

ARGOSY

MARCH
9

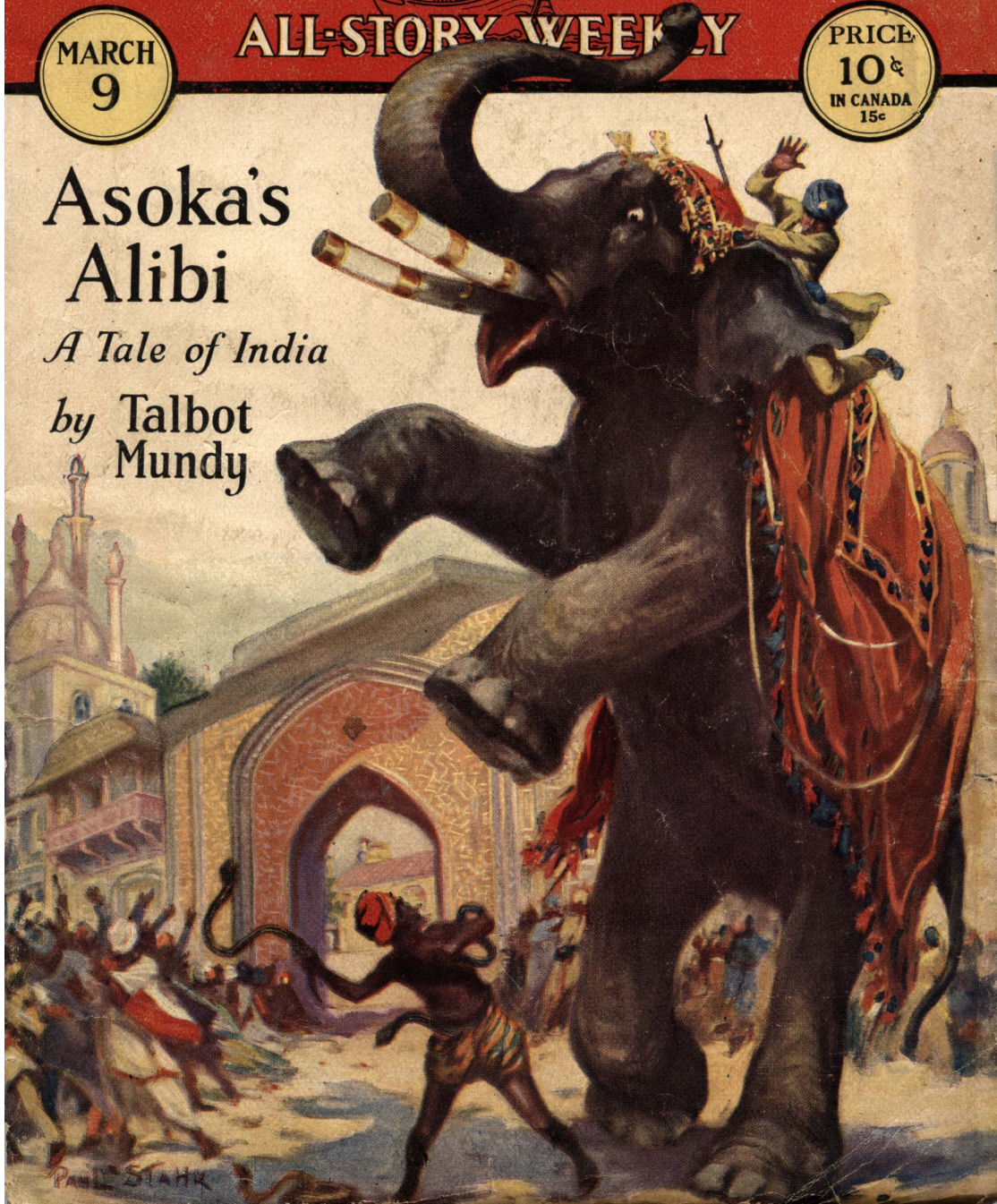
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

PRICE
10¢
IN CANADA
15¢

Asoka's Alibi

A Tale of India

by Talbot
Mundy



PAUL STAHR

* A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook *

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: Stopping 'Em With Lead

Date of first publication: 1929

Author: Wirt Winchester Young (1876-1950)

Illustrator: Paul Stahr (1883–1953)

Date first posted: October 6, 2026

Date last updated: October 6, 2026

Faded Page eBook #20261014

This eBook was produced by: Greg Weeks, Mary Meehan & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpcanada.net>

Stopping 'Em With Lead

By W. WIRT

*Author of "More Than a Double Cross,"
"War Lord of Many Swordsmen," etc.*

Novelette—Complete

*Jimmie Grant, of the Secret Service, and
Jimmie Earpe, Arizona Ranger, form an
alliance that starts plenty of trouble for
the smugglers of dope and Chinese tong men.*

[Transcriber's Note: This etext was produced from
Argosy All-Story Weekly March 9 1929.]

CHAPTER I.

THE BORDER TRAIL.

The pilot car on the Benson trail stopped as a Mexican stepped in the glare of the headlights and waved it down. The evil-faced little driver leaned out over the wheel.

"Come on," he snarled, "get a move on you. Whatinell do you think, that we got all day? Hurry up, spig!"

The Mexican understood the tone and finished the last ten feet to the car in a shuffling trot.

"*Señor!*" he chattered. "Back! *Vuelva Vd. pronto—muchos hombres delante! Rangeros!*"

"Get out of the way," answered the driver. "Tell Pedro O K," and the big car turned around, almost running over the Mexican, who for once in his life, jumped with the swiftness of a jack-rabbit. As he stood for a moment in the shadow of the mesquite, he muttered: "*Adios—diablos Americanos.*"

The car swayed desperately from side to side.

"What the hell, now?" asked the young, reckless-eyed man sitting beside him. "Do you reckon they are out for us, Mike?"

"Don't know and don't give a damn," snapped the driver, his eyes on the road. "It's up to us to pass the word, and up to Monckton to do the figuring. Keep still and let me drive, the boys are close behind us and coming fast."

A few minutes went by and then, as they rounded a curve, the headlights of two cars picked them up.

"There they are," said the man beside Mike. "We're in plenty of—what the hell are you doin', you crazy Irish—"

Mike had swung the car off the trail and was on the alkali of the desert. "Get to your rod, quick," he shouted. "Border Patrol! They're ambushin' us!"

The young man laughed and stood up, facing back in the swaying car, drawing a .45 Colt automatic. "Keep goin', Mike, old bull-buster," he grinned, his gun beginning to spit out a steel-jacketed answer to the streaks of red coming from the two cars now on the right rear.

"Stick and slug, Kid," shouted the man at the wheel. "It's catchin' before hangin'."

Whatever he was, this man Mike at the wheel had plenty of cold nerve. He drove that car blind, headlights out, through the desert at seventy-five and eighty miles an hour. The *thud-thud-thud* of bullets hitting the car didn't even make him wince. The Kid emptied his gun, snapped the magazine out, brought another out of his side pocket, slipped it in, raised his gun. They went up a little rise, swooped down again, and suddenly were in the clear.

Mike swung sharply to the left and the Kid sat down heavily. "Hope I can hit that damn trail again in time to turn the boys," Mike snarled. "It's a tip-off sure as shootin'."

"How'd you know they weren't our bunch?" asked the Kid.

"Because they didn't dim their lights when we flashed 'em. Sa-a-ay, how come you don't know that, Kid?"

"I never been out riding on this side before. Monckton brought me up from Tepoca. I been on the receivin' end down there and before that I was on the old Shark, transportin'. Hey, you're on the trail now, boy."

"I know it," grunted Mike, as he turned down the trail. "They ought to be along here right now. Maybe-so the shootin' turned 'em."

"There they are! Something anyway," said the Kid, a minute later. "Look—over to the right of the road. What the hell? All lights out!" The big car came to a brake-burning stop alongside of two others, just off the trail. Its headlights disclosed a scene of recent death, quick and merciless.

On the sand near the cars lay the bodies of four Chinese, sprawled out in different directions and attitudes, as if shot down while running. In the car nearest the trail was the body of a white man, slumped in the front seat. Over the wheel, his head resting on that man's body, lay another. In the other car, the muzzle of a Browning sub-machine gun showing between them, their bodies hanging out over the side, were two more white men, both dead.

As the Kid said, "Oh, my God," Mike drew a long whistling breath and reached for the gear shift. His hand froze on it as he felt a cold round ring of steel press into his neck and the drawl of a soft, deceptively mild old voice came to his ear. "Don't move, feller." Out of the corner of his eye, Mike could see the Kid stiffen as he had done, and he knew they were caught, like rats in a trap.

"You gents sit right still now," the old voice went on, "until my boys get them popguns you-all call pistols."

They felt hands pawing over them, searching for and finding their guns, then the voice again, "All right, son, turn on the lights and we'll see who's come to call on us."

The lights of the other two cars went on and Mike and the Kid saw around them the grim, tanned faces of the best shots in the world, the Arizona Rangers.

Old Ranger Captain Johnston, whose equally old ivory-handled single-action Colt .41 had been against Mike's neck, stepped close to the car.

"You gents are both under arrest," he said.

Mike laughed. "On what charge, rube?" He knew that he was in no danger of being killed or even manhandled, now that he was disarmed and under arrest. In a city, a question like that, with a word of derision or scorn tacked on to the end of it, would have brought an instant physical answer; but here in Arizona, he knew that while a ranger would cheerfully kill him if he resisted, or disobeyed an order, he could say what he wanted to. His warped brain did not or never could sense the utter scorn and loathing that he and his kind inspired in the hearts of the clean-living, hard-riding, straight-shooting outdoor men, whose code of honor was as fine and clear as a Knight Templar's.

"Well, suh," drawled Johnston. "You-all are carryin' weapons, that's one charge; unless you-all have a permit," and he paused skeptically.

"We haven't," grinned Mike; "go on, tell us some more. We're packin' those rods to protect us against a lot of bad

men that are hijackin' around here. Fellers that you drug store cowboys and coppers can't seem to get. That's easy; our mouthpiece will get us out an hour after you throw us in the coop. You got nothin' on us but that, big boy. Let's go."

"No hurry, feller," drawled Johnston. "Just step out of the car for a minute while we look it over."

"Think we got some yellow-bellies in the flaps?" sneered Mike, but doing as ordered, the Kid following him. "Look at all the hardware hanging around these birds, Kid."

The Kid smiled. "May I reach in my pocket for a cigarette?" he asked the ranger beside him. The Kid was a college man who had deliberately chosen the path of adventure and "easy money."

"Yeah, boy," answered young Jimmie Earpe, who measured up to the rest of the Earpes as a gunfighter, and went quite a little beyond, in the estimation of many in Arizona. "Go on, reach for it; and listen, feller, maybe-so you've got another gun planted. Bring that out, too. I'll give you first shot, honest Injun—both you and this mangy little coyote here that's been yappin'. Go on," he coaxed, "the rest of 'em ain't lookin'. Get something in your hand."

The Kid laughed. "I'd be delighted to oblige you," he drawled, "but at the moment I really only have some cigarettes in my pocket. Some other time—any other time, in fact, that you and I may meet."

Mike's evil, wizened-up little face grew even more so, as the lean, hard-bodied young ranger called him "a mangy little coyote."

"God made big men and God made little men," he snarled, "and Mr. Colt .45 he made all men equal. Gimme a gun, you big false alarm, and let's you and me step out in the light. I'll give you a chance to strut your stuff, cops or no cops."

Earpe chuckled. "I reckon Capt'n Johnston would get right fussy at me, if I did. You might try snatchin' at a gun."

"That's right, Jimmie," drawled Johnston, behind him.

"These here jaspers are prisoners. No gun playin' now, son. This here is business."

Later, Earpe, Chick Absolom, and Red River Thomas drove into Rosemont with the prisoners, Captain Johnston and the rest of the rangers and United States deputy marshals remaining at the scene of the killing. The Kid leaned forward to where Earpe was sitting in the front seat, half turned so that he could see them. "Your name is Earpe, isn't it?" he asked, politely.

"Yes, suh," answered Earpe, "Jimmie Earpe—so's you won't be gettin' me mixed up with Sam Earpe or William or Bud. Just ask for Jimmie Earpe and you'll get me, feller."

"Thanks," murmured the Kid, "that's just what I intend to do, Mr. Earpe."

"Dog-gone it," said Jimmie Earpe, plaintively, "and me on ranger business."

There was no question but what Mike had told the truth saying that he and the Kid only being in jail for an hour. It

was hardly that long before a big car roared into Rosemont and unloaded a quiet, well-dressed attorney from Nogales, who produced the bonds necessary and the car slipped swiftly out of Rosemont, this time with Mike and the Kid in it.

"Well," said Captain Johnston, later, when he had come in and learned that the two men were freed, "I didn't reckon we could hold 'em long. I was sure hopin' that we could, though, until that Federal man that's workin' with the district attorney got up here to look 'em over."

"How'd it come off, Wes?" asked ex-Ranger White, who had ridden line with Johnston in the old days, before they both became rangers.

"Well, suh, there was a tip come from somewhere that Gomez was on the road; and the Border Patrol boys and us reckoned we might box 'em in. These gents we let go by us, not thinkin' they'd meet up with the Patrol so soon. When the jaspers in the other two cars heard the shootin', they stopped, and it looked like the Chinamen made a break of some kind. When we got there, the shootin' was all over—the smugglers was kinda destroyin' the evidence, Wes, looks like to me. Anyway, those four hombres was just startin' away when we climbed 'em."

"Any of the boys get hurt?"

"Well, suh, that's a right, funny thing. They had 'em one of those little machine guns and when that hombre usin' it cut loose, he sure gave Billy Yancey a right good hair cut; took hat and hair right off him. Shotgun Collins got him one in the arm, and Sam Morgan drew him a right bad wound in the chest from one of them little automatics."

"Dog-gone," said Wes, enviously, "I shore wish I was there. Then what, Bud?"

"Why, that's all, Wes. Them four jaspers called it a day, right after."

CHAPTER II.

DESERT DUEL.

The car with Mike and the Kid pulled into Nogales about dawn and the suave, high-priced attorney unloaded them near a little house on the outskirts. There was a light burning in the kitchen and as they walked around from the front the Kid said, with a grin, "Kentuck will be willin' to give a rattler the first two bites after he hears this sad tale of woe."

The neatly dressed, solidly built, middle-aged man, who looked like men seen around city clubs, looked up from the solitaire game, but did not stop playing.

"I know about it," Kentuck said, quietly. "Are the boys all dead?"

"We didn't get a chance to go over and hold a post-mortem," answered the Kid, with a yawn, "being in conference with three or four rangers. From where we stood they looked plenty dead."

"Who turned you?"

"A spig—one of Pedro's men."

"Any other cars on the road?"

"We didn't meet any. Langdon took off with a couple of yellow gentlemen just before we pulled out," the Kid replied.

"How much snow and chandoo were you packing?"

"About sixty grand, all told."

"That's not so good," said Kentuck. "The chief will be very much fussed up, I'm afraid."

"Yeah?" The Kid was apparently not much impressed. "Well, I'll hit the hay. If you want me I'll be over to Francisco y Herrera de Gonzales's *pulperia*, where I have what is known as chambers. *Adios, amigo hasta mañana.*"

"How long has the Kid been up on this end?" Kentuck demanded of Mike, after the Kid had gone.

"Three weeks now. Clark told me that he's a game kid, but reckless as hell." Mike's mean little eyes tightened as his crafty brain, trained in race-track double and triple crossing, began to work. "Follow this through, Kentuck. Dolores Gonzales, the spig that the Kid thinks is his sweetie, is tricking him—her real sweetie is Juan Martinez."

"Well, what then?"

"This Juan was a rurale; and not long ago he was tellin' me that a United States deputy marshal named Beardsley saved his bacon for him. The Kid is a great bird for wah, wah stuff with the dames.

"Get it, Kentuck?"

"Sounds like from Evers to Tinker to Chance," said Kentuck, with a cold smile, then he played in silence for a little while. Suddenly he looked up and said, "Take the Kid for a ride."

"When, right now?" asked Mike.

"The sooner the better. Better get some sleep, Mike."

"And a rod," answered Mike, rising. "I got mine taken off me by them damn rangers. Say, Kentuck, I want to get a ranger

named Earpe, Jimmie Earpe—will you give me a hand to frame on him?"

"Why, sure, only you must want to die. They're a good outfit to let alone, those Earpes. You kill one, and you've only got started. There's four or five more coming up from behind all the time. They're too heavy for you, Mike. Better lay off."

"He called me a mangy little coyote," answered Mike, his little eyes venomous as a cobra's, "and I'm goin' to get him."

"Fair enough," said Kentuck, going back to his game. "I'll help you, of course."

"Where the hell was you-all the mornin'?" demanded Mike, when he finally located the Kid in one of the *pulperias*.

"Why, *pobrecito loco*, where else would I be but with Dolores Gonzales?"

"What's that you called me?" demanded Mike, suspiciously, "the first part." His Spanish consisted of two or three oaths.

"Why, it's a sort of a pet phrase which means 'poor little crazed one.' You must be, not knowing where I generally am. What's doing?"

"Kentuck wants us to drive out to the ranch and make sure that Langdon landed O. K."

"Yeah? He said last night that Langdon reported in. Well, it's nothing in my young life. I'd just as soon drive out in the country as not. Whose car are we going to take?"

Mike, who was a fastidious little man about his clothes, had stooped to brush some dust off his trousers leg when he made his statement about Langdon, and had missed the slight tightening of the Kid's eyes. When he straightened up it wasn't there for him to see.

"I got to get me a gat," the Kid said, lighting a cigarette.

"Kentuck gave me one last night," answered Mike. "We don't need any gats along. Them damn cops might be around and look us over. If they found gats on us, maybe-so our mouthpiece couldn't spring us this time. They got us pegged as something else besides tourists, boy. I'm going to plant the one Kentuck gave me in the seat stuffin'. Let's go. We can take that car of Kentuck's."

"You get her, Mike. I'll go and get me another bonnet. This one's too heavy."

"Hurry up, then. I'll pick you up in front of Ortiz's place."

They drove out toward the Atoscas Mountains, through Tubac and across the little curving branch of the Santa Cruze River, and kept going up the eastern slope of the foothills. Mike was driving the powerful roadster absent-mindedly, smoking one cigarette after another.

It was burning hot, with absolutely no breeze, and the Kid sat with the collar of his soft white silk shirt open, his left arm along the seat, his hand just behind Mike's head. He was singing little snatches of songs and watching the ever varying desert with eager young eyes that noted every movement of the "desert people." Suddenly he stopped singing and said:

"How do you like this game, Mike?"

"What game?" demanded Mike, coming back from where he mentally had Jimmie Earpe on his knees begging for mercy.

"Why, this gay buccaneer business, being land pirates and bad men and everything, like Sir Henry Morgan. Do you get a kick out of it?"

"Aw, fer cripe's sake," Mike snarled out of the corner of his mouth. "You're goofy, feller. I'm in it for the jack, nothin' else."

"Yeah? The way you talk out of the corner of your mouth, Mike, leads me to believe you been in stir. Have you been in stir, Mike?"

"Who wants to know?" grinned Mike.

"Why, I do. I'm your buddy, am I not, Mike?"

"Sure," answered Mike, turning to the left of the trail up a little cañon. "Regular buddies."

The Kid laughed, and after a moment or so asked softly:

"What are you stopping here for, Mike?"

"Hear that canary? I've been hearin' it ever since we started. I told Kentuck yesterday he had one in this damn car.

"Get out and see if you can find it, will you, Kid? I'll run the engine, maybe-so you can locate it. I hate like hell to drive with a squeak."

"I don't mind it," said the Kid lazily, "and you needn't bother about it, Mike. You're not going to hear it any longer."

Mike's left hand, which had been down at his side, stopped abruptly in the pocket where it had slipped with the ease and quickness of a snake in its hole. Once again in twenty-four hours he felt a cold, round little circle pressing against the top of his spine.

"You poor fool," the Kid was saying softly, his body in the same position as before, his head turned a little toward Mike, his left arm now a little bent—"you poor ignorant little fool! As wise a guy as you think you are, to let a man ride along with his left arm back of you! If you move, Mike, you're dead. This .25-caliber steel-jacketed automatic bullet isn't so very big, but I've got her where she can go through what little brains you pack. Sit still, Mike, and listen, so's you can tell all the pretty angels—or, rather, all the little imps—just how come you got yours."

"Aw, hell," sneered Mike, "cut her loose, feller, an' quit that damn kiddin'. I ain't afraid to go. Cut her loose if you feel that way."

"Scar-faced Tony Mareno taught me how to pack a little automatic up my sleeve on a spring, Mike. You know, the lad that Federal agent knocked off last year. It's like one of those telephone things that stretches out. I'm telling you this, Mike, so your crooked soul won't go to hell worrying how come."

"Doin' a little torturin' first, ain't you?" sneered Mike. "Go ahead and talk your head off. You ain't got me goin' yet."

"That'll be all, Mike. Get ready to say good morning, God—Oh, damn it all, I can't pull trigger with you sitting still that way. Draw your gun, Mike; this is too much like killing a baby."

"I won't," said Mike calmly. "You would pull then, and I'd have no chance."

The Kid's reckless laugh echoed among the hills. "It's a stalemate," he said. "I can't kill you like this. Mike, did you ever hear of a duel—a regular duel?"

"Yeah," answered the game little gangster, "I seen two fellows fight one once down in the Argentine."

"Well, only one of us can drive out of here, Mike. I could kill you, take this car and pull for the north—if I weren't born and bred otherwise. Here is what we'll do. Listen carefully now. You take your left hand out of your pocket and your right from the wheel and raise them up over your head. I'll take your gat as soon as you raise your hands, then you get out and walk the forty paces.

"I'll come after you until I've stepped off twenty; then I'll put your rod down on the ground and walk back. When I holler 'Halt,' you turn and walk back to your gat. I'll have mine on the ground also. When I say 'Go,' we'll help ourselves from then on. Got it, Mike?"

Mike's answer was to raise his hands.

The Kid naturally couldn't see the cruel, exultant gleam in his little pig-like eyes.

"That's the boy," said the Kid, reaching in Mike's left pocket and taking out the automatic. "You haven't another on you,

by any chance?" He slapped Mike's shirt under the armpits and felt his trousers legs.

"I ain't got no gun," growled Mike. "You're givin' me a break, Kid; I'll play square."

"I doubt if you know the meaning of the word," answered the Kid. "I'm the one that's playing square—with myself. I ought to kill you like a rat, and I know it. Go on, get started."

Mike walked the forty paces, stopped when the Kid called, turned and walked slowly back to where his gun lay on the hot alkali.

The Kid stood, a smile on his young face, the little .25 caliber automatic at his feet. This was a bigger thrill than he had ever experienced. This watching a man walk slowly toward a gun and knowing that in another half moment he would have it in his hand, spitting out death. This was the spirit in which the knights of old used to fight.

Mike reached the gun and halted, his right hand spread out like a claw.

"Ready?" called the Kid cheerfully.

"Wait a minute. I'm as game a guy as you are, Kid; you ain't got an even break with that little .25 from there. You pick your gat up, and I'll walk back a little. You come and get my rod and drop it again ten paces closer. Then we'll go."

The Kid laughed. "Mike, you've some good blood in you somewhere. I never thought of that. All right, start back."

When the operation of getting the duelists to within thirty feet of each other had been completed and once more they faced each other, the Kid again called:

"Ready?"

"Yeah," called back Mike, an evil sneer on his twisted lips. "I'm—" His right hand flashed back of his neck, then out, and his arm straightened. A flicker of steel like a lightning flash passed between him and the Kid, shoulder high, and lost itself in the Kid's chest, in spite of the instantaneous swerve of his body as his eye caught the motion.

Mike stood and watched the body as it pitched forward.

"There's another thing I learned in the Argentine, Mr. Wise Guy Kid," he said. "That's as good as that sleeve stuff."

He went to where the Kid lay, his face to the hot sand, and turned him over with his foot. The deadly throwing knife of the tropics was buried to the hilt in the Kid's gallant young heart, and he had met the great adventure like the officer and gentleman he had once been.

"Not so bad," he said as he stooped to draw out the knife. "I'm still good."

The whine of a high-powered rifle bullet came to his ears as his hat jumped from his head. A second later and he felt a searing pain in his left shoulder. He straightened up without the dagger and ran for the car, the bullet-whines following him, little spurts of sand jumping up around him. He made it, threw himself in, started the motor and turned. As he did he heard the *thud, thud* of bullets against the car body. As he stepped on the gas a bullet grazed his ear, making a neat hole in the windshield, then no more, as the car leaped down the cañon.

Mike sprinted for the car, bullet-whines following him, and sand spurting up all around him.

"Magazine empty," Mike grunted aloud. "This is sure my lucky day. Wonder who the hell that was and how much he seen?"

CHAPTER III.

THE FEDERAL AGENT.

Federal Agent James H. Grant sat in conference with United States District Attorney Sawyer and United States Marshal Sam Putney in the Attorney's office in the Federal building in Phoenix. Ranger Captain Johnston was there also.

"It was sure a right funny break," Johnston was saying. "It wasn't the outfit we were after at all, son. We heard that Gomez was comin' across, and so we was kinda ridin' herd on him, when these jaspers came runnin' plumb into the net. What-all happened to Gomez's outfit I don't know. Maybe-so they heard the ruckus and went home."

"You were fishing for minnows and caught a whale, captain," said Jimmie Grant, his lean, browned face lighting up as he smiled at the old Ranger captain, who had more notches on his old Colt than he cared to count, not including Mexicans. "I know it ties in somewhere with the gang we're after, but where, I'm frank to say, I can't see at the moment. One thing I do know, and that is that those Chinamen that were killed were Chang Kwang Tong men. No one touched the bodies, I suppose, until we got there?"

"I don't reckon they did, son," answered Johnston. "At least I left orders with the boys, and my orders ain't always disobeyed."

"I'll bet they're not," Grant smiled cordially. "Well, they didn't have anything on 'em; but one of them had the high

Tong mark on his wrist; and if he was a Chang Kwang it's a cinch the others were also. This bird we're after does business with them; we now know that much."

"Is that going to help you any, Jimmie?" asked the District Attorney.

Jimmie Grant was working openly, not under cover; and he smiled as he answered: "It ought to, in some way; but how? I wish I knew. It may be that when I get the reports of the under-cover men that are on it with me, it may fit in. I've got a bearcat planted—"

The door opened, and the District Attorney's secretary stuck her pretty little head in a few inches. "Mr. Sawyer, Ranger James Earpe wants to know if you're right busy?"

"Tell him to come in, Betty," answered Sawyer, then as the door closed behind her: "Bud, you're always bragging about this Jimmie Earpe of yours, maybe he can give Mr. Grant here a line."

"Who—me?" demanded Johnston, as the door opened and Earpe came in. "Brag 'bout that no-'count scoundrel? That Earpe boy is just naturally worthless, yes, suh! I'm talkin' about you, Jimmie—you-all come on over and shake hands with another Jimmie. This here one's name is Grant, and he's a Federal agent from Washington."

Earpe smiled cheerfully; he knew that old Ranger Captain Johnston was telling them, and him, how much he loved him. "I'm right glad to meet up with you, Mr. Grant," he said as he shook hands. With the first quick glance of his keen young blue eyes he knew that Grant "belonged."

Jimmie Grant's hand tightened in Earpe's. "Being as how we're two Jimmies," he said, "let's you and me sink the mister stuff. You be Jimmie No. 1, and I'll be Jimmie No. 2. How is that?"

"Suits me down to the ground," young Earpe answered promptly. "I got me something that might interest you a whole lot, Jimmie. That's the reason I came up, to show it to Mr. Sawyer here."

"Light and sit," said Marshal Putney, who had ridden the range in the old days with both Johnston and Sawyer, and had looked through the fog of gun smoke with Jimmie Earpe's father many times.

"Well, suh," said Jimmie Earpe, slouching into a chair. "Yesterday Jinny—that's my sister," he explained to Grant, "and old Ma Collins that's visitin' us down on the Lazy W, went up to see how Grizzly Callen was gettin' along. He's an old prospector that got him a dig up back of Snake Cañon. On the way back they sights a car coming, so they holes up behind a bunch of mesquite to watch 'em, it not being natural for a car to wander up thataway. Jinny, she's packing her thirty-thirty. The car stops and two men get out and begin to do what Jinny thought was some kind of surveyin' or locatin'.

"Old Ma Collins can't see right good, and she allus totes Slim's field glasses around with her—bein' loco about birds and such. All at once one of the men pitches forward, and Jinny says she could just make out that the other threw something. Old Ma Collins had the glasses on 'em, and she

lets out a hoot and grabs Jinny's thirty-thirty and begins tryin' to get her the feller that was standing. She did lift his hat off, Jinny says, and—"

"Dog-gone," said old Ranger Captain Johnston. "Ma still's got some of her shootin' eye left anyway. Darn good thing for that jasper that she was gettin' a little near-sighted. Time was when Sarah Collins could outshoot old Shotgun himself with a pistol for a rifle.

"You hombres remember the time she stood off the Waco Kid and his gang and got her three of them to boot? Man—"

"Gettin' old, gettin' old," moaned United States Marshal Putney, turning to Sawyer. "Talkin' all the time, pore ole man. Too bad, ain't it, Bill?"

"He is, old and feeble," answered Sawyer. "He was a right good man once, too, wasn't you, Bud?"

"Go on, son," Johnston told Earpe. "Never mind these two old polecats always buttin' in. Ma cracked down on him; then what?"

"Why, Jinny says that she grabbed the glasses, and could see the sand fly up all around this gent that was foggin' it right smart toward his car. He got away and they slid down to see what for. The jasper lying on the ground was dead, with a knife in his heart. They didn't stay around no more, but burned the wind gettin' back to the ranch. Jinny, she telephones me, and I come out with Bob Beardsley.

"The man that was dead is the one that we took in night before last—the young, smilin' one they called Kid. The other jasper, from the description Ma and Jinny gives, is the little feller that got right fussed up when I called him a

coyote. We got the knife out and wrapped it right careful so's not to disturb the finger-prints; and on the Kid's body, tucked under the lining of his waistband, we found this."

Earpe tossed on the table a half sheet of notepaper. The three men bent toward it as one. On it was written in a very good hand:

KENTUCK:

The Kid is the Chang Kwang Tong man for Mexico. Do whatever he says.

It was signed by a square in the middle of which the numbers 2-0-0-0 were written. That was all.

"My gosh," gasped Jimmie Grant; "it's gettin' like Alice in Wonderland. You say the Kid and the bird that knocked him off were together last night in one of the cars; they must have been acting as pilot car for the others, and the border patrol turned them—that's easy. But why does Jimmie's little 'coyote' knock this buddy off the next day, especially if he knows he's a representative of the hardest-boiled Tong in the world?

"Unless he's a damn fool he would know that they'd boil him in oil sooner or later. Wait—maybe he didn't know. I'm just thinking out loud. Any one got a line on who this Kentuck is? There's forty Kentucks in every neck of the woods."

"I reckon," Johnston put in, "this here Kentuck is George Mears, the gambler over at the Ace of Spades across the line."

This here Kid and the little jasper have been seen with him once or twice, my boys tell me."

"Yeah? Well, let's go on the basis that he is. Then he has been top cutter for this bird who makes a square with 2-0-0-0 in the middle of it for his John Hancock. This Kentuck has been falling down and—No, that's wet. They'd simply put him on the spot and send another man in. Maybe—so the Chang Kwang can't understand why so many of its members get knocked off. Have you been turning many back lately, Mr. Sawyer?"

"Don't get a chance," answered Sawyer grimly. "We've been finding quite a few dead, like this time. I heard that when the Barracuda left Martinique she had forty on board; but when the coast guard picked her up she was empty."

"That's just what makes me want to kill these birds first and arrest 'em after," said Jimmie Grant grimly. "They'll throw the Chinese overboard or shoot them the moment they think they are in danger of getting knocked off. That darn thing," and he pointed to the square and numbers in it, "reminds me of something—Holy Mackinaw! Monckton! See—2000—2000 pounds to a ton!

"He's the bird higher up that we're after—that's cold turkey! He's shipping in yellow brothers for the Chang Kwang; Kentuck is one of his lieutenants; the Kid was working in the gang as the Tong man. There may not have been any trouble; he came on to look at this end—didn't show this to Kentuck—so, after the other day's knock-off, Kentuck, not knowing who the Kid is, any more than that he's one of the mob, orders him taken for a ride as a squealer—and the little man does it.

"I don't get that walking up and down stuff, but it doesn't matter. Kentuck has pulled a frightful boner, having the Kid killed. I was in China long enough to know how the Tongs feel about a thing like that!"

"How come this Jasper Monckton to be so careless as to give this here Kid writin', Jimmie?" asked Earpe.

"I don't know. Maybe the Kid asked for something to show Kentuck, if he had to. Maybe Kentuck would not take word of mouth. There's nothing criminal in representing a Tong, Jimmie; the Five Companies have lots of white men doing business for them. It's a darn good job, on the legitimate end.

"There was no danger to Monckton. He could have addressed it to Mr. George Mears and signed it Charles L. Monckton, and asked the D. A. here to deliver it.

"If the Kid had 've been killed with the Chinese in the car and the note found, Monckton would have said: 'Certainly; I do business with the Chang Kwang, as I do with a good many Chinese societies. On their request I gave their representative a note to one of my friends.'

"What does the 'Do as he says' mean? Why, it seems that a Chinaman absconded with a temple idol—or any old thing, see, Jimmie? The Kid was sent to round him up, and Monckton, out of the goodness of his heart, ordered one of his men-Fridays to help him. Just try to prove anything different! Suppose we ask him: 'How about the Kid being found with some Chinamen running the line, Mr. Monckton?' He smiles and says: 'You will have to ask him; I know nothing of his—er—personal activities.' You can't prove anything. His attorney will jump up and say: 'Just what is the charge against my client?' Isn't that right, Mr. Sawyer?"

"Boy," answered the District Attorney with deep feeling, "who knows that better than I? That paper doesn't mean a thing as far as evidence goes."

"That's right," agreed Jimmie Grant. "But I wonder just how strong Monckton is now with the Chang Kwang? Here's four of their high-binders cold-meated, and the next day one of their white brothers. If it was only the high-binders, they might pass it off as the fortunes of war; but the Kid's death is going to take some fast explaining. Monckton will unquestionably throw Kentuck to the wolves, but will that satisfy them?"

"If I could only frame something that would lead them to blame it all on Monckton—I know it's there, if I can dope it out. Their headquarters are in San Francisco. Well, I'll get on it; maybe it'll be the weak link in the chain. He's suspected of more than slipping yellow brothers over the line. There was a big gem robbery abroad not long ago that included some foreign government stuff, that he's tabbed with engineering."

"We might have the sheriff bring in this man that killed the Kid," suggested the District Attorney, "on a murder charge, if Jinny and Ma Collins will swear to the information. That will put him away in a safe place, and he might break enough to give us some stuff to go on. Would it make this Monckton suspicious, Jimmie?"

"Natural thing for the sheriff to do," answered Grant promptly. "Go get him, hold him *incomunicado*—maybe-so we can open him up."

"Please, suh," said Jimmie Earpe, his eyes shining, as he turned to Ranger Captain Johnston, "can you-all get me that warrant to serve?"

"That's a sheriff's warrant, and it's up to his deputies," began the old Ranger captain sternly. Then, as he saw the disappointment in Earpe's eyes, he finished with: "But if you-all got a feud with this here little feller, I reckon it might be arranged."

"And listen to me," the District Attorney added, "I want this hombre alive."

"Yes, suh," answered Jimmie Earpe, standing up. "I'll shore bring him in for you, Mr. Sawyer. No shootin'—"

"Unless to protect your life," Johnston finished for him.

"Unless to protect my life," Jimmie repeated gravely. "I'll go and get Jinny and Ma Collins right away."

CHAPTER IV.

MIKE, THE KILLER.

Mike went over to the Ace of Spades and played draw poker until he saw Kentuck push back from his stud game. They sauntered to meet at the bar, had a couple of rounds, then drifted slowly outside to where some chairs were lined up against the 'dobe wall in the shade. They moved two chairs away from the rest and sat down, tilting back against the building.

"I did 'er," said Mike, lighting a cigarette. "He's havin' sand for breakfast."

"Yeah? Any trouble?"

"Not much. He had a rod up his sleeve and hung it on me at first. Something made him suspicious, I guess. Anyway, I bulled him out of it, and finally I slipped a sparkler into him. It was a pretty throw, all of thirty feet. He couldn't dodge it, and—"

"Forget it, Mike," said Kentuck, "long as it's done. Did you go through him?"

"Naw—I didn't have time."

"What's that?" demanded Kentuck, his chair coming down heavily on the ground. "What do you mean by that?"

"Aw, it wasn't anything. I was just stoopin' over to get my knife, when somebody way up in the hills began crackin'

down on me with a high-powered rifle. I high-balled it outta there."

Kentuck's face was impassive as he asked:

"How far away were they, Mike?"

"Way up on the side of the hill. Hell, they couldn't see me or what it was all about."

"Then why did they shoot at you?" asked Kentuck. "You say you left your knife, also?"

"Sure I did. So would you or any one else," answered Mike, with a grin. "You're thinkin' about finger-printin'. They send 'em in, and they correspond with a guy named Goofy alias Gafoozalum, who went to Copper John. My name is Mike Maloney—but what's that got to do with them suspectin' me?"

Kentuck looked at him as if he were a new kind of bug. "You were picked up the other night with the Kid," he said. "You have been seen around here with him; you drove out of town with him, and you got back alone. Instead of choosing a place where you'd be safe and could leave him for the coyotes to play with, it seems as if you picked out a spot like a theater stage. You must have softening of the brain. I understood that you knew your business."

"I do," snarled Mike. "All that is applesauce. We was way up a cañon."

"This man that shot at you—what would he do, just as soon as he made sure you'd pulled out?"

"He'd come down and take a look," said Mike, with a grin, "and find the Kid with a knife in him. What of it?"

"Then what would he do?" went on Kentuck, ignoring Mike's flippancy.

"Go and holler for some of them damn rangers or border patrol cops," answered Mike. "What the hell can they do?"

"And I picked you out!" said Kentuck softly. "Mike, you see the border? Well, you stay on this side of it, understand? They'd have to frame with the rurales to get you, or else go through all the red tape of extradition. I'm in good enough to stop any frame, I guess. It may be that they won't think the Kid important enough to make any fuss over, at that. They'll put it down to a gang killing, and let it go."

"I got to go over and get my car and clothes," said Mike. "I ain't afraid of any of those damn rube cops. I'll come over, if you say so."

"I do; very much so. And at that, I think you had better pull out for Tepoca instead of hanging around here."

"Whichever you say," answered Mike, with a yawn. "It makes no never-mind to me, as long as I get mine."

He had a couple more drinks, some lunch, played a little more poker, then leisurely sauntered across the line into United States territory, without any thought of fear. Going to the garage where he kept his car, he paid his bill, drove around settling several small accounts, and finally about four o'clock drove up to the curb in the quiet little side street where he had a room in one of the ornate little bungalows.

He stepped out of the car and reached in for his coat, which had been on the seat beside him. Tossing it over his left arm, he crossed the sidewalk. As he put his foot up to take the one stone step leading from the sidewalk to the bungalow walk, he stopped.

From between his bungalow and the next came Arizona Ranger Earpe, his gun on his right hip, hanging low and a little to the front. It was a Colt .45 with mother-of-pearl handle, once the gun of the famous Wyatt Earpe. Earpe stopped twelve feet away from Mike:

"I have a warrant for your arrest, Maloney. Put your hands up!"

The little gangster looked steadily at Earpe. Here was the man who had called him a little mangy coyote. His car was at the curb; there were plenty of safe places beyond the line; and, best of all, his gat was in the side pocket of the coat hanging over his left arm. It was within two inches of his right hand, which had been raised to put a cigarette in his mouth when he froze at the sight of Earpe.

He could see that Earpe's right hand hung loosely at his side, four or five inches away from his gun butt. Two inches for him, and five for Earpe; the safety was off his automatic, as always; the butt was up, and he could cut loose through the pocket. All of this went through his brain in the flash of time that Earpe said "Put your hands up!"

All his mean and crooked life he had been fast—fast as a jockey, fast as a fighter; he was quick with a gun and quicker with a knife. Now, as he made his decision, his right hand went in to the loosely hanging pocket of the linen coat,

already opened and sagging with the weight of the .38 caliber automatic.

He put every ounce of speed he had into the effort. It was as light and quick as the dip of a swallow in the twilight.

As the cloth raised his eyes lighted with unholy joy—to be closed forever in darkness as a .45 Colt lead bullet crashed between them.

The city gangster, killer, and bad man had tried out his swiftness against the hard-riding, clean-living, clear-eyed ranger, down in the southwest, where gun swiftness was common and the Earpe family noted.

He lost.

Jimmie Earpe stood looking down at the man he had killed in self-defense, smoke still curling from his .45.

"You may have been little, and you may have lived like a mangy coyote, but you shore died game, feller," he said softly.

CHAPTER V.

YACHTING PARTY.

The trim white yacht, every inch of its brasswork polished and shining in the hot sun, its paintwork immaculate, lay at anchor in a little bay between Cape Tepoca and Cape Lobos in the Gulf of California. It flew the flag of an exclusive Eastern yacht club.

The bay was one hundred and fifty miles below Port Isabel, fifty-odd miles from Yuma. The owner, sitting with two other men beneath the gayly striped awning over the quarter-deck aft, listened intently to what one of the men was relating.

His face showed unmistakable signs of birth and breeding, but was hard and cold, as was his eyes. The two men with him were of the same type, one about forty, the other ten years younger.

The awning kept the hot sun out, and several electric fans gave a cooling breeze. The wicker table around which they were sitting was loaded with bottles bearing foreign labels, soda bottles, cracked ice, and glasses. Several curiously carved Chinese dishes or bowls held candied fruits and preserves.

"I am very much afraid," the owner said, leaning over and carefully selecting a piece of candied ginger, "that Mr. George Mears has, we shall say, outlived his usefulness to us. You say, Langdon, that he told you frankly that he had—how

do you term it?—oh, yes—'put the Kid on the spot.' I say, Carewe, that's a bit of Yankee slang for you to remember."

"I asked him where the Kid was, Monckton," replied Langdon, the young man of the party, "and he told me that; he added that his man Mike seemed to have done it in plain sight of some one who began to shoot his disapproval of such methods."

All three men smiled. They were university men; Carewe an Englishman, who, if he wished, could use one of the proudest titles in England; Monckton and Langdon, Americans. All of them suave gentlemen, and ruthless killers and pirates by choice. They had been born some centuries too late. In Sir Francis Drake's day they would have been captains in his fleet—or have a fleet of their own. Monckton had plenty of money, as did Carewe. Instead of living on it, or being useful members of society, they deliberately used their wealth and their clever brains to prey on the very society that had given it to them.

Langdon was as they were, sans the money. He made up in absolute recklessness and daring what he lacked in that respect. The relationship was practically that of Monckton, captain; Carewe, first lieutenant; Langdon, second lieutenant.

"I wonder," Monckton went on, "if the Kid had told or shown Kentuck who he was?"

"Evidently not," answered Langdon, "or he wouldn't have dared do what he did."

"You say that a Ranger named Earpe killed Mike?"

"Yes. They must have had a tip; probably from the chap that shot at him before. Anyway, Earpe had a warrant for his

arrest. It doesn't point to us, as far as I can see."

"Not as far as the killing goes, no. But it does put me in a frightful position with the Chang Kwang. Wang Li has been getting rather uppish lately about losing so many men; now I must go to him with the story of four more of his best hatchet men, and, to crown it, one of his best-liked lieutenants."

"Why go?" drawled Carewe. "Put in to San Francisco and send for him to come on board."

"Send for Wang Li! Old chap, that Five Star must have gone to your head. He's more apt to send for me. Here, you!" to a sailor who had appeared around from the port side of the steam launch, swung in-board. "What are you doing there?"

The sailor, a young man whose flaxen hair, blue eyes and fair skin showed Teutonic blood, came to attention and saluted.

"De—de boson he tell me to the little boat clean," he stammered. "I jus' got de dime to up on deck come."

"Get forward," ordered Monckton curtly, "and pass the word for Captain Davis or Mr. Clark to come aft." To his companions he added: "I wonder how much he heard?"

"Nothing, probably," answered Langdon indifferently; "and if he did, he wouldn't get half of it. Those squareheads are two-thirds moron anyway, except when it comes to the sea. Supposing he did hear something, what could he do with it?"

"That's the first time my rule has been disobeyed," said Monckton sternly. "You are no doubt right, Langdon, but we were talking rather freely."

Mr. Clark, the first officer, came hurrying up. He was a tall, well-built, rangy man about twenty-eight years of age. Hard-faced, with cold blue eyes and tight lips.

"Captain Davis is indisposed, sir," he began to Monckton.

"For that, read drunk," sneered Carewe, helping himself to a big drink of brandy.

"Which same he has a perfect right to be, as long as the anchor's over the side," said Monckton suavely. "A very good man, at all times. Allow me to suggest, Carewe, that you tighten up a bit; you know what that brandy does to you. Well, Mr. Clark, you are familiar with the rules and regulations of this yacht?"

"Yes, sir," answered Clark, a flush coming in his cheeks.

"Quite so. And what is the one regarding enlisted men, or any other man for that matter, coming aft on the quarter-deck while the owner is present? Unless sent for, of course."

"Same as on the bridge, sir. Not allowed."

"Right; and yet, not five minutes ago, I looked up from a private conversation with these gentlemen and saw an enlisted man within hearing."

"Some mistake, sir," answered Mr. Clark.

"A bad one, Mr. Clark. I pride myself on the efficiency of my officers. This man stated that the boson had sent him up to clean the launch. Look into it, please, and report to me. The man is the one who passed the word to you to come aft. And by the way, Mr. Clark, cancel any shore leave he may have; and I would suggest that he be given duties that would require his time—below. You understand me, Mr. Clark?"

"Yes, sir," answered Mr. Clark grimly. "He will be sent below, some time to-night."

He gave a brisk navy salute and left.

Langdon whistled.

"My hat, Monckton. You're not going to have that poor devil sent west, are you? What could he do, even if he did hear anything?"

"Better safe than sorry," said Monckton, reaching for some more ginger. "What's his life against mine, or any of ours? A good many organizations have been broken up by letting some little thing go by. We were careless in the first place, but there is no need of being careless twice. You left the plane at the ranch, Langdon?"

Carewe had risen and sauntered around the quarter-deck behind the launch, looked carelessly in it, then returned to his seat. The launch was the only boat swung inward on the quarter-deck, because of its size, requiring extra large davits.

"Go ahead," he said as he came back and sat down. "All clear now. If that sailor just came up, why didn't we see him coming?"

"Chances are he was corked up in there," smiled Langdon. "I know I used to, when I was in France, every chance I got, rules or no rules. Yes, Monckton, I unloaded my two passengers on schedule and took the car. I was heading for Kentuck when I heard the news. You owe Pedro something; he turned the pilot car as soon as he heard the boys were out.

"Say, you chaps, that brings me up to my knitting. I'm done, Monckton. That was my last flight for the outfit. I'm quitting

—matter of fact, I'm done done, as the old colored man used to say."

"I don't quite get that, Langdon," said Monckton calmly.

"You mean that you are going to pull out, entirely?"

"Yes. I'm fed up. All I get out of this is the privilege of flying, and I had enough of that in France. I'm going on my own for awhile."

"You have always received your share, haven't you?"

"I have," answered Langdon. "No argument there at all. I'm just fed up with this neck of the woods and being dry nurse for a lot of yellow brothers. I'll take my share of the stones, if you don't mind, and go away from here."

"Sorry, old chap," said Monckton. "At the moment they are not available for division; and besides that, it won't be quite convenient to have you pull out."

Langdon laughed.

"Just like that? Well, I never cared much regarding the conveniences—and you had much better get the—shall I say loot?—for division. Pronto."

Carewe, who had been drinking steadily, leaned forward, his eyes contracted to pin points. "I say, old thing, that could be very readily construed as a threat, you know."

"Why, so it could," grinned Langdon. "The brandy has sharpened up your brain, old bean?"

"Steady," warned Monckton evenly. "Let's give each other the credit for knowing that none of us is a man to play with very much. Just what is the basic idea of your wanting to quit the game, Langdon?"

"Well," answered Langdon, smiling at Monckton, whom he really liked, "frankly, I'm going in on my own, without any partners."

"Here?" asked Monckton, reaching for some of the candied fruit.

"Not exactly here, on this spot; farther up the coast."

"Sorry, old dear," said Monckton. "I am afraid that it can't be done—at the moment anyway. It would interfere with several things at the moment."

"No?" questioned Langdon quietly. "Just how do you think you can stop me?"

Carewe leaned forward a little.

"The same way as we have stopped many a man, my lad."

"Yeah?" said Langdon silkily. "Well, laugh this off, both of you. I will fly no more yellow brothers, or snow, or chandoo, over the line for you. I want my cut from the stones in, say, ten days."

"If you are very, very lucky," interrupted Carewe, "you may drink your morning coffee twice more. With extraordinary luck, perhaps three times."

"I have a rendezvous with death," quoted Langdon with a laugh. "I did as the Japs do before going into battle, Carewe,

a long time ago. I held my own funeral. So really the matter doesn't interest me."

"I will take the deck, Carewe, if you don't mind," said Monckton. "Listen, Langdon; you have always received your share; you have never been asked to do anything more than you agreed to do. I knew you on the western front and know that you are all right in every way—but it will take a better reason than you have advanced to explain your sudden desire to quit the game; at least as far as we are concerned. I know that you would not give out any information, of course, but you might readily fog up our lines if you went in as an independent."

Langdon laughed. "I ran out of reasons last night and forgot to bring any more with me. All the talk is bush-wah as far as I am concerned. I am washed up, Monckton. You can put me ashore again, right here."

"Sorry." Monckton shook his head. "If you persist, Langdon, I'm afraid I'll have to concur in what Carewe said. There are many ways to die—some short and pleasant, some long and—very unpleasant. I am afraid that Wang Li might not care to have competition."

Langdon gave vent to an amused, reckless laugh. "In other words, if I do not continue to play in your yard, I meet Wang Li. Well, I never learned to count costs, and I'm much too old to begin now. So the bet goes as she lays. You can deliver my cut in the stones to Smithie, in San Francisco."

Carewe snarled a laugh. "You can't get by with it, Langdon. You're in with us too far. Who's backing you?"

"Who wants to know?" questioned Langdon silkily.

There was a sudden tension in the air, although none of the three men changed his position in the slightest. When Langdon issued the underworld challenge, it was as if all the softness, culture and breeding had suddenly sloughed off, leaving only the naked, merciless, cruel killers exposed.

"I think it only fair to tell you," Monckton said very softly indeed, "that if Mrs. Monckton has anything to do with your sudden desire to pull out, that I have been fully aware of your plans for some time, and at the moment she is not in a position to join you as arranged. I knew some time ago that you and she had planned to go—Sit tight, Carewe! This is my show!"

The words were intermingled with the whiplike crack of Carewe's automatic. He loved the woman who posed as Monckton's wife, and the sudden knowledge that Langdon was the favored one snapped him into action. He had half risen and fired through the pocket of his immaculate white linen coat.

Langdon's body had swerved out and to the right as he saw Carewe start to rise, and his hand had flashed under his left armpit and out with a .38 Savage automatic.

As he fired straight into Carewe's drink-inflamed face, his left shoulder jerked back from the impact of the steel-jacketed bullet from Carewe's gun.

Monckton slid from his seat like the gray shadow of a jungle cat flitting across a moonlit space among the trees, and

before the body of Carewe fell against the table he had tilted it and with all his strength shoved it against Langdon's legs, throwing him off balance for a moment. Kneeling, he fired twice at Langdon, hitting both times. Langdon returned the fire, standing erect, his heels together as if at attention, a smile on his lips in spite of his wounds.

There is one thing about an automatic which many a gangster has found in times of stress. The slender steel-jacketed bullet goes through so fast that it cauterizes the wound and prevents much bleeding. Unless a man is hit in a vital spot, it does not stop him, at least for a little while.

Monckton's face all at once seemed to have a curtain of blood lowered over it, and he slumped to the no longer spotless deck, his automatic sliding from his nerveless hand.

Langdon stood for a moment watching him, looked at the body of Carewe, laughed, holstered his gun, turned and, staggering to the rail, slowly climbed up on it. He poised a moment and took the water in a clean, perfect dive. The shore lay three hundred yards away, and the water between was calm as a mill pond.

From the quiet, peaceful scene of three gentlemen in spotless whites, sitting under the striped awning of a private yacht with their cooling drinks, it had in less time than the count of five in the ring changed to what looked like a shambles.

Men came from both the starboard and port gangways. Monckton stirred and tried to raise his head, then fell back again.

A man dressed as a ship's officer stepped from the wheelhouse, a thirty-thirty Winchester in his hands. As

Langdon's head appeared for a moment fifty feet away, he calmly raised the rifle and fired once. The head disappeared and a little splotch of blood floated on the surface for a moment.

The man who had shot put the Winchester down, and, going to the bridge ladder, came on deck. As he turned to go aft he ran into the sailor who had caused him to get a "wiggling" from Monckton.

"What the hell are you doing forward?" he snarled. "Get below, you damn piece of Dutch cheese! What were you doing to port?"

"I does shots heard," stammered the sailor, "und on deck ran mit de rest. Boson he holler de doctor to get und he forward point."

"Get below," Clark ordered, "and stay below."

Clark then ran aft to find that Monckton had been taken below, as had the body of Carewe. Stewards already were busy with buckets and mops.

The sailor, instead of obeying Clark, went to the side, eased himself gently under the bottom rail, hung by his hands for a moment, then dropped silently into the water. He swam close to the ship's side until he came to the bow, then dived and swam under water as long as he could toward the shore.

The doctor was coming out of Monckton's suite when Clark arrived.

"Did Langdon get him?" Clark asked indifferently.

"No," answered the doctor curtly. He didn't like this paid killer of Monckton's. "The first bullet went high and just missed the lungs, and the second glanced along his skull. It laid his scalp open for seven inches. He'll have a bad scar, that's all."

"Yeah? Is there any chance of seeing him?"

"No," the doctor answered brusquely. "He is under an opiate." He had been a famous surgeon once, respected and honored, before he found that a little, just a little, of the drugs he knew so well would relieve the strain after an operation. Even now, when he had fallen, there remained a trace of his former code, and he looked at Clark through narrowed eyes.

Clark knew how the doctor felt, and it amused him. "Tell him when he wakes up that I got Langdon for him," he said.

"Doc"—he knew that the doctor hated to be called that—"you ought to have seen the shot I made; I got him smack center when his head came up, and—"

"You killed Langdon?" asked a cold voice behind him.

He turned to see the woman whom Monckton had mentioned standing at his elbow. The doctor bowed to her and went to his cabin forward, leaving her with Clark.

She was beautiful, this woman who had done the same as the men—given up her position in society, her home, and all that the average woman clings to, solely because of her hatred of restraint of any kind. Beautiful, graceful, with slender ankles and little arched feet, her slim, exquisite body moved with the sinuous grace of a black pantheress.

With a face almost perfect in its clear-cut patrician contour, she was more than beautiful; but her eyes spoiled it. They were blue; not a warm, soft blue, but a blue as cold and deadly as the sheen of northern ice.

"Yes," answered Clark coldly, "I killed him."

"He was in the water, wounded, swimming for what little life he had—and you killed him?" Her eyes were full on Clark's, which were almost as cold as hers. He knew then that he had made an enemy that was more dangerous than a king cobra, and that his life was worth just the trouble to snuff it out if she could compass it; and he also knew that she as well as Monckton had been able several times before to reach that particular consummation.

He was not afraid of her, any more than he was afraid of any man. He believed that when the Three Sisters sitting up there cut the thread, he'd go on the one-way trail—and not before. Which most men and women who belong to the "Lost Legion" believe.

"I couldn't see whether he was wounded or not," he answered. "Not that it would have made any difference. I obey orders, Mrs. Monckton; no one leaves this boat unless Mr. Monckton states that he may."

"I see," she answered, her eyes still holding his. "Mr. Monckton asked me to pass the word for Captain Davis to put the anchor on the bow. He will give him sailing orders as soon as possible."

"Very good, Mrs. Monckton," said Clark, saluting. "Put the anchor on the bow. I will pass the word to Captain Davis."

"Thank you," she answered, stepping by him. "I will tell Mr. Monckton as soon as he awakens that you—'got Langdon,' I think you said—for him."

Clark stood still for a moment after she had gone, then he smiled grimly. "I think," he said softly, "that I will seriously consider Kentuck's offer—and in the meantime be very careful where I step."

CHAPTER VI.

DUTCH VON HOLZEMAN, SPECIAL AGENT.

Jimmie Grant, sitting on the cool veranda of Captain Johnston's ranch house, grinned at the young man sitting opposite, from whom he had received a telephone message the night before asking for a meeting place.

"What happened to you, Dutch?" Jimmie asked with a grin. "I thought you were planted on board until the finish?"

"It came," said the young man who had, up to the day before, been an ordinary seaman on the yacht Carmen, "as far as I was concerned, Jimmie, old kid. Boy, howdy, I heard Monckton tell Clark to drown me that night, just as he would tell him to drown a sick kitten or something. Hot damn—I'd just as soon be in a den of rattlers. I could sleep sounder. They think as much of a human life as I do of a cigarette."

"Which is a hell of a lot sometimes, when you've only got one, and I want it," said Jimmie. "You big piece of Limburger cheese!"

"Yeah?" grinned Dutch von Holzeman, one hundred per cent American in spite of his name, and a crack special agent for Uncle. "If you'd buy you some cigarettes once in awhile I wouldn't feel like that, you grifter."

"So's your grandma," said Jimmie. "Tell me about it."

Dutch told him about the fight on board the Carmen and the killing of Langdon, also about Wang Li and the Chang

Kwang Tong.

"Hot damn," said Jimmie; "that's the stuff I want. Boy, as a special agent you're a fine shoemaker. How'd you come to get out of the boat, though?"

"I'd heard plenty, and I knew the boson was due any minute huntin' for me. He'd stop way back and ask permission to come aft. He'd be looking for me with blood in his eye and bawl out the fact that I'd been missing for a couple of hours. So I thought I better take a chance and show. I figured I could alibi myself in some way."

"Except to explain how come they didn't see you coming to the boat, dumb-bell," grinned Jimmie.

"Easy. I'd stick it that I walked along the rail, and that they were taking a drink and didn't notice me. Well, what to do now, Jimmie?"

"Well, now we know that what Uncle suspected before is plenty true. Monckton is top cutter of the outfit; Carewe, the one that engineered the jewel robbery, is eliminated; Monckton has the stuff planted somewhere. Langdon, who helped Carewe grab off the stones, is out also. That leaves Monckton.

"We can't touch him on what we got—unless we could pull him on a charge of killing Langdon: rotten—he didn't, Clark did the killing; you say you saw him crack down. Besides, he would alibi with every man on the boat that he was below. Let's dope it out, Dutch; we darn near got him."

"He's wounded pretty badly; maybe-so he's dead by now. I didn't wait to inquire, but when they brought him down deck he looked all in."

"No chance," said Jimmie positively. "You can't kill those birds like Monckton; you got to hang 'em or put 'em on the hot chair. I wish to heck I knew where the junk was that they copped in England. That Scotland Yard man is foaming at the mouth."

"Yeah? Where is he, Jimmie?"

"In San Francisco, holed up at the Palace. I told him I'd break this case for him right away and then he'd have a better chance to get a line. He gently insinuated the last time I saw him that he was muchly disappointed at the Americano much-touted speed."

"I know where the junk is—it's on board the yacht," said Dutch, lighting a cigarette.

"What?" yelled Jimmie Grant, so loud that Captain Johnston stuck his head out of one of the feed barn doors. "You know that! Well, you poor nit-wit! By gosh, Dutch, if you had forty-nine per cent more brains you'd be half human. Why the heck didn't you say so, fish?"

"Aw, I haven't seen 'em. One—"

"There you go! What good does all that 'I heard,' 'he said,' 'they acted like' stuff do? We got to catch 'em red-handed, boy."

"You're teachin' your grandma how to fry eggs," answered Dutch. "Well, anyway, one night I was where I oughtn't to be, as usual, and I heard Monckton raising hell and high water

with that sweetie of his about putting on a lot of stuff, and she comes back with the fact that she wanted to see how she'd look wearing some of the crown jewels or what-not, and that she had as much of an interest in them as he did.

"He said she had an interest that would put her away for the rest of her life if she didn't show any more sense than to be parading 'em. Just then some nosey bird came along and I had to play dead."

"Boy, you done noble," said Jimmie admiringly. "You're better than nine regiments of marines. We might try to get a United States Commissioner to give us a search warrant."

"First, find one that would, on that dope," answered Dutch pityingly. "This bird Monckton stands too darn high at the moment for them to take any chances. If we got one, we might search the darn hooker from stem to stern and not find a thing. Then what, Jeems?"

"You and I would get ze one grand bawling out," admitted Jimmie. "Well—here we are: Monckton is the lad, all right; Carewe is dead; Langdon, who killed Carewe, also is very much dead, unless Clark missed him?"

"He didn't," said Dutch positively. "I saw it."

"We know where Clark is. We can take him on a murder charge any time on your say-so. But we don't want him now, unless he could be made to talk on a promise of an easy one—Langdon being a crook anyway."

"He wouldn't," asserted Dutch. "That bird is probably wanted for a few killings himself. Boy, he's got a cold eye like a fish."

"Never mind studying natural history; Uncle sent us down here to get Monckton, not to talk about eyes. Remember you're drawing pay, feller."

"Man, you get on that old bum-boat for awhile, and you'd be earning yours, for a change. Let me be top cutter for awhile, and you get in and do some work. And say, Jimmie, that lady of Monckton's has got the same kind of an eye, only worse."

"What did I just tell you?" chided Jimmie severely. "Well, we now have Monckton, the fish-eyed lady, Kentuck, and the jewels, with Clark as a side issue. Does he know about things in general, Dutch?"

"Who—Clark?" asked Dutch, who had been watching a young colt in one of the corrals.

"No, President Nicholas Murray Butler! Pay attention! Here I am working my massive brain overtime and you moon around looking at colts. I asked if Clark is in the know, all around?"

"He seems to be; but he's more of a top sergeant, Jimmie."

"Well, we got to rib up something to get Monckton and his boat in a place where we can give it the once-over, that's all. How about your going back and—"

"What?" yelled Dutch almost as loud as Jimmie had. "Me? Go back on that? Dilly, dilly, come and be killed. You're crazy, boy. I couldn't get back any more than—"

"I mean to San Francisco, fool," interrupted Jimmie. "You go back there and see if you can't horn in. Say, have they got licker on board?"

"Yeah, plenty of it, and fine stuff, boy."

"How do you know?" demanded Jimmie enviously.

"Me and one of the stewards were just like that," smiled Dutch, holding up two fingers close together.

"Fine! The next time she comes into port we'll get the Prohibition outfit to jump her. You can swear out the information; that lot isn't fussy about evidence. She flies the American flag, I suppose?"

"Sure," Dutch chuckled, "and also she keeps out of American waters, old slute. Any old time Monckton or any of them go ashore they land in Mexico; so there goes your old ball game, Chames."

"All wet," admitted Jimmie. "How's this, Dutch: you go to San Francisco, get to this bird Wang Li, tell him you've got the dope that Monckton himself had the Kid put on the spot because the Kid had found out that Monckton was double crossing the Chang Kwang, and—"

"How was he double crossing?"

"How the heck do I know? Make up some of it yourself. He was sending in a poor brand of chandoo—no, that won't do; they'd know it as soon as he did it. Here—how's this? Monckton has been hired by the Mock Duck Tong to kill off as many of the Chang Kwang crowd as he can, claiming that they got knocked off by the John Laws. That ought to get their goat."

"Boy, that's some dope," said Dutch admiringly. "No wonder they pay you a couple of dollars a day. I got me a friend in the Mock Ducks that'll fix me up papers to prove it, and I got dates and everything about landings. Take two chairs, feller."

"When Wang Li hears that, being naturally suspicious of all foreign devils," Jimmie smiled angelically, "he'll sharpen his best little hatchet and go out and scrag Mr. Monckton on general principles, and investigate later. Man, that'll start a Tong war from who-laid-the-chunk."

"Over which I will no doubt shed a lot of tears," said Dutch, "coming from California as I do, and loving Chinks with all my heart. Well, when I get Wang Li all het up I'll restrain him from using the said hatchet and propose a more subtle way of revenge. We will frame on Mr. Monckton to get him and his boat in 'Melican waters with some yellow gents on board. I'll have Wang Li insist that Monckton himself be present in person, himself and no other, with his boat and all, to show good faith. Savvy?"

"Now you *are* teaching your grandma," admitted Jimmie. "It may work. We'll try it anyway. Then when we take the hooker the gal is mine."

"You can have 'er!" answered Dutch, with deep feeling. "I prefer something a little farther south than Greenland's well-known icy mountains."

"Maybe your peculiar style of beauty didn't register, Dutch," grinned Jimmie. "Well, go and frame up with your Chink friend. We got the yacht covered outside. Frank McGee and old Doc Cook are on the job in San Diego and Yuma. I'll attend to Kentuck at this end. There won't be much doing for a week or so, until Monckton gets better. We put an awful

crimp into them, or rather Langdon and Kentuck did, for us. We might pick up Kentuck and tell him that Mike and the Kid both said he was the big noise before they kicked off, and then see what happens. Get going, boy."

"Hey, listen! I swam ashore from that floating hearse expecting any second to hear that same Winchester go *pow!* and get it in the back of my head—"

"You'd get it first and hear it afterward. Be more careful in your language," Jimmie smiled sweetly.

"Yeah? Well, anyway, I swam ashore, walked twenty miles, rode a blamed old mule for forty more without a saddle before I could get to a telephone, with nothing to eat but some cold beans I collected *en route*. Then the minute I get here you give me the bum's rush. *Du hast mein Herz gebrochen*, James."

"I'll break more than your heart if you don't snap into it," answered Jimmie with a stern air. "We got to get this thing ribbed up before Monckton comes to. On your way, feller. Want any jack?"

"All you got," answered Dutch. "When I left the Carmen flat, all I had on me was my working whites. Bet four dollars that the Bureau of Accounts won't allow me a nickel for my clothes or anything."

"You win," said Jimmie, grinning. "All you'll get is: 'Disallowed; agent should have taken clothes and belongings with him.'"

"I'll try 'em out, anyway. Come through with all the jack you got, Jimmie. I'll need a bundle in Frisco."

"I'll go in with you as far as Phoenix and draw some."

CHAPTER VII.

LOOKING OUT FOR NUMBER ONE.

The play at the Ace of Spades was not heavy, and Kentuck went out to get a little fresh air and to escape from the old familiar scene of chips and cards and strained white faces.

Mike's death grieved him more than he would admit. There had been something in the little Irishman that had appealed to him strongly, probably his utter disregard for all law and conventions of society. The little man had lived in a world of his own, peopled with "wise guys" like himself and with "come-ons" and "John Laws," to be taken and fought respectively.

As he passed Vasquez's *pulperia* shop, Señora Vasquez leaned from the window and beckoned. "Señor Clark *está en casa, amigo.*"

"Is he? Thank you, *señora,*" answered Kentuck, who went through the cool drinking room and upstairs to where he knew Clark would be waiting.

"Hello, Clark," he said, as he shook hands. "What brought you this far inland?"

"Several things. Sit down and have a drink of this *aguardiente* the *señora* dug up for me."

"No, thanks—not before night; I may have to sit in a game. What do you know, Clark?"

"Quite a little. Monckton sent me over here to put you on the spot, Kentuck."

"Yes?" answered Kentuck calmly. "What for, Clark?"

"Did you by any chance know who the Kid was?"

"No, any more than he was one of Monckton's men from the south. Why, who was he?"

"One of Wang Li's special agents. Monckton himself didn't know it until just before the Kid came up to look this end over."

"He should have told me," stated Kentuck, with impassive face. "All I took him for was a young fool that might have talked a little in the wrong place; so I took no chances, according to instructions."

"Monckton thinks that feeding you to the lions might have a soothing effect on the Chang Kwang Tong," said Clark, with a grim smile.

"No doubt it would," Kentuck suavely agreed. "Just what happened, Clark? Did Langdon get back?"

"Yes, he got back—then he and Carewe went away, indefinitely, almost taking Monckton with them."

"What?" said Kentuck, surprised for a moment out of his pose of utter indifference to everything.

Clark told him of what had happened on the yacht, down to the last detail, ending with: "And I know that she will get me for killing Langdon, the first moment she can. It all rather clears the deck for us, Kentuck—if you have decided to go through."

"I had, a long time ago, whenever you were ready. This Tong thing complicates the play, though. If Wang Li does not think I am dead, the word will go out for all Chang Kwang men to see that I am assisted on the one-way trail, and they are very strong down here."

"That's easy," answered Clark. "I will take you for a ride, then come back and announce it, and pass the word that that's what happens to men that pull bonehead plays in the game. You drop out of sight. How do you stand with the *rurales*?"

"O. K. I can get any help I wish. Go on; what then?"

"You arrange to lay doggo somewhere near Port Isabel; say between there and Adair Bay," Clark explained. "Monckton makes headquarters between Tepoca and Lobos.

"When he wants to get to San Diego or San Francisco he lands there and goes up by car or plane, and now that Langdon's been knocked off, it'll be by car. You get your outfit together and patrol the coast. Keep close enough to the yacht so that you can see a messenger land. He'll be my Jap.

"Here"—Clark tore an envelope in half—"take this piece; I'll give him the other to show you. Here it is, cold turkey, Kentuck. I'll wait until I get the right play, then I'll pile the boat up on the beach; chances are, at night. It'll be right after the Jap gets to you with the message. All he'll say is, 'Let's go,' or 'To-night.' The ship's an oil burner, and I can turn her over and cut the anchor loose and have her on the beach before they know it.

"You be ready with some of your friends and boil over the side to the rescue. Get it? I've a damn good idea where the jewels are. In the excitement I'm very much afraid that Mr. Monckton is going to get hurt, also that she-devil that's out for me. Wait a minute—better save her. In case we don't find the stuff she'll come in handy to tell us, with a little persuasion. You tell your outfit that they can have the looting of the boat. There's all kinds of gold and silver junk on board. You and I will get the sparklers and be on our way to Paris. There's over a million dollars' worth, Kentuck. You fully understand? When you come on board, either you or I will kill Monckton and—"

"I will have one or two men with me that can attend to it," interrupted Kentuck. "How about the rest of the crew?"

"Davis is harmless. The second and third don't know what it's all about; they're squareheads, and do as they're told. Maybe a couple of Monckton's old men will put up a fight. If they do we can take care of them easily enough. Any chance of your bunch trying a double cross?"

"A very good chance; but they can't get away with it. I'll take Fernando Rodriguez in with me, up to the jewel level. He's *jefe* down there, and he'll keep 'em fairly straight, to get his. You and I can handle it, Clark."

"Certainly. I've one or two friends on board myself that will give me a hand for a little cut. No one in the crew knows about the stones. Are you ready to go?"

"I always stay that way," answered Kentuck. "I'm ready whenever you are. When do you figure on making the play?"

"Can't tell—maybe a week or so. You keep the yacht covered from shore. If he pulls out for other waters I'll get word to you."

"And when we board her, Monckton is to be killed and the woman also, if you have located the jewels; then you and I ease off as soon as possible. That's it, isn't it?"

"Exactly," answered Clark, with a cold smile. "If you're ready, let me take you for a ride. Hope you don't mind getting bumped off like this?"

They smiled bleakly at each other.

When Clark arrived on board the Carmen he was met by the second officer.

"Mr. Monckton's compliments, Mr. Clark, and will you see him as soon as possible?"

"My compliments to Mr. Monckton, and I will report to him just as soon as I have freshened up a bit. How is he, Mr. Larson?"

"Very much better, sir. The doctor says that he will be able to go on shore almost any time now. He's got a mean-looking scar on his forehead, though."

"That's too bad. Everything all right?"

"Yes, sir," answered young Larson. "Mr. Monckton requested Captain Davis to cancel all shore leave. One of the men went over the side some time ago and hasn't shown up since."

Monckton was sitting in an easy-chair when Clark entered his suite. "Hello, Clark," he said. "Sit down. There's some drinks on the stand."

His face was as usual, but pale and drawn-looking. Langdon's bullet had just missed his lungs, and that, coupled with the blood he had lost from the scalp wound, had drained him of a lot of vitality, but his nerve was intact and his eyes active.

They chatted for a moment or so about little things, as long as Monckton's man, who was cleaning up, was in the room. When he went out Monckton motioned to Clark to lock the door even more securely than the snap lock made it, by shooting the bolt.

"I've been a bit jumpy, I think," he said with a smile, "ever since that sailor disappeared. You left before we missed him, didn't you?"

"Yes," answered Clark, pouring out a drink. "I intended to give orders that night, but the shooting drove it out of my mind temporarily. You remember, just as soon as you came to again, you told me to go and attend to Kentuck? Larson told me when I came on board that a man had gone over the side. Probably nothing in it but a plain case of jumping ship. I'll have him looked up, though. He's no doubt hanging around some dump near Yuma, as they generally do."

"No doubt you're right," said Monckton. "The boson says that he did order him to clean up the launch earlier in the day. Well, did you see that Kentuck was—safely settled?"

"Yes, sir. He had no idea, of course. I took him to a place where it was very quiet, and settled him down. Then I caused

the rumor to leak out that he had become a little careless and had been—transferred."

"Quite right, Clark. By George, that reminds me of Carewe. Too bad he went crazy that way. I could have handled Langdon, I think."

"Carewe was in love with Mrs. Monckton," answered Clark calmly, "and when he found out that Langdon—"

Monckton laughed, holding his wounded chest as he did.

"Why, it was like a French comedy, wasn't it? Do you know, I had never suspected that! How do you know, Clark?"

"I had the deck one night, and it got stuffy up on the bridge, and I walked aft. I overheard him tell Mrs. Monckton so."

Monckton smiled. "No wonder you know, then. Er—by any chance are you in love with her also?"

Clark, his lips twisted into a grim smile, shook his head. "No, sir. I am in love with no woman, nor ever have been."

"Well, let's get down to business. I'm going to promote you, Clark. Carewe and Langdon are both gone; Kentuck is gone, and Davis is good for only running a boat. I don't want to pull any of the rest in closer. There are plenty of flyers to be had, so Langdon's place can be filled. Carewe has left quite a hole, though. He attended to most of the financial matters with the Tongs. If you care to take it on, your cut will be the same as his was. After overhead had been paid, he drew one-third."

"That is very satisfactory, Mr. Monckton," answered Clark, "and I see no reason why we cannot—"

They heard the deck watch forward hail:

"Lay off! Officer of the deck—small boat on port side amidship wants to board us!"

Monckton started to rise, then sank back. "See who it is, Clark, there's a good chap."

Clark went on deck and to the rail. In the small boat, rowed by two Mexicans, sat a well-dressed Chinaman fanning himself with his neat straw hat, which bore the colors of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a hatband. He waved his hand in a quick signal when he saw Clark.

As Clark ordered the port gangplank lowered, the Chinaman gave an order to his two oarsmen, who strained at the oars in a way that showed fear of their passenger as well as a desire to please him by fast work—something which a Mexican avoids whenever possible.

Clark met the Chinaman at the top step of the gangplank and shook hands with him. He was Chieh-yu, Wang Li's first lieutenant, and second only to him in the Chang Kwangs. Boston Tech graduate, mining engineer, student of literature, chess player, rich and cultured—and with it all he was, first, last, and all the time, a Chang Kwang, as his fathers had been before him for generations.

When Clark brought him to Monckton, explaining on the way that the yacht owner was unable to come on deck, Monckton tried to rise. "Pardon my not getting up, old chap," he said. "I am still under the doctor's orders. Mr. Clark, will

you ring for a steward, please? Sit down, Chieh-yu. Is there anything special you would like to have to drink?"

"The ride was a hot, long, dusty one," answered the young Chinaman, with a smile, "and the last part in the little boat was hottest of all. I would really like a mint julep. I have always remembered the ones I had when I had the pleasure of coming on board the Carmen at Havana last year."

"Sanetomo," said Monckton to the Jap steward who had materialized like magic out of the companionway to the owner's suite, "start making mint juleps and keep on until I tell you to stop."

The Jap drew his breath in with a hissing sound, bowed, said "Sir, can do," and disappeared.

"One or two will be plenty," said Chieh-yu, with a small smile. "Wang Li asked me to see you, Mr. Monckton, to ask if it would be convenient for you to come up to San Francisco for a conference."

"Certainly," answered Monckton. "The doctor tells me that he will release me almost any time. I will be there Friday or Saturday."

"That will be quite all right," said Chieh-yu.

Monckton knew that Chieh-yu was high in the Chang Kwang councils, and that he knew just how Wang Li had taken the killing of the Kid; and he also knew enough not to ask Chieh-yu anything about it.

The mint juleps arrived and the rest of the hour was spent discussing China of the Ming dynasty and the Chinese

method of candying fruits. Clark excused himself and went on deck.

As Chieh-yu went over the side he smiled at Clark, whom he liked. "We hope to see more of you, Mr. Clark," he said. "Mr. Monckton has been telling me of the sad accident to Mr. Carewe and Mr. Langdon."

"Thanks," replied Clark. "I hope you will."

He stood and watched the Mexicans pulling Chieh-yu toward the shore.

"I wonder," he said softly, "if that was a tip that I had been chosen in Monckton's place."

A sailor came up to him with a message from Captain Davis, and Clark promptly dismissed any further thoughts of that nature, becoming at once the efficient ship's officer he really was.

CHAPTER VIII.

PLANNING A PRIVATE WAR.

Jimmie Grant and Jimmie Earpe were talking in the post-office lobby, having met by chance after breakfast. In his soft, drawling voice Earpe was telling Grant of a round-up the Rangers had made the night before, and Jimmie number two was grinning as Earpe described the gun-fight that followed. A Mexican eased up alongside Earpe, said something, and kept on drifting.

"He wants me to go to the Last Chance," Earpe said. "He's got something to tell me. Come on, Jimmie; it's right cool over there, and maybe it's something you might want to know. That was Jesus Carrera. I know him right well. He used to be a *rurale* until he killed a man that was way up, and he had to drift, pronto. I got him a job out at the Lazy W."

The former *rurale*, after he had one or two drinks and Earpe had assured him that Jimmie Grant was *muchísimo caballero* and his own *buen amigo*, began to tell them a long story. He left the main line several times to go up branches telling Earpe how much he loved him, and how it happened that he got the word, and why Pedro this and Manuel that had told him so-and-so.

It all boiled down to the statement that Kentuck was far from dead—he was holed up at a sheep camp near Libertad, and was organizing some kind of a standing army. He, Carrera, knowing that his *amigo* Earpe had killed the so-worthless Malonee, thought it best to learn about this, as without doubt

Kentuck was planning to come over and wipe him out. Also that watch from the shore was kept on the big boat from which the Señor Clark came so often.

Jimmie Earpe thanked him for the information, prevailed on him to accept a "loan" of twenty dollars, and bought him several drinks. Señor Carrera, his sombrero well on the back of his head, swaggered down the street, warm in the knowledge that he had protected a friend—also that he had enough to get into a game of monte.

"Let's you and I go somewhere and make medicine," said Earpe, as Carrera faded from sight.

"Come on up to my room. It's quiet and no one around this time in the morning," answered Grant. "Boy, something's surely due to break. That's a funny stunt, Jimmie. Why would—Better wait until we get holed up."

Once in Jimmie's room Earpe said: "Jimmie, I reckon that this here Clark must be throwin' in with Kentuck on some play."

"Yeah, sure's shootin'. We know that Clark and Kentuck went for a ride and Clark came back alone and passed the word that Kentuck had gone away to attend to some business. In other words, Kentuck had been put on the spot for the bonehead play he pulled with the Kid. That's easy to dope out. All right: Clark and Kentuck frame something, he plants Kentuck in a place where Monckton couldn't find him or get word that he's there; then he goes back and tells Monckton that the matter has been attended to. But that business of patrolling the beach, and the standing army recruiting stuff

—"

"Maybe-so they aim on gettin' them a boat," drawled Earpe.

"Gosh, boy, you sure nicked it, I bet you. I'm going to get you a Distinguished Service Medal and everything. Let's set the stage: Clark comes to Kentuck, tells him cold turkey Monckton has ordered him to act as the Lord High Executioner; and instead of that, they frame to turn regular pirates."

"Why would they do that?" puzzled Earpe. "That's what I can't see. They couldn't go anywhere in that boat, and the Chang Kwang would get them."

"Yeah, that's right," and Jimmie Grant's keen eyes bored into Jimmie Earpe's smiling, equally keen blue ones as if searching for the answer. Suddenly he smiled. "I got it. Clark knows of the jewels—"

"What jewels, Jimmie?" interrupted Earpe.

"What jewels? Oh, remember I said in the D. A.'s office that Monckton was suspected of being the big cow in an international gem robbery? Well, I've found out that he was, and that the jewels are on board the Carmen."

"Yeah? Then why don't you—"

"I'm going to take that Distinguished Service Medal right away from you," said Jimmie severely. "First reason is he hangs out in Mexican waters, and if we went to Mexico City and asked for a search warrant they'd want to handle it, naturally—and where would the jewels be afterward, answer me that?"

"*Quién sabe?*" said Jimmie Earpe, sadly.

"You can have your medal back," grinned Jimmie Grant.

"Well, how's this: Clark knows where they are, and he frames something with Kentuck. That bird is down close to the yacht, waiting for Clark to flash the word that the stunt is ready. They've got some play where they figure on stealing the jewels in the excitement and fading out of the picture."

"Yeah," agreed Jimmie Earpe, "that's it."

"If they pull that, it's going to knock all my plans higher than hell and high water. They'll get Monckton, probably, and get the jewels—and all I'll get will be a bawling out that'll go down in history. I got to stop that some way, Jimmie, old kid."

"My pa was a right good figurer," drawled Earpe, "and he always said the best way to stop anything was to stop it with lead."

"Your pa sure had the right idea," agreed Jimmie, grinning.

"How far is this Libertad from here, Jimmie?"

"About a hundred and ten miles, I reckon. It's on the west slope of the Sierra del Nazaren mountains. Maybe-so it's a little farther. You go to Altar, then to Cruces, and through the pass to the Gulf of California."

"How long would it take?" asked Grant.

"Two days, I reckon. You can use a car as far as the eastern slope beyond Cruces. It's the pass that's the hardest."

"Let's get a map for a minute. Come on over to the Federal building."

A little later they were poring over a map in the postmaster's office. "See? Go by boat from Port Isabel, Earpe. Slip down the coast and go in on 'em. Less chance of a tip-off. Mexico or no Mexico, I'm going down there and get me this Kentuck feller for interfering in my plans this way."

"You and me both," said Ranger Earpe. "I'll get me a week's leave and go with you."

"Come on," grinned Grant. "We'll follow your pa's advice."

The two young men, going deliberately into another country, where they only amounted to what they weighed, smiled delightedly at each other.

"If we get Kentuck," said Jimmie Grant, "that'll sure hesitate Clark. He can't pull anything by himself, unless he steals the jewels and jumps ship—and I'll bank on Monckton being too fast for him to do that. I wonder how many men Kentuck has with him?"

"*No sabe*," shrugged Earpe. "Tell you what, Jimmie, let's take Sam and Bill Earpe along with us. The four of us can handle all the men he's got. Besides, Sam he's got him a fishin' boat at Port Isabel, him being one of these here *loco* fishermen. It would look plumb natural, seein' him come down there with a party."

"Boy," said Jimmie Grant, "I'm going to get you the Congressional Medal also. Let's go and find them."

CHAPTER IX.

GUNS OUT!

Kentuck was making headquarters in a little 'dobe house, quite a bit back from the beach and set in a clump of prickly pears. It was a pretty place, with flowers and shade, plenty to eat and drink. Music and the quiet had relaxed his taut nerves. He had arranged all details as far as his end went.

Two of the *rurales* in whose beat he was had agreed to play in according to his instructions; the *jefe politico* of the district was to share with Kentuck fifty-fifty—at least he thought so. With the *jefe's* help Kentuck had picked out ten men who didn't care whether it was a yacht or a battleship, if the looting was good and they could get away with it.

As far as killing went, neither Kentuck nor any of the others once thought about that. They killed without a moment's hesitation, as simply as they would raise a drink to their mouths. Now there was nothing to do but await Clark's messenger.

Kentuck, through his glasses, saw the fishing boat coming up the coast. It stopped and dropped anchor every once in awhile, and he saw the lines go out. He had been a fisherman himself in his younger days, and watched them for awhile with a smile on his thin lips. Some one called him after a short time, and he went in the house.

The fishing boat lazed along, coming nearer inshore, and finally beached a mile up from the house. The four men

pulled it up on the beach, threw an anchor on the beach, secured it with an old spar, stretched and appeared to see the house for the first time.

They started to walk up the gentle slope toward it. A Mexican slid off the roof and went inside. Kentuck was talking to two of the men who had joined him.

"*Señor*," the man said, "a small boat has just come, and from it there comes four men to the house. Is it your desire that they come?"

"It's a fishing party," answered Kentuck. "I saw them. No reason why they shouldn't come up, Juan; they probably want to get a drink. If we stopped them it would look suspicious. Let them come, *amigo*. If they question, I am a mining man, and you are my helpers."

His Spanish was almost as good as Juan's, who nodded and went out to greet the fishing party.

"I do not think it advisable," Kentuck went on to the two men, "to allow more men than absolutely necessary to board the ship when she comes ashore. The crew will not show fight, we believe, and it will lessen confusion. The whole thing must be carried through as a rescue; is that plain to you both?"

"*Sí, señor*," they both said eagerly, "*muy claro!*"

A man came in. "*Señor*," he said, "the *señores* of the small boat ask that you come out and drink with them."

"I didn't want them to know that a white man was here," said Kentuck with a frown. "Who told them?"

The man raised his shoulders and held out his hands.

"*Quién sabe?*" he answered in a resigned tone. "They ask, as I said. What more, Señor Kentuck?"

Kentuck went out and around to the side of the house where the shade was best. Two of the four men were over away from the house watching with interest a card game that several Mexicans were playing, a blanket spread on the ground acting as table. The Mexicans were squatting around it or kneeling. One or two stretched out on the ground were watching the others, having evidently gone broke. The two Mexicans had come out with Kentuck and were with him when he came up.

Jimmie Earpe turned to face the white man as he heard him coming. Kentuck recognized him. The slight tightening of his eyes was the only sign that he sensed danger.

"Hello, Earpe," he said calmly. "I didn't know you went in for fishing."

"Well, suh," drawled Earpe, "I don't reckon I do, very much. That no-'count Sam over yonder is the fisherman of the Earpe family."

"Yes? Is he—oh, yes, I see him—and your other cousin, Bill, too. Is this gentleman a Ranger also?"

"No," answered Earpe. "This here jasper is a Federal agent named Grant. Jimmie, this is Kentuck Mears."

Jimmie Grant grinned at Kentuck, who smiled politely in return. "I've heard of Mr. Grant," Kentuck said. "I knew there

was a Federal man working with Sawyer. I won't insult you gentlemen by pretending you came here for a drink. What do you want, Earpe?"

Kentuck's tone became wintry. As soon as he saw Sam and Bill Earpe he knew that something somewhere had slipped, and that they had come for him.

"You know, of course, you are in Mexico," Kentuck went on. "Your authority is the same as mine or any one's here—absolutely nothing."

"Yes, suh," agreed Earpe. "We know that, Kentuck."

"Here it is," said Jimmie Grant shortly. "Cutting out all the wah-wah, when you had the Kid put on the spot, Kentuck—which incidentally we can't prove, of course—you spoiled some plans of ours for getting the Chang Kwang."

"What you are doing here we don't know and we don't give a damn. We got word you were here, and came down to do one of two things. First, take you back with us and hold you *incomunicado* until we round up, then try you on any old charge and make it stick if we can; or we will just remove you from the picture. You can take your choice."

Kentuck's eyes widened. "Short, sweet, and to the point! I always like to have matters put plainly to me, Mr. Grant. I will speak just as plainly. First, I will not go back with you, for several reasons, ignoring the reason why I am here. I am wanted for a few things that would be rather embarrassing to face. Second, let me call your attention to the fact that there are ten or more men here with me, picked for their ability along certain lines; and while I give you gentlemen full

credit for your nerve and your undoubted skill with guns, I can only say that I don't think you can make the play good."

Jimmie Grant laughed gayly.

"I didn't think you would accept the first, Kentuck. Well, get something in your hand—"

A Mexican coming around from the rear of the house had reached the card game on the blanket. As he started to sit down he saw Sam Earpe and jumped back, his hand going to his holster.

"*El Rangero Earpe!*" he yelled. "*Muerte!*"

Young Bill Earpe, being closest to him, killed him before his hand had started to draw his gun from the holster.

All the card players who could rolled away from the blanket, the others faced the two Rangers from where they sat.

The two men who had been with Kentuck, not understanding much of what was said, ran toward the blanket, now covered with bodies. Sam and Bill Earpe were standing as they had been when the Mexican shouted, but now their heavy Colt .45s were roaring out death at every pull of the trigger.

Jimmie Earpe stepped out a step from Grant, and his Colt rose and fell twice. He "threw down" on the two men as coldly and calmly as he would on a rattlesnake; they were rattlesnakes, human ones. After he fired the second shot he ran out about ten feet, whirled, and stood facing the house, his eyes alert for a shot or man from within.

Kentuck stood facing Jimmie Grant. There was no fear in his eyes. He knew that it was hopeless now and that he had lost. If there had been time to signal Juan and one or two others to get posted while he talked, there might have been a chance. He had decided, at the moment the Mexican yelled, to pretend to yield. Now there was nothing left but to shoot it out. He could not go back to the United States—it would be going to the chair.

In the split second it had taken him to reach for his gun he had thought it out.

Jimmie Grant read in Kentuck's eyes that he was going to take a chance. The two shots came together, and both men staggered back from the impact of the bullets. Kentuck's teeth closed over his underlip as he tried to maintain his upright position. Jimmie Grant was already swaying back. Kentuck fired twice more and Jimmie fired once as he straightened up almost to attention, facing Kentuck some five feet from him.

Jimmie Grant whirled around as Kentuck's second bullet tore through his shoulder, the third getting him in the left arm as he turned. The force of the bullet was enough to turn Jimmie halfway around, and, falling as he was, his nerve forced his body the rest of the way.

As he fell he fired once more at Kentuck, whose knees were giving. Kentuck was already in the shadow of the valley of death, with everything going black, yet with the instinct of a born killer he returned the fire, then his body fell across Jimmie Grant.

The firing by the blanket had ceased. Four Mexicans had their hands up, the rest were dead. Sam Earpe had a bullet in

his leg, Bill Earpe was untouched.

The Rangers had been too fast for the Mexicans, and those that were alive had promptly thrown up their hands after seeing five men killed before they could get really into action. The bullet Sam had collected came from the third man, who had time to fire once.

Jimmie Earpe pulled the body of Kentuck off Jimmie Grant and knelt beside him. Bill Earpe stayed with the Mexicans, and Sam came limping over.

"Through the shoulder and the arm," Jimmie announced, "and a bad one in the chest. Reckon we better get this no-'count scoundrel of a Jimmie Grant to a doctor, *muy pronto*, Sam. You hurt bad?"

"Not any," answered Sam. "I got me a little one in the leg. I'll get Bill to plug it up for me. You tend to this here Jimmie. Man howdy, he can sure take it, can't he, Jimmie? I seen him workin', out of the corner of my eye."

Jimmie and Bill Earpe searched the house, after locking the survivors in one of the rooms, and after they had given Jimmie Grant all the first aid they knew, they carried him to the boat, leaving the body of Kentuck to await Clark's messenger.

CHAPTER X.

CLARK PICKS UP A PRICKLY PEAR.

Monckton sat with Clark aft on the quarter-deck, almost in the same place as he had sat when Carewe ran amuck. "Wang Li took the death of the Kid easier than I expected," Monckton said. "I explained to him that the Kid did not show Kentuck any credentials and that I had attended to Kentuck. He questioned the number of men that we were losing, though.

"What he wants is this. There are two men coming in for some special work, and he wants me personally to see that they arrive safely. We are to take them off a boat that will bring them up to Mazatlan and then slip up the coast to the Umpqua River, one hundred and fifty miles north of Cape Blanco. He says that he will be there in person to receive them."

Clark whistled. "Way up in Oregon! Must be something hot, to require all that care and bring the big chief out. These birds must be important. Thought you didn't like to have the yacht mix in."

"I don't, especially now with that stuff on board which I told you of. There has been a delay in passing it along. Carewe was to attend to it, and I don't like to pick up the strings he had out.

"I'm not sure of the people anyway. He seemed to be, and I knew that he could take care of himself. They really are a

damn nuisance, Clark. Hard to get and harder to get rid of unless one wants to take less than they're worth.

"Well, I told Wang Li I would attend to it. I don't want to lose out with them; the connection is valuable in more ways than one."

"If they meet us offshore up there it will be easy," said Clark. "We can outrun anything Uncle Sam has got. When are we to pick them up?"

"To-morrow night. We'll pull anchor in the morning and laze down. I think I'll land Captain Davis and let him go to a hospital in Mazatlan. He has absolutely unbelted, hasn't he?"

"Pretty bad, I'm afraid," answered Clark. "He comes off one drunk to slide into another, and that means he's done."

"He was a good man, too. Many times he has helped out very much. Well, Clark, we'll make this delivery for Wang Li and then go into executive session about the stones."

"Right." Clark rose. "I'm going to send my Jap on shore for some of those pears, if we are pulling out in the morning."

Monckton laughed. "You seem to have fallen for them awfully hard. Why not send a steward?"

"They wouldn't give him the kind I want," said Clark. "My boy knows just where to go by now."

Monckton laughed again and waved his hand, as if to say "Help yourself," and Clark went below. Not many minutes later Mrs. Monckton came aft and sat down beside Monckton.

"Hello, old dear," he said with a smile. "You are just in time to join me. What will you have?"

"Nothing, at the moment," she replied curtly.

Monckton looked at her. "Ridin' hard?" he drawled.

He did not love her, and she knew it. He lived with her as he had with other beautiful women in all parts of the world. He acted like a gentleman always, but he did not love her, nor did she love him. She was with him for the material things that his wealth could afford, and in turn she knew he counted her as one of them.

"No, not especially." Her cold blue eyes were intent on his handsome face. "Are you taking this man Clark in with you?"

"Yes. Case of necessity, old thing, since Carewe found out that Langdon was cutting him out with you. I am rather short-handed at the moment. You caused me to lose two good men, my dear."

She ignored the taunt.

"He reported he had killed Kentuck?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Monckton, showing a little surprise.

"Why?"

"Did he do it?" she said shortly. "It was the first time I ever saw you take a man's word for a thing like that and not do any checking up."

"Perhaps I should have," admitted Monckton. "You don't think that crack I got on the head has made me feeble-minded, do you?"

She colored a little at his tone.

"No; but I think you are not showing your usual carefulness. What's his Jap going on shore for, at this place?"

"See what suspicion does," chided Monckton. "For some prickly pears that Clark likes. Simple, isn't it, when you know."

"Very," she said, "especially since he came on board yesterday afternoon with almost half a cutter full."

The smile left Monckton's face as if wiped off by a hand. He looked over at the shore and began to whistle softly an old Irish love song. Suddenly he broke it off.

"Thanks, old lady; I'll attend to it. Will you go below and get to McGuire without Clark seeing you? Tell him to report to me and to bring Mareno with him. Then go and get Clark, and tell him I told you to show him the jewels. That's what he's after. Take him to the stateroom and show them to him."

"What?" she interrupted.

"Follow through, dear, like a good girl now, and do just what I say. Show them to him, put them back, then later go back and get them and carry them on you until I take them. Do you follow me? I will arrange to have the Jap covered. He hasn't left yet?"

"No. I heard Clark tell him to go about six o'clock."

"That's all right, then. Keep Clark occupied for an hour or as long as you can. I'll have the starboard side cleared so that McGuire and Mareno can ease over. We'll see what kind of prickly pears he gets. It may be a mare's nest, but best be sure."

That night about nine o'clock Monckton sent for Clark.

"The boson just reported to me that two more men are missing, Clark," he said curtly. "A seaman named McGuire and a steward named Mareno. This jumping ship has got to be stopped. Better send a cutter on shore and have those two drinking places combed out. Has your Jap got back, by the way?"

"No," said Clark. "He's overdue. That's the trouble with these waters—too easy to get amusement any place they hit the shore. I'll skin my boy when he does show. I'll take the cutter in myself."

"No need," yawned Monckton. "Send Larson or Sivertson. I want some one to sit and drink with me. Beastly thing, to sit and drink alone. Sit down, Clark, and tell me some of your adventures on the seven seas."

Perhaps two hours later the cutter came back, bringing the highly befuddled McGuire and Mareno, who were singing Irish and Italian songs at the top of their voices. They brought along the body of Clark's Jap. The face was bruised and discolored and the doctor reported that the man's body, on examination, showed that he had been brutally beaten.

McGuire and Mareno, under quiet, deadly cross-examination by Clark, maintained as best they could in their drunken condition that they had stumbled over the corpse not far from

the path leading to one of the *pulperias*. They had hoisted it on their shoulders and carried it to the beach, where they had met the cutter crew.

Clark had ordered the body into the sick bay and had stood by as the doctor stripped it. The Jap's pockets contained little, and there was no half envelope among the contents of his clothing.

Clark went on deck, his cold, crafty brain searching and twisting through the labyrinth of doubt and suspicion the bringing of his boy's dead body had opened up. Was Kentuck double crossing him? Or had his man delivered the message and stumbled into a fight on the way back? Could Monckton have learned—No; he dismissed the thought; it was impossible. Yet, how had McGuire and Mareno got on shore? Clark knew they were Monckton's gunmen. Their story was air-tight. Should he go through as planned?

He laughed recklessly and went below to his own room. When he came out he had a .45 Colt under his left armpit, as well as his automatic in his hip pocket. He had decided to go through and beach the yacht. If Kentuck didn't show as planned, Clark would shoot his way to the jewels, get them, and take his chances of getting away ashore. He figured on the confusion that would follow the grounding, and although he knew that Monckton and several more would be prompt to combat any such action, he would rely on their being sufficiently scattered out for him to shoot his way clear. If a double cross showed, then it was on the knees of the nine Red Gods—let the best man have the stuff.

McGuire was reporting to Monckton, in a little room off the library that was absolutely sound-proof and could be entered only through Monckton's suite. Mrs. Monckton sat in their living room reading a novel.

"We gits to shore," reported McGuire, who had miraculously sobered, "and we follys him. He goes up to a place on a hill back a ways. We tags along, me and the wop. There's a lot of dead Spigs lying in the yard, and wan dead white man, nawthin' else. The Jap he goes up and looks at the white man, lets out a screech that would wake the dead and away he goes, me and the wop after him. We catch up wid him soon, and we gits him to tell us all about it—after a little persuadin'."

"A little persuading," echoed Monckton, with a smile. "The doctor told me that the body showed more than a little—er—persuasion."

"That come after, most of it," replied the gunman. "Well, he told us that Mr. Clark had sent him with half an envelope—the wan ye have ferninst ye there on the table—to a man named Kentuck. That was the white man lyin' dead in the yard. His message was: 'To-night.' Whin he saw this Kentuck was dead he squawked and ran—that's all he knew. The beatin' he got was when he tried wan of them jewy-jitsoo tricks of his to get away from us. Me havin' him by the scruff of the neck at the time."

"All right, McGuire. There is one grand to your credit and to Maren's also. Keep as close to Clark as you can, either of you, without attracting his attention. That's all. And pass the word that I want to see him, in about twenty minutes."

Mrs. Monckton came in as McGuire went out. "Well?"

"You were right," Monckton said. "He did not attend to Kentuck, but brought him down here. He and Kentuck had something ribbed up—to take place to-night. Kentuck got into a fight and was killed. His bringing Kentuck down looks to me as if they had planned an attack from shore."

"Either that or he figured on getting the jewels, and Kentuck was waiting to pick him up and help him get away."

Monckton laughed. "Well, forewarned is forearmed, old girl. I need him until after I make this delivery to Wang Li. But I have the deck, old dear; I think I can run rings around Mr. Clark. A little while after he comes in you drop in and ask that we put to open waters for the night. Complain a little of heat. If I ordered it done without a little preliminary play, he might think our wind was up. I don't rely much on Davis, and Clark knows these northern waters."

Clark was with Monckton when Mrs. Monckton came languidly in and suggested that they put to sea for the night on account of the heat. Monckton readily agreed, and laughingly stopped Clark from going on deck; he said that Larson wanted a chance to "strut his stuff," and he wanted Clark to stay with him, boasting that he would drink Clark under the table.

Clark sat there, a smile on his tight lips, and heard the anchor come on the bow, the screw begin to turn. He knew that his present chance had slipped by him. He had sensed that he was being watched and that in some way the coils were tightening around him. But to his reckless, chilled-steel, fearless heart it was all a huge joke. If the gods so willed, he would win clear with the jewels; if not, he wouldn't. Monckton and his paid killers and his cold-eyed woman,

who was out to get him, Clark—none of them could do a thing but play the parts the gods decided they should. Clark was a paid killer, he thought grimly, but this time he was working for himself.

CHAPTER XI.

SEA FIGHT.

Dutch von Holzeman sat beside Jimmie Grant's bed in the hospital at Yuma. "You got a swell chance," he said firmly. "Be thankful you're not sittin' on a damp cloud right now playing a harp. The doctor tells me that if that bullet went a gnat's heel lower you'd have caught it in the lung instead of just above. Be your age, you poor old wreck. You're going to stay right here, and Field Marshal von Holzeman will attend to the knock-off. Me and the Scotland Yard johnnie."

"You forget that I'm your superior officer," Jimmie said, sitting up in bed. "If Jimmie Earpe and I don't come to the party, there ain't goin' to be no party, my Dutch friend."

"German, not Dutch," corrected Von Holzeman, as he always did when any one deliberately mentioned his ancestry.

"German is 'von,' Dutch is 'van,' ignorant."

"Excuse me," grinned Jimmie. "Anyway, I'll be there."

"Oh, no, you won't," said a calm voice from the doorway.

The old doctor, who had treated gun wounds in the Southwest long before Jimmie was born, came in the room.

"The human body, young feller, can only stand so much; then it goes out of commission. Yours is a strong one and is coming back all right—to get some more, no doubt. But for the next two weeks you will stay right in that bed unless you think you can lick me and all the rest of us."

"I don't," Jimmie mourned. "If I did, I'd have tried her a long time ago."

"Laugh that off, Chames," said Dutch. "Anyway, don't worry, old kid. You had your fun with Kentuck, and we got this Monckton walking right in our parlor."

"Yeah? How are you doin' 'er, Dutch?"

"Two revenue boats, the Bear and the Haddon, will follow 'em up the coast, while a navy flyer spots the Carmen and radios her progress. Wang Li has given Monckton a place to get contact in the mouth of the river. When the Carmen gets in far enough, the navy will close the neck of the bottle; the army, consisting of me and the Scotland Yard man and nine million customhouse hombres, will put out from shore in launches and what not; we'll board her, and once aboard the lugger, the jewels are mine."

"How about the Chinks that Wang Li is sending up as decoy ducks? What happens to them?"

"It'll take some knockin'," replied Dutch, with a grin. "Those two are the hardest-boiled gunmen the Chang Kwang owns. Soon as the yacht gets in the mouth of the river they are going to retire quietly but firmly to some place where they can repel any attack until we get on board."

"Well," Jimmie sighed, as he leaned back against the pillows, "I guess Jimmie number one and Jimmie number two fade from the picture, darn it all. That's what we get for going around playing instead of tending to business. Hop to it, old kid Field Marshal von Holzeman."

The beautiful white yacht nosed her way daintily into the mouth of the river from the open sea, Clark, Monckton, and Mrs. Monckton on the bridge. Captain Davis had been dropped at Mazatlan. The Umpqua River mouth was fairly wide, perhaps half a mile, clear of obstructions, and heavily timbered on both sides.

"We ought to sight Wang Li's launch any minute," said Monckton, and he turned and looked aft along the deck. "The gentlemen high-binders have gone below. Packing up, probably. Better slow down a little, Clark."

Mrs. Monckton, who had turned as Monckton spoke, suddenly laughed, an amused, clear laugh. "Look behind you."

From around the bend in the shore line, not a mile behind them, came the two revenue cutters, crews at the guns.

"My word!" laughed Monckton. "Neatly trapped."

"Take the wheel," said Clark. "I'll go below and get those two yellow crooks. We may have time to—"

"You're going to stay right here, Mr. Clark," said Mrs. Monckton icily. "You need not hunt for the jewels; I have them on me."

Clark laughed and let go the wheel, which Monckton seized, throwing it over to hard-a-port as the Carmen gathered speed.

Clark looked at the fast converging revenue boats, at the launches speeding out from shore, at Monckton at the wheel, and at the lovely, ice-cold woman who stood with a sneer on her exquisite lips, her eyes intent on his, all else forgotten.

This was the man who had killed Langdon, swimming wounded in the water, and she forgot all else.

"Give them to me!" Clark commanded, his own eyes as cold as hers, his hand flashing under his arm.

Mrs. Monckton laughed, and in the face of the revenue boats and the crowded launches and the crew of the *Carmen*, who were now on deck, she straightened her right hand out from the frilly lace cuff and shot Clark between the eyes with a little .25 caliber automatic.

Monckton laughed recklessly.

"Nice work, old girl! Get down! I'm going between them!"

He headed the *Carmen* straight at the *Bear* instead, the guns of his killers on deck spitting lead.

The grizzled old captain of the *Bear* grunted: "Going to ram us? Let him have it!"

The first shell struck the *Carmen* on the bow, the second hit square amidships as she fell away. The rapid-fire guns swept her deck as mercilessly as her crew had swept men out of life.

A bugle blew "cease firing," and the *rat-tat-tat-tat* was stilled. The *Carmen* lay on her side, filling rapidly, her immaculate woodwork splintered and torn.

Men were jumping overboard, to be picked up by the launches. The bridge was practically intact; the gunners of the *Bear* had seen a woman there and had avoided it.

Monckton lay clinging to the wheel, on the bridge, whose slant now was pronounced. Mrs. Monckton, holding to a rail, was beside him.

"Get them off you," he commanded calmly. "Claim that you knew nothing of my—"

"Do you think that I would live to go to prison?" she demanded. "Fight it out, Frank."

McGuire crawled up beside them, his Colt in his hand.

"What now, captain?" he asked, with a grin.

"Whatever you like," answered Monckton, letting go the wheel and getting into a sitting position as he drew his gun.

Climbing over the rail of the bridge from starboard came the Scotland Yard man and Dutch von Holzeman, followed by two of the customhouse men.

Monckton and McGuire fired at them.

A splotch of red came on Dutch's linen coat—the Scotland Yard man fell back, a bullet in his shoulder from McGuire's gun. The customs men fired at the same time as Dutch. Monckton and McGuire slumped to the slanting deck, dead.

Mrs. Monckton fired once at the nearest man, missed, put the little automatic to her mouth—and the yacht went under the calm water.

The small boats backed away to avoid the suction, only the Bear steaming closer. Dutch von Holzeman came up, then the Scotland Yard man, then the customs men, who had jumped as far clear as they could. Monckton's body floated

to the surface, and the Scotland Yard man ordered it taken in one of the boats.

A young lieutenant on the Bear suddenly kicked off his shoes, tossed his coat on the deck and took a long dive over the side.

He came up with Mrs. Monckton's body, which he had seen drifting along under water. In spite of the shattering wound in the back of her head, where the bullet had spread coming out, she had the same cold, calm beauty of face. Her blue eyes were open and as wintry as ever.

Dutch von Holzeman, who had insisted on being taken to the same hospital, was telling Jimmie Grant and Jimmie Earpe about it. Jimmie Grant was so far advanced now that he was sitting in an invalid chair.

He and Jimmie Earpe listened with envy in their eyes as Dutch rubbed it in by describing every detail of what he termed the sea fight of the century. He wound up by saying:

"The jewels were on her, and after the Scotland Yard man gets out of the hospital he's going home and get made an inspector, I bet you. Boy, howdy, you poor prunes missed a show."

"Yeah?" said Jimmie Grant. "How about the two yellow brothers—did they get away?"

"Well, when me and the Scotland Yard bird was climbing up onto the yacht, we passed them climbing out of a porthole.

Old Wang Li had a launch up there on watch for them. Chances are they made it."

"If they didn't, you better go far, far away, boy, and every time you see a Chink for the next million years you get something in your hand, right quick, as Jimmie number one would put it."

"It's catching before hanging," answered Dutch cheerfully. "The D. A. at San Francisco is seeing Wang Li right away. Old Wang is a good sport, and he doesn't want to lose face, not any. If it came out that he had been gypped by a Federal agent, it wouldn't be so good for him. They'd laugh him out of the Chang Kwang."

"Tell you who *will* scare you," answered Jimmie grimly, "and that is the Bureau of Accounts, when they get your expense account for the last month."

"Now," said Dutch, with a grin, "you said something."

THE END.

[The end of *Stopping 'Em With Lead* by Wirt Winchester Young]