Published Weekly

The Curtis Publishing Company

Cyrus H. K. Curtis, President

C. H. Ludington, Vice-President and Treasurer
F. S. Collins, General Business Manager
Walter D. Fuller, Secretary
William Boyd, Advertising Director

Independence Square, Philadelphia

London: 6, Henrietta Street
Covent Garden, W. C.

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

Founded A° D° 1728 by Benj. Franklin

George Horace Lorimer
EDITOR

Churchill Williams, F. S. Bigelow,
A. W. Neall, Arthur McKeogh,
T. B. Costain, Associate Editors

Entered as Second-Class Matter, November 18, 1879, at the Post Office at Philadelphia, Under the Act of March 3, 1879
Additional Entry as Second-Class Matter at Columbus, Ohio, at Decatur, Illinois, at Chicago, Illinois, and at Indianapolis, Ind.

Entered as Second-Class Matter at the Post-Office Department, Ottawa, Canada

Volume 194 | 5c. THE COPY 10c. in Canada | PHILADELPHIA, PA., SEPTEMBER 3, 1921 | $2.00 THE YEAR by Subscription | Number 10

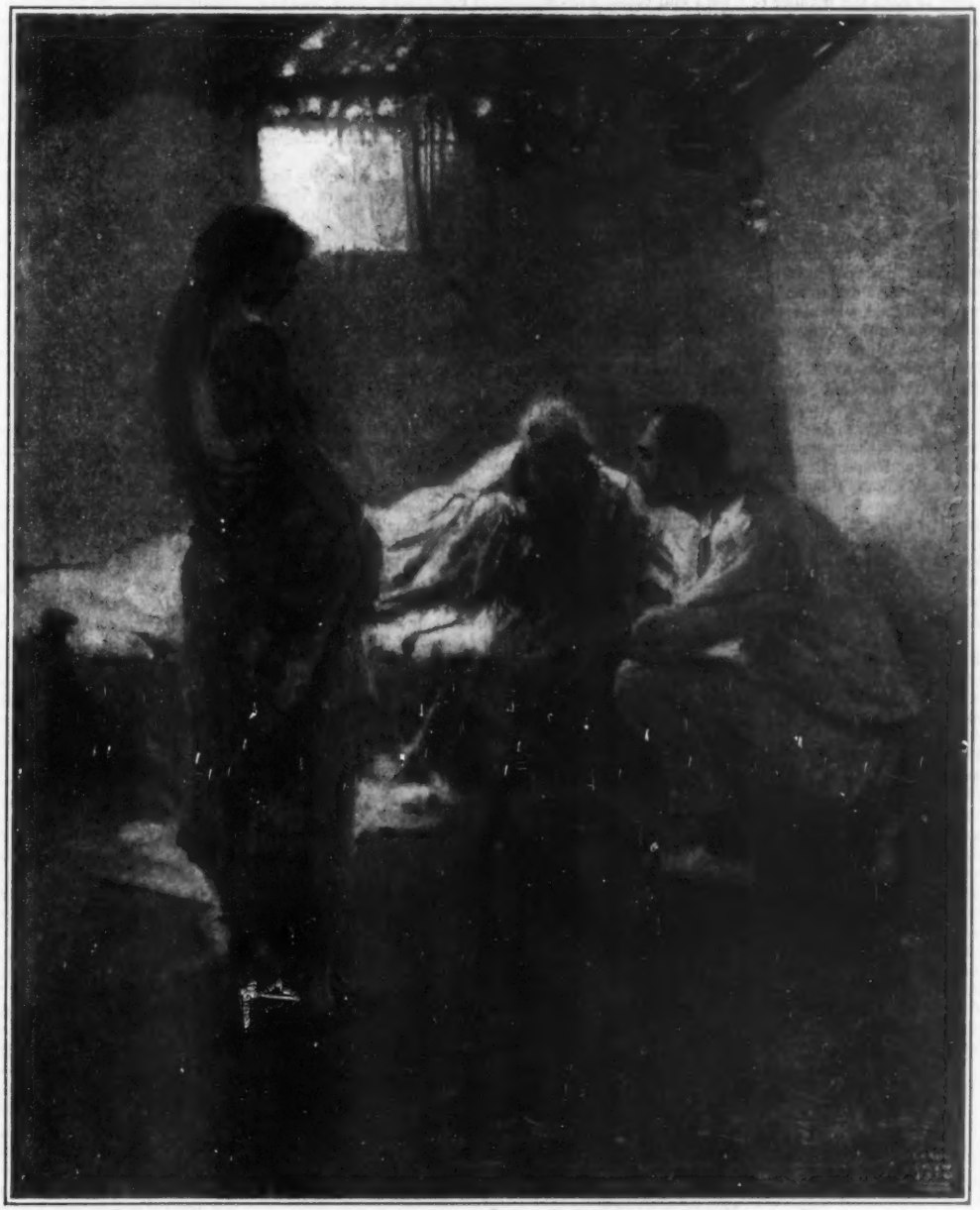
MOB OF THREE

By Herschel S. Hall

ILLUSTRATED BY CLARK FAY

WE WERE a mob of three, Scrobe, Labo and I, on our way to kill Puysegur, somewhere over there on the Naranja River, whither he had fled with the helpless, pitiable slip of a girl he had bestially stolen from her father's house. Slowly and painfully we were tunneling through the dense, muggy, tropical jungle, digging out a path along which we could travel to do our work of justice. Four *mozos* worked ahead of us, swinging their keen-edged, glistening machetes, cutting and slashing and hacking at the snarled and looped and twisted vines, chopping at the tough interlaced palm grasses and mighty ferns, slicing off the giant cannalike plants and toppling them over to the right and to the left, smashing down and trampling underfoot the slimy, slippery, mushroomy growths that choked the swales and hollows over which we had to pass. We were a mob, on our way to kill a man; and as mobs are ever in a hurry to seize their victims and get done with their work, so were we in a hurry to come to the Naranja and get done with ours. But our progress was nerve-rackingly slow, and many a kilometer lay between us and the Naranja.

Sopping wet with perspiration were we three, though we did no more than move along at less than tortoise speed, following the tunnelers ahead of us. We had sweat until our clothing was soaked to the last stitch, until we were weakened by this excessive outflowing from the pores of our skins. And we breathed heavily and laboriously, we three, white men, for there in the dank depths of the muggy malodorous jungle it was as if we were passing through and inhaling into our laboring lungs warm fogs of sweetish-tasting invisible steam. We were attacked, set upon and driven into an ecstasy of miserableness by ten thousand hordes of insects that bit and stung and gouged and bored into the exposed parts of our bodies, that crept beneath our clothing and made race courses of our sensitive skins, that went exploring into our ears, into our nostrils, into our mouths when they were opened, even attempted our eyes. I shudder now as I think of our exquisite wretchedness. And all the while came floating up to our nostrils that foul, nauseating, stinking smell of the dank moldy jungle; all the while on our tongues played the sweetish, emetical taste of the air we breathed; all the while before our eyes the ugly—— Pah! Loathing, I live again those days in the jungle, fighting through to kill Puysegur. This moment I see it all as I saw it then—the four half-naked Indians ahead of us, slashing and cutting and hacking down the luxuriant growths of vine and grass and giant plants; the two men, my companions, Scrobe and Labo, dripping with perspiration, grimy with a hundred kinds of dirt, fighting the flies and gnats and mosquitoes and stinging ants that swarmed about them, with their faces and hands splotched with a thousand little red splotches of dried blood, marks of the bite of the tiny *rodador* that assailed us in its myriad millions. I hear it all yet—the swish and smack of the machetes, the crashing down of the severed fern fronds and palms and cannalike plants, the squawking of parrots and macaws in the trees above us, the screaming of droves of black monkeys, the muttered mumblings of the *mozos*, the senseless cursing of my two companions. I sense it all again in my nostrils—that nasty, musty smell of an excess of decayed and rotting vegetation, the malodorous vapors from the fungi through which we at times waded as through the muck of uncleaned stables, and the stench beneath our feet of the carrion of snake and lizard and toad and little things long dead—— Pah! Let me hasten to the telling of my story, finish and forget!



"Puysegur? Not Puysegur!" The Words Came, Screamed, and He Sat Up Suddenly, Glaring at Me With Dilated Eyes

"I say, hang him!" shouted Labo, and he shook the coil of rope he was carrying.

"And I say, cut his throat!" yelled Scrobe in a louder voice. "Cut his throat, and while he is bleeding to death he will have time to think over this thing he has done! Give him a chance to repent of his sins before he dies!" And Scrobe's yellow fangs showed through his bristly mustache, and a lethargic twinkle came into his ferret eyes.

Labo sneered. "Pretty work, that'd be! Who ever heard of a mob cutting a man's throat?" he demanded disgustedly. "And a mob is what we are—mob of three. And if we're going to do a mob's work, I say let's do it right! Don't you say so too?"

He had appealed to me. I was lighting a cigarette at the moment, and I unnecessarily prolonged my efforts to set aglow the end of the little brown-paper cylinder I held between my lips. I hoped my delaying to make reply to his question might cause him to return to Scrobe. I did not wish to answer him; let the dispute over the method we were to employ in killing Puysegur be waged between them and settled between them.

It was the third time the question had been brought up since we had started for the Naranja. A little way out of Pichucalco, before we had left the beaten plantation paths and come to the untracked jungle, Scrobe had asked Labo why he carried a rope. "To hang Puysegur with," Labo had replied, and both of them had then laughed. But the following morning when the rope was again referred to they had argued, and not a little sharply, as to the manner by which Puysegur should be done to death; and now in the afternoon of our second day out they were shouting at each other. The matter disturbed me; I did not like it, this incipient quarrel that was looming up, and I was made uncomfortable by the question Labo had put to me—asked, I could see, to drag me into the controversy.

"Don't you say so too?"

Labo was again addressing me, pointedly now, repeating his question.

"What?" I asked.

"That a mob should do mob work right; that if we are going to kill Puysegur we must hang him."

"Of course we shall kill him," I returned. "But I fail to see why it is necessary for us here to elect the manner of his death. Indeed, I do not see how we can beforehand determine upon that manner, for circumstances may so alter whatever plans ——"

"Yes, but the principle of the thing!" interrupted Labo. "For a mob to cut a man's throat ——"

"If it's simply the death of Puysegur you want, and nothing else," Scrobe broke in, "why hang him? There are quicker ways to dispose of him. Why not shoot him from ambush with this?" And he touched with his dirty right hand the barrel of the high-power rifle that lay in the hollow of his left arm. "Or better, why not let one of us sneak in and poison his spring? You don't approve, eh? Why? Because a mob does not kill merely to remove—its first thought is always punishment, physical suffering, torture. Are we thinking only of depriving Puysegur of his life, making a corpse of him in the quickest possible way, or do we want to see him suffer for his crime? I know what I want, and I know what you want—both of you. I say we'll cut his throat—slowly!" And Scrobe's pinkish, ferret-like eyes gleamed down at me in such a way that I stirred uneasily.

"And I say we'll hang him—mob style!" declared Labo vehemently. "I'll hang him more slowly than you could ever cut his throat! Oh, I'll delay the end—leave it to me! I'll give him plenty of time to repent! Why, I'll strangle him so slowly ——"

"Look yonder!" I interrupted, pointing ahead. This gruesome talk of these two companions of mine was unnerving me, and for several minutes I had been searching for something to say that would turn the conversation into other channels, when my eyes chanced to wander ahead along the newly cut path, and I cried "Look yonder!"

We had come to the top of a little rise in the flat terrain over which we had been traveling all day. The jungle growth was markedly thinner there and the air was lighter and sweeter, and we had dropped down to rest. The four *mozos*, wearied with their steady labor of hours, had halted, too, on the descending slope of the slight elevation, thrown down their machetes, and sprawled themselves about over the worthless harvest of their knives.

A troop of black monkeys came swinging through the tree tops, chattering and screaming, making a bedlam of noise in the then still and gloomy and echoey forest. Catching sight of the Indians they had halted in their tree running to peer and peek and jabber and grimace, and, fascinated as the animals always are by the strange and unusual, they came dropping down the vines and limbs, clambering closer to the men lying on the ground, doubling their inquisitive cries as they came.

I saw one of the *mozos*, Primo Morales, our guide, the man who had brought in the news to Pichucalco of the whereabouts of Puysegur, look up at the approaching simians. His hand went quietly out and picked up the machete he had thrown down beside him, and he began bringing himself to his knees. Closer and closer came the little black animals, one of them, braver or more curious than the others, leading by a yard or more. Suddenly the Indian leaped to his feet, the machete went flying through the air, and the advanced monkey fell from the bush to which it had been clinging, its head completely severed from its body. We walked forward and with the four *mozos* began turning it over and examining it.

"*Buena comida!*" chuckled the Indian, Primo, grinning up at us.

"Says it's good eating," laughed Scrobe, translating the fellow's words for my benefit. "Maybe so, but I don't think I'll ask him for a bid to his banquet."

The *mozo* pulled over a slender young tree and tied the body of the dead animal to it, to be taken down and brought into camp by our six carriers, who were coming along with their heavy loads somewhere behind us.

"There's a sample of your throat cutting!" sneered Labo. "Pretty work! Pretty work! How much time was given the bloody monkey to meet his God, eh? No, sir, we'll hang ——"

"Oh, shut up!" commanded Scrobe savagely.

Labo subsided, and we resumed our slow, snail-paced advance in silence, following close behind the slashing, chopping, cutting *mozos*.

I was puzzled, bewildered, mystified by this strange talk, by these queer wishes and resolves of the two men. We were on our way to kill Puysegur for the foul and wicked thing he had done, and I—I cared not a whit by what means that death was to be accomplished. Let it be by bullet, knife or rope—it mattered not to me. Only let it be a quick death for the man, a sudden death; not the slow strangling of the drawn slip noose, but the sudden breaking of the neck by the clever hangman's knot, with the jagged, broken vertebral bones jabbing into the spinal cord and causing instantaneous cessation of life; not the deliberate severing of the jugular vein, with the leaping up before my eyes of that little scarlet fountain that I knew would follow, but the pointed steel straight into the heart; not a shot placed in this part of the body, another in that, a broken bone here, a ripped muscle there until the collapse of the human target came, but one speedy, certain bullet through the brain. I wanted it done quickly—that killing.

Scrobe had been wrong, wholly wrong, when he had intimated that I, as a member of that mob of three, wanted to see Puysegur suffer, wanted to see him tortured, wanted to hear him howl; and I should hotly have resented his implication had I not at the moment been so deeply engrossed in searching for something to say that would turn him and Labo away from their ugly topic. I wanted to see Puysegur killed; I wanted to help kill him—he deserved death—but that strangling rope hanging on Labo's shoulder, that bare knife stuck in Scrobe's belt were now causing me to shudder each time I glanced at them.

Had these two men turned suddenly savage? Had Puysegur's crime roused in them old atavistic lusts for cruelties and brutalities and acts inhuman? I began to fear. Scrobe's pinkish, ferrety eyes gleamed as I had never before seen them gleam, and Labo's licking of his puffy, sensual lips, always a habit with him, was now so constant that the sight revolted me. I began to fear I had not acted in all wisdom in allying myself with these two men; I began to doubt whether the thought of Puysegur's crime was the only thought at work in their brains; I began to wish I had moved with less haste to join them when they had invited me to become one of their mob and make it a mob of three. For what did I know of them, these two men hidden away from the world, there in the southernmost part of Mexico? Next to nothing. Two months before I had never seen either of them; I had never heard of them. A little more than two months before I should have hooted and laughed had anyone said to me that I was then on my hurrying way to the tropical jungle of southernmost Mexico, there to take employment under a man named Scrobe, to associate not infrequently with another man named Labo, and with these two to go on a death hunt for a third man named Puysegur. Yet here I was, in southernmost Mexico, and here was Scrobe and here was Labo, and we were on our way to kill Puysegur!

I Loathed Labo—He Was So Repulsively Unclean

Two months before Scrobe had picked me up at Coatzacoalcos. He had found me there in the little seaport town, sitting on the veranda of the Hotel of the Two Republics, gazing across the mile-wide mouth of the Coatzacoalcos River to the coconut groves on the farther side, wondering how long it would be before the Chinese manager of the hotel, who had refused me a bed last night and denied me breakfast and lunch to-day, would order me to quit sitting on his veranda.

For a half hour and more I had been aware that the tall, thin, cadaverous-faced man in cheap, white, none too clean cottons, sitting over there, the third post of the veranda removed from me, was throwing inquisitive glances in my direction. Three or four times I had caught his eyes touching me as I had turned my face toward him, and even at the distance he sat removed from me, which was rather great for close observations, I had noticed the strange pinkish color of his eyes and their unusual shape and brilliancy—eyes of ferrets, they seemed to me.

He was not a prepossessing figure—far from it. His clothing was of the cheapest of white hard cotton in a sad state of wear and neglect—torn in some places, patched in others, faded, stained, spotty. It was dirty. And I could imagine his body, hidden, was dirty, too. A scraggy, bristly beard—not so much a beard as it was uncut hair—covered his thin bony face, and once when the smoke from the thick black cigar he was smoking poured up too strongly into his nostrils, and he tightened and drew back his lips, gripping the cigar between his front teeth in the manner cigar smokers have, I saw that those teeth, showing through his shapeless mustache, were yellow and broken and snaggy—almost fangy. I did not like the man.

At last he rose from his chair, yawned and stretched, and then paced the length of the veranda two or three times, to pause a few feet distant from my own chair and look at me hard.

"Up against it, kid?" he asked, not in the manner and voice of one who seeks to succor, who hopes to help; his question was nothing more than the question of the curious.

With a few more years added to my number I should not have replied so promptly to his query; I might even have denied my then unfortunate condition. At the most I should have returned a temporarily evasive answer. But I was young and immature—I was youth susceptible, I was youth friendless, I was youth penniless, I was youth homesick and lonely and adrift in a strange land; and my pulses leaped as these words of a stranger were addressed to me, repulsive though that person was to me, much as I had come to dislike him before he had spoken.

"Strictly!" I replied.

And I tried to smile, but failing miserably—for my heart came crawling up into my throat—I turned my suddenly misty eyes back to the coconut groves on the farther bank of the mile-wide river.

"I've been there myself—more than once!" laughed the man in cheap dirty cottons, dragging forward a chair to the side of my own, seating himself in it, and hoisting his illy shod feet to the veranda railing. A strange and offensive alcoholic odor struck into my nostrils as he took his place close to me—I had smelled the smell before, there in Coatzacoalcos, passing by the drinking places of the city. "Well, how did it happen?"

No note of sympathy was in his words, though to tell the truth I did not at that moment notice its absence; he was simply looking for a story. A few years more to my number and I should have resented the lack of that note of sympathy in such a question; I should have demanded it, and not receiving it I should not have made myself this man's entertainer, the story of my misfortune his entertainment. But I was young—I was youth, youth communicative and garrulous, and I told him.

How at my coming of age, gaining my freedom from a testy, cranky guardian, I had straightway flown away to Europe with the whole of my paltry patrimony in my purse—that was the beginning of my narrative, for I knew he could take no interest in anything gone before. Of the wild and joyous and fun-filled weeks I spent in Paris—when I told him in detail of them he smiled a yellow-toothed smile. My description of my four desperate days at Monte Carlo and of the trouncing I received there at the roulette tables—flayed to my almost last louis d'or—caused him to chuckle. He found something to laugh loudly over in my recounting of my mad

scared flight from Monte Carlo to Marseilles, to Paris, to Calais, to Folkestone, to London, to Southampton, to Cardiff, advised but not assisted by wandering Americans I chanced to meet. And when I gave him that part of the story that had to do with my shipping as purser with Captain Churn, of the tramp steamer Strothersfield loading with coal for Coatzacoalcos, he fairly roared.

"Purser on a tramp, eh?" he shouted at me. "And you agreed to desert the ship when you reached your destination, didn't you? Oh, I know—I've sailed twice as purser on tramps. How did you manage it though, without a few dollars to slip to the skipper?"

"I play chess."

"Huh?"

"Captain Churn was a chess hound," I replied. "At first he would have nothing to do with me, though I begged him with tears in my eyes to put me into Mobile. You see, he was carrying coal to Coatzacoalcos, to go in ballast from there to Mobile, where he was to pick up a cargo of lumber for U. K. Very positively he refused my request—after he found out I could only give him my promise to pay for my passage at some future date. Said he wasn't allowed to carry passengers; said he had no accommodations for me on the ship; said food cost a lot of money these days—and that sort of talk. My promise to send him a hundred dollars, two hundred dollars within six months did not interest him; he was obdurate. But on my fifth trip to the docks to see him—I think it was my fifth—he called to me as I was despondently turning away.

"'Say, you don't now happen to play chess, do you?' he said as I looked back at his call.

"'Why, yes, I do,' I replied, puzzled by his question.

"'Play a good game?'

"'Not such a very bad one, I've been told.'

"'H'm! Suppose you come back in an hour or two and see me. I might—I may be able to carry you over—for two hundred, you know. You'd have to sign on as purser ——'

"I interrupted him to say that I'd sign on as mate, steward or stoker, if he'd only carry me to Mobile. I was getting panicky; I wanted to get home, to the United States. Well, I went aboard as purser, and I played chess with that captain almost constantly for twelve days—I wouldn't care if I never again saw a chessboard!"

"And why aren't you in Mobile?" demanded the man there in the chair beside me. "That ship left here three or four days ago."

"I played chess too well—I beat Captain Churn."

"But what did you do that for—under the circumstances?"

"Because I was and am a young fool," I replied disgustedly. "Because I lacked common sense and mediocre diplomacy! As I think now of that silly act of mine in defeating the captain I realize what a mastodonic ass I am!"

"Sure! If you'd only held back until you had left this port and was on the last leg of your journey, you could have trimmed him to your heart's content."

"Exactly. But I didn't wait. That captain took me on board his ship to carry me to Mobile on a promise of two hundred dollars, to be paid within six months, because he was daffy on the subject of chess; he wanted someone to play with. He never expected me to pay him two hundred dollars; I was to earn my passage by playing chess with him. He considered himself as good as a professional, but my first game with him showed him to be a rank amateur. I let him win game after game until he got so cocky and boastful that he nettled me. So, fool-like, I turned to and gave him a mild, admonitory drubbing. He made some highly sarcastic remarks. I retaliated. Then he became angry and abusive and among other things called me a Yankee upstart, and I went in and trounced him again and again; I showed him up; I made him look like butter in the sun; I humiliated him. For I must state that I do know chess—I can hardly remember when I was not playing it.

"That's all. When we reached this port Captain Churn chased me; he told me to go to the devil, and—here I am."

The man beside me smoked in silence for a moment or two.

"Puysegur plays chess, and so does ——" he began and stopped.

"Who is Puysegur?" I asked, repeating his queer pronunciation of the queer name as nearly as I could.

"Oh, a fellow up country. Well, let's go to dinner."

He led the way into the dining room of the hotel, where he proceeded to order generously for two; he was going to pay for his entertainment.

It was a good dinner, and I was hungry. I was hungry, but not so hungry that my senses were invulnerable to the man's awful table manners. For he hogged down and bolted his food in such a sloppy, noisy, abominable way that under different circumstances I should have left the table. I could not have eaten there with him had not my stomach been crying out as it was for food. I can see him now, as I think of that meal, lifting with his dirty hand a great forkful of dressing-dripping lettuce leaves from the bowl by his place, nabbing at it as he held it up, securing it, and working it into his mouth with his flexible lips, chewing it down as a browsing goat might chew down a mouthful of burdock leaves or a bunch of tansy.

As Mobs are Ever in a Hurry to Seize Their Victims and Get Done With Their Work, So Were We in a Hurry to Get Done With Ours. But Our Progress Was Nerve-Rackingly Slow

The marked contrast in our appearances served to increase my distaste for him. There was a mirror hanging on the wall near the table at which we sat, and glancing into it, as I did now and then, I could take note of my own rather pleasing and well-groomed person, for I was then still wearing my stylish Parisian garments and I had not yet dropped my habit of shaving daily. I was clean. And I was young, I was healthy, I was not altogether unhandsome then. I was youth vain, youth conceited, youth well satisfied with self. But the man across the table from me—unwashed, unshaven, uncombed, dirty, dressed like a tropical tramp, smelling of *aguardiente* and *tequila*—I would turn from my mirrored self to look at him with loathing eyes.

It was a good dinner, and I ate it as I believe I had never before eaten, yet was I through with my meal some time before my benefactor had finished his. I produced a box of London cigarettes, the last I had, and we smoked. I started to express my thanks, but he waved his hand to check my words.

"That's all right," he said, pushing back his chair. "I'll fix it up with the Chink to give you a bed here to-night and breakfast to-morrow morning. I may see you again and I may not. If I do not—why good luck! Everything will come out all right sooner or later—it always does. *Haec olim meminisse juvabit.* Ha, ha! Did I get it right?"

"*Forsan,*" I laughed.

"Well—all right. Scrobe is my name—I live up country—quite a way in. So long." He took his hat and left the hotel.

The next morning—it was close to noon—he came to me where I loafed again on the hotel's veranda, drew up a chair and sat down.

"I've been thinking about you," he began. "I have a little rubber plantation up country, quite a way in. Scrobe's my name. I'm one of the leftovers of the big rubber-plantation rush that was made in this direction a few years ago. You may not know anything about it. I came down here to act as a member of one of the reception committees that received and entertained the simps, suckers and marks who had invested their money in rubber plantations. After the promoters back home had grown rich and retired, or gone to the penitentiary, where they all should have been sent, and the rubber-plantation boom had collapsed, I was one of the few down here who stayed on. I had learned to like the country, and I thought I could make a go with rubber, working it alone. I haven't done so badly—I have a little place of my own now. I could use you up there for two or three months. It would be an opportunity for you to make a little stake—enough to carry you back to the States decently. I'll pay you a hundred dollars gold a month and expenses. If you care to go ——"

"I'll go!" I broke in.

Youth spoke again in that hasty decision. A few more years on my head, and I should have asked him something of the nature of the work he was hiring me to do, and I should have requested time for considering his proposal. But without a question I accepted his offer.

"A train leaves in an hour. We'll travel by rail, on horseback, by foot and by rowboat. I'm quite a distance in—it's rather an out-of-the-way place where I'm located. Be ready pretty soon?" Scrobe had risen from his chair and was looking hard at me.

"In ten minutes," I replied.

"All right. Eat your lunch here first—I'll speak to the Chink. Meet me at the depot—there's only one and you'll find it."

We were three days traveling to Pichucalco, where Scrobe's plantation lay, and a hard, wearisome trip it was, though I found it not uninteresting, new as everything I saw was to me. We could have done the trip in a day less had not Scrobe wasted so much of our time in the *cantinas* we passed, drinking the villainous, smelly Mexican liquors. I did not like these liquors, any of them; and after a few experimental tastes I refused to touch them.

Scrobe laughed at me. "You'll like them before you've been in here a fortnight. You'll take to some one of them in particular, as we all do who come into this country; and then you'll be ready to write sonnets in praise of it, ready to fight for it. My own favorite is *agua de cebada;* Labo's is *tequila;* Simon's is *aguardiente,* because it's dirt cheap and he has no money to buy better; Puysegur's—I don't know what Puysegur drinks, but it isn't Mexican stuff—imported cognac, probably."

"Who is Labo, and who is Simon, and who is Puysegur?" I asked.

"Oh, Labo is a neighbor of mine, a leftover like myself, who doesn't want to go back. He has a little rubber plantation close to mine. Simon is a fat-headed old Hoosier who did some kind of crooked work in promoting a rubber-plantation company, and who can't go back. Puysegur—he's a queer one, an all-round scoundrel, to tell the whole truth. Swiss, I believe; and a sort of second-class civil engineer. Came drifting into this country about the time of the big rush, did a lot of cheap surveying and line running for the new companies, and then settled down to stay here. If all the facts were known I suspect his case is one like Simon's—he can't go back. Still, he was always talking of going back—but that was before Simon came. He and the old man were pretty thick for a while, but they're not now. His place is about fifteen kilometers from Pichucalco—maybe not so much. We don't see much of him. Queer chap, Puysegur is."

"Are there many Americans or Europeans near you?" I inquired.

"I've named them all—Labo, Simon, Puysegur. I don't believe there's another within a hundred kilometers. Some Spaniards, of course, but they're different from us, you know. We don't exactly mix. And there's old Simon's daughter, too—I almost forgot her. But she hardly counts—she's deaf and dumb, and—well, you know deaf and dumb people often seem queer up here." And Scrobe tapped his head with two fingers.

"Pretty little thing she is, too, that girl. Old Simon ought to be horsewhipped and tarred and feathered for keeping her here in a place like this. But I suppose he can't do otherwise—he's a pauper now, or nearly so. And *aguardiente* is hurrying him along to his final resting place.

(Continued on Page 32)

MOB OF THREE

(Continued from Page 5)

It's a shame about that little girl. What will become of her when he dies—*quién sabe?*"

We got up from the fallen tree on which we had been sitting, waiting for the carriers to overtake us with their loads, and moved on. In another hour or so we were in Pichucalco.

It was a wretched, dirty little Indian village, stuck down there in a hole cut out of the jungle, a damp, steamy, hot and smelly place. A score of palm-thatched huts filled the small clearing, sorry makeshifts of human habitation, erected without any semblance of order or arrangement. I saw Indian men and women moving about among the huts, and I saw an unbelievably large number of children of all ages playing about the clearing. There were half-starved mangy dogs by dozens. From one of the palm-thatched huts a man stepped, stood in the shadow of the building, watching us for a moment, then advanced slowly to meet us.

"There's Labo," Scrobe said to me.

He was a short, squat man, this Labo, bald of head, hairy of face and arms—the latter were bare to the elbows—and where his shirt fell open in front, exposing his breast, I saw little whorls and knots of black hair in profusion. His skin was so dark that before Scrobe had spoken I believed him a negro. I judged him to be of an age with Scrobe, a few years older perhaps—nearer forty than thirty-five. He was much dirtier than Scrobe, and his clothes were filthy, but I did not forget the fact that Scrobe was dressed and groomed for outside traveling, while he, Labo, was *chez lui en déshabillé*. In a day or two, I told myself, Scrobe would no doubt return to his customary home habits, and then I would be able to judge correctly which of the two was more repulsive in habits and looks. So sensitive was I at that susceptible period of my life to things unclean, especially to physical uncleanliness in persons; and as I watched the approaching man I was wondering, shuddering, if I, too, might come to copy the customs of these two fellows.

There was unlimited curiosity in the man's cold hard eyes as they looked me over from head to foot in the little moment of silence we stood facing each other, and as I put out my hand to take his, which he extended as Scrobe made the introductions, I saw a question framing itself on his thick lips. But Scrobe had spoken before it came.

"My new bookkeeper, private secretary and stenographer," he laughed.

Labo gave a snort of amusement. "Pretty work!" he chuckled.

"Well, we'll go on to the hut—we're pretty well tired out," said Scrobe. "Come over in an hour or two, after I've had a nap, and I'll open the packs and get out the stuff I brought in for you."

"All right."

Labo turned and went back to the hut from which I had seen him come, while we continued on to the farther side of the clearing to a hut slightly larger than any other there.

"Evidently they don't know we're coming," said Scrobe as we neared the building toward which we had turned, which seemed silent and deserted. "Sit down here a minute until I go in and break the news of my safe arrival home."

He pointed to a crude bench that had been hewed from a great log of mahogany, which was standing just outside the opening to the hut. I dropped down upon the thick rough board and he passed on inside.

I heard a woman's voice, a cry of surprise, a laugh, and then a babbling in Spanish, none of which I understood except the word "*Señor! Señor!*" repeated over and over. I could hear Scrobe's coarser voice answering the softer one, the flow of conversation continuing for several minutes, when Scrobe came to the opening and asked me to come in.

As I entered the hut I saw the woman whose voice I had heard. In spite of the cheap and shapeless garment of cotton she was wearing; in spite of the fact that we had taken her unaware, giving her no opportunity to arrange her undressed hair and to remove the marks of the unclean work in which she had been engaged, her beauty was so striking, it was presented to my eyes with such startling unexpectedness that I stopped and stared at her, stared in undisguised admiration. Never before had I beheld a face whose loveliness so appealed to me. It was the face of Murillo's most perfect Madonna; it was the face of a hundred beautiful women I had seen, with but the most exquisite little portion of the beauty of each chosen for this face before me; it was the face that I, youth, had how many times gazed upon in dreams! I was looking at a rich olive complexion and at cheeks as flushed as unfaded roses; at ripe full lips; at great masses of uncoifed night-black hair piled upon a shapely head; at lustrous eyes, soft and melting eyes. I was staring at the woman before me like a fool, when I realized that Scrobe was introducing her to me, for she bowed and smiled and murmured something I could not understand.

"This is Martina Vasquez," said Scrobe, turning to me. "She bids you welcome here, expresses her good wishes concerning your health, and hopes you will find happiness with us."

I bowed to her and thanked her, and then added a few further words which Scrobe translated to her, when she smiled at me again in a friendly way.

"There's a lean-to outside here that we must offer to you—our one and only guest chamber," laughed Scrobe. "Don't expect anything de luxe."

I murmured "Of course not," picked up my suitcase, which one of the carriers had just brought in, and followed him to the rear of the hut.

"Lord knows our manner of living out here is rough enough," he said as we stood looking about the bare pen, for it was little more than a pen—split saplings stuck into the ground making the walls, cleverly laid palm leaves the roof, the uncovered hard-beaten earth the floor. "But I suppose you can endure it for two or three months, eh?"

"Oh, to be sure—it's a lark!" I laughed. "Is the young lady ——" I began, and stopped suddenly, confused; and that I showed my confusion I do not doubt. I was going to ask who that young woman was, for she was young, much younger than Scrobe, not a great deal older than myself.

Scrobe looked at me curiously, and I felt my cheeks flushing. The idiocy of that initiated question!

"She's my—housekeeper. What do you think of her?"

"I never saw a more beautiful face!"

"H'm! Well, lie down and take a nap and get rested—that's what I'm going to do." And the man left me.

In the days that followed I saw much of Scrobe and Labo, and much of Martina Vasquez. The extreme beauty of the girl—I could not think of her but as a girl, so youthful and fresh and unlined was her face, though I discovered she was the mother of two children—the beauty of this woman hypnotized me into boorish stupid staring when I was in her presence, haunted me in vivid visualization when I was absent from her. This boorishness of mine, this rudeness, she did not seem to notice, but Scrobe did, though without apparent resentfulness.

"You think she's good-looking, eh?" he said to me one day as Martina left the room where we sat smoking and my eyes went running after her.

"Yes, indeed, I do!" I replied, reddening.

Scrobe chuckled and said nothing more at the time.

There was much card playing and much drinking done by the two men in the days following my coming to Pichucalco; mostly at Labo's hut and at the *cantina* that was run by a noisy, drunken Mexican; a few times at Scrobe's. I was invited once or twice—but not urged—to sit in at the games and the drinking bouts, but I hated the smells of the liquors they imbibed, I loathed the dirtiness and the slovenliness of the two men, cards had never interested me, and I asked them to excuse me. So I saw more and more of the woman, Martina Vasquez, for I would sit about Scrobe's hut or lie on my cot in the lean-to, smoking, scribbling in my diary, reading some ancient magazines and old books which I had uncovered there in a box in the hut, killing time.

If I could have spoken Spanish or the woman English we should have hurried on our acquaintance to a greater intimacy, I do not doubt; but I could understand nothing she said to me, she nothing I would say to her in those first days. Yet did we come to know each other pleasantly enough; we were quickly good friends, and I was soon acquiring imperfect Spanish under her tutelage, while she was learning poor English from me.

As the days ran on I could not but wonder why Scrobe had brought me there, for he said nothing whatever about the work he had in mind for me to take up. We went together to his rubber plantation a few times, where he had a number of Indians at work, but I saw there nothing to be done in the doing of which I might be employed. One day I asked him what there was for me and when I could set to work; my enforced idleness was beginning to irk me sorely.

"Oh, this is the dull season with us just now," he replied. "You'll have to loaf a while longer. By the way," he went on after a moment's silence, "I'm leaving here tomorrow to be gone a week or two. There's a plantation down country that I wish to visit, and I must go after new seed and plant stock too. I hope you won't find life unbearably dull while I'm away."

"Perhaps I should go over to Labo's and stay there while you are absent," I said.

"Eh? Why, certainly not! Stay where you are! Martina will cook and wash for you and take care of you properly. Aren't you and she on very friendly terms?"

"But ——"

"Stay where you are! There's no room at Labo's for you; he has his huts filled with his women and his children, and he wouldn't want you anyway."

"If I knew Puysegur ——"

"Eh? Puysegur? Why, go over and call on him if you like, if time hangs too heavily on your hands—but I don't think it will. He won't be glad to see you, I imagine. Still, he plays chess, I've heard. Maybe you'll get a game out of him. But I don't think you'll go." And he chuckled as he said this—almost laughed. I wondered why.

But I did go to visit Puysegur three days later. Labo gave me directions for coming to his plantation, though warning me at the same time that I would find the fellow a Tartar, and I walked the twelve or fifteen kilometers between Pichucalco and his place.

I was not anticipant of any great pleasure from the call I was about to make on this man of whom I had heard so many hard and wretched and ugly reports—from Scrobe and Labo. What a sour, surly brute of a fellow he must be; the very personification, as I had drawn from their description of him, of all that was vile, evil, unprincipled, repellent! But I was sick for a new face, sick for a new theme of conversation from new lips, sick of the dirt and squalor and monotonous wretchedness of Pichucalco. I loathed Labo—he was so repulsively unclean; and long before this period when I was left alone with him I had pumped him dry of the little knowledge he possessed that interested me. And I had wearied of gazing at the exquisitely beautiful Spanish face of Martina Vasquez; I found myself picking out flaws in that matchless face, finding fault with the woman for not dressing her masses of night-black hair occasionally, for not washing her perfect teeth, for not scrubbing her shapely neck with soap and water. Her slovenliness was annoying to me; I was disenchanted. Pichucalco held not a thing that interested me, not a thing that did not disgust me. So I went to see Puysegur.

I found him sitting in the shade of a large rubber tree at the rear of his palm-thatched hut, smoking a cigar and reading from a small, thin, leather-bound book. His greeting to me was not uncivil, neither was it cordial.

"Yes, I heard you were at Pichucalco," he said in English that bore no trace of a foreign accent, when I introduced myself and told him whence I came. "Sit down—there's a stool yonder."

I fetched the crude little stool he indicated and sat down, and we fell into desultory conversation. I could not rid myself of the feeling that had come over me at his first words that I was *persona non grata*. I was very certain he would rather I were not there, and I resolved to make my call a short one.

I looked sharply at him as we talked—this man of whom I had heard so many evil reports from Labo and Scrobe. I could look

(Continued on Page 35)

(Continued from Page 32)

at him closely without embarrassment, for he seemed to find in me nothing to interest him; he was more attentive to the end of his cigar than he was to me. I judged him to be considerably younger than either of the two men at Pichucalco, though his physique was of that excellent kind which carries concealed the marks of years. He was of huge proportions, a very giant of a man, as I could well see, though he had remained seated and I must guess at his towering height. Scrobe and Labo had spoken to me of his prodigious strength, and they had described some of the muscular feats they had seen him perform; and as I looked at the big bony hands resting on the closed volume that lay on his knees—he was sitting hunched forward—and observed the thick heavy forearms, I could easily believe their stories now, though at the time of their telling I had found them incredible. He was a blond, clean-shaven, of bronze-colored hair, of blue eyes—and harder, colder, icier eyes I thought I had never looked into. I did not like him.

I did not like him—he made me stir uneasily with his great bulk; with his bulgy muscles, covered but not concealed by the thin garments he was wearing; with those icy eyes. And I had heard wicked stories about him. But one quality I perceived was his that drew me to him—personal cleanliness. He was clean—that I had noticed at first glance. He had shaved that morning and his full cheeks showed the ruddy flush that comes from friction-filled capillaries of the skin; his bronze-colored hair was barbered not badly, and I wondered if he could have done so good a job himself; the nails of his big powerful hands were evenly trimmed and free from dirt; the linen suit he wore was white, white as if laundered yesterday. He was the first clean man I had seen since leaving Coatzacoalcos.

Impressed though I was by this personal cleanliness of the man, it did not of itself suffice to free me from the feeling of uneasiness I was experiencing in his presence. I could not like him, for I had heard too much about him from Labo and Scrobe. The hackneyed wheeze that cleanliness is akin to godliness had no measure of truth in it for me as I sat there regarding Puysegur in those first few moments of our meeting, for I knew what manner of man he was; Scrobe and Labo had told me. And as I looked at him, immaculately garbed and groomed, I thought of Lattman, the Boston murderer, and his fifty suits of clothes, of whom I had read so much; and of the fastidious Hemanier, the Parisian throttler, whom I had seen going to his trial in Paris.

The shade of the rubber tree shifted as we talked, and the tropical sun struck down upon us. Puysegur rose.

"We'll go inside," he said.

The book he had been reading slipped from his grasp and fell to the ground, open. I stooped and picked it up, and as I did so I read the title page.

"Wherever did you get it—down here?" I asked, holding it and looking at it in surprise.

It was a copy of Stephen Phillips' Paolo and Francesca. At its issue from the press the book I held had been, as I could see, a dainty and de luxe volume, but it was now maculated and stained, as if it might have been lying in water.

He smiled slightly at my question. "You know it?" he asked.

"Yes, I read it before I left college. I liked it immensely."

"I found the thing," he said, taking the book from me. "Picked it up a hundred kilometers from here, lying by the tracks of the Isthmian Railroad. Someone, I suppose, had had enough of it and had tossed it out of a car window. If I were traveling to some point where I could get hold of a London Times or a Paris Temps or a New York Tribune that's just what I'd do with it—throw it away." As he finished the words he tossed the little volume from him. It went flying through the air and fell into a thicket of weeds and bushes. "Sorry stuff, I call it. I'm hungry for something to read."

I made no further comment touching on the book. His words, "I call it sorry stuff," and his throwing the volume from him had angered me. I followed him into the hut and took the chair which he designated mine with a wave of his hand.

"You are with Labo and Scrobe, are you?" he asked. And I fancied I detected the faintest hint of a sneer in his question.

"With Scrobe," I replied, and I was glad he did not speak further of the two men.

I had sat down near a makeshift table, and as I now turned toward it I saw a chessboard with the pieces on it arranged in place. It was a beautifully carved set, the black pieces cut from hard close-grained wood not unlike ebony, the white pieces from bone, but from bone of such quality—or perhaps it had been very cleverly treated—that it closely resembled ivory. An exclamation of admiration fell from my lips as my eyes lighted upon the set, and I rose and stepped to the table to examine it.

"A beautiful set!" I cried. "Where did you get it?"

"I made it," he replied quietly.

"You—you carved these?" I had picked up a black knight and was holding it in my hand. My eyes left it to look at him in surprise.

"Yes. Do you play?"

"Oh, yes."

"Good! We'll have a game."

We played. Before I had pushed forward my first pawn I had resolved that I would not with this man make the *faux pas* I had made with Captain Churn; I would not beat Puysegur at the game. I did not care to rouse his anger, to have him vent his rage upon me, for Scrobe and Labo had told me it was maniacal in its ferocity and unreasonableness. But before many moves had been made I knew I was not playing with another Captain Churn; I was pitted against a near if not a professional player. But I did not play my best—far from it—and he took the game.

"You know chess," he said as we set up the pieces, "and I'm pretty certain you can play a better game than that, and I almost believe you saw the false move I made with my rook and the opening I gave you. Don't spare me—that isn't chess."

"I'm afraid you rate my ability too high," I returned. But in our second game I mated him so quickly and with so little effort that he swore.

"I thought so," he muttered.

The third game went slowly; it was long and it was difficult. In the intensity of my concentration upon it I quite completely forgot the man across the table from me, forgot it was Puysegur who sat there, forgot all that I had heard against him, forgot that instinctively I disliked him, distrusted him, feared him. I was in the grip of the game.

We left off play once to partake of the food which an Indian woman brought in and placed on one end of the table at which we sat. We ate hurriedly, with scarcely a word between us. Then we returned to our places at the chessboard and sat in silence the game through. The shadows were long in the clearing before I finally mated him, and I was tired, very tired. I had labored hard. I rose to my feet, and glancing at my watch I was dismayed at the lateness of the hour.

"I must start back at once," I said, picking up my hat. "It will be dark before I can get to Pichucalco, and this is my first trip over the trail."

He did not ask me to remain the night with him, and I was well enough pleased he did not; I should have refused the invitation had it been tendered. With my quitting the chessboard there had returned to me that uneasiness I had felt in his presence at first.

"You play a superior game of chess," he remarked, lighting a cigar as he spoke. And that was all he said to me.

At the edge of the clearing, just before I stepped into the forest, I turned and looked back. He stood in the doorway of his hut, gazing after me.

I never went to his house again; I did not care to meet him again. Twice thereafter I saw him at Pichucalco, whither he had come looking for a runaway field hand, but he gave me no more than a curt nod, saying nothing.

I had not yet seen Simon, of whom Scrobe had told me something on our way in from Coatzacoalcos. Now and then I had caught distant glimpses of his daughter—I supposed it was she whom I saw moving about their hut—but I had not been taken there to be introduced to them. That Scrobe had not offered to do this puzzled me, for with but four Americans besides myself in the dreary isolated little settlement it seemed strange that in the lengthened time I had been there I had not come to know each of those four. I asked Scrobe one day why he did not take me to see Simon.

"Why, the old man is continuously in a drunken stupor, soaked in *aguardiente;* he wouldn't and couldn't talk intelligently to you if I did take you to see him; he probably wouldn't be aware of your presence, and wouldn't acknowledge it even if he was. As for the girl—well, as I told you, she is a deaf mute and decidedly queer. I don't imagine you would find her very entertaining company."

I accepted the explanation and thought little more about the matter, and as the hut occupied by the two exiles stood at the farther end of the clearing, in which direction I seldom had occasion to go, I all but forgot the existence of the drunkard and his afflicted daughter, and my first wish to meet them became no more than a sometime wondering curiosity as to what manner of folk they might be.

But before Scrobe returned I had met them, had been to their hut, had communicated with both of them—and under most unpleasant circumstances. The meeting came about in this way:

One morning two or three days after my visit to Puysegur I lay on my cot in the lean-to, smoking, scribbling in my diary, trying to read, battling flies and mosquitoes and other insects, cursing my lot, wallowing deep in physical and mental misery. Why hadn't I stayed in the seaport town, to rot there, rather than come to this hell's edge of a hole? Why had I become panicky, frightened, lost my courage, lost my nerve at the sight of my empty purse, and weakened at that first sting of the nipping pains of hunger? Why had I listened to Scrobe? Hang the fellow and his ferretlike eyes, his dirty face and hands and neck and ears, his yellow fangy teeth, with the foul alcoholic odor that was ever floating about him! And why, for what purpose, had he brought me there? Work? There was no work there for me to do! What would be the outcome of this insane venture of mine? How would I free myself from the trap into which I had set my foolish foot? And I swore the mild unseasoned oaths that youth essays in times of trouble.

Labo had gone early to his plantation that morning; Martina Vasquez was busy with her work in another room of the hut; the noisy meaningless prattle of her children—Scrobe's children—as they played outside came irritatingly to my ears; I heard the rattling of the holding chain of a captive black monkey kept behind the hut, and in the adjoining room the raucous squawking of a caged macaw rasped my frayed and ragged nerves until I could have cried aloud in my torment. I buried my face in the blanket of my cot, stuck tips of fingers into my ears, but still must I hear—the torturing noises struck through all barriers.

Then another sound came to me, the sound of hurrying footsteps just outside, running footsteps just outside, coming toward my lean-to. I sat up and turned toward the doorway, and in that moment a girl stepped into the opening.

I knew who it was—Simon's daughter. I had never seen her face before but I recognized the slight figure there before me as the one I had seen moving about the hut of Simon. And, anyway, who else could it be if not she? There was no one else.

We stared at each other for an instant, just an instant, yet in that little interval of time I had taken in every detail of that white, frightened, terror-stricken face. I saw great brown eyes looking at me fearfully; I saw pale cheeks, pale as the cheeks of death; I saw tightened, unattractive lips, colorless and all a-tremble. And the thick coming and going of her breath told further of the strain under which she was struggling.

"How little she is, how frail, how fragile! What a helpless thing she appears to be!" The thought shot through my brain in that little instant of our staring. And I recalled, too, in that flash of thinking Scrobe's words to me—"She's a pretty little thing, that girl." But she wasn't a girl. She was a woman, matured, older somewhat, but not much, than myself, I guessed. And pretty? I did not think her pretty. What an ordinary face it was. What a common, nondistinctive type, compared with that gloriously beautiful face of Martina Vasquez! No doubt the slightness of her figure had caused Scrobe to think of her as a girl, and he was perhaps contrasting her pale dollish face with the heavy dark face of Martina when he had spoken of her as being beautiful. But to me the impression of helplessness I received in that first glimpse of her—she was so white, so slender, so fragile, so pathetic a sight—that was what touched me, aroused all my sympathy, awoke all my pity, caused me to leap to my feet and step toward her.

"Are you in trouble? Can I help you?" I asked. And before the words had run from my lips I had remembered—she was deaf and she was dumb!

She had a pad of paper and a pencil in her hand, and as I spoke she raised them and wrote rapidly on the pad and handed it to me.

"Help me—my father," I read.

She turned about in the doorway to leave, and I moved quickly to follow her. Behind me I heard a mutter, a word snarled out in Spanish, the ugly meaning of which I knew. I looked back. Martina stood in the opening between my lean-to and the main room of our hut. Her great dark lustrous eyes were flashing hate and loathing, and her thick sensuous lips were curling in an expression that bespoke something worse than hate burning in her heart.

Astonished at what I saw in the woman's face I momentarily checked my going, but in the same moment I moved on, to follow the little figure ahead of me.

(TO BE CONCLUDED)

DEAD TIMBER

(Continued from Page 21)

controlled it indicated that he was regarded as at least a fair-sized post if not a pillar of the institution. His complacency was also increased by the fact that his town property, located in a city which was experiencing a phenomenal industrial boom, had about doubled in value.

Under these pleasant reflections this salesman decided that he was entitled to have comforts and luxuries which he had denied himself in his younger years of struggle. He built a new house on a vacant lot which he owned. Believing that he could make a saving by carrying the contract himself he engaged a builder who was a close personal friend. Although offered a tempting sum for the house which he was to vacate he decided not to sell—on the ground that the industrial development of the city had only begun and that he could get the benefit of the further advance in the value of his property by holding it and renting for a figure which seemed absurdly high.

Yes; after years of hard fighting he had come into his own and could take a little comfort and live like other men of his kind. He felt that he was fixed for life, and acted on this conviction by buying a high-powered motor car. He had to hit the open road from week-end to week-end—why shouldn't he do it in a car that turned this steady driving from a punishment to a pleasure?

Incidentally, supervising the building of a house is quite an absorbing pastime—especially when done on the day-labor plan. Overseeing the operation of a farm located fifteen miles distant is also quite intriguing. Also he found that the ownership of a real aristocrat of the road was a constant temptation to evening pleasure drives with his wife, his two granddaughters and their friends.

Before the new house was half built its owner had doubled the top cost of the builder's estimate. But it had to be finished because the old house was rented and tenants were insistent. However, so he reasoned, cost what it would, the new house would justify its expense because the industrial expansion of the city was exceeding the dreams of its wildest boomers and was gathering momentum from day to day! The value would be in the house next year or the year after.

When the decorators were done the house had cost almost three times what its owner had expected.

Then dawned a morning when a sudden and uncanny silence fell upon the wonder city; the great works were deserted by the construction gangs. Next came a falling

(Continued on Page 38)

MOB OF THREE

By Herschel S. Hall

ILLUSTRATION BY CLARK FAY

II

I RAN across the clearing, Simon's daughter keeping a few paces ahead of me, for though I ran rapidly she seemed fairly to fly over the ground. But I gained on her a little, and so close was I to her I could have touched her as we entered the hut to which she had led the way.

Inside, in the first room we entered, I saw Simon, and as my eyes lighted upon him I understood why she had come for me. The aged man lay on the dirt floor of the hut, writhing and twisting in the tortures of an alcoholic fit.

It was an ugly sight I looked upon there—a snowy-white head lifting up and lifting up, and beating down and beating down against the hard-packed ground; an old and lined and haggard face, hideous in its contorted muscles and monkey-like grimaces; bloodless lips blubbering in the froth that smeared them over; hands like talons, clasping and unclasping. And loud in my ears were the maudlin mumblings of the miserable man.

I knew not what to do. The girl had run to the other side of the room and stood there in that pathetic silence of the mute, that pitiable silence, shivering and shrinking, her little helpless hands raised to her breast and throat, where they fluttered and trembled, shutting and unshutting, even as those talonlike hands of her father at our feet were clasping and unclasping.

"What shall I do?" Again had I spoken to her, again forgetting in my excitement that she could not hear me. But she had read my question on my lips, and she pointed to a cot that stood in a farther corner. I picked up the old man—his body was thin and emaciated and his weight was as nothing to me—carried him, writhing in his spasms, and laid him upon the cot, where I pressed him down and held him fast to prevent him from throwing himself to the floor. I looked at the girl again, asking with my lips the question: "What shall I do now?"

From a shelf behind her she took a large bottle and brought it to me. There was a little bit of liquid in the flask, and by its yellowish color and by the odor I caught in my nostrils as she removed the cork I recognized it as *aguardiente*. I took the bottle from her shaking hand and, still holding down with one arm the struggling man beneath me, poured the fiery liquor between his froth-smeared lips. He gulped it down as an orphaned and starved animal suckling gulps down the offered milk, and in a minute or two I felt his tense and taut muscles relaxing, and from between his slobbering lips came a contented sigh. Gently and carefully I began withdrawing my hands from his quivering body. He opened dazed and unrecognizing eyes and looked at me.

"Scrobe?" he whispered.

"No, not Scrobe but ——"

"Labo, eh?"

"Nor Labo. I'm ——"

"Puysegur? Not Puysegur!" The words came, screamed, and he sat up suddenly, glaring at me with dilated eyes from which every vestige of the film of uncertainty that had veiled them a moment before was swept away. "No—of course not—not Puysegur!" he muttered, and fell back.

A little while of silence and then: "Where's Scrobe? Where's Scrobe? Why doesn't he come?" His questions were whined. "He promised he'd be back before I'd used it all! Why isn't he back? Labo won't let me have it unless—unless—where's Scrobe? Labo wants me to give—but I won't! I—I want Scrobe! Where is he?"

The whine had gone, and his voice was rising in a crescendo of passion, and I fancied I could detect symptoms of the returning paroxysms. The girl, too, seemed to notice it, and she hastily wrote on her pad of paper and handed it to me.

"He must have more liquor. Can you get it?"

I read the two lines at a glance—her writing had that easy legibility characteristic of the writing of the mute—and I turned and ran out of the hut. I remembered the big demijohn of *aguardiente* which Scrobe kept in his room, from which he poured liberally for the Indians with whom he had business dealings. I raced across the clearing, found the big container, filled from it a great bottle of the liquor and raced back. And again I poured the vile stuff between the lips of old Simon. In a few minutes he was sleeping.

"He will be all right now," wrote the girl. "Thank you. You can go. I shall be able to manage."

I wrote on the pad "Call on me if you need me," and handed it back to her.

She nodded her head as if to say, "Yes, certainly, I will." But her eyes, never quitting my face, still carried in them that look of fear, that same look of terror they had held when I first gazed into them at my lean-to, and all at once it came to me that she feared me, that she was afraid of me! In a flash of comprehension I knew that I was an object of dread to her! But why? She had never seen me before that half hour; I had run willingly to assist her when she came seeking help; I had looked at her with none but eyes of pity—why should she draw back, shrink away from me, tell me by every expression showing in her eyes, on her lips, in her trembling hands, in her whole shuddering person that she wished me gone?

I bowed and left the hut and returned to my lean-to.

Martina soon came to call me to dinner, and all the while I was eating she was hovering about the table in a way she was not accustomed to do, serving me with exaggerated attention, saying nothing, keeping turned away from direct encounter with mine her dark wonderful eyes, in which, when I would catch a glimpse of them, I could still detect the smoldering fire of hate which I had seen burning up in them a little while before.

But when I had finished my meal, and before I had had time to push back my chair, she sat down opposite me, looked me full in the face and began talking.

She spoke rapidly, so rapidly that only now and then could I catch a word I understood. I shook my head, I waved my hands at her, I cried "*No sabe! No sabe!*" but she heeded me not, continuing to pour out upon me a very torrent of words, emphasizing them often with sharp smacks upon the table with her hand. I settled down to wait and to listen until she had finished, and as I now gave closer attention to her I came to understand that she was speaking of Scrobe, that she was singing his praises to me, telling me what a wonderful, powerful, mighty señor he was; telling me that he was her man and no other woman's, she his woman and no other man's; telling me the two children there before us were his children and her children; telling me how she idolized him, gloried in him, worshiped the ground upon which he trod; telling me she would sacrifice her very life for him; telling me that nothing should ever come between them, no person, no man or woman; that she would kill, kill, kill if necessary—yes, she would kill Scrobe himself!

I listened to her in wonder, catching her meaning in familiar words here and there; now and then finding an understandable fragment of a phrase, and so, helped along in my translating of her speech by her frequent repetitions, I gathered the gist of her tirade. And through it all I heard over and over that ugly word she had snarled out when the girl had stood in the doorway of my lean-to, and "white face," "white face" came so often from her lips that I knew she was cursing the daughter of Simon.

When she had finished—or, rather, when she had exhausted herself—she reached out and touched my hand, calling me her very good friend who would understand, and left me. I went into my own apartment and lay down to think over this strange, inexplicable upheaval of passion in the usually lethargic Martina, but I could make nothing of it. What had the deaf-and-dumb daughter of Simon to do with the Spanish woman? With Scrobe? Martina Vasquez, I had learned today, hated the slip of a girl over there at the other side of the clearing, hated her to the limit of murder; and she loved Scrobe with primitive passion, loved him to the limit of killing him. She had told me so. And Scrobe, I had no doubt, loved her in her own primitive manner of loving. A queer pair, this goddess and her satyr! But Simon's daughter! Had she and Scrobe some secret? Ridiculous, absurd, idiotic! I would not think through the thought commenced in my brain. I drew up my blanket and drove my eyes to sleep. The next day I started to go to the hut of Simon, though I should not, I told myself as I went; the girl did not want to see me there. But pity for her helplessness impelled me on. All through the remainder of yesterday, and through the night, in my waking moments, I had been envisaging that scene in the hut—the old and white-haired man writhing on the ground in his alcoholic spasms; the young, white-faced, trembling mute, with her little helpless hands raised up to her throat and breast, standing there in her pathetic silence, watching him. I could not put out of my thoughts the horror, the hideous horror of her lot, and I went—I went to ask her if I could again be of assistance to her.

As I approached the hut I heard voices inside, raised voices, voices speaking in anger, and I recognized them as Labo's and Simon's.

"In gold, I tell you! In gold! Three hundred in gold!" It was Simon's shrill voice, raised almost to a shriek.

"I meant in silver. I didn't say gold!" Labo's coarse, harsh voice was unusually loud.

"It will be in gold or nothing—three hundred dollars in gold. Mexican? No! I will not do it for that! And the affair will

(Continued on Page 32)

Advancing Upon Him, Gripping a Revolver, Was the Girl, Simon's Daughter

(Continued from Page 30)

have to be consummated in regular form, Labo—I want you to understand that! You'll have to bring and show to me a certificate from the ——"

"I agreed to do that, didn't I?" demanded Labo, shouting out the question. "But I tell you I'll pay it only in silver! I meant Mexican!"

I was standing in such position that my eyes could cover a little portion of the room in which the two men were talking, and twice I saw the slight form of the girl pass by the opening through which I was looking. She was there with her father and Labo, moving about near them, seeing them, but hearing nothing of their quarrel, whatever it was about! I had paused for but a moment but I had overheard—I felt guilty of eavesdropping—and before Simon made reply to Labo's last remark I had turned and hurried off. I would not come upon the two while they were in angry argument.

I went into the forest, the edge of which was but a rod or so distant, and sat down on a fallen tree, concealed from outside view, but able to watch Simon's hut. When Labo had left I would go on and make the inquiry I had planned—could I do anything for them?

As I waited there I tried to thrust through the web of mystery that was weaving about me in that little Indian village. Why was I there? For what purpose had Scrobe brought me there? What were the relations of Labo and Simon? Here were they two, quarreling about the payment of a sum of money, three hundred dollars! Why should the Spanish woman, Martina Vasquez, become so excited at the sight of Simon's daughter? Why should Simon's daughter show such marked signs of fear of me, whom she did not know, whom she had never before seen? What were Scrobe's relations with Simon? Yesterday I had heard the old man calling for him. And Puysegur! Who was this Puysegur, and what had he done that these people should so abhor him? Labo and Scrobe were always condemning him, cursing him; and yesterday Simon had shown terror, violent fear, thinking the man was near him.

The questions came rushing at me, leaping at me, crying for answer, each a-hurrying after the one preceding it, crowding my brain, confusing my mind, checking consecutive thought; and no answer for any one of them was forthcoming—I knew nothing. I knew nothing; and a web of mystery was weaving all about me. And I sensed the coming of tragedy.

I had sat in the edge of the forest for a half hour or more when I saw Labo leaving the hut I was watching. When he was gone from sight across the clearing I rose and walked to the doorless opening of the wretched structure, and stood there looking in, making my presence known by rapping upon one of the posts of the wall with a stick I had been whittling. The old man and the girl sat at a table but a few feet distant from me, on which stood a chessboard, and Simon's finger was pushing forward a pawn as I rapped. They both looked up.

I saw the startled, the scared look come into the girl's great brown eyes, and she hurriedly rose and almost ran from the room.

"Oh, it's you, eh?" was Simon's greeting. "Come in. Glad you've come over. I wanted to thank you for your assistance yesterday. I'm afraid you found me in a rather bad way. The fact is, I'm in a bad way permanently. Have a seat." He waved me to the chair the girl had just left. I moved to it and sat down.

"I'm glad you could so overlook yesterday's happenings here as to come to us again. A man in my condition must be excused many faults, eh? I'm a neurotic, you know—one of the worst kind; and my only alleviative, when the bad spells strike me, is alcohol. Scrobe has been keeping me—but no matter about that. I'll have to have a drink now." He rose and took from a shelf the bottle I had brought there yesterday, now less than half full.

I had not yet spoken to him other than to murmur "Good afternoon." As he talked I had been looking at the set of chessmen on the board before me. Surely this was the same set with which Puysegur and I had played our three games—the same blacks cleverly carved from ebonylike wood, the same whites cut from bone resembling ivory! Another strand to the web of mystery weaving about me! What was it doing here? How came it here—that same set I had seen and handled a few days before in Puysegur's hut?

"Will you join me?"

I looked up. Simon was holding the bottle of *aguardiente* in one hand, a glass tumbler in the other.

"No, thank you."

He filled the glass to the brim and drank, twice; returned the bottle to the shelf and sat down.

"Do you play the game?" he asked, nodding his head toward the board.

"Oh, yes."

"Aha? That's fine! Why, this is luck! Why haven't you been to see us before, and get acquainted? How many bouts we have missed because of your exclusiveness! I die daily for a good game of chess. My daughter knows but little about the game. She cannot grasp its intricacies."

"You have a beautiful set here," I said. "I saw one so much like it over at Puysegur's ——"

I stopped, leaving my sentence unfinished. The face of the man before me had suddenly gone livid and its muscles began to twitch; his eyes were dilating, while his hands lying on the table were clasping and unclasping, even as I had seen them doing yesterday. Was the attack of yesterday returning upon him, I wondered.

"Puysegur! You name Puysegur to me?" he cried, gasping out the words in his thin falsetto voice. "You know? You know? And you taunt me? Hell take him, and may he burn there forever! His chess, eh? His chess ——"

With a quick movement of his hands he swept the chessmen into a heap, gathered them up, a double handful, threw them upon the hard-packed ground at his feet, and began stamping upon them, grinding them down, breaking them to bits, driving them into the earth. And all the while he was shrilling out curses and anathemas against Puysegur.

I listened to the crunching noise his feet made, and to the sound of the snapping of the little carved pieces of blackwood and white bone, disturbed and disgusted. The man was crazy! I was in the presence of a maniac!

His destruction of the chessmen complete, he left off his stamping, to pace up and down the room, talking loudly, rapidly, passionately, and his theme was Puysegur.

He should have destroyed the things at the time he had driven Puysegur from his house, but foolishly he had kept them! He cried the words at me savagely, as if I were to blame for his not having done the thing he should have done. Puysegur had brought them there a year ago, two years ago, soon after their first meeting, before he had come to know what manner of man he was, before he had found him out! Puysegur came there often in those days and played chess with him; he had even tried to teach his daughter the game! Then he had found the fellow out. Oh, he had found him out!

And with oaths and revilements and maledictions he told me what kind of man was Puysegur—a snake, a beast, a monster, a thing of evil, a degenerate, a ghoul! And he told me hideous, ugly, gruesome tales of Puysegur—of his crimes, his obscenities, his deeds of hellishness, his brutalities. But I had heard them all before, those tales—from Labo and Scrobe—told by them without difference in detail, just as he was telling them to me.

"And he came here, the snake, the creeping thing, the blond beast, with his pink skin, his blue eyes, his auburn hair, garbed in his starched white linen, clean, repulsively clean, stinkingly clean—came here and talked fair words to me, fooled me, sneered at me, advised, admonished, corrected me! Came here and smiled at my poor afflicted daughter, looked at her with his big blue eyes with evil in them, covered pad after pad of paper, writing foolish things to her! Came here until I found him out and drove him away as I would drive off a leper, telling him as he went that I would kill him if he should ever again come within sight of this hut!"

He broke off in his passionate speaking, to take down the bottle of liquor and drink freely from it, tipping it now to his lips and letting the saffron stuff gurgle from its contracted top into his mouth. He then sat down in silence, and I noticed he was drooping, as one exhausted after great effort.

"You see how I am," he mumbled indistinctly after a few minutes. "Nerves—bad shape—neurotic—need alcohol—kill Puysegur." His head sank lower and lower.

I rose to leave. My movement caused him to rouse up just for a moment.

"Watch that man!" he cried in his shrill voice.

I slipped out of the hut, glad to get away from him.

Why did I return to Simon's the next day, and the next, and the next? Because of my pity for the girl? Because I wished to render her some little service? Partly for those reasons. But I had an additional aim now—curiosity drew me. I was constantly thinking of the mystery in which each of these six people whom I had come to know was playing a part, and through Simon I hoped to discover some sort of solution to that mystery. I would go to him and lead him on to talk. take him in his maudlin maunderings, listen to his drunken drool, ply him with questions, and so, perhaps, learn something—maybe all.

But my visits to him availed me nothing. Each time I went I found him in that stupid semiconscious state of which Scrobe had spoken to me, and only once was he even aware of my presence, and then but dimly. He roused up slowly, blinked at me, and muttered "Puysegur!" coupling the word with an ugly curse.

"Came here," he hiccuped on—"came here—looking at Carlotta—smiling at her—lying to her—poor girl—afflicted—not always afflicted—scarlet fever did it—twelve years old! I'll kill him yet!"

That was all I heard from him. And the girl I did not meet; she would flee at my approach.

On one of these three visits—the second or the third—I saw her sitting in the shade of the hut reading a book. As if she heard the sound of my footsteps she looked up as I drew near. The book dropped from her hands, and she rose and disappeared about the corner of the building. As I passed by the bench where she had sat I glanced down at the book lying on the ground.

"That?" I spoke the word aloud in my surprise, my astonishment. For the little volume there before me was none other than the Paolo and Francesca I had seen at Puysegur's, the one I had held in my hand, the one I had seen him toss away! Surely it was. I could not be mistaken!

I picked it up and opened it. Yes, it was the same—there were the stained and mottled pages, the half-rotted edges of the leaves, the drawn and puckered leather of the binding. How came it here? Puysegur had thrown it away. I had seen it fall into a clump of weeds and bushes. And now it was here at Simon's, read by Simon's daughter! More mystery!

Then I smiled at my readiness to find mystery in everything about me. There was no mystery about the book's being there. Some Indian had found it lying in the weeds where it had fallen and had picked it up and carried it off as a thing of curiosity. No doubt it had passed through many unwanting hands, and by chance had come into the possession of Simon's one servant, the old Indian woman whom I had seen there each time I had been to the hut, and so the girl had obtained it. For a moment I mused over her possible interpretation of the story it told, as she followed the tragedy; then I dropped the little volume upon the bench and went on to my sounding out of Simon, with that lack of results of which I have already told.

I might have persisted in my plan for uncovering the mystery, I might have paid many more visits to the old exile, but Scrobe came back, and I went to his hut no more.

I was lying on my cot in the lean-to, half asleep, when he came. In the adjoining room I heard Martina's glad cry of welcome, her murmured "*Señor! Señor!*" her soft words of love, her little expressions of happiness. And I heard Scrobe's voice replying, and by its unpleasant tone I fancied he had come back in no happy mood.

The next moment he stood in the opening to my lean-to, looking at me sourly.

"So you've decided to go to the devil, eh?" he said, speaking in a manner he had never shown before in addressing me.

I sat up, startled by the question, with my anger awakening and quickening at the way in which it was asked. What did he mean? I raised my hand to my chin and it touched a stubby bristly beard of a week's growth. Oh, that was it, no doubt!

I had taken to the slovenliness of the life of the place quickly; much of my fastidiousness over my personal appearance I had soon put away. What was the use, there in

(Continued on Page 34)

(Continued from Page 32)

that hole, I had asked myself. I was dressing carelessly, I was bathing less frequently, I was watching my hands and nails with little attention, I had dropped my habit of shaving every morning on rising, ignoring and forgetting the slogan which I had once evolved for myself, and of which I thought rather well—"Hope, pride and ambition have not died in him who shaves daily." Now for a week I had not opened my razor case, and Scrobe—dirty, frowzy, slovenly Scrobe—was criticizing me!

I rose to my feet, laughing. "You mean this?" I asked, rubbing the stubby bristly beard that covered my cheeks and chin.

"So you've quit shaving, eh? No doubt you've quit washing too! And I suppose you've chosen your liquor by this time?" The man's words were insultingly hurled at me.

"No! I want none of your Mexican slops!" I replied, raising my voice.

He turned and left me, and through the doorway I saw him striding across the clearing in the direction of Labo's hut. I went for a walk in the forest, pondering on this new question that had so suddenly and unexpectedly come up for answer. Why should Scrobe care, all at once, what I did or how I looked; whether I drank to drunkenness or remained sober; whether I took to slovenly habits or retained my pronounced fastidiousness; whether I shaved daily or at all? Of course I could find no answer.

I was gone two hours or more. When I came back, well toward evening, I passed by Martina at the rear of the hut, busy with her work. I saw anger in the dark face, and I saw the baleful light in her great lustrous eyes that I had twice before seen there.

"*Qué tiene?*" I asked, smiling at her. I had learned the little colloquialism from her—so often had she used it in speaking to me. "*Qué tiene?*" "What's the matter?"

But she paid me no attention, going on with her work as if she had not heard me. I went into the hut, where I found Scrobe. I waited for him to speak.

"I hate to see you falling into our sloppy habits—Labo's and mine," he said. There was nothing in his manner now that could give offense. "Have a cigarette?" And he handed me a package.

"It's catching, I suppose," I laughed.

We smoked in silence for a few moments.

"You think Martina a beautiful woman, don't you?" he asked.

"Certainly—who wouldn't?"

Another little silence.

"Why haven't you made love to her?"

"What?" I fired the word at him with such quickness and force that he started back in his chair just a trifle, but I saw he was undisturbed.

"Just that, just that!" he replied. "Why haven't you? I gave you opportunity."

I leaped to my feet. "You—you—you ——"

"Oh, sit down there, and don't be silly! Sit down and let me tell you what is on my mind! And don't affect too much surprise!" He pointed his glowing cigarette toward my chair.

But I did not sit down. I stood there staring at him in a burning rage, in shuddering disgust. Was it possible I had unconsciously given the man cause to think so mean of me? He was very calm, and he puffed easily at his cigarette.

"It's this: I'm tired of the woman, sick of her and her angel face. She wearies me, bores me, nauseates me. I loathe her, I hate her! I want to rid myself of her and I'm going to. Now if ——"

"Why, she loves you, loves you insanely!" I burst out.

"Pshaw! Still, you're right. 'Insanely' is good, very good! And to-morrow she could love some other fellow insanely—I know their kind! Now then, here she is, divinely beautiful—I'll admit that; and here are you, young and not unhandsome—when you're shaved and dolled up, eh? Ha, ha, ha! Now why shouldn't you make love to her and elope with her if I make it worth ——"

"What?" I fairly yelled the word at him this time, but he only laughed.

"Tut, tut, tut! Why so hot?" he chuckled. "Here, here! Let me state my proposal: I agreed to hire you to work for me at a hundred gold a month, didn't I? And I said I'd give you something like three months' work, in which time you could earn enough to get back to the States. Now, you induce Martina to run away with you and I'll hand you three hundred dollars gold, which at the present rate of exchange will be a tidy sum in Mexican currency. I'll hand it to you just as soon as you're ready to leave."

I had started when I heard the expression, "Three hundred in gold." A few days before I had heard it in the mouths of Labo and Simon, when I had come upon them in their bargaining.

"I have it here," he went on, rising and going to a cupboard, out of which he took a bulging purse. "I left it there for you when I went away—Martina knew it was there. I was hoping you and she and the money would be gone when I returned. I'm disappointed, greatly disappointed. Now it will be an easy thing to accomplish; you can abandon her as soon as you get to the railroad, and go on home decently enough. And if she leaves me in such a manner she cannot, and, of course, she would not, come back to me. It is in this way I must get rid of her. She might become cantankerous, really dangerous if I ——"

"You—you brought me up here for this?" I shouted at him.

"Sure! And I thought I was doing you a favor!" And he lighted another cigarette.

The cold-blooded brutality of the fellow! I looked at him in amazement, finding it hard to believe that such a man could be discovered anywhere in the world.

"And—and your children ——"

"Let that go! Vermin needs no attention; it thrives any place! So, what do you say? It's a fair enough offer. You're in a bad fix. I'll see you out of it."

I stepped to the table and struck it with my fist. "Scrobe, you agreed to pay me a hundred a month to come here and work for you! I've been here one month! Pay me my salary for that month. Pay me now!"

"I'll make it four hundred! I'll make it five! Come now!"

"Pay me my month's salary!"

"Your month isn't up for three days yet—you know that! I'll pay you in three days—if at the end of that time you are still asking. But in the meantime I want you to consider this offer of mine—five hundred in gold! It will be easy money; it will take you home in style. Think it over."

I turned and strode out of the room and into the lean-to, where I hastily gathered together my belongings and packed my suitcase. Then I left Scrobe's house. I must get away from him, out of sight of him, beyond the reach of his voice!

But where to go? I could not leave Pichucalco, penniless, to travel through a strange country, the language of which I could not speak, where I could not hope to find Americans to whom I might appeal for assistance. I must have money before I could make a move! I would have to wait there those three days. With the hundred dollars I was to receive from Scrobe, if he kept his promise and paid it—and I would not permit myself to think of the possibility of his not paying—I could start. Start where? I didn't know, I didn't care, only let me get away from that place, away from those people there—Labo, Scrobe, Simon, his daughter! And away from the vicinity of that other man too—Puysegur! I wanted never to hear the name again.

At the north side of the clearing, not very far from Simon's hut, there was an empty hut. I recalled having seen an Indian family moving out of it the day before. I turned toward it; I would make it shelter me for those three days I must wait. No thought of going to Labo or Simon came to me; I wanted nothing more to do with anybody in the village.

I found the hut a dismal, dirty, bare place, infested with vermin, moldy, bad smelling, and I shuddered as I looked about it. But it would have to serve, and I set to work rigging up a sort of cot on which I could sleep, and I turned to and cleared out a portion of the accumulated refuse. When I had finished my task it was dark. I went to bed supperless.

The next morning when I rose and stepped outside I found an old Indian woman at work in the open with her primitive kitchen outfit, preparing a meal. What was she doing there, I managed to ask her. Scrobe had sent her—she was to cook for me—she was to stay there while I remained. And she had brought along a supply of food.

So Scrobe was going to look after my actual needs for those three days! Very well, let him. He had agreed to cover all my expenses while I was in his service. Whether I wished to or not I must accept this offer of his; I had no other recourse.

That afternoon he came to see me. He was very friendly in his manner, very genial, and he talked as if nothing had come between us. Only as he was turning to go away did he refer to yesterday's subject.

"Have you decided ——"

I turned my back to him and walked into the hut.

He came the next day, chatted carelessly of a number of unimportant things for several minutes, then went to the hated topic.

"I hope you have by this time come to your senses and decided to accept ——"

Again I turned and left him. I could not come to blows with the man; I could not afford to; I must have the money from him, the hundred dollars! But I wanted to fight him, I wanted to smash his ugly face with my fists, knock him down, trample him, kick him, make him yell for mercy; and then go. And had there been but a few, a very few dollars in my pocket, I should have done it. But I had not so much as a corroded *centavo*, so I walked away from him in humiliating silence.

To-morrow would be my last day, thank heaven! To-morrow evening I could leave! I would get an Indian or two and go to the next village, twenty kilometers north, and stay the next night there. And I went to bed that evening happier than I had been for many a day.

Near noon of the next day, chancing to look toward Simon's hut I saw signs there that told me something unusual had occurred. A score or more Indians, men and women of the village, crowded and milled about in front of the place. As I watched I saw Labo come out of the hut and send them scurrying. A minute or two later Scrobe came hurrying across the clearing. He joined Labo, and the two stood there talking together. I noticed them turn and look in my direction, and seeing me Scrobe raised his hand and beckoned. I went over to them.

"Pretty work! Pretty work here!" shouted Labo as I came up. "He's got her!"

"Got her? Who? What do you mean?" I asked.

"Puysegur—got the girl!"

"Not ——"

"Stole her—stole her and carried her off as an African gorilla steals and carries off a native woman—as I've read they do." It was Scrobe who had taken up the subject. Both men were greatly excited, Labo something more than Scrobe, I thought.

"Pretty work!" growled Labo again. "Listen there!"

A cry, a gasping choking cry came from inside the hut, followed by a shrilling out of the words, "He's got to be killed! I'll kill him!" It was Simon's voice.

"It will mean the end of the old sponge fast enough," said Scrobe, and I imagined I caught the sound of a chuckle as he spoke. "He thought a lot of the girl—in his way."

"Yes, he did—in his way," drawled Labo.

"But when did it happen?" I demanded. "How ——"

"Oh, last night sometime," replied Labo. "I was here talking to Simon until after dark—had a few games of cards with him. Puysegur came in the night—I don't know what time—and carried off the girl. It was easy. The old man was too deep in his customary drunken sleep to know anything about it, but he says Puysegur left a note lying on his table in there, telling him what he was going to do. There's cold-bloodedness for you, eh? He didn't let us see the note—I wish he had. He found it lying there when he woke up this morning late, and he sent the old woman after me. Pretty work! Listen to him! Shall we take a look at him?"

We went inside. I saw Simon sitting at the table, where I had a few days before sat with him, his white head buried in his hands. He was sobbing and moaning, muttering and mumbling. As we advanced toward him he raised tear-blurred eyes and looked at us.

"Carlotta! Carlotta!" he cried. "My daughter! Oh, my afflicted daughter!"

Might it all have been maudlin—his moans, his mutterings, his tears, his calling to his daughter? Perhaps—I do not know. At the moment such a thought could have found no lodgment in my brain; I saw only an old, white-haired man bowed down with

(Continued on Page 37)

(Continued from Page 34)

awful grief and dreadful despair; heard only an aged father calling for his lost daughter, his helpless, afflicted daughter, lost to him in a manner sickening to contemplate—carried off by a brute, a beast, a ghoul! I shuddered, I trembled, I grew hot with hatred for Puysegur, aflame with hatred for that man who had done this awful thing; for as I stood there I was seeing the girl as plainly as if she were before me—her slight fragile figure, her pale wan face, her great dark eyes, fear-choked and pathetic, her little helpless hands fluttering about her throat. And she it was, whom I there envisaged, the afflicted, the pitiable one, who had been carried off to a fate worse than death, to a fate that could not but be doubly dreadful to her who could make no murmur, send out no cry for help, loose no feminine scream of distress!

"He must be killed! Fetch him to me and let me kill him!"

"Soused to the limit! Soaked to the brim!"

I started at the words Scrobe had spoken, spoken I knew in a spirit of levity, and I turned and looked at him in disgust. Had the man no feelings? What infinite meanness must be his!

"And he's drained dry his bottle too," he went on. "I'll go get him a new supply; he'll have to have it. Wait here, you two."

He crossed the clearing to his hut. Labo and I stepped outside and sat down. There was silence between us for some time, then Labo said: "The old man is right—Puysegur must be killed for this!"

I returned no comment to his remark, and we sat without speaking until Scrobe came back with the liquor. He had brought the great demijohn, the one from which I had drawn a full flask for Simon a while ago. Labo laughed when he saw it.

"Pretty work!" he grunted.

"I'm tired of doling," said Scrobe with a grin, and he went into the hut, carrying the big jug.

A minute later he came out and sat down with us, and the two began to talk about the ugly affair.

I quickly perceived they had made their decision to hunt down Puysegur to his death before they had called me in. Scrobe had already started off a half dozen of his men to look for signs of Puysegur's flight, to find out in what direction he had gone. One of them had been sent to his plantation, to see if he was there, he told us.

"No use of our looking there; he'll avoid that place," said Labo.

"You're right, but we must make sure; we've got to get him," returned Scrobe. "We may have trouble picking up his trail—that rain this morning. But we'll get him sooner or later."

"It's a mob's job," said Labo, "but a mob of two is something new. Say, how do you feel about this affair?" He turned to me. "You're a stranger here, I know, and maybe you don't care to mix in our ——"

"The man deserves death!" I declared savagely.

"Sure! And we intend to see that he gets his deserts!" said Scrobe.

"But the law, the courts of justice; there must be means ——"

"Pretty work!" snorted Labo, interrupting me. "Pretty work, waiting for a court of justice in this country, or in any other country, to handle a case like this and handle it right! Don't you know there have been no regular court sessions in this section of the so-called republic for three years and more—since the revolution started? Crimes like this demand speedy punishment and severe punishment, and we're going to mob him, even if there are but two of us to do the job!"

"Join us and make it a mob of three!" invited Scrobe. "If there were other Americans within reach I'd go and ask every one of them to join us!"

"I'll go."

It was youth deciding again, hastily and without long thinking—youth revengeful, youth impetuous and precipitate, youth quixotic. A few years older, I should have hesitated, drawn back, demanded investigation, demanded proof positive that Puysegur had merited death. But I was young and immature, and I answered promptly, "I'll go!"

"Good! A mob of three! And we'll get him! It's a hideous thing he's done. I sicken, thinking of it! A pretty little thing like her! And so helpless, too—deaf and dumb! Think of it! We should have taken her to Coatzacoalcos and turned her over to the American consul there, the time we talked about doing that, shouldn't we?" And Scrobe turned to Labo.

"Of course we should! Why didn't we?"

The Indians came back late in the afternoon. They had discovered nothing, found no signs to indicate in what direction Puysegur had gone. Next morning at daybreak they were started out again, with additional men, but again they returned without results.

"He could hide away in a thousand places in these jungles where he could be found only by merest chance," Scrobe said to me. "These Indians know little about trailing—but more than Labo and I do. We'll find him!"

My month's end had passed but I had dropped all thought of leaving the place; I must stay to help punish Puysegur! Scrobe paid me my month's salary. He made no further mention to me of his ugly proposal. And I forgot much in those days; I forgot everything except the fact that I was to go on a man hunt, that I was to help put a man to death. But I would not go back to Scrobe's hut, though he asked me.

On the fourth day after the abduction came the Indian, Primo Morales, a former hand of Scrobe's, who had left his employer some months before and who had now come back to ask for his old job. Somewhere over to the south of us, on the Naranja River, he had seen Puysegur. He could guide us to the place and by a short route, a new route cut through the jungle; he could bring us to the spot in two days. He used many words, that Indian, and with much gesticulating and waving of his arms, and with much loud talk—little of which I could understand—he described the place where he had happened upon Puysegur, living in a hut on an old abandoned plantation. The girl? He knew nothing about the girl; he had seen no one but Puysegur. He could take us to him, straight to the spot through the untracked jungle; he was an expert guide, he boasted. We made ready to depart.

That night Simon died. I knew nothing about it until next morning when we were several kilometers out of Pichucalco, on our way to kill Puysegur. Scrobe told me.

"The demijohn proved too much for him, I suppose," he said with his evil little chuckle.

The voluble, boastful Primo was a better talker than he was a guide. The two days that were to bring us to the hiding place of Puysegur had apparently brought us nowhither; deeper and deeper into the unchanging jungle were we digging, without a sign, without a hint that would indicate the nearness of the stream we sought. Indeed we found evidence in the course of the arroyos and little creeks we were crossing that told us we were not traveling toward the river but were paralleling it.

"The fool is lost!" growled Scrobe as we made camp that evening of our second day out.

"Of course he is!" agreed Labo. "Tomorrow we must take hold ourselves and lay the course!"

"I think so too," returned Scrobe.

The next morning when the *mozos* started on their work with their machetes, hewing out the path for us, they swerved to the right, almost at right angles with the course of yesterday, with the guide protesting loudly and volubly; and all that day we proceeded at our snail's pace in the new direction taken.

The curse of the jungle was almost unbearable—the swarming millions of insects that rushed out upon us from the hot muggy depths of the black forest; the enervating, the exhausting, the killing heat that wore us down and down day and night; the sweetish nauseating taste of the air ever on our lips; the abominable stenches that were constantly assailing our nostrils; the slimy creeping things writhing about our feet. I marvel, as I recall those days in the jungle, that we did not turn and flee back along the track we had made.

And now Scrobe and Labo, as the time lengthened, had passed from good-humored disputing and blatant arguing to ugly bickering, to positive quarreling, to fault-finding, even to cursing each other, as men do when too great intimacy with their fellows becomes an irritant, a burden and a bore. Sometimes they would forget their differences and become disgustingly friendly, and sometimes they would turn upon me to concentrate their sarcasm, their exasperation, their wrath upon my head, laughing at me, sneering at me, taunting me, humiliating me in many ways. I endured it with what composure I could, though I would now and then let fly at them a verbal volley that was quite as effective as they gave, for I knew that men tortured as we were being tortured, harried and harassed by the hundred horrors of the jungle, until all our nerves had crawled to the outside of our bodies, were to be excused much.

And still were they two clashing, squabbling and wrangling over the manner in which Puysegur was to be done to death, Labo coiling and uncoiling the little flexible rope he carried, Scrobe flourishing his long-bladed knife and running his thumb along its keen edge; Labo shouting that Puysegur should be hung, Scrobe yelling that he should have his throat cut.

Sickened and disgusted by the savagery and brutishness of the two men, uncovered to me more and more in this steady lusting of theirs for barbarous cruelties and heathenish tortures, I was now withdrawing from their presence whenever opportunity offered. As we moved slowly forward on our march I would linger behind; when we halted to rest I would sit down in a place removed from them; when they would begin their shouted discussion of the subject with which they had become so insanely obsessed I would walk away from them and join the *mozos* ahead of us or go back and meet the carriers. I could have found the society of beasts preferable to the company of those two men in those periods.

Questions, questions, questions! My brain was crowded and jammed and in a constant turmoil with unanswerable questions. They came rushing at me every minute, every second, crying for answer—old questions, the ones that had assailed me at Pichucalco; new questions, provoked by the happenings there in the jungle. Sometimes I felt I must go insane, asking myself over and over the questions I could not answer.

What manner of men were these two fellows with whom I had allied myself in this man hunt? Both of them, I had early perceived in my association with them, were debasements, degenerated from better beings of better existences. In both of them I had now and then discovered faint vestiges of those virtues and excellences that mark men of superior breeding. Scrobe had once essayed to quote a line from Vergil to me, and the books I had uncovered in his hut were books that only a man of some education would have cared for, though they had long been unused, and were wet and moldy, with the leaves stuck together with mildew. In Labo I found fewer evidences that bespoke for him a higher life than that he now lived, but certain mannerisms, certain expressions he had let fall told me he had once known decency. What curse, what temptations, what physical or mental atony had dragged them down to this, to play at times the parts of such beasts that would have shamed the apes of their ancestors?

And what were their real relations, one with the other? To what extent were they friends, to what enemies? What was there back of Puysegur's crime that caused them to hate him with such savage hatred? Why this mad desire of theirs to do Puysegur to death in a manner hideous and revolting? I asked myself such questions. And I asked myself, too, what would happen after we had accomplished our mission over there on the Naranja? What would then become of me? Where should I go then? And—what would become of the girl?

The girl! Simon's daughter! I had forgotten too much when I had centered my whole attention on Puysegur's punishment. I had almost ceased to think about the girl. Now I was asking myself what would become of the girl. Her father was dead. Where would she go? What would we do with her? We? Rather what would they do with her—those two savages? And this was the question that now took and held first place in my mind.

Once as we sat resting after an hour of going, Scrobe turned to Labo: "I suppose we'll have to take the girl to Coatzacoalcos, won't we?"

"Of course; there's nothing else to do with her," Labo replied.

"Perhaps—perhaps I could escort her there as I go out," I suggested hesitatingly.

They stared at me in silence for several moments.

"Good idea!" said Scrobe.

"Fine!" grunted Labo.

They made no further reference to that subject.

As I continued to observe them I became convinced that there was deep-rooted hatred between the two men, that there was positive enmity in their hearts, murdering enmity. They mistrusted each other; they suspected each other of something, I knew not what. Each feared the other; I divined it in their looks, perceived it in their actions, discerned it in their talk. Sooner or later there would be a clash, final and determining. It would come, I told myself, after we had finished with Puysegur, not before.

In the afternoon of that third day we were crossing a deep water-filled arroyo when Scrobe, missing his footing on the log we were using as a bridge, fell, and the high-power rifle he was carrying dropped into the stream.

For more than an hour we worked trying to recover it, the Indians diving after it in the black, thick water of the stagnant stream, but it was not found; it had sunk deep into the muck and ooze.

I saw pronounced fear looking out of Scrobe's ferretlike eyes as we gave up the search, but it was there but for a moment, when he seemed to recover himself. He had now only his knife for a weapon. Labo was carrying a large-caliber automatic revolver. I had a small pistol that was practically worthless, for it had been lying neglected in my suitcase, and rust had taken it in every part. And for ammunition I had but the five shots that were in its magazine.

"Pretty work!" growled Labo. "Now we have this, and this." He touched his automatic and shook his coil of rope. "A knife and our friend's popgun with which to go hunting for a man who is as big as two of us, as strong as all three of us, and who is doubtless as desperate as are all men who do the sort of thing he has done! Why, why, in the name of heaven, do you go losing your rifle at a time like this? Well, what shall we do now—go back?"

He showed signs of wrath as he talked, but I fancied it was wrath simulated, for had I not caught sight of the ghost of a grin playing over his fat lips when Scrobe had stumbled and the rifle went splashing out of sight in the water?

"Go back?" echoed Scrobe. "Not a bit of it! We'll finish the job! You have an automatic; let me carry that now. I'll get the drop on him and you can tie him up."

"Not a bad plan at all, but I'll carry the gun until we actually have need for it," returned Labo.

"Just as you like," said Scrobe, and we resumed our march.

That night the automatic disappeared.

Scrobe and I had risen ahead of Labo and were washing our hands and faces at the pool of water near which we had camped. Suddenly Labo came bursting out from beneath his little cloth cage of mosquito netting, yelling at us, every other word he spoke an oath.

His revolver was gone, he roared—stolen from his *pabellón!* He had taken it from its holster and laid it down upon the ground beside him when he had gone to bed, and now it was gone! How could it have happened? How could anyone have reached in beneath the netting without awakening him?

"An unavoidable accident lost us the rifle, but carelessness, nothing but carelessness, has deprived us of the revolver," said Scrobe, mumbling the words from behind the dirty rag he was using in lieu of a towel to dry his face. And as he mumbled I thought I heard that faint chuckle of his.

"Well, it isn't far from here. It's certain that one of you two has it—or one of the *mozos!*" snarled Labo.

"Right! Unless a monkey slipped in and took it or unless you hid it while wandering in your sleep—don't overlook those two possibilities," drawled Scrobe. "But search us, look us over thoroughly. Look over our heavy baggage too! It's all right with you to be searched, isn't it?" he asked, turning to me.

I replied that it was.

"Oh, I don't expect to find it in your possession," said Labo, but he stood there watching us closely as we turned out our pockets, opened our shirt fronts, and drew tight about our limbs and hips the cloth of our trousers to show that the weapon could not be concealed anywhere about our bodies. We then pulled down our *pabellóns*, the little cloth cages of mosquito netting beneath which we always slept, and shook them out. Other possible hiding places there were none.

Labo swore viciously. "One of the *mozos* has it, but we'll never get it; it's stuck away in the bushes somewhere. I'd like to tie them up, every one of them, and whip a confession out of the fellow that took it! That Primo—there's the thief! I'd take him on first! A month or two from now he'll dig his way back here to get it; and a fine piece of rust he'll find it! Well, let's go up and look them over."

We went forward to the camp of the Indians, who were then at their breakfast. Labo stood them up in line and searched each one, cursing them and knocking them about unnecessarily in the process.

"I knew it!" he roared. "I knew it! Lick it out of them; that's the only way we'll get it back!"

"And now we're down to a knife, a rope and a pea shooter," laughed Scrobe. "Let me look at that terrible weapon of yours," he said to me.

I handed him my diminutive revolver. He took it and grinned over it as he examined it. He cocked it, aimed at a tree and pulled the trigger. It missed fire. He tried again, and this time there followed the falling of the trigger a sound not much louder than that of an exploding firecracker. He handed the little weapon back to me.

"Here—keep it—take good care of it, and don't get hurt with it! Don't try it on anything bigger than a parrot!" He was sneering at me as he talked. "So we're down to a knife and a rope—the pea shooter can't be relied on! What now—shall we turn back?"

"No! I say go on, if for nothing more than to reconnoiter," replied Labo. "If the Indian can bring us to the place let him do it; then we can come back again as soon as we have reëquipped. And something might happen, you know; we might come upon him unexpectedly and take him in, unarmed as we are. Let me get just one throw at him in a little open space and he's mine!"

In the early days of our acquaintanceship Labo had told me that he had once ridden the range in the Southwest, and two or three times he had displayed before me his skill with the lasso. When he spoke of a throw in a little open space I knew he was referring to the lasso, into which, the day before, he had converted the rope he was carrying.

"I'm willing to go ahead and try to locate the spot," he went on, "but I don't think that Indian up there will ever find it. He's lost! Let's get him back here before they start to work, and tell him he must do something, and do it quickly!"

The man came hurrying back at their call. They questioned him; he began waving his arms, gesticulating, grimacing, pointing this way and that—the Naranja was here, it was there, it curved about in this direction, it turned in that. Leave him alone and he would bring us to it, he would show us the river by noon of that day! With a warning from both the men that he would find himself in trouble if we did not see the Naranja by noon, he was sent back to the front.

Noon came and there was no change in the appearance of the country through which we were passing; there were no signs indicating that we were approaching a stream. Then I was made witness to an exhibition of savagery and brutality that chills my blood yet to-day as I think of it.

I had dropped behind the two men to be free from their company. Looking ahead I saw them standing conversing together. They moved closer to the working gang of *mozos*, and I heard Labo calling to Primo to come to him. Scrobe stepped out of sight among the bushes at the side of the trail.

The big Indian struck the blade of his machete into the trunk of a tree, paused for a moment to say something to his companions, then came walking back. When he was within a few feet of Labo I saw Scrobe come from the bushes. He was carrying a bundle of long switches which he had just cut.

The *mozo* stopped in his tracks, stared for a moment, then turned and started to run back toward the other Indians, who had dropped their work and were watching.

Labo had been expecting this move, I suppose, for he was holding his rope coiled and ready for throwing. At the spot where he stood the forest growth was thin and sparse, and he had before him the little open space of which he had spoken that morning. I saw the ring of rope go flying through the air and fall over the head and neck and shoulders of the running Indian. He was jerked from his feet, fell tumbling backward, and went sprawling among the stubble of the newly cut bush.

He began fighting and struggling to free himself from the binding rope, but Labo was quickly upon him and with dexterous casts and loopings of his lasso he tied him up in a minute, as he might have tied a thrown steer on the range, making me think, as I watched him at his work, of a great black spider casting its strands of web about the legs and wings of some insect caught in its net.

Scrobe went running up, laughing, and in another minute they had triced the man up to a tree, stripped down the thin cotton garments he was wearing, and were laying on their victim with the long slender whips, lashing him upon his bare back, swinging in their blows with all their strength, with their hands gripping the butts of their limber switches, striking alternately, laughing, cursing, yelling, acting as drunken demons might act.

Though distant from them several rods I could plainly hear the swishing, whining sound of the switches cutting through the air, for they were lithe and limber and long, and I could hear them smacking down upon the back of the tied man, who howled and screamed out his agony. Horrified and sickened by the sight and sounds, with hot and searing anger surging up within me, I rushed forward to protest, to cry out against the brutal, inhuman thing I was witnessing, to beg for mercy for the unfortunate *mozo*. As men bereft of reason the whippers turned upon me, rushed at me, cursing me, threatening me with their whips, promising me the same flogging they were administering to the Indian if I interfered with them by speaking so much as another word. I was frightened; my courage, born a moment before of righteous anger, died suddenly, and trembling I turned and walked hurriedly back along the trail. And behind me as I went came sounds that told me the punishment of the unfortunate *mozo* had been renewed. I heard the smack, smack, smack of the whips, the yelling and laughing and cursing of the two planters, the howling and the shrieking of their victim.

Finally, out of sight and out of sound of it all, I sat down to take counsel with myself, to consider and study the wretched predicament in which I found myself. What was I to do? For I could not go on longer with these two human fiends, these two loosed demons! What I had seen and what I had heard, together with their threats against me, had left me terrified and shaken. I was afraid of them, and I could go on no farther! But could I go back—alone? Did I dare try to find my way through the jungle to Pichucalco, where I could make my start for the railroad to the north? I might be able to follow the new-cut trail where the forest was thick, but where it thinned out and the bush was short, where the machete had not been used at all—what would I have to guide me over those spaces? Or in some of the swales and hollows we had crossed, where in our haste to get along we had pushed aside the great plant stalks and fern fronds and crowded our way between them, letting them close into place again behind us—how quickly would I become lost there!

I could not hope to induce one of the carriers to return with me and guide me out of the jungle, even if there was one of them able to do it, which I doubted. They were all simple-minded fellows, practically slaves of Scrobe and Labo, owned by them, according to law, for debt, and they knew and feared the law of peonage; they must serve their masters until the last *centaro* of their debts had been paid. Should I force one of them to accompany me he would desert me at first opportunity and return to his companions.

I was caught, I was held in the trap into which I had stepped, I must go on with Scrobe and Labo! There was nothing else I could do!

Full realization of this helplessness of mine numbed me with dread and apprehension for a while, but after I had accepted the inevitableness of the necessity before me I found myself doubting whether I should indeed have gone back, could I have done so. Ought I not to go on and see the thing through to its end? For there was the girl, the helpless, the afflicted girl, the victim of Puysegur, held somewhere over there on the Naranja, which we must soon find! And the more the vileness and

(Continued on Page 40)

(Continued from Page 38)

depravity of my two companions were revealed to me the more my thoughts kept turning to her. Puysegur had her now; if Puysegur should be killed, then these two villains would have her; they would have her and ——

I leaped to my feet, trembling, chilling with horror, aghast at the thought that had in that instant struck through my lethargic, my stupid, my uncomprehending mind! Why, these wretches here with me, each wanted the daughter of Simon for himself! They were going to the Naranja to get her—each for himself! Working together for the same end, each for himself! Working together to kill Puysegur, each fearing to undertake the job alone, and then—then the clash, the determining clash. And she would go to one or the other of them! Working together and using me as their tool, me the immature, the brainless one, the fool—me, youth!

Why had I not seen before, why had I not understood before? That web of mystery that was weaving about me all the while—why should I have found it so difficult to break through? Plain enough now was the reason for the Spanish woman's fury and upheaval of passion at the sight of Simon's daughter—she had seen Scrobe—her man and no other woman's—casting eyes of desire upon the girl! Scrobe had told me he had brought me to his plantation, hoping I would fall in love with Martina Vasquez, carry her away, and so rid him of her. Blind young fool that I was, I had not seen in his ugly plan anything more than he had stated—that he was tired of the woman. Now I comprehended all! He was afraid of her, afraid to cast her off, to drive her away from him, knowing she would try to kill him. No doubt she had told him she would do that. And so he had brought me there! He had seen me, youthful, well-dressed, of attractive appearance; Martina Vasquez was young and, as he had said to me that day, divinely beautiful. What more natural, he had thought, than for us to become infatuated, one with the other, and disappear? Then he could take Simon's daughter! He had thrown us together; he had even arranged for our going, leaving money I could steal!

I writhed with the torture of the load of shame and humiliation that descended upon me as I stood there alone in the depths of the jungle, with the light of understanding beginning to break in upon my confused and wondering and inefficient brain; as I stood there looking at myself stripped to my naked helplessness!

Scrobe wanted the deaf and dumb girl! Labo wanted her. I knew it now! Puysegur had wanted her, and he had taken her; he had moved first! And now they were on their way to kill Puysegur, with me to assist them; and then—I wondered what was in their minds, what plans they had evolved, each for himself; just how they intended to make use of me; what they would do with me, once they were through with me; how much they knew or suspected of each other's intentions. But I conjectured nothing—I could not!

Each feared the other—I knew that—but in what degree? Fear had looked out of Scrobe's eyes when he had lost his rifle, and Labo had been unable to conceal his satisfaction; Labo had gone wild with rage when he found his revolver gone, and Scrobe had chuckled! What would happen, once they had killed Puysegur?

I must go on with them, but I would not go on with them to help kill Puysegur; I would now as willingly have helped Puysegur kill them. It mattered not now with which side I was allied! I would go on with them to the end, hoping that in some way I could rescue the girl. She was afraid of me, I remembered, but now I was asking myself if that fear came not from the fact that she saw me an associate of these two whose evil designs she had divined, and as she feared them so she feared me. She was afraid of me, but if I could let her know the truth—if I could separate myself from these two after we had located the hut where she was being held, creep up to it, find her and speak to her—but she was deaf! How could I communicate with her, how make her understand at such a critical moment, as it would surely be, that I was there to help her escape, that I was not allied with this pair of wretches? Here was a difficulty confronting me already, apparently insurmountable as I considered it. But I would find a way! I would go on with Scrobe and Labo, stay with them, work with them, camouflage my feelings, hide from them this new knowledge I had acquired, deceive them, and hope that fate would be kind to me and to the girl.

I turned about and went forward to overtake my companions. I came to the place of the flogging. The big Indian was lying on the ground where he had fallen when the rope binding him had been removed; lying there unconscious, his face in the mold, with his back and shoulders cut to scarlet ribbons. They had used up many whips, those two fiends; I saw the stubs and broken pieces. Ten thousand gorging flies and insects were already swarming over him, and another legion came crowding up as I stood there, gazing in horror. I stooped down and put my canteen to his mouth, but the water leaked from his lifeless lips and dribbled away over his chin. I brought his machete from the tree where I had seen him strike it in when Labo had called him, and with it set to work cutting down new plant shoots and small bushes and young fern fronds, which I piled about him thickly, building a little leafy house of green about him. Then I went on; I had done what I could.

I never saw him again. Did he die there, devoured in his unconscious state by flies and insects and creeping things of the jungle? *Quien sabe?*

But now must we all, indeed, turn back, I reflected as I moved on; we were without a guide, and we could not expect to find Puysegur's hiding place without assistance, unless we should by mere chance stumble upon it. I thought to find Scrobe and Labo decided as to this, and making ready for the return.

But they were still going on; they had been making rapid progress in that last hour, and I had walked a long distance before I saw them ahead of me. Labo was close behind the *mozos*, who were cutting and slashing with their machetes in scared haste, frightened by what they had witnessed back there, urged on by the curses and threats of the driver near them. Scrobe was sitting on a log, smoking a cigarette, when I came up.

"We had begun to think you had left us for good," he drawled. "But you can't always do what you'd like to do when you're in the tropics, you know. It's something here as it must be in the Arctic regions—human companionship is very essential; you can't get anywhere alone."

I made no response, busying myself with retying my shoe laces.

"That business back there," he went on, indicating with a toss of his hand the path we had come, "may seem a trifle rough to you who are not used to the ways of the country, but such things have to be, now and then."

I listened to his words with loathing in my heart for him, and remained silent.

After a while I ventured, "Are you going on without a guide?"

"Sure! Primo was no good anyway. We lost nothing, losing him," he replied.

A few minutes later Labo came back and joined us.

"I really believe we are approaching the river," he said, dropping down upon the log beside Scrobe. "The ground is beginning to dip sharply. If we could only see ahead farther than our noses—but we can't."

We smoked and perspired and slapped at the mosquitoes and flies and tiny insects that were tormenting us with their usual persistency and voraciousness. None of us spoke for some time. Then Scrobe broke the silence.

"What's wrong up yonder?" he asked, rising to his feet and looking ahead.

The Indians had stopped their work and were standing with their machetes laid over their shoulders, listening intently, it seemed to me as I watched them, to some noise over in the jungle to the right of them.

Labo yelled a question, asking what was the matter, but their shouted reply was not understood. We walked forward a little way, then stopped, for we, too, heard something over there in the jungle to the right of us.

It was that time of the day when the sounds of the tropical forest were fewest, when the birds were quiet, and the crying of other forms of animal life was stilled, but now we heard a bedlamish squawking of parrots, a frightened chirping and crying of other feathered flyers, while a drove of monkeys set up such an unearthly screaming and screeching as I had not heard from the animals before. Something was coming through the jungle, over there to the right of us, disturbing its denizens in their haunts and homes! Something was coming through the jungle in our direction, driving all living things before it, for now there was a great fluttering and beating of wings among the trees and low-growing bushes to our right, and then a great flock of the smaller birds of the forest came breaking out from the dense growth, to cross our trail ahead and disappear in the other side; little ratlike animals appeared suddenly before us, scurrying across the cleared path, followed by a horde of snakes and lizards and toads, and every kind of creeping, crawling thing, all rushing panic-stricken away from that something that was coming through the jungle.

Cold chills began running up and down my spine, and I broke out in clammy sweat as I stood there waiting for the coming of that mysterious thing from the jungle. I looked at the two men beside me. Their faces showed no signs that they were at all disturbed; just at that moment they were both calmly lighting cigarettes. I looked toward the Indians ahead of us. They were coming down the trail, hurrying, and I saw one and another of them stoop to slap his bare ankles or to clutch the cloth of his white cotton pantaloons and twist it and rub it over his legs.

"Ants!" said Labo in his expressionless voice. "We'd better be getting out of here. The stream may be a wide one."

I scarcely heard him; I was listening to a new and strange sound that had, all unnoticed, crept into and filled my ears. The cries of the birds, the chattering and screaming of the monkeys, the squeaking noises of the little animals running along the ground had passed on and were growing fainter and fainter; but now from out the depths from which they had fled floated a sound indescribable; a sound as of swishing garments of silk, steady and unbroken; a sound as of the beating of blizzard dust on winter window panes; a sound as of the gentle rubbing together of sheets of sandpaper of enormous size, a weird, an uncanny, a ghostly sound.

Suddenly the ground in front of me and on either side of me began moving before my staring eyes, moving with a swimming, gliding motion, ripplingly floating away, it seemed, and its color had gone from mottled green to dusky brown. Then I saw them—the ants! They were everywhere, covering the earth, covering the choppings of the *mozos'* machetes, covering my shoes, swarming up my leggings—great black and brown fellows, big mandibled, fat bellied, stilt legged.

"Get out of there, you fool!"

It was Labo shouting at me. The Indians had passed us, and Labo and Scrobe had left me standing there. I had not noticed their going. At the call I turned and walked rapidly toward them, wading through the black, shallow, crawling waves. I felt a stinging on my hand and looked to see a huge ant setting his jaws into my flesh; another nipped my ear; others were on my neck biting savagely. I brushed them off and broke into a run.

"Haven't you enough sense to get out of the path of army ants?" demanded Scrobe in a tone of disgust, as I came up to them.

"I didn't know there were such things as army ants," I replied. "Are they so dangerous? If they are will we be safe here?"

"Safe enough here, but walk forward fifteen or twenty feet, well into the stream, and they'll uncover your skeleton for you fast enough."

I went forward cautiously, watching the ground at my feet lest I go too far, and came to the well-defined, well-ordered left flank of the marching army. I stood gazing at its hurrying millions, fascinated, awed, scared by the sight of that flowing, rippling stream of brown and black life. And again was that indescribable sound in my ears, stronger now—the ghostly patter of trillions of tiny feet, stepping on leaf and limb and grass blade and bark and stone and mold. Into my mind as I hearkened to its steady murmur came strangely the allusion of the old Biblical writer to "a sound of going in the mulberry trees," and I wondered if the sound the ancient prophet had heard, that had occasioned the making of that line, was not similar to the sound that was then flooding my ears as I stood there listening to the ghostly patter of those tripping trillions of tiny feet marching through the jungle.

Scrobe had told me they would strip the flesh from my bones. Would they, indeed;

(Continued on Page 43)

(Continued from Page 40)

or did he speak jestingly? It did not seem possible they could be so terrible as he had said, but there was the sting of that one's just-beginning bite on my hand, where yet I could see two tiny specks of red; and all living things were fleeing before them in panic rout, with even the high-flying, high-nesting birds, safe enough from the menace below them, flying away before their coming, driven it must be by deep instinctive fear. Scrobe was right, no doubt; he would know, knowing the jungle and its ways.

My eye caught sight of a dried piece of *tortilla* lying in the path a few feet outside the road of the marching army, tossed there by one of the *mozos*, the leaving of his lunch that day. I picked it up and threw it among the ants. Hardly had it touched the ground before it was buried beneath a squirming mass of brown and black, and an instant later I was watching it walking away in tiny bits. Then a large green lizard, aged or sick or perhaps injured, came crawling through the bushes into my sight, swarmed over with the gnawing, chewing insects. I beheld its very flesh melting away, as it were, saw it flayed of its green skin, watched it pared down and down until I turned my eyes.

I thought of the flogged Indian lying helpless and unconscious back yonder in the trail, beneath the little house of green I had built over him. What if this marching army of frightfulness had passed that way! I shuddered and left the flowing stream of ants, walked back to the two planters and sat down near them.

I do not know how long I had stood watching, entranced, the running millions, but as we rose to go on again, after an Indian had reported the trail clear, I heard Scrobe growling to Labo about another two hours lost. The *mozos* returned to their chopping, with Labo keeping close behind them to lay the course for them and to curse and harry them into greater haste. Scrobe and I loafed slowly along a little way in the rear.

An hour passed, and the greater portion of another, and then we heard a cry from the foremost Indians.

"*El rio! El rio!*" they all began shouting, paying no heed to Labo's savage commands to keep silent.

We ran forward, broke through the cane growths and fern thickets, following close on the heels of the excited, uncontrollable Indians, and in a few minutes we were looking out over the sluggish dirty waters of the Naranja.

In a second the Indians had stripped off their garments of thin cotton and plunged into the stream, where they floundered about through the stagnant waters in luxurious bliss, as hogs in mucky wallows.

Labo proposed our following their example, but Scrobe said no, it was getting late in the day; we must try to find out just where we were on the river. And he set to work getting the bathers back on shore.

There was an old trail running along the river's edge, thick with heavy plant growth and choked with low-standing bush, but quickly made passable by a little work with the knives, and following it we moved rapidly down stream for four or five kilometers. Then Labo and Scrobe discovered certain landmarks corresponding to some described to them by the Indian, Primo, and they stopped to confer—but apart from me.

When they had finished their talk one of the carriers was sent for and he came up to us, a young man with a face of more than ordinary intelligence for the class of *mozos* we had with us, and I saw Labo and Scrobe talking to him earnestly, giving him directions and instructions, as I supposed. He heard them through, nodded his head and walked away, disappearing down the old trail we had been coming along.

"We've sent him on ahead to do a little scouting work and to see what he can discover," Labo said to me. "We're not altogether certain that Primo wasn't lying to us all the while about the whole business."

It was dusk when the Indian returned. He had found the place he had been sent to look for, he reported, and it was just as Primo had reported it. He had passed completely about the hut, which stood in a small clearing from which Puysegur had cut the new growth, and he had caught a glimpse of the woman; he had recognized her as the one he had often seen at Pichucalco. But he had seen nothing of Puysegur, and he had not lingered long about the place; he was afraid.

"Well, we've found him, anyway," said Scrobe. "But we cannot expect to accomplish anything now. We cannot go bursting in upon him without weapons, even if we are three against one."

"We can make the trip to Pichucalco, get guns and be back here in four days, can't we?" asked Labo.

"Easily enough; we have a good open trail almost all the way, and we can move rapidly along, going and coming."

"Then the thing to do, as I see it, is to make our camp here for to-night and start early to-morrow morning. There is no use of our losing time even to spy on him now, unarmed as we are; it would only mean a delay, a useless delay. We may not find him here four days from now."

"You are quite right, Labo. We'll get off from here by daybreak. You're still inclined to see this thing through with us, aren't you?" Scrobe turned to me as he asked the question.

"Why, certainly! The man deserves death!" I replied promptly.

"Good! I thought so—thought you were that kind! This trip of ours through the woods tried us all; none of us displayed angelic tempers and dispositions at times, but I felt certain that you would not hold any grudge against either of us for any unpleasantness that has occurred among us, and I'm glad to learn that you have not. We'll go back to Pichucalco and equip ourselves again, and this time we'll use better judgment, and I'll see that you carry with you something more efficient than a pea shooter such as that you now have, eh? But I'm tired enough to take a rest. It has been a long, hard day!"

Both of them stretched themselves out on the ground, lighted cigarettes, and fell to talking about rubber culture. I walked away from them a few paces and sat down alone. I had told them I was ready to stay with them, to return with them to Pichucalco for new weapons, and to come back with them to help kill Puysegur. Nothing could have been further from my real intentions.

I was about to break with them. Tomorrow morning before dawn, before either of them had awakened, I would leave them and strike out alone. Down the river, less than a kilometer distant, was the girl they sought—the helpless, the pitiable, the afflicted one, held by the beastly Puysegur. I would quit these two fiends while they slept, and go down there and do what I could to rescue her. I would risk much, I would take great chances, I would kill Puysegur, if I must! And I would kill Scrobe and I would kill Labo, if I must! But—kill! With what? The absurdity, the quixotism of my resolve!

The diminutive revolver with its four uncertain shots in its rusty magazine lay in my pocket, a thing of ridicule—and that was my means for killing Puysegur, if I must; and Scrobe and Labo, if I must! And should I not expect to be compelled to defend myself against those three if luck went not with me in my adventure? The moment Scrobe and Labo discovered I had left them I would become their hunted prey; and should Puysegur catch sight of me near his hut he would strike me down as quickly as he would strike down both of these men, for he knew I had been associated with them! A few moments before, Scrobe had spoken of the division as three against one. Yes, three against one, but not as he disposed the four, for when I quit these two companions of mine to-morrow morning I would be the one against three! And for my protection, for the task ahead of me, I had that toy pistol! What could I do? What should I do? Nothing but go on and trust to chance!

I put up my little cage of mosquito netting on its four sticks, placing it between those of Scrobe and Labo, as I had been doing every night—they had always seen to it that I was between them—and crawled beneath it early. But not to sleep; I was determined that I should not sleep that night. I could not trust my subconscious self to stand watch over me to awaken me at that early hour when I must creep out and away; myself, my conscious self must watch.

And hour after hour I lay there in the hot heavy darkness; listening to the mysterious nocturnal sounds of the jungle, trying to measure the minutes by my pulse beats, fighting against the onslaughts of slumber, battling against the creeping lethargy of sleep. But to no avail. I was weary, worn, exhausted; all my body cried out for rest, and with the repeated and rerepeated words on my lips, "I must not close my eyes! I must not close my eyes!" I closed my eyes.

I woke with a start, found myself, remembered, and hurriedly raised the side curtain of my *pabellón* and peeped out. It was the edge of day. A faint dim light was sifting down through the thick-leaved branches of the trees beneath which we had camped, and that profound silence that follows the stilling of the night's noises of the jungle and just precedes the breaking out of the day's din enveloped the world. I should have been away before this moment; I had not waked on time!

I was cautiously slipping from beneath the netting of my little cage when I heard Scrobe at the right of me moving about. I settled back and let the netting drop; perhaps he was but stirring in his sleep. But a moment later he was crawling out of his sleeping tent, crawling carefully and almost noiselessly, as I could perceive, with all my senses alert as they were. Then I heard him go tiptoeing past me. I peeped out again. There was light enough now for me to see him, and he was standing, stooping, over Labo's *pabellón*, as if listening.

Suddenly with a muttered curse he seized the thin cloth of the little structure and gave it a jerk, and the supporting sticks falling away from their places the flimsy thing went down and flattened out on the ground like a collapsed balloon. And Labo was not beneath it!

Another oath broke from the man's lips. Then he straightened up and turned to look at my *pabellón* to see if his outbursts had roused me. Satisfied that I had not been disturbed in my slumbers he walked away a few steps, to stop and stand rubbing his hand over his forehead as if trying to make decision what now to do.

The light was growing steadily stronger, and the profound, the absolute silence that hovered over the jungled world about us continued. Then it was broken, broken in a way so unexpected, so startling that I almost cried out the surprise and astonishment that struck through me in that instant. For through the stillness of the dusk of dawning, running down the reaches of the soundless forests, came a scream, a woman's scream, a scream of terror and awful fright, coming from the direction in which the Indian had gone yesterday to find Puysegur's hiding place.

One single piercing scream, distant, yet near, too, because of the mighty silence; but others might have followed it that I did not hear, for with its echoing ending there burst out the raucous squawking of innumerable parrots and macaws, the yawping of toucans, and a jumbled medley of other unrecognized cries and yellings and screechings—the jungle's denizens declared it day.

At the moment of the coming of the scream my eyes were on Scrobe. He, too, was startled violently, as I had been, and I saw his hands drop down to his sides, and he stood motionless, staring off in the direction whence the cry had come. Just for a minute he was there, and then he walked rapidly away and disappeared among the trees and bushes, taking the trail that would bring him to the hut of Puysegur.

What was the meaning of that scream? From whose lips had it been torn by fright? Not from the girl's, of course. Had Puysegur dragged with him to his hiding place, besides her, one of his Indian women, of whom he kept a score or more about him, so Scrobe and Labo had told me; and was it she who had screamed? But what did it matter to me who it was—it was not the girl! My work was before me. I must make my start now, follow Scrobe and Labo, and do what I could! But I had slept, I had given them the advantage, and by doing that I had trebled my danger!

I found the trail kept running close along the river's bank, and I went forward without great difficulty, for the Indian who had traveled that way the evening before had cut away the looped and hanging vines where they had dropped down across it, and Labo and Scrobe—I had no doubt they had gone that way just ahead of me—had beaten down another portion of the young growth that was beginning to close it up. I had walked a short distance—less, I believed, than I must go to reach the hut I sought—when I came to a branching of the path, a turning off to the left, but I did not take it, though it showed signs of recent travel. A little farther on I found another branching to the left, and into it I turned; I thought I had gone far enough, and I

knew the hut would be located on rising ground, back from the river.

But after I had walked for some time and had seen nothing but unbroken jungle, with the trail I was following growing more and more difficult, I realized that I had traveled much farther from our camping place than the Indian had reported the hut to be. I turned to retrace my steps, wandered by mistake into a little opening among the trees, passed into a false trail, and into another, and so blundered about for almost an hour before I regained the path at the river's edge; so easy was it for me, unacquainted with the tropical forest and its ways, to lose myself amidst its mazes.

I went back to the first branching of the path, turned into that, and in a few minutes saw before me a small clearing, an old clearing but newly cut over, for the drying bush and palms and ferns were lying thickly scattered about it. Near its center stood an ancient and dilapidated palm-thatched hut with the thatches rotting and falling away, and with many of the wall palings gone from place, thrown down or leaning inward and outward. Was this the place, the hiding place of Puysegur? Was he in there, in that wretched hovel, shut up with the girl, or was she there alone, left secured, perhaps with ropes, tied up by him as an animal might be tied, while he had gone away on some necessary mission? The Indian had reported that he had seen nothing of Puysegur the day before. And Labo and Scrobe—were they slipping and sneaking through the woods somewhere near me, peering and peeking out from among the vines, staring at that dilapidated hut as was I?

Though I watched for a long while I could see no sign of life about the old structure, and only the lately cut and drying underbrush told that anyone had recently been thereabout. I started to make a circuit of the clearing, keeping in the fringe of the wood, that I might observe the hut from every side, going forward cautiously, studying every inch of the ground ahead of me before I ventured foot upon it, knowing well that at any moment I might come upon Labo or Scrobe. In my hand I carried the ridiculous little pistol with its four uncertain shots in its rusty cylinder!

I had completed half of the circuit about the open space when I stopped suddenly, trembling and chilling, with my heart almost losing its beats. I had caught sight of Puysegur. He had been hidden from me all the while by a little clump of bushes, left growing there near the hut for its shade, I suppose. He sat on a large tree stump that had been fashioned into a kind of bench, resting his arms and hands on a crude table built of poles and slabs. A machete lay before him close to his clasped hands.

I was astonished at the appearance of the man. Was this the clean, the immaculate Puysegur I had seen a few weeks before? I could scarcely believe it was he, for this man's garments were fouled and slimed with the dirt of the jungle, torn and frayed, and in places quite in tatters; I could see that his huge bare arms and his hands were grimy and unwashed; and there was a heavy growth of beard covering his face. As I stared at him he raised his head and looked straight at the leafy screen behind which I stood hidden, and his face was the face of a man drowning in the depths of despair.

As I continued to watch him I noticed he was moving his right leg about as if it pained him, stretching it out and drawing it back and turning it, reaching down a hand to press and massage it about the knee. Then he stooped over and began slowly to unlace the leather legging that incased it.

Where had he been, I kept wondering as I watched him, for I could see that he had just returned from a hard trip through the forests; his shoes were water soaked and muck covered, and much of the disordering and untidying of his garments had been recently done. Why had he gone away from the place? Where was the girl? How had he disposed of her? Where was Labo? Where was Scrobe?

Even as the questions ran racing through my brain I saw Scrobe. He came slipping from behind the hut, and with cautious, tip-toeing steps was sneaking from the rear upon the stooping man at the table. In his hand he carried the long-bladed knife I had seen sticking in his belt for so many days, the knife I had seen him handling so often, running his finger along its keen edge, as he and Labo disputed about the manner of doing Puysegur to death. Little step by little step he came on, with each foot setting itself carefully and quietly in place before he shifted his weight from the other to it, as a cat sneaks up on the unsuspecting mouse. A little closer and a little closer he came, and the unlacing of the leather legging went slowly on.

What should I do? Shout a warning? Warn Puysegur? Why should I? He was one of the three against whom I must fight sooner or later! Another minute, a few more seconds, and there would be but two of them! But could I stand there and see this killing done—could I? Should I not—should I ——

"Behind you, Hal! Behind you! Scrobe!"

A woman's voice had cried the words, but I did not turn to see who she was or where she was; my eyes could not leave Puysegur, so quickly, so almost instantaneously did he act at that warning cry. I saw his huge right hand go darting to the handle of the machete; I saw him jerk the ugly weapon up and swing it about as he swung his body round. With a whishing noise the great knife went cutting through the air, straight to its mark, thrown with all the concentrated strength of that mighty arm. I saw it strike Scrobe's thin long neck, and I saw the man's head go flying from his body, which tottered and wavered just a moment, then sank down in a crumpled heap. In like manner I had seen the Indian, Primo, kill a monkey.

"Drop that! Drop it quick!"

The woman's cry again. I shifted my eyes to the other side of the little clearing, whence the sharp command had come, to see Labo standing there at the edge of the forest, with the looped rope falling from his hands, the rope I had seen him coiling and uncoiling so many times, as, gloating, he would tell us how he would hang Puysegur with it. And advancing upon him, gripping in her right hand a revolver that pointed straight at Labo's head, was the girl, Simon's daughter, the woman whom I had come to rescue!

Simon's daughter? Was this the fragile slip of a girl I had seen in Pichucalco? Was that the pale face, the pathetic eyes that had roused all my pity, called up all my sympathy? Were those the little helpless hands I had so often envisioned since I had seen them fluttering about her throat that day she stood watching her father writhing on the ground in drunken spasms? Was this the girl for whom I had come hurrying hither, hoping to rescue her from the clutches of a human beast, hoping to prevent her from falling into the hands of human fiends?

"Tie him with the rope, Hal!"

Puysegur was upon Labo as she spoke.

"Put your hands against your sides, and if you move a finger I'll break you into bits!"

Without a word Labo lowered his hands, and the loop of the rope fell over his shoulders, to be wound round and round his body, with a tied hitch here and a knot there, with the winding working down and down until it ended at his ankles. Then Puysegur straightened up and stepped toward the girl. The revolver dropped from her lowered hand and she ran into his arms.

"Oh, Hal, Hal, Hal! Oh, Hal, Hal, Hal!"

Shaken and torn by a passion of weeping and sobbing, she was burying her face in the stained and ragged folds of the linen blouse he was wearing, and he was bending down his rough shaggy face close to hers, speaking to her softly in words I could not hear. Suddenly he put her away from him, held her at arm's length, and stared at her with eyes grown great with wonder and incredulity.

"What!" he cried. "You—you speak? You speak?" His voice was unsteady and uncertain, burdened to breaking with emotion, and again he cried: "You—you are speaking, Carlotta?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" And she raised her hands and began clapping them together, laughing and weeping as one on the verge of hysteria. "Yes, yes, yes! I found it! It came back, it came back! I knew it would! Oh, I knew it would! All these years I knew it would come back, and I've been waiting! This morning I had gone down the path by the river, thinking I would meet you returning, and I saw—I saw him!" With a shudder she looked over at the trussed and tied body of Labo, lying where Puysegur had tossed it. "I saw him coming toward me along the trail, and I knew why he was there, and I screamed! I could not help it—I had to scream! Then I turned and ran, with him following me, but I lost him among the paths we had made down there! Oh, Hal, Hal, Hal!"

Again he was pressing her close to him, comforting her.

"I should not have gone away and left you—it was a cruel thing to do—but I could not take you with me, and I had to make the trip! To think of your being here alone all night! But my leg—I fell and rehurt that old hurt, and I could scarcely make my way back at all. I traveled all night, stumbling along in the darkness. But I've arranged everything; the horses will be at the crossing this afternoon and we can go ——"

"And my father?"

"He's dead. I learned that from one of my men. Don't cry, Carlotta; it is for the best. Oh, if you had only come away with me long ago when I wanted you ——"

"I couldn't, Hal; I couldn't leave him! He was my father, he was all alone! And then, then I had to go—when I found out he had sold me to him!" Again I saw her shudder as she spoke of the man she so dreaded. "Oh, that awful night when I found it out—learned that he'd sold me to that brute for three hundred Mexican dollars! If you had not come that night ——"

"Don't think about it any more, Carlotta, don't think about it! He was insane—never was a man more insane than was your father at the last! And that it should manifest itself, that insanity of his, in such violent form against me who was his best friend ——"

"They did it, they did it!" she cried. "I knew all the time while they were wrecking his body with that awful liquor and poisoning his mind against you with their lies; and I knew their designs! But I couldn't leave him, I couldn't! Oh, the horror of it all! Oh, how afraid I was of them—I was afraid of everything, of everybody, of the Spanish woman, the Indians, that man they had with them for a while who ——"

"Pshaw! That young milksop! Some floating derelict they picked up and brought in there to train up to do their dirty work for them! I had no fear of him, but I would have crushed him with them had he come!"

I stirred uneasily in my hiding place, and I felt the red flush of shame and humiliation warming my face; and I felt the cold creep of fear chilling my spine.

"I wonder what became of him. He couldn't have come in with them or he would be about here with them."

I was trembling now, trembling with fright. What if he should find me there! Could I make him understand? I must get away! But could I withdraw without attracting their attention? I was very close to them; the clearing was very small.

They moved across to the table, Puysegur limping badly as he went, and there before they seated themselves he caught her up in his arms, held her to him a moment, put her away, and looked at her with eyes of sacred love.

"I thought I had lost you, Carlotta—when I came back and found you were not here! I feared they had come and taken you! But I have you, and oh, Carlotta, you speak, you hear!" I saw their lips meeting again.

And this was the man to help kill whom I had traveled here with those two over there, one dead, one bound and helpless! This was the man of whom I had heard so many foul and obscene and hideous things, listening to them with the ears of credulity, believing them all, young fool that I was! This was that beast, that snake, that loathsome thing described to me by the crazy Simon, whose words I accepted as truth!

I wanted to rush out from my hiding place, stand before them and cry, "Let me explain! Let me explain!" and tell them all. But shame mixed with fear held me back, and I stood there listening to their lovers' talk, to their words and terms of endearment, listening with unwilling ears. I did not want to hear, but I was afraid to move, fearful I should discover my presence to them. For would they understand, if I came out and stood before them? Would they believe me; could I explain to satisfaction if they found me?

"We must get our few things together and start shortly," said Puysegur after a little while. "I shall not be able to travel fast. We shall go straight to the coast. I had thought to stop at my place to obtain some things of mine I do not wish to lose,

(Continued on Page 46)

(Continued from Page 44)

but because of that"—he indicated by a turn of his hand the headless body of Scrobe—"we had best not linger. That will have to be explained, and I don't care about explaining."

"And what will you do with him?" she asked, looking toward Labo, lying at the other side of the clearing.

"Him? Why, I think I'll —— Listen!"

I cowered down behind the screen of leaves that concealed me. I had shifted my body's weight from one foot to the other, and a dry stick had snapped sharply. He had heard it!

"Listen!"

He had spoken the word again, and he was looking off toward the jungle. He had not heard the snapping stick beneath my foot; it was something else.

No one of us three there at that little clearing in the jungle had for many minutes had apperceptive senses for anything that was transpiring outside that little open space, and so no one of us three had noticed the rising and swelling and rolling toward and passing over us of such a surge of sound as that which I had heard yesterday when the frightened things of the jungle came fleeing before the marching myriads of army ants. Nor had any one of us noticed the flitting across the clearing of little running things, or the hurrying past of crawling things, though for some moments I had been half aware of a steady rustling among the leaves at my feet. Now at Puysegur's word we listened, and we heard—that swishing sound, that rustling, rasping sound, that ghostly patter of trillions of tiny feet running toward us.

I looked down at the ground. Two or three of the scouting vanguard of the coming hordes were already exploring my shoes.

"They're here on us already!" cried Puysegur. "Come, let us go! We must hurry and find the edge of the stream and pass beyond it! This leg of mine—I'm afraid I'll ——"

They disappeared about the corner of the hut, and I lost his last words.

I felt a stinging sensation on my hand, another on the other hand, and in an instant I was overrun with the insects. I turned and fled away through the woods, away from the clearing, happening by good fortune to strike into a well-defined trail. But the path ended when I had gone but a little distance along it—ended against a green wall of twisted vines and crowding plants and bushes, and still was I in the midst of that ripply, rushing stream of ants, fighting them off my body, beating and brushing and striking at them as they swarmed over me. I plunged into the untracked jungle, struggling forward among the looped and hanging vines, tripping, stumbling, falling, groping forward in the semidarkness that was now all about me, but I could not find, I could not come to the margin of that rippling stream of brownish black.

From behind me, in the direction of the clearing, came a cry, a scream of terror, a man's cry of despair.

"Puysegur!" I muttered. "His leg has failed him. He is down!" And as I went fighting and struggling on I found myself wondering if the girl would desert him, if she would go on without him, as he would command her to do. I told myself she would not.

The going became harder and harder, almost impossible. I was in a thicket of small wiry bushes that were woven and tied together by innumerable slender, ropelike vines that caught me, entangled me, wrapped themselves about my legs and arms and shoulders, held me fast. I became panic-stricken, insane with fright and horror, and with strength augmented to many times its normalcy by the awful fear that clutched and clawed at my heart, I plunged ahead, breaking free from the twisted, tangled network that held me, tearing my clothing to shreds, bruising and lacerating my flesh in a hundred places, straining my every muscle to its hurting.

And when at last I had come to the edge of the living stream and passed safely out of it, the panic that had gripped me did not loose its hold—I ran on and on, with the sound of those tripping trillions of tiny feet playing in my ears; ran stumbling, falling, floundering on and on until I sank down in complete exhaustion. And still in my ears was that sound of the marching in the jungle.

When I had somewhat collected my scattered senses and had risen to go on I knew I was lost. All directions were gone—it mattered not which way I went. And I moved forward as I faced.

With every step I took the woods grew denser and darker, more and more a place of horror, and over and over I told myself that I was walking to my death, the jungle would strangle me at last. Now with my furious speed checked and my violent struggling at an end, I found myself exposed to new tortures, for myriads of hungry insects—in my moments of terror I had not noticed them—came rushing out of the green-black depths about me to feast upon me, finding in me some slow-moving thing of prey that had blundered into their lairs. And half my weak and failing strength must I use up in fighting them off. I pulled down and broke off great masses of bush branches and fern fronds, sat down and piled them about me, burying myself beneath them as I had buried the Indian, Primo, but the tiny specks of winged viciousness and voraciousness came sifting through each little chink and interstice, searching me out to torment me with agonies all but unbearable.

I had eaten but a few dry biscuits at the camp before I quit it in the early morning, and as the day wore on I was gnawed by the pangs of hunger, which added another torment to my hundred tortures. The tepid, buggy, malodorous water I drank from the stagnant pools in the arroyos sickened me, and every new minute of my unhappy existence was more intolerable, more wretched than the last.

Night came and I could do nothing but stumble on and on through the sticky darkness, thrashing about me with the branches I carried, or sit down to be devoured alive, for the nocturnal pests were more bloodthirsty than those of the day. The hideousness of it in my memory!

Dawning day saw me at the edge of collapse—another hour and I could go no farther, and with startling clearness I envisioned myself lying there dead in the jungle, a prey to the jungle, done to death by the jungle into which I had come blindly blundering, a young fool—youth impulsive, youth credulous, youth easily led, youth injudicious, youth quixotic, youth ununderstanding! But I would not give up, not until the last, for I was youth loving life. And I went on.

Before I was aware of the forest's thinning out I found myself standing in a little clearing. I looked about me with unbelieving eyes. I was in the clearing to which I had come yesterday, in Puysegur's hiding place!

Were they here now, he and the girl? Had they escaped the marching millions of ants as I had escaped them, and had they come back? I must throw myself upon his mercy. I must, I must make him understand! And I shouted and hallooed several times. But there was no answer to my calling; I saw no sign of life; and it was very still there.

Then I remembered. Even if they had escaped they would not be here to-day; I had heard him say to the girl that they must go away that afternoon. But I hoped they were there; I wanted them to be there; and I dragged myself across to the hut and looked in. It was dismally empty and bare.

I walked about the corner of the structure. There was the table beside the clump of bushes where they had sat together, and there a few yards off lay—Scrobe? No! I saw a skull, and I saw a skull-less skeleton partly clothed in tattered stuff that was not unlike deviled rags prepared for shoddy. I walked to the other side of the clearing, where lay—Labo? No! I saw a skeleton loosely wound round and round with rope and partly covered with that same tattered stuff that looked like deviled rags for shoddy.

With new strength born of something more than fright, something more than terror, something more than horror, I turned and fled—fled down the nearest trail I saw before me, going I knew not where, I cared not whither.

The path opened, grew lighter, grew broader and better, and I ran on and on and on. And I saw footprints in the soft bare spots of earth along the trail, the large imprint of a man's boot and the smaller imprint of a woman's shoe, and I fled on, watching them going together out of the jungle, searching for them in panicky fear when I missed them, following them—following Puysegur, whom I had come to kill, whom I must find if I would save my life.