

Terry

A Tale of the Hill People

Charles Goff Thomson

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TERRY

A TALE OF THE HILL PEOPLE

BY

CHARLES GOFF THOMSON

**Late Lieut.-Colonel, U. S. Army.
Formerly Assistant Director of Prisons
for Philippine Government**

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**DEDICATED TO
MR. E. J. B.
WHO HAS GIVEN OF HIS
COUNSEL, SPIRIT AND SUBSTANCE
TO NEEDY YOUNG MEN**

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The poem "Casey" used in Chapter IX was written by the late Arthur W. Ferguson, formerly Executive Secretary for the Philippine Government. It has been edited and amplified but is substantially as written by him. A man of unusual facility, Mr. Ferguson composed the verses under circumstances somewhat similar to those set down herein, and with like spontaneity.



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TERRY

CHAPTER I

THE FOX

The frosty silence of the snow-mantled hills was rent by the vicious crack of a high-powered, small-calibered rifle. The hunter sprang from the thicket in which he had lain concealed and crossed the gully to a knoll where a black furry bundle had dropped to the snow after one convulsive leap.

Exultant, Terry bent down to examine the silky black coat.

"Right through the ear. Well, Mister Fox, you're mine—though you did lead me a merry chase for twelve days! You laughed at me till the snow came—knew I wouldn't bring you out of your hole with formalin, that it was a square game we played. But to-day everything broke against you, boy,—sun and wind and snow. And perhaps hunger."

The twinge of pain that stabs every true sportsman as he realizes that he has extinguished a spark of life shadowed Terry's thin, sensitive face. It was a face of singular appeal, dominated by a queer twist of upper lip that stamped his mouth with a permanent wistfulness. Even in the bracing cold of the winter morning his skin was white, but the clear pallor was belied by the swift energy with which he moved and the eager sparkle of his dark gray eyes. He picked up the fluffy bundle and stroked the sleek fur.

"Hard luck, old boy! But now you'll never be hungry again, or cold. And I haven't hunted you all this time just for the sake of the sport." His face lighted. "You're going to be a proud little fox. If foxes have souls—and I don't see why we should deny you what we lay selfish claims to for ourselves—yours will rejoice in the purpose of your end. Every night and every morning you—"

He broke off as the distant pealing of church bells came to his ears, carried faintly but clearly by the light wind that whispered over the snowy stretches of rolling meadowlands. For a long time Terry stood facing toward the invisible village, his face moody and inscrutable. As the sound of the bells died away he shook off the spell with conscious, humorous effort and picking up his rifle and the fox he went into the thicket to secure and adjust his snowshoes.

Ignoring paths and sleighroads he made his way toward the town. The crisp pine-laden air charged his muscles with exuberant excess of the fine energy of youth and he made his way swiftly across the sparkling snow that blanketed the gentle landscape, through the thickets of evergreens and across the tiny, ice-edged creeks that flowed in swift escape from winter's frozen grip.

Keen-eyed, he stopped a moment in study of a group of pheasants that huddled in a clump of underbrush. They played possum till he passed on. A rabbit, reared up in nervous-nosed inquiry, watched him furtively as he approached the rock behind which it had vainly sought concealment. Terry laughed at its ridiculous plight.

"You'd better improve your strategy, you young scamp, or you'll wind up in the pot of some one who hunts rabbits!"

He watched its jumpy flight into a distant copse of young pines, then went on swiftly. In an hour he paused at the top of a last steep grade. Lake Champlain stretched her flat-frozen bosom to the north and south of him. The more level timbered areas of the opposite shore were broken here and there by clearings in which white farm houses and red barns nestled like doll houses.

At the foot of the slope directly beneath him a village lay primly along the lake shore. It was a square-built town, its limits almost rectangular, its breadth and width checkered into exact squares by wide, straight streets. It was an old town: a score of its flat-roofed structures had been built while the Mohawks still guarded the Western Gate of the Long House, and many of the great, old-

fashioned homes had stood when Ethan Allen strutted through its streets.

It was not a snug little town, there was no air of hospitality to encourage strangers to tarry within its gates, but seemed to promise "value received" for any who came, paid their way and attended strictly to their own affairs.

Thus Terry saw the town in which he had been born and had spent all of his twenty-six years except the four at Princeton. He tarried, his eyes fixed upon the cemetery which limited the eastern edge of the town, to which his father and mother had been carried when he was a boy of eleven.

He faced about in lingering appreciation of the blue-vaulted expanse, then descended toward the village. Whipping off his snowshoes at the border of the village he entered the main street, which ran straight through town to the lake front. No one was in sight on the broad thoroughfare and he found a measure of relief in its emptiness, for though he did not adhere to the rigid New England doctrine that governed his neighbors, he found no pleasure in wanton violation of their stiff code. Realizing that with snowshoes, gun and fox he jarred heavily upon the atmosphere of the quiet Sunday morning, he hurried down the street.

He encountered no one, but as he passed by the ice-incrusted watering trough at the central square and approached the block made up by Crampville's three churches, the big doors of his own church were flung open and the congregation emerged. As the decorous crowd filed out Terry hesitated a moment, then kept on his way.

The progress of the lone figure along the opposite side of the street was the topic of conversation at nearly every dinner table in Crampville that Sunday. It became a sort of small-town epic, so that they still tell how stern the elders looked, and how white Terry's face against the background of black fur which he had thrown across his shoulder in order to free his right hand that he might gravely raise his crimson hunting cap in respectful salutation of families he had known from childhood. And they still tell, too, how Deane Hunter, flushed with mortification

at her father's frigid refusal to recognize Terry's greeting, checked the nudges and whisperings by calling out a cheerful "Good Morning, Dick." Her courageous voice still rang in his ears as he entered the iron-fenced yard that surrounded the home of his fathers.

Inside the great, high-ceilinged house Terry stood a while in somber reflection, then shrugged his trim shoulders and passed through the shadowy rooms out into the barn. In five minutes he had cleaned and oiled his rifle, but an hour passed while he carefully removed the pelt and tacked it taut upon a stretching board.

He was in the library, reading, when his sister and brother-in-law came downstairs in response to the dinner bell. Susan and her husband, Ellis Crofts, had lived in the old mansion since their marriage two years previously, rather against Ellis' desires. He had wished to set up an establishment of his own, but had yielded to Susan's pleadings and Terry's sincere letter from college asking him not to be instrumental in closing up a house that had been lived in continuously by the Terrys of four generations.

They had been among the last to emerge from church, but had come out in time to see Terry as he opened the gate, and had heard enough of the murmured comment to understand its significance. It had been difficult for them to control their emotions as they kept slow step with the throng down the broad sidewalk. Susan, mortified but loyal to the core, had set her face in defiant smile lest she burst into tears: Ellis, devoted to Terry but tickled by the situation, had smothered his snickers in protracted fits of coughing.

Terry threw aside a handbook on the curing of pelts and rose at their entrance, smiling:

"Well, do you good folks think you are safe in sitting at the same table with an unrepentant sinner?"

Susan had been crying. "Oh, Dick! Why did you do it? How do you do such

things?"

He waved his hand in humorous deprecation. "Easy. It's the simplest thing I do. It isn't difficult if you have a knack for it."

"But, Dick, it's no joke. I saw the three elders of our church—Ballard, Remington and Van Slyke—talking about it, and they were very bitter. And you know they can expel any church member."

Terry made no answer save to put his arm around each and lead them into the dining room. But Susan was not content.

"Dick, I wish you would explain it to Ballard or Van Slyke. They are influential men and both are very religious."

Ellis took a hand: "Their religion is all right, so far as it goes—but they mix it up with their dyspepsia too much to suit me!"

As his wife turned rebuking eyes upon him he pursued doggedly: "Not that their dyspepsia and religion are always mixed; they have their dyspepsia seven days in the week!"

She joined in their laughter over Ellis' exaggerated defense, then turned again to her brother.

"What are you going to do with that nasty thing you shot, Dick?"

"Nasty?" broke in Ellis in quick alarm. "You didn't shoot a skunk, did you?"

She ignored her husband and persisted: "Tell me why you shot that fox, Dick. You have been out hunting nearly every day for two weeks and have shot nothing else, so I know you have a reason."

"I'm not going to help eat it!" Ellis broke in. "I've heard they are stringy—and a bit smelly."

"Ellis, will you stop being ridiculous? Dick, why have you hunted that fox so long?"

Ellis had seen that Terry was not to be pumped, that this was another of his queer quests. He tried again to shunt Susan away.

"Maybe it was a personal matter between him and the fox, Sue."

She turned on him a look she endeavored to make disdainful, but only succeeded in raising another laugh from both. But she was not to be deterred. Her eyes lit with sudden inspiration.

"I'll bet—I'll bet anything—" she began.

"Susan Terry Crofts! Even Dick would not bet on Sunday!"

"I will bet anything," she insisted, "that it is something for Deane—for Christmas!"

In the slight flush that rose in her brother's face Susan learned that she had hit the mark. But she was instantly sorry that she had pressed the issue, as she had learned long before to respect what was to her his queer reticence.

Ellis hurried into the breach: "Wonder what Bruce will give Deane this Christmas? He is about due to present her with something really worth while—like a patent mop!"

Even Terry laughed. The struggle for Deane's favor between Bruce Ballard and Terry had been in progress nearly ten years and had become one of the town's institutions. The first formal offerings tendered by the two boys on the occasion of her graduation from high school typified the contrasting characters of the rivals: Terry, idealistic, impressionable, reserved, had sent her a beautiful copy of the "Love Letters of a Musician," while Bruce, sincere, obvious and practical, had given her a hat-pin.

On her succeeding birthday Terry, after a six-hour climb, had won for her a box of trailing arbutus from Mount Defiance's cool top; Bruce had sent her candy. From his medical college at Baltimore Bruce had sent, as succeeding Christmas gifts, an ivory toilet set, a thermos bottle, a reading lamp and a chafing dish.

Terry's offerings on those occasions had been a Japanese kimono embroidered with her favorite flower—a wondrous thing secured by correspondence with the American consul at Kobe: a pair of Siamese kittens which he named Cat-Nip and Cat-Nap: a sandal-wood fan out of India; and a little, triple-chinned, ebony god of Mirth, its impish eyes rolled back in merriment, mouth wrinkled with utter joy of the world.

The rivalry had divided the town into two camps. The pro-Bruce faction, composed largely of men folk, claimed for their protégé a splendid common sense in selection of his gifts: but the women and girls, who made up the other group, envied Deane not only the gifts Terry gave her, but also—and more so—the rarefied romantic spirit of the youth who conceived and offered them.

Deane realized that both Bruce and Terry stayed on in the dull old town principally to be near her. This was true of Bruce particularly, as he was a young surgeon of such promise that he had twice been invited into junior association with Albany's greatest specialist. She had strongly urged him to embrace the increased opportunity for service and profit which the city afforded.

But Terry was only six months out of college, a six months spent in futile effort to adjust himself to the theme of the village, to find appropriate outlet for that urgent desire to be of use in the world which dominated his character. As the Terrys were of those families termed "comfortable" in Crampville, he felt no need of devoting himself to adding to an already ample estate. At his sister's request, he had undertaken to manage a shoe store that represented one of their holdings but at the end of a couple of months had given it up—also in accord with her wishes. Higgins, their old clerk, had come to her with tearful warnings that Terry's unwillingness to refuse credit to any one who came in with a tale of

hard-luck was ruining the business: and Terry had lost the custom of several good families by declining to humor their crotchety unreasonableness.

But Higgins did not know how they came to lose the trade of the Hunter family. At the end of a trying day of insistent demand for smaller shoes than feminine feet could accommodate, of viewing bunions and flat arches and wry-jointed toes, he had written Deane:

DEANE DEAR:—

I used to think that the true glory of Trilby rested in the wondrous mesmeric voice—but after a month in the shoe business I know better. Between perfect vocal cords and perfect feet, give me the feet.

The word "shoe" used to bring to my mind thoughts of calfskin, kid, patent leather. But no more! Now I think of—well, many things.

I am glad that your family is not among those who favor this establishment with its patronage. I am very happy in this, as it is good to think that your dear shoes are but a part of you, are incidental to your being, and not a consequence of drear barter and "fitting."

I will not be over to-night. But I will be thinking of you.

DICK.

A bit puzzled, she had shown the note to her father.irate, he had issued a mandate that produced the effect Terry had asked. Mr. Hunter was acutely sensitive about twin corns which had been a part of his toes so long that he honestly thought them congenital.

After quitting the store Terry had turned his attention to their farm properties but, as a careful investigation covering three months had demonstrated them to be in capable hands, he had returned them to the full management of the old tenants at the end of the harvest. He had then studied the possibilities of enlarging their only other business, a small pulp plant, but after satisfying himself that the meager water power was being fully utilized and that the location of the mill at Crampville precluded competition with those more favorably located that were operated with steam power, he had abandoned the project. For a month he had been seeking outlet for his restless energy.

Deane, anxiously watching his endeavor to fit himself into one of Crampville's narrow grooves and vaguely understanding his unvoiced craving for wider horizons, dreaded the break she knew would take him away. Susan, studying him with the uneasy solicitude of an older sister, saw in Deane an anchor which would hold him to the town. Ellis had been less concerned, as he had recognized that Terry's intolerance of the village was but the outcropping of a sane young spirit that gauged the peaks and sought real service. He had been trying lately to prepare his wife for Terry's departure to other fields, as he thought it inevitable. It was a word to this effect that had precipitated the tears with which she had greeted her brother before dinner.

Ellis plagued Susan throughout the leisurely meal, Terry adding an occasional word whenever the flow of affectionate badgering lagged. Fanny, who had served them since they were children, bustled in and out, redfaced, wholesome, fruitlessly trying to press upon Terry an excess of the over-ample dinner. It was a sort of unwritten law in Crampville that the Sunday dinner should be sufficiently heavy to drive the menfolk to a long digestive nap.

Ellis lingered at the table after Terry had excused himself and gone out into the barn again. Susan helped Fanny clear the old mahogany table, then sank into a chair beside her abstracted husband.

"Sue," he said finally, "Dick hasn't said anything lately about accepting that position in the Philippines, has he?"

A worried look crept into her smooth face: "No. I supposed he had decided against it."

He patted her hand consolingly: "Don't be too confident about his staying home, Sue. He wants to see things—do things! There isn't much in this town to hold one of his nature."

"There's—Deane," she said, hopefully.

"Sue, don't be so sure of that, either. You know that you and I hold different theories about that. Don't bank too heavily on yours." He drummed the polished table a moment before continuing: "He received another telegram from Washington yesterday—I thought he might have mentioned it to you."

"No," she quavered.

"Nor to me. Guess he doesn't want to worry you."

She was close to tears again: "I wish he had never met that young Bronner in college—he gave Dick all these crazy ideas about going to those horrid islands where his brother is!"

"Well, Sue, he made me feel the same way—and I'm a fat married man! I enjoyed his stories of his brother's experiences with the wild people over there. It must be an interesting life."

"You don't talk like that to Dick, do you?" she implored.

"Of course not. But I think you've been too sure that he would stay on here indefinitely—I think it will take very little to tip the scales the other way."

He yawned prodigiously, rousing Susan to an ire that stemmed the flow of tears which had threatened to overflow her blue eyes. Then, content with his tactics, he went upstairs for his traditional nap.



Later, Terry came into the big living room and stood in front of the fireplace a long time, his lean face grave and thoughtful. Decision made, he wrote a note of sincere apology to Doctor Mather, his pastor. He also wrote Deane that he would not be over in the evening but would see her during the week, and made the delivery of the notes an excuse to get the faithful Fanny out into the crisp December afternoon.

The light in the Terry library burned long after Crampville's other lights had winked out. He had been picked up by Stevenson and carried by that pathetic master into the far places of the earth.



The next morning he was in the barn, his gay mood revealed by the running talk addressed to the pelt on which he worked.

"Well, old boy, only four days to get you into shape for your dedication, but the book says it can be done. So you might as well soften up now—"he vigorously rubbed the dried bare side with some oily preparation—"as later."

"What a destiny, old chap! Surely no other fox ever born to lady-fox can be as happy as you're going to be!" He rubbed industriously. "You're not for me, you know. No, sir! I wouldn't bring you out of the hills into this burg—where they kill ambition by preaching content with your lot, where the hoarders of pennies are venerated and the pluggers canonized—I wouldn't bring you here just for me. For I'm not worthy of you. No, sir-ree! Don't you know I'm no good—didn't you see that yesterday? Why, Old Samuel Terwilliger said I'm an atheist because I quoted Ingersoll's graveside oration—said no Christian would repeat anything that man ever said, even if his watch is a bargain at a dollar!... Samuel likes bargains."

Working rapidly, with no lost motions, he rambled on, congratulatory, reproachful, whimsical. Having carried the curing to a point where a twenty-four-hour time process was the next essential factor, he carefully pegged the skin to the barn door.



That evening Susan came running home excitedly, having learned that one of the elders had asked that a meeting be called to consider Dick's case, and that the

young pastor had very promptly and very emphatically vetoed the proceeding. It seemed that Bruce had heard of the move and persuaded his father not to support it, after a stormy scene in which he had threatened to resign his own membership if they moved against Terry.

Ellis looked long at Terry: "Nothing small about Bruce, Dick. Some fellows, under the circumstances—all the circumstances—might have let you have it to the hilt."

Terry smiled gravely. "Good old Bruce," he said.

He left the room, slowly, and sat alone in the library. It had struck deep, that even one God-fearing but not God-loving old man should think him unfit to sit in the church in which his father and mother had been married, from which they had been carried side by side for their long rest. It was midnight when he went up the broad staircase to his room.

The following afternoon he dropped in to see Father Jennings, the gentle little priest who had been beloved by two generations of all denominations—and those of none. Terry loved the old study, which in forty years had taken on something of the priest's character. It was a comfortable room; cheerful in its wide windows, warm with a bright hearthfire, and well worn with long years of service.

Terry had found friendship and counsel here since his boyhood, had been one of the procession that passed through the door in search of wisdom and cheer. All the gossip of the town came to the priest: he knew of Terry's hunting trip and of the climax which had scandalized the sterner factions of the community. He was of those who knew Terry best, and entertained no misgivings about the state of his immortal soul.

They talked fitfully, as intimate friends do. The old man knew that it was worry over the town's harsh reaction to the Sunday fox hunt that had brought Terry to

him. He broached the subject.

"Dick, I have wanted to see you since Sunday morning. I had a question to ask you nobody else could answer."

As Terry turned to him with somber mien he concluded, his eyes twinkling: "I wanted to know if it was the best fox ever!"

And that was all, though Terry stayed to sup with him. Till nine o'clock they sat before the fire, the priest in a worn rocker drawn up close to the hearth: the single log burning glorified his fine old face as he placidly rocked and pondered.

He had spent the morning among his foreign parishioners, who lived in the squalid section of the town, across the river. A frugal, law-abiding lot, they furnished the brawn needed in the three pulp factories and lived a life apart from the balance of the towns-people, bitterly but voicelessly resenting the villagers' careless ostracism of all who came under the easy classification of the term "wop." There existed a tacit agreement among property owners that no house north of the river should be sold or leased to a foreigner, and that no garlic might taint the atmosphere their children breathed in school, they had erected a small schoolhouse upon the southside. So, sequestered six days in the week in a settlement that was entirely foreign, communicating their thoughts in the tongues of the Mediterranean and the Balkans, the southsiders mingled with Americans only during the brief hours of Sunday worship.

In his morning visit Father Jennings had again met with several evidences of Terry's curious influence over the foreigners. Terry understood them instinctively, grasped their viewpoints and ideals, and was the only layman on the northside in whom they confided, called in to settle knotty problems and to partake of the hospitality they lavished upon appropriate occasions of weddings, christenings and the neverending procession of days of patron saints. Subtle, romantic, circumscribed by alien environment, they recognized in him a kindred spirit and opened their hearts wide to him. Terry, his ardent young pastor—Dr.

Mather—and Father Jennings were the only northsiders whom they called friends. None of the three had been named on the town's "Committee on Americanization." ...

The priest roused from his reverie and for a long time contemplated the quiet, thoughtful lad who sat beside him. Gradually a deep concern spread across his comfortably aged features, a presentiment of impending loss shadowed his pleasant eyes. He reached out to lay his hand on Terry's forearm.

"Dick," he said, "there is plenty for you to do right here in Crampville—what is this I hear about your going to the Philippines?"



CHAPTER II

TERRY DECIDES

Christmas Eve, the large snowflakes drifted slowly down out of a windless sky. The dusk was cheerful with the sound of sleigh bells that announced the arrival or departure of last-hour shoppers.

Terry, at his desk in the great living room, surveyed the finished trophy happily. It was an unusually black and lustrous pelt. He buried his face in the silky mat a moment, then drew out paper and pen, and wrote:

DEANE-DEAR:—

Some three years ago a mother fox suffered that this one might be born: denied herself food that he might satisfy his urgent little appetite as he grew bigger and stronger. When he was big enough he left her and forgot her—she may have suffered then, too.

He lived as foxes do. Things died that he might eat; rabbits, pheasants, chickens, field-mice. He stalked all things less strong and clever than himself. A cruel cycle, but it is the law of the wild, something that you and I cannot alter.

He enjoyed the summers best, with their longer days, fuller larders, sweet wood odors, long naps in the cool shadows of the thicket. But winter came, with its hardships and its cold, a cold that little foxes feel the same as you and I. But it was this cold that stimulated and silkened his fur, made it this wondrous, prized thing.

Then I came, and he ceased to be what he was—a hunter of smaller, weaker things—and became what you see here: a finer thing—a token. Your kind heart need find no cruelty in a merciful shot that spelled no pain and that by stopping him assured that gentler, weaker things will live on and on.

And he will be glad, too, as not only is he forever freed from cold and hunger and stark fear, but his is to be a tender office.

Will you lay it at your bedside, that each night it may cushion your last step at slumbertime, and each morning soften the first contact between the vistas of dreamland and the less yielding surfaces of life to which we wake.

So even the things of the wild are made to serve. To serve—is that not the law of man?

My part in it? But little: none other than I will have touched it till it reaches your dear hands. I shaped it, wrought to preserve its beauties that it might give you pleasure.

To give pleasure—is that not the law of love?

A very, very Merry Christmas!

DICK.

He sent his gift, at about nine o'clock. In gay mood, he wandered about the great house: entered the kitchen where Fanny was singeing the Christmas turkey: returned to the living room to throw a fresh log in the wide fireplace. His mood was too expansive for indoors. He donned short coat and thick cap, but as he passed out of the gate a scared little lad, a foreigner, rushed up breathlessly and begged him to come—trouble was brewing on the southside.

His questions elicited meager information. Excited, the lad relapsed so often into his native tongue that Terry could make nothing of his tale.

Hand in hand they hurried through the village, crossed the dark bridge and approached a ramshackle house from which a babble of voices rose in strident argument. The excited chorus abated at Terry's sharp knock and the door was thrown open to disclose the belligerent figure of Tony Ricorro, the leader of the Italian colony. Recognizing the reefered figure that smiled up at him through the falling flakes, Tony's dark scowl faded as he reached out his powerful hands and with a joyous shout fairly lifted Terry into the house.

Terry laughed as the gaudily dressed occupants of the room crowded around him, and greeted most of the score of swarthy men and women by name. Tony masterfully stripped him of his overcoat and cap and placed them in the kitchen from which emanated odors of strange things cooking. The room was stifling with heat and with smells—beer, garlic, tobacco, perfumes, kerosene.

Tony charged in from the kitchen with a bottle of beer but Terry shook his head. Tony was hospitably insistent, "What! No beer?"

"No thanks, Tony."

"What's matt'? Bad stomach?"

"Yes," smiled Terry, "call it that."

He plunged into the business in hand. "Tony, what's the trouble here to-night?"

Tony's first word of explanation was instantly submerged beneath a chorus of voices; the excited crowd surged around Terry, as voluble of gesture as of tongue. Pandemonium descended.

Terry finally silenced the din by standing on his chair and pantomiming his desire to be heard. "Now, listen to me," he began, after quiet was restored, "I'm going to ask you all to keep silent, and to promise me that no one will speak except those I call by name." They all promised—each one not once but in a series of lengthy assurances which he had to raise his hand to cut short.

"Now, Tony, you first. What's the matter?"

Tony's face registered his utter disgust. "What'sa matt'? What'sa matt'? Evra teeng 'sa matt'! Tommor' we christen our bab' and evra' bod' want a name heem!" He glared at the restless circle which ringed them.

The odd wistful twist at the corner of Terry's mouth disappeared for a moment in his slow smile; this was so like these people, who bore big troubles stoically and reacted powerfully to inconsequential.

He called on several others. All were relatives of Tony or of his wife; sisters, brothers, several "in-laws," Tony's father, two uncles. Each had his or her name for the child, and sound reasons for the choice.

"Tony, where is Felice?" he asked, noting that Tony's wife was not in the crowded dining room.

Tony took him into a dimly lighted room, where his wife lay in bed; the guiltless cause of all this dissension, obviously inured to clamor, was asleep in her arm. She smiled up at Terry as he sat down on the edge of the bed and took her hand.

Tony stood looking down at Felice and their first-born, his heart in his eyes.

"Tony, what does Felice wish to name your son?" Terry asked suddenly.

Receiving no answer, he looked up at Tony and read in the agonized contrition of Tony's dark face that she had not yet been consulted. Tears glistened in the forgiving eyes Felice turned on Tony, and as he flung himself down at the side of the bed and buried his face in her pillow, Terry tiptoed out of the room and softly closed the door.

In a few minutes Tony flung the door open and strode into the room, unashamed of the tears that shone on his rough cheeks.

"You all a go to hell-a with your a-names! Felice, she name-a our boy and to-morrow we go Padre Jenneeng. She a name heem"—he paused with true Latin sense of the value of suspense—"She a name heem—Reechar' Terree—Ricorro!"

A moment of hesitation, of assimilation, and then a hubbub of delighted acceptance and acclaim. Terry stayed but a few minutes, realizing that much as they liked him, there would be more spontaneity at the fiesta if there were none but their own people at the table.

He went in and thanked Felice gravely for the honor she had conferred upon him, wished for them all a merry Christmas, and passed out amid a medley of thanks and benedictions.

The snowfall had ceased. He crossed to the North Side and hastened up Main Street, and though it lacked but an hour of midnight, he found Judd's jewelry store still open. He went in and found young Judd about to close up.

Judd, hollow eyed with the fatigue of the long day, studied his old friend's beaming face: "Hello, Sir Galahad!" he said.

Terry eyed him scornfully: "Hello, Rut!" He drew himself up proudly. "Behold in me a new dignity—I am now a god-father!"

Having in mind the parents' love for the elaborate, he gayly selected an ornate silver cup for the infant.

"I'll engrave it for you after the holidays," Judd offered.

"Good old boy, Judd! The initials will be R—T—R."

He buttoned his coat and went to the door: Judd was musing over the monogram: "Richard—Terry—what's the 'R' stand for, Dick?"

Terry grinned as he called back through the open door.

"Why,—Romance, of course!"



He tramped far out the north road through the new fallen snow, his whole being glowing. The stars sparkled through the clear cold air in myriad chorus of the message of hope that one in the East had heralded to a sadder world on another Christmas eve. The snow-flung star beams illuminated the peaceful countryside: there was no moon, no light save the great glow of the heavens, no shadows under gaunt oaks or huddled evergreens.

He was in harmony with the night. He followed the sleigh-rutted highway for several miles, then swung back to town along a woodcutter's trail that edged the lakeshore, winding through the new growths of pine and balsam whose night-black branches were outlined by the white fall.

He loved the open: there was no loneliness here.... Magic-wrought, Deane's phantom figure kept apace, matched step with step along the shore trail through the hushed woods, across the white sheen of open spaces. Ever, when summoned thus, she came to share the hours and the places that he loved best.

Love surged hot through his veins: love of friends, of living, of youth, love of a woman ... probably his gift lay at her bedside now, as she slept....

Unconsciously he slowed his pace and lifted his fine, pale face upward: his low, clear baritone flooded the broken woods, carried far out across the silent frozen lake, unechoed; it was vibrant with the very spirit of yuletide—love of man and woman.

Love, to share again those winged scented days,
Those starry skies:
To see once more your joyous face,
Your tender eyes:
Just to know that years so fair might come again,
Awhile:
Oh! To thrill again to your dear voice—
Your smile!

It was long past midnight when he reached town, his mood chilling indefinitely at sight of its dark houses.

"You're a queer old town," he muttered. "You go to bed on this night of nights—yes, and you batten your windows tight against this glorious air—and all of the other glorious things."

Passing the suspicious village constable, he penetrated even his callous heart with the most gladsome Christmas greeting he had heard in many a year.

Home, he stirred the dying logs into flame and sank into a deep cushioned chair drawn up before the glowing embers. The long day had taken no toll of his lithe frame: sleepless, he sat long in pleasant retrospection of the day, which had

brought him opportunities to contribute to the sum of peace on earth and to give pleasure to those whom he loved.

His gift to Deane had approached even his exacting criterion of what was fit for her. He envied the skin its rapturous reception, the sparkle of bright eyes its beauty would invoke. It was characteristic that his vision did not carry him to the daily contact of pink toes he had assigned as its function. And it was characteristic of him, too, that he did not think of the gifts which had come for him.

He would see the elders, he mused, and apologize for what must have seemed to them a deliberate flaunting of their standards ... he had been a little careless, lately ... he would remedy that ... it was a good town—his failure to settle down had been a fault ... he would find something to do, worth doing—and do it.... Deane's friendship might ripen into something mellow, and then....

He reached into an inner pocket and withdrew a telegram, bending nearer the fireplace to read it.

Washington, D. C.

Richard Terry, Crampville, Vermont.

Wire will you accept commission second lieutenant Philippine Constabulary period immediate
decision essential period if you accept wire date you will be able to sail from San Francisco

Wilson Insular Bureau

The glow from the fire which ruddied his face revealed the struggle of the minute before decision came. With an expression curiously mingled of renunciation and relief he tossed the paper among the glowing embers. He rose as the sheet took fire and in the brief flash of light which marked the consumption of the telegram he saw a familiar-looking package on the library table in the shadow cast by his big chair. He carried it to the now fainter glow of the hearth and saw that it was addressed to him in Deane's trim hand. He opened it eagerly, to see what form her remembrance had taken.

It was the fox-skin, returned. Vague, trouble-eyed, he read the inclosed note.

DEAR DICK:—

I am sending you back your present. Father insists, because you secured it on Sunday.

It hurts me, Dick, dreadfully, but you know how he feels about such things.

It is the loveliest present I ever received—and it makes me want to cry, sometimes, when I think of your doing such things for me and thinking about me as you do. I *AM* crying, now, Dick.

Though I can not have it, your present will always be mine—I can never forget that you were good enough to wish me to have it.

And will you accept my very best wishes that your Christmas may be a very merry one.

DEANE.

He sank back into the chair again, sickened.... "That your Christmas may be a very merry one."



Susan, first down in the morning, raised the curtains to the brilliant Christmas morning, and turned to find him sitting in the chilled room before the dead fire. Shocked by the haggard face, she hurried to him.

"Dick, are you sick?" As she sank by the side of his chair her hand brushed against the rich fur which lay across his knees, and she understood. She placed a pitying arm about his shoulders.

"I feared it, Dick—I feared it! You know how he is—her father. I'll never speak to him again as long as—" She burst into tears.

Gently he withdrew her arm and took her hand in his.

"It's all right, Sue, it's—all—right."

Through her tears she read the pain that lurked in his eyes, the agony that

betrayed the patient smile. She sobbed convulsively, heartsick in her helplessness to ease this young brother to whom she had been half mother.

"That's what you always say—about everything: 'it will be all right.' When you were a boy it was always the same—'it's all right.'"

He comforted her with quiet words till the storm abated. Then, "I'm going to miss you, Sue-sister," he said.

She stood up, comprehension dawning in her wide eyes.

"You're going away!"

He nodded gravely.

Slowly, fearfully, she asked, "When?"

"To-night."

"Way off to—those—Philippines?"

He nodded, then unable to bear longer the hurt in her tremulous face, he sought refuge in the ridiculous; he struck an attitude.

"I'm going in quest of adventure—riches—romance! I'm going to sail the Spanish Main—seek golden doubloons—maids in distress—the Fountain of Youth! I'm going to cross strange waters—travel untraveled forest ... see unseen peoples ... know unknown hills...."

An odd light flickered in his eyes, as if he half believed what he spoke. Fanny appeared at the kitchen door and with her cheery call of "Merry Christmas," the light faded from his face as he turned in quick response.

He turned to his sister in mock reproof: "Shure and it's ye that has not yet wished me aven a dacent top o' the marnin', let alone the gratin's of the sason! Shame on

ye—ye heartless, thoughtless, loveless—"

He broke off, laughing at her bewilderment: she never could keep apace with his quick moods. Noting a tear still glistening he took her cheeks between his hands and kissed the wet eyes, then asked her to get word to Deane that he would be over some time during the evening.

Surprised and pleased that he should ask her to participate in his affair with Deane, she hurried to the desk set in a deep bay window.

Ellis, sleepy-eyed, came down with his hearty greetings of the day, and was surprised to find Sue bent earnestly over her writing.

"Say," he said, "can't you wait till after breakfast to thank everybody for their presents? What's the rush? Say, Dick, did you hear yet what Bruce gave to the lady of his heart? No? Well, he out-Bruced Bruce this time! He gave her a patented, electric foot-warmer!"

Terry smiled his appreciation of Ellis' chuckling loyalty and escaped upstairs to his room. Ellis wandered aimlessly over to the Christmas table and noted the number of unopened packages marked with Terry's name, then called up from the foot of the stairs:

"Come right down here, you ungrateful Non-christian, and see what Santa Claus brought you! You got more than any of us and—"

He desisted as he suddenly became aware of his wife's frantic signals, and reading the grievous trouble in her twitching face, he went to her.



Susan, entering Terry's room at dusk, found him standing at the window staring out into the evening, watching the shadows paint out one by one the landmarks he had known from boyhood. Two large leather bags, packed but still open,

stood at the side of the bed. The two frames which had held the pictures of his father and mother lay upon the table, empty, beside letters addressed to Father Jennings, Doctor Mather, and Tony Ricorro.

He did not hear her but continued at the window, his relaxed shoulders giving an unwonted aspect of frailty to his body. She tiptoed out of the room, crept back again to look through brimming eyes at the lonely figure silhouetted against the darkening window, then stumbled into her own room and closed the door.



Terry returned to Deane in the sitting room after bidding her father and mother a courteously friendly farewell. Mr. Hunter, vaguely disturbed, had followed his wife upstairs reluctantly; he was not quite confident that his decision regarding the fox skin had been justified, and would have been glad had Terry given him opportunity to discuss it. In a moment his voice sounded down to them as he defended himself against his irate spouse.

"I don't care what you say, Marthy, he's got to settle down and—"

Then their door closed.

For a long time Deane and Terry stood voiceless, each leaden with a dull misery. The shock of his announcement had paled her and she stared hopelessly at him out of wide blue eyes, her full red lips aquiver at the hurt she read in the gray eyes and the queer wistful mouth.

She broke the pulsing silence: "I never understand you, Dick,—quite. Is it because of the fox skin?"

He shook his head uncertainly, barely conscious of her words in a last rapt gaze at her, vaguely aware that this was the picture of her that he would carry in his mind through the years to come. Rounded, long of lines, apart from him she

looked as tall as he, though there was a two inch discrepancy; the wide eyes and generous, curved mouth indicated her infinite capacity for affection. The shadow of a dimple flickered high on her left cheek: the quickened beat of heart pulsed in the white column of her throat.

"Is it because you hate the town, Dick?" she asked tremulously.

Again he shook his head slowly: "No, Deane, it is not that. The town is all right—it is not that."

He paused, brooding, then went on: "Last night I did not sleep—much—thinking about it. It's all my fault.... I do not fit. So I am going away, going to try to find my own place, somehow."

Tortured by his patient smile, she followed him out into the dim hall, half blinded by her burning tears. She sobbed unrestrainedly as he slipped into his overcoat.

He came to her, his hand outstretched, his voice husky.

"Good-by, Deane-girl," he said.

Taking his hand she stepped close to him, misty-eyed, atremble.

"Good-by, Di—Oh, Dick! Don't go! Don't go way over to those awful Islands!"

He steadied her with an arm about the shaking shoulders. She leaned full against him and in the soft contact his pulses leaped. He fought to resist the temptation to take advantage of her mood, knew that for the moment she was his if he but pressed his claim.

Suddenly she looked up at him, glorious in her grief and surrender.

"Shall I—do you want me to—to—wait?"

For a few moments it seemed that he had not heard the low voice.

Then: "Don't wait, Deane-girl,—don't wait."

Then the arm was gone from about her shoulder.

"But I will, Dick, I will!" she sobbed, but as the words fell from her lips she heard the door close and felt the gust of cold air that chilled the hall.



She was still awake when the midnight accommodation whistled its impending arrival from the north. She listened, tense, as the train came to a stop in the town. A brief halt, then it sounded its underway, the pistons accelerated their chugging beat and it passed out of Crampville into the south.

She stood, still-breathed, dry-eyed, till the last grinding rumble died out of the frosty night, then as a full realization of her loss came home, she dropped to the side of the bed and buried her face in the coverlid.

The floor where she knelt seemed cold and hard.



CHAPTER III

MINDANAO

The old *Francesca*, directed by a nervous and none too competent Tagalog captain, maneuvered in the six-mile tidal current which swept west through the Straits making Zamboanga a nightmare to all the native skippers who called at that port. Crab-like, she crawled obliquely to within a few hundred feet of the low-lying town, then the screw churned up a furious wake as the anxious Tagalog on the bridge swung her back into the Straits to circle in a new attempt. Carried by the tidal rush the old tub circled in a great ellipse.

Alone at the rail on the dingy promenade Terry stood enjoying his first glimpse of Mindanao. Seven months in Luzon had brought him countless tales of this uncertain southland—tales of pirates, of insolent, murderous datos defiant behind their cotta fortresses, of kris and barong wielded by fanatic Moros gone amok; of pearls as large as robins' eggs, of nuggets tossed as playthings by naked children of the forests, of mysterious tribes who inhabited the fastnesses of inaccessible hills.

He wore the service uniform of the Constabulary, the field uniform of khaki blouse and breeches, tan shoes and leggings, and stiff-brimmed cavalry Stetson. The smart uniform set his erect figure off trimly and added to the impression of alertness conveyed by his steady gray eyes.

In the two wide swings back into midstream that ensued before the steamer approached near enough land to get ropes to the little brown stevedores who waited on the dock, Terry had ample opportunity for study of the tropic panorama. The sea was dotted with Moro vintas, swiftest of all Malayan sailing craft; tide and wind borne, some scurried at tremendous pace toward the fishing

grounds of the Sulu Sea, others tacked painfully into the Celebes. A Government launch, its starred and striped flag brilliant against the green sea in the morning light, left its jetty and headed south toward the dim coastline of Basilan. A score of gulls, that had followed the ship down from Sorsogon, fattening on the waste thrown overboard after each meal, circled around the ship aimlessly, uttering unpleasant cries. The young sun mounted swiftly in a cloudless sky, hot on the trail of the cool morning breezes, white in its threat of blistering punishment of all who dared its shafts.

The hawser snubbed, the drum of the rusty winch rattled and banged on worn bearings to a tune of escaping steam, laboriously warping the smelly hull alongside the dock. Terry watched the sturdy little Moros spring into agile life as the vessel slowly neared the pier, then he turned to look over the town which was built flush with the edge of the narrow beach, extending each way from the shore end of the pier. The galvanized-iron roofs of the taller buildings—church, convent, club, a few more pretentious dwellings,—were visible above the low foliage and between the tall acacias and firetrees which jagged the skyline. A heavily laden breeze identified unmistakably several long buildings as copra warehouses.

It seemed a busy town, as towns near the equator go. In the street into which the pier opened a thin stream of pedestrians passed by in brief review before the watcher: Moros, a few Filipinos, a Chino staggering under a heavy balanced pinga, two white-clad Americans, while several rickshaws, Moro drawn, jogged by with patrons concealed under raised tops. Then a big foreign touring car turned the corner and drew up in front of the government building to deposit a middle aged American, immaculate in fresh pongee.

Terry, observing him idly from where he stood at the rail, saw a larger, uniformed American swing the corner with vigorous stride and after saluting the older man accompany him respectfully to the entrance to the big building, where they stood a moment in conversation. Terry's interest quickened as he recognized the big American as a member of his own service; he watched him approach the

ship through the crowd of half-nude sweating Moros who now swarmed the dock.

Terry, hastening down the ship's ladder, met the tall officer as he reached the end of the pier.

He was a loosely knit, raw-boned man of about thirty-five, of serious but pleasant mien. As he stepped to meet Terry, Terry saw that he wore the leaves of a Major.

"Lieutenant Terry?" he asked, responding with friendly informality to Terry's stiff salute.

"Yes, sir."

"I'm Bronner. Mighty glad to know you. We've been looking for you ever since receiving a copy of the Headquarters Bulletin ordering you down here. Have a good trip?"

"Well, Major, the *Francesca* is no Empress liner but we got along all right. I am very glad to know you, Major. Your brother and I were roommates at college—he used to tell me of your experiences with the head hunters—"

"Huh!" the Major interrupted. "Guess he stretched things some. Fine boy. Wants to come over when he graduates this June, but his mother says one son over here is enough. And she's right."

Terry liked the big irregular features. In the steady eyes he saw something that forced instant credence to the stories told of the Major's resourceful bravery under difficult situations, a bravery which had made the name of Bronner famous in a service made up of intrepid men.

"Welcome to Moroland," the Major continued. "I hope you like it down here—I think you will. If I didn't I wouldn't have requested your transfer. You are

assigned to the most interesting of the Moro provinces,—Davao. You go there to command a Macabebe company. Your baggage still aboard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Forget the 'sir'! Leave your stuff on board—the *Francesca* sails at daylight tomorrow, and you go on to Davao with her. Had breakfast? I thought not. Pack a bag with what you will need for a day ashore—put on a white uniform for tonight. My orderly will take you to my quarters where you can get a shower and some breakfast. Join me at the Service Club for lunch."

Throughout the abrupt discourse Terry had endured the frank appraisal of the shrewd black eyes. He experienced a pleasant reaction when the Major again extended his broad hand.

"Lieutenant, I said a minute ago that I was glad to know you. Let me repeat it—I mean it. Adios, till lunch time."

He pushed his way good-naturedly through the throng of Moros who were handling the bales and boxes unloaded from the roach-ridden hull and walked off the pier, disappearing into the government building. Terry boarded the vessel, warmed by the friendliness of his new chief, and by the time the orderly arrived had thrown a few things into his bag and was ready to go ashore.

He followed the soldier down the main street, a dusty thoroughfare lined with the usual assortment of structures which adorn Philippine provincial towns: adobe, tile-roofed business houses honeycombed with little box-like shops in which the Chinese merchants displayed their wares: square wooden houses set high on stone understructures: scores of bamboo shacks stilted on crooked timbers, unkempt, wry, powdered with the dust risen since the last rains.

Though it was not yet nine o'clock, they sought the shaded side of the street with the habit which becomes instinctive near the equator, and welcomed the coolness of Bronner's low house.

The cook and the houseboy looked after him with the unobtrusive perfection of service found only in the East. A good breakfast cheered a stomach outraged by the greasy mess perpetrated upon native boats in the name of Spanish cookery, and a cool shower bath eliminated the stench of stale copra which had clung to his nostrils if not to his clothing. An hour before noon he left the house and strolled about the scorching town, regardless of where he went so long as he found shaded walks on which to tread.



Most Philippine towns are coast towns, and most coast towns are flat and uninteresting unless you are interested in their peoples—and you are not interested in them unless they are of a different tribe than you have known previously.

Take a couple of dusty—or muddy—streets, unroll them along some freshwater stream just above a line of palmed beach: place an immense, deserted-looking softstone church in an unkept square flanked with a few straggled acacias and a big convent in which a native priest lives in weary and squalid detachment from a world he knows nothing about: line the two streets with an assortment of rusty bamboo and mixed-material houses which impress one as never having been built but as always having stood there: sprinkle a few naked, pot-bellied, brown children staring at each other in pathetic, Malay ignorance of the manner and spirit of play: set a few brown manikins in the open windows—women who let life fly by in dull wonder of what it is all about: add a few carabaos lying in neck-deep content in mudwallows, and a score of emaciated curs which snarl at each other in habitual, gnawing hunger and which greet their masters with terrified whines: spread over it all a pall of still moist heat and a sky arched by a molten sun. Contrive all this, then imbue every object—human and creature, animate and inanimate,—with an air of hopelessness, of the futility of effort, and you will have a typical Malay town as the Americans found them.

But not so where the American has set his impious foot—impious of the dogma that you can not change the East, nor hurry it. He enjoyed the finesse of the phrase, quoted it, then jumped in to hustle the East. The old timers,—Spaniards and Britishers for the greater part—shrugged at each other over their heavy tiffins and nine o'clock dinners; these crazy Americans would soon learn! But the crazy, enthusiastic Americans, engineers, health officers, executives, school teachers, Constabulary, labored on in the glory of service: eradicated cholera, built roads and bridges, brought six hundred thousand children into school that two score tribes might find a common tongue, fought the devastating cattle plagues, wiped out brigandage and piracy, brought order and first semblance of prosperity to eight millions of people.

Young men did it all. The old-timers suddenly found that they were living in new times, in clean, healthful towns: found that business was increasing by leaps and bounds as the natives fell in behind the young Americans with a quicker stride than Orientals had ever known. And they are the reasons—those few thousands of smooth-faced Americans who laughingly threw themselves at the wall of immemorial sloth and apathy—why Kipling's phrase is seldom quoted east of India, and now not often there. And they are the reasons, those carefully chosen, confident young men of whom too many are buried over there, that we have so much of which to be proud in what has been done in our name for a backward, unfortunate people.

But we, you and I, do not know very much about it all: it is so far away and we are so busy with our affairs, our politics, our—

... You know ... we are just too busy to bother about those Tagalogs and headhunters who live over there where Dewey licked Cervera, and Aguinaldo was king of the Igorotes or something, and Pershing rose from a captain to a general: why, I heard one of those Filipinos make a speech about independence and he was so smart and bright—he had been sent to our congress or something and was handsome and polished and....

Yes, he doubtless was. That is why he was sent: but he bore about the same mental relation to the race he is supposed to represent as a Supreme Court Justice bears to a Georgia cracker!

Terry had thoroughly assimilated the atmosphere of the Luzon provinces in his seven months in the Islands, so he found a real pleasure in studying a Moro town which had been under the energizing influence of the Army for nearly two decades. He wandered slowly through the native quarter, cutting down clean cross streets lined with neat nipa huts inclosed behind latticed bamboo fences, enjoying the novelty of a community different from any he had known. Every detail of the well kept streets testified to the strictness of the standards set by the white men who governed the town. The few Moros whom he encountered on the noon-deserted streets passed him silently and with averted eyes, wary, secretive, entirely alien. One looked him square in the eye, leaving him uncomfortable with the antipathy unveiled, the cold, everlasting contempt of the Mohammedan for the unbeliever whom he does not know.

He walked with lids half-closed against the white glare and the heat waves which danced above the tortured roads and roofs: by the hour set for his luncheon engagement he had covered the town thoroughly, including the beautiful post which had been turned over to Scouts when the Army at last finished its tedious Moro project.

He found the Major waiting him at the Club, a large, single-story building set in a grove of tall palms at the edge of the beach and cooled by the breezes from the Straits. He followed him out on the wide veranda built over the water's edge, passing through a friendly, incurious group of young Americans who sat at little round tables in groups of three and four. Major Bronner responded to a dozen greetings as they crossed to a table set for two at the edge of the veranda. In a moment the deft tableboy had their service under way.

"Well," began the Major, "you will have a busy time of it during the rest of your stay—I wish it were to be longer. This afternoon I want you to come to the office with me—there are lots of things to talk over about your work down there. The Governor will see you about five o'clock. How do you like Zamboanga?"

"It's clean, and interesting, Major."

"'Clean and interesting!' That is a boost! Though we can't take much credit for the 'interesting'—the Moros furnish that!"

The white-smocked servants moved noiselessly about the cool veranda, serving the score of Americans with that perfect impersonal care found nowhere except among Oriental servitors: the subdued clatter of silver against dish and the tinkle of iced drinks was often drowned in outbursts of merriment from one or other of the little tables. Most of the Americans were mere youths, though two were evidently in their forties. Bronner noted Terry's study of a group of three who sat nearby, heavily tanned men evidently not quite at home in the club.

"Davao planters," he explained. "Hemp planters: you will know them. Three good men: they're going down on your boat."

Lunch finished, coffee and cigars furnished excuse for the white-clad crowd to linger on the darkened porch: scraps of shop talk reached Terry's ears, a jargon of strangely twisted English and Spanish words. Bridges, appropriations, rinderpest, lack of labor, artesian wells, cholera—such was their table talk, as such was their life.

The breeze freshened, gently stirring the potted plants which flanked each row of tables; the hot stillness of the noon gave way to the sibilant murmur of the cocoanut palms whose bases were lapped by the quickening ripples. The breaking of the withering calm was the signal for departure to office and field. The veranda cleared rapidly. Bronner, watching the three planters, interrupted their departure.

"Lindsey—just a minute."

He took Terry to their table and introduced him.

"Lieutenant Terry, gentlemen: Mr. Lindsey, Mr. Cochran, Mr. Casey. Lieutenant Terry goes to Davao to-morrow as Senior Inspector. You will be able to help him, till he learns his way down there—and later he may be able to help you."

Terry shook hands with the three in turn. All were out-doors men, bronzed, diffident with the social shyness of men who live their lives alone or among none but alien people. Lindsey and Cochran were square-set, serious young men: Casey, older, but of eager, enthusiastic mien.

The Major discussed them as he and Terry left the club.

"They're three of the best planters in the Gulf. You'll have no trouble with them. But you may with some others, those who have a fancied grievance against the

government just now. I had better start at the beginning.

"You know the best hemp in the world grows down there—soil, climate, rainfall all combine wonderfully to make it the one ideal spot for hemp production. In another twenty years it will probably rate as the richest single agricultural area on the globe—that's why those little fellows over there"—he indicated a pair of Japanese passing on the opposite side of the street—"are piling into Davao so fast these days.

"The world needs hemp—and areas where it can be cultivated are rare. Three years ago a little stampede occurred into Davao; the pioneers are a mixed lot—about sixty Americans, a few Britishers, a scattering of Moros and Filipinos and nearly two hundred Japs. The Japs are quiet—you will seldom see them: they stay on their places and 'saw wood'; they're backed by some syndicate—probably their government. But the others are lone handers, working on their own 'shoe-strings' or financed by the contributions of optimistic shareholders in Manila.

"They are good men, these planters. You will like them. They went into the fastnesses of Mindanao, braved the wild tribes, cleared their land, planted hemp, working largely with their own hands—and in a climate where they say the white man shall labor only with his head. You will hear all about their troubles and difficulties—you won't hear much else down there but hemp—hemp and wild tribes! Hemp and wildmen—that's Davao!

"About their grievance. They cleared and planted rapidly and have raised fabulous crops, but when it came time to strip the hemp for market they found that the wildmen upon whom they had banked as potential labor would not work. A few came and stayed, but most of them quit after earning a few pesos. So the hemp rotted in the field. Desperate, facing ruin, some of the planters went after labor too strongly, frightened and browbeat the Bogobos into working. The scheme worked, so a condition approximating peonage was developed upon several of the plantations.

"We ordered it stopped. Those planters are very sore, looking for trouble. That's the story—and the condition you must face, and overcome. You've got to hold down that class of planter, but at the same time encourage the Bogobos to work for them. It means prosperity for the planters, and money and comfort for the Bogobos—and it will keep them out of the hills: we want the Bogobos near the coast, under civilizing influences. They are newly won to us and apt to fade away into the foothills on the least provocation."



Crossing the acacia-shaded lawns of the beautiful plaza he stopped in front of the artistic concrete bandstand, jerking a big thumb at the dedication inscribed upon the ivy-covered façade.

"Pershing Plaza," he read aloud. "He was the last military Governor, you remember. I knew him: a good man. No genius—just a good man, hard worker: has two traits that will carry him a long way if he gets the chance—common sense and industry. Wants to know everything about everything, and never quits working. Surrounds himself with workers: gives his men their jobs and doesn't bother them while they do them—just wants results.

"'Make good or make way!' Some slogan! Pershing, Wood, Scott, Carpenter,—America has sent some of her best into Mindanao. I'm glad to be here—aren't you?"

At the sudden question Terry turned to him.

"Yes," he said. "I hope to be—useful."

They had reached the entrance to the government building: the Major paused at the foot of the mahogany staircase to conclude earnestly: "It is fashionable just now in Manila to decry this effort to institute civil government among the Moros—but I know you are not of the type to be influenced. Governor Mason is

making good: you will see that after you have been here a month. He is a wonder, Terry,—probably the only man who could handle this situation with a few Constabulary. Study, patience, and square-dealing, backed by occasional use of troops, prepared the Moros for this experiment, and Governor Mason is carrying it forward almost alone—opposing the backward tendencies of Sululand with little else save personality, inspiration and a wonderful knowledge of Malay character.

"You're going to like it down here," he wound up suddenly, confused by his own unaccustomed oratory.

Mounting the polished stairway, they passed down the tall concrete corridors and into the Major's office. He drew up a chair for Terry and seated himself behind a desk whose orderly array of accessories bespoke his methodical bachelor habits. The walls were covered with large-scale maps of Moroland showing location of various tribes, scattered settlements and district boundaries, with great blank areas eloquent of the unknown character of unexplored fastnesses. The crosses which indicated the distribution of Constabulary forces controlled from his office dotted every sizable island: pins bearing the names of government agents showed into what remote regions our trail-breakers had penetrated. One purple-flagged pin showed a veterinarian warring against a cattle plague in Jolo: a blue flag thrust into one of the blank spaces of Mindanao indicated the whereabouts of a fearless ethnologist from the Field Museum: a red sticker bore the name of an engineer who had been out of touch for six weeks, running the line of a new trail across the great bulk of Mindanao. The map was symbolic of the Constabulary, whose duty it is to know all, to protect all.

Leaving Terry to his study of the maps the Major spent an unapologetic fifteen minutes clearing the mass of papers that had accumulated during the lunch hour, then turned to him. For an hour he outlined the salient problems which would confront the young officer in his new assignment. He was all business, curt, concise, definite. He touched upon the ordinary service activities of drill, patrol, secret service, supply and report, then took up those phases which required

delicate and original handling.

"Now, Lieutenant, we did not pull you down here to handle an ordinary job—you know it means something these days to get a Mindanao assignment."

Terry did know it. Only men who had demonstrated unusual ability in their line had been sent to Moroland under Governor Mason. As the months went by the northern provinces were being stripped of their crack men for assignment to the southern experiment, so that detail there had become a mark of distinction. He had been as surprised as pleased at his summons from Sorsogon, a poor, colorless province where he had spent seven months in uneventful, and as he thought, inconspicuous service.

The Major detected something of what was passing in his mind: "You were selected because of your understanding of native character, your sympathy with them: that, and your faculty for learning dialects. By the way, what is your method of studying these languages—your record of three dialects in half a year is remarkable."

"There was little else to do—and I like to study them."

The Major noted the slight flush of embarrassment. He reached into a drawer and pulled out a card, scanning it carefully before continuing:

"Your qualification card indicates that you are an unusual pistol shot: it reads 'Pistol rating—two-handed expert, extraordinary in accuracy and rapidity.'"

Disregarding Terry's increased embarrassment he pushed the question: "How did you acquire such skill?"

"Well, as I had to carry a sidearm, I thought to make it useful—it is not much of an ornament. After I became really interested it cost me about fifty dollars a month for ammunition."

"Well, things happen down here! Some day you may be glad you spent the money—your skill may come in handy!"

"On—men?" It was the one aspect of the service from which Terry shrank.

"Well, I hope not. It seldom comes to that. But a number of hard characters have been concentrating recently in the Davao Gulf, a batch of discharged convicts who served long terms for brigandage and murder. We have been watching them, but nothing significant transpired till last month."

The muscles of his heavy jaw tightened as he went on: "You have heard of Malabanan, haven't you?"

"The ladrone leader?"

"Yes, he. He was released from Bilibid prison last summer and came through here last month. One of our operatives uncovered him on the boat—traveling as an ordinary steerage passenger. He went to Davao, and I fear it means trouble. I think he gathered that tough crew together to operate in Davao, thinking to test us out now that the Army is gone."

His face was grim as he snapped: "Terry, watch him! And if he makes a single move—smash him! Make no false starts, do not arrest him unless you are sure that your evidence will convict in the courts. Give him plenty of rope—but if he breaks loose ... smash him hard! Understand?"

Terry nodded quietly, but something in his competent face contented his chief. He repeated his warning against premature action:

"Be sure you can get him before you move—he is slippery and has friends in high native circles. We do not want to be turned down in the courts at this stage of the game, and it may be he intends to play the game square—plant hemp, for instance. But if he wants a showdown—smash him good and plenty!"

He briefly reviewed the substance of his instructions: "You can see that your work is going to call for a good deal of tact and patience: patience with the angry planters, with the wild people. Everybody is scared and jumpy down there just now, and we want to restore their confidence."

Terry had listened attentively throughout the interview, speaking only to answer questions. He broke the silence which followed:

"Major, I have heard a great deal about the Hill People of Davao: will I be near them?"

The Major eyed him queerly for a moment before answering: "About thirty miles as the bird flies," he said, "but about a million to all intents and purposes! No living man has been among them—those who have tried have left their bones rotting in the dark forest. They kill all who attempt to reach them, expeditions in force find nothing as the Hillmen simply fade away before their approach.

"I don't want you to attempt to go among them—in fact I expressly forbid it, as it means certain death. But some day we hope to open the Hills up, to win among them: it is one of the Governor's cherished ambitions. So learn what you can about them from the old Bogobos who live in the foothills, and report any interesting traditions you may hear. Pieced together, the tales may make a helpful contribution—may help solve the riddle of how to get to them peaceably. Not that you or I are likely to live long enough to see it done—they are too confounded wild, too inaccessible behind their jungled hills."

He shrugged his broad shoulders in eloquent dismissal of a vain hope, and rose: "I want you to meet the Governor. I'll see if we can get to him yet."

He strode out of the office, returning immediately to inform Terry that the Governor was closeted with the two Moro datos whom he had fetched to the capitol by launch.

"They haven't promised to be good boys yet," he chuckled, "but they will before

he finishes with them! His Secretary says that he expects you and me to go down to San Ramon with him to-night at seven sharp, to dine with Wade, the prison superintendent. You're in luck, Lieutenant. It will be an evening you won't soon forget."

So it proved to be.



CHAPTER IV

THE FANATIC

Terry, refreshed by a shower and change to formal white uniform, was listening to the Major's grave summing up of the Moro problem when the arrival of the governor's car took them both down to join him. As Governor Mason alighted to meet him Terry felt the magnetism of the man who had been selected to attempt the difficult Moro venture. Governor Mason had grown up in the island service, had been identified with the inner government circle since the days of the First Commission, and had been retained and promoted by each succeeding administration. Far-sighted, patient, wary, suave, he was the most consummate master of Island policy developed under the American regime. A press bitterly hostile to the idea of giving the Moros civil government had attested to his proven capacity by moderating its criticism following the announcement that he would head the new government.

Terry was welcomed with a graceful simplicity that made him feel at home. Immediately he fell under the spell of this man whose spirit enthused the small band of whites who were redeeming a people from their prehistoric lethargy. He was fit to lead; the sweep of line from temple through jaw bespoke an uncompromising force of character, but was gentled by the deep cleft of chin: something in the poise of head gave him the manner best described as aristocratic but it was toned down by the mischievous gleam which flickered, often without obvious reason, in the thoughtful eyes.

The big car bore them swiftly through the cooling evening over smooth coral roads which were laid down like ribbons on the green tableland over which they sped: they shot under groves of tall cocoanut trees, past clumps of feathery bamboo which flanked the highway. Dusk was near when they entered the

reservation and drew up in front of a red-roofed bungalow set on a great lawn facing the prison inclosure.

Superintendent Wade rose from the wide veranda and came down to meet them, a tall, smooth-faced man of young middle-age, evidently on most intimate terms with the Governor and the Major. While expressing his pleasure in being privileged to entertain Terry, he bent upon him the searching look of appraisal which is instinctive in the Orient, where the masses are controlled by the white man's prestige, a prestige which may suffer through attitude or actions of each newcomer.

Terry halted a moment at the curb, rapt in appreciation of the spot. Acres of lawn, splashed with flaming red and yellow canna beds, swept from roadway to edge of sea: wide shell roads, smooth as planks, wound in great curves into the dark groves of cocoanut palms which surrounded the inclosure on three sides and extended back a thousand acres in symmetrical rows of towering trunks which created endless shaded glades: turning slowly, he saw the immaculately policed prison inclosure showing through the steel grillwork which an intelligent mind had substituted for grim and stuffy prison walls. It seemed less prison than sanctuary.

The development of the prison farm, the development of its Moro inmates, was Wade's life. "Lieutenant, I am glad you like it," he said simply. "It is home to me."

The Governor had strolled out on the lawn for a lingering look around him. Returning to the veranda he eyed Wade and Bronner quizzically.

"Each of you has too fine an establishment for the barren needs of bachelors. I wish you had more confidence in the blissful state of matrimony!"

Wade shook his head decisively. The Major snorted.

"Huh! No petticoats for mine!"

A stolid Moro servant padded up with a tray bearing four cocktails: in a moment carried them kitchen-ward, rejected.

The Governor laughed: "Not one in four! An unusual showing, Wade." He turned to Terry: "You never drink?"

"I—I don't care for it, Governor."

A pause, and he added, flushing slightly: "That was not quite honest, sir. I have never tried it."

As they moved to the table the Governor exchanged a glance of delighted approval with the Major over the nice amend.

The steady breeze off the Straits that blew across the veranda where they sat at dinner roused the sea into a little confusion of beach sounds. They ate leisurely, talking of the strange things of Sululand, talked as men do who find surpassing interest in the little and the big things of their work; and Terry listened as they deliberately drew him within their circle.

It was a dinner deserving of the time given up to it. Following a vegetable soup the Moro bore in a great lapu-lapu, fresh from the Straits: if you have never tasted the flaky substance of a lapu-lapu,—don't! For once you do, you will be forever impatient of the quality of all other fish. Roast duck followed, with sweet corn, camotes, tart roselle sauce, a papaya salad, an ice, and pili nuts; all perfectly prepared, and flawlessly served by the expressionless Moro boy who moved noiselessly about the snowy table.

"I want to brag a little, Governor," Wade said as he and the Major lighted cigars over a second cup of black coffee. "Everything we ate to-night—with the exception of such things as salt and pepper and cream,—was the product of this farm. You will be able to report at the end of the year that we are eighty per cent self-supporting."

Pressed by the Governor, Wade explained to Terry his system of handling the six hundred Moro inmates. He stopped midway in a graphic account of three prisoners whom he had sent out with instructions to fetch in a runaway convict dead or alive.

"I didn't ask you down here to talk you to death!" he apologized.

"But what happened?" insisted the Major. "Did the three skip too?"

Wade glared at him. "Skip? My trusties? I guess not! They came in last night after dark, after being gone in the interior for three weeks, carrying a gunnysack. I was sitting out here, so they came right up and without a word emptied the sack on the veranda floor. They had stayed out till they got him—his head rolled out of the sack and landed right under where you're sitting, Major. Then the three walked over to the prison gate and reported in."

A moment later the Major moved his chair.

The Governor had been quietly studying Terry. "How did the Philippines first impress you?" he asked. "About as you anticipated?"

Terry hesitated, then responded to the authority of the kindly eyes: "No, sir. I had read enough typical stories of the tropics to absorb an atmosphere, but I did not find it. You know what I mean, sir: all that stuff about *dulce far niente*, manana, gin-soaked beach-combers,—that sort of thing. But I don't find it, sir. I find a spirit of hustle, of getting things done despite obstacles, a spirit which the natives seem to be absorbing,—though rather slowly."

The Governor was frankly interested: "You doubtless have formed some opinion regarding the Filipinos—their fitness for independence?"

Terry felt the three pairs of eyes drilling him as he answered: "It seems to me, sir, that—disregarding such baffling obstacles to independence as their absolute defenselessness as a nation, the profound ignorance of the masses, lack of a

common tongue, and all that,—I think that in view of the fact that under our guidance they have advanced further than under four hundred years of Spanish rule, it would be kinder if we waited decision until we see what a second or third generation of English-speaking natives are like."

He reflected a moment, serious, then added: "In short, sir, I think that it would be a great injustice to them to mistake our own driving force for their capacity."

"Sus-marie-hosep!" exclaimed the delighted Major, who had fidgeted while his protégé was undergoing the Governor's test, "Don't mistake our driving force for—I'd like to hear the native demagogues argue on that thesis!"

The Governor surveyed Terry with added interest, but was non-committal.

They fell silent, listening to the dark sea, in its gentlest mood, caressing the beach: the wind flowed past them steadily, like a soft current, stirring the long fronds into purring contact. A sharp challenge from an alert native sentry rang clear, followed by the crunching sound of a heavy iron gate opening and closing with grating finality. The hourly call was sounded by a guard, who, unseen by them, paced the main entrance to the inclosure: "All's Well." It sounded six times from invisible lips. Terry pondered its ironic message to those who heard it from within those steel and concrete dormitories: "All's Well," sounding to those who had crime on their souls, and had left, somewhere, mothers, wives, children ... sweethearts.... It oppressed him heavily.

Then a roar of laughter rose from within the prison, the free and joyous expression of mirth from hundreds of throats, from men who found life good. Terry looked up to see Wade observing him closely, smiling.

"They're having 'movies' to-night," he explained. "They're crazy about Charlie Chaplin."

Then Terry understood better the spirit of the institution, and of its inmates. This was no dungeon, it was a school where men were being taught how to live at

peace with their kind, how to work,—and how to laugh.

Vaguely conscious of being the object of intent scrutiny by some one stationed behind his chair, Terry turned, restlessly, to face the Moro servant, who stood just within the circle of light cast by the lamp, his smoldering eyes fixed upon him. Unabashed, inscrutable, he studied the white youth unblinkingly: then, as if decision had ripened, he entered the full glare of the lamp and faced Wade, his master.

Astounded at the extraordinary intrusion, Wade questioned him curtly in his dialect. The Moro responded at length, in a listless monotone that contrasted strangely with the determined gleam of his black eyes. Surprise flooded Wade's face, heightened to astonishment as the Moro continued; and as he concluded his story with an expressive gesture toward Terry, Wade struck his knee.

"Well, I'll be everlastingly consumed!" he prophesied. He searched Terry's thin face intently, then turned to the Governor.

"This boy, Matak," he pointed to the passive Moro, "adopted me over a year ago: just dropped in and said he was going to work for me. I didn't need him—you know I draw on the trusties for servants—but he would not accept refusal: he just stayed on. He is a fine servant, but a queer fish—I let him stay for both reasons! I've tried to persuade him to go to different friends who needed servants, but he looked them over and then refused. I don't know where he came from, don't know anything about his history: I only know that he is a very faithful boy, with some grievance against life that leaves him morose and silent.

"Now he coolly announces," he paused to again study Terry's countenance queerly, "now he says he is going with Lieutenant Terry!"

The small but powerfully built Moro calmly returned the stare of the four white men, his face passionless, his inert hands and thick bare feet curiously expressive of a primitiveness beyond conception. Evidently he had decided upon a course

of action from which nothing would sway him, and he waited until the white men should adjust themselves to the fact. The Governor's face expressed his sympathy with the Moro as he turned to Wade and asked permission to address his servant.

"Matak, why do you wish to go with Lieutenant Terry?"

The Moro shifted his brooding eyes to Terry, then back to the Governor before he answered.

"Because I like him, sir."

"Why do you like him?"

"Because he understands, sir."

"Understands what, Matak?"

"He understands us, sir,—the unfortunate. Because he is lonely too, sir."

The Governor had been trying all evening to solve the strange appeal of Terry's countenance: the primitive Moro had understood. Gazing at the white youth, the Governor saw that Matak was right. The tone in which he addressed Terry was gentle, fatherly.

"Lieutenant, do you need a boy?"

The Major's quick sympathy had been enlisted: "Lieutenant, you will run your own mess down there," he interposed.

Meeting the black eyes turned upon him in confident expectation, Terry found their dull appeal irresistible.

"He may come with me," he said. "I will look after him."

Matak stood motionless a moment, then stepped to Wade and slipping to one knee pressed Wade's hand against his lips in token of gratitude and farewell. Then he rose and went silently into the house.

The Governor, the Major and Wade were busy men with large responsibilities: Terry found ample material for reverie in contemplation of what was opening up before him. The incident served to stifle further conversation. The four settled comfortably into the long rattan chairs drawn up near the railing, each content in the mere association with friends and occupied with his own problems.

The quiet intimacy of the group was jarred by the sudden jangle of a telephone. Wade jumped up with a muttered excuse but before he had crossed to the open door it rang again, insistent. They heard his murmured "hello," then an incredulous "What!" in higher pitch. He appeared at the door, pale, excited.

"Governor Mason," he exclaimed, "Captain Hornbecker reports that there is a *juramentado* loose between here and Zamboanga!"

At the startling intelligence the Governor's feet rapped to the floor: the Major jumped to his feet, astounded.

"Why," he protested, "who ever heard of a Moro running amuck at this time of night!"

"Hornbecker insists that it is true, nevertheless. He has sent a detachment out after him but was worried because the Governor and you might have started before he got word for you to wait."

The Governor shook his head decidedly: "We will not wait. Please call my car."

The Major's protest against the Executive's endangering himself died in his throat at a quiet look from the Governor. They hurried to the car, Wade delaying them a few seconds while he secured three heavy pistols, handing one to each of the two officers. They found Matak waiting in the seat beside the driver.

A sharp order from the Governor and the chauffeur shot them out of the reservation and into the provincial road. The big Renault roared through the night, the kilometer posts flitting by like specters, the headlights tunneling the cocoanut groves through which the white highway spun.

The four Americans crouched low in the tonneau to escape the blinding rush of air that eddied over the windshield. They shot over a bridge, tore through a dark village, rounded a corner at top speed and took the grassed shoulder of the road as the little chauffeur twisted the wheel to avoid a bewildered carabao which blocked the middle of the highway. A sickening skid, and they were back in the road. At the end of a roaring flight down a long straightaway they rounded a sharp curve into a short stretch terminating in a nipa village which seemed to leap toward the rushing car. As the powerful lights swung upon the widened road which formed the village street the alert driver saw that which brought foot and hand to the brakes in a frantic effort that brought the car to a grinding, sliding stop and tumbled the Americans to the floor of the tonneau.

Crouched in the middle of the road a Moro, gone amuck, darted fanatic glances in search of the Christians he had vowed to die killing, his eyes bloodshot with the self-inflicted torture of the juramentado rite. He balanced a great two-handed kris that gleamed like a row of stars where the headlight struck its polished corrugations.

A Filipino, unaware of the terrific figure behind him, had sauntered from the shadows into the path of light, curious, half-blinded by the glare he faced. As he reached the middle of the road the most terrifying of all cries issued from one of the dark windows.

"Juramentado!! Juramentado!!!"

At the cry his face turned sickly green in the glare. He wheeled, uncertain, then ran blindly toward the frenzied Moro who was creeping toward him.

It happened with the swiftness of nightmare. By the time the Americans had picked themselves up from the bottom of the car the Filipino's frantic burst had brought him within twenty feet of the black-clad fanatic. His flying feet lagged to a halt, he stood stock still in sheer horror till the Moro bounded toward him, then turned back toward the car—too late!

The four white men leaped out just as the Filipino turned back toward them with fear-leaden feet, and in the moment of discovery of the Mohammedan who leaped in his shadow, they saw the glistening blade rise above the Filipino's head and fall in a terrific sweep that seemed to end at the point where neck and shoulder join. Before their eyes the body opened like a book.

It seemed inconceivable, but the crazed face of the Moro showed through the cleft which widened as the victim fell.

"God!" sobbed the Governor.

Sighting the group of Americans the blood-crazed Mohammedan bounded toward them triumphantly, swinging a kris which no longer gleamed. Bronner had reached the road first and stood in front. His heavy pistol roared six times and at the last shot the leaping Moro spun clear around and fell heavily.

He staggered to his feet and with the same implacable hatred gleaming in his eyes came on toward them, still grasping the awful weapon. Then, as Matak stepped out to meet him, armed only with a hub wrench, Terry's right hand extended in swift gesture as he shot once. The Moro collapsed to the road, limply, like a wet stocking off a line.

His race was run, but he had taken one unbeliever with him to justify his claim to a choice seat in the Mohammedan heavens. There is a certain impressive earnestness about the followers of Mohammed.

The dismayed villagers poured out into the street, venting their frenzied fear by kicking the dead fanatic. Captain Hornbecker, a round-faced officer, arrived with

his soldiers. As the chauffeur had emerged from his hiding place in the brush, the Governor turned matters over to the captain and the four drove on into Zamboanga. All had been sickened by the horror of the swift tragedy.

They stopped at Bronner's house to get Terry's bag, then drove him to the wharf. The *Francesca* was about to cast off, her dim-lit decks loud with the confusion of misdirected effort.

Terry sent Matak aboard, thanked the three warmly for their kindness to him; after a moment of hesitation he added something that was drowned in a sudden rumble of winch. Two waiting sailors threw off the hawser in response to a shouted signal from the bridge. The three Americans remained at the end of the pier till after Terry had mounted to the deck and the boat swung out into the current.

As they walked along the dark pier the Governor asked: "What was that he was saying? I did not quite catch it."

"I heard only part of it," answered Bronner. "It was something about how queer religions may be—he was thinking of the juramentado."

Wade spoke: "Did you notice how hard the affair got him? Of course it was a pretty stiff sight."

"It wasn't that," said the Major, slowly. "From something he said to me to-day I know that he has had a horror of some day being compelled to kill a man—and the day came. I'm very sorry I didn't stop that Moro devil—yet I hit him three times."

The Governor walked the short distance to his residence. Wade dropped the Major at his bungalow, and sat oblivious to the Major's outstretched hand, musing.

"Major," he said finally, "Matak's selecting Terry for his master—queer, isn't it?"

"Huh!" growled the Major, "I would go with him myself—anywhere!"



CHAPTER V

NEW FRIENDS, AND AN ENEMY

The *Francesca*, no slower and no dirtier than most of the other steamers which ply the inter-island trade routes, had waddled all night and all day through the Celebes Sea. Afternoon found her laboring over a becalmed mirror of sea, past rippled reefs, through clusters of little coral islands from which straggled-plumed palms raised wry fronds in anemic defiance of inhospitable, root resisting soil. Mindanao lay to the west and south, vast, mysterious.

Terry stood alone at the forward end of the small promenade deck watching the third class passengers, who, though still manifesting the uneasiness of the Malay landsman at sea, were comfortably sprawled upon the dirty hatch covers enjoying the seven-mile breeze created by the movement of the vessel through the still atmosphere. Upon the cooler side of the upper deck the first class passengers had disposed themselves under the once-white awning. Two natives, a Tagalog planter named Ledesma and his big-eyed, full-bosomed daughter, had withdrawn themselves from the whites and were seated in conscious dignity near the aft rail. Four Americans were grouped up forward, stretched out in full length steamer chairs in the complete physical comfort born of a cooling evening after a blistering day.

Lindsey reached out to pull up an extra chair, beckoned Terry to join them and introduced him to the fourth member of the group, naming him as Sears.

He was a big man, heavy-set, a bit untidy of dress and beard: his face was flushed, and he answered Terry's pleasant salutation with a mattered growl. Lindsey moved in his chair, uneasily.

"Lieutenant," he said, "we want to get acquainted with you. We shall see much of each other in Davao."

Before Terry could respond a harsh voice broke in: "Yes, none of us are stuck on ourselves down here!"

The words fell cold. Sensing the purpose to offend, Terry straightened in his chair to face Sears. He met his surly stare squarely: their eyes battled, but under the level gaze Sears' bloodshot eyes wavered and lowered, the flush deepening angrily with his confusion.

Lindsey hastily summoned the deckboy to take their orders and by the time he returned with the drinks the constraint had abated. Sears, the only one who had ordered whiskey, settled back in his chair in sullen relief from a situation not quite to his liking. Lindsey raised his glass to Terry.

"To your arrival among us," he offered, pleasantly.

"To you all, sir," Terry responded.

"More hemp!" suggested Cochran.

Little Casey attested to his passion: "To breeds and breeders and breeding!" he grinned: it was his never-failing toast at the Davao Club.

They waited a moment for Sears, but he had gulped his drink.

It was the enthusiastic Casey who first spoke: "Lieutenant, and when do you think you can come down to my place? I want you to see my Berkshire boar and my two American mares!"

Cochran smiled at him, affectionately: everybody liked Casey for his wild enthusiasms. His latest hobby was the importation of blooded animals to cross with native stock.

"Casey," said Cochran, "if you would pay half as much attention to your plantation as you do to your mares and that old grunter, you'd get somewhere!"

Casey snorted: "Sure, and in about three months I'll have a colt to show you—then you'll sing another tune! And wait till I get some half-breed pigs—instead of the hollow-backed scrawny things we've got now—then you'll admit that Casey was the boy!"

Casey was more or less of a character in the Gulf. His words flew so fast they overran each other in effort to keep abreast of his racing ideas. Thoroughly respected for his sterling character, he was made the target of much good-natured hilarity because of his constant hobby-riding and the rushing speech that made him almost incoherent. His mares and boar had cost him money that could better have gone into plantation improvements.

The conversation, drifting fitfully, touched upon a new stripping machine which Lindsey had purchased in Manila: he was bringing it down in the hold of the *Francesca*.

"I watched them load it," he declared. "I took no chances in being shy a necessary bolt or belt. I'll have it set up in a couple of weeks and if it works as well in the field as it did in the agent's warehouse—no more labor troubles for me—no more hemp rotting in the ground for lack of strippers!"

Cochran was mildly pessimistic. He had seen too many other heralded inventions which worked well experimentally but failed in the hemp fields. Of course Casey was hopeful—it was his nature.

Sears broke his long silence: "Labor troubles, labor shortage! Hell!—there's plenty of labor in the Gulf—if only the Government wasn't always hornin' in on us!"

Terry knew the remark was aimed at him but refrained from comment. Sears mistook his silence.

"But no meddlin' government is goin' to interfere with me! I'm goin' to run my own place from now on—and get my labor where I please—and how I please!"

As this elicited no response from the patient officer he continued despite Lindsey's distressed signals. Emboldened, he turned directly to Terry.

"I suppose," he snarled, "that you were sent down to be the little fairy god-father to the Bogobos—to protect the poor heathen from the awful planters who want to make them work. No?"

Terry stirred. "Mr. Sears, I am instructed to protect the Bogobos from any oppression—and to aid the planters in every legitimate way. I hope to do both."

Sears' passion seemed fed by the conciliatory tone. Terry studied the convulsed face and through the thick veil of rage saw the lines of worry that had aged him prematurely: the black hair was streaked with gray and his hands were thickened and stained with toil. Moved by a quick sympathy Terry spoke again:

"Mr. Sears, this is no time to discuss the matter. In a week or so I will come to see you and—"

Sears interrupted in a voice hoarse with anger: "Terry, if any government man comes—snoopin' round my place—I'll—I'll—he will never snoop again!"

In the tense silence that followed the challenge Lindsey bit clean through his cigar. Terry's answer was so long in coming that the trio of Americans who listened experienced something of the faint qualm which sickens a man when he witnesses another's backing-down. Finally he spoke, slowly, his measured words scarcely audible above the muffled beat of the propeller.

"Sears, I am coming to your place first. I will come within a week."

Sears jumped to his feet, shaking with the hatred he had conceived for the young officer. Terry rose easily, looking frail in comparison with the burly figure

opposing him, but he surveyed Sears steadily, unafraid, and not unfriendly.

Cochran coughed loudly, and again. Casey nervously undid a shoelace, retieing it with meticulous care. Lindsey rose with studied leisureliness and stood at the rail near Sears, ready.

But the ship's bell rang out the dinner hour, a waiting Visayan steward stepped out on the deck hammering a Chinese dinner gong, and in the strident din the crisis passed. Lindsey lingered to speak with Terry after the others had passed below.

"I'm very sorry, Lieutenant. Sears is a rough fellow, but he is half-crazed with worry. He's really not a bad *hombre*."

Terry nodded: "I can see that he is worried about something."

"It's his plantation. He has invested what little money he had in it, has worked hard for three years, and now that he has his first big crop he can't harvest it—the Bogobos won't work for him. He is pretty rough with them, I guess—but if he doesn't harvest this crop he's ruined. He's in debt—and pretty desperate."

He paused, a deeper concern crept into his face: "Lieutenant," he said earnestly, "can't you stay away from his place—a while—till he gets his hemp cut and stripped? He is really desperate—and always packs a gun."

Terry smiled his gratitude. "Lindsey, I am much obliged to you. You need not worry about it."



Neither Sears nor Lindsey were of the group which assembled on deck after dinner to enjoy the brilliancy of the swift sunset. The ship had swung through Sarangani Channel and was paralleling the west coast due north toward Davao. The red glory of the dying sun tinted the waters of the Gulf to the line of palm-

fringed beach which edged the distant shoreline. From the shore the land sloped gently to the west and north, mile after mile of primeval jungle broken here and there where brush and thorn and creeper had yielded to man's demand for more and more hemp. Far inland the steady rise persisted, grew more abrupt and more heavily timbered, terminating in the far interior in a dim and mighty mountain whose dark-wooded slopes and misted crest dominated the Gulf: the red orb of the sun had dropped behind this towering summit.

Cochran pointed up at the distant mountain: "Mount Apo."

Terry nodded: "Where the Hill People live?"

"Yes,—where they are supposed to live: no one really knows ... you will hear all sorts of stories."

The shadows which lurked upon Mount Apo descended over the lower slopes, then enfolded the Gulf. The lights on the steamer shone murkily. The three lay back watching the stars brighten overhead. For a long time nothing was heard but the querulous mutterings of the old boat as she waddled on her way.

Terry broke the silence: "Where is Lindsey?"

Cochran answered quickly to head off the more explicit Casey: "Oh, he's busy—busy with Sears."

Terry understood. Cochran sparred for an opening in the silence his friendship for Sears made embarrassing.

"Lieutenant, you are likely to have work for your soldiers pretty soon. There's a rough outfit gathering down here in the Gulf—though I imagine Bronner told you all about it."

"He told me something of it, but I would like to hear more."

"Well, I don't know much about it, excepting that a score or more of tough

characters have come down in the past two months. They settled on a mangy plantation up the coast, north of Davao, but they aren't working: just loafing around all day. They seem to be waiting for something—or somebody. The natives are scared, and the whites don't feel any too good about it either! You know we are scattered all over the Gulf—everybody a mile or more away from his neighbors—and that means a mile of jungle."

Casey flared up: "We ought to run 'em out—they're no good, probably carabao thieves or worse—"

"How worse?" grinned Cochran. "Horse thieves—or pig thieves?"

Casey did not mind being ragged by his friends. He persisted: "Lieutenant, you ought to run 'em out as undesirables or under the vagabond law! They're no good—they won't work—and they're the toughest lookin' lot I ever did see! Sure and if I had my way I'd toss the lot into Sears' crocodile hole—the dirty, low-lived, shiftless lot of 'em!"

Terry was interested: "Sears' crocodile hole?" he asked.

Cochran laughingly explained: "It's more or less of a joke between Sears and Lindsey: each has a hoodoo on his place that makes it harder to get laborers. The Bogobos fear a great snake they swear haunts Lindsey's woods, and none of them wants to go near a pool on Sears' places just below the ford—they claim it is the home of a monstrous crocodile, thirty feet long. No white man has ever seen either; it's a big joke in a way—but a costly one for them as it makes the wild men give their places a wide berth."

"What have they done about it?"

"Everything. Got up hunting parties—stalked the places for hours and days, tried to convince the natives that it is all bosh. But they insist it's all true, and stay away—and loss of man power means loss of money they both need this year. Both of them think the stories are just the usual Bogobo exaggerations."

Terry thought Cochran not quite convinced: "What do you think?"

"I? Oh, I don't know. It's hard to swallow the stories—man-eating snakes and crocodiles sound all right on the lips of the old Spaniards but where our flag flies things seem to sober down. Yet I've usually found that back of all these Bogobo tales there is an element of truth: and two years ago when I was clearing my place I shot an eighteen-foot python. Stumbled on it sleeping—glad it was!"

The evening monsoon had set in, rippling the surface of the sea and humming its cooling refrain through the rigging. Casey yawned heavily and went below to seek the planter's early sleep. Cochran remained with Terry for a half-hour, enlightening him with a running talk of the problems confronting the planters. He was well educated, progressive, and backed by ample family means had developed the best holding in the Gulf. He told Terry that on this trip he had succeeded in persuading thirty timid Visayan families to settle upon his plantation despite their native fear of all things Mindanaoan, and that his profits for the year would return him sixty per cent of the capital he had invested in his place.

"You will soon understand conditions, Lieutenant," he declared as he rose to go below. "Most of the planters need labor, and they need capital." He threw his cigar butt over the rail, debating the ethics of uttering what might be thought a criticism of his associates. "And they need farming intelligence most—too many of them were army men or government men before coming down here, yet they tackle a highly specialized form of tropical agriculture with utter confidence! They aren't farmers—they're just heroes!"

He half-turned to go, hesitated: "Lieutenant, you're going to like it down here—because we're going to like you. Now, of course it's none of my business, but if I were you I would keep away from Sears' place—he will make his threat good. He has it in him to become a pretty bad man—but as I say, it's none of my business. Goodnight, sir."

After Cochran had gone, Terry, sleepless, slowly walked the gently rolling deck. Ledesma stood at the rail near the forward lifeboat gazing into the soft shadows which shrouded the muttering ship. At Terry's quiet approach he turned to address him abstractedly in the liquid Spanish of cultured Filipinos.

"Buenas Noches, Señor Teniente."

Terry answered in the same tongue: "Good Evening, Señor Ledesma. A fine night."

The natives' vague fear of the dark—wrought into instinct by a thousand generations of ancestors who crouched at night around flickering campfires in jungles through which crept hostile men and marauding beasts—had fastened upon him, stripping him of the thin veneer of civilization the Spaniards had laid but lightly over the Malayan barbarism. He shifted uneasily, looked out over the starlit sea.

"Teniente," he murmured, "I like not the night. The dead rise ... some sing ... some complain ... drift through the black mists searching for those they have long lost ... the vampires seek for unprotected children.... I like not the night...."

Lost in the ghastly realms of native ghostlore, he ignored the American. Terry rounded the deck once and when he came again to where Ledesma had stood he found him gone to seek the cheer of lighted cabin. Terry stopped at the forward rail, his face upturned to the big stars which burned in the soft depths of the warm sky: the Southern Cross poised just over the crest of Apo. Below, on the black sea, the thrust of the vessel threw up a great welt which bordered the wedge of disturbed waters: phosphorescence gleamed like great wet stars. The tips of cigarettes glowed on the forward deck where members of the crew lay prone, exchanging occasional words in the hushed voices races not far from nature use in the still hours of the night.

The morning would find him in a strange place, among strangers ... he leaned

upon the rail in a sudden excess of yearning for those whom he loved, summoned the spirits of those who loved him. They came to him through the night—Susan fretting, Ellis affectionately gruff, Enrico boisterously cheerful, Father Jennings wise, patient, watchful. Another, fairer, unutterably dear, hovered near him: he strove, as of old, to bridge the gap—and was baffled, as of old.

The eight bells of midnight roused him from his dejected reverie: he straightened from the rail. The Cross had dipped into the clouded crest: miles to the west a shorefire bit into the black mantle that draped the Gulf. The low wailing of an infant and the guttural endeavors of the mother to soothe it came up from the forward deck where the native passengers lay sprawled in the profound slumber of the Malay: pacified, it slept again, then the night was still but for the soft sounds of displaced waters and the creakings of the ship's old joints.



As he passed along the narrow, ill-lighted passage toward his cabin he heard a voice raised in ugly imprecation:

"I'll get him if he comes, the —— upstart! Just let him show his face on my place, by ——, I'll fix him!"

It was Sears' voice. As he felt his way down the dark corridor, he heard Lindsey's low tones, reproachful, conciliatory.

A few steps further brought him near Sears' door. Suddenly he distinguished a figure outlined against the door, listening. As a match flared in Terry's fingers, the native whirled.

It was Matak. He followed Terry to his cabin, unabashed.

"Master," he said simply, "he talk about you. He make fight talk—kill talk—so I

listen."

The seed of his loyalty fell on ground furrowed by the lonely hours on deck. Shame at having given way to a great depression swept over Terry—friends were in the making, this splendid friend already made ... and he had come to serve, not to seek.... He smiled into the worshiping black eyes.

"It's all right, Matak. You do not understand. You go to your quarters and get some sleep."

The Moro lingered. "Anything more, master?"

"Yes, Matak. Don't call me 'master': call me 'lieutenant.'"

"Yes, master." He left the cabin.

Terry, always a light sleeper, was awakened toward morning by a slight sound outside his door. Looking out into the dim corridor he saw that Matak was standing guard over his slumbers, armed with a big bolo whose naked length gleamed viciously in the semi-darkness.

Touched by the devotion and realizing the futility of trying to drive him from his vigil, Terry lay back on the pillow, the rhythmic beat of the propeller in his ears. Asleep, he dreamed, and the chug of the screw became the beat of an engine bearing him away from the home of his fathers.

The Moro heard the restless tossing and stepped silently into the little stateroom, his young-old eyes fastened upon the wistful lines that marked the competent young face. While he stood brooding over his young master the dawn streaked through the open porthole, and a soft splash sounded from up forward as the ship dropped her roped anchor. They were off Davao.

Terry had come into port.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAND OF HEMP

In three months the Gulf had laid its spell upon Terry. He had come to love the great slopes, from the sandy coastline to the last swift grades to Apo's distant top, the loveliness of the wind-tossed palms which fringed the water's edge, the sparkle of the ocean's blue expanse and its quick response to moods of sun and wind.

During the noontime hours the sun was blazing hot but he could order his work so as to avoid exposure. Out at daybreak, he usually accomplished the duties of the day during the cool morning hours, reading through the siesta hours in the coolness of his great open house.

Seldom did the routine of his work—the drill, the sifting of patrol reports, the minutiae of the service—overreach into the afternoon hours: then he was free to range the country, to learn its trails and towns, its people and its spirit. His big gray pony had become a familiar sight in every village, on nearly every plantation. Sometimes he was gone upon two-day trips up or down the coast, or riding the narrow trails through the deep green shade of the woods, his Stetson seldom touched by direct sunlight.

There was a never-ending pleasure in the hemp fields, great sweeps of tall abaca plants glinting in the sun: and in the sluggish, useful river which drained the levels, its turbid bosom bearing a few silent native craft, its oily depths suggesting a basis for the legends of huge crocodiles which no white man had ever seen.

He worked hard, but it was not all work. Many an early evening found him out

on the broad Gulf in an outrigger canoe he had learned to handle with native skill, sometimes with Matak, oftener with Mercado, the first sergeant of his Macabebe company. Sometimes, when the surface was calm, he spent wonderful hours in studying the cool depths of the waters, the lee-shore coral ledges which bore fairy gardens of oceanic flora, brilliant-hued, weird-shaped, swaying gently in the tidal current: strange forms of sea-life moved among the marine growths, —some beautiful in form and color, others hideous. Once, while he watched a school of smaller fish playing around a huge sea-turtle, they disappeared as if by signal and the tortoise drew in his scaled head and sank to rest on the bottom as a swordfish swam majestically over the spot, then darted into deeper waters. There were clams as large as washtubs.

Often, while Mercado—or Matak—paddled, he trolled a flashing bait to lure the gamefish which swarmed in the depths. Rarely did such an evening pass without a long fight with a leaping pampano or a sea bass: with thirty or forty pounds of desperate muscle at the other end of a hundred-yard line, the song of reel was sweet. One night he brought in an eighty-pound barracuda but usually the larger fish cost him line, leader or spoon.

At times the surface of the Gulf was alive with schools of leaping fish: one evening he saw a great fish, a tanguingi, rise into the air with nose pointed upward, till, at a height of twenty-five feet, it reversed for a downward rush to plunge in the exact center of the ripples its great leap had created. Once, far out on the Gulf with Matak, he came upon a forty-foot whale asleep on the surface, rolling dreamily from side to side: the Moro, unafraid of man or devil, turned Malay-green with terror as Terry prodded the huge black surface with his paddle. Awakened, it upended in a sluggish dive, the heavy flirt of its great glistening tail smashing the left outrigger and drenching them to the skin.

Terry had attended strictly to the affairs which properly came under his control and in doing this and doing it well, had won the respect of natives and whites, a respect which had warmed into admiration among those who knew him better, into affection with those who knew him best. The loyal Macabebes would have

followed him against any foe, and, better than that, they drilled hard and worked faithfully that they might be a credit to their leader.

The natives knew him as "*El Solitario*," "The Solitary," partly because he played his game alone in a quiet competent way, to all appearances equally friendly to all, regardless of color or condition, partly because he seemed unconscious of the lures of all those brown maidens known to be as shady of character as of color.

He had often stopped to spend an hour or two with Ledesma on his prospering plantation. He liked Ledesma's sincere, old-school courtesy, and he liked him because Ledesma was known as an Americanista, looked upon the Americans as God-sent to guide his people out of their sloth and abysmal ignorance. But he gave up these visits following a day when he found the dark-eyed, ripe-bosomed daughter alone in the house and learned, in her flaming passion for him, that she had misunderstood the reason for his calls.

The frequency of his trips to the outlying plantations had increased as the weeks went by, especially to the pitiful holdings of some of the poor natives. Malabanan's coming had been broadcasted across the land, and an uneasiness had settled over the Gulf, a vague fear Terry sought to allay. But Malabanan's record, a dark and dismal history of hideous crime for which he had been but half punished, was known throughout the country, and was the nightly subject of fearful conversation in every hut on every isolated plantation.

Terry had ridden, alone, to the neglected settlement up the coast where the gang of roughs had rendezvous, but Malabanan was away. A dozen hard-looking natives had sullenly responded to his curt questions. None were working, though he had arrived during the cool of the afternoon and the fields cried for attention.

In Davao, the town, he found consuming interest. Sleepy six days in the week it woke each Wednesday during the couple of hours the weekly steamer anchored offshore to discharge cargo into a lighter, drop a passenger or two, and send ashore the exiles' greatest balm—home mail. He came to know everybody: first

the other government people—Lieutenant-Governor; Scout officers; Dr. Merchant, the district health officer; school teachers, native postmaster. Seldom a week passed that he failed to saunter into each of the Chinese tiendas, making the purchase of matches or other small articles the excuse for a half-hour's visit. Oftenest he went into Lan Yek's smelly little shop, for there the Bogobos brought their mountain hemp to trade for small agongs: tired from their heavy packing, they would squat down on the floor along the wall, one of them occasionally stepping to an agong to test it with deft contact of finger, all joining him in rapt study of its tone, measuring the duration of the lingering waves of sound. Terry learned, in time, that they found greatest merit in those agongs which rang longest to lightest stroke.

Even those timid Bogobos who never left the wooded foothills knew him. He went among them, studying their language, learning their customs and hopes and fears, listening to their picturesque traditions. Always, when he met a file of the beaded, braceleted folk upon the trail, he dismounted to exchange a few words with them. Unbelievably shy at first, in time they came to know him as word passed through the foothills of the young white man who understood: so they brought their problems to him, some pathetic, some ridiculous—recently he had ridden twenty miles to settle a dispute regarding the ownership of some yet unborn puppies.

As their confidence increased, they unsealed their tight lips in relation of strange tales of the Hill People, unbelievable stories of the wild tribe who lived in the forbidden mountain beyond the Dark Forest: stories told usually by old men and old women, who shivered as they whispered their legends to the white man by the campfire. They told him the dread stories because they liked his quietness, his slightly twisted, friendly smile, and because, as they told each other, he listened as one who sees not with the eyes alone.

When he saw that the fear of Malabanan had spread among these widely scattered, defenseless wildmen, Terry grew grimmer. But as the weeks passed peacefully by, hope grew within him that Malabanan's presence in the lovely,

fertile Gulf boded no ill.



Major Bronner, arriving unexpectedly, found that Terry had been away all day on a mission among the Bogobos. Learning from Matak that his master would return within a few hours the Major left his bag and crossed over to the Davao Club for dinner. Entering the club, a roomy house furnished by the planters to provide a comfortable place in which to put up when forced to town by business or the monotony of their isolation, he passed straight to the dining room, discovering Lindsey, Cochran and a dozen others he knew. As he paused in the doorway Lindsey spied him and called him to the table he shared with Cochran and two others. After the Major had responded to the greeting called from all four tables, Lindsey took up the thread of a story the Major's entrance had interrupted.

"Major, I was just telling of my experiences with the hemp machine I brought down three months ago. As I was saying, I set the machine up in my biggest field and tried it out in private—and Man! How she did strip hemp! Convinced that I had the world by the tail I sent word out to all the Bogobos in the neighborhood to come in next day to see the machine work, and sent a special bid to the old chief who lords it over that section.

"Well, they came all right—ready to see the crazy Americans' newest devilment—and all set for the feast they knew I'd give! The chief came, with the bunch who act as a staff for him, and I lined them up right in front of the machine in the center of a crowd of two hundred wild men—all about as scared by the machine's appearance as they could be. I was pretty proud, and pretty happy: I gave them a good spiel through my interpreter, telling them that from now on all who worked for me would be free from the hard toil of stripping—nothing to do but field work—and all that. I thought that they would admire this new evidence of the American genius, would pile over each other in their desire to work for

me.

"I nodded to the mechanic: he cranked the engine and it got off to a fine start and before throwing in the clutch that hooked it up with the stripper I looked out over the silent, brown-faced crowd. I had to grin at their expectant, half-scared attitude: the old chief stood right in front of the big machine—he was uncertain about it all, but game. I threw her in and waved to the feeders, who tossed in the great stalks as the big iron arms started to revolve in the air. It did make an infernal racket—but it did strip hemp. The fiber came out of one end, the juice ran into a trough—oh, it worked great.

"I spent a minute or two seeing that everything worked right, then I turned triumphantly to the crowd. But, Lord—there wasn't any crowd—I saw the last of their brown backs disappearing into the brush!

"All but the old chief. He stood right there; stiff with fright, I guess! I stopped the machine and went over to him to ask him to tell his young men to work for me as he could see how easy it would be for them, now that I had this machine."

He paused, laughing ruefully. "But I didn't get a chance to say a word. He took one last look at the now quiet iron monster, clucked that peculiar 'Tuk!' in which they express the maximum of emotion, uttered two words—'*Americano devils!*'—then stalked away as rapidly as his bent old legs would carry him. He disappeared into the woods—and hasn't been seen since!

"And worst of all, all of my Bogobos quit me, so that instead of cornering the labor market in Davao I lost most of what I had! I'm punching the bag every day now, getting in shape to greet the next *hombre* that tries to sell me a machine!"

He joined goodnaturedly in the laugh which filled the room and when it subsided turned to the Major gratefully.

"Major, my hemp lay rotting in my fields: it meant serious loss to me—it would have wiped me out. But Lieutenant Terry heard about it and without saying

anything to me, went among the Bogobos and persuaded sixty of them to work for me—the most I ever had was thirty-one. He has a wonderful hold upon them—they will do anything he says: and I'm not the only one he has helped out; am I, boys?"

A dozen planters supported him, enthusiastic, vehement.

Cochran knew the Major intimately, his hobbies and aversions. He turned to him solemnly.

"Married yet, Major?"

"Who—me? I guess not! No petticoats for mine!"

In the laugh which rose over Cochran's elicitation of the bachelor's invariable formula, several of the planters moved their chairs near the Major's table. All of these quiet, efficient Constabulary were well liked, and the Major had been known to many of these Davao pioneers since the days when they had fought together against insurrectos, cholera, torturing sun, treachery; the days when capture had meant the agony of dissection piecemeal, hamstringing, the ant hill.

The Major's face had relapsed into gravity: "Lieutenant Terry is well liked, then?" he suggested.

Lindsey replied, earnestly: "Major, he owns this whole Gulf. He hasn't an enemy—not counting that gang of Malabanan's up the coast."

Burns, a gruff old planter, interposed: "He had one enemy, once."

Cochran understood that the uncommunicative Burns would go no further and thought the Major should be enlightened.

"As I was the only witness," he began, "I guess I must tell the story. One of our planters, Sears, took a dislike to Terry on the way down from Zamboanga: no reason for it—he was grouchy and sore, had been drinking too hard trying to

forget his troubles.

"You know Sears, Major. His inability to get labor was ruining him and he went too far in 'persuading' the Bogobos to work for him. Well, he went after Terry on the boat, and it wound up with Sears threatening to do Terry up if he came near his plantation: and Terry quietly assured him that he would go there first of all.

"We were all worried about it for a week, as Sears is a bad man when aroused and never goes back on his word, and we knew Terry would go—he was all business, though quiet and white. Well, when Sears got back to his place all of his Bogobos had left him, the fields were deserted. It meant the loss of his crop, complete ruin, so he got to drinking harder and finally, desperate, brought in some Bogobos at the point of a pistol and put them to work.

"It was pretty raw, of course. Everybody knew of it that night. The next morning I rode over to offer him some of my men and as I came in sight of the house I saw Terry, riding his gray pony, enter Sears' clearing from the east trail.

"I was pretty scared. I knew he was there on business—that he would be the first one to hear of Sears' coup. I spurred up to see if I couldn't prevent serious trouble, but when I drew near I pulled up: there was something in his face that made me keep out, made me understand that I was an outsider in this affair.

"Well, Sears rushed out just as Terry dismounted, his eyes inflamed with rage—and with a whiskey hangover, I guess, though he seemed perfectly sober. He stood at the top of the steps looking at Terry, his face purple, trembling all over: he had his 45 in his hand. Terry tied the reins to the lower railing, then stood looking up at Sears with that queer expression which I couldn't fathom. Sears spoke first, his voice husky.

"So you've come, Terry,' he said.

"Yes, I have come, Sears.' He looked sort of small and white compared with Sears up there, but somehow I could not worry about him. I thought Sears would choke for a minute, then he said:

"If you put a foot on those steps I'll—I'll—'

"Terry didn't give him a chance to finish the threat, but stepped forward. I noticed that his gray pony sort of nipped at him, affectionately, as he passed his head and made the first step up. Sears must have gone clean crazy. He raised the big pistol and fired pointblank!

"They weren't fifteen feet apart, but he missed, and that shot passed over Terry's shoulder and tore a great chunk out of the cantle of his saddle. The pony tore loose and ran away. I just sat there, scared to death!

"Terry never took his eyes off Sears and he still wore that same expression I mentioned before: he was white as a sheet but he was not scared. No, sir! Sears kept the pistol pointed at him and as Terry came up another step I saw the hammer lift again, but it eased back and the pistol wavered as Sears fell under

the spell of Terry's upturned eyes. His face changed queerly as Terry kept coming, he stepped back uncertainly, the pistol dropped to his side. He understood why Terry had come, and I did also, at the same time.

"Terry was SORRY for him!"

Cochran paused a moment to conquer a little catch that had crept into his voice, and then concluded his story: "Well, Major, Sears realized suddenly what he had tried to do and looked down at the gun in his hands as in a dream, then offered it to Terry. But Terry shook his head, said something in a low tone I didn't hear, and they went inside, leaving me to cool my heels in the yard like the rank outsider I was! They came out in half an hour, arm in arm, and Terry stepped to the rail and sounded the Bogobo call. In about a minute a big gang of half-naked Bogobos filed out of the woods into the clearing and gathered around him at the foot of the steps.

"Terry talked to them awhile in their own lingo, then asked Sears if he had living accommodations for the whole bunch. Before coming to Sears' place he had spent the night in the foothills and persuaded seventy Bogobos to come in and work for Sears—Bogobos, mind you, who have always feared Sears and refused to approach his place!

"That's the story, Major,—except that Sears harvested his full crop, is on his feet again, has cut booze and treats his men as well as any planter in the Gulf. And he sure does worship this young lieutenant of yours!"

The Major studied the end of his cigar. "He never reports anything like that," he admitted. "I'm glad you told me."

"You'll hear plenty more such—" Cochran began, but was interrupted by the loud entrance of little Casey. He tore into the room, breezy, voluble, greeting every one with short, jerky sentences. He reached the Major last.

"Hello, Major! How's everything? I passed Lieutenant Terry on the trail—three

miles out—he was leading his pony—said it was lame though it hardly limped at all! Tried to get him to mount and ride in with me—but he wouldn't—sure and he's the merciful man to beasts!"

He rambled on till the Major interrupted him with: "How are the breeding experiments coming on, Casey? Any foals yet—or pigs?"

The little man disregarded the amused grin of the planters, pouring forth in long eulogy of American mares and boar. "You come down to my place in about two weeks," he wound up at last, "and I'll show you! I'll have some cross-bred colts and pigs worth the seeing—and I'm going to name the first one after Terry!"

"First pig?" Cochran seemed serious.

"No—first colt—the first pig I'll name for you!"

Soon the Major left Casey capably sparring with the plaguing Cochran, and seated himself on a broad window ledge above the dark plaza, smoking thoughtfully. He had made no mistake in sending Terry here. Three phonographs strove against each other from different houses along the plaza. It is characteristic of the Americans in the Philippines that most of them take unto their bosoms these mechanical comforts, instead of the animated talking machines which the Spaniards affected. The sky was black with the threat of rain, low thunder rumbled in the west, above Apo.

A few minutes, and the Major distinguished two forms making their way along the north side of the dark plaza and as they passed under one of the oil park-lamps he recognized Terry, leading a weary pony which limped slightly. As the Major secured his cap and waved a cheery goodnight to the gathering, Lindsey hurried to the door to intercept him.

"Major, Lieutenant Terry promised to come over to my place to-morrow afternoon. We were going to have a drive against the wild pigs—they've been raising the devil with my young plants. You will come along with him, won't

you?"

"You bet! I haven't had any shooting in months. But you won't let that big snake get me, will you?"

Chuckling, he left the club and crossed the plaza to Terry's quarters. Entering, he heard Terry splashing under the shower. Terry emerged soon, kimono clad, his face lighted hospitably when he spied the Major sitting by the lamp-lit table.

Dressed, Terry ate and listened while the Major smoked and talked.

"Lieutenant," he finally remarked, "there is no more trouble among the Bogobos?"

"No, sir. It has stopped—as I reported to you."

The Major regarded him closely: "What stopped it?"

"I just talked to some of the planters, and they understood."

Looking up, he flushed under the Major's quizzical gaze.

"Major, those planters at the club have been stuffing you!" he complained.

The Major gravely discussed Malabanan. "Terry, you may not have to move against him—I hope not, anyway. But I want you to be in a position to finish anything he starts. Do you want me to send you an additional company?"

"No—I can handle anything in reason with the Macabebes."

"What did you do with the secret service man I sent down?"

"I planted him up the coast where he can watch that gang."

Terry unfolded his plans for handling the situation should the ladrones break loose upon the Gulf, and the Major was satisfied.

"It hardly seems possible," he said, "that they will try it—but with only one company here to cover the whole Gulf—and in so remote a settlement—it may look like easy pickings. But if Malabanan dares—you smash him!"

The threatened rainstorm had passed to the north, leaving the night clear and cool: a strong breeze fluttered the lamp. Matak entered to clear the table and Terry, who had not eaten the fried chicken, pushed it toward the Moro with goodnatured impatience.

"Matak, this chicken is only half cooked: I've warned the cook several times—tell him to eat it."

Matak, silent and grim as ever, bore the offending dish out, while Terry turned to the Major to discuss the morrow's sport. In a moment their voices were drowned by the crash of dishes falling in the kitchen, then a fearsome shriek reached the startled pair, a moaning cry terminating abruptly in a choking gurgle. They sprang up and into the kitchen.

Matak was astride the prostrate Visayan in the midst of the broken crockery and bent tinware spilled from the upset table. He had the cook's mouth pried open in determined endeavor to ram what looked like half a chicken down the Visayan's gullet. Half-strangled and crazed with fear the cook rolled his eyes beseechingly.

Bronner raised Matak bodily and Terry helped the trembling Filipino to his feet. He turned to Matak sternly.

"What does this mean?"

"He would not eat it, master."

The cook broke in, almost hysterical: "Matak say I must eat cheecken, that you say so. I say 'all right, eat to-morrow.' He say 'eat now.' I say 'no, to-morrow.' Then he fight. I no eat to-day—notheeng—to-day church fast day!"

As recollection came of his joking instructions to the ever serious Matak, Terry turned to the Major but he had run from the kitchen, choking. Having patched up a truce between them, Terry followed the Major into the sala.

At sight of his rueful face the Major burst into fresh laughter. "His fast day!" he chuckled. "These Moros are sure literal-minded—they follow your words exactly. I've had some queer examples in the past year."

They sat through the cool evening talking of their multi-phased service, Bronner earnest and unwittingly eloquent in his summing up of its ideals, its hopes for the future, Terry silent and thoughtful as the big man talked about plans for Mindanao, for the Gulf.

"And some day, Terry," he concluded, after a stirring account of what two officers, Case and Gallman, had done among the Luzon headhunters, "some day we will get to the Hill People: the right man will come along, and the right combination of circumstances. It is an unusual combination—the right man plus the right place plus the right time. Carnegie would probably have been just a tight-fisted Scot had he lived in Napoleon's time, and Napoleon if born in this generation might never get a headline.

"I would like to be the man who first wins to the Hills. Think of the glory of such a life work—opening the doors for a benighted people and leading them out of savagery into the decencies and comforts and safety of civilization!"

The steady evening breeze had stiffened, swinging the great airplants which hung in the big windows. The far howl of a dog sounded through the dark: the sleepy crowing of scores of gamecocks accurately gauged the passing of another hour. The Major suggested sleep.

Terry, in pajamas and slippers, came in to see if his guest were comfortable for the night: assured, he crossed the sala, blew out the light and entered his own room, closing the door behind him. Shortly, while the Major lay watching, he

threw open the door and the Major heard him climb into bed and adjust his mosquito net.

The Major mused: "That's queer—I wonder what he does behind the closed door?"

He fell asleep puzzling over it.



CHAPTER VII

THE PYTHON

Nothing could be more impersonal than the manner in which the Major inspected the company. He was very curt and official: no detail eluded his attention, no fault of equipment, quarters, drill or training escaped comment and correction. The command was in fine shape but it is a service in which there is but one standard—perfection, and perfection may never be attained. The inspection consumed the morning, but when they sat at lunch in Terry's quarters, rank had perished again.

At two o'clock they set off leisurely for Lindsey's, Terry quiet, the Major jovial at the prospect of a drive at the wild boar. They jogged through the hot afternoon over a trail winding under a canopy of foliage shrill with the plaint of myriad insect life. An hour out and the Major was nearly unseated as his pony shied violently from a three-foot iguana that scurried across their path in furious haste. Farther into the woods, and they drew rein, listening to the mystic tone of a Bogobo agong rung at minute intervals: Terry judged the gong to be six miles distant westward, the Major contended for half a mile, north of them. Such is the weird quality of the agong in the forest.

At four o'clock they drew up at Lindsey's roomy, thatched house set in the middle of his clearing and in a few minutes Lindsey, soaked with perspiration, hurried out of the tall growth of hemp ripening in his south field.

"I feared you might not be able to make it," he smiled. "You can never tell what the next day may bring you Constabulary fellows!"

He called his head native, a stocky Visayan, and ordered him to start the beaters

out, explaining to his guests that they would take their places in an hour. The three then strolled through the streets of the little village Lindsey had built for his laborers and their families, a double row of neat bamboo huts, grass roofed, of which he was very proud. Returning, they passed a huge machine rusting under a rough shed, Lindsey's ill-fated hemp machine, introduced a little too early to an ignorant people.

Lindsey unlocked a trunk and brought out three high-powered rifles, two of them borrowed, contrary to the law of a land where firearms must be zealously protected against falling into hostile hands. He led the way through the long rows of abaca which drooped listless fronds in the quivering heat, and into the cool woods which surrounded his fields. They went on for a half-hour into deeper jungle, emerging into a strip of natural clearing from which they could hear the beaters converging toward them. Lindsey stationed Terry at the left end of the break, Bronner in the center where the shooting should be best, himself taking the right end.

As the beaters approached, crashing the underbrush and shouting lustily, the three stood motionless, guns ready: the suspense grew tense and the beaters grew silent as they hurried, unseen, from the line of fire. A moment of dead silence, then Lindsey heard to his right a dry twig snap and turning saw a big boar slip out from the brush and pause, its ugly tusks foam-flecked. His heavy gun crashed, the boar leaped convulsively across the clearing, falling at a second shot. As it dropped he whirled to cover a big buck which sped across his field of fire: as it fell he heard the cracking of a lighter weapon to his right and thought, as he shot again and again, that his guests were not being disappointed in their sport.

It was fast work while it lasted. Lindsey inspected with keen satisfaction the bag of two pigs and one deer that had fallen to his gun: he had missed one boar and another, which he had wounded, had escaped down the trail which led to his house. He turned to see how his friends had fared.

The Major was known as a crack shot but no game lay before him. Approaching him, surprised, Lindsey saw that he was absent-mindedly putting his rifle at safe the while he stared at Terry.

"Major, I'm sorry you had no chances—" Lindsey began but the Major interrupted him.

"Chances! Chances? Sus-marie-hosep! Some of those pigs almost ran up my breeches!" He was as nearly excited as Lindsey had ever seen him, and they had served together in a Kansas regiment.

"Lindsey, I'm sure glad you asked me to come—I've seen something worth seeing. I've seen him shoot!"

He pointed to Terry. His borrowed rifle stood nearby against a tree and he was busy clipping fresh ammunition into his pistol magazines. Five wild pigs lay in front of him near the opposite side of the clearing. Lindsey looked his unbelief.

"Yes, he did!" asserted the Major. "I watched him do it—that's why I drew a blank. Five pigs, five shots,—and after each shot he holstered the gun till the next pig hove in sight! I've seen good shooting, but such drawing—such certainty—

"Sus-marie-hosep!" he wound up, lamely.

Terry, having replenished his magazine, clipped it into the big automatic with a deft snap, and turned round toward them. Noting their attitude, he colored boyishly.

"Pretty lucky, wasn't I?" he said.

"Yes," agreed the Major, drily, "you were pretty lucky!"

The beaters had come up. Lindsey ordered them to carry the game for distribution among his villagers. The sun was dipping behind the hills as the

three started back the trail through the dense woods, Lindsey leading the way and searching for signs of the wounded boar. Every few rods he found a pool of blood where it had paused in flight.

They entered the deep shadow cast by the spread of a great banyan tree from whose thick branches a score of accessory trunks were sent down to seek root in the soil. Rooting, they grew into smooth, heavy supports for the wide-spread limbs which towered above the surrounding forest. Terry paused a moment in the twilight of the tree, studying appreciatively the miniature forest of trunks parented by the one ancient growth. Suddenly a warning cry escaped his lips as he saw one of the long dark trunks, a foot in diameter, loosen from a branch where it hung suspended high over the Major's head.

"LOOK OUT, MAJOR!"

He leaped forward, expecting to find the Major crushed, but involuntarily halted midway in his stride as the heavy trunk, landing at the Major's feet with a slithering thud, writhed a terrible length into massive folds. No eye could follow the inconceivably swift contortions that wrapped the Major in a triple fold.

Two heavy coils prisoned his legs, a third passed round his back up over his right shoulder to curve to the trail in front of him and rear again in a length which terminated in a massive head poised six feet from the Major's blanched face. Demon-eyed, unwinking, its thin lips bisected the thick-boned jaws in frightful, moist grimace.

Lindsey, horror-stricken, stood helpless while the hammer head catapulted at the sickened face of its victim. The Major's free left arm, raised instinctively to blot out the sight of the living horror, took the terrific impact, then dropped to his side, paralyzed. Still bearing that hideous grin the flat head drew back for another blow at the exposed face. The Major, faint with the terror of his helplessness and the crushing weight of the quivering masses of muscle about him, would have fallen but for their dread support. His consciousness fast

deserting him, fascinated, he watched the monstrous leer as the head drew farther back, poised. He felt the agonizing pressure as the great muscles steeled for the blow, and in the moment before his senses departed, heard two crashing shots that sounded from behind him. With the smashing reports the poised head thudded to the ground, the folds fell from about him and he slid down among the great quivering coils.

Recovering consciousness, the horror crept back into his face but receded when he saw Terry standing by him. Still faint and sick he struggled to his feet, leaning against the trunk of the banyan and stamping his feet weakly to restore the still numb legs. Terry helped him hobble over to where the Bogobos, who had come up at the shots, were grouped about the dead monster. Lindsey, kneeling to examine the head of the great reptile, struck a match to point out the jagged wounds that had shattered the base of the head.

"Cut the spinal cord," he explained quietly. He was as pale as the Major. "Any other wound, even fatal,—it's death struggles would have—I hate to think of it, Major."

At the Major's questioning look he pointed toward Terry: "He shot it. Pistol."

The Major surveyed Terry steadfastly, striving for appropriate expression of what was in his heart.

Then, "Terry, I am much obliged. If I ever—if ever you—I'm much obliged!"

It was dark when they reached the house. Later they heard the triumphant shouts which announced the arrival in the village of the men bearing the carcass of the snake, which had haunted the neighborhood for a generation. The celebration of its passing lasted far into the night. After dinner Lindsey and Terry strolled to the village to measure the python, and Lindsey ordered it skinned immediately.

You may still see the trophy in the Davao Club, its scaly length stretched along the molding on two sides of the library, where the Major asked Lindsey to place

it with this legend:

This python attacked Major John Bronner, P.C.,
on the Lindsey Plantation.

Length.....24 feet, 9 inches
Greatest diameter.....14 inches

Major Bronner owes his life to the wonderful
pistol marksmanship of his friend,

Lieut. Richard Terry, P.C.

The ride home through the dewy night stiffened the Major's sore muscles and strained joints intolerably. Terry called in the Health Officer, fat Doctor Merchant, who looked him over and pronounced him uninjured, leaving some vile-smelling liniment. The Major winced under Matak's too efficient rubbing of bruised areas.

"Horse dope!" he snorted.

Later, dozing, he waked to see Terry's door close and open again after a few minutes. Puzzled as on the preceding night, he fell asleep over the problem.



Governor Mason had dropped the Major at Davao while he went on to Mati, planning to return for a short stop at Davao in forty-eight hours, but as they finished their leisurely breakfast they heard the whistle of his cutter approaching Davao from the south.

"Wonder what's up," said the Major. "He's twelve hours ahead of his schedule."

They walked slowly to the dock, the Major still stiff-legged, arriving just as the launch was lowered over the side of the trim white boat which lay anchored a half-mile offshore. As the launch neared shore they saw the Governor standing on the stern seat.

He stepped up on to the little dock and greeted the Major, then turned his smile

upon Terry, apologizing:

"I planned to spend a day here with you all, but have been recalled. As usual my departure from the capitol was the signal for a dato to start a row!"

A group of officials and more prominent natives had gathered at the pier. He shook hands with each, calling each by name, then gathered the officials about him in a brief conference which disclosed his grasp of conditions in the Gulf. At the end of the short discussion he drew Terry aside.

"No trouble yet with that gang of roughs—with Malabanan?"

"No, sir."

The Governor's face bore a look Terry had not seen in it, an unrelenting determination, a grimness: "Major Bronner has told you how I want this matter handled?"

"Yes, sir. Wait, let him make the first move, then move against them."

"Exactly! I want to demonstrate for all time that this province is as unhealthy now for criminals as during Army days!"

For a moment he studied Terry keenly, then his gaze traveled over the splendid vista of the Gulf appreciatively, mounting higher and higher till it rested on Apo's dim crest. A moment and he turned to Terry again, to find that he, too, was lost in a rapt contemplation of the Hills.

"Lieutenant, some day ... somehow...."

"Yes, Governor."

The Major fidgeted uncomfortably in the presence of the two dreamers. Two short blasts of the cutter's whistle restored the Governor's urban manner. In a minute he and the Major had said their good-bys and were bobbing over the little

seas toward the ship.

The group of Americans and natives split up as they returned toward the town but Terry lingered at the dock watching the cutter as it got under way and raced toward the horizon, leaving a white ribbon of wake on the blue gulf waters. Three large bancas were approaching the shore, belated fishermen returning with the night's catch: a fleet vinta, bearing Moro traders, bore toward Samal, its little sail glaring white in the actinic sunlight: the morning air was hot and filled with the heavy odors of sea and shore. It was a fair spot, Davao, productive, peaceful.... He looked up the coast toward the north where Malababan had settled with his unsavory crew.

He spent the day at the *cuartel*, correcting all the little defects the Major's stiff inspection had uncovered. The Macabebes responded eagerly—they, too, wanted to be perfect. They felt trouble in the air, scented impending combat, and Macabebes thrive on combat. Sergeant Mercado, veteran of seven campaigns in Samar and Cavite, drilled them tirelessly, his eyes afire with the old fighting glint. And that night he donned his starchiest uniform, pinned on his bright service medals, and made the round of the tiendas, throwing chests at the black-haired girls behind the counters. Great fighting blood is usually great loving blood.

Terry ate dinner alone. The house seemed too big without the Major. Restless, reading failed of its usual absorption. After a while he took up a letter the last mail had brought from Deane and reread it.

DEAR DICK:—

Your letter telling of transfer to the Moro Province has just come. I had to study the map to find out where it is! If it means advancement I am glad—though we had all hoped that when you left Sorsogon

it would be to come home.

Your letters are so funny, so interesting. You write such nice things about the natives that I am becoming fond of them too. But the other day I read an article written by a cynical woman who has lived in the Islands only a few months. I read part of it to father, the part which says that "the Filipinos are a worthless, shiftless, lazy people; improvident, untrustworthy and immoral!" After I had read that he thought a moment and then said:

"Well, Deane, people are just about the same as that around here!"

Everything is going about as usual around Crampville. They are tearing down the old watering trough in the square—it is a nuisance to automobiles. They had some trouble over on the South Side last week among the foreigners but Father Jennings smoothed things out. He told me that he has a harder time keeping them contented since you left. I learned from him that you used to spend a good deal of your time among them, that they idolized you.... Why did you never talk to me about such things, Dick?

Bruce is earning a great reputation but insists on staying in Crampville. He has been called to Albany twice during the month to perform some special operation. He finds time to run in on us nearly every day.

Susan and Ellis do not change: they are quite the happiest couple we have—though they both do miss you terribly.

You never mention the native girls. Are they attractive, lovely? Do not let one of them fascinate you. We need you here, Dick,—Susan and Ellis, Father Jennings, the foreigners—all of us.

DEANE.

His deft fingers fumbled as he folded the letter and locked it in the drawer. Vainly smoothing at the lock of hair which always stuck out from the crown of his head, he stared vacantly at the lamp shade, oblivious to the entrance of the silent, morose Matak, who carried the bottle of boiled drinking water into the bedroom and then went out for the night.

A hoarse ghekko lizard croaked its raucous six-song from a rafter overhead: a giant bat flapped through an open window, fluttered, crazy-winged, thrice about the big room and blundered through another window into the night: the low voweled voices of native passersby floated up from the dark street.

But Terry heard nothing, nor felt the scent-laden breezes which roused the heat-soaked town to life.... He was walking up Main Street again, with rifle and

snowshoes and fox, of a Sunday morning just as the heavy church doors swung wide to the emerging congregation....

A strong gust flickered the lamp. He rose, slid shut the exposed window and returned to his desk. In a few moments he took pen and paper, and wrote.

DEANE-DEAR:—

Your letters come to me across the thousands of miles of land and sea, carried by sooty train and boat, buried in a dross of mail in prosy canvas sacks: I open them with the delight one feels when he brushes aside the mat of damp and frosty withered leaves to find the timid beauty of arbutus.

You think, perhaps, you might grow fond of these people? I know that you would love this Gulf as I do. The humid heat of the day oppresses me but little: I love the sparkling hours of dawn, the cool of the evenings; the great tangled stretches of green which clothe the slopes from sea to the edge of the mountains that loom gray in the distance, like the rim of the world. And I like the courageous planters, toiling that the world may have its hemp: the young-old wild tribes, emerging from their primitive mental shallows, a bit bewildered, pathetic.

Yes, I think that you would like it all, too, though—sometimes—I am not quite sure.

The mountains are not like our Vermont hills: more rugged, wilder, more—what shall I say!—unsolved.... Thinking of the home hills I can almost conceive the vast significance of the word "eternity": but thoughts of these primeval hills sweeps my mind backward, to the infinity of creation. Untamed, untraveled, mysterious by day as by night, they threaten as they beckon.

Nearly every evening, near sundown, I see a pair of wild pigeons homing toward the crest of Apo. "Limoçons," the Bogobos call them—"leem-o-sahns": the word falls limpid from their lips, unaccented. They say the limoçon never was heard to sing in the lowlands, and tell a strange legend that it is an oracle of the Hill People, its song a harbinger of good or evil tidings.

An old Bogobo woman told me of this one night, in a little foothill village, when the spell of dusk had unlocked her lips: and she told, whisperingly, of twice having heard the Giant Agong of the Hill dwellers, once when she was a child, again when she was grandmother to nineteen. I wish you could have been there to watch and to listen: sitting near the fire in front of her hut, surrounded by a circle of almost naked wildmen who moved, uneasy, she told quaveringly of how the booming tones had rumbled down the forested slopes, and of how ill had befallen her people both times; when she ceased, they stood breathless, their whole beings strained to catch the dread sound none but she had ever heard. Yes, she moved me, queerly ... I scarce know why.

I am lonely—a little—at times. But who is not? Yet I have my work to keep me busy, usually happy. Just now I am facing less pleasant duty—but it is, I fear, a work that must be done. It is good to know that one is needed, as I am here,—just now.

But never a day is born or dies but that I miss you all, as I love you all ... Susan and Ellis, Father Jennings, the foreigners ... all of you.

DICK.



CHAPTER VIII

THE STRICKEN VILLAGE

A week later, Terry stood at the window looking down over the blistering plaza. Davao was torpid under the noonday heat. Three carabaos grazed undisturbed on the forbidden square: another of the awkward powerful brutes dawdled up the dusty road, hauling a decrepit two-wheeled cart on which a naked-backed, red-pantalooned native dozed: Padre Velasco, the aged Spanish priest, waved a weary hand at Terry from his window in the old adobe convento. As he watched he saw the soldierly figure of Sergeant Mercado emerge from the *cuartel* and hurry toward him.

Entering the room the soldier saluted stiffly and reported that a patrol had just come in from the foothills with the information that a mysterious fever had attacked the Bogobos in the barrio of Dalag, that a score were stricken and four already dead.

Terry hastened to the quarters of the Health Officer to apprise him of the facts. He found him cursing the heat, sweating profusely, though wearing nothing but a thin kimono. A very fat man, Doctor Merchant, inclined to be fussy about little things but magnificent in big things, and thoroughly imbued with the idea that his work of protecting the natives against their own sloth and filth was the only interesting problem in the universe. Alarmed at Terry's report, he ordered his horse saddled and rose heavily to don his field clothes.

Terry expostulated. "Doctor, you ought to wait till it cools off."

"Lieutenant, disease spreads all the time—it takes no time off duty—so why should I?"

He came out fuming over a missing button: "Confound it all! I never have—how do you keep so immaculate, Terry? You always look as if you were on your way to a dinner or dance!" Wiping the perspiration from heavy jowl and neck he lumbered about the room collecting medicine cases, saddle bags, two big canteens, finally answering Terry's question.

"No, you can't go with me—if I need you I'll send for you."

Terry followed him downstairs and helped him mount the ridiculously small pony, then watched the sweating, cussing, bighearted doctor ride out into the sun on his errand of mercy. As the tough little pony bore his heavy burden into the trail and out of sight in the brush, Terry decided humorously that Casey was right—bigger ponies were needed.

During the afternoon the *Francesca* had limped in and out of port. Among his official mail Terry received a confidential memorandum from Major Bronner that erased the softer lines about his mouth:

Zamboanga, 12/18/191-.

Memo for Lieut. Terry.

Last night a notorious criminal, Ignacio Sakay, passed through Zamboanga enroute to Davao.

Sakay was identified with Malabanan in some of the latter's most vicious undertakings, was convicted of brigandage and has been but recently released from Bilibid Prison.

Sakay is not a leader but is bold and absolutely relentless. Among the natives he was known as "Malabanan's stiletto," and was supposed to do all of the killing.

You may look for immediate action from these men: Malabanan has doubtless been awaiting his arrival.

Destroy this memorandum.

BRONNER.

Terry read the terse communication twice before lighting it with a match and scattering the charred remnants over the polished mahogany floor. He passed a grim afternoon with the Macabebes on the target range, where the scorers

wagged bull's eye after bull's eye, for twenty-seven of the Macabebes were expert riflemen, forty-three were marksmen.

He saw that Matak, serving dinner, was gripped in one of the smoldering moods that often preyed upon him. Though his attentions to his master were even more meticulous than usual, he moved with an air of somber detachment. Terry had often pondered on the history of the queer Moro and now he studied him as he cleared the dishes and lighted the desk lamp.

"Matak," he said.

The Moro came to him, his melancholy eyes fixed steadfastly upon the master of his choice.

"Matak, you know that I have never asked you anything about your past life. I am not going to ask you now, unless there is something in which I can be of help to you."

Matak faced his master, his brown features Moro-masked, inscrutable. A moment he searched the concerned countenance, then before Terry understood his purpose, the tight muscles of his face relaxed and he slid forward to kneel on one knee and raise Terry's hand to his lips in the Moros' final homage to an *apo*—a self-chosen master. Rising, he exposed a face stripped of its mask of Oriental imperturbability.

"Master," he said, "I tell you. No other knows. When I am small boy—twelve years old—my family live east coast Basilan. Very happy family, master: father, mother, sister, me; three carabaos we have, a little house, chickens, a little *vinta* in which to fish—everything Moro family want. We hurt nobody, just work.

"One night, very late," his face darkened, "men come. They steal carabaos, everything. My father wake up, go out to see, and they laugh—and kill him. I—a little boy—see them do it: see them kill my father—with bolos. Then they kill my mother—the same man—the same bolo. I see that, too: they say she too old,

and they laugh." He spoke slowly, hesitating before each short sentence, his black eyes dulled with the terrible memories.

"My sister—she sixteen years old—they take her away. They take me, too, because I soon be strong boy to work. My sister—they say she pretty girl!" He raised his hand in unutterable execration.

"We sail all night, all day. Second night, I hear my sister scream, see her fighting with same big Filipino who kill my father and mother. Another Filipino hold me away, laughing ... always I know that laugh, master!

"She Moro girl, he Filipino, so she fight hard—she rather die. She hurt him, so he draw knife, kill her, and throw her in sea: then other Filipino holding me hit me with bolo and throw me in too."

He whipped off his thin cotton camisa and exposed a deep scar which furrowed his left shoulder. It had severed the clavicle, and improperly knit, drew the left arm slightly forward.

"I swim ashore, two miles, to Lassak. Next morning I take boat, find sister, bury her on beach. I, twelve years old, master."

He paused, a picture of implacable hatred and purpose.

"Master, I see Filipino who kill all three my family. He born with left eye all white. I know him any time, any place. That nine years ago. Nine years I no laugh, no sing, no play, no talk with Moro girls, no marry—just listen—just look; listen for that laugh, look for big Filipino with left white eye. Nine years I no tell anybody, just listen, just look. I never find.

"But now I know I find him, soon. For I know you help Matak, master."

He had read the distressed white face correctly. Terry rose, placed his hand upon the Moro's shoulder—the scarred shoulder—and looked down into his now

emotionless face:

"Yes, Matak, I will help," he said simply.

Content, the Moro turned silently on his bare heels and padded out into the kitchen.

Usually Terry strolled the dark streets before going to bed, but to-night a heavy downpour kept him indoors. Outside, the square was loud with the drum-fire of the heavy fall on iron roofs, the rush of water through shallow dirt gutters; inside, the big house roared, the roof trembled overhead. He paced the floor, sleepless, worried with thinking of Matak's terrible story, of the Doctor striving to succor the stricken village, of Sakay's joining Malabanan.

There was another worry, too. Though there was nothing in the eternally verdant land in which he was living to make the fact seem real, the calendar indicated that Christmas was less than two weeks distant, and for the first time since the days when she had first intruded upon his boyish consciousness as something different, something wondrously dear and fine and unattainable, he had sent Deane nothing.



He was awakened before daylight by the arrival of a spent Bogobo runner bearing a note from Doctor Merchant:

Dear Lieut:—

Can you come to Dalag for a day? These people are panic-stricken, won't do a thing I order, won't take treatment, but are trying to exorcise the devils of disease by all sorts of queer rites.

I hate to ask you to come but your influence among them is so great that it seems justifiable to ask it.

If you do come, bring your mosquito net—don't fail to do this. The disease is mosquito-borne, and fatal if untreated. The temperature runs are terrific—highest I ever saw.

MERCHANT.

Terry rode out of Davao at seven o'clock, bound for Dalag. Within a mile he overtook Lindsey, who had spent the night in town. They rode together several miles to where the trail, soaked with the night's rain, forked toward Lindsey's plantation: the sun shone white hot, the earth steamed through its mat of decayed vegetation.

They drew rein at the fork, dismounted. Lindsey broke the silence in which they had ridden following Terry's brief explanation of his mission.

"Terry," he said, "you're too young for all this worry."

Terry's face relaxed into a slow grin: "Lindsey, how old are you?"

"But your work is different—and you are different, Terry."

Terry's bantering grin gave way to a smile of singular sweetness, the queer smile which deepened the depression at the corner of his mouth.

"Lindsey, I know what you mean, I think.... All my friends—"

He paused, gently discouraging his pony from its persistent nibbling at his arm. Lindsey waited, hoping he would continue, but Terry looked away, idly studying the thickly planted hemp fields that extended from the fork to Lindsey's house, a mile distant. The still wet leaves flaunted on great stalks fifteen feet above the wonderfully fertile soil.

"Lindsey, I wonder if you really appreciate what you are doing in taming a soil that was wild in jungle ages before Pharaoh's time, and making it useful to man."

He pointed to the huge plant nearest them; "The fibers in those stalks—I can see them, woven into a rope that may warp a steamer to dock in Tripoli or Hoboken or Archangel: or fashioned by happy Japanese fingers into braided hats to cover lovely heads in Picadilly or Valparaiso or Montreal: or woven into a cord which will fly a kite for some tousle-headed boy in Michigan or for a slant-eyed urchin

on the banks of the Yang-Tse Kiang: or, somewhere, it may be looped into ugliest knot by a grim figure standing on a scaffold—though I hope not!"

Lindsey had listened in curious wonderment to this conception of his work. He thought it over, laughed.

"Well, maybe that's what you see, Lieutenant,—but I see wild pigs rooting up my immature plants, lack of labor, poor transportation, fluctuations of price, typhoons undoing a whole year's work—take my word for it, I see aplenty!"

Terry tightened the girth, tickling the knowing pony's nose till a sneeze compelled contraction of the expanded chest. Mounted, he seemed loath to go, and twisted in the saddle to look down at Lindsey.

"About what you said a moment back—that I was 'different.' All my friends have always been like that—wanted to look after me, somehow, though I can look after myself, pretty well. I never quite understood why they felt like that ... about me. So, I know what you meant, Lindsey. And I want you to know that—that I like it."

Lindsey gripped his outstretched hand, then stood at the fork watching the slender rider thread through the maze of the trail out of sight. Mounting, he started homeward along the edge of the field trying to interpret the strange appeal this young officer had exerted over him, this quiet lad whose very competence and cheerfulness he somehow found pathetic. He involuntarily halted his pony as solution came to him.

"Why, curl my cowlick!" he exclaimed aloud. "That's it—he was BORN lonely!"



Terry rode into Dalag at noon and found the doctor even redder and hotter than usual. The perspiration glistened on his hands and wrists, dripped from his fat

face and neck, and his once-starched clothes hung limp from his rickety frame. Worn with loss of sleep and fruitless efforts to bring the frightened Bogobos to reason, he welcomed Terry wearily to the little hut that had been set aside for his use.

Terry took command, so quietly that the doctor did not realize it. A few brief questions elicited the measures the doctor wished put into effect, simple curative methods and preventive precautions. Understanding, Terry started out, but was recalled by the doctor.

"Lieutenant, did you bring your mosquito net?" At Terry's affirmative nod he continued: "It's a good thing you did—the village is swarming with nightflyers, and every one of them is loaded to the hilt with plasmodiae!"

The village, a mere scattering of crudest huts along the river front, seemed deserted, but from nearly every hut came the low wailings of the sick and the frightened. Noting that the lamentations had ceased a few minutes after Terry went out, the doctor stepped to the door and watched his progress from shack to shack, saw how the picturesque little savages grouped about him. They knew him and listened to him confidently, so that the parboiled doctor was as much disgusted as pleased with the ease with which Terry secured the cooperation for which he had begged and stormed in vain.

Under his direction they cut down all of the plant life whose upturned leaves or fronds held stagnant, mosquito-breeding water, climbed tall palms to brush out the rain water accumulated in the concave depressions where frond joins trunk, even twisted off the cuplike scarlet blossoms from hibiscus shrubs. They carried green brush to a series of smudges he lit to cordon the village against the vicious singing horde of germ carriers. Best of all, they ceased their incantations over the sick, unwound the tight cords they had knotted around the abdomens of the stricken to prevent the fever from "going further down," opened the grass windows that gasping lungs might obtain decent air, and swallowed the doctor's hitherto neglected medicines.

There were no chickens in the village, no eggs. The doctor bemoaned the lack of nourishment for his sick. So Terry summoned four of the ablest hunters and disappeared into the woods for an hour, returning with a young buck speared through the lungs and shot mercifully through the head. In an hour a big pot was boiling in the middle of the street that throughout the night the sufferers might receive hot soup made up of venison, yams, eggplant and rice, all that the village afforded.

Doctor Merchant, watching the transformation, marveled at the method of persuasion. There was no attempt at exercise of authority, no raising of voice, no gestures, only patient explanation, an assumption of mutual friendliness, a sincere and ample sympathy.

Shortly after sundown the doctor, exhausted with the worry and stress of the hours before Terry came, distributed his bulk as comfortably as possible on the bamboo floor, tucked in his mosquito net very carefully, and fell into a heavy sleep, too exhausted to await Terry's return.

It was as well that the doctor did not await him, for Terry spent half of the night by a fire kindled at the base of a big tree in front of the chief's abode. Seated on a stump near the blaze, surrounded by a ring of half-nude Bogobos whose timid eyes seldom wandered from his face, he answered their questions and erased the last vestiges of the panic into which the epidemic had precipitated the villagers.

Interrogation at an end, he still stayed on with them. The flickering blaze lighted the circle of little brown folk, each flare gleaming on an eye here, glinting there on beaded jacket or brass trinkets with which both men and women were adorned. The first mad panic had abated, but Death had stalked through the settlement six times in as many days, and they listened superstitiously for the stark Tread through the woods which hemmed them in. Each whispering wind that stirred the leaves overhead brought a deeper silence, each wail from delirious sufferers in nearby huts tightened the little circle.

The quavering gutturals of a half-blind old woman, wrinkled and shrivelled with a number of years no man could estimate, jarred the dumb circle.

"My years are as the scales of a fish. Each year has brought wisdom. Listen."

It was the invariable preface of a Bogobo legend. Terry stirred: it was the old woman who had told him of the Giant Agong.

"This sickness takes not many more of our people. The white men will stop it. Trust them. These white men are Bogobo friends. These white men are strong, wise, honest. White is better blood than brown blood. Yes. The Hill People knew this."

At the mention of the dread folk the group of tribesmen moved uneasily. A young hunter nervously stirred the flagging fire into brighter blaze as the old woman went on:

"Yes. The Hill People knew. Have you forgotten how the Giant Agong rang the night the Spaniards lost their girl-child?

"No. You have not forgotten. The Hill People took her—they wanted white blood in the veins of future chiefs. They knew what white blood means—the Hill People know!"

Curiously thrilled by the simple legend, Terry moved nearer to the old woman.

"Grandmother, how many years ago was this?"

"Years? Years? I know naught of your white man's years, but this I know—it happened during the rains before the dark-eyed white men gave way to the blue-eyed white men."

Interpreting this as referring to the departure of the Spanish troops, he gently pressed her for further details. But she was finished.

It was dawn when the doctor rose. Groaning in the agony of the fat man who wakes stiff from the discomfort of an unaccustomed hard bed, he sat up, then forgot his miseries in a new worry as he saw Terry asleep under the open window, wrapped in his saddle blanket but without the protection of a mosquito net. He cursed, stopping midway in his vehement outburst to cock his head at the absurd angle in which men think their ears function best. As he heard the ominous drone of the insects his experience had taught him to fear more than wild beasts, he scrambled to his feet with amazing celerity.

A light sleeper, Terry awakened and lay regarding him quizzically, enthusiastically dissecting the stream of invective the doctor poured upon him for sleeping without his net. Suddenly sensing the responsibility the doctor felt in having summoned him to the village, Terry explained his lack of a net.

"Doctor, I gave my net to the chief's wife: she—she is about to become a mother, and she had none."

"Hell's bells! What Bogobo woman isn't about to become a mother?" he stormed, refusing to concede the justice of the act. "'She had none'—and probably didn't use yours!"

He was facing the window, past which the chief, arrayed in all his half-naked splendor of beads and brass, sauntered with an air of confidence quite different from his terror of the past week.

"There goes the chief, Terry, all fancied up like a bathroom on a German liner! But he has no pants—why don't you give him yours? He 'has none'! You make me—"

He stormed on and on. Terry, still wrapped in his blanket, sat before him looking up with an absurdly rapt air as of a student at his master's feet. Merchant stopped to swab the thick perspiration from his face, laughed at Terry's humbugging pose, and desisted. Terry slipped on his shoes, buckled on the leather leggings he

had used as a pillow and picking up his saddlebags went out to clean up at the river.

Finding on his return that the doctor was again genuinely disturbed over his exposure to the disease, he sought to divert him. He sneezed violently, and as the doctor listened with professional interest he followed it with a series which mounted in volume and vigor. Merchant eyed him solicitously.

"You've caught a bad cold, Lieutenant."

"Yes." Terry snuffled and drew his handkerchief. "It was awfully damp in here last night."

"Damp? How could it be damp in an open shack this time of year?"

"Well, it was. A regular mist!" He sneezed explosively, then took a few short turns about the little hut in search of the cause of his malady.

The doctor watched him, interested. Bending suddenly, Terry held aloft the perspiration-soaked nightshirt which the doctor affected.

"Eureka!" he exclaimed, dramatically, then dodged the shoe the hoaxed doctor let drive at his head.

After an hour's investigation of conditions in the village the doctor was convinced that he could now handle the situation alone and insisted upon Terry's returning home. His parting injunctions were worried.

"Now Lieutenant, you watch yourself closely for several days and if you display fever symptoms, you send for me."

After Terry had ridden down the river bank and into the long homeward trail, the doctor's overworked conscience smote him hard:

"Hell's bells! I never thanked him for coming!"



CHAPTER IX

MALABANAN STRIKES

Next morning Terry rose as the first sleepy cock challenged the pink-streaked day. Shaving in the dim light, he watched the plaza merge out of its darkness and fill with the natives passing listlessly to field or waterfront. A few short minutes and the day arrived hot and still: hens sauntered forth to begin their tireless, day-long, scratching search: bony curs, sleepy after their instinctive vigils through the night, made couches in the dusty road: across from where Terry stood at his bedroom window, the four daughters of his Tagalog neighbor sat in a little circle on a sunny bamboo porch structure, each intently examining another's loosened hair in a community search for—well, for whatever might be found.

By nine o'clock he had snapped the company through a sharp drill and by noon had finished the weekly inspection. The afternoon passed in preparation of monthly reports scheduled to go on the mailboat expected in that evening. It is the function of the Constabulary to know everything that transpires: health conditions, state of crops, appearance of any strangers, activities of native demagogues, movements of suspicious characters, morale of the people. Everything is observed and reported, and summarized at headquarters to form the basis for intelligent handling of a difficult problem.

Of the epidemic he wrote: "A disease identified as a particularly virulent form of pernicious malaria appeared last week among the Bogobos in the barrio of Dalag. The Health Officer is on the scene and in conference with the undersigned decided that the use of our troops for quarantine duty was not necessary. It appears that he has the disease under control."

Under the heading "Recommendations" he set down: "Request that the old

provincial archives be searched to ascertain if a Spanish family living in this Gulf during the last months of Spanish occupation suffered the loss, by abduction, of a female infant. An interesting story to this effect has been communicated to me by Bogobos, who attribute the crime to the Hill People."

The mailboat limped in early in the afternoon, waking the torpid town into semblance of interested activity during the brief duration of its stay. But before she had disappeared over the horizon native Davao had relapsed into stupid placidity, and the Chinos had stored the meager cargoes dropped for them—print goods, cigarettes, matches, rice, a few small agongs, and, probably, a little opium. The lethargy of the tropics during the hot hours is entire and complete: the angel Gabriel himself will fail of unanimous native response unless he toots his cheerful summons during the cool hours between dusk to dawn.

Terry still sat in the cool orderly room at the cuartel, energetically clearing his desk of the last accumulations of the paper work he found a chore, when the dapper sergeant entered with his mail. Sorting quickly through the dozen official envelopes in anxious search for one addressed in the neat hand that always quickened his pulses, he discovered, miserably, that there was none from her. Fighting off the discouraged feeling that accompanied lapses in her correspondence with him, he slowly opened a letter from Ellis. Ellis' letters, few in number, had always been cheerful but brief statements of how matters went on at home, usually business affairs. He put Ellis' letter in his blouse pocket to read after dinner, then attacked the pile of official mail: he wanted no unfinished office work to keep him in the morrow, as he planned another quiet look at Malabanan's place. When the Sergeant bore in the lighted lamp Terry ordered him to have the launch ready at daylight.

Night had wrapped the town when he crossed the plaza to his quarters. Matak, silent as ever but of more cheerful countenance, set the table. At his second laconic announcement Terry rose and crossed to the dinner table, and as he seated himself a white missile was tossed through the open window by an unseen hand and landed with a thud on the bare floor. Matak brought it to him,

and unwrapping the paper from about the pebble Terry read the note. It was from the secreto whom he had planted near Malabanan's plantation.

Sir:

At eight o'clock last night Malabanan left here with a newcomer named Sakay and 22 of his "laborers."

From my post I could not see if they were armed.

They have not yet returned. (9 A.M.)

I will follow in banca. They sailed south in a large lorcha.

Will report further when I return.

"47"

Leaving his unfinished dinner, he paced the floor. The midnight departure of Malabanan with his chief lieutenant and a majority of his followers might mark the beginning of outlawry, or it might be a legitimate excursion into the deepsea fisheries. Yet the secreto had said nothing of nets, and a party of twenty-four men would be in each others' way. Terry hastened over to the cuartel, checked up the patrol chart, then called the Sergeant, who verified the position and route of each of the two-man patrols who were covering the countryside. Satisfied that his men would discover and report the landing of any strangers within a few hours after they touched soil, Terry returned to the house.

He sat on the wide ledge of the window, thinking. The night seemed unusually warm despite the stiffening breeze which blew off the Gulf; he opened the collar of his blouse.... Where was Malabanan—what was he doing? He saw a man's form outlined against the bright Club window and answered the arm waved at him: it looked like Lindsey, he thought.... "Give 'em plenty of rope and if they make a break—Smash 'em!" He shivered at the thought of sighting a gun against a fellow man, and again in sudden rush of memory of the night in Zamboanga.... He saw Lindsey appear again at the Club window to peer in his direction, then turn abruptly. In a moment he saw him leave the Club and cross the plaza, hatless.... Deane—why had no letter come—he had expected one, wanted one....

He slid off the window ledge as Lindsey came in, sincere and direct as usual.

"Terry," he began, "I saw you sitting here alone and came over to ask you to join us at the Club."

"I can't, Lindsey."

Lindsey studied the unusually pallid skin: "Why not?" he demanded. "You're working too hard, Terry, and worrying too hard. Let's forget it all for an hour or two!"

"I'm much obliged, Lindsey, but I can't come to-night."

"The fellows asked me to get you, Terry. They think it is queer you come so seldom."

Understanding something of Terry's weariness of spirit he strove hard to persuade him to spend the evening in the pleasant Club, but was unsuccessful. Desisting, he talked a few minutes with Terry and then left, a little embarrassed, wholly disappointed.

Alone again, Terry slumped into a big cane chair drawn up by the table. His cheeks burned; he thought, vaguely, that he must have shaved too closely. Loosening his stiffly starched blouse, he crackled the letter from Ellis, opened it without much interest: then his whole being tensed.

Crampville, Nov. 23, 191-.

Dear Dick:

Everything lovely here—and things are going to pick up with you when you read this!

Yesterday Deane's father came in the bank and asked to see me confidentially. Thinking he had come on bank business I took him into my private office. Well, he just sat there facing me for several minutes, not knowing how to begin. You would have thought he had been robbing a train or something, he looked so absurdly guilty!

I just sat there watching him, taking a most unchristian joy in his trouble, whatever it was: I have had it in for him ever since—since you know what. I liked the way his Adam's apple chased up and down his

throat.

Finally he swallowed hard and began: "Ellis, I came over to—to ask you to—to send over that fox skin that Terry gave Deane last Christmas."

Just like that! It sure was a pill for the old boy to swallow but he went the whole hog like the old Puritan he is. Once started he kept going, though still phased. Said that he was glad that you had found something worth doing and were doing it well, that he took a lot of interest in your goings-on—as he called it—and that Deane always read your letters aloud. And the last thing he said before he went out was that he hoped you would soon get spunk enough to write her some letters she "wouldn't dast read out loud!"

He said THAT about my brother-in-law! Great leaping frogs! What is the matter with you?

Get busy! Write—and make 'em sizzle!

ELLIS.

P.S.—I forgot to say that I am sure she made him come to see me. Also that Sue took the skin over last night. And also that Bruce is more than professionally interested in the nurse he imported from Albany to look after his office. It has been some time since he hung around Hunter's—and as to why, I do not know, but I sure am some little guesser!

Terry had never questioned the decision he thought she had made that Christmas eve in returning the fox skin, had thought it hers, and final. As the burden of a year fell from him he sat quietly, smoothing at his stubborn, crown lock, the wistful twist of mouth ironed out by a faint smile. He bent to read the letter again but after a few lines the words were blurred out by a salty rush to his steady gray eyes. Rising, he went into his bedroom and closed the door quietly behind him, emerging in a few minutes. Perfect peace lay in his eyes and they shone with the light that will never die in this world as long as men live, and women.

Two days to Christmas, he thought, and he had sent her no remembrance. He stood at the window, tasting the cool thickness of the evening, breathing the fragrance of ylang-ylang: leaf and frond, stirred by the monsoon, purred in gentle contact. In the starlight the old stone church outlined its old-world, old-time architecture in friendly shadows which veiled the pitiful scars and age-stains: the bamboo shacks across the square—wry, flimsy, smutted by a hotly jealous sun—had yielded to the magic of the night to become little golden houses in which the fairies abode till the morning stars should fade.

A present for her ... he pondered long, the while he stifled his desire to go outside and shout the joy that tugged at his restraint. Suddenly he started, tightened as the idea fastened upon him, then fairly ran to his desk. A hurried search for cable blanks and he wrote in desperate haste that consumed four misused forms before he accomplished an intelligible message:

Miss Deane Hunter, Crampville, Vermont.

Christmas greetings from palmed coast to snowy shore. Please cable will you accept so humble a Christmas offering as an equal share in the future of one

RICHARD TERRY.

Buttoning his blouse as he ran, he raced down out of the house and over to his orderly room, where he typed the message and sent it out by a soldier. The dozen Macabebes lounging in the *cuartel*, who had sprung to attention when he passed, stared at him and then at each other—this joyous, whistling boy was new to them! He crossed the dark plaza: natives, looking out of raised windows, wondered who that Americano was who walked in and out of the shadows of the great acacias, singing:

When in thy dreaming
Moons like these shall shine again:

Being natives they did not understand the English words, but being natives and instinctively attuned to the most ancient of emotions that throbbed in the low baritone, they listened silently and stared out into the night long after the singer had passed.

He reached the house, hesitated. Lindsey had said that the fellows wanted him to come over to the Club ... he had neglected opportunities to be with these good friends. He sailed his cap up through an open window and crossing a corner of the square went up into the gayly lighted building.

That night at the Club became a sort of tradition in the Gulf. They still tell, wonderingly, of how he entered—a laughing, mischievous, fun-loving boy, and of how the crowd welcomed this new Terry that none of them had ever known before. They talk, still, of his deviltries, the clean jests and keen wit he whetted—always at his own expense, and as rough old Burns put it the next morning when they talked it over: "And he niver took a drink and he niver cussed once, I'll be ---- if he did!" As the story of Terry's night at Club spread over the Gulf all of the planters found excuses to bring them into town afternoons in the hope of being present when he came again. They rode in by pony or launch every night for two weeks, and then they ceased coming.

For two hours he held them in the spell of his infectious deviltries. Irrepressibly gay, impish, it seemed as if he vented all of the stored up boyishness in him, spilled it in one heaping measure. Story followed story, in quickly shifting brogues that rocked the building with the sidesore laughter of the transported audience; they followed him through a seemingly inexhaustible series of anecdote, through a dozen ridiculous parodies he sang to a one-handed accompaniment chorded on the battered piano the while he pantomimed with free hand and roguish face.

"Why," whispered the astonished Cochran, "the—the—son of a gun!"

The uproar stilled suddenly as, seated at the old piano, he forgot them for a moment, saw a vision on the white wall that was not visible to the others. A few deep chords from knowing fingers, then his low voice, rich with the depth of his happiness:

Love, to share again those winged scented days,
Those starry skies:
To see once more your joyous face,
Your tender eyes ...

The song, or something in the deep voice, pulled at the heart-strings of those lonely men, who, womenless, never discussed women. Burns sniffled, then glared belligerently at the others.

Cochran whispered to Lindsey: "Just what is there about—about that boy? Is it because he's so pale?"

"Yes, that's it—you poor fish! But it's about time you quit pinching my arm—it's getting numb!"

Flushing slightly in realization of his lapse, Terry had sprung astraddle the corner of the billiard table, where, absurdly solemn, he declaimed tragically, combing the classics for sepulchral passages, plunging the intent listeners into deepest melancholy but concluding with a droll extemporization that swept them from verge of tears to convulsed mirth.

Lindsey, flinging a laughter-helpless arm across a call-bell, rang an inadvertent summons to the steward that cost him the price of the drinks and gave Terry a breathing spell. He sat astride the billiard table under the acetylene lights, vainly trying to smooth down his scalplock, his eyes dancing in eager enjoyment of the hour and of the friends who crowded around him in affectionate amazement, laughing and shouting at each other and at him.

Cochran's voice rose above the clamor of the room in a raucous whoop. They all turned toward where he stood near the bulletin board reading a message he had just torn down.

He waved the sheet joyously: "I saw the steward tacking it up a minute ago—it just arrived—from Casey. He couldn't wait to tell us—the long awaited day has come for Casey!"

He bent with laughter, then straightened and sobered to read it aloud.

"Casey talks like the Congressional Record but he sure minces his written words. Listen.

Davao Club, Davao.

Horray! American mare had a filly colt last night. Also sixteen pigs by Berkshire boar.

CASEY.

A roar of merriment greeted the phraseology in which Casey had hurriedly couched the double event of his day of days. The terse—too terse—message passed from hand to hand till it reached Terry. He studied it, his head cocked to one side like a puppy's and with something of a puppy's quizzical expression. A moment and he slid slowly from the billiard table and crossed to the corner of the room where a typewriter had been placed for the convenience of club members.

They watched him, glancing uncertainly at each other, as he inserted a sheet of paper, spelled out a few hesitating words, then jerked it out, crumpled it in his hand. Slipping in a fresh sheet he started slowly, pausing, rapt, after each few words. As line followed line the room became quiet save for the click of the machine, the planters eyeing each other, waiting impatiently for disclosure of the new deviltry his whole attitude betokened. Pausing after each few lines to seek inspiration at the roots of his thick tumbled hair, he wrote for about fifteen minutes.

Then, tearing out the sheet, he mounted the chair and with a face owlsh in its affectation of heavy wisdom, he thrust his hand in his blouse in classic barnstorming attitude and read his creation.

"CASEY"

The palm-fringed gulf of fair Davao—
The garden-spot of Mindanao—
Has been the Theater where Surprise
Has pried apart our mouth and eyes.
But bounteous Nature, in her last,
Has all her former deeds surpassed!

What now are Burbank's grafting deeds
Marconi's stunts, whose genius speeds
A message on a wireless tack
And makes of space a jumping-jack?
Where now does Edison hold sway?
Or radium's finder, Pierre Curié?

Does not this deed alone suffice
To render all that men or mice
Have wrought since days of Tubal Cain
Infinitesimal, and vain?

No man before has seen a dam
Provide the rudiments for a ham.
And not content with razor-backs
Produce a quota for the tracks.

It seems like thistles yielding figs—
A blooded mare with sixteen pigs!
And Truth receives a serious jolt
To find the seventeenth a colt!
Can anything on earth compare
With this performance of a mare?

But hold! For while I eulogize,
There is another claims a prize

And puts to shame all gone before;
I mean this humble Yankee boar!
What lowly hog did yet aspire
To ribboned fame as race-track sire?

Consult the annals of all time,
Great deeds extolled in prose and rhyme,
Delve deep in Clio's treasured store,
Exhaust encyclopedic lore—
You will not find in one edition
A hint of such high pig-ambition!

Had he but lived in days gone by
When Richard raised his voice on high
And offered Kingdom for a Horse,
To him he might have had recourse....
Imagine bristly Berkshire swine
Upon the throne of Cœur de Lion!!

But, while we give our meed of praise
To those who would these isles upraise,
Forget not him who planned all that—
For it was Casey at the bat!

Forget not him whose Celtic head
Outdid, when all is done or said,
That classic stunt—the herculean
Minerva sprung from Jovian bean!

Where else but in the Philippines
Amid these sunny tropic scenes
That lull the senses into rest,
Could come this genius of the West?
For, not content with colt and swine,
He must produce domestic kine—
To heap the brimming measure full
He perpetrates an Irish Bull!

Finished, he still stood on the chair, frankly happy in the uproarious response to

his effort to amuse them.

The clamor subsided in a sudden and almost incredulous appreciation of his swift composing: and in the momentary silence during which they gazed at the happy, laughing boy, a pair of heavy shod feet sounded on the bare stairway—loud, hurried.

All eyes shifted from where Terry stood on the chair to the stern visaged Macabebe sergeant who had stopped in the open doorway. He hesitated a moment, then urgency overbore his instinct against violation of the white man's domain, and he stepped toward his chief.

Terry met him in the center of the room. The Macabebe saluted, then reported in a savage grating voice that carried clear to every startled ear.

"Sir, Patrol Number Seven reports that ladrones raided Ledesma's plantation at one o'clock last night: killed one servant, stole all of Ledesma's carabaos and money, and stole his daughter."

Malabanan had dared! The ladrones had struck!



CHAPTER X

MALABANAN

Terry's pace across the plaza taxed Mercado's shorter legs. He was surprised that Malabanan's move came almost as a relief after the weeks of anxious waiting. Scoffing the Constabulary, they had sought to test the strength of the new government ... "if they make a break—Smash 'em!" He whirled, taut, as they reached his quarters, and the battle-loving veteran thrilled with delight as he caught the hard ring of voice.

"Sergeant, I'll be ready in ten minutes—you will go with me to Ledesma's plantation—have the ponies saddled. Double every patrol along the coast. Send the launch out at once to scour the gulf for information about a fifty-foot lorch—add four soldiers to the regular crew: if they sight or learn of this lorch they are to return at once and report the facts—they are not to engage. Retain in the post twenty of your very best men, under full field equipment ready to move instantly. Issue extra ammunition. Understand?"

"Yes, sir!" He about-faced and hurried on his mission, eager, joyful. This was the life!

Terry ran upstairs, turned up the light, ripped off his white clothes and slipped into riding clothes and flannel shirt. As he buckled on his belt and hooked in canteen and holster, he heard the Sergeant galloping down the street with his led horse. A swift inspection of the mechanism of his big automatic, four extra clips added to the belt, and he ran downstairs as the Macabebe drew up.

Reaching the beach they turned south, riding fast through the chill darkness, Mercado keeping his pony a length behind Terry's nervous gray. They had

covered several miles before the sun rose from behind Samal, gray-pinked sky and sea for a brief bewitching moment, then swept the low hanging mists from gulf and mountain, and smote, full-powered, upon the sandy shore down which they rode. The tireless ponies—crooked of leg but splendid of head and eye in true indications of their heritage of coarse Chinese and fine Arabian bloods—toiled steadily over the high-tide beach, sinking coronet deep in the soaked sand, their footprints disappearing almost as they lifted hoofs. Courageous, the little animals scrambled over the coral formations that blocked their path, picked their way, delicately, through sour mangrove swamps: once, unsaddled, they swam a wide tide-deepened creek that the riders crossed, bridle reins in hand, in a small dugout which they found on the bank.

Their sharp shadows had shortened a third when they swung up from the beach and trotted down the unkempt street of Sabaga. A chorus of howls, set up by bony, slinking curs of the type that infest all native villages, announced their presence but there was no sign of life in any of the shambling bamboo houses. The village seemed deserted.

They pulled up, the Sergeant pointing significantly at the carabaos tied up under the high perched huts. Terry understood: fear of the ladrones had paralyzed the natives. As he studied the closed windows and doors, sensed the terror of these defenseless, harmless people, a cold hatred of the spoilers narrowed his steel-gray eyes. They were about to press on when the quiet of the town was suddenly broken by a cry sounded from a house behind them:

"El Soltario! El Constabulario!"

The exultant shout was taken up by other voices as windows were cautiously raised: in a moment the doors were thrown wide and a crowd of natives swarmed about the two riders. The men shrill-voiced, women and children hysterical, they crowded around the pair in a confidence that was pitiful.

Frightened beyond a white man's conception by the midnight visitation of

ladrones within a half-mile of their village, cowed, witless, they were reassured merely by the uniforms the two riders wore—the red-piped uniform of the small, scattered force of five thousand Filipinos, who, ably officered, highly trained, intrepid, have never tasted defeat: have wiped out every murderous band that raised treacherous hand and then, outlawry scotched, have turned the power of their discipline against the scourges of diseases, floods, cattle plagues, typhoons. Unsung, unwept, they have carried on, their motto Service and their goal Success.

Terry, patient, reassuring, lingered till he had overcome their immediate fears, left them content with their faith in the protection he promised them. Hurrying on, Terry and his Sergeant shortly came to Ledesma's well kept plantation, and Terry turned his pony over to the Sergeant and approached the big bamboo house.

Ledesma, gray-haired, distinguished looking, bearing his grief with Tagalog stoicism, greeted him with the finished courtesy of the Spanish tradition and led him up the precarious slatted steps into the house. It was a house of desolation.

The mother lay moaning wretchedly upon the cane bottom of the carved mahogany bed which, with four chairs, a round table and a talking machine made up the furniture of the main room. Ledesma's son, a lad of eight, sat big-eyed and solemn near an open window, not fully understanding the blow that had fallen but vaguely frightened by his mother's lamentations.

The Tagalog, dignified in his suffering, answered Terry's brief interrogations intelligently but as he had been out on the gulf with his fishermen during the raid he had little to offer. Terry turned to the sobbing mother and in a few minutes she had quieted sufficiently to tell her story. He grew paler and grimmer as she dramatized the terror of the midnight entrance of the ominous shadows, the noiseless gliding of bare feet, the vicious whispered threats, the cries of the girl as they bore her away into the night and the long wait for Ledesma's return. Finishing her story, she sank back upon the great bed, moaning and muttering

incoherently.

Ledesma elaborated her story with details she had told him. She had recognized neither shadowed forms nor whispering voices of any of the four who had entered the house while the others herded the stolen carabaos toward the waterfront. One of them had warned her that this was what would happen to all of the natives who made too good friends with the Americanos: and the biggest of the four had bent over her to whisper in the dark: "And the pale Constabulario won't be able to help you with his celebrated pistol—soon we will visit him!"

Terry soon realized that he was wasting valuable time here—and time was the big factor. He conferred with Mercado, who had been questioning the scared laborers, but equally without result: no one could identify any of the band, there was no evidence that would lead to Malabanan's conviction, though all were certain that the biggest figure had been his. Bidding Ledesma a hurried adieu he rode away. Time was pressing ... Ledesma's daughter must be rescued ... soon. He followed the trail of the stolen carabaos, the renewed lamentations of the distracted mother ringing in his ears.

Fifteen minutes along the plain trail torn through the brush by the driven carabaos brought them out on the beach. There the trail ended: it was for this that Malabanan had brought the big lorchas that the secreto had mentioned. A moment of thought and he swung northward toward Davao, again following the glistening beach. At noon, and low tide, they forded the creek and swung up off the beach to breathe the sweating ponies in the deep shade of a mango tree that spread high above the surrounding brush. Dismounting, they stood as in a huge green bowl: its bottom the smooth waters of the gulf, iridescent under a zenith sun and framed as far as the eye could reach with a slant of parched beach; the sides of the vast concavity were formed by the verdant mat of jungled slopes that rose with ever increasing abruptness to the far, somber-edged mountains.

The doughty Macabebe gave not a glance at the great panorama, busying himself in refolding the reeking saddle blankets and tightening girths, then lighted a

casual cigarette. Terry, impatient of the necessary halt, paced the shadowed space restlessly after his first appreciation of the sun-drenched Gulf. He turned to the Macabebe with the first words they had passed since leaving Ledesma.

"Sergant, what is your opinion? Was it Malabanan?"

Mercado looked up quickly, pleased with this mark of confidence from his uncommunicative chief. He was positive.

"Yes, sir. Malabanan."

"Of course—it could be no other. But—what would you do if you were in my place—we have no legal proof."

"I would take a platoon of our best men, sir, and visit his hacienda—and then there would be no Malabanan, sir—unless dead men live!"

"But the courts, Sergeant: we could not convict him on the evidence we have. And what you suggest would be mere murder."

"Courts, sir? Malabanan will never face a court—I know that, sir. I FEEL that, sir!"

Terry studied the hard face of the little fighting man: "Sergeant, you don't seem to fear man or devil."

Mercado's white teeth flashed as he shrugged pleased denial of claim to such courage, then his roving gaze focussed upon a distant object and the confident expression altered swiftly to uneasiness, awe, superstitious terror. Terry, startled at the transformation, followed the direction of his dread stare and saw that his eyes were fixed upon the distant, mist-wreathed crest of Apo. He understood. Even this sturdy little soldier cowered before the obscure menace of the hidden Hill People. Terry resented, vaguely, that others did not respond to the spell of the Hills as he did.

The five minutes had freshened the wonderful little steeds, so they mounted and pushed on through the heat with eyes half shut against the glare of sand and water. At four o'clock they pulled up in front of Terry's quarters.

A note from the secreto lay on his table. He opened it and read that Malabanan had not returned, that the place was deserted. He had anticipated this, knowing that the band would now operate from some secret rendezvous in the maze of the forests. His problem now was to locate their meeting place: his patrols must search them out. Information would be passed quickly to them by the inhabitants of the gulf—every planter, laborer, trader and native now knew that the ladrones were rampant: and now the Bogobos would be most valuable to him, as in their wanderings they covered every inch of the woods to the edge of the Hill Country, and news of strangers would be brought to him by swift Bogobo runners.

A quick shower to rid himself of the intolerable stickiness of the long hot ride, a change to fresh shirt and breeches, and he hastened to the *cuartel*. Two patrols had come in during the afternoon, reporting no intelligence of the bandits but bearing tidings of an aroused American and frightened native population. The launch returned an hour later after a fruitless search of the west coast for signs of the lorch. He manned it with fresh crew and detail and hurried it out to cover every inch of the east coast.

He ordered out two additional patrols to help cover the back country; detached four of the twenty men whom he had retained for pursuit and sent them to guard the heedless doctor who labored with his sick at Dalag. The four warriors marched off cursing picturesquely at the luck which took them away from the combat group.

An air of expectancy hung over the *cuartel*. Terry, grave, smoothly efficient, sat in the orderly room studying maps and keeping the Sergeant and the clerk busy as he wove a net of patrols of gulf and coast and foothills which would cover every inch of terrain within the night. In the big squad room the fierce little

Macabebes joked with each other as they repolished stainless rifles and repacked field equipment under a zealous corporal's eye. Outside, a knot of frightened natives occluded each window facing the plaza, peering in at the laughing soldiers, dully wondering at the makeup of these men who grinned at the prospect of facing the dread ladrones.

Every loose string tightened, every loophole closed, Terry left the *cuartel* and crossed the plaza toward his quarters. Preoccupied, he noted that for once all of the phonographs were silenced, the plaza deserted; and already the town's doors and windows were closed against the coming night. The impact of Malabanan's first blow, struck thirty miles south, had been felt in native Davao. His face hardened.

He strove hard, under Matak's urgings, to do justice to the perfect dinner. But a dull headache had fastened across his forehead, a symptom he attributed to his long ride over the scorching beach and to loss of sleep.

He had spread his net, the quarry could not escape capture, he had but to wait as patiently as possible for information as to their whereabouts: some time during the night word must come from launch or patrol, from planter or Bogobo.

Another thought had pressed all day—the answer to his cable. He sent Matak to the postoffice, hopeful, nervous. But nothing had come. Rising, he found the room stifling, and he reached for his hat to go out. Matak noticed that he had forgotten his sidearm and delayed him long enough to lift it off the wallhook and fasten the belt about his waist.

The sun had set. As he walked aimlessly across the town he noticed that all of the little stores, whose main trade came during the evening hours, were boarded tight. He wandered down to the little dock and out to its end, looking over the rippled waters with eyes that ached strangely. The light faded swiftly, taking with it the pall of oppressive humidity and freeing the Gulf to the coolness of approaching night. None of the fishing craft which usually dotted the gulf at this

hour had ventured out. Malabanan had indeed made himself felt.

Terry stood near an upended pile, numb with disappointment over the expected cablegram. The dusk yielded in the distance to a darkness which crept toward him over the ever diminishing circle of water.

Suddenly his dulled faculties registered an insistent warning of danger, he caught the slight creaking of a board behind him. Aroused, he whirled to face two figures which had halted ten feet from him in attitudes expressive of the stealth of their approach. In the dusk he distinguished two unusually large natives dressed in coarse unstarched crash, and wearing shoes. Each carried a bolo thrust in braided hemp belts.

For a tense moment they maintained the pose in which he had surprised them, then the shorter of the two, who was a pace in front, took a slow step backward, uneasy in being the closer to the young American whose eyes drilled him through the gloom.

Terry, idly fingering his pistol belt with his left hand, shifted his gaze to the larger of the pair, then unconsciously took a step forward to better see that queer face. In the shock of surprise he stopped short and his right arm jerked back into a curious position that brought the hand below and behind his holster. The left eye of the big Tagalog glittered white in the night!

His impetuous, fearless step toward the pair had broken the spell which held them motionless. The white-eyed native hesitated, glanced uneasily at Terry's holster, then spoke in brief gutturals to his companion. Lifting his hat in salutation he bade Terry a suave "*Buenas Noches, Señor,*" and turning, walked off the dock, his consort close behind him.

Through the soft darkness Terry saw them mount two ponies which were tethered to a tree near the end of the wharf, and heard the shrill, mocking laugh aimed back at him by the smaller of the two as they galloped away into the

night.

As he made his way rapidly across the poorly lighted town he gave no thought to the fact that the pair had evidently meant him harm, speculating upon the peculiar birthmark in the eye of the larger Tagalog and wondering if he could be the man for whom Matak had sought so many years.

He found Matak sitting crosslegged upon the floor fastening brass buttons into some uniforms which had just returned from the *lavendera*. Terry stopped before him:

"Matak, I want to thank you for reminding me of my gun. As it happened, it didn't do any harm."

Stepping to the window he blew a blast upon his whistle, an unusual summons that brought Mercado running across the plaza in most unsoldierly fashion. Entering, he cracked his heels in salute, his eye agleam with hope that the break had come. Terry dismissed Matak from the room before addressing him.

"Sergeant, do you know anybody in this Gulf who has an albino left eye—an eye that is all white but the pupil?"

"No, sir."

"Who might know?"

"The Chino Lan Yek, sir. He knows everybody—everybody owes him money, sir!"

"Fetch him here."

In a few minutes Lan Yek stood before Terry, his Mongolian imperturbability shaken by this night summons from an officer of the law. With the natives' love of ragging a Chinamen, Mercado had been very stern and mysterious concerning his mission—and Lan Yek knew a thing or two about opium smuggling that

bothered him as he faced the American.

Terry repeated his inquiry regarding the identity of the white-eyed native, and Lan Yek's response was startlingly illuminating.

"Yes, me know him. Me know white-eyed fellah. His name Malabanan!"

Malabanan! This had been the "visit" they had told Ledesma's wife they would pay Terry.

"Lan Yek, when did you see him last?"

"To-night he come, buy cigalet, no pay—talk 'Melican talk—tell me 'Go to Hell.'"

Terry gestured his dismissal and the nervous Celestial scurried away, relieved that the interrogation had not been intimate.

Terry briefly recounted to Mercado what had occurred on the dock, ordered him to send out a patrol at once to circle the town at a distance of five miles to discover if possible upon what trail the pair had ridden out, emphasizing that the patrol was to return and report to him, regardless of the hour of arrival.

"And hold the men in instant readiness. I may need them at any moment during the night."

There was at least one supremely happy man in the Gulf that night, for the Sergeant's joy was a living thing as he departed to put the orders into effect.

A moment later Terry heard the kitchen door open slowly, and looking up he beheld the mottled face and burning eyes of the Moro. It was manifest that Matak had overheard Lan Yek. He stood in the doorway battling for his voice.

"Master," he said huskily, "I knew you would help me find him."

Gratitude suffused his face, then receded before the tide of Mohammedan fanaticism and fury which welled up from his bitter heart. Stepping backward, he kept his eyes fastened upon Terry till he had passed through the door into the kitchen.

Terry was deeply disturbed by this unforeseen turn of events. He had decided against informing Matak until he had lodged Malabanan safely behind prison walls, then to confront him with the Moro and if he proved to be Matak's long sought enemy, he would add the charge of triple murder against the desperado. The day of private vengeance must pass in Mindanao—vengeful killings were murder, punishable as murder.

He called to Matak, then again, but there was no answer. He hurried into the kitchen, into Matak's room, then down into the double stable back of the house. But Matak was gone, and so was Terry's spare pony. Realizing the futility of searching for him in the night, he composed himself as best he could. It added another phase to the exigency—everything now rested with the patrols who were tirelessly combing the Gulf to discover the new rendezvous.

He strove for patience, but waiting is hard. He picked up a volume of poems, discarded it impatiently for a magazine, threw this back on the table and withdrew from the glare of the lamp which added to his insistent headache. Looking out on the dark town he saw that even the Club was unlighted, the first time since his arrival in Davao. His jaw tightened as he pictured the isolated planters sitting through the night, rifles on knees, listening for hostile movements in the jungle surrounding their hardwon acres.

Drawing up a big cane chair he sat in the shadow looking out into the dark. The sky was like a vast black colander perforated haphazardly with a myriad brilliant openings which paled and glowed. The crescent of the young moon hung over the faintly outlined mountains: he watched it slant slowly down till its lower point was absorbed in the heavy mist which blanketed Apo.

Malabanan loose with his ravaging band ... Matak, alone, searching for him in the night ... Ledesma's daughter, that gentle, big-eyed girl, at the mercy of such beasts ... would the patrols never return? He rose and paced the floor, frantic with the enforced inaction. Schooling himself to a semblance of patience, he sat through another long hour.

Why, he thought dully, should he have had the presumption to expect an answer to his cable ... she was too kind to cable "no" ... her letter of explanation would be a month in coming.... He watched as the mists around Apo gathered, thickened, darkened: the banks were flashlighted into white billows, then the soft rumble of thunder rolled down the slopes, a vanguard of the rainstorm which rustled the forest tops as it swept down nearer, louder, to expire as it touched the edge of the town: a few drops splashed heavily on the tin roof of the silent house, then the stars shone more brilliantly than before and Apo loomed sharp against a cleared sky.

It was a long night. At last he rose wearily and seated himself at his desk, shading his dulled eyes. A moment of indecision, and he wrote to his sister.

Dear Sue-sister:

Sometimes your sweet letters breathe the fear that harm might befall me. You need not worry.

I live in a lovely land, a land of sunny days and balmy nights, a land of courteous, friendly folk.

I live in a land where pneumonia is unknown, or sunstroke: cholera perished in boiling water, and behind our mosquito nets we laugh at malaria.

Should other dangers threaten, I have my company of loyal Macabebes: laughing fighters, stern lovers, they guard me while I sleep. They like me, I think.

Nothing but Old Age can befall me here; and I think the Fountain of Youth lies not where old Ponce searched—but here, on Apo's towering crest. I am going there to search ... some day ... before I am too old.

I have but one fear: that you and the others whom I love may some day cease to—

His head ached intolerably. He dropped his pen in sudden listlessness, crossed aimlessly to the window. Dawn wavered over Samal. The plaza was dark save

for the lights which blazed in the cuartel to show that the Macabebes, too, had kept the long vigil.

Suddenly he saw four fagged little Macabebes emerge from the shadowed street and enter the path of light which streamed from the wide cuartel door. Shoulders drooping under heavy packs after the long night's hike, they staggered into the building.

A moment, and a fiercely glad yell rose from the barracks, and the Sergeant bounded out of the doorway to speed toward Terry's house. Terry straightened his relaxed muscles as the Sergeant burst into the room.

A patrol had succeeded! They had learned from Bogobos that during the afternoon a number of unknown armed natives had gathered in the three deserted shacks near Sears' ford. Malabanan and Sakay were riding westward toward Sears' plantation. On the way in the patrol had encountered Matak riding hard on Malabanan's trail!



CHAPTER XI

INTO THE FORBIDDEN HILLS

Terry's two black pistols, canteen and packed saddle bags lay on the table. Without a word he snapped holster and canteen into his belt holes and the Sergeant picked up the bags and extra gun. As he blew out the light Terry first realized that dawn had come. They hurried silently to the cuartel, in front of which the sixteen impatient Macabebes were drawn up, each equipped for the field and holding saddled ponies. As he drank the coffee that the thoughtful Mercado had prepared for him Terry gestured questioningly toward the ponies.

"I knew you would want to travel fast, sir, so I borrowed these ponies from planters. They are very angry about the ladrones, sir, and were glad to help." He found ample reward for his foresight in Terry's unspoken commendation.

Several brown heads appeared at windows to stare after the little cavalcade that trotted down the side of the plaza at daylight and took the west trail into the brush. It was not a smart outfit, it lacked all of the flourish and the trappings of parade, but it did look eager to use the carbines that flapped from pommel straps. Terry's compact gray set the pace for the dauntless men who rode behind him, and the Sergeant brought up the rear snapping sharp-voiced invectives that withered three over-zealous riders.

A long trail lay before them. Terry maintained a steady trot that ate up the miles. The day grew hot, the brush thicker. Twice he halted the column to water the ponies at shallow fords: once he stopped to smooth saddle blankets and resaddle.

He felt the heat intensely. His skin seemed dry and hot, and he slanted his campaign hat low over his eyes to dim the glare of the sun and relieve the strain

on his eyeballs, which ached fiercely. His pony, having worked off its excess of spirit, settled down into a tireless pace that tested the picked mounts the planters had selected as their best, and the miles passed in silence save for staccato pounding of hoofs on hard packed earth and the swish of underbrush that lined the narrow crooked trail.

At noon he drew up at Sears' plantation to freshen men and beasts. Sears tore out to meet them, greeted Terry enthusiastically and ran inside again to hurry his cook while Terry superintended the care of the ponies. When Sears' foreman bore the soldiers into the cookshack for a hot dinner of rice and fish Terry passed up the high stairway and into the cool house, there to sink into a big chair, faint.

Sears was energetically speeding his boy in the laying of his "company" linens and silver. He lumbered over to Terry and in his enthusiasm shook hands again. Feeling the hand hot to his touch, he glanced keenly down into the burning eyes.

"Man, you're sick! You shouldn't be out in the sun in this condition!"

Terry mustered a weak laugh but Sears insisted: he poured out a stiff drink of Scotch and when Terry refused this he half wrecked his medicine chest in search of aspirin. He found only two tablets, and these Terry swallowed obligingly, finding almost instant relief as the perspiration cooled his parched skin.

Sears' anxious hospitality suffered during lunch as despite a brave show of appetite Terry ate nothing, but briefly outlined the situation that was taking him into the foothills.

"So they are coming this way?" Sears exclaimed. "I hadn't heard it yet but I knew something was up. Last night some Bogobos—they are fine to me since you—since I—" he floundered a moment, "I mean they're fine to me. Well, anyway, last night they came to tell me that two strange natives, both armed, had ridden past here toward the foothills: didn't know who the pair were—you may, though, as they described one as havin' a white eye."

Terry nodded: "That is Malabanan, Sears."

Sears whistled: "Pwhew! I am gettin' some likely neighbors—probably the other was his side-kicker, that laughin' devil of a Sakay! Well, anyway, that's not all, Lieutenant. About two hours ago my foreman saw your Moro boy, Matak. He was ridin' that black pony of yours and stopped to ask my foreman if he had seen two natives ridin' by, describin' Malabanan. Then he beat it after 'em."

Terry was watching through the open window and when he saw his men emerge from the shack he rose apologetically, listening attentively while Sears told him the best trail to the three abandoned shacks that Terry sought. Sears, distressed in the helpless way of physically big men, detained him while he refilled his canteen with fresh water and sought Terry's habits long enough to again try to press a Scotch upon him.

"Sears, that aspirin fixed me up. I wish you would give me a couple more of those tablets."

Further search proved fruitless, he had no more. He turned to Terry with a sorrow out of all proportion to the situation.

"Lieutenant, I haven't got any more. But here's some quinine—take a few grains every few hours—it may help you."

Terry thrust the vial of capsules into his shirt pocket and after thanking Sears hastened outside to where his men were tightening girths under the watchful Sergeant's eye. Sears hovered over Terry, offering advice, expostulating, as Terry mounted and gathered rein.

"Lieutenant," he said, "you know the ford is just above the pool they call the 'Crocodile Hole.' Cross the ford, come back along the bank, and you'll find a trail leadin' to the three shacks in the woods."

"I know, Sears. Thanks. Good-by."

"*Adios*," Sears called. Then he stood watching the little band trot through the gate and into the woods. His eyes moistened, he raised his big fist against an invisible foe.

"If they get him—" he muttered through lips that trembled unashamed, "if they get that boy—that sick boy, I'll—I'll—we'll ... and I didn't have any medicine for him—the only thing he ever asked me for—or ever asked anybody for!"



For the first time Terry urged the gray. Matak over two hours ahead of him and mounted on the next best pony in the Gulf ... Malabanan hours ahead of Matak, riding toward the Ledesma girl held for him in one of the three shacks.... He pushed the pony hard across the open clearings, recklessly forced him through the underbrush that in frequent areas obliterated the trail. They were now well inland and mounting a perceptible grade toward the foothills: the sluggish stream they had paralleled all day ran swift here. Once, where the trail twisted near the bank, they heard the rush of rapids, and a mile farther on they came in sight of a curiously soundless waterfall. They had reached the Bogobo country but the afternoon quiet was unbroken by the sound of agongs. Fear had reached the foothills.

His pony was too much for the courageous but smaller mounts of the Macabebes and Terry gradually drew ahead. He must overtake Malabanan before nightfall.... Ledesma had not put his confidence into words, but he had looked it—had trusted him ... the pony's head and neck dripped, a welt of lather fringed the saddle blanket over the withers and down both shoulders. The Sergeant, seeing his men fall behind, galloped up into the lead and cursed them on with graphic phrases culled from the English, Spanish and Malay tongues. But it was useless: the gray pony carried its desperately anxious rider faster than their jaded mounts could travel. Terry drew out of sight, but they rode on.

All through the afternoon Terry had been dimly conscious that the headache had

returned, that his face was flushed and hot, but the fast pumping blood seemed to energize his faculties. Never had he felt so keyed-up, so sinewy of nerve.

The hours flew with the miles. At five o'clock he crashed out of the woods into an open spot where the trail bent down toward the river to skirt a deep black pool—the Bogobos' Crocodile Hole, which none of them would ever approach. It was a roughly circular depression extending from bank to bank, a hundred feet in diameter; it lay just below the ledge of rock that made a low-water ford but which, at high water, was the brink of a falls which had worn a deep hole in the soft river bottom.

Terry slowed his steaming pony as he rounded the pool. Stories that he had overheard flashed across his mind, ghastly stories whispered by tremulous native lips into credulous brown ears, of the size of the Thing which dwelt here, of its age, its incredible scaly length and girth, its patient devilish cunning; of the toll it had taken of three generations, tales you would not care to hear—like that of the old blind Bogobo who lost his way, and groping for the trail with naked hands—no, you would not care to hear such appalling tales.

Riding the river ledge above the pool he glanced down into the deep, quiet waters but his thoughts snapped back to the present as his pony balked at the edge of the ford. The gray had never balked at water, and attributing the display of vice to fatigue, he tried to gentle him into the shallow water, then touched him with spur—minutes were precious now. Driven by the steel, the gray stepped gingerly into the stream, took several steps, then snorted as he wheeled back to the bank. Terry swung him back sharply and sent the spur deep into the flanks of the trembling beast: half wild with the unaccustomed punishment he dashed into the water and splashed across in frightened bounds that took him up the opposite bank into the brush.

Terry brought the pony round and stroked its neck soothingly to calm the unaccountable terror apparent in the nervous tossing of head and distension of red nostrils. As he guided him along the bank a sound of disturbed water brought

Terry's head up sharply: heavy ripples circled away from a spot near the opposite shore just under the ford. As he peered keenly he discerned the indistinct outline of something that looked like a heavy log sink slowly into the dark depths. The pony fretted until they left the river-bank to follow an old trail that led into the woods.

Here Terry held him to a walk, riding cautiously, pausing at each turn of the trail to scrutinize every inch of brush intently, ears alert to faintest sound. He knew he was nearing the deserted huts. He advanced several hundred yards thus, searching for the clearing, listening. Discerning well ahead a space where the sky was open above a cleared area he dismounted, hurriedly knotted the reins to a sapling, snatched his extra pistol from the saddle holster, then crept forward through the early forest twilight, wary, both pistols at full cock.

Creeping round the first bend in the trail he searched the near thickets with penetrating keenness: he knew Malay treachery. His eyes, flashing from side to side, focussed upon a dim, motionless figure outlined in the shadow beneath the trunk of a large tree that stood on the edge of the clearing. His back was to Terry and he seemed engrossed in some silent drama that was being enacted in the clearing out of Terry's field of vision.

Terry crept toward him soundlessly and when he had covered half of the distance that separated them he was overjoyed to recognize him as Matak. As Terry's lips parted in a low call, Matak glided from the tree like a swift shadow just as a shriek of pain and terror rent the silence of the woods, followed by a vowelled curse and the sound of a heavy hand on naked flesh.

As Terry sprang forward to the edge of the clearing he heard behind him the distant sound of ponies driven recklessly through the underbrush, and knew that the Macabebes were coming up!

He halted at the edge of the clearing, unobserved by the crowd of bandits who had sprung out of the three disused huts when Matak leaped into the open: with

ready rifles and bolos they awaited the command of their white-eyed leader, who stood in front of them, startled, but coolly confronting the Moro. Ledesma's daughter, who had fallen under Malabanan's heavy blow, staggered to her feet and ran blindly into the arms of a laughing rough whom Terry recognized as Malabanan's companion at the dock—the sardonic Sakay.

For a moment the tableau held. Terry could not see Matak's face but he heard the tense fury of the voice:

"Malabanan, you speak English?"

Malabanan looked him over insolently before answering: "Yes."

Moro met Tagalog in the Bogobo's country on the common ground of the American-brought English tongue!

"Malabanan, you know me?"

"No."

"You remember one night—nine years now—on Basilan? You remember kill old man, old woman, then girl on boat? You remember kill little boy, too, and throw in sea?"

The Moro's voice dripped with the released passions of nine years of brooding over terrible wrongs. As he saw the light of recollection appear in the desperado's dark face, he struggled to speak the words that had been dammed up so long:

"Malabanan, I am that boy.... Now you die!"

He snatched the long knife from the scarf knotted about his waist in Moro fashion, his knees bending under him in a tigerish crouch as he slowly circled toward his powerful enemy. Malabanan drew his great bolo with a contemptuous sneer at the little Moro and before Terry could have interfered had he wished,

they leaped at each other. Matak dodged down under the first awful sweep of the gleaming bolo and as he came up he struck at Malabanan, not with the classic downward stroke, but UP!

As the glittering blade went home, deep, Malabanan threw the Moro from him with a convulsive heave that crashed him senseless against the stump of a charred tree. His colorless left eye, lusterless in strange contrast to the baleful fire that glowed in the right, Malabanan gathered his fast ebbing strength in a last effort and staggered toward the unconscious Moro, his glittering weapon upraised, heedless of the pale American who stepped out with a rasping: "Halt!"

But he sank limp as Terry's heavy pistol roared a message he did heed—though never heard—sagging down to sprawl across the Moro's legs.

Terry leaped full into the clearing and covered the ladrones, who stood paralyzed by the swiftness of the tragedy, stunned by the dramatic appearance of the young American whose pistols were famed throughout the Gulf, and as they hesitated the Macabebes smashed out of the fringe of timber, threw themselves off their reeking ponies and moved to surround the band.

Sakay, supporting the girl as a screen, drew back toward the nearest of the huts and opened fire at Terry with a rifle. The ladrones scattered for cover and in a minute the woods rang with their fusillade and with the deadly volleys sent in answer by the Macabebes.

It was a brief combat. Though outnumbered nearly two to one the soldiers were disciplined and highly trained marksmen. In a moment six of the bandits were on the ground, nine threw up their hands in surrender and the balance fled through the woods. The Sergeant, who had been slugging away with his rifle with a calculating attention to the details of marksmanship belied by the fierce joy in his brilliant black eyes, ceased firing at Terry's shouted command and detached eight of his men, who caught up some frightened ponies and raced through the woods to head off the fleeing brigands.

Sakay, using the fear-crazed girl as a shield from behind which to shoot at Terry, found his aim thwarted by her struggles. Seeing Terry advancing straight upon him and fearful of exposing himself to the fire of the two black pistols, he dropped his rifle and holding the girl directly in front of him, called out in English:

"I surrender! I surrender! I surrender, Lieutenant!"

His deep anxiety subsiding when he realized that he would suffer no immediate harm, Sakay threw the girl from him with a brutal force that sent her prostrate and was promptly rewarded by the husky Mercado, who had been under American tutelage long enough to understand the virtue and the technique of what is vulgarly known as "a good swift kick."

The Sergeant escorted Sakay into the group of prisoners rounded up by the four soldiers and set them to digging a grave for the six, who, with Malabanan, would "never appear before the court." In a few minutes the pursuit party rode into the clearing herding all but three of the criminals who had fled: those three were carried in and placed alongside the grave.

Terry worked over Matak, who had been merely stunned. In a few minutes the Moro recovered fully and went back to secure Terry's pony, which he had abandoned near the ford.

While the Sergeant attended to the duties of identification and burial of the dead Terry led the girl into one of the huts and quietly comforted her. She told him of the ordeal of her forced journey through the greater part of a day and a night, of the captors who leered at her but remained aloof because of fear of Malabanan, of being waked from sleep at Malabanan's arrival just before Matak appeared. Malabanan and Sakay, worn with the night's ride, had stopped during the noon hours to rest in the woods.

When it came time to go, Terry placed the girl on his pony, declining another

mount, as his head now ached too fiercely to withstand jolting in the saddle. He set off in the lead, afoot, followed by the prisoners under escort, Mercado bringing up the rear with the girl.

As they neared the ford Terry heard a sharp out-cry from one of the guards, followed by the sharp crack of a rifle. Whirling, he saw the brush on his right agitated by the movements of a figure that crashed unseen through the tangle of vegetation. Two soldiers flung themselves off their ponies and leaped in pursuit, pausing fruitlessly for sight of the fleeing form and dashing on with trailed rifles. The aggressive Mercado galloped up, shouting an explanatory "Sakay!" as he charged straight into the brush.

Terry sped down the trail toward the river, emerging on the bank just as the lithe Sakay burst from the brush. Laughing derisively at Terry Sakay leaped toward the stream, reached the bank in four great bounds and leaped far out from the low edge. As the bandit's powerful body curved in the air Terry's pistol barked twice before the supple form straightened to strike the pool in a perfect dive.

Terry leaped down the bank to cover Sakay when he should rise. Leaning over the ledge he distinguished the white-clad figure sliding gracefully through the dark depths with the momentum of the dive: ten feet, twenty, thirty, then it slowed, started to rise.

But as he watched, tense ... there was a rush of a massive armored body through the shadowed depths, a great scaly thing swirled the limpid pool, a flash of hideous teeth—and the white form was gone.

Spellbound with the unutterable horror of what he had seen, Terry watched the waters become quiet again, but turned away, aghast, when bubbles rose like tiny silver globes against the jet depths. When he turned back there were no more bubbles.

He sank down on the bank, sickened. The Macabebes had come up with their

meek prisoners and waited at the ford, restless, their eyes fixed on the oily pool. Even Mercado was anxious to be gone. Unaffected by the terrible fate of the bandit he had hunted, he viewed the approach of sunset with vague concern, for this was the nearest that he had ever been to the edge of the Hill Country.

Terry strove to rise, and at last realized that he was ill. He sank back, dazed with the sudden force of a fever that coursed through his body aching, that throbbed in his head with a tumultuous roar. He tried again, but fell back, dizzy. He rested till his head cleared, then sat up and called Mercado to him. His voice came weak.

"Sergeant," he explained, "I do not feel—like going in to-night. You push on—rest at Sears' to-night. Keep the prisoners in his corral under guard. He will look after Señorita Ledesma and the men. Tell him that I request that he come here and dynamite this pool—thoroughly. Push on to Davao next morning and send for Ledesma to get his daughter; and if I am not there by that time, you send a brief report of this affair to Zamboanga. Understand?"

"Yes, sir, but you look sick, sir!" A quick concern flooded the Macabebe's heavy face.

"Yes—I do not feel—very well. I am going to cut across country to get to Doctor Merchant tonight. It is only six miles straight through the woods."

The Macabebe led his charges across the ford, then, worried, returned to Terry's side. Reassured somewhat by the brave smile, he mounted after receiving a final injunction to take Matak in with him if they overtook him. As the Macabebes herded their cowed prisoners into the woods across from where he lay, Terry lay prone in another of the intermittent surges of mounting fever that robbed him of his strength and faculties.

When the wave of fever subsided he rose weakly, took his bearings by the low sun and crossing the ford struck straight into the woods in the direction he knew

Dalag to lie. Entrance into the deep woods brought instant twilight. He had covered a mile when a resurgent tide of fever brought him down on the thick carpet of dead leaves that covered the darkening forest floor, and for several minutes he lay gripped in the sickening spasm that rioted through his veins and robbed him of all reason. When it passed he rose dizzily to stumble on under the trees, which reached up toward a sky glorious with the flaming reds and deep pinks that mark the passing of a hot day over the Celebes Sea.

He staggered on, conscious only of the necessity of getting to the doctor and of the agonizing explosions in his head which threatened to rend his skull asunder at each jarring footfall. The sky grayed, darkened. Dusk found him a short quarter-mile further on, where another surge of raging temperature brought him low. Another followed swiftly. When he rose at last, night had wrapped the thick woods in its black mantle, and he was no longer conscious of direction, or of purpose, or of self. He stumbled along dazedly, trying to recall the purpose that had taken him into the woods.

The paroxysms passed. The fever had reached a consistent high level, lending him a singular buoyancy of body and of spirit, but his reason was gone. He walked faster and faster, his vision keen under the dark canopy, his mind racing with disordered ideas, a kaleidoscope of long displaced memories. Often he stopped short, puzzled, vainly striving to stem the fugitive currents of conceits in his efforts to remember what purpose had brought him here. His head throbbed. He kept step with each pulsing ache—it seemed to help. He hurried on through the night.

The way grew steeper, always he traveled up the ascent. Flooded with the hot energy that swept through his arteries, each passing hour seemed to add to the fires that fed his strength.

The gray beams of early dawn, filtering through a now taller vault of forest, found him far up the slope and mounting still steeper grades. He could not quite remember what his mission was ... something that the Governor wanted, he

thought, something he, too, wanted to do ... or was it a Christmas present for Deane....

He climbed higher, laughing, singing, talking loudly. Stumbling over a log his burning eyes had not seen, he turned in grotesque humor to offer curtsy and abject apology, then hastened on upward. Later, carroming from a huge tree he had hit head on, he addressed it in grave good humor: "Please keep to the right." His flushed face purple in the green light of the deep woods, he hurried on, again worrying over the nature of his forgotten mission and hysterically impressed with its importance.

The sun rose high overhead but it was twilight in the deep forest through which he clambered, over decayed logs, through rank overgrowth, past little streams of filthy water flowing in sullen silence through channels overgrown with moss. No sounds of forest life challenged the vast silence of the damp and cheerless vault of green, no song of bird or shrill thrumming of insects that makes the tropical forest a palpitant discordance during the hot hours of the day.

His laughter rang mockingly through the shadowed silence, the loud vagaries of his delirium carried far tinder the overhang of tunneled foliage.

"It's all right, Sears ... poor little fox, you won't ... you need not worry about me, Doctor ... on Sunday, too—snowshoes and all.... LOOK OUT MAJOR!... and we need you here, Dick,—Ellis and Susan, Father Jennings, the foreigners—all of us...."

Always he kept his face turned toward the heights, and climbed. The afternoon, waning, found him groping slowly upward, the furious energy of his fever wearing off. His voice was weaker but he babbled unceasingly, through dry lips parted in set fever-grin.

"I hope I did not miss, Sakay. I hope I did not miss.... 'Imagine bristly Berkshire swine upon the throne of Coeur de Lion!'—and if they make a break, SMASH

'EM!... Don't wait, Deane, don't wait."

Unaware of the ill omened forms which, surrounding him while still the sun was high overhead, had kept apace all afternoon with his slackening gait, he halted under a huge tree, leaning against the trunk in sudden weariness. His voice, weak, tremulous, carried to an audience he could not see:

Just to know that years so fair might come again,
Awhile ...

Oh! To thrill again to your dear voice—
Your smile....

At the end of the song his hoarse laughter rasped through, the woods. He sank down, tried to rise, then lay where he had fallen beneath the great tree. He lay still while the last white rays of the dying sun faded from the topmost leaves far overhead, heedless of the narrowing circle of eyes which flashed in the dusk.

Then, as he weakly pressed a hot hand against his scalding eyes in a gesture of pain that was infinitely pathetic, the Hill People closed in.



CHAPTER XII

THE MAJOR FOLLOWS

The big wall fan, a new symbol of the progress of the American undertaking, oscillated in jumpy turns that rustled the papers on the polished desk. Major Bronner sat staring at the maps which covered the walls of his office. His heavily tanned face bore new lines, worry and grief and there was a new set to the heavy jaw.

Rising with sudden determination he hurried down the corridor into the Governor's office and faced Governor Mason with the strained aspect of a strong man sorely beset. The Governor gravely studied the eyes that bored beseechingly into his own, then reached into one of his desk baskets and lifted a stiff paper.

"Major," he said slowly, "here is Lieutenant Terry's promotion. They forwarded it immediately after receipt of my telegraphed report of his prompt action against Malabanan's brigands." As the Major did not take it but continued to regard him steadily out of brooding eyes, the Governor returned the commission to the basket and fell to drumming his desk.

He broke the long silence: "Major, you really think you should go?" It was hardly a question.

"Governor, I must go!"

The older man studied his inkwell: "Major, it was over three weeks ago that Sergeant Mercado sent you his report: it seems rather—rather—" he was loath, to say it—"rather hopeless."

He remained in contemplation of his uninspiring inkwell for a long minute then

delved into his basket for a letter received that morning from the Lieutenant Governor of Davao, a letter he had read many times. He scanned it again.

"Major, Terry has been missing over three weeks, was ill when he was last seen. It seems certain that he either succumbed to fever or else—you know he entered the woods right at the edge of the Hill Country, and if he strayed off his course he is almost certainly—"

Bronner broke in upon him, frantically unwilling to hear the word spoken. He was furious in his grief.

"Yes, they wait three weeks before reporting his disappearance—the best officer in the Service—sick—alone in the woods!—no rations, no—nothing, except a canteen and a pistol! If I were governor I'd fire the whole damned crew down there!"

The Governor regarded him with wise patience till he choked into silence. "No, Major. There was no fault. The Sergeant reported in Davao that Terry had gone to Dalag to see the doctor, so it was not until Merchant finished his work there that they learned from him that Terry had not reached him. It was no fault of any one, Major; just hard, hard luck. Now, I have been thinking over your request to go in search of Terry's—in search of Terry, and I have decided. The despatch boat is now at the wharf subject to your orders. She makes something over twenty knots."

"Governor, I'm—I appreciate your—Governor, it means a good deal to me!"

"I will not detain you, Major. You do as you find best when you reach Davao. Pacify the planters first—this report says that they are wild with grief and rage. Of course you will take temporary command of Terry's Macabebes. The entire company is there now and with them you could doubtless smash your way up into the Hills. I had other hopes, hopes of winning them peaceably—hopes in which Terry figured.... Well, I know you are anxious—so run along."

He rose and came around the big desk to take the Major's hand in a fatherly farewell. After the Major had torn out of the room the Governor closed the door and stood at the window looking out over the busy Straits, his face older, stripped of the optimism with which he invariably confronted all of these young men who were associated with him in the Moro task. Sometimes it all seemed so hopeless, so futile.

For a long time the Governor stood at the window. He was facing westward toward India, that mystic ever-ever land that had been the goal of all the nations since before Columbus and was finally won by the steady strength and genius of a meager island people. But its cost—its cost in fair-haired, ruddy-cheeked youth! As in other matters of government we had learned colonization at Mother England's knee, had sought to apply her precepts, to avoid her mistakes: but there was no avoiding that penalty, that expenditure of young men. Quotations from the interpreter of the white man's burden came to his lips: "*The deaths ye have died I have watched beside.*" He whispered the line over and over again.

He was still gazing somberly over the wide waters when Bronner rushed down the pier below him and leaped into the cockpit of the power boat. An orderly followed on the run and dumped the Major's luggage into the boat. A Moro cast off the restraining hauser and the snowy hull leaped forward, nose high in the air. When it reached a point opposite where the Governor stood its stern was buried deep by the terrific thrash of the screw, and borne on the swift ebb tide it streaked out of sight into the west, like a thing alive. The Major was off—the Constabulary guards its own. When one falls, others search, and bury, and avenge.



The Major settled on the stern seat for the long ride. He had his thoughts, thoughts that set his jaws till they ached. The motors roared as they coursed through a shifting panorama of islands, little heavens of cool verdure as seen

from the power boat which rode low, rising and falling gently in the smooth swells which ribbed the Celebes from horizon to horizon. From the low seaboard they looked back upon a thin trail of white dashes which marked the wake their speed had traced upon the tops of the oily undulations. Adams, the mechanic, a slim, clean-cut young fellow, scarce glanced at Bronner through the passing hours but hovered over his engines, absorbed in their operation.

The night passed, and the day was nearly done as they shot up to the little wooden dock at Davao with a grinding of gears in reverse. Adams silenced the motors, then turned in stiff fatigue to the Major with an expression that transfigured his greasy features.

"Major, I've broken the record for this run by four hours. Now it's up to you!"

"You know, then, why I'm—"

"Yes, I know. And I knew Terry—in Sorsogon Province. I was down and out, a beachcomber,—booze. And he was kind to me, when I needed kindness.... It's up to you, Bronner."

The Major stepped up on the dock, unsteady of limb after the night and day, his ears roaring from the long punishment. Stamping the length of the dock to regain his land legs, he returned to meet Doctor Merchant, who had hastened down to the dock. His heavy hurry had glittered him with a profuse perspiration that coursed down over his exposed skin areas, and he wiped his hands and wrists with a big bandana before shaking hands with the Major. His entire mien bespoke anxiety.

"We expected you, Major—though not so soon. You know all about—about it?"

The Major nodded: "The Governor showed me Whipple's letter."

"Well, that's about all we know here. Terry was sick when he went after Malabanan's outfit—he never should have gone. And after doing that job—and it

was SOME job, believe me!—he started cross country to see me—knew he was sick. It was over two weeks later that I finished and came in—and when I arrived without him there was a regular riot!"

He wiped his face and neck: "Major, I'll never forgive myself for exposing him to that fever—but I couldn't do a thing till he came—they would do nothing I told them. Do you know how it was he caught it?" He was at once mournful and enraged. "Gave his mosquito net to the chief's wife because she was 'soon to become a mother,' as he put it: and right after he rode away I found she had cut the net into four big pieces and was using them for *towels*! Yes, sir! For towels!"

He wiped away with the bandana, thinking that thus he concealed his emotions.

"Major, you've got your work cut out—a bunch of the planters are in town this afternoon, planning a raid into the Hills. Lindsey and Sears are the wildest—the whole bunch will get wiped out if they set foot in the Hills! You had better see them right away—and you'll have your hands full—they're mighty determined."

He paused, fretting, then turned his big bulk with surprising swiftness: "Well—say something! What are you going to do about this? Going to clean out the Hills? Or are you going to let—" he stormed on and on, checking the flow at last to press his hospitality upon the Major.

"Thanks, Medico, but I'll just sling my bag in Terry's house and sleep there to-night: and I can eat at the Club."

The doctor accompanied him as far as Terry's old quarters and passed on to his own house farther down the street. Matak, gloomy and wordless, relieved the Major of his bag at the door. The house was silent, and darkened by drawn pearl-shell shutters. The Major stood a moment at the doorway, half sickened by the unused appearance of the familiar cane chairs, table, desk, and bookcases, then he followed Matak into the bedroom he had used before. He cleaned up and changed to whites, and when he came out Matak had thrown the windows wide

to the afternoon sun. But the house was thick with the uncomfortable silence that pervades unused, furnished habitations and unable to endure the room he hurried out and over to the *cuartel*.

The fiery little Macabebes seemed subdued. Mercado blamed himself for leaving his officer under the circumstances, was bitterly self-reproachful for not having sent a soldier with him. He went over the ground carefully but could add nothing but immaterial detail to what the Major already knew, but the Major remained in the little office until dark, listening with grim satisfaction to Mercado's account of the swift retribution that had followed Malabanan's testing of Constabulary strength.

He excused the Sergeant and sifted through the pile of official and personal mail which lay in the basket marked "unfinished." Sorting it, he came across a cablegram addressed to Terry and dated the morning that Terry had left in pursuit of the brigands.

"From the States, too," he muttered. Moved by an impulse and hardly conscious of what he did, he folded it twice and placed it in his purse.

In half an hour he had finished the few reports that must be executed, and rose to go. Mercado was waiting for him at the door.

"Sir," he said, standing stiffly at attention and watched by a score of Macabebes who knew his intention to draw the Major out, "we Macabebes are soldiers, sir—we never question. But if the Major comes to lead troops up—there, sir, to bury our Lieutenant, it is a Macabebe task! We loved him, sir."

The big Major looked down at the earnest veteran, touched by the dramatic simplicity of his appeal.

"Sergeant," he said, "if I do lead a force up there your Macabebes will be where they belong—at the front of the column!"

He took the grateful salute and passing out between two rigid lines of the stalwart little men he crossed the plaza to the Club.

Entering, he noted the unusual number of Stetsons that hung on the hatrack, and passing inside, saw that the steward was guarding a score of rifles and revolvers. For a moment he stood unnoticed by the groups of determined men who occupied the round dining tables in parties of four and five. Selecting the table occupied by Lindsey, he went in.

He felt the tension of the room increase as he entered. All looked up with friendly word or nod, but from the manner in which they eyed him and each other he knew that his coming and his purpose had been the subject of their conversations. He sat down with Lindsey and his two companions. One of these, O'Rourke, had been the pioneer hemp planter and now enjoyed a big income; the other, a nervous, hasty young fellow named Boynton, had borne a reputation as a squawman that had deprived him of intimacy with his own kind, but had recently put his house in order and rehabilitated himself with those who found decency in clean living.

In an effort to relieve the atmosphere of constraint the three planters attempted conversation, but it fell dead, and each applied himself to his dinner. The Major's eyes roved over the crowded room, then bored Lindsey's.

"This is the biggest crowd I ever saw in the Club," he suggested, tentatively.

All understood the question in his words, but none answered. Suddenly Boynton flushed with the hot rush of temper to which he was subject.

"Yes," he exclaimed defiantly, "and it's a good crowd, too! A crowd that's got guts! We're going to have a look at those Hills!"

Lindsey had tried to stop him, but nothing could halt the impetuous Boynton. O'Rourke snorted disgustedly: "Lave it to Bhoynnton to shpill the banes!"

With Boynton's outburst the Major tightened. These determined men were hard to handle. He glanced around the room into the faces turned toward him: Boynton's tense voice had carried throughout the room and all of the planters had twisted about in their chairs to face him. They knew the showdown was at hand, were ready to support Boynton's declaration of their purpose.

The Major turned to Boynton: "You aim to leave forty or fifty more good Americans to rot in the Hills?"

Boynton fully realizing that the Major was addressing the crowd through him, and feeling their support, spoke more coolly: "Well, Major, we're ready to chance that!"

The Major continued, more slowly: "What could fifty men—even such good men as this fifty would be—do against the Hill People? And how would they find their way to them? And how would they overcome enemies they could not find or see, enemies who blow darts that just prick the skin but bring almost instant death? And if you did reach them, and kill a large number of them—what would it avail Terry?"

Pausing long enough for this to sink into their minds, he continued more sternly: "And furthermore and more important, how could such a force, organized out of worthy motives but nevertheless engaged in an unlawful enterprise, hope to even reach the Hill Country—knowing that they would have to first fight their way through a hundred of the best Macabebe riflemen in the Islands ... with me leading the Macabebes."

No one stirred. They knew the Major. This was no threat, no boast, he had merely stated a fixed purpose. This was Constabulary business, would be handled by Constabulary.

"Snap" Hoffman, a husky, keen-eyed youth who enjoyed the unique reputation of being the best poker player and the hardest worker in the Gulf, spoke coldly

from an adjoining table.

"Bronner, maybe your Macabebes wouldn't fight against people going up to square things for the officer they lost—I guess you don't know what they thought of him! But forgetting that part of it—what we want to know is, what are you going to do about reaching out for him, or for those who 'got' him?"

The hissing of the acetylene burners sounded loud in the room during the pause in which the sunburned planters waited the Major's answer. He spoke to Hoffman, without resentment.

"'Snap,' I had plenty of time to think it all out, on the way down here. There is just one way to find out about Terry: I am starting into the Hills to-morrow at daylight."

"With the Macabebes?" Hoffman retained the spokesmanship.

The Major slowly shook his head. The powerful lights glinted upon the brass buttons of his uniform and etched the deep lines in the heavily tanned face.

"No," he said. "The Governor has given me a free hand in this, as it is a Constabulary job—we look after our own. You all know, as well as I, what it would mean to force our way in. We would get in eventually, but in addition to leaving too many good men in the everlasting shade of the forest, we would defeat our own ends. For if he is still living they would surely finish him if we undertook a punitive expedition.

"I have laid my plans on my absolute confidence that he is living. I know he is, somehow. So I am starting up after him in the morning ... alone."

Consternation was written upon every face excepting Lindsey's, who had understood the Major's purpose from the moment he curbed Boynton. Amazement altered to admiration, then to uneasy forebodings. The Major watched them as they whispered to each other and as he read their acceptance of

his plans he turned to his cold dinner.

The planters found relief in following suit. The stewards returned to the care of the tables. Cigars, the best from Luzon's northern fields, followed Benguet coffee and when champagne glasses appeared at each plate in indication of some diner's birthday or other happy occasion, the planters searched each others' faces to identify the celebrant. As the Chino withdrew after filling the glasses Lindsey rose, glass in hand, speaking with his characteristic sincerity and with an easy grace that belied his rough planter's garb.

"Gentlemen, I propose an absent friend ... a friend of all of us. One who has meant much to all of us, has done much for many of us, has harmed none by careless deed or word or thought: one who knows the high places but realizes that life is lived on level planes. Gentlemen"—he lifted his glass high—"to the —HEALTH—of Lieutenant Richard Terry, P. C."

A swift scraping of feet and of chairs pushed back and they all stood in mute acclaim of Lindsey's sentiments, subscribed with him to the Major's refusal to believe that ill had befallen him whom they had assembled to avenge. Seated again they watched Lindsey, who remained standing while the Chino refilled the glasses. Lindsey spoke again.

"I ask you now to pledge the only man I know whose bravery, sincerity and friendship are of a quality to fit him to be the chief of him to whom it was just now our honor to do honor.

"Gentlemen ... Major John Bronner, P. C.!"

The response was a thrilling tribute to the flushed officer who remained seated until the clamor had subsided, then bowed his embarrassed gratitude.

They crowded around him as he rose to go, each offering advice and warnings, wringing his big hand. Boynton drew him a little aside.

"Major," he said earnestly, "I hope you find him—all right—not—not hurt. He was fine to me—I came near making an awful mistake—about a native woman. But he came to me and talked me out of it—spent the night with me, talking about his mother ... she died when he was a little shaver ... and he talked about clean living, and the duty of carrying on your white blood unpolluted. He didn't preach—just talked sense, and was awfully—friendly. I quit the dame cold!"

Gripping Bronner's hand, Boynton left the room. Lindsey accompanied the Major to the door and into the reading room, pointing to the placard tacked up under the skin of the python.

"You remember the wording of the first sign? 'Major Bronner owes his life to the wonderful pistol marksmanship of his friend, Lieut. Richard Terry, P. C.' He was here the night that Malabanan broke loose—you will hear about that night of his in the Club—and the next day we found that he had changed the placard. Look."

He pulled the Major over and they read:

This python, the largest but one measured since American occupation, was killed on the plantation of Mr. Eric Lindsey.
Length.....24 ft., 9 inches
Diameter, thickest.....14 inches

"We didn't see him do it, but we knew he must have been the one who changed it. As that's the way he wanted it, we can't change it—now."

Grief shadowed his earnest countenance again as he faced the Major: "Don't you think that in view of my friendship for him—and for you—that I am entitled to go up with you?"

"No, that's all settled, Lindsey."

The Major passed out, but pausing on the dark walk in front of the building to relight his cigar, he heard Lindsey outlining plans for the campaign the planters would undertake if the Major had not returned at the end of two weeks.

In the early morning he made a light pack of rations and the beads, matches and red calico he had secured to use as presents in case he won through to the Hill People. He dressed for the field in khaki, filled an extra canteen and after breakfast mounted Terry's big gray pony and rode off with Mercado, whom he took to guide him to the spot where Terry was last seen. The Macabebe took the lead and pressed by the urgent white man lathered his pony in the rapid pace he set through the winding trail. They dismounted at the ford shortly before sunset.

While the Major was transferring his pack from saddle to shoulders the Macabebe explored the pool with distrustful eyes. But Sears had done his work thoroughly: two cases of dynamite had blown in the banks and created a new channel through which the water flowed swiftly. The pool had been narrowed by half and shallowed to a depth of ten feet in the series of explosions Sears had detonated until the river gave up the rent carcass of the monstrous reptile.

The Major adjusted the pack to his liking, waved farewell to the Macabebe and moved toward the fringe of woods with a swinging stride. The soldier watched the receding figure with mingled admiration and awe. The Malay stood irresolute as the white man's head and shoulders passed from view under the low hanging branches, watched the pendulous khaki legs swing rhythmically into the shadows of the forest and out of vision, then cast one long look up over the dense roof of the forest which swept far up to end at Apo's summit, and atremble with the appalling memories of the lonely spot he mounted the gray and led his own exhausted pony along the edge of the pool. Once he glanced back apprehensively as a small Bogobo agong sounded somewhere to the north and filled the woods with its deep and mournful tones, then hurried on homewards.

The Major had headed due west, straight toward the summit of the mountain. He walked on through the last hour of the afternoon and as the woods became denser and darker he used the slope of the forest floor as his point, always facing in the direction of the rising ascent. He made good time, as here the going was

little obstructed by creepers or thorned "wait-a-minute." Alert, he studied every sound of the forest life, for though he had placed his life on the knees of the gods he valued it too highly to neglect any slightest precaution. Inside his shirt there bulged a heavy 45 slung from a leather breast-holster. This lone attempt of the Hills was no sudden inspiration; he had planned it logically. There was no other way. Up there, somewhere, lay or lived his friend. Friendship was the call, friendship and ... The Service.

The sun, glinting fitfully through openings in the thatching of sparkling green leaves, dropped lower and sank from sight, and before the brief twilight faded he selected a spot beneath a great mango tree as his first camping place. Gathering some dry twigs and dead boughs he built a fire at the edge of a little stream and ate sparingly of his store of beans, chocolate and tinned sausages. In his collapsible pan he heated water and dissolved his coffee crystals, and the coffee finished, he boiled more water with which he filled his canteens and hung them on a branch after dipping the woolen jackets into the creek to secure the coolness of evaporation.

Night fell black in the forest. He threw more brush on the fire to enlarge the circle of light, and made himself a comfortable couch by patiently stripping the small branches of their most leafy twigs, and wrapped himself in his blanket, vainly hoping that sleep would come.

From time to time he rose to add fuel to the fire, as he wanted the light to be visible from the Gulf, where troubled friends would be searching the night hills with worried eyes. And he wished the flame to be seen in the Hills by those who lurked in the dark shadows so that they might know that no element of stealth entered into the approach of this white man who invaded a territory forbidden to strangers since the earliest dawn of Philippine history. This idea—the thorough advertisement of fearless confidence—was the basis of his plan. He knew wild men.

Desperately he fought off the forebodings which assailed him in the deep silence

of the forest night, for hours he tossed in the distress of apprehension over the friend of whom he came in search. Toward dawn he fell asleep puzzling over the problem of Terry's reason for closing the door of his bedroom before going to bed and then opening it for ventilation. He waked from a dream in which he had slyly peered into the room in time to see Terry withdrawing a hypodermic needle from his arm, and lay worrying about the vivid nightmare until he noticed that the fire was dimming before the coming of dawn.

He breakfasted, drowned the embers of his fire with water from the stream, then reslung his pack and started up the slope. The way grew steeper with the hours, the forest thicker. The green roof of foliage was now so thick that the sun seldom penetrated and where it did strike through the sunlit spots were dazzling in contrast with the somber shadow of the forest. The undergrowth grew denser, so that he climbed with greater toil through the maze of thorned bush and snaky creepers that twined in enormous lengths across the forest floor.

The never-ending gloom of the weird twilight grew on his nerves. He tried to whistle to cheer himself but forebore when the uncanny echoes rocketed in the dismal cathedral of towering trunks.

It was rough and cheerless going. There were no trails. Once, toward noon, while he was munching chocolate to appease his empty stomach, he suddenly came upon a sort of runway, a beaten trail. He stepped into this easier path but had taken but a few steps when he was startled by the vicious rush of a swift object that whizzed up through the air and tore through a fold of his loose riding breeches, then swung back before his eyes to vibrate into stillness. It was a bamboo dagger, sharpened to a keen edge and point, hardened by charring in a slow fire. Fastened to a young sapling, it had been bent down over the trail and secured by a trigger his foot had released in passing. Level with his thigh, it had been designed to pierce the abdomen of the Hillmen's natural foes. He bent to examine the glutinous material with which the dagger was poisoned, and paled as he considered his close escape. Such a death—in such a place....

After assuring himself that his skin had not been broken by the *balatak*, he stepped gingerly off the trail and made his way upward, carefully avoiding every inch of ground that appeared suspicious. With each mile of ascent the way grew steeper, the forest deeper and darker, the green ceiling reared higher on more massive trunks.

In mid afternoon he noticed that he was passing through a zone of utter forest silence. There were no relieving sounds of voice or wing or padded foot. It was appalling. Nothing in his vivid experiences had approached the menace of these silent trees.

Pausing to rest in an area where an unusual amount of indirect light filtered down through the lofty screen of leaves he looked about him, found no tree he could identify, and felt the hostility that strange growths radiate. His thoughts flew back to the security and friendliness of the elms and maples of his boyhood haunts. As he peered through the endless avenues of trunks that rose from the dark slope, he learned what fear is. But he went on, faster.

An hour later, clambering over the trunk of a huge windfall that blocked his path, he jumped down upon something that half pierced the heel of his heavy shoe. Leaning back upon the big log he tugged till the foot was released. He had landed upon a carpet of leaves which concealed a number of sharpened bamboo stakes bedded deep in the ground, point upward. Raking out the leaves with a stick, he uncovered a nest of sixteen spearheads smeared with the brown venom.

Forced to study his every footfall, he made slower progress. He was far up the great slope when he noticed that the tangled underbrush had given way to a smooth carpet of leaves. Night was near, so he halted when he came to an open spot, a place where volcanic rock precluded vegetable growth. Water, steaming hot, poured from a fissure.

It was the first time he had sighted the sky since morning, and here he saw the only sign of life the day had afforded. Two gray pigeons flew side by side across

the opening in the trees, winging toward the crest of the mountain.

Sleep did not come to him. All through the night he sat by the fire, staring out into the ruddy circle of vision illumined by the blaze, peering into the shadows cast by the great trunks. Once a dead limb fell from a towering tree that stood just at the edge of the circle of light: he started violently, his hand darting into his shirt front to his gun. He relaxed, slowly. Big drops of moisture dripped from the invisible treetops. Thinking it nearly dawn he consulted his watch. It was eleven o'clock.

Suddenly he sensed that he was no longer alone, felt the presence of stealthy forms in the surrounding darkness, heard a twig snap in the still forest behind him. He waited, tense, the hair at the back of his neck stiffening as he thought of blowpipes and of darts poisoned by steeping in the putrid entrails of wild hogs.

He felt the scrutiny of hostile eyes. Certain that he detected the movement of an indistinct figure on the rim of the firelight, he threw on a handful of dry twigs hoping to uncover the prowlers, but the flareup revealed only an enlarged circle of great trees and emphasized their shadows. He sat motionless, his eyes focussed sharply upon the spot, and as the fire died down he saw the flicker of a dark form as it darted from the shadow of the tree and dissolved into the bordering gloom.

He gritted his teeth in an agony of suspense and enforced inaction. As the long minutes crawled by he writhed inwardly in the horror of waiting for the stinging impact of the feathered messengers of death, marshalled every resource of his will in his effort to appear casual, unafraid, confident of friendly reception.

Suddenly the silence of the night hills was broken by a weird sound that rolled down from the heights. He listened, rigid, and realized that some one was striking a small agong. It came from the crest. Three times the faint resonance was carried down, the last note humming long in the tunnel of forest and fading out in slow-dying vibrations.

Listening, he noted a change in the forest about him. Minutes passed, and at last he realized that he was alone, the lurking figures had been recalled. In the reaction fatigue came, and he wrapped himself in the blanket and fell asleep.

At sunrise he was off again, climbing the mountain side, confident that the recall of his midnight visitors had ended all dangers. The night would see him at the summit.... APO!

But with the sense of personal security there came a deep apprehension of what he would find at the end of his strange quest. His worry over the fate of the friend for whom he had made this venture increased with every hour. As the day wore on he fell into a panic of foreboding, scarce noting that the forest had lost its sinister aspects, had opened into a lovely wood of sun-splashed vistas broken here and there by great rugs of thick grass which tempered the beat of the afternoon sun striking through the openings above the frequent clearings.

Suddenly he stopped, sniffing to identify the odor that had rapped at his heedless nostrils for an hour. Disbelieving the testimony of his sense of smell he scanned the woods for visual evidence, for the first time taking in the quiet beauty of the scene. Finding the objects for which he searched he exclaimed aloud in his wonder.

"Pines! Pines! Sus-marie-hosep!"

He drank in the bracing spice of the rare atmosphere, glorying in the clear coolness of the altitude after the months of oppressive heat in the lowlands.

"Real, honest-to-heaven pines—that puts me a clean mile above sea level!"

Worry came again, and he turned to continue his ascent, but halted in midstride as he discovered a form that stood, motionless, upon a grassy plot a few rods above him. A Hillman confronted him!

Evidently a young fighting man, of small stature but wonderfully developed of

shoulder and limb, full chested and round of barrel, his brown skin covered only with a red G-string, spear in hand, he returned the Major's stare with a steady gaze of appraisal. For a long minute he remained poised, then beckoned to the Major to follow him and whirling with a flirt of his long black hair he led the way up the acclivity, bearing to the right of the course the Major had taken.

The Major turned his back to the savage while he reached into his shirt to put his pistol at full cock and safe, then followed him. The ascent stiffened abruptly, then ended, so that they came out on a wooded plateau a half-mile square in the center of which the crest of the mountain reared in a last upheave of perfect cone several hundred feet high. Skirting the edge of the cone they emerged from the woods and came to the border of a village.

The Major paused at the edge of the clearing, congratulating himself upon the wonderful good fortune that had brought him safely among the Hill People, and studying the village. A large number of crude thatched huts had been erected scatteringly at the bases of the trees surrounding the level clearing. Not a soul was in sight except the young warrior who had acted as his guide, who stood in front of a shack somewhat larger and better built than its neighbors.

As the Major stepped into the clearing he saw a figure appear at the door, and his sturdy heart lodged in his throat as he leaped forward.

It was Terry.

They met in the center of the clearing near the smoldering cooking fire, their hands gripping hard. Their eyes were moist with the relief each found in the other's safety. Both struggled for apt expression of their pentup emotions.

The Major found his tongue first.

"Well, it's fine air up here," he offered.

"Ayeh." Terry's grin was uncertain. "And there's so much of it!"

And they shook hands on it, complacently.



CHAPTER XIII

THE HILL PEOPLE

Occasionally one passes a stranger on the street whose face bears the unmistakable imprint of recent pain, a patient line of mouth and haunting glow of eyes that have looked close into the eternal shadows. Terry bore this look.

He unbuckled the Major's pack straps and relieving him of the load led him into the shack he occupied. It was a small hut, roofed and sided with grass woven into a bamboo lattice work; stilted six feet above the ground it trembled under the Major's heavy tread. A woven bamboo partition divided it into two small halves, and each room was bare save for a slatted cot that served as chair by day and couch by night. The breeze blew up through the strips of bamboo flooring.

Exhausted the Major sank down upon the hard cot but rose to sitting posture to study Terry with bloodshot eyes.

"Terry," he said, "you're looking a little—what the folks back home call 'peaked'."

Terry's face was a little haggard, his body a little slimmer, the steady gray eyes were deeper set.

"Oh, I'm all right." He seated himself on the ledge of the window near the Major. "You had a tight go of it last night. Did you hear the little agong ring?"

"Yes."

"The young Hillmen wanted to wipe you out. I had to work pretty hard with Ohto—the old chief—to persuade him to let you come in unharmed." His face

clouded. "I have been worried ever since you started into the Hills."

"How did you know that I was coming?"

"Major, that's why I have been so worried about not being able to start back—I knew that you would come as soon as you heard."

The Major flushed in quick pleasure at the unconscious tribute to his friendship and his courage. He filled his pipe and smoked contentedly. It was the biggest hour that he had ever known. Terry unharmed, well; his own hazards surmounted; and the Hill Country penetrated at last—the impossible again achieved by the Constabulary. He settled back comfortably, using his pack as a pillow.

"Tell me all about it," he said.

"There is not much to tell, Major. You must already know all about the way in which the Macabebes finished what Malabanan started, and of Sakay's leap into the pool—did Sears dynamite that pool?"

Horror shadowed the steady eyes till the Major assured him that the pool and its dweller were of the past.

"Major, that Sakay affair was pretty—bad: I keep wondering if I missed him—I would hate to think that.... Well, I had not felt well all day. I must have been exposed to that fever at Dalag and—"

"Yes, I guess you had! Merchant told me about that!"

Terry flushed and went on. "I started through the brush to get to the doctor, but I must have been sicker than I thought, for I don't remember anything after entering the woods. It's all a dream to me. Something pulled me up this way—I've always hoped to be the one to open up the Hills—and I kept coming. I remember lying down at dusk and being picked up and carried through the night.

I must have been delirious for about ten days, but had conscious periods every day. Every time I had a clear spell I swallowed several tablets of the quinine Sears gave me. I guess that quinine saved me—I would like to have Sears know about it.

"Those ten days are rather confused, of course, but I remember the care the women gave me and some of their rough remedies. I came out of the delirium two weeks ago but was pretty weak, so did not try to get up, but lay there listening to their talk. Their dialect is quite like the Bogobo—I think they're just a tribe of Bogobos separated from the others by those infernal woods. I soon learned that they had spared me and cared for me because they thought that I was daft. You know that these primitive tribes never molest lunatics—they think that they are possessed of devils which, if disturbed, will enter the heads of whoever harms their present host. Probably I raved a good bit on the way up, when they were following me.

"When they realized that I was sane the tribe split into two factions—one wanted to finish me but the other insisted that my coming was a good augury. It was rather queer to lie here and listen to the arguments pro and con—I pulled pretty hard for the negative contenders! The question was finally decided by the old chief, Ohto, who announced that my fate would be determined when next the limoçons sang. That settled the immediate question.

"The limoçon is a big species of pigeon that nests in the Hills. It seldom sings, and then only at nightfall. It is revered by these people, who believe that it sings prophecies of good or evil, the character of the omen being determined by the point of the compass in which it lights to offer its rare evening song. Direction is gauged from where the Tribal Agong hangs—I will show you that after supper. It is a queer superstition, Major: they think that a song in the west means greatest harm—death by famine or disease or intra-tribal wars, from the north the omen is ill but to a lesser degree, south is good, but a song from the east augurs greatest happiness to their people."

The Major was pulling on a dead pipe, absorbed in Terry's story but building into it all of the suffering and loneliness and suspense which the lad ignored in the telling.

"They say that the limoçon has sung in the east but once since it heralded the birth of Ohto, who is the greatest chief they ever had. But it has sung in the west eight times—and each time it was followed by the death of one of Ohto's family. Now the old man is the last of his line. These things may have been mere coincidences but you can see why they believe implicitly in their feathered oracles.

"A week ago, while I was still kept prisoned in this hut, the bird sang in the south, an omen of sufficient favor to cause my release. Since then I have been free to wander about—and if it had not sung, my influence would have amounted to nothing when I pled for you. And I might not have been here to plead.

"That's about all, Major, except as to what manner of folk these Hillmen are, and that you will learn better for yourself."

The Major rose and stepped to the door where they could survey the village, unseen by the brown people who now swarmed the hard-packed clearing. They were a squat race. The men, G-stringed, displayed the same powerful physique that had marked the warrior who had conducted the Major, the women were clad in a single width of homespun cotton which draped from waist to knee and passed up over breast and back to knot at the right shoulder. Men, women and children were all long haired, and marked alike with broad, high cheek-boned faces flattened across the bridge of the nose. Their slightly thickened lips and widened nostrils were offset by large, intelligent eyes. They were grouped about the fires which burned in the center of the village, the women tending the pots which steamed over the coals. The fresh hide of a buck lay in the center of the ring of fires amid heaps of yams and unthreshed rice.

"Community cooking," explained Terry. "The young men hunt, the older ones farm, the girls weave and the old women cook. The scheme works out well in such a simple manner of living. Such government as they have is a blending of a little democracy with strong patriarchy. The old chief, Ohto, lets them have their own way about the little things, but when he speaks it is the law."

"How numerous are they?"

"Six or eight thousand. This is the largest of nine villages scattered around the crown of the mountain. Ohto rules them all."

He pointed to a wide lane leading through the fringe of woods into another and smaller clearing a few hundred feet south.

"That is where Ohto lives. No one approaches his house unless sent for. You—we—are to have an audience with him to-night. He set the time at moonrise."

"A husky lot," commented the Major. "They're bigger than the Bogobos, and lighter skinned—but they sure don't get much chance to tan in these woods!"

"They're a wild lot, Major, but you'll like them."

They saw a woman leave the circle of fires and approach their hut bearing two crude dishes. She hesitated near the door, nervously searching the newcomer with timid black eyes, but reassured by Terry's low word she climbed the bamboo steps and laid before them a supper of venison, yams and boiled rice, then scampered out with a twinkle of brown legs.

While they ate the Major outlined the news of Davao. Terry, tired of the monotonous fare, finished quickly and sat on the threshold, looking out upon the savages who squatted at supper about the fires.

"Major," he said, "we arrived here at a strange time. These people are all worked up over the question as to who shall succeed Ohto as chief of the tribe. You

remember I told you that he has no relatives, that they have all died off. His last grandson died three years ago. He was to have married—"

He broke off and turned to face the Major. "You may remember my reporting a Bogobo tale to the effect that a Spanish baby had been abducted?"

"Yes, we looked it up, Terry. It was true."

"It's true all right. She is here! A wonderful girl, Major, beautiful, wildly reared but—well, you may see her to-night for yourself. She was stolen by these people when she was an infant and Ohto's grandson was three years old, stolen to become his bride when both came of age. That is the way they keep their chieftain strain fresh—by stealing children from outside tribes and mating them when they grow up. Ahma—that is her name—is the only white child they ever abducted.

"But Ohto's grandson died a year before the marrying age. She has grown up in Ohto's household, has been taught their beliefs, dresses like them except that as his adopted daughter she is entitled to finer things. She is one of them except for the whiteness of her skin. One of them, yet ... different."

His voice trailed off into a silence in which the subdued murmurings of the Hill People sounded loud.

The Major stirred where he lay stretched on the hard couch: "Who will succeed this Ohto, then?"

Terry roused himself. "The tribe is wrought up over this problem, as well as the problem of our presence here. They gather every night and discuss the matter. Some want to select a new chief among the young men and train him so that he will be ready when Ohto dies, others insist that Ahma—this girl—shall select a husband from among them and thus raise him automatically to chieftainship. But she laughs at them all, though there are plenty of aspirants for the honor. The old chief has said nothing—he just sits and thinks.

"He loves Ahma with all of the wild love of a savage for the young he has cared for since infancy. He seems to consider her happiness even above the wishes and welfare of the tribe."

"Terry, you said this girl is 'different.' How different?"

Terry shrugged his shoulders, rose and secured their hats before answering.

"You will probably see her to-night, Major. Come, I want to show you the Tribal Agong."

Leaving the shack they threaded through the tiers of huts and crossed through the fringe of trees that surrounded the village, coming out at the foot of the cone. The huge monolith rose some eight hundred feet above the tableland on which the village was built. Its symmetrical slopes were smooth and steep. A goat could not have found footing anywhere upon its precipitous sides.

A winding shelf had been cut out of the rock to serve as a trail. It wound round the cone a dozen times in an ascent of several hundred feet where it terminated, high above where they stood, in a niche twenty feet square. Niche and trail had been chipped out of solid rock and were worn smooth by the rains of many years. Here and there the smooth surface was checkered with fissures, marks of erosion and earthquake.

The Major, head bent far back, breathed deeply:

"Sus-marie-hosep!" he exclaimed.

High above the spot where they stood a granite arm had been carved over the rock platform in which the winding trail ended, and from this arm a mammoth bronze agong hung suspended over them.

"Why, I always thought those stories of the Giant Agong were just—why, how in thunder did they get it up there? And how did they cast it? Why—Sus-marie-

hosep!"

The Major gazed up till the muscles at the back of his neck ached: "Why, it must be fifteen feet in diameter—that striking knob is—why, the thing must weigh six or seven tons!"

With this last thought the Major moved uneasily to one side. Terry grinned at him.

"I felt that same way when I first stood under it, but I've been up there. That flimsy-looking arm on which it hangs is two feet thick and chiseled out of solid granite to form a bracket. I think you are right about its size—the striking knob in the center is about six inches wide."

The Major shook his head, still bewildered: "Terry, I feel as if this is all a dream—being up here on Apo, this cold air, the smell of the pines, and now this thing here—Sus-marie-hosep!"

"The old Bogobo woman who told me of hearing the Agong insisted that she would live to hear it rung again. It is never rung except at the marriage of a chieftain or the birth of his heir. These Hillmen fairly worship it. They have the most absurd legends as to how it was cast and hung up there, and of the reasons for the wonderful tone they say it sounds. They believe that the souls of all the dead limoçons live on in it forever and that when it is sounded they all burst forth in song."

The sun exhausted its last white rays and sank below the low hills beneath them. Terry moved forward into the narrow trail and indicated to the Major that he should follow. They ascended slowly, the shelf narrowing so that by the time they had mounted twice about the base of the crag they were forced to advance by careful side steps, their backs against the cliff. Terry stopped at the fourth spiral, his hands gripping the jagged projections, his back tight against the cliff, and when the Major reached his side he nodded significantly toward the horizon.

The Major slowly withdrew his eyes from the dizzying abruptness of the fall beneath them, and followed Terry's rapt gaze. The great panorama of the Gulf lay unfolded beneath their aerie.

The sun, glowing pink against the crag, cast its huge shadow over the now tiny huts beneath them. Dusk was already falling over the great sloping forest that stretched from beneath their feet far into the Mindanao fastnesses and ended in a dim horizon where pink-blue of sky melted into the misted billows of distant hills. Far southward the Celebes was faintly outlined, a frosted mirror framed by primeval verdure, and to the east the slopes extended down mile upon mile, flattened, then leveled to edge the great sweep of the gulf.

They stood tight against the clear crest while the swift shadows gathered the Gulf into its fold. The little valleys faded, and blackened, and the lower hills disappeared. The gulf narrowed, shortened, and dissolved into the night. The dark crept swiftly up the slopes as if envious of the ruby crown set on Apo's forehead by the abdicating sun.

A steady wind, cool and fragrant with the odorous pines, streamed against them, forced their bodies hard against the crag. The Major, enraptured of the vast grandeur, voiced his exaltation.

"Jiminy!" he said. "The top of the world! An empire!—an empire of hemp! And our flag covers it all!"

Receiving no answer, he carefully pivoted his head so as to face Terry, and was humbled by what he saw. Terry's face, white in the fast fading light, was exalted, glowed like that of an esthetic of the Middle Ages, his eyes shone with a vision wider than that disclosed from the mountain top.

"Terry, what do you see—in all this?" the Major asked.

The wind whipped his words into space. He repeated, louder.

Terry stirred slightly, answered vaguely, his gaze still fixed upon the tremendous shadowed expanse below them: "I was thinking of a ... dozen words ... spoken upon another mountain, words that seem very real ... and make one feel very small ... in such a place as this."

The Major puzzled, gave it up. He was on the point of asking explanation when Terry spoke.

"We had best get down from here, Major. It is getting darker."

It took them but a few minutes to work their way down, but the crag reared black against ten thousand stars when they reached the base. In the regions near the equator the sun courses in hot hurry.

Returned to the hut, the Major sat on the window ledge and Terry at the threshold. The night was chill with the clear crispness of altitude. The Major sniffed the pine-laden breeze gratefully.

"We have found a new Baguio," he said.

Terry assented, absentmindedly.

The Major nursed his empty pipe, studying the savages who grouped around the fires to warm their almost naked bodies. Occasionally one or two would detach themselves from the groups and approach near where the two white men sat illumined by the flames, staring at these strangers in frank curiosity, silent, inscrutable, unafraid. Noticing the glint of fire upon a nearby row of long-shafted spears which reared their vicious barbs eight feet above the ground into which they had been thrust, the Major spoke to Terry.

"Your pistol?"

Terry motioned toward his room; "In there. They never bothered me about it—probably don't know what a pistol is."

The Major, thinking of the sensation the opening of the Hill Country would create, of the Governor's joy when he should hear the news, of the added prestige for his Service, turned to Terry to express something of his thoughts. But he desisted when he saw by Terry's flame-illuminated countenance that he had forgotten his presence, for there was something about the lean wistful face that made his detachment inviolable.

Soon the moon rose above the level of the plateau and flooded the village with a filtered glow. Terry rose.

"Ohto ordered me to bring you at moonrise." He waited until the Major had secured the gifts he had packed up, then led the way through the lane into the smaller clearing.



CHAPTER XIV

AHMA

In the center of the moonlit clearing there stood a larger house than any in the village. The soft beams of light reflected from the bamboo sides of the structure and the heavy dew on the thatched roof glistened like a myriad of fireflies. A wide path led to the porch, and near this there was set a tripod, fashioned of saplings, from which was suspended the little agong the Major had heard during the night.

As they neared the foot of the ladder that served as stairway the Major started violently as two brown forms appeared at their elbows; at a word from Terry they stepped aside to let the two white men pass, one calling softly to a guard stationed at the top of the ladder. The door was thrown open and they mounted the bamboo rungs and entered the house of Ohto.

Pine torches illuminated the room, which was some twenty feet square, roughly sided and floored with bamboo slats; there was no ceiling, so that a quarter of the high-pitched thatching of the house showed overhead. A dozen middle-aged Hillmen stood along the wall, evidently the influential men of the village. Across from them an aged Hillman sat in a rough-hewed, high-backed chair.

Terry advanced and addressed the old man, his whole manner bespeaking a sincere regard and respect; then he beckoned to the Major.

"This is Ohto," he said. "I will interpret for you if he does not understand your dialect."

The Major faced the fine, austere old patriarch. The brown face had been wrinkled bewilderingly by the heavy-handed years, but his eyes still glowed with

something of the pride and spirit of his youth. Wrapped in a thick blanket of hand woven *kapok*, he confronted them with that air of dignity and distinction common to those who from early life have dominated the councils of a community.

The Major silently tendered his gifts. Ohto motioned to one of his retainers and in a few monosyllables ordered their distribution among the people, the red cloth to the women, the beads to the children and the matches to be divided among the young men. As he retained nothing for himself the Major produced a new pocket knife he carried, and bade Terry make Ohto understand that it was for himself. The savage bent his hoary locks over the treasure, examining the mysterious blades that opened and closed at his will, and accepted it as his own.

The Major attempted to address the chief in his scanty Bogobo, stumbled, and turned to Terry beseechingly.

"You tell him, Terry. You know what we've got to say better than I do!"

So Terry spoke, and though the Major did not know it, he continually referred to him as his chief, put all of the fine phrases in his name. The warriors along the wall weighed every word.

Terry told Ohto of their great pleasure in having entered the Hills, and of their appreciation of their reception. He extended the greetings of the White Chief across the waters at Zamboanga, tried to impress him with the interest the White Chief took in the Hill People and of his good will toward them: told of the advantages that would follow intercourse with the lowlands, of the good that would come to his people from contact with others. Finally he dwelt upon the folly of isolation, of the benefits of commerce and schools and other elements of civilization.

The flare of the pitch torches brought out the sincerity of his face. The old chief listened, inscrutably, his unwavering gaze fixed upon the earnest speaker. Before

the aged infirmity of Ohto Terry stood in apt symbol of lithe youth.

It was apparent that Ohto did not grasp much of what Terry strove to impart, for the primitive imagination was powerless to understand institutions he could not conceive. He listened gravely but gave no inkling of what went on behind the mask of his wise old eyes.

Terry finished, awaited expression of his decision. For a long time the patriarch remained silent, idly opening and closing the blades of his knife. The Hillmen ranged along the wall, who had listened attentively to Terry's arguments for opening up their country to the outlanders, waited their chief's pronouncement with set faces and gleaming eyes, their brown bodies still as bronze figures.

At last the patriarch raised his head high, so that the snow white hair fell back across his blanketed shoulders. He spoke so slowly that Terry was able to follow him with whispered interpretations into the anxious Major's ear.

"Many rainy seasons have washed my hair white. I live to see strange things—I never thought to see a white man's face within my walls—except, perhaps, upon a spear, grinning.

"When I was born—and no other man or woman of my tribe lives who saw the sun of that far day—they said, the wise men, that much good would come to my people before I died.

"They read it in the stars, they said. No great ill has come, except to my own blood. All gone—wife, sons, grandsons. Never again will the Agong ring for one of Ohto's blood!"

They felt the greater pity because the proud old chieftain demanded no sympathy, but merely stated the pathetic fact with a simple dignity.

He was silent for a time, lost in an old man's memories. Then he turned to one of the four retainers who flanked his chair.

"I am lonely," he said. "I would that Ahma would sit by me."

As the swart Hillman crossed the springy floor and rapped gently upon a closed door, the Major saw that every black eye focussed upon it with eager expectancy. For a moment the room was palpitant with suspense. He looked to Terry for explanation, but turned back at the grinding crunch of the hingeless door which opened to frame a fairer vision than the Major had ever dreamed, asleep or awake.

A white girl had stepped out of the other room and paused a moment against the dark background of the door to sweep the room with big black eyes.

A single piece of white cloth, fringed with bat fur, was draped about her waist and fell below her knee, the ends passing up in front and back of her round body to fasten loosely at the right shoulder. This, with a little sleeveless garment fashioned, bolero-like, out of the delicate bat skins, and a pair of sandals contrived in such a way as to bring the hair of the deer skin against the little feet, was all she wore.

Bronner scarcely realized the symmetry of the slender form, so lost was he in the spell of the dark eyes that plumbed his for one long second, leaving him tingling with a curious conviction that his soul had been bared. Vivid of white skin, of jet eyes, of a mass of midnight hair that hung loose to her waist, she radiated the fire and spirit of vibrant youth.

"God! Such a girl—up here—all these years!" he breathed.

She left the doorway and crossing the room with the light grace of slender, untrammelled limbs, sank down on a bench drawn up at Ohto's side. He set his withered hand contentedly upon the mass of her hair, and in a moment he spoke again.

"If the prophecies of the wise men are to be fulfilled, it must be soon. The good fortune of which they spoke has not come to my people—and Ohto cannot tarry

long in wait.... Death calls an old man.

"It may be that the prophecy had to do with the coming of these white men. It may be that it would be better to no longer guard the Hills with balatak and stake and spear and poisoned dart. It may be that our people would be stronger—happier."

Again he halted his slow monosyllables, searching the faces of the Hillmen who waited upon his words: utter devotion and loyalty were apparent in every brown face. Proudly conscious of their fidelity, he regarded them kindly, then his thoughts reverted to the girl at his side, and he gently stroked the lustrous black hair. She sat quiet under the caress, her head bent down in an attitude that revealed the white line from shoulder to throat, her eyes sheltered behind long lashes. At last Ohto raised his head again and when he spoke he gazed straight at Terry.

"Ever since we ... found ... her, this lovely flower has flourished. She now blooms in full blossom in my house—a white orchid on a gnarled old root.

"Before Ohto leaves the Hills he would like to see Ahma safe,—guarded and cherished by one who loves ... and knows. Though not of Ohto's blood, she is of Ohto's heart. I will that when she finds a stronger tree upon which to fasten—the Tribal Agong shall be rung for her."

Astonished out of their racial imperturbability, the Hillmen eyed each other at this departure from the ancient custom of ringing the Giant Agong only for those of chieftain blood. The girl's wide eyes raised to Terry, shifted momentarily to the Major, and lowered.

The old man concluded: "You both speak fair, but I do not know what is best for my people. I do not know.

"We must await a sign to guide us. The Spirit will speak to us through limoçon or nature, will solve the problem that you have brought to us ... and will decide

your fate.

"Until the Spirit speaks, you are safe with us, white men.

"I am weary now."



The venerable savage gathered the blanket more closely about his thin shoulders and closed his eyes as if exhausted. One of the four who stood behind him pointed to the door to indicate that their audience was at an end. As they passed out, the Major turned for a last look at Ahma, who was leading the old man into his room.

In the middle of the clearing he stopped short.

"Say, you forgot to translate what Ohto said after she came into the room!"

Terry smiled whimsically up into the chagrined face: "That's right, I did! But you seemed to lose interest in his words!"

As they made their way through the village Terry explained Ohto's decision, concluding with: "And so he awaits one of their 'signs,' the appearance of the limoçons, or some freak of weather or natural phenomenon like an earthquake—they read prophecies in everything."

The Major sat down heavily upon the bench. He was genuinely disturbed at this new phase, as he had thought their hazards passed.

"Why," he exclaimed, "that puts us square in the Lap o' Luck! Think of just waiting around for an earthquake or something—or for some darned bird to sing! With the opening up of this country as the stake—yes and our own hides. Susmarie-hosep!"

Terry had taken his usual seat on the threshold, chin in hand, his face bathed in the light of the moon that now hung high overhead and flooded the mountain top with a friendly glow. The cool night breezes came in strong gusts which rustled the foliage about them.

Calmed by Terry's attitude of quiet confidence and strength, the Major faced their problem coolly, sought a way out. For a while his mind raced with plans, but each died in the minute of inception. He could not influence winds, or induce wild birds to sing in given quarters of the compass, or devise earthquakes. He fell to thinking of Ahma.

Later, observing Terry closely, he asked: "And what are you dreaming about now?"

Terry stirred as though awakened: "Oh, home—mostly."

The Major wanted to talk, but the patient distress in the voice deterred him from what seemed intrusion.

Later he suggested sleep. Terry lighted a torch and stuck it into the doorway, so that while lighting both rooms its fumes carried into the open. The Major discarded shoes and leggings, and wrapping himself in his blanket lay down with his pack as pillow. Terry waited till the Major had disposed himself as comfortably as possible, then extinguished the torch and went into his own room, closing the door behind him.

The Major stared through the dark at the closed door, wondering, as usual, what was going on behind it. Then as a gust of cold wind blew in through the window he snugged down into his blanket.

Another and stronger gust, and he heard the door into Terry's room creak as it swung to the breeze. Looking up, he learned at last.

In the rectangular patch of moonlight which entered Terry's room through a

raised window he saw him by the side of the rough slatted cot, kneeling in that most ancient of attitudes, in which the children of all the ages have bowed to supplicate and render homage to the Keeper of the Great Secret.

The Major's eyes moistened. As the last clear phrase reached him he again stood flattened against the wind swept crag—"on the top of the world," and he now understood the "dozen words spoken on another mountain." They came from Terry's lips low, simple, majestic:

"—is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory.... Forever...."



CHAPTER XV

THE SIGN

The sun striking on his face through the open window waked the Major to the cool clear morning. Sitting up, he saw Terry sunning himself on the threshold, wrapped in a scant blanket such as Ohto had worn, his hair wet from his bath in the creek which emptied the big spring at the foot of the crag. Even in the stupor in which he woke from his heavy sleep the Major noted the ruddy glow of the skin which covered Terry's bare arm and leg, was surprised at the development of the muscles which played into being at each slight movement. His face was as evenly pallid as ever.

The Major stopped yawning. "Terry, I always thought of you as being—sort of skinny, but you're as hard as nails."

He wrapped closer in the cotton cloth. "I've always taken good care of myself, Major. From the time when I was a boy I have thought a good deal about—all sorts of things—and I realized early that one thing was certain—that this is the only body I'm ever going to have."

Learning from Terry where he could wash up, the Major made his way to the creek and after disrobing waded into the deepest spot and soaped himself liberally. For a moment he enjoyed the bath, but as the spring was the source of water supply for the village and as the young women were allotted the task of carrying it, his exhilaration was short lived. The water came but to his knees, so most of the half hour he spent in the pool he lay submerged to his chin, his agonized bachelor face exposed to the maidens who observed him from the spring three rods away. He would have taken no comfort from the thought—if it had come to him—that to them comparative nakedness was the normal state.

Mountain springs are usually clear and chill, and this was no exception. He was numb with cold when, hearing a snort of irrepressible joy behind him, he twisted his head about to discover Terry enjoying his discomfiture. After Terry drove the girls away the Major jumped out of the creek and hurried into his clothes, blue lipped, shivering.

"T-Terry, you'd better q-q-quit laughing! M-Millions have been m-m-murdered on less p-p-provocation!"

After breakfast Terry, intent upon discovery of some way out of their predicament, left for a long walk. Alone in the little house, the Major brooded half the morning over the plight in which the old chief's dictum had placed them, then dismissed the profitless forebodings and went out to the village to study the natives.

The clearing was empty of men. A score of the older women were fetching wood to the fires, another group were washing camotes and threshing rice with hand flails. Upward of a hundred naked children, pot-bellied, straightbacked, stared at the big white stranger as he passed, then ceased their pathetically futile efforts at play and trooped along behind him, their eyes as old as Ohto's. He looked in at the young women weaving kapok thread into cloth for blankets and the garments the women wore, but recognizing in the third house he entered three of the girls who had watched him in the creek, he fled in confusion.

He ate dinner alone, as Terry had not returned. In the afternoon he continued his study of tribal customs. He had known the Luzon head hunters intimately, so had a basis of comparison. He went among the older women freely and sat with them about the fires, practicing his Bogobo, questioning, enlarging his vocabulary, winning their friendliness.

As the afternoon waned he left the clearing, feeling in need of exercise. He strode rapidly about the circumference of the plateau and as he threaded the fringe of woods that separated the main clearing from Ohto's reservation, he

halted suddenly as he saw Ahma tripping toward him on her way to Ohto's house.

His first wild impulse was to dodge among the trees and avoid her, but as she had seen him he stood still until she should pass. But she swerved toward him and approaching with light, swift tread of free limbs she stopped a few feet before him, smiling.

Embarrassed by the creamy curves of shoulder and limbs, he sought diversion in the treetops. She spoke, and at the sound of the clear little voice he looked at her, and in looking forgot the eccentricity of her frank costume. Her dark eyes held him: he knew that he was gazing at the only wholly ingenuous being he had ever seen. He swallowed convulsively.

"Hello," he said.

Bronner was subtle to a fault!

Puzzled at the word, she wrinkled her nose in delicious groping for understanding, then laughed up at him. And with the laugh something popped within his sturdy chest.

He hastily substituted the Hillmen's word of greeting, which he had learned during the morning, and joined loudly in her merriment. Elated with this success, he marshalled his resources of dialect to further impress her but with a last bewildering glance from her dark eyes she flitted homeward.

He watched the white figure out of sight in the woods, vaguely aware that some new emotion had come to him. He stood among the trees some minutes after she had disappeared, then turned toward the village.

"Sus-marie-hosep!" he exploded.



At supper time the clearing was again crowded with the entire population of the village, the men having returned from their pursuits of hunting, gardening and patrolling the great slope. Terry and Bronner talked little, each taking his usual seat at window and door to idly watch the crowd outside.

Most of the Hillmen ignored their presence, but one, a squat, powerful fellow, swaggered by the door where Terry sat. Twice he passed, and each time he leered derisively at the white man.

"Who's your friend, Terry?" queried the Major.

"Oh, that's Pud-Pud. He's the town bully—and never has liked me. He led the crowd that opposed my—staying. He has bothered Ahma a good deal, too: wants to marry her. She laughs at him, of course. What have you been doing all day, Major?"

The Major told him of everything but the meeting with Ahma, spoke enthusiastically of the tribe.

"They're straight Malay, Terry," he wound up. "A pure strain, something you seldom see in the lowlands where the Spanish and Chinese have addled the blood. They ought to develop rapidly under proper guidance—they are a single-minded, sincere, fearless people."

Terry nodded agreement: "Nor are they the terrible people that the Bogobos think them. Their fear of them must have been based on dread of that sinister belt of forest. A good road will end all that."

They waited till Pud-Pud made a third mocking trip past their hut, gay in a G-string contrived of a length of the cloth the Major had brought up: it flamed against the naked brownness of back and legs.

"He's a lady-killer all right!" Terry said. "Ahma told me that he had coaxed the calico away from one of the girls."

The Major stirred. "You saw Ahma to-day?"

But he had hesitated so long over the question that Terry, sunk in deep thought, did not hear him, and somehow he did not feel like repeating. He turned in on the hard bed with new things on his mind. Measles is not the only affection that "takes harder" near maturity.

Several days passed without incident. Each morning the clearing emptied after breakfast as all but the cooks left for the day's work. Usually Terry wandered out alone, returning at evening to sit in the doorway, lost in study.

Daily the Major loitered about the village till late afternoon, then took up his stand in the woods near Ohto's domicile, waiting: and Ahma never failed him. Bashfully distressed at first in the close proximity to the wealth of charm revealed by her scant costume, he soon became unconscious of it, her garb was so entirely congruous to her free, unschooled nature. He practiced his sketchy dialect upon her, delighted in each successful transmission of thought, more delighted in the naïve bewilderment that many of his linguistic efforts wrought in her frank features.

The fifth day she failed to appear. He waited long, restless, till certain that she would not come and then set off through the woods, his big heart yearning for an unattainable something he could not define or classify.

Regardless of where he went the Major crossed the tableland and started down the incline of the slope. A mile, and he came across some young hunters beating deer into a fenced runway that converged to a narrow opening where two warriors stood ready, armed with great spears. He turned to the left, crossing a little burnt clearing which still bore the stubble of the season's harvest. Another half-mile and he suddenly came upon a grass lean-to behind which two old Hillmen grimly stirred a simmering pot from which arose an overpowering stench: he fled the spot, knowing the sinister character of the venomous brew.

The sun was low when he returned to the hut, still unhappy over Ahma's failure to appear. In a few minutes Terry entered the shack. He had come from the direction of Ohto's house, and his face was cleared of the perplexity of the last few days.

During supper Terry studied the moody face of his friend, but forebore comment. At the hour of sunset—the hour when the superstitious Hillmen looked for their "signs"—the savages thronged the clearing in mute expectancy. It was apparent that Ohto's injunction had been communicated throughout the Hills, as each night the crowd who waited the sign was augmented by contingents from other villages. The hundreds stood, silent, as the sun sank slowly into a horizon of white clouds which flushed pink, brightened into shades of rose and crimson. For a brief moment the upturned faces of the brown host were ruddied; they stood motionless, mute, while dusk settled. Then night fell almost at a stroke.

Again there had been no revelation. As the heaped fires illuminated the clearing, five mature Hillmen stalked past the white men's hut and into the forest. Terry identified them to the Major as the sub-chiefs who ruled the five adjacent villages.

The Major sat in the window a while, watching the Hillmen, who squatted around the fires smoking their ridiculously tiny pipes and conversing in low gutturals. He fidgeted, then left Terry unceremoniously and skirting the village through the woods unseen by the crowd, he waited an hour near Ohto's house in the hope of seeing Ahma. Disappointed, he returned and threw himself on the cot.

Terry sat in his accustomed place in the doorway, watching the fleecy clouds that a high wind drove across the sky, vast sliding shutters which opened and closed over the cool glow of the moon. The cold breeze chilled the Major, and he drew his blanket tight about him. Terry's voice roused him from his dejected reverie.

"Major, I notice that you didn't carry your gun to-day. Don't go without it again."

The Major half rose: "Why—you don't think—I haven't seen any indication of —"

"I guess you've forgotten that we are in the Hill Country. If they find a 'sign' that is unfavorable to us—there won't be any delay. And we don't want to sell out cheaply."

The grave judicial tones startled the Major. In his absorption in the white girl he had lost sight of their precarious situation.

Terry went on: "The tide of sentiment is turning against us. They seem more antagonistic, more sullen. So please be careful."

Terry lapsed silent and sat in the door, chin in hand. Soon the increasing wind drove the Major under his blanket again, and overcome by a curious feeling of comfort and security in the mere presence of the slight figure huddled at the door, he soon fell asleep.

Terry, unmindful of the chill breeze, remained in the doorway, deep in thought. Suddenly he brought his hand to his knee in quick decision, and after tip-toeing over to the Major to be sure that he slept, he silently departed the hut and skirting the edge of the moonlit clearing, disappeared into the lane that led to the house where Ahma lived.



Toward morning the Major woke with a start, bewildered by an unearthly sound that smote his ears. The wind had risen to a gale, tearing the fleece from the sky, so that the moon peered down upon a sea of treetops turbulent with the buffets of rushing air.

He sat up straight to relieve the thunderous humming in his head, then comprehending that the amazing sound was a reality, he strove to solve the

source of the bewildering tones. A deep, low murmuring filled the air, swelling in volume with each heavier gust which drove over the mountain: the sound deepened and strengthened, mounting to a sustained musical rumble that almost stupefied him.

"Oooooommmmmmm-ah-ooooommmmmmmmm-ah-oooooo-ommmmmmmmm." The muffled volume diminished, increased again with fresh burst of fleeting wind, and as the wind subsided suddenly, the vibrant note fluttered, died away.

The Major had lived too long and too much to believe in the supernatural but in the dark he found relief in the sound of his own voice.

"Sus-marie-hosep!" he breathed. "Some ghost! No wonder they believe in signs up here!"

He saw that the wind had blown shut the door into Terry's room. Knowing his habit of ventilation he rose to open it, and as it swung ajar he saw that Terry was not there.

He stood in the dim room a moment, staring out of the window at the triple rows of huts which the moonlight had transformed into elfin playhouses. Perplexity as to Terry's whereabouts gave way to deep anxiety. Then his eyes caught the flicker of something white in the shadowy grove that fronted Ohto's house. Looking closely, he watched it flutter away among the trees, then a darker figure emerged from the spot.

It was Terry.

The Major's big hands closed hard upon the bamboo sill. Ahma! Terry! For the first time in his passionless life he felt the fangs of the green-eyed monster.

An impulse to deceive, unusual with him, hurried the Major into the folds of his blanket before Terry entered, but by the time Terry had thrown himself upon his couch the Major was ashamed of the duplicity and spoke to uncover the deceit.

"Terry, what was that infernal sound that waked me up a while ago?"

"The gale playing on the Agong, Major."

The Major said no more but tossed on the hard couch until daylight shot through the trees. He rose at once and in a few minutes Terry joined him, a little hollow-eyed with fatigue. The Major pointed at his soiled shirt and breeches, then at the soaked leggings and shoes.

"Man, you're a sight! Fall in the creek?"

Terry grinned contentedly. "No. This waiting was getting monotonous—so I fixed up a sign for them!"

"That infernal noise, you mean?"

"No. The wind always does that."

"Well, what did you do?"

Terry's grin broadened. "I'm not going to spoil it for you by telling, but if you stick around you'll see a sizeable 'natural' phenomenon within a day or so. In the east, too, the most favorable quarter!"

The Major could extract nothing further from him, so desisted after an irate: "Well, you let me in on these stunts after this. You're all in—and here I lay sleeping all night!"

Terry sobered. "Major, we did not need you—we got along all right."

"We?" Heartsick, the Major sought to plunge the iron deeper. But Terry had slipped out to clean up at the creek before the girls should come.

That morning they noted that for the first time a number of warriors hung around the village, watching the hut where the white men lived with a studied insolence

that proved their hostility. Pud-Pud was of them, and loudest in his talk. At noon a large crowd had gathered, composed of those most inimical to the strangers.

While the two stood near the entrance to their shack watching the eddying currents of almost naked humanity they saw Pud-Pud detach himself from his companions and swagger toward them, spear in hand.

The crowd watched him eagerly as he advanced to test the mettle of the pale outlanders: Pud-Pud had boasted that he would end this suspense.

The insolent savage advanced, stopped ten feet from them and brandished his weapon, his attitude one of utter contempt. He spat at them.

Rage suffused the Major's face and his hand crept into his shirt front, but before he could withdraw the gun Terry whispered a restraining caution.

"I know him, Major,—a grandstander."

Terry stepped in front of the Major and returned the savage's stare. A moment they battled, then the Hillman saw something in the white face that disconcerted him, so that his offensive black eyes lost their hint of insult, wavered, fell. As Terry moved toward him slowly, Pud-Pud hesitated, then gave way before the stern visage of the approaching American.

Terry, boring him with cold gray eyes, came faster: retreating rapidly to maintain his distance from the white man, Pud-Pud hurried his backward pace toward the ring of silent Hillmen who watched them. Heedless of his steps, conscious only of an overwhelming desire to maintain a safe distance from this purposeful white man whom he had affronted, Pud-Pud backed away, eyes fastened upon the pale avenger.

Moving suddenly to the right, Terry forced him to alter the direction of his hurrying footsteps. The rapid heels hit a boulder and Pud-Pud fell backward into one of the cooking places, his spear flying aimlessly into the air as the sitting

portions of his anatomy came into contact with the red hot stones.

One howl and one swift contortion of outraged flesh lifted him from the spot and he escaped through the crowd, followed by the mocking laughter of the Hillmen. Terry picked up the spear and crossed the circle of savages to hand it to the largest and loudest savage in the group to which the braggart had belonged. He looked him full in the eye with a significance fully understood by the onlookers, then turned his back upon him and returned to the Major.

The Major was convulsed: "I saw what you—had in mind—when you circled him toward it," he laughed. "It must have been hot with nothing but a red G-string between his rump and those coals!"

But the incident was significant of the attitude of many of the Hillmen. Inside the hut they examined their pistols carefully, Terry insisting that the Major take two of his extra magazines.

The Major, in grim mood, left for a long walk. In crossing the clearing he purposely cut straight toward a group of warriors who at the last moment stepped sullenly aside to let him pass. Surlily pleased with his little victory, he crossed the broad plateau and struck down the slope, unconscious of his direction in the worried fumbling of his problems and his hurt. He started down the first great incline, distraught, sorely troubled. He crossed a green expanse where grass had sprung up over the site of an abandoned clearing, and as he reached the trees which marked its edge he was startled by the sudden appearance of two Hillmen who stepped out to confront him, pointing their spears toward the village in unmistakable gesture.

As he angrily struck another course he realized for the first time how complete his absorption in Ahma had become. He had forgotten that he and Terry were prisoners, had lost sight of the mission that had brought him into the Hills.

Chastened, he slowly retraced his way to the edge of the woods and sat down

upon a windfall to think it all out. He blamed only himself. Her interest in him, he thought dully, had been but a friendship natural toward the friend of the one for whom she cared. Little things came back to him: her expression when she watched Terry approach, the sympathy that existed between them, little understandings which he had attributed to nothing more than longer acquaintance. It suddenly occurred to him that she had helped nurse him when he was ill. And it came to him that he had given little thought to the days when Terry had fought off death, had been heedless of what those days must have been when Terry looked from the mountain deep into the valley of the shadow, he groaned aloud.

He shook his head, miserably: "Here I've been, mooning around like a—like a—and left him to do all the worrying—all the planning! Last night I slept while he —" He cursed himself for a fatuous fool.

When he rose, the bitterness of spirit had left him, and his sacrifice had been made, but his lips were white with suffering.

As he neared the village his course took him about the base of the crag, and as he rounded the western side he heard the murmur of subdued voices. He slowed and approached cautiously. A jutting buttress of rock masked the talkers until he was almost upon them, and as he turned this corner he halted in a wretched pang of the jealousy he thought he had subdued.

Terry and Ahma sat on a bench of rock, their backs to him, unaware of his presence. Terry's trim head was bent forward as if he studied the western horizon; she leaned against him in gentle contact of firm white shoulder.

For a moment the Major's heart thumped painfully, then the confusion of the unwitting eavesdropper compelled him to make his presence known. He did so with that fine discrimination and artful delicacy he summoned in times of emotional stress.

"Hello," he said.

Both turned, and rose, unembarrassed. Terry's welcome shone in his face, and Ahma was radiant with a quick emotion which, true to the traditions of those among whom she had been reared, she made no effort to dissemble or restrain. The Major dropped his eyes before the gaze, noting, dully, how wind and sun had faintly tanned the neck and shoulders and limbs. Sun and wind were patent, too, in the vigor and elasticity of the slim, loose clad form.

"I'm teaching her English, Major," Terry said.

For a moment she maintained her searching of the Major's averted eyes, then spoke a word to Terry and turned to go. A few steps took her to the buttress, where she stopped and turned her eyes full upon the Major, and spoke in English, teasingly:

"Hello, sir."

The Major answered in a voice that sounded harsh in his own ears and watched her disappear around the corner. Then he spoke to Terry without facing him.

"She does speak English!"

"Not much, yet. She really meant 'good-by.'"

They started toward the village slowly, each wrapped in his own meditations. Passing round the eastern side of the cone, Terry halted to gaze searchingly at the Great Agong hung over the stone platform far overhead. Anxiety was evident in his manner as he hastened to catch up with the Major, who had walked on.

The throng had gathered earlier than usual, the clearing was packed more densely than upon any previous afternoon. The two Americans avoided the clearing, passing to their shack directly through the woods.

The Major dropped down on his bench and pillowed his head on what remained

of his pack, staring up at the grass roofing. Shortly the serving woman appeared with their suppers, but neither moved, so she placed the two bowls on the floor mat near where Terry sat and withdrew noiselessly.

As the sun sank below the trees, the Major stirred out of his melancholy and twisting over on the hard cot sought the reason for Terry's long silence. Terry sat, as always, at the top of the crude steps, gazing over the trees. The Major was shocked at the utter dejection of the slumped figure, the pain that showed in the set muscles of the thin face.

The Major sat up. "What is the matter, Terry? You aren't sick?"

"No, Major. I'm all right." His tone was weary.

"What is the matter! Is this suspense—"

Terry shook his head. "No, Major. It's something else—something home. I expected—I hoped for some news before I came up—news I did not receive."

A flash of memory, and the Major asked: "A cable?"

At the bare nod of head he jumped upright and reaching into his hip pocket brought out his purse to extract the cablegram he had brought up but forgotten. Crossing the little room, he dropped it on Terry's knees.

Terry ripped open the envelope, hesitated, then unfolded the message. And as the Major looked on, every vestige of care and patient suffering left the white face, the wistful line was ironed from the corner of his mouth and Terry stood up a joyous, vibrant youth.

He had read:

Lieut. Richard Terry, P.C.

Davao, Mindanao, P. I.

At last the perfect Christmas gift. Am sailing immediately to claim it. Arriving Zamboanga January

twenty-sixth with Susan and Ellis.

DEANE.

He carefully refolded the sheet and placed it in his shirt pocket, then turned to the Major, his eyes darkened with such a joy as the Major had never seen.

"This message will cost you a wedding present, Major!"

"What now?" asked the Major. Things were moving too fast since he reached the Hills.

"It is from ... a girl. I left home—oh, foolishly. But she is on her way over here, with my sister and brother-in-law. That's where the present comes in!"

"But—but—what about Ahma?"

"Ahma?" Terry asked, in his turn astounded. In Terry's bewilderment the Major understood that his own unhappiness had been unfounded. At his shout of delight the Hillmen all turned toward the white men's hut, wondering at the joyous antics of the strange pair.

In a few minutes the Major had calmed sufficiently to discuss their affairs.

"But, Major," Terry asked him, "why did you think that we—Ahma and I—that we—you know?"

"Why, everything. I saw you leave her early this morning over there in the woods. Then, this afternoon—the way you sat together, and—and everything!"

"Last night—why, she helped me fix up that 'sign' I told you about: and to-day we were talking about you—she has asked me a million questions about you—and about white girls. She has a jealous streak in her—as you will learn!"

More explanations, and Terry suddenly reverted to their plight.

"Now everything depends upon that sign I fabricated. If it fails—or if an

unfavorable natural sign comes first.... You know I must be in Zamboanga on the twenty-sixth, some way."

He lapsed into reverie. The Major fidgeted, reached for his hat and stepped to the door, a bit shamefaced.

"Terry," he said, awkwardly, "if you don't mind I think I'll run over toward Ahma's house. There is a lot to talk over with her now and I guess I—"

His words were drowned in a resounding crash that blotted out all other sounds. The village shook with the jarring impact of some vast missile striking near, the air filled with the roar of shattering rock and heavy rumble of sliding earth.

The Hillmen bounded upright at the first terrific crash and stood transfixed, witless, superstitious fear written upon every brown face.

A dead silence followed the dying out of the last thunderous echoes, then a child whimpered, another, and the women took up the whining note. A warrior, one of the sub-chiefs from a neighboring village, raised a braceleted arm in astounded gesture toward the crag.

"The SIGN! The SIGN!" he shouted.

The thousand heads raised as one, and taking up the cry, surged toward the great cone, sifting through the timber like brown seeds through a screen.

CHAPTER XVI

CIVILIZATION DAWNS IN THE HILLS

When the tumult had subsided, the amazed Major wheeled to face Terry's quizzical grin.

"Well, Major," he said, "there is their merry little 'sign'! The darn thing worked!"

The Major pulled him toward the door. "Come on," he exclaimed. "Let's see what happened."

He hurried down the short ladder ahead of Terry and raced through the strip of woods to where the mob was packed about the base of the cone. The Major smashed an unceremonious pathway through the brown jam and in a moment they stood at the foot of the crest.

A large segment of the huge pillar of rock had broken off and in falling had carried thousands of tons of shale and eroded stone. The immense rock, whose fracture and fall had precipitated the slide, lay directly under the Tribal Agong, at which the Hillmen were staring up, dumfounded.

Following their upward gaze the Major saw that the fallen stone had formed the platform beneath the Agong, which now pivoted on its granite bracket over a cliff which fell sheer for hundreds of feet before curving into the stiff slope where crag fused into tableland. The great black gong hung directly over them. Looking closely, Bronner saw that it swung slowly in the evening breeze, and moved by the same impulse that had impelled him the first time he stood beneath it, he shouldered their way through the crowd to a safer position.

"You need not worry about its falling, Major. It will hang there for a thousand

years."

"I know it, but it gets me just the—what's that they're yelling?" he exclaimed, as a swelling chorus of guttural shouts rose from the excited throng.

"They are saying that the Tribal Agong can never be sounded again—without the platform they can't reach it." As a new phrase was caught up and repeated by hundreds of voices he added: "And now they are calling for Ohto to interpret the sign!"

Several of the older savages tore out of the densely packed throng and sped toward Ohto's house. In a few moments one of them returned and announced that the chieftain would arrive shortly. The two white men, absorbed in the drama, did not notice that four of the warriors who had summoned Ohto had returned by another path and taken up their position behind the captives, spears in hand, grim.

Ohto advanced slowly through the trees and emerged into the open space about the crag. The Hillmen gave way respectfully and he walked to the base of the cone through a wide lane opened up for his passage. Age slowed his steps but he walked erect, his head held high in simple dignity and gratitude for the silent homage his people offered.

Pausing near the base he surveyed the evidences of cleavage of the ancient rock, the tribe's historic rallying point. Then he raised his eyes to the Agong.

The dense circle of Hillmen bated their breath while the beloved patriarch communed with the spirits of the long line who had heard the happy song of the bronze-lipped gong. A deep hush pervaded the plateau, now lighted with the last white rays of the dipping sun.

The sage turned to his people, his furrowed face burdened with an added melancholy. His voice came low and weak, so that the assemblage bent forward in strained silence to hear his fateful words. Terry gripped the Major's arm,

whispering the translation.



"Listen, my children. We asked for guidance, and a sign is sent to the east of Ohto's lodge—a happy omen.

"The breaking of this age-old stone betokens the breaking of our ancient custom ... no longer will we bar the stranger from the Hills ... and those who are with us now may go in peace, or stay in peace."

He paused, and a great sigh of relieved suspense rose from the throng. The four armed men left their position behind the two white men and melted into the dense circle.

Terry gave the Major's arm a last ecstatic squeeze. "It's working out just as we planned! I'll be back soon."

He raced through the trees toward Ohto's house, returning in a couple of minutes to find Ohto still standing with bowed head before his people.

A rustle of whispers roused him, and he raised his silvered head to behold the loveliness of his stolen foster-child. Summoned by Terry, Ahma had come out of the shadows of the trees and stood at the forest end of the lane made for Ohto's passage through the crowd.

The old man extended his hand toward her in compelling gesture and she went to him with the agile swiftness of a half-wild thing. A moment he lightly stroked the rippling mass of hair, then he turned to his people again.

"Ohto said that the Tribal Agong would ring for the marriage of this white daughter of our tribe—but now—"

They followed his sadly expressive gaze to where the gong hung far out over the

cliff, inaccessible to human touch.

"Daughter, it *will* be rung for you ... somehow.... Ohto has said it. I hope to live to hear it rung ... when you have found him who is to share your house—and after that, I do not care."

He paused again—lost in a patriarch's vague memories of other years. Retrieving his vagrant thoughts, he caught the frank message of the upturned face, a message which startled as it pleased him.

"Ah! You have found him, then? Let him step forth."

Ohto searched every brown face in the hushed circle, but none stepped forward.

Ahma slowly turned her head toward where the two white men stood apart, her eyes fastened upon Major Bronner. Terry gently pushed him forward. Trembling, his tanned face bloodless, the Major advanced and took her outstretched hand.

Ohto studied the Major, then turned to Terry. For a long moment he searched the lad's strong face, a deep disappointment in his own, before he again faced the two before him.

"I had not thought of this. But it will do. It is as it should be—white will be happier with white. But ... will she stay until Ohto joins his fathers?"

The Major hesitated, then answered the sadly anxious question with a nod. He had no voice.

"Then she is yours ... after you have found a way to ring the Tribal Agong for her marriage. Ohto never spoke in vain. Ring the Agong first."

The Major's glance swept from Ahma to the lofty gong. His triumphant joy gave way to deepest dejection. He saw no way to fulfil the chief's requirement, and he turned despairingly to Terry, who had shouldered through the crowd and stood beside him.

The Hillmen had accepted Ohto's interpretation unquestioningly. Their chief had spoken. The unexpectedness of the new phase, the avowal of love by the tribe's adopted daughter for one of the outlanders, had appealed to the keen sense of the dramatic that is shared by all primitive peoples. Their brown skins coppered by the rosy glow of the setting sun, they stood in strained suspense awaiting the climax.

All but Pud-Pud. He jostled an avenue through the innermost ring of Hillmen and leaped out in front of Terry, brandishing a short blow tube he carried and laughing in shrill derision.

"Ya, white men! Now ring the Agong! Ring the Agong and get your woman! I saw! I watched! And I laughed because I knew the Agong would never ring again! Yeah! Now ring it!"

The Major was in no mood for finesse: with a vicious shove he sent the vindictive Pud-Pud sprawling, then turned to Terry, worriedly.

"What are we going to do?"

Terry shook his head, at a loss. This was a contingency he had not foreseen. He glanced penitently at the melancholy girl, at the old man who waited, swept the circle of tense faces, then resumed his hopeless contemplation of the gong overhead.

Swiftly Ahma broke the tableau. Dropping the Major's hand she darted forward to where Pud-Pud had risen to his knees, her white foot flashing up to dash from his lips the blow tube he leveled at Terry. The venomous dart sped aimlessly into the air and fell outside the ring of Hillmen.

Pud-Pud's violation of the sanctity of council roused Ohto to a wrath terrible to see. All of the savagery, all of the unbridled fury of a primitive, passionate nature mounted to his wrinkled face as he pointed to the culprit with a majestic gesture

that summoned the four armed men. At a word they hustled the terror-stricken savage away to await Ohto's judgment.

Ahma calmly returned to the Major's side and together they resumed their hopeless contemplation of the Agong. He peered up till his neck ached.

"Terry," he whispered, "to ring it you have to strike that little knob in the center, don't you?"

"Yes."

Then inspiration shone in the Major's face. He eyed Terry covertly.

"Wish we had a rifle," he suggested.

Terry caught his meaning. He fingered his holster but shook his head. "It can't be done, Major."

"Sure it can—sure *you* can! I've seen you shoot!"

Terry shook his head but the excited Major insisted: "Try it. Rest your gun on my head. Sure you can do it—and think what it will mean—the Hills opened up for all time—think what it will mean to the Governor—and to the Service!"

The hushed crowd stiffened as they saw the two white men draw back a hundred feet, wondered as to the character of the strange black thing the smaller drew from his leather pocket. They watched intently, thinking to see sorcery wrought before their eyes.

Terry cocked the weapon and resting his wrist upon the tall Major's head, sighted carefully. A thousand pairs of eyes focussed upon him. Could the slim white man ring the gong by pointing a magic finger?

The Major, braced for the shock of explosion, felt the iron wrist tremble, grow limp and lift away. He wheeled around to find Terry shaking his head, uncertain,

faltering. He slowly holstered the gun.

"Major, I keep thinking how I have deceived—this fine old man," he said.

The Major stared at him, then exploded: "By making this 'sign' that saved your life—and mine? Sus-marie-hosep! I've heard of those New England consciences but—Sus-marie-hosep!"

Disgust, dismay, affection swept in succession across the Major's countenance: affection held. He laid his hand upon Terry's shoulder as he played his ace:

"Terry, I thought you had a date in Zamboanga on the twenty-sixth!"

The crowd then saw the white youth stiffen with swift decision, saw him whirl to face the crag. For a moment he stood with eyes riveted upon the Agong till the little knob swung toward him, then he bent slightly at the knees and his hand swept back with a swiftness that seemed to bring the pistol leaping to meet the extended arm. It raised to the darkening sky, and the Hills awoke to the resounding crash of white man's weapons. Six times Terry shot, but only the first two reports were heard, for the others were swallowed in the booming of the Agong.

The sound beat down deafeningly, seemed to enfold them bodily in its mighty volume, blotting out all else. From the sounding board of cliff it smote upon their ears in thunderous, sustained, musical tone. Slowly, the note lessened in volume, deepened, and tumbled down in vibrant waves that rolled on and on. The sonorous reverberations died out, then surged again and again in ever fainter, ever deeper tones.

At last the air quieted, and nothing but the roaring in his ears remained to convince the Major that the vast sound had been reality. "Jimmy!" he exploded. "What a noise—and what shooting!"

A whisper of awe rustled through the surrounding ranks. Ignorant of firearms,

they thought the young American wielded some uncanny power with his black weapon. Already distinguished as the first white man to set his foot upon Apo, he was now regarded with a feeling akin to worship.

Ohto was silent, lost in a protracted, inscrutable study of Terry's face. At last the old man turned on his heels to sweep the circle of his people for confirmation of his surmise. Satisfied, he raised his hand for silence.

"There has been worry ... doubt ... among you—who should take up Ohto's burden when he lets it fall ... soon. You are entering new times, will meet new and strange things. To Ohto it seems best that he leave his people under the guidance of a young and strong and kind chief who knows all these strange things ... one who can lead you safely into the new life. What say you, my people? Who shall sit in Ohto's chair when he is gone?"

For a moment the multitude was silent as the significance of Ohto's query sank into their slow minds, then a murmur of approval rose among them, swelled into a deafening shout of acclamation.

"The pale white man! The pale white man!"

Terry understood. Uncertain, he turned to the Major, but Ohto interrupted by addressing him directly.

"You have heard. When Ohto leaves—and it can not be long—he leaves his people in your hands. You will be patient, kindly, gentle, with them. That Ohto knows ... it is written in your face."

As Terry slowly bowed his head slightly in acceptance of the trust, the delighted Hillmen stirred, whispered to each other. The hum of voices grew louder but was instantly hushed by the dramatic gesture with which Ohto extended his arm toward a low cotton tree that stood at the edge of the woods. The thousand eager heads turned almost as one.

Upon a slender leafless branch which extended at right angles from the trunk of a *kapok* tree two large gray wood pigeons had perched side by side in the close communion of mated birds, heedless of the host below them. Unafraid, tired, content with what the day had brought them in the lowlands, they were happy in safe return together to their mountain home.

In the hush which followed recognition by the throng, the limoçons moved closer to each other, wing brushed wing, sleepy lids lowered over soft eyes to shut out the crimson glory of the dying sun. Then the little throats throbbed as they voiced gratitude to their Creator in gentle, low pitched notes, lilting with the joy of life, plaintive with the brevity of its span.

The sweet song died with the day, and as dusk reached down in brief embrace of tropic earth, the birds winged side by side into the darkening forest.

Peace settled upon the face of the old man who had made decision vitally affecting the welfare of the people over whom he had ruled for two generations. The limoçons had sung in the East. His fathers were pleased with him.

A shout of fierce joy burst from the Hillmen. Then the women surrounded the dainty white girl and bore her off to prepare for the long ceremony with which the Hill People give in marriage. And the two friends walked through the woods, arm in arm, silent, profoundly humble.



CHAPTER XVII

"SUS-MARIE-HOSEP!"

Terry was happily engaged in remaking the Major's old pack for his own use when the Major entered the torchlit shack. It lacked an hour till dawn. Outside, the main clearing was dark, but the big fires which illuminated the surrounding trees revealed the excited natives still celebrating Ahma's nuptials in the clearing around Ohto's house.

Terry straightened up from his task and studied the face of his friend: fatigue and happiness had softened the serious lines that had given the Major an appearance of age beyond his years.

"Major, isn't the ceremony finished yet?"

"No, it takes forty-eight hours to get married up here—and only two hours to get buried! But a month ago I would have said that it was about the correct ratio, at that."

Terry grinned as he finished the pack and threw it on the floor near the door, then sat beside the Major on the cot.

"Major, I want to send up a gift for Ahma by the first runner the postoffice people send through. It's hard to decide what to give her, because she is entirely different from other girls, and the usual bridal gifts would hardly do. Can't you help me out?"

For a minute the Major pondered heavily: "How about a mirror? She is twenty years old and has never seen her own reflection."

"Just the thing! Enter the civilizing influence of vanity in the Hill Country!"

Terry drew a notebook from his shirt pocket. "Major, I have jotted down a list of things we are going to need for this work up here. I thought it would be better if I had a definite program to submit to the Governor, with estimate of appropriations necessary, and so on. First I listed those things you will need in order to build and furnish your house: cook stoves, lamps, dishes, window glass, and so on. I think I have included everything, so just run over those things you will need to begin this work."

For an hour earnestly they discussed the problems the Major would confront pending Terry's return to take up the work. They listed a wide variety of needs—pigs, chickens, medicines, books, tools, seeds: contingent upon the Governor's approval, they outlined several months of planting, trail making, establishment of regular communication with the lowlands, selection of school teachers, of a health officer—all of the varied instruments needed for the initial work of elevating the tribesmen out of their barbarism.

Dawn had dimmed their torches when they finished. For a while they sat silent, Terry happy in the outcome of this strange adventure in the Hills, the Major thrilling with the joy that had come to him.

The Major broke the silence: "Terry, I AM a chump! All this time I've forgotten to tell you that a captain's commission is waiting your acceptance in Zamboanga!"

He went on, slowly: "Are you sure that you can come back here for a year—after your honeymoon? Maybe she—your wife—won't wish to come."

"Yes, she will." Terry was confident. "It will be for only one year, and then—"

"And then what?" the Major demanded after a while.

"Then—back home, among my own people. I left home foolishly, Major. I was

restless—looking for a dragon to slay. But I have had a year in which to think—and I see things differently. During the time I was sick up here I—I ... well, I know now that a man need not cross the world to find service: he can be just as useful in preventing bunions as in—as in such lucky ventures as this."

"Preventing bunions?" The Major was puzzled.

But Terry did not answer. He had risen to finish his preparations for the journey down.

"Just one more thing, Terry. You promised to tell me how you started that little avalanche—the 'sign.'"

Something of the serenity faded from Terry's face as he turned to explain: "I had been up there several times, and had noticed a deep crevice that split the platform from the parent rock. It would have fallen within a few months. I carried up some softwood wedges, drove them into the fault, poured in a lot of water and expansion did the rest."

The Major visualized the toil and peril of lugging heavy logs up the spiral trail at night. "Why didn't you let me help?" he demanded.

"Well, Ahma kept guard for me, and that was enough. If I had been caught I could probably have talked myself out of the scrape, but it might have gone harder with you. Luckily the timbers I used for wedges were buried in the slide."

The Major's face clouded swiftly: "Say, Terry! That scoundrel Pud-Pud said that he saw you that night—he can ruin the thing yet if he talks!"

Terry shook his head, a little sorrowfully: "No, Pud-Pud will never talk to anybody about anything again. I got to Ohto too late: they had already executed sentence."

"What did they do with him?"

"Shot him full of darts and turned him loose in the Dark Forest. So I confessed to Ohto that I contrived the 'sign.' Of course I made him understand that you had nothing to do with the—trickery."

"What did he say—what is he going to do about it?" The Major was anxious.

"He had known about it all the time—his men have trailed every step we have taken, watched everything we have done."

A slow blush mounted the Major's rugged features as he thought of the possibility that secret onlookers had witnessed his meeting with Ahma just before the wedding ceremony when he had sought to teach her the White Man's customs of caress. The flush persisted as he turned to Terry.

"There's one thing I forgot to ask you to buy for me. I want a good talking machine, with plenty of records." He paused, then continued abstractedly: "She can keep it in her house."

Terry looked up in astonishment. "In *her* house? Aren't you both going to live in the same house?"

"No. Not till you send a missionary up here to marry us. I don't figure that two days of savage rites constitutes a marriage—but I'm going to have a deuce of a time trying to explain it to Ahma!"

Terry nodded sympathetically and walked the springy floor a dozen times, nonplussed by the Major's dilemma. Pausing in his preoccupation before the open window he noted vaguely that the nuptial fires were yellowing before the approach of dawn: a moment and he started violently as the solution struck him and he whirled upon the dejected groom with beaming countenance.

"Say!" he shouted, "I'm certainly not going down with you two only half-married—she a bride and you not a groom! You forget that as Senior Inspector of Constabulary I am an ex-officio Justice of the Peace! Come on!"

He lifted the Major by the arm and shot him through the doorway with an exuberant shove that left him no alternative save a jarring leap to the ground. Terry landed beside him as light as a cat, and catching him by the elbow he hurried him on through the woods and into the fading light of the big fires that burned before Ohto's house.

Terry, his eyes dancing joyously, broke up the dance with which a hundred Hill People were keeping the ceremonial pot boiling, and despatched two women to fetch the bride, who had sought a brief respite from the interminable ritual. Shortly Ahma appeared before them, her dark eyes shadowed with fatigue, but radiant with exaltation.

Understanding from Terry's few words that the Major desired that they be united also in accordance with the rites of his own people, she stepped quietly before Terry and took the Major's outstretched hand. The crowd of natives, who had crowded about them, waited the alien ritual curiously.

Ahma was clad in the white costume in which the Major had first seen her. A scarlet hibiscus blossom, the Hillmen's nuptial flower, was thrust in her black hair, but there was no other addition to her scant covering.

Possessed of a sudden spirit of banter Terry turned to the Major: "Before I begin, Major, I wish to congratulate you upon having won to the bliss of matrimony without violating that bachelor formula which you so often boasted."

"What formula?"

Terry's voice deepened in mimicry: "'No petticoats for mine!'"

A moment he enjoyed the Major's embarrassment, then composed himself to the business in hand, happy, confident.

But—the competent Terry fumbled. Swept away in the exuberance of having found a way out for the Major, he had forgotten that, never having exercised his

legal privilege of joining in marriage in a province where all of the natives were either Catholic or Mohammedan, he was wanting in the phraseology the ceremony demanded.

Vainly he sought inspiration in a sky chill with the pale lights of daybreak. He shuffled his feet nervously, scowled at the ring of brown-skinned spectators, looked at his watch. As the sweat of worry appeared upon his white forehead he drew his handkerchief and wiped his face vigorously, then blew his nose resoundingly. This last device seemed to serve.

He turned to the serene couple who waited patiently: "Do you, John Bronner, take this woman, Ahma—Ahma of the Hills, to be your lawful wedded wife, to love and cherish and to—er—provide for?"

"I do," said the Major. He was proud of Terry—trust the Constabulary to see a thing through!

Terry was triumphant in his success. He unconsciously drew up his slim, muscular figure as he turned to the bride, focussing his gaze upon the blossom in the waves of jet locks that tumbled smoothly about the downcast head.

"And do you, Ahma of the Hills, take this man, John Bronner, to be your wedded lawful husband, to love and to—er—care for when he—er—is sick?"

She caught the groom's whispered instructions and grasped the wonderful import of the unknown words that Terry had spoken. Twice her silent lips formed the two words of response in soundless practice, then she looked up squarely into Terry's eyes and pronounced them.

"I do."

Either the clear voice was too rich with gladness, or else she should not have turned the starry eyes so suddenly upon him. Lost for a long moment in the splendor of the vision opened up to him, he forced himself back to the duty of

the minute. But he was off the track again.

He floundered for an opening. Bits of biblical and legal phrases raced through his tortured brain, but none seemed appropriate to this situation. The haunt of the dark eyes obscured his vision, the limpid "I do," filled his ears. "I do." The significance of the words brought him back to the point of interruption, and he turned to them, desperate, vague.

"You do? You do, eh—you both do ... well, ... join hands! I do say and declare this twenty-third day of January that you are man and wife in accord with the law of this land, and now—"

He glared at the grinning beneficiary of the service, and finished: "And now—and now what I—what God and I have joined let no man put asunder ... till death do us part ... so help me God, Amen!"

In an agony of torment he ripped through the crowd and raced to the shack, where the Major joined him after taking Ahma into Ohto's house. It was now broad daylight, and the huts were emptying of the crowd waking to take up the burden of fiesta.

Terry buckled up his pack, joining in the Major's mirth.

"But you are married all right. I will send you up a certificate as soon as I reach Zamboanga, all signed and sealed and everything."

They became serious in thought of imminent separation. Now that the time had come Terry dreaded leaving his friend alone in the Hills.

"I will relieve you in three months, Major," he said.

"You needn't hurry—don't forget I'm on a honeymoon, too!"

Terry hesitated, then risked the question that had been bothering him: "After we come—what are you going to do? Will Ahma be ready to go below?"

"No, she will not. I am figuring on leaving her here a few months—your wife can teach her to—to dress, and all that. And I can't take her away so long as Ohto lives. After that, I want to take her to the States. She learns fast, Terry,—and I want her to see Europe—she will learn a lot there, too!"

The old woman brought them their breakfast. The Major hurried through the meal and left to secure a guide to take Terry down, explaining that he would join him in the woods. Terry ate under the sorrowing eyes of the faithful woman, and when he finished he presented her with the only gaud that remained to him, the gold medallion from his fob. She scurried out to display it, the proudest woman, save one, in all the Hills.

Slinging the pack across his shoulders he turned for a last look at the little hut that had sheltered him. Within its cramped walls he had suffered, had known grave peril, and great joy. A hint of the old wistfulness flickered about the corner of his mouth, then he left the hut and strode through the clearing into the woods, halting to wave cheerfully at the Hillmen who somberly watched the departure of their future chief.

He dipped over the edge of the plateau and found the Major awaiting him with Ahma and the young warrior who was to guide him down. From where they stood at the edge of a wide glade they could see far down over the tops of the trees that matted the slope. In the clear morning air the mists which gleamed over the distant Gulf shone white as billowed snow. There lay Davao! Davao, then Zamboanga, then—! A fiercely glad light blazed in Terry's gray eyes, then darkened in anticipation of leaving the Major alone and with that melancholy with which all men face the knowledge that even as Life turns the pages of existence into its happiest chapter, she closes each finished page forever.

The Major spoke first. "This guide knows the shortest route. He will take you safe past all the man traps—you should sleep but one night on the trail. Give my regards to Lindsey, Sears,—everybody."

Ahma looked from one to the other, not quite understanding what they said, but understanding fully what they did not say. That showed in the face of each.

"Major, I have never said anything about your—how I feel about your risking the Hills to search for me, when it meant almost certain death."

Death!... For an instant the Major again stood helpless in the dark woods behind Lindsey's plantation embraced in coils of steel that quivered, and heard the crash of delivering shots.... He searched the white face, in which the lines of suffering from a chivalrously contracted fever still lingered. An extraordinary warm cataract suddenly obscured his vision.

"Sus-marie-hosep!" he spluttered. "Good-by."

Their hands gripped hard in an abiding friendship, then Terry turned to Ahma doubtfully, at a loss as to how to bid adieu to this creature of the Hills who knew so few of the white man's words or usages. He found, too, a source of embarrassment in her new capacity of wife. As she gazed up at him he looked away in boyish confusion.

The Major grasped the situation and addressed her very slowly in English: "Ahma, say good-by to him."

As she nodded brightly, understanding, the Major turned to Terry as proud as Punch: "You see—she is learning fast! Can't you imagine her, all dressed up and everything, in Europe?"

Terry focussed his eyes safely upon the white line that marked the part in her hair, and carefully pronounced each English word.

"Ahma, I am leaving for a while. Understand?"

She bobbed the dark head: "I do," she said.

The memories wrought by the limpid "I do" were a bit unsettling. He addressed

the jet locks again: "Good-by."

She looked at the capable hand he extended toward her, puzzled at the gesture, then looked at the Major. He said a single word in dialect and her small white teeth glistened in a smile of comprehension. She approached close to Terry.

"I know. You say—good-night. I know how—to good-night."

Her concentration upon the unaccustomed pronunciations was bewitching. To relieve the strain of embarrassment he felt in her closeness to him, he turned to the grinning Major.

"As you say—she *does* learn quickly," he offered, rather vaguely.

She came closer still. "Yes, I know—how to—good-night!" she trilled: "Good-night is kiss!"

She called it "Keez" but Terry understood. If he did not then he did an instant later when he felt the clasp of warm round arms, the molding pressure of a soft form and the swift impress of full sensitive lips.

Loosed, he straightened up. His blush was explosive. Bewildered, he shrugged the light pack higher on his shoulders and gestured his readiness to the warrior who had stood watching the inexplicable ways of these strange white folk.

Following the Hillman, Terry set off across the glade. Midway down the green sward he wheeled.

"I should say she *DOES* learn fast!" he called. "You won't need to take *HER* to Europe!"

The two stood watching him as he followed the powerful little savage. As the forest swallowed up the slim form the Major blinked rapidly, and gripped the little hand he held.

"Sus-marie-hosep!" he exclaimed huskily. "But won't they be glad to see him in Davao! And in Zamboanga!"



CHAPTER XVIII

THE FOX SKIN

Terry pushed the hardy Hillman to his limit, so that when night fell they were far down among the foothills, the Dark Forest behind them. At daylight the Hillman was proudly mounting homeward, Terry's belt tightly buckled about his naked trunk. The white man's last dispensable possession had gone as a reward for the service.

Terry's joyous urge carried him swiftly, so that in an hour he dropped out of the foothills and into the heat of the jungled lowlands. At noon he climbed Sears' steps and dropped into a porch chair, his clothes wet with perspiration and torn by contact with brush and thorn, for he had cut straight through the woods.

He had nearly emptied Sears' water bottle when he saw the big planter coming out of a wonderful growth of hemp. Sears advanced slowly, deep in thought, not looking up till he had mounted the last step. At sight of Terry's grinning features he recoiled violently, then as the lad rose, he jumped forward to wring his hand furiously. Incapable of coherent speech for several minutes, he at last mastered his vocal cords.

"Man! I thought you were a ghost!" he cried.

Terry sketched his journey into the Hills, and added a brief account of the experiences he and the Major had undergone. Learning that the Major was also safe, Sears called a Bogobo boy and issued instructions that sent him scurrying into one of the Bogobo huts. In a few minutes he returned bearing a small agong and striker.

Under Sears' directions he hung it upon a pole in front of the house and struck it

sharply, again and again. As the deep notes carried out through the still, hot woods Sears motioned to him to desist and turned to Terry.

"Listen!" he exclaimed, intent, his hand on Terry's shoulder.

In a moment another agong, somewhere close to the south, sounded several times, then another further away, then another, another. Soon the noon stillness of the brush pulsed with the mystic multi-tones of scores of far agongs rung from plantations. Slowly the murmur grew as hundreds of agongs rung by Bogobos in the foothills took up the signal, flooding the hemplands with a glad, bronze chorus.

Sears gripped Terry's shoulder hard, his eyes brimming.

"That's the signal we fixed up," he said. "Welcome home!"

He hovered over Terry, questioning, commenting, incredulous over the Major's marriage, overjoyed that the quinine he had given Terry had been a factor in his recovery. After lunch Terry borrowed Sears' best pony and rode away with the planter's profane benedictions in his ears.

He rode hard, but each familiar landmark, each twist in trail, each sight of river, each expanse of glistening hemp plants, thrilled him with a sense of homecoming. Once, drawing up to cool and water his pony, he caught the sparkle of the sunny Gulf, his nostrils sensed its tang, and with the surge of thanksgiving for the wonderful good fortune that had attended him, he first realized the strain of the past weeks.

Great as was his hurry to reach Davao—an hour's tardiness might mean the loss of the weekly steamer—he spent a half-hour with Lindsey, who had ridden out to the trail in the hope of intercepting him. From Lindsey he learned more of the suspense that had hung over the Gulf since his disappearance, the deep anxiety that had spread among the Bogobos and silenced every agong in the foothills.

"And Terry—the night the Giant Agong rang up there—we most went crazy!"

"We wondered if you heard it, Lindsey."

"Heard it! Heard it? It reached clear over on the East Coast. Boynton heard it over there."

Terry pressed on. Three miles below he found Casey was out to meet him, and further on, Burns. At four o'clock he dismounted to greet some Bogobos whom he overtook on the trail. Pushing Sears' little brown hard, he rode into Davao at five o'clock.

The plaza was crowded. Warned of his coming by the agong chorus, the whole town had turned out, Americans, Filipinos, Chinese, several Spaniards and Moros. The sleepy, dusty square waked to their noisy welcome.

"El Solitario!! El Conquistador del Malabanan!"

Laughing, misty eyed with the warmth of their greeting, he stood in the center of the jostling crowd, shaking hands, calling each white, native and Mongolian by name. Then the Macabebes claimed him and swept him into the privacy of the cuartel.

The jealous Matak had waited till Terry entered the house that his welcome might be unshared.

"Master, I know you come back. All time I know," he assured him gravely, then looked him over and sent out for the barber. Solemn and efficient as ever, he hustled his master under the shower, helped him into the first starched clothes he had known in five weeks, then went into the kitchen to frighten the cook into greater haste in preparation of dinner.

Barber shears, soap and clean linens restored Terry to his usual nattiness, and he delighted the cook with the zest with which he approached a good dinner after

the weeks of the crude and undiversified fare of the Hillmen. Halfway through dinner he beckoned to Matak who stood with folded arms near the kitchen door as matter of fact as though the routine of the household had never been disturbed.

"Matak, when is the mail boat due?"

"She come this morning, go noontime."

And this was the twenty-fourth. Terry's keen disappointment was apparent to the watchful Moro.

"Master, you want go to Zamboanga?" he said.

"Yes. I must go as soon as possible, Matak."

"Take little boat Major come in. She still here."

Terry jumped up from the dinner table and hurried to the dock and found the speedboat tied up alongside. After a hurried conference with Adams he raced back to the house, where the forehanded Matak was already packing his bags. Terry added a steamer trunk which held his civilian clothes, and as dusk fell master and man stepped aboard the frail craft. Adams was ready. A sharp thrust of foot quickened the engine into life, and they swung in a short circle. Straightening, motors roaring, the stern sucked deep as they sped in swift flight into the south.

From his seat in the stern Terry watched the light fade out of the western sky. The stars invaded the deserted field and dimly outlined the rim of the mountains, a smooth line save where Apo reared high in the west. For a moment the dark peak seemed lonely to him, but he knew that the Major was happy on the pine clad height.... After Ohto's passing, his own responsibility, the guidance of a child-tribe, would be a heavy one ... a year of that, perhaps, and then—but first ... his heart throbbed in vivid realization of all that awaited him in Zamboanga.

Adams hovered about his engines, happy in Terry's return and in this opportunity to render him service. Matak stretched out on a cross seat, unhappy in the deafening roar of the motors and the rhythmic rise and fall of the speeding craft in the smooth landswells.

As they rounded Sarangani in the middle of the calm moonlit night Adams left the cockpit long enough to cover Terry with a thick blanket, for he had succumbed to the monotonous chorus of the motors and the lull of the bewitching night at sea.

As the calm weather held, Adams steered straight for Zamboanga, putting out to sea in the little motorboat. When Terry woke Basilan was in sight, and at five o'clock they rushed down the tidal current of the Straits and eased into the slip alongside the dock.

Adams, grimy, worn with his long vigil, grinned contentedly under Terry's warm thanks. Leaving Matak to secure a bulcart to transport his luggage to the Major's house Terry hurried down the dock and entered the Government Building. The clerks had left for the day but at Terry's knock the Governor himself threw wide the door.

Profound thankfulness lit Mason's intellectual face. Grasping Terry's hand he led him into the office.

"And the Major?" he questioned.

"Well—and very happy, sir!"

Keen-eyed, observant, in the moment of welcome the Governor had sensed the new Terry, read the new contentment and confidence manifest in his face and bearing.

In a few minutes Terry had sketched his experiences to his eager auditor. The Governor contented himself with a bare outline, though his eyes glistened. The

Hills opened!

"Captain Terry," he said, "come in to-morrow and tell me the details—I will give you the entire morning. To-morrow I will try to tell you how happy I am in your safe return, and in the service you have rendered this Government."

He rose, beaming with the news it was his privilege to impart.

"You had best run along now, Captain. You will find three anxious—friends—awaiting you at the Major's house. They expected to arrive to-morrow but caught the transport and docked yesterday. They will be relieved to see you, for I had to tell them something of the uncertainty we felt regarding your—whereabouts. Take my car, and run along!"

And Terry ran along! He flew down the steps and into the automobile and in three minutes was leaping up the stairway into the Major's house.

Ellis, fatter, somehow absurd in tropic whites, met him at the entrance. Meeting halfway around the world from where they had parted, choking with the end of the dread suspense into which the Governor's guarded references to Terry's disappearance had plunged him, Ellis' big heart thumped in glad relief, but true to the traditions of his lifetime environment he strove to repress it, to appear as casual as though they had been in daily association. Pumping Terry's hand spasmodically, he measured the ecstatic lad with extravagant care, studied him from crown to heel.

"Dick, how do you do it?" he asked.

"Do what, Ellis?" Terry's voice was unsteady, too.

"Keep so fit in this oven of a country—you're as hard as nails!"

Terry's unsteady laugh rang through the big bungalow: "Go on, you fakir—you're crying right now!"

Ellis was. He turned away as Susan rushed out of an adjoining room. Laughing, sobbing, she threw herself upon her brother, held him away to study his appearance, hugged him tighter, pouring out a volume of questions she offered him no opportunity to answer.

Five minutes, and she recovered sufficient reason to catch the significance of Ellis' vehement gestures toward the second of the row of four bedrooms that opened off the sala. Understanding, she left Terry and followed Ellis into their room, closing the door with a bang intended as a signal to another who listened.

Terry waited, idly stroking the long frond of an air plant that hung in the wide window near where he stood. He wondered, vaguely, that he should be so collected, almost unconcerned, in the face of what awaited him. He saw the door open slowly, wider, then arrest as if the hand on the knob had faltered, and in the instant his self-possession deserted him.

His heart skipped a beat, then accelerated into a heavy thumping that seemed to fill the room with pulsing muffled roar. He moistened his lips as the door moved again, opened wide.

Deane stepped into the room, pale, her wide blue eyes fixed upon him. Slender, rounded, white of arm and throat, she had fulfilled gloriously all of the fair promise of her youth. The rich heritage of womanhood had stamped the softly curved form and the sweetly pensive face. Virginal, she was a mother of men.

He faced her from the window, powerless to move, to speak, but there was that in his eyes that made words unnecessary. Scarce breathing, atremble, she saw the steady gray eyes blaze with a light no other had ever seen, ever would see.

To him she suddenly became unreal, and his mind reverted to another hour when they had stood facing each other. Again she stood before him in the dimly lit hall, sobbing, and with the memory came a surging realization of what he might have lost. Unconsciously his last words to her, spoken that Christmas night, sprang

brokenly to his lips as he held out his arms:

"Don't wait, Deane-girl, don't wait."

With the sudden deepening of the wistful lines of his mouth she felt a burning rush of tears, and at his words she crossed to him, starry eyed, full red lips aquiver.

There never was a merrier party of four than theirs that night. The questions flew back and forth, answers clipped short by new and more pressing queries. Ellis and Susan were full of the newcomers' interest in the country, its peoples and customs. Deane, quieter, was interested most in Terry's work, in Davao, in the story of the Hills. Terry learned of the home friends. Father Jennings, Doctor Mather, Mr. Hunter, a score of others, had sent messages to him. Deane had brought special greetings from his friends on the Southside, and a garish picture of little Richard Terry Ricorro. Half of her larger trunk was filled with silver and linens which had poured in when news of the purpose of her journey had sifted through Crampville.

They were seated on the cool veranda at coffee when the Governor's car drew up outside the gate, and the chauffeur entered with a note.

Dear Captain Terry:

This car is yours throughout the stay of your—will not the word "family" soon properly cover all three of them?

Please use it freely. I have another entirely suited for my present needs.

I am very happy to-night, happy in your safe return and in the achievement you have wrought in the name of the Government it is my unmerited privilege to head. And this happiness will be the greater for knowing that you are driving through this glorious evening by the side of her who came so far to join her life with yours.

MASON.

After Terry had read the note aloud Deane added her pleas to his that Susan and Ellis should share the car with them. But they would have none of it. When

Susan wavered, Ellis became emphatic.

So the two rode through the tropic night alone, that night and during the glorious evenings that followed for a week. They came to know every village along the ribboned roads, each grove of tall palms, each stretch of beach where smooth highways ran along the coast. She loved the island empire.

They talked as such do talk. The third night, as they rolled through the moonlight down the San Ramon road, he found courage to broach the one subject he had hesitated to mention.

"The Governor wants me to stay a year," he faltered. "A year up in the Hills."

She had expected it, was ready. She looked full up at him, and in the soft light her lovely face shone with a strange beauty that humbled him.

"Dick, 'and thy people shall be my people.'"



They planned their house in the Hills, bought and stored picturesque odds and ends of furniture and fittings; brasses, embroideries, carved teak: and he outlined their honeymoon, which was to be a three-months' ramble through Japan, the magic lover's land. They arranged no exact itinerary, just a wandering through Miajima, Kyoto, Nikko,—a score of out of the way places.

The mornings he spent with the enthusiastic Governor, planning, discussing. Two tons of supplies went out to the Major the fourth day.

"I put in an assortment of presents for him to give to the Hillmen," the Governor told him. "And plenty of matches—you say they went wild over those he packed up. They will be rich!"

"Governor, the Hillmen are the richest people I have ever seen."

The Governor was puzzled: "How?"

"They have everything they want. Land for the clearing, a spear, cotton growing wild on trees for such clothes as they wear, meat in the forest, bamboo to cut for shelter against wind and rain, upland rice springing up from barely scratched soils. No social striving, no politics, no taxes. All their wants are satisfied—was Croesus as rich?"

"Then you do not believe in civilizing them—it means introducing new wants—some of which they never will satisfy!"

"Yes, I do, Governor. Civilization means doctors, less suffering, longer life: schools and books: agriculture and better diet: commerce and clothes: churches, and morality—and soap!"

The day came when Terry and Deane drove down the San Ramon road where the Governor had preceded them, with Ellis and Susan and a score of the new friends they had made in Zamboanga. Wade had insisted that his spacious bungalow be the scene of their wedding.

Even before he had wrought the house into a fairy-land of palm and cadena and hibiscus the great flowered sweeps of lawn and grove set by the sea had been an ideal setting. Ellis, given his choice of functions, had elected to officiate as best man, so the Governor was happy in giving the bride away. Susan cried, as matrons of honor always do, as she stood with them in the fret-work of shadows under the palms which stirred gently in the off-sea breeze.

None of those most concerned remembered many of the details of the evening, excepting Matak, who met there a young Moro maid and found her fair.

They returned to Zamboanga under enchanting stars, and at nine o'clock they saw Ellis and Susan leave, for they were returning home at once through the Suez, taking steamer first for Borneo and Java. Their own boat left an hour later for Manila, Hong Kong and Nagasaki.

Bidding Ellis good-by, Terry woke from the dream in which he had moved through the afternoon.

"Ellis, do not sell the shoe store. We may be home in a year, and I'll want to pitch into something."

"But you'd never fool with that after—after all this over here!"

Terry laughed happily: "You never can tell, Ellis. I am learning lessons every day!"

Later, Ellis sought to dry Susan's tears. "Dick, you're a fine lover! After all these years of search for things for Deane you failed to give her a wedding gift!"

Terry flushed miserably, for it was true. But Deane thrilled the more happily for the utter absorption in her that had expelled all other things from his mind: she knew that Susan had prompted him to both engagement and wedding rings.

From the pier they watched Ellis and Susan at the rail till the altering course of the brilliantly lighted steamer swept them from sight.

An hour later their own liner carried them northward through the dark Straits.

The deck was deserted, dark. They sat close, in long steamer chairs, watching the mysterious coastline of Mindanao, the shadowy masses of distant mountains that seemed less substance than opaque obstruction of the warm, starry sky. Neither spoke. It was the hour of fullest gratitude, of mutual dedication. The night about them was filled with that humming heard only on a big ship plowing through a calm sea after sundown, the drone of light winds through lofty rigging, the heavy slipping of displaced water, the muffled roar of great engines throbbing in the deep hold.

Eight bells rang the midnight hour. Deane rose, whispering that she had a few things to unpack, bidding him come in ten minutes. Leaning over him, she

smoothed his hair lightly with her two hands, curling about her fingers the obstinate scalp lock that always would stand forth from his crown. Reaching up, he took her cool hands and held them tightly against his cheeks. Releasing her, he watched the progress of the buoyant form down the long deck, his soul lit with the flame that warms all mankind.

The moon, in its last quarter, peered over the dark rim of the mountains. When its lower tip cleared, he rose.

When he joined her in their stateroom, her eyes filled happily as she watched the fine, white face.

The fox skin lay on the cabin floor before her berth.

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Transcriber's Notes:

Every effort has been made to replicate this text as faithfully as possible, including obsolete and variant spellings and other inconsistencies. The transcriber made the following changes to the text to correct obvious errors:

1. p. 70, "Sear interrupted" changed to "Sears interrupted"
2. p. 81, "wierd-shaped" changed to "weird-shaped"
3. p. 96, "guaged" changed to "gauged"
4. p. 189, "move toward the fringe" changed to "moved toward the fringe"
5. p. 200, "spit into two factions" changed to "split into two factions"
6. p. 207, "beneath their eerie" changed to "beneath their aerie"
7. p. 219, "the swind swept crag" changed to "the wind swept crag"

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