow, all sharks are not man-eaters. I expect you have been capsized from a surf-boat on the Guinea coast, Welland?"

"That is so," said Welland. "When the moon was bright one evening I leaned against the *Biafra's* taffrail in Lagos roads. Fifty or sixty yards off, her sister boat rolled about; our surf-boat's crew hung on to her guess-warp. An engineer, sitting on her bridge-deck rails, played a banjo, and she perhaps rolled harder than he thought, for he went overboard. We saw his white clothes vanish and water splash. The surf-boat boys were quick, but when they got out their paddles the man was gone."

He stopped and Carthew turned his head. Where the moonlight pierced the shade, a hammock lurched about; the porters' dark figures swaying awkwardly on broken ground. After a few moments they put down their load and a man in white clothes hailed the canoe. Huysler pulled her to the bank and the stranger got on board.

"Your Worships' servant, Martin Ramos, department secretary to Señor Galdos, whose authority all acknowledge," he said. "Since your arrival was expected, my duty is to carry my master's compliments."

Carthew gave him a drink, and waited. Don Martin, using French and Castilian, began to talk about the heat and the drawbacks of traveling in the swamps. It accounted for his arriving in the dark and not inviting the party to visit at his house.

Welland had imagined negotiations would begin like that, and when Don Martin took another drink, he carelessly threw fresh wood on the fire. Little snapping flames leaped up, and he saw the fellow's skin was very dark and his hair was short and crisp. Moreover, he talked with the fluent plausibility native lawyers use at Sar Leone. Welland imagined Carthew knew the type; but he agreed urbanely with his guest's remarks. Father Sebastian smoked a cigarette, as if he were bored.

"You cannot go much farther by water," Don Martin said by and by. "There are no roads, the paths are bad, and the country is disturbed. In front is the negro belt, and one senses a sort of restlessness—In fact, something we do not know goes on." He shrugged meaningly. "Our country is volcanic, gentlemen."

"Are the negroes West Indians?" Carthew inquired.

"A number are native born, the descendants of the Spaniards' slaves; but some are from Cuba, Jamaica, and Haiti, and a few, I think, emigrated from Liberia. On the whole, they are *mala gente*; in English, a d——bad lot."

"You perhaps have got some Voodoo men? I expect the Leopards do not emigrate," said Welland.

Don Martin gave him a queer, searching glance. In the reflections from the hearth, his white eyeballs were rather conspicuous. It looked as if he were afraid.

"A few use some sort of magic, about which we know nothing," he replied. "Some others call themselves Metodistas."

"All are *mala gente*," Father Sebastian remarked.

Nilson laughed. "I am a Methodist, padre, although I do not claim to be a first-class example."

Father Sebastian gave him an indulgent smile, and Nilson was not annoyed. Yet Don Martin had annoyed him. The fellow pretended to be a white man, but one sensed a subtle, treacherous vein. Well, Carthew, for all his urbanity, was not a fool.

"Father Sebastian's Indians are Catholics, but it is said they have sacrificed children to the old Aztec gods," Don Martin resumed. "Travelers' tales, perhaps; but the Government thinks he ought not to trust his flock, and we understood he was ordered to the coast. Well, I am discreet, and I do not inquire where he is going."

"I go where you dare not," said Father Sebastian, in a quiet, scornful voice.

The other shrugged indulgently. "It is possible; I am not ambitious to be a martyr." He turned to Carthew. "Just now the neighborhood you plan to search is not altogether safe for foreigners. If the negroes had but a leader, I think they would

revolt. In the circumstances, the *comandante's* friendship might be worth something."

"The trouble is, Señor Galdos's friendship is expensive," Carthew rejoined. "We are not rich, but you might perhaps state the smallest sum that would satisfy him."

Don Martin did so, and for a few minutes Carthew pretended to cogitate. He saw Huysler's and Nilson's interest, but they trusted him, and waited.

"I am sorry, but I am afraid we must let it go," he said. "The permits we got at the capital cost us much, and since we have not yet found the gum we cannot be extravagant."

"Oh, well, Señor Galdos is not greedy, and he makes another proposition. The country is disturbed and all our soldiers and *rurales* have not good rifles."

"Those who have rifles have not much ammunition," said Father Sebastian. "Cartridges cost something, but the Government must reward its supporters."

Don Martin laughed, but not as if he were much amused.

"There is the drawback. Well, we are informed Señor Huysler's relations are important and they might help to satisfy a Connecticut manufacturer who could supply the goods we want. In fact, if he will go with me to headquarters—"

"I certainly am not going," Huysler declared in English. "So long as he gets that, you need not bother to be polite, sir."

Carthew turned to Don Martin, with an apologetic smile.

"My friend is not keen, and I hesitate to persuade him. Our negotiations were with the President, and one does not send military supplies to a country except by the direct sanction of its Government. If we had authority, in Señor Vallon's hand, it would be another thing."

"My chief is responsible for his department," Don Martin replied, and was quiet for a few moments. Then he shrugged and got up. "Well, I cannot persuade you; the path is bad and I have some distance to go. One respects your courage. Your servant, gentlemen!"

Calling his porters, he jumped for the bank. The moon shone on his white clothes and the lowered hammock; and then the stooping porters lifted the pole. Leaves rustled, branches cracked, and Don Martin was gone.

"I expect you agreed, Jack?" said Carthew.

"Altogether, sir," Huysler replied. "The fellow annoyed me. I felt he was treacherous. Anyhow, he's a grafter and I hate to be robbed." He turned to the priest. "A *ladron*, padre?"

"*Todos ladrones*. All his sort are thieves," Father Sebastian agreed.

"The queer thing was, he did not urge us much. Somehow, I felt he thought it did not matter if he persuaded us or not."

"*Lo mismo*. To him it was equal," said Father Sebastian.

Huysler said nothing. When the padre was about, one could not be altogether frank. Carthew began to talk about something else, and after a time poles were fixed and the tents stretched like an awning across the canoe. The fire burned down, mosquitoes droned behind the muslin bar, sometimes the current gurgled, and land-crabs scratched the bank. Welland imagined Carthew did not sleep, and when the other beckoned he crawled noiselessly from his mat.

"I expect we have turned down Galdos's last offer, but his messenger's indifference puzzles me," Carthew said in a quiet voice. "He may have thought to entangle us in a plot against Vallon, but since we are not important, I don't see his object."

"I imagine Father Sebastian does see, but does not mean to enlighten us," Welland replied. "The President, however, gave us an official permit, and if we did not return, awkward inquiries might be made from Washington. The United States is the predominant foreign influence. When Don Martin stated the country is volcanic, I think he did not exaggerate. Do you think he expects an eruption?"

"There is not much use in speculating, but I'd like to know. Well, we undertook to find the gum, and I suppose we must face the risks and go ahead."

Welland agreed and crawled back to his mat bed. He, like Carthew, sprang from Northern stock and was not subtle. The dark-skinned people's cunning had baffled him before, but where one could not see a light Carthew's plan was good. One set one's mouth and calmly went ahead.

Sometimes the canoe rocked. Mosquitoes droned behind the bar. A pale flame leaped from the ashes in the hearth and sank, but Welland did not know.



VII

THE GUIDE

In the morning the peons went on board the smaller craft. They had carried out efficiently all they engaged to do, and now were anxious to be off. For all their vein of Indian blood, they claimed to be civilized and they declared the negroes in the swamps were *mala gente*. They took their wages and pushed off the canoe, and when the beat of their paddles died away Welland admitted he was sorry to see them go.

The guide and the negro porters Almirez had hired to meet the party at the spot did not arrive, and although the mosquitoes had vanished, tangled vines and creepers choked the steaming forest. Nilson and Carthew landed, but stole back, splashed and limp and pursued by blood-thirsty flies. In the thick woods the air was stagnant; the yellow creek was smooth like greasy brass.

For half her length, however, the double tents and thatch covered the dugout, and to some extent the mosquito-bars stopped the swarming flies. Carthew declared that in the *caliente* belt nobody was punctual, and as they were first at the rendezvous all they could do was to wait. Welland was philosophical. In Africa he had waited long for supplies and medicine that never arrived, and he imagined Carthew had sometimes gone without. Nilson and Huysler, however, were fresh from the mechanical North, where money commanded all a white man required. For the boys to wait was no doubt hard, but Welland remarked that they did not grumble.

Stretching cramped legs under the leaf awning, and resting languid bodies against their supply boxes, they smoked and talked. Sometimes when the tobacco got bitter one slept uneasily, and for a time Huysler instructed the others about an intricate game with Spanish cards.

"The game is a pretty good game," he said. "To study it cost me twenty dollars at Havana."

He looked up with surprise, for Carthew put down a card and took the pool.

"I learned the rules at Iquique, a long time since. To do so cost me more."

"Then, you were in Chile, sir?"

"The British navy is ubiquitous," Carthew remarked and stopped.

Huysler put up the cards. It looked as if he could take a cue.

"Oh, well, there is not much use in my trying to teach an expert a game I don't really know; but I hope our porters will soon come along. Our camp has some drawbacks, and I'd like to get ahead. The republicans don't bother much about communications. The transport the first Spanish explorers used is good enough."

"I believe we are following the track an expedition took three hundred years ago. At all events, when Santa Catalina was a busy port, a famous missionary priest and some Spanish officers in command of a mixed force started upriver—" said Carthew, and turned to Father Sebastian. "Does tradition state what happened to them."

"*Quién sabe?*" said Father Sebastian, but his shrug implied that nobody knew. "Like others who went afterwards, they did not come back. *Los Indios* declare that devils roamed the woods and one, whose emblem is a frog, has yet some power."

"A frog?" said Carthew, smiling. "The god of the flies is a worse antagonist; tropical-disease students begin to know his strength, but he has some useful confederates. In the swamps, a white man is up against triumphant Nature."

"We beat her at Panama," Huysler rejoined.

"Victory cost you a useful sum and the world's shipping pays the toll. Our searching the *caliente* forests is another thing. However, I think you understood you had not got an easy job."

Huysler laughed, a boyish, careless laugh.

"That is so, sir. We don't like to wait, but so long as you lead us, we are going all the way."

Talk languished. In the pitiless heat one's brain got dull. All longed for dark, but when the woods swiftly melted the thick gloom brought small relief to high-strung nerves and fevered skin. Although a fire was something of a joke, Welland built a heap of rotten sticks on the stones. The smoke might baffle the mosquitoes that got through the bar, and to some extent banish the smell of hot, sour mud. Moreover, although nobody's appetite was keen, to cook some food was a comforting, domestic ritual.

Warm mist floated about. The creek steamed like a factory reservoir, and the fire's dim reflections did not touch its surface. The canoe floated in a strange black void; one knew she did float only when she rocked. Huysler speculated, uneasily, about the creatures whose noiseless movements disturbed the current. Welland smelt musk and knew a crocodile lurked about. The brutes were not afraid.

The woods were not quiet. Branches cracked and dead creepers rattled. Padded feet stealthily touched the hot sand, and once a heavy body slid down the bank. Farther back a shrill scream pierced the gloom, and one knew the note of mortal fear and pain.

On board the canoe dinner went slowly. To pretend to eat was an occupation, and the gloom the small wax lamp banished was not altogether material gloom. Sitting by the mat on which the food was served, the group used the civilized white man's rules and Carthew was as correctly polite as the chairman at a civic feast. Each knew the other played up and meant to do so as long as possible. Only Father Sebastian was altogether quiet, but when the meal was over he looked up with a twinkle.

"*Muy caballero, señores!*" he remarked.

To sleep was harder than to dine. Mosquitoes swarmed behind the gauze, and larger insects struck the thin material, as if the blood-thirsty hosts were resolved to break through. At length, however, a dazzling flash searched the dugout and for a moment the uncouthly posed figures were distinct. Then thunder rolled across the woods and rain crashed on the tent and thatch. Beaten leaves throbbed like drums and the thunder hardly drowned the deluge's turmoil. It stopped, and but for the splash of big drops all was strangely quiet. Then branches gently swung and a light wind touched the cottonwoods' high tops. The mosquitoes were gone, a soothing freshness pierced the drifting steam, and the party slept.

In the morning a clumsy dugout floated downstream and twelve muscular negroes and a half-breed guide disembarked. Carthew had expected a larger number, and lining up the men on the bank, he inquired where the others were.

So far as he could ascertain, the porters did not know; but their Spanish was uncouth and his was not very good. Shortly before they started, a messenger arrived, and their companions refused to go. One seemed to think they were afraid, but he did not know who had sent the messenger and why they were daunted.

The guide did not help much. He had nothing to do with the negroes, and had but joined them at a spot Señor Almiraz fixed. They were superstitious savages who believed in magic, he declared with a scornful shrug; but he used a queer *lingua franca* and to understand him was hard.

Carthew had landed; the others, on board, studied the group on the bank. The porters were strongly built negroes, although their legs were thin. Welland thought them native born, because, unlike the Africans, they wore large leaf hats. They carried machetes—heavy, cheap cutlasses, with which the plantation laborer chops a path and sometimes his enemy. Welland knew the type, and he remarked that some were embarrassed. Uncivilized men and wild animals hate to be scrutinized.

The guide was another type. His skin was brown, his body athletic, and his white clothes were good. In his red waist-band he carried a beautiful Spanish knife. One of his ancestors was obviously white, but the Indian vein was strongly marked. He carried himself well, and fronted Carthew with a sort of scornful calm. Welland thought him truculent and somehow sinister.

"I know nothing about the gum crystal," he said. "But I know the country, and if the rain does not stop us, I can take you where you want to go."

"We ought to be back before the rains begin," Carthew remarked.

The other shrugged, and Welland imagined Carthew, like himself, could not translate his reply. The *lingua franca* has some drawbacks, but it helps one to baffle awkward curiosity.

Two porters, however, were not embarrassed, and when Welland studied them one gave him a friendly grin. His greasy double-hat was the expensive kind London outfitters supply to tropical excursionists, and Welland imagined it was not honestly acquired. The other's soiled jacket was fastened by a steamship company's brass buttons. Welland knew the buttons and he had noted the upright blue stripes on the men's low foreheads.

"Liberia boys?" said Carthew, indicating the pair.

"Kroos," said Welland. "Liberian citizens, but certainly not subjects. As a rule, the black republicans are willing to leave them alone. These two are steamship firemen; cheerful ruffians but probably stanch. I do not see what they are doing in the Catalina swamps."

He inquired and was given a broken narrative in West Coast English. After some trouble in a British African boat's stokehold, they were landed at Dakar, Senegal, and engaged on board a French *Messagerie*. They did not altogether know where the steamer went, but eventually they got to Havana and resolved to stay. Although the narrative got vague, Welland understood the Cuban officials did not agree, and firmly put the Kroos on board another ship. Anyhow, they were in the swamps and had not yet got rich. One stated, confidentially, that their companions lived like monkeys in the bush. The guide, however, had coiled up his tail.

Welland smiled. He knew their sort, and it looked as if they knew his. They were sailors of fortune and where they could seize another's goods would not be fastidious; but he would sooner trust them than the guide. One said his name was Bad Hat, and the other's was George Washington. Nothing indicated that the fellow saw the joke.

"Do you think them a useful lot?" Carthew asked.

"I believe we can reckon on the Kroos; I don't know about the others. My notion is, they're *cowed*, and since negroes are not a brooding lot, they have some grounds to be afraid. The guide rather baffles me."

Carthew nodded. "You think him hostile? *Gringos* are not remarkably popular. Still, all we want is a guide, and so long as the fellow knows the swamps—we'll talk about it another time. Now we must push off."

The Kroos and two or three more boarded the dugout; the others manned the smaller craft. Poles were swung and paddles splashed, and the rocking canoe forged ahead. By contrast with the night, the morning was fresh, and the Kroos began a paddling song. The tune was strange, but the rhythm was marked, and presently melodious voices joined. The labored strokes got faster, water gurgled at the bows, and the long rows of trunks rolled smoothly by.

VIII

THE POTTERY MERCHANT

Sunbeams pierced the shade like glittering blades, and where they struck, the muddy water was intolerably bright. Huysler, stooping to pull off his boots, felt his shoulders burn and his head swim.

"Get under the thatch," said Carthew. "Then, if you are going overboard, go with your boots on."

"I'm not keen; but I expect we must lighten her and the gang may want some help," Huysler replied.

He looked about. The creek was getting small and the dugout had grounded on a bar. While she floated one hardly felt the current, but now that she rested in the mud, sluggish, yellow ripples touched her slanted side. Five or six yards in front the water was as smooth as oil. Its smoothness indicated depth and somehow the greasy pool was sinister. A short distance downstream the porters dragged their canoe across the bar, and Nilson, splashed and sweating, braced his shoulders against her stern. On the bank, the guide smoked a cigarette, and Father Sebastian rested in the shade.

"So long as a Spanish gentleman has a servant, he does not use much effort," Carthew remarked. "For him to labor is not logical, and he believes it's not dignified."

"In the tropics, the rule's a useful one," Welland commented. "All the same, if we are held up, the flies will find us out."

"Our guide is not a Spaniard and he's certainly not a gentleman," Huysler rejoined. "The near-beer sort must pretend to be fastidious; but, if we are going to help, let's get busy."

They jumped overboard. On the bar the water was shallow, but Huysler's boots sank in the mud, and he shrank, instinctively, from its slimy clutch. Although he was not a naturalist, he knew the creatures that haunted shade and mire were man's antagonists, and he trod cautiously. Moreover, the pool in front was deep and one might see the current swirl about a horny back.

The pool was still, and when he got to work his shrinking went. The boy had inherited much from ancestors whose talents were utilitarian, and he concentrated mechanically on his task. Carthew, up to his knees in water, took command, but Huysler remarked that the Kroos went where Welland led. They knew his sort, and it looked as if they dominated their companions. Yet Welland acknowledged the other's authority; he knew his post and, so to speak, played up. Since both struggled in the mud, his punctiliousness was somehow humorous, but Huysler reflected that Britishers are like that.

Nilson was obviously satisfied to use his splendid muscles, and where the load was heaviest he labored with the Kroos. He and they were seamen, and a sailor is the proper man for an awkward job. When her load was landed they manhandled the porter's canoe across the bar, her bows on the Kroos' backs, her stern plowing through the slime. Launching her on the other side, they seized the larger craft, but she had settled in the mire and for a time their feet got no purchase in the treacherous stuff. The disturbed water splashed along the bank, and Huysler pictured the proper inhabitants of the creek lurking in their dark caves. Sometimes he was glad he was not a naturalist.

The dugout began to move. Nilson's back was under her bow; his face was crimson and the veins on his forehead swelled. The negroes' naked bodies swayed forward and got straight. Their legs churned the greasy shallows, and the dugout advanced a yard or two. Huysler's soft cotton jacket hurt his burned arms and neck; the reflections from the water hurt his dazzled eyes. Nilson breathlessly shouted his ridiculous college chant. The Krooboy's gasped another tune and their dusky bodies bent. The dugout was going, and Huysler remembered his business was to help her along. After all, he had got as muddy at a football game.

They launched her in the pool, and the guide ordered a negro to carry him on board. Nilson signed him back.

"You'll wait. If you are through with your cigarette, help the boys load her up."

It looked as if the fellow did not understand, but when Nilson turned his head he spat.

"*Malditos Gringos!*" he remarked.

Nilson joined Huysler on the bar's dry top, and Carthew said, "Well, have you had enough?"

Nilson laughed. "Maybe I'm ridiculous, commander, but I've had a bully time. All that bothers me is, I didn't put Don Pepe in the ditch. But what about loading up?"

"I think we'll allow the gang to cool off. In the meantime you and Jack might like to change your clothes."

The young fellows splashed to the bank; Carthew and Welland got on board the canoe and moored her in the shade. They pulled off their boots and Carthew lighted a cigarette.

"The boys are fine stuff, and to know they can be trusted is some relief," he said. "We cannot get much farther by water, and we have not enough porters to move our loads. In the meantime, however, we mustn't dump a pound of goods."

"It's awkward," Welland agreed. "Don Pancho promised to send a sufficient gang, and I don't think he meant to cheat."

"Some went back because they were afraid. They are, no doubt, superstitious, but I expect Señor Galdos had something to do with it."

"If he meant to hold us up, why did he not stop them all?"

"Ah," said Carthew, "there's the puzzle! Perhaps he is satisfied to embarrass us; but I'd like to know. In an intricate game, the advantage is with our antagonists; particularly since we don't altogether know who they are."

Welland nodded. "If we try to negotiate, the dark skins beat us; their talent is for intrigue. Well, we refused to bribe the fellow and he's perhaps revengeful, but, after all, the sum was not very large."

"To pay would not have broken us," Carthew agreed. "The President, however, is our friend, and I begin to think Galdos expects to lead the opposition. Something is going on, and his wanting cartridges is significant. That is all we know, and for us to try to spot the winner might be rash. Then I'd sooner not let down the man whose protection we bargained for."

"Of course! If Father Sebastian were willing I imagine he could help us solve the puzzle. He is certainly not the President's man, but I doubt if he has much liking for the other side."

"He is for the Church, and in a revolutionary state, the dictator, as a rule, is anti-clerical. In fact, I rather think President Vallon and Galdos would be glad to be rid of him. The man's sincere and I expect his nerve is good; but if it would help his cause, he would not hesitate to use us. By comparison, we are not important."

Welland agreed. Father Sebastian obstinately returned to the post from which the Government had banished him, and was, in consequence, an embarrassing passenger. Yet Welland liked his pluck. The priest was probably willing to risk his life; the drawback was, where he thought his duty called, he might not scruple to risk the lives of others. So long as his object, in the main, was good, to be fastidious was not logical.

"Oh, well," he said, "all in front is dark. There's not much use in speculating. We must shove ahead, and now the porters have rested, we might load up."

Half an hour afterward the canoes moved upstream, paddles splashed with a measured beat, poles swung, and muscular bodies bent. Nilson stretched his long legs across the mats, and Huysler smoked a cigarette. The effort he had used had braced him, and he liked to feel he was not altogether a passenger. At college he was rather an athlete than a student; and when others strained and sweated he hated to look on. His inherited instinct was to get busy.

The canoe rocked and steadied. When the shining paddles dipped one felt her forge ahead. Her advance was rhythmical; Huysler sensed the measured throb one feels when the rail joints click under a limited express. He smiled. The comparison was ridiculous, but useful progress was marked by a sort of rhythm, and to know one was going somewhere had a curious charm.

When he was half asleep the canoes again took the ground, and he helped to move the loads and haul the craft across the shoal. A mile or two farther on another bar blocked the creek, and, since the bottom was very soft, the struggle in the scorching heat was exhausting. When Huysler got on board he had frankly had enough, and Nilson's look was thoughtful. He hoped the portages were not going to be numerous.

In the morning the channel forked, and the guide said that the canoes would not carry them much farther. In the meantime, to push across the shallows was easier than to cut a path in the woods, and they laboriously steered upstream. At the

mouth of a backwater a small canoe was tied to the bank and an Indian cooked some food in a small cast-iron fire-pot.

Carthew stopped the paddlers and began to talk. The Indian was old and did not know much Spanish. It looked as if he were dull and did not altogether understand the guide's inquiries, but Welland thought him moody. He said he carried goods to sell at Santa Catalina. He had, for example, ollas for cooling water, and useful cooking-pots. The pots were rough, red clay, crudely ornamented, but the outline was good. Huysler thought stuff like that was still being made in Arizona; the model perhaps was Aztec.

Carthew said the pots were too heavy for transport, and inquired if the other knew anything about gum crystal. When Father Sebastian and the guide translated, the other admitted he had a package of the stuff and threw across a small fiber bag. Carthew cut the fastening and sifted a quantity of the gum through his hands. The lumps were duller than the freshly-gathered lumps, but when he broke one or two he noted the luminous color.

"Crystalium!" he said. "Four or five pounds, I think. We will take the bag."

To bargain was awkward. The pottery-merchant was dull and sullen, but the price was fixed, and Carthew paid in republican currency and kept the bag.

"Ask him where the stuff was gathered," he said.

The Indian declared he did not know. He was a merchant and bought the gum from others. The quantity he got was small and the price was high.

"On the coast they sell the gum for copal," said Carthew, and signed the guide. "Ask if he will go with us to his village and try to find some more."

The Indian refused. He must go to Santa Catalina and sell his pots.

"We will buy his load," said Carthew. "If he likes, we will engage him at good pay for a month."

The offer was rejected. The Indian declared he must supply the customers who awaited his arrival, and at all events he was not going back. Welland imagined Father Sebastian thought his resolve significant, for he began to talk. The other's replies were short, and by and by Father Sebastian shrugged.

"The fellow is not a Catholic. Some of his people are yet heathen, and I cannot persuade him."

"Very well. Offer him a good bribe to tell you where his pueblo is."

Father Sebastian smiled. "I think not. He would take the money, but you might not find the village. Although he is obstinate, I doubt if he is stupid."

Carthew shouted to the paddlers, the canoes plowed ahead, and Welland, looking back, saw the pottery-merchant brooding by his fire. The fellow was perhaps a heathen, but he was not a savage. When the first Spaniards landed his ancestors were civilized. They built strong cities, huge temples, and viaducts, but for four hundred years white adventurers had exploited the decadent race. The fellow had perhaps inherited his sullen antagonism; but Welland felt the still, bent figure on the bank somehow threatened him and his friends. To see it melt was some relief.

At sunset they moored in a backwater, and Welland's sleep was disturbed. When a branch cracked he pushed back the mosquito-bar. The moon shone behind the trees, but the brush and big trunks along the bank were dark. Then he heard steps in the soft sand. Since the steps went up the bank, the fellow was not a stranger. A porter had landed and that was all.

Welland drowsily resolved to listen for his return, but he did not. When he woke, day was breaking and two porters were gone. Since he knew negroes fear the dark, their flight was ominous.

IX

WELLAND USES MAGIC

When breakfast was over Carthew questioned the negroes. Welland approved his waiting and his careless manner. In the tropics, where mechanical inventions do not help him, a white man frankly rules by bluff, and if a leader's nerve is not good his authority vanishes. Carthew's white clothes were no longer spotless, but his expensive English shooting boots shone and his silk cummerbund and the pugrees round his sun-hat were fastidiously neat. Nothing indicated that he was bothered, and he smoked a cigarette.

Welland thought Father Sebastian humorously interested; the padre himself, no doubt, knew where to use theatrical methods, and he did not meddle. The guide was an inscrutable ruffian, but since the porters seemed to distrust him, he was not questioned. Three or four were obviously disturbed, although they declared they did not know why their companions went. When they got up, the others were gone; that was all.

"Them boy d—— fool bushman," Bad Hat, the Kroo, remarked. "He t'ink somet'ing go chop him and he lib for up a tree."

Welland nodded. The taunt was African and implied the absconders' relationship to the apes. The significant thing was Bad Hat knew the boys were afraid. It, however, did not look as if he were daunted, and George Washington's comment was practical.

"Now we done got to carry them d—— fools' load."

"There's the trouble. They might be forced to carry us," said Carthew in a quiet voice. "However, since I don't suppose we will find out anything useful, you might send them off."

Welland addressed the Kroos. "You are not bushmen; you savvy. When you think something go chop you, you stop where the guns lib." He turned to Nilson. "I expect you are a good rifle-shot?"

"I have hit a moose. The animal is almost as large as a Percheron horse," said Nilson modestly, and resumed with a laugh: "But I get the notion, and since your nerve's all right, we might try the William Tell stunt." He glanced at Carthew. "Your permission, sir?"

"If you are satisfied about your steadiness—We have breakfasted, but I don't want my chief officer to be hurt."

Nilson stretched his arm and pointed his firm index finger at a distant mark.

"Where it works, prohibition has some advantages, and at my home town we get up for breakfast. In London, I guess you wait for lunch."

"Your audience waits," said Carthew. "Get on with the show."

Nilson pulled a magazine rifle from its waterproof bag. Welland picked up a bottle and climbed the bank.

"On my head, Olaf? Is forty yards too much?"

"Fifty yards," said Nilson. "The sight's graded by hundreds. You'd better hold the bottle; if you like, by the neck."

Welland measured the distance with an easy stride. Nilson moved the telescopic sight and lay across the mats, the long barrel on the canoe's side.

"My shooting is not all the show, sir, and with a fixed rest for the rifle I ought not to miss. The point is, it *looks* risky, and the boys may argue that the chief officer is hard stuff."

"It's possible," said Carthew. "When I agreed to the experiment, I reckoned on something like that."

Welland turned and, holding the bottle carelessly, faced the canoe. The porters were very quiet; only their white eyeballs moved. Nilson braced his arms. His body and legs were rigid as marble; and then the rifle jerked. Thin smoke blew from the muzzle and the explosion drowned the crash of splintering glass, but all saw that most of the bottle was gone. Only the swelled top and neck were left in Welland's steady hand.

"Still!" said Nilson, and pressed the trigger.

The crash echoed in the woods, and Welland, turning to the porters, threw down the cork.

"Palaver set!" he said. "Shove off them canoes, Washington. *Adelante, todos!*"

The negroes seized the paddles and the canoes moved upstream. Nilson cleaned his rifle; the others held a council under the thatch, which hid them from their servants' interested glance.

"The boys' deserting is awkward; particularly since we had not the proper number before they went," said Carthew. "Crystalium grows in hot moist soil; but after we had searched the swamps my plan was to steer for the *templadas* tableland, and rejoin the coast by road. The map marks a *carretera*, which implies a track carts sometimes can use. However, I'm afraid the plan is now impossible."

"Transport's the difficulty?" said Huysler.

Carthew nodded. "In three or four hours the guide expects we must leave the canoes. We need tents, ground-sheets, medicine and food; we might need cartridges. Since we cannot much longer move the stuff, the prudent line is to start for Santa Catalina and hire fresh porters."

"No," said Huysler firmly. "Time is going, and the old man fixed the sum the search must cost. Unless, when the *Shenandoah* picks us up, we have something to show for our efforts, he'd turn down the proposition and cut his loss. But I imagine you are not really keen to go back, sir?"

"I am not," Carthew admitted with a smile. "I expect our excursion is my last adventure, and, if we do not find the gum, I am done with. For all that, you must weigh the risk. The porters cannot carry all the supplies we ought to have, and, as I stated, they might be forced to carry us." He turned to Welland. "So far, our luck has perhaps been remarkably good."

Welland took his cue. Carthew, whom they trusted, refused to persuade the young fellows, although, if they were daunted, it might cost him much.

"I think that is so. The low country is a typical malaria belt, but I expect it breeds worse fevers. Two, at all events, are worse."

"Then your vote's for turning back?"

"I have not a vote and I'm willing to go forward. My pay is good and I might not get another post."

"Very well," said Huysler. "I undertook to find the gum, and if it's possible for flesh and blood, I mean to make good. All the same, we must not be rash, and here's my plan—We'll cache the stores we cannot move, and the canoes. Then we'll shove on until we find a dry and healthy spot for a base camp from which we can search the surrounding country. When our supplies run out we can fall back on the dump and start for the coast."

"That's the stuff!" said Nilson, laughing. "Young America doesn't quit. When our Jack gets going, he goes all the way."

"When we have loaded up the gum, I'll shout. If you're wise, you'll wait," Huysler rejoined.

He glanced, thoughtfully, in front, and Welland imagined his responsibility weighed. The boy, perhaps for the first time, carried a load civilized man, for the most part, must bear.

For an hour or two, the dugouts crept slowly up the narrowing channel, and then were poled into a backwater choked by reeds. The porters dragged them up the bank, and, while Carthew superintended, covered the hulls with branches. Nilson imagined the cache was good, but it looked as if the negroes were not yet satisfied. One cut and peeled a thin straight branch, and driving the end into the ground, plaited a few rags and leaves about the split top.

"Magic?" said Huysler. "The thing stands for hands off?"

"Something like that," said Carthew. "I imagine the canoes are now guarded by the Green Snake. Obeah is yet a force to reckon on in the West Indies, and the Haiti boys are supposed to be experts. They, no doubt, were taught by African slaves. Welland perhaps knows."

"I have not studied Obeah and Voodoo, but in Africa I was something of a magician and it looks as if our lot did not know the proper ritual. Since we stopped the slave ships some time has gone."

"Do you know the ritual?"

Welland smiled, a rather grim smile.

"One mustn't boast, but I had opportunities to study Ju-Ju that a white man, as a rule, is not allowed to get. Anyhow, I'll risk an experiment. It might, so to speak, supplement Nilson's shooting. But I must have some rags. They're indispensable."

Ordering the porters to wait, he opened his waterproof kit-bag; and then cut and peeled a branch. The negroes were obviously interested, and the guide watched him with fixed intentness. Father Sebastian frowned. When he twisted a handful of rags and fiber about the cleft stick his movements were ceremonious. Nothing he did was careless, and the dark-skinned group surrounding him was strangely quiet. By and by he fronted the Kroos.

"You savvy them t'ing?"

The negroes' eyes rolled, but they did not speak. Although they were steamship sailors and thought themselves sophisticated, they did know the spell. The others were obviously impressed; Father Sebastian's mouth was tight; the guide turned his head and spat, and then looked round furtively, as if to assure himself his scorn was not rash. Welland ordered the porters to make their loads and sat down in the shade.

"You put it across," said Nilson. "You have beaten the boy's fakir."

"Oh, well," said Welland with a smile, "I had some advantages. His school is the Haitian school; mine's the older establishment in Dahomey."

"But are the fellows convinced the rags will scare off their friends?" Huysler inquired.

"It looks like that," said Welland. "I rather think they're justified. Modern philosophers declare that all we reckon we know is relative; and, in a sense, the thing you firmly believe in is. For example—where a creek curves away from the Niger, a little hut of thatch and branches, rather like a doll's house, guarded its mouth. The channel went to a native market village. Sometimes the bush markets were fought for, and when the Houssa constabulary were not about, black merchants combined to seize the goods sent to their competitors. The boldest thieves, however, left that creek alone.

"A white trader's clerk, bothered by prickly heat and annoyed by a dispute with the headman about some bags of salt, wrecked the Ju-Ju house. He was a raw youth from a shabby English street; but it looked as if he challenged the powers of the dark and they dared not reply. There was no manifestation; I believe it's the fashionable word. The Ju-Ju house went down the creek, and that was all.

"You can picture the bushmen's emotions. Their market, by which they lived, and their village, were no longer safe; the god they had trusted could not help. Where all had gone reverently, only tall cottonwoods grew and yellow water ran. The spot was like another spot."

"Was the fellow allowed to get away with it?" Huysler asked.

"In two weeks he died, very possibly from malaria, but the Government doctor was a hundred miles off and no white man knew. At all events, the Ju-Ju house was rebuilt, and the spot is, no doubt, more sacred than before. I don't know if the tale's instructive."

"Looks as if the magicians knew their job," said Nilson, in a thoughtful voice. "However, we must sort out the stores we mean to cache, and they ought to be as few as possible. To dump a large stock would, of course, cut down the distance from our farthest camp to the base, and for a time we must try to move the lot. All the same, relaying stuff is a strenuous business. I have had some experience."

Carthew agreed. Their supplies could not be renewed, and as much as possible must be transported to the next camp, from which the porters would return for a fresh load. In consequence, the party's advance would be slow. Moreover, the white men must help, and, as he and Welland knew, in the tropics a white man cannot for long carry a useful load. In fact, when sick with malaria, he must be carried. In the meantime, the pole-hammocks, provided for the purpose, might be

loaded with food and small packages.

In an hour all was ready and, following a curving path, they plunged into the jungle.



X

THE FROG

Thunder crashed behind the woods, the sky was dark, and the sun would soon set. In the steaming jungle the nights are very dark, and snakes and mosquitoes are numerous. The ground, however, began to rise, and the bush was getting thin. Carthew thought the broken ridge in front an island in the low swampy forest, but he hoped to find a spot for his base camp on comparatively high ground.

Carthew admitted he was bothered. For one thing, his white clothes were torn and stained and his skin was wet by sweat. He knew himself fastidious, but to be ragged and dirty annoyed him. Then his head and his joints ached, although when he experimented with his clinical thermometer the mercury stopped at a point very little above ninety-nine degrees. For all that, he was very slack and his boot galled his foot. Throwing off his load, he examined a broken logwood-trunk and sat down. Some caution was advisable, because venomous insects might lurk in the bark.

For two or three weeks the party had laboriously pushed through tangled forest, and Carthew reckoned they had kept the line he meant to follow. To relay their supplies, however, implied their covering the ground between the camps two or three times, and their progress was slow. Then, since he imagined crystalium grew only in the hot jungle, there was no use in steering for the healthier tableland behind the seaboard flats. All the same, he doubted if he and the others could bear the heat for long. And they had not found the gum.

Carthew shrugged. He was something of a gambler and knew when one must bet all one had; but he reflected with dreary humor that he did not have much. His wife was dead and his relations had indicated that they did not mean to be embarrassed by his daughter. In all the circumstances, Carthew admitted their refusal was not strange; and he and the girl had drifted about France and Belgium, stopping for a time where the pension was cheap. Adela had not the sort of talents a girl needed for a career, her training would cost something, and he was poor and getting old. In a sense, he was done with, but he was not going to dwell on that.

The search for crystalium offered the last chance to mend his fortunes. The gum did grow in the swamps, but to get enough to make its exploitation profitable might be another thing. When Carthew undertook to find out, he knew he ran some risks, and he now faced others on which he had not reckoned. Yet he was not very much daunted and the boys were keen. After all, if he did not come back, Adela would get a useful sum from the American insurance company, and that was something.

Cracking branches and labored steps announced his companions' arrival. Father Sebastian pushed through the tangled creepers and, carrying a heavy pack, toiled up the slope. His skin was wet and his face was pinched. Don Sebastian was a *Peninsular* and had inherited the Spaniard's dislike for physical exertion. In the circumstances, Carthew admired his pluck. He looked straight in front and vanished in the bush. The Krooboys, loaded like pack-animals, came next; and then six or seven native-born negroes.

The others had deserted, and Carthew knew his pushing on with so small a force was reckless. Moreover, the men were exhausted and had, in scorching heat, three or four times carried a heavy load across awkward ground. He imagined they stayed with him only because they dared not cross the forest unless the white men went. Something was happening—that was all Carthew knew. The guide was not about, and he speculated rather anxiously about his absence. Since they sent back the relay party, he had not seen the fellow.

Welland went by. He was very thin, and stooped a little under his load. Carthew noted that his brows were knit. He knew, of course, their continuing to advance was ridiculous, but he had undertaken to earn his pay. None of the party, however, had seen Carthew, and when he studied their faces their emotions were not masked. In the priest's fixed look he read fanatic resolution, and in Welland's a queer, thoughtful calm. The negroes were dully apathetic, but Carthew knew them afraid.

Then Huysler and Nilson, one a few yards behind the other, climbed the incline. Huysler frowned, as if he pondered something that disturbed him; when Nilson plunged into a hole he swore. He was thinner; his step was languid and the red had faded from his skin. Huysler's look was older; he was not the joyously keen young fellow Carthew had known on board the yacht. Fatigue and perhaps responsibility were molding the boys, but the stuff of which they were made was

good. Then Huysler turned his head.

"Hello, sir! Did you stop to look for us?"

"My wet boot began to pinch. Do you know where Macias is?"

"I do not, and I'm not much interested. Anyhow, you don't want to worry. If the snakes are at all fastidious, they will leave Don Pepe alone."

"Dog does not eat dog," Nilson agreed. "If the brute has pulled out I'm resigned."

"Macias is not attractive, but he knows the country."

"That is so, sir. You gave him our line, and on the whole perhaps we are where you calculated; but when a creek or a muskeg stopped us, I noted he, each time, edged off in one direction."

Carthew was a navigator and had remarked something like that, although he had not thought it significant. The boy was rather keen.

"Well?" he said.

"I wondered whether we were being steered."

"After all," said Carthew, "I cannot fix very accurately where we ought to go."

"So long as it is not where Macias thinks we ought to go—" Huysler rejoined. "In the meantime, the boys have had enough, sir. We were bothered to shove them along."

"We will camp as soon as we can find a proper spot."

They went up the hill. The jungle was thinner, but the light had begun to melt and one could not see far in front. The ground was firm and for the most part dry. After a time Nilson slipped on a large stone, and when he had got his balance he stopped.

"The stone is squared, and here's another like it. I reckon we are walking on masonry."

Carthew bent down. So far as he could see, the grass and tangled vines covered rectangular blocks.

"A paved causeway! The stones are very much larger than the stuff modern road-makers use. I wonder how far it goes— But I think the porters have stopped."

Welland's voice rolled across the trees, Carthew jumped up, and they followed the pavement. Forest clothed the hill, but at the flat top the trees were small, as if the soil were barren, and a broken upright slab cut the sky. Rain and scorching sun had crumbled the stone, and the outline of the monstrous object, carved in high relief, was blurred. For all that, the vanished sculptor's work carried the stamp of power. The gigantic frog, crouched, as if to leap, dominated the little tableland. Its uncouth, dark bulk was ominous and somehow evil.

The porters had thrown down their loads and Carthew imagined Welland had had some trouble to stop their headlong flight. They gathered in a compact group and their eyes rolled, for where a white man turns his head to command a wider view a negro turns his eyes. Carthew himself admitted a sort of atavistic shrinking, but to allow the carved frog to disturb him was absurd, and he looked about.

He saw why the trees were small. The flat was covered by broken masonry, across which tangled creepers crawled. At one or two spots, however, a few massive blocks had not yet fallen, and he thought the pile behind the frog a ruined gate-tower.

"Had you much trouble to hold the boys?" he asked Welland.

"At the beginning, I think their notion was to lib for the woods. Then they perhaps reflected that to run away from their supplies and protectors was not logical. Anyhow, I persuaded them to stop."

Carthew nodded. Physically, Welland, worn by heat and fever, was the weakest of the group, and he never bullied. Yet

he had power over the carriers that Carthew, trained to command, had not. Frowning unconsciously, Carthew indicated the frog.

"The carving's Aztec?"

"Maya, I think," said Huysler. "By comparison, the Aztecs were recent, and a decadent lot. Then somehow the brute's Egyptian, and the gate-tower is like a pylon. But I'm not an expert. What about our camp, sir?"

Carthew studied the dreary landscape. On the low ground, white mist began to float across the trunks; but he thought the hot, sour vapor would not rise. A prudent white man sleeps in the fever mist only when he is forced. Besides, after the dark, stifling jungle, on the hill top one got a sense of space and freedom.

"We will stop," he said. "If the boys hurry, they ought to get all fixed by dark. I think we'll pitch our particular camp in the gateway."

The arch, when built, was wide and flat. Part of the supporting wall had fallen, but an end of the weighty lintel, balanced like a cantilever, stood, and the pavement underneath was dry. To be occupied was some relief, and when dark rolled across the jungle the tents were up. The night was hot, but the porters had found some dead wood, and where they camped yellow reflections pierced the gloom. Sometimes their crouching figures got distinct, and sometimes vanished.

Supper was frugal. For the most part, the food was canned stuff, and nobody's appetite was keen. All were tired, but at seven o'clock in the evening one cannot sleep, and they languidly talked and smoked. Mosquitoes were not numerous, and the tent mouth was open; the wax lamp burned with a steady flame. The pale illumination melted a few yards off, and then one saw the porters' fire. That was all.

"The Frog has vanished; but the queer thing is, you know he's about," Huysler remarked. "Somehow I'd sooner see the brute. Although he's sculptured stone, I expect he stood for malignant force, and the folk who built this pylon had some grounds to fear him."

"Oh, well," said Carthew, "if your supposition's accurate, the Frog was probably out of date when Cortés conquered Mexico, but I believe the Green Snake must yet be reckoned on. He's the Voodoo symbol, and tales I heard in Jamaica imply that he's as cruel as the Aztec gods. But you think the Frog is Maya?"

"He is very old. The Mayas were first on the ground and their works indicate a virile, conquering race. The Aztec tribes on our southwest frontier are dull and apathetic, and physically small. But at one time their god was a snake."

Although Huysler used colloquial English, Father Sebastian looked up.

"From the beginning, men have feared the snake," he said.

"In Central America, it is not remarkable," Carthew rejoined. "Anyhow, the race that built this temple and carved the Frog was not physically weak. One senses a sort of ruthless imperial force. The model's Egyptian."

"Maya architecture was Egyptian; there's the queer thing," Huysler agreed. "The Pharaohs probably used muscular Ethiopian slaves, but in Central America there was not a subject type like that. Anyhow, when the builders put up these pylons, somebody sweated—"

He got an electric torch and crossed the pavement. The concentrated beam moved about the massive bonded stones, and rested on a pile of broken stuff at the bottom of the wall. Then it stopped, and Huysler beckoned.

"Come on, Olaf! Help me shift this block."

For a few moments they strained, and then a stone rolled from the pile. Huysler's torch flashed in the floating dust.

"Metal! Armor, I expect," he gasped.

The others joined him. Where the beam from the torch rested they saw three or four lumps of corroded iron. One piece was roughly straight; another was rounded, but the rust had gone deep and blurred their proper shape. Huysler got up, the straight flat object in his hand.

"This thing was perhaps a shining Toledo blade; the curved lump a breastplate. Anyhow, it's Spanish. The Aztec armor

was quilted cotton and feathers. I expect the steel has rusted for four hundred years."

"Three hundred and ten years," said Father Sebastian, as if he knew.

"The stuff was obviously dumped before the stones fell," Nilson remarked. "I dare say there's another lot under the large blocks. But, supposing it is armor, why did they leave it there?"

"A steel breastplate is an awkward load for a sick man; a dying man cannot use a sword."

Nilson, on his knees, searched the dust and rubbish. When he got up he held a thin, flat medallion by a broken chain.

"A scapula, of a sort! Silver, I guess. By and by, we'll clean it. I don't suppose a museum would have much use for the other truck."

Carthew took the torch from Huysler. The beam flickered about the wall, and where it stopped the others saw the stone was rudely carved.

"Steady the spotlight, sir," said Nilson. "Looks like an inscription."

Standing outside the beam, he studied the worn letters and noted that the first were firmer than the lines underneath. At the top was a rude Latin cross.

"*Ora pro nobis*," he read, and went on: "*Hic jacet, Herminio*—I think it's *Lautera*. The next is *José Suarez*—"

"The third line is very faint; and there are one or two more I cannot read. Looks as if the carver's hand got shaky, or perhaps the tool got dull."

"All the lines were not cut at one time," said Father Sebastian. "There is another thing: Herminio Lautera was a Spanish gentleman, but the carver does not state his mother's name. When he began, his hand was not very firm. But I see something below the names. You have not been long in the *tierra caliente* and your eyes are young."

Carthew advanced the torch, and Nilson bent his head.

"Broken letters. *Andres*, a blank and *S. I.* then *Solus*."

"He writes in Latin," said Father Sebastian. "In English, the I is J. He was a Jesuit missionary. But is there not more?"

"Two oblique and very shaky crossing lines. The *Saltire* perhaps; St. Andrew's cross. Then I think he begins afresh, *In hoc signo*—and stops for good."

"The tool dropped," said Father Sebastian. "The word he could not see to cut was Conquer. Well, one feels he did not boast. One by one they died; he was alone and last."

Nilson straightened his back and lifted his sun-hat.

"A stout fellow, Brother Andrew! One likes his pluck."

They went back to the tent and Father Sebastian began to talk.

"The expedition's start is recorded in a letter to Madrid, but nobody knows its adventures. Perhaps the Indians drove back the soldiers, and they thought the hill a natural fort; perhaps they were sick with fever, and when they reached high ground they stopped. I think they fought and were beaten, because Andres gives but few names, although there was another priest, besides some well-born adventurers. Had they not been sick or wounded, they would not have camped by the Frog."

Lightning flickered behind the woods, big drops splashed the tent, and for a moment the monstrous stone reptile glimmered in the blue flame.

"Oh, well," said Nilson, "in the dark you feel the brute stands for something evil, and anyhow he stopped Don Herminio's expedition. In fact, when I saw him in the trees, I felt his motto was, *Ils ne passeront pas*."

Father Sebastian asked him for the medal and, rubbing the thin disc on his clothes, carried it under the lamp. Then he

drew the chain round Nilson's neck and twisted the ends.

"The devil is not yet dead," he said.

Nilson politely pushed the medal under his jacket. Huysler pulled out his Spanish cards, and since Father Sebastian knew some games, the party was soon occupied. Welland, however, smoked his pipe and cogitated. The porters were very few and the guide was not back.

XI

THE SNAKE

The night was hot and very dark, but sometimes lightning shimmered in the sky. Faint luminous vapor marked the porters' camp, but their fire had sunk, and Huysler thought the boys asleep; at all events, they were quiet and did not know he was about. The tent, thirty or forty yards off, was indistinguishable, and since he could not see his watch, he hoped it would soon be time for Nilson to relieve him.

Huysler lay behind a massive block, and the warmth of the flat stone beneath him pierced his folded ground-sheet. A powerful electric torch and a choke-bore gun were under his blanket. He did not need a blanket, but the dew was heavy and his thin white clothes were conspicuous. When Carthew resolved to post a sentry, Huysler and Nilson privately agreed to keep the longest watches. They were young, and fresher than the others, although, now Huysler thought about it, he had not felt particularly fresh since he landed at Santa Catalina. He imagined his business was rather to see nobody stole away than to guard against a stranger's creeping into the camp.

To be disturbed by their finding the Frog and the relics was absurd. Huysler thought himself logical, but he felt, as Olaf felt, that the sculptured reptile warned them that none might pass. Herminio Lautera and his soldiers certainly had not passed. In the dark, Huysler refused to dwell on things like that.

To muse about the people who hewed the ominous monument from the rock might banish awkward speculations, and although Huysler was not an antiquary, he was a cultivated young American. Maya architecture carried a queer Eastern stamp, as if it had originated in Assyria and Egypt. As a rule, however, the carving was relief carving on a flat surface. The Mayas used massive blocks and the flat arch; the Aztecs, their decadent successors, built pyramids. Well, the post and lintel were perhaps man's first experiment in construction with stone. Then he began to carve in low relief and at length, when his skill developed, worked in the round. In Egypt and America primitive architecture, so to speak, evolved in similar lines. One could not imagine the art was being carried across the Atlantic.

Huysler smiled. It had nothing to do with him. All he really wanted was not to think about the blasted Frog. Well, he might profitably cogitate about another matter. The party's advance depended on their transport. There was the trouble, because, in the tropical forest, a white man needed much, but could not carry a useful load. Since Huysler had recently tried, he knew. Almirez at Santa Catalina had engaged porters, but some had not arrived, and some, like the guide, had vanished.

In consequence, the prudent line was to make for the coast, but Huysler was not going. Helen expected him to find the gum; he did not know about his father. When Jack modestly offered to join the expedition as the company's representative the old man was rather humorous, and his other relations thought it a joke. Jack had resolved to show the scoffers; but that was not all.

He admitted a man ought to have an occupation, although he maintained the occupation need not be economically profitable. Since speed attracted him, his idea was to experiment with racing cars; he might have borne his relations' disapproval, but Helen did not agree. Well, all Helen said went, and he was in the *caliente* swamps.

The queer thing was, since he had got there he had begun to use commercial arguments: his father's arguments. The company could do much with crystalium, and although the search was expensive, the old man had put up the wad. President Vallon and his officers had got a large sum, supplies cost much, and the funds had melted. In a way, it was strange, but Jack hated to see the money go for nothing. Frankly, until he had something to show for his efforts, he must stay with his job. After all, he admitted humorously, he was the son of Jasper Huysler, the famous varnish manufacturer.

He looked about. The night was very dark, but the mist did not roll up the hill, and on the high ground the air was fresh. Huysler had begun to hate the miasmatic jungle and he was vaguely conscious that sometimes hate sprang from fear. For a time all was quiet, and then he heard a puzzling noise. After a few moments he knew something in the gloom behind him moved across uneven ground. When he turned his head all he saw was the blurred gate-tower.

The noise, although faint, began to get distinct. In a way, it was not continuous, but went with a sort of rhythm; Huysler sensed a forward impulse and then a pause. He pictured a smooth body sliding across the big stone slabs, and crushing the creeper vines. Moreover, a little pulse began to beat in his ears. When he was moved to physical repulsion his ears

throbbled, as if a small electric fan revolved inside his head. Sometimes he felt the throb before he actually saw the repulsive object, as if he were warned by a mechanical sensibility. Anyhow, he had never known his ears to throb for nothing.

Pushing back his blanket, Jack seized the choke-bore gun. The cartridges were long, and up to fifty yards the gun would throw its heavy load in a narrow circle. To feel the cold barrel was some relief, but Huysler reflected that he must not shoot so long as shooting could be avoided. The porters were moody and daunted; an alarm in the dark might break their nerve, and if they ran for the jungle, they might vanish for good. Without the porters, the party could not move their camp. Carthew's tent was forty yards off. Huysler did not want to shout, and he must not leave his post.

At college and in the athletic circles Jack frequented, one's physical courage was taken for granted. The convention, however, was not warranted. At all events, now Jack saw he must not shoot, his skin was wet by sweat, but he was bothered by a queer, creeping chill. Cold feet was not altogether a symbolical phrase.

The noise got louder; the advancing object was not far off, and Huysler, feeling the suspense intolerable, seized his torch. When he pushed down the contact his clammy fingers shook, but the beam searched the tumbled slabs and crawling vines. Then it stopped and Huysler gasped.

Behind the leaves, a thick, smooth, gliding body bent in a sinuous curve. The curve got straight; Huysler pictured the muscles near the ground expanding and forcing the thing ahead. He reckoned the illuminated circle was six or seven feet across, and for that distance the snake's body was thicker than his leg—But there was more of it, and for a moment or two shining scales rippled in the light. Rippled was perhaps the proper word. Ten feet, fifteen feet, Huysler calculated, and the gleaming thing yet writhed through the leaves. Then his hand slipped on the spring, and all was dark.

Huysler was conscious of a horrible nausea, and the pulse in his head beat like a drum. He seized the gun and his impulse was to pull both triggers, but somehow he did not. For one thing, he could not hold the torch and gun; and then he did not know where the big snake went. In fact, he did not know if it preyed on man, and he doubted if it steered for the porters' camp.

He picked up the torch, and where the reflections melted saw the dull gleam of scales. The snake went fast, but it was going away from the camp, and in a moment or two it vanished. Huysler felt he had taken the proper line, but his legs were not steady and nausea came near to conquering him. The python had crawled from its den in the ruins, but that was all he knew, although since it had not bothered him, it perhaps had meant to steal away. Jack tried to light a cigarette, but broke the match.

Half an hour afterwards Nilson arrived and Jack in a low voice narrated his adventure.

"I mustn't exaggerate, but I reckon the brute was twenty feet, and I did not see its head and tail."

"Father Sebastian declares some are thirty feet," said Nilson dryly. "But can you spot its track?"

Huysler, flashing the torch, advanced, and stopped about ten yards from the spot he had occupied. The creepers' leaves and stalks were crushed, and where the trail crossed a slab the gritty dust was ridged.

"Looks as if somebody had dragged a big armored fire-hose through the brush; but when you study the marks, you begin to think the thing pushed itself," Nilson remarked. "The grit on the stone is crushed, the stalks are torn and shoved back. Some abdominal muscle to grind the stuff like that! Your nerve is pretty good, old son. All the same, I guess the snake wasn't hunting the boys or you."

"Would you like me to stay?" Huysler asked.

Nilson laughed. "You're a regular fellow, Jake; but I think not. You see, I don't dare admit I want somebody around."

Huysler went off. He was not keen to stay. Nilson laughed, but he had not seen the monstrous scaly thing writhe across the stones.

When Huysler woke, the sun was rising and the wet jungle steamed. The hill was like an island in a smooth white sea, for the mist was level and the tops of the higher trees, breaking the surface, as if they were rocks, helped the illusion. On the narrow tableland the stones and creepers dried and the sun was already hot. The porters were occupied about a fire

and Jack triumphantly carried off a small can of hot water for a bath. On the march he had been forced to go without, and to put on fresh clothes was something of a luxury.

Sometimes he thought about the swimming-pool at his home in the North, and pictured the shimmering green reflections and pearly cement; but were he transported there, he knew he dared not risk the plunge. Since he swam around the yacht some time had gone and in the *tierra caliente* one got horribly slack. All the same, the bath braced him, and when he glanced at the crumbling Frog he smiled. The reptile's power to disturb him had melted at daybreak.

At breakfast he talked carelessly about the snake. To do so was easier than he had thought, although he imagined Carthew studied him.

"Had you shot, it is possible the negroes would have gone," said Father Sebastian. "In the daylight, however, they might hunt and eat the reptile. A large snake's flesh is good."

"But the snake would be the same snake, padre."

"That is so," Father Sebastian agreed. "To be afraid in the dark is human, but courage comes at daybreak."

When breakfast was over, he asked for supplies for three or four days, and began to make his pack.

"I must thank you for much, señores, but now I push on alone," he said.

Carthew protested. As far as one could see, dark forest rolled back into the thinning mist. There was not a road, and where the party had found a curving jungle path, to cut a passage for the loaded porters was sometimes hard. Then a white man could not carry the supplies on which his life might depend, and Father Sebastian was not young. It, however, looked as if Carthew's arguments did not move him.

"I am wanted, and I hope soon to reach the *templadas* belt," he said.

"And when you do arrive?"

Father Sebastian shrugged. "I do not know. Perhaps it is not very important. However, if I am fortunate, I may find friends who wait for me."

"Then you know your line to the high ground? The Frog is a landmark?"

"The Indians talk about the spot, but they do not go there. I think but for us, no white man now living has seen the Frog."

"When we find the gum he will not be lonely," Huysler remarked. "Our first job will be to cut a road to the creek."

Father Sebastian gave him a queer smile.

"To be young is to be hopeful. Although some *crystal* grows in the forest, it may be long before the road is cut." He turned to Carthew. "I am not meddlesome, señor, and to advise another is rash, but you were kind hosts. If you are wise, you will load your porters and start this morning for the creek."

Carthew shook his head, but his eyes twinkled.

"Since we could not persuade you, we are entitled to be obstinate. Then Mr. Huysler is accountable for the rather large sum risked by an American manufacturing company. To squander money for nothing is not an American habit."

"But you and Señor Welland are not American."

"We are the company's servants. However, we will let it go. You expect soon to reach high ground, and we might, of course, be forced to leave the swamps. One understands the *templadas* belt is pastoral, and harmless strangers, willing to pay for all they got, might be welcome at a ranch."

"Once it was so. Now the ranchers fear the Indians, and a number have gone. The country is volcanic, and one feels it shake. Then in the *tierras frias*, where the mountains are high, half-breed brigands haunt the ravines. They are people without shame, who live by murder and robbery."

"An unruly flock!" Carthew remarked. "When one expects an explosion, one tries not to be about."

"We are servants," said Father Sebastian, and fastened on his pack. Then he turned, and, fronting the group, made the sign of the cross. "*Vaya con Dios!*"

He went down the hill, and when he vanished in the trees Carthew lighted a cigarette.

"Father Sebastian is not afraid, and so far as he sees, he's sincere. I think he felt he was forced to warn us."

"He left us to guess," said Nilson. "We don't know all he knows."

"We were warned. So long as we are obstinate, he is not accountable," Carthew rejoined. "Well, I doubt if we could cross the *templadas*, and our business is to find the gum. In the meantime, we'll use the hill for a base camp and search the neighborhood. To-day, however, we will give the boys a rest."

Huysler and Nilson were willing, and when they went off Carthew glanced at Welland, who knitted his brows.

"Father Sebastian expects a rebellion. I imagine Galdos, or his adjutant, Don Martin, could account for our boys deserting, but had he wanted, he might perhaps have stopped us altogether. My notion is, he, so to speak, *allowed* us to go ahead. Then our guide's vanishing when we had got as far as we dared go was rather significant."

Carthew nodded. "Our battery is worth something and I expect only the President's supporters are allowed to buy first-class guns. I don't know if somebody is planning to seize ours, but it's possible. Suppose we admit we have been steered to a spot the bush folk would sooner not visit? Exploring parties have vanished in the swamps."

"The expedition is American. The United States is the predominant foreign influence."

"That is so; it weighs against my argument," Carthew agreed. "Well, I suppose we mustn't risk a fresh advance, but by contrast with the jungle the hill is salubrious—"

Welland looked at him rather hard, and Carthew smiled.

"My head aches; your hand is not steady, but we know something about malaria, and so long as the boys are not knocked out, I imagine we'll carry on. Then we have a spring of good water and the hill is a natural fort. In daylight to rush four men who can shoot would be a rash experiment, and the bush folk hate the dark."

"As a rule, the malaria likes fresh blood; the young and vigorous go down first," Welland remarked.

"Very well. If Huysler agrees to pull out for the coast, I am willing."

"Huysler will not agree," said Welland, and got up. "He's resolved to hold the fort, and, after all, I dare say we could do so."

XII

WELLAND'S WATCH

In the morning the search for crystalium began, and for a week or two exploring parties pushed through the jungle. As a rule, they came back moodily at dusk, their thin clothes torn and their skins scratched. Sometimes they found the gum, but a handful of the hard transparent globules was all they got. The natural supply was apparently limited, and Huysler began to doubt if one could economically cultivate the stuff. To clear the soil and cut roads would be an expensive undertaking; only negroes could labor in the stifling heat, and Huysler imagined a white man could not for long superintend. After a particularly strenuous excursion, he knew.

For four or five days he tossed and sweated, and shivered, under thick blankets, but Welland was something of a doctor. He used quinine and hot lime-juice, and the fever went. Huysler's legs were not steady and he was tormented by prickly heat, but his resolve stood. Unless malaria knocked him out, he was going to find the gum; at all events, he was going to satisfy himself if the quantity to be found were worth exploiting.

In the meantime, the others carried on the search; the rule was, while one was in the jungle, two must watch the camp. Moreover, the explorer must return at sunset. In the dark, one could not front the mosquitoes, leeches haunted the swamp-grass, and poisonous spiders lurked about the rotten logs. Other insects bored into one's skin. On the hill one must use some caution, but for the most part one could baffle the crawling hosts.

An hour or two after dark Welland, one evening, stole noiselessly to a spot about thirty yards from the white men's camp. The tents were not side by side. Pitched at the corners of a triangle, they and the sentry post commanded the camp. Carthew had no particular grounds to expect a raid, but, as far as possible, he guarded against the risk.

Welland imagined the porters did not know he watched. A negro could sleep when he wanted, but a white man could not, and since dark fell about six o'clock, the hot evenings were drearily long. Sometimes thunder rolled about the sky, and for a few moments big drops splashed the stones. Then, as a rule, a revolving gust of wind tossed the branches and, sucking up fallen leaves, died away in the forest.

Although the sky was dark, for a time the night was calm. Welland's ground-sheet protected him from the damp, the air was cooling and he began to muse. In Africa he had cultivated a sort of mechanical vigilance; although his body relaxed and his brain was occupied, his eyes watched. Since they began the search he had speculated about Carthew. He admitted he liked his leader, but the fellow baffled him. Yet Welland had studied men. In fact, had he not done so, he imagined his rule at his lonely post in the African hinterland would soon have ended.

Carthew's frankness was the frankness that covers much that reserve might reveal. He knew where silence excites speculation. He admitted his poverty, and Welland knew he had, for his daughter's sake, forced Huysler to insure him against all risks. Although he stopped there, Welland imagined him a broken man, seizing, as he, in fact, acknowledged, the last chance he might get. It perhaps accounted for his carrying on the search when he knew he ought to march for the coast. Jack Huysler might not be willing, but Carthew was chief. The implication was, he expected to find the gum in useful quantities. Yet Welland doubted—

He let it go. Adela Carthew had given him her confidence, and he was moved by a queer, disturbing pity for the girl. If the party came back baffled, Welland did not see old Huysler giving its leader another post. He would, rather justly, think he had had enough, and he might go farther—Anyhow, Carthew and his daughter must, no doubt, resume their dreary wanderings about Continental watering-places where the pensions were cheap.

Adela declared her talents were not marked, and training for a specialized career was expensive. All she had was her fresh charm, and since Carthew's friends left him alone, she might in the end marry some shabby adventurer. Welland knew the type that haunts the tourist resorts. He had met examples at Madeira, and although it had nothing to do with him, the supposition jarred.

Welland turned his head. Twenty yards to his right a stick cracked. The noise was faint, and for a few moments afterwards all was quiet. Then, two or three yards farther away, grass and leaves rustled, and a rasping noise seemed to indicate that something crawled across a stone. Welland did not think it was a snake, and as he was lying down, he imagined he would have seen an animal's back against the sky. It looked as if a man crept through the grass towards

Huysler and Nilson's tent. Welland carried a pistol and an electric torch, but he pondered.

In the dark a pistol is not much use, and a shot would rouse the porters. The noise they would make might help the fellow to escape, and some perhaps were his confederates. On the whole, Welland imagined he was not a stranger and his object was robbery. Cartridges and medical stores were valuable, and the party's supplies were stacked behind the tents. Yet Welland did not know, and if Huysler and Nilson slept, the other must not crawl into their tent.

He was now some distance in front and might not know if he were followed; and Welland cautiously crawled ahead. He imagined he moved almost noiselessly, but the big torch embarrassed him. The thing threatened to slip from his pocket, and if it struck a stone, might clink. Then pale lightning shimmered behind the trees and thunder rumbled. All Welland saw was dark foliage, but the distant peal had perhaps covered his advance, and a fresh dull crash echoed in the clouds.

For the next few moments he heard nothing, but it did not matter. He and the other steered for Huysler's tent, and although the fellow might get there first, Welland reckoned he would stop to find out if its occupants were asleep. While he crouched behind the canvas Welland expected to arrive. He would seize the brute and shout for the boys.

Welland thought the plan good. Although he himself might not hold a muscular negro, it would not bother Nilson, and if the brute struggled, Carthew would soon be on the spot. Welland argued coolly. Heat and fever had wasted his physical strength, but his nerve was firm and he thought his brain better than a negro's brain.

Fresh thunder rolled about the sky, and when it stopped Welland lifted his body as far as his arms allowed. The tent was but three or four yards off and he felt for his torch. It was not there; the thing had jolted from his pocket. Sinking back into the grass, he waited. All was quiet and the night was very dark. So far as he could see and hear, nobody was about.

Welland certainly had heard somebody, and he wondered whether the fellow was behind the tent. Feeling for the peg-ropes, he began to crawl along the canvas. The door was fastened back, but he must concentrate on getting round the corner noiselessly, and he wriggled past the opening like a snake. Then he stopped and tried to roll over, for somebody jumped upon his back and muscular hands felt for his throat.

"Freeze on to his legs," said a voice he knew. "We have got the swine!"

"Let me go, you d—— fools!" Welland gasped.

"Welland?" said Nilson, and choked a laugh. "What in—?"

"Don't talk! Go for the other behind the tent!"

Nilson plunged the corner; Huysler went the other way. In a moment or two they were back and Huysler said, "Nobody's behind the tent."

"It's very strange. You obviously heard the fellow."

"We heard you," said Nilson. "We got you. Pretty good hunting!"

Welland looked about. His struggle with the boys was short and nearly noiseless, and they had talked in low voices. Nothing indicated that the porters were disturbed.

"You let the proper man go, but there's no use in searching for him now," he said, and narrated his attempt to capture the stranger.

"Very well; I'll crawl out to your post. It's almost time for my watch," said Nilson. "You can see if the stores are all right and warn Carthew."

He vanished in the gloom, and Welland stole across to the stack of goods. The neat pile was covered by a waterproof sheet and, so far as he could distinguish by feeling, nothing had been removed. To pull off the sheet would occupy some time, and Welland went to Carthew's tent and touched him gently.

Carthew looked up. He was for long a navy officer, and as a rule a man who commands at sea wakens alert and cool. He listened attentively, and for about a minute Welland talked in a low voice.

"You think the fellow had not time to rob the dump?" Carthew remarked. "On the whole, I think your not mustering and

counting the porters was the proper line."

"The boys are nervous. We might have lost the gang. Besides, before we found out anything useful the thief would have got away. If he was a stranger, he'd have reached the jungle; if he was one of our lot, he'd rejoin the others and pretend to be asleep."

"Your reasoning's plausible," Carthew agreed.

"I hope it's accurate," said Welland dryly. "If I'm cheated, we may pay for my mistake."

"You are satisfied the fellow was a thief?"

"If he was a murderer, he'd have gone for our tent."

Carthew smiled. "It's possible; in a way, the boys are of less consequence. Well, when we agreed with Huysler, we knew our job would not be soft. In the morning, before the dew is off the stones and leaves, we'll get Nilson to study the ground. He's a hunter and may find out something. In the meantime, your watch is up and you had better go to bed."

Welland was soon asleep. At daybreak a porter was gone. The others declared they did not know why, or when, he went, and Carthew pretended to be satisfied and waited for Nilson's report. In America, hunter implies a sportsman who follows shy game on foot, and Nilson knew the woods. After a time he joined the others in front of Carthew's tent.

"You are storekeeper, and if you serve out rations for breakfast, it will account for our opening the dump," he said to Welland.

Welland pulled off the sheet and moved some bags.

"A hundred rifle cartridges have vanished. I suppose you knew?"

"I suspected something like it," Nilson agreed. "You see, two men crawled about the camp last night. One steered for our tent and got away when we jumped on you; the other, probably knowing you were occupied, got busy at the dump. When he was loaded up he went down the hill, and has not come back."

"Yes," said Welland. "I'm not as keen as I imagined and the swine properly cheated me. However, he certainly hasn't an American rifle, and in the dark, he'd no doubt be afraid to cross the woods by himself. It's possible he joined the customers for whom he stole the cartridges."

"There's another thing," said Carthew. "His confederate is yet in our camp."

"I think that is so, sir," Nilson agreed. "One fellow went down the hill. If he had a companion, I can't find the second's track."

For a few moments all were quiet. A porter had vanished, another was treacherous, and they were not justified to trust the rest. Moreover, the few now left could not move the party's supplies. Carthew had some time since admitted that he dare not push on; it began to look as if he could not go back.

"Ought we to roll up the gang, sir, and try something like the third degree?" Huysler asked.

Carthew glanced at Welland, who shook his head.

"Some of the boys, for their own sakes, may be willing to stick to us, and I trust the Kroos. All the same, if they are like the negroes I knew in Africa, they're moved by a sort of herd instinct. The white man is their antagonist, and they try, sometimes unconsciously, to baffle him. Then, to inquire about the thief would be to admit we were alarmed."

Nilson laughed. "In the tropics the white man lives by bluff! Our line's to show a front? We don't worry. Let them all go. However, I hate to feel we are held up. Not far ahead there's dry country; ranching country where we might hire fresh porters. Why not push for it?"

"The drawback is, our party's weak," Carthew rejoined. "In normal times I'd try your plan; but the times are not normal, and we are worth robbing. A rebellion is brewing, and when we reached the *templadas* we might find the ranches burned and half-caste brigands ravaging the country."

"To put us out would be to ask for trouble with the United States."

"It's possible. Brigands, however, are not fastidious, and from their point of view, a rebellion justifies some plundering," Carthew rejoined. "When they had loaded up all they could carry, I expect they'd retire to the mountains and allow the Government to answer for their exploits—"

He stopped, as if he pondered, and Welland knitted his brows. Where much was dark, a faint illumination began to flicker, but Welland's head ached and his brain was dull. Somehow he could not concentrate and the glimmer faded.

"All we can do is to hold the fort and trust our luck," Carthew resumed. "If we find the crystalium, we can perhaps relay our stores to the canoes. For one thing, the loads would be lighter. In the meantime, I think we will say nothing about the cartridges."

He got up. The council was over, but Welland noted that Carthew did not say *when* they found the gum. The others' looks were thoughtful, and Welland imagined the boys began to see they could not hold the fort for long. Although the rebels might leave them alone, heat and malaria were insidious antagonists.



XIII

THE SURVIVOR

A path curved through the tangle under the trees, and Nilson, sitting on a broken log, pulled back the net that hung from his sun-hat. To some extent the gauze kept off the flies, but it flapped about his face and neck, and his skin was wet by sweat.

The trees were large, but few were altogether sound. Creepers choked them and parasitic growths drained the sap. The trunks rotted while they were yet alive and boring worms hastened their decay. In fact, the jungle smelt of corruption, and, for all the heat, nothing was dry. One's clothes and skin were clammy; the stagnant, saturated air made breathing an effort. For a white man to labor was impossible.

All the same, a few negro porters could move a useful load of crystalium along the jungle paths; but Nilson smiled. Although Jack Huysler refused to acknowledge himself beaten, Nilson doubted if they would get a useful load. He imagined Carthew doubted, but, in a sense, Carthew was an adventurer and frankly acknowledged his pay was good. When they returned without the gum his occupation would be gone. For all that, he certainly had not urged the others to stop, and Nilson thought him a sport. Anyhow, Olaf's business was to see his pal and Carthew out; but since two more carriers had vanished he wondered whether they could make the creek.

After breakfast he and the Kroos had gone off to search for crystalium. To do so was a sort of routine, and since he had for three or four hours roamed about the jungle, he was justified to get his lunch. For all that, he had not much appetite, and when he lighted a cigarette the damp tobacco tasted like quinine. A few yards off, Bad Hat polished his shining teeth with a chewed stick and Washington rubbed his machete.

When Nilson had smoked his cigarette he did not want to get up. If the clinical thermometer recorded accurately, he did not have fever, but when he moved his joints hurt and he was horribly languid. At sunrise he hated to crawl from his tent, and as a rule he wanted to dispute with Welland and Jack. One did not dispute with Carthew: his queer, understanding twinkle banished one's moodiness. Then, although he was a sport, he was boss.

Nilson began to muse. His father was long since dead; the old man had planned and sweated, and Olaf's inheritance was large. He had refused to labor and had gone where he wanted to go, but he was not extravagant and the occupations in which he was happiest did not cost very much. He knew the Great Lakes, the Western snow-peaks, and the Canadian woods. He had climbed for mountain sheep, and watched the caribou herds swim a river of the North. When he looked back, he recaptured joyous adventures and bracing thrills.

Where others might calculate, he trustfully followed his bent, and when he got back to the coast he was going to marry Mariquita Viñoles. Carthew thought him rash, and Olaf imagined Jack agreed, but they did not know Mariquita. Moreover, they claimed that he did not. Nilson laughed. To be cautious was to be ridiculous. Love was a splendid adventure.

Yet he pondered. So far, life had gone smoothly, and all he had wanted was his. His athletic body was his servant; on the snowy rocks and where crested seas broke about his sloop, his will controlled nerve and muscle. He had not known the humiliations that spring from poverty, and he had never gone without.

Well, he was not superstitious, but since he knew Mariquita, he sometimes wondered whether his luck were not too good. In the old days men believed the gods were jealous, and his Methodist mother declared in this world each must carry his load. In America he knew prosperous men whose look was tired, and when one studied Carthew and Welland their lined faces carried the stamp of strain. The dark jungle perhaps daunted him, but he began to feel that since he, like the others, was flesh and blood, he might yet be forced to pay for the immunity he had enjoyed.

Bad Hat turned his head and George Washington got up noiselessly. Nilson knew the boys heard something, but since he soaked himself in quinine faint sounds escaped his ears. By and by, however, he thought leaves rustled and green stalks bent, as if somebody pushed through the creepers that crawled across the path.

"Bushman lib," said Bad Hat. "We go chop him."

Washington tried his machete's edge, and Nilson mechanically seized his gun. In the jungle, a stranger was an enemy, but he rather hoped Macias, the guide, was coming back to steal some cartridges. In the meantime he signed the boys.

"You'll wait. Get under cover!"

"Softly, softly, man catch monkey," said Bad Hat, and the Kroos melted into the shade.

Nilson, balancing the choke-bore gun, stole behind a trunk. The gun was bored for a long cartridge, and although his ears chimed and his head ached, he had cheated shy and cunning moose. He rather thought the Kroos had hunted Liberian tax collectors. Somebody advanced along the path, and Nilson reflected with grim humor that if the fellow were Macias, he looked for trouble.

Then he remarked that the steps were uneven. The stranger obviously did not know the path was watched; he gasped and stumbled, and Nilson heard him crash into the bamboo canes as if he were drunk. All the same, Nilson waited, his finger on the trigger. Somebody had persuaded the porters to desert, somebody had stolen the ammunition, and Olaf felt a reckoning was due.

Jumping into the path, he faced an exhausted man. The other's olive face was pinched and his cotton clothes were ragged. Blood crusted his jacket sleeve, and flies swarmed about the stain. His long silk belt was loose and one end trailed about his feet. When he saw Nilson, he stopped and balanced awkwardly. A yard or two behind him, the negroes cut his line of retreat, but it looked as if he did not know they were about. His dull glance was fixed on the lunch Nilson had not eaten.

"*Por amor de Dios*—" he gasped.

Nilson saw the man was famishing, and he steadied him to the trunk and gave him the packet of food.

"It is yours," he said in Castilian.

The other seized the food and began to eat like a hungry animal, but after a moment or two he stopped as if he choked. Nilson saw he tried to moisten his cracked lips, and he pulled out his flask. One does not drink the water that oozes from the swamps, and the diluted lime-juice was mixed with a little spirit and bitter with quinine. The stranger held the flask above his tilted head, and although his hand shook, most of the liquor splashed into his mouth. When the last drop fell he savagely resumed his meal.

"You are alone?" said Nilson by and by.

"*Solo*," agreed the other and touched his chest. "*Su servidor de usted*, Juan Forgas."

"But you have friends not far off?"

Forgas knitted his brows; Nilson's Castilian was not good.

"*Nuertos, señor. Todos muertos*. All are dead," he replied in a dull voice.

Then he rolled from the log on which he sat, rested his head against the rotting bark, and in a few moments was asleep.

Nilson lighted a cigarette. To rouse the exhausted man was cruel, and he was not keen to front the effort their helping him to the camp implied. In the jungle one got horribly slack. For all that, Forgas must be moved; he rather obviously needed help. Insect bites spotted his face and neck. His rawhide shoes were broken, his puttees, torn back from his legs, left gaps where leeches had fastened on his skin. Nilson imagined somebody had cut the puttees from an American flour-bag, for one was stamped *Minn*— Torn cotton and holed shoes would not stop the horrible, boring jigger Welland talked about. Moreover, one side of the man's jacket was stained by blood.

After a time Nilson and the Kroos got Forgas on his feet. His head rolled and he moved as if he were yet asleep. The jungle was as hot as a Turkish bath, the air was saturated, and Nilson's skin and clothes were wet by sweat. The negroes glistened, as if they were rubbed with oil. One hated to use effort, but they must get the man to camp.

Somehow the Krooboy did so, and Welland washed and bandaged Forgas's arm. After the bandage was fixed, he gave his patient a drink and a mat in the double tent.

"You were shot," he said. "Where was the fight?"

Forgas gave him a dull, puzzled look.

"At my ranch. All are dead, and I am very tired," he said, and went to sleep.

Welland locked the medicine-chest and frowned.

"The bullet went through his shoulder, and although I think it did not touch the bone, the wound is poisoned. We will get his story another time. I am rather bothered about our stock of drugs; the quinine, in particular, is nearly gone."

"We dumped a quantity and some cartridges when we made our second cache," Nilson remarked. "The spot is not very far off. If Carthew agrees, I might go back for the things you want."

Carthew pondered. When, after leaving the main depot by the canoes, he had found they must again reduce the loads, he had buried stuff he thought they might not for some time need. Only the white men knew the spot, and the ammunition and drugs were packed in tin-lined cases. All the same, he hesitated to divide his small force.

"Although you started light, the double journey would occupy at least four days, and you could not go alone," he said. "To take the Kroos would leave us without a boy I can trust. On the whole, I think we'll wait."

Welland agreed. His stock was not exhausted and he might use economy. Nilson acknowledged he was not remarkably keen to start. In the evening they woke Forgas for supper, and he told a moving tale.

"But a short time since, my ranch of the Star was prosperous, and I had many cattle and half-breed servants. Now I am a broken man and thankful for a generous stranger's charity."

He bowed to Carthew and went on: "Comes a band of brigands from the mountains; people without mercy and without shame. May hell's lightning blast the swine!"

Carthew gave him a sympathetic nod. He thought Forgas's Castilian good, and the fellow was obviously sincere. His eyes sparkled and the blood came to his skin. Then, although his ancestors perhaps were mixed, he was a white man. As a rule, a Spaniard indulges his emotions; an Indian's reserve is inscrutable.

"The brigands round up my cattle, but my servants are stanch, and we have rifles. One thief is shot; the others drive us back to the ranch-house. All do not get there, but the wall is thick and the roof is iron. One has a rest for one's rifle, and so long as the light is good we are left alone. All the same, my cousin is outside in the burning sun; he is not yet dead, and we dare not go for him. Then two or three are hurt, we have not much water, and the brigands watch the well. Picture it for yourselves, señores! The afternoon is very long, but we know the others wait for night."

"In the dark, a rifle is not much use," Carthew remarked.

"I have a gun," said Forgas. "At sunset my cousin is dead, and I break a packet of twenty-five cartridges. The shot is number four, and a good ejector gun shoots fast. In a few minutes it is dark. We do not see the brigands crawl up to the house, but they begin to break the door. Well, when one shoots with a twelve-bore one does not miss a man five or six yards off. But all are shooting, somebody has lighted a fire, and the smoke gets thick. The gun is hot; I cannot touch the barrel, and when I feel for a cartridge all are gone. Then I am hit, and the door crashes—"

Forgas stopped for a moment, and his voice was quiet when he resumed: "That is all I know. It is dark and we are fighting in the smoke. Then I am under the window outside; I think I am thrown across the ledge. My gun and my knife are not there, and I crawl away. My arm hurts and my head swims, and I creep behind a bush."

"As a rule, the ground-floor windows open to the courtyard," Carthew remarked. "I expect he was thrown from the first floor."

"In the morning, all that will burn is ashes," Forgas continued. "The brigands and my cousin are vanished. They have thrown him, with the others, into the fire. All are dead, and when I have found a little food and another knife I start for the coast."

"A stout fellow!" said Huysler in English. "If he's willing to join us, he might be useful, sir."

Carthew nodded and turned to his guest.

"But for the political turmoil, I expect the band dared not have sacked your ranch?"

Forgas swore. "When revolution breaks out is the robbers' harvest. So long as one can seize another's goods, to be a liberator pays."

"Then you are for the President?"

"Vallon is a brute, but he knows how to rule," Forgas rejoined.

"But there is a rebellion."

"Fools are numerous, and nobody is altogether satisfied. The leader is an Indian and will soon be shot. Señor Galdos is a good soldier."

"We understood Galdos was not the President's friend."

Forgas laughed. "He is ambitious and would like his master's post; but if he joins the Indian, he helps a competitor. He will use Vallon's troops to put down the fellow, and then bribe the soldiers to march for the capital."

"Do you think he will get much support?"

"Who knows," said Forgas with a shrug. "He perhaps reckons on the negroes he governs, but I doubt if they will fight for him, although some may take his bribe. Señor Galdos is their neighbor, and his rule is harsh. The President, at the capital, is a long way off."

For a few moments the others said nothing. They dared not steer for the dry *templada* belt, and if the rebellion spread across the swamps, their road to the coast was cut.

Then Carthew turned to Forgas.

"Do you know much about the *goma-cristal*?"

Forgas shrugged. "Sometimes one finds a tree, but where *cristal* grows a white man cannot live."

"It's possible you do not exaggerate," said Carthew, in a careless voice. "However, in the meantime you cannot reach Santa Catalina, and I think you ought to stop with us."

"I am your servant and I might be useful. When my arm is better I can shoot," Forgas replied.



XIV

FEVER

At daybreak Nilson threw back his blanket and languidly lifted his head. Wood smoke floated by the tent and somehow the pungent smell nauseated him. The others had got up, and he ought to help Welland examine his stores while the morning was cool. Their supplies were running out, and although one or two more porters had deserted, Forgas had joined the party. When Welland had reckoned up, they would know when somebody must try to reach the dump.

All the same, Nilson did not want to move. His sleep had been disturbed, he was very hot, and his mouth was parched. When he tried to lift himself from his ground-sheet he sank limply back. By and by Carthew looked into the tent and called Welland. Welland gave Nilson a bitter drink, and for five or six days that was all Olaf really knew.

When he returned to consciousness the pain in his joints had gone. Nothing mattered; his dull brain refused to work, and so long as he was left alone he was happy. For a week he indulged his drowsy languidness; and then he remarked that Welland limped and the camp was quiet. He must get up, and before the sun was hot one morning he crawled from the tent. To keep his feet was awkward, and when he joined the others at breakfast he got a knock.

Carthew's face was pinched and his look was grim. Welland's leg was bandaged; he imagined a poisonous spider had bitten his foot. His skin seemed to have shrunk, and one saw the bony contour under the fine wrinkles. Nilson wondered whether he exaggerated. After his two weeks' seclusion he, perhaps for the first time, noted the stamp of strain that had slowly got distinct. In fact, it was possible that he himself looked like that. Forgas's arm was supported by a sling, and Nilson did not see Huysler.

"Where is Jack?" he asked.

Welland said Jack had fever, but was not very ill. They had moved him to a hut the porters had built at a cool spot behind the gate-tower. Nilson, looking about, saw four boys loafed in the shade.

"All we have got!" said Carthew dryly. "You need not bother about your pal."

"But he was sick not long since."

"There's the trouble. If you are a good host—I believe it's the doctor's term—malaria looks you up again. Something depends on circumstances and perhaps on your temperament."

Nilson turned to Welland.

"You were sick? But you nursed me?"

"Oh, well, the attack was light and to go slack for three or four days is nothing very fresh. All that really bothers me is the blasted spider's bite."

"You cannot knock out an old West African," Carthew remarked. "To some extent I'm salted, and, as a rule, the microbe likes fresh blood. But will you take a drink?"

Nilson drained a cup of bitter lime-juice. He had recently found he could not satisfy his thirst, but he noted that the others left the stuff alone. He must not be greedy, and he pushed back the flask.

For four or five days his legs were unsteady, but youth conquered and his strength came back. Huysler, however, recovered slowly, and Welland could not pull on his boot. He was quiet, as if he bore some pain, and Carthew was preoccupied. Nilson felt an ominous gloom brooded over the camp. Moreover, they ought not to stop; the rain would soon begin, but four porters could not carry the stuff one white man needed. On the upward journey Nilson had helped relay the loads. Now it was impossible, although he reckoned he was the strongest of the lot.

Nobody bothered about the gum, but sometimes when Nilson got tired of loafing he wandered into the woods, and when he returned to the camp one evening he stopped to rest by the path. He did not know whether men or animals had made the jungle paths. As a rule, they curved about through the creepers and tangled brush; but where he stopped, the wood for twenty or thirty yards was thin and slanted sunbeams splashed the trunks. The air was damp like steam; Nilson smelt the

hot soil and another smell he thought was lilies. He pulled out a cigarette, from force of habit, but threw it away. There was no use in smoking; the tobacco did not taste good.

Then he imagined something moved in the jungle behind him. Since he got the quinine habit his ears were dull, but with mechanical caution he seized his gun and jumped for a trunk. All was quiet, and after a few moments he set his mouth. To allow his nerves to cheat him was rash, and balancing the gun, he steered for the spot where a branch perhaps had shaken.

When he got there he knew he had not been cheated. A tree had fallen by the path, and behind the trunk the leaves were crushed. Then in the damp soil he saw a mark a rawhide shoe might have made, and the print of a man's knee. Somebody had knelt behind the log, and probably rested a gun-barrel on the bark. Nilson's impulse was to search for the fellow; but dark would soon roll across the woods, and he set off, as noiselessly as possible, for the camp.

All the same, he hated to steal away. The Huysler Company had paid a useful sum for leave to search the forest and had nothing to do with revolutionary politics. Yet, from the beginning, they had been bullied and embarrassed. Somebody had frightened the porters, and their guide was treacherous. In fact, it looked as if somebody had planned to hold them up on the forbidding hill. Nilson felt he would give much to front their hidden antagonist.

When he climbed the hill the trees and broken walls melted swiftly in the dark. Carthew's tent shone like a paper lantern; he was writing under the lamp and, since one could not mail a letter, Nilson thought it strange. Carthew pushed back the sheet and looked up quietly. His skin was wet and flushed; his pose was slack.

"Well?" he said. "I expect you have something to report."

Nilson narrated his finding the marks behind the trunk.

"I rather think the swine was kneeling to take a steady shot, and when I jumped I spoiled his aim," he said. "It looks as if he had a rifle, and in the brush he was afraid of my double-barrel gun. All the same, I don't know— There's the hard thing, sir. If we knew whom we were up against and got a chance to shoot—"

Carthew gave him an indulgent smile.

"One feels like that, but I expect you must wait. In the meantime, our worst antagonist is in our camp. Huysler does not make much progress, Welland's foot is badly poisoned, and he himself is sick. Although Forgas is willing, he cannot use his arm."

"In the circumstances, we ought, perhaps, to let the gum go and concentrate on pulling out," said Nilson in an apologetic voice. "We know you'd like to find the stuff; but the rain will soon begin and, after all, when the rebellion's smashed, we might come back. If old man Huysler holds down the option, Jack and I would put up the wad."

"You are a good sort, Olaf; but you have had enough, and I do not think I will undertake another search. In fact, for some time I have not thought about crystalium. If I could steer you back to the coast, I'd be satisfied."

Nilson hesitated. Although Britishers used reserve, he knew Carthew was moved. Anyhow, Olaf liked his chief, and thought some candor excusable.

"Your word goes, whether we stop or start, and if we are up against it, you are not to blame. Where one's resolved to make good something must be risked, and you reckoned you had a fighting chance."

"Then you don't feel I have entangled you in a reckless adventure?"

"Not at all, sir," said Nilson firmly. "We went because we trusted you, and although our luck has not been good, you had nothing to do with that. I feel, and I know Jack feels, we could not have got a better leader."

Carthew gave him a queer, fixed look.

"Well, that is something, and you are generous young fellows. However, let's be practical. If I am sick or knocked out, Welland takes command. I begin to think you might trust his judgment where you doubted mine."

There was no use in pretending. All, to some extent, were sick, and Nilson imagined he had but an hour ago risked

getting shot.

"We hope you'll keep control, sir, but we would follow Welland, as we follow you," he said quietly. "However, what about our trying to make the canoes?"

"You know the obstacles," Carthew rejoined. "The stuff we dare not go without must be moved laboriously from camp to camp. It implies three or four journeys, with an awkward load, over the same ground. Forgas's arm is useless, Jack and Welland cannot walk. When they are better we may be forced to try your plan."

"We cannot go now," Nilson agreed. "Well, you are occupied, and I'll go along and talk to Jack."

Carthew gave him a smile and resumed his writing. He wrote fast, as if he were resolved to finish before he was again disturbed. Nilson thought it strange, but he went off and met Welland coming from the little thatched hospital.

"How's Jack? Did he get some sleep?"

Welland sat down on a broken slab. Although he used a stick, his swollen leg would not support him long.

"Jack does not get much better, and our quinine is nearly gone. Then I need some other stuff; antiseptics, and so forth. Our stock's exhausted and I'm frankly anxious."

"It's d—— awkward," Nilson remarked. "There's another thing; since the cartridges were stolen, we haven't much ammunition."

For a few moments Welland pondered.

"Have you some particular grounds to think we might need ammunition?"

"I reckon my grounds are pretty good, but we'll talk about it again. Just now we ought to think about bringing up fresh supplies."

"Who is to go?" said Welland. "The boys don't know where the dump is, and they are needed at the camp. Then I suspect Carthew would not agree to divide our forces."

"Looks as if I were the proper man," Nilson rejoined. "If I hustled, I might make it in four days. Coming up, we were longer, because we relayed the loads, but I would go light. All I want is a spade, a pistol, and a mosquito-net."

Welland cogitated. He must get fresh medicines, but a white man who, without proper defense against the damp and insects, plunged into the jungle ran a daunting risk. Then the camp might be attacked, and Nilson was the best shot.

"In the morning we'll ask Carthew," he said. "He has a touch of fever and I don't want to bother him when he ought to sleep."

Nilson pictured Carthew writing in his tent and his strange preoccupied look.

"I suppose we have got to wait, but I'd sooner pull out now," he said. "Sometimes you get a sort of hunch; you feel you must do something you can't logically justify. Well, when I have felt like that and plunged ahead, I've found the notion right. Then we chopped a path for the porters that I reckon I could keep in the dark. Perhaps it's queer, but my feeling is I *ought* to go."

Welland hesitated. He admitted he was not logical, but he wanted to agree. All the same, he must not indulge an extravagant impulse, and he knew the dangers that threatened a lonely traveler.

"In the morning we will consult with Carthew. You must wait," he said.

XV

SPEED

Dawn was breaking and Nilson looked up drowsily. Bad Hat, the Kroo, kept the morning watch, and since they could trust the fellow's vigilance Nilson's sleep had been sound. The air was cool and a dark object blocked the door of the tent.

"Hello!" he said. "Welland? Do you want me?"

"Where is Carthew?" Welland inquired.

Nilson jumped up and went to the other tent. Carthew's mat was not occupied and his boots were gone.

"I don't know," he said in a disturbed voice. "Since you didn't hear him, he meant to crawl out quietly. But something white is fastened to his blanket."

Welland picked up a long envelope and a small paper, folded like a note. He pushed both into his pocket, and said nothing. He knew Nilson knew their finding the note was ominous, but the light was yet faint. They crossed the camp. The porters had lighted their cooking fire, and Welland called Bad Hat, whose watch was up at daybreak.

The negro stated that Carthew had left his tent in the dark; he thought it was soon after he had gone to his post. Anyhow, Carthew signed him to be quiet and carried something that might have been a gun. That was all Bad Hat knew. His business was not to find out where "Cappy Cartoo" went.

"It doesn't look as if he was interested," Nilson observed. "Seems to think the commander's stealing off in the dark is not at all strange!"

"I wonder—" said Welland. "When a white man questions a negro, his defense is an inscrutable dulness. I suppose he feels we must not know how he reasons. Yet they are not fools, and the Kroos are stanch."

"They are pretty good samples, but when I try to understand them they leave me guessing," said Nilson absently.

Although his voice was careless, his pose was braced and he knit his brows. Day broke swiftly, and when a red glimmer leaped up the east he pulled out his watch.

"Six o'clock. If Bad Hat's memory is accurate, Carthew's been gone four hours."

Welland unfolded the note and fronted the west, the light shining over his shoulder.

"Carthew has gone to the dump for medicine and cartridges. If he is not back in five days, I am to open the long envelope. I expect you see what he implies?"

"Sure, I see," said Nilson. "He reckons he might not get back; for one thing, he knows a lurking brute tried to shoot me yesterday evening. The envelope covers a message and some instructions for Miss Carthew; but in the meantime that has nothing to do with us. He's my boss and my business is to go after him. You can't walk, you need the boys, and Jack is sick. However, if Forgas is willing, I'll take him along."

Welland pondered. He was now in command and must not be carried away. Yet he dare not allow his leader to sacrifice himself, and, if possible, the medicine must be got. Moreover, he doubted if he could hold Nilson. The young fellow's lassitude had vanished. Although his face was pinched and touched by pallid yellow, his mouth was firm.

"I'm going; that's all," Nilson resumed. "Come and help me explain to Don Juan."

Don Juan was willing. When he understood why he was wanted and Welland apologized for bothering him before his wound was healed, he bowed ceremoniously.

"Your servant, sir. I cannot carry much, but one does not walk upon one's arm."

"Stout fellow!" said Nilson. "There will not be much to carry, and I'll engage to pack the lot."

"Stout fel-lo. *Eso es? Qu'est-ce que c'est?*"

Nilson laughed; he doubted if he had done so for three or four weeks.

"Now he's got me beat! *Brave homme, señor. Hombre de buen corazon. Gallantuomo. Oh—blast it—muy caballero!*"

Forgas grinned and swept off his battered hat.

"The last is a compliment I do not often get."

Welland ordered breakfast, and when the meal was over Nilson made his pack: a rubber sheet, a mosquito-net, and some food. He strapped a pistol on his hip and picked up a light spade, molded like a soldier's trenching-tool. Forgas pushed a Spanish knife through his waist-belt.

"The knife was my cousin's. The steel is good and it has been used before," he said.

Nilson gave Welland his hand. "You haven't got to worry. If our luck holds up we'll make it in four days." Then he addressed the Kroos. "Your job's to hold the fort for Cappy Welland. If t'ief bushman lib, you d—— well go chop him."

The Krooboys grinned. Forgas lifted his battered hat.

"*Hasta la vista. Vamonos, señor.*"

"*Vaya con Dios,*" said Welland in a quiet voice.

The others plunged down the hill, and he carried Huysler his breakfast.

"They're gone, but Nilson rather puzzled me," he remarked. "Although he's anxious for Carthew, and I think has weighed the risks, he started like a schoolboy on a holiday excursion."

Huysler smiled. "Much depends on temperament. You'd go because you thought you ought, but Olaf's *happy*. Sometimes young America's rather primitive than logical. Anyhow, we hate to be cheated and bullied, and I'd be sorry for the revolutionaries Olaf gets up against. He's Nordic, the Viking type, and I see him using the grub-hoe tool like a battle-ax. But you're not yet out of date. Have you *forgotten?*"

"When Nilson studied athletics at college, I was in the African hinterland. I expect it explains my soberness," Welland rejoined. "However, your breakfast is in front of you, and I am waiting for you to get busy."

Huysler loathed the food, but he knew Welland's firmness, and although he grumbled he began to eat. When Welland went off, Jack pictured Nilson speeding along the trail, and frankly swore. But for the blasted fever, he would have been with his pal. Forgas was a sport, but if Carthew needed help, to see him out was not a stranger's duty. All the same, Huysler could not crawl from his bed, and he must try to be resigned.

In the meantime, Nilson took the jungle path. By contrast with the heat at night, the morning was fresh, and for all his anxiety, he was conscious of a queer exhilaration he had not felt for long. Since the fever went he had occupied himself by a careless search for the gum he really imagined was not there. Anyhow, he was satisfied it could not be found in useful quantities. Then he had waited for the others to get better and justify their breaking camp, and when one is young to wait is hard.

Now, however, he had a man's job; his talent was for action and he could let himself go. Moreover, speed was important. When Jack allowed himself to think about it, Carthew's writing the letter was ominous; it looked as if he did not expect to get back. Carthew was not altogether Nilson's type, but he had strongly attractive qualities. In fact, Olaf felt he loved the fellow.

The path, beaten out perhaps by wild pigs' hoofs, curved round obstacles and was nowhere straight. For the most part, it was narrow, but on the upward journey the negroes had cut back the creepers and bamboo canes. Nilson squared his shoulders and tilted back his head. So long as the morning and he were fresh, he must travel fast. But a few weeks since, he had crawled along the path, the other way, with a heavy load on his aching shoulders. At a fixed spot he dumped the stuff and returned, sweating and breathless, for another lot. As a rule, he reckoned their advance was about four miles a day, and when dark fell the exhausted white men hardly forced themselves to eat.

Yet they held on, and their reward was fever and imprisonment on the hill. Nilson hated the forbidding spot. Now he was going four miles an hour, although he knew he could not keep it up. Where man could not use his mechanical inventions, he was a feeble animal. For four or five days Olaf must strain and sweat. On a graded road an American car would cover the ground by noon.

The sun was getting hot, and although the scorching beams hardly pierced the shade, Nilson's head began to throb. One got soft in the swamps, and the fever was perhaps not altogether gone. For all that, he pushed ahead. In two or three hours he would be forced to stop, and somewhere in front Carthew followed the dangerous path alone. Nilson knew the path was dangerous.

Yet, when he looked about, he admitted the jungle, faintly lighted by the brightness behind the trees, was beautiful. Orchids dotted the crumbling trees, and where, on sandy soil, the trunks were widely spaced, splendid flowers sprang. Nilson saw large, painted butterflies, and birds whose plumage shone with iridescent coloring. Like himself, they must get busy before the heat was insupportable. Sometimes the trunks were crowded and rolled in the creepers' strangling embrace. Ferns sprang from the rotting wood and the gloom was thick. Nilson's boots sank in boggy soil, and he went cautiously across the haunts of poisonous crawling things that love the dark.

The trouble was, he went slower. His heart beat, his head ached, and his mouth got parched. He carried a felt-covered bottle, but the liquor must be husbanded. In the *tierra caliente*, to drink water is rash. Yet, so long as progress was possible, he must not stop, and although his breath got short he labored on.

When flesh and blood could bear no more, Forgas found a dry spot under thick matted leaves, and Nilson unrolled his ground-sheet. The tough material ought to baffle a blood-thirsty spider, and the mosquito-net would guard his face, but he began to feel suffocated and pulled back the gauze.

His white clothes were wet, and for all the heat, they would not dry. Not far off, a pool shone, but one does not bathe in the water-lice's haunts, and all the creeping things of the jungle are man's antagonists. Forgas slept; Nilson grimly endured the heat and the torment of the flies. At length, Forgas got up. One could not see the sun, but where the shade was thin the light seemed to be oblique.

"It is time we start. Before we go, you might fix my arm so that it will not move," he said.

Nilson pulled the bandage tight, and although he was gentle Forgas set his mouth. When they started he balanced awkwardly, as if he feared to jolt, but he said nothing and went fast. Nilson was sympathetic, but there was nothing to be said. Until sunset both must conquer fatigue and pain and keep the curving trail.

To do so cost them something. The freshness Nilson had known at daybreak was gone; his head ached and his brain was dull. His clothes stuck clammily to his skin and his breath was labored. Sometimes he speculated about Carthew and tried to calculate how far he was in front. Carthew carried a first-class English sporting rifle, and was a good shot. Nilson had, perhaps, not much grounds to be anxious, but he was anxious. For one thing, it looked as if the other did not expect to get back, although, unless he returned with the medicine and cartridges, there was not much use in his setting off. Then he was leader, and ought not to undertake a dangerous duty a subordinate could carry out.

Yet, if one used Carthew's point of view, his adventure might be logical. He was fastidious and cultivated, but he had admitted the search for crystalium was his last chance to mend his fortunes. Since the search had failed, he must again bear the poverty and embarrassments from which he had, for a time, escaped. Then all he was forced to bear his daughter must bear. The argument would carry some weight, and Carthew's bargaining for insurance was significant.

Moreover, he might feel he had selfishly entangled his companions. They certainly were entangled. To advance was impossible; retreat at all events was awkward, and they had exhausted their medical supplies. Carthew might feel himself responsible.

Nilson thought his reasoning plausible, but his business was to shove ahead. Dark would soon roll across the jungle, and he reckoned Carthew was yet two or three hours in front. Moreover, he was alone.

The path would have bothered a fresh man, but when Nilson started he was not really fresh. In the swamp belt, malaria seldom altogether lets its victim go, and he had labored through the stifling afternoon. Now his boots, slipping in the mire, galled his feet, and creepers and sharp-pointed canes seized his clothes. Sometimes the thin material tore, and he

savagely slashed the stems with the keen trenching-tool. The brush they had but a few weeks since cut back began to choke the path, and Nilson felt he hated the stealthy, crawling jungle. In fact, he hated the whole blasted *caliente* belt.

In the sudden dusk they stopped and, cautiously trampling the soil, spread their ground-sheet. The spot was as far as possible from a tree, since the trunk might harbor reptile enemies. Huge bats flitted about the camp and fireflies twinkled.

For all the effort he had used, Nilson's appetite was not keen. He ate because he thought he ought, and when the jungle steamed and melted in the dark to put up the food was some relief. Lying down, he pulled the ground-sheet across his body and the mosquito-net over his head. He was uncomfortably hot, but the tough sheet could not be pierced by small poisonous jaws, and since the mosquitoes had found him, he must endure the suffocating net. All the same, he slept, and when his cramped body for a few moments disturbed him in the thick dark, he thought he was in his tomb.



XVI

NILSON SEES RED

A light wind touched the bamboos, leaves fluttered in the puzzling shade, and Nilson stopped. Afternoon was nearly over, but the jungle was like an oven, and he felt as if his brain were sick with heat. In a moment or two all was quiet, and he clenched his fist.

"Only the wind, but I thought somebody stole through the canes," he said. "I expected to make the dump two hours ago, and I do not see where the chief has got."

Forgas's look was puzzled and Nilson translated awkwardly.

"I do not know where the dump is, but Señor Carthew is not far in front," said Don Juan. "He is not young, and we go fast."

Olaf nodded. But for a short rest when the heat was insupportable, they had since daybreak kept the trail, and although fever had softened his muscles, speed does not altogether depend on one's physical strength. Forgas's argument was logical; an older man could not for long endure the nervous strain they had borne. Moreover, if Nilson's calculation about the dump were accurate, they ought, at all events, to have met Carthew coming back.

"I'm bothered and it will soon be dark," he said. "*Viene la tarde. La via tenebrosa mi attacca a los nervios.*"

"*Via tenebrosa* is not Castilian, señor," Forgas remarked.

"Es posible," Nilson agreed. "It's a bully good name for our dark road; but come on. *Adelante! Toda fuerza!*"

The jungle in front was thinner, and dazzling, slanted beams touched the festooned trunks. Nilson's boots galled his feet and by and by he stopped to slacken a lace. When he got up Forgas was forty yards in front and presently vanished behind some tall canes.

"*Ave Maria!*" he cried in a strange hoarse voice.

Nilson's fatigue vanished. He ran as he had not run since he led his college athletic team, and plunging through the canes, seized a branch. His head swam, his chest heaved, and he fought a horrible nervous slackness. Six or seven yards off Carthew lay in the hot sand, his arms extended and his face to the ground. Nilson pictured his lurching forward and crashing like a log.

Behind the quiet figure were marks in the sand, such as a hurt man's boots might make if he tried to hold himself upright. The back of the white coat was darkly stained, and at a spot between the shoulders torn by a ragged hole. Carthew was dead, and for a few moments Nilson was carried away by grief and savage rage. He felt the veins on his forehead swell and the blood leap to his skin.

The revengeful passion went. He signed Forgas and they moved the body. In front, Carthew's cotton jacket was clean; his breastbone had stopped the load of shot, but Nilson dared not dwell on that. He looked for the sporting-rifle, but it was not about, although a tin box rested on its sharp corner, as if it had been flung into the sand. Carthew had reached the cache. When he was shot, in the back, he was steering for the hill.

Nilson's emotion had left him; he was calm and his brain worked with a strange clarity. The tin box was a drug box, but the cartridges Carthew had no doubt carried had vanished. Somebody had killed him for his rifle and a hundred rounds of ammunition; and Nilson thought he knew the man. To carry the body to the camp was impossible, the loathsome flies were busy, and it would soon be dark. Moreover, Forgas could not help.

Olaf pulled off his jacket and shirt. He had got thin, but when he balanced the trenching-tool his splendid muscles ridged his silky skin and his pose was statuesque. Using the pick at the top of the curved blade, he scored the ground, for all must be done in order. Seven feet, from west to east—the old rule was good. Where all was dark and the trail broke, one waited for the dawn.

He swung the tool. The handle was long and the blade sank to the top. Sand tossed and steel sparkled. Nilson's body bent

and straightened; his circling arms followed the shaft's wide sweep as if wood and flesh were one. The showering sand got thinner, and dark clods leaped up. Nilson was but dully conscious that his heart beat and his labored breathing hurt. He hardly knew the swarming flies crawled about his naked chest.

So far, the clods he flung out were dry. Unless water stopped him, he must go as deep as the melting light allowed. Now the edge of the pit was level with his knees; he reckoned he had half an hour, but night came suddenly and he must work fast. The shining tool circled and cut the soil with a measured beat. Nilson's swing and recovery were rhythmical. His face, however, was dark with blood, his eyes were veined by red. Forgas had thought to see him beaten, but the bank of soil steadily piled up, and sometimes Don Juan said softly, "*Ave Maria!*"

At length Nilson was satisfied and he jumped from the hole.

"The ground-sheet! *Ayudame*; you must help," he gasped.

Although the tough rubber was all their protection against the poisonous things that crawl in the dark, Forgas did not hesitate.

"It is proper," he agreed. "One of my arms is good."

For a few minutes they were occupied; and then Nilson awkwardly straightened his aching back. All was very quiet and the light had begun to go. He lifted his sun-hat, and Don Juan signed the cross. That was all. Carthew was gone. Nilson refused to think him dead and done with; and resting for a moment, his hands clenched on the trench-tool's shaft, he wondered where the other was. Perhaps it was strange, but his mood was not emotional; he dared not let himself go, and when he got his breath he resumed his labor.

Forgas went off to find a spot for their camp. Nilson turned the last clods in the dark, and waited for the other's shout. Don Juan had lighted a small fire and the smoke to some extent baffled the mosquitoes. He had got ready a frugal supper, but Nilson could not eat. He did not want to talk, and for a time the other rubbed his long knife on his boot.

"You have got the medicine, but you have not got the cartridges," he said by and by. "Where do we go in the morning?"

"We will look for the cartridges," Nilson replied. "I want the man who carried them off."

Forgas felt his knife's point, and nodded sympathetically.

"The edge is keen, and I have one useful arm."

"I have a pistol," said Nilson. "Somehow I feel I'd sooner use your knife. But where do you think the brute has gone?"

"I do not know," Forgas replied and, lighting a cigarette, knitted his brows. "Let us try to calculate—He has got a splendid rifle and a hundred cartridges; but a man who has no shame is not soon satisfied. Other cartridges were stolen from your camp, and you have guns that are worth much to the brigands. Well, they know your friends are sick, and one knows your chief is dead."

Nilson agreed that Don Juan argued plausibly, and he knew the fellow would see him out. The other's code was the jungle code; the rebels had broken him, and his servants and his recent host were dead. The reckoning was long, and Don Juan, like Olaf himself, was resolved that somebody must meet the bill. He acknowledged his resolve the sort of resolve a Chicago gunman might indulge, but he was moved by primitive passions and not at all ashamed.

"Then you think the swine will lurk about the hill, like a vulture, and wait for malaria to do its work? Well, two of us are not yet knocked out! But, if he went for the camp, we passed him in the bush. Is there another path?"

Don Juan thought the paths by which the wild animals stole to their drinking pools were numerous; but they were narrow, and the assassin might presently rejoin the track the porters had chopped. To understand his Castilian, however, implied an effort Nilson could not force himself to make. For a time he brooded; and then pulled the mosquito-net over his head and lay down in the hot sand.

He had not thought to sleep, but fatigue banished mental strain, and when, bitten perhaps by an insect, he dully looked about, three or four hours had passed. A light glimmered. Carthew was writing in his tent and must not be disturbed. His face was lined and his mouth was set. Nilson knew why his look was fixed and stern. The queer thing was, he felt he

knew all the other wrote. He, however, must noiselessly crawl away and watch out for the tent-ropes.

When he moved, the picture melted. There was not a tent. A small fire burned in the jungle, and thin smoke floated across a vague, uncouth object like a sleeping man. Nilson knew where he was, and when his brain functioned properly he clenched his fist.

Carthew was dead, but the man who shot him was yet at large. Nilson must weigh his plans for the morrow and calculate speed and distance, but somehow he could not. All he could do was to indulge his sense of loss. However, he must brace up. In the thick dark, the man he wanted could not keep the path; he must camp, and in the morning would be no farther off. On the whole, Olaf reckoned he was but an hour or two in front, and he carried a gun, a rifle, and a hundred cartridges. Something of a load, and if one hustled—The fire's dim reflections melted, the dark trunks vanished, and Nilson was asleep.

They started at daybreak, and after two or three hours he knew Forgas's surmise was accurate. Somebody had broken through the canes and joined their path. About noon they stopped where the path forked. The smaller track was trodden by animals and the ground was not remarkably soft, but by and by Nilson indicated a mark he knew was fresh. Forgas nodded. Somebody had, not long since, taken the smaller trail. The man for whom they searched reckoned on their pursuit.

"*Adelante!*" said Nilson. "*Debemos*—I don't know the word for hike. *Il faut—es menester iremos con mucha priza. Buscamos el sale cochon.* We've got to find the swine by dark!"

They found him sooner. Creepers trailed from the branches; ferns, flowering brush, and canes with plummy tops encroached upon the narrow path. Nilson, swinging the trench-tool, went in front. The handle was long and the curved blade sheared the juicy stalks.

At a fresh spot tangled creepers blocked his way, and his body swayed with his circling arms. The tough stems crashed, and, three or four yards off, he saw a leveled gun, and behind the barrels a dark, malignant face. The man was Macias, their treacherous guide.

Nilson's swing had perhaps carried him farther than the other thought, and at three or four yards shot does not spread. The gun exploded, but he was not hurt. Macias, however, had not used the other barrel, and Nilson's pistol was in the holster on his hip. His hands were on the tool's long shaft, and he jumped into the smoke. The blade clashed on metal, and his arms were jarred. Then he and Macias collided, and dropping the tool, he felt for the other's throat.

He could not get the hold he wanted. The gun was between him and his antagonist. He had beaten down the barrel, but Macias pushed the butt into his face. One of his arms was round Nilson and he had hooked his leg.

They reeled about, the gun jammed between them, and Macias drove the butt against Nilson's jaw. The barrels jarred his ribs, and he braced himself to throw the brute. He felt the other's muscular body yield, and they lurched forward, driving the gun-barrels into the ground. As they fell, the cartridge exploded. Nilson took a smashing knock, and all was dark.

When he got shakily on his feet, warm blood ran down his face and he knew his head was cut. Groping for his handkerchief, he rubbed his eyes, but the darkness did not melt. All he saw was a sort of dim reflection, as if he looked up to the light through deep water. Yet his eyes did not hurt much.

Somebody seized his arm. The hand was not Macias' hand, for the firm touch was friendly and helpful.

"My head is cut?" he said dully. "*La cabeza pega—pegada?*"

"Your forehead, señor. I think the cut is not deep, but your hair is scorched and your face blackened."

"That doesn't matter," said Nilson with impatience. "I cannot see. *No puedo ver—ciego—sabe?*"

"*Ave Maria!*" said Forgas, and steered him to a broken mahogany log.

He washed the cut. They had found a spring at which they risked filling their water-bag, and a mosquito-net bandage would keep off the flies. Then for five or six minutes, Nilson fought the numbing horror. The gloom had not yet broken; he began to think it might not break. For all his life he must perhaps creep about in the dark. He frankly dared not dwell upon it.

"Where is Macias?" he asked.

"*El asesino?* He is dead."

"Was he shot?"

"I think not," said Forgas. "My knife is sharp, and I have one good arm. When you fell the gun burst—the muzzle was in the ground."

Nilson nodded. A small obstruction to the expanding gases will burst a gun, and he tried to recapture the fight. He and Macias had fallen on the gun, and the torn barrel had, no doubt, struck his head. The explosion was perhaps almost in his face; Forgas said his hair was scorched.

"I have found Señor Carthew's rifle and the cartridges," the other resumed.

Nilson knew all he wanted to know and he braced up. He dared not stop and brood, and Welland waited for the medicine. Anyhow, he could keep his feet, and to get going would be some relief.

"I will carry the rifle. We must start," he said.

He put his hand on the other's shoulder, and they set off, but in the narrow path to avoid colliding was awkward, and by and by Forgas gave him the end of his long silk belt. Nilson's eyes did not hurt, and the gloom about him was perhaps less thick. The queer, twilight belt in front was the path, but that was all he knew. He, however, must concentrate on making the camp, and he clumsily pushed ahead.

XVII

HUYSLER OWNS DEFEAT

Siesta was over at the camp on the hill, and Huysler in his tent door rested his back against a box. The sun was going down the sky, and the shadow of the pylon fell across the scorched canvas. Although Huysler was horribly weak and languid, his youth had conquered the malaria and he hoped soon to be about. In the meantime, thought was an effort, but he could not force his brain to rest, and since the tent commanded the low ground his glance feebly searched the jungle.

Welland, sitting in the shade, supported his bandaged leg upon a broken slab. The stick he used for a crutch was by his side, but until the air began to cool he hoped to rest. Malaria had poisoned his thin blood, and his bitten foot would not carry his weight. He knew it did not get better, and the swollen flesh throbbed. Except for the noisy grasshoppers, nothing moved on the hill. Across the camp three apathetic porters squatted in the shade.

"You mustn't bother about Nilson. Your business is to get fit," Welland rejoined.

"I expect that is so, but I have not your philosophical temperament and Olaf ought to be back. He expected to make the dump on the second evening, but since Carthew started some hours in front, they would meet before Olaf got there. The time to calculate on is Carthew's time. He would not go slowly, and he pulled out in the dark."

"So long as you don't know his speed, there's not much use in calculating," Welland rejoined. "Anyhow, to worry about it will put up your temperature."

Huysler smiled. Welland would not admit he was anxious; but he knew Nilson ought to be back. All was quiet in the jungle his dull glance had searched since noon, and the quivering, reflected light hurt his dazzled eyes. It was four o'clock, but he must resign himself to wait, and he languidly turned his head.

After a time a porter shouted, and Huysler looked up. Near the bottom of the hill branches tossed and two indistinct figures pushed through the brush. He did not see another, and for a few moments he waited in tormenting suspense. Then he knew there was not another. Welland had got up and leaned on his stick. His look was very grim.

The men began to climb the hill. For the most part the branches hid them. All Huysler could see was that where three had started two returned, and he dared not speculate about the third. Then they crossed a belt where the trees were thin, and he knew the first was Forgas. The other was Nilson, but it looked as if he went awkwardly and Forgas steered him up the hill. Huysler's heart beat, and when he tried to concentrate his head swam. He turned to Welland.

"What's the matter? Olaf's stumbling about as if he were drunk!"

"I think he cannot see. We'll soon know," said Welland, in a queer voice.

Forgas, gasping and sweating, led Nilson to the tent. Insect-bites spotted their faces; their clothes were soiled and torn. Nilson, balancing awkwardly, turned his head from side to side, but his half-shut eyes were vacant and dull. Then Forgas steered him to a block, and he sat down slackly, as if he were exhausted.

"Where is Carthew?" Welland asked.

"He is dead," said Nilson. "His rifle and the stuff he went for are at the bottom of the hill. Before he was shot he put across his job."

"Then he was shot?"

Nilson nodded. "We got the man; Macias, the guide. He's dead."

Huysler was moved by a queer thrill. Nilson had told them all he thought important, and he was Carthew's sort. Something must be done, and was done! The thrill, however, vanished and Huysler began to feel the knock he had got. Carthew was gone, and none of the lonely group was sound. He himself could not conquer his bodily weakness. He felt the jungle claimed them and would not let them go. For all that, the others must not know he was daunted.

"But what about your eyes?" he asked.

"I think they are not hurt. A nerve shock, I expect. Macias' gun burst and the torn barrel cut my head. All is not quite dark. I see a sort of reflection—And the shock may go."

"But when the gun burst—?"

"Don Juan will put you wise," said Nilson wearily.

Forgas, since he joined them, had remarked the Northerner's strange reserve. He, however, sprang from Latin stock, and now that he had a moving tale to tell he told it dramatically. He pictured their finding Carthew, and Nilson's leaping for the leveled gun. Where the rolling Castilian puzzled his audience he used expressive pantomime, and the narrative was not much less vivid because he had but one sound arm. Nilson himself was interested and, for the first time, clearly understood all that followed his falling, stunned and blinded by the explosion.

Macias, it seemed, had not remarked, or had perhaps for a moment forgotten, he had another antagonist. At all events, when he threw off Nilson he pulled his knife. Don Juan's knife, however, was already in his useful hand, and he stated modestly that it reached the spot for which he aimed. Macias' knife, driven by his falling body, plunged into the ground. Don Juan reckoned the ants would undertake his funeral.

"Another brigand finished!" he concluded. "At the ranch of the Star, while the light was good, one went for every cartridge. The country will be tranquil when all are dead."

"Stout fellow!" Nilson remarked with a tired smile. "We must try to see we do not join the vanished gang."

Welland, leaning on his stick, sent a porter for the rifle and the medicine, and then washed Nilson's forehead. The cut was not deep, and although his face was dotted by powder-grains, it looked as if his eyes had escaped mechanical injury. When he had fixed a fresh bandage, Bad Hat served dinner, and soon afterwards Nilson and Forgas went to bed. Dark fell, the air cooled, and Welland joined Huysler by the other tent.

"Do you think Olaf's not seeing properly is the consequence of nervous shock?" Huysler asked.

"I don't know; I am not a doctor. Nilson was exhausted and had borne an awkward strain; when the gun exploded he was carried away by savage emotion and he got a smashing knock. The supposition's plausible. We are intricate machines."

"Before I persuaded him to join us, his body was like a Greek athlete's, and you sensed a kind of splendid dynamic force," Huysler remarked in a brooding voice. "Nothing bothered him; he was the jolliest pal I knew. Now he gropes about like a blind man; I begin to think he is blind. It's frankly horrible!"

"Then let it go," said Welland, firmly. "Nilson's pluck is good and I don't suppose his case will baffle a first-class oculist. Anyhow, there's another thing. You will soon be on your feet, and we must fix our line."

"Carthew's letter gives you command."

"That is so. He gave me some instructions about Miss Carthew. I am her trustee."

"His estate is not large?"

"His life insurance is all. In the meantime, it's not of much consequence. You stand for the Huysler Company; I'm the company's servant."

For a few moments Huysler pondered, and then looked up.

"My first commercial venture is rather obviously not a success. I reckoned to show the old man and Helen the sort of stuff I was! If I applied my talents to business, I'd make good as well as another, and I had some qualities the old-time gang had not. Perhaps you know how raw youth argues?"

Welland smiled and Huysler resumed: "Well, the old man indulged me, and maybe chuckled when I was not about. Helen approved, but I doubt if she bet much on my finding the gum. I guess they had another object for letting me go."

Welland imagined Miss Whitney did not know all the risks her lover might run. Yet, if she had experimented, he thought her experiment was justified. Huysler had perhaps found something worth more to both than crystalium. He was not the raw young fellow who plunged carelessly into the swamps.

"To know when one is beaten is useful; perhaps only fools do not," Welland observed. "All the same, to take a knock-out is hard."

"The trouble's not there. Since I stand for the Company, I'm accountable for Carthew, Olaf, and you; and I begin to feel Forgas's slogan might soon apply to the lot. Well, my job's to bring the battered survivors to the coast, and when we are fit to front the hike we'll shove off. We have a fighting chance to make the canoes."

Welland agreed, although he did not think the chance worth much. Huysler, however, had talked for some time, and he went off to see if the Kroo sentry was at his post.

For the first time since the fever seized him, Huysler's sleep was sound, and in the morning he was satisfied to keep his mat in the tent. Although Carthew was gone, Nilson had made the camp; he had not, as he had feared, lost both. Then he knew all he had for long wanted to know and his line was fixed. Before the rains began they must break camp.

In the hot afternoon he resolved to try his strength. The others took their siesta, but he did not know if Nilson slept, and with something of an effort he got on his feet, and went shakily to a spot in the shade where great blocks had fallen from the pylon wall. When he sat down, the tent not far off shook, and Nilson asked: "Where are you, Jack?"

Huysler said he was at the bottom of the wall, and Nilson crawled from the tent. He felt for a peg and guy-rope, as if he knew where they were and, getting up, hesitated for a moment, and then steered for the wall.

"Eight or nine yards, I think," he said. "Leave me alone."

To watch him hurt. Huysler pictured his leap for the plunging boat and his throwing his antagonist across the street at Santa Catalina. All the same, the other's cool, level voice warned him he must not be sympathetic. A yard from the wall, Nilson stopped and stretched out his arm.

"I made it! Pretty good reckoning. Watch out I don't sit down on you!"

He lowered himself cautiously and felt for a cigarette.

"Bully to know you're up. Fever's going? But I guess you have not begun to smoke?"

His studied carelessness jarred, but Huysler knew he must play up. At all events, he must not yet inquire about Olaf's eyes.

"So far, I have not. Wait a moment and I will give you a light."

"I'll get a light," Nilson rejoined, and rubbed a match. Then he stopped and resumed with a dreary laugh: "The business end's the other way. Looks as if I'm too independent, but I must begin to help myself."

Reversing the match, he lighted his cigarette. Huysler said nothing. Although he was strongly moved, there was nothing to be said. After a few moments, Nilson remarked:

"You can't find that gum, Jack. I guess you're beat."

"I am beaten," Huysler agreed. "As soon as Welland and I can walk, we are going to pull out. One hates to quit, and if I thought crystalium worth exploiting, I'd come back with a fresh gang; but I'm satisfied all the stuff there is would not pay for the search."

Nilson nodded. "That's so, partner; you have got to face it. In fact, I think, for the last three or four weeks, Carthew knew ___"

He stopped, and Huysler cogitated. The ground was awkward, and he imagined Olaf, like himself, wondered whether Carthew had not known before.

"You reckon it explains his trying to reach the cache?"

"Well, the job was not the leader's job, and he knew somebody had hidden in the bush for a shot at me. Welland's leg was poisoned and you were sick; it looked as if we were held up here for good, and my notion is, the boss himself was sick. Maybe he felt he had entangled us, and anyhow he was done with. He'd bet high, and the loser pays."

"I entangled you," Huysler rejoined. "But for me, the old man would not have financed the expedition."

Nilson turned his head. He had begun to locate noises, and his glance rested accurately on Huysler's face.

"One must take some chances, and you didn't know— Carthew bet all he had, but it was for his daughter, and when he lost our lot and his he was willing to make good. I reckon he did make good; but the girl must not guess—I think that's all, Jack."

"That is all," Huysler agreed. "Welland knows, but he's Miss Carthew's trustee, and altogether discreet. It's done with, and as soon as possible we are going to break camp."



XVIII

THE MORNING HYMN

A week or two passed. Sometimes thunder crashed behind the woods and for a few minutes big drops splashed the leaves. The dry season was breaking, but the rains had not begun, and Huysler wondered anxiously whether he yet might reach the canoes before the tropical deluge stopped him.

Transport was the difficulty. They had but three porters, and the supplies without which they dared not travel were numerous. Then Welland's leg did not get better, and although Nilson steered himself about the camp he must be guided in the jungle. Huysler's fever had gone, but he was horribly slack, and muscular effort was almost impossible. Forgas, however, began to use his arm and the porters were not sick, although they got moody. Jack imagined the Krooboys stopped because Welland stopped, and the other dared not steal away alone.

After supper one evening Nilson joined Huysler in front of the tent. For the *caliente* belt, the evening was cool and the steam from the jungle rolled about the hill. The dew touched the hot soil and the smell was like the smell of a forcing-house. In front, the Frog's dark obelisk cut the sky.

"I hate the brute, and I hate the dreary spot," Huysler remarked.

"After all, there's not much use in waiting. When do we shove off?"

"I must talk to Welland. If I urge him, I think he'll go. He hesitates because he must be carried."

"And I must be steered," said Nilson; "there's a job for another man. And every yard of ground must be covered four or five times. Looks as if our venture's a pretty forlorn hope. Well, maybe we'll make it, and if we do get there, I'll admit Carthew's luck, in some respects, is as good as ours. He went out like a white man; we must apologize for stealing back."

"I have not much grounds to boast. Now we talk about it, I am sorry for you."

Nilson smiled, a dreary smile. "Oh, well, I have risked a knock-out before, and I don't know if my sight is gone for good. Anyhow, it was a great excursion and I went with a bully gang. That's something."

Huysler knew Olaf generous, but it looked as if his pal were finer stuff than he had thought.

"But Señorita Viñoles—" he said, and stopped awkwardly.

"Now we talk about it, I'll be frank," Nilson rejoined with a touch of humor. "For me to let her go might look noble. It would not be noble. Mariquita's mine. If I were blind for good, dead broke, or in jail, she'd stick to me; and she reckons on my holding the best thing I've got."

"It's possible; but you don't really know the señorita."

"You think understanding comes by study? One ought to weigh one's lover's qualities, and not allow romance to tip the beam? Well, I'm not like that, and Mariquita's qualities are obvious. When you start on a splendid adventure you don't calculate. You know the proper line and you plunge ahead. Now I expect you get me? And it's done with, Jack."

Huysler smiled. Olaf certainly did not calculate. At Santa Catalina, he threw his antagonist across the street, and Jack pictured his leaping on Macias' gun. Anyhow, he was a first-class sport, and a man's main business was not to avoid getting hurt.

"Since all the crystalium we found could be carried in our pockets, our meeting the pottery-merchant with a bagful was strange," Nilson resumed.

"I begin to think he was hired to meet us. In the gold-rush days, if you wanted to attract tenderfoot speculators, you salted a mine with high-grade rock you bought somewhere else. There's a classic joke about a nugget stamped—*ed Stat*—Somebody perhaps imagined a packet of crystalium might encourage us to persevere."

"Maybe so; I guess you have got it," Nilson agreed, in a stern voice. "Well, I want to meet the fellow who framed up the joke on us."

He turned his head. Rawhide shoes beat the stones; Forgas was coming to join them, and the talk was over.

The night, by contrast with others, was not very hot, but Huysler's sleep was disturbed. Sometimes he feverishly tossed about, and sometimes he pondered their journey to the coast. The obstacles were daunting, but they must not wait for the rain.

At length he woke from a restless doze. The sky was dark, but a bracing freshness indicated dawn. On the low ground the mist moved languidly, as if a slow current carried it along; the damp was soothing on Huysler's hot skin. For a few moments he thought all was quiet; and then a queer rhythmic throb stole across the jungle. The noise puzzled Huysler. It went with a measured beat and by degrees got loud. Then the canvas flapped and he knew Welland crawled from the tent.

"Do you hear something in the woods? It's like drums."

"It is drums," said Welland. "In Africa, the proper time for music is when the cooking fires get low after supper—" He turned his head. "The noise has roused the boys. Hallo, Bad Hat! You savvy them drum?"

The porters stopped three or four yards off. Their figures began to get distinct, and Huysler thought they sought the white men's society because they were afraid.

"Bushman's drum. War-palaver drum. Oh, yes, I sabbee," the Kroo replied and, crouching in the grass, tapped the rhythm on a stone.

Forgas, advancing with Nilson, pushed Bad Hat back.

"Music of the devil! Arrive more brigands; negro brigands. Hell's lightning blast them!" he exclaimed.

"They have changed the beat," said Nilson. "Signaling, perhaps. A sort of Morse code?"

Welland signed him to stop, and for a few moments all were quiet. In the misty dawn, the swelling throb was ominous, and the negroes, perhaps mechanically, crept nearer the white men.

"Although they are expert drummers, I doubt if they have a code," Welland rejoined. "They certainly signal; but my notion is, the noise is like a bird's call or a dog's growl, meaning, but, so to speak, not articulate. As a rule, a negro hates to travel when the dew is on the brush. However, we will soon know their business, and in the meantime I'll serve out cartridges."

They fastened belts, and, loading pouches, went to their posts, Welland and Huysler in the brush where they commanded the causeway up the hill. The drums had stopped, but Jack felt they stood for superstition and cruelty; Ju-Ju magic carried from Africa and Haitian Voodoo. In fact, when the savage throb rolled across the jungle he had sensed a challenge to the white man's rule. And all in the lonely group were worn and sick.

Yet the jungle was not altogether still. One sensed a stir and a movement that got louder, and Jack presently knew it for the beat of feet. Then he thought brushwood rustled and canes cracked. The swelling noise was like the noise of a battalion's march.

A swarm of negroes advanced upon the hill; the rebellion had, no doubt, turned them loose to plunder and destroy. Huysler's mouth was parched. It looked as if he must fight, but the light grew swiftly, and at length he would meet visible antagonists. Although he could not shoot like Nilson, he was a good shot.

"Hallo!" he said rather hoarsely. "They are singing!"

Voices pierced the crawling mist. Huysler had thought to hear a savage battle-chant, but the voices were musical and the flowing melody was good. Moreover, he imagined he ought to know the tune.

"The song is not African," Welland remarked.

For a few moments Huysler was quiet. The singing got louder, and he laughed, an excited laugh.

"It's American! I believe Mississippi wharf-hands sang it not very long since. In a way, the thing's ridiculous— But Olaf knows the tune."

Nilson, twenty yards off, got up, his white clothes shining in the first sunbeams. He tilted his head and his big voice echoed in the broken walls.

"*I'se gwine to hebben! Oh, all you people—*"

"*Hebben, hebben! All you people gwine to hebben—*" the triumphant antiphone pierced the baffling mist.

"A few minutes since, I thought it possible," Welland remarked with grim humor. "Get down, Nilson. After all, African drums are not the proper accompaniment for a Methodist hymn."

The singing stopped, but the tramp of feet and rustle of brush continued. Although the mist had begun to melt, it yet floated about the plain, and all one saw was the tops of the high trees. The noise seemed to indicate that the men below surrounded the hill. Then somebody shouted, and for a few minutes all was quiet.

Boots rattled on stones, and a man's figure rose from the mist as he climbed to higher ground. His skin was black, but his cotton clothes and silk belt were good and he pulled off an expensive Panama hat. Huysler thought the material the genuine stuff the Indians laboriously weave in running water.

"Good-morning, sir."

"Good-morning," said Welland. "Before you advance, you might state what you want."

"A few minutes' talk. I don't expect to bother you, and my men will wait at the bottom of the hill."

"Very well. Come along. Perhaps you'd like a drink."

The other went with them to the tent and took a drink and a cigarette.

"You are Americans?" he said.

"My friends are Americans. I am English; the Spanish gentleman is, I believe, a citizen of this republic. Who are you?"

"Moses Lake. Superintendent for a Jamaica house at an *estancia* shipping fruit to the United States. I have recently undertaken another job."

"Your helpers are pretty numerous," Welland remarked.

Lake smiled. "My scouts are round the hill. We had heard about you, and I thought I'd look you up. Then I rather wanted to see the Frog, although I believe the boys did not. Some are Methodists; but I doubt if I'd have got them here before daybreak. Anyhow, my visit's friendly. I understand your business is to search for gum-crystal."

"By the President's permission! We did not get much of the stuff, and were planning our return to the coast."

"There is not much gum," said Lake. "I expect you carry an official *vaya*?"

His manner was friendly, but somehow implied that he was entitled to inquire, and Welland sent Jack for the document. After a few moments Lake gave it back to him.

"Well, that's all right. By your leave—"

He jumped on a block and signaled. Thirty yards off, down the hill, a negro crawled from behind a bush and vanished in the mist, but Welland saw a gun-barrel shine. Lake had obviously used some caution.

"There is not another. The country is disturbed, and I have some enemies," he remarked when he sat down.

"Ask him about the brigands who burned my ranch of the Star," said Forgas.

It looked as if Lake knew some Spanish, for he replied:

"I expect they are dead. Señor Galdos has smashed a rebel force in the *templada* belt."

"Then the rebellion is over?" said Welland.

Lake smiled. "I think it begins. Señor Galdos is ambitious, and now a rival is gone. In this country one shoots a beaten competitor. But I expect republican politics do not interest you much."

For a moment or two Welland pondered his reply, and Huysler saw Lake studied him. Although the mist melted in the hot sun, nothing indicated that the men the fellow led watched the hill. Where the trees rose from the thinning vapor, the leaves were motionless, and somehow the quiet was daunting.

Jack, however, felt he had some grounds for satisfaction. Although he had expected to meet a truculent savage, they were politely conversing with a fellow whose English was as good as his. Yet Lake carried the stamp of authority. In the jungle, one felt he was of some consequence.

"We have nothing to do with politics, but it looks as if Señor Galdos, or at all events his adjutant, was willing to embarrass us," Welland replied. "To see his object is another thing. Anyhow, all we want is to get back to the coast and on board ship."

"As a rule, Galdos has an object, and I don't know if you will have done with him when you do reach Santa Catalina," Lake replied with some dryness. "All the same, you can't remain at the hill. I suppose your porters have quit?"

Welland agreed and stated that they were willing to pay for a fresh gang who would engage to move their stuff to the canoes. Lake seemed to cogitate and then looked up.

"I know the spot, and our transport's pretty strong; the boys could rejoin me. Well, money is useful, and if you can pay, I'll take the contract for—"

The sum was large, but the others dared not refuse, and Welland sent Huysler for a bundle of American currency. Lake got up.

"You have hammocks? Very well. In about twenty minutes the boys will be here. When you make the canoes, shove ahead for Santa Catalina as fast as possible, and if a steamer calls, get on board. Three or four of the boys will go downstream with you. Well, I have stopped for some time. Good luck and *Bon voyage!*"

He went down the hill, and shouted orders rolled across the woods. Brush rattled, sticks cracked, and the tramp of marching feet echoed in the jungle and slowly got faint. In the meantime the fresh porters arrived, and when breakfast was over the white men broke camp.

XIX

THE BLOCKED CREEK

The porters Lake supplied were sturdy and willing. They carried their own supplies, and since they were numerous enough to move the white men's goods, the party's advance was fast. Welland kept his hammock, which two muscular negroes carried by a pole; but in the cool of the morning Huysler used his feet, and where the path was good steered Nilson. By contrast with the journey inland, their speed was bracing, and at some stages over which Huysler in his rocking hammock was smoothly carried, he pictured the effort he had used to drag himself and his load over the ground.

That, however, was not all the contrast. In spite of the strain and effort, when he went up-country his heart beat with hope. He was going to find the gum and to show his rather doubting friends the stuff of which he was made. Now he acknowledged himself beaten, and it looked as if his pal were blind. Welland was crippled and Carthew was dead.

When the sun got hot and Huysler was forced to keep his hammock, he brooded. He felt himself accountable; but Carthew and he had been cheated and baffled. Somebody had planned to entangle them in the swamps, and Huysler darkly hoped he might yet spot the brute. For this, however, he must trust his luck. Since Welland was crippled, his business was to get the party to the coast and on board the yacht. He reckoned he ought to make it not long before she arrived.

Pushing ahead of the others one morning, Jack thought he saw water shine. Welland calculated they were not far from the creek, and as a rule Welland's reckoning was accurate. For all that, the reflection from a pool had cheated Jack before, and the Kroos scouted a hundred yards in front. Huysler stopped and looked back.

Leaves tossed and branches shook. Where the path curved a hammock swung beneath a bending pole, and half-naked bodies strained. Touched by the filtering light, the porters' wet skin shone, and in the background, round the curve, one sensed a sort of sinuous movement, as if a giant snake crawled through the brush. The caravan's advance, however, was not noisy. The tangled jungle seemed to deaden and absorb the cracking of sticks and the labored beat of feet.

After a few minutes, Huysler turned his head. A shout pierced the gloom. That was all he heard; the cry was not articulate, but he felt it struck a joyous note. He heard it again, louder and triumphant: "Canoe lib!"

For all the heat, Huysler plunged along the path, and the noise behind him implied that the porters made the best speed they could. When he reached the creek, Bad Hat and Washington were pulling off the branches that covered the canoes. In the damp shade, the thin hulls had not cracked and the ants had left the wood alone. At bow and stern the limp Ju-Ju rags hung from the cleft sticks. Although nobody perhaps had passed the lonely backwater, it looked as if the charm had worked.

In a few moments the porters arrived and threw down their loads. Huysler helped Welland from his hammock.

"We have made it, chief! Your reckoning was good. Hulls and poles and paddles are all right."

Welland smiled. "I lay in my hammock, Jack. You superintended and hustled the gang along."

Cooking fires were lighted and Welland extravagantly served out supplies for a feast. Their labors were over, and, so far as he knew, the road to the sea was open. He felt they were entitled to celebrate. Yet the feast was touched by melancholy. One who went inland with them had fallen by the dark road; another might for all his life walk in the gloom. Nilson, however, was young and youth is hopeful. He had yet something of his muscular strength, and he dared not brood. Action was some relief, and when the meal was over he helped the negroes launch the canoes.

Welland chose four porters from the gang and gave the others a small sum in paper currency. For the most part, they were a willing lot, and had carried out all Lake engaged for them to do. Although they refused to state where they went, they took the path, singing, and Washington ordered the rest on board.

The paddles splashed, and Nilson, balancing in the larger dugout, pushed down his pole. He felt he must get busy, and Washington would superintend the steering. The dim, glimmering belt was water, the dark blur was jungle, but that was all he knew.

Cottonwoods and mahoganies floated back; shafts of dazzling illumination quivered on trunks and bank. The yellow water got intolerably bright, and they were in the main channel. Sometimes where the channel shoaled, Huysler and Nilson helped the negroes drag the canoes across the mud, but for the most part they loafed and smoked in the shade of the thatch. After the sweat and strain, to go slack was something fresh, and the languid current carried them along. The negroes' paddles splashed steadily; tangled creepers, orchid-dotted trunks, and shining sand-bars drifted by. At night huge bats circled round the moored canoes, and sometimes heaving water marked the passing of a noiseless crocodile.

But for the sand-bars, nothing delayed the party, and Huysler felt that now was the time to weigh things and revise his plans for the future. His boyish carelessness had vanished; somewhere a man's job waited him, but he could not concentrate. A reaction had begun; his body was slack and his brain was dull. All he wanted was to hear the paddles splash and feel the dugouts steal along. After much muscular labor and emotional strain, he felt he had reached a restful land where the sun banished effort and nobody bothered.

For some days they floated downstream, and then his brooding was disturbed. In the afternoon the negroes stopped their paddles, and Huysler saw a big cottonwood-trunk was fastened across the creek. Opposite one end, somebody had built an open-fronted hut of branches and palmetto leaves, and a white man, smoking a cigarette, leaned against a post. In the background, his hammock-bearers and two or three dark-skinned soldiers waited. The soldiers slouched and their white uniforms were soiled, but Huysler thought their rifles an up-to-date pattern.

"Don Martin Ramos, Galdos's chief officer!" he remarked.

Welland knit his brows; Nilson swore.

"The swine who tried to put the screw on us? I want to meet him!"

"You'll sit tight," said Huysler. "Since he's brought some of his army, Welland will talk."

The canoes floated to the bank and Ramos advanced. He wore an ornamental military uniform and saluted the party with ironical politeness. Huysler noted the malevolent humor in his crooked smile, and calm was hard. In some way, the brute and his master were accountable for the pain and loss the group had borne. Jack sympathized with Olaf; he wanted to beat the smile from the dark-skinned face.

"Will you order your men to move the boom?" said Welland, in a level voice.

"I am sorry, señor, but the creek is stopped and you cannot pass."

"We have the President's *vaya*, giving us free passage."

Don Martin shrugged. "In the meantime, no *vaya* goes that does not carry Señor Galdos's countersign. Since he is occupied in the interior, you must wait."

"If you stop us, you must reckon with President Vallon."

"It might not be difficult," Ramos remarked, as if he were amused. "To wait is annoying, but you were warned, and sometimes one must pay for one's obstinacy. However, when you went up the creek your party was more numerous."

"Father Sebastian left us in the woods. Do you know where he is?"

"He is dead. Some may claim he was martyred; I myself do not know. His saint was shot with arrows, and although Don Sebastian's executioners used rifles, if one is a good Catholic, the reward is perhaps the same. Well, he was a rash and dangerous man— But I do not see Señor Carthew."

"Carthew was shot," said Welland. "His murderer, at all events, got his reward."

It looked as if Don Martin were interested, but Forgas interrupted theatrically:

"Another brigand gone! When the President gets to work some more will go. Politicians, secretaries, adjutants, and brigands, all are the same. Long live Señor Vallon, the man who knows where to shoot!"

"Stout fellow!" said Nilson, and Huysler laughed.

Welland signed them to be quiet. Don Juan was dramatic, but he used a language the other understood, and Ramos's look was thoughtfully malignant.

"You, at all events, are a citizen of this republic," he said to Forgas meaningly, and turned to Welland. "Since your leader was shot and another killed, inquiries will, no doubt, be made. In the meantime, you cannot go on. If you moor your canoes by the sand-bar, my soldiers will not disturb you."

"How long do you mean to keep us?" Welland inquired.

Ramos shrugged. "I do not know. I expect some orders and when they arrive I may send for you." He saluted the group with mock politeness. "Until I see you, gentlemen!"

The hammock-bearers advanced and lowered the pole. Ramos got on board and was carried off, a soldier slouching in front of the party.

"*Hasta la vista!*" said Nilson. "If I were the man I was not long since, the brute would see me sooner than he thinks. Anyhow, we started for the coast, and we are going there."

"Two soldiers guard the boom," said Welland dryly. "It's possible another lot is posted farther along the creek. I think we must wait for Don Martin to send for us, and then try to persuade him his stopping us is rash. We may find a useful argument."

Nilson frowned, but Huysler said nothing. He imagined Welland, like himself, had studied the porters. One could reckon on the Krooboy's stanchness, and Lake's men knew Castilian. Huysler thought they knew something about the republican politics and Galdos's supporters were not their friends; but negroes were rather inscrutable. Anyhow, they were not much disturbed, and Ramos had hardly bothered to glance at them. In the circumstances, Jack thought he himself would have studied the gang; but Don Martin was a white man, the near-beer sort.

The sun got low and the negroes pitched their camp on the sandy bank, about a hundred yards from the hut. Huysler went across and gave the soldiers some cigarettes. The short, dusky half-breeds were polite; so long as the party did not go near the boom, they would be left alone, and if they wanted wood or water for cooking it could be supplied. Señor Galdos had won a fight in the *templadas* belt, and Don Martin, his trusted *ayutante*, now occupied an old fruit *finca*, a mile or two off, from which he watched the swamps.

Huysler imagined it was all the fellows knew, and he went back to the dugout. After supper, he and Nilson climbed the bank and joined Forgas, who was sitting in the sand. Clouds rolled across the sky and distant thunder rumbled, but at times the moon was bright, and the creek, shining like silver, rolled sluggishly into the gloom. Huysler watched the smooth current slide by and his mouth went tight. Thin smoke from the porters' cooking fire floated about and the mosquitoes were not numerous. Another small fire burned in front of the soldiers' hut.

"The night's cool," said Nilson. "If the swine holds us up for long, we will not make Santa Catalina before the rains begin. Well, I reckon you are weighing something, Jack."

"Ramos's post is about a mile off, at an old fruit ranch, and the path looks pretty good. Since he took a soldier with him, I expect his guard is not strong. Then I imagine these fellows have not much use for discipline and when all's quiet a sentry takes a smoke or goes to sleep."

"Well?" said Nilson. "We put the *dagos* in the creek and move the boom?"

"Not at all. Our lot will watch out. My proposition is, we look Ramos up."

Nilson laughed, a short, grim laugh.

"That's the stuff, Jack. After all, if his guard is awake, we must offer to negotiate. If, however, nobody is watching out, we'll hold up the swine for a passport. He reckoned he might send for us; and if you explain things, I guess Don Juan will see the joke. He's a useful man for a rough-house. But I am going."

When Olaf talked like that there was no use in arguing, and Huysler enlightened Forgas about their plans.

"Of a surety, I go with you, and I have now two good arms," Don Juan declared. "If the brigand is obstinate, it is all the

same. We will soon persuade him."

For a time, they weighed the scheme; and then went on board. Welland hesitated, but at length agreed.

"The yacht will presently arrive, and unless we reach the coast soon, fever may stop us for good. To bully a republican officer might be risky, but on the whole I imagine it would not annoy President Vallon, and you are, at all events, entitled to see the fellow and protest. Well, if you steal away quietly, you might reach the *finca* without our guards suspecting you have left the camp. The boys will keep their fire burning and Nilson and I will be on board."

"You argue like a lawyer, but I see where I might be useful," Nilson remarked with a laugh. "Jack must wait for an hour or two. When the soldiers begin to think all's quiet for the night, he'll get going."

NILSON'S PASSPORT

Huysler pulled back the mosquito-net and looked about. The creek sparkled in the moonlight, and where a fish splashed shining ripples spread. Silver light splashed the high trunks and a faint red glow marked the porters' sinking fire, but the partial illumination rather exaggerated the surrounding gloom. The soldiers' hut was dark.

"Do you see Nilson?" Welland asked.

Nilson had landed five minutes earlier. The dark did not embarrass him and he had begun to cultivate the blind's strange ability to find their way about. The soldiers did not know his sight was gone, and his business was to fix their attention while he went round the camp, as if to see all was safe for the night. In the meantime the others would land. They imagined Nilson's tour of inspection would satisfy the soldiers, but Huysler knew he could not persuade his pal to go back on board. In fact, when he saw Olaf feel his way across a belt of moonlight he admitted his stubbornness was justified. But for their antagonists' treachery, Olaf would have seen where he went.

"He's coming. We'll get busy," said Huysler, and touched Forgas. "*Vamos, compañero.*"

"Good luck!" said Welland quietly, and gave Jack his hand.

Huysler got overboard and crawled up the bank. Welland did not yet know Olaf's resolve, and when he found out he dared not meddle. Nilson had stopped under a big cottonwood, and Huysler and Forgas, keeping the thickest gloom, steered circuitously for the spot. Jack did not think they made much noise, but Nilson turned his head, as if he marked their advance. To watch him hurt, and Huysler was moved to vindictive rage. Not long since Olaf's eyes were a hunter's eyes; now he must listen, and feel about with a stick.

"Where is Bad Hat?" Huysler asked when they arrived.

"In the canes, about a yard behind you," Nilson rejoined. "I expect the soldiers saw somebody land, and if they see him return to the bank, they'll probably not bother about us until daybreak. Maybe Don Juan will humor them."

Forgas agreed and, carelessly crossing the belt of moonlight, vanished by the creek. A stick cracked and water splashed, as if sand disturbed by somebody slipped down the bank; but Forgas's return was cautious, and until Nilson touched him, Huysler did not know Don Juan was behind a bush.

"My ears will soon be as useful as your eyes," Nilson remarked. "You haven't got to bother about me. Creep ahead, and find the path."

The path was dark like a tunnel, and Huysler rather steered by touch than sight. Crossing branches and massed creepers melted in thick gloom, and one advanced gropingly where nothing seemed to be in front. Bad Hat led the group and Huysler listened for his feet; he knew the negro's step and Nilson's was light. It looked as if he did not hesitate, but for Olaf to front the dark was nothing fresh.

Bad Hat went fast. He carried a keen machete and Huysler imagined he liked the excursion. The fellow was a sport and boasted he had at one time hunted poll-tax collectors in the Liberian bush. By and by Huysler, listening for his companions, began to be puzzled. The Kroo was in front. Nilson a few yards behind, and Forgas was last. The queer thing was, Jack thought he heard another. Then Nilson touched him, and he knew Forgas stopped.

"Who comes?" Don Juan asked, in an ominous, quiet voice.

Somebody laughed, a negro's apologetic laugh.

"Washington lib, sah!"

"You got your machete? Then, go ahead and scout," said Nilson, and pushed Huysler. "Shove along, Jack. When you go hunting there's not much use in trying to cheat your dog."

The Kroos stole ahead and they went faster. Moonbeams began to pierce the tangle and the path got wide. The thick

trunks grew distinct against creeping light, by and by a Krooboy signaled, and the party stopped at the edge of an oblong clearing.

Somebody had cut back the forest, perhaps for dyewood, and planted a *finca*, but vines and brush had run across the cultivated ground. Jack wondered whether malaria and the insect hosts had driven out the cultivators; but fifty yards from where he stood a house occupied a corner of the block, and a light burned behind a mosquito-net. As a rule, in the tropics one does not use window-glass. At one end of the house Huysler saw a broken hut and sheds. The spot was not attractive, but for an officer who watched the creek it had advantages, and a roof would be some protection when the rain began.

Anyhow, they had got there, and Jack admitted the excursion was frankly humorous. He carried an automatic pistol, but that was their only firearm, although their object was to hold up a republican outpost and bully the commander. For two fever-shaken white men and two African savages, it was something of a job. Huysler doubted if he could reckon on Olaf's help, and the Kroos were savages. When they started they had stripped off their clothes, and all that covered their greasy skin was a cotton waist-belt. Yet in the dark a machete was as good as a rifle, and Huysler knew he must not shoot.

Large bats circled about the clearing, fireflies sparkled in the wet leaves; one smelt flowers and hot soil, but nothing disturbed the brooding calm. Only the yellow light indicated that somebody was not asleep. Jack wondered where the soldiers were. Two watched the creek, but he imagined Ramos had some sort of guard. Anyhow, the republican soldiers he had seen were a slouching, half-drilled lot, and might not be vigilant. Besides, Don Martin did not expect visitors.

Whispering to Forgas, he sent the Kroos ahead. They vanished in the brush and for about ten minutes the others waited. Huysler's heart beat and his mouth got parched. He was a sober American, and had not much talent for moving-picture stunts; but somehow he had got entangled. After all, his plan was perhaps as good as another, and if the soldiers were awake, he must ask for the commandante and pretend to negotiate.

The Kroos did not return, and Huysler, touching Nilson, took a path along the jungle's edge. For the most part, they were in the gloom and it looked as if nobody heard their cautious advance. When they were near the house, Washington crawled from the bush and signed them to go on. The house was not the Spanish-Mexican type, with thick mud walls. It was wooden and raised six or seven feet from the ground on posts, and a veranda went along the front. Huysler thought its builders were American lumbermen, who had bought a concession to cut dyewood and mahogany.

At the bottom of the steps Forgas pulled off his rawhide boots. Huysler did not remove his: he hated the horrible jiggers that bore into one's feet. They went up, and he remarked that Nilson was the quietest of the group. The veranda shook; the beams perhaps were eaten by ants, and a rotten board broke, but Forgas pushed back the door and they were in the room. A nicked American lamp, surrounded by insects, hung from the roof, and Ramos, at a modern office desk, jumped to his feet.

"You know some English," said Huysler. "Move back from the desk!"

"*Mal rayo*—" said Ramos, and stopped.

Huysler pulled round his pistol-belt; Forgas pushed the *persiana* shutter across the window. Behind them, the muscular Kroo quietly shut the door. He carried a two-foot cutlass, his naked skin shone, and his eyes rolled. Nilson, looking straight in front, was two or three yards off. Forgas leaned against the wall, where he commanded the door to another room. Ramos frowned savagely, moved his chair, and sat down.

"What do you want?" he asked in Castilian.

"A passport to Santa Catalina," Huysler replied. "You stated the President's *vaya* must be countersigned by Señor Galdos. Well, you are his *ayutante* and we have brought the document. You might countersign it, per procuration."

"The drawback is, I was ordered to allow nobody to go down the creek. Rebellion has broken out, and the Government is responsible for the safety of foreigners."

Huysler pondered. To argue in Castilian was awkward, and he knew the other's cunning. He was willing to use force, but he would sooner the force was implied.

"If we stop in the swamps until we get fever, we run a worse risk than we would run by pushing ahead. If we did not reach the coast, Señor Galdos certainly would be made accountable."

"I expect we could satisfy American inquiries. The *caliente* belt is unhealthy. Our people do not escape malaria and the worse *prieto*, but foreigners from the North are the first to be attacked."

"There's my argument; we refuse to take the chance—"

Nilson lifted his hand and turned his head. Somebody went along the path in front of the house, and the step was measured, like a soldier's step. Huysler signed Ramos to be quiet, and Forgas moved nearer his chair. Ramos was quiet, and when the steps passed the house, Washington pulled back the door and vanished silently. In a few moments the man in the clearing turned, for the noise he made got louder, and all waited until his steps began to die away. It looked as if a sentry had made his round, but Huysler's hand shook and his mouth was dry.

"We have stopped longer than we thought, and we cannot wait," he said.

"Very well," Ramos agreed. "Since you force me, I will write an order that will pass you to the coast."

Huysler reflected. The cunning brute did not want to countersign the *vaya*. Perhaps his master had not yet challenged President Vallon's authority.

"No," he said. "We want Señor Galdos's name, which you, yourself, stated was necessary—"

Nilson touched him and he saw the door to the other room was pushed back about a foot from the post. It looked as if only Nilson had heard the hinges jar. Huysler did not turn his head, but in the narrow opening he saw a woman's face. She was young; a half-breed or an Indian, and the queer thing was, she was not disturbed. The only emotion her glance implied was curiosity. She vanished, and Jack knew Ramos had not seen her. All the same, she might have gone to call the guard.

"Oh, well," said Ramos. "You have got the *vaya*?"

"I will give it to him. I know where he is, and you must watch the brute," said Nilson in English, and pulled out the document.

He advanced with a cautious step, moving his head as if he listened, and when his blank glance swept the spot the other occupied Ramos shrank.

"*Ciego!*" he gasped.

"Yes," said Nilson grimly, "I am blind. I believe the fellow who blinded me was your man, but he did not live to boast about his exploit. Here is the *vaya*. Sign for Señor Galdos, in your proper name, opposite the President's, and above the Republic's seal."

Ramos hesitated. He saw all his agreeing implied, and if Galdos's plans did not work, knew it might cost him much. President Vallon was not the man to forgive the affront. Nilson's mouth, however, was ominously firm and his big hands were clenched. His strange, fixed glance broke Don Martin's nerve.

"Write," said Nilson sternly.

Don Martin wrote, and Nilson gave the document to Huysler.

"Are you satisfied, Jack?"

"It will go," said Huysler, and knitted his brows.

He thought Ramos studied him, and the swine was subtle. Suppose he reckoned to get back the document? The creek curved about, and was probably blockaded at another spot. A messenger might cross the loop and warn the guards to stop the canoes. In fact, if Galdos were beaten, the party might never be allowed to reach the coast. The *prieto* Ramos talked about was yellow fever; Huysler saw him baffling American inquiries.

"After all," he said in English, "I think we'll take the brute himself along."

Nilson laughed, an ominous laugh, and turned to Ramos.

"We have not much grounds to be trustful, señor, and we might be held up for fresh orders. In the circumstances, our safest passport is yourself. You are going with us, and if you call for help, you might get hurt."

He beckoned Huysler, and Forgas significantly touched his knife. Ramos got up and, pushed by Huysler, went to the door. Jack wondered where the Indian woman was, and imagined somebody in the gloom leaned against the wall. It, however, looked as if she were not going to meddle, and Washington, at the bottom of the steps, signaled them to advance.

They went down, Huysler holding Ramos's arm, and Forgas, on his other side carrying his long knife. Don Martin did not call for help, and in two or three minutes the group vanished in the gloom.



XXI

FREEDOM

For a few moments Huysler stopped in the jungle-path. He admitted his luck was perhaps remarkable, but so far his extravagant plan had worked. They had carried off Don Martin, and it looked as if nobody knew the fellow was gone. All was quiet, and Nilson agreed that nothing indicated that they were pursued.

The strange thing was, the Indian woman had not warned the guard. Unless she were a fool, she must have seen the visit was not a friendly visit, but she refused to go for help. Huysler said something like that to Nilson, who laughed.

"I expect the fellow stole her. In the old spacious days, a woman, forcibly carried off, was satisfied to stop. Perhaps she liked her abductor's pluck. One can think up some classical examples; but now the sex is emancipated the old-time rules don't go. Then Don Martin is not attractive— However, we have not yet put across our bluff, and if the swine's nerve is good, he may beat us."

They pushed on. Forgas and Washington guarded the prisoner, for Huysler hated to touch the man. Had Ramos put up a fight, he would have rejoiced to knock him out; to shove the unarmed brute along was another thing. Moreover, he thought Don Martin knew his countryman, and reckoned the negro might use primitive methods where an American would not.

The others were a dozen yards in front and their steps echoed dully in the gloom. That, however, was all one heard. The moon had gone and the jungle was very dark and steamy. Huysler gasped and sweated. When he went the other way he had not been conscious of much heat and fatigue. He had concentrated on reaching the *fincá*, but now he pondered.

Ramos was not a fool, and if he refused to help them cheat the guard at the creek, all would soon be prisoners. The cunning brute might reckon on their not hurting him, since, if he were stabbed, the group must fight the soldiers. Unless their officer ordered, the men would see nobody passed the boom. Besides, Ramos knew his captors were cultivated Americans.

Well, Forgas was not cultivated, and George Washington, stripped of his cotton clothes, was frankly a savage. They would not be fastidious, and if their prisoner shouted for help, might take their revenge before they were captured. Then, where one bluffed, nerve and cool judgment won, and a man whose antagonist's knife pricks his back is apt to think about his safety first. Huysler braced up. The creek was not far off, and they soon would know.

Dim reflections began to shine behind the trunks, and the group went faster. Although Huysler did not think the woman had roused the guard, somebody might have found out that Ramos was carried off. If it were so, when the rescue party arrived his captors must be as far down the creek as possible, and Huysler, touching Nilson, joined the group in front. Forgas, immediately behind Ramos, pushed him along, and Jack imagined his other hand clutched his knife. Washington, balancing his cutlass, was at his side.

Sticks cracked, the creepers they brushed rustled, and then the trees rolled back. The moon was gone and the porters' fire was low, but the sandy belt along the bank was not altogether dark. Huysler's skin was wet by sweat and he clenched his fist in suspense. If Ramos's nerve were good, they were done with.

"Who goes?" somebody shouted in Castilian.

For a moment Ramos hesitated and the suspense got intolerable. Huysler pictured Don Martin's emotions and dared not hope that fear would conquer. Then Forgas pushed his knife through the other's thin cotton clothes.

"A friend," said Ramos hoarsely. "Loose the boom. I go down the creek with the Americans."

The soldier called his comrade, and water splashed. Huysler called the porters and hurried them on board. Forgas pushed Don Martin into a canoe; Huysler and Nilson got on board Welland's.

"We'll explain another time; the important thing is to beat it while the road is good," said Jack.

Welland took his cue. They must go, but the soldiers must not think speed was urgent.

"You got your ropes and pegs, Bad Hat?" he asked in a languid voice.

"All aboard, sah."

"Then shove off," said Welland, carelessly. "Push out her bow. Steady with the pole. Now pallum, pallum!"

The paddles splashed and the dugouts floated down the sluggish current. The sinking fire was a hundred yards off and the jungle was dark, but Huysler thought two indistinct objects waited by the boom. If Ramos were not afraid he might yet stop the party.

When Jack sent the fellow on board the second dugout he did better than he knew. Ramos imagined his countryman would use his knife, and he was horribly afraid of the African savage whose large, greasy hands fastened meaningly on his throat. Then Forgas whispered and Washington moved one hand.

"You will wait fresh orders. I may not be back—for two or three days," Ramos shouted.

"*Bueno, señor,*" somebody replied.

The paddles splashed faster, the red reflections vanished, and the canoes went downstream in the dark. Disturbed water gurgled along the bank, the thudding stroke echoed in the woods, and one smelt the mud the thrashing blades stirred up.

"Well?" said Welland. "You have got your passport?"

"He's on board Don Juan's barge. We didn't dare trust a written order," Huysler replied, and narrated their exploit. "You see, if another guard is posted, he might have sent a messenger overland to turn us back. On the whole, I expect we were lucky, but sometimes a freak scheme does work."

"You are modest, Jack," said Welland, with dry humor. "The queer thing is, you did not disturb the guard. You believe a sentry passed the house?"

"That is so," Nilson replied. "The fellow was a soldier; he went with something like an even step, but it's possible three men are all Ramos has got. When we went in he was writing, and he perhaps expected to be reenforced. Anyhow, he expected a messenger."

"You knew he was writing?" Huysler remarked.

Nilson laughed. "It was pretty obvious, Jack. I knew a woman was at the door before you knew. If I'm beat for an occupation, I'll buy me a house where the red lights burn and set up for a fakir."

Huysler said nothing. He thought Olaf's joke cost him much, but he liked his pluck.

"If we do not need Ramos to help us pass another post, he'll be an embarrassment," Welland remarked. "We might, perhaps, be thanked for handing him to the constitutionalists at Santa Catalina, but it's possible they have now joined the rebels. We don't know what is going on, and although we must try to find out, I imagine our passenger will not enlighten us much. Why did you put him in the other canoe?"

"To put the brute in the creek would be soothing," Huysler rejoined. "I can't stand for having him near me, and to hold myself down might be something of a strain. Then I think Lake's boys don't like him, and he's afraid of Don Juan. You see, he knows their methods and, on the whole, I expect he'd sooner cheat us than them."

Nilson nodded. "I feel like that. In fact, when I think about Carthew, I want, for half an hour, to be a savage."

All night the canoes forged ahead through the steamy dark. Sometimes they struck a sand-bar and their crews got overboard; sometimes they plunged into brush and reeds along the swampy bank. The beat of paddles echoed in the woods, disturbed water splashed, and the scaly inhabitants of the slime fled before their noisy advance. Mosquitoes swarmed about the paddlers' greasy bodies, but the measured stroke was fast. All knew they yet risked pursuit, and swift messengers might now be speeding along the jungle-paths.

In the cool at daybreak the creek steamed, and the thick sour mist was more puzzling than the dark. Cooking fires were lighted on the sand hearths, the canoes drifted, and after breakfast Welland called Forgas to bring his dugout alongside.

Lake's men pushed Ramos on board, and one touched Huysler.

"A bad man," he remarked, and meaningly indicated the creek.

Huysler imagined he had an interested audience, and he shrugged.

"Not yet, I think," he said.

Ramos sat down under the thatch and lighted a cigarette. It looked as if his hand were firm.

"Well?" he said. "Have you fixed what you are going to do with me?"

"You might help us fix it," Huysler replied in English. "I suppose you heard the boy's proposition? The gang don't like you, and I guess they wouldn't talk."

Ramos knew some English, and he gave the negro a scornful glance.

"A raw savage!"

"And we are white men? Well, we might forget it, and one was for some time in Africa, where white men's rules don't go."

"Ah," said Ramos, smiling, "you think to try the American third degree!"

He turned and fronted Nilson's blank glance, and Huysler saw he shrank. Then Welland began to talk.

"You are an embarrassment, señor. Only that we must get to Santa Catalina as soon as possible, we would be glad to be rid of you."

"You carry the President's *vaya*," Ramos remarked in a mocking voice.

"The document is countersigned for your master," said Welland dryly. "All the same, an order might be sent to an outpost in front of us. I expect you see why we hesitate?"

"If I gave you my word, on the faith of a gentleman, that no order was sent?"

Welland weighed the suggestion. Ramos had begun to use Castilian and Creole French, and Welland thought he meant to be ambiguous. Anyhow, he knew they doubted him. On the whole, it looked as if he expected the canoes to be stopped and did not want to be on board.

"One would sooner be polite, señor, but we cannot run much risk. Although you did not send an order, your guard might make inquiries, and so forth— In the circumstances, I think we must use you for a passport to the coast."

Ramos shrugged. "Oh, well, I must be philosophical; but if you are stopped, I might not be able to satisfy the soldiers. All are not fools."

"The risk is yours," said Nilson meaningly. "You are not a fool."

"There is another thing," Ramos went on. "You imagine your difficulties will vanish when you are at Santa Catalina. You do not think I might be an embarrassment at the town?"

"We do not know," said Welland. "We frankly want to know. In fact, if you could enlighten us, it might help us decide what to do with you."

Ramos gave him a baffling smile. "My business is in the forest, and I do not get much news. If I used my imagination and declared my friends occupied the town, you might doubt, and if it was not so when you got there, you might be annoyed. Then if I stated the other side was yet in power, you might expect some reward for me."

"You do not state whose side your friends support."

"One must use some discretion, señor."

"That is so," Welland agreed. "Well, if we take the cautious line, you cannot grumble. You might put him on board

Forgas's canoe, Jack."

They transferred Ramos, and the canoes forged ahead. For two or three days they did not stop. Speed was important, and the mangrove swamps where salt water flowed were not far off. When the heat got intolerable, the crews divided the siesta, and half languidly swung the paddles while their comrades slept. At night watch was kept, and, steered by poles, the canoes drifted on.

Then, before the mist rolled away one morning, smoke floated about the trees, and Welland ordered Ramos on board his dugout. The creek was obviously blockaded, but if they could pass the post, he imagined they would soon reach the lagoons, where nobody on foot could follow them.

"You know your part. When the soldiers challenge us you will reply," he said.

His leg was worse. To move hurt, and he was satisfied to throw back the mosquito-net hanging from the thatch. The mist had begun to melt and he saw a branch hut and three or four soldiers on the bank. Huysler, sitting by Ramos, gave him a cigarette and a light; Forgas, behind the fellow, rested his arm against his back. Huysler hoped they looked like a careless, friendly group. Yet his heart beat. A shout from Ramos would banish the illusion; and then Forgas would use his knife. The suspense was tormenting.

A short, dark-skinned soldier challenged. Two or three more ran to the bank. The canoes were fifty yards off, and the noisy paddles slowed.

Ramos replied. It looked as if the soldier knew him, for he saluted clumsily.

"Move the boom and let us go," Ramos resumed.

A puff of hot wind shook the leaves and the mist got thin. Two men began to pull a log to the bank. The sentry waited, and Huysler remarked another, nearly opposite him, at the water's edge. In a sense, he mechanically noted the man, for he had concentrated on Ramos's reply. A hoarse note or a shake in his voice might excite suspicion. Ramos's voice was level, but Huysler began to think the nearest soldier's look was puzzled. For a moment he studied the dusky face; and then he turned his head. Forgas was behind Ramos, Welland was under the awning, and Nilson could not see. The brute gesticulated; since he dared not shout a warning, he tried to signal.

In a moment or two the creek would be open, and Huysler thought the dull, half-breed soldier did not yet see a light. Jack's boot touched Forgas's leg, and the rancher's knife pricked the other's back. Ramos took the warning and shouted the soldiers that he did not like to wait. Huysler watched the fellow opposite, but so far as he could distinguish, he had ceased to speculate about the officer's grimace. Then the log rolled against the bank, the paddles thudded and the canoes lurched ahead. The way to the sea was open, but Huysler's mouth was parched.

When the camp melted into the jungle he narrated Ramos's treachery.

"If the fellow on the bank had had a school-boy's intelligence, he'd have understood," he said. "However, I did not see a canoe about and I expect the post is the last. Well, I reckon we have cheated the gang, but I cannot stand for our keeping the swine on board."

"As soon as I think it safe, we'll land him," Welland said.

The sun did not pierce the clouds, and all day they paddled fast. In the afternoon the big cottonwoods vanished and small tangled jungle rolled along the bank. When the light began to go the lagoons were obviously not far ahead, and Welland stopped the paddlers opposite a sandy point. Nilson and Huysler went on board the porters' canoe, and when Ramos watched Nilson feel his way along the dugout he shivered.

"You tried to cheat," said Huysler in English. "I reckon you have some grounds to be thankful your man was a fool. Anyhow, we have had enough."

He threw a machete and some food onto the sand, four or five yards away, and resumed: "If the jungle is thick, you can chop a path. To sweat and tear your uniform will not hurt you much."

Ramos knew some English and the blood leaped to his skin. Baffled and humiliated by a boy he had thought his victim, fury at length carried him away, and he rashly translated a Castilian insult.

"How far is the bank?" Nilson asked in a quiet voice.

Huysler told him, and Nilson, seizing Ramos, swung him from his feet. The dugout rocked, water splashed, and Don Martin was in the creek. When, shrieking Castilian curses, he floundered up the bank the negroes' laughter drowned the thud of paddles and the canoes went ahead.

In the morning they moored for breakfast by a mangrove's slimy roots. Black slime choked the channels between the trees, and Huysler doubted if a monkey could follow the canoes by land. For some time the current had not helped them, and now it began sluggishly to run the other way. When he put his wet hand across his face, the water smelt salt.

"Tide-water!" he said. "We have made it. Freedom's in front!"

THE LANDING PARTY

Captain Grant, on the *Shenandoah's* slanting bridge, put up his glasses. The low coast to starboard was indistinct, but he had got a bearing and reckoned he knew where he was. Moreover, his calculations and the depths the leadsman called agreed. Dark clouds floated across the sky, and the last of the tropical deluge drained from the yacht's scuppers; the wind was light, but the lead-colored sea rolled with a long and ominous heave.

Grant frowned and hoped his passengers would not be obstinate. Anyhow, he was going to be firm; he was accountable for his ship and the owner was not on board. In fact, before sunset he was going to start for Kingston or Havana; the option was the passengers'. Captain Grant argued like that. His mouth was firm, his glance was keen, and his brain worked with a sort of snap.

Some caution was justified. The engineers imagined small shellfish blocked the inlet valves below the water-line, and the vacuum in the condenser was bad. Then, when a savage Norther swept the Central American coast, they had lost an anchor and cable, and while the yacht fought the gale her racing propeller had broken a gland in the stern tube. Water leaked into the tunnel, and her best speed was six or seven knots an hour.

Now the barometer was falling, the low coast was dangerous, and when the rains began, tornadoes accompanied the tropical thunder storms. Captain Grant went down the bridge ladder and joined the group on deck. The yachting party he had carried from New York had scattered; some had landed for tarpon fishing, and some were at the fashionable resorts in Florida. Mrs. Folsom, Helen Whitney, Adela Carthew, and Marcus Platting, however, occupied canvas chairs under the wet awning.

Mrs. Folsom was the sister of the Huysler Company's president: a kind, cultivated woman, although one sensed the energy and firmness she had inherited from two generations of American manufacturers. Her hair was going white, but she carried herself like a girl. Platting was a rather elderly invalid, something of a scholar, and a student of ancient art. For all that, his friends admitted his social charm, and when his sciatica did not bother him he was philosophically humorous.

Mrs. Folsom heard the captain's step and looked up.

"We ought to make the Catalina lagoon about three o'clock," said Grant. "I can send a boat across the bar, but if Mr. Huysler's party is not on the wharf, I cannot wait."

Platting nodded. "Yes; you must think about the yacht. You want to steer for Kingston?"

"Havana, if you like. So long as I think the program safe I take your orders; but I must make a port where I can buy a cable and the engineers can refit. They reckon we might get back in about two weeks."

"It's awkward," said Platting. "We engaged to pick up the boys and they will expect to find us there. Then I think they ought not to wait for a ship. The news we got at Vera Cruz was disturbing. In a Central American state, a political crisis generally ends in a murderous revolution."

"My engagement stands," said Helen Whitney. "The revolutionaries dare not meddle with United States citizens."

"I imagine the *dagos* would be willing to leave Americans alone; but it's possible to get entangled in a fight," Platting rejoined. "However, we do not know if there is a fight, and one understands the President's supporters are stanch and powerful."

"At three o'clock I'll lower a boat," said Grant. "My notion is, the ladies ought to stay on board, but my job's to sail the yacht. Maybe you and Mrs. Folsom would like to talk about it, sir."

He went off and Marcus Platting smiled.

"Grant is a model captain; he concentrates, efficiently, on his proper business. On the whole, however, I think his notion good."

"I am your guest, and I oughtn't perhaps to persuade you—" said Adela, and stopped with a touch of embarrassment.

"You are our friend," said Mrs. Folsom. "Go on, my dear."

"Very well," said Adela shyly, "I would sooner land. When, after a long journey, you expect your friends to meet you, it hurts to find they are not there. Then, while we were cruising about the West Indies and dancing at Florida hotels, they were in the jungle. And sometimes I'm bothered. My father is leader, and since they started we have got no news."

"Almirez, their agent, knew nothing about them, and did not reply to my last letter," Platting remarked in a thoughtful voice, and turned to Mrs. Folsom. "When one is young, adventure calls, and it looks as if Helen and Adela don't approve my caution. Well, the chairman's vote is yours, and I reckon on your support. If you land, you might be forced to wait for some time at a dreary, and probably very dirty, *dago* town. Mules stabled next to the hotel kitchen, *garbanzos* and garlic for dinner, and so forth. One perhaps ought not to speculate about the beds. You are a fastidious American. I doubt if you could stand it."

Mrs. Folsom laughed. "My hair is white, Marcus, but I think my heart is young, and not very long since your folk and mine were roughneck pioneers. Then, when one thinks about it, safety first is not a very noble rule. My vote is for the opposition."

"We know your pluck," Platting rejoined. "Well, I am not much of a protector, but if you are resolved to land, to stop on board would hurt my vanity. Then, although my body is infirm, I hope my judgment's sound, and you might need prudent advice."

"I think we ought to go without. When one is ill, small discomforts jar, and you probably do not exaggerate about the *fonda*. I expect the house is hot, and the service rudimentary."

"Then, if I'm not philosophical, you must be indulgent. Besides, if we are forced to wait, to soothe a cranky valetudinarian would be an occupation."

"You are a good sort, Marcus," said Mrs. Folsom and signaled the captain. "We will land at Santa Catalina. You will come back for us as soon as possible."

"At three o'clock the boat will be at the ladder, ma'am," said Grant. "When she is hoisted in we start for Havana, and I'll engage to hustle the engineers."

He climbed to his bridge, Mrs. Folsom and Marcus crossed the deck, and Helen Whitney remarked his cautious step.

"They are first-class sports and perhaps I'm shabby, but Jack reckons on my being there and I'd hate to let him down," she said. "But for me, I doubt if he'd have bothered about the gum. You have not my grounds for going, but I expect you are keen to see your father."

"He is all I've got," said Adela Carthew.

Helen calmly studied her. She herself was strongly built, tall and frank, and sometimes imperious. Adela was light and short, and rather delicately attractive than beautiful. Yet she was attractive and thoroughbred.

"That is perhaps strange!" she remarked.

"We are poor, and when you are poor you haven't many friends. Besides, I was at an English school, and when I joined Father in Belgium the girls I knew forgot me. The aunt with whom I sometimes stopped is dead—"

"I was thinking about lovers. The strange thing is somebody has not carried you off."

For a moment or two Adela looked straight in front, and although she smiled a touch of color stained her skin.

"In France and Belgium, a young man expects a dowry, and Father did not like *les aristocrats de la boutique*: they were rather greedy, boastful people. Then I haven't the qualities that might help a young officer's career— Besides, none much attracted me."

"You are another sort of aristocrat, and I dare say it explains your fastidiousness," Helen replied with a twinkle.

"Anyhow, when we were in Florida you had a chance to study our American gilded youth. Two or three pretty good

samples were rather obviously interested. Didn't you like them?"

"All were kind," said Adela in a thoughtful voice. "One felt they really wanted one to be happy; but their extravagance was bewildering and I could not use their rules. To use all one's effort to invent fresh amusements that got stale before you could enjoy them would be like a feverish nightmare, and I could not keep it up. Sometimes I felt the speed was frantic."

Helen laughed. "Oh, well, we have begun to cultivate a rather frantic social type. To keep the pace the erotic ambitious hit implies some staying power, and a number break. For a few weeks now and then, one may let oneself go and not get much hurt; but, after all, social extravagance is not typically American. To build and control our railroads, factories, and trade is a strenuous job, and that, for the most part, we are willing to labor and concentrate is pretty obvious. A nation cannot live by jazz. And I'd sooner my lover searched the *caliente* swamps in the scorching heat than loafed about cabarets and fashionable country clubs."

"He was keen to go, and Father liked him," said Adela with a touch of hesitation. "Father was an officer, and he knows men. I think he saw Jack had qualities he had perhaps not yet tried to use—"

"You are keen. Well, I dare say you have sometimes pictured a model lover. To know the qualities you approve might be interesting."

"I wonder—" said Adela shyly, and knitted her brows. "One likes sober steadfastness; I don't know the proper word, but a man ought to be resolute and know where he steers. Youth is not very important; sometimes a boy is selfish because he does not understand—as a rule, he cannot make allowances. One likes balance and a touch of humorous reserve. A man who knows much is not keen to dispute. He would sooner indulge you—"

Helen began to see a light. Adela unconsciously drew a portrait, and Helen thought she knew her model.

"You are fastidious, my dear; but to some extent your father might meet the stipulations. I suppose you were picturing him?"

"I was not," said Adela, and stopping with some embarrassment resumed: "You wanted to know the qualities I approve."

"That is so," Helen agreed. "Well, Jack is young, but he is not selfish, and I imagine one soon gets sober in the jungle. At all events, I undertook to meet him, and since we start at three o'clock, I think I'll pack my trunk."

They went to the cabins, and at three o'clock the *Shenandoah's* engines stopped. The motor-launch was hoisted out and Captain Grant at the gangway shut his glasses. The afternoon was rather ominously calm, and the coast was indistinct, but the dull sea heaved and a streak of tossing white marked the bar. Dark, torn clouds floated about the mangroves and sometimes lightning flashed.

"If you are resolved to go, ma'am, we must land you before the surf is bad," the captain said to Mrs. Folsom. "When your trunks are on the wharf the cox'n will shove off. If a tornado breaks, we'd be bothered to hoist in the boat."

For a moment Mrs. Folsom hesitated; and then Helen went to the ladder.

"Come on," she said. "Captain Grant must think for his ship, and when the storm breaks I want to be at the *fonda*."

They went on board and the launch engine throbbed. The bow man pushed off and Grant lifted his cap.

"In two weeks, at longest, we'll be back for you."

The little screw beat faster and foam leaped at the bows. The launch's bubbling wake streaked the gray sea and when it no longer touched the yacht the group on board fixed their glance in front. Sometimes they saw torn thunder-clouds, mangroves, and tossing spray; sometimes a roller's oily back cut their view. Nobody talked. Mrs. Folsom wondered whether they had not started on a rash adventure. Marcus Plating was satisfied they had done so.

The spray in front got thicker, and the launch began to roll about. Water leaped on board; the little propeller was lifted from the foam and the engine rattled furiously, but they plunged across the turmoil into the lagoon. Greasy water lapped the mud banks and gurgled in the mangrove roots. Small flat-topped houses stretched back from a broken mole, the engine stopped, and the launch was at the crumbling steps.

XXIII

DON MANUEL'S GUESTS

A blast of hot wind swept the lagoon and the greasy water broke in noisy ripples. The group on the mole smelt the jungle and hot, sour mud. Mrs. Folsom seized her hat, but the wind dropped and in the calm thunder crashed. Then a fresher gust tossed the mangroves and the launch jarred against the wall. Two sailors carried up the last large trunk, and the coxswain touched his cap.

"That's the lot, sir. If you don't want us, we must shove off."

Marcus Platting looked about. Santa Catalina was not an attractive spot. The sandy street was torn by wheels and the plaster crumbled from the wet housefronts. But for a few narrow windows, as a rule on the second floor, the walls were blank, and Marcus thought the architect's model was a Moorish fort.

Although he had expected the health and Port Captain's officers to interview him, nobody but a few half-breed peons seemed to be about, and he got a sense of dreariness and poverty. Across the street a mulatto clerk occupied the steps of the *fielato* hut where the town dues were collected, but that was all. Nothing, however, indicated political disturbance, and when Marcus studied his companions, Mrs. Folsom gave him an apologetic smile. She implied that they must indulge the girls, and Marcus admitted to turn back would be ridiculous. Yet before he sent off the boat he hesitated, and when the propeller throbbled his impulse was to call her back.

A ragged, dark-skinned fellow began to load the trunks on his mule-cart, and Marcus inquired if an American exploring party had recently arrived from the swamps. He knew Paris and had studied the famous Spanish cathedrals, and although his Castilian was not good, the *fielato* clerk knew some uncouth French, and stated that nobody had heard about the foreigners since they started. Then he asked where the muleteer must take the trunks.

"The *fonda Malagueña*," said Marcus, and touched Mrs. Folsom. "We might find out something at the agent's office. *La casa Almiraz, señor?*"

A peon pulled off his big hat. For a *quartito* he would guide the party, and they set off along the street behind the lumbering mule-cart. The cart stopped in front of a square, flat-topped building larger than the rest. The republican flag flew from a pole on the roof, and the half-breed vulgarly signified his contempt.

"*Bandera de los puercos!*" he remarked.

"*Puerco* is Castilian for hog; *bandera* is rather obvious," said Marcus in a thoughtful voice.

"*Si, señor,*" agreed the peon. "D—— porks' flag."

Marcus said nothing. The fellow was not a loyal citizen, and he began to think the town rather strangely quiet. Where a low window pierced a wall, the thick lattice shutters were bolted across, and the courtyard doors were fast. After a few minutes the guide stopped in front of a house. The Spanish coat-of-arms was on the wall, as if the occupant were consul, but the shutters were fixed.

"*La casa Almiraz!*" remarked the guide.

Marcus was getting tired. His sciatic leg would not carry him for long, and he beat angrily on the thick door. The door was not opened, and he turned to the guide.

"*N'il y a personne? No hay ninguno.* No sabe yet? Everybody's gone?"

"*Ya lo creo. Salidos todos.* They pull out las' week," the other replied.

Marcus did not feel humorous, but he laughed.

"Oh, well, the fellow's logical. We asked for the *house*."

He had no republican currency, but the peon was satisfied with an American coin and went with them to the hotel. When

he clapped his hands in the courtyard a large, fat man came down the outside stairs. His short black jacket did not meet across his chest, and although his white clothes were not remarkably clean an expensive silk sash was rolled about his ample waist. Where the ends were tucked, a Spanish knife rested on his hip. His shoes were glassy rawhide, his stockings thin cotton bandages rolled like puttees; he had no hat, and his black hair, shining with oil, curled about his bullet head. On the whole he was rather like a brigand in an opera.

"*Ave Maria!* T'ree lady!" he exclaimed.

"Our friends, Carthew and Huysler, stopped with you," said Marcus. "We expected to meet them here, but they have not arrived, and we hope you can find room for us."

The landlord bowed. "Your friends are friends of me, Manuel Blas, *su servidor de usted*. They are *muy caballero, tres gentils*; the boys are *buen mozo*, regular fellar. I like the bunch—" He spread out his arms theatrically, as if to indicate the dirty courtyard, the balconies, and the stained walls. "My house is yours, sir: the best wine, the best room, the mule in the stables, everyt'ing I got. But t'ree lady. *Ave Maria!* I call my señora."

Señora Blas came from the kitchen adjoining the stable. She was short and fat; her black clothes strained tight upon her bulky form, and her olive skin was thickly smeared with powder. For all that, Marcus thought her alert and, somehow, competent. Mrs. Folsom imagined her disturbed.

"Three ladies! Just now it might be awkward," she said in creole French and signed her husband commandingly. "To the roof, dull one, and see where is the boat."

Don Manuel went up the outside stairs, and for a large man his movements were strangely agile. When he vanished, the peon who had guided the party advanced.

"I bring you four rich guests. There is perhaps a bottle of caña for me?"

The landlady called a shabby servant man, and when he brought a bottle and a tray poured scented liquor into a little glass.

"It is aniseed. If you are an honest man, the bottle is yours."

Resting her hands on her firm hips, she smiled, a menacing smile. Marcus thought her rather like Madame Defarge, and although her Castilian baffled him, *Veremos a ver* was perhaps, Let us see. Madame experimented; since Marcus heard *El Presidente*, it looked as if she proposed a loyal toast.

The peon seized the glass; he tried to seize the bottle, but Señora Blas intervened.

"*El Presidente en infierno*—" he said, and drained the glass.

"*Fuera, anarquista!*" shouted Don Manuel, and jumped from the steps.

He had perhaps tried to pull his knife, for the end of his long sash swung about his legs, and, treading on the silk, he plunged into the wall. The peon threw the glass and fled. Then it looked as if Don Manuel remembered his errand.

"*Sale el bote*. The steamer is smoke. When the boat comes she go."

Señora Blas shrugged.

"It is a misfortune," she said to Mrs. Folsom in French. "However, since you must stop, I think you are safe with us. My husband, like the others, is stupid but of a stupidity; but his heart is good." She signed him imperiously. "Dinner must soon be served. Occupy thyself."

Then she rather ordered than invited the ladies to follow her up the steps, and when they vanished Don Manuel gave Marcus an apologetic grin.

"Another time we take a little glass; but when my señora says so, I get busy."

Marcus sat down on an old stone bench. A gallery, on which doors and windows opened, went round the *patio*, for the plan of the house was a hollow square and the windows in the outside walls were high up and small. The *fonda* was old,

but Marcus thought the building strong and the hardwood door of the tunnel to the street was two or three inches thick. At the patio end was a beautifully forged but rusty iron grille. On the flat roof the Republican flag snapped in the hot wind. On the whole, Marcus thought the *fonda* safe against attack by rioters, and the landlord and his señora were obviously staunch constitutionalists.

For all that, he felt his allowing the party to land was rash. The yacht was gone and would not be back for two weeks; Don Manuel seemed to think the town disturbed, and if a revolution did break out, Marcus admitted he was not much of a protector. In fact, for eight or nine years he had been more or less a cripple, and his main occupation was contemplative study.

Then he was bothered about the explorers. The boys were fine boys, and Marcus was Huysler's friend. A recent letter indicated that he began to be anxious for his son. Marcus, as soon as possible, must try to get some news. After a time his landlord crossed the *patio*. He carried a bottle and two small glass *copitas*, which he filled with perfumed liquor.

"In America you take the cocktail before you dine. Just now we have not the proper stuff. Comes a Mobile *commercialista* who drink the lot. But this is *buena cosa*, first-class hootch. *Brindamos* the friends we love."

Marcus smiled and drained the glass. The liquor was good and he began to like his rather theatrical host.

"In America, cocktails are now less numerous, and those one gets are not first-class— But I went to see if I could find out something about my friends from their agent. His house was shut."

"That is so," Don Manuel agreed. "Don Pancho hates the President, but he not know who will win, and to sit on the fence for a long time is not comfortable. When the Galdos gang tell him get busy, he make the quit."

"Then the Catalina citizens have not yet fixed their side?"

"They wait. If Galdos arrives with an army, they are *libertadores*; if President Vallon gets there first, they are constitutional patriots. It is puzzling for them, señor. In the *templadas* there is fighting, but that is all one knows."

"But do you think the revolutionaries would meddle with an American exploring party?"

Don Manuel knit his brows. "Señor, I do not know. In this country the politic is complicate. All politicians are bad, but when they are *anarquistas* they are worse. Well, if Galdos think he win, I guess your friends is left alone; if he is beat, I doubt— One is afraid of the big stick, but when it looks as if the other fella get the smack one is brave."

Marcus thought he reasoned shrewdly. Carthew carried President Vallon's protection, but a rebel leader, knowing himself defeated, might be willing to entangle his victorious antagonist in a dispute with the United States Government. After all, the expedition was American, and old man Huysler was influential. In the meantime, Marcus thought there was not much use in speculating.

"You do not sit on the fence," he said, and indicated the flag.

"I am not a politician," Don Manuel rejoined. "When the Government is firm I keep my *fonda*, I pay my tax, and I am left alone. That is all an honest man wants. But you will take another little glass?"

Marcus agreed and Don Manuel lifted his *copita*.

"*Brindo el Presidente Vallon!* The man who is not afraid to rule. So long as he is boss, I can work and sleep. *Mi fonda, mi señora*, and the mule team is mine."

"After all, that is something," Marcus approved. "To see useful citizens enjoy the reward for their labor is perhaps a Government's most important business."

Don Manuel looked about. All was quiet in the *patio*, and he once more filled his glass.

"The flag and peace! To h—— with all cranks and anarchists!"

"Manuelito! Must I wait for the lazy mule?" somebody inquired.

The landlord pushed the bottle under the bench.

"My señora calls. Me I go," he said and went.



XXIV

MARIQUITA

Torrential rain had washed the street, and the air that blew about the *salon* on the first floor was fresh. On the flat roof the sun was insupportably hot, pools sparkled in the *patio*, and Señora Blas had warned her guests not to walk about the town.

Marcus and Mrs. Folsom were not keen to do so. Marcus could not walk much, and the calm that brooded over Santa Catalina rather daunted him. He sensed a sort of tension, as if a storm rolled up behind the calm and soon might break. Little groups stole through the arch under the *fonda*, and sometimes a splashed and muddy messenger got down from his mule. Sometimes excited voices echoed in the passages, and then all one heard was the swarming flies.

Yet one could not get away, and if it were possible, Marcus doubted if you could persuade Helen and Miss Carthew to start. For the most part, communication with Santa Catalina was by sea, but the coasting steamers that sometimes touched at the port had stopped running, and although one or two motor-launches lay in the mud, in the tornado season a voyage along the inhospitable, mangrove-bordered coast was rash. One or two adventurous citizens owned automobiles, but when the rains began the *carretera* to the frontier melted. Moreover, the landlord declared the road was watched by half-breed brigands, for whom the rebellion was an excuse for robbery.

In the meantime, to see Don Manuel was not much disturbed was some comfort. The Republican flag yet floated on the roof, and since the party must wait, the *fonda Malagueña* was as good a spot as another. Marcus hoped he was logical. If one wanted the amenities and security civilization supplied, one must stop where they could be bought. The girls did not grumble. Marcus thought the heat and discomfort hardly bothered them, but he was sorry for Mrs. Folsom.

A narrow window opened to a balcony above the street, and a sunbeam sparkled on the stained wall. The larger window at the back commanded the *patio*, and one smelt garlic, burned oil, and the queer musky smell that pervades old Spanish towns.

Mrs. Folsom wrote a letter. Marcus had bought some stamps at a baker's shop, but the baker stated that letters might wait until the *correo* officers knew which President's head the stamps ought to carry. Moreover, one could not telegraph, because the wires were cut. Helen Whitney and Adela talked in low voices at the other end of the spacious room. Marcus himself occupied an easy-chair by the *patio* window. By and by the door opened and he got up, for the landlady ceremoniously showed in two visitors.

Señora Viñoles y Reina was large and generously powdered, but she carried herself well. Her dress was sober black and she wore the old-fashioned Spanish mantilla. Señorita Mariquita Viñoles was small and light, and moved with a touch of distinctive grace. Her clothes were in the recent fashion, and Marcus thought the straw-colored material harmonized with her black eyes and hair and warm olive skin. Although she was not at all the Northern type, he admitted Mariquita was an attractive girl.

When the landlady went off the party formed two groups: Señora Viñoles, Mrs. Folsom and Marcus; Mariquita, Adela, and Helen across the floor. The señora began to talk in easy French.

"Some time since, we met a friend of yours, Monsieur Nilson. It accounts for our visit, as you perhaps understand. In Spain—and we are *Peninsulares*—one offers one's friends one's house, but my husband is away on the President's business and perhaps you are safer at the *fonda*."

Marcus did not understand and he saw Mrs. Folsom was puzzled; but she replied politely, and he imagined Miss Viñoles would enlighten the girls.

"I am Mariquita," she said. "You know about me?"

It looked as if they did not, but their interest was obvious.

"We got but two letters since our friends landed," Helen replied.

"Ah," said Mariquita, "I got but one, in pencil, which the peons carried back from the swamps. A dear letter, but

sometimes when I study it I smile. I do not know English, and Olaf's mixed French and Castilian is not very good."

"Then Olaf Nilson wrote to you?" said Helen, and hoped her voice was level.

Mariquita blushed, but she met the other's searching glance.

"I do not know your word, and I like ours better than the French. Olaf is *mi novio*."

Marcus saw a light, and he imagined Helen did so, for her brows were knit. To reply was her business and he was glad it was not his.

"You imply that you are going to marry him?" she said.

Señora Viñoles looked up, as if Helen's frankness jarred.

"The child is young," she remarked in an indulgent voice. "When one is young one is not discreet, and perhaps she talks rashly." She turned to Marcus. "Yet, since I suppose you are Monsieur Nilson's relation—"

Marcus thought Señora Viñoles willing to satisfy their curiosity. To satisfy hers was perhaps the real object for her visit, although, but for her daughter's statement, she might first have talked politely about something else.

"We are not Nilson's relations. I believe they are not numerous, but since we claim to be his friends we are interested."

"Nothing is fixed," Señora Viñoles resumed, studying Mrs. Folsom, whose look was rather inscrutable. "When the expedition started Monsieur Nilson asked if he might make some proposals when he is back. We are willing for him to do so, but that is all. In Spain one first negotiates with the head of the young man's family. Much must be weighed, and sometimes one sees obstacles—"

"You cannot negotiate with Olaf's family. His father and mother are dead," Mrs. Folsom rejoined. "He, however, is American, with a typical American's point of view and rules. Your daughter, I suppose, springs from good Spanish stock."

"I and her father are *Peninsulares*, of Andalusia."

"There, perhaps, is an obstacle," Mrs. Folsom remarked.

Marcus turned his head and smiled. He knew Constance Folsom and rather sympathized. Yet the señora was entitled to make some inquiries.

"Olaf is a young man of first-class character and education. In Spain, I believe education implies rather more than scholarship," he said. "Then I believe he is able to support a wife."

"It is important," Señora Viñoles agreed.

Mariquita turned and the blood came to her skin.

"It is not important. Although I am a *Peninsular*, my *novio* is American. He does not negotiate, like a shopkeeper, for a wife, and the rules the Moors used in Spain are now out of date. Me, I do not care at all if my husband is rich!"

Mrs. Folsom's eyes twinkled and Marcus smiled. Although Mariquita was theatrical, her sincerity was obvious. Señora Viñoles' program had not gone as she planned; Mariquita's remark about her *novio*, so to speak, had stampeded Madame. Yet the girl was thoroughbred, and Madame carried a touch of old-fashioned dignity. She had tried to use the rules she knew.

"Oh, well," said Marcus, "in America youth is joyously rebellious, and although I, myself, am old and sober, I sympathize. After all, romantic generosity may carry one farther than selfish calculation. One must make allowance for *sangre encarnado—jeunesse aux sangue rouge*—I don't get the proper phrase. Adela, see me out."

"We will let it go. You are a dear old sport," Helen Whitney remarked.

"But all blood is red," said Señora Viñoles, in a puzzled voice.

"I believe that is so," Marcus agreed politely. "At all events, a good Republican must not admit that some is blue—"

He stopped and the others got up. A clamor began at the Café Bolivar, farther along the street, and the group, hearing horses' feet in the wet sand, went to the balcony window.

The animals' legs were crusted with mud, and where the stirrup leathers rubbed, their sides were white. The horsemen's white clothes were soiled and ragged, and their look was hard. Marcus thought them a ruffianly lot, but they carried good modern rifles. In all they were about two dozen, and a triumphant shouting marked their arrival. When they vanished, a crowd from the café swarmed along the street and hooted Don Manuel's flag.

"Rebels?" said Marcus. "I suppose the other lot are carrying the good news?"

Señora Viñoles turned from the window. Her look was scornful and Marcus knew she was not afraid.

"*Canalla. Ladrones sin vergüenza. Sales sans-culotte!* But they make nothing. It will soon rain, and the patriots do not like water. Well, we must go. My husband is away, but if there is a tumult I am at the *casa Viñoles*."

"With Madame's permission," said Marcus, getting his stick and hat.

"But for you to walk is awkward. Then you are a foreigner, and the *sans-culottes* do not like the *Gringos*."

"I am your servant," said Marcus in Castilian. "Then an old fellow's infirmity is his protection."

"In Santa Catalina he might be rash to trust it," said Señora Viñoles and tapped him with her fan. "All the same, you are *muy caballero*, and you may go with me."

They went down the steps and along the tunnel; Señora Viñoles and her daughter carelessly, but when they crossed the street Marcus glanced sharply about. Groups stopped to watch them pass and some shouted insults, but nobody meddled. At length the thick door of the *casa Viñoles* was opened for Marcus's companions. They thanked him and he turned to front the gathering crowd.

His heart beat, but he must not hesitate, and he saw Don Manuel and two or three more in the *fonda* arch. Going as carelessly as his leg allowed, he crossed the street, and when a stone crashed against the wall he was at the door. Somebody pulled him into the arch and the door swung back.

"Your leg is weak, but your heart is good," Don Manuel remarked.

THE DEMONSTRATION

Two days after Señora Viñoles' visit, she and Mariquita one morning crossed the street. At the *fonda Malagueña* breakfast was served about ten o'clock, and Marcus and Mrs. Folsom waited on the small balcony. A servant in front of the ladies carried two large, old-fashioned portmanteaux and, putting down his load at the door, went off as fast as possible. The señora and Mariquita waited for the door to open.

"It looks as if Madame meant to stop," Marcus remarked.

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Folsom, "although I certainly did not invite her, the *fonda* is not ours."

"That is so. Our landlady is competent, as far as she knows, but one can picture the startling innovations that would mark your taking control. For example, I imagine our ten o'clock breakfast would be served at ten o'clock. Well, in Central America I suppose one must learn to wait— And I do not think you have yet stated your views about Olaf's romantic experiment."

"To begin with, it is not an experiment. The boy is not a philanderer; the girl's a Catholic."

"If they marry, they must see it out? I don't know if one ought to feel that there's the trouble; but our easier code has some advantages. Yet she's thoroughbred."

"That's something," said Mrs. Folsom. "I'm a Nordic American and I suppose I have some prejudices, but I'm not very much of a democrat. Then the girl's charm is marked, and Helen likes her. Helen stands for the new school, but she's shrewd."

"She is not at all a fool," Marcus agreed. "In spite of their extravagance and their firm conviction that the world was made for them, I think the young folks a braver, finer and more generous lot than we are—"

He saw Mrs. Folsom's smile, and resumed: "I was thinking about their *fathers*, but I did not know Nilson's, and I own it's some relief. One hates to feel one might be made accountable, particularly when one does not see one's line. Then, if I must be frank, I have fallen for Mariquita, and my ridiculous impulse is to tell the boy to see it through."

Mrs. Folsom laughed. "You are an old-fashioned romantic, Marcus. Helen declares you are a sport, and perhaps you ought to be flattered."

"Is romance altogether old-fashioned?" Marcus inquired.

"Let's be practical. I do not imagine Olaf will ask for advice, and when you do not see your line, the proper plan is to leave things alone."

Steps echoed along the *patio* balcony, and Señora Viñoles, Mariquita, Helen and Adela came in. Marcus waited. When the proper compliments were exchanged, the señora, no doubt, would get down to business.

"If I embarrass you, I am sorry, but the muleteers and townspeople use Don Manuel's other room," she said.

Mrs. Folsom declared the room was the señora's and she hoped she would join them for breakfast.

"It is for my daughter's sake I am at the *fonda*," Señora Viñoles resumed. "We are constitutionalists, and now my husband is not at home, it seems the liberators have fixed for a patriotic demonstration in front of our house. They will probably break the furniture they cannot remove, and my servants refuse to stay."

Somebody knocked and Marcus saw Don Manuel at the door. Behind him the landlady balanced a large tray.

"The señora's luggage is in Number Three," he said. "It is the best room at the *fonda*, and in any case, we have not another."

"Large mule!" his wife remarked, "if you will move yourself, I can carry the breakfast."

Don Manuel was not embarrassed, and he advanced with a friendly smile.

"There is perhaps some food at your house, señora?"

"There is not much food, and none that will keep for long. The liquor is hidden, but for one jar. But the liberators will soon arrive and they do not like your flag. At Santa Catalina liberty implies freedom to carry off other people's goods."

"It is so. All revolutionaries are brigands," Don Manuel agreed, and turned to his wife. "If they break into my *fonda*, we will make them a feast. But such a feast, my little one!"

The landlady's smile was grim, and Marcus thought her strangely like Madame Defarge.

"Breakfast with the Borgias!" he remarked with a twinkle.

It looked as if Señora Viñoles understood.

"Not at the *casa Viñoles*," she said soberly. "One does not use poison, but in the circumstances one is perhaps allowed to *medicate* the liquor."

Marcus turned his head. Madame was not at all humorous, and he must be polite. Well, he was a bachelor, but he admitted he would sooner not annoy a vindictive woman. The landlord, however, laughed, a boisterous, full-throated laugh.

"*V'la la belle chose. Muy buena cosa!*" he shouted, and went noisily down the stairs.

"Now the mule is gone, I will serve breakfast," his wife remarked calmly.

All perhaps were anxious, but breakfast was a cheerful function. Marcus thought his line was to be humorous, and the others played up. Moreover, he saw Mariquita and the girls were friends, and since he speculated about Nilson's romantic plunge, that was something. Mariquita certainly was not daunted. When she talked about the rebels one sensed a sort of indulgent scorn. The girl was unconsciously an aristocrat. Although she was not afraid, she did not want to be revenged on the *cañalla*.

Not long after breakfast, hoarse shouts and noisy laughter marked the mob's advance, and Marcus went to the window commanding the *patio* before he joined the group at the other behind the front balcony.

"The demonstration is obviously about to begin, but Don Manuel's door is thick, and he has collected about a dozen rather tough-looking loyalists," he said.

He politely pushed Helen from the window and drew the lattice shutter some distance across. The women were, no doubt, resolved to see, but there was no use in being conspicuous. A noisy crowd followed a mule-cart along the street. A cart was a convenient platform for a mob orator, but Marcus wondered why two mules were required. The procession stopped in front of the Café Bolívar and an uproar indicated that a dispute began. Marcus gave Señora Viñoles an inquiring glance.

"I thought the Bolívar the fellows' headquarters. In France and Spain a wine-shop is the small politicians' club."

Señora Viñoles gave him a dry smile.

"Where men drink and talk, mischief broods, and patriots are thirsty; but if one must pay for one's liquor, freedom is not much use."

For a minute or two the crowd smashed the chairs and little tables on the pavement and flung the wreckage into the café. Some carried out bottles and flasks, but one mounted the cart and his impassioned speech seemed to stop the plunder. Then he started the mules, and the procession forged ahead.

The group by the window were quiet, and Marcus's heart beat. He was a crippled invalid, the others were women, and the voice of the mob was frankly daunting. He had heard something like it before, when Polish strikers fronted the police in an American city, and he pictured the ambulances taking up their load. But he must not dwell on things like that; for the women's sake, his part was the rather amused spectator. Marcus hoped he could play up.

When he studied his companions, however, he imagined they did not need his support. Madame and Mrs. Folsom talked calmly. The girls were obviously interested and Mariquita's eyes sparkled, but so far as Marcus could see, nothing indicated that they were alarmed. Young women had perhaps begun to cultivate the poker-face, and the rules Marcus knew were out of date. Yet Madame and Constance Folsom belonged to his generation.

The mules stopped in front of the *fonda*, and the gentleman in the cart shouted commandingly. Although his skin was dark, his shirt was white and his clothes and hat were good. A clerk with political ambitions, perhaps; Marcus did not like the type.

A voice like a bull's voice replied from the roof. Marcus heard *Hijos de putas*—and knew Don Manuel was not fastidious. Stones rattled on the shutters, and a shouting group rushed for the *patio* door. Water splashed, a sandbag plunged from the roof, and the crowd rolled back.

The gentleman in the cart apparently urged the mob ahead. It looked as if nobody carried a gun, and after some shouting the procession re-formed and followed the cart along the street.

"Why did they hoot the Republican flag?" Helen inquired in English.

"I don't know much about America, but in England and some European countries, the old-fashioned political parties claim the flag and all it stands for are theirs. If you do not think as they think, you cannot be a patriot," Adela replied.

Marcus doubted if the girls were interested. Helen's face was the poker-face, and Miss Carthew's voice was not as careless as she perhaps thought. Well, he liked their pluck.

"The other school's argument is logical," he remarked. "Since the flag is the stand-patters' flag, the opposition does not owe it much respect. But where are the liberators going?"

Señora Viñoles looked up and Adela translated.

"They go to my house. Since they know my husband is not there, they are brave."

The mules stopped and the fellow in the cart began a fervid speech. His gestures were theatrical, he tossed his arms and beat his chest. The mob applauded rather indulgently, as if they agreed but would sooner get to work. Marcus felt he disliked the fellow and unconsciously he frowned.

"If the man annoys you, why do you stand in the window?" Mrs. Folsom inquired. "People are looking up, and you might attract some stones."

"I expect I felt we ought to show a careless front, but a mob-orator does annoy me," Marcus replied in an apologetic voice. "A prophet, particularly a young prophet, with a patent-medicine cure for all the state's evils, is obnoxious. Don't you feel like that?"

"I have done so. I don't know if I was justified."

"Perhaps you were not," said Helen. "After all, to dispute the old school's code implies some courage."

"I don't doubt the fellows' courage," Marcus rejoined. "One rather doubts their sense. Civilization is old and evolves slowly on intricate lines; but where students and philosophers laboriously weigh things, the mob orator *knows*. All you have got to do is to swallow his patent pill. Since you yourself are something of a philosopher, you feel his claim's ridiculous. In fact, you feel you'd like to throw a large stone at him—"

The speechmaker spread out his arms as if he triumphantly released dynamic force, and jumped down from the cart. The crowd rolled across the street and stones crashed on the *casa Viñoles* shutters. Another gang, carrying a beam, began to batter the door. A broken shutter plunged from the wall and the door swung back. The mob shouted, but hesitated. It looked as if they thought the quiet sinister, and nobody was keen to be first to enter the gloomy arch. A fresh volley of stones broke the shutters and six or seven fellows cautiously advanced.

"They are not rash," Señora Viñoles scornfully remarked.

After a few minutes, a shutter on the first floor was flung into the street, and Marcus admitted to see it fall on a liberator

was some satisfaction. Two men at the window signaled; the mob roared and pushed savagely into the house. One felt the arch's swallowing the struggling groups was strange. It looked as if they must choke the *patio* and solidly block the rooms.

Furniture, pictures and crockery plunged from the windows; in the *caliente* belt windows as a rule are not covered by glass. The stuff crashed on the pavement and grew into a pile; but by a sort of reflux stream pierced the pushing mob at the door. The men who shoved back the others were loaded, and Marcus saw why the demonstrators had brought two mules and a cart. The stuff thrown from the windows was large and awkward to carry off.

It looked as if some had found the doctored liquor, for they stormed and fought about the cart, and tried to pull off articles others threw on. The leader had vanished, and had perhaps gone to claim his share of the loot. Followed by contentious groups, the cart rolled off; a fire was lighted in the wreckage, and Marcus hoped the mob was satisfied. For the most part, they were half-breeds and mulattoes, and since they had begun to plunder they might not stop.

A stone crashed on the shutter, and when he stepped back another rolled into the room. He was, no doubt, a conspicuous target, and the next fellow's aim might be good. Then he thought the sky got gloomy and saw the sun was gone. Thunder crashed, a hot wind swept the street and tossed the bonfire's smoke. Then tremendous rain splashed the sand and ran down the walls. The crowd broke and melted; the rain drowned the beat of feet, and all one heard was the deluge on the roof. Marcus lighted a cigarette, but his hand shook. Señora Viñoles got up.

"It is done with. To-morrow some will be sick," she said. "Don Manuel must go for the wine I hid."

XXVI

THE EBB-TIDE

For two or three days the mob was quiet, but Don Manuel's guests were satisfied to take the air on the flat roof, and, when the sun was hot, in the shady balcony. Sometimes they heard excited shouts from the *plaza* up the street, and sometimes a stranger getting down from his mule was surrounded by pushing groups, but Don Manuel said the news was vague and not trustworthy. When something important happened he would know, and in the meantime the streets were not safe for foreigners.

Although Marcus's party kept to the *fonda*, they sensed the tension outside. One felt the citizens waited for the storm to break. Don Manuel imagined the most part did not yet know which side to choose, and wanted, if possible, to support the winner. He admitted it was awkward for them, particularly since some must pay for their hesitation when the President conquered.

The weather helped the queer strained calm. Revolutionary demonstrations melted away in the tropical rain, and after a few hours' steamy heat a fresh thunderstorm rolled across the town. The jungle roads were miry sloughs, and tornadoes swept the mangrove coast. Yet muddy, furtive strangers came and went, and little groups of sober men talked in low voices under the *Malagueña* courtyard balconies. Marcus remarked that the groups got larger after dark. Don Manuel was resolved to hold the fort, and apparently collected something like a garrison.

At length, when breakfast was over one morning, the landlord arrived with news. Two large canoes had come downstream in the morning mist, and ought soon to be at the mole. Although the canoes were paddled by negroes, Don Manuel's informant declared white men were on board.

Marcus got up as carelessly as possible, and gave the landlord a meaning glance.

"I will go to the landing and wait for the canoes. It's very possible the passengers are not our friends, and if all went, we might excite curiosity and be followed by a crowd."

Don Manuel took his cue. The *cañalla* hated foreigners and now were in control. The ladies would be insulted, and so forth; but Helen was already on her feet and Adela went for her hat.

"Your object is good, Marcus, but you signaled clumsily," Helen remarked. "Anyhow, I am going, and Adela means to join me."

It looked as if Mariquita were equally resolved, and Marcus imagined his objections would not carry much weight. Señora Viñoles rather obviously did not.

"A young woman of education does not run about the streets, and for her to meet her *novio* unless she is attended by a relation is something like a scandal," she declared. "I myself will not risk the mob's insults."

Marcus did not want Señora Viñoles' society, and although he could not stop the girls, he was resolved Mrs. Folsom should not go. Don Manuel supported him. The señoras, at all events, must keep to the *fonda*. A small party might be allowed to reach the mole; a procession certainly would not.

In three or four minutes, the group was in the street; Marcus between Adela and Helen; Don Manuel and Mariquita a few yards behind. In the background, five or six hefty fellows strolled along the pavement, and Marcus imagined the landlord had supplied something like a bodyguard. After the shady room at the *fonda*, the light reflected from the white and yellow walls was dazzling, and Marcus's leg hurt; the damp heat was bringing back his sciatica. He, however, must try to hide his limp and talk as if he were not at all disturbed. The girls concentrated on the joyous reunion with father and lover.

So far, nobody molested them, but swarthy loafers in dark arches turned their heads to watch the group, and *persiana* shutters were pushed back. The glances were not friendly, and sometimes a scowling peon spat on the pavement. Others gathered by twos and threes, and followed the group.

Clouds rolled across the sun, and when Marcus stopped at the mole the sky was dark. The sea-breeze had not begun to

blow and the greasy water was smooth as glass. Yet it moved, for the tide was falling and the current from the flooded swamps helped the ebb. Leaves and canes and yellow scum floated by, and near the point where the dreary mangroves thrust their roots into the stream, splashing ripples broke. A crowd had begun to gather, and Marcus steered the girls to a stack of dyewood where nobody was about.

For some time they waited. The sun had gone and the lagoon reflected the gloomy sky; the mangroves were blurred and indistinct. Talk languished and stopped; it looked as if the gloom and heat reacted on the girls, and Marcus knew himself highly strung.

At length, somebody shouted, and a long canoe, thatched amidship, swung round the point, and then another. Paddles splashed, dusky, naked bodies swung, and a man, balancing in the stern, pushed down a long pole. Marcus saw the man's skin was white and he thrilled triumphantly. In a few moments he knew the young fellow, and Helen Whitney, jumping on the dyewood, waved a colored scarf.

Jack, for a moment or two, stopped his pole and lifted his big sun-hat. Another white man occupied the bottom of the canoe; he fronted the mole, but he did not move. Marcus saw it was Nilson, and Mariquita studied him; she frowned, as if she were puzzled. Then Adela seized Marcus's arm.

"Huysler and Nilson!" she said. "Where are the others?"

Marcus wondered—He dared not admit that he was anxious, and he got up.

The tide ran strongly and the canoes came on fast, but Nilson was strangely quiet, and although Jack shouted, his shout was flat. The boys were not the keen young fellows who had happily started on the adventure. Then the negroes were tired; their paddles beat slackly, and the tide carried the cracked and battered canoes along.

In the meantime they steered for the landing, and when Marcus and his group advanced the crowd gave them room. Foreigners were not popular, but as a rule people in whom runs a vein of Spanish blood are marked by a keen sense of drama and an instinctive courtesy.

Somebody threw a rope. The first canoe shocked against the wall, and Huysler jumped for the broken, muddy steps. He was very thin, his clothes were ragged, and his skin was touched by yellow.

"All's well, Helen?" he asked.

"All's well, Jack," said Helen, and wondered why he stopped.

Huysler turned to the negroes. "You got the hammock, Washington? Come up after us. Now then, Olaf. Hold on to me!"

Nilson had got up. He took Huysler's hand, but when he was on the bottom step, his glance blankly swept the group at the top and passed. Somehow one knew he listened for a voice. Mariquita's pose was stiff and she clenched her hands. Marcus was conscious of strain.

"*Ciego! Ayudelo, el pobre!*" said a man in the crowd.

Marcus seized Mariquita; for her to plunge down the steps would embarrass Jack. Huysler touched Nilson, and a big dark-skinned man jumped on the step behind them. They went up cautiously, Nilson feeling for the wall. At the top he hesitated and turned his head, mechanically, backwards and forwards.

"*Ojala, mi carido—*" Mariquita gasped.

Nilson heard. He let go Huysler's hand and went forward. Mariquita pushed back Marcus, and with a choking cry was in Nilson's arms. Marcus thrilled. The girl was stanch and pity had conquered tradition. From the Spanish point of view, her publicly embracing her lover was scandalous, but the crowd was moved, and one heard sympathetic murmurs.

"*Buena niña! Los pobrecitos!*"

In the meantime Huysler gave his hand to Helen.

"I have another job, my dear. Welland needs some help."

Helen nodded, like a comrade, but her look was very gentle.

"Yes; you mustn't stop. So long as I know you're back—"

Huysler went down the steps and Welland crawled from under the thatch. Supporting himself by his stick, he seized Huysler's hand and balanced awkwardly on the greasy step. Huysler steadied him, and when they were at the top the dark-skinned fellow who had landed with Nilson helped him across the thick timber baulk. Welland leaned on his stick and got his breath, as if he had used some effort. His face was pinched and the lines were deep. For two or three minutes the landing had occupied Marcus's attention; now he was conscious that Adela pressed his arm.

"Huysler, Nilson, and Welland!" she said. "I don't see Father."

Marcus did not see Carthew. Nobody was under the awning, and two negroes carried a pole-hammock up the steps. Then it looked as if the crowd remarked that somebody was gone, for men began to push about the steps.

"*Habia quatro*," said one.

Another shoved him back. "*Todos estan en tierra. No hay mas—*"

Adela leaned against Marcus.

"There are no more! Father is not with them."

Helen Whitney left Huysler and joined the two.

"My dear, you must brace up. I am sorry I have bad news. Mr. Carthew is not on board—"

She stopped. Adela pulled her hand from Marcus's arm, and, pushing by, crossed the mole. Helen saw she went, as if instinctively, to Welland.

"Father's dead," she said. "You know all. He trusted you."

"Yes," said Welland quietly, giving her his hand. "He died some weeks since, in the jungle. Another time I will give up the message he wrote."

Washington and Bad Hat brought up the hammock and he got into it. Helen touched Adela and they started for the hotel. The swaying hammock went in front, Forgas steered Nilson, and Adela, saying nothing, walked by Marcus. Her skin was colorless and she looked straight in front. The negroes followed the quiet group, and behind them Don Manuel's bodyguard rolled along the street. Carthew was gone and Nilson was blind. Marcus felt as if he had joined a funeral procession.

To reach the *fonda* was some relief, and for a time Marcus was occupied. At the *Malagueña* bathtubs were not numerous, and fresh clothes must be got. At length all was supplied, and Marcus talked with Welland in the room they were to occupy. Welland's leg was swollen, but he could crawl about and Don Manuel had sent for a doctor. In the meantime he was content to lie in his string bed and narrate his adventures.

By and by Marcus went to the *salon*. But for Adela Carthew the others were there, and when he arrived Huysler was rather awkwardly telling his tale. Mariquita occupied a chair by Nilson's, as if she felt he needed her protection. Sometimes he turned his head, and she touched him gently to indicate that she was yet about. Sometimes he politely corrected Jack.

Señora Viñoles studied the young people. Her look was thoughtful and her mouth was tight; Marcus imagined she had got a knock. Since nobody at Santa Catalina was rich, she had, no doubt, been willing for Mariquita to make a good marriage; but to approve a blind *novio* was another thing. Yet it looked as if she knew she could not control her daughter. Marcus was sorry for Señora Viñoles; in the circumstances, he himself might hesitate. Mariquita, however, did not, and since he was not her relation, he liked her pluck.

By and by he heard Welland limp along the balcony, and he went to the door. Welland joined Miss Carthew at the other end and they engaged in quiet talk. In fact, Marcus thought they would sooner be left alone, and he went down the steps. Don Manuel might take a *copita* of vermouth. The day had been rather strenuous, and Marcus was getting old. Then the

swarthy fellow who helped Nilson along the street might be about, and for all he was something of a brigand, Marcus thought he liked Don Juan.

XXVII

ADELA'S TRUSTEE

Adela Carthew, on a bench at a corner of the balcony, brooded drearily. The others were in the *salon*, and sometimes she heard their voices. They had much to talk about, and she might embarrass them. Four of the group were reunited, and after all Mariquita had got back her lover and did not mean to let him go. Adela was sorry for Mariquita, but Nilson had come back.

In the meantime Adela felt she could not join the party. For her to do so might force them to sympathize with her. All were kind, but she must not disturb the lovers' reunion. Then she wanted to be alone. Somehow she must get back her courage. She was forlorn and broken by her loss, but she must begin to think for herself and look in front.

Welland's stick tapped the boards, and when she saw he steered for the bench the dreariness she had tried to conquer went. His awkwardness moved her to pity, and she fetched a chair. When she took his stick and gave him her hand he smiled, and his smile was comforting.

"Thanks," he said. "I expect I could have got into the chair, but when one's friends are kind one ought perhaps to indulge them. Then, until recently, to be helped was something fresh."

Steps echoed in the *patio* and Forgas, carrying a tray, stopped at the bottom of the steps.

"*Buena cosa las plumas de gallo!*"

Welland shook his head, and Don Juan, seeing Adela, bowed. His politeness jolted the tray; he seized a tottering bottle and went off.

"Hen's feathers?" Adela translated.

"Cock's tail," said Welland. "Don Juan is studying civilized habits and Nilson's his model. He's an operative swashbuckler, but a first-class sort."

Adela laughed. She had not thought to laugh for long, but Welland struck the proper note. His smile was very kind, and when it vanished his quiet look was steady.

"I expect you want to know about our misfortunes?" he said. "Helen Whitney has told you something. Can you bear to hear the rest?"

"I must know all," said Adela. "To wait might hurt worse."

Welland concentrated on Carthew; he did not want to talk about the gum crystal. The girl must see her father, as, for example, Nilson saw him; a man with a talent for leading, unselfish, and hiding firmness by urbanity; a wise commander, and at the end a hero. Welland thought his object good, but he must not exaggerate. He doubted his skill and Adela was not a fool. She, no doubt, knew no man was altogether heroic. Yet, if his picture of Carthew's last adventure were but accurate, it was something the girl might proudly keep.

"All were sick and two were crippled," he said. "Our ammunition and medicine were gone; we expected to be attacked and had but a few cartridges. Somebody must go for fresh supplies and Mr. Carthew went. The job was not his, but where the job was daunting he did not send another. After all, a leader's business is to lead, and he was entitled to argue that the need justified the risk."

Adela's head was bent, but she signed that she agreed.

"Yes; he hated shabbiness, and I think he never was afraid. Then, since all were sick, he was forced to go."

"He went for us. Until the morning we did not know he was gone. Then Nilson and Forgas started. Olaf was shaken by fever, and Don Juan could not use his arm."

"But they were too late," said Adela, in a choked voice.

For a few moments she frankly wept and Welland turned his head. Then somehow he knew she looked up and waited. He narrated Nilson's finding Carthew, and all he knew about the funeral. He hated to talk about it, but Adela must not be allowed to speculate. For a time she was quiet, and then she said:

"You could not use your leg."

Welland noted that the remark was rather a statement than a question.

"That was so—Well, I suppose I was second in command, but Forgas is a first-class scout and Olaf a better shot."

"He is a boy. A fine boy, of course; but you could not start."

"It was perhaps better that I could not," said Welland. "The brute who shot Mr. Carthew did not get away. If I had fronted the leveled gun, he'd, no doubt, have baffled us. My strength and speed are not like Olaf's, when my leg is sound."

He narrated Nilson's reckless leap and the fight for the gun. When he stopped, the blood came to Adela's skin and her wet eyes sparkled.

"Revenge is rather horrible, but Olaf fought for his leader and all who loved him. The boy is fine; but he must pay. For all his splendid youth, he's blind."

"He does not grumble. Pluck like his is not altogether physical. Then we don't yet know if he is blind for good."

For a time Adela brooded and Welland was quiet. Then she turned to him.

"You found a quantity of gum?"

"That is so," Welland agreed. "The stuff was where Mr. Carthew thought. The drawback was, in view of the cost of transport and so forth, it looked as if all we might get would not pay for gathering."

Adela gave him a quiet, searching glance, as if she weighed his reply.

"Yes," he declared, "the crystalium certainly was there—Well, perhaps you would sooner be alone?"

"I would like you to stay. Just now I don't dare think—And I feel I am horribly alone."

Welland stayed. Miss Carthew was young and had got a smashing knock. He was moved to pity, but since he did not know how to comfort her, he said nothing. Adela did not seem to find his silence awkward, and after a time she said, as if she wanted to banish disturbing thought:

"Perhaps the others were lucky because you were second in command. You brought them back."

"Huysler brought us back. I was a helpless passenger. The young fellow took control with rather surprising competence."

"Oh, well, I suppose one ought to be generous," Adela remarked. "However, if you really feel Jack's help was useful, you might say something like that to Mr. Huysler when you meet him in New York. Then, in the meantime, I think Helen would like to know. You see, she's a dear. And she believes in Jack."

Welland was flattered and, in a way, amused. Women, he understood, had some talent for intrigue; perhaps management was the proper word. Miss Carthew wanted to use him, although her object was kind. In her grief, she thought for her friend.

"Miss Whitney has some grounds for her belief. Jack's a fine young fellow," he said. "Well, I'll write to Huysler. I'm not going to New York."

"I wondered—" said Adela.

She gave him an understanding glance. Miss Carthew was obviously keener than he had thought. She knew he was not going to bother Huysler for a post. Moreover, although it had nothing to do with her, she approved. Then Helen Whitney came to the door and he went off.

For two or three days the town was quiet but for a few demonstrations in front of the wine-shops, and in the languid afternoons Welland's habit was to limp along the balcony. As a rule he found Adela, and sometimes Mrs. Folsom, on the bench at the corner. The hot afternoons were dreary and she agreed that Adela must not be allowed to brood.

Sometimes he and Marcus talked. Welland liked Platting, and his lameness was a sort of bond. When the sun was hot one morning they loafed and smoked at the shady end of the *patio*. The doctor had not long since gone.

"You got down the steps pretty briskly," Platting remarked. "Is the medico satisfied about your leg?"

"I am satisfied," said Welland. "The cure is rest and proper food."

"Oh, well," said Marcus, "the damp heat bothers me. But what about Nilson? I gather you do not think the doctor talented."

"My notion is, he doesn't know—He talks about nerve shock, and so forth, but he's rather obviously cautious. Since we cannot get another man, Olaf's annoyed and throws out his stuff."

"Something of a tragedy for the boy! However, our landlord thinks the revolution will collapse before long, and we ought to find a competent oculist in Havana. Then one could soon reach New York by Galveston or New Orleans. I hope Olaf's *novia* sees she must let him go."

"If she let him go for good, I imagine you would be resigned."

Marcus smiled, a thoughtful smile.

"I am not Olaf's relation; in the circumstances, it is some relief. Maybe, like other old fellows of my sort, I am prejudiced, but where industrial civilization advances, I feel the Nordic type is the conquering type."

"Nordic is a useful word. It carries one farther than Anglo-Saxon."

"There's its advantage," Marcus agreed with a twinkle. "All the same, if you study our immigration quotas, you will see where we put your lot. But we were talking about Mariquita, who is not at all Nordic, and I own I cannot yet fix my point of view. If Olaf had social ambitions, I might think him rash, but so far as I know, he is satisfied to be a sport. Perhaps the important thing is, he is a sport. Well, one likes a man who is not afraid to take a romantic plunge. The girl is attractive, intelligent, and stanch. On the whole, I think the proper line is to wish them luck."

"It is my line," said Welland. "You are frank, sir."

"Sometimes an old fellow likes a confidant, and although the boys are indulgently polite, I expect they think me out of date. We talk with a sort of understanding, like contemporaries. Since I suppose I'm twenty years in front, how do you account for it?"

Welland smiled. "In Africa one soon gets old. Then I imagine you have not known poverty and baffled ambition. Before my youth had vanished, I was sober."

"My ambitions were not commercial," Marcus rejoined in a quiet voice. "Anyhow, it's done with long since, and to some extent I suppose my luck was good. However, you are Miss Carthew's trustee, and I understand her father's insurance is all his estate. Helen is her friend and believes Whitney and Mr. Huysler might be willing to make some provision—Then Constance Folsom wants to take the girl to her home. You might perhaps weigh the suggestion."

"I'll talk to Miss Carthew," said Welland.

In the afternoon he joined Adela and narrated Platting's remarks.

"Yes, I know!" said Adela. "They are very kind and they want me to visit with them in America. They rather imply that I'm to stay until I make a good marriage; but I might not marry."

"It's possible, of course," Welland agreed in a sober voice. "Still, if Nilson and Jack Huysler are, so to speak, representative examples—"

Adela's glance was calm, but he felt his remark was not altogether happy. In fact, when he thought about it afterwards, all

the interview was somehow disturbing. He was sorry for Adela and wanted to indulge her, but he had undertaken a duty and pity must not carry him away.

"You are my trustee," she said. "If you were old, like Marcus, it might be less embarrassing for you."

"I am not remarkably young," he rejoined. "However, all I want is to be useful."

"Very well. We must weigh things. When Father agreed with Huysler he was poor. Do you know how much money I have?"

Welland told her. "The sum ought to be invested, but the income would be very small." Adela quietly agreed.

"I expect you see I cannot go to America?"

"I imagine you do not properly understand our friends' invitation," Welland replied with some awkwardness. "Remember they know your circumstances, and you admit they're kind—"

Adela's color came and went, but her mouth was firm. She was small and her girlish slenderness exaggerated her youth. Welland knew her forlorn, but he sensed her steely pride. In fact, he began to see Miss Carthew was sterner stuff than he had thought.

"The drawback is, I do understand. Could I have gone like another guest, I might have done so. You know it's impossible. In America, all I have would not supply me with clothes. Then you ought to sympathize. You declared you would not ask Huysler to get you another post."

"That is altogether another thing."

"A man may be independent. A girl must not?" Adela rejoined. "Huysler engaged Father to search for crystalium, but that was all. He did not engage to support me. In fact, he has some grounds to be sorry he was persuaded to send off the expedition—But we must not dispute. Where are you going when we leave Santa Catalina?"

Welland did not want to dispute. Moreover, he doubted if he really wanted Adela to go to America.

"A small African house offered me a post at Liverpool, and a letter states that the offer stands. The pay is small, but I'm not extravagant. Then I reckon a fresh adventure in the malaria belt would stop my career for good. However, we must weigh your plans."

"You would sooner not talk about yourself," Adela remarked. "Very well. I must find an occupation, but all I'd like imply one's studying for three or four years, and before I did so my capital would melt. Then I doubt if my talents are numerous. I might perhaps teach small children French—The drawback is, a governess ought to be old and sober."

Welland said nothing. Adela's fresh youth was a drawback. He saw her exploited, bullied, and, worst of all, perhaps courted by an unscrupulous employer. Pity moved him, but he dared not indicate the only plan he saw. Then Adela looked up, and he thought she smiled.

"I expect you feel your trustee's duties are going to be an awkward load, but until the yacht calls for us we need not bother."

She went off. Welland lighted a cigarette, and after a time Platting limped along the balcony.

"You were talking to Miss Carthew," he remarked. "Perhaps you touched the subject we recently discussed?"

"Miss Carthew acknowledges your kindness, but I don't think she'll go. Her independence is the obstacle."

Marcus nodded. "I imagined we were up against something like that; but to find a girl who hesitates is bracing. In New York and London, the rule is for young folks to seize all they can get, particularly where another meets the bill. In fact, it sometimes looks as if modern youth's main object is to satisfy an unscrupulous lust for pleasure; but the gang who jazz in the limelight do not stand for the lot. Where the new rules work like yeast, fermentation carries the light and worthless stuff to the top. In time it runs to the gutter. Well, I mustn't philosophize, and our lot, at all events, are another sort. We want Miss Carthew, Welland, and I believe she'd be happy with Constance. Although we doubted if we could persuade her, we reckoned you might."

"I do not see your grounds," said Welland, in a thoughtful voice.

"Oh, well," said Marcus with a touch of dryness, "you are her trustee. Then I believe she trusts your judgment— And you are going to New York."

"I am not going to New York."

"Ah," said Marcus, "that's another thing! Constance Folsom's suggestion stands; but I mustn't meddle."

He resumed his awkward stroll along the balcony, and Welland knit his brows.

XXVIII

REQUISITIONS

Bugles called in the rain and the flag no longer tossed on the *Malagueña* roof. Don Manuel, running down the steps to the *patio*, stopped by Welland.

"A few seditious talkers are not dangerous, and the *cañalla* is satisfied to throw the stone and shout; but one does not defy an army," he said.

Welland was disturbed. Since he knew the landlord's stubbornness, his hauling down his flag was ominous.

"Do you expect the rebels to occupy the town in force?"

"I do not think they stop," Don Manuel replied. "This bunch is the Army of the South; there is perhaps a company who have made the drill, and some *cañalla*. In war time the news one gets is lies, but I reckon the President's gang is on their track. If one could send a message, but the road is block— Well, maybe I find some way. *Veremos a ver.*"

He joined his friends in the *patio*, and Welland cogitated. If the retiring rebels meant to hold the town, their pickets would stop the roads and creek, and Welland imagined nobody could cross the mangrove swamps. Moreover, if the President's troops arrived and fighting in the streets began, the *fonda* would not be a safe spot for women to occupy. Welland was frankly bothered when he joined the party by the *salon* window.

Water ran from the spouts on the roof, the street was flooded, and the light had begun to go. A tropical deluge swept the town, but the hoarse bugles called, and men carrying packs and rifles slouched along the street. The first platoon wore uniform and marched by loose fours, but it looked as if they had pulled off their badges and shoulder-straps when they deserted from the President's army. All the same, they were soldiers, and Welland remarked a machine-gun section.

Their advance was not triumphant. Wet and muddy, they labored by, splashing in the pools, and the loaded machine-gunners stumbling as if broken by fatigue. Here and there a civilian group sheltered in a *patio* arch, and spiritless *Vivas* answered the bugles, but for the most part the windows and doors were fast. The rather small, dark-skinned men did not look like conquerors.

A ragged squad followed the platoon, their rifles sloped at awkward angles. The fours straggled and the men had not packs. A few carried belts and bayonets, others Spanish knives pushed through a red waist-belt. Behind them, their transport struggled in the wet sand. Steaming mules hauled mud-crusting carts, and when a team stopped the drivers swore and labored at the wheels. Welland thought the exhausted muleteers hard-faced ruffians and, so far as he could see, the citizens were not keen to welcome their deliverers.

Straining, sweating, cursing, the transport lumbered by, and a fresh squad, carrying shotguns, advanced. Then came a small, disciplined rearguard with rifles, packs, and a machine-gun. All were soaked and looked dejected. At the head of the column the throaty bugles called, but the dragging step did not get firmer and the loose fours did not close. The tired men slouched along, and when the citizens shouted looked sullenly in front.

"A beaten gang, but beaten men are dangerous," said Huysler in a low voice. "If I were a city boss, I'd hand them free rations as soon as possible. Anyhow, their arrival may encourage the revolutionary mob, and although I don't know Don Manuel's plans, we'll guard our floor to-night."

"He reckoned some constitutionalist troops were not far off," Welland replied. "I imagine the difficulty is to smuggle a messenger through the pickets. Since the officers have, no doubt, remarked the citizens, on the whole, are not enthusiastic, they'll use some caution."

"Oh, well," said Nilson, "our job is to hold the first floor, and the front balcony is the weak spot; an active fellow might climb up and fix a rope. However, if you'll give me Bad Hat and Forgas, I'll engage to keep the window."

They talked about something else. The soldiers had gone, and the street was quiet, but distant shouts pierced the throbbing rain. Señora Blas served dinner, and to be occupied was some relief. By and by wheels rattled in the street and somebody beat on the door.

"Let us in, you lazy dogs!" shouted a commanding voice.

The door opened noisily, steps echoed in the arch, and Welland and Huysler went to the *patio* steps. The rebels' march through the town had put back the five o'clock *comida*, and although the rain had stopped, the evening was dark. A young officer, two soldiers, and three or four ruffianly transport peons were in the courtyard.

"What do you want?" the landlord inquired.

"Food and wine," said the officer. "It is a requisition, and I do not like to wait. Where are your supplies? We will take all you've got."

"I am a wine merchant, señor. To lose my stock would break me. If you take my goods, who will pay?"

"We know who you are. I will give you an acknowledgment, and when Galdos is President you may perhaps be paid. If he is beaten, Vallon will no doubt reward you for supplying his enemies. But be careful! If my men are sick in the morning, we will shoot you."

"It is not just," Don Manuel protested. "Sometimes a man who drinks much is sick, but to shoot the inn-keeper will not cure him."

Welland looked round. Mrs. Folsom, carrying food from the table, came down the steps; behind her Adela carried a small *garrafon* of wine. The wet and muddy soldiers watched their advance. One saw they were exhausted and savage from hunger.

"Your men are starving," Mrs. Folsom said in French.

"It is possible," the officer agreed, and shrugged. "Well, you may give them food."

Welland stepped in front of Adela and, taking the *garrafon*, motioned her to go back. She colored and her eyes sparkled rebelliously, but Welland blocked the way. She could not push past him and the officer looked up, as if he were interested.

"Go back," said Welland in English. "You don't know the brutes."

Adela hesitated, but Welland's look was commanding, and she went. Mrs. Folsom gave the soldiers the food. One balanced the *garrafon* above his head and caught the liquor in his mouth. Then his comrade drank, and the transport peons seized the jar. For a minute or two, the officer did not meddle, and somehow Welland thought Don Manuel approved, although he admitted his doing so was strange.

"We must get to work," said the officer. "Open your cave!"

The wine-cellar was underground, and Don Manuel, getting a light, unlocked the door. He and the officer and two peons went down the steps, and Welland limped to a neighboring bench and lighted a cigarette. The *patio* was dark but for the reflections from a window, and Mrs. Folsom had gone. The soldiers ate awkwardly, holding the broken food in one hand.

Two peons came up the steps. They carried a large *garrafon*, covered by basket-work, like a sulphuric acid carboy, and shuffled along the tunnel. Their load was probably *caña* distilled from Cuban sugar-cane. Coming back from the cart, they brought up wooden cases—aniseed, or perhaps white Havana rum.

Welland, leaning forward, found he could look into the cellar. The steps were shallow, and the figures moving about below cut the light. He pictured the landlord's emotions, for Don Manuel was not the sort to supply his enemies philosophically. All the same, it looked as if he must be resigned.

The *fonda* was a sort of headquarters for the President's party, and as a rule was garrisoned by a dozen muscular loyalists. Welland imagined they had not been able to steal away and had perhaps hidden in the kitchen and stable. To call them would be rash, for although the soldiers were yet trying to satisfy their appetite, a shot would bring help and justify the rebels' sacking the *fonda*. For all that, Welland did not see Don Manuel tamely submit to be robbed.

After a time, Don Manuel came to the top of the steps and, clapping his hands, shouted, "Tomas!"

A young man joined him, and when they went down pulled about the bottles in a rack, as if he looked for something the landlord wanted. Lifting out a bottle by and by, he went for a glass. The officer sat down on a barrel and pushed back his *képi*. His shoulders were bent and his pose was slack. Don Manuel opened the bottle.

The light was behind the group and not good. All Welland saw was a sort of silhouette pantomime, but the picture carried its meaning. The exhausted young officer at length was resolved to think for himself and had asked for some liquor he particularly liked. His host dared not refuse, and since the peons were occupied carrying the plunder to the cart, for a minute or two he might relax. Yet it looked as if he would sooner the soldiers did not note his slackness, for he turned to Don Manuel, who pushed back the door.

The peons were away for five or six minutes, and a jarring noise seemed to indicate that they moved some heavy articles in order to put their load on the cart. When they got back, Don Manuel and the officer came up the steps. The landlord shut the door, and in order to do so put down his lamp. Welland remarked that the glass was smoked and the light was dim. The other scornfully threw him a document.

"Take care of it, you dog," he said with grim humor, and turned to his men. "*Adelante!*"

The peons picked up the last few articles; the soldiers trailed their rifles, for the arch was low, and the group marched off. When they reached the pavement, the cart and its escort labored up the street, but the officer went the other way. Somebody fastened the thick door, and Welland limped back to the *patio*. Don Manuel, on the bench, drained a glass.

"My goods are gone; but one cannot be a patriot for nothing, and since all know my loyalty, it is possible Vallon will pay."

"The order is on President Galdos," Welland remarked. "The officer's nerve is good, for he sent off the cart and soldiers, and went along the street alone in the dark."

"The night is dark. We reckoned on that," Don Manuel agreed in Castilian. "Then, if the pickets are very watchful, Tomas wears their uniform."

"Tomas?" said Welland. "Your cellar man? When you left him below and shut the door, I wondered—"

Don Manuel chuckled. "You are keen, señor. The others are dull dogs; but when one is exhausted and famishing— Besides, they knew the uniform."

"But where is the officer?"

"In the wine bin. When I went down for Tomas's clothes he was quiet. In fact, I do not think he will make much noise for some time, and the door is thick. Well, the night is hot, and he has a blanket, but that is all."

Welland thought Don Manuel's pluck and coolness deserved some reward. To dope, or knock out, an officer, a few yards from his guard, was something of an exploit. The soldiers, however, were no doubt persuaded they had seen him go along the street, and the cellar man in his uniform ought to cheat the patrols.

"I expect he will not be obstinate," Don Manuel resumed. "These fellows are deserters. Galdos bribed them and, now that it looks as if he is beaten, they will not stick to him. The uniform is the President's, and I expect they have not thrown away the badges and shoulder-straps. Well, I think you ought to say nothing to the ladies about our prisoner."

Welland agreed and joined the others in the *salon*.

XXIX

NILSON KEEPS THE BALCONY

Welland, in a low cane chair, occupied a corner of the balcony. Marcus and Forgas were on the bench; Nilson and Huysler leaned against the railing. The evening was dark, and the stagnant air was hot and wet like steam. Musky smells floated about the *patio*. Sometimes one heard people splash along the street, and sometimes hoarse shouts rolled across the roofs. Then the noises stopped and the group on the balcony felt the quiet threatening.

"So far as I can find out," said Welland, "the rebels are beaten, and the lot in town will push on again at daybreak. In the meantime, they are billeted about a quarter of a mile off, and Don Manuel imagines them too worn out to make much trouble. He reckons some of Vallon's troops are moving on Santa Catalina and, if his messenger gets through, they might arrive early to-morrow. There's what you might call the general situation."

"Our particular situation is the important thing," Huysler remarked. "If the soldiers get some *caña* and the loyalists annoy them, they might shoot up the town. Then I expect there is some money in the forlorn place, and the transport boys are a hard-faced gang. In the meantime, we are responsible for the safety of five women."

"Six," said Marcus. "Have you forgotten Señora Blas?"

Huysler laughed. "I reckon the Defarge is competent to take care of herself. In fact, she is probably the best man we've got. Anyhow, she commands the *patio* garrison, and expects us to hold our rooms on the first floor."

"You could not hold the building against drilled soldiers and machine-guns," Marcus rejoined.

"That is so," Welland agreed. "However, since his cellar was looted, Don Manuel imagines the rebels will leave him alone. He's rather afraid of the mob and admits he has some personal antagonists who might try to carry out an unofficial raid."

"It's very possible," said Marcus. "Well, if there is trouble, we must try to hold our side of the house."

"My post is the *salon* balcony fronting the street," said Nilson. "I'll take Bad Hat and Don Juan."

"I go weet you," Don Juan declared.

"You ought not to risk it," Huysler objected.

Nilson smiled. "The night is very dark and the little balcony commands the main door. If somebody tried to climb up, I guess I'd know before you. A moment or two since, you leaned back against the railing. I believe your foot is on Welland's chair."

"It certainly is. You beat me, Olaf! After all, you have had but a few weeks—"

"I began before, Jack. I've hunted moose, and in the woods you measure distance by the noise of a snapping twig—Well, when my sight went I reckoned I had to use my ears; but we were talking about something else. I'll keep the balcony."

They revised their plans for the night and fixed the posts. Then the young men went off with Forgas, but Marcus and Welland remained. Welland's low chair was easy and he was willing to rest.

"I expect Nilson is as good a sentry as we could find," said Marcus in a brooding voice. "To grumble does not help, but to find nobody has much use for you hurts. Yet, of course, I am not much use. But do you think the liberators will look us up?"

"It's certainly possible. Carthew refused to bribe Galdos, and from the beginning I sensed a sort of hostile influence; I don't know the proper word, but the implication was, somebody would sooner we did not come back. Although I don't yet see the fellow's object, he may not have done with us. Then we humiliated Galdos's officer, and the half-breeds are a revengeful lot."

Marcus pondered. Welland knew he was not afraid for himself. By and by Marcus went to the *patio* and Helen Whitney

came to the bench.

"I suppose you have planned your defenses. Do you expect to hold the fort?"

"If we are attacked, I think we can do so," Welland replied. "Don Manuel's friends are a hefty lot, and to force the *patio* arch would be awkward. Then Jack engages to keep this floor, and since the windows on the outside are high and narrow, it ought not to bother him."

"I like your frankness," said Helen. "You do not feel you must try to cheat me. All the same, Jack is not leader."

Welland smiled. "Would you sooner Nilson led? I, myself, rather obviously cannot take the post. In fact, Jack has had command since Carthew was shot and, but for him, I imagine we'd have stayed in the swamps. A few days since I wrote to Mr. Huysler and stated something like that, although I believe the letter is yet at the post-office."

Helen touched him, and the light touch thrilled, for he knew her moved.

"Then you have given an old man grounds for happiness and pride. Had you no other claim to our friendship, you would be our friend—Jack's and mine—for life. Well, I suppose a generous object justifies some exaggeration."

"I did not exaggerate," Welland declared. "Then, since you don't like to be cheated, I must confess the generosity was not altogether mine."

"Ah," said Helen, "Adela prompted you? Perhaps I ought to have spotted a woman's touch. All the same, I do not doubt your kindness."

"Others have doubted my intelligence," Welland rejoined.

"Adela has both. In every way, and always, she's a charming girl," said Helen and, getting up, left him to ponder her remark.

About nine o'clock Welland firmly ordered the ladies to their rooms. The windows fronting the street were high in the wall, and he was persuaded the only dangerous spot on the first floor was the balcony over the arch. The comparatively large window had perhaps been cut after the house was built. There was no glass, and the thick lattice shutters were pushed back to the wall; if an attack were made, the defenders must command the balcony. They, however, were not numerous. Huysler, Forgas, and the Krooboy could be reckoned on, but the negroes engaged from Lake had vanished soon after their arrival, and Nilson, Marcus, and Welland were not effective combatants.

Welland's and Marcus's post was on the large inner balcony. If help were needed in the *salon*, they could signal Don Manuel, whose main force was in the *patio*. Nilson's small party sat in the gloom behind the window; the negroes on the floor. A light would rather embarrass them and might be a useful target for a sniper on a roof across the street. All the same, the rebels might leave them alone, and to wait in suspense was harder than to face an obvious danger.

For a time they talked in low voices. The night was very dark and the steam from the swamps floated across the town. The lights at the Café Bolivar went out, the house fronts were black and indistinct, and it looked as if the exhausted soldiers were content to sleep. Huysler wondered whether others, as highly strung as himself, waited for morning behind the dark walls. He pictured shadowy figures stealing about the *patios*; he imagined he heard whispering voices.

Rain swept the street and stopped, but the gutters on the flat roof spouted and for a few minutes water splashed on the pavement. Then Nilson touched Huysler and got up noiselessly. Huysler's heart beat. Although he carried a good automatic pistol, he must not shoot unless he were forced. A shot might rouse the mob, and the *fonda's* garrison was but fourteen or fifteen useful men. Somehow Jack was not afraid of the soldiers.

For a few moments all he heard was the splash from the roof. The Kroos were on their feet, one at each side of the window, a little blacker than the dark. They carried machetes and had stripped off their cotton clothes. Then something rasped about a stanchion of the balcony. A rope, Huysler thought, but Nilson's hand got tight on his arm, and he knew Olaf heard something he himself did not.

A boot scraped the pillar by the arch and the stanchion rattled. Somebody was coming up, and Huysler imagined others, on the pavement, steadied the double rope. Then a vague, dark object topped the balcony rail, lurched across and, lengthening until it was a man's height, stopped. The rails behind it jarred. Another was coming up the rope.

For a moment or two the vaguely outlined figure blocked the window, and since the *salon* was dark as a mine, Huysler thought the fellow listened. Perhaps he sensed the men who waited a yard or two off in the gloom. Then something sparkled and a bright beam flickered on the wall. Nilson pushed Huysler back, and his large, braced figure cut the dazzling circle.

"The blind man!" said the stranger, in a hoarse voice, as if he were afraid.

Huysler knew the voice, but had he doubted, the fellow said *ciego*, using the Castilian *th* for *c*, although, as a rule in Spanish-America one softens the *c* to *s*. Perhaps because he was not altogether Spanish, Galdos's lieutenant was fastidious. Moreover, Jack knew Olaf had spotted his antagonist, for he advanced with a catlike step.

Don Martin dared not front him. He flung the torch and stepped back. Nilson plunged ahead and crashed against the wall. A Kroo's machete rang on the shutter fastening and Don Martin's retreat was cut. Huysler knew he was in the room and Nilson groped about for him.

"Don't meddle, Jack! Hold the window," he shouted.

Huysler jumped for the window. In the thick dark, the advantage was Olaf's, but the others were coming up the rope. Shouting for a machete, he felt for the rope, but it was not round the stanchion he thought, and behind him a pistol flashed. The explosion echoed in the room, and then Nilson gasped triumphantly:

"I've got him! Stand clear!"

The boards cracked, and a vague, formless object lurched onto the balcony. Huysler knew Olaf had grappled Don Martin and swept him across the floor. He heard labored breath; Olaf was lifting the fellow. A large struggling body was level with the balcony rail, and then was flung across. It shocked against another, a yard or two below, and crashed on the pavement. Then Nilson fell against the wall, and laughed, a savage, breathless laugh.

"He carried down his pals, but the d—— swine had farthest to fall. Can you find his torch?"

For a moment or two Huysler did not try. People were running up the *patio* steps. Others pushed about the pavement in the street, and Welland's stick tapped the inside balcony.

"Stop, Don Manuel! We have made good," Huysler shouted.

He heard the group *turn* back, and then the arch door was battered savagely. The thick timber bore the shock, stones crashed on the pavement as if the guard on the roof got to work, and the men below moved off. Huysler found the torch and, snapping the spring, leaned over the balcony rail. Forgas threw him back, a pistol flashed in the street, and plaster fell from the wall.

Huysler got up and tried to get his breath. The men in the street had had enough, but his skin was wet by sweat and his hands shook.

"Well?" said Nilson. "You snapped the torch."

"They are going," Huysler gasped. "I think they're carrying somebody. There's blood on the stones."

"The brute weighs something and he went pretty fast," Nilson remarked. "Well, I guess you can fix the shutters and get a light."

Huysler got a light and they went to the *patio* balcony. The ladies must know the raid was over. Somebody called, and they saw Marcus sitting on the boards. His overturned chair was a yard off and his stick was gone. He gave Huysler an apologetic smile.

"I was not asleep at my post. In my speed to send you help, I forgot my lameness, and my stick went through the railing. One must bear one's infirmities, but sometimes they're humiliating."

Huysler helped him to his feet and sent Forgas for his stick. He felt the old fellow deserved some sympathy, but Mrs. Folsom, Señora Viñoles, and the girls were at a neighboring door.



PRESIDENT VALLON'S APOLOGY

Huysler lighted a cigarette. The ladies, persuaded by Welland, had gone back to bed, although Jack doubted if they would go to sleep. Forgas and the Kroos watched by the *salon* window, and the landlord was on the roof. All was quiet and the lamp Huysler had brought could not be seen outside the *patio*. The dim illumination somehow was comforting.

"I expect we were lucky," he said. "Although it looks as if Olaf put the leader out of action, the gang might have rolled up the mob. The *cañalla* do not like foreigners, particularly American foreigners. Since we buy their fruit and help them carry on all the trade they've got, I don't think they're logical."

"The *sans-culotte* have nothing to do with big business, and the fellow who risks nothing need not be scrupulous," Welland remarked with a touch of dryness. "Then I suppose your politicians are forced to use a sort of protective watchfulness over the small republics on the caliente coast. The Canal perhaps accounts for the emergence of a fresh state along its banks, and you hold first option on the alternative northern route."

Marcus Plating smiled. "We have got something like the leasehold, and if my history's good, Britain meddled in Egypt on much the same grounds that justify us at Panama. Where your money goes you use some control, and I expect the neighboring states begin to ponder. In the meantime, it is not important, and, like Jack, I'm puzzled. The fellows who raided us might have roused the mob. In fact, they might have brought the soldiers."

"My notion is, the raid, so to speak, was not a patriotic demonstration," said Welland thoughtfully. "The gentleman who led the gang had a private object, and while I don't know if they hoped to punish us or Don Manuel, I imagine they did not want to be famous. When people get hurt during a revolutionary turmoil, to find out who's responsible is difficult."

"Oh, well," said Nilson, "if the rain stops, the gang may come back, although I reckon Don Martin will not. Until daybreak we have got to watch."

The others agreed. None was much disposed to sleep, and sometimes they exchanged posts and sometimes went to the *patio* for a *copita* of liquor. The night was very dark and hot, and Marcus and Welland thought it long. They were not useful combatants, but their responsibility weighed. Welland, after all, was commander, and Marcus had allowed his party to land.

At length, when dawn broke, hoarse bugles blew, and Marcus got up stiffly from his chair.

"Do you think the rebels are pulling out?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Welland. "The call was not our *reveille*. There it goes again! Sounds like an alarm."

He glanced over the railing. In the wet *patio* Don Manuel's friends waited noiselessly. Their figures were indistinct but very still, and one knew they listened. After a few minutes, shots echoed in the walls and a man on the roof began to shout. Don Manuel leaped up the steps and Welland saw the President's flag blow from the staff on the roof. Then, six or seven hundred yards off, rifles crashed in rapid fire. Mrs. Folsom's door swung back. Welland saw her and Señora Viñoles, and he limped along the balcony.

"The fighting is across the town, but you must keep your room," he said and, turning, saw the girls.

"We are going to the *salon* window," Helen remarked. "There is no use in your trying to stop us, and although Marcus might support you, he is not my guardian."

Welland shrugged. He saw she was resolute and he could not use force.

"Very well. If you must go, I'd sooner you went to the roof."

He started for the steps. To get up was awkward, and near the top he stopped for breath. Below him, Adela and Helen helped Plating, who smiled, as if he apologized.

"I tried to be firm, but youth has not much respect for age. Where I ought to command, I'm something like a confederate."

"You're a sport," said Helen. "You might, however, concentrate on getting up."

Welland could not help them, and he waited at the top. When Helen pushed Marcus on to the flat roof, Adela gave him a twinkling glance.

"I don't like to be rebellious, but behind the parapet we ought to be safe. Although I cannot shoot, I might, if it were useful, drop a sandbag on somebody's head."

"You will keep behind the parapet," said Welland sternly.

The parapet was thick and two or three feet high; he admitted the spot was as safe as another. In the meantime, a sharp staccato throb, like the rapid beat of a hammer, began behind the roofs.

"A machine-gun!" he said. "I wonder whether Don Manuel's messenger got through."

Marcus touched him and he turned his head. The light got stronger swiftly, and men in little groups pushed along the street. Some carried rifles, and some haversacks Welland thought were loaded with bombs. Their skins were black and they went fast.

"*Viva el Presidente!*" shouted Mariquita Viñoles. "*Adelante los Africanos!*"

Welland firmly pulled her behind the wall, but he saw a man here and there carried a small tricolor badge, and the doubts that had disturbed him vanished. Now he knew for whom the negroes meant to fight. They rather flowed than marched by, for they went with swift, padding steps, like men whose main object was to get somewhere, and in the confused turmoil of a street fight they were perhaps as dangerous as disciplined soldiers.

"I go to look for my *novio*, but he is not grateful, and Jack has no politeness," Mariquita resumed in French. "Juan Forgas is a pig, without education."

"I expect Don Juan fired her out," Platting remarked. "Adela might inform her that we are not much interested, and she must stay behind the wall."

A machine-gun rattled and the running groups broke. Men flung themselves in the gutter and against the houses. Bullets splashed the stones and swept the street in noisy ricochets. Then, although the throbbing rattle continued, the shower of metal stopped and the groups re-formed. The men flowed along the street, and so far as one could see across the parapet, it looked as if none were hurt. In the background, rifles crashed, and for a few moments the quick explosions drowned the machine-gun's tapping note.

"The rebels are fighting two gangs, and I reckon the main attack is on the other front," said Huysler, who arrived from the opposite side of the house. "They might have stopped these fellows by concentrated fire. A rearguard action, I guess. They're trying to hold up the loyalists' advance while their partners take the road."

On the whole, Welland agreed. The wind was light, and six or seven hundred yards off thin smoke floated about the street. Pale flashes leaped from an arch, but the shooting presently stopped. One could not see the fight, but it looked as if the President's commander had divided his troops and the larger body forced a side street.

A man in front of the negroes waved a shining machete; the groups went faster and, howling like wolves, plunged round the corner of a block. For two or three minutes, machine-guns, bombs, and rifles exploded, and a savage turmoil rolled across the roofs. Then the firing got slack and farther off. One heard faint shouts, and a pillar of thick, yellow smoke went up.

"Galdos's lot have quit," said Huysler. "They're beating it for the woods, and if the machete gang was on my track, I'd make good time." He jumped on the parapet, and then signed Welland. "If you can persuade Miss Carthew, I think she ought to go. The fight's over, Helen. Perhaps you will see the señorita down the steps."

Welland put his hand on Adela's arm and his touch was firm. She turned; Helen glanced across the parapet, and went. Now the group had got up, they commanded a wider view, and uncouth objects dotted the sandy street. Hot sunbeams sped across the walls and flies began to swarm about the quiet figures. Behind the town, a machine-gun drummed and stopped; the rifle-shots got indistinct. Shutters were thrown back and people flocked into the street. Huysler sat down on the parapet and lighted a cigarette.

"They're gone; I expect the first stop's the frontier. Now the strain is over, I admit I was cold scared."

In the afternoon, a polite young officer, whom Don Manuel saluted respectfully, was shown up the steps. His manner was cultivated and his expensive uniform was clean. Welland received him on the *patio* balcony and sent for the best liquor the landlord could supply. They exchanged compliments in Castilian and French, but Don Jaime knew some West Indian English, and their talk went easily in a rather mixed *lingua franca*.

"I suppose the rebellion is broken?" said Welland.

"Galdos is across the frontier; he started before his supporters knew he meant to go, and was lucky to get across," Don Jaime replied. "I expect he saw he was beaten when the negroes turned him down. The strange thing is, he reckoned on their help. His rule in the swamps was harsh, but since the blacks submitted, I expect he imagined he had broken them to dull obedience. There are men like that."

Welland nodded. "All the same, they are fools. One does not fight for the fellow who bullies one, and the head of the state is the poor man's friend. The small tyrant who uses the other's authority is his real antagonist. Well, I suppose Mr. Moses Lake led the negroes' revolt. The force that swept the town was his?"

"Lake is a useful man; I believe you met him," Don Jaime agreed. "He will be rewarded, although his keenness cost us something. You see, we reckoned he might keep the rebels occupied while our troops advanced and cut their retreat. His *guerrillas*, however, drove them from the town, and they went so fast that when our battalion reached its objective the beaten mob was four or five miles on the other side—"

He gave Welland an envelope, carrying the Republican seal. "My credentials, señor. I am the President's envoy, and since he is occupied, I carry his apologies. We know something about your misfortunes, but we would like to know more."

Welland told him. When he stopped, the shadow had crossed the *patio*, and he thought he had talked for long. For a minute or two Don Jaime cogitated.

"The President hopes Miss Carthew will accept his sympathy," he said. "You will, I suppose, write a statement for the British consul, to whom the Government will offer correct apologies. We cannot punish the assassin."

"The assassin is dead," said Welland dryly. "I am Miss Carthew's trustee. Until I have seen the consul, I do not know if she is entitled to some compensation."

Don Jaime looked disturbed. "The President sympathizes, señor, but our treasury is broken, and I doubt if you could enforce a claim. However, the consul will advise you, and we must wait—In the meantime, there is another thing. Your journey was expensive, but you did not find the gum, and since you stanchly refused to negotiate with his enemies, Señor Vallon is willing to give you a fresh concession: for example, to cut dyewood."

"In exchange for a fresh fee?" said Huysler. "I do not know the polite term."

"A small sum would help the negotiations."

Huysler laughed. "Nothing doing, señor! We have had enough. However, if you know Galdos's object for baffling us, you might help us solve a puzzle."

"Although it is intricate, I will try to explain. You refused him his bribe, but had you paid, I doubt if he would have left you alone. The venture was American, and American interests are recently important on the *caliente* coast. Some people think your Government jealous and too keen to meddle. Very well. If your party vanished, stern inquiries would be made from Washington, and we might be forced to shoot your supposititious murderers. Had the President done so, his enemies would use the popular indignation. Had he refused, he must face a dispute with your Government, and Galdos would exploit his humiliation."

"Then, in order to embarrass Señor Vallon, we were to be put out by bullet or fever?" said Nilson, in a stern voice. "Our lives were chips with which the brute gambled in a crooked political game."

"Allowing for intricacies, the plan was like that," Don Jaime agreed. He shrugged. "Well, Galdos is across the frontier, but if it is some comfort, we expect to shoot his *ayutante*. The doctor imagines he can cure the fellow, although when he

went over the balcony he got a dangerous knock."

Welland glanced at Huysler. Jack's look was very grim. Carthew was gone, Nilson was blind, and Welland himself was crippled. They had been used and cheated, and all carried marks they might wear for life. Yet he felt they had perhaps brought back something from the swamps: Huysler a balance and steadfastness that was not his when he set out, and Welland a vague hope that began to banish his loneliness.

"You talked about a fresh concession," said Huysler. "If you offered us all the dyewood that grows in your forests, I'd leave the stuff alone. I'd sooner sweep the streets in a white man's city—But where is Carthew's agent, Almirez? Was he Galdos's confederate?"

"Don Pancha is in Cuba. When he knew the rebels could not win, he thought he ought to go. Yet, on the whole, I think him an honest citizen, and he was not Galdos's friend. Since his brother was shot he hated the President, but his hatred was not altogether political. Well, I expect he knew something—"

"And Father Sebastian?"

Don Jaime shrugged. "Sincere, but dangerous. His ambitions were not selfish. The Government is anti-clerical, and for the honor of his Church he ran daunting risks. Well, he is dead. I think he argued that where the Church was threatened the safety of two or three heretics ought not to weigh."

He got up. "Now, señores, you will perhaps allow me to carry the President's sympathy to Señorita Carthew. Then, in the morning, I hope to send you a doctor whom Señor Vallon himself employs."



Welland climbed the steps to the *fonda* roof, and although he carried his stick and leaned on the balustrade, he reflected humorously that to get up was easier than when he last made the ascent. Sometimes one was perhaps mechanically cautious and used care that was not altogether needed. Hope was bracing, and if one believed one would get better one did get better. The President's doctor had not long since gone, and his report was encouraging.

At the next step Welland experimented. For a moment he balanced on his bandaged leg, and then he leaned against the railing and swore. For all his philosophizing, the swollen flesh would not bear his weight. He, however, must get up. The night was very hot, and Nilson and one or two of the others were on the roof. Welland was keen to know what the doctor thought about Olaf.

"Hallo!" said Huysler. "Here's a chair for you; sit right down. I believe the doctor has seen you. What's the verdict?"

"Discharged with a warning to use some caution another time. A month or two in a cool, bracing climate ought to put all straight. I hope Olaf got some encouragement."

"I liked the fellow," said Nilson. "As a rule, I think, one spots a fakir, but he was the other sort. The man who really knows is marked by a sort of confidence—Well, he experimented, and did not find much mechanical injury. On the whole, he's optimistic, but since he cannot come back, I must as soon as possible see a fellow he knows in Havana. When the yacht arrives I'm going."

"We have some competent oculists in New York," Huysler remarked.

"They are in New York," Nilson rejoined. "Then Señora Viñoles hates the sea, although she thinks she might stand it until we make Havana."

"Then, Señora Viñoles is going with you?"

"Sure," said Nilson, smiling. "She's an Andalusian lady, and since her daughter's going, she reckons to come along. Where I go Mariquita goes. Now you get it!"

He went off and Welland remarked that he steered directly for the top of the steps, as if he saw. Huysler laughed, a sympathetic laugh.

"At the beginning I thought Olaf dippy, but I'm willing to allow his luck is pretty good. If Mariquita knew he'd never see, she would stick to him. Where he goes she goes, and when she engaged to start all the road was dark. Now day perhaps is breaking—Well, I'm getting romantic, and I know your soberness; but I'm frankly bucked and feel we ought to celebrate. Let's get some vermouth and fill up Don Juan."

Welland politely refused. To reach the roof was awkward, and since he had got there he would stay for a time. Huysler went, and when the landlord's boisterous laugh and Forgas's *Brindo* echoed in the courtyard walls he knew the celebration had begun. Well, Jack was a first-class sort, and although his plans had miscarried, he had some grounds for satisfaction. In the swamps the boy had found something worth more than the elusive crystalium, and the girl who loved him knew. Then Nilson had followed his heart and had got his reward.

Welland's mouth went tight. Carthew's daughter had lost all she had. Her road, like his, was lonely and she was poor. He wanted to help, but his youth was gone; he was dull and sober, and dared not weigh the only plan he saw. For all that, he was not, as he had thought, a cripple for good.

Little shoes tapped the cement and Welland looked up. Adela was at the top of the steps; he would have known her small, light figure in much thicker gloom. She crossed the roof and sat down in Nilson's chair.

"I felt I must tell you how glad I am you have got good news," she said.

"You are very kind. The doctor's report was encouraging, and now the strain is over, I admit I was daunted. My fortune needs some mending and nobody has much use for a battered cripple."

"Ah," said Adela, with a touch of shyness, "you mustn't exaggerate. People are kinder than you think. I suppose strength and boyish hopefulness like Olaf's and Jack's are attractive, but they are not all. Some other qualities are worth as much, and to be rich is not very important."

"To be poor is awkward. In the circumstances I ought to be modest," Welland rejoined. "However, the port is now open, and in a day or two the yacht will arrive. I would be sorry to hurt you, but there is something about which we must talk."

"I think I know—Well, I am not going to New York. The expedition has cost Huysler much and he gets nothing back. Although his relations are generous, I cannot allow strangers to support me. Then, since I must be candid, I am not going to marry an American because he is rich."

"He might have some other attractions."

For a few moments Adela brooded; and then she said in a quiet voice: "I expect your object's good, but when you engaged to be my trustee you did not know all you undertook. To think for an obstinate girl must be embarrassing."

Welland was puzzled. In the dark, he could not study Adela, but he saw she turned her head. Yet he thought she knew he did not want to be rid of her. Anyhow, she ought to know his poverty was the real obstacle. If he were richer, and had but Jack's triumphant youth—

"All I want is to carry out the duty your father gave me," he rejoined.

"Yes," said Adela; "you are very conscientious. And you're modest. But I am not going to America."

"Very well. We must talk about something else, and you must try not to be jarred. To some extent a government is responsible for the safety of the foreigners in the country it rules, and although I rather think President Vallon will dispute the claim, you are entitled to some compensation. To begin with, I must look up the British consul."

Adela turned. In the dark he knew she was angry, for her light figure was braced.

"You must not! Do you imagine I would take money—for my father? That I measure my loss by dollars? I will not begin a shabby dispute with the treacherous Government."

Her pride moved Welland; Adela Carthew was thoroughbred, and he wanted to take her in his arms and approve. He, however, knew his drawbacks and must carry out the duty he undertook.

"One must weigh things," he remarked. "You have no occupation, and I doubt if your income will supply you with first-class boots and clothes."

"Then I will go without. After all, to buy fashionable clothes would be something novel. I have some pluck—and I have known poverty. But we'll let it go. If the President were willing to meet your claim, to take the greasy paper money would be an unthinkable humiliation."

"Oh, well," said Welland, "I expect he is not willing. My notion is, the officers at the capital are an unscrupulous shabby lot—"

He stopped and Adela jumped up. A rocket pierced the dark and, exploding two or three miles off, dropped a trail of colored stars. Another went up in a flowing curve, and a whistle's faint, throbbing blast rolled across the town.

"The yacht!" said Adela. "In the morning Captain Grant will send a boat for us."

Again the distant whistle blew and Welland heard steps on the balconies.

"Grant has made it," Nilson shouted. "You can pack your trunks. We pull out at sun-up. It's time for us to go."

Then in a big resonant voice he began to sing:

"Oh, Shenandoah, I long to hear you—"

Huysler, Marcus and Helen helped the swinging chorus, and Nilson beat the rhythm on the balcony railing.

"Let her go," he shouted.

"The broad and rolling river—"

A guitar tinkled in the *patio*; another, clanging in harmonic chords, caught the tune. The music went triumphantly, and since all who spring from Spanish stock can sing, Latin voices joined. Welland heard Helen's fine contralto, and for all his soberness he thrilled. Then he heard another sound, and knew Adela Carthew wept. Carried away by pity, he took her in his arms.

"My dear, my dear," he said.

For a moment Adela was quiet, and then she firmly pushed him back and vanished down the steps. When Welland reached the balcony she was not about.

His sleep was disturbed, his room was hot, and in the early morning he returned to the roof. Day was breaking and the swamps behind the harbor steamed. In front, pale reflections touched the sea. But for a faint pearly strip, sky and water were lifeless gray, and the yacht's dim hull vaguely cut the smeared horizon. One could not yet see her masts, but the smoke floating about her funnel indicated that the stokers got to work. In the gloom where the land mist rolled surf splashed languidly.

For a time Welland brooded. He had let himself go like a romantic fool; and perhaps he was lucky if Adela thought that was all. His trusteeship certainly did not entitle him to take her in his arms. To declare he was carried away by the yacht's arrival and Olaf's singing would not justify his rashness. It rather implied that he was not the proper man to be a girl's trustee. Besides, he knew the statement was not accurate.

He might admit he loved her, but he had no grounds to think she wanted a lover, and if she refused, she would be forced to let him go for good. So far as he knew, her relations were dead, and in consequence of his folly, she must perhaps front the world alone. Welland set his mouth and clenched his fist.

Youth called to youth, and although he was not yet remarkably old, he was a dull dog. Perhaps he was stanch, but if he had ever had qualities that attracted youth they had melted in the African sun. Besides, he was poor. If he took the post at Liverpool, he could support a wife, but she must be frugal. No! He had argued it all out before; and then, when the rockets went up, he had acted like a fool. Welland frankly swore.

Somebody laughed and he looked up. Adela Carthew crossed the roof. She fronted the dawn, and now the horizon glimmered like a pearl.

"Were you annoyed because you heard my step?" she asked.

"Not at all. I believe I wanted to see you before our friends were about."

"Yes?" said Adela, stopping a yard off.

"The ground is awkward," Welland resumed. "You see, I'm not up to date, and I don't know the proper rules. However, I suppose I ought to apologize."

Adela fronted him calmly, but she smiled.

"To apologize, Mr. Welland? For kissing me? Well, after all, you didn't—if it's some comfort."

Welland studied her, his brows knit and his mouth set tight. Adela saw his face was lined and he steadied himself by his stick. Her look was gentle.

"We will not pretend," she said. "Had I not been willing, you wouldn't have dared to take me in your arms."

"I expect that is so," Welland agreed. "Perhaps my pluck's remarkable, but I'll risk a fresh plunge. For long my road was lonely, but until I knew you, I was satisfied. Now, unless you're compassionate, I'll be lonely to the end."

"Ah," said Adela, "I'm not compassionate; I might marry a man I pitied, but I'd sooner marry one I trusted, who where I was weak would be wise and firm for me—" She blushed, and, looking up, resumed: "Before the expedition started, I knew you were the man."

Welland kissed her and let her go. Somehow he knew she approved his control.

"My dear," he said, "I doubted. You stood for conquering youth. Then, you see, my post at Liverpool is not good. To be frugal is dreary; I felt I'd hate to see you go without."

"I know," said Adela, with a quiet smile. "I think I knew all you pondered, but I wasn't daunted. I have known worse poverty than you have known, and where love and trust are, dreariness vanishes."

She gave him her hand and the dazzling sun swung up. The sky was flushed with red and the yacht's white hull glimmered like ivory on the slow green swell. Color touched floating clouds and sparkling sea; the mist and the night were gone.

Then a plume of steam blew about the yacht, a winch rattled, and a boat swung out from her side. The whistle called and Adela steered Welland to the steps.

"In an hour we start for Havana and your adventure begins," he said.

"Ah," said Adela, "if you are not daunted, I am not."

For a moment she stopped and glanced across the roofs to the dim swamps, and then gave Welland her hand to steady him down the steps.

"One cannot forget, but one looks in front and hopes," she said.

THE END

Transcriber's Note:

1. page 7—corrected typo 'moist' to 'mist'
2. page 265—added missing end-quote to sentence '...so to speak, representative examples—'

[End of *The Dark Road* by Harold Bindloss]