

By the author of THE WHIP-POOR-WILL MYSTERY

SCARRED JUNGLE

BY
HULBERT FOOTNER



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**SCARRED
JUNGLE**

**HULBERT
FOOTNER**

BOOKS BY
HULBERT FOOTNER

SCARRED JUNGLE

THE MYSTERY OF THE FOLDED PAPER

EASY TO KILL

DEAD MAN'S HAT

THE RING OF EYES

MURDER RUNS IN THE FAMILY

DANGEROUS CARGO

THE WHIP-POOR-WILL MYSTERY

Harper & Brothers
Publishers

Scarred Jungle

By

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SCARRED JUNGLE

WHEN he was released from Sing Sing he would not look up any of his old friends. He slouched along the waterfront in New York, trying for a berth on a ship. Something he had read in a newspaper a year before had given him the idea that Fay had taken a theatrical engagement in South America. He had not answered her letters in prison because he thought it better for her to break away from him clean. He had no hope of being reunited with her, but was stirred by a blind impulse to seek the same part of the world where she was.

Now he had been in Manaus for upwards of a year and was down and out. As long as he kept shoes on his feet he had a hope of coming back, but when they finally dropped off, hope died. Once a white man went barefoot in the tropics, he was done for, they said. Occasionally a nightmare terror gripped his entrails. But such moments were becoming rarer because for the most part he kept himself fuddled with cachasso and didn't have to think. Rum was easier to come by in Manaus than food.

Somewhere or another he had picked up the name of Legs because he could outrun anything on two feet. All he possessed in the world was a pair of cotton dungarees rolled up to the knees because the bottoms were tattered, a ragged cotton singlet, and a straw hat with part of the crown out. Gaunt, bearded, and black, he no longer knew himself when he happened to pass a mirror. Well, he felt comfortable in his disguise.

There were about a dozen white men on the beach. With rubber at three dollars a pound, Manaus the boom town, "Paris in the wilderness," attracted adventurers from all over the globe. But it was just as hard to scratch a living there as anywhere else. The beachcombers hung together, alternately fighting and drinking because it was only amongst themselves that they could brag. When he had a certain number of drinks in him, Legs mourned

voluptuously over their fate. Poor bums! The homeless dogs were better off because they couldn't remember anything!

They hung out along the waterfront by day, watching for men coming off the ships with leave. Indescribably ragged and hairy as they were, many of them covered with the ugly sores that afflict white men in the tropics, the beachcombers were aware that there was something remarkable about them, and they played it up for all there was in it.

Ordinarily Legs could brag with the best of them. "I'm a known man, I am. You mustn't think that I belong with this scum on the beach. If I told you who I was, you'd open your eyes, 'bo! I'm a New Yorker. I'm known. Just temporarily down on my luck. When I get my money from the States I'll go back and take my rightful place there. In New York I'm accustomed to sporting a top hat and opening wine with the best. Shanley's, Churchill's, the Waldorf—those are my hangouts." And so on; and so on. Legs had repeated this so many times he believed it—at least for the moment.

But rum was an unreliable friend. It was apt to play tricks with your nerves, particularly on an empty stomach. Once when Legs was holding forth in this vein in the Casa do Machaco (Monkey-house) to a little stoker with sooty eyes and a sweat rag round his throat, the man shut him off by putting his hands on the table and leaning forward.

"You've done me a good turn, mate," he said. "I come ashore this morning meaning to shake the ship. I heard a lot of talk about the Amazon River and this here town, Manaos. Huh! With rubber at three dollars a pound they told me a man could work for one month and live like a Sultan the other eleven. And sure I thought a stokehold in the tropics was the last hell on earth. But when I look at you and your mates I sees there's other hells that I don't know of. So it's back to the stokehold for mine!"

When the stoker left him Legs' nerves gave way. He dropped his head on his arms and wept. Lucky stiff to have a stokehold!

Late one afternoon, while Legs was lying half asleep in the shade of a warehouse commanding a view of the floating docks, he saw a trim new steamboat come upriver and prepare to make fast. She was loaded to the guards with balls of black rubber. Fifty tons, Legs figured, at six thousand dollars a ton! He groaned in bitterness. So much money in the world, and himself without a shirt to cover his nakedness! However, he sat up eagerly. There might be something in it if the owner was aboard—provided he wasn't a greaser. Greasers hated Americans.

A single passenger disembarked from the steamboat. Legs sized him up with a beggar's sharpness. A tall man—too tall for a greaser, elegantly

dressed in a frock coat and silk hat. There was something vaguely familiar about him. He was undoubtedly the owner of the rubber, and the steamboat, too; he walked as if the earth was his. Legs moved to the other end of the warehouse, where he could intercept him as he passed.

When Legs got a good look into the hard, handsome face, he pulled back as if he had been struck, and the beggar's whine died on his lips. It was Jack Beatty! *Jack Beatty*, of all men on earth, here in Manaos! As for the tall man, he looked right through Legs as if he didn't exist, and strode on his way.

Legs' head whirled around. A hot resentment frothed up in him. Jack Beatty rich and free, with diamonds in his shirt front and a steamboat full of rubber! Legs started to follow him, with no purpose beyond the need of feeding his hate. He always had hated Jack Beatty even when he was taking his money. And Beatty had always hated him.

O God! how he hated him! There walked the man who had wrecked his life! So strong was the feeling that it made Legs come alive. He forgot himself. Beatty didn't recognize me, he thought, with a cunning grin. If a weapon had been thrust in Legs' hand at that moment he wouldn't have used it. Killing was too merciful. What he desired was to bring Beatty to a death-in-life such as he had known.

The tall man never looked behind him. He made his way to the main Avenida. It was the hour of the promenade and the pavement under the arcades was crowded with Brazilian officers, elegantly dressed women with the complexions of magnolia petals, frock-coated politicians, and foreign millionaires. Legs' man strode along head and shoulders above all, a contemptuous half-smile on his lips. Some persons of consequence greeted him respectfully.

Legs, slouching in the gutter, wary of kicks, ran into a beachcomber known as Melba. "What do they call that stiff in these parts?" he asked, with a jerk of the head towards the tall man's back.

Melba was an Australian. "You can search me," he answered, bitterly. "Another God-damned American. It's no wonder they're beginning to call the Amazon Yankee River. What chance has an honest man got against them sharks?"

Legs went on, leaving him grousing.

The tall man went into a jewelry store. According to gossip, more diamonds were being sold in Manaos at this time than in any city in the world. Legs loitered in the gutter outside the arcade. By and by his man came to the door of the shop, accompanied by the jeweler, to examine a

superb diamond bracelet that he held; three rows of solitaires set in platinum.

The sight lighted a fire in Legs. Jack Beatty can buy diamonds for his girl, while my belly is empty!

Beatty bought the bracelet with a casual nod.

As he was coming out of the shop, a greasy Brazilian roustabout known as Bullmouth happened by in the gutter. Bullmouth occasionally served as runner for one of the cheaper houses, and was pretty well informed.

“Who is he?” asked Legs.

“Torrenegro,” said Bullmouth, with an admiring grin. “What you call Blacktower. He’s one big man in Amazonas.”

“What’s his graft here?”

“They call him King of Bom Successo. He runs the town.”

Legs hurried on, fearful of losing his man.

Bom Successo; Portuguese for Good Success, generally shortened in American to Bum Success. Legs had heard plenty about the place. A mysterious town buried in the jungle. In a side channel off the main-traveled routes, they said, but easy enough to get to if you knew the way. Outlaws, absconders, wanted men from all over the world had come together there to make a town where they could live as they pleased. No laws, no police, no government.

A free town! There was magic in the words. The lid was off; everything went and nothing went any farther; no limit but the sky. The rubber-gatherers were willing to bury themselves for a year in the foul igapi, facing solitude, fevers, snake-bite, and starvation for the sake of winning a couple of weeks’ blow-out at Bom Successo. Such was the talk about the place. Men came all the way from Bolivia and Peru to spend their money there. Naturally, the merchants of Manaus resented what they termed the unfair competition, and they were always after the governor of Amazonas to clean up the place. But nothing had been done. It was said the governor was making a good thing out of it on the q.t. And Jack Beatty was the boss of Bom Successo! He would be, thought Legs.

Blacktower went into the Hotel Inghilterra. Presently he came out again and sat down at a table on the sidewalk. Legs lurked behind one of the pillars of the arcade, watching him. He ordered an aperitif, and surveyed the passing crowd with good-humored scorn. Sitting there stiff and buttoned up in the frock coat, he looked just as he had looked at Martin’s in New York, only here the frock coat was made of silk out of respect to the climate. There was a quality in his gaze that made men cringe.

By and by he spotted Legs behind the pillar. “Who are you looking at?” he demanded, with a cold stare.

An hour before, Legs would have taken to his heels, but something was changing in him. He stood his ground. “No offense meant,” he mumbled.

“Get the hell away from here,” said Blacktower, coolly. “You’re spoiling the view.”

Still Legs made no move to obey. Blacktower rose suddenly, and an ominous furrow appeared in his forehead. His face was terrible in anger. “Beat it,” he said, “before I give you the boot! Barefooted dog!”

Legs ran then. He was not afraid; he was ashamed to let Blacktower see the tears welling in his eyes. Darting across the street, he lost himself in a maze of alleys to the south, running blindly, with his head down. Blacktower had touched him in his tenderest spot. Barefooted! Barefooted!

He passed a squalid little open space known as Prago dos Castanhas, though there were no castanha trees there, only a muddy rectangle with an adobe wall down one side and a row of cheap stores on the other. He passed a bench displaying rows of wooden sandals, and his flesh yearned like a starving man at the sight of food. He stopped short, but immediately started on again, because the *caboclo* proprietor was sitting beside his stock, and his eyes became sharp with suspicion at the sight of the barefooted man. The sandals sold for the equivalent of a dime a pair, but a dime was as far out of Legs’ reach as a gold eagle.

Down at the end of the row, out of sight of the *caboclo*, he stopped to take counsel with himself. He had never stolen anything—not on account of any moral scruples, but because he was afraid. Dared he steal now? The *caboclo* was a brawny, well-fed specimen. There were dozens of his people around. Legs started to walk on. He was afraid.

But if he didn’t get shoes he couldn’t face Blacktower again. The man would pass out of his life, and all would be the same tomorrow as it had been yesterday. Legs felt himself sinking. Blacktower was his last straw. He stopped. He turned and walked back. At least he possessed one advantage—he could outrun any greaser in Brazil.

Stopping by the bench, he asked the price of the sandals. This was to give him time to pick out a pair big enough for him. His heart was beating fast. The *caboclo* was lazily swinging forward and back on the hind legs of his chair. Stooping suddenly, Legs grasped the front leg of the chair, and threw him over backwards. He snatched up the sandals and ran.

The *caboclo* raised an ungodly noise behind him, and Legs ran with his heart turning to water. People darted out of the little shops in front of him,

and he veered out into the middle of the square. None dared to lay hands on the tall American. They fell in behind, yelling like a pack of fiends. At the bottom of the square Legs darted into the darkest alley that offered itself. As he had figured, the caboclos had small stomach for running. After he had turned three corners he knew he was going to get away, and his breast was flooded with joy.

In a minute or two the sounds of pursuit died away and he slowed down. He was drenched with sweat, and his heart was hammering. He pressed his prize joyfully against his ribs. Later, in a shaft of light streaming from an open door, he went down on one knee and fastened them on. He stamped his feet for the pleasure of hearing the soles knock on the hard earth. His breast swelled with pride. I've got shoes! he murmured to himself. They can say what they like!

He returned to the Hotel Inghilterra, though he had small notion of what he was going to do when he got there. Blacktower exercised the power of a magnet over him. The sidewalk café was empty now. It was the hour when well-to-do folk sit down to their dinners. Legs squatted on his heels across the road with his back against a pillar of the arcade, and waited. He waited for two hours, forgetful of his own gnawing hunger.

In the course of time Blacktower came out of the hotel and sat down at a sidewalk table. A waiter put a cup of coffee and a pony of cognac before him. Legs arose and moved up and down the street, filled with a thick excitement; longing to approach the man; afraid to show himself. Up and down, up and down, always drifting a little nearer, until finally the lights of the café fell on him, and Blacktower saw him. He was in a better humor now, having dined.

“Well, damned if here isn't the hairy ape again!” he said, with his contemptuous grin.

Legs could scarcely speak for excitement. “You . . . you called me barefoot dog,” he stammered. “See, I got shoes.”

Blacktower laughed heartily. “What of it?” he asked.

Legs was silent. He did not know the right thing to say.

“Much obliged for giving me a look,” said Blacktower, with heavy sarcasm. “You can beat it now.”

Legs, despairing, nevertheless stood his ground. “I'm an American like yourself,” he mumbled.

“You're no credit to your country,” said Blacktower.

“You're rich . . .”

“I wouldn’t be if I shelled out to every tramp in the gutter.”

“I don’t want to take money off you,” muttered Legs.

“What do you want, then?”

“I want a leg-up . . . I want you to give me a job.”

Blacktower laughed again in pure amusement. “Fellow,” he said, “I got to have *men* to serve me.”

Legs was silenced.

However, Blacktower did not order him away again. He must have felt something of Legs’ powerful emotion. “What sort of job?” he asked.

“Anything at all.”

“I might put you in the kitchen with the Chinese,” he said, grinning.

“All right,” said Legs.

There was a silence. Blacktower rolled his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, and bored Legs through and through with his hard black eyes. The fragrance of the cigar reached Legs’ nostrils, making him think, Once I smoked cigars like that. His spirits dropped down, and then rose again, as Blacktower studied. Finally the latter thrust a lazy hand in his pocket and drew out some coins. Choosing an American silver dollar, he threw it on the pavement at Legs’ feet.

“Go and get your face mown,” he said. “If I can stand looking at it I may take you on.”

Legs picked up the coin and ran off. He could scarcely believe his good fortune. Sure, Lady Luck was with him today. He knew of an humble barber in the Rua Vasca whose shop would still be open. Suddenly he stopped, and a cold sweat broke out over him. If he cleaned himself up, Blacktower would recognize him. Why hadn’t he thought of that? Legs alternately shivered and sweat in fear, but his legs automatically started moving again.

At the barber’s door he paused. Blacktower doesn’t mean anything by it; he’ll only give you the laugh when you go back. Why go back? Why waste the money on the barber? On a dollar you can stay drunk for a couple of days at the Monkey-house. Such an overpowering desire for rum came over Legs he had to lean against the door frame for support.

But the struggle was not over. Maybe he means it, Legs thought. Are you satisfied to swill rotgut while Blacktower is sipping champagne with his girl? If he gets away from you you’re a goner . . . a goner!

He refused to think about it any longer. He staggered into the shop and, pressing the dollar on the surprised barber, said, “Give me a haircut and a shave.”

When his own lean brown face began to issue from under its hairy covering, he was terrified by the sight of it. He shut his eyes. It brought back too many things that he didn't want to think about. It was no joke for a dead man to take up the job of living again.

Half an hour later he presented himself at Blacktower's table with a hangdog scowl. Blacktower started to say something sarcastic, but the grin froze in his face. He half started out of his chair, and fell back again. "Matt McArdle!" he exclaimed softly. "Well, I'm damned! . . . I'm damned!"

Legs felt that it was something to have shaken the gambler's nerve, if only for a moment. He said nothing.

Blacktower quickly recovered himself. "So you had your bit of fun with me!" he said, with his usual grin. "How in hell did you get down to this part of the world?"

"What does it matter?" said Legs.

Blacktower suddenly snarled, "I don't owe you nothing!"

Legs' burning hatred gave him an insight into the man. He saw that Blacktower behind his mask was afraid. Full of hatred and afraid. They were predestined enemies. Their fates were crossed. As in a flash it came to Legs: He's no better a man than I am! And at one stroke he entered on a new existence.

"Do you figure that I owe you anything?" Blacktower demanded.

"No," said Legs. "It was just my rotten luck to get caught."

"And my luck not to get caught," Blacktower retorted, with an ugly grin. "You always were a soft fool. Why didn't you brazen it out?"

Legs shrugged.

"Well, if I don't owe you anything, what are you coming after me for?" Blacktower demanded.

"I didn't come after you," said Legs. "It was just accident that I saw you."

"What do you want of me?"

"You said you'd give me a job."

Blacktower laughed in a surprised way. "Do you know where I live?" he asked.

Legs nodded.

"Do you know what kind of place it is?"

"I've heard talk about it."

“Man!” said Blacktower with a hard smile. “It’s no place for a policeman! There are men there from New York who remember you. They’d make it worse for you than Sing Sing.”

“I’ll chance it,” said Legs.

Once more Blacktower was silent, holding his head on one side to keep the smoke out of his eyes, and studying Legs. Notwithstanding his contemptuousness, there was a puzzled look in the back of his eyes. Legs thought, He can’t get shut of me and he don’t understand it. Finally the hard smile wreathed itself around Blacktower’s lips again.

“All right,” he said; “it’ll be a kind of novelty to have an ex-sergeant of detectives for a kitchen mechanic. Matt McArdle, the darling of the Tenderloin, to black my shoes! You’re hired. If you don’t like it later, don’t blame me.”

Legs lowered his eyes to prevent Blacktower from reading anything there.

“Come round in the morning,” Blacktower went on, carelessly, “and I’ll stake you to an outfit. You can wear a pair of dark glasses around camp. I won’t give you away. We’re sailing tomorrow evening.”

“I haven’t eaten since morning,” muttered Legs.

Blacktower tossed him another coin.

BLACKTOWER and Legs went aboard the steamboat *Rio Purus* at sunset next day. Legs was wearing a natty white drill suit and a pair of white canvas shoes. New clothes made a big difference in his feelings. He could look anybody in the eye. The beach was far behind him. Crossing the dock, they passed Melba and a beachcomber known as Flat-car, who held out their hands whining. Legs made believe to haul off with his fist, and they beat it. They failed to recognize their late companion. Gosh! what a pair of dirty bums! thought Legs.

The *Rio Purus* had a dandified Brazilian skipper, a rough Scots engineer, and a crew of caboclos. It was clear that Blacktower was the boss on board. The ordinary passengers swung their hammocks between stanchions on deck, but Blacktower had a private deck above, all screened in with copper mesh, and Legs, as his servant, shared it. He would have been better pleased to mix with the humbler folk, because he and Blacktower were uneasy when left alone together. Blacktower took it out in tormenting him.

Lying in his hammock with his hands under his head, and his long legs hanging out on either side, Blacktower said, with an ugly smile: "Let's talk about old times. Did they give you hell up in Sing Sing?"

Legs' flesh crawled at the recollection, but he kept a mask over his face. "No worse than ordinary."

"They tell me it's jam to the convicts when they get their hands on a cop," Blacktower went on. "They find ways of making him sweat right under the eyes of the keepers, I hear. Is that a fact?"

"You can't prove it by me," said Legs.

"You're a liar," laughed Blacktower. "I know."

Legs kept a wary eye out for clouts and kicks, but inside he was less afraid of Blacktower. A full stomach gives a man courage. However, he was

careful not to let this appear. If I make out he's got me scared, it will put him off his guard, he thought.

Legs had been told they had a twenty-four-hour voyage before them. His ideas of the geography of the country were rudimentary. When they issued out of the Rio Negro he noticed that they turned down the Amazon. Later, in the dark, he saw that the steamboat was bucking the current again. A deckhand told him they were ascending the Madeira River. This was where the worse fevers came from, Legs had heard.

He slept but poorly that night. Blacktower was too near him. He would start up with a tightening throat, and see the man lying almost beside him. Never had he expected to have *him* for a bedfellow. Legs would sit up, nursing his knees, and gloating over the sleeping Blacktower, rolling his hatred under his tongue. It tasted salty. It was a satisfaction to him that Blacktower was a handsome man, and powerful and rich, made it worth while hating him.

During the night the steamboat left the broad river, and with the aid of her searchlight started pushing at half-speed through a stream so narrow that the branches of the lofty trees laced overhead. The searchlight created a little false day in the thick night. The gigantic trees seemed to march out of the dark with a stare of surprise before disappearing into the dark astern. There was no visible land anywhere; the trees were rooted in the black water. Except for the slow heartbeat of the propeller, it was as still as a burial vault. Thick vines hanging from nowhere—bushrope, Legs had heard them called—occasionally slapped against the sides of the vessel or dragged like snakes over the roof. Legs slept and woke and slept again, as men do in hot countries.

When the sun rose the steamboat was still threading her way through the forest. Flocks of screaming parrots flashed overhead like broken bits of rainbow, and families of monkeys swung themselves out of sight like bunches of brown rope. Occasionally in an opening a gigantic orchid plant hung down a cascade of flame. A delicious morning freshness filled the air, and Legs felt something that he had long forgotten—the sense of being young. After all, he wasn't thirty yet. The old world wasn't so bad. A phrase out of the Bible kept running through his head: Born anew! Born anew!

When Blacktower awoke, his glittering eyes and contemptuous grin followed Legs, looking for an opportunity to get at him, and Legs was careful to keep his eyes lowered. Blacktower's animosity stimulated him. He gave me a leg-up, but I don't owe him anything for it, he thought. He only did it, thinking to humble me.

Before ten o'clock the full heat descended, and all on board the steamboat became half stupefied by it. In the close jungle it was like a blanket wrapping you in fold after fold. Silence held everything in its spell; the marching trees seemed to look down at a man with secret enmity. Passing through the narrow stream, the water sucked away from the roots at either side, rolling back with a hollow splash after the boat had gone on.

At evening their destination revealed itself with a dramatic suddenness. Rounding a bend, the narrow waterway opened into a broad pool, and a wooden pier supported on piles lay before them. A pier, an open space of bare earth, a cluster of houses around it, a crowd of men watching the steamboat. After the day-long solitude it was astonishing to discover that other little humans besides themselves frequented this large-scale world.

The first sight of the far-famed city of pleasure was disappointing. A raw wound in the jungle, with a huddle of earth-colored buildings on it like an eruption. Legs was not exactly a connoisseur of beauty, but it made him sore. Well, what did you expect? he asked himself—a world's fair?

While the steamboat was maneuvering alongside the pier he looked it over. It was built on a promontory of firm ground coming to a point at the river, and having an igaripe, or creek, flowing in at one side and a dry gully on the other. To the left of the pier rose a big warehouse with an iron roof, and beyond it a street of 'dobe houses straggled along the bank of the creek, with bigger buildings of wood sticking up here and there, and an occasional giant tree. A rickety bridge hung over the creek on the left, supported by bushrope from the trees above; and at the farther end of the bridge was a crazy huddle of palm shacks, leaning this way and that on piles in the swamp.

"That's Brooklyn," said Blacktower, dryly.

The camp seemed quiet enough; nevertheless, before going ashore Blacktower opened his valise and, taking out his gun, dropped it in a special pocket in the tail of his coat. Legs put on the dark glasses with a quickening pulse. I must get me a gun, somehow, he thought, as he picked up his master's valise.

What seemed to be the entire population of the place had gathered at the shore end of the pier to watch the steamboat land. A rough-looking crowd, but quiet; too quiet, somehow. There were no women amongst them. Blacktower walked down the pier like a king returning to his capital. There were no cheers to greet him. Over the tree tops to the right, Legs had a glimpse of gorgeous sunset clouds in orange and purple. The whole effect was queer.

There was a stir in the crowd. Suddenly every man had turned his face towards the center. Legs saw a confused milling there; a man's shriek shattered the evening stillness. At the sound the crowd seemed to explode in pieces, every man running as for dear life. By the time Blacktower reached the spot no one was there. No one, that is, except a single figure lying on the beaten earth with a wet and crimson shirt. His mouth was still open for that final shriek; he stared at the sky.

Blacktower looked down at him with a bored expression. A white man joined him, English by the look of him, a queer-looking specimen, young, but already bald as an egg, and cynical.

"Here's a nice thing!" drawled Blacktower. "Saluting the steamboat with a murder!"

"What do you expect?" said the Englishman. "It's one of the by-products of freedom."

Blacktower ignored the flip answer. "Who is he?" he asked.

"A *seringueiro* from the upper Purus."

"Has he got anybody belonging to him?"

"No. He came alone."

"So much the better," said Blacktower. "Get rid of him."

Some of the caboclos were drifting back, registering innocence for the benefit of the white men. The Englishman gave an order, and four of them picked up the dead man by his arms and legs and, carrying him a little way out on the pier, swung him over the rail, still warm. All leaned over the rail to look. The instant the dead man struck the water a furious commotion took place. Legs had a glimpse of flashing silver sides, and the river was whipped up into crimson foam.

The Englishman, observing Legs' staring eyes, remarked in his cynical manner, "Piranhas—in case you think of taking a swim."

Blacktower and the Englishman proceeded, and Legs followed with the bag, in a daze. It was all over so quick! And all so casual and matter-of-fact!

"The trouble started over in Brooklyn," said the Englishman to Blacktower. "Two days ago. As I heard the story a fellow called Archie came down the Madeira with a little bag of gold dust he had washed on the bars. He gave it to the woman called Black Amelie to keep for him. You know her. When he asked for it again, she said he had drunk it up in her house. Archie went away and collected his friends, and they hitched a rope to Amelie's shack and started to pull it over in the swamp. But a friend of Amelie's shot into them out of the window and they beat it. Ever since

there's been scattered shootings over there, not to speak of knifings. I don't know which side that bloke was on."

"Well, let them shoot it out," said Blacktower, indifferently. "But warn them to keep to their own side of the creek."

They were crossing the open space of hard-packed earth. On their left a narrow street made away, following the course of the creek in an S-shaped curve. Along it the close-built shacks had porches thatched with palm in crude imitation of the arcades of Manaos. The whole effect was flimsy, like theatrical scenery. As you went back from the river the promontory of high ground widened, giving room for a confusion of crooked lanes on the right.

Darkness was falling, and all at once hundreds of colored lights were turned on, giving the curving arcade a festive air. Coney Island, thought Legs; Coney Island in the jungle. It was queer. Overhead you could see the gigantic still trees, brooding.

Blacktower turned to the right. At the end of a short side passage rose a more pretentious building than any in the neighborhood. It was square in shape, built of lumber, and surrounded by a broad veranda. They entered a brightly lighted hall; a roulette table at one side, smaller tables for loo, faro, etc., on the other. Jack Beatty has not changed his business, thought Legs. There were no players at this hour.

At a cash-desk just inside the entrance sat an elegantly dressed young man with a face as smooth and expressionless as wax. Legs knew him. It was "Duke" Hammill, wanted by the New York police for murder. He and Legs had had more than one run-in in the past, and the latter stiffened warily. A pair of dark glasses does not provide much of a disguise.

Hammill and Blacktower greeted each other casually.

"Hello, Duke!"

"Hello, Black!"

"How's business?"

"So-so."

Hammill looked at Legs, and Blacktower said, indifferently: "This is a servant I hired in Manaos. Answers to the name of Legs."

"Why the blinders?" asked Hammill, and Legs held his breath.

"Ophthalmia," said Blacktower, blandly.

Hammill accepted it, and Legs relaxed. This guy would think no more of shooting me than rolling over in bed, he thought. I must get me a gun.

Blacktower's dwelling was in a separate building at the rear of the gambling hall. The ground fell away here into the gully and the smaller

house was built up on piles to bring it on a level with its neighbor. They were connected by a bridge. The piles were surrounded by an impenetrable thicket of bamboo, and even in the dark it struck Legs how well suited the place was for defense.

He got a start upon entering it. It had been Blacktower's fancy to make the house look as much as possible like his famous place in New York. After the dirt and squalor outside, the Oriental rugs, the oil-paintings in heavy gold frames, the statuary, the deeply-cushioned divans, struck strangely on the eye. He had even brought the bronze statue of Fortune into the jungle. Every sporting character in New York was familiar with it. Legs looked at the naked lady with an unfriendly eye. Heretofore she had brought him no good.

Legs was handed over to the care of a grinning Hawaiian boy called George. Blacktower said: "Tomorrow we'll start breaking you in. Tonight you can do what you please." The smile seemed to add: If you get your damn throat cut, so much the worse for you!

George showed Legs where to sling his hammock on the veranda, and took him into the kitchen for his dinner. Legs laid himself out to win the good will of his fellow servants. Particularly Chou, the fat Chinese cook. Fond of the bottle, Legs saw. A timorous soul; afraid of the rowdy main street.

Chou was not unwilling to be placated. It flattered him to have a white man serving in the kitchen. He gave Legs portions of the dishes that he was sending in to the masters. Legs thought he had never tasted better food. The jerked beef and farina days were over.

After dinner a great restlessness seized on Legs. He was burning up for a drink. The town drew him. He could hear the shouting and the singing in the distance; the pounding of out-of-tune pianos and the plucking of guitars. He hadn't a cent of money, but he was accustomed to cadging drinks. He stole across the bridge and circled the veranda surrounding the gambling-hall. The place was oddly quiet, yet when he peeped through the slats of the blinds he saw that the tables were well filled.

A minute later he was in the main street. The din was terrific. Fights were of momentary occurrence. In one dive or another the music would be interrupted by a sudden uproar. Somebody would be thrown into the street; the music would recommence exactly where it had left off. Whenever you lifted your head, through the holes in the palm awnings you could see the noble, quiet trees.

A white man standing at one of the open bars hailed Legs. This was what he was looking for, and he went in. It was a fellow of his own age, half drunk, with a powerful and embittered glance. He was leaning on the bar surrounded by half a dozen fawning caboclos for whom he was buying. He turned on them.

“Get out! Don’t you see I’ve invited a gentleman to drink with me?”

They faded.

“A new white stiff in town! Who the hell are you?”

“I work for Blacktower.”

“We all work for Blacktower.”

He suddenly leaned forward and, lifting Legs’ glasses, peered into his eyes. Startling. However, it appeared that his interest was a professional one. “White as milk,” he said. “You come to this pesthole like a lamb to the slaughter. I’m the doctor here. Gene Buckles. Graduate of Johns Hopkins. Very brilliant fellow. Don’t I look it? . . . Goddamn!” He suddenly smashed his glass down on the bar. “What you drinking?”

“Rum,” said Legs.

“Rum for the gentleman!” shouted the doctor. “Genuine St. Croix, and none of your rotgut!”

Legs downed it and felt like a new man. He was drawn to the doctor. This man gave utterance to feelings that were festering in his own breast.

“What you call yourself?” demanded the doctor.

“Legs.”

“Good! Nothing could be briefer or more descriptive.” He glanced down. “You have the look of a sprinter. That’s all right. But why hide your bonny blue eyes? There’s no danger in being recognized by the law here. There ain’t no such thing!”

“There are other reasons.”

“Well, you’re safe with me,” said the doctor. “Have another.”

Presently he asked, “Where did Blacktower pick you up, Legs?”

“In Manaos.”

“Look, did that black devil buy diamonds in Manaos?”

Legs looked stupid. “How should I know?”

“He did! He did! Damn him!”

“What’s he want diamonds for?”

The doctor grinned at Legs derisively. “To stick up his nose.”

Legs waited, sure that more would be forthcoming.

The doctor bared his teeth in a grimace of drunken, savage pain. "She sings in the theater here. Last turn. I'll show her to you directly . . . O God!" he cried. "Here we are, sunk in this cesspool. Well, we become permeated with the stink and nobody gives a damn." He swallowed his rum at a gulp. "Then this girl comes. She brings to mind the things that every man wants to forget. She looks like somebody's sister. Who is she? Nobody knows! They call her La Rosadora, but she's from God's country like you and me, Legs. How did she get with this bunch of floozeys from Pará? Nobody knows!"

"She's never let outside the theater. It costs five dollars just to have a drink with her at the table. And what do you get out of it? She smiles in a way that would break a man's heart and talks about the weather!" The doctor ground his teeth together. "Well, if she falls for that — Blacktower, we'll know what she is," he muttered.

Presently he started for the street. "Come on!" he said over his shoulder.

They turned up the street. The last building but one on the left-hand side was a big, unpainted wooden shed, boarded up all round to a height of seven or eight feet, open above to permit the circulation of air. There was a wooden screen inside the entrance, to keep anybody from seeing in. No advertising was necessary. Men were streaming in. The sound of a raucous female voice could be heard. Is that the wonderful star? Legs thought, grinning to himself.

At the ticket office Buckles said over his shoulder, "Costs five dollars."

"Haven't got it," muttered Legs.

"Well, to hell with you, then. I need my money inside."

He disappeared. It was all one to Legs. He drifted back into the crowded street, looking for another buyer.

It appeared that a well-dressed white man had not to look far. It made a drunken caboclo feel big to treat such a one. It didn't trouble Legs that there was something insolent in such hospitality. All he wanted was the rum. He lined up at another bar with a little fat brown man who gesticulated with a big diamond on his forefinger and boasted that he had three wives on the Rio Purus. Legs let him run on. He didn't feel like talking.

But as he was conveying his drink to his lips, he heard a sound that caused him to put the glass down again. A vagrant sound that for a second seemed to find a little hole in the surrounding babel and was then lost again. Far off, a woman's voice singing a song that he knew. He thought his senses must be tricking him. But he had only had one drink. Swallowing his rum, he listened with nerves at a stretch. He heard it again. His caboclo friend had

turned to harangue somebody on the other side. Legs slipped out into the street.

Here he heard it clearly, and was drawn back to the theater like a needle to the magnet. It was called “A Newsboy’s Love Song” and he knew the wistful comic words by heart. They had called it their song. It raked his breast with sharp points.

“I love you like the kids love street pianos,
I love you like a gambler loves a game.”

He walked along under the side wall of the building, gazing up at the opening like a soul barred from Paradise. He knew that there could be but one voice in the world able so to tear his breast; he heard the slightly husky quality that had always prevented her from getting a principal part—a huskiness sweeter to him than silver bells. He *had* to see. He gauged the distance, sprang, and, hooking his fingers over the top of the wall, drew his head over it.

He saw Fay on the stage. She had scarcely changed at all. The flaming red hair, the pale cheeks without rouge; shadowy eyes and wistful lips; what an apparition to rise in *Bom Successo!* Suddenly weak, he dropped to the foot of the wall and pressed his head between his hands. Such a violent emotion as he experienced exceeded both pleasure and pain. It was the sensation of flying to pieces.

After the song was over his faculties began to work. He saw things in a new way; the curving street with the parti-colored lights, drunken crowd, high-arching trees. He was Matt McArdle again. He recollected with a shock that this was what he came to South America for. He had found her after he had forgotten his search!

Fay in *Bom Successo!* The delicate Fay with her nice ways that he used to laugh at long ago, trapped in this hell-hole! Fay on the stage for these brutes to gape at! If I had not failed her she wouldn’t be here, he thought, and tasted the dregs of the cup.

FOOD was coming in all day at Blacktower's. Hampers from the steamboat with caviare, marrons, pâté de foie gras, truffles, and other delicacies of the great world. Cases of champagne and liqueurs. Also the best that the country provided; turtles to make soup; a big bird called ungaruru that was to be roasted—the caboclos who brought it groaned and rubbed their bellies; a basket of silvery piranhas. Legs wondered idly if these could be some of the same fish that had feasted on the dead caboclo last night.

When Chou was not requiring their services, the flat-faced George undertook to drill Legs in waiting on the table.

“God help you if you spill anything,” he said, grinning.

“What’s all the excitement about?” asked Legs.

“Big bonton dinner tonight. Boss gonna have his girl here.”

Legs lowered his eyes. “Who’s his girl?”

“La Rosadora.”

Legs thought of the diamond bracelet. “Who’s she?” he asked, offhand.

“She’s the star singer in the show. Most beautiful woman in South America!” The Hawaiian boy made sounds of rapture and kissed his fingers.

“Has she been here long?”

“Two weeks. Manoel Carvalho brought her up from Pará.”

“Tough place for a woman,” ventured Legs.

George shrugged. “She don’t need to worry. She’s took care of.”

“What does she do all day?”

“I don’t know. She’s never seen.”

“What do you mean, never seen?”

“Well, Manoel keeps her close, you bet.”

Rage made Legs' blood thicken. He skirted around the subject. "Who is this Manoel?"

"He runs the show. He's a smart feller. He don't have to take nothin' from Blacktower or nobody, because he's a friend of the governor's. See?"

"What sort of fellow is he?"

"A regular greaser. You can see for yourself tonight. He'll be here. Him and Pepita."

"Who's Pepita?"

"His wife."

"So he has a wife."

"You and me'll be waitin' on 'em," said George.

Legs stiffened all over.

"What's the matter with you?" asked George, staring.

"Nothing."

"You look as if you had a sudden bellyache."

"I was trying to remember," said Legs, quickly. "I must always come to the left of a person, you said, and offer the dish on the flat of my hand."

The lesson proceeded.

Legs realized that there was no way of avoiding the ordeal. He was thankful for the dark glasses. Nobody looks at a waiter, he told himself.

The table was set for ten persons. As the dinner hour approached, Blacktower himself came to look it over. Legs beheld him with new and burning feelings. Blacktower was fifty years old, it was true, but there was a vigor and power in him that a woman might find irresistible. He looked his best in evening clothes. So he had been dressed the first time Legs had met him—and so had Legs been dressed. Now Legs was the waiter. Moreover, there was the diamond bracelet. Legs had never come within a thousand miles of presenting Fay with such a bracelet.

Blacktower arranged bowls of orchids for the table. "Nobody else in the dump to do it," he grumbled, shamefacedly. He placed two rows of candles in pink shades. "When dinner is served, put out the other lights," he ordered.

Legs' anxiety lightened a little. I'll be in the shadow, he thought.

At a moment when George was out of the room, Blacktower looked at Legs with a hard and quizzical smile. "Well, how goes it?" he asked.

"All right," said Legs.

"Call me sir," said Blacktower.

"Very well, sir."

“Tonight I’ll call you William,” Blacktower went on, grinning. “Legs would hardly be the thing with ladies at the table.”

George was stationed at the front door when the guests entered, consequently Legs’ ordeal did not begin until they came in to dinner. When Fay appeared in the doorway, hanging to Blacktower’s arm, the room rocked in front of his eyes. He clenched his teeth to steady himself. She did not look at him, but at the table decorations. She had a blue-and-silver dress on.

“How pretty!” she murmured, in the voice that knocked on Legs’ naked heart. “I haven’t seen anything like that since . . .”

She didn’t finish the sentence.

She was seated at Blacktower’s right. George and Legs had already fixed it up between them that George was to serve the left side of the table and Legs the right. This enabled George to get a good look at the beauty, while Legs kept out of the direct line of her vision.

His worst moment came when he had to place the first plate before her. Fay’s thin white arms had an appealing quality like no other arms on earth. And the sweetness of her that rose to his nostrils as he bent over! His hand began to shake dangerously. Somehow he got the plate down and beat it.

In the beginning he could see nobody else at the table. By degrees they began to register. A fat Brazilian, all dressed up to the nines, but fat and greasy still; a heavy dark woman, his wife, once a beauty, perhaps, but now adorned with a mustache; two girls from the company, haggard under their rouge; Duke Hammill and another employee of the tables known as Frenchie; the cynical Englishman whom they addressed as Osman; and Dr. Buckles. Buckles sat on Legs’ side and as Legs served him he murmured out of the corner of his mouth:

“So this is your job! New to it, ain’t you?”

Legs smiled as a servant might. A feeling of uneasiness went through him. This man was too noticing.

Legs’ observations of Fay were necessarily confined to her profile and back. Her thinness hurt him. It was no climate for white women. Her bright-red hair was rolled up on top of her head, and the sight of the escaped tendrils curling at the nape of her neck almost brought the tears to his eyes. That soft and childish neck that he had been used to enclose within his hands!

The whole thing seemed like a dream, it was so unreal. All this phony elegance in the depths of the jungle; men and women in evening dress, sipping champagne out of hollow-stemmed glasses, with the crude roar of the camp coming faintly through the windows.

The discipline imposed on a waiter steadied Legs. As the meal went on and he realized that there was almost no chance of being recognized by Fay, his head cleared. It was necessary for him to learn the inwardness of the situation, and he applied himself to watching and listening.

By degrees a number of things became evident. Firstly, the terrible Blacktower was hard hit. He lowered his head when he addressed Fay, and his rocky face softened in spite of himself. Secondly, all the other men, Duke Hammill, Frenchie, Osman, and Buckles were likewise in love with her and jealous of Blacktower. Thirdly, Manoel and Pepita were keenly aware of Fay's value to themselves, and were on the alert to prevent any man from stealing her. They were full of greasy confidence. Fourthly—and this made Legs burn inside—Manoel himself was infatuated with Fay, and was only restrained by fear of his wife, who was as jealous as only an aging woman can be.

As to Fay's own feelings, he could not tell. He had never understood her. All he could see was that she was enjoying the moment like a child. She was like a pale plant brought out of the cellar into the sun. Occasionally he saw her checking her laughter and glancing uneasily at either Manoel or Pepita. She was no better than a prisoner. What was he himself but a prisoner?

During the meal Blacktower endeavored to keep Fay engaged in low-voiced talk with himself, but the other men would not stand for it. One or another of them was continually drawing her into the general conversation. A thing that comforted Legs was that they all treated her with respect. There was no loose talk around the table. He heard Blacktower murmur to her:

“Having a good time?”

“Oh yes!” breathed Fay. “Only . . .”

“Only what?”

“It will be over so soon.”

“It needn't be,” he murmured, meaningly.

Legs felt as if somebody had squeezed his heart strings, so real was the pain. How can she stand out against him? he thought.

“Oh, Miss Rosadora,” Buckles sang out from the foot of the table, “you ought to come see my menagerie. One of my patients brought me a little black monkey today. Serious-minded chap. Would you like to have him for a pet?”

Fay did not answer immediately, but looked at Manoel.

“That would be very nice,” said Manoel, with his oily grin.

Buckles scowled. “What do *you* say?” he asked, pointedly, addressing Fay.

“I should love it.”

None of the men paid any attention to the other two girls. They seemed not to resent it, but drank more champagne than anybody else, and babbled to each other back and forth across the table.

Blacktower got Fay’s ear again. “This camp is no place for a woman like you,” he murmured.

“I know it,” she said, simply.

“How did you happen to come here?”

“I didn’t know we were coming here. My contract with Manoel said the leading cities of Brazil.”

“Before signing the contract you ought to have found out if he was a scoundrel.”

“I had no one to go to . . . and he offered a good salary.”

“Is he paying it?”

“No. He says he’s keeping it for me.”

Blacktower scowled. “Do they ill-treat you?”

“Oh no! They leave me alone.” Legs saw a little shiver pass through her. “But it’s horrible!” she murmured.

“Manoel will never pay you a cent,” said Blacktower.

“Then what am I to do?”

“Leave it to me.”

These low-voiced talks made Manoel restive. His wife was watching him like a lynx from across the table. His yellow eyeballs rolled viciously towards Blacktower. Finally he said:

“Rosadora, sing a little song for the company, dearie.”

“Be quiet,” said his wife. “It is not the time for singing.”

Manoel subsided, flushing darkly. Nobody wanted music, it appeared.

Then there was Duke Hammill, the handsome skinny little gambler, trained to a finish by danger. He raised his glass. “Drink with me, Miss Rosadora.” Blacktower scowled, but Hammill coolly faced him out. “Happy days!” he said with a conceited air.

The continual interruptions made Blacktower sore, and as soon as the ices were eaten he pushed back his chair. They all went into the main room that Blacktower called “the salon,” and George served coffee there. Legs

cleared the table. Soon afterwards he heard them drift across the bridge to take a flyer at the tables in the front building.

Legs was gathering up the coffee-cups in the salon when Blacktower and La Rosadora unexpectedly returned. His retreat was cut off and he began to shake. But the girl never looked at him.

“Bring fresh coffee, a bottle of benedictine, and glasses upstairs,” ordered Blacktower.

Legs’ head reeled. Upstairs! He couldn’t face it. In the pantry he tried to persuade George to go.

“Not on your life!” said the Hawaiian.

“It won’t make any difference to him.”

“Sure, it won’t make any difference to him. But he told you to bring it, and if everything is not done exactly as he says, he raises all hell.”

Legs climbed the stairs with his knees giving under him. There was only one room on the second floor, surrounded by a narrow balcony and open to the air on all four sides. This was Blacktower’s private apartment. It was lighted only by a single lamp under a colored shade. Fay was sitting in an easy chair under the lamp, and Blacktower had drawn up a small chair where he could look into her face. His back was to the stairs. Fay had the diamond bracelet in her hands and was examining it wistfully.

Legs had to put his tray down on a large table by the head of the stairs, fetch a small table and place it before them, then return for the tray. The two were oblivious to him.

Fay handed the bracelet back. “I can’t take it,” she murmured.

“I went all the way to Manaos to get it for you,” said Blacktower.

“Oh, you only say that,” she returned, with a bleak smile.

“It’s the truth!”

“There would be no use in my accepting it. They would only take it from me.”

“Take it from you?”

“Oh, on one excuse or another . . . for the sake of keeping it safe,” she added, with her wry smile.

“How long are you going to put up with this?” asked Blacktower.

“Will you pay my fare to New York?” she countered.

“You ask too much of me,” muttered Blacktower. “I’m only flesh and blood.”

“Then what else can I do,” she said, spreading out her hands, “except put up with it?”

“Come to me,” said Blacktower.

Legs, with lowered head, was in the act of placing the tray on the small table before them. He wondered that they did not hear the loud beating of his heart.

Fay did not answer immediately.

“Isn’t this a nice room?” asked Blacktower. “Away from all the filthy muck.”

She mutely nodded.

“This would be your room,” he went on. “All yours. You would be provided with a key to the door, too. Could a man offer you more? Here, you would be safe from Manoel and his like. You would be surrounded with all the comforts that a pretty woman is entitled to. Plenty of servants to wait on you . . .”

Including me! thought Legs.

“No, I cannot,” said Fay.

There was no further excuse for Legs to linger. He started slowly down the narrow stairs.

Blacktower said: “Don’t you want your coffee? . . . Perhaps you’d rather have an ice?” He raised his voice. “William!”

Legs returned.

“Fetch madame an ice.”

Legs flew to the pantry. Chou and George were eating their dinner. When he gave his order, his breathlessness made them stare. Chou’s deliberate movements nearly drove him mad. In two or three minutes he was back in the upstairs room.

They were sitting as before. He judged from Blacktower’s attitude that he was pleading his case hard. Fay was listening with downcast face. Her hand lay limply in Blacktower’s. She’s going to give in! Legs thought, with a stab in his breast. Well . . . what else can she do?

Blacktower was saying: “Manoel enjoys power here because of his connection with the governor of Amazonas. We have to keep the governor in a good humor. So we send him a handsome present every month through Manoel. If you come to me Manoel will run to the governor with his complaints. It’s risky because these grafters can always raise up race prejudice against us Americans; but I’ll chance it. I can prove that Manoel is

grafting off his boss. And On Kai-Ling will stand by me. He pays a bigger export tax than anybody in the state.”

“I am not worth so much risk,” murmured Fay.

“You are worth all a man has!” murmured Blacktower.

There was a silence. Legs, between the two of them, was removing the coffee-cups and placing the ice before Fay.

“Manoel is a foul beast,” Blacktower resumed. “He means you no good. If it was not for Pepita . . . I guess you know it. Women have their instincts.”

“Yes, I know it,” said Fay, very low.

Another silence. Legs had finished his task.

“Then you must come to me,” said Blacktower, with quiet assurance. “The present situation is impossible.”

Legs, behind Blacktower’s chair, paused for a second, glancing at Fay. He saw her lips tremble. He knew she was about to give in. Yielding to a desperate impulse, he took off the dark glasses and, holding them up, he made believe to be looking through them. The fluttering of his hands attracted the girl’s attention. She looked into his face. . . .

He had thought her pale before, but now her face became as white as paper. Even her lips changed color. But she was game; no cry escaped her. Legs, afraid that Blacktower might turn around, walked slowly to the stairs and went down. He had played his only card. The thing was out of his hands now.

LEGS was not sent for again. The party broke up early because La Rosadora had to do her turn before the show ended. Blacktower went across the bridge with the guests and did not return; consequently, Legs had no way of knowing how the situation had turned out.

The uncertainty was more than a man could bear. Sleep was out of the question. Having marked the kitchen shelf where Chou kept his private store of rum, Legs took a long pull while the Chinaman slept. But there was no forgetfulness in the stuff now. This thing had to be faced out. He tossed in his hammock while the night dragged through, his hot brain endlessly traveling the same ground, like a squirrel in a revolving cage. He did not return to the bottle.

In the end the sun came up as it will do.

On ordinary occasions Blacktower remained in the gambling-hall most of the night, and did not show himself downstairs until noon. Today he appeared before eight o'clock. Legs was still sweeping the salon, while George gathered up cigarette butts.

A single glance in Blacktower's sour and yellowed face was enough. The boss had not slept, either. Legs' heart rose up like a balloon cut loose. Everything all right so far!

Out of pure viciousness Blacktower launched a stream of curses at the heads of his two servants. He had a searching tongue. "Kitchen lice! Lard bellies!" these were the mildest terms he used. "Are you obliged to raise hell down here in the mornings? Do you think it's funny to spoil my sleep?"

George and Legs silently faded through the pantry door.

This did not suit Blacktower. "Legs! Come back here!" he roared.

Legs returned to the room.

"Did you hear me speaking to you?"

At the moment Legs felt no fear of him. "I heard you," he said.

"Say *sir*, when you speak to me!"

"Sir," said Legs, keeping a straight face. He was thinking: That's all right, old man; you got turned down last night! You got turned down, and you're sore!

"Don't give me any lip!" shouted Blacktower. "You're only here at my pleasure. You got no rights. If you rile me I'll step on you like a centipede or any other vermin!"

Legs said nothing.

"I asked you a question when I came downstairs."

"I didn't know we were making any noise," said Legs, adding "Sir," after a couple of seconds.

"You didn't know it! God almighty! what *do* you know? I ought to have left you swilling in the gutter, you sewer rat. You were at home there! . . ." And so on. And so on. Legs kept his eyes lowered. It was sweet, after his night of anxiety, to hear the big boss giving himself away.

When Blacktower had exhausted his vocabulary he strode across the bridge. "I want my coffee in ten minutes," he called back.

When they heard him shouting for his coffee, Chou said, with a grin, "Which boy goin' carry it?"

"I stood up to him before," said Legs.

"Aw, go on," pleaded George turning yellowish. "I'd spill it all over him, my hand trembles so."

"All right. I'm not afraid of him."

Blacktower's mood had changed. He paid no attention to Legs. He sat at the dining-table, staring down at the cloth with knitted forehead. Legs put the coffee-cup down beside him, and he started stirring it without looking up. His thin lips worked on themselves.

Plotting, thought Legs, and his sense of satisfaction was suddenly chilled. Blacktower had men and money behind him; he was practically the king of the place. Who was to stop him from doing what he pleased?

"What the hell are you standing around for?" snarled Blacktower.

Legs went back to the kitchen.

In an hour or so Blacktower shouted for Legs from upstairs. Legs found him sitting at his desk. He had written two letters, which lay sealed and addressed beside him. There were two small packages with them. Blacktower's confidence had returned. He said, with his usual sarcastic grin:

“I want you to deliver these two letters and packages.”

One of the letters was addressed to Senhora Pepita Carvalho; the other to Senhorina La Rosadora. Legs turned wary.

“Where do they live?” he asked.

“Where do you suppose, you fool?” said Blacktower. “In the hotel back of the theater.”

“Do you want answers?”

“That is as may be.”

Legs picked up the letters and packages and turned to go.

“Wait a minute,” said Blacktower. “There’s more to it than that. You are not to hand that stuff over to any servant. See? You are to say that you can only put it in the hands of the ladies themselves. You will not be allowed to see Rosadora, but you can say it, anyhow. . . . You are to keep your eyes open when you’re inside the place. That’s what I’m sending you for.

“The letters are only a stall. I don’t give a damn whether they’re delivered or not. But when you come back I’ll expect a full description of the layout of the place. Use your detective skill. I want to know where Pepita’s room is, and the girl’s room. I want to know if Rosadora is allowed any freedom or if they keep her locked up, and especially what other ways there may be of getting into the house and of getting into her room besides the front door. Do you get me?”

Legs nodded. “If I had a little money I might pick up something from the servants,” he suggested.

“Good,” said Blacktower, grinning, “you show almost human intelligence.” He poured a handful of coins on the edge of the desk and Legs scooped them up. “Go on,” said Blacktower. “Say nothing about where you’re going to the other servants.”

Legs smiled to himself as he went over the bridge.

The street of Bom Successo at eleven o’clock in the morning was not a pretty sight. The fierce still heat had already descended. The drinking-places were open, but though Legs had money jingling in his pocket, it did not occur to him to enter one of them. He had other things on his mind. No one appeared to be stirring but the caboclo water-carrier. Men lay in every corner, sleeping it off. Their own mothers would have turned from them in disgust. Some were stretched across the middle of the road, and Legs stepped over them.

Just beyond the wooden theater the street took a further turn to the right, and Legs was faced by a heavy wooden gateway. It stood in the middle of a

stockade of palm trunks taller than a man's head, plastered with mud. Alongside the gate was nailed a crudely lettered sign reading, "Hotel." Legs pounded on the gate and waited. No sound came from the yard within.

They were in no hurry to answer. He alternately pounded and kicked on the gate. Blacktower's commission gave him the assurance to make plenty of noise. While he waited he looked about him, fixing everything in his mind. Over the top of the stockade he could see the second story of a long adobe building with a row of windows having no sashes, but filled in with dirty mosquito netting. Outside the middle window there was a balcony. This building joined on obliquely to the rear of the wooden theater. From the configuration of the land it was evident that both buildings overhung the creek on the other side. The hotel was the last building in camp. Beyond the mud wall the road lost itself in a patch of waste land, then the forest.

The gate was finally opened by a native girl. To Legs they all looked alike—brown masklike face, glassy eyes, dumpy figure in a faded cotton dress, bare feet which left a print almost rectangular in the dust. Before he could speak she said: "Too early. Come back tonight."

Legs saw red. So that was the sort of joint where Fay was kept prisoner! He hesitated until he could steady his voice. "I've got a letter for Senhora Carvalho. From Torrenegro."

The girl merely looked blank.

"For Pepita," he said.

She showed a spark of intelligence and held out her hand.

He shook his head. "I got to give it to her myself."

Her face became like wood again. They stared at each other until Legs thought to produce an American half dollar. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Ria." She snatched the coin and put it in her mouth. She let him in and fastened the gate by dropping a bar across it.

The narrow courtyard was empty, and filled with a rank growth of dusty weeds in the corners. One side of it was bounded obliquely by the back of the theater, one side by the squalid hotel, and the other two by the stockade of palm legs.

As he followed the girl into the house the beating of Legs' heart made him dizzy. He was afraid of suddenly coming face to face with Fay. They entered a good-sized room with windows on the far side overlooking the creek. When the building had been a bona-fide hotel, this had been the lobby and dining-room. Fay was not in it, and Legs got a grip on himself.

Telling him to wait, the native girl disappeared through a doorway on the left. The door hung by one hinge and could not be closed. Judging by the smell that came through, the kitchen lay that way. The room was full of flies. At a long table in the back two slatternly white girls were sitting, one picking at her food in an indifferent way, one humped in her chair, staring into space. They cast a look of dislike at Legs in which there was nothing personal, and paid no further attention to him.

A corridor opened in the side of the room opposite the kitchen door, and by taking a step forward Legs could look down it. Four doors, all closed, opened off on the creek side of the building. Opposite the doors a dilapidated stairway ran up alongside the wall. Legs could not see up it. There was a bend in the corridor at the far end. He figured that this must lead into the back premises of the theater.

Presently he became aware that Pepita was squinting at him through the crack of the kitchen door. Making up her mind that he was a person of no account, she came forward, brazening out her appearance. Without stays or make-up she looked horrible. She paused to curse the girls for showing themselves in such a state. They got up listlessly, and Legs presently heard them going upstairs.

With a suspicious look, Pepita demanded what Legs wanted. They talked together in the mixture of Portuguese, English, and Quichua that passed current in Amazonas. He handed over the package and envelope that were addressed to her. She looked at the other package.

Glancing over her note indifferently, she sneered when she opened up a little silver-gilt box with an enameled cover. Blacktower's ruse did not deceive her. "What's that?" she demanded, pointing.

"For La Rosadora," said Legs.

"Give it to me."

"Blacktower said I was to give it to her."

"You can't see her. She's sleeping."

"I'll come back later," he said, woodenly. The fear that he might have to meet Fay under the eyes of this woman turned him clammy all over.

"You can't see her any time," she said. "She don't want to see anybody."

He breathed more freely.

"Well, give it to me," she said, holding out her hand.

"Will you get me some writing from La Rosadora to show Blacktower?"

"Sure."

Pepita carried the girl's package back into the kitchen. From the shape of it, it was a book. Is Fay in there? thought Legs. No! The woman wanted to take time to read the note and run over the pages of the book to make sure there was not a second note hidden in it.

He was now alone in the dining-room, and he moved a few steps towards the corridor with the idea of exploring a little farther. He wanted to see what was upstairs. But the sound of a turning handle made him draw back quickly. The first door in the corridor opened and the fat figure of Manoel appeared, wearing pajamas, yawning and scratching his bald pate. Legs' bristles rose at the sight. Manoel, taken aback by the stranger, snarled silently.

He padded on to the kitchen with an ugly look. A loud quarrel arose out there. It was carried on in Portuguese, but it was not difficult for Legs to comprehend that Manoel was accusing his wife of carrying on an intrigue behind his back. Her answers were contemptuous.

After a while Pepita reappeared, with Manoel shuffling after her. Pepita was carrying the book, now unwrapped, with Blacktower's note sticking in it. Legs could read the title as she passed—*The Cardinal's Snuff-Box*. Strange, coming from Blacktower! But the gambler was full of contradictions. For a pet he kept a little Pekinese spaniel like a society dame. Anyhow, Blacktower was a gentleman alongside the beast Manoel.

They passed Legs without looking at him and entered the corridor. Stopping before the last door, Pepita took a key from her pocket, and Legs shook as if he had a chill. *That* was Fay's room! She was literally a prisoner! He could picture the face of terror that she turned, hearing the key in the lock. . . . Keep cool! Keep cool!, he thought. You'll have to stand for worse than this!

Pepita and Manoel were quarreling again. They kept their voices too low for him to hear, but he understood that Manoel wanted to go in with her, and Pepita was forbidding it. Legs was all for the woman then. He moved closer, keeping behind the corner of the opening.

Listening hard, he heard Pepita say, low-voiced and furious: "You go into your room or I'll take the girl to Blacktower myself, and who's going to stop me?"

Taking a slant around the corner, Legs saw Manoel slouching back to his own door. Pepita went into Fay's room. A surge of relief flooded through him. For a moment the coarse figure of Pepita appeared to him in a beautiful light.

He waited, standing in the musty dining-room with his senses all alert. Time passed. Myriads of flies crawled over the littered table. Overhead he heard a pair of listless feet dragging themselves across the floor.

Later, Ria came in from the kitchen and started gathering up the dirty dishes. Legs thought, I ought to leave a friend behind me in this house. He drew out the rest of the coins Blacktower had given him, and poured them into the girl's hands. She promptly transferred them to her mouth, since she had neither pocket or stocking, and a sparkle of intelligence came into her glassy eyes. From that time Legs never had any difficulty in distinguishing her from the other native girls. She was bought.

Nothing was said between them. She went out with the dishes, and he continued to wait.

Finally Pepita appeared with an envelope addressed to Blacktower. At sight of the angular, ladylike characters that he knew so well, Legs went queer again. She had addressed it to "Mr. Blacktower." The ink was scarcely dry. The note came almost warm from her fingers to his. Luckily his dark glasses baffled Pepita's hard glance. He bowed to her politely, and left. Ria followed him across the yard to bar the gate.

Back under the crazy palm awnings of the Avenida, as they called the main street, Legs loafed along to give himself time to think things out before facing Blacktower. As noon approached, the camp was coming to life. Men lined up at the bars for a hair of the dog. Finding an unoccupied keg in front of a rum-shop, Legs sat down on it. Loafing never made you conspicuous in Bom Successo. He would have been glad of a drink, but had neglected to save out the price.

He decided to give Blacktower an exact and truthful account of all he had observed. Unless he did so, his boss would not continue to employ him in this matter; and unless he knew what Blacktower was up to, he couldn't hope to block him.

Before going home Legs struck down the path in front of the theater and slouched across the swaying bridge. On the other side lived the lowest type of caboclos in their squalid palm huts built on shaky platforms in the mud. It was said to be as much as a white man's life was worth to venture amongst them alone. Legs did not linger, but came back over the bridge, covertly studying the hotel from the rear.

Simple enough to pick out Fay's room. It was the first on the ground floor next to the theater. The rooms on the back had no doubt been planned as the best in the hotel. There was a double gallery running along outside, divided by heavy, ventilated partitions. Thus each room had its private

veranda. This gallery was built out from the bank on tall piles driven into the mud. Fay undoubtedly slept on her veranda.

The creek at this season of falling water was no more than a sluggish ditch winding through a wide expanse of stinking mud littered with rusty tin cans. However, there was sufficient water to float a canoe. No easy job to climb up to the gallery, but it could be done. It was screened in, but metal screening offers no serious resistance to a good knife.

Back at home, Legs gave Blacktower a matter-of-fact account of all he had observed. The tall man listened, leaning back in his chair, with his hands clasped behind his head and his feet on the desk. He gazed out of the window as if the matter was of no great interest to him. But apparently he was pleased with the morning's work, because in the end he produced a silver dollar and flipped it in Legs' direction.

Legs let it lie where it fell. Something hardened inside him. He thought, You've made yourself necessary to this brute. It's time now to make a stand.

Blacktower stared at him in amazement. "Aren't you going to pick it up?"

"No."

Blacktower turned pale with rage, and his eyes glittered like a snake's. He sprang up with raised fist as if to strike Legs down on the spot. Legs faced him out and the blow never fell. Once again a suggestion of fear appeared in Blacktower's eyes. It was gone immediately; his look became calculating and propitiatory.

"Well, after all, you're a white man," he said. "Living amongst these greasy swine, a fellow forgets the difference."

Blacktower taking water! Legs could scarcely believe his ears. He did not relax any.

"Go get your dinner," said Blacktower. His voice was smooth, his glance murderous.

Legs was not deceived by the voice. He went out, leaving the silver dollar lying on the floor.

LEGS as a house servant had the best possible opportunities for watching Blacktower. He was nearly always in a position to say where his boss was and whom he was with. As a matter of fact, the gambler seldom left his own establishment except between the hours of nine and eleven at night. That was before heavy play began at the tables. At this time he would be in the theater. Legs never succeeded in scraping together the price of admission to the theater, but he had the camp gossip as passed on by the Hawaiian boy to go by.

“La Rosadora’s straight as a string. Manoel and Pepita figure that she pays them better so. Every night when she’s not singing she sits at a table in the hall, with Pepita beside her. Pepita never leaves her. It’s what they call a duenna in this country. Any white man who has the price is free to sit down at the table and talk to La Rosadora. Drinks at that table are five dollars gold. Lately, they say, our old man has been engaging the whole table and keeping the others off. There’s trouble brewing with the other white men because of it.”

“Why do they stand for it?” asked Legs.

George looked at him in surprise. “Blacktower’s the boss of Bom Successo.”

Always in the back of his mind Legs was mulling over the complicated situation. For the moment Blacktower appeared to be pretty well up against it. He was in a position to pay a price for the girl that would square Pepita, and as for the other white men he was undoubtedly ready to tell them to go to hell; but Manoel’s infatuation for Fay stood in the way of his making a deal.

Manoel, in his turn, couldn’t reach her, because of Pepita. A man’s own wife is his most formidable antagonist. She has his number. Obviously Pepita was the key to the situation. But for how long? In a place like Bom

Successo what was there to prevent a man from suddenly removing a person who stood in his way? Legs wondered if the woman was alive to her danger.

Powerful as he might be, Blacktower could expect no help in this project from any other white man in camp. Legs took a certain comfort from that thought. If there's a kidnapping plot afoot, he'll have to use me! It brought him squarely up against his job.

The first essential was to procure a gun. It was in his mind every hour. Gun seemed to come between him and everything he looked at. Blacktower's extensive arsenal was under careful lock and key. No hope of priggging a weapon from him. There was a brisk barter in guns always going on in camp, but Legs had nothing to swap with. Well, when a man's pockets are empty, he must trade with personal service. He set about making friends.

The Hawaiian boy, the Chinese cook, the four gamblers who lodged in the house—you never knew who might be useful; he studied them all with a view to winning their good will. Not by sucking up to them; that would only have been to get himself kicked; but by facing them out and taking everything in good part. Not too easy a job for a man who had come into the house despised by all.

On the outside the two white men with whom he came oftenest in contact were the Englishman, Osman, who ran the ice-and-electric-plant, and Doc Buckles. The first-named fancied himself as a wit, and the way to get next him was to show a keen appreciation of his humor. Buckles was too sharp to have anything like that put over on him, but as Legs had a real liking for Doc, it wasn't necessary to study how to make friends with him.

When he was drunk, Doc was a valuable source of information. He seemed to recognize by instinct that the close-mouthed Legs wouldn't give him away. He liked to have Legs come drink with him in his stifling little laboratory between two rum-shops on the Avenida. There he could rail against Blacktower without any danger of being overheard. Doc often worked in his laboratory far into the night. He was trying to isolate the organisms that caused the diverse and dizzy fevers of that country.

Always Doc's tirades would end with a similar cry. "But you can't touch the ——! He has us dead to rights!"

"Why?" Legs asked him one day.

The answer was the same as he had received before. "Blacktower's the boss here."

"How did he get to be boss?"

Doc grinned sardonically. "Ever read Darwin, Sprinter?"

"No."

“Case of natural selection. There ain’t a man in camp can face Blacktower out when his black eyes glitter. And every other white man is obliged to back him up.”

“Why?”

“To keep the caboclos under. God! how they hate us! And there is only a handful of us. If they got out of hand and stormed the rum-shops, the camp would go up in smoke and we’d all get our gizzards slit.” He illustrated graphically. “Come on, drink up! I’m two ahead of you.”

Legs only sipped his rum. He couldn’t afford to get drunk any more.

“A year ago last Christmas,” Doc went on, “things got so bad here we had to take measures. There was twenty-two men killed here in twenty-four hours. Made quite a scandal. The governor sent word popular opinion would force him to clean us up if we didn’t put on the brakes. So we formed a law-and-order committee. Every American and Englishman, saving the bums, is on it. All the Brazilians with money in the camp are with us, too, but we don’t let them on the committee. Blacktower was elected chairman or mayor, or what you will. He has the power and we are pledged to support him. Everybody in business pays the committee for protection.”

“Just like home,” said Legs, dryly. “Who gets it?”

“The committee hands it to Manoel Carvalho for the governor. Manoel is the Governor’s spy here. Tries to put the fear of God in us by holding the troops over our heads. But as Blacktower has evidence that Manoel himself is grafting off the governor, it preserves a kind of even balance. See?”

“And if the balance is ever disturbed?”

“All hell will break loose,” said Doc, cheerfully. He tossed off his rum. “What are you grinning at, Prancer?”

“I was thinking that in Manaos they call Bom Sucesso the free town,” said Legs.

“Yeah. And when those poor chumps arrive here, they find a cast-iron government—of Blacktower; by Blacktower and for Blacktower!”

“If he takes this girl will the committee stand for it?” asked Legs, with an indifferent air.

“If she goes to him willingly nobody can say anything,” said Doc, gloomily. “If he undertook to take her by force . . . !”

“Well, what?”

“God knows! . . . Reckon we’d all blow up together in one big bang!”

“Well, she’s turned him down,” said Legs, glancing up to see how Doc would take it.

He put down his glass carefully; his glance sharpened. "How do you know that?" he demanded.

"She's refused the diamond bracelet. He still has it."

Doc grabbed up Legs' hand. His eyes were shining. "Boy, that's the best news I've heard in a month of Sundays! I knew she was on the square!" He suddenly burst out in wild laughter. "Jeese! what a bloody fool I am! One would think I stood some chance there myself! What is it to me either way?" His voice broke; his head dropped on his arms and his shoulders began to shake. "I'm drunk!" he muttered. "I'm drunk!"

"Well, I know how it is," said Legs, woodenly.

Somebody from Blacktower's had often to be going to the store, and Legs took over the job from the lazy Chou. There were twenty-five rum-shops, more or less, in Bom Successo, and one general store, On Kai-Ling's. The rubber warehouse was his also; the store adjoined it. Originally a crude 'dobe hovel, it had been added to from time to time until the buildings covered upwards of an acre. Somewhere in the middle of it the old Chinaman lived in Oriental splendor, it was said, but no white man had ever been in to see.

On Kai-Ling weighed more than three hundred pounds, but he could carry it, for he was six feet four inches tall. An elephant of a man in his long robe of blue brocade and round black cap. His face was good-humored, his hands soft and well kept. All day long, whether there was any business going or not, he sat inside the door, with a little table before him bearing fan, tobacco-pipe and writing materials, ready to issue his script for rubber. The rubber was handled in the warehouse next door. On Kai-Ling's little I.O.U.'s could be exchanged for gold in any bank in Brazil, it was said. Or he would pay gold if it was demanded.

He employed an indefinite number of felt-shod clerks who could not be told apart. They were said to be his nephews. Outside of business they had not a word to say, and they were never seen off the premises. Amidst all the disorder of trade goods that stacked the place, they could instantly put hand on anything that was asked for. It seemed as if a man could buy anything in the world at On Kai-Ling's, even rich velvets, silks, ivory fans, ostrich feathers, and gold jewelry if he happened to get stuck on a girl.

Legs eyed the old man every time he went in and out, wondering how he could get next to him. On Kai-Ling and Blacktower were said to be in partnership on almost everything—steamboat, rubber business, gambling-house—but their relations when they met were merely formal. The one

partner paid gold or scrip for rubber, and the other took most of it back in his gambling-house. Very convenient arrangement. The exact terms of the partnership were not known.

Legs thought: If I could once get him talking he might take a liking to me. Old men love to talk. But naturally, being only a house servant, he had to watch his step.

One afternoon Blacktower sent him with a note to On Kai-Ling. The merchant dictated an answer to a clerk, and while they waited for it to be written out, he started talking of his own accord.

“Blacktower treat you good?” he asked, with a sly Chinese smile.

Pulling my leg! thought Legs. “Nothing to complain of,” he said.

“Got sore eyes? I got eye medicine.”

Legs reflected that a good way to make friends with a man is to offer him your confidence. “It’s only a stall,” he said. “Don’t give me away. There are men here who have it in for me.”

“Merchant never give away,” said On Kai-Ling, laughing silently.

Legs tried a little flattery. “You do a big business here, Uncle Ling.” (Such was the common pronunciation of his name.)

The Chinaman shrugged. “Business is good while it’s good!”

“I hear the men say that the rubber comes to you because it is known on all the rivers that your scales are true.”

“I got give good weight,” said On Kai-Ling, smiling, “because I too fat to run away.”

“You were the first one here, weren’t you?”

“Yes. I build store on this point because it is hidden, but not hard to find. On right Madeira River; on left Purus; little way in front Amazon. Nobody come in this little river unless they lookin’ for me. I build up my business quiet. When the big men got on to me, see? I was as big as them. Now”—with an expressive wave of his hand Uncle Ling included the whole camp—“the purse-suckers are here. That is nothing to me. I buy rubber.”

The next time Legs came into the store On Kai-Ling said, without any preamble, “What Blacktower pay you?”

“Nothing,” said Legs.

“You work for me I give you two hundred dollar a month; board you outside.”

Legs slowly shook his head. “Can’t do it, Uncle Ling. But it certainly is white of you.”

“I not white,” he retorted, with his Chinese smile; “I yellow.”

Legs was embarrassed. “Well, you know what I mean.”

“Why you won’t work for me?”

Naturally Legs was not giving his real reason. “When Blacktower picked me up in Manaos I was down and out,” he said. “It don’t seem quite square to shake him the first chance I get.”

“You good boy,” said On Kai-Ling. “I tell Blacktower you good, loyal servant.”

“Better not,” said Legs, cautiously. “You can’t be sure how he’ll take a thing.”

“All right, I say nothing. . . . You pretty smart boy,” he added, smiling. “Know your master.”

“When a man’s up against it,” said Legs, “he’d damn well better sharpen up his wits.”

“Sure,” said the old man, coolly, “but few do.”

“Well, it took a hell of a kick in the pants to bring me to.”

Uncle Ling shook in silent mirth. “You good boy. I like.”

Legs struck then and there. “Will you sell me a gun?” he asked, eagerly. “I’ll pay for it as quick as I can. Blacktower shells out a dollar from time to time. And you know I can’t get away from here.”

Uncle Ling looked at him, screwing up his eyes until they almost disappeared, and rubbing his chin.

“You know how it is here,” Legs pleaded. “A man has got to look out for himself. Blacktower sends me all around camp for one thing or another. I never know when I’m going to hit trouble. Without any means of defending myself I feel like a woman.”

“All right,” said Uncle Ling. “I sell.”

He spoke to one of his nephews in Chinese, and Legs left the store with a practically new Smith and Wesson .32 warming his backside. Big enough to do his business, but not big enough to look boastful. He felt like a man made over.

One of Legs’ jobs was to fetch ice in a wheelbarrow morning and night. On his night trip, as he turned out of the ice-plant with his load, he heard a creature breathing in distress, and set the barrow down. This lower end of the camp, with its little plaza between the Chinese outfit and the ice-plant, was quiet and deserted after nightfall. The hum of the generator was louder than the racket upstreet.

He saw a man lying on the ground, pressing himself against the ice-house wall in an attempt to hold the terrible shaking that had him in its grip. It was not an unusual sight in Bom Successo. He had only a few dirty rags of clothing on his body. He was sun-baked to such a degree that it was only by his matted beard Legs knew him for a white man.

A white man! he thought. And worse off than I am. If I could pull him out of the hole he would be my man.

The first violence of the shaking having passed, Legs said, "You seem to have it bad, Jack."

A harsh croak of laughter issued from the ground. "Boy! you ought to see me when I get good and going!"

Legs was surprised by the laugh. The rattling voice sounded young. A game chicken! he thought. "Have you seen the doctor?" he asked.

"Just landed," said the other. "Cleaned. Got nothing to give the doctor."

"That don't matter," said Legs. "He's a white man. Wait here till I get back."

"Wait!" said the other, with his cracked laugh. "Can you see me running away, 'bo?"

Legs left the wheelbarrow standing. The laboratory was less than two hundred yards upstreet. He found Doc in the ovenlike room with the sweat running down his naked breast, busy with his test tubes.

"Silly, isn't it?" he said, indicating his occupation. "Promising young investigator ruined by drink! Oh, hell! If there's a bigger fool than me on earth, I'd pay admission to have a look at him."

Legs told him about the sick man.

"Well, what do you come to me for?" he asked.

"Quinine."

"Too late for that when the fit has him. After it passes what he wants is light food and sleep. He's probably starving. Let him come to me a few hours before his next chill is due, and I'll dope him up."

"Where can he eat and sleep?"

"You can search me, Blue Eyes," said Doc, with his bitter grin. "The eleemosynary provisions at Bum Success were somehow overlooked."

"Can you give me any old clothes for him?" asked Legs. "I have nothing myself."

Digging among his things, Doc produced a torn undershirt and a faded pair of dungarees. "Now get out!" he said. "I'm on the track of something." He returned to the test tubes.

Back with the sick man, Legs found that the shaking fit had passed. He lay on the ground, exhausted and gasping. Legs stood looking down at him and debating what to do, while the wheelbarrow dripped busily. He decided to take a chance. Blacktower would not return from the theater for another hour, and always went directly to the gambling-hall. He never came into the kitchen of his house, or visited that part of the veranda where the servants slept.

Legs lifted the sick man under the arms and deposited him in the wheelbarrow, with his back against the cake of ice. On the way home he had not to pass through the crowded part of camp. The few who saw him with his burden thought nothing of it. A sick man or a drunk in an improvised ambulance. Who cared?

The sound of his barrow trundling around the dark veranda was familiar to all. In the kitchen Chou and George raised their eyebrows, but said nothing. There was a spirit of live and let live amongst Blacktower's servants. None of them was in a position to carry tales.

"Pal of mine," said Legs.

"Don't let the boss see him."

"Not a chance! He can have my hammock."

"Better give him a bath first."

Legs fed the sick man, helped him to bathe, dressed him in the clean clothes, and led him staggering with weakness and weariness to his hammock. He was instantly asleep.

When his day's work was done, Legs stretched himself on the floor beneath the hammock. Waking in the night and hearing no sound of breathing above, he said, softly, "Are you awake?"

"Yes."

"How you feel?"

"My head is clear. I'll be all right until the next round."

"When?"

"Day after tomorrow."

"We'll stall that off with quinine. . . . What's your name?"

"Bill Keene."

"American?"

"Sure."

"Thought so. Same here. . . . I'm called Legs, hereabouts."

"You're a white man, Legs."

“Aw, cut it out! . . . How did you come here, Bill?”

“It’s a long story, Legs. I’ll tell you bit by bit. . . . I’m a construction engineer. See? I was on a job in Lima, but I got fed up with cities, and when we were paid off me and my side-kick made up our minds to cross the Andes and go down the rivers until we fetched the Atlantic Ocean. We didn’t know what we were tackling. It must be three thousand miles from there to here, and a couple more thousand to the Atlantic.

“It was grand at first. Talk about shooting the chutes! Indian crew. After a couple of hundred miles they deserted and we were left on our own. But they were gentlemen. Only swiped half our outfit. Later we lost the whole damn thing in a rapid, and went to work for a rubber-trader. He staked us to another outfit, and we got a crew—real wild babies, these were—and went three or four hundred miles up a river that had never been entered by white men. One night our crew vamoosed with every blessed thing we owned except a couple of machetes. It’s a way they have. There we were!”

“What did you do?”

“I can scarcely tell you, Legs. Stumbled in circles around the jungle, starving, sick, covered with sores, raving. In the end by dumb luck we stumbled on a *chacra* belonging to some Indians. Those are the little clearings they make to raise their vegetables and bananas. There was nobody home, so we fed and rested up. Nobody ever did show up. I suppose they were afraid of us. There was plenty of rubber in the neighborhood, so we stayed on. We stayed on for a year, eating the Indians’ store of grub and collecting rubber. My God! I never want to see another banana! We got a ton and a half of rubber, made a rough boat, descended the river, and cashed in at the trader’s.

“Then we started out for God’s country. But we were attacked by some savages in the upper Madeira, and my partner was killed. I escaped by swimming. So there I was left flat again. Alone this time. Didn’t seem to have the same incentive to get up and git. It was a rapid river, so I lashed a sort of raft together with bushrope, and sat on it and let her go. Anywhere at all. I almost settled the old question, how long can a man go without eating? Two weeks, anyhow. Met a couple of rubber-gatherers, who fed me, but it only made me sick then. Met another crew later, and they brought me here and laid me where you found me.”

“Gosh!” said Legs. “And I thought I’d been through the mill!”

“That’s only the outline, fellow. Wait till I fill it in. Anacondas thirty feet long, jaguars, cannibals, headhunters, poison blow-guns; all the fixings. . . . Reckon I better go to sleep now.”

“Sure! We’ll talk tomorrow.”

Legs roused his friend while Chou and George still slept. When he was shaved and clipped up a bit, Bill Keene was revealed as a long lad with a gaunt face marked in mirthful lines. He was younger than Legs. They ate some more cold food and went out into the silent street. By day it was not so easy to talk to each other, but there was good feeling between them.

As soon as On Kai-Ling opened his store and took his place at the table inside, Legs led his friend in to him. “Here’s a white man, Uncle Ling,” he said. “He’s a bit pulled down by fever, but he’s an able man. Will you give him the job you offered me?”

The old man looked Bill over with the shrewd little eyes twinkling in fat. “No,” he said, pleasantly, “not that job. But I got plenty jobs for good men. I talk to him.”

Legs took this as a hint, and went out and sat on the pier until Bill appeared half an hour later. He was carrying a pair of new shoes by their laces, which was a good sign. He sat down on the pier to put them on.

“Badges of manhood,” he said, humorously. “Gosh! how they hurt!”

“What did the old man say?” asked Legs.

“I’m hired.”

“What as?”

“General handy man. These Chinks are A-1 storekeepers, but they all got butter fingers with tools. He wants new shelves put up in the store, and his bateloas repaired. He’s got a gasoline pump that won’t work, and God knows what all. Said I could build me a little screened shack alongside the warehouse and eat at the short-order restaurant.”

“Pretty soft,” said Legs.

“Say, Legs,” Bill went on, much embarrassed, “I can’t tell you how . . .”

“Oh, for God’s sake, Bill!” interrupted Legs. “Say, Bill, let’s keep it dark that you and I are pals. See?”

“Okay,” said Bill, “but what for?”

“I got a hunch that it would be safer in this hell-hole. Men stick together here for what there may be in it, but no man has a friend that he sets any store by. He daren’t. If you and I went around as pals it would attract too much attention. The best way to survive here is not to attract attention.”

“Well, if you say so,” said Bill; “but I’m a fellow that likes to let himself go.”

“So was I once,” said Legs. “That’s all right. If you build your shelter at the far end of the warehouse, it’s well out of the way. I can come down

nights for a while and we can smoke and chin.”

“Right!” said Bill.

FOR several days all Legs' watching yielded him no information as to what his boss was plotting. That he *was* plotting Legs never doubted, for Blacktower was not the man to give up anything he had set his heart on. Behind that cold and cagy exterior Legs guessed that he hid an insane passion that was ready to wreck the world sooner than give up its object.

Blacktower went to the theater each night, where he presumably sat with Fay under the eyes of Pepita. Once again Legs was drawn under the wall at night to listen to her singing, but the feelings that it roused were too violent. They didn't jibe with the necessity of keeping a cool head. So he never went back. He was training himself not to think of her. Not easy when he woke up in his hammock during the breathless torrid nights.

During this time Blacktower made one move that might or might not mean something. He ordered the four gamblers who shared a couple of rooms in his house to move into some unoccupied rooms in the front building. He needed the space, he said. They obeyed, grumbling behind his back.

Finally the steamboat returned after another trip to Manaos, bringing Blacktower all sorts of packages, and next day the reason for the delay in his plans became clear.

Legs was awakened in his hammock at daybreak by Blacktower himself. He got a nasty start upon opening his eyes to perceive the saturnine face looking down at him. A man is caught at a disadvantage in his sleep. Legs wondered if he had given anything away at the moment of waking. Blacktower merely jerked his head as a sign that he was to get up and follow him. How thankful Legs was that it was not the morning when Bill Keene had been sleeping there.

He was led upstairs. Blacktower's big room, open to the air on all four sides, was cool and fresh. His bed stood at one end, closed off by bamboo

portières. Early as it was, he was already wearing the formal black-silk suit and stiff collar. Legs guessed that he had not been to bed. There was an ash-tray on the desk, completely filled with cigar butts. On the desk stood a plain wooden box that had not been there the night before.

Blacktower sat down. "They tell me you're sore," he said, with his sarcastic smile, "because you're not getting regular wages."

Legs suspected that he was being drawn. "It's only natural," he said, "but I never let it on to anybody."

"Well, I'll have a job for you during the next few days," said Blacktower. "If you can pull it off without letting me down, we'll talk about wages."

Legs' throat tightened. Now it's coming! he thought. "Certainly am obliged," he mumbled.

"Wait till you get it," said Blacktower coolly. ". . . Can you handle tools?"

"I'm no carpenter," said Legs. "But I'm average handy."

"There are tools in this box," said Blacktower, rapping it; "machado, hatchet, and so on. Take it and put it in my canoe. It's tied to the east side of the pier. You will know it because it's got a B painted on the bow."

"I know it," said Legs. "I fetched charcoal in it for Chou."

"I want you to take a day off," said Blacktower, "and go upriver and make me a ladder."

Legs had himself under good control. He looked Blacktower in the eye.

". . . Eighteen feet long," Blacktower went on. "You'll find a foot rule in the box. No, make it twenty, in order to be on the safe side. You'll find bamboo growing everywhere, but I want you to go well outside of camp. Go up one of the igaripes so that anybody passing in the main stream can't see what you're doing. Do you get me?"

"Yes, sir."

"You'll find good dry poles in every clump. Make sure they are sound from end to end. The poles and the cross-pieces must be notched and fitted together, for it's got to be strong. It's got to bear up a heavy weight. The cross-pieces must be bolted to the poles. Bolts are in the box. The best way to make holes is by burning. Build a little fire and heat the irons you'll find for that purpose. When your ladder is finished stand it up against a tree and jump on each rung." Blacktower's eyes glittered. "If that ladder was to fail me," he said, quietly, "I'd kill you by inches!"

Legs made out to throw him a scared look. "I get you," he muttered.

“Go on, then,” said Blacktower. “If anybody’s curious, tell them you’re going fishing. Better take some lines and bring back a string for a stall. When your ladder’s finished, hide it in such a way that you can get it when you want it. Leave the tools with it. You can fetch them some time later. Report to me as soon as you come back.”

“If you’re asleep do you want me to wake you?” asked Legs.

“Yes.”

Legs set off in the canoe. Bom Successo had no suburbs. As soon as you turned the first bend in the river you were walled by the unbroken jungle. He took care to go far enough away so that the strokes of his machado could not be heard in camp.

All day while he worked in the steaming jungle he had plenty of time to think things over. He made an honest ladder, knowing that he would have to find a better expedient than a broken rung to meet the situation. The great question in his mind was, did Blacktower intend to take him along on this expedition with the ladder? Or would he be left at home? He would have to be prepared to meet either situation. Or any other situation.

Legs would not admit the idea of shooting Blacktower, except as a last resort. His fixed resolve to put the man behind the bars stood in the way. He was as keen to preserve Blacktower’s life as if he had loved the man. And, anyhow, if the strong hand failed, they said the caboclos would break loose and that that would be the end of the handful of whites at Bom Successo.

By the time he had finished his work, Legs had doped out a rough plan. Like a good many grim things, it had its comic side. If Blacktower takes me with him, he thought, with a hard grin, I’ll get Bill Keene to turn the trick. If he leaves me at home, I’ll do it myself.

Legs assumed that Blacktower intended ascending the creek in a canoe in order to reach the back of the hotel. It would be the only way he could transport a ladder unseen. What Legs could not puzzle out was, how did Blacktower expect to get away with it if the girl resisted and made a racket? He couldn’t land with her in camp, and there was no place outside of camp except the jungle. Remembering Blacktower’s softened manner in her presence, Legs didn’t believe that he planned to hurt her.

It was four o’clock when he got home. Blacktower had cut out the afternoon siesta, and Legs found him sitting at his desk upstairs, as before. He had shed coat and collar, a little thing, but significant, because it was a point of pride with him never to be seen except in full regalia. I am getting closer to him than he realizes, thought Legs. Woo-hoo, the little Pekinese, was playing about the room.

Legs' sharpened eyes took note of a druggist's bottle on the desk that had not been there before. It contained a colorless liquid and the cork had lately been drawn. The label had been scraped off with a knife. Allowing his eyes to stray around carelessly, Legs perceived the scrapings of paper mixed with cigar ashes in a tray.

While he was making a report of the day's work to Blacktower, he noticed that the latter's eyes were following the movements of the little dog around the room. It was more than just an idle glance; he was watching the dog with hard intentness. Presently his eyes dropped in a satisfied way. Legs waited a moment or two and looked around. The dog had fallen asleep on the floor.

When Blacktower dismissed him, Legs, in order to make sure of what he suspected, made believe to be struck by the dog's attitude. He approached him saying: "The little fellow don't look right, Boss. He's sick."

"Let him alone," growled Blacktower. "He's only asleep."

So that's it! thought Legs, on his way downstairs. Fay is to be drugged. He's experimenting with the dog to find out how long it is before the stuff takes effect and how long the effect will last.

An hour and a half later Blacktower's bell sounded through the house—two strokes for Legs. When Legs entered the room the little dog was playing around as usual. He seemed unharmed. Blacktower, notwithstanding his self-control, betrayed signs of excitement.

"How long would it take you to fetch the ladder?" he asked.

Legs hardened himself to take what was coming. "Half an hour to go and half an hour to come, Boss."

"Could you find it in the dark?"

"Sure, with an acetylene lantern."

Blacktower stood up suddenly. Legs thought, He has nerves like anybody else. "All right! I'll be needing it tonight," he said, showing his teeth.

A pulse thumped in Legs' ears. He needed more time! more time!

"Go to your hammock and get a couple of hours' sleep," said Blacktower.

Sleep! thought Legs. With this hanging over me!

". . . Get yourself a good feed and start out after dark, say half-past eight or nine. I don't want it until eleven, but I can't risk any slip-up. You must give yourself an hour or more to spare. . . . Wait a minute! Before you start for the ladder go out on the end of the pier. You'll find a pile of planks there.

Slip a couple of them in the water without making any noise, and retrieve them with the canoe. I shall want them as well as the ladder. Cache the planks while you're fetching the ladder. Are you getting all this?"

Legs nodded.

"I want you to be waiting for me at eleven fifteen. Neither a minute earlier nor later."

"I have no watch," said Legs, woodenly.

Blacktower coolly handed over his watch. "Take this. You must wait for me on the creek shore at the opening between the ice-plant and the bunk-house next door. At that hour the bunk-house will be empty. If you hear me whistling a tune you'll know that there's somebody about and you'll have to wait for me. I'll whistle the song that La Rosadora sings every night — 'Newsboy's Love Song.' It goes like this:"

"I know it," muttered Legs, with stiff lips.

"I'll take the canoe from you then, with the ladder and the planks, and you can beat it."

"Where to?"

"Come back to the house for your wheelbarrow just like you do when you're going for ice," said Blacktower, grinning. "But don't get any ice. Wait for me with the wheelbarrow in the space between the ice-plant and the bunk-house, and keep a sharp lookout in the plaza. I'll be back in forty minutes or so; an hour at the outside. As I approach the shore I'll whistle a few bars of the same tune and break off. If the coast is clear you pick it up where I break off. See? I won't land unless I hear you whistle. Have you got it straight?"

Legs nodded.

"Go get your sleep, then. Come back to me before you start out and we'll go over it again."

Legs left the room. He was thinking: I won't have to call on Bill Keene. It's safer to play a lone hand.

PRECISELY at quarter past eleven by Blacktower's watch, Legs grounded the canoe in the mud at the appointed spot on the creek shore. He wondered idly if he would be allowed to keep the watch. It was worth a good bit of money. He had the two planks laid across the stern of the canoe, and he was towing the bamboo ladder.

Blacktower immediately stepped out of the shadow of the buildings. "The plaza is empty," he whispered. "Give me the watch."

Legs handed it over regretfully.

"Go get your wheelbarrow," Blacktower went on, "and wait between the two buildings. Keep out of sight of the plaza."

"Yes, sir," said Legs.

"Do you bring something to cover the ice with?" he asked. Legs could hear the hard grin in his voice.

"I can," he answered.

"All right. A big piece of canvas or a blanket."

Legs noted that he was still wearing the top hat and the long coat. It was a funny costume to go adventuring in. Probably he had come direct from the theater. When he got into the canoe Blacktower removed his upper garments.

Pushing the canoe free of the mud, Legs waited for a moment to watch Blacktower. The gambler was no expert with the paddle. He kept shifting it from side to side. At this stage of the water the channel of the creek was tortuous above, and Legs foresaw that he would be in continual difficulties with the muddy shoals. I shall have plenty of time, he thought, with satisfaction.

Blacktower was swallowed up in the darkness. Legs returned home, brought the wheelbarrow out, and hid it behind a shack where he could pick

it up readily on the way back. He then hastened through the back ways of the camp towards the theater. There were no lights out-of-doors, and he met nobody but a furtive figure or two, no less anxious to escape recognition than himself.

He had to cross the noisy Avenida at the corner of the theater. So far as he could tell, nobody recognized him under the lights. The theater was closed for the night. It presented its longest side to the Avenida, and the lane leading to the hanging bridge passed in front of it. Legs paused at the far corner of the building to make sure he was not observed. Nobody was near. Slipping around the corner, he made his way back along the top of the bank, feeling his way by the wooden wall. It was completely dark on this side. There was a rank growth of weeds and thorns on the bank, but that was a minor difficulty.

In the rear of the theater, the hotel galleries jugged out over the bank. When he stood at the top of the bank, Legs was almost on a level with the first-floor gallery, but the end of the structure was boarded up to prevent ingress from this side. He ducked under the floor. A foul smell of muck filled his nostrils. Should he be forced to descend into the muck, he realized that it would betray him afterwards, so he took off his pants and shoes and rolled them into a bundle handy to his hand.

He squatted down to wait for Blacktower, gun in hand. The jungle was quiet except for the far-off cry of a howler. The noises of camp came to him muffled by the floor close overhead. His whole life seemed to pass in review before his keyed-up faculties. Mostly his thoughts were of Fay. Her bed just over his head! He stretched his ears to catch any tremor of movement. He could hear nothing. But if Blacktower's plans were working out, Fay was already sunk in a drugged sleep. Legs placed his palm against the floor overhead, taking comfort in his nearness to her.

So long a time passed that he began to fear Blacktower must have given up his plan. Not likely, however. Two drunken caboclos crossed the bridge about fifty yards from where he crouched. He could follow every step of their passage by the sounds they made. In a little while they came lurching back again, the bridge creaking and swaying under their weight. They stopped in the middle to argue drunkenly, and a sharp anxiety attacked Legs. Suppose they caught sight of Blacktower! He sighed with relief when they finally stepped off on the bank, and their voices died away.

He heard the splash of Blacktower's paddle before he saw him. He crept down nearer to the piles that supported the veranda. The narrow stream in the middle of its wide bed of mud reflected a little light from the sky, and Legs saw the long black shape of the canoe pass across it like some great

swimming creature. The beating of his heart quieted down. When the actual moment arrived he was ready for it.

Blacktower grounded his craft. He lifted one of the planks and laid it softly across the mud. He stepped out on the first plank carrying the second in his arms, and carefully lowered it in its place. It was at that moment Legs had planned to fire, but Blacktower was only a dim shape in the dark, and the danger of missing him was too great—not to speak of the risk of hitting him in a vital spot. Legs felt a curious tenderness for his enemy.

Legs waited for him to return to the canoe and fetch the ladder ashore. Blacktower planted it in the mud, and let the top fall softly against the rail of the veranda overhead. Legs was no more than a couple of yards from him. He found it none too easy to shoot a man in cold blood. He had a vision of the bullet tearing its way through living flesh. Nevertheless, when Blacktower mounted the first rung of the ladder, Legs extended his arm until the gun was almost touching the man's thigh, and pulled the trigger.

The report shattered the stillness, Blacktower dropped like a stone. So rigid was the man's self-control that no sound escaped him. Legs, fearing that he might make a light, clambered swiftly up the bank, and concealed himself under the floor beams. However Blacktower had his own reasons for not wishing to call attention to himself. He lay still. There was a deathly silence. Legs heard voices at an upper window of the hotel. They faded away again. In *Bom Successo* the first rule of conduct was always, *Mind your own business.*

Legs crept down the bank again. Blacktower still lay huddled at the foot of the ladder. He suppressed his groans, but he could not stifle his labored breathing. A new anxiety filled Legs. Suppose the man was unable to help himself, what would he do? If Blacktower were discovered lying there by daylight, all hell would break loose in camp, yet Legs could make no move to aid him.

Blacktower began to drag himself a foot at a time along the planks towards the canoe. Legs released his pent-up breath. Blacktower rolled himself into the canoe and, picking up the paddle, contrived to push himself off the mud. Going back, there was a sluggish current to aid him. He was swallowed up in the darkness, and a load was lifted from Legs' breast. He could even grin in the darkness. Well, the situation had its comic side.

Legs lifted down the light ladder and, carrying it under the gallery, laid it along the house wall at the top of the bank. The two planks followed it. They would never be found here unless somebody went searching for them. He drew on pants and shoes and ran back the way he had come.

Five minutes later he was in the spot where Blacktower had left him, watching for the canoe. His wheelbarrow was hidden behind him. A long time passed before the black shadow shaped itself out of the darkness. Blacktower was scarce able to wield the paddle. He forgot the agreed signal. He was in danger of being carried out into the river, and Legs, chancing the man-eating fish, ran into the water a little way and, seizing the bow of the canoe, pulled it ashore. Blacktower sank down into the bottom.

“Help me,” he muttered. “I’ve been shot.”

“I heard the shot!” said Legs, with an innocent air. “What happened?”

“None of your damned business,” snarled Blacktower. “All you got to do is help me home.”

Legs brought the wheelbarrow down to the edge of the firm ground, and half lifted, half dragged Blacktower ashore. No whimper of pain escaped the wounded man. Legs loaded him into the wheelbarrow and, covering him with the piece of canvas he had brought, started home. At this end of camp there was nobody stirring. The grim smile played around Legs’ lips. It was not the load that Blacktower had planned for him to carry home in his wheelbarrow.

When they circled the veranda of the gambling-hall, play was going on inside. The trundling of Legs’ wheelbarrow was such a familiar sound, nobody looked out. Chou and George were asleep long ago, and the house was quiet. Legs took Blacktower on his back to get him up the stairs, and laid him on his bed.

The wound had bled profusely and he was in bad shape. He had pulled off his shirt and torn it into strips to tie around his leg. His lean torso was as smooth and hard as a youth’s. Legs cut away the bloody bandages and clothes. The bullet had gone clean through the fleshy part of the thigh. Not a serious wound, but in that climate there was danger of serious infection.

Blacktower pointed out where the first-aid kit was kept. “Go and wash the blood out of the canoe,” he commanded, “and tie it in its usual place. Roll up the bloody clothes in a bundle and throw them in the river.”

“Got to dress your wound first,” said Legs.

“Do what I tell you!” cried Blacktower. “I’ll ’tend to myself.”

Legs merely grinned at him. It gave him a pleasant sense of power to defy the wounded Blacktower. “Keep your shirt on,” he said. “The boat won’t take any harm by being left for half an hour.”

Blacktower started up angrily “Damn you . . . !” A twinge of pain cut him short. He fell back and let Legs have his way.

Legs made all ready to wash and dress the wound. “Can you stand letting me probe it with a swab of iodine?” he asked.

“Go ahead,” muttered Blacktower.

During the painful operation he gripped the sides of the bed and ground his teeth together. Legs went about his work swiftly and expertly. He had a feeling of proprietorship towards his patient. Got him where I want him now!

When the worst was over, Blacktower opened his eyes. “Where did you get your skill in doctoring?” he asked.

“It’s part of the police training,” said Legs.

Something new began to stew in Blacktower’s skull. His dark eyes followed Legs’ movements full of craft. “You’re a good fellow, Legs,” he said, with false friendliness. “You’re as good nursing as a woman. I’m lucky to have you here.”

Legs grinned and said nothing.

“I know who it was had me shot,” said Blacktower, darkly.

Legs thought, The hell you do!

“If you’ll see me through this I’ll make it well worth your while! Keep your mouth shut. See? The man who shot me couldn’t see my face. If you keep your mouth shut they can’t bring nothing home to me.”

“There’s your wound,” said Legs.

Blacktower brought his teeth together. “I’ll bluff it out. Nobody is to know I’m wounded but you. . . . ’T ain’t a question of wages now,” he went on, buttering his voice. “If you stand by me, I’ll give you a share in the business. You’ll be my right-hand man.”

Legs went on grinning. Oh yes, he thought, now that you need me! He said: “Sure, I’m your man, Boss. Whatever you say goes with me!”

“Get the keys out of my pants and open the top right-hand drawer of my desk,” commanded Blacktower.

Legs obeyed. The drawer held a gun that he coveted; one of the new stubby automatics; blued steel; .38 caliber.

“It’s yours,” said Blacktower, grinning. “There’s a box of shells at the back of the drawer.”

“Gee! Boss,” said Legs, making his face beam like the sun. Behind it he waited tensely for what was coming next.

Pain and hatred made Blacktower’s grin look wolfish. “If Manoel was to die sudden, your fortune would be made,” he said, coolly.

“Gosh! Boss, how could a fellow get him?”

“That’s up to the fellow,” he said, callously. “Understand, if the fellow missed him or got caught, I’d wash my hands of him.”

“Sure,” said Legs. “I’m acquainted with a fellow who will do his damndest, Boss.”

“That’s all right,” said Blacktower. “I’ll give him a week. At the end of that time I’ll get another fellow.”

Blacktower’s meaning was perfectly clear. Legs made out to throw a startled glance his way. “I get you, Boss.”

★ VIII ★

ON THE following day Blacktower remained in bed. This was not sufficiently unusual to arouse comment among his employees. At night, when Legs had dressed his wound, he insisted on putting on his clothes and at the usual hour departed for the theater, tight-lipped and sweating with pain, but walking without any suggestion of a limp. Legs watched his erect figure crossing the bridge with a grudging admiration. Certainly the brute was game!

After a little while Legs followed him to the theater. Springing for the top of the wall, he drew himself up until he could get a slant inside. There they sat, the four of them, at a table, Blacktower, Manoel, Pepita, and Fay, all smiling with made-to-order friendliness, each watchful behind the smile. Legs dropped back, grinning too. Grim comedy; and only he possessed the key to it.

Bill Keene had finished his lean-to at the end of Uncle Ling's warehouse, and Legs went down there. It was only a wooden frame screened all around and having an overhanging roof to shed the rain, but the privacy was luxurious. Bill had a cot, two chairs, and a folding table. It was great, after you had been on edge all day, to relax and smoke in the dark; to chin with a friend about going back to God's country, or what not.

Bill was pretty well informed about the situation in camp produced by the coming of La Rosadora. But even to Bill, Legs could not bring himself to speak of his terrific stake in the matter. Not yet, anyhow. The subject was too painful. Maybe Bill guessed part of it. Tonight Legs merely said, with a short laugh:

"I've got a new assignment."

"What's that?" asked Bill.

"My boss has given me the job of putting Manoel's light out."

"The hell you say!" remarked Bill, pleasantly.

“It’s either Manoel or me.”

“Are you going to do it?”

“No.”

“What do you stick around here for, anyhow?” asked Bill. “There’s nothing here for you.”

“I have reasons,” said Legs, reticently. “One will do. No money.”

They smoked awhile in silence; then Legs said:

“Thought maybe you and me could stage a fake assassination of Manoel. Just to keep Blacktower quiet for a while.”

Bill laughed. “Pretty good! Got a plan doped out?”

“Not yet. I have six days. It’s got to be something convincing.”

“Sure! Let’s make it spectacular! Count on me, fellow!”

“Thanks,” said Legs.

On his way home with the ice, Legs paused to look through the shutters of the gambling-hall, and saw Blacktower in his usual elevated seat behind the cash-desk, overlooking the scene with his hard grin. Hours later, lying awake in his hammock, he heard the boss come stumbling over the bridge, cursing under his breath. Blacktower almost never drank. A moment later the double ring, Legs’ signal, rang through the house. Finding Blacktower lying panting on his bed, he made him as comfortable as he could.

During the following days Blacktower would allow nobody to enter his room but Legs. Legs said to him:

“I’ve got to get out and around some, if I want to pick up any information.”

“Let the others do the housework,” growled Blacktower.

“I need money for expenses.”

“What the hell expenses have you?”

“I want to keep on feeding change to the servant at the hotel, so I can find out what goes on in there. And if I’m going to hang around camp, I’ve got to buy occasionally.”

“There’s money in the drawer. Take two dollars. One for the girl. And hear me! If you get drunk I won’t wait for the week to be out.”

Legs grinned inwardly at this threat. He knew his own value now. “A man can’t buy a load for a dollar in Bum Success,” he said.

Blacktower showed his teeth at this bit of lip, but said nothing.

Thus Legs won the right to go and come pretty much as he chose. Naturally, it made Chou and the Hawaiian boy sore. They looked on Legs as

a traitor to their common cause against the boss. But that was a mere flea-bite. They'll have to lump it, thought Legs.

As he went around the camp it was not Manoel that concerned him—Manoel could wait a day or two—but how to get in touch with Fay. It was hard to think of Fay at all and keep cool. The ladder was presumably still lying under the veranda of the hotel where he had hidden it, but he could not approach her *via* the veranda without cutting the screen, and that would give everything away. The ladder must be saved for the final getaway.

There remained Ria. Ria probably did up Fay's room. Even if she were not permitted to see Fay, she could slip a letter under her door. Might be more difficult for Fay to answer it. Anyhow, trust the two women to find a way. Judging from the treatment that Ria received from Pepita, there was little danger of the caboclo girl betraying him to her mistress. But what was the use of writing to Fay unless he had something definite to propose? There Legs stuck.

The sight of Bill Keene putting in a new pane of glass in Uncle Ling's store gave him an idea. He paused idly in the store to watch the operation. The old Chinaman was figuring at his table a few yards behind him.

"Listen," said Legs to Bill under his breath. "Could you spare me a handful of putty well worked up?"

Bill, seemingly intent on his work, nodded imperceptibly.

Legs said, "Take it home when you go, and I'll get it there," and went back into the store to make his purchases.

Again that night Blacktower departed for the theater all buttoned up and top-hatted, though he was swaying on his feet with fever. As yet no infection had developed in the wound. Legs remained in his room to tidy it up. All the medicaments had to be put out of sight, and the soiled bandages rolled up and shoved in Legs' pocket until he got a chance to throw them overboard.

Legs searched through Blacktower's things until he found a little wooden box that had brought a pair of spectacles through the mail. Blacktower never allowed anybody to catch him using the spectacles. The box was the exact size that Legs required, and he priggled it. It would never be missed.

In Bill's shack five minutes later he received the putty. Bill was full of curiosity, but would not ask questions. Legs volunteered no information. He mumbled in hangdog fashion:

"Mind if I write a letter here?"

"Go ahead," said Bill.

“If I wrote it at Blacktower’s desk the servants would tell on me. And I’ve got no place of my own to go. That flat-faced Hawaiian would have a rag-baby if he saw anybody writing a letter and couldn’t find out what was in it.”

They rigged an acetylene lamp in such fashion that it illuminated the table without showing up the occupants of the shack. Thus if anybody passed by, it might be supposed that it was Bill sitting there writing. Legs had brought his own paper and envelope. He started without any idea of what he was going to say; but as soon as he had written “Fay,” it came pouring out. His pencil raced back and forth across the paper as if driven by a power outside himself. All the thoughts and feelings locked up inside him, surprising him a little when he saw them written down.

In the middle of it he checked himself. How was Fay going to take this? With a crooked smile, maybe, and saying: “If you love me as much as that, why didn’t you stand by me in the beginning?” Legs’ head sank down between his shoulders. You have no rights over her now, he told himself; better stick to plain facts. He slowly tore his letter into small bits and shoved them in his pocket. He started again:

DEAR FAY:

You know I’m here, because you saw me. I know you’re in a nasty jam, Fay, and I’m studying how to get you out of it. Not that I think I mean anything to you now, because I know I don’t, but just what any man would do. I am giving Ria a little box with this that has putty in the bottom. If you or she can get hold of the key to your door for a minute, and make an impression of it in the putty, I’ll have another key made, so you can let yourself out at night. I noticed there was a communicating door between the hotel and the back of the theater. After I get the key back in your hands I’ll be waiting in the theater every morning between four-thirty and five-thirty, hoping you may be able to join me there. So we can talk over what’s to be done. Don’t come after five-thirty, because it gets light.

Yours truly,

MATT.

When he read it over he hated the bald words. In thought he added to his letter: O God! if you knew how I loved you! But he would not write it.

At noon next day Legs, dressing Blacktower’s wound, said: “Could you get up some excuse to send me to the hotel, Boss? Unless I got a reason for going, they’ll get suspicious.”

“Sure,” said Blacktower, grinning through his pain. “Make up a package for La Rosadora of some of the fancy food I got in on the steamboat, and I’ll send a letter with it.”

Thus, half an hour later Legs was pounding and kicking at the gate of the hotel. In due course Ria opened it. Her stolid brown face never changed a muscle at the sight of Legs, nevertheless there was a kind of unspoken exchange. She let him understand she was his friend. For the benefit of any possible watcher from the windows, he slapped her cheek playfully and gave her a shove. Ria bridled and shoved back. The caboclos were natural-born deceivers.

He gave her first Blacktower’s package and letter. “For La Rosadora,” he said. “Let Pepita see it.” Ria nodded. Then his own little box and letter. “For La Rosadora. *Don’t* let Pepita see it.” Box and letter were whisked inside the bosom of her dress. Finally they shook hands, and Ria palmed the silver dollar expertly.

“How can I get an answer from you?” asked Legs.

“Morning I go On Kai-Ling store,” said Ria.

Legs went home, already in a fever at the prospect of getting an answer. He presented a smooth face to the boss. Blacktower’s eyes were fever-bright, too, for a different reason.

“Well, what did you find out?” he snarled.

Legs lied glibly. “Manoel goes to play jack-pot afternoons in the room back of Figueroa’s rum-shop, but I don’t see how I can get him by daylight without showing myself. The same when he’s around the theater. There’s no possible getaway. But Ria says he’s a bad sleeper, and sometimes he walks out at night. I’ll be laying for him then.”

Legs’ stolid air enraged Blacktower. “I want action on this!” he snarled, cursing. “*Make* a chance to get the man or I’ll find somebody who can!”

“Doing my best,” said Legs.

Next morning he was hanging around On Kai-Ling’s store as soon as it opened. Anybody who knew Blacktower might have been surprised to see one of his servants with nothing to do for hour after hour. That had to be chanced. Legs’ head was hot and his hands cold while he waited, but his face gave nothing away.

Ria came along about ten o’clock. She passed Legs without a sign of recognition. Nothing in her hands but an empty basket. The shock of disappointment was like falling through space. But after she had gone into the store there was his little box lying on the ground. Pouncing on it and slipping back the cover, he saw the impression of a key in the putty—but no

letter! Tell himself as much as he liked that Fay no longer had any use for him, it was a stab just the same. Though it was risky, he hung around until Ria came out of the store.

“No letter?” he murmured.

“She got no paper for write,” said Ria, without looking at him.

Well, anyhow, he had the impression of the key. Fay meant to meet him in the empty theater. Legs was too excited to wait until night before seeing Bill. He loafed around store and warehouse until he saw his friend passing through with his tools. Legs hailed him and slipped him the little box.

“Look, Bill, could you make me a key from that impression?”

Bill could not contain his curiosity. “For God’s sake what you up to, fellow?”

“Nothing crooked,” mumbled Legs.

“Did I say I thought it was crooked?”

“No. But I—but I can’t explain. You’re the only friend I’ve got. It’s not because I don’t trust you. I’m in your hands, anyhow. But I can’t talk about it, Bill.”

“That’s all right, fellow. I’ll have it for you tonight.”

On the following morning Legs sat among other loafers on the rail near the shore end of the pier, keeping his eye on the door of the store, a hundred yards away. When Ria went in, he moved up to the ice-plant and lounged against the corrugated-iron front. In a spirit of derision they called the sun-baked open space between the ice-and-electric-plant and On Kai-Ling’s buildings “the plaza.” In his pants pocket Legs was fingering the little wooden box which now had a key in it. He had ripped the seam of the pocket.

When Ria came out with her basket, he took a leaf out of her book and slouched up the curving way a few paces in advance of her. At this hour there were few to be seen on the Avenida except the drunks sleeping it off in odd corners. Choosing a moment when there was no one between them, Legs let the little box slide to the ground through his pants leg, and turned into Crummy Carl’s rum-shop. Barefooted Ria ducked and plodded on with an expression of perfect savage dumbness. She was concealing the little box in the fullness of her faded skirt.

Crummy Carl was a wizened little ape of a man, who nevertheless managed to survive and carry on his business. He hired two slugging barmen, and frankly got behind them when trouble started. He was always

the first to open up in the morning, and was said to send out a bag of gold every time the steamboat went.

“My God!” he said, fretfully. “Look at the fresh blood on the floor!”

“Whose is it?” asked Legs, just to be saying something. He watched Ria disappearing through the ragged-palm-thatched arcade.

“Bloke called Marsayles,” said Carl. “On his way out to spend his roll, but he drunk it up in Bum Success. Has to go back for more now. He was near paralyzed last night. It was Wingy Sullivan jumped him. For no reason except Wingy wanted to show off before Baldy Red, who had money. Cheese! what a beating Wingy give him, and he a one-armed man! Marsayles was all over blood. Wingy got the shirt tore off him. Baldy Red give him a new one and bought his rum.”

“My God! what a world!” said Legs, swallowing his liquor. What with his own business and the boss’, he had had only a couple of hours sleep in twenty-four, and he needed the drink.

“Yeah, that’s what I say,” agreed Carl. “What a world! . . . You ain’t paid me, fellow.”

Eighteen hours later—the longest eighteen hours Legs had ever put in in his life, and no sleep yet!—he was standing under the wall of the theater on the creek side, listening. It was half-past four, and he had lately put Blacktower to bed. From the Avenida still came the sounds of drunken shouting, but where he stood all was dark and still. He could not be seen from this side, except from the hanging bridge. And the bridge creaked so loudly when anybody stepped on it, there was little chance of being taken by surprise from there.

He sprang for the top of the wall, drew himself up, and dropped on his toes inside. He had matches, but wouldn’t strike them, fearing that the reflection under the room might betray him to somebody outside the building. He felt his way cautiously among the tables and chairs. The place stank of cigar butts and spilled liquor. Finally he found the steps leading to a little door alongside the stage. Through that door Fay must come. Would she have the nerve to try it?

He dropped on a chair near by, and rested his arms on a table. There he waited in a state of suspended animation, all his faculties concentrated in one—hearing. Soft, winged, night-creatures flitted in and out over the side-walls, there were scurryings and squeakings in the corners; he could even hear the termites busy at their infinitesimal work of destruction; but nothing stirred behind the little door. Gradually he had to face the fact that she wasn’t coming. Yet he stayed beyond the hour he had set; he waited until a

rising uproar from the jungle warned him that the swift dawn was about to break.

This was Thursday night. On Friday and Saturday nights it was repeated; agonizing wait; sickening disappointment. And no explanation forthcoming. Ria came no more to the store. Instead, Pepita, fat and bedizened, her old eyes rolling at men from force of habit, appeared in the afternoons to do the shopping. When Legs persuaded Blacktower to send him on another errand to the hotel, a different servant answered his pounding at the gate. “Where’s Ria?” he asked, grinning clownishly. The other only answered with a dumb stare, took his package and slammed the gate.

Legs nearly went crazy. What if his plot had been discovered? It couldn’t all have been discovered, or they would have been laying for him in the dark theater. But maybe they had found the extra key. Maybe they were making Fay suffer for it. The thought caused his teeth to grind. Every night during the performance he pulled himself up and looked in, along with the caboclos who were doing the same. He saw Fay singing on the stage, or sitting at a table with Blacktower and Pepita, fragile and alluring under her red-gold crown, with the sweet mechanical smile that concealed God knows what depth of misery. A few more days and nights like this—! There was a limit to what a man could stand!

MEANWHILE Blacktower was frying on his particular griddle. As the days passed, pain, rage, and frustration worked him up to a state bordering on insanity. Since in public he always showed himself the icy pattern of a gambler, Legs received the sole benefit of his outbursts. Legs always went armed into his room during these days.

On Sunday morning, though Blacktower hadn't gone to bed until four, at eight he was already yelling for Legs again. He seemed to be made of tougher fiber than other men. He had escaped infection; and though he had done everything to hinder it, the wound had started to heal. But the pain was bad. He swore that the bandage was too tight and ordered Legs to change it.

Legs did his best—only to be rewarded with a fusillade of cursing. “Easy, you fool! You’re tearing it open! Is my leg a joint of meat, you butcher! You’ve got hands like a nigger stevedore!” And so on.

In Legs’ present state of mind it was just too much. He stood up, letting the bandage drop. “How much of this am I expected to take?” he asked. “I work for you without pay; I keep your secret; I doctor you; and all I get is foul abuse.”

“Shut up!” snarled Blacktower. “Getting pretty brave ain’t you, with a gun in your pocket?”

“Brave or no,” said Legs, “I’m through. And you can damned well go to hell and get somebody else to take it!” He backed away to the door with his hand on his gun. Blacktower’s gun was under his pillow.

But the boss quieted right down. A look of plain fear came into his face along with an ugly deceitfulness. “Come back,” he growled. “I didn’t mean it. I admit I hadn’t ought to have spoken to you that way. You’re a good boy, Legs. I told you what I was going to do for you, and I stand by every word of it.”

Legs remained by the door, watching him, and wondering grimly if anybody beside himself had ever heard the terrible Blacktower begging for a favor. Also he thought, Later on he'll make me pay dear for bringing him to it!

Blacktower dragged himself down to the foot of his cot. "Take the gun and shut it up in the desk if that's what you're afraid of," he growled.

Legs was not afraid that Blacktower would shoot him—at present; however, he took the gun from under the pillow, and dropping it in a drawer of the desk, resumed the bandaging as if nothing had happened.

For a while no more was said. Blacktower's glance at the man who was attending to his needs was not a pretty one. Legs was well aware of it, though he did not look at Blacktower directly. Plots were weaving under that black thatch. Finally the boss said, in a conciliatory voice:

"The trouble is, I'm near crazy, Legs. That's what made me act so rough to you. I can't stand being laid out just at the time when I want every bit of strength and wits that God ever gave me."

Legs thought, Why bring God in?

"It takes so much out of me to bluff out the pain that I can't think good," Blacktower went on. "And I never had such need of thinking as now."

"Why?" asked Legs, to see what he would say.

"It's that swine, Manoel! . . . Oh, not the way you think! I know it was Manoel had me plugged, all right, but it ain't revenge that actuates me. I'm concerned for that girl."

He paused to let this sink in. Legs said nothing.

"Would you stand to let that greaser get an American girl?" demanded Blacktower.

"No!" said Legs, loudly. Inwardly he grinned.

"Then stop him," said Blacktower. "The only thing that stands between him and his purpose is Pepita. He'll put the skids under Pepita if you don't act quick. By stopping Manoel you'll be saving the life of a woman—maybe two women."

Presently there was another outburst of irritation. "Why the hell ain't you done something already?" demanded Blacktower. "It's a simple thing to shoot a man down!"

"Sure," said Legs, "to shoot him down. But you stipulated nobody must see me do it. That's the difficulty."

After thinking and stroking his chin, Blacktower said: "I remove that stipulation. Shoot him down at sight, like the vermin he is."

“What would happen to me after?”

“I’m powerful enough to protect you.”

Legs thought: But would you? Against the governor of Amazonas? He said: “Well, first-off I’ll try it without showing myself. I’ve got a plan.”

“What’s that?”

It was true that Legs in his off moments had been watching Manoel and had acquired a working knowledge of his habits. He said: “Every night near the end of the show when nobody is going in, Manoel slips down to Mike Figueroa’s to get a shot of rum. Pepita won’t let him drink hard liquor in the theater. He don’t stay but ten minutes or so, and gets back before the show lets out. I’ll try to nail him tonight between the theater and Figueroa’s place.”

“Go to it,” said Blacktower. “If you pull it off, you can ask what you want of me!”

Legs thought, Sure I can ask!

Blacktower, freshly bandaged, settled himself to sleep, and Legs went out of the house.

Sunday was almost the same as any other day in Bom Successo, which made it difficult to keep track of the days. The exception was that On Kai-Ling closed his store. Only the Heathen Chinese kept the Christian Commandment. Not that he gave a hoot for Sunday, men said, but because he and his clerks wanted to carouse in the midst of the Oriental luxury said to be hidden back of the store. There was a lot of talk about this amongst the men. Of all the untidy huddle of buildings, wood, ’dobe, and iron, only store and warehouse had openings on the outside. There was no place where you could see in.

Walking down the platform outside the warehouse, Legs regarded the trim steamboat lying at the end of the pier. She had arrived the day before, causing considerable excitement by fetching a consignment of many heavy packing-cases for Manoel Carvalho. These were said to contain scenery, costumes, and properties for a new extravaganza that would outdo anything ever put on in Amazonas. Now she lay dead with cold boilers, since some days would elapse before they collected enough rubber for another cargo. Nobody at Bom Successo wanted too frequent communication with the outside world.

Legs found Bill in the lean-to with his feet cocked up on the table, trying to translate his way through a three-days-old Manaus newspaper. “McKinley was shot at the Buffalo Exposition,” he said, “but I can’t rightly make out the story.”

“Sorry I can’t get heated up over it,” said Legs, gloomily. “I’ve got shootings nearer home.”

Bill lowered the paper. “What’s biting you, fellow?”

“I’ve promised to take a pop at Manoel tonight.”

“Well, that’s all right. What’s the program?”

Legs repeated what he had told Blacktower.

“You mean, just shoot somewhere in his direction in the dark and beat it? That’s no good. There’s so much damn shooting hereabouts he maybe wouldn’t even know that it was meant for him.”

“What do you want me to do?” asked Legs, with a grin. “Squawk out, ‘Die villain!’ and let fly?”

“Nah! But if you want it to reach Blacktower’s ears it’s got to attract notice! You want to do it artistically.”

Legs laughed shortly.

“Look,” said Bill. “I’ll mosey up the Avenida and look over the ground. In a little while you can follow me and do likewise. Then afterwards we’ll compare notes and dope out something unusual. We’ve got all day to lay pipes for the act.”

Later, when they “compared notes,” Bill said, thoughtfully: “There’s that unoccupied shack on the right-hand side, about twenty-five yards beyond Figueroa’s. The termites have completely undermined it. It’s ready to fall. We might do something with that.”

At quarter to eleven that night Legs, gun in hand, was crouching in a narrow, unoccupied space looking out on the upper Avenida. On his right was the empty and crumbling shack. Bill Keene was lying in the dark behind it. On his left, the Dutch short-order restaurant. In front of him a growth of dusty weeds and a lot of miscellaneous rubbish as cover against the colored lights strung along outside.

The camp was roaring. For some reason they always whooped it up on Sunday nights. But not yet as loud as it would be in half an hour when the theater let out; the maximum of noise was reached about one o’clock; after that a slow muffling down until silence spread at dawn. Behind the thin wall of the short-order restaurant a mechanical piano was playing “The Sunshine of Paradise Alley.” The hammers seemed to be striking on Legs’ ear-drums. Only scattered Bum Successors passed up and down in front of Legs, for nearly everybody had a bar to lean on; a couple of men, arm in arm, bawling a song; a solitary figure staggering from side to side; never a woman.

A little down the way from where he lay, on the opposite side and within plain view, was Figueroa's, one of the focal points of the noise. This place was patronized mostly by Brazilians. For coolness' sake, the rum-shops took down their whole fronts when they opened for business; however, the angle was too sharp to see inside Figueroa's. Manoel was in there. Legs kept his gaze glued to the open front.

Presently Manoel came out, fat, grinning, lickerish, with a complexion the color of blue clay. He was bareheaded and his curls stood out around his bald crown like a greasy halo. The sight of him made Legs feel a little sick. He would not at all have minded shooting him in earnest. Manoel had a friend on either side of him—bodyguard, perhaps. Legs never looked at them.

“Bill?” he whispered.

“Here!” came the answer out of the dark.

“He's coming. Wait till I give you the word.”

“All set!”

“Now!”

Bill gave a heave from behind; the rotten structure tottered almost without resistance and crashed across the way, sending up a tall column of dust. The three approaching figures stopped stockstill, staring. The fall broke a wire and all the colored lights at this end went out. For a second Legs couldn't see anything. But there was light streaming out from the buildings, and the three figures reappeared in front of him like silhouettes of astonishment. Aiming low over the curly pate of the middle one, he started emptying his gun.

Manoel with a yell of fright cast himself forward on his face. The other two ran. Before Legs finished firing, a general shooting started. Nobody came into the open, but from every building the guns flashed and barked in an aimless hysteria. It was nip and tuck whether Manoel might not be killed, after all.

Legs turned and ran out of the rear of his hiding-place. He didn't see Bill anywhere, but Bill could look after himself. Legs was immediately swallowed up in the maze of crooked passages on this side of camp. Finding that there was no attempt to pursue him in the dark, he soon slowed up. Sticking his gun under the edge of a porch where he could retrieve it later, he put on the dark glasses and struck back into the Avenida, lower down. Bill had his other gun.

The shooting stopped as abruptly as it had begun. All the bars were vomiting their customers into the street, and everybody was running and

asking, “What’s the matter?” Legs ran, too, and asked, “What’s the matter?” It was the crash of the house, not the shooting, which caused the excitement. In the dense crowd which gathered in front of the fallen building, Legs found himself next to the gaunt, half-naked Doc Buckles.

“What’s the matter?” asked Legs.

“Somebody tried to bring down Manoel for the pot,” said Doc, grinning. “Must have been awful hungry!”

“Is he dead?” asked Legs.

“No, little one! I just saw him skipping like a gazelle into the theater!”

Legs laughed. Blacktower was in the theater, and he thought: “His Nibs will hear the story of the dastardly attempt direct from the lips of the intended victim!”

Doc said: “I reckon that the fine Italian hand of Blacktower might be found in this.”

“So?” said Legs, opening his eyes.

“Just so! . . . And why couldn’t you have been his trigger?”

Legs stiffened. This man was too shrewd. “Haven’t got a gun,” he said.

Doc, with one of his unexpected swift movements, patted Legs’ hip pocket. Lucky it was empty! Legs looked innocent, and Doc laughed, unconvinced.

“Come and have a smile,” he said.

“My buy this time,” said Legs.

“What! This must be a guilty conscience! Don’t you worry, Prancer! I’m as deep as a well!”

The excitement quickly subsided. Manoel was anything but popular with the Anglo-Saxons, and the caboclos hid their feelings. All hands joined in throwing the debris out of the way, and everybody went back to the bars.

Blacktower came over from the gambling-hall shortly before four, and shouted for Legs. Legs followed him upstairs, bracing himself. Now for it! But Blacktower was unexpectedly quiet—ominously quiet. His lips were compressed, and there was a nasty glitter in his eyes that he was trying to hide.

“So you muffed it!” he said, sarcastically.

“I couldn’t see good,” muttered Legs, simulating confusion. “How did I know the lights would go out?”

“If you couldn’t see him you should have held your fire,” snarled Blacktower. “Now that the bastard is warned, you’ll never get him.”

“A man can’t foresee everything.”

“Who helped you?” Blacktower demanded, suspiciously. “Who pushed over the shack?”

Legs looked startled. “I wouldn’t dare ask for help in a thing like this. Pushed it over myself when I saw him coming.”

“Well, you’re no good! You’ve proved that now. Stay off it. I’ll get somebody else.”

“And me?” queried Legs.

“Change the bandage.”

Legs looked at the wound and thought: In two days it will be healed over. Then look out!

LEGS sat in the dark of the theater without hope. A dozen times he had said to himself: She isn't coming! However, in his letter to her he had promised to be waiting every morning, and there he must be.

Somewhere he had read that a man's vitality is always lowest just before dawn. Certainly his thermometer was registering zero. All that thought and planning; all he had put up with in silence; all he had risked—and the results *nil!* Less than *nil!* because Fay was probably worse off now than when he had first made a move to reach her. He was nothing but a clumsy bungler; he spoiled everything he touched. . . .

He heard the handle of the little door softly turning, and the heart almost burst out of his body. He stood up breathless and trembling, his eyes fixed on the black space where he knew the door was. He couldn't see it opening, but presently in the middle of the black space appeared a palish wraith, and he heard a fluttering breathing.

"Fay, is it you?" he whispered.

A soft cry, "Oh, Matt!" and she came running, falling down the three steps. He caught her in his arms. "Oh, Matt! dearest, dearest Matt! how I wanted you!" The sweet, thin arms went swiftly around his neck and held him tight. Her face strained up to his. He took her lips. This was better than he had dared to dream.

Speech came back brokenly, a word at a time. They found themselves sitting on two chairs, pressed close together.

"Matt . . . !"

"Fay . . . !"

"Never let me go!"

"It's near three years!"

"I never expected to have this again."

“Nor me.”

“So strong! . . . So good to hold on to!”

“You’re crying!”

“From relief.”

“I could cry, too.”

“I thought you would hate me!”

“Me hate you? That’s funny!”

“It was all my fault.”

“Don’t be silly!”

“It *was* my fault! I wanted everything. I never considered the cost.”

“It was me went crooked.”

“Oh! Was it awful in prison, Matt?”

“Not so bad.”

“You will never tell me how awful it was!”

“Never mind it now. We’ve both paid. By God! we’ve paid a hundred times over! We’re square with them, whoever they are!”

“Anyhow, you’re just the same! My dear, strong, quiet Matt! They couldn’t break you!”

“They broke me, all right! But I picked up the pieces after.”

“Funny Matt! Just the same! Your hard arms around me just the same! I’m afraid of waking up.”

“Can’t be a dream when there are two in it.”

Her head lay on his shoulder; his cheek pillowed in her fragrant hair. The old feeling of awe came over him. Beauty seemed to set her apart. She was too wonderful to be his, really. It had always been like this. A sort of religious feeling. Yet he knew, too, that Fay was very much a flesh-and-blood woman.

“Kiss me, Matt.”

They became one then.

“Never to be parted again at night,” she murmured.

“I hope not.”

“Hope not?”

“We’re not yet out of the woods.”

“Why can’t we climb over the wall and get away now?”

“There is no place where I could take you, dear. This camp is like a den of wild animals.”

“Yes . . . I know.”

“How did you happen to come to this God-forsaken country?”

“For a long time after you . . . after it happened, I couldn’t do anything. I went to pieces. I got right up against it . . .”

“Oh, don’t!” he whispered. “Can’t stand to hear that part!”

“Well, I got an offer to go to South America. I wanted to make a lot of money so we’d have something when you came out. The first company wasn’t so bad, but the manager went broke in Rio. Manoel came along and made me a better offer. He seemed all right. But as soon as we got away from the cities I found I was a prisoner. I didn’t get my money. I couldn’t communicate with anybody. I . . . I . . . Oh, I can’t tell you . . . !” She began to weep and to tremble.

“Don’t cry!” he whispered, in an agony of compassion. “I shouldn’t have asked! I shouldn’t have asked!”

With a long breath she recovered herself. “It’s all right, darling. We are together again. Hold me tighter!”

Silence again; then Legs drew away from her with a groan. “This is awful!”

“Awful?”

“I am losing myself! I can’t let myself love you now. It’s too dangerous. All of a sudden it will be day. We must talk over what to do.”

Fay sat upright with a sigh. “Hard to think when I have just found you!”

“What prevented you coming the first night?” he asked.

“My poor Matt! I thought of you waiting here. I was nearly crazy. . . . Something or other made Pepita suspicious. It couldn’t have been your letter, because I chewed that up and swallowed it. And she never got a sight of the key, of course, or I wouldn’t be here now. Anyhow, she had a cot brought into my room and slept there for three nights. She put Ria to work in the kitchen, so I couldn’t send a message out by her. I couldn’t do anything.”

“Where’s Pepita tonight?”

“I don’t know. Whatever it was made her suspicious, she must be satisfied now, for she took the cot out of my room today.”

“There’s something I want to tell you,” he said; “it was through Blacktower that I went to prison.”

“O God!” she said, startled. “How could that be?”

“Blacktower is the Jack Beatty that you heard so much about during the trial. He skipped his bail.”

“Why didn’t something warn me?” she whispered. “. . . How does it happen that you are working for him as his servant?”

Legs grinned in the dark. “We hate each other so much we can’t bear to lose touch!”

“Oh, be serious!”

“I am perfectly serious! After I take you out of this country, I’m coming back for him!”

“Not if I know it!” she said, passionately. “Let him rot here!”

Legs merely compressed his lips. She couldn’t see that.

“Couldn’t we escape down the rivers in a little boat?”

“It’s the only way,” he said. “Can you face such a journey through the jungle?”

“Anywhere with you!”

“No woman ever made such a journey,” he said, doubtfully. “Certainly no woman like you. We’d be pursued. We’d have to travel by night and hide during the day.”

“Shall we start tomorrow night?” she asked, breathlessly.

He groaned in his helplessness. “I could always steal a canoe, but I must get a store of grub and money for the journey.”

He felt her body sag with disappointment.

“We must have money. We could perhaps make Manaos or Serpa in a canoe. That’s not more than two hundred miles. But we couldn’t paddle all the way to the sea. That’s fifteen hundred miles from here. We must have money for our passage.”

“I could stand *anything*!” she whispered.

“It’s not hardship nor hunger I’m afraid of for you,” he said; “nor wild animals, nor snakes, nor fever. It’s *men*! How could I ever sleep while I had you to guard?”

“I could watch while you slept.”

He was silent for a while. “I’ll find a way,” he said. “I have a good friend here. Perhaps he’ll come with us. He’d be worth a dozen! But he has no money, either. . . . I’d steal it if I could! But Blacktower keeps all but a dollar or two locked in his safe.”

“It must be soon,” said Fay, tremulously. “I know by the way this beast looks at me that he doesn’t mean to wait long.”

Legs knew that it had to be soon. He drew away from her and took out his gun. “You must take this. Are you brave enough to use it?”

“I’ll have to be.”

“I’ll show you how it works.”

“But you need it, Matt.”

“I have another.” He made her strike matches and hold them, while he explained the mechanism of the gun. “You should always have it on you. . . . How can you carry it?”

“I’ll wear dresses that open in front, and slip it inside. I’ll make a pocket for it.”

“Be sure it’s fixed so you can draw quickly. Better practice drawing it when you’re alone.”

She concealed the gun in the bosom of her dress. Striking another match, she held it up, murmuring, “I want to see your face.”

“You won’t see much!”

The match dropped.

“My Matt! I love every inch of you! You are so much a man!”

“Easy, Fay!” he protested, in a kind of terror. “I daren’t let myself go, here! I’ve got to beat it now. Wait till I get you out!”

“I have waited so long!”

He weakened. “Oh, Fay! . . . Oh, Fay . . . !”

“Kiss me!”

He lost himself.

Presently, without any warning, they found themselves in a strong white light. They sprang to their feet, pressing together. The door had been opened without their hearing it, and the source of the light was there. While it shone in their eyes they could see nothing beyond it.

“This is the end,” whispered Fay. “I don’t care.”

“You have my gun!” he groaned. “Now we’re covered.”

They heard a harsh laugh from behind the light—a woman’s laugh. “So that’s your man,” she said. “Blacktower’s servant. I must say you looked pretty low!”

Pepita!

“Say nothing,” Legs whispered to Fay.

“Where did you pick him up?” demanded Pepita. “He never came to the theater. He’s a servant. . . . But he’s good-enough-looking fellow, I will say,” she added, with a laugh. “When we choose for ourselves we don’t care, do we dearie?”

Legs thought, If she comes down the steps I'll strangle her before she can raise an alarm.

Pepita held her point of vantage above them. "I knew there was something up. I seen it in your face three days ago. That's why I slept in your room. Then I thought I'd catch you if I made believe to get out. And here you are! You ain't the first miss that I've kept under lock and key, darlie!" Her voice became a snarl. "How did you get out of your room?"

"You forgot to lock the door," murmured Fay.

"You lie! It's still locked. I tried it when I come by. Then I seen that the bar was raised over the door into the theater."

Fay said nothing.

Suddenly Pepita lowered her light—they could see her then—turned, and shut the door behind her. A heavenly feeling of relief flooded through Legs. She wasn't going to raise an alarm. She had no gun. She descended the steps a little uncertainly, and sidled up to Legs with her customary leer.

"What would you do for me, Handsome, if I was to help you get the girl away from here?"

He could feel Fay bristling beside him. A little dizzied by this sudden face-about in the situation, he could find nothing to say. Pepita didn't expect any answer. She dropped heavily in a chair and, producing a bottle, planted it on the table.

"Draw up! Draw up!" she said. "Have a drink."

"Easy!" warned Legs, "or you'll bring somebody in here! You'd better turn out that light."

Pepita was carrying one of the acetylene bull's-eyes that were customary around camp. She turned it out. Legs and Fay sat down. Fay slipped her hand in his under the table. Pepita took a pull at the bottle, and passed it. Fay made believe to put her lips to it, but Legs took a man's drink. He needed it. The situation had the crazy aspect of a dream.

"I'm willing to hand her over to you," said Pepita. "God knows the pretty bitch has caused me trouble enough!" Her voice deepened to a growl. "And worse to come! . . . He thinks I don't know!" She took another drink. "For God's sake get her away from here before we're all murdered in our beds!

"I was as pretty as her," she went on, drunkenly. "And men killed for me!" She laughed. "Not my husband! I married him because he was a fool! Fools make good husbands. There's still plenty of men likes me better than her. She's too skinny. There's no blood in her body!"

An answer pushed against Legs' tongue, but he clamped his teeth on it. He knew the vagaries of drunkenness. He pressed Fay's hand.

"I'm willing you should have her," Pepita went on, "though I lose money by it. Well, money isn't everything." She laughed, and gave Fay a push. "Is it, dearie? *We* know!"

Fay shrank closer to Legs.

"You understand, I can't appear in this," Pepita went on, "or I sure would get my throat cut. You must make it look as if you had done it all. Once you're safe out of the way, I'll raise my hands and curse you black in the face." She laughed, and swayed on her chair. "Why don't you let me sit next to him, dearie," she grumbled, and then forgot it.

"We got to have money," said Legs. "We can't move without money."

Pepita cursed him like a man. "Money! What the hell do you think I am? Rockefeller? I'm not giving a bonus with the girl. Money's too hard to get! I hand her over to you. What happens to you after that is nothing to me."

"You would get it back in the end."

"Oh yes, if I lived long enough."

"Well, give me twenty-four hours," said Legs. "You and Fay meet me here tomorrow morning at four-thirty, and I'll be ready to talk. If I have any luck we can make a break for it the following night."

"I won't bring red-head tomorrow night," said Pepita, coolly. "It's too risky. She can stay in her room and I'll keep both keys." She grinned evilly. "Nothing out of the way if *I* was seen going to meet a man. You'll have to whisper your sweet words in my ear tomorrow night, Handsome."

He was forced to submit. All of a sudden he realized that daylight was stealing under the rafters of the hall. "I've got to beat it quick," he said, taking Fay's hand and feasting his eyes on her dawn-pale face. He wouldn't kiss her before the other woman.

"Aah, give her one!" said Pepita.

Fay drew back. Neither of them wanted to kiss at *her* behest.

"Then give it to me!" said Pepita, grinning and opening her arms.

Legs' stomach failed him. She looked terrible; her breath almost knocked him down. But his hesitation was only for a second. He could do more than that for Fay. He gave Pepita a rough smack while Fay looked on in horror; sprang for the top of the wall and went over. Landing on the bank of the creek, he scrubbed his lips with the back of his hand.

LEGS snatched a couple of hours sleep, and was out again by eight o'clock. At this hour Bom Successo was sunk in almost complete slumber. Only a few gaunt dogs roamed up and down the Avenida in search of garbage, ready to run if anybody looked at them. But these were the best working-hours of the day, and Legs knew that Bill Keene would be up and somewhere around the Chinese outfit.

The store was not open yet. Bill was not in the warehouse or in the little machine-shop he had rigged up. The lean-to was empty—you could see right through it—and locked. Everything tidied up inside. A nasty feeling of anxiety seized on Legs. The only human creature in sight was a caboclo fishing from the pier. Ordinarily Bill and Legs took care to conceal their association, but Legs could not stop for that now. He went down and addressed the fisherman:

“Seen Bill Keene?”

“Went up river in *bateloa* half an hour ago. Two Indians paddling.”

Legs spat overboard to express indifference. “Did they take grub?”

“Sure, plenty grub.”

This was heart-breaking news. Legs loitered, whistling between his teeth, asked a couple of fool questions about fishing, and slouched away.

There was nothing he could do now except wait for the store to open. This it did about an hour later. The impressive bulk of On Kai-Ling appeared in long blue robe and round cap. He seated himself at his table just inside the door, and proceeded to do his accounts in Chinese.

Legs went in to him. “ ’Morning! Uncle Ling.”

“ ’Morning!” returned the old man, with the unchanging Chinese smile.

“You send Bill Keene away?”

“Yes. I buy broken-down launch up Purus River. Send Bill Keene to fix. Back four, five days if he get her going.”

Legs was so floored by this information that his powers of dissimulation failed him. He just stood there.

“What’s the matter?” asked Uncle Ling. “You sick?”

Legs shook his head. “Can I talk to you, Uncle Ling?”

“Sure! Fire away!”

“This is private talk. It will take some time.” Legs grinned feebly. “Want to tell you the story of my life.”

On Kai-Ling looked at him shrewdly, fingered his chin, then hoisted his three-hundred-odd pounds to an upright position. “Come inside,” he said.

They passed back through the long store with its extraordinary hodge-podge of goods stowed anyhow, and passed through a door into a bare room where two of the “nephews” were still eating their rice. They looked astonished at the intrusion of a white man, but quickly remembered to smile. This room was lighted from an interior court, likewise the one beyond, which had bunks around three sides.

On Kai-Ling finally led Legs into an interior garden which made him open his eyes. A garden in Bum Success! It was a tiny place, but so cunningly laid out as to seem spacious. Legs had seen pictures of such Chinese gardens with their elaborate rock-work and fantastic pinnacles in the background; their bronze birds and animals. It had everything but flowers. From the uplifted beak of one of the birds a jet of water sprang in the air and fell in a basin. Theatrical, but pretty.

On Kai-Ling waved Legs to a carved ebony chair and took another. There was a small table between them. Somewhere behind them a noiseless fan stirred the air.

“Have you eaten?” asked On Kai-Ling.

“Couldn’t eat,” mumbled Legs.

“Coffee, then?”

Legs thought. This is the first gentleman I have met since I went to prison.

On Kai-Ling clapped his hands smartly, and a magical apparition appeared from behind the artificial rocks; a pretty young girl, slant-eyed, with a black fringe across her forehead, and wearing silken pants and jacket as gaily colored as flower petals. She pattered up to them, smiling. She included Legs in her smile, like a nice child who takes it for granted everybody is going to be her friend. Legs wondered that anybody could

smile like that in Bum Success. A second girl stuck her head around the rocks and smiled with the same confidence.

On Kai-Ling pinched the girl's cheek in a grandfatherly way, and gave her an order in Chinese. She ran away. The old man turned to his guest.

"You see, I trust you," he said, with an explanatory gesture that included the garden and the girls. "Trust me!"

Legs launched out on his story. "My right name is Matthew McArdle. Until three years ago I was a member of the New York police force. They thought I was a pretty good detective. Already at twenty-six they made me a sergeant of detectives, attached to what they call the Tenderloin precinct."

"I have heard of it," said On Kai-Ling, smiling.

"I was well known and popular; the whole Tenderloin crowd made a lot of me, being the youngest sergeant on the force and all. Quite a figure around town! Maybe it went to my head a bit. I had fallen in love with a beautiful girl, Fay Sherborne, who was playing a small part in a musical comedy, and when I got my promotion we were married. We were terribly in love. I thought I was riding on the crest of the wave.

"But pretty soon I found I couldn't do it on the wages of a police sergeant. I had made Fay leave the stage, because I wasn't going to play second fiddle to my wife. And I was stubborn; I wouldn't let her go back. I was too much in love with her. I just couldn't stand to see her exhibiting before the public. And, anyhow, I knew if she did, that the admiration she excited would break up our marriage one way or another.

"She was a famous beauty; accustomed to luxury. I couldn't ask her to live in a Bronx flat. I ran so deeply in debt that I was desperate. Well, there was a well-known gambler, the biggest man in his line. After having laid low for a time, he opened a new house in my precinct grander than anything before . . ."

"Was his name Jack Beatty?" asked On Kai-Ling, slyly.

Legs nodded.

"My partner!" said the old man, softly.

"Well, you know half the story, then," said Legs. "He offered me a big bribe and a monthly income not to report his new house. Everybody knew about the house, you understand, but if it wasn't officially reported they didn't have to take action. I took his money. I was caught, tried, convicted, and sentenced to Sing Sing for two years. Plenty of others were in it, too, but I was the goat. Jack Beatty was arrested, too. But they were in no hurry to bring *him* to trial. He jumped his bail and got away with it. So that was that!"

“Well, many a good man goes to jail,” said On Kai-Ling.

“When I came out my wife had disappeared,” Legs resumed in his matter-of-fact way. “I had heard a rumor that she had taken an engagement in S. A. and I shipped for Pará. I hadn’t any notion of trying to get her back; I considered that she was well rid of me. All I wanted was to sit in the house somewhere and watch her and listen to her on the stage.

“I finally got to Manaus, and there I went under. Completely down and out. One day I saw Jack Beatty wearing diamonds and I braced him for a job. He brought me here. Not out of charity. He thought it would be fun to have an ex-sergeant of detectives to boot around. It hasn’t worked out just that way. . . . Well, in Bom Sucesso I found my wife.”

On Kai-Ling appeared not to take it in completely. He only stared.

“La Rosadora,” said Legs.

For once Legs saw the Chinese impassivity break up. On Kai-Ling opened his eyes and his mouth like any foolish white man. He gasped; he exclaimed in his own tongue. When he had recovered himself partly, he asked:

“Blacktower know she your wife?”

“No. They never met in New York.”

The old man got up, paced the garden walk, took off the round cap, and scratched his bristly poll. “What can I do?” he muttered. “What can anybody do? Blacktower is not a man to be crossed.” He sat down again.

“I have seen and talked with my wife.” Legs went on. “Pepita is willing to help us. Just to get her out of Manoel’s way.”

On Kai-Ling made no reply. He sat staring ahead of him, fingering his chin until Legs went wild with suspense. He burst out:

“I suppose you think I’m a pretty short sport, coming to you again before I’ve paid you what I owe you!”

On Kai-Ling wagged his hand to silence him. “Wait! I think!”

The two Chinese girls came running with a pot of coffee on a tray and delicate porcelain cups. One girl would have been sufficient for the service, but the other wanted to have a good look at the white man, too. They put down the tray, smiled, and ran away again. They were as lively and natural as kittens.

The old man poured out the coffee with ceremony. Legs tried to drink some. No go. His hand was shaking. He couldn’t hold himself in.

“Look, Uncle Ling,” he said, trying to speak reasonably, “I wouldn’t have the face to ask help for myself alone. It’s to your interest to help me.

This is going to end in a fight to a finish between Blacktower and Manoel. If a race war breaks out, you know what will happen. The whole camp will go up in flames. And where will your business be then? What will happen to those pretty little girls? If I can get La Rosadora away from here there won't be anything to fight about."

"But how? How?" demanded the old man, agitatedly. "How you get away from here? I Blacktower's partner. I can't help you openly."

"We'll go by canoe."

"No!" he cried. "Too dangerous! How you take care nice girl in jungle? How you protect her? You will be followed. No can do!"

"We have talked it over. We'll hide by day."

"On the steamboat they have searchlights to use at night."

Legs set his jaw. "Sure," he said, "it's a hell of a long chance. But to stay here would be fatal."

On Kai-Ling shrugged. "What you want of me?" he asked.

"I'll steal one of Blacktower's canoes," said Legs. "He owes it to me in wages. I want grub from you to take us to Serpa—Manaos would be too dangerous—and money to pay our passage to the coast. As long as I'm in Brazil I'll have to watch my step. Manoel has powerful connections. He will claim, of course, that La Rosadora is jumping her contract, and try to stop us by legal means."

"Gold I can give you," said On Kai-Ling, fingering his chin. "That's nobody's business. But goods from the store? How can I? I have all the goods in Bom Successo. Blacktower would know I outfitted you."

Legs was silent. He had an idea, but he was afraid to open it. Finally it came out. "Could we fix it to look as if I had robbed the store?"

The old man laughed noiselessly, and slapped his thigh. "You smart boy! You pretty dam' smart! . . . How I know you don't take all I got?"

"I couldn't take anything but what the canoe would hold," said Legs. "And, anyhow, you could have a clerk there to watch me."

"Poh! I just fooling," said On Kai-Ling. "Sure you rob the store. When you gone I raise hullabaloo!" He laughed again.

"I'll see Pepita tonight and make all arrangements," said Legs. "Could I get the stuff tomorrow night about eleven? The camp's in full swing then. Nobody goes near the river."

"All right. I break lock on warehouse door. I break door from warehouse into store. We carry everything into warehouse early. I have two men help you run it in canoe. Five minutes and it is done! I give you little primus

stove and can kerosene for cooking. A fire by the river give you away day or night. How you get the girl?"

"I'll go up the creek for her."

"All right. I get money now." He stalked away.

Legs sat there staring sightlessly at the bronze animals, dazed by his good luck. Dazed and strangled by a sense of gratitude. Hopeless to try to express it.

On Kai-Ling returned with a little canvas bag. "It cost fifty dollars gold on the steamboat to Pará," he said. "I give you two hundred." He counted out twenty golden eagles. "What you do when get to Pará?" he asked.

"Cable to New York. I don't know if I have any friends left, but Fay has. We'll manage." He pocketed the money and stood up. "Uncle Ling, I'll pay you back if I live."

The old man shrugged. "If you like, I pay you for taking La Rosadora away from here. It's worth it to me."

"Will you shake hands with me?" said Legs. "I can't thank you proper."

"Sure!"

Legs left the store walking on air. What a change in the outlook since he had gone in! Now he got a kind of satisfaction in the ugliness of the sun-baked earthen plaza, all scored with gullies washed by the rain, the rusty corrugated-iron buildings opposite, the dilapidated Avenida curving away on the right—satisfaction because he had the means to leave it in his pocket.

At noon Blacktower shouted for him as usual. Blacktower preferred shouting to ringing the bell, because it provided a vent for his bad temper in the mornings. He looked at Legs when he entered with frank suspicion and hatred.

"Where you been?" he demanded.

"Sleeping."

"You lie! You're much too busy around camp. From this time on you stay in the house. See? Unless I give you leave to go out. And do your work with the others."

Legs started to unwind the bandage.

"Do you hear me?"

"I heard you."

"Then answer me!"

Legs thought: Only twelve hours more! "Yes, sir," he said.

“Can’t I leave this damned bandage off now?” demanded Blacktower.

Legs touched the freshly healed wound delicately. Blacktower winced, and cursed him roundly.

“You see it’s pretty tender,” said Legs. “Your clothes would chafe it. It might open again.”

“Then bind it up,” growled Blacktower. “This is the last time.”

Legs thought, Tonight is none too soon!

LEGS tried to get some sleep in preparation for the night's work. But his hammock was swung immediately outside the kitchen, and Chou and George, getting Blacktower's dinner, made a spiteful clatter among the dishes and pans.

"Some men can take it easy," remarked George to Chou.

"We work and he sleep," said Chou.

"He thinks he's earned it," said George, sarcastically, "after doing the boss' dirty business."

Legs sat up in his hammock. They didn't know yet that he was out of favor. He cursed George with precision. "Another word out of you and I'll push in your flat face so far it'll stick out behind!"

George turned a shade yellower and kept his mouth shut. Chou, however, was a good cook, and surer of himself. He went on clattering the pans.

Legs could not have slept if the place had been perfectly quiet. He was worrying now about Pepita. Suppose she had forgotten about their agreement of the previous night. No, he couldn't believe that. She had been drunk, certainly, but not drunk enough to forget. She knew what she was saying. But she might have gone on drinking after Legs had left, and be lying in a drunken stupor now!

Or maybe she had just been stalling, pulling his leg. Maybe she hadn't any intention of helping Fay to get away and was laughing at them both. Maybe she had told Manoel. No, he didn't believe she had told Manoel. But maybe it was a trick just to get Legs alone in the theater. God! What if she started making love to him! . . .

He was roused from this torment by hearing Chou address somebody who had approached along the veranda behind him. "What you want?"

A woman's voice replied, "Legs."

He sprang up and looked around. Ria! Instantly his anxieties galloped off in a new direction. What had happened? What had happened?

Chou laughed. "Here's Legs' girl," he said.

"Ain't she pretty!" said George, glancing behind him to make sure that his way of retreat was clear.

"You better not bring her round here, boy," said Chou to Legs, "or Blacktower kill you."

Legs ignored them. "What's the matter?" he demanded of Ria.

"Got talk to you," she muttered, sullenly. "Not here. Follow me." He saw that she was stiff with terror. She was carrying a bundle tied in a handkerchief.

She went back the way she had come. Legs thrust his feet into his shoes and went after her, leaving Chou and George laughing fit to kill themselves, slapping each other. Little he cared for them. Across the bridge and around the gambling-hall. Must be a powerful motive that had induced the half-breed girl to enter the terrifying Blacktower's house.

Through the passage and across the plaza to the Avenida; halfway up the Avenida, then to the right again amongst the huddle of shacks on this side. Ria paused beside a dump-heap out of earshot of any house, and waited for him to come up. Such furtive meetings were too common to attract any notice.

"Pepita sick," she said.

"Sick? How?" demanded Legs.

Ria performed a ghastly pantomime of one suffering from pains in the belly. "Think Manoel put something in her whisky."

"Poison!" gasped Legs.

"Manoel take both keys to La Rosadora's room."

"Oh Christ! What now?" groaned Legs.

Ria looked around her in sullen terror. "Somebody hear you," she muttered.

The girl was swimming before Legs' eyes in a red mist. His brain wouldn't work properly.

"Give me dollar," she demanded.

The voice seemed to come to him from a distance. He had nothing in his pocket but the gold pieces. "I'll get it for you," he said. "You'll be well paid for this. Don't you worry."

“All right. I going now.” She turned away from him.

“Wait a minute. I’m going with you.”

“What for?”

“I’ll shoot him! . . . It’s the only way.”

“You not see Manoel. He watching for trouble.”

“You go on ahead. You can let me in when I come.”

“I not going back there no more.”

“You’ve got to go!” said Legs, violently. “I need you there. La Rosadora needs you. You can watch over her.”

Ria looked at him with glassy dumbness. “Not going back. If Manoel know I tell you, he kill me.”

“Where are you going?”

“I got friend across the creek. I go there.”

“Wait a minute!” said Legs, desperately. “Let me think this out!”

She had already started away. She was afraid of his wild stare. He couldn’t chase her through the camp. He had to let her go.

Legs’ hand went lovingly to the butt of his gun. But he let it go again. Foolish to think of attacking the hotel single-handed. He had to cool down; he had to think things out, though red-hot wires were stabbing his brain.

He started back home. He must tell Blacktower about this. At this juncture his interest was the same as Blacktower’s and the backing of the big boss would be useful. One thing at a time. Later he could deal with Blacktower.

Blacktower, Duke Hammill, and two of the waxy-faced croupiers were eating their dinners when Legs entered the room. The big man showed his teeth at the sight of him.

“Get out of here!” he barked. “I told you not to leave the house. I’ll attend to you later!”

“I’ve got to speak to you, Boss,” said Legs.

“Get out!” shouted Blacktower.

His rage meant nothing to Legs then. “Better send George out of the room,” he said, quietly.

Blacktower saw that there was something serious in it, and checked himself. He looked at the gaping George, and the boy silently beat it to the kitchen. Legs said:

“Pepita is sick. Dying, maybe. I was told Manoel had given her poison.”

All the men stopped eating. Blacktower stood up, staring. “Who told you this?”

“Ria, the girl that I fixed for you. She came after me. That’s why I went out.”

Blacktower flung down his napkin. “Come on, boys!” he said, hoarsely. “We’ll get the white men together.”

Duke Hammill, the finished little gambler, was in no hurry to play Blacktower’s game. “Wait a minute, Boss,” he said, smoothly. “We got talk this over.”

“Talk it over!” snarled Blacktower. “When the way is clear for that dirty greaser to reach the girl!”

“We got to have a plan,” said Hammill, spreading his manicured hands. “We got to know what we’re going to do!”

“I’m going to get the girl out of there.”

“Suppose Manoel gets shot in the shuffle?”

“Well, suppose he does?”

“His friend, the governor, will send an army in here and clean us all up.”

“We’ll meet that situation when we come to it.”

“What will you do with the girl?” asked Hammill, softly.

“Bring her here!” said Blacktower, with a defiant glare.

Hammill faced him out, smiling. “I don’t know as the fellows would be in favor of that.”

Blacktower began to breathe fast. Legs thought, If they start fighting amongst themselves we’re lost! He said:

“Duke is right, Boss.”

They looked at him. All distinctions were leveled now. Blacktower’s anger against his servant had been driven out by a stronger feeling. Legs went on:

“You’ve got to have proof that Manoel has poisoned his wife. Then neither the governor nor the president himself could touch you.”

“I’m going to get the proof!” growled Blacktower.

“There’s only one man hereabouts could give you legal proof of poison. That’s Doc Buckles.”

They said nothing. Legs had their full attention. He went on:

“Give me authority to go and get Doc and take him there. We’ll get in by a trick. If Manoel refuses to let the doctor see her, you’ve got a case right there.”

“Good!” said Hammill. “And while they’re getting information we can get the white men together and make a plan.”

Blacktower was not enthusiastic. “Sure!” he said, bitterly. “Meanwhile Manoel can get to the girl.”

“I could buy a bolt in the store,” suggested Legs. “With screws and a screwdriver and gimlet. I’ll square the servant who feeds her, and get it into her hands.”

“Manoel wouldn’t stop at a bolted door,” growled Blacktower.

How thankfully Legs pictured the gun he had given Fay! He said, “Well, he couldn’t steal in.”

“This fellow’s got sense!” said Hammill. “It’s worth trying.”

“I’ll want money,” said Legs.

Blacktower gave him what he had in his pocket, a handful of silver dollars. “Come on, we’ll go to Doc,” he said, starting for the door.

Legs hung back. “If you’re seen legging it to Doc’s place, the news will be carried to Manoel before we can get there,” he said.

Blacktower turned back with a groan of balked rage. He produced his notebook, scribbled in it, and tore out the page. “Give that to Doc,” he muttered, “and look sharp about it!”

Doc Buckles in his cluttered little laboratory glanced at Blacktower’s note, and his face turned grim. He opened his battered medicine-satchel, added one or two things that he thought he might need, including an ice-bag, pulled his shirt on over his head. As they went out he asked, with a sharp glance in Legs’ face:

“This visit your idea?”

Legs nodded.

“You’ve come on a bit since you landed in Bum Success.”

Legs said nothing.

“Is it your idea that you and I can get *her* out of there?” asked Doc.

“I don’t know what we’ll find,” muttered Legs. “If Manoel’s the only man around, or just a few caboclos, we might do it.”

“What then?” asked Doc, with a bitter grin. “Take her to Blacktower’s?”

“No. To your place. You and I can watch over her until the white men gather together.”

Doc grinned differently. “Sure!” he said, quietly.

Five minutes later they were knocking on the hotel gate. It was opened by a powerfully-built little caboclo with a long-barreled gun slung over his

shoulder. Without giving him time to speak, Legs pushed in as a matter of course, Doc at his heels.

The native, intimidated by the white man's brass, didn't know how to act. Scowling, he closed the gate and unslung the gun from around his neck.

"Don't look at him," whispered Legs out of the corner of his mouth.

They crossed the yard. In front of them five or six more caboclos were squatting and lying around the door to the building, each with a gun almost as long as himself. They arose, unslinging their weapons.

"Hm! Warlike preparations!" said Doc, grinning.

Legs' heart warmed towards him. This was the right kind of guy to have along. Legs said: "There's no chance of getting the girl out, but take me inside with you, whatever you do. I can watch that you're not knifed while you're working over the patient."

One of the armed men said, "What you want?"

"Manoel," said Legs.

"No can go in."

"Don't be silly," said Legs, laughing. He raised his voice. "Ho, Manoel!"

The caboclos pressed around them, frisked them, took their guns. It would have been suicidal to resist. Instead, Legs and Doc made out that it was all a joke. "Don't forget to return them when we go out," they said, laughing.

Having been disarmed, they were allowed to enter the building. Two of the armed men followed. There was a noise of wailing in the dirty main room. A girl sat at one of the littered tables, with her arms flung across it and her head down. Legs knew her as Carlotta, pale olive skin, enormous eyes, tubercular. From farther off they could hear an incessant animallike groaning. Manoel came running out of the corridor; stopped dead.

"Where is she?" asked Doc, quickly.

"Who?"

"Pepita."

"What you want Pepita?"

Doc looked tremendously surprised. "Why, man, I want to treat her, of course, to cure her if I can."

"How you know Pepita sick?"

"How do I know it? Didn't you send Ria to tell me to come quick? Have you gone crazy?"

It cut all the ground from under Manoel's feet. He glared at them helplessly, then lowered his head. He decided to take his cue from Doc's words, and raised his head with a slimy look of pretended grief. "Sure I am crazy! . . . crazy!" he bellowed. "Pepita is bad! I think I lose her! Come!"

If one was a comedian, so was the other. Doc shook his head lugubriously and made sounds of commiseration. He started after Manoel. The latter, seeing Legs make to follow, said, sharply:

"You stay here."

"I'll be needing him," said Doc.

"No one can come in my wife's room but the doctor!" said Manoel, passionately.

"Come on, Legs," said Doc, coolly. To Manoel he explained soothingly: "He's been a nurse in a U. S. naval hospital. He knows everything to do."

Manoel shrugged and gave in. The armed men remained in the big room.

Pepita's room was the third opening off the corridor, next door to Fay's room. Outside the door stood two brown-skinned servants, looking in, an old woman and a young one. They drew back as the men approached. A disgusting smell came through the open door, and Pepita—she had passed human decency. Legs turned his eyes away. Her hoarse groaning was like no sound that he had ever heard.

Three of the girls stood looking down at her with a kind of inhuman eagerness. God help them! they're getting a kick out of it! he thought. A fourth girl, Teresa by name, was kneeling on the floor beside the bed, wiping the sweat from Pepita's face. Teresa was not young; her face was gaunt, her hair had been doctored until it looked like hemp fibers, but she had lost herself in caring for the sick woman; she looked beautiful.

Doc Buckles and Manoel passed into the room, and the girls closed up behind them. For a few seconds Legs was invisible to Manoel. He looked at the two servants. Caboclos always stood together, he thought. He swiftly produced money, and dropped a couple of dollars in each palm. The universal language. In a flash the coins were transferred to their mouths. Their faces were as blank as wrapping-paper.

"How's La Rosadora?" he whispered.

The old woman looked towards the next door. "All right."

"Who takes her food in?"

The old woman pointed to herself.

Legs produced the heavy little bundle from inside his shirt. Instantly it disappeared in the woman's dress. Legs whispered, "I give more dollars if

she gets it,” and went on into Pepita’s room.

Manoel was saying, “She is resting easier now.”

Doc replied, grimly, “Her strength is ebbing.”

Manoel clasped his pudgy hands together; he actually showed tears in his eyes. “Oh, Doctor, save her! save her!” he cried. “Can’t you do something for her?”

Doc was feeling Pepita’s pulse. He significantly laid her arm across her breast and straightened up.

“What is the matter with her?” asked Manoel, rolling his eyes theatrically. “This morning she all right.”

“Ptomaine poisoning,” said Doc, dryly.

“Ah! she eat too much!” cried Manoel. “Always eat, eat, eat! I am telling her she eat too much for this climate. No good! . . . She was a good wife to me! I cannot let her go!”

The muscles of Legs’ right leg ached with the need to kick him.

Pepita was still conscious, it appeared. “Do you know me?” Doc asked her, gravely.

“Doctor,” she whispered.

“Pepita,” he asked, “what did you eat or drink that was bad?”

In the middle of his tears and wailing Manoel snarled, and caught his breath like an animal about to spring. However, Pepita could not, or would not, answer. She only asked for a priest. Manoel relaxed and wept again.

“Bring the priest,” murmured Pepita.

“There is no priest,” said Doc, gravely.

A cry of terror broke from the dying woman. “Don’t let me die! Don’t let me die! I cannot die without absolution!”

Big, slow tears rolled down Teresa’s cheeks. Legs thought, anyhow, those are genuine. She soothed Pepita like a baby. “Mary is merciful,” she whispered. “Pray to her.”

Pepita started gabbling prayers.

“Can’t you give her something?” asked Manoel. “She suffer so much! Morphine, hey?”

“The worst is over now,” said Doc, grimly.

Manoel appeared to fly into a passion. “Call yourself a doctor! Stand there do nothing! What good are you?”

“It is too late!” said Doc.

Manoel went into fresh paroxysms. His swimming eyes were always watchful of the effect he was creating. The three girls gaped at him with a kind of admiration.

Doc whispered to Legs: "She is about to die. If I gave her anything, he would accuse me later of having hastened it."

"What do you suspect?" asked Legs.

"Arsenic. I'd have to make an analysis."

"How can you?"

"Leave it to me, 'bo!"

"What are you saying to him?" demanded Manoel.

"We want ice," answered Doc, blandly.

"I have sent for it."

The dying woman gabbled her frantic prayers. The words were not distinguishable. Legs thought, Neck and neck with death. Teresa knelt on the floor with meek bent head, as if she dared not presume to pray. They waited. Legs' mind was with Fay in the adjoining room. Every sound must be audible through the match-board partition. How terrible for Fay! Mustn't think about that! What time was it? The broken shuttered door in the opening to the veranda reduced the glare to a stifling twilight.

Doc Buckles' eyes never left the face of Pepita. He said to Manoel, "Time to say good-by."

Manoel shrank away from the bed. "I have said it! I have said it!" he stuttered.

"Bring in La Rosadora to see her."

"No!" said Manoel, sharply. "The room is too dirty."

Doc shrugged. The prayer slowed down; dwindled to a whisper; ceased on a sigh. The tortured body shuddered and became still. "She is gone," said Doc. Teresa, with a beautiful gesture, drew the lids over the staring eyes. She looked up at Doc for help. He thrust a hand in his pocket, chose two small coins, and handed them to her.

The three girls started screaming insanely. Doc bundled them out of the room. "You stay," he said to Teresa. The others fled upstairs and a louder screaming arose. Manoel, with a gasp, backed out into the hall and stood staring through the door, muttering "Dead? Dead?" There was no acting about this. He refused to enter the room again.

WHILE Manoel stood out in the corridor, gasping, Doc Buckles said softly to Teresa, “Think she was murdered?”

Without looking at him, the woman answered, “Yes.”

“I’m going to find out before I leave here. Will you stand by me?”

“Yes.”

Doc went out in the corridor. “Manoel, we got to get her out of this dirty room. Where will I take her?”

Manoel pointed to the adjoining room, number two in the corridor. While Doc and Legs were carrying the body in, he fled out into the main room, but came back after and peered in, half beside himself with terror, but always watchful. While Teresa and the women servants washed the body, Doc came out to talk to Manoel. Legs watched and listened.

“You sure she got ptomaine poisoning?” asked Manoel.

“Absolutely,” said Doc. His face was as open as the sky. “Ptomaine kills like a hammer-stroke. You see, food spoils so quickly in the tropics.”

Manoel gnawed his lower lip. Had Doc been of the Latin race, Manoel could have told instantly if he was lying, but Anglo-Saxons were more difficult for him to read.

“What about the funeral?” asked Doc.

“No funeral,” said Manoel.

“What are you going to do with her, then?”

“Dig a grave by the other graves at the edge of the jungle.”

“You must have a funeral. The boys will want to give Pepita a good send-off. She’s the first white woman ever to be buried here. It’s an occasion.”

“What use funeral?” said Manoel. “No priest.”

“Well, none of us are much on praying, that’s a fact,” said Doc. “But somebody would make a nice speech.”

Manoel hesitated. Doc had him guessing.

“The girls would want to see the last of her,” suggested Doc, blandly.

“Girls can’t go!” said Manoel, quickly.

“Why not?”

The fat man spread out his hands. “I ask you, Doc! How could I let my girls out? You know what men are.”

“Not at a funeral.”

“But *after* the funeral. Very dangerous. I’d never get them back again.”

“Have it in the house, then.”

“No!” said Manoel, sullenly. “Funeral to grave, but no girls.”

“Will you come?”

“Sure!” said Manoel as if astonished at such a question.

Legs, watching his face, thought: He won’t come, though. That would be too big a cinch for us.

“It’ll have to be soon,” said Doc, “the state she’s in.”

“Why not tonight?” put in Legs. “I could knock a coffin together if I had help. We could send caboclos to dig the grave.”

Manoel laid an affectionate hand on Doc’s shoulder. Legs saw a spark leap in the doctor’s eye, but he grinned and stood under it. “Doc, you do all,” said Manoel, cajolingly. “I trust you, Doc. Get coffin; dig grave; look after everything. I pay.”

“Well, for a friend like you, Manoel,” said Doc.

“Wait a minute,” said Manoel. He ran into his own room, the first in the corridor.

Doc said swiftly to Legs: “Grisly comedy, eh, Prancer? . . . Look! while I’m doing my job, try to keep him interested. Only take me five minutes. But don’t let it come to a fight or we’ll never get out of here alive. If he should open the door, he won’t see anything. He’s too scared to come all the way in.”

Manoel stuck his head out into the corridor and beckoned. “Come here, Doc.”

Doc went in and Manoel closed the door. Legs looked longingly towards the door of Fay’s room. Should he try to speak to her? No, too risky! And nothing to be gained by it at this moment.

Almost immediately the two men reappeared. Doc dropped half a step behind Manoel and signaled to Legs by holding up three fingers and making two noughts with thumb and finger. Three hundred dollars. A bribe! Looked as if Doc had Manoel fooled.

A moment later the door in front of them opened and Teresa said: "Doc, will you help me fix everything nice? These breeds are no good."

He went to her, carrying his satchel. "Get out of here," he ordered the two caboclo women. "Go back to the kitchen."

They padded away on their bare feet and Doc closed the door again. A spasm of suspicion passed over Manoel's face. Legs said, to distract his attention:

"I won't have time to make a nice outside casket. It'll just be the rough boards."

"No matter," muttered Manoel, with his eyes fixed on the closed door.

"What do you want put over the grave?" asked Legs.

Manoel paid no attention. He started for the door. Legs had to think of something more exciting. He lowered his voice confidentially.

"You want to look out for Blacktower, Manoel."

The fat man turned sharply. "Hey? What you know?" he demanded.

"He's after La Rosadora."

"Sure," said Manoel, impatiently; "but what's he doing about it?"

"Well, I don't know, but he's got a diamond bracelet for her."

Legs couldn't keep this up indefinitely. Manoel finally thrust him out of the way and opened the door. Legs, looking over his shoulder, saw that Doc and Teresa had arranged themselves in such a way in front of the bed that they hid what lay upon it.

"What you doing?" demanded Manoel.

"Just fixing her nice," Doc sang out, cheerfully. "Wait till you see her!"

Manoel hovered on the threshold, scowling, trying vainly to pierce through their backs.

"Say," called Doc, "get me some make-up from the girls, will you? Powder, rouge, lipstick, and mascara."

Manoel went sullenly up the stairs in the corridor. Above, the screaming had subsided to a muffled tumult of sobbing, wailing, and excited talk in different languages. Manoel cursed them savagely. Some moments passed before he could make them understand what he wanted. When he returned

downstairs, Teresa was already drawing a dress over Pepita's head, while Doc raised the body.

Presently Doc came to the door to get what Manoel had brought. Now the body could be seen lying peacefully on the bed, clad in a pink satin dress. Teresa started to do Pepita's hair. Doc handed her the make-up, and came out into the corridor, carrying his satchel.

"She can do the rest without my help," he said, grinning. "We'll be off now to 'tend to everything outside." He paused as with an afterthought. "How's La Rosadora taking it?"

"All right," said Manoel.

"I'd better have a look at her professionally, as long as I'm here."

"You can see her in the theater tonight," said Manoel, dryly.

"What!" cried Doc. "Are you going to give a show tonight?"

"Sure," said Manoel, with a self-righteous air. "Good troupers always go on with the show."

"Well, I'll be there," said Doc.

Their guns were returned at the gate. After it had closed behind them, Legs asked, anxiously:

"Did you get it all right?"

"Sure!"

"Where did you put it?"

"In the ice-bag, sonny. What did you reckon I took it for?"

Legs dropped Doc at his laboratory and went on to Blacktower's. The gambling-hall was closed. In the salon he found a group of men assembled. They looked queer in their nondescript clothes amidst the elegant furnishing: Hamill and the croupiers; Macgregor, the engineer of the steamboat; Osman; Crummy Carl; Dan Beasley, and the others, sixteen in all. Most of them were openly displaying pistols in holsters, and half a dozen long guns leaned against the wall.

Legs entered as a man among his equals. He had made up his mind that his serving days were over. The men were quiet, but the atmosphere was tense. Clearly the meeting had been a heated one. It was noticeable that Blacktower was seated by himself at the far end of the room, with his feet on a table. He was obscuring himself in a cloud of cigar smoke, but Legs saw the tell-tale furrow plowed in his stony face.

Legs addressed the committee tersely. "Doc and I bluffed our way into the hotel. There are six armed men in the yard. Pepita was sick, all right. Symptoms of arsenic. She died while we were there."

A murmur went around the room. Blacktower stared angrily at the bold tone Legs was taking, but he said nothing about it.

“Doc brought her internal organs away for analysis.”

“What the hell did Manoel say to that?” demanded Blacktower.

“Doc fooled him. He doesn’t know it. . . . I am to see about making a coffin and digging the grave. The funeral will take place this evening. Manoel said he would come, but I reckon he’ll be overcome with grief by that time.”

“How long Doc want for his analysis?” growled Dan Beasley.

“Three or four hours.”

Dan glared at Blacktower. “We’ll wait for that.”

Dan was the biggest rum-seller in Bom Successo. An ex-prizefighter decorated with a broken nose, wanted for murder in St. Louis. He still traded on his reputation as a slugger, but physically he was finished, swilled too much of his own rum. Yet he, too, fancied himself as a suitor for La Rosadora, and resented Blacktower’s pretensions.

They put Legs through a searching examination as to what had passed inside the hotel. He had nothing to conceal. Afterwards the men went away over the bridge, singly and in couples. Blacktower started for the gambling-hall. Legs said to him:

“Is it all right to use a few of your soft-wood planks to make the coffin?”

“Ah, the hell with it!” growled Blacktower.

Legs took this for an assent—what difference did it make anyhow?—and set out. He went first to On Kai-Ling to tell him what had happened, and to offer him his money back, since there was no chance of getting away that night. The old man took it with a shrug. Told him to come and get it when he was ready. Legs then got men together for the work in hand. Doc gave him money for that purpose.

It was after dark when the coffin was completed. Legs, looking it over, thought: A crummy job, but I reckon she’s lucky to get any. The caboclos carried it solemnly up the Avenida. It made him feel cynical to see the hats come off. He thought, These guys kill without thinking, and bow to a coffin.

Manoel’s men took it in at the gate of the hotel, telling Legs to come back in half an hour for the funeral. He went on to see how the grave was getting along. Graves were scattered around anywhere in the waste space between the buildings of the camp and the jungle wall. Pepita’s was now about four feet deep. That was farther than they usually troubled to dig. Legs

ordered the caboclos to build a big fire near the grave, to provide light for the burial.

The news was all over camp by now, and as he came back a crowd was gathering in front of the hotel. Down the Avenida the colored lights were turned on and the music was going—pianos, banjos, phonographs. Most of the customers were on their way to the funeral; the music was to stimulate a thirst against their return, Legs supposed. At this hour of the evening Bum Success made a man ache with desire as for a woman whom he feared.

Jao Gonzales' place, opposite the hotel, was packed and bulging into the street. It was a small joint, the last in camp, and Jao scarcely knew how to handle the rush. Not being able to afford a full-size instrument, Jao had imported a street piano on wheels. He had a standing offer of a free drink to any man who would turn the handle for ten minutes, and never lacked for takers. Some notes were missing.

Blacktower, Dan Beasley, Osman, and other leading men were standing by the gate. Legs joined them. The guns were decently hidden. A throng of caboclos filled the open space. Legs observed with a feeling of uneasiness that women, children, and old men were in the majority. Where were the rest of the able-bodied men? Not a sound came from the other side of the hotel wall. All the windows of the second story visible over the wall were dark.

Suddenly the gate opened and four of the armed men appeared, carrying the coffin. Two others stood behind them. The crowd drew back to make room. The four unexpectedly dropped the coffin in the road, scuttled back inside, and slammed the gate. Inside it, the bar dropped. A wondering murmur passed through the crowd. The Anglo-Saxons jeered.

There was a note pinned to the top of the coffin. Osman picked it up, and somebody cast the light of a match on it. Osman read:

Thanks all good folks for honoring my Pepita. Sorry I can't shake all by the hand. I am prostrate with grief! Manoel Carvalho.

Those who could understand the English words shouted with derisive laughter. "This will never be forgotten! This will be handed down in Bum Success!" said Macgregor, wiping his eyes. Only Blacktower didn't laugh. He cursed Manoel fluently.

"Are we his servants?" he snarled. "Let him bury his own dead or let her lie there until she rots!"

Others glanced at the coffin uneasily. Osman said: "Aw, come on, Black! The woman's got to be buried, anyhow. 'Tain't her fault if her man's a skunk. Come on, let's give her a send-off."

“What are we waiting for?” demanded Blacktower, low and furiously. “Why don’t we go in there and fetch him out?”

Dan Beasley muttered, obstinately: “It was agreed to wait. You won’t get anyone to follow you in there now.”

“All right,” answered Blacktower. “Go on and bury her. I won’t take part in such a farce!” He strode away.

Legs had screwed handles on the coffin. Six white men picked it up and the whole mob started moving forward. A few carried lanterns. Beyond the walls they spread out in the clearing, all heading for the blazing fire, the caboclos chattering excitedly, small children falling down and bawling. Here and there a big tree had been left standing. Legs looked up at their branches, and at the stars in a velvety sky. It eased his eyes.

Osman, the tall Englishman with the egglike skull, took charge of proceedings at the grave. All was arranged in good outside fashion, with planks to support the coffin, and ropes to lower it. The ragged caboclos banked themselves around the foot of the grave, children in front, the little ones innocently naked. The fire was behind Osman, throwing his longdrawn shadow on the jangle wall in front. Lanterns sparkled here and there like big fireflies.

There was a certain look of gentility about the emaciated, bald-headed Osman with the young eyes. College man, thought Legs. He looked around with a grin. “Anybody want to say a prayer?” he asked. “Not very good at it, myself.”

There was no answer. The white men grinned sheepishly, and shifted from one foot to the other.

Osman repeated his question in the native jargon. The caboclos merely stared.

“I asked around camp for a Bible before we started,” he went on, “thinking I might find something suitable for the occasion. But there wasn’t any.”

The white men laughed. No irreverence intended. Legs felt religious himself, and it was clear they all did. Something you couldn’t get away from.

“So it’s up to me to say a few well-chosen words,” continued Osman, “not aspiring to anything like a funeral oration. There’s Pepita. I wouldn’t presume to call her a pure-white soul whom St. Peter is waiting for with the gates thrown back. You all know what she was. But the point is, she’s dead and death wipes the slate clean. We’ve all got to die, if you’ll excuse the banality. Dead and coffined, all are equal; the queen in her palace or Madam

Pepita of Bum Success. When we lie there, speechless, we'll be wanting somebody to say a word for us, and so I say, God help Pepita! . . . That's all! Lower away, boys. . . . Good luck, sister! *Requiescat in pace!*"

When it was over, the crowd streamed back into camp. The women and children went meekly over the creaking bridge to the native settlement, while their men distributed themselves among the rum-shops. A group of white men went down the Avenida together. Dan Beasley knocked on the screened window of Doc Buckles' shack. The room inside was brightly lighted, but Doc had hung up a sheet to conceal what he was doing.

"Are you ready for us, Doc?"

"Give me half an hour, Dan."

"All right. Meet you at Black's."

"Send Legs in here a minute. I need a little help."

While the other men scattered for a drink, Legs went in. Behind the sheet he found Doc streaming with sweat, surrounded by his grewsome paraphernalia. Legs thought, Parts of me look like that! Doc said:

"Enough arsenic to kill a horse."

"So!" said Legs.

"I wanted to tell you first, so that we could keep this business in our own hands as far as possible."

"Sure. We got to get backing against Blacktower. I'll get hold of Dan Beasley. He'll be just drunk enough to do what we want without knowing it."

He found Dan taking a drink at his own bar. Legs took a couple with him, and led him aside.

SOON they were back at Blacktower's again. The boss received them in a sour silence. He had closed up the gambling-house and put his cash in the safe. They were eighteen now, because Crummy Carl had likewise shut up shop and brought his bartenders, a couple of young Irish fellows, thick in the wits maybe, but thick in the limbs, too. Not all of these men were members of the committee. Legs looked them over; nineteen with Doc, most of them grinning in anticipation of a fight; a good hard bunch—but there was not the right feeling between them and their leader.

Doc followed the last man in. "Pepita was poisoned with arsenic," he announced.

The men scowled and muttered; instinctively felt of their guns. Only Blacktower's face cleared. He was his own man again. Inaction galled him. "Come on, men!" he said. "Let's get the greaser. He has played right into our hands!"

"Wait a minute," said Dan Beasley.

"Oh, for God's sake!" cried Blacktower. "Must you still be talking about it?"

The white-faced Hammill intervened. "Aah, you needn't think we're going to hand the girl over to you, Black!"

It was the thought in every man's mind. Their faces revealed it.

"Well, are *you* going to take her, runt?" retorted Blacktower.

Dan Beasley wagged his big hand. "Wa-a-it a minute!" he drawled. "We got to act as one man in this affair, or we might as well chuck our guns in the drink and wait for our throats to be cut! . . . *Nobody's* going to take the girl!"

"She can't live here without a man's protection!"

"Sure! But she gets a free choice. See? Am I right, men?"

A unanimous chorus answered him. "Sure!" . . . "That the ticket!" . . . "A free choice!" . . . "That's fair!"

Legs was watching Blacktower. The boss's face turned masklike and he became very quiet. Well, he knew when he was up against it. Or perhaps he was satisfied that no man present could match him in a woman's eyes. At any rate, he said, indifferently, "Suits me all right."

"When we take Manoel," Dan went on, "La Rosadora stays in the hotel with the other girls. She has her own room there, and the place is big enough so that some of the committee can be there on guard the whole time."

Blacktower looked surprised. This was more constructive than he expected from the muzzy-headed Dan.

"Are we going to operate the joint?" asked Osman, slyly.

When the laughter had subsided, Dan said: "Let every man present raise his right hand and swear that he will stand by the girl's choice."

They swore it, Blacktower with the rest. Doc looked over at Legs humorously. "Your work!" his eyes said.

"Now we're all set," said Dan. "Men, from this moment Black is our leader. Whatever he says goes!"

They set off over the bridge in a good humor. Perfect harmony now between leader and men—anyhow, apparent harmony. Somebody said:

"What are we going to do with Manoel? String him up?"

Another voice, "Let's have a regular outside trial, everything up to date."

"I know a better one than that," said Blacktower. "Send him out to Manaos for trial, along with the evidence, as a present to his friend the governor."

"We'll all go out to see the fun. A free ride on the steamboat, eh, Black?"

Reaching the Avenida, Blacktower issued his first order: "Straggle out as we go through. We're not parading."

Business was good in the rum-shops. From the snatches of talk he picked up, Legs gathered that everybody was taking it for granted Manoel had put his wife out of the way. It didn't seem to arouse any moral indignation. They shrugged their shoulders.

The theater was lighted up and the orchestra sawing away inside. The show had not yet started; men were going in. Blacktower sent Legs on to reconnoiter the entrance, while he and the rest distributed themselves casually at the four corners where the lanes crossed.

Legs found “Juize” Cavados, Manoel’s right-hand man, taking the money at the table beside the entrance gate. The Juize was an undersized brown man with a long thin face like a horse, who wore a high celluloid collar to promote his dignity. He was said to be the brains of Manoel’s outfit. Opposite him lounged a brawny caboclo, ready for anybody who might try to rush the gate. A wooden screen within cut off all view of the interior.

“Where’s Manoel?” asked Legs.

“Who want Manoel?”

“Blacktower send letter.”

“Give it to me.”

“No. Only to Manoel.”

“Manoel in his bed,” said Juize, severely. “He bad tonight. Nobody can see him.”

“All right,” said Legs. “Come back tomorrow.”

When Legs reported to the boss, the latter growled: “So much the better. We can take him quieter in the hotel.”

Singly and in couples they drifted on casually to the wall surrounding the hotel yard. “If the men in the yard offer any resistance shoot to kill,” Blacktower whispered to one and another.

Somehow the hotel did not look right. Too quiet; no lights in the upper windows; a faint pinkish glow reflected from the plastered wall. At Blacktower’s whispered command, one of the Irish lads gave little Hammill a boost so that he could look over the wall.

Instantly there was a shot from the yard, and Hammill dropped to the ground with a bullet hole through his hat. “Close,” he said, panting a little. “There’s about a hundred men in the yard. Armed, and lying around a couple of little fires.”

Blacktower immediately drew his men away. They halted under the wall of the theater. If he was disconcerted by this formidable resistance, his face didn’t show it. He said:

“Tomorrow we’ll organize a strong enough party to smoke out this skunk. In the meantime we can’t let the girl stay in there. Go into the theater everybody.”

“Manoel will never let her show tonight,” growled Beasley.

“If he don’t, we’ll have plenty of help in wrecking the place,” said Blacktower, dryly. “All those men in there have put up five dollars to see her.”

“Where did Manoel get the guns to arm a hundred men?” somebody muttered.

“Reckon they are part of the new scenery,” said Doc, dryly.

There was a silence. The men avoided looking at one another. The joke was on them, and it was a damned bad one. Their bitterness was too deep for cursing. Some spat on the ground.

“Well . . . we’ll get him!” growled Dan Beasley.

“Hear me, men,” said Blacktower, softly. “Go in singly and in couples. Spread yourselves around inside, but all sit where you can see me. Do a little quiet recruiting if you get the chance. These *seringueiros* are fighting-men and nobody has any strings on them. Get them on our side. Tell them to come and see me. But don’t start anything in the theater until we have the girl safe. I’ll give you your cue.”

Doc Buckles and Legs, who stuck together, were amongst the first of the white men to enter the theater. Juize Cavados stared hard at Legs when he saw him again, but he couldn’t refuse their money. The interior was painted green, with clumsy scrollwork in white. All the tables and chairs were of iron, with paint and rust flaking off. Show was late in starting tonight; the curtain was still down. Dampness had reduced the painting on the curtain to a moldy reddish smudge. It was held down by a heavy wooden roller.

Legs and Doc chose a table on the left of the hall, near the front—handy to the little door alongside the stage. It gave Legs a wrench to remember how happy he had been there only sixteen hours before. The table where he and Fay had sat was just in front of him. It was unoccupied now. Why, the two chairs were still pressed close together! He shook himself to get rid of these weakening thoughts and looked over the audience.

Something under two hundred men, drinking at the little tables, mostly rubber-gatherers. Dirty, ragged, hairy as they were, these fellows were a long cut above the caboclos who hung around camp. They were their own masters with money to spend. Adventurers from every quarter of the globe were included—white, brown, black, yellow, even red. For with rubber at three dollars a pound the Indians sent in their delegates with the tribal quota of black pills. So far the men were quiet, only stamping and whistling sometimes for the show to start.

The waiters were caboclos, the best specimens Manoel could find. Individually they cringed before a white man, but were always ready to draw together. They were not armed. The tamest men present were in the orchestra—piano, violin, bass viol, cornet, and drums; all playing away like

galvanized corpses. Legs wondered what had attracted them to the jungle. Likely they had had no choice.

The curtain rolled up clumsily, and the entire troupe came mincing out from the wings, ten girls in tights, all with different shaped legs, none of them true. They smiled like chromos and went through their motions. In their painted faces the eyes showed muddy and sick. Legs felt sorry for them. They began to sing in voices like creaking slate pencils.

“My God! Do they have to sing like that?” he muttered.

“That’s camp style,” said Doc. “Established since ’forty-nine.”

While they sang, the waiters circulated amongst the tables, asking the drinkers if they cared to buy for any lady. Doc, just to see what would come of it, said:

“We’ll take La Rosadora.”

“Mr. Blacktower already ask for her,” said the waiter. “Can’t come out tonight. Feel bad along of death in the family.”

“No!” said Doc. “Ain’t she going to sing?”

“Sure she’ll sing for the men.”

After the ensemble, a little girl called Clo-Clo sang a song in Portuguese. She was popular with the Latins. The other girls came through the little door and down the steps, each swaying in the same cut-and-dried manner. To mix with the audience they had put on dresses like abbreviated Mother Hubbard gowns. Under their fixed smiles they were shaking with nervousness. Carlotta, who had seated herself with three white men at the next table, suddenly burst into tears and ran back through the little door.

“We never said nothing to her!” muttered the men, looking at one another. The waiter asked them to excuse her “on account of death in the family.”

One of these white men was a long lad whose beard still grew in tufts. Doc and Legs asked him over and bought him a drink. Nineteen years old and had spent three of them in the jungle. Tough as an alligator hide, and proud of it. Legs in a low tone told him of the situation, and he swore he’d be on their side and bring his partners. Fringe Penrose was his name. He went back to tell his friends the story.

The show went on. Different girls went up on the stage and sang. All the songs in English were sentimental—“Sweet Rosy O’Grady,” “Mamie Reilly,” and the like. There was one that went:

Oh, Mr. Contractor, do not tear our shanty down!
My crippled brother lies within!

A gem, Doc called it. To supply the dirt, Manoel had a couple of dialect comedians a hundred times removed from Weber and Fields. Legs thought of Broadway and Thirtieth. He had seen these two actors around camp. They were not like men. They made the bristles rise at the back of Legs' neck.

His eyes remained fixed on the stage, but he only took in the show in spots. His mind was always hurrying forward to the end. When the comedians dawdled or the girls flirted, he muttered: "Aah, get on with it! Get on with it!" He didn't know he was speaking aloud until he saw Doc grinning. Doc himself, though he grinned, was pale with suspense.

At last, after an endless silly olio in which all took part, the curtain fell with a thump on the stage. This was the moment when Manoel always came out in front and announced: "La Rosadora, the peerless!" No Manoel tonight. After an unbearable wait the curtain rolled up slowly, revealing an empty stage with the same faded scenery representing a garden. The orchestra started to play "A Newsboy's Love Song" and Legs ground his teeth together.

She came out on the stage, pale, smiling, frightened. Crown of red hair, light-green dress, silver slippers—that picture of her burned into Legs' brain. A few started to applaud and were angrily told to shut up by many. Complete silence in the hall. Her eyes found Legs in the pool of faces before her, and a little color came into her face. She started to sing in a shaking voice.

Blacktower sat at a table in the middle of the front row. He stood up, saying in his resonant voice, "La Rosadora, your friends are here . . ."

The song stopped on a gasp. The orchestra straggled to silence, one instrument leaving off, then another. The seringueiros gaped at the speaker blankly.

Blacktower with a gesture invited his men to rise. All around the hall they stood up. "These are men of your own country," he said. "They have pledged themselves to take care of you. Come with us!" He put up his hands to help her down from the stage.

But Fay stood staring, frozen with terror. Before she could recover herself, somebody released the curtain and the heavy roller banged down in front, blotting her out. A muffled scream reached their ears. Blacktower with an oath, knocked aside fiddler and cornetist who stood in his way, and leaped on the stage. Drawing a knife, he slashed a long rent in the curtain, and tore it apart. Then all the lights in the house went out.

For an instant there was silence except for a vague scuffling in the wings, a smothered piteous cry; then a deafening uproar broke out like an

explosion; curses, yells, shots. The Latins, true to their custom, were firing in the air. The iron tables and chairs were thrown over; glasses crashed. The whole crowd seemed to be rushing back and forth blindly in the dark. Many made for the entrance door, others attacked the men nearest them out of sheer love of fighting.

Instantly Legs had cried to Doc: "The little door!" They sprang for it together. It was locked. They put their shoulders against it but could get no purchase on account of the steps outside. Legs ran back, feeling for the nearest table. Grasping it by the legs, he yelled: "Get out of the way!" and brought it crashing against the door. It flew in. All was dark and quiet on the stage. He groped ahead.

"Wait! I have matches!" shouted Doc, behind him. Doc got a match lighted and found the switchboard beside him. He pulled down all the levers in sight; and the lights went up everywhere. Out in the hall the noise of the fighting stopped—and was renewed again. Infernal yelling; crashes and blows.

They came face to face with Blacktower coming off the scene. The rest of the men were pushing through the torn curtain, or running up the steps. All the actors had vanished. "Where are they? Where are they?" men were demanding, looking behind things.

"Door into the hotel," said Legs. "Somewhere on this side."

They found it behind a pile of leaning scenery. Three men put their shoulders to it, but it was held by an iron bar, and their efforts were useless.

"Shove the scenery out of the way!" shouted Legs running back to get the table.

He swung it with all his strength, but this door held under the crash, though he split a panel of it. As he raised the table for another swing a voice came through, saying:

"We got a machine-gun here. If you come any further we'll blow you to hell!"

Legs lowered the table. A dead silence fell on the group of men. They tasted gall. Legs motioned them back out of range, and picked up the table again. "Let's see if he's lying," he muttered.

He stood to one side of the door, and swung. This blow broke a second panel. But instantly the gun roared from the other side, and a burst of bullets splintered through the wood. The rattle of the gun stilled the noise in the hall as if by magic. The gun ceased, and in the strange silence which followed, they heard a laugh from the other side of the door. The same voice asked:

"Are you satisfied, or do you want another dose?"

Blacktower raised his hands and let them fall. Every man understood the gesture. Nobody questioned Blacktower's courage, but there are some arguments that are unanswerable, and a machine-gun is one—unless you have another. The men began to move softly away from there. Those who were to the left of the door, dropped to the floor and wriggled across below the broken panels. All went out through the curtain, because the gun commanded the little door.

Legs hung back. The necessity of retreating nearly broke his heart. "I can't!" he groaned to Doc, who was pulling at his arm. "Fay is in there!"

"Quiet!" whispered Doc. "You're giving yourself away!"

"Look. I'll stay here and watch him," said Legs, trying to persuade Doc how reasonable he was. "He's bound to show himself sometime. I'll tease him until he shoots the door to pieces. Then I can see him. I'll use the iron table top for a shield. I'll get him!"

"Come away, you fool!" said Doc. "You got to look around your shield to see him, ain't you? And a machine-gun shoots all over the place. You won't save her by getting yourself shot."

Legs submitted, cursing his fate. Fay in there with that beast!

As they pushed through the torn curtain, he surveyed the hall in surprise. Quiet already? Empty? In two or three minutes they had made a complete job of the place.

"The sound of the machine-gun cooled them down," said Doc. "Them as couldn't get out the door went over the side walls."

One or two men who had been knocked out were lying amongst the debris, and at their feet the harmless players amongst their smashed instruments, unhurt but paralyzed with terror.

Doc and Legs pushed their way through the scared crowd peering in at the door. Legs didn't realize that he was reeling on his feet until Doc grabbed his arm and told him to brace up. Doc led him into the laboratory.

"When did you have a good sleep?" he asked.

"Don't remember," muttered Legs. "Come on, let's go to Blacktower's. They'll be having a meeting."

"You got to have a pick-me-up before you can go to a meeting," said Doc. He mixed something in a cup and Legs obediently drank it off. A delicious paralysis began to creep through his limbs. He fought against it.

"Goddamn it! what was in that cup?" he demanded. "I'm not going to sleep! You said a pick-me-up! You're a rotten friend! . . ."

Even while he was cursing Doc he sank down on the edge of his bed. Doc gave him a little push, and he knew nothing more.

LEGS woke up, lapped in peace. But not for long. Recollection returned, and he sprang up, cursing himself. Sleeping while Fay was a prisoner! It was daylight, but the shack was darkish, door closed, window shuttered. What light there was came in at the back. He saw Doc Buckles leaning across the front table, peering sideways through the shutter.

Doc interrupted Legs' cursing by saying, quietly, "We got to get out of here now."

"Why?" demanded Legs.

"Manoel's scouts working down the Avenida. Dodging from building to building. Here, give me a hand with this, and out the back. I made a couple of trips with the lighter stuff."

Doc had packed his test tubes, notebooks, and medical works in a wooden chest with rope handles. "Nobody in this living world gives a damn about my work," he said, flippantly, "but it intrigues me."

They ran the chest through the back door. This brought them out on the creek. Ten o'clock, Legs saw, glancing at the sun. The full heat of the day was spreading. Running along the edge of the bank behind the buildings, they worked back to the Avenida in front of a sprawling barricade composed of planks, timbers, logs, boxes, whatever could be snatched up. A gun barrel poked out between the planks and a voice demanded, "Who are you?"

"White men like yourself," said Doc, coolly. "Here, catch this!"

They slung the box up on top of the pile, and clambered after it. Four hairy seringueiros were guarding it. Doc said:

"The niggers are creeping down the Avenida."

"Good! We'll give 'em the glad hand!"

Behind the temporary barricade a straggling line of men was digging a trench clean across from the creek to the dry gully. This work, when

finished, would cover Blacktower's buildings, the Chinese outfit, the ice-and-electric-plant, and the deep-water landing. Blacktower's men and the seringueiros were shoveling side by side. There were only half enough shovels to go around, and the men spelled one another. There were incessant disputes amongst the seringueiros.

"So they came in with us," said Legs.

"Sure, Blacktower squared them," said Doc. "Good fighters," he added, "but hellish unreliable troops. This isn't their war. Their boats are drawn up along the shore. If anything doesn't please them, all they've got to do is paddle off."

"Are we going to let Manoel put us on the defensive?" asked Legs, scowling at the trench.

"Not at all," said Doc. "Blacktower's a good general. He's making a base that he can attack from."

Beyond the trench, Legs could see On Kai-Ling's Chinese clerks hurrying across the little plaza, carrying boxes, and returning empty-handed.

"All food and ammunition is being stored in the ice-plant," Doc explained. "It's the nearest thing to a fire-proof building in camp. There's a well inside, too."

They carried Doc's chest into the corrugated-iron building and set it down in a far corner. "War is hell on the sciences," Doc remarked. Coming out, they met Blacktower making his rounds, a resolute figure buttoned up in his frock coat, top hat just so. A couple of holsters strapped around his waist, black like the rest of his costume, added a warlike touch. He turned a hard eye on Legs.

"Where the hell you been?"

Legs tried to lay a line between servility on the one hand and defiance on the other. "Sleeping," he said, mildly.

"You would be!" sneered Blacktower.

Doc spoke up: "Blame me for it, boss. Last night this fellow was going bugs for lack of sleep. I doped him up."

"Pretty good friends, ain't you?" sneered Blacktower.

Doc, as the only medical man in the army, knew his value. "Sure! Why not?" he said.

"Get to work on the trench," Blacktower said to Legs. "You, Doc, fix a place where you can take care of wounded men if we have any."

Legs walked away, churning with an unbearable bitterness. Set to work like a navy while the mucka-mucks of camp made their plans to rescue his

wife! What were they up to, anyhow? Was he to be kept out of everything? God! I will go bugs for certain, he thought, if I don't get into action!

He took a shovel from a man who was dropping it, and made the dirt fly. Later, when he spelled, Doc walked around that way, just to relieve his feelings.

"That ——!" said Doc. "Every time he sees two men getting friendly he smells a conspiracy! He hasn't got a friend in the world, himself."

"Oh, well!" said Legs.

Doc grinned. "Sure! What the hell! Let him pull us through this, and be damned to him!" He went on with restored good humor.

Legs had not been working above an hour when Blacktower sent George to summon him to the house. Legs found the salon stripped of its elegant furnishings. There was a guard out on the veranda, watching the gully. Blacktower had a group of the principal men around him. Mike Figueroa, Jao Gonzales, and the other Brazilians who had a stake in the camp had joined up, but they looked uneasy. They were not at home on this side.

At the moment Blacktower was receiving a delegation from the seringueiros with grievances: they hadn't enlisted to do spade-work; fifteen dollars a day was no sort of pay in times like these; they could make more gathering rubber; all the rum-shops were outside the barricade and there was nothing to drink.

Blacktower, masking his real feelings, spoke to them blandly. "Bom Successo belongs to you men just the same as us. It's your pleasure resort. If you don't want it wiped out, it's up to you to help me save it. This is only the first step in driving us all out of Brazil together. The trench will be dug in a couple of hours. After that the only work you'll have to do is gunwork. I'll raise your pay to twenty dollars a day and give you half in roulette counters, so you'll have something to play with. The Casino will be open tonight. As for rum, all you got to do is to lick the caboclos and take it. There's rum enough out there to float a battleship. Only lick them first."

The seringueiros departed, grinning.

Macgregor reported that he had got steam up.

"Where's Fazenda?" demanded Blacktower. Fazenda was the captain of the steamboat.

Nobody knew where he was.

"I didn't order the fires lighted," said Blacktower, coldly.

"What good is a steamboat without steam?" said Macgregor. "Don't you want me to go out and fetch help?"

“This will be settled before you could get out to Manaos and back,” said Blacktower, grimly. “And, anyhow, what help is there for us in Manaos? Government soldiers? Where did Manoel get his shipment of arms and ammunition? We’ll help ourselves.”

“Well, if necessary, she can carry us all away from here.”

“We’re not leaving,” said Blacktower.

He turned his attention to Legs. “Before I can make an attack,” he said, “I’ve got to know what Manoel is doing. How has he got his men disposed? Where is the machine-gun posted? What’s he planning? You’re said to be the fastest runner in camp. Will you go? . . . Understand, I’m not ordering you to go,” he added, with a peculiar smile, “but I thought you’d appreciate the honor.”

Blacktower’s motive was obvious, but Legs did not hesitate. “Sure!” he said.

“This is murder!” muttered Doc, under his breath, beside him.

“Shut up!” whispered Legs. “It’s what I want!”

“What can you do in broad day with your white skin?”

“I’ll stain it with coffee extract.”

“You’ll never come back!”

Blacktower was looking at them, grinning still. “Good man!” he said to Legs, ironically. “Go to it! Your instructions are simply to find out all you can. Be back here in a couple of hours or it will be too late to attack today.”

Legs got food in Blacktower’s kitchen, stained his skin, and put on the sort of rags that were popular in Bum Success. The dark glasses were given up. He provided himself with a keen knife, in case he was obliged to strike silently. He looked over the ground to choose the best way out, and all the possible ways of getting in again.

Blacktower’s position was a strong one. His left was protected by the soft mud of the creek shore, his right by the gully filled with bamboo thickets and jungle scrub that was almost impenetrable. There was a second barricade across the lane that led into the back quarters of camp. The old bunk-house next door to the ice-plant and a resort across the plaza known as the hop-house had been partly pulled down to make way for the trench. When the trench was completed, it was intended to demolish the buildings on the other side and the barricades in order to deprive the enemy of cover. All the boats were supposed to be in Blacktower’s possession. Manoel’s party could only reach deep water by crossing the bridge and making a détour through the swampy jungle.

Legs knew that the Avenida was watched, and suspected that the lanes were, also. The creek shore was exposed to the view of outposts across the water. The only way out by daylight that promised any hope of success was through the gully. He took a machado, meaning to drop it as soon as he got out of the undergrowth.

Creeping down under Blacktower's house, he entered the thicket. It was his first go at the jungle. It took it out of you with the temperature at a hundred or more and not a breath of air stirring. The earth steamed like a blanket in the washtub. He made way very slowly. Creepers, thorns, branches, were inspired with a personal malice; tripped him; whipped his face; tore at his flesh when he wasn't looking. He could only saw gently with the machado; a chopping sound would have betrayed him. He had to be careful, too, not to cause the young growth and the ferns to sway over his head.

Occasionally he climbed the bank to take a survey. So far as he could see there was not a living soul left on this side of camp. All the inhabitants had enlisted with one side or the other, and their miserable shacks were abandoned.

Even so, it was none too easy to come out in the open. When he finally did he walked upright and unhurried with a cigarette hanging from his lips, caboclo style. To have ducked and run, to peer around corners and look over his shoulder, would only have called attention to himself. Unless he should come face to face with a native, he trusted to his brown skin to get by. But the emptiness made him horribly conspicuous.

As he crossed the end of the last lane he got a nasty start. A hundred yards away it was barricaded where it crossed the Avenida. Surprised heads stuck over the top and voices yelled at him. He made a reassuring gesture and went on out of their sight. All right, so far. They were yelling to him for God's sake to get behind the barrier or the gringos would get him. But his heart beat like a trip-hammer.

He went on beyond the last houses. Lying amongst the weeds, he looked across the clearing. He saw the smoke of several little fires rising at the edge of the jungle, and naked brown forms moving among the trees. The Infeles! So Manoel had brought them into it! A chilly ripple passed over his skin. Legs had had no contact with savages, but had heard all the stories about poisoned blow-guns, headhunters, and cannibal feasts. He drew back under cover of the houses.

Building by building, he made his way forward in the direction of the hotel. Nervous work. While keeping up his casual attitude he had to bear in

mind not to show himself (a) to the barricade somewhere on his left; (b) to the hotel in front; (c) to the Indians across the clearing on his right.

Finally he arrived behind Jao Gonzales' place. It was a 'dobe structure with a low parapet raised above the roof on three sides for style. With the aid of a shed at the back Legs climbed to the roof, and inched himself along under the parapet. Excellent cover, but he couldn't see anything. Voices all around.

He attacked the 'dobe with his knife. It crumbled easily. He started a funnel-shaped hole in the front parapet, working with extreme caution as the hole grew deeper. If he knocked a hunk of the stuff in the street, good-night! In the end the point of his knife went through without a sound, opening a peephole. The hotel lay in front of him.

He could look over the wall. The sun-baked yard was empty, but a couple of narrow slits had been opened in the wooden gates, and Legs guessed that there were watchers behind them. There were two sleepy sentries squatting inside the door out of the sun, and the big room seemed to be crowded with men. He couldn't distinguish individuals. Upstairs there was a sentry on the little balcony. He would command a stretch of the Avenida. There were some men in the room behind him; no women in sight; no machine-gun.

Legs opened another peephole in the side wall near the front, and looked down on the back of a second barricade across the Avenida beyond the land, with half a dozen men on guard. Over their heads the palm thatch had been removed. The barricade in the lane he could not see; there was a building between.

He returned to his first hole. O God! If Manoel would come out on the balcony I could end the war with a single shot! he thought. He widened the hole so that he could shoot through it. But Manoel never appeared. He knew better. And time was passing. Legs was forced to let himself down at the back of the roof. I'll come back here, he said to himself.

The next problem was how to cross the end of the Avenida. The men at the barricade farther down had their backs to him, the sentry on the balcony was also looking the other way. Legs wouldn't be exposed to them more than five seconds before gaining the end wall. But the Indians across the clearing could see him until he turned the back of the hotel. Well, they were a good way off. It had to be chanced. He flitted across as silently as a shadow. No alarm raised.

Behind the hotel he was covered by trees growing along the bank. The building overhung the bank somewhat, and the windows on this side were

above his head. In front of him the verandas attached to the bedrooms jutted out still farther over the bank. The end of the veranda structure was covered with heavy, fixed shutters. As he drew close Legs heard low voices on the other side. This was Manoel's own room. Impossible to reach him from here.

Legs ducked under the veranda. No good. The voices were too low to catch. He went on, and got a nasty blow. The ladder that he had hidden there was gone! Some scout had discovered it. The thought of that ladder had always been in the back of his mind as a last resort. He stared blankly at the spot where it had lain.

He was now under that part of the veranda which opened off Fay's room. He listened with strained ears. No sound from above. With the point of his knife he tried the flooring overhead. Matched boards of some soft wood. It would be possible to slit it if he had time, and send Fay a letter. But he must first make sure that she was still in that room. His breast tightened when he thought of the alternative.

Coming out from under the veranda, there was no cover except a rank growth of weeds. In the wall of the theater he found a loose knot in the wood, pried it out, and put his eye to the hole. The main body of Manoel's men was billeted inside. At the stage end they had torn down the proscenium, exposing the door into the hotel with its split panels and bullet-holes. A couple of caboclo women came through it, bringing food, and when the door was opened, Legs glimpsed the muzzle of the machine-gun beyond.

He snaked on inch by inch through the weeds. Occasionally a pair of caboclos came over the creaking bridge, bearing a palm log on their shoulders. Just beyond the bridge Manoel had erected another barricade. Four men were guarding it. Nearer Legs grew an immense, low-spreading zamang tree. From its branches hung the strands of bijuco or bushrope that supported this side of the bridge.

Legs considered the bridge. It was an important link in Manoel's communications, and to destroy it would be something definitely accomplished. Easy enough to destroy it. The question was, getting away after. There were four men at the barricade. Two were sitting, two standing, keeping one eye down the creek while they talked with their comrades. Not expecting danger from the other side, they never looked towards the spot where Legs lay. The branches of the big tree reached out beyond the barricade. Naturally, if the bridge crashed, the men would run back to look. . . .

Legs crept up to the tree, keeping its huge bole between him and the men. At a moment when the bridge was empty he gained the lowermost branch, and was swallowed up in the thick foliage. Working out on the thick horizontal branch which supported the bridge, he tackled the strands of bjuco with his knife, and cut them almost through, one after another, working back towards the trunk. As he finished the job he saw a pair of caboclos, bearing a log, come out of the jungle, and made haste to creep out on the branch over the barricade. He knew when the log-bearers set foot to the bridge by the creaking. They had about seventy-five feet to go. He waited with a fast-beating heart.

There was a crash of splintering bamboo behind him; frightened yells. He waited for no more. Running out along the branch as far as it would support him, he dropped to the ground and set off running along the bank at top speed. In a moment he was seen; shouts were raised behind him, a bullet sang past. He ran on, zigzagging, not greatly concerned about the bullets, for the bank rounded out of sight just ahead.

After he turned the bend, two men ran into view a hundred yards ahead, and leveled their guns. Legs measured the back of the house at his left, and clawed his way to the roof with the aid of a window. He scrambled to the front, and let himself down on the poles supporting the thatch over the Avenida. The whole structure came down with him into the street. He was unhurt and started running again.

But the men in front found a way through, and still cut him off, nearer now. He ran back to an opening on the other side, and darted through between two buildings, hoping to lose himself amongst the huddle of shacks on the other side. This whole end of camp was ringing with yells and shots. Between the houses he caught glimpses of them closing in on three sides. There was only one thing to do: he plunged pell mell into the gully. The thorns tore his rags to ribbons and gouged his flesh—but he was safe. His pursuers stood at the edge of the gully, firing down into it blindly.

He crossed the path he had cut an hour before, and turned into it thankfully. Five minutes later he flung himself down on the veranda of Blacktower's house, panting. The boss, hearing him, came out.

“So you're back!” he said, sourly.

Legs thought: Yes damn you! I fooled you! He said: “I had to cut a way through the scrub in the gully. You'll have to watch it now or they'll creep through.”

BLACKWATER'S army was assembled on the plaza under the blazing sun. The trench was completed. A hundred men had been picked for an attacking party, divided into ten squads, each under command of a member of the committee. The less warlike spirits were to be left to guard the base. With the prospect of a fight ahead, the seringueiros didn't feel the heat. They stamped in the dust and fingered their rifles in anticipation. Their teeth gleamed in their hairy faces. The Chinese circulated amongst them with buckets of iced rum and water.

Legs had not yet received an assignment. He stood close behind Blacktower, listening to his final dispositions. "I take six squads and approach the theater from along the creek bank, Hammill's squad in advance. If we're attacked from the backs of the houses, we can drop down the bank.

"Beasley, with the other four squads, will make his way along the path cut by Legs in the bottom of the gully. He must cut his way a hundred yards farther than Legs went in order to get by the post on that side without being seen. Don't fool with the Indians at the edge of the jungle. They won't attack men with firearms. Occupy the roof and the interior of Gonzales' place, entering by the rear, also the adjoining house on the right. The point is, not to let the people in the hotel suspect your presence across the road until I give the word to fire. Surprise is everything. My whistle will give you the signal. Not a shot until you hear the whistle." Blacktower blew softly on the whistle to familiarize everybody with the sound.

"I leave Macgregor in command of the base," he went on. "Keep men in the trench at all times, and let others patrol the shore. The chief danger is from the water. I don't know what boats the caboclos may have got together. In case anything comes up that you can't handle, you can summon help by

blowing the steamboat whistle. But you are not to call us back unless it is vitally necessary.”

Blacktower now mounted a box so that all could see him. “Men,” he said, “we’re going out to get a murderer who has gathered a mob of dirty caboclos around him for protection. You know what the caboclos are. They can’t stand against men. It’s true they have a machine-gun. That gives them an advantage. But remember, a machine-gun can’t be in but one place at once. If we keep it occupied by making a feint at one door, we can walk in by the other. I look for this whole war to be over in an hour.

“But we must absolutely act together. Organization is the white man’s strength. That’s why I have divided you into squads and given each squad a leader. I can’t keep in touch with all of you, but I can with the ten leaders. I’ll see that they get my orders, and I look to you to obey the orders they give you. Stick to your leader! Remember, the caboclos outnumber us, and if we fall apart, you’ll have to submit to the everlasting disgrace of being licked by a parcel of breeds!

“One thing more. Leave the liquor alone until . . .”

That was all Legs heard of Blacktower’s speech. At his feet he saw a broken arrow ground into the dust. Nobody had seen it fall. God knows how long it had lain there. Dozens of men must have stepped on it or over it. He picked it up. A piece of paper was wound around the shaft. Detaching it, Legs read:

BLACKTOWER:

It was you started this trouble. I am only fighting for what is mine. I was married to La Rosadora today by Juize Cavados. A Juize is authorized to marry people, so this marriage is legal and binding. I wanted to wait awhile for decency, but you forced me to this. So there is nothing more for you to fight about. La Rosadora is my wife. You better send your seringueiros home or the Avenida will run with blood.

MANOEL CARVALHO.

Underneath was written:

I was married to Manoel with my full consent. Nobody forced me to do it.

LA ROSADORA.

Legs thought he had steeled himself to bear anything. But this unexpected blow out of the dust at his feet unnerved him. It was a lie, of course, Fay *had* been forced to sign it. The handwriting was hers all right.

Such a marriage meant nothing, for Fay was married to him. But even a form of marriage, a mock marriage . . . ! Fay in the arms of that swine!

He suddenly realized that Blacktower had stepped down from his box and was barking at him. "What have you got there?"

Legs handed it over.

"This is addressed to me! What are you doing with it?"

"It was wrapped around this arrow," said Legs. "There was nothing on the outside to tell who it was for."

Blacktower read it, and his face turned blackish like a man with apoplexy. The veins in his forehead seemed to be about to burst. He recovered himself with an effort.

"A clumsy forgery!" he said, thickly. "It means nothing."

Blacktower knew that it was Fay's hand, because he had had several notes from her. Legs said nothing.

"Anyhow, it makes no difference," said Blacktower. "We want Manoel for murder!" He raised his voice. "Forward, men!" To Legs he said: "You go with Hammill's squad. Say nothing about this."

The disorderly mob straggled along the creek bank, hawking, spitting, cursing, talking big. The tall spare figure of Blacktower strode ahead, gun under his arm. A seringueiro yelled:

"Hey, boss! That tile of yours will make an elegant target!"

"That's all right," said Blacktower, coolly. "It's my everyday hat and I'm not going to take it off for any God's amount of caboclos!"

Progress was slow because the way was littered with rubbish thrown out of the backs of the houses. Blacktower put George in front of him to kick the stuff down the bank. The Hawaiian boy's skin was gray with terror. When he hesitated, Blacktower kicked *him*.

Most of the trees along the bank had been cut down, and there was little cover on the creekside. The creek was about two hundred yards wide at its mouth. An occasional shot came over from the other side, but they disregarded it, knowing that most of the caboclos were handling high-powered guns for the first time in their lives. As for an alarm being given, Blacktower's men could reach their objective sooner than those across the creek. Ordinarily the jungle over there was under water, though it was drying out at this season.

With a gun in his hand and the enemy just around the bend, Legs had ceased to be a thinking creature. Eyes and ears automatically registered impressions. He found himself walking beside Fringe Penrose, the tall boy with tufts of silky hair on his chin. Just a scatter-brained kid. Fringe grinned at him, saying:

“Cheese! I’m glad you’re on my side!”

“Why?” asked Legs, without caring what the answer was.

“You look dangerous. Not sayin’ a word!”

In front of them walked the trim, well-knit Hammill in his neatly pressed black suit, starched collar and cuffs, patent-leather shoes, just as he presided over the roulette table every night. It was the only sort of clothes he had. When space permitted, he walked beside Blacktower. These two hated and respected each other. Self-interest kept them together. Hammill had killed men in his time, but not in this style. Legs guessed that the elegant little gambler was pretty much out of his element. But his yellow, waxy face gave nothing away. He had guts.

As they neared the bend that would bring Manoel’s barricade into view, Blacktower turned, and held up his hand to halt the main body. To Hammill he said: “Go ahead! You know what you have to do.”

The twelve men, instinctively taking their guns in both hands, went forward. “For God’s sake don’t shoot one another!” growled Blacktower. To the men behind he said: “Quiet now, and take cover! The fun is beginning.”

The broken bridge gradually edged into view, the big tree, the barricade with the corner of the theater building behind it. A yell of excitement went up from the barricade and the caboclos’ guns popped. The seringueiros spread out as well as they could, and answered. Hammill said:

“You want to act scared and foolish.”

He flung himself down and they followed suit; fired, got up and, running a few steps, flung themselves down again. The caboclos’ guns answered. No damage was done on either side. The seringueiros were laughing.

“Iron out that grin!” ordered Hammill. “Or what’s the use?”

The fire from behind the barricade ceased. “Gone to tell their friends,” muttered Hammill. “Lie where you are until they come back.”

Silence. Some of the men lit cigarettes. “Good comedy,” said one. “Just wait until Martin comes,” answered his mate.

A tremendous yelling arose as the caboclos poured out of the theater. A row of heads appeared over the barricade. The seringueiros fired; the caboclos answered. Seeing how few were in the attacking party, the bolder

men on Manoel's side began to creep around the barricade, taking cover under the edge of the bank, and firing as they came.

Hammill said: "Run forward once more and fire. Then make out to be wavering. You," he added to Penrose, "start running back, and I'll knock you down."

The seringueiros entered into this byplay with zest; improved on Hammill's instructions. It worked. With a yell of triumph the whole mob of caboclos came pouring over the barricade, crouched, fired, ran forward a few steps.

"Now give ground," said Hammill. "Slowly! Slowly! or they'll suspect something! Lead 'em on! There's time yet."

The seringueiros, with much pantomime of panic, retreated slowly, fired half-heartedly, retreated again. Suddenly the caboclos broke into a charge.

"Now beat it!" said Hammill. "Not too fast. They can't fire when they're running. Let them catch up a little. Run like hell when you get around the bend!"

The men obeyed. Some made believe to fall, and scrambled up, looking behind them as if frenzied with terror. Legs ran with the rest. "Come on, niggers!" they were muttering. "Shake a leg! You'll catch it!"

Around the bend Blacktower and his men were waiting between the empty houses, behind the windows, lying along the edges of the roofs. The twelve ran past them. In a moment or two came the caboclos, yelling like triumphant demons. They had made the white men run! Blacktower let them get well past, then the whistle sounded like a silver thread amidst the yelling, and the fifty guns spoke. The range was between ten and twenty feet.

Hammill's men turned around and poured in their fire. It was a weird sight. The caboclos leaped crazily, twisted, flung up their arms like puppets on wires, dropped limply. The yells of triumph merged into the inhuman screeching of wounded men. It seemed as if every one of them must be killed, but it was not so. The casualties were not above forty. They rolled over the edge of the bank, or pitched down headlong. Some ran through mud and water straight across the creek; the greater number went back the way they had come. A part of them had never rounded the bend.

The seringueiros poured out of their hiding-places. "After them! After them!" Blacktower was shouting, waving his gun above his head like a Civil War picture. The whole mob set out along the edge of the bank. It was their turn to yell now. Hammill's men joined them. They were now the rear guard. One of the seringueiros started collecting the guns of the fallen.

“Drop it!” ordered Hammill. “Plenty of time later!”

Another bearded pioneer in a ten-gallon black hat dropped to his knees and stabbed a caboclo in whom he thought he saw signs of life. “Not taking any chances of getting it in the back!” he growled. He went on to another. They left him stabbing.

They ran on the way they had first gone, jumping over the dead caboclos. Smallish men, but strongly built, with smooth, pleasant faces. Fond of eating and drinking and loving like other men, no doubt. Beyond the barricade the terrified flock divided. The greater part ran down the bank and across the creek. The other end of the bridge had not been cut and it was possible to cross by the fallen structure, though a foot of water flowed over the middle of it. Others turned to the left and hid themselves amongst the empty buildings.

Blacktower halted the chase at the barricade. Everything had become strangely quiet. Legs and others looked over the top. Not a soul in sight. The entrance to the theater yawned wide, for the screen inside had been smashed down. The building looked deserted, but no one was anxious to go see. The machine-gun commanded the whole interior.

Blacktower glanced at his watch. “That was so damn quick,” he said, “I don’t suppose Beasley is in position yet.” He looked at Legs. “Go and see what they’re doing in the Avenida.”

Legs got a couple of men to boost him up on the roof of the building at their right, and crept forward to look down into the Avenida. In two minutes he was back.

“All clear,” he said. “Both the other barricades have been abandoned.”

“Find Beasley,” said Blacktower, “and tell him to get a move on. As soon as he is in position to keep up a sustained fire on the hotel, give me two pistol-shots and wait for the sound of the whistle. Meanwhile we’ll be mopping up on this side.”

“Boss,” said Legs, “if you held the outside of the two barricades it would keep them from working around behind us. Manoel still has a crowd of men in the hotel.”

“When I want your advice I’ll ask for it,” said Blacktower, with a hard look. Just the same, Legs noticed that he split one of the squads to man the barricades.

Legs made his way to the Avenida between two buildings, took a slant up and down that empty thoroughfare, and ran across. He was seen from the hotel and fired at, but by that time he was over. Making a détour among the

shacks, he came up behind Jao Gonzales' place. Beasley's party was not in sight.

Climbing to the roof, he went to his loophole in the front parapet. In the hotel everything looked much the same. A crowd of men faintly visible through the windows of the lower floor; a few men in the big room upstairs; sentries inside the door, and the same man squatting on the little balcony with the barrel of his gun resting on the rail—probably the best marksman on their side. No women visible; no signs of excitement. Apparently they did not yet know how seriously they had been defeated.

Legs waited, hoping that Manoel might appear at one of the windows. But he did not. In quarter of an hour or so the heads of the first seringueiros of Dan Beasley's party popped up over the back of the roof. They came creeping to his side.

"Here already?" said one. "Jeese! but you're swift."

"Where you been?" retorted Legs. "Christ! but you're slow!"

He slipped down at the back to see Beasley. The big man was unscrewing the hinges of the back door to let his men inside. A pleasant spirituous smell was wafted out. The front of the shop was boarded up. Rows of bottles still stood along the shelves, but these were mostly for show. The real stuff, two kegs of rum, rested, one on each end of the bar. The seringueiros looked at it longingly.

"If any man takes a drink I'll bean him!" growled Dan. "Afterwards you can have all you want."

Jao's famous street piano stood against the wall. A man made believe to turn the handle, while he gave an imitation of one of its cracked tunes.

Legs told Beasley what had happened. "Sure!" he snarled. "Blacktower would take the showy stuff and leave me do the sweating!" Dan was too fat to go campaigning. Already he was spent and sore.

"There's nobody in the street in front," Legs went on. "You had better occupy the corner house instead of the one on the right, because it has a flat roof. The barricade alongside it is now held by our men. Warn every man with a gun to watch out for the women in the hotel."

Dan merely grunted ill-temperedly.

He allowed Legs to go around and see that every man was in place; lined up under the parapets of the roofs, and waiting under cover below. The corner building had been a "parlor house" and the seringueiros stretched out on the floor of the front room, ready to rise up and fire through the windows. In the rum-shop they slyly whittled out the cracks between the shutters to give them room to shoot through. The men above were directed to fire into

the ground floor windows of the hotel, and vice versa. Two men were chosen from each squad and held in reserve behind Gonzales' with a long log that the party had brought. These, when the command was given, were to run through to the right of the house and smash in the hotel gate.

When all was ready, Legs sent a man with instructions to proceed a hundred yards to the left and fire the pistol. He didn't want to alarm the hotel prematurely. Legs himself climbed back to his original peephole in the front parapet and waited.

Across the way, all looked peaceful. The dingy hotel seemed to be sleeping in the heat. The rags of mosquito netting hung motionless in the windows. High against the hot, white sky beyond, the vultures were circling. It was feast day for them. The marksman on the balcony lit a cigarette. His last.

The pistol was discharged twice. The marksman on the balcony started up a little, raised his gun, peered down the Avenida. The silvery keening of Blacktower's whistle sounded in the stillness, and hell broke loose. Nearly forty guns poured their fire into the hotel. The sound rose and broke in waves as the men continued firing.

For so much power the effect was small. There was no reply from across the way. The man on the balcony settled quietly back and let go his gun. He was dead ten times over. One of the sentries sprawled out across the door-sill; the other escaped inside. The figures seen through the windows vanished. They had dropped to the floor. The casualties could not have been high, because no sound came across. A muffled screaming of women could be heard, but they were cries of fright, not pain. Judging from the direction of the sound, they were confined in a back room upstairs.

Since they had nothing to shoot at, the seringueiros slackened fire; stopped. In spite of orders, several stood up to get a better view. A single gun barked from across the way, and a fellow known as Turtle toppled over backwards beside Legs with a little hole in his forehead. Everybody ducked then. Through his peephole Legs searched the front of the hotel, yard by yard. He saw the top of a head; a gun barrel. It disappeared quickly.

"He's on the roof, fellows. Over the fourth window, counting from the right."

A man near him growled to his mate: "You're the best shot, sojer. I'll stand up and wave, and you get him when he takes aim at me."

They got him.

On the roof of the next house they were popping up and down and firing. This was getting nowhere. Legs slipped down at the back to see Dan

Beasley.

“They’re willing to let us keep this up as long as we like.”

“What can we do?”

“Keep up a steady fire, and under cover of it let the boys break down the gate.”

The necessary orders were sent next door, and Legs went back. He fired his gun for a signal, and once more the rattle of firing rolled up and broke in waves of sound. This time the men had been instructed to keep on firing until the fellows with the battering-ram got back under cover.

They started across the street with their log. Two puffs of smoke issued from the gate, the two leading men collapsed, their comrades fell over them, the blow failed. As soon as they had fired once, the two caboclos behind the gate scuttled for the house. They were shot down as they reached the door.

The men with the log could not see this. The four survivors gamely retired across the road, reformed, and came charging back. Under the first blow the gate flew in. They dropped the log, snatched up their wounded comrades, under the arms, and ran back for cover.

A lull followed. The gate stood open; the yard was empty except for three dead men. No head appeared at any window; a dead man’s rifle barrel stuck up over the roof. Legs hustled down into the rum-shop. Dan Beasley was cursing and biting his fingers, at a loss how to act. The seringueiros were itching to be out and across the street.

“Wait a minute!” said Legs, warningly.

There was a quality in his voice that they respected. They lowered their guns. Legs put his eye to a loophole.

Presently a leg stuck out of the middle window of the second story, and kicked the dead marksman out of the way. The muzzle of the machine-gun was thrust forward. A steel shield protected the gunner.

“Back out of range!” cried Legs.

The gun opened its vicious chatter. A storm of bullets tore through the wooden shutters and buried themselves in the floor. The seringueiros were out of harm’s way at the back. The hail of bullets passed across the front and on next door like feet running away. The gun was elevated, and they came back, rattling against the ’dobe parapets above. A shower of fragments fell into the street. Back across the shutter, blowing in little pieces of wood, and returning along the roofs. Legs wondered what Blacktower was doing.

Suddenly the gun ceased firing. Legs ran forward to the shutters. “The gun is gone, boys!” he cried. “Now’s the time! Come on!”

They threw up the bars, and let the shutters fall in the street. They ran over them cheering, heading for the gate. Men were climbing from the windows next door; dropping from the parapets of both houses. They dashed across the yard—only a shot or two came from the windows above—jammed in the doorway in their eagerness; spread out inside. The big room was empty. Open windows at the back showed which way the caboclos had gone. One or two of them could still be seen splashing across the creek.

The machine-gun opened fire somewhere inside the house, roaring. The bullets rang against an iron surface. Looking off to the left, Legs saw a strange sight. The round table-tops were advancing one after another around the bend in the corridor. No human agency was visible, only the round disks one after another, overlapping and ranging themselves in an oblique barricade across the corridor. Like some kind of crazy dance on the stage. Behind Legs, the seringueiros roared with laughter. Before the first tier was completed, tables appeared higher up and a second tier began to drop into place. The bullets splashed harmlessly against the iron.

Legs saw that it would not be necessary to build the tables all the way across the corridor. Owing to the restricted position of the gun at the head of the stairs, it could only shoot straight down, and a foot or two to one side. It could not be shoved forward through the door above without exposing the gunner to a flanking fire. He held the stairs, that was all. The range of the gun was exactly marked out by the bullet-holes in the floor.

Legs could not wait for the barricade to be completed. There were only a few feet exposed. He watched for the gun to move away from the spot and sped past it and down the corridor. Once behind the barricade, he saw the crouching seringueiros advancing with still more tables. Planks laid across the legs of the first tier supported the legs of the second tier. Legs' objective was the last door in the corridor. He flung it open. The room was empty.

As he turned away from the door, Blacktower was entering from the theater. "What are you doing?" he demanded.

"This was La Rosadora's room," said Legs.

"Well?"

"She's not there. They have taken the women upstairs."

When the shield was completed past the danger zone, the gun ceased firing. Blacktower went through to the big room and shook hands with Dan Beasley.

"Well, we got 'em sewed up!" said Beasley, grinning.

"How many are there upstairs?" asked Blacktower.

"We could see about twenty," said Beasley. "Maybe more."

The seringueiros were ranging through the kitchen, looking for food. They came out with slabs of bread and carne secco. As the other party poured in from the theater a hilarious reunion took place. They roared with laughter, slapped one another on the back, each boasting of the part he had played. The room became jammed with men. "Find any rum?" they were all asking one another. Blacktower scowled.

"Get back into the theater, men!" he commanded. "You've got room in there. Take a rest, and I'll have your supper fetched from the base."

"We want rum!" they cried.

"All right, I'll fetch it for you."

"Have we got to stay in the theater?" demanded a voice from the back. "Why can't we go out and mop 'em up?"

"Your job's not done yet," said Blacktower. "As soon as we get our hands on that skunk and liberate the women, you can do as you please."

They filed out, grumbling. One of the last to go was an ill-favored ruffian with red-rimmed eyes and lips drooling tobacco juice. He pointed upstairs.

"How about smoking 'em out, gov'nor? Build little fire down here and toast 'em."

"There are women amongst them!"

"All right! They'd jump out of the windows and we would catch 'em!" He hugged himself.

"Go into the theater and wait for orders."

"All right! All right! No offense!" He shuffled away.

IN THE big room of the hotel, Blacktower, surrounded by his committee, made his dispositions. Pat Cruise, the bartender, a dead shot, was posted inside the door of Manoel's bedroom off the corridor. From this position he flanked the door at the head of the stairs, in case an incautious head should stick out.

George was dispatched to the base with a note to Doc Buckles bidding him to come and look after the wounded men they had; and an order to Macgregor to send up food and rum for the seringueiros. Macgregor was further ordered to make with all speed half a dozen scaling-ladders ten feet long, and an equal number fifteen feet long (to reach the back windows of the hotel).

Osman was sent to collect his squad and reoccupy the two roofs across the street, with the object of picking off any man upstairs who might show himself at a window. Hammill was ordered to bring his seringueiros back into the hotel in case Manoel's party took it into their heads to make a demonstration. The other squad-leaders, eight in all, were sent into the theater to keep an eye on their men and to prevent them from going out. Guards were to be posted along the creek bank to watch the caboclos. Blacktower kept Dan Beasley and Crummy Carl with him. The latter was no warrior, but he was as crafty as an ape.

Legs, receiving no specific instructions, remained in the hotel. Blacktower and his leaders discussed plans in a somewhat futile fashion. They had Manoel cornered upstairs, but they couldn't get at him.

"He's bound to give up," said Blacktower. "He can't have any water or food up there."

"It's a safe bet that he's plotting something," grumbled Dan.

"What can he plot?"

“I don’t know, but we’re losing valuable time. The ladders ought to have been made beforehand.”

“Why didn’t you suggest it?” Blacktower asked, dryly.

Dan shut up.

“We can’t use ladders until after dark,” Blacktower went on. “There are men enough upstairs to blow the tops off any heads that appeared, above the window-sills. After dark we’ll smother them.”

Blacktower, with a hardy grin, went to the opening into the corridor and raised his head. “Hey, Manoel!” he called.

A cautious voice from the top of the stairs answered, “What you want with Manoel?”

“This has gone far enough. Let him speak with me and we’ll end it.”

There was a pause. They heard footsteps crossing the floor overhead; steps returned. Manoel’s voice spoke out:

“What you want, Blacktower?”

“The jig is up, Manoel. We have you!”

“Not yet, Blacktower.”

“What the hell! We can shoot you out, burn you out, or starve you out as suits us. You better give up.”

A silence. Then Manoel’s voice asking, craftily. “You let me and my wife go away free and clear?”

“What about the rest of the girls?”

“You can have them.”

Ah, the dirty swine! thought Legs.

Blacktower winked at his associates back in the room. “Sure I’ll let you and her go clear,” he said, smoothly. “All I want is to stop this fighting. There’s been too much damage done already.”

“Word of honor?” demanded Manoel.

“Word of honor,” answered Blacktower, coolly.

Legs didn’t blame him particularly for that. Not in dealing with a skunk.

“All right,” said Manoel. “You take all your men back to your own place and keep them there, and we go.”

“How will you get away from here?”

“That’s all right. We go.”

“I couldn’t risk it,” said Blacktower. “Too dangerous for the woman. Any of these wild seringueiros around here might catch you. You come

down and give yourself up to me, and I'll guarantee to land you in Manaus safe and sound."

"Blacktower, you go to hell!" said Manoel. "I know you."

So ended the parley. Blacktower came back into the room, laughing.

Hammill brought his men in from the theater. They looked sullen. Two of them drew squares on the dining-table with a bit of charcoal, and started a game of draughts, with broken matches for men.

Time passed. The period of inaction almost broke Legs' heart. He moved restlessly back and forth through the rooms, watching, listening, making crazy plans that he discarded as soon as made. If one could cut a little hole in the floor overhead under the spot where the machine-gunner stood, and shoot down any man who came to serve the gun! But this floor, laid on rough, strong sleepers, was made of one of the native woods almost as hard as iron. And what would they be doing while he was cutting through it?

Beyond the big room was the long narrow kitchen. It had no door on the outside. It was evident that this old house had been built with a view to defense. The yard wall joined the end wall of the house. This end wall—that is, the side of the house which faced the jungle—had no openings in it whatsoever.

Whenever it was quiet, Legs could hear faint stirrings overhead. What were they thinking about up there? What were they up to? There were two bedrooms on the left-hand side of the corridor with windows looking out on the yard. The first opened directly off the big room, and it had a door communicating with the second room, which had another door opening at the foot of the stairs. Legs, going through, softly turned the handle of this door and opened it a crack, hoping to get a shot at the machine-gunner above. But this fellow was on the alert. The moment the door moved, he opened fire, and Legs had to pull it shut.

He went around by the corridor to Fay's room. While in here he heard women's voices overhead, and a sound of weeping that made his chest draw tight. . . . Fay? . . . No! She wasn't a crying woman. She grew quiet when she was frightened. Would they let her stay with the other girls now? Legs felt kindly towards them. Better for Fay to be with them than lying white and still in another room alone.

Fay's clothes were still in the room that had been hers, also the big iron-bound trunk marked "theater" that he knew so well! Her own name had been painted out, and La Rosadora substituted. The silver slippers were on the floor, the light-green dress hanging from a hook, the faint perfume of her

clinging about it. . . . Legs ground his teeth together. The feeling of helplessness was almost more than a man could bear.

When he returned to the big room he noticed that Hammill's ten men had shrunk to six. The others had quietly faded. He called Hammill's attention to it. The latter swore, and ordered Pat Cruise to challenge any man who tried to slip past in the corridor.

Without any warning, Frenchy, one of the croupiers, ran in with his face streaming with blood from a scalp wound. "They're out!" he gasped.

Blacktower and the others sprang up. "Who's out?"

"The seringueiros. They went crazy. We couldn't hold them. Dapper [another croupier] pulled his gun and shot in the air . . ."

"Ah, the fool!" muttered Blacktower.

"Well, he paid for it," said Frenchy. "Somebody shot him dead. I didn't see who it was. I was knocked out with the butt of a gun."

"What started them?" demanded Blacktower.

"A caboclo tried to sneak by the theater, making for the creek. They wanted to chase him. They went crazy. They're all over the place now, hunting caboclos and breaking into the rum-shops."

"Where are the other squad-leaders?"

"Gone after to try to bring them back."

"Did the seringueiros have a leader?"

"There was a fellow called Sawney Hack had the loudest voice. They followed him."

"I know him," said Blacktower. "A trouble-maker." He coolly unfastened the belt which supported his holsters. "You stay here, Frenchy. The doctor's coming. He'll plaster up your nob."

Blacktower, turning to drop his belt on the table, suddenly broke into savage, heartfelt cursing. In their concern with Frenchy, all had forgotten the six seringueiros in the back of the room. They had flitted as noiselessly as bats, out of the windows.

"Come on, Legs!" said Blacktower, harshly. "You can take a gun in your pocket, but don't display it."

"Going unarmed?" stuttered Carl.

"Sure," said Blacktower, with his hard grin. "We got to depend on moral force now. I'd go alone, but I want a messenger."

"But . . . but you're only leaving five of us here—and one wounded. There are twenty men upstairs. Maybe more."

“They don’t know their own luck,” said Blacktower, “and there’s nobody to tell them. Pat by himself can keep ’em from coming downstairs.”

“Don’t leave us!” stuttered Carl.

“Goddamn it! are you going to run out on me, too?” snarled Blacktower.

Carl dropped on a chair, trembling. Blacktower and Legs went away through the corridor.

The theater was empty except for the four wounded men lying on the floor, and the dead man in the entrance. Outside they ran into Doc Buckles coming in.

“Hell to pay!” he said, grinning.

Blacktower jerked his head towards the wounded men. “Fix them up,” he said. “Go into the hotel afterwards. They’re shorthanded. And for God’s sake see if you can give Crummy Carl a shot of something to restore his manhood.”

“That’s beyond my power,” said Doc.

At the corner they found a group of the committee standing about in uncertainty. “Can’t do nothing with them,” they muttered.

“Go back to the hotel,” said Blacktower.

He and Legs followed the direction of the greatest noise, and were led to Dan Beasley’s place, halfway down the Avenida. The seringueiros had smashed down the shutters and swarmed in. Dan’s was the showiest rum-shop in Bum Success. A long bar encircled three sides, and a great assortment of outside liquors was displayed on the shelves. It was said that Dan kept every brand that was put up. Behind the bar the seringueiros were sampling everything, and passing the bottles over to their friends. All were drinking down the stuff like water, and already a couple of them were laid out on the floor as if struck down by hammers.

The din was terrific. “Free drinks! Free drinks!” was the slogan. The entrance of Blacktower passed unnoticed. “Is Sawney Hack here?” he shouted.

Sawney disengaged himself from his friends. A lean American, youngish, over six feet in height, with an untidy shock of hay-colored hair. He had worked on the pampas at some time, for he wore a gaucho’s hat and a gaudy, silver-embroidered vest. A cowpuncher gone bad in the tropics. He was fairly drunk and grinning devilishly. There was a threat in the grin.

“Well, if ’tain’t my old friend Blacktower! Put it there, Black, and share this bottle with me. It’s called Old Vatted Glenlivet. That’s a new one on me, but damned if it ain’t a smooth article!”

Blacktower took Sawney's hand, but declined the drink. The cords of the boss's neck were swollen, but his face was smooth. He was forced to be diplomatic. Sawney knew that he had him on the hip, and goaded him.

"Certainly am sorry about that stiff that got plugged in the hall. He drew a gun, and my reply was just naturally automatic. Come on, drink up, boss, and you'll feel better. Mustn't get sore because we're helping ourselves here."

"It's not my liquor," said Blacktower.

"Fighting gives a man a thirst that won't be denied. What the hell! If we hadn't been here the caboclos would have licked you. Better for white men to have the liquor than them."

"Sure!" said Blacktower. "I'm not kicking. Now that you've had your drink, come on back. There's still above a hundred armed caboclos across the creek. We've got our work to do."

"We'll be there!" said Sawney. "Li'l' drink just puts an edge on a fellow for fighting."

Blacktower laughed pleasantly. "Sure! If he don't get too much. Look at them!" He pointed to the two who had passed out.

"Them!" said Sawney, scornfully. "Two dagoes from Borba. They can't portage liquor. Me, I can swill it all night and fight like a bunch of wild cats in the morning."

"I don't doubt it," said Blacktower, laughing. "But we haven't all got your capacity." He laid a friendly hand on Sawney's shoulder. "Come on, fellow! You're a sensible man. You can see how this is going to end. Let's get them started back!"

Sawney's eyes bolted. "Don't paw me, Blacktower," he growled. "Never did cotton to a pawing man, nohow."

Disregarding him, Blacktower pushed through to the bar, put a hand on it and vaulted on top. Picking up a bottle at random, he stood up, holding it on high and grinning. This was a new Blacktower. He even made out to be a little tipsy. It caught the fancy of the crowd, and they gave him a cheer.

"Yea, Blacktower! Speech! Speech!"

"Have you heard the one about the menagerie?" asked Blacktower. He reeled off the ancient smutty patter about the wild cat, the rhinoceros, the elephant, the baboon, etc., while Legs wondered at him. It exactly suited his audience. They howled with laughter, slapped one another on the back, and pounded the bottles.

"Give us another! another!" they yelled.

“Know the one about the dago who went to the doctor to get medicine for his sick wife?” Blacktower followed it with another and another, acting it all out expressively. The drunken seringueiros gazed up at him with childlike responsiveness, craving more. He had them!

“Drink up, fighters,” he shouted, “and let’s take another crack at the caboclos! Come on, supper is waiting in the hall! As soon as we’ve all eaten, we’ll go across creek and lick the tar out of them!” He jumped down from the bar. “Come on!”

Laughing and cheering, they started out after him, most of them carrying bottles. They were halted by a loud derisive laugh from the rear. As they opened up, Sawney Hack could be seen leaning back, swaying with his elbows propped on the bar, jeering at them.

“You poor goddam fools! Listen to me and I’ll tell you an animal story. It’s so old it’s got whiskers on it, but ’pears you ain’t heard it yet, so listen! Cat and monkey lined up in front of fire watching chestnuts roast. Cat grabs monkey’s paw and pulls out chestnut. Monkey sucks his burned paw, cat eats chestnut!”

The seringueiros looked foolish and hung back.

“What the hell is it to us whether Blacktower gets the girl or not?” shouted Sawney. “That’s his lookout.”

“Sure, it’s my lookout,” said Blacktower, obstinately good-natured. “I made a deal with you men to help me out. Between men a deal is a deal!”

“Ain’t seen the color of your money yet!” cried a voice. And other voices: “We ain’t wage slaves! We’re free men. . . . What do we want with money, boys, as long as liquor’s free?”

“As soon as you settle with the caboclos you can drink at your leisure,” said Blacktower. “Leave the girl out of it. It’s gone beyond that. If you get drunk the caboclos will come over after dark and cut your throats one by one.”

The seringueiros were beyond reasoning with now. One yelled: “Aah! we’ll go down inside your fort to sleep it off.” All bellowed with laughter.

“Who will guard the fort while you’re sleeping?” asked Blacktower.

“Any time there’s a fight going, blow your whistle and we’ll come to time!”

Faintly above the uproar that filled the rum-shop, Legs heard the steamboat whistle. It did not register instantly. Then he remembered, and stiffened. The sound meant nothing to the seringueiros—if they heard it.

Blacktower changed color. With a masklike face he sauntered out into the street. Legs, following, found him cursing softly and desperately.

“If they heard that in the hotel it will bring them running down,” he muttered, “and Manoel will escape. I’ve got to go up there. You go to the boat. Take my whistle. If the trouble is serious, blow it!”

Legs ran on down the Avenida. As the vista opened up in front of him, he saw in the direction of the riverfront a great pillar of black smoke rising and mushrooming in the sky. A sense of fatalism came over Legs. Their luck was out! Not until he rounded the last house could he see what was burning. The steamboat.

She appeared to be afire on the offshore side from stem to stern. How could she have caught in such a fashion? The shore side was still intact except for the tongues of flame that came creeping through. Legs could see Macgregor and his men formed in two lines, frantically passing buckets from canoe to pier and from pier to steamboat. It was evident at a glance that no amount of buckets could cope with such a blaze. They couldn’t get at the seat of the fire. She was doomed.

There was nothing the seringueiros could do, either, but the fire provided a good excuse to get them out of the rum-shop. Legs ran back part way, blowing the whistle shrilly. As the men came staggering out of Beasley’s he beckoned them vigorously with his arms, and pointed to the smoke. They came running towards him. They were drunk, but not yet too drunk to fight. They handled their guns in businesslike fashion. If only they could be kept occupied!

They leaped over the empty trench and ran down the plaza. Already the flames were leaping higher than the funnel. The burning steamboat dimmed the setting sun. On the pier Legs ran into the panting, smoke-blackened Macgregor.

“What happened?” he asked.

“Indians . . . Across the river. . . . Sent over a cloud of fire arrows without warning. . . . Set her afire in fifty places at once. When we tried to put it out, they fired at us. . . . After a couple of my men had been hit they wouldn’t expose themselves any more . . . afraid of poison.”

“Well, you can spell your men now,” said Legs. “Give these fellows the buckets. Got any more?”

“Plenty of buckets,” muttered Macgregor. “What the hell good are buckets?”

“Never mind that! Set these men to work!”

In a minute or two the seringueiros were passing the buckets. Legs and Macgregor established two additional lines by mooring small boats under the vessel's counter and passing the buckets up on deck. The men worked as men will always work against fire, desperately. They weren't doing any good; the fire ate across the deck foot by foot. But Legs thought, It will sober them up.

There was no wind and the flames went up in a straight thin wall of fire from end to end of the vessel; an inverted red cascade, burning with an indefatigable murmuring and crackling. The water they threw on it seemed to dissipate in steam before it hit anything. Nobody noticed the coming of darkness. The jungle wall surrounding the quiet pool was lighted up like a fantastic scene on the stage.

Legs sent George to Blacktower to report what had happened, and to tell him there was nothing he could do by coming down. The food had not been sent up to the theater. Beans and meat were simmering in big caldrons out in the open in front of the store. Chou was in charge, one eye on the burning steamboat, one on the food. The fire was increasing.

"We must call off the men," muttered Macgregor. "The boilers are like to go."

"All right," said Legs. "Set her adrift. No use burning up the pier, too."

The men were called ashore, the hawsers cut, and the burning vessel began to drift away on the sluggish current. When water opened between her and the watchers, the scene increased in grandeur. The flames took complete possession of her, mounting straight up in a peak of fire higher than the jungle. From the opposite shore they knew the Infiles were watching, grinning at their own handiwork, but no sign of them was visible in the glare.

A couple of hundred yards away she grounded on the mud bar off the mouth of the creek, and listed, burning like an orchid in the night. Suddenly her boilers let go with a roar, and a volcano of planks, pipes, ventilators, squares of tin, was thrown up, and fell into the water, hissing. The vessel sagged, the funnel toppled over. For an instant the force of the explosion seemed to blow out the fire, then it sprang up again viciously. She was ruined and shapeless now.

"Cost eighty thousand dollars," said Macgregor, mournfully. "Everything aboard was of the best." He shook his fist at the jungle opposite.

When the seringueiros began to turn away from the fire, Legs said, "Supper, boys!" They were willing to be fed. Getting their food in tin cups

and plates, they squatted down in the plaza to eat it. Chou threw wood on the fires to give them light. Legs tried counting them, but it was difficult. About sixty, anyhow. The rest were around in the rum-shops. They could be heard hitting it up. The men at supper glanced uneasily in the direction of the sounds.

George having returned, Legs wanted to send him back with a further report. The Hawaiian burst into tears. "I can't do it, Legs! There's men hiding and watching all around camp. I don't know who they are. I'm afraid!"

Legs shrugged and let him go. While he was casting around for somebody else to send, Doc Buckles jumped over the trench. "Hot grub!" he said. "That's more than we got uptown."

"Fill up," said Legs. "What's the news?"

"Not too good," said Doc, with his cheerful grin. "We're wide open to an attack in the hotel, but Blacktower won't abandon it."

"Anything doing upstairs?"

"Not a sound."

"They probably have some means of communication with the outside. Light in the window or something."

"Not a doubt of it!"

"After you eat, go back and tell Blacktower that I have sixty men here fairly sober. I doubt if I can hold them long. Tell him half the ladders are ready, and ask for orders."

"Sure."

After Doc had gone, Legs circulated amongst the men, not trying to spellbind them like Blacktower, but just talking naturally. "This fire looks like it might be the beginning of a concerted plan. I reckon you boys will have plenty to do tonight. Half of you had better take a sleep while the others stand to in the trench. The chinks are guarding the shore."

He couldn't tell whether he was making good with them or not. They were too quiet. However, there was no lack of volunteers for trench duty. The remaining men lay around the fires.

Legs patrolled up and down behind the trench. He never saw a man go, but every time he counted them there were less; twenty-four, nineteen, seventeen, fourteen. That was why they were so ready to volunteer, he thought, sorely. When he glanced towards the fires there were always fewer figures there, too. Meanwhile the racket in the rum-shops was increasing; singing, fighting, breaking glass, a shot or two. When Doc Buckles finally

returned with Blacktower's order to bring the men and the ladders, Legs' army had dwindled to eighteen men. But he thought these would stick.

LEGS led his men through the back ways of camp to keep them out of temptation. Since he had information that the caboclos were spying in the dark, he walked fifty yards ahead of the main party bringing the ladders. Doc Buckles was in the rear. There was no electric light in camp. The night was clear and starry; moon due to rise about ten-thirty. Off to the left the seringueiros were raising hell along the Avenida. The racket seemed to center around three rum-shops—Figuroa's, Dan Beasley's, and Crummy Carl's.

Legs neither saw nor started anything suspicious on this side. Coming to the cross-lane, he halted his men while he went forward around the corner to reconnoiter. By this time his eyes were well accustomed to the dark and he sensed the shadow of the barricade a hundred yards ahead. As he drew near, he crouched and listened. No sound from behind it. No movement. But he had a hunch that it was occupied. Searching around with his hands, he found a lump of 'dobe, and pitched it into the barricade.

Instantly a gun answered over the top. Legs threw himself flat and rolled over close under the wall of the house on his left. A whole row of guns flashed and barked from the barricade. The bullets plopped into the earth of the lane. Legs ran back, keeping close under the wall. He was seen, because the caboclos shouted, and began to swarm over the pile of logs. He heard them jumping down.

He ran around the corner. "Spread out! Spread out!" he whispered. "And let them have it!"

As the running shadows appeared, the seringueiros fired. The caboclos cast themselves down, grunting, then began to scuttle back on all fours, like gigantic beetles. One or two did not rise.

"Come on!" shouted Legs. "They won't stop running!"

Leaving their ladders, they chased the caboclos back through the lane, occasionally pausing to fire. In the dark no man could be sure of his target. The caboclos flung themselves on the barricade and clawed their way over. Their pursuers hesitated.

“Come on!” yelled Legs. “Don’t let them make a stand!”

They ran on to the barricade yelling, climbed part way up, and looked over. Nobody there. The lane beyond was as empty and quiet as if the earth had swallowed the running caboclos. The crossing of the Avenida was a few yards ahead. They could see the corner of the theater looming in the dark. Some of the seringueiros ran back for the ladders. All wanted to push right on.

“Wait a minute!” said Legs. “This is too sudden a victory. They’re not going to let us get by as easy as that. We don’t know what’s around those two corners!”

Fringe Penrose, the lanky stripling, had attached himself to Legs. He was laughing like a child. “We made them run!” he boasted. “We can always make them run! Oh, golly! Did you see them run!”

When the ladders were brought up, Legs planted one against the side of the house at their left and ran up. Creeping forward over the slanting roof, he peeped down over the front edge into the Avenida, and grinned hardily. As he had thought! A suspicious, broken shadow below him; very still, very quiet, but alive! Fifteen or twenty men huddled close to the barricade there. And only a few yards away on the other side of the barricade the seringueiros were sousing themselves in Figueroa’s rum-shop. Ah, what bloody fools!

Looking off to his right, there was a much bigger mass on the other side of the lane, fifty or sixty men he figured, crowded into the space between the parlor house and the theater, waiting! How easy for some of these to slip around Jao Gonzales’ place and take Legs’ little party in the rear! If they had been anything but caboclos they would have thought of it before this. Legs made haste to return to his men.

“There are nearly a hundred men laying for us in the Avenida,” he whispered. “We got to back up quick or they’ll take us behind. We’ll have to go all the way around through the clearing, and enter the hotel through the rear windows”—if we can! he added to himself.

They beat it softly back to the end of the lane, and turned to the left.

“How did you get through when you came down to us?” Legs asked Doc Buckles.

“Over the barricade and straight down the Avenida. Must have been before they came.”

“Or they saw you and let you pass,” said Legs, “to make a bigger haul.”

They were now back in the lane that followed the lip of the gully. Legs ceaselessly urged his men to hurry, to be quiet. What he feared was that the caboclos would pour out of the Avenida into the clearing and block them there. He ran ahead.

Suddenly becoming aware that there was something in front of him, he stopped. His men came up. At that moment a line of guns across their front flashed and cracked. A caboclo yell went up. The seringueiros dropped the ladders clattering, and flung themselves down. One was groaning.

“Forward! Forward!” shouted Legs. “They won’t stand against you.”

The caboclos continued to fire and the seringueiros lay still.

“For God’s sake charge them!” yelled Legs. “It’s our only chance!”

Close on their right stood a little ’dobe house with the door open. As one man they scrambled to their feet and broke for it, jamming in through the door. Legs was obliged to follow. He heard more yells, running feet, from *behind* them.

“For God’s sake get out of here!” he pleaded. “You’re in a trap! Run for your lives! Run anywhere! In here we’re all dead men!”

Panic had seized the seringueiros and they would not listen. When he tried to push them out through the door, they jammed him in a corner of the hut and held him there by sheer weight. He was almost crying with rage. The ladders lost, his party broken up! Fools! Fools! Fools!

Like many of the huts of the lazy natives, this one had door and window in front, no other openings. Consequently a perfect trap. The caboclos, arriving from two directions, swarmed around three sides of it without ever showing themselves in front. Coming up close to the walls, they yelled their taunts at the men inside. The simple roof of the one-roomed structure was formed of poles supporting a thatch of palm.

A caboclo climbed up on the roof of the hut from the back, thrust the barrel of his gun through the thatch, and fired it. Nobody was hurt. A seringueiro, maddened with rage, stuck his gun between the poles to return the fire. Half a dozen hands dragged it down. “You’ll set fire to the thatch.”

Off to the left of the hut a number of caboclos were busy about something. Presently a growing light told what it was. “Building a fire so they can see to shoot us!” said Legs, bitterly. The flames leaped up, throwing a great circle of light all around. Those in the hut could not see the

fire, but only the grotesque shadows of the caboclos moving around it. The fire showed up the dropped ladders, and the bodies of three seringueiros who had fallen beside them. The yelling was fiendish.

Inside the hut, quiet, except for the labored breathing of the trapped men. Legs swallowed his bitterness. What use to curse them? Guns were lined up along the window-sill and the door-sill, but the caboclos outside took care to keep out of range. Quiet in front, the flames throwing rosy lights on the huts opposite. The young boy pressed close to Legs. Occasionally a shudder went through him.

Something thudded softly on the roof. A moment later they heard the thatch crackling. Smoke seeped down. "Now you'll have to run for it," said Legs, bitterly, "or burn!

"Listen!" he went on. "Your only chance is to run straight ahead from the door. Once you get past the shacks across the way you'll be out of the light. I'll go first. Let every man follow singly. Straight ahead for fifty yards, then off to the right. Scatter out in the clearing and they'll never find you. Make your way to the back of the hotel. If it's blocked off, go back to the trench by way of the gully."

Legs jerked his cap down, drew a long breath, and ran out. A curious lightness of heart possessed him. If this is the end it's the end! Guns spoke out on both sides the hut; bullets whined by and threw up the dirt. Never touched him! He heard another man run out behind him, and another and another. There was a scream and a fall, but they didn't get them all. Feet were still coming. No time to look around. Danger of being cut off in front. He turned sharp to the right and was swallowed in the lovely darkness. He only passed one figure, who fired a surprised shot after him, and ran the other way. Zigzagging around the obstructions, Legs headed out into the clearing and flung himself down, panting.

Another man dropped beside him. "Who is it?" whispered Legs.

"Penrose." The boy's hand felt around for Legs' hand. "Oh, Legs!" he whimpered. "Only the two of us! They got all the others! O God! only the two of us!" He wept softly.

"It isn't possible," Legs said. "Some of them will turn up!"

They started on. All along the edge of the dark camp guns were flashing and popping at intervals, but they were safe out in the middle. The caboclos, afraid of becoming separated, would not venture from the buildings.

Making a wide détour, they headed back for the bank of the creek, behind the hotel. Nearing the corner of the building, they saw a shadowy

figure converging on them from the left, and stopped. The man caught sight of them at the same moment, and dropped.

Legs said softly, "Who goes?"

A thankful voice answered, "You Legs!"

Running together, they pumped each other's arms as if they never would stop. "Legs!" "Doc! Thank God it's you!" Laughing weakly, they cursed each other: "You goddam old so-and-so! You left their bullets at the post, eh? . . . You horny old crocodile! Reckon they flattened against *your* hide! . . ."

Proceeding, they found a seringueiro leaning against the hotel wall, spent and gasping. Another joined them there. That was all who came. Five out of twenty.

The rear windows of the hotel were about five feet above their heads. Not wanting to be shot by his own side now, Legs sought to attract attention to themselves before venturing into range. "Sst! Blacktower! This is Legs!"

Instantly a head—and a pistol—stuck out of the window. "Legs, Doc Buckles, and three seringueiros," said Legs. "We're coming up."

"All right."

Legs whispered to Doc: "You tell Blacktower what has happened. And tell him he's got to get out of here now. He'll take it better from you."

He gave Doc a leg up; Doc stood on his shoulders, and was helped through the window. The three seringueiros followed. Finally they reached down out of the window and pulled Legs up.

The room was lighted by a couple of candles. Blankets had been hung inside the windows. About ten men were sitting around, unoccupied and gloomy. Only Blacktower, pacing jerkily up and down, still displayed a certain energy. There were a couple of men behind the blankets, keeping watch.

"Where are the rest of you?" demanded Blacktower.

"This is all," said Doc.

"The ladders?"

"We had to abandon them."

Blacktower cursed him, Legs, the seringueiros, long and bitterly. They stood up to it unconcernedly. In this moment of extreme danger Blacktower was not so terrible. When Doc got a chance, he said:

"We had to fight our way through near a hundred caboclos. We're lucky to be here."

“No ladders!” cried Blacktower, flinging up his hands. “What’s to be done?”

“We got to get out of here,” said Doc, firmly, “and quickly, too. The caboclos are massed in the Avenida. If they had any sense they’d have cut you off at the back before this.”

“We’re not leaving here,” said Blacktower, setting his jaw.

The other men began to murmur against him.

“As long as we have a base, this is the time to retire to it,” said Doc, calmly. “Else why go to all that trouble to prepare it? . . . There’s nobody to defend it but the chinks and a few old men and boys. If the caboclos seize our food and ammunition, where are we? You can’t support a siege here!”

Blacktower had no arguments, but only a blind obstinacy. “Here we stay!”

“Not me!” said Dan Beasley, suddenly getting up. “I know when I’ve had aplenty.”

“Nor me! Nor me!” others chimed in.

“Goddamn it!” shouted Blacktower. “Am I your leader or am I not. You agreed to obey me.”

“Sure!” said Beasley, “but there’s a limit! We couldn’t foresee this!”

“This little argument will be interesting to our friends upstairs,” put in Doc, dryly.

They fell silent. Before the dispute could be resumed, a hellish uproar broke out somewhere in the middle of camp—shots, yells, screams, like nothing on earth. All those in the room looked at one another with dropping jaws. It shook the nerves of the toughest white man amongst them.

“They’re mowing down the seringueiros,” said Doc. “. . . Well, they asked for it! . . . Our turn next.”

Dan Beasley waddled for the nearest rear window. There was a general movement in that direction—not quite a stampede. Somebody blew out the candles. Blacktower cursed them all softly and helplessly. At the windows, Legs said, “First men out cover the upstairs windows.”

One by one they dropped to the earth below. Legs and Blacktower last. Legs felt as if he were leaving a part of his flesh behind. In his mind he was bidding good-by to Fay. Heads stuck out of the second-story windows, but jerked back at the first shot from below. Everybody scuttled around the corner of the building. From the front they heard Manoel bawling in the native lingo: “The white men are escaping! The white men are escaping!” A roar answered him from the Avenida.

They struck straight out into the clearing. From the Avenida on their right ran the caboclos. The moon was beginning to make the sky bright. The caboclos dropped to one knee, fired, and came on. "Doc! Osman! Pat! Hammill!" called Legs. "Back, and help me keep 'em off!" These five were the best shots in the party. Falling behind, they turned and fired, ran on, fired again. Judging from the sounds, they accounted for more than one caboclo. At any rate, it took the heart out of them. They followed more cautiously.

The fat Beasley, sobbing for breath, led them around in a wide semicircle to the spot where he had brought his party out of the scrub, earlier in the day. They plunged down into the gully. Their pursuers followed. A number of shots were exchanged harmlessly in the undergrowth, then silence from behind. Legs shouted:

"Beat it, ahead there! They're aiming to run along the top and cut us off when we come out!"

They tore through the thicket, holding up an arm to shield their faces from the whipping branches and thorns. Men bumped into each other, fell, scrambled to their feet, cursing thickly. Dan Beasley, all in, was obliged to fall out altogether. Above the noise they were making could be heard that horrible screaming from the center of camp.

Before coming out into the open under Blacktower's house, they paused. The sharpshooters pressed ahead. They lined up, Legs and the four others, parting the leaves and peering through, searching along the top of the bank, which made a sharp line against the brightening sky. There were some suspicious-looking bumps in the line.

"Five heads," whispered Pat Cruise. "I'll take the farthest one."

They fired. Pat's caboclo leaped up with a cry and plunged headlong into the gully. The caboclos fired. More figures popped up behind, fired, dropped again. Pat stopped a bullet with a grunt. He whispered: "They got me, fellows. I'm gone!" Somebody drew him back by his feet. The other four went on firing.

Blacktower said in Legs' ear: "Keep them busy with a hot fire and we'll creep around and climb the bank on the other side of the house."

The boy Penrose remained at Legs' side. The five guns fired as fast as they could reload, continually changing their positions. They were shooting at random now. A long time seemed to pass. Legs couldn't help but wonder if Blacktower had abandoned them.

He was reduced to his last clip when the fire of Blacktower's party suddenly broke out from the bridge beyond. The caboclos sprang up and bolted, leaving four of their number. They sprang over the end of the trench

and disappeared in the darkness. Legs thankfully lowered his gun. Doc put his ear to Pat's breast.

"He's gone," he said.

"Shall we take him with us?" somebody asked.

"What's the use? We've got no place to put him."

"Well, it's all one to him," said Legs.

Beasley joined them, gasping, and they climbed the bank. The screaming from the Avenida had ceased; the shots were scattering now. The yelling had a different character—triumphant yells.

"They'll be down here directly," muttered Doc.

Circling the casino, the whole party issued out on the plaza watchfully. The moon was rising over the ice-plant opposite. Here and there a wavering silhouette ran across the open, one was dragging himself in the dust. These men were making for their boats. They had no guns.

"Let them go," growled Blacktower. "They are useless to us now."

Doc intercepted one man who was staggering under the weight of a wounded partner. "What happened, fellow?"

The man was dazed. He spoke with difficulty. "It was like a dream, Doc. We . . . drinking in Crummy Carl's. . . . Caboclos surrounded the place before we knew. Fired in from four sides at once. . . . The same at Beasley's and Mike Figueroa's, where the others were. . . . Most of our fellows were drunk. Had laid down their guns. . . . I can't tell you, Doc. . . . A massacre . . . All dead and twisted together! . . . I don't know how I got out. . . . Found myself running with Dave on my back. He's shot through the lung."

"Bring him over to the ice-plant and I'll fix him up."

"I won't leave Dave, Doc."

"You can stay there, too. We have food, water, ammunition. We can stand a siege."

"Sure, Doc; but who's ever coming to get you out in this goddam country?"

Doc was silent.

"Reckon I'll take Dave back to our pitch," said the seringueiro. "Dave's a strong fellow. He may pull through. Much obliged, Doc. You're a white man!" He staggered on under his burden.

IN THE ice-plant they heard the caboclos coming, and ran the sliding doors across, and hooked them. There were two of these doors facing the plaza, and two looking out on the creek; no other openings. They had prepared loopholes by bending up the edges of the overlapping sheets of corrugated iron that formed the walls.

The long barnlike structure was illuminated by a couple of stable lanterns. A steam-engine occupied the middle part between the cells for freezing water on one side, and the electric-light generators on the other. On the battery of little tanks sat On Kai-Ling in unruffled dignity, smoking a tiny pipe with a long stem. Behind him on the iron covers crouched his household. The two little girls were dressed in boy's clothes out of the store. Along the front of the building the white men were lined up, looking through the loopholes. Blacktower's little dog crouched against his master's legs.

Legs put an eye to his loophole. The caboclos came pouring out of the Avenida, leaping over the trench, yelling and shooting their guns, pausing to tip up bottles to their lips. Blacktower's was their objective. They headed diagonally across the plaza, a long line of little ragged men like ghostly demons in the moonlight. There was no end to them. The head of the line was swallowed in the passage leading to the Casino.

They could be heard smashing their way into the gambling-house, then silence for a while; another burst of yelling and smashing when they attacked the house. After a while, not having found their enemies, they poured back into the plaza, with Blacktower's hangings fantastically draped around them, dragging loot of all kinds. Having decided that the white men must be in the ice-plant, some of them threw themselves down in line and discharged a scattering volley that clanged against the iron. In the silence

that followed Legs heard the little girls whimpering behind him. The sound was shut off by a hand.

“Hold your fire until they come closer,” ordered Blacktower.

Failing to draw fire, the caboclos sprang up and capered insanely, brandishing their guns. A long row of manikins flinging themselves about in the moonlight. They spat on the ground, and screamed insults. All the stored-up venom of an inferior race was finding outlet. “We made the white men run! We made the white men run!” It was too much for flesh and blood to stand. Blacktower’s men began firing from the loopholes. The caboclos flung themselves down and fired back. Whang! Whang! against the iron.

Farther back, others had broken into the store and were dragging out whatever they could lay their hands on. They couldn’t see to do their work, and the looting paused while they heaped up wood and started a blaze. When the fire burned up, pandemonium broke out afresh. A whole army of caboclos struggled to get into the store at once. The men lined up in front of the ice-plant ran back to share the loot.

They could get neither in nor out of the store. Finally they allowed a certain number to remain inside, to pitch things out the door for the rest to fight over; bolts of cloth, cooking-pots, machados, a phonograph, cases of canned goods smashing as they fell. Meanwhile men were always slipping away up the Avenida and coming back with bottles and jugs. The whole mob was becoming crazed with liquor. One would seize the end of a bolt of goods and run, unrolling it half down the plaza. When they had pitched out everything in the store, they began to throw burning brands from the fire through the door.

During this On Kai-Ling remained sitting on the edge of the water-tanks. A man at a loophole spoke over his shoulder:

“They are burning the store, Uncle Ling.”

“Stores always get burned,” said the old man. “Part of the business.”

In a few minutes the flames broke through the roof with a roar. It was almost certain that Blacktower’s wooden Casino would catch from it, as well as his house behind. If the flames jumped the trench, the whole camp would go.

Legs found Doc and pulled him away from his loophole. “Doc, let me out the back door without saying anything.”

“For God’s sake, what for?”

“I can’t stand it,” muttered Legs. “Not knowing what is happening up there. Manoel can’t control this devilry he has set loose. They’ll turn on him next, and seize the women.”

“What can you do?”

“I don’t know . . . just scout around. Manoel is off his guard now; thinks he’s won all along the line. . . . If I stayed here doing nothing I’d go clean off my nut before morning.”

Young Penrose, who stuck close to Legs, heard this. “Aw, Legs, take me with you,” he pleaded. “Two is better than one.”

“No!”

“Aw, Legs!”

“Be quiet! Or they’ll stop me from going.”

“Bring back some rum,” said Doc, grinning.

“Sure! Listen for three taps on the door.”

When the door was pushed back it creaked a little. “What’s that?” Blacktower demanded.

“Beat it!” whispered Doc.

As Legs slipped out he heard Doc answer, blandly, “Legs going out to do a little scouting, boss.” The door slid back and was hooked. He couldn’t hear Blacktower’s reply.

Legs had brought two pistols with him. A long gun would have hampered his movements. Back of the ice-plant there was a platform used for storing wood to feed the steam-engine. The wood had been thrown off when the place was prepared for defense. Legs crept to the end of the platform. In front of him stretched an open space where the bunk-house had formerly stood. Some of the planks and timbers still lay on the ground, but otherwise there was no cover for two hundred feet or more.

This was the biggest chance he had to take. The ground sloped down imperceptibly into the mud and there was no bank to hide under. The course he must follow would take him not more than fifty yards from the point where the caboclos were crossing the trench on their way to and from the rum-shops. They had laid planks across to make the passage easier. On one side the wasted moon was shining down, and on the other the flames of the burning store were leaping. Suicidal? He shook his head. It *had* to be crossed. There was no way around.

He figured that there were now so many bodies lying around camp, one more or less would attract no attention. At a moment when no one was passing, he crept out a little way from the ice-plant, and lay still, playing dead. His stained skin would not betray him; his clothes, after the day’s hazards, were as tattered as any caboclo’s; he drew his legs up to conceal their uncommon length.

Through his lashes he watched a little party of boastful drunken caboclos bringing liquor. They crossed the trench and passed up towards the store without more than glancing his way. When their backs were turned, he inched forward a little, and lay still again. Slow! slow! he kept whispering to himself; or you'll never get any farther.

A caboclo coming down from the store by himself looked at Legs and stopped. Legs stiffened all over. The caboclo approached him, his eyes fixed greedily on the pistol holsters. Legs had left them unfastened. Legs pulled a gun and fired, and the astonished caboclo dropped without a sound. Legs moved on a little. Two dead bodies in the open space now. Gives realism to the scene, he thought.

He crossed the trench at the point where it petered out in the mud. Hours seemed to pass before he made the back of the first building fronting on the Avenida, and was able to relax for a moment or two. From here fairly plain sailing, because the houses were built in a continuous line, and no caboclo was going to stand watch on the creek bank while there was so much doing in camp.

As he picked his way around the corpses of the men who had fallen that morning, the gorged carrion birds rose slowly and beat softly away on their powerful wings, sinister shadows against the moon. The stench was terrible. Judging from the sounds off to his right, there were plenty of caboclos remaining in the Avenida. Occasionally he heard them smash into another building.

He had another anxious moment when he reached the barricade. The more prudent amongst the caboclos, bringing their loot home before it should be taken from them, were passing on the other side. Spreading himself out on the creek bank, he watched until he saw his chance, and sped across. Here the big zamang tree shielded him from the rays of the moon. Beyond it, he dropped, and snaked through the rank weeds alongside the theater.

What Legs had in mind was the caboclo who had fired from the roof of the hotel that morning. He figured that there must be an opening in the hotel roof, and he was going to find out. Coming to the end of the theater, he watched his chance again, and, at a moment when no caboclo was crossing the creek, climbed to the top of the side wall. From inside came a sound of groaning, and he remembered the four wounded seringueiros who had been left there without food or water all day. Poor wretches! Well, they had to take their chance, as he was taking his.

From the wall, he drew himself with difficulty up on the overhanging roof. It was fairly steep, and covered with wooden shingles which had dried out and become loose and slippery since the rains. He was obliged to spread-eagle himself upon them to keep from sliding off, and could progress but an inch at a time. Under him, the shingles shifted and creaked a little, but there were none but wounded men below.

Halfway up the shingles the two roofs came together. The hotel had a flat roof, or almost flat, covered with sheet zinc laid on stout planks. Legs let his weight down on it with infinite care. It made no sound. From somewhere near he heard the murmur of women's voices. The girls were still in the end room upstairs, but he did not know if Fay was with them. If he could get hold of Teresa, she'd help him. First he must place Manoel.

He crept slowly forward, pausing after each step to listen. There in the strong moonlight the dead man slumped against the front parapet, with his gun sticking up. Grim company on the roof. A little way beyond, Legs could make out the scuttle projecting an inch or two. It was open, because the cover was lying beside it on the roof. As he drew closer, he could see a little light coming through. Under it must be the principal upstairs room.

He began to hear voices. Or rather, a single voice. Some man was making a report on the great victory in characteristic caboclo style. He spoke in the bastard native dialect which Legs understood pretty well. Reaching the scuttle, Legs listened without attempting to look down.

The speaker related how the seringueiros had been surrounded in the rum-shops and shot down to the last man; how Blacktower's party had been ignominiously chased across the clearing and through the gully, man after man falling dead as they ran. How some brave fellows had run on ahead and cut them off when they attempted to climb the bank. Only two or three had escaped. They had shut themselves up in the ice-plant with the chinks.

Manoel and others in the room exclaimed in delight, laughed aloud, and slapped one another during the telling of the story. Legs was grinning, too, but for a different reason. All in the point of view!

"Is Blacktower dead?" Manoel demanded.

"Yes, sir!"

"Have you seen his dead body?"

"N-no!"

"I won't believe he is dead until I see his body! . . . A hundred dollars gold to the man who brings me his dead body! Fifty dollars for Doc Buckles! Fifty dollars for Blacktower's servant, Legs!"

Legs thought, Pretty good price for a stiff at that!

When the story-teller described how the Chinese outfit had been set on fire, Manoel became angry. "Fools! There's enough goods in the store to make you all rich!"

"They took everything before they fired it," said the caboclo.

"But in his house Uncle Ling has much rich stuff. He has gold. That will burn up too. . . . Did you find gunpowder in the store?"

"No gunpowder!"

"With gunpowder you could blow in the doors of the ice-plant."

Another voice spoke. "Plenty easy to get them in the ice-plant. Build a fire all around and cook them."

Manoel roared with laughter. On the roof Legs silently cursed the brutes.

Presently a dispute arose. As well as he could make out in the confusion of voices, the caboclos guarding Manoel, excited by the tales of loot and liquor, demanded permission to go out and get theirs. Manoel objected. He could be heard trying to bribe them to stay. Finally a compromise was reached. The caboclos promised to send in other men to take their places.

He heard them running downstairs. Quiet settled on the room. Manoel and his friends were chuckling and congratulating themselves on the victory. Legs peeped over the edge of the scuttle.

The room was lighted by candles stuck in bottle necks. Around a center table sat a party of sleek-looking men, drinking; Manoel, the Juize, Mike Figueroa, Jao Gonzales, Captain Fazenda, and other Brazilians. These had gone in with Blacktower, and slipped over to Manoel's side when the tide began to turn. Manoel was their blood brother, now. Two of the girls, Clo-clo and Cassie, had been brought out to entertain Manoel's friends.

At the back of the room a couple of caboclos were squatting on the floor, playing cards, and a third, evidently the gunner, sat tipped back against the wall at the head of the stairs, settling himself for a snooze. The machine-gun on its squatty tripod was within reach of his hand. It had been shifted a little to allow passage up and down the stairs. Plenty of ammunition lying on the floor.

The sound of Manoel's greasy chuckle made Legs' gorge rise. Manoel was sitting with his back to him. His round bald spot offered such a target that Legs' fingers itched for the trigger. He might bring down three or four of them before they got the machine-gun trained on the scuttle. But it wasn't good enough. Once the alarm was raised, he would never be able to get Fay out. Must look after Fay first. He drew away from the scuttle.

Creeping softly back to the end of the roof where he had heard women's voices, he let his body project over the edge, and looked under. The dark veranda lay beneath him, and beyond it a dimly lighted room seen through door and window. The room was filled with women in various stages of undress. There was an enameled bedstead with brass knobs. They sat and lay upon it in apathetic attitudes and upon the floor. They weren't speaking much.

The light was too dim for him to recognize individuals readily. Besides, he was looking at them upside-down. He searched for Fay. Certainly he ought to recognize her, however dim. He couldn't find her. However, there were parts of the room he couldn't see into.

Suddenly he perceived that there was a woman lying on a cot in the veranda almost directly under him. Asleep, perhaps? Hardly, amidst the blood-curdling sounds that were coming from the Avenida. Her head was towards him; that was why she hadn't seen the shadow of his head against the moon. He whispered the name that was never absent from his consciousness.

"Fay!"

She sprang up all of a piece, wildly pressing her clenched hands to her breast.

"Shh!" he whispered. "It's all right. It's me, Matt."

She swayed to the veranda rail, gasping: "Matt! . . . Matt! . . . Oh, thank God! . . . I thought . . . all dead!" The wire screening was between them.

"Not on your life!"

"Oh, why did you come here? The danger is too awful!"

"I'll take care of myself, and you, too. . . . Stand back a little. I'm going to cut the wire."

When he had cut it as far as he could reach, he passed her the knife through the slit. "Cut it all the way down to the rail. Make another cut, and then cut across."

She obeyed, and a flap of the screening noiselessly dropped over the rail. Passing back the knife, she extended her hands through the aperture. He caught them and kissed them, and pressed them hard against his face.

"Oh, Matt! I'm so afraid! so afraid!"

"What!" he said. "You're not so bad off as you were five minutes ago!"

"We haven't a chance!"

"We *have* a chance, and we're staking our last dollar on it!"

"I'm not brave like you."

“Stop thinking about it. Leave it to me.”

“What are you going to do?”

He didn't answer, because he didn't know what he was going to do. But he believed in himself. “Those girls yonder, can we trust them?” he asked.

“Them, yes! I have told them about you. The Brazilian girls are outside.”

“Then I'm coming in. . . . Look! when I get my feet on the rail you'll have to pull me in, on account of this damned overhang.”

“It's too dangerous!” she whispered.

“I'm not going to fall now,” he said, with a brief laugh. “Not after what I've been through.”

“Wait, Matt! They'll hear you when you jump down on the floor. The door into the corridor is open a little. Manoel makes us keep it that way. There's an armed man in the corridor.”

“Can't you close the door?”

“He would go and tell Manoel.”

Legs considered for a moment. “Get Teresa out here,” he said. “If the girls are on our side, tell them I'm up here, so they won't screech out if they suddenly see me.”

She went away. Legs rolled back on the roof and lit a cigarette. It was the best he had ever tasted. The moon shone on him. The touch of Fay's hands made him feel like a giant. What the hell! A man only lived but once! He found himself grinning. He sat up and took off his shoes.

The two girls came back, and he stuck his head over. “Hello, Teresa!”

She didn't speak.

“Look! I'm all alone in this, and I'm counting on you to play a man's part.”

“I can,” she said, steadily.

“I reckon you know what's going on in camp.”

“I can hear.”

“The caboclos are crazed with liquor. Manoel doesn't know the truth. He won't be able to protect you from them.”

“I know.”

“If I can get you girls out of here I've got a place to take you where you'll be safe. But I can only save those who can forget that they're women and stand by.”

“Well . . . it's up to them!”

“That's just the point. It's up to them.”

“They know what the drunken caboclos are,” said Teresa, quietly.

“All right. I’m coming down there now. When I reach you my hand, pull me in. I’ve taken off my shoes. I won’t make any noise.”

A moment later he was standing beside them. Inside the room, the girls were hastily putting on their clothes. Fay crept into his arms, whimpering a little. “I’ll be all right . . . in a minute,” she whispered. “You won’t be ashamed of me.” Teresa stood looking at them as if she saw everything in life that had passed her by. But she had a good heart. She didn’t hate them for it.

With one kiss, Legs swung Fay away from him inside his arm. To Teresa he said: “Are you game to invite the sentry into the room?”

She nodded.

“Come on, then!”

They went into the room. All the girls gazed at Legs as if they were hypnotized by his daring. He thought, They’ll do what I tell them! He had his eye on one of the brass knobs of the bedstead. Unscrewing it, he silently pointed to a stocking on the floor. It was handed up; he dropped the knob into the toe and twisted it.

“Go out on the porch,” he whispered to the girls. “We want room. When he falls, come in and tie his hands behind his back, and tie his feet.”

They crept out. Legs took his stand behind the door into the corridor, grasped his blackjack firmly, and nodded at Teresa. Teresa, very pale, but steady, opened the door wider and looked through with the smile that her profession had taught her. She backed away from the door, and a cocky little caboclo came in, somewhat scared, but grinning conceitedly. He laid it all to his own attractiveness.

Legs let him get well in, and swung the loaded stocking. It struck with a hollow thud, not very loud; the caboclo went limp. Teresa caught him as he fell, and Legs snatched his gun to keep it from clattering on the floor. Teresa dragged him to the back of the room. Some of the girls came in and tied his hands and feet with more stockings.

Meanwhile Legs had closed the door to within an inch, and stood with his ear at the crack. From the sounds which reached him it was evident that a number of caboclos had come into the hotel yard. When Teresa returned to him he handed her the gun. “Your job is to keep anybody from potting me,” he whispered.

Out in the main room he heard Manoel say: “Where’s Carlos?” A chair was pushed back. Legs grinned, and softly closed the door all the way. “He’s coming,” he whispered to Teresa. “Keep out of my way.” Holding the door

with his left hand, he pulled a gun. Teresa stepped back. The other girls, holding their hands over their mouths, ran out on the veranda.

Manoel tried the door. “Carlos!” he yelled in a passion. “I know what you’re up to! Let me in!”

Legs released the door, and it flew in. Manoel saw him and his hand went to his holster. Legs fired. Manoel pitched forward. Side-stepping the body, Legs ran into the corridor, drawing his other gun. Those at the table outside had sprung up and were turning terrified faces down the corridor. Fazenda was the most dangerous. Legs fired at him and he crashed backward over his chair. The others ran yelling for the stairs.

Legs ran on, grinning. Teresa was beside him. “Watch the caboclos on the left,” he said. Issuing into the room, he saw the gunner desperately trying to free his gun from the legs of the men who had fallen over it. Unable to reach the stairs, some men ran for the balcony and dropped over. The two girls, crazed with terror, ran back into a far corner and dropped there, covering their faces and screaming continuously.

Legs heard Teresa’s gun go off behind him. He crouched, concentrating on the gunner. He thought: This shot has got to tell or it’s all over! He saw his chance and fired. The man slumped. A flood of joy poured through Legs. The gun is mine!

The Brazilians were now all out of the room. Behind him, all was right. One of the card-players lay dead, the other was standing, hands above his head, screaming for mercy. Teresa fired at him point blank. No time for prisoners.

Legs shouted down the corridor: “Come on, girls! All clear!”

From the yard in front, a pandemonium of yells was rising. Legs picked up the machine-gun, and shoved it before him out on the balcony. He turned the handle; the gun yammered and shook. Sweetest music that had ever fallen on his ears! The yells suddenly changed in pitch. The caboclos as one man made for the gate. Suddenly it was quiet below. Legs ceased firing, and looking down a little surprised, saw that the yard was empty except for some still figures lying in the shadow.

Meanwhile Teresa and the others had thrown the two Brazilian girls into one of the rooms, and had locked the door. These two had never ceased screaming as fast as they could draw breath.

Legs drew a pistol from the holster of the dead Fazenda, and thrust it into Fay’s hands. “Stick close to me!” he whispered. Shouldering the smoking machine-gun, he started downstairs. “Come on!” he shouted.

“We’ve got ’em on the run!” The other girls picked up the spare ammunition and followed.

Down the stairs, through the big room, across the yard. Legs, planting his gun in the gateway, looked left and right. Nobody in sight. He sprayed a few shots up and down to make sure. “I can’t carry the gun and fire it, too!” he said. “O God! if I only had a carriage for it!”

Suddenly he recollected the only thing in Bum Success that ran on two wheels. “I’ve got it!” he yelled. “Come on!”

Shouldering the gun, he ran across the road and into Jao Gonzales’ place. Moonlight streamed in through the open front. The street piano stood by the wall.

“There’s our gun-limber, girls. You got to be the horses!”

Pulling it out a little, he planted the gun on top of the piano and climbed up behind it, with his legs hanging down either side, spare ammunition across his lap. They put Fay sideways on the keyboard, with her fingers hooked in the grill over the upright part. The strongest girl got between the shafts, another seized the strap in front, two pushed from behind. Others carried ammunition and steadied the contraption from the sides. Tall Teresa, with her gun, brought up the rear.

They bumped out over the fallen shutters. “Can’t go down the Avenida, because of the barricade!” Legs said. “Make around to the right and head for the back lanes. Never mind how she rocks, I’ll hang on. But for God’s sake don’t let her turn over!”

From the back of the house they labored forward over rough ground. The machine lurched, the girls screeched and leaned against it. A crazy fit of laughter seized Legs. “Avast there, my hearties!” he yelled. “Ship’s making heavy weather! Furl the topgallant s’ls, and strike the jibboom!” Even the girls laughed hysterically while they struggled.

Legs had a feeling that the caboclos were hidden all around them, and fired his gun from side to side to keep them overawed. Occasionally an answering shot came out of the dark. Nobody was hit. The quiet Teresa plugged a man in the act of firing over a window-sill after they had passed.

Turning into the lane that followed the edge of the gully, they found smooth going underfoot, and the girls broke into a trot. “Go it, my beauties!” yelled Legs. “Lean against the collars and you shall have a feed of oats tonight!” He searched and sprayed every opening on the right that led towards the Avenida. Here and there they glimpsed a startled figure which instantly dropped out of sight.

A small party of caboclos ran out into view, gazed in frozen amazement, and threw themselves flat even before the gun spoke. "One look at us is enough!" cried Legs.

Ahead of them a terrific spectacle was rounding into view; the whole Chinese outfit, the hop-house, the Casino, and Blacktower's house all going up together in an inferno of flame. The fire roared so loudly that the yelling of the caboclos around it could scarcely be heard, and certainly the caboclos could not hear the popping of the machine-gun. The flames had leaped over the end of the trench, and were licking up a couple of shacks on the edge of the gully.

To get across the trench they had to run through to the Avenida. Legs made the girls stop with the gun pointing up the street, while he sent a blast of metal up the narrow way. Then turning around, they bumped over the planks covering the trench.

In front of them the main body of the caboclos were leaping and cavorting in fantastic outline against the fire, still ignorant of what had happened. Crazed with drink, brandishing their bottles, they writhed and sprawled in inhuman abandonment. Halfway across, Legs stopped and opened fire on them.

The little figures dropped, started to run, staggered. Those at the ends couldn't see what was happening in the middle. The girls wrapped their arms around their heads to cover eyes and ears. The long frieze of figures parted in the center, rolling back like a curtain on either side as the caboclos ran. In a few moments there was nothing in sight that moved.

"That's enough," said Legs. "Back to the ice-plant!"

They raced down the gentle slope, all yelling now. Through the loopholes the white men saw them coming, and one of the big doors rolled back. They ran in amidst a little hurricane of laughing and cheering, and the door closed behind them. Half the girls fainted. Everybody seemed to have gone mad like the caboclos. Legs leaped down and started whirling the handle of the piano. "How you like our musical gun-carriage, boys?" The piano banged out the anvil chorus from "Trovatore" with some notes missing.

Blacktower, like everybody else, roared with laughter and clapped Legs on the back. "Good boy, Legs!" But his eyes glittered poisonously. While Legs played the fool, he was thinking, Black would like right well to plant a knife between my shoulder-blades.

THE fire burned itself out without spreading any farther. It was a dismal prospect that faced Legs when he looked through the door of the ice-plant next morning. Of the buildings across the plaza only a thick blanket of white ash remained on the ground, the morning breeze whirling it in little spirals. A meager fringe of dead bodies lay scattered along in front.

The dismalness was reflected inside Legs. The lovely drunkenness of danger had passed, leaving a bad taste in the mouth. The cheering and back-slapping had turned out to be no more than a herd demonstration. In reality, his exploit had aroused a murderous jealousy in the other white men. He had rescued Fay from one danger only to expose her to another; he couldn't see any way out of this one.

Blacktower had concealed his feelings; Beasley, Osman, Hammill, Frenchy, Macgregor, *et al.*, made no pretense of doing so. Only Doc, who loved Fay better than any of them, stood by him. It was pitiful to see Doc look at Fay when he thought himself unobserved. Fay was safe with Doc, all right.

All was quiet in the ice-plant now. Teresa came up behind him. "It is dangerous to stand there in the doorway!" she murmured.

"Not a living thing in sight," he answered. "The caboclos have had a bellyful. . . . How's Fay?"

"All right. . . . She wants to see you."

"It's not safe."

Teresa said nothing.

"I suppose she'll think I've turned chicken-hearted when you tell her that," Legs said, bitterly.

"I will explain to her."

“Could you bring her here to me?” he asked. “The three of us standing here in plain view, that ought not to start anything. . . . I’ve *got* to talk to her. We’re in a damned ticklish situation.”

Teresa nodded and went away.

Fay came towards him with soft eyes and a shaky smile. He groaned inwardly. This was what he was afraid of. However, it was dark inside the shed, and they could hardly have read her expression. He nodded a brisk good morning. “Don’t touch me,” he whispered. “Some of these alleged sleepers behind us are watching.”

Fay’s hands fell. “Oh!” she murmured, forlornly.

Legs grinned. “You needn’t think, either, that it’s because I don’t love you any more.” He filled his lungs. “If you knew, girl!”

“I thought the danger was over,” she whispered.

“Not quite,” he said, dryly. “Nobody must suspect what we are to each other.”

“I’ve told the girls.”

“Well, you must warn them not to say anything. They’re a square bunch and they understand what the danger is! . . . Half a dozen of these men are crazy with jealousy. I can’t fight them all. We’ve got to fool them. If it got around that I was your husband, you would likely find yourself a widow again.”

“Again?” she echoed. “Oh! you’re blaming me for Manoel!”

“Only a joke,” he said, quickly. “I know you were forced into it. It means nothing to me.”

“Let me explain. Manoel promised that if I would let the Juize marry us he wouldn’t bother me until all danger was over. Such a ceremony had no meaning because I was already married to you. So I agreed.”

“Best thing you could have done,” growled Legs. He suddenly blurted out, “O God! I wish I could hug you!”

Fay smiled and lowered her head. Legs hastily pointed out across the plaza. “Look what a sight of destruction! Yet Uncle Ling is the most unconcerned one among us!”

“I wish you could!” she whispered.

“Don’t, for God’s sake!” he said. “I can’t keep it up alone! . . . Listen! I won’t be allowed to talk to you for long. Blacktower is way and above the strongest man. If he approaches you, treat him as you did before I came—with friendliness. If he makes any kind of proposal, don’t turn him down; stall him off until I can see my way clear. . . . The men agreed amongst

themselves that when they had whipped the caboclos they would put it up to you to choose your man. I doubt if they'll stick to that now. They are crazy. If they should put it up to you, stall them off!"

"How?"

"Get sick. A woman can always pull that. . . . Another thing, you can trust Doc as you would me. If Doc is allowed to see you, and I'm not, you can send me messages by him. . . ."

He heard some one coming up behind them. "Gone across the creek," he said, raising his voice. "Reckon they're beginning to realize that they've cooked their own goose. Caboclos can't live off the jungle. They're dependent on white men."

It was Osman and Macgregor, suspicious of Legs, suspicious of each other. Fay turned her wistful smile on each in turn. "How foolish," she said, answering Legs, "to destroy the thing they live by!"

Legs left them thinking: All women can fool men. Better leave it to her.

A little later two seringueiros were seen to rise from the riverfront, and to stand staring in wonder at the empty place where the Chinese outfit had been. They were called over to the ice-plant. It transpired that they had a bateloa full of rubber on the shore.

"All right," said On Kai-Ling, imperturbably, "I buy. Got plenty grub, ammunition, for trade. Pay balance in gold or scrip as usual."

Bum Success began to resume business.

"That's the proper spirit, Uncle Ling!" cried Blacktower. "You keep the ice-plant for your temporary store, and I'll make my headquarters in the hotel." He bowed elaborately to the group of girls. "Ladies, I hope you'll do me the honor of becoming my guests for the time being."

Some of the men sneered. Hammill's thin lips shaped the words, "Pretty damn cool!" But as the hotel was obviously the only place where the women could go, nobody said anything.

After a scouting party had reported that there were no caboclos about, they all set out. They took the girls through the back way where the bloody results of last night's shooting were less in evidence. Legs kept himself in the background. It was a weird situation. Each jealous man instinctively stayed away from Fay, and dared the others, with furious glances, to approach her. Consequently, she walked with Teresa on one side, and Carlotta on the other. Blacktower was merely polite.

Arriving at the hotel, they found the two Brazilian girls gone. They set about mounting the machine-gun on the balcony, and armoring the door into

the theater with a sheet of corrugated iron. The girls went away to their own rooms, and the men gathered downstairs, for the purpose, Blacktower said, of “organizing.”

When Legs entered the room he could feel their antagonism like a wall. This was another kind of danger, less stimulating. This could only be met by using his wits. One wrong word and he was lost—and Fay with him.

“Find a broom and sweep this place out,” Blacktower said to Legs, coolly.

Legs turned wooden. All the men looked to see how he was going to take it.

“Maybe you don’t consider yourself my servant any more,” Blacktower suggested, sarcastically.

Legs saw that he was looking for a pretext to throw him out of the hotel. “Sure I’m working for you,” he said, as if surprised by the question.

He saved his face by handing the broom to young Penrose, who did the job for him. From the back of the room Hammill muttered: “It appears that servants now have servants of their own.” Legs made believe not to hear it.

Blacktower was an astute politician. He had already gathered the pliable men around him, the second-raters of the committee: Crummy Carl and his remaining bartender; the two Dutchmen who ran a restaurant; Macao, the Eurasian, who ran the hop-joint; and Seattle Joe, former proprietor of the bunk-house. As there were only twelve survivors of the original fourteen, this gave him a majority of the committee. There were two distinct parties present, Legs saw, who hated one another, yet were both ready to down him. Could he play off one side against the other?

Further evidence of Blacktower’s activities came out when Hammill snarled at Legs, “I know you, Matt McArdle!”

And Beasley growled, “Detective, eh?”

“That’s all past and done with,” said Legs, calmly.

When they had gathered around the table, Blacktower said: “The first thing we got to do is organize a sanitary patrol. Doc, that’s your job. You can take all my men—Hammill, Frenchie, Legs, Chou, and the Hawaiian.”

“Wait a minute!” said Hammill, in an ugly voice. “Sanitary patrol ain’t such a nice job.”

“Somebody’s got to do it,” said Blacktower, staring.

“Sure somebody’s got to do it. But why me?”

“Well, draw lots for it, if you’d sooner,” said Blacktower, indifferently. He began to tear a piece of paper into strips.

“Put in one for yourself,” said Hammill.

“Don’t be foolish,” said Blacktower, coolly. “I’ve got to direct the whole works.”

Hammill sprang up in a passion. “Aah, we all know what *you’re* after!” he shouted. “I say that this meeting ought to begin with the election of a new leader!”

All Blacktower’s rivals applauded. Blacktower himself smiled.

Doc Buckles struck the table and sprang up. “I second that! And I nominate Legs for our leader as the best man amongst us! Good God! after last night it makes me mad to hear you! A servant, is he? A policeman? Vipers, that’s what you are! Shooting your venom into the man that licked the caboclos single-handed! Last night Legs saved the life of every man present! It’s only owing to him that you’re sitting here and shooting off your mouths today! And you know it!”

He sat down, still muttering angrily. A dangerous silence followed. Legs gritted his teeth helplessly. Doc was not helping him by this—nor himself, either. Hammill laughed derisively.

“Lousy policeman!” he drawled. “Ex-sergeant of detectives! It’s owing to his kind that we’re all here in this bed of roses. Jeese! how we love a policeman!”

Doc jumped up to reply, but Legs waved him down. “Wait a minute!” he said. “I got something to say about this. Doc means well, and I’m obliged to him, but I’m *out!* Get that! . . . I don’t aspire to be anybody’s leader. I’m for Blacktower. He’s the strongest man amongst us. It’s a thankless job, and we ought to be glad if he’ll take it.”

Doc stared at Legs incredulously. Naturally, he couldn’t understand the game he was playing. Even Blacktower looked surprised.

“Put it to the vote,” said Legs.

“Since when have you been a member of this committee?” snarled Beasley.

Blacktower assumed to be indignant then. “Legs is a member from this moment!” he shouted. “After last night that goes without saying. Is anybody against it?” No voice was raised. “All right, then, it’s carried.”

Beasley subsided, muttering, “Dirty deal here somewhere!”

Legs breathed more freely. Rounded that corner, he thought.

Hammill, looking to get another vote against Blacktower, said: “Macgregor ought to be made a member. There’s no steamboat any more. He’ll be here right along.”

“Sure Mac’s a member now,” said Blacktower, secure in his majority.

“How about the three seringueiros who stuck by us?” asked Legs.

“Grand fellows!” said Blacktower, blandly. “We got to do something for them. But they’ll be off after rubber directly. They don’t belong here.”

Blacktower was elected leader by eight votes to five. Doc abstained from voting.

The meeting was interrupted by stragglers applying for admittance at the hotel gate. They came in all morning from their hiding-places. First Figueroa and Gonzales, bringing the two Brazilian girls. The men told a plausible tale about having been forced to join with Manoel.

“Shall we believe them?” Blacktower asked his committee, cynically.

Blacktower himself voted yes, and all his satellites with him. Only Legs knew the truth about these men. He kept his mouth shut. So the two Brazilians went off to salvage what they could of their wrecked rum-shops. The girls were sent upstairs.

Then the five miserable white men who played on the orchestra turned up, men without occupation, since their instruments had been smashed. They were allotted to the sanitary patrol. Others followed, Brazilians, and even caboclos who swore that they had had no part in the previous night’s doings. All were put on sanitary patrol, and in this manner the members of the committee escaped that duty.

Meanwhile, the dog-fight meeting went on, Hammill and his side opposing everything that Blacktower wanted; Blacktower and Legs now working in apparent amity; Doc sore at everybody, including Legs, because he seemed to have gone in with Blacktower. Legs kept his end up in the discussion, and Hammill cried out:

“Where did this fellow get the gift of gab so quick? Never heard him open his mouth before. Much too gabby for my taste. He thinks he’s number one with La Rosadora now, and he’s aiming to fool you all!”

“Nothing in it, Duke,” said Legs.

“Well, what did you take her outside the ice-plant for this morning?”

“I didn’t take her outside. We stood there in the doorway talking, just as anybody might.”

“What did you have to say to her that was so important?”

“I don’t *have* to tell you that, Duke,” said Legs, hardily, “but I’m willing to. She seemed to think she had to come and thank me for what I did last night. Can you understand that?”

“Well, don’t give me no lip about it!” snarled Hammill.

All bristled when the question of sleeping arrangements was brought up. “The girls ought to be given the entire upstairs floor,” said Blacktower. “Teresa can take charge of them. She’s got good sense. And everything go on as before.”

“How about La Rosadora?” asked Frenchie.

“She’ll have her own room on this floor, just like she always had.”

“And you’ll be living here?”

Blacktower shrugged and spread out his hands.

“I’ve got to have a room in the hotel,” demanded Dan Beasley. “My place is wrecked.”

“Why you any more than the rest of us?” snarled Hammill.

“We can all bunk in the hotel,” said Frenchie. “There’s plenty room.”

“Fat lot of sleep any man would get amongst this quarrelsome bunch,” grumbled Dan.

“I was counting on starting a little game in this room to attract the seringueiros,” said Blacktower.

“Where you aiming to sleep, Legs?” Hammill asked, as softly as a cat preparing to spring.

“It’s all one with me. I can bunk with Doc.”

Their anger fixed on Blacktower then. Soon there were half a dozen men shouting at once.

“By God! we’re not going to fall for Blacktower having the free run of the place!”

“It was agreed the committee should take turns looking after the girls.”

“For God’s sake how long are you going to keep this up? It don’t get us nowhere!”

“End it, then! End it!”

“Put it up to the girl!”

“Sure! That was what we agreed on. Let the girl choose her man, and let everybody else shut up!”

When Blacktower could make himself heard, he said, smoothly: “That’s all right, we’ll put it up to her. But we got to have some consideration for her after what she’s been through. Let her rest up awhile for God’s sake.”

“You’d like to get in a little of your fine work, eh? before putting it to the test!” sneered Hammill.

“Ah, put it to the vote,” said Blacktower.

Legs and Doc now cast their votes with the anti-Blacktowers, and the result was a deadlock, seven to seven.

“You want to put it up to her, eh, Legs?” sneered Hammill.

“For God’s sake what’s biting you?” said Legs. “I’m not in this. I only want to see the thing settled. If you *do* put it up to her, I’ll eliminate myself. See? I’ll go out of the room.”

This declaration took the meeting by surprise. They stared at Legs suspiciously. Even Blacktower rubbed his chin. Legs thought: Anyhow, I’ve got them guessing. Always he had it in mind that Blacktower was the real danger.

“Vote on it again,” said Blacktower.

In order to save his face, he still voted against the proposal, but passed the word to his followers to switch, and so it was carried.

They called Teresa downstairs. She told them that La Rosadora was sick and couldn’t come down. Doc started to go up to her, whereupon Hammill violently protested.

“He can’t see her alone! It’s against the agreement!”

“Aw, let Hammill go with Doc,” said Legs. “Maybe that will satisfy him.”

When they returned, Doc gravely told the committee that La Rosadora had a temperature of 102. He couldn’t tell them as yet what the trouble was, but refused to answer for the consequences unless she were left in quiet for a couple of days. They had to accept this. It was agreed that three of the committee should sleep in the hotel every night.

As the meeting was breaking up, Hammill flared out against Legs again. “Feeling pretty good, ain’t you? Think you’ve made good with this bunch! Not with me! Not with me! I know you for what you are, you lying, double-faced cop! You’re like all the rest of them!”

Hammill’s hand had stolen to his gun. Legs grinned. He refused to draw. Keeping his eyes fixed on Hammill, he said: “I put it up to these men here if I haven’t tried to avoid trouble with you, Hammill. God! we’ve had trouble enough! But there’s a limit to what a man can stand. If this committee don’t stop your mouth, I will!”

“Try it! Try it!” yelled Hammill.

Blacktower suddenly banged the table with his fist. “Shut up, Hammill!” he roared. “Legs is right, and this committee is backing him. See? Am I right, men?”

A chorus of “Ayes” answered him.

“Lay off Legs!” commanded Blacktower. “Stay away from him! Or, by God! we’ll put you some place where you can’t make trouble!”

Hammill laughed and walked out. Legs thought: Whatever I do or say works against me. Hammill is playing right into Blacktower’s fist. Blacktower can have me quietly murdered and put it off on Hammill now. . . . I’ll have to learn to sleep with both eyes open.

AS SOON as he got Blacktower alone, Legs, playing simple, said with a confidential grin: "When you asked me if I was still working for you I didn't know what to say. Didn't want to give away our private arrangements to the whole gang."

"What do you mean?" demanded Blacktower.

"Well, you put up a certain job to me, offering to make me your partner if I pulled it off. Maybe I was a little slow, but I turned the trick last night, didn't I? How about it?"

Blacktower produced a start of recollection. "By God! that's so, Legs! So much has happened the last twenty-four hours! . . . And I stand by every word of it, man! I've had terrible losses, but from this moment two-fifths of everything I have here is yours, Legs."

Legs thought, For how long? He said: "I just wanted it to go on record. Put me right with the other men and I'll have no more trouble with them."

"I will, you can depend on it," said Blacktower, smoothly.

He sent Legs down to the ruin of his house to see what had happened to his safe. "That's our sole capital now," he said as one partner to another. Legs found the safe lying in the ashes. The terrific heat appeared to have welded the door fast. In any case, it was still too hot to be touched.

As Legs mounted the bank he came face to face with a huge grinning Negro who asked, "Yo' name Laigs?"

"That's right."

"Mah name Jess Dandy."

"Pleased to meet you, Jess. What can I do for you?"

"Got letter for you from Bill Keene."

The sound of that name was heartening in Legs' ears. "Good boy!"

"Bill say don't let anybody see me give you his letter."

Legs glanced around him. There were several men near, gazing at the ruins. He said, for their benefit: "Take it to Uncle Ling. He has opened store in the ice-plant." In a lower tone he added: "Give the letter to Uncle Ling for me. . . . Where is Bill?"

"A mile upriver."

"How did you come?"

"Got montaria lying beside pier."

"After you give Uncle Ling the letter go back to your boat and wait until I get an answer in your hands."

"Yes sir, boss."

Bill's letter, when Legs got it, was brief:

DEAR LEGS:

Met some fellows in the river said there was hell to pay in Bum Success. For God's sake are you all right? Thought I better find out how the land lies before bringing the launch in. Send me a line back by this fellow. You can trust him. Regards.

BILL.

The significance of this letter did not strike Legs at once, but began to steal through his mind like a thread of sweet water in a dusty drouth. Bill Keene . . . launch . . . safety for Fay . . . !

There were no white men in the ice-plant at the moment. Legs handed the note over to Uncle Ling. "Can I borrow the launch?" he asked, diffidently. "You know what for."

The old man read it. "Borrow?" he said, with his astute Chinese smile. "I never see again. Nor Bill Keene, neither, I guess."

"Don't know about Bill," muttered Legs. "But we will send back the launch, certain."

"All right," said the old man, as coolly as if it was a ball of rubber in the scales. "How you pick up grub?"

"Let you know later."

There was a silence. Legs' feelings were too much for him.

"Want me to take the little girls outside, Uncle Ling?" he asked, looking on the ground.

"No. I keep. We all right now."

"Want me to take letters outside?"

"No. I not know anything about you going."

“Goddamn it!” said Legs, “can’t I do anything for you to show how I feel?”

The old man grinned and glanced back at the two girls in boy’s clothes sleeping on a pile of palm thatch laid on the tanks. Two of the young Chinese were unostentatiously keeping watch over them. “You save us all last night,” said Uncle Ling. “Me and you quits.”

Legs borrowed a sheet of paper from him. After studying awhile, chewing his pencil, he grinned and wrote:

DEAR BILL:

You’re right there’s hell to pay. Over a hundred dead. The Chinese outfit and Blacktower’s burned to the ground. Suggest you write to Blacktower like you wrote to me, saying you thought you better find out how things stood before bringing the launch in, and was writing to him as boss of the camp. Keep in touch with me through Uncle Ling. Regards.

LEGS.

Legs did not show the contents to On Kai-Ling. The old man sealed it with his well-known seal, and sent one of the young Chinese down to the landing-place to hand it to Jess Dandy. Legs returned to the hotel to report to Blacktower on the condition of the safe.

An hour later, while Legs was writing out, from Blacktower’s dictation, a list of building materials to be ordered from Manaos, he had the satisfaction of seeing big Jess enter the hotel and hand the boss a note. Jess never batted an eye in Legs’ direction. Blacktower read the note and slipped it in his pocket.

“Wait outside,” he said to Jess. “I’ll talk to you directly.”

With a masklike face he finished dictating his list. “After I talk to this fellow I’m going to make a round of the camp to see for myself what has to be done. After you make a copy of this list, get Osman to help you hoist the safe out of the gully. He has tackle in the ice-plant. You can move the safe over to the plant on rollers.”

“All right, boss.”

Blacktower went out through the gate with big Jess. Legs now had a great need to talk to Fay. But with Hammill and Frenchie hanging around the hotel, to make a move in the direction of the women’s quarters would only have been to start a fight. Instead, Legs went out and around into the theater, where Doc had collected a dozen wounded men, white and brown, and was working over them with Teresa’s help.

Legs told them his story. Afterwards he went on in search of Osman. When Teresa returned to the hotel a little later in search of material for additional bandages, Hammill couldn't interfere with her.

It was early afternoon before Legs saw Blacktower again. Not hard to guess where he had been. They opened the safe with the help of tools out of Osman's machine shop. It contained upwards of ten thousand dollars in gold, besides several small packages which Blacktower pocketed without opening. Showing Legs the gold, he said with a wicked grin:

"This is the capital of the new firm."

"Pretty good!" exclaimed Legs, with a simple air.

As they left the ice-plant, Legs guessed from On Kai-Ling's particularly Chinese expression that there was something there for him. After he had helped Blacktower carry the gold to the hotel, he returned and received another note from Bill Keene.

DEAR LEGS:

Jess will be waiting for you tonight between nine and ten on the river bank a short distance above the spot where my shack used to stand. Don't be later.

BILL.

This was something like! Legs puffed up with joy like a popover in the oven. He couldn't hold it all. The old Chinaman was grinning at him. There wasn't anybody but Chinese around. Legs flung his arms around the old man, crying: "Uncle Ling, I love you! Whoops!" and ran out.

Outside, he had to be on his guard every minute. It was easier now. As he passed through camp he saw Blacktower in close talk with Macao and Seattle Joe, two men who had lost their means of livelihood in the fire, and were presumably ready for anything.

All the white men dined in the hotel. As nine o'clock drew on, Blacktower began to stage a business of yawns and stretches. "By God! after last night, bed will go pretty good, men! I'm going to turn in. . . . Where you bunking, Legs?"

"In Doc's shack."

"Well, come up to breakfast early. We got a big day tomorrow."

"I'll be with you," said Legs.

Blacktower went off to his room. He had chosen the one which had formerly been Manoel's. Fay had been installed in her old room at the other end of the corridor. Hammill and Osman were going to sleep in the hotel

tonight, and Legs could see with half an eye that they intended to keep watch in the corridor. Well, that would be up to Blacktower.

Legs found Doc in his own shack. Having made his wounded men comfortable for the time being, he was trying to bring order amongst his test tubes. "All packed up, Prancer?" he asked, with exaggerated cheerfulness.

"You know damned well that I've got nothing but what I stand in," said Legs. "It's no joke. How am I going to keep myself decent?"

"My old things weren't touched," said Doc. "I can let you have a shirt, a towel, a piece of soap, and a razor. You'll have to strop the razor on the sole of your shoe."

"Damned decent of you," said Legs. "Look, Doc, why don't you chuck this hell-hole and come along too?"

"Not on your life!" said Doc, quickly. It sounded as if he were terrified at the idea.

"Why not?"

"Well, like Napoleon, I got twenty-four good reasons, and one is enough. Wouldn't know what to do with myself out there. Here I got plenty to do." He made up a little package of the articles he had offered Legs. "Here! Be on your way!"

Legs threw an arm around his shoulders. "Good-by, Doc! I'll never forget you!"

Doc was embarrassed. "For God's sake, Prancer! For God's sake . . . !"

Legs ran out.

He found Jess Dandy waiting for him on the shore above camp with his montaria. They pushed off. The launch was lying at anchor in midstream. As they came alongside Legs saw that Bill had a second Negro aboard only a little less husky than the mighty Jess. This one answered to the name of Plug. When Legs and long Bill gripped hands they burst out laughing.

"Legs, you son-of-a-gun!"

"Bill, Goddamn you! large as life and twice as natural!"

"Feeling pretty good, ain't you?"

"You bet! After what I been through this is a cinch!"

"Well, we're starting a long voyage. You'll have time to tell me."

"You feeling nervous, Bill?"

"Not too bad. I got two grand fighting-men aboard."

"Ought to be enough."

They went over the launch together. “Not much accommodation,” said Bill. “She was designed for towing.”

“Plenty room for us.”

“It was no job at all to repair her. I found spare parts stowed under the deck. She’s no great shakes for speed.”

“There’s nothing here can catch us.”

“However, she’s sound and seaworthy.”

“What’s her name?”

“Lulu.”

“Hope she lives up to it.”

“Did you square Uncle Ling?”

“Absolutely.”

“I can teach these niggers to run her. They can bring her back.”

“That’s what I told him.”

The launch was about thirty feet over all, and roofed from stem to stern. Up forward the cargo space was filled with wood for the engine except enough room to sleep four men. Aft of boiler and engine was a little cabin perhaps five by eight with a seat locker on either side.

“Not exactly luxurious,” said Bill, “but I swear it’s clean.”

Legs looked at it with a strange lump in his throat. Fay’s quarters—and his?

Bill gave the word to up-anchor, and they drifted slowly down on the current, all lights out. Legs and Bill leaned on the gunwale, smoking and taking, as they hoped, their last look at the bloody camp. Osman had got the generator turned on, and the colored lamps on the Avenida were sparkling gaily again. They could hear drunken singing up the street, and a banjo plunking on the night. Farther off the banging of Jao Gonzales’ street piano. No mistaking that sound.

“Gosh!” murmured Bill. “A hundred men killed here yesterday! They got short memories, certain.”

“Good-by, Bum Success!” said Legs. “And to hell with you!”

They drifted on past the mouth of the creek where the burned steamboat lay on the bar. A furlong below they dropped anchor again.

“What time did he set?” asked Legs.

“Eleven o’clock. Wants to get aboard before the moon rises.” Bill lighted a lantern and hung it from the roof.

They discussed their plan of action.

After a while Bill said: "They're coming. Get under cover!"

Legs went aft into the little cabin, where he flattened himself against the partition that separated it from the engine-room. He had a dirty cotton comforter in his hands. He heard the quiet dip of the paddles as the bateloa approached. Bill was the first to speak.

"Bring her alongside the bow, boss."

Then Blacktower's voice from the bateloa. He was in a fine humor. "Everything all right, Cap'n Bill?"

"Right as rain, boss."

The bateloa bumped softly alongside. General greetings were exchanged. Legs heard the reedy voice of Macao, and the thick accents of Seattle Joe. But stretch his ears as he would, he couldn't hear Fay. She must be there. The darling! He could picture how piteously she must be trembling at that moment. It would seem natural enough to Blacktower. One more scene of violence, and please God she'd be safe.

He heard Blacktower say: "I couldn't bring much grub, Cap'n, without attracting attention to myself. But we can buy anything we need along the Amazon."

"Sure, boss! . . . Hand the lady aboard first, and we'll take her to her cabin while the boys are passing the stuff."

A moment later he heard them coming along by the boiler and the engine, and hardened. Bill was apologizing for the bareness of the cabin.

"It doesn't matter," said Blacktower. "We can get anything we want at Serpa."

Fay was in advance. Legs heard her broken breathing. Then she came in. She saw him and passed straight on. Blacktower followed. He was carrying the dog and a heavy little satchel. Legs flung the comforter over his head and drew it tight. He dropped the dog and the satchel. Bill added his weight to Legs' and Blacktower was forced down on his face. He struggled madly to get at his holster, but Legs, kneeling between his shoulders, pinned him flat. Through the comforter came his smothered voice crying: "What's this? What's this? What's this?" Legs drew a gun and presented it against the base of his skull. Blacktower took the hint and became still.

Fay had dropped on one of the lockers, covering her face with her hands. Bill tied Blacktower's ankles together with ropes that he had ready in his pocket. Dragging his arms behind his back, he tied his wrists. He then seized him by the feet and pulled him into the engine-room. Legs, with a reassuring wave of the hand towards Fay, closed the door on her. Bill and Legs ran forward.

The lantern hanging from the roof gave light to the scene. The bateloa alongside was made fast to a stanchion. At the first sound of a struggle from astern, the two Negroes had drawn their guns. Now, grinning widely, they were presenting them at the heads of the two white men who sat in the boat with their hands up, looking foolish. As Bill approached, Macao whined:

“What’s it all about, Cap’n?”

Bill and Legs both had their guns out. “Stand up!” ordered Bill.

Each of the men had a holster with two pistols.

“Throw your belts aboard the launch.”

They obeyed, Macao protesting pitifully, “It’s every damn thing I got left from the fire!”

“Get busy now and pass that stuff aboard,” said Bill.

“Sure, Cap’n, anything you say!” said Macao, making haste to obey. “But what’s it all about?”

“Figure it out to suit yourself.”

“Take me with you, Cap’n,” whined Macao while he passed the boxes. “I’ll starve to death in that burned-out hole back there.”

Bill paid no attention.

“I ain’t Blacktower’s man. Only took his money to get away from there. I hate the ——! I would like fine to be his jailer.”

“Aah, shut up!” growled Seattle Joe. “If Bill takes anybody, it’ll be me. He wants a man aboard, not a lousy rat!”

Bill was deaf to both pleas. Jess pulled up the anchor, while Plug opened the draught of his firebox and sparks began to shoot out of the funnel. Bill started the engine; Legs with a stroke of his knife severed the painter of the bateloa; Macao and Joe were left in the dark, cursing bitterly.

All this time not a word had come from Blacktower, but he could be heard taking mighty breaths like a creature about to burst with rage. “Take him out of my way,” said Bill, prodding him with a foot.

Plug started dragging the bound man farther forward by his heels. Through the head wrappings they could hear him muttering:

“Take this dirty thing off my head! It’s stifling me!”

Legs and Bill grinned at each other. Same old Blacktower. Kneeling beside him, Legs threw off the coverlet and they looked at each other. Blacktower, drawing back his head a little, was like an adder pinned under a stick, choking with unexpressed venom. No cursing now. “You!” he said.

“Well,” Legs coolly answered, “did you think you’d seen the last of me?”

“No!” Blacktower unexpectedly muttered.

Struggling in his bonds, he contrived to roll over. He presented his back to Legs.

THERE was a scuttle over the little cabin, and at night Legs and Fay were accustomed to climb to the roof and lie forward of the funnel, with their faces to the stars. Fay pillowed her cheek in the hollow inside Legs' shoulder while the launch churned quietly down the big river. The Amazon was more like an ever-quiet sea than a river.

"No man that ever lived was as happy as me," said Legs.

Fay laughed comfortably. "A big claim."

"I mean it. No man ever climbed from such a deep hell to such a high heaven. You've got to know hell before you can appreciate heaven. I have tasted the worst and the best."

"I, too," she said, with a little shiver. "The worst of having been in hell is that you are always afraid you may fall in again."

"Not me! . . . I discovered something on the way up. . . ."

"What's that?"

"It's hard to name it, but it's something that will keep me from going all the way under again. . . . Like this: a man can be forced into the meanest job, can become a servant like I was, without losing face, if he looks the facts square in the eye. As soon as I found that out I knew I was a better man than Blacktower, and he began to be afraid of me, though he was my master. It's when a man begins to kid himself that he hits the toboggan."

"How about a woman?"

"Ah, women are different. I don't know women. I should think it would be the same, but much more difficult. Women are brought up wrong."

Fay laughed and pressed closer. "You can start in and do the job right now."

"I don't want you changed any."

"I wish I was braver or cleverer."

“You are beautiful,” he murmured. “What the hell does anything else matter besides that! Beauty is something you can’t argue about. It just is. It’s like . . . it’s like. . . . Oh, I express myself rottenly! . . . Like something you brought with you from a better place, just to show the world.”

“Dear, dear Matt, it’s all yours!” she whispered.

“No!” he insisted. “That’s the wrong way to look at it! A man can’t own beauty. He’s a fool if he thinks it. It is just something that is shown to him. All he can do is to open up and let it have its way with him!”

“Darling! I think you’re talking nonsense.”

Legs chuckled. “Maybe I am. Who cares?”

“Can you kiss beauty?”

“Sure can!”

After a while he asked: “Happy?”

“Yes.”

“Perfectly happy?”

She hesitated, and he immediately rose on his elbow agitatedly. “What’s the matter?”

“I could be happier if that man wasn’t aboard.”

“You never have to see him.”

“I know, but I can feel him . . . I can feel him now under us, hating us!”

Legs laughed. “Let him hate!”

“What a satisfaction it would be to him to kill us both.”

“Sure! But he’s watched every minute. He isn’t going to get the chance.”

“Why couldn’t you have left him behind with the other two.”

Legs sat up. “Listen, Fay, this is a promise I made to myself the day I went to prison. To see that Jack Beatty followed me there!”

“But you’ve got me now.”

“That’s different. I’ve got him, too. . . . No woman could understand what that means to me. Almost every night that I lay in prison I thought about it. Jack Beatty measuring off the days—after I was out. It kept me from going off my nut. It hardened me and made me able to put up with—well, what I had to put up with. It’s all saving for him, I would tell myself. . . .”

“But this is vengeful, Matt!”

“It’s not vengeful; it’s justice. If there was justice everywhere nobody would be sore. Later on, I forgot the promise I had made myself, and I went

all to pieces. When I saw him it came back. It pulled me out of the hole I was in. It gave me an aim in life. *To see that Jack Beatty got his!*"

She sighed. "I think you're wrong," she murmured. "But I can't argue with you."

"How did he get you out of the hotel that night?" asked Legs.

"He arranged it beforehand with those two men who came out in the boat with us. They brought a ladder back of the hotel, and planted it against his porch. He went down and they moved the ladder over to my porch, and I went down. We walked part way out on the broken bridge and got into the bateloa."

"Were you scared?"

"Scared? . . . Oh, Matt! I nearly died! . . . You had told me to do everything he said, but after I had put myself in his hands, I kept thinking, suppose something happened? suppose you never came?"

"That couldn't have happened, because Bill wouldn't have gone without me."

"I didn't know that."

Legs laughed suddenly.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I can see the faces of the committee next morning when they found us gone—you and I, and Blacktower, too! Gosh!"

"Matt," she said, softly, "let him go!"

"Let him go!" he cried, in such a voice of astonishment that she was silenced.

Bill, in a little forge that he contrived in his engine-room, fashioned a fetter for Blacktower's left wrist. With this he was chained to one of the bow stanchions, leaving him sufficient play to wait on himself. To everybody's surprise, after his rage had quieted he turned out to be a model prisoner. He bore himself as if he were a guest aboard the launch and must always be good-humored, considerate of his hosts, entertaining. This was still another Blacktower. Legs thought, with grudging admiration, In his way he has faced things out, too.

Blacktower had an endless store of tales out of his own experience which he related with a good deal of humor. During the long monotonous days on the river it was not only the Negroes who were drawn to listen, but Bill and Legs, also. More and more Blacktower was allowed his liberty

during the day. They didn't trust him, but all the weapons on board were safely stowed in the cabin, and it would have been suicidal for him to attack anybody with his bare hands as long as the mighty Jess and Plug were awake and in their right minds. When all hands went ashore to cut wood, Blacktower did his share in carrying it aboard.

He still exercised a kind of fascination over Legs. It was stimulating to spar with him verbally. One day when all five men were in the bow, eating, Plug steering the launch with one hand, Jess keeping an eye on his fire, Blacktower asked, casually:

"Where's my little satchel?"

"I have it safe," said Legs, coolly.

"Going to keep what's in it?"

"Only four thousand. That's rightfully mine. The balance will be handed back to you in New York. Reckon you'll want it for your defense. If you take my advice you won't waste it on lawyers. Take your medicine and save your money until you come out again."

"Thanks for the advice," said Blacktower, dryly. After a moment he added, "There weren't any witnesses to our partnership agreement."

"What of it?"

"Well, if you handed me over to justice and I claimed that you had stolen four thousand dollars from me while I was your prisoner it wouldn't look nice."

"Oh, if you want to lie about it!"

Blacktower grinned. "I don't mind lying," he said, "and you do. I don't give a damn what people think of me, and you care a lot. That gives me a kind of an advantage, don't it?"

"Well, I could put it up to the court to decide who the money rightfully belonged to."

"Would you tell the court that I offered it to you for killing a man?"

He had Legs there. "It was in fair fight," he said, quickly.

"Oh, sure! You and I know that. But if it all came out in the newspapers the authorities in Brazil might become interested. Suppose they asked for your extradition on a charge of murder? Awkward!"

"It's too remote a contingency," said Legs. "Can't get excited over that."

"I promised Bill a thousand for landing me at any town on the river," said Blacktower.

"I'm not going to take your money," said Bill, quickly.

“Honest fellow! . . . Either one of you or both of you can take the whole ten thousand with my blessing in Pará, if you send me back with the launch.”

“What!” said Bill. “Would you face the jungle without a cent?”

“I can always make a stake.”

“The launch is On Kai-Ling’s,” said Legs.

“Sure. He’s my partner. I’m not going to see him wronged.”

“Nothing doing,” said Legs. “If your proposition appealed to us we wouldn’t have brought you all this way.”

Lying on the roof at night, Legs had always to be resisting a gentle, persistent pressure.

“Matt, what are you going to do with the man, anyhow?”

“Turn him over to the district attorney in New York.”

“How will you get him out of Brazil? Won’t there be a lot of legal complications?”

“Bill and I have worked that out. We’ll steam right past Pará, and hail an American ship that has already cleared for home. That’s United States territory. We’ve got plenty of money to pay our passages. The Negroes will take the launch back.”

“What good will it do to send Blacktower to prison?” she murmured.

“It’s not a question of good,” he said. “It’s just something I’ve got to do to square myself.”

“Let him go, dearest!”

“I can’t. I have thought about this so long it’s like a part of me.”

“Dear Matt, I want us to make a fresh start in life!”

“Well, aren’t we making a fresh start?” he asked, surprised.

“No! This is just going on with the old bad story. You are bitter against Blacktower. You are determined to put him in prison to make him suffer like you did. He will come out of prison just as bitter against you and will start plotting, plotting to ruin us. And so on! Only misery can come of it. I want him to go out of our lives altogether. I want to forget him. That’s what I mean by . . .”

Legs turned over and covered her mouth with his. Presently he whispered: “It’s not fair to keep at me at a time like this. When I’m all softened down . . .”

“You’re not softened,” she whispered. “Your feeling against Blacktower is like a hard lump in here!” She laid her hand on his breast. “I *must* keep on trying to soften it for both our sakes.”

“We are one person now,” he whispered. “To refuse you anything is like going against myself!”

“I shall never ask anything else of you, Matt. I’ll be content with whatever life you give me!”

He sighed deeply. “I can’t say I’ll do it,” he murmured. “But I’ll fight it out with myself.”

“*Dear Matt!*” . . . They drifted away.

On the following day they were passing a little town with a pier sticking out into the river, when a steamboat hove into view astern, obviously heading for the pier. Legs looked at Bill, and the latter nodded. They had come to an understanding some hours before. Bill spoke to Plug, who had the wheel, and the launch circled round and headed back to the town.

“Going ashore?” said Blacktower, surprised.

Legs went into the cabin and came out with the heavy little satchel. He opened it in the engine-room and began counting out the money. It was packed in neat paper-covered rolls. Bill was at the controls of the engine.

“Oh, Blacktower,” said Legs. “Come here a moment.”

Blacktower came aft of the boiler. He looked bitterly at the money.

“We have decided to let you take the launch back,” said Legs.

Blacktower stared at him, and his dead white face turned pink—an odd phenomenon. He said nothing.

“I’m dividing the money,” said Legs.

Blacktower moistened his lips. “How much are you giving me?” he asked, hoarsely.

“Just what you’re entitled to. Six thousand.”

Blacktower looked even more astonished.

“Oh, I know you offered us the lot to set you free, but we’re not taking it. Your offer had nothing to do with our decision.”

“Here, leave me out of it!” put in Bill, grinning. “It’s entirely your affair, Legs.”

“As a matter of fact, it was La Rosadora who begged you off,” said Legs. “Her motto is ‘Let bygones be bygones.’ I don’t mind telling you that

it went hard with me to give in, but . . . well . . . I'm convinced that she's right. So here's the money, and here's my hand on it."

Blacktower looked dazed, but at the same time more human than Legs had ever seen him. He silently took Legs' hand.

"Where will you go, Black?" asked Bill, curiously.

"Back to Bom Successo," he said at once.

"What! Will you face what you left behind there?"

"I can handle that crew," said Blacktower, scornfully.

"Well, I'll say you're game!"

"There's one thing I want to tell you, Black," said Legs. "On Kai-Ling lent me the launch for the purpose of taking the girl out and avoiding further trouble. He didn't know that I aimed to kidnap you at the same time."

"You needn't be afraid that I'm going to quarrel with On Kai-Ling," said Blacktower, with unexpected honesty. "I can't afford to. On Kai-Ling can get along without me, but I need him."

"Know anything about engines?" asked Bill.

"Not a thing."

"Well, I've taught these two boys all I could in ten days. Guess you'll get along all right. If you have trouble you can pick up an engineer."

Meanwhile Legs was paying off the two Negroes. "After we go ashore here, Mr. Blacktower is the skipper," he told them.

They scratched their kinky polls at the strange ways of white men. However, the gold was beautiful, and they had nothing against Blacktower.

Plug brought the launch handily up to the pier. Fay came out of the cabin. It was the first time she had seen Blacktower since coming aboard, and she was nervous. So was Blacktower. But he made her a bow in his best fashion.

"May I thank you?" he said.

"Oh, it wasn't me," she stammered. "It was up to Matt to decide."

"Please . . . I can take it easier from you."

There was a quality of feeling in his voice that caused her to extend her hand impulsively. "Good luck!" she said.

Legs and Bill climbed out on the pier with their meager belongings, and pulled Fay after them. Blacktower took the wheel and gave the engine-room two bells. The little dog was frisking around him. As the launch backed off, the steamboat whistled for her landing. The launch started ahead and disappeared behind her. Blacktower never looked back.

On the pier Fay clung to Legs' arm. All three of them were embarrassed by their emotions. Bill said, to break the spell:

“Less than a day's journey to Pará. Gosh! I hope we find a ship ready to sail for God's country!”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Scarred Jungle* by Hulbert Footner]