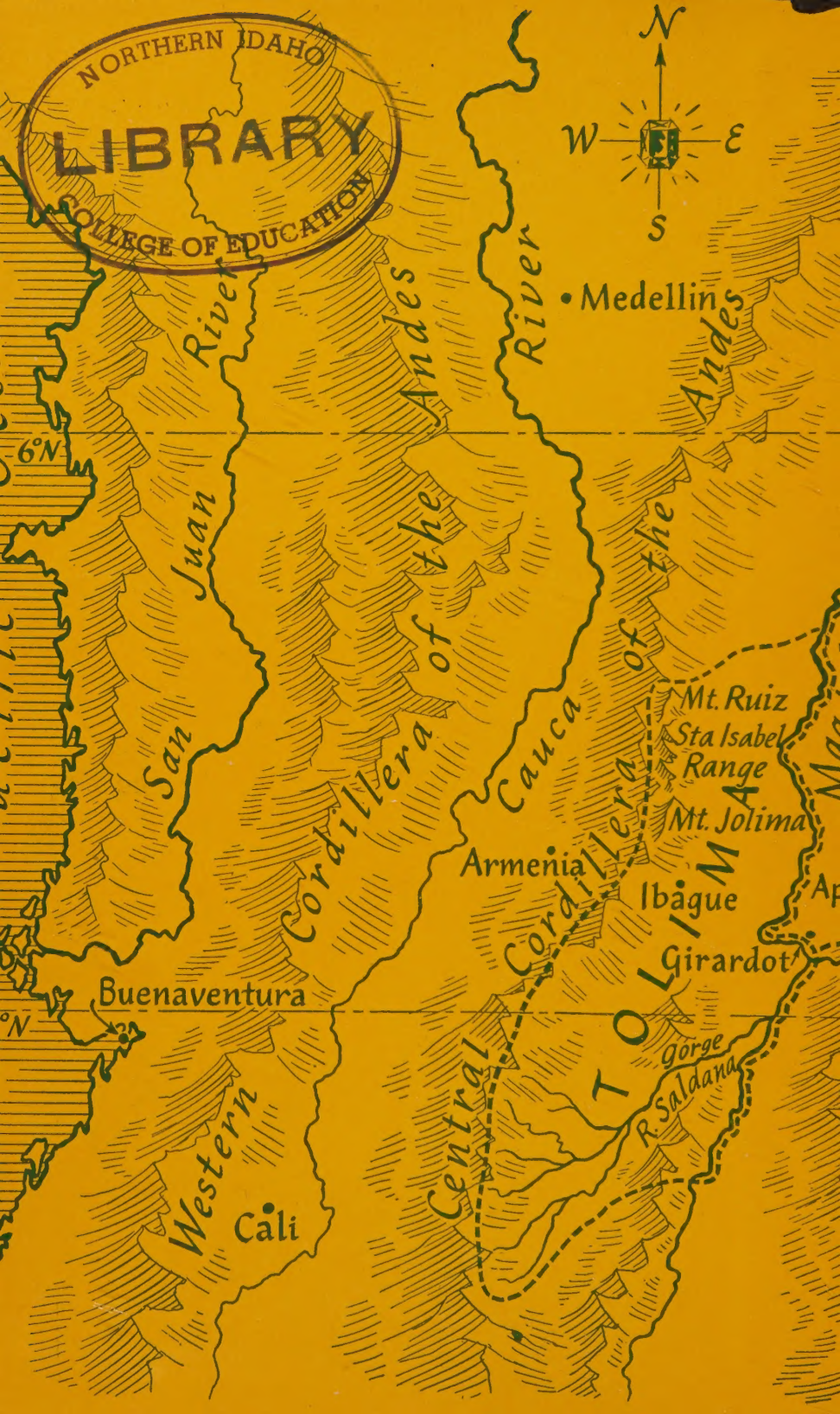
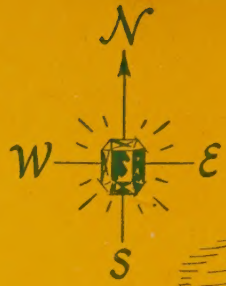
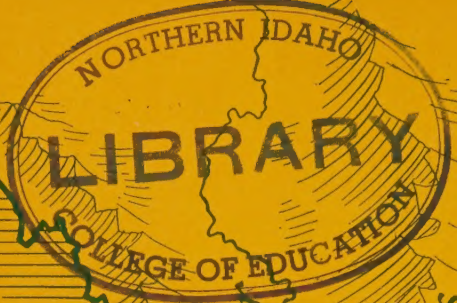


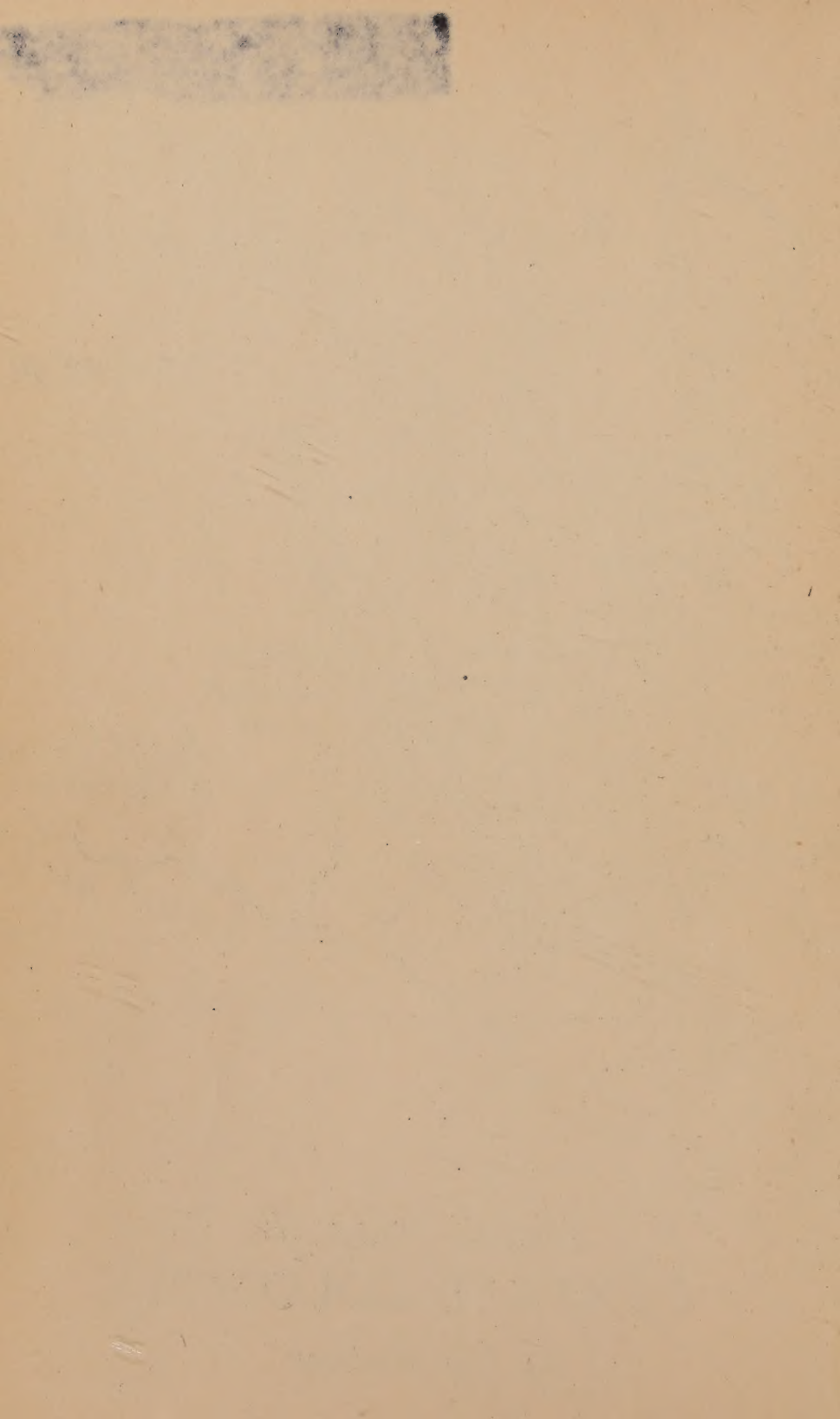
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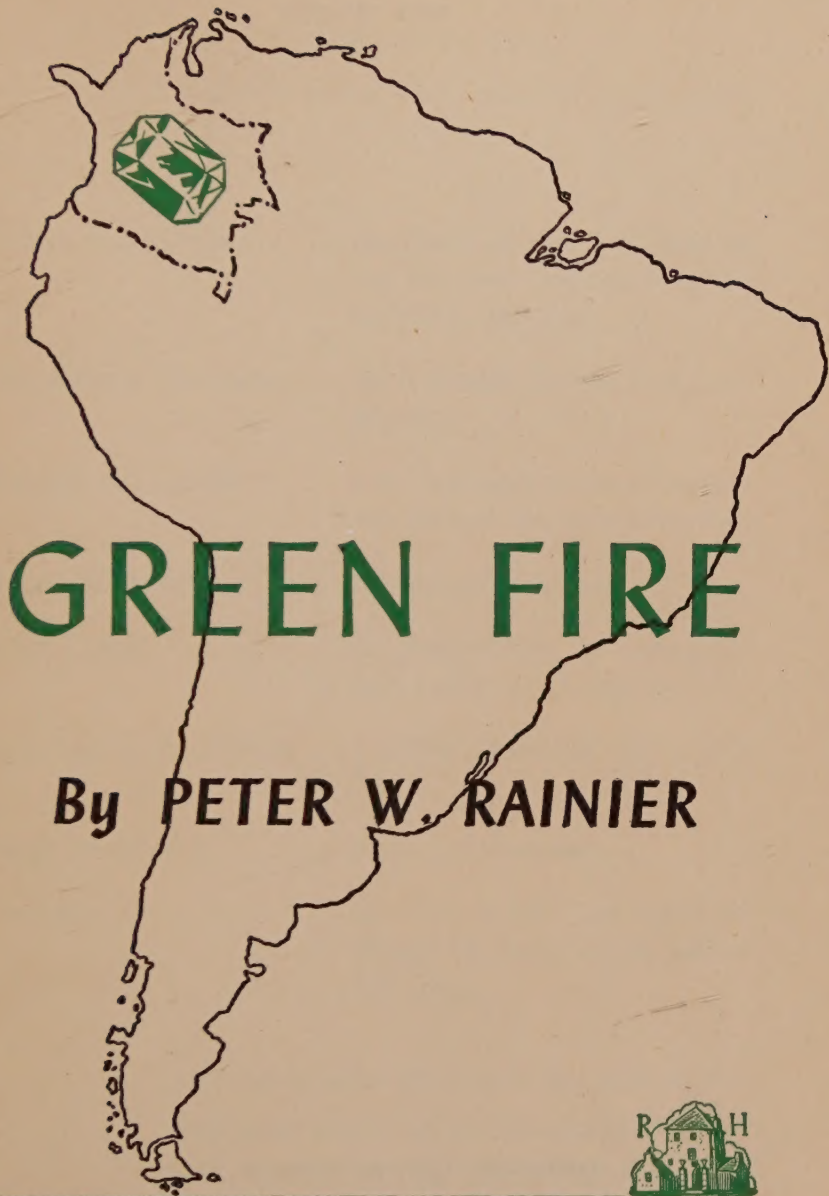
Sketch Map of
CENTRAL COLOMBIA
by the Author



Green

Fire

Other Books by P. W. Rainier: AMERICAN HAZARD • MY VANISHED AFRICA



GREEN FIRE

By PETER W. RAINIER



RANDOM HOUSE • NEW YORK

FIRST PRINTING

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA BY
KINGSPORT PRESS, KINGSPORT, TENNESSEE

This Book
Is Dedicated to:

- Doctor Luis Osorio *the friend in need who gave me
my first deep impression of the
Colombian character.*
- Don Marco Hincapie *the best mine foreman I ever em-
ployed.*
- Joaquin the bandit *who challenged me to a duel and
was the most evil man I ever met.*
- Doctor Octavio *an immoral little man.*
- Chris Dixon *the frontiersman, in memory of
hard trails we rode together.*
- Don Carlos Piedrahita *a feudal landowner and a firm
friend.*
- Peggy Hubbard *a true-hearted woman.*
- Juancho *the river Indian, who rafted me
through the rapids of the Saban-
dija Gorge.*

but above all to Margaret, my wife, a cou-
rageous woman and the first person to grow
tea commercially in South America.

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I. Battle for Emeralds

1.

Journey
to an
Emerald Mine

FASTER and faster flew the contraption. A "gasolina" my driver called it. It was an ancient Ford fitted with railway wheels. Once clear of Cartagena railway station, the nonchalant young Colombian had pulled the throttle open to the limit, slouched back in his seat, lighted a cigarette and thereafter seemed to disclaim all further interest in the proceedings. Faster and still faster we went. The warm tropical air began to flow past my face through the place where the windshield had once been. The scent of flowers was in that air, sweet and sticky, almost tangible, intoxicating. How many years since I had inhaled the breath of the tropical jungle! It was like coming home. But there were beetles and moths on that windstream. They bounced painfully off my face at intervals. The headlights were dim, their radius extended only a yard or two ahead, and I hoped

we had this railway line clear ahead to the little port of Calamar on the Magdalena River where I had to catch my plane at daybreak. The flanged metal wheels under us began to sing the song of speed and to wind up the two shiny streaks of metal ahead. Around was sooty blackness. The night noises of the jungle floated to us from either side—the squawk of a bird or a monkey's startled chatter as he woke from a dream of snakes or jaguars. When I switched on the dashboard bulb, sixty was showing on the speedometer. We were hurling ourselves into the blackness at sixty miles an hour. When I suggested, in English, a little more caution, my driver's glowing cigarette end made a nonchalant gesture and his white teeth flashed amiably in the light of the tiny bulb. He made a remark in Spanish which I inferred to be an apology for not traveling faster still. He had missed my point entirely and apparently sixty was that Lizzie's limit. It was my first experience of the South American driver, among whom Jehu, the son of Nimshi, would be relegated to driving a hearse. My Spanish wasn't equal to an argument, so I resigned myself to my position. After all, I wanted to get to Calamar by daybreak and we were certainly getting there in a hurry. Thus, speed was my first deeply registered impression of what is popularly supposed to be a lackadaisical Spanish America. Strange to relate, speed was also my last deeply felt sensation when I closed my career in Colombia nearly twelve years later. Speed on water this time, amid the roar of the rapids of a swollen river.

Fortunately, we seemed to have a clear line all the way through, except for the fact that the local Indian inhabitants apparently used the railway embankment to walk on by nights. At intervals the back of a pedestrian would flash for a split second into the constricted arc of light ahead. Then a yell of fright and a startled leap sideways into the darkness. I knew we were passing through alternate stretches of swamp and jungle because sometimes there would be a splash after the leap, at others the crash of undergrowth.

Emeralds. I was going to mine emeralds in a romantic setting on the eastern slope of the Andes, among the now partially Christianized descendants of those old sun-worshipping Chibcha Indians whom steel-corseletted Spaniards had conquered four centuries before. Behind me lay the eight years I had resided in the United States—the fight Bill Bitard and I had made to become powers in the coal-mining industry—my months in the Southwest, prospecting with that old desert rat, Gable—the taming of a lawless clan in the Florida swamps. Then the meeting with the financial magnate, in New York. Twenty-four hours later I was on my way to Colombia to practice again my chosen profession of mining engineer. My wife, Margaret, and my three children had been left behind in Florida.

It was not much after midnight when the “gasolina” pulled up opposite a dimly lighted shed. It was Calamar Station. Just as we halted it began to rain in torrents. The rain was warm but it was awfully wet. My thin tropical suit was clinging to me as I followed my driver to the hotel, a vast palm-thatched shed without walls. In the light of a single hurricane lamp the sausage shapes of many hammocks loomed, slung to the rafters. Just outside, a mighty river gurgled. Passing along the row of hammocks, the black-bearded proprietor prodded each in turn to see if it was occupied and allotted me the first vacant one.

Next morning I stood by the mile-wide turgid flood of the Magdalena River as the rising sun rapidly transmuted its muddy copper to gold. In a dugout canoe an almost naked Indian slipped by, propelling his craft by clean-cut strokes of his oval-shaped paddle. Close to the green line of forest on the further bank the paddle of a river steamer churned the muddy water white as it proceeded upstream to Girardot, the port for the capital city of Bogota. It would take that steamer two weeks to arrive, even if it were lucky enough to avoid running aground on a sand bank. I was about to do the same journey by air in four hours. Just then my plane

roared out of the north from Barranquilla, the Caribbean port. It circled once overhead while the Indian waved his paddle, then settled on the water as neatly as a duck.

It was piled with mail, and I was the only passenger. For a couple of hours I sat behind the German pilot and watched the river life below, on the great yellow highway of the country walled by the green cliffs of the forest. Anything might be hidden beneath that green forest carpet. Tapirs, jaguars, wild Indians, ruins of ancient cities—all these were there, and I was to find them in the course of the next few years. Brightly colored birds circled as we flew low over the tree tops, and troops of monkeys dived frantically beneath the leafy green surface, panic-stricken at the roar of our engine.

At another little river port a second passenger climbed aboard. A stocky, dapper, dark-haired man who spoke English as well as I, better, because he was less careless of his speech. He introduced himself as Dr. Luis Osorio, also a mining engineer, and one who had taken his degree in England.

The endless level carpet of the forest began to constrict itself as we sped up-river, southward, toward the heart of the continent. On either side of the forest, mountain ranges, vague outlines before, began to close in on either side. After some time my companion nudged me and pointed out of the window on his side. Three snow-clad giants were in view: the cone-shaped, extinct volcano of Mt. Tolima, the great, flat table with the lace-broidered white cloth which was Mt. Ruiz, and the long, serrated range of Santa Isabel showing delicate tracery against the bright blue background of the sky. Above a dark cloud layer they swam, pure and aloof, devoid of life. At their feet steamed the tropical jungle, teeming with life. Between that jungle and the glaciers above, a few short miles of mountain slope encompassed every climate of this earth—from equator to pole.

Then and there I decided I liked Colombia.

But I cursed the sultry river port of Girardot when the plane decanted us there. In Girardot I should have found money awaiting me, but there was none. I would have to stay in that steaming hothouse till I could get in touch with Lowenstein's agent in Bogota and have him telegraph me funds enough to complete my journey. Preceded by an Indian carrying my suitcase, I was trying to select the least unsavory of the Girardot hotels when I almost bumped into my late fellow-passenger, Dr. Luis Osorio.

"Hurry up. We'll miss the train and have to spend the night in this *purgatorio*." He grabbed me by the arm.

"I'm staying here a day or two." I cursed the luck.

"But you told me you were for Bogota."

"I expected funds here. They have not arrived."

"*Por Dios!* That's no reason for you to wait. I've plenty for us both."

"But you don't know me from Adam. . . ."

"Come on." He grabbed me by the arm and hurried me toward the station. "We'll sleep tonight in Apulo. . . . You've earned a good bed if you slept in a hammock in Calamar last night. Tomorrow night we'll be in Bogota. You can send me the money when you like."

In that moment I decided I liked the Colombians as well as their country.

Apulo had a luxurious hotel. The government maintained it for people who wanted to sweat out the cold of Bogota's nine-thousand-foot altitude. I found it as good a hotel as I have ever stayed in anywhere, and the price was about one-quarter of what New York would have charged for similar accommodations.

Next morning the train first threaded the scattered timber of the hot country—the *tierra caliente* of the Colombians—then squeezed itself somehow between a mountain torrent and a mountain along a ledge that seemed no wider than the cornice of a house. It surmounted the intricate windings of a mountain valley, then hurled itself at a mountain slope,

twisting and turning like a dog chasing its tail. With a scream of defiance it darted in and out of a tunnel and then seemed to saunter through mile-long slopes of coffee bushes. The leaves of the coffee bushes were a dark, shiny green, and the red berries showed like hawthorn. Great trees shaded the coffee from too-bright sunlight, and the tall shade trees had red flowers on them too. Beyond the coffee belt, still climbing, the train traversed mountain meadows with cows grazing knee-deep in lush green grass. Higher and higher. Colder with every mile, till I donned my raincoat over the thin tropical suit in which I had been comfortable ever since leaving New York. A last hard pull over a ridge, and the train leaped forward onto level ground—the *sabana* of Bogota, an ancient lake bed, flat and fertile, every inch of it. Five thousand square miles of as fair a countryside as man can find. Shrieking triumphantly, the train brought me to Bogota.

The mining company's local agent was a tall, polished gentleman, of pure Spanish type, with the manners of an ambassador and a command of the English language which was Shakesperian.

Squinting at me over gold pince-nez, he held my card between a slender finger and thumb.

"Welcome to Bogota, Mr. Rainier."

"It's a colder welcome than I expected." I shivered in my thin clothes. "The funds you were to send me to Girardot miscarried, and I'd welcome the inside of an overcoat more than anything else I can think of." The capitalists in New York had got me clear of the city in such a rush that I had had no time to outfit myself for a journey through a terrific range of climates.

"You'll find it just as cold in Chivor," he remarked, as he scribbled me a check.

"What sort of a place is the Chivor emerald mine?" I asked him as I folded the check.

"That depends a lot on the kind of man you are," he re-

plied enigmatically, as he opened the door to let me out. "I believe the right kind of man would find Chivor *simpatico*, but most that have lived there say it is a cold hell inhabited by devils, meaning the Boyaca Indians, of course."

Although I was in a hurry to get to Chivor and relieve the mine manager who was awaiting my coming, I tarried a day or two in Bogota. On my departure I spent several hours on a crowded bus. I had bought a first-class ticket and I shared the front seat with several well-dressed Colombians, land-owners evidently, from the odd word or two of their conversation that I managed to understand. The third-class seats behind were packed with Indians—stocky, broad-faced people with copper skins. First- and third-class passengers alike all wore the *ruana*, a black square of native, woven wool with a hole in the middle to put the head through.

The bus deposited me at the red-tiled village of Choconta on the edge of the *paramo*. After I obtained lodging for the night at the little inn, I bought myself a *ruana* in the store across the street. Its heavy woollen folds were comforting as they draped around me from shoulders to waist. Above the ten-thousand foot line lay the *paramos* of Colombia: At Choconta the tilled highlands ceased and the *paramo* began—a vast stretch of uplands where mountain mists swirled above the short tussock grass. The *paramos* are bare, bleak places, swampy, and yet at times a blaze of flowers. The Choconta *paramo* seemed tilted. From Choconta village it sloped upward to a line of saw-toothed peaks, and I could see my trail of tomorrow zig-zagging still more sharply upward from its further edge. Up and up climbed that trail, its last turn hooked tight into a gash between two peaks. That gash was the pass through which I must travel. Beyond that pass, two days' ride beyond, lay the Chivor mine where I was to dig for emeralds in what the agent had called a "cold hell inhabited by devils."

The innkeeper provided me with a mule, a great gray brute with the pace of a pack camel. After ten hours on that

mule I arrived in the village of Guateque, somewhat the worse for wear, as I hadn't thrown my leg over a riding animal since I left Africa more than eight years before. Damn the mules. Give me a horse to ride. Properly ridden, the horse is as sure-footed as any mule, popular opinion to the contrary notwithstanding. In the thousands of miles of mountain trail I covered in the saddle in Colombia I had three bad spills. By a bad spill I mean the kind of mishap where the animal misses its footing on a narrow trail and goes rolling down the steep slope below, shedding pieces of saddlery as a Catherine wheel sheds sparks, while the rider, if skillful, lies spreadeagled on the slope to keep from rolling, or hangs precariously to some shrub below the trail. If the rider is not skillful, he gets rolled on by the animal and usually has no further cause for worry about this world's events. In each of those three bad spills my mount was a mule. I've seen horses roll too, but they were badly ridden.

On the evening of the second day of my ride I arrived at the Chivor mine, and took over from my predecessor, who departed forthwith for more civilized parts.

2.

Reprieve

for an

Emerald Mine

FROM the flank of a black-forested mountain range a long green ridge thrust outward into the void and culminated in a cone-shaped peak against whose deep-rooted buttresses two roaring mountain torrents flung themselves in fury, locked themselves in grapple and sped together, bellowing, to their destiny in the Atlantic Ocean two thousand miles away. Notched into the steep outer shoulder of the peak was a small cluster of crude wooden buildings. The meadow above the buildings was so steep that their roofs were below the contour of the land behind them. One night a cow grazed incautiously too near the edge. The ground caved beneath her and she fell onto the roof of my house, broke through the flimsy wooden shingles and landed on my dining-room table. In bare feet and pajamas I conducted the surprised animal out of the front

door, through my tiny, terraced garden and onto the continuation of the meadow below the house. But the cow is in parentheses and a digression—she happened much later, anyway.

Below the buildings a great yellow gash in the mountain-side was the emerald pit of the Chivor mine. Beyond the pit, the ground fell almost sheer, four thousand feet into the immensity of the Sinai valley. Again beyond the Sinai, five miles away, was another black-forested range and in that range was a fissure, as though made by some giant's sword stroke, where the turbulent Guavio River had battered down the barrier which kept it pent. Looking from the mine through that beetling Guavio gorge one saw what seemed an ocean horizon, the horizontal straight line which separated sea from sky. But this ocean was green and through it meandered yellow streaks. An ocean of grass. The *llanos*. The vast plains which stretch from the foot of the Andes to the Orinoco River, a thousand miles to the eastward. Those yellow streaks were rivers, mile-wide yellow rivers, mighty tributaries of the still mightier Orinoco. Through thousands of uninhabited leagues they ran, with only the antelope herds, the tapir, the jaguar and the wandering tribes of Guaharibo Indians to view them.

Andean scenery is deceptive. So huge in its conception that one could drop an ordinary mountain range into one of its great valleys with no result save an irregularity of the valley's floor; decant an ordinary river into one of the great tributaries of the Orinoco and notice no difference in the flow; add a thousand square leagues to its forest belt and none would be the wiser. But that view through the Guavio gorge was of historical interest. The Chivor mine was the only point on the inner Andean ranges of the district from which the *llanos* of the Orinoco could be seen, and that distant view had provided the only clue to the rediscovery of the mine which had been affected some twenty years before I had arrived.

Chivor had been one of the "lost mines" of Colombia. Another was Coscuez, the emerald mine which old Chris Dixon and I were to rediscover some years later. There are other lost mines, still undiscovered. While some of these exist in popular legend only, others were real mines which had been successfully operated for years. It is not hard to lose a mine in such a country as Colombia. Shut down a property for a few years, and the dependent population emigrates elsewhere in search of a living. Such a circumstance is easily encompassed during a revolution or civil war. In a couple of years at most the narrow mule trail connecting it to civilization becomes hidden by undergrowth and the buildings become enshrouded by creepers in that land of fertile soil and prolific rainfall. The masking of the mine thus having been accomplished, it is a matter for exploration to rediscover the spot where hundreds of men had toiled and lived only a few years before.

Now, with Don Marco Hincapie, my Colombian foreman, I climbed down into the Chivor emerald pit. We didn't converse much because my Spanish vocabulary was still limited and his English consisted of the phrase "rice and milk," which, I inferred, had been the staple diet of an Anglo-Saxon mine manager he had formerly worked with—the same manager who had made him a present of the enormous boots he occasionally wore. Marco had large feet, but those boots were at least a couple of inches too long for him. Misfit notwithstanding, Marco's frugal Antioquenan soul would not countenance waste of good shoe leather, so he wore them at intervals, the toes stuffed with old rags to prevent too much play. Marco was tall and gawky, with a square, grim face. He seldom smiled and, when he did, it produced the merest flaw in the granite of his out-thrust chin. Those long compass-like legs of his used to cover a surprising mileage daily, and he administered to perfection, unaided, the hundred or more unruly Indian devils whom the mine employed.

Down endless flights of steps we scrambled into the emer-

ald pit—steps rough-hewn from the rocky sides of the pit itself. The pit was two hundred feet deep and over a quarter of a mile long—a great V-shaped gash. As we neared the bottom, the texture of the rock seemed to change. Instead of being rough, sharp and jagged, it now appeared to have a silky feel and to break off in chunks of squares or parallelograms—the sign of emerald formation, so Marco, by dint of much gesticulating, managed to make me understand. When we reached the bottom he led me to a place where a pile of rock and debris had been placed against the rocky wall, as though to conceal something. At a shouted command from the big Antioquenan, a gang of Indians left their working place and began to clear the debris. Within an hour the vertical rocky face stood bare. Zigzagging unevenly across the yellow rock was a tiny green streak, no wider than my finger. An emerald vein, which had been sealed from prying fingers by the simple and effective expedient of tumbling from above enough debris to bury it beyond the power of any night-prowling thief to clear.

With the geologist's pick I wore at my belt I explored it for a foot or so in depth. Pale green mineral. Beryl—mother mineral of the emerald. It was worthless at that time, although some years later the element beryllium which it contained was to rock the mining world to its foundations and be the subject of a world-wide search for sources of supply. I was a prime mover in that excitement—but that came years afterward. Here and there in the powdery green beryl was a pale green crystal. Emeralds. Their color was so pale that they were worthless. I knew a little more about emeralds now than I had a few weeks before, when I had been signed on so hurriedly, in spite of my admitted inexperience with those stones.

Signing to Marco to cover up the vein once more, I climbed out of the pit alone, traversed the steep mountain meadow around the camp and seated myself on the top of

the Chivor peak. I felt it was time to think the situation over thoroughly and determine a line of action.

"Do you believe the Chivor mine can be made to produce?" I had asked the Bogota agent.

Without reply, he had gone to a safe and extracted two little cardboard boxes such as one sees in a jeweler's window. In each had been an emerald. Small gems, but value had shone from them like light from a star. One was a very dark green with a hint of smoldering fire in the heart of it. Green fire. The other was dark green also but a shade paler than its companion, and in the green was a faint tint of blue. Green fire in this one also, but blazing green fire instead of smoldering.

"This is from the famous Muzo mine which the Colombian government operates." The agent had held up the first gem between finger and thumb. "First quality."

"And the other?" I had queried.

"First quality also—of about equal value. The increased brilliance makes up for the slight lack of color."

"Where did that one come from?"

"It was presented to one of my family by the Spanish Viceroy soon after the Conquest—*before the Muzo mine was discovered by the conquistadores.*"

I jumped to my feet. "Then it must have come from . . ."

"The Chivor mine." He had completed my sentence for me. "Chivor was the only known emerald mine in the Western Hemisphere at that date."

"Then why does Chivor produce only low-grade emeralds today?"

He had shrugged his lean shoulders. "The best mine is only as good as its manager."

"Then you believe there are good emeralds still to be mined in Chivor?" I had paced the room in my excitement.

The agent had leaned back in a chair and pressed together the thin tips of his fingers. "Why not?"

"Then why did the Spaniards abandon the mine centuries ago if there were still good-quality emeralds in it?"

"Two reasons." He had tipped his chair to and fro on its hind legs. "First, there were the new Muzo workings just opened. There would have been a rush to them. Second, Spanish labor methods had almost depopulated the Chivor region and labor was almost unobtainable."

Then and there I had made my resolve. If there were real emeralds to be mined in Chivor—emeralds of dark green fire which were more valuable than diamonds, I'd find them or burst a lung doing it. There wasn't much time. Four months was about what I estimated the people in New York would allow. But in that four months if I could only find one small gem of the right color it would be evidence that they did exist and, on the strength of the discovery, I'd try to persuade the owners to put up substantial capital for a real mining operation instead of scratching at the side of a mountain with a mere hundred miners. Damn those New Yorkers! I'd show them.

As soon as I made my decision I wrote the company a letter, suggesting a slightly lower salary than the generous one I was receiving. In exchange for the reduction I had asked for an interest in the value of the proceeds of the mine. Now, as I sat on Chivor peak, I had the answer in my pocket. They had agreed, so now, if I were to find something worth while in the bowels of the mountain, at least I should profit by it. On the other hand, if I found nothing . . . Well, my gamble wouldn't cost me much in the few short months left me to try.

Where to look for those dark-green emeralds, which were as different from the pallid things I had just seen in the pit as a buxom, hearty country wench is from an anemic little seamstress? The most portable form of wealth is the high-grade emerald. A king's ransom in emeralds could be contained in my hat—and there was a whole mountain peak to search. The proverbial needle in the haystack would be easy

hunting compared to it. But one thing was certain. The formation we were exploiting was not the right one. My predecessors had spent years hunting in it and found nothing worth while.

Above or below? Above was no good. Those upper strata had been passed through when the pit had been sunk. If there had been emeralds in those rough upper rock layers they would then have come to light. So it must be below. We must dig deeper. But we could not deepen the present pit because it already was so deep that the washing away of the debris was presenting quite a problem. We must open another pit further down the mountainside.

By next morning our full force of miners was felling trees and clearing roots from the next stratum of rock below, which we had found outcropping from the mountainside. Those men were working hard. Hacking and hewing at that mountain peak as though they would tear it to pieces. They too had an interest in the game now. I had promised a bonus to the first man to discover the dark green beryl that would presage the same color of emerald—a whale of a bonus, according to their simple lights. Big enough to keep the lucky finder drunk for a month on the *guarapo*, the fermented sugar-cane molasses which was their favorite tippie. That *guarapo* was a flexible beverage. Not a bad mild drink after one day's fermentation—with about the strength of a light Pilsener beer and a slightly sweet taste that was not unpleasant. After two days' fermentation it became a fairly heady drink. After three, it had the kick of a mule. Mix with the three-day vintage a noggin or two of *aguardiente*—the fiery anise brandy of Colombia—and a normally peaceable Indian would become a fighting fiend, ready to slit a stomach at the slightest provocation. That was their favorite knife-stroke. The stomach stroke. A horizontal, slashing sweep of the knife-hand left the opponent writhing on the ground, his bowels protruding. I was to see the results of that stroke more than once during my stay in Colombia. . . .

It was a lonely life on Chivor. Alone, save for the rather grim companionship of Marco. My family were still residing in the States, and I had no intention of bringing them to live with me until my position should be more assured.

The first task I set myself while awaiting the result of my change of mine policy was to take up seriously the study of Spanish. Four hours every night, and during the day, too, I had plenty of opportunity to practice what I had learned, since there was not an English-speaking person within a hundred miles of the mine and it was to be a full year before I should hear my native tongue once more. Within a month or two I could chatter Spanish fairly fluently, if somewhat ungrammatically. Before six months had passed, the language came more naturally to my lips than my mother tongue, which was admittedly getting a bit rusty from disuse.

Once Spanish was mastered I tried to teach myself to write—articles, short stories. Night after night I sat by the fire concocting them while pregnant clouds swept through the gap in the outer ranges and sluiced water off the eaves of my house. With commendable regularity my weekly mail-runner bore with him to the outer world a story. With equal regularity the editor to whom I had addressed it returned it. Writing has always come hard to me and years were to pass before I wrote anything which an editor deemed worthy of print. I yearned to express myself but was frustrated. Ruth Chesbrough had fired the spark of self-expression in me back in those days in the Lostman River country. The spark persisted, but I never knew a spark which took so long to kindle into flame.

I was not long in acquiring a four-legged family, a pup and a kitten. The pup developed an intelligence which can only be described as fiendish and was well christened Maluko—the evil one. He must have been partly well-bred because so many breeds seemed to have gone into his make-up. His low clearance and bandy legs suggested the beagle for the foundation to his structure. He was marked like a fox-

hound—no aristocrat of the Quorn or Belvoir had more correct markings. There was a hint of the bulldog in his jaw, but his crowning glory was his tail—feathered like a setter's. On our liberal Chivor rations Maluko soon put on weight and became more than a match for any of the half-starved Indian curs which used to come slinking around the plot where he kept buried and maturing his plentiful supply of bones. Maluko, too, by right of conquest, took his pick of the local bitches and, incidentally, was the only dog I ever met to show the least sense of parental responsibility. For days he regularly carried bones to a bitch who had produced a heterogeneous litter in a cave near by. I let him feed her until I judged her pups were old enough to move. Then I took a hand. Maluko's offspring deserved a better nursery than a damp, ant-infested cave.

As soon as I approached the cave the half-wild bitch dashed out at me. She came right at me till her nose was almost touching my leg. Then, sensing that I was not afraid of dogs, she retreated growling to the cave. Step by step I eased my way toward the dark opening, slowly, so as not to startle her anxious mother-sense. Time after time she dashed at me, always stopping short when I made no move to flee. If cats had better knowledge of dog psychology and wouldn't turn and run, the cats would be chasing the dogs up trees instead of vice versa. Finally, after hours, the bitch did not retreat from her charge but remained, bristling silently, within easy reach. Then, by almost imperceptible movement, I laid my hand on her head. At my touch she growled and shivered, but the hand remained. I began to rub her gently behind the ears in the place dogs love to be rubbed. Soon after that I descended to the house with an armful of mongrel puppies and the bitch anxiously nuzzling my calves in an ecstasy of anxiety. She and her family joined my menage.

The cat we named Pacho, which is Spanish for Frank. On his plentiful meat diet—we killed two cattle a week for beef in Chivor—Pacho developed into a huge tiger-striped tom.

He and Maluko were pals. I have seen the cat leap from a sunny fence-post when Maluko tangled in a death grapple with an Indian cur below. Pacho landed neatly on the cur's neck holding tight with his hind claws while both forepaws raked the dog's ears with rapid strokes. The dog lost interest in the fight and fled, the cat riding him for many yards and tearing his ears to ribbons.

In the rough wooden house next to mine lived Don Marco and his wife. Marco must have been about fifty when I knew him, and his wife was a scant half dozen years younger. Religious, like most Colombians of their class, they burned candles constantly to St. Christopher in petition for a son. Finally, it worked. . . . At any rate, something did, and Marco was almost beside himself with joy when he informed me that his wife was pregnant. Now the consumption of mine candles for St. Christopher redoubled to insure the birth of a male child. She was a plucky woman. Thirty miles of fiendish mountain trail separated the mine from the village of Guateque, where the nearest doctor lived. When his wife's time approached Marco strapped an ordinary dining-room chair onto the stalwart back of an Indian and tied his wife into the chair. Thus she traveled to Guateque, telling her beads and praying, on relays of Indians. In Guateque she gave birth to a son.

Remarkable fellows, those Boyaca Indians. Half devil, half man, but the man side of them was very much uppermost at times. There was the one-armed chap I used as a messenger. Juan Pato de Perro, his mates used to call him. John Dog-Foot. No dog could have traveled faster. I have known him to bring an urgent letter from far-off Choconta in one day. Sixty miles, in which he crossed two mountain ranges whose passes were not far short of fifteen thousand feet above sea level.

Young Miguel was my personal attendant on my excursions over the worse than primitive trails that plunged downward through the forest or zig-zagged endlessly up the side of

some mountain ridge in the neighborhood. He had high cheekbones, Mongolian slant-eyes, reddish copper complexion, lank black hair, the huge chest development of the mountaineer and a stumpy, wiry body. He was the embodiment of the true type of Chibcha Indian conquered by the Spaniard four centuries before. Miguel, on foot, would trot behind my horse with the thirty-inch blade of his *penilla* bush knife dangling from his belt. He would leap agilely ahead of me to clear with a couple of sure strokes some obstructing bough, or stand bored while I gave my horse a breather after some particularly heart-breaking climb. For a year or more Miguel was my bodyguard. But the life was too slow for his adventure-loving spirit. He finally drifted away from me and joined Joaquin's gang of dubious characters down in the Sinai valley. They were known to be horse thieves and distillers of illicit liquor. They were suspected of mild banditry, and the suspicions seem to have been justified because they afterward formed the nucleus of the gang which took forcible possession of the Chivor mine itself, after I had left it. Miguel himself was among the killed when I returned from New York and cleared the bandits out after an exciting skirmish. After Miguel left me I had no more bodyguards. For one thing, I now knew my way about the district almost as well as the Indians themselves. For another, there was by this time an adverse influence—that of the infamous Joaquin—working among the Indians so that they were no longer to be trusted with a long *penilla* bush knife behind your back.

Old Guatavita was one of the first men I visited after my arrival at the mine. He was the embodiment of all the romance of the conquest of Colombia four hundred years before. He was of royal descent, having no less than the King-Priest Guatavita for an ancestor—the same Guatavita who had ruled the Chibchas when the Spanish conqueror came. The ancient Guatavita had given his name to the sacred lake which lay, high, serene and cold, cradled by mountain peaks, a few score miles to the north. As the representative of the

sun-god on earth, Guatavita was the innocent source of the legend of the Eldorado which brought adventurers flocking to the Colombian hinterland and was the direct incentive for the conquest of the country.

That story of the Eldorado is worth retelling. Before the Spanish conquest, the Chibcha nation worshipped the sun, as did most of the Andean mountain tribes. You will always find the sun-worshipper among the dwellers on mist-shrouded mountain slopes rather than among those who dwell in hot sun-strafed valleys. To the sun-worshippers the sun was too splendid a deity to receive directly the offerings of his worshippers. Therefore the offerings were made to the mountain lakes, those peak-bordered mirrors which reflected his image.

Each year the Guatavita—the sun-god's representative on earth—made formal offering to the sun in the sacred lake of Guatavita. Each year on a certain day the devout of the Chibcha nation assembled on the lake shores with offerings in their hands. The wealthy among them brought emeralds or the little beaten-gold images which became known afterward among the Spaniards as *tunjas*. The offerings of the poor were humbler. They brought images of clay, grain, fruits, corn cakes or perhaps a hare. As the sun rose above the encircling peaks on the day of sacrifice, Guatavita would appear on the shores of the lake, embark on the sacred barge, accompanied by his attendant priests, and be rowed to the center of the mirrorlike sheet of water. In the center of the lake the King-Priest would strip and his attendant priests would plaster him with wet clay and sprinkle him with gold dust till he glittered. He was then Eldorado, which in Spanish simply means the "Gilded Man." Plunging into the sacred lake, he would wash off his glittering covering while the devotees on the banks flung their offerings into the sacred waters. The legend of the "Gilded Man," magnified a thousandfold, spread through the neighboring tribes to the coastal regions of the country, regions the Spaniards had recently conquered. As the legend grew in passage the man

sprinkled with gold dust became a city of golden streets and houses studded with gems.

Jiminez de Quesada heard the story in Santa Marta on the Caribbean coast and organized the heroic expedition which ascended the Magdalena River in search of the golden city. In Peru, Belalcazar, Pizarro's lieutenant, heard it and started hotfoot across what is now Ecuador to find it. On the Atlantic coast of Venezuela, Federmann, the German, heard the legend and crossed the vast *llanos* of the Orinoco after it. Of the three adventurers Jiminez de Quesada reached the Colombian highlands a few weeks before Belalcazar or Federmann, conquered the Chibchas and raped their riches, but he never found the golden city because it had never existed. The legend of those streets of gold persisted. Years afterward Raleigh sought it in his ill-fated expedition to the Orinoco. For at least a century after the death of the real Eldorado, the "Gilded Man," at the hands of his Spanish conquerors, the mythical city of Eldorado was the goal of expeditions which perished in the steaming jungles in the heart of the South American continent. Now the direct descendant of the Eldorado—old Guatavita—worked as a humble ditch-walker on the Chivor mine, ate a simple diet of maize cakes, *yuca* and *guarapo*, wore the cast-off clothing of the white man and groaned with the pain of his rheumatic joints.

Meantime my Indian miners were tearing into the mountainside, literally moving part of a mountain to discover the color of some minute crystals which might lie in the heart of it. Emerald mining was difficult—a wild gamble at best—by far the most trying kind of mining I had attempted. I had mined a good many different minerals in the score of years which had passed since Tom and I had worked our hearts out to prove up a gold concession on the Ruenya River in Mozambique. Tom had died there.

Gold, tin, coal, fluorspar—each of those minerals was the subject of textbooks which helped the miner, but there was no bibliography on the emerald-mining industry. So seldom

does the gem appear on the earth's crust and so poorly organized is the emerald-mining industry that I could find no textbook to guide me. In mining the emerald I was forced to proceed by the method of trial and error, and there was only time for one trial and no errors. If the formation I had chosen to exploit should prove barren there would be no funds forthcoming to try elsewhere. The mine would die and I would go on record as being the man who failed to make it live. But I had hopes. To my inexperienced eye the formation appeared favorable as we sunk the pit deeper. It had the silky texture and the regular fracture of the other rocks which had produced emeralds. I knew also that from somewhere in this Chivor mine the Spaniards had produced the right quality of gem, and I prayed that I had chanced on the same layer of formation. Also the veteran Indian miners were sanguine of success. That heartened me.

After I had been on the property a month or two I received a letter from the company which confirmed the policy I had suspected. "As the mine still continues to operate at a loss," to quote from the letter, "the Board has regretfully decided to close it down as soon as the funds to its credit in Bogota are exhausted. You will reserve sufficient of these funds to reimburse you for the unexpired portion of your six-months' contract and to cover your first-class passage to New York. Please cable acknowledgment of receipt of this letter."

That shook me. It is one thing to feel convinced of a disagreeable possibility and quite another to have proof that your convictions are right. I felt sick at heart. The emerald formation in our new pit was becoming more favorable every day and the miners were enthusiastic. We were on the eve of finding emeralds, that was certain. Whether they would be of the right quality—that was another matter. But I was just as sure we would get high-grade emeralds out of that new pit—if we were given time to do it—as I was that the miners

would steal the pick of them if I gave them half a chance.

After due consideration, I decided not to cable my acknowledgment of the letter immediately. Once I had acknowledged the instructions to close down, I reasoned, it would be harder to persuade the mine owners to reverse their policy and continue. So I decided to lie low for a week and then to treat the letter as though it had arrived in the following week's mail. That would give me one week's leeway. In that week anything might happen.

And in that week it did happen. On my morning round of the working parties I found our Indian miners buzzing like bees about to swarm. They were leaning on their tools instead of working, chattering excitedly. At the far end of the pit—quite a big pit already—men were clustered. As I hurriedly approached, I saw Marco's tall figure straighten up from a bending position as though he had been examining some formation. His granite jaw remained immobile, but his eyes sparkled as he poured a handful of crumbled rock into my palm. Among the yellow rock fragments were tiny green specks—*dark green*. My hands trembled as I fumbled in my pocket for a magnifying glass. Under its powerful lens the almost invisible specks grew into emeralds of appreciable size. Tiny hexagonal crystals, the dark green of still water and with the green a trace of blue. There was no fire in them. They were too small for that. But the color was right. Given brilliance—that would be present in the larger gems—they would compete with the stone our agent had showed me. I had guessed right in my geology. Now, if I could only hammer my point of view into the thick heads of that crowd in New York, we should yet make a famous mine out of poor Cinderella Chivor.

"Who found it?" I asked Marco.

"*Yo, su Merced*. I, your worship." The finder spoke for himself, shuffling his gnarled bare feet below the ragged ends of his trouser legs, as though the rock under him were hot.

"What is your name?"

"Jesus is my name. Swear to me, Senor, that the bonus is mine."

I glanced at Marco. He nodded assent to the man's claim.

"All right, Jesus. The bonus is yours. You will receive it as soon as I get back to the office."

"*Gracias, su Merced.* May the Virgin bless you." He executed a wild dance among the debris at the bottom of the pit.

The miners began to work once more. But now their movements were purely mechanical. The fire had gone out of them. Gone was the fury with which they had been attacking that mountain for months. Someone else had won the prize. Instead of being competitors they were once more just workmen on a weekly wage, and they meant to do as little as possible to earn their pay.

This would not do at all, I felt. So far, our find had been merely an indication that high-grade emeralds existed in the new pit. To find them was another matter. With a bit of luck that indication might make the New York crowd play along for a few more months. But, unless we soon produced actual emeralds that could be translated into dollars and cents—a lot of dollars—we had merely postponed the evil day of the shut-down. Unless those miners continued to tear into the mountainside as before we might yet be sunk. Months of intensive work might yet be necessary before I could roll into my palm that glowing morsel of green fire from its age-old bed among the rocks. We must redouble our efforts, not relax them.

I climbed onto a rock and raised my voice.

"All men cease work and come here." I thanked my stars for those hours of study which had made my Spanish equal to what I wanted to say.

A hundred miners downed their tools and clustered round me. Their copper faces looked sullen. Battered, home-woven straw hats were clamped down on the long black hair. Ragged remnants of shirts and trousers, often so patched that

no trace remained of the original cloth. Dull black eyes that moved resentfully over my figure.

"I offered a bonus for the first dark-green mineral found in this pit. Jesus found it. He earns the bonus. Does any man dispute that?"

Dull eyes sought other dull eyes in the crowd. There came a mutter. "Jesus found it. Jesus gets a month's wages for nothing. We worked as hard as Jesus. Jesus goes back to his woman to drink while we work." They were disappointed, just as the rest of the pack is disappointed when one dog gets the only bone. But these people, half-man half-brute, did have a sense of humor which the brutes did not. They could laugh on occasion.

I delved for that spark of humor in them. It lay deep, but it was there. "When Jesus comes back his head will be sore from *guarapo* and his back weak from women."

The dull eyes lit a little and the sullen faces brightened. I had touched their sense of humor, but only just touched it.

"Listen," I cried. "Jesus has found the trail of the *tigre* but the *tigre* is still hidden in the forest. The trail Jesus found must be followed till the *tigre* is caught. Therefore I will pay another bonus—equal to what I am going to pay Jesus—to the first man that finds an emerald larger than a pea, of the same color as this." I held out some of the little green specks still in my hand. "Now get back to work and dig."

With excited yells they scrambled back to work, life in their movements once more.

As soon as I had paid Jesus his bonus I drafted a cable to the company, making no reference to their letter about shutting down. As far as they knew I had not yet received it.

HAVE EXPLOITED HITHERTO UNTOUCHED FORMATION AND DISCOVERED EMERALD MINERAL OF GRADE-ONE COLOR STOP GEMS OF THIS COLOR WOULD COMPETE WITH BEST IN WORLD'S MARKET STOP DESIRE AUTHORIZATION TREBLE SCALE OF OPERATION IN ORDER TO PRODUCE AT EARLIEST DATE

In a few days came the reply, carried in a cleft stick by swift-running Dog-Foot Juan from the telegraph office in the tiny village of Somondoco, eight hours' ride away.

HOW SOON CAN YOU PRODUCE GRADE-ONE EMERALDS?

Damn that New York office crowd. Did they expect me to see into the bowels of a mountain to locate the exact position of a tiny green streak with some green crystals in it? We might be in production the very next day. The next stroke of a miner's bar might bring the emeralds rolling out. On the other hand, it might be months before we found an emerald. But the emeralds were there. Good emeralds. Jesus' find had proved that to me conclusively. I hedged in my reply.

DEPENDS ON SCALE OF OPERATION YOU AUTHORIZE

That was true enough, and I couldn't afford to commit myself to a date. That would be pure guessing and mining engineers who guess at dates of production are apt to become unpopular with capitalists.

I tore the cover off the next message with anxious fingers.

AUTHORIZE SIX MONTHS OPERATION ON PRESENT SCALE STOP IF NO
PAYABLE PRODUCTION IN SIX MONTHS CLOSE DOWN AS PER MINE OF
_____DATE

That was better than I had expected. I had wrung six months' grace for the mine from its owners. Six months' reprieve. With luck we should make our find before the sentence of death was pronounced on what I now knew to be an honest mine.

3.

About Emeralds

MIX beryllium with aluminum in a certain way and you've got an emerald. A white one. There are white emeralds—I've mined them by the hatful. So far it sounds quite simple, and man can make a synthetic white emerald as easily as he makes a synthetic diamond, but only nature knows how to add to the emerald that dash of chromium which turns it green. The more chromium in the mixture the darker the green color and the more valuable the gem. A white emerald is merely a geological curiosity, worth nothing in dollars and cents; while the dark-green bit of fire which is a first-grade emerald may be worth anything up to five thousand dollars a carat. Five carats weigh one gram and thirty-odd grams weigh one ounce. One ounce of the very best emerald material—grade one super—would therefore be worth the greater part of a million dollars.

I don't believe there exists a one-ounce emerald of that total value because the larger gems usually have some flaws

in them. I have never heard of an emerald of anywhere near that value, much less handled one, and I have probably mined more emeralds than any man living, unless it be old Chris Dixon, who made the big strike in the Muzo mine. But I have handled some beauties in my time. The emerald miner doesn't get most of the money, though. The dealers and jewelers see to that.

For example, I remember an emerald. . . . Sixteen carats the little beauty weighed the day I pried her loose from her red-earth bed, a blue-green, fiery hexagon. A chap named Alfred Ramsay bought that one—the same world-renowned gem expert who has written about precious stones in the *Saturday Evening Post*. He cut it himself, and made a twelve-carat gem out of it. I always did consider Ramsay one of the best cutters in the States. I've held my breath many a time when his supple fingers held a living green crystal to the fiercely whirling copper wheel sprinkled with diamond dust. But Ramsay's fingers knew their task and one could see the gem's brilliance grow as he ground the facets on it. Ramsay paid something like twelve thousand dollars for that particular emerald—about one thousand dollars a carat. He sold it to another dealer, who, in turn, sold it to another. Tiffany bought it in the end and, when I saw it in their Fifth Avenue window, it was valued at forty thousand dollars—over three thousand dollars a carat. That was the best emerald, carat by carat, that I ever teased from her earthy bed in the bowels of a mountain.

The emerald was well known to the ancients who ascribed many beneficent qualities to the gem, as opposed to the diamond and the ruby, both of which were classed as malevolent. Incidentally, an ancient belief was that the infidelity of a wife would flaw any emerald given her by her husband—but my wife refuses to believe that one.

Emeralds accumulate a history which sometimes enhances their sales price far above their real value. Such a one—I am

always getting ahead of my story, but I don't seem to be able to help it—was a gem that I afterward appraised for a famous Fifth Avenue bank which did most of its business with jewelers. Along with two other appraisers I filed into the bank. There an official handed each of us a thick wad of typewritten sheets.

"That is the history of the gem," the official informed us, fiddling with his gold watch chain and holding up his nose till he appeared to look right over us. "Quite a privilege to appraise anything so historical. We lent the owner some money on it. Now he wants to borrow more, so we thought we'd better appraise it. Quite a formality . . . The value's there, of course, but banks have rules."

According to the typewritten history, that gem was historical. It had belonged to most of the crowned heads of Europe, including the Empress Maria Theresa.

"Righto. Produce the goods and let's look at them," we chorused.

Moving reverently, as though to rebuke our levity, the banker produced an ebony box about the size of a hatbox. As though uncovering a holy relic, he lifted the lid and produced a crown which he set upon a table about ten feet from us. Breathtaking. Hundreds of small diamonds seemed to cling to the gold like dewdrops to a frame of molten moonlight. A ray of wintry sunlight was shining in through a window to make the diamonds blaze. In the middle of them was a great green gem as thick as my thumb and not much shorter. It seemed dark green, but the whole assembly of jewels was blazing so brilliantly that it was difficult to distinguish the green fire of the emerald from the white light of the diamonds.

The banker seemed so overawed by the effect that we had great difficulty in persuading him that we could not appraise a gem at long range but must pry it loose from its setting, weigh it and examine it under a powerful lense. Eventually,

however, he handed the crown to us, watching us furtively as though he expected one of us to dive through the window with it.

We removed the emerald from its setting. One glance at the diamonds was enough. Seen at close quarters they were small—mere chicken-feed beside the master stone.

The banker handed us each a piece of paper. "Please write your appraisal separately, without communicating with one another." He wanted three independent appraisals.

When finally the emerald was passed to my hands I blinked, glanced helplessly at the expressionless faces of my two companions, who were famous gem dealers, by the way, then again at the thing in my hands. Only in patches had it much color. In between the dark patches was a milky translucency. Its flaws were legion, and there were dozens of tiny impurities in it. From a commercial point of view it was almost worthless. I doubted my eyesight. It couldn't be. Such a famous gem as this must be valuable. Still, I must appraise it at what I considered the true figure. Half expecting a storm of ridicule I wrote down *one thousand dollars*.

We handed our slips of paper to the banker. His face paled as his eye caught the three sets of figures. Then he slumped into a chair and gasped.

"You are almost unanimous," he wailed, "but it can't be."

Unanimously we assured him that it was.

"But great God Almighty, we have already lent fifty thousand dollars on it and only thought of appraising it because the owner wanted to borrow another twenty-five thousand." His sigh sounded like the deflating of a football.

It was not long afterward that I heard of the failure of that famous bank. It didn't surprise me, as the bank must have made scores of such loans without bothering to get an appraisal.

But to get back to emeralds in general. Having thus created one of the most concentrated forms of wealth known to man, nature took good care to hide her treasure from him.

She hid her emeralds in the appendices of mountain peaks and placed the mountains as far from civilized centers as possible. To make them still more secure, she covered the region with a thick layer of forest, just in case some clue to the contents of the mountain might be visible on the surface. At least, that is what she did with the Colombian emerald deposits, and Colombia produces most of the world's worthwhile emeralds. Emerald mining sounds like wealth. There's a luscious atmosphere given off by the mere mention of the profession. But, of all the chancy kinds of mining, the search for emeralds is easily the worst. By far the worst. There is more good money poured into emerald mines than ever comes out of them. It's the toughest kind of mining that I ever tried.

The Chibcha Indians of the high plateau of Colombia mined emeralds from Chivor before the Spanish conquest. There were no gold deposits in their country, so they used to acquire gold by trading for it with the Tolima Indians across the Magdalena River. They used to give emeralds and salt in exchange for the gold with which they plastered their Eldorado or threw into the sacred lake as sacrifice to their sun-god.

Soon after the conquest the Spaniards were shown Chivor. According to the old Spanish historian, "The Indians were reluctantly persuaded to disclose the source of the green gem." "Reluctantly persuaded" is a good term. Hanging by one toe over a slow fire was probably one of the methods of persuasion used—if those cruel, iron-hearted Spanish conquerors were running true to form. Whatever the dubious means by which they had acquired it, the Spaniards began to develop the mine just before the middle of the sixteenth century. For a hundred years they continued to develop it, until the conquest of the Muzo Indians, in the Carare valley across the eastern chain of the Andes, opened up a temporarily more attractive and virgin source of supply. The conquest of the Muzo Indians and the discovery of the Muzo mine constitute quite an epic, but have no place here. Paren-

thetically, I find great difficulty in writing consecutively about Colombia. The romantic history of the country crowds in on me and tries to force itself onto the typewritten page to the exclusion of my story. Later I was to have much to do with Muzo, and the history of that deadly place will fit better when I write of that.

Chivor lay abandoned after the discovery of Muzo. From the middle of the seventeenth century till early in the twentieth no man trod the deep valleys and vast mountain slopes of the Chivor region. Plentiful rainfall and warm sunshine caused the jungle to grow till a great forest clothed the district where hundreds of men had toiled and died for a century in search of the emerald.

But at the close of the nineteenth century a young English adventurer, Chris Dixon, made a fabulously rich strike in the Muzo region while he was operating the famous old mine for a British syndicate. Chris recovered more emeralds from the Muzo mine in the four years of his administration than the Colombians had extracted in the previous century. The news of his strike rejuvenated an industry that was tending to become impotent. Emeralds and emerald mines. Capital was forthcoming to finance them now. Prospectors began to drift forestward to investigate the legends of lost emerald mines of the Spaniards or to hunt for new formations.

It was Pacho Restrepo, the Antioqueñian, who picked on the lost Chivor mine as his quarry. Like most of his fellow citizens of the *Departamento* of Antioquia in Colombia, Pacho was a stout fellow. He needed to be, if he were to rediscover Chivor. Its general location in the Somondoco district was known, of course, but that might mean anywhere in an area of fifty square miles—two thousand five hundred square miles of dense forest. There was hardly an acre of it that was not tilted up on edge. Why, a man might scramble over the old workings themselves without knowing that he was on the object of his search, so overgrown with vegetation would those old emerald pits be. Ditches would be so over-

grown with roots that no trace of them would be visible. The old Spaniards had used tunnels for mining in the early days of the conquest before they learned that a tunnel might be driven within a foot of emeralds worth a king's ransom without any clue to their presence being discovered. Only after many years of experience had they developed the same pit system of mining that we were using at Chivor—after experience had taught them that the only profitable system of mining the emerald is to move the mountain bodily and sift it, bit by bit. Yes, a tunnel might provide the clue to Chivor's location, if you could only find the mouth of it. But tree roots have a habit of masking the mouths of tunnels if you give the trees enough centuries in which to grow.

But good old Pacho did have one clue. In his history of the Spanish conquest, Fray Simone, the priestly historian, had written of Chivor: "The mines of Chivor are situated on the point of a ridge from which the *llanos* of the Orinoco can be seen." To one who knows the region that seems a slender clue. But, still, a clue it was, and Pacho set out to follow it. Climb to the top of every ridge in that forest sea. That was his plan. Set foot on every mountain top in the area. If the *llanos* could be seen from it he would search its sides foot by foot for the old workings of Chivor. Scores of ridges, each ridge bristling with peaks. Between the ridges, gigantic valleys through which swift mountain rivers raced toward their destiny on the level plains below. Dense forest clothed the well-nigh precipitous slopes. Pathless. Each step of progress must be made by hacking a path through vegetation so dense as to approximate a solid. Month after month. Year after year. Don Pacho's once substantial fortune began to become attenuated with the strain of maintaining the force of men required in such an uninhabited wilderness. Axemen and *macheteros* for hacking trails. Scores of pack Indians to bring in supplies—sixty pounds of grain or *yuca* on a pair of humped shoulders while the bearer eased his way down or clambered up slopes.

Meat was scarce and Don Pacho's men depended for their meat ration on what the forest provided. Squirrels darting along the fern-wreathed branches of the huge yellow laurel or cedar trees, coneys in their holes in the rocky cliffs. Down in the warmer valleys were monkeys, but the monkey is thin-blooded and refuses to inhabit the higher, colder regions. The fat *buruga*—the South American version of the North American ground-hog. It was a *buruga* that found Chivor for Don Pacho. One of his Indians chased the sluggish animal into a hole and proceeded to dig it out. After a yard or so of digging the opening widened. The Indian entered and stood upright. Regular walls and arched roof. A tunnel. In the soft rock through which it had been driven were the pick-marks of long-dead Indian slaves—three centuries dead or more.

The "lost" mine of Chivor had been found.

Don Pacho spent the scanty remnant of his fortune on developing his find. His luck was small—a few emeralds of low value. In the end he was glad enough to unload it on an American syndicate. Several times thereafter the mine changed hands before my employers drew in a deal what was well on the way to being regarded in mining circles as a white elephant. The reputation of a mine is tender as that of a virgin. And now—if I were lucky—I expected to redeem Chivor's reputation. A rich strike enhances the reputation of the man who makes it. As yet, I was unknown in my profession in Colombia. But, if I were to make Chivor famous, I should become an engineer of note, a man marked for advancement by success.

Chivor would produce worth-while emeralds. I knew it. Don Marco knew it, too, and never during daylight hours relaxed his grim perambulations round the working places in the pit. No Indian miner could reach down to pick up something from the ground without Marco's shadow falling across him with a demand to see what he had picked up. The Indian miners knew it also and redoubled their efforts to

win the bonus by being the first to make the discovery they felt was imminent. In their cunning minds, too, was the hope that there might be one moment—just one short moment—in which they could get their itching fingers on the emerald vein to grab a few souvenirs for themselves before Marco or I could reach the spot.

Well before the expiration of the given time limit we did make our find. As good luck would have it, I was within a few feet of the spot when it happened. I'd done everything but sleep in that pit for weeks. Epaminondas struck it—blame the parish priests for the classical names so many of the Colombian Indians bear. When an Indian mother has named her eldest son Jesus and her eldest daughter Maria she has exhausted her repertoire of names and relies on the parish priest to supply the deficiency at the christening of the remaining instalments of her family—a christening which has been preceded by some pagan rites of her own people.

One of Don Pacho's veterans was Epaminondas. He had worked on the mine ever since Don Pacho had discovered it and felt almost as though he owned it. He was a sturdy, grizzled old warrior with a reputation as a knife fighter. He affected a floppy straw hat over his straight black hair and a brightly colored sash over the rags which clothed him.

This occasion was quite different from the original discovery by Jesus some months before. Nothing hysterical about old Epaminondas. Just as my eye happened to rest on him, the old boy leaned forward, gazed at something which the point of his eight foot crowbar had turned up and promptly planted one splayed foot on it.

Slowly his head turned till he caught sight of me.

"*Su Merced*. I have it," he said calmly.

In a second I was on the spot.

The Indian removed his gnarled bare foot, disclosing a thin green streak similar to the one Jesus had found, only more clearly defined. No isolated pocket this one evidently.

A vein. Walls well defined and the green content was two inches wide. Big for an emerald vein. If I didn't get emeralds by following that vein I'd be willing to throw in my hand and agree with the rest of the mining world that Chivor was a dud. Good color, too. A dark, dull green. If that dark mineral had in places crystallized into emeralds they would be valuable.

"Good, Epaminondas, good. But the bonus was to be paid for the first emerald this time—not for the trail of the *tigre* only. Catch me the *tigre* now. Strike again with your bar and open the vein for me. There are emeralds in it, I know."

I leaned forward with bated breath as I waited for the stroke of the crowbar to remove a section of the rocky walls which enclosed the dark green streak, like a layer of green peppermint between two yellow layers of cake, with the cake turned on edge.

But Epaminondas made no stroke. Instead he grinned at me as he leaned upon his heavy bar. Then he lifted one prehensile foot, sole upward for me to see. Between the first and second toes was a glint of green. I held out my open palm and an emerald fell into it.

If I live to be a hundred I shall never forget that stone. Later I bought it from the company and had it mounted in its native state as a brooch for Margaret, my wife. It looks a bit barbaric by some people's standards, but at least it is unusual. More, it is unique. Each emerald before cutting has its own individuality, and it is only the lapidary's lack of imagination that shapes two cut gems alike. Anyway, it gave pleasure to the recipient. Margaret treasured it and our daughter Marge inherited it from her. On each of the six sides of the hexagon, nature had put a polish which no lapidary could hope to emulate. All emeralds are hexagons or fragments of a hexagon. Why? Because the emerald mineral happens to crystallize only in that form. Every mineral has its characteristic form of crystallization. That is one of the easiest ways for a prospector to determine the name of an unfamiliar min-

eral. Find a crystal and then look in the handbook tables to see which mineral crystallizes in that form. My first emerald weighed five carats even. A second-grade gem—not enough fire in it to make it first-grade. But I knew that as long as the color persisted some of the emeralds in that vein would be firsts. In that moment I knew I had won my fight for the life of the mine.

The finder had earned his bonus.

With Epaminondas as my sole helper I set to work to explore the vein further, having moved the remainder of the gang to another working place a safe distance away. One man is enough to watch when you are reaping the hard-won harvest of many months of costly work. Even one man might ease an emerald from me. Once Epaminondas got these splay feet of his over a gem he could retain it between his toes till he went home from work. The old devil had known I was there and was afraid I might have spotted his foot going over it. Otherwise that emerald would have gone for *aguardiente* in the nearest village.

With my geologist's pick I hewed a little level shelf in front of the low vertical face of rock in which the vein was exposed.

"Strike, Epaminondas." I crouched expectant.

Epaminondas braced his short legs while his flexible toes felt for a grip on the slippery rock surface. Slowly his heavy crowbar rose, gripped tight in sinewy hands. Perpendicular, its upper end reaching far above his head. With a grunt he struck. The sharp steel point split the rock on one side of the vein, loosening a piece about two feet square.

Gently Epaminondas swayed the bar to and fro. Under that purchase the fissure opened till I could see that a section of the green vein had adhered to the loosened yellow rock. How green that inner surface showed! With both hands I grabbed the rock and eased it gently over till the green surface was on top. Here and there in the dull green beryl were hexagonal shapes. Opaque. They had the shape and color of

the emerald, but not the translucency and luster. Semi-formed emeralds. Some unfavorable condition at the time of their deposit had prevented them from crystallizing into gem form. Gently I scraped the point of my little pick over the green surface. In one point the pick broke through. There was a cavity in the beryl and the cavity seemed filled with iron oxide which looked like dry, powdered, iron rust. Loose in the powder were hard things. One by one I picked them out. Emeralds. Small but marketable. I emptied my tobacco into my pocket and placed the emeralds in the pouch for want of a better container. All that day Epaminondas and I worked, exploring the vein deeper and deeper. Before we left it for the night I sealed it with wet clay and caused tons of debris to be rolled onto it from above. Safe from prowlers. No ten men could have moved that pile of debris in a single night. That was the method I always adopted to protect an emerald vein from being rifled. Less complicated than the system of search in vogue in the South African diamond mines and, besides, what hope had Marco and I of searching those wild Indians each night, alone as we were in the jungle?

Then I walked back to the camp, placed the emeralds in a bath of hydrochloric acid and cleaned the rusty covering from them. Once clean, they satisfied me. A couple of grade-one stones. The others were seconds and thirds with the usual proportion of rubbish—crushed hexagons that looked all right till you handled them when they fell to fragments in your hand. None of the day's catch was likely to be famous, but most of it was marketable. At a conservative estimate that day's work had recovered the expenses of three months' mine operation. There would be more emeralds in that vein too; we had barely begun to explore it. In the expanse of the pit we had sunk there would surely be other veins also.

Month by month passed. Some months were more profitable than others, but each month that pit showed a handsome profit. By the time my first year on the mine had passed

I had not only shown a profit for that year but had gone far to recoup the owners for the mine's previous losses.

Month by month the pit deepened. Month by month we explored the veins which our excavations uncovered. At last the character of the rock changed. The silky texture left it. The bottom of the pit was now formed of formation which fractured sharply into jagged edges, quite unlike the square-breaking strata which had produced emeralds. Once an emerald vein approached that jagged layer on which it lay the green streak ceased. The fissure closed. I knew that if we sunk a mile deeper not another emerald would we recover. The pit had "bottomed." We must now open a new pit and wait many months till it had reached the same stratum of formation that we had just finished exploiting.

Leaving Marco to carry on the preliminaries, I mounted my horse and set out for Bogota, the saddle wallets which bumped my knees carrying the results of my last year's work.

I rode alone, without an escort, because Marco was the only man I could trust among my employees, and Marco was needed to run the mine in my absence. Better no escort, I felt, than an untrustworthy one. The loneliness of my ride with a valuable cargo did not worry me unduly. I reasoned that no one inclined to banditry could be certain that my wallets carried anything more valuable than a toothbrush and pair of pajamas, and even bandits think twice before molesting an Englishman in Colombia. Besides, the revolver in full view at my hip tended to discourage anyone from being too inquisitive about the contents of my saddle wallets. This was a method of carrying valuables that I followed throughout my four years in Chivor, four years in which I was to carry enough valuable emeralds into Bogota to seriously disturb the equilibrium of the world's emerald market. Yet not once was I molested.

A year or two later—this was when my feud with Joaquin the bandit had become acute—I will admit that I strapped on a second revolver and rode by night instead of by day. At

first thought it might seem that the hours of darkness increased the danger to a man riding alone. But the contrary was the case, in my opinion. It was no open bandit that I had to fear. In Colombia there was no Dick Turpin openly to accost the traveler and rifle his wallets. There was no man, I knew, in all that region, who was willing to ride to meet me and shoot it out—unless it were Joaquin himself and even Joaquin didn't operate like that, as a rule. Joaquin liked to commit his crimes at second hand, through underlings. If they pulled the job off, he got most of the loot. If they bungled the show they paid the piper because he always had a good alibi. No. The chap I had to look out for on the trail was the ambushed Indian with a rifle. The darkness was my best protection against that. In the darkness the man who tried to get me would have to do it from point-blank range when my chances of getting him were at least as good, better, because I was prepared to open fire without question on any night traveler who came too close, while the bandit after my wallets would certainly want to identify me before he committed himself.

In Bogota I rolled a pile of green gems onto the agent's table. He fingered them. He held them to the light. Then he carefully replaced them in the canvas bag in which they had traveled.

"I congratulate you," he tipped his chair back. "You have proved true what I told you a year ago when you visited me."

"What was that?"

"I remarked that a mine was only as good as the man who ran it."

That was true enough, in a way. If I hadn't sweated blood over the Chivor mine it would have been closed down once more, abandoned and eventually overgrown with jungle as when Don Pacho rediscovered it. It would have been lost once more, to become a legend to tempt prospectors of some future age to repeat the cycle.

4.

A Synthetic Baron,
an Alcoholic Gun-Runner
and Others

BANKERS seemed overly plentiful among the foreign colony in Bogota. American bankers. Or so it seemed to me in the stay of several weeks I made after my arrival with my first shipment of emeralds. I felt I had earned a sojourn among my own kind, and there were no more emeralds to be found in Chivor for a while. Marco would have to sink the new pit a couple of hundred feet at least before the formation even began to get interesting—months of work. The reason for such an influx of foreign notables was that Colombia was borrowing money and every large bank in the United States seemed determined to be the lender. Colombia was booming and needed fifty million pesos for development. Offering good security for that amount of money, too, and an attractive rate of interest.

At the head of the Colombian Ministry of Finance at that

time was a general. Most of the cabinet ministers were generals who had rendered service in the civil war of twenty years before when the Conservatives had fought the Liberals to a standstill in a three-years bitter campaign. The Conservatives had won and had remained in power ever since. If I remember rightly the only cabinet post not held by a general was that of the Minister of War. I cannot give you an opinion of the abilities of any of the other cabinet ministers because I never met them. Some years were yet to elapse before I should myself become a government official and be on nodding terms with presidents and their colleagues in government. But I did meet the Finance Minister because the mining department came under his jurisdiction.

One day I had to see this official about some changes I was suggesting in the emerald-mining laws. I found his ante-room thronged with bankers. American bankers, eying each other askance when their eyes were not fixed on the Finance Minister's door. It seemed to me that should one of them be admitted the others would stampede in after him, so jealous of one another did they appear, so anxious to lend their money.

I passed in ahead of them—our Bogota agent saw to that. His family had not been prominent in Colombian affairs for four centuries without having acquired precedence. A dozen pairs of eyes glared at me as I passed through the anteroom. I suppose they thought I was a rival banker. But I got nowhere with the gallant soldier who was now handling his country's finance. A heavy-bottomed, genial type of man with a huge black mustache, who kept lifting papers out of one tray, putting them in another and then reversing the process as I presented my case. I doubt if he heard a word I said. Absent-minded. Small wonder.

His government had authorized him to borrow fifty million pesos—the Colombian peso was then about equal in value to the American dollar—while the total of the loans offered by the pent-up flood of bankers outside his door

amounted to three hundred million pesos. They seemed not worried at all by lack of security for the larger amount. Any old security would do, apparently. The general finally borrowed every cent that was offered. Three hundred million dollars. The American bankers were on top for the moment because they unloaded on the American public in the form of bonds on which they made a nice profit. Colombia became saddled with a load of debt totally disproportionate to the revenue of that mostly undeveloped country and when the world-wide depression hit they had to default on payments. The ensuing uproar was partly responsible for a change of government. Under a new and very astute banker as Minister of Finance, later to be my immediate chief, the country raised new and smaller loans elsewhere, bought back their old bonds at the market price—a small fraction of their face value—and so restored the national credit. That much for the drama of South American bonds in the depression, as I saw it.

Soon after I arrived in Bogota from Chivor I dropped my card at the British Legation. I found there a congenial crowd. Mrs. Lomax, French wife of the secretary, acted as hostess, for the minister was a bachelor.

At the legation I met Sir Arnold Wilson, who was in the throes of trying to negotiate in Colombia an oil concession for his company, Anglo-Persian Oil. I had known Arnold's brother in Rhodesia in the early days, and I found Arnold just as jolly a chap as his brother had been. Soon afterward he spent some time with me in Chivor. After he left Colombia we corresponded intermittently. I followed with interest the progress of his career. He left Anglo-Persian and entered Parliament, devoting his leisure time to writing. I still have an autographed copy of his *Persian Gulf* which I treasure as a memento of him. Then we lost track of one another. Not for a decade did I have news of him, except an occasional mention in the English papers. Then, after I had left Colombia, someone whom I met in the Continental Savoy in Cairo

—St. John Philby, I think it was, the man who is reputed to be the power behind the throne in Saudi Arabia—told me that Arnold had gone fascist and become one of Moseley's chief supporters. Then came the war. Arnold Wilson realized his mistake—and to expiate it, I believe—succeeded in getting himself into the Royal Air Force. Colossal! A man of fifty-five. Colonel in the last war. K.C.B., D.S.O. and a string of other letters after his name. He joined the R.A.F. as a machine gunner on a bomber, a private soldier. He died over the Dunkirk evacuation. God rest his soul. A grand companion and a very gallant man.

A less pleasant acquaintance was the Italian Baron. Any one from legation circles of the late twenties in Bogota will remember the man. As far as the Baron part of it was concerned I think the title was synthetic, but I believe his father had possessed some kind of title, the only possession of value which the father had brought to England when he left his native Italy, presumably one jump ahead of the police. The Baron said his father was a "political exile." The son, the Baron of my story, came out to Bogota with a letter of introduction to the Minister from no less an august body than the British Foreign Office and had to be handled like eggs in consequence. The fact that the eggs were bad made no difference to the minister's responsibility.

The Baron was interested in emeralds in some vague way, and the Minister promptly passed him on to me in a friendly attempt to get me to hold the baby for him. I didn't hold any baby because I left Bogota before the baby was born. But what a baby it was when it did arrive.

The day I was introduced to the Baron he asked me to dine with him at the Regina Hotel. The Regina was a good hotel with a rousing wood fire always burning in the lounge, although it was not as ornate as the Granada which was built later. The Baron was a dapper, well-groomed party with black eyes, sleek black hair, a well-oiled appearance—the perfect picture of a gigolo. Before I had known him an hour

he had given me the genealogy of his family as far back as Romulus, asked me to his place in Scotland for the shooting season and told me he seldom played bridge for less than a pound a point.

"Better lay off that 'pound a point' talk round the Anglo-American club," I remarked. "There are some real bridge sharks in the card room there."

"Bridge sharks!" his English accent was almost perfect. "Are there indeed good bridge players in such a place as Bogota?"

I laughed. "So the losers say."

Just then he excused himself. "Can you amuse yourself for an hour while I dress for dinner?"

"Good God, man," I cried, "no one dresses for dinner at the Regina. Not unless he's entertaining the President or someone like that."

He drew himself up proudly. "I have never eaten a dinner in my life without dressing for it."

The damned fop shortened my stay in Bogota. I left before I had intended to just to get clear of him. He definitely wasn't in my line of country, and I wished the Minister joy of him.

Hardly had I arrived once more in Chivor, however, when, to my astonishment, an S.O.S. arrived from the Minister, carried by a special runner in the usual cleft stick. It brought me hot-footing back the whole two days' journey through the mud of the wet season. The Baron, it seemed, was giving the Minister a spot of trouble and the Minister needed my help.

Plastered with mud from my two days' ride, I went straight to the legation without even going to my hotel to clean up—actually dismounted at the legation door from my bus as it entered the city.

Mrs. Lomax was the first to greet me when a scandalized flunky ushered me into one of the best-furnished drawing rooms in the capital. With raised eyebrows she hastily picked

up a rug off the floor and covered a sofa before she pushed me gently down onto the soft cushions. Convulsed with mirth at my appearance, she mixed me a stiff whisky and soda and placed it in my not unwilling hand.

"What's the trouble?" I asked, after I had gulped half of it. How good whisky and soda always tasted after even a short sojourn on the native *aguardiente* or rum—first-class rum at about three shillings the bottle, but it wasn't whisky.

"That Baron"—she doubled her tiny fist and shook it, scowling fiercely till her dark brows met—"he is a peeg."

"What's he done?" I took another swig at my glass and looked regretfully at the empty bottom.

"You dreenk this queek one," she refilled the glass. "Then you ruin my bathroom with the mud on you. Then the Meenister come and tell you about eet." She ushered me upstairs.

The Minister was one of the most taciturn men I ever met, but he waxed eloquent about the Baron. "The bloody fool lost his shirt at bridge with those sharks at the Anglo-American club. Then he tried to recoup his losses by playing poker at the Jockey Club." The Minister tamped his pipe savagely.

I whistled. It sounded like a lost soul leaving Purgatory to cool himself in Gehenna. Bridge at the Anglo-American club was fast enough for anyone. But poker at the Jockey Club! They were first-class poker players down there. Rich Colombian coffee planters and cattlemen who could lose—or win—at a sitting the price of a London mansion without noticing the dent.

"Was the Baron badly bent?" I queried.

"To the tune of five thousand pounds in one glorious thirty-six-hour sitting." The Minister flung his used match into the fireplace.

"But surely that's the Baron's trouble, not yours." Serve the silly fop right, I felt.

"Not my trouble?" The Minister almost spluttered. "Not

my trouble when the Foreign Office expect me to nurse him? I've got to see him through."

"Through what? They can't prosecute him on a gambling debt."

"It's worse than that. The misbegotten ass went and signed a check for the debt without having funds in the bank. Drunk, I suppose."

"God Almighty! Have they got him in jail? That's a criminal offense."

"They gave him a week to cover. The week is up tonight."

"Can't he raise the money on his place in Scotland? He asked me up there for the shooting, so it must be worth quite a bit."

"Place in Scotland my foot." The Minister paced up and down, his feet soundless in the soft carpet. "I cabled about that at once, of course. It seemed the best bet. Had it investigated. The only connection the Baron has in Scotland is a small cottage where his mother lives. The cottage is hers—not his."

"He'll be picked up tonight if he doesn't cover and they'll throw him into the calaboose. That'll spoil the crease in his trousers."

The Minister snorted. "No, they won't. I've got him lying snug with a farmer friend of mine out in the *sabana*. Made the fool swear that he'd stay out of Bogota in daylight, but I told him he could come in here for a drink every evening after dark. Had to make some kind of concession or he'd have been sneaking into pubs and getting himself spotted."

"But you can't keep him hidden long."

"That's where you come in." The Minister looked at me almost prayerfully. "I need your help to smuggle him out of the country."

I could actually feel my face fall. I had been hoping that I had seen the last of that slimy gigolo. "What's your idea?" If I had been able to follow my own inclinations I should have taken the Baron out to some lonely place and shot him

out of hand. Less trouble than any other scheme I could think of.

"We've been looking up that outlandish mine of yours on the map." The Minister's voice was eager. "It's near the Meta River. The Meta is a tributary of the Orinoco. The Orinoco runs through Venezuela. Once he's over the Venezuelan border I'm clear of him."

"You mean you want me to take him down the Meta River into Venezuela?"

"If you're willing to help." His eyes were shining. "The damned fool isn't fit to be trusted alone."

"I'm willing to help all I can, of course, but it isn't as easy as you seem to think. It's true I can even see the Meta River from my house, but it takes three days to ride there. Then it's the best part of a thousand miles down the river to Venezuela. Say a month's canoe trip. Another month back—more against the current. It would mean three months away from my job. I'm afraid I shouldn't have any job to come back to." Strangely enough, I was sorry I couldn't make the trip, in spite of the disadvantage of having to valet a gigolo through the wilderness. Those *llanos* had been calling me for months, and I had sworn to ride across them at the first opportunity.

"Great Scott!" The Minister's face fell. "Of course you can't do it. Out of the question." He rammed his hands fiercely into his pockets. "But it looked such a little way on the map," he added plaintively.

I reflected that geography was evidently not the Minister's strong point.

"What do you suggest?" he asked after a moment.

"Venezuela, by all means—by air."

"The Scadta airline is out of the question. The airport is the first place the police will begin to watch when they find they can't locate the Baron tonight."

"There's a chap here who gives flying lessons in his own plane. Square him to fly the blighter over the border. They

will be able to land almost anywhere in Venezuela east of the Andes. Lots of flat country. Lonely, too. No one to see them land. The Baron had better take some rations, or he'll starve before some cattleman happens along to find him."

The Minister smote one hand into the other. "That's the ticket. I don't care how soon he starves as long as he does it in Venezuela."

Just then an apparition shuffled into the drawing room. A pair of hob-nailed boots whose effect on the carpet made little Mrs. Lomax scowl. Shabby checked trousers, muddy at the cuffs. A *ruana* draped over the upper man. Between a thick muffler and a low, peaked cap—still on his head—the pallid features of the Baron peeped out. Disguised. The stage villain to the life. Furtively, he drank several whiskies in quick succession, scarcely seeming to notice his host. But he did notice the lady. His attempt to ogle her must have been purely automatic, because the man was scared stiff. Cowed. But Mrs. Lomax caught the languishing glance and her scowl became a glare. Catching my eye she threw her hands out in a hopeless gesture, slumped into a seat and helped herself to a cigarette. I surmised that she had her private feud with the ogler, quite apart from the trouble he had caused the household.

The Baron departed furtively as he had arrived. No dressing for dinner now. Nemesis had got him thoroughly. I chuckled to myself. The dainty-feeding Baron would dine that night on a huge platterful of boiled beef, potatoes and *yuca*. Enough for three men would be dumped before him on a rough, homemade wooden platter. Nothing dainty about it, although it would be well-cooked and clean. Plain peasants' fare that makes men strong. Strong men aren't bred on paté and dainty trifles. I could see him toying with a he-man's meal while the wood smoke from the open fire on the hearthstone made his unaccustomed eyes water.

While in Bogota I met Kirk. He was a wizened, little, old man, who must have been about seventy. He was an engi-

neer. By all accounts none better when sober, but he had the fatal faculty of getting drunk just when needed. Most employers will pardon a wild bust when a man isn't particularly busy, but to start a pub-crawl when there's a job of work in hand . . . Do that once or twice, and jobs become scarce. Then a man has to take to adventure to live, as Kirk had evidently done at an early age. Now he was too old to adventure any more and existed mostly on small loans which he had, to do him justice, every intention to repay and entered meticulously in a small notebook. Kirk's arrival in Colombia is worth the retelling. I give it to you as nearly as I can remember in his own words, told in a disreputable *cantina* in the workmen's part of the city.

Unwittingly I started it by an argument with a thin-faced English mining engineer by the name of Granville. He was a man of some reputation at one time, but somewhat out of things now. We were arguing about murderers.

Kirk had been dozing at the table, nodding. His venerable white head seemed to cast shame at the beer slops, the mixture of blue cigarette smoke and obscenities which made the atmosphere of the sordid place. But at the word "murderer" his head jerked up. His gnarled old hands gripped the table edge, and his gaze traveled around our circle. His rheumy old eyes had brightened, glaring.

"Murderer! By God, I'm no murderer! They died of fever. I swear they did." His head dropped forward once more.

"Have you heard that yarn?" queried Granville in my ear, as he slopped more whitish fluid from his *aguardiente* bottle into his glass.

I shook my head.

"It's worth hearing. If you order him a beer I'll transmute it into his favorite tippie to loosen his tongue." Granville's cultured voice had the husky tone which told the tale of vocal cords burned out by years on straight fiery liquor.

When the beer arrived, Granville tipped into it a gen-

erous noggin of fiery *aguardiente* from his bottle. " 'Bitch's blood' we call that cocktail. He'll talk with that inside him."

Kirk's hand reached for the tankard, absentmindedly. One swig. His eyes brightened once more. He drained the mug, setting it back on the rough board table with a bang. After a deep breath he exhaled noisily. No wonder. Drinking *aguardiente* in beer must make a man think he has swallowed a mule.

"They say I murdered my pards but they lie, damn them." His voice was no longer an old man's piping. Stronger with the potent liquor in him.

Someone refilled his mug with the poisonous mixture. Kirk drank again.

"The show started in the days when Teddy Roosevelt wanted to dig the big ditch through the Isthmus of Panama. But the Isthmus was part of Colombia then, and Colombia was unsociable. The coffee and cattle barons that ran this roost didn't want any ditches dug in their back yard. Refused Teddy flat, they did, when he tried to buy the right of way." Kirk drank again.

"But Teddy was a hard man to beat," he continued. "He stirred up a revolution in Panama and his agents kept it going with plenty of money to buy guns. There was a sight of coasters that began to unload big packing cases along the coast of the Isthmus in the dark of the moon. The Rebs were paying cash money for arms.

"Looked like quick money to me, so I sunk the stake I'd just made in China. Bought a coasting schooner and filled her with rifles. Ran them ashore in the bayou which the Rebs' New York agent had marked for me on the map. I went ashore with the last boatload to collect the cash, but those yellow-bellied Panamanians gave me the laugh. 'No monee now, Gringo. You want money you come when revolution feenish.'

"But when they'd won the revolution and Panama was independent they gave me the laugh again. The bastards.

'Manana,' it was. Always 'manana.' Till I got tired of the sound of the word and set out to collect for myself.

"Found two pards, I did. Lads with go in them. We rented the lot in Panama City next to the Bank of Panama and went into the building business. Lumber and cement. A few piles of lumber and a hell of a lot of cement. We used to take the cement barrels out into the jungle and dump the cement because we wanted the empty barrels.

"Next I did some surveying. Set up my instrument in the street as though I were the town surveyor. Ran a traverse from our yard to the door of the bank and got a sight on the door of the big steel vault inside. Then I plotted the traverse on paper and we were ready to dig. Behind a pile of lumber we sunk and drove a tunnel straight for the vault in the bank. The earth we dug by night we hid in the empty cement barrels. Night after night. It took us two months to tunnel the two hundred feet to the vault. Once I calculated we were under that vault we began to raise.

"After we reached the concrete floor of the vault it was hammer and drill into the concrete, just like a raise on a mine when you drive up a vertical tunnel from a lower level to an upper. We drilled a whole round of holes in that floor, all ready for the dynamite. Once that round of holes was fired I calculated the floor of the vault would drop into our tunnel and the money with it.

"But our get-away was the difficulty. The money was as good as in our hands—but how to get it out of the country? Not easy. Two hundred miles of swamp and jungle between us and the Colombian border. If we tried that road, Indian trackers would get us before we were halfway through. No. We must get clear by water. But we'd need at least three clear days to do it because they'd come cruising down the coast as soon as the money was missed. Yes. A three-day *fiesta*, and we'd be safe in Colombia before the banker opened the vault for business again.

"We waited weeks for the next three-day *fiesta*, which hap-

pened to be the first anniversary of the Independence of the Republic of Panama. That was justice. They'd pay for their rifles exactly one year after they'd used them.

"We found enough in that vault to pay for the rifles. The bit that was over we counted as interest on the debt. We slipped down the coast in a fast motor launch, and before the bank discovered its loss we were speeding up the Choco River in Colombia.

"Extradition! What a hell of a hope Panama had of getting back fugitives from the country against which she had just successfully rebelled. Just the same we played safe, sunk our launch when we were well up-river and started on foot across the coast range for Medellin in Antioquia."

Kirk's head drooped.

"But the murder, Kirk. What happened to your pals?"

"They died. Died of fever." His rheumy, bloodshot eyes glared around the table.

"And the money?"

Kirk's head was resting on his arms. "The money? How the hell do I know what happened to the money? Lived like a gentleman for a year in Medellin. . . . Then it was gone. . . . I don't remember much about that year."

"What did happen to his partners?" I asked Granville.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I was down that way once after platinum—years afterward. The Choco Indians were still talking about two white men they had found on the coast range—bullet holes in them."

One day Kirk came to see me in my room in the Europa Hotel—at least a year after I had listened to his story. I frequented the Europa rather than the more fashionable hotels because in the Europa I met Colombians, while the swank hotels were frequented mostly by the Anglo-American colony. I liked the Colombians and wanted to know them better.

"What can I do for you, Kirk?" Such visits—I had had several—were usually the prelude to a "touch."

"No money this time. I've got money." He pulled out of his pocket a ten-peso note and some silver. "Just came in to let you know I haven't forgotten the loans you've made me. Look . . ." He opened a tattered notebook and thumbed over the pages till he found the right one, handed it to me. On the head of that page was my name and under it a long list of trifling amounts, neatly totaled. "Won't be long before I pay you now. . . ." He began an account of his latest scheme to recoup his fortunes.

Not long after that poor old Kirk died of old age hastened by injudicious mixture of alcoholic drinks. In his will he left me a prismatic compass. It was a good compass, one of the few relics of his more prosperous youth.

5.

An Empty Paradise
and an
Undertaking Job

I PRESSED my heels to Moro's ribs and caused him to slither down the steep mountain trail at a pace that would have been dangerous to a rider astride any lesser beast. I had bought Moro not long before. Fifteen hands of lean, muscular grace. Small hoofs. Small aristocratic head. He had the gigantic chest and barrel that a horse must have to house the over-size lungs required for carrying a rider through that heart-breaking country, where no road is level and a horse must needs be clawing for toe holds with his forefeet or sitting on his tail for a brake the whole day long. A grand horse and one who became famous during the years I rode him. Once, years after it happened, I was traveling in a bus on the other side of the country, among strangers, apparently, hundreds of miles from home. But the sound of my name shouted from the back seat caused me to

turn my head. A vaguely familiar face beamed at me, a face I couldn't for the life of me put a name to. For the next half hour the owner of the face entertained the bus load of passengers—all horsemen of course—with how the narrator with a crowd of other flood-bound travelers had breathlessly watched old Moro ferry me across the flooded river which had blocked them for days, saving me a three-day wait. Few rivers in flood could stop him. A man could depend on him to stay right side up in the white water of the rapids. That horse could think, and there wasn't a lazy bone in his great gray body. His feet seemed to fall into the right footing automatically when traversing dangerous ground.

I lifted my wide-brimmed hat and let out a whoop that set the echoes rolling across the gorge of the Sinai. Five seconds later my whoop came back to me, fainter. I laughed at it. Carefree. On vacation. The mine was prospering, on its way to becoming famous. Technical papers pestered me nowadays for articles on emerald mining. New York papers carried stories—headliners in one case—of the potential wealth to be unearthed from the forest-clad treasure house of Chivor. Even my employers now realized that they had had a winner almost thrust on them, and had loosened up their purse strings to the extent of re-investing in the mine a fair proportion of the profits it was making them. We now employed three hundred miners instead of the paltry hundred with whom I had started. They consumed daily one fair-sized steer, fifteen mule loads of provisions and six hundred gallons of *guarapo*.

There was probably trouble ahead, of course. That was inevitable. When a mine has the reputation of being valueless the owner remains in undisturbed possession. But just as soon as the mine begins to glitter with value plenty of people on the short cut to fortune think up claims on it. But damn the trouble ahead. Time for that when it came. Just now the clear mountain air was making me drunk, and the Sinai River was foaming and thundering a hundred feet

under my left stirrup. If I had spit over the toe of my left boot the spittle would have dropped sheer to the white froth spouting below while my right boot was rubbing against the cliff which ascended perpendicularly above me. The narrow shelf of trail descended till the spray from the rapids lashed it. Then the trail hesitated, began to climb, twisting itself from the grasp of that hungry, bellowing gorge which would have swallowed it, dodged once or twice in the sharp zigzag of a snipe, then composed itself and sauntered out onto the smooth green turf of a ridge.

Once on the ridge I dismounted to allow my three pack mules and three attendant Indians to come up. Beyond the ridge the river Rucio stormed its way to wrestle with its brother, the Sinai. Once locked together, the two hurled themselves still further downward to where the river Guavio moaned and roared in impatient anger. Between me and the forest-clad wall of the outermost Andean range was a great abyss, the amphitheatre where the three rivers struggled. From a sky-flung peak a white wisp of cloud detached itself, hung motionless, expanded. Black began to show in its erstwhile fleecy belly where the impregnations of the storm-god swelled its womb. Still larger grew the cloud. Still blacker. Its once fleecy, benign appearance became wrathful. The birth pangs started and lightning flickered in its belly while thunder rumbled. Torrents of rain fell from it between the sun-bathed ridge on which I stood and the sun-bathed mountain chain from which the cloud had detached itself. Then, the miracle. A rainbow. The full circle of the rainbow. I looked downward into the abyss at the full circle whose lower segment is usually cut off by the horizon. Only in the Andes did I ever see this miracle and then only three times. This was the first.

An hour before sunset I crossed the Guavio on a flimsy bridge. A somber river, which I was later to know well. The Guavio had the reputation of never allowing a swimmer to escape. Unfordable in all its sixty miles of length

from where it is born near Gachala village, of the union of the black waters of the Rio Negro and the mulatto-colored body of the river Gacheta, to its junction with the river Upia beyond the outer ranges where the vast plain of the *llanos* begins.

Beyond the Guavio was Monte Cristo *hacienda* where I would pass the night, but before we approached the great wooden farmhouse I looked back. Behind us the great Chivor peak still towered over us. Near its crest I could see a white patch that was my house. If one scaled on a map the distance we had traveled it would be less than five miles. And yet we had ridden eight hours to accomplish it—eight hours in which the tortured trail had tried every point of the compass to find a means of descent. Chivor mine lay nine thousand feet above sea level, and there one huddled over a fire every night. Monte Cristo farmhouse was eight thousand feet lower and they dined in their shirt sleeves on a mosquito-proofed veranda. Those two contrasting climates—the frigid zone and the torrid—were only five miles apart.

Next day we climbed again, my Indians and I. The Monte Cristo range this time—the last mountain rampart which the Andes has flung out to keep the plains away. After six hours of climbing we were again at nine thousand feet while the plains opened before us. Like looking down at a vast lawn from the top of a high building. On our left the Guavio boomed in its gorge—eight thousand feet deep, and somewhere in it was a high fall which the eye of man had never seen because the gorge was too precipitous to permit approach. Above the gorge the Guavio was a mountain torrent, raging and thundering along its boulder-strewn bed. Below the gorge it was a river, sedate and well-behaved, its turbulent youth left behind. Above the gorge floating tree trunks—torn by the hungry torrent from their home upon its banks—splintered themselves against the jagged fangs of rock which tore the swift-running current into foam. Below

the gorge large ships could sail upon the Guavio—if ships there had been.

That night we slept in our hammocks among foothills with the plains calling to us as the sea calls to a man camped among the sand dunes behind the beach.

Once clear of the ranges we rode into the eye of the rising sun. For thirty days we rode. Six hundred miles of smooth grassland. In the cool trade-wind it waved like the waves of a sea. Antelope herds grazed on it. Shallow, palm-fringed lakes threw back the image of sky-clouds through earth-clouds of feathered life: flamingoes, egrets, wild duck. We crossed at least one river daily. Each river fringed by a quarter mile of jungle in which lived the tapir and the jaguar. A snort, a crashing flight through the undergrowth—the tapir has taken to water. If you happen to have moored your canoe at the point the tapir has chosen for his dive the result is the same, except for a splintering crash as a prelude to the splash—the tapir has plunged through your stout dugout apparently without noticing it. You don't see the jaguar in the jungle at all, although he lives there. But if you sling your hammock on the jungle's outer edge and wake at the first light of dawn, you may catch him sneaking back to cover from his marauding expedition against the antelope—just like a great spotted house-cat sneaking home after the dubious acts of the night life of a cat.

The rivers were the natural highways of this unpeopled paradise. The old Spanish pioneers stuck to the hills, and it was only in the last of my years in Colombia that the first motor road reached the plains at the little cattle town of Villavicencio and the first wheeled vehicle drove out on it. When the rivers were narrow we swam our beasts over them after firing a few shots into the water to scare the *caymanes*—the South American alligators. There were sting-rays in the muddy shallows, small, flat, fresh-water rays. . . . They were miniatures of their enormous salt-water cousins

of the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico, but with plenty of venom in the sting at the end of their long, flexible tails. There were electric eels with enough voltage to shock and drown a mule. But the greatest danger of those rivers was the tiny *caribe* fish, a few inches long, swimming in shoals whose count went by millions. The smell of blood brings them swarming to nip to tiny mouthfuls the swimming beast or man. The wider rivers we crossed in canoes borrowed from the wandering Guaharibo Indians. They wiped out a Colombian survey party a few years later, but the surveyors had been tampering with their women. We had no trouble with the Guahariboes. I never had trouble with savages in my life. I've always found the "untutored savage" the friendliest person on earth, but the more wives he affects the more jealous does he become.

Writing of the *caribe* fish, there is a story current in Colombia—I don't vouch for it—of a man who towed a mule behind a canoe in crossing a river. When he reached the farther bank only the mule's head remained in the halter. A head attached to a skeleton. The *caribes* had eaten the flesh off it. Anyway we towed our mules across like that and they escaped uneaten. We had no mishaps. No adventures. We rode eastward six hundred miles. We gazed at the vast sliding flood of the Orinoco, then rode six hundred miles back. A stupid way to spend a holiday by some standards—but I wouldn't have missed the experience for ten years of my life. Ten years of normal life is a cheap price for two months with God in Paradise.

On our return we struck the Andes about fifty miles farther south than the point at which we had descended them. We found a cattle trail from some cattle ranches in the foothills, climbed the outer rampart of the Andes and stood upon its crest. Now to our left lay the Farallone Range, fairly close, that range in which I was to suffer considerably a few years later, the same stark peaks which we could see far off from Chivor. Before us lay a great green

basin, and in the center of it a village clustered round a great white church. The settlement looked like a cluster of indeterminate chickens huddling round a great white hen and all perched on the top of a rocky crag which jutted—fanglike—from the greensward of the valley. That smiling valley was ten miles across and almost circular. Through it coursed a swift-running stream. There was no forest here, although to the right of us the range was wooded clear to the Chivor peak, which stood in plain sight with a tiny white splotch near its tip that looked as though some great bird had fouled it—that splotch was our mine camp.

In place of forest that valley in front of us was studded with cultivated plots. Hundreds of little Indian farms lay in my sight, their boundaries marked by rows of basket willows or the alloe-like *fique* plant from whose fiber the coffee sacks of the country are made on hand looms by Indian women. In my wanderings through Colombia I was to know many such valleys in which every farm was freehold—owned by the Indian who cultivated it. But this valley of the Murca River was different. The old order reigned here! The Feudal System.

Those hundreds of Indians in the Murca valley held their land in fief from the Lord of the Manor—the *Patron*. For their holdings they paid in service. So many days' service in the cane or coffee fields of the *Patron* in lieu of rent. In the center of the valley—as though the valley had grown up round it—sat the great house of the *Patron*, not far from the village to which it had given life. Built in the form of a quadrangle to enclose a spacious *patio*, it was in turn encircled by a high wall, almost high enough and strong enough to be the rampart of an old-world feudal castle. The wall was ringed by the green river meadows, held tight against it by a loop of the river which encircled the place on three sides.

Followed by my pack train I rode down the trail and turned in at the wide-open gate in the great wall. A figure

stood before me at the entrance to the red-tiled *patio*. A slender little man whose tapered fingers held to his lips a thin cheroot. A wide-brimmed felt hat capped an intellectual-looking face. Black-gray hair peeped from under the brim of the hat, and an eagle's beak of a nose stood guard over a black mustache. From slightly stooped shoulders a black *ruana* drooped in graceful folds to a slim waist. Spanish, obviously. Old-world Spanish grandee. His black eyes held mine questioningly, and the cheroot puffed its regular beat as I reined Moro to a stop.

I slid from my saddle and advanced toward him, sweeping my hat from my head. I had long since learned that that courteous gesture does more to win a Colombian to you than a week of spoken words.

"*Buenos días, Señor.*"

"*Bienvenida*. Welcome. This house is yours." Now his hat brim swept the ground and his body inclined, such a bow as a lady of the court of old Spain might have received from her *caballero*. "Carlos Piedrahita." He introduced himself. It was the *Patron* in person. Now, as though conjured from the evening shadows of the vast building, Indians came running. With his belt knife one scraped the mud from my boots. Another detached my saddle bags and scampered with them into the house. My own Indians and beasts disappeared into a hushed babel of voices as though by magic. My host ushered me ceremoniously into the *patio* and hardly had I entered when an Indian girl tendered me a small cup of black coffee—the *tinto* that the Colombian drinks at any hour of the day he happens to think of it.

Two withered old ladies did the honors at dinner that night—maiden sisters of the bachelor *Patron*. The long table literally groaned under the weight of a roast sucking pig, a brace of ducks, huge piles of corn cakes, smoking platters of *yuca* and potatoes.

"You have come at a good time," remarked Carlos, as he showed me to my room by the light of a homemade candle.

"There is a sick Meester in the village. An *Americano*. Bad he is. Malaria. We do what we can for him, but he speaks no Spanish and we are all so ignorant in this country of the Murca that we speak no English. Tomorrow we will visit him together." Placing the candle on a table by my bed he left me.

The room was vast. Its whitewashed walls swept upward till the feeble light of the candle barely touched with faint shadows the ceiling above. One could have stood an ordinary cottage in its area and still have had room to sleep. There was no catch on the heavy wooden door, so I merely closed it after my host. It seemed full of rubbish. The country-bred Colombian has a habit of leaving his treasures lying about. Several high-peaked saddles leaned against the wall. Tables were piled with dusty old Spanish papers and magazines. In the center of the room a blanket covered a mysterious pile of something which I did not investigate. Rats had bored holes in the wooden floor. Tired, I threw off my clothes, dropped into bed and slept at once.

In the black hours a crashing of the door woke me. A cold draught told me the door was open, and by the sound I judged that someone had broken into the room. Hurriedly I lit the candle and investigated. The door was open, but the room seemed empty as I swept my dim light about. So I returned to bed. There was a wolf lying on my bed.

It took me several seconds to realize that the wolf was a big Alsatian dog who had permitted me his friendship the evening before. Probably he slept on that bed regularly—that would account for the fleas—and objected to being shut out. It took me some time to persuade the dog that I preferred to sleep alone, but I finally got him outside and barricaded the door with a saddle.

On my way back to bed I stumbled against the blanket-covered pile in the middle of the room.

"Santisima Virgin." A harsh voice came from under the blanket. I jumped as though shot. But it was a great red

and gold macaw who peered elfishly at me and mumbled his great bill as I lifted the corner of his covering.

Back to bed. Sleep was long in coming. Every time I dozed a mysterious scurrying in the room aroused me. Rats? If they were rats they were damned persistent ones. Again I lifted the candle and set off to investigate. There was a cage of squirrels in a dark corner which I had not noticed.

With some old coffee sacks I covered the squirrels and lay down. This time I really dozed and gray light was seeping through the window when another noise awoke me. A hissing. There must be a snake in the room.

I found a broomstick—that room seemed to stock all the appliances necessary for subduing its denizens—and investigated the corner whence the hissing came. A long black something was proceeding from a hole in the floor. Hissing. It was the head and neck of a Muscovy duck. Under my bed a dozen little yellow balls were disporting themselves. Ducklings. The old mother duck evidently slept under the floor with her family. The ducklings had escaped through a hole in what was their roof and the mother was frantic.

I dressed hastily before I should uncover more of the zoo.

Don Carlos was in the *patio* drinking his morning *tinto*. He looked sad this morning. The black mustache drooped almost pathetically. In silence he passed me a tiny cup from which the delicious aroma of home-grown coffee floated.

"*El pobre se murio*," he announced.

"The poor man is dead! Which poor man?" My thoughts were still with my last night's experiences.

"The sick Meester. The one I told you about in the village." He rolled and lit a cigarette with an abstracted air.

"What did he die of?"

"Suicide."

"Committed suicide?"

"Blew his brains out last night. He had the *malaria melancholia*. When the inn-keeper found him the gun was still in his hand."

It was a gruesome sight when we inspected the scene of the tragedy. There was not a doubt of its being suicide. The poor devil had put the barrel of his .38 Colt into his mouth and blown the top of his head off. He seemed young from what was left of him. He had been prospecting at the foot of the ranges, apparently. Malaria caught him as soon as he reached the cold country on his way out. It always does that if you've got malaria in you. Sick, alone among strangers whose language he could not speak. Kind folk, they did their best for him, but the melancholies caught him and he took the coward's way out. He had scarcely any kit—a bundle of letters and a few worthless-looking specimens of quartz.

From his letters I found the address of his parents in Indiana, and sent them a cable through the village telegraph office. We got a coffin made by the village carpenter and the village *cura* read the burial service over him that evening. Corpses don't keep well in Colombia, and burials are effected on the day of death.

Two days I awaited a reply to my cable and in that time struck up a friendship with Carlos which ripened till the day of his death some years later.

When the reply did come it read:

SHIP REMAINS HOME STOP BOGOTA CONSUL INSTRUCTED DEFRAY
EXPENSES

God! What foolishness! The man was already two days buried. I translated the cable to Carlos.

His sun-tanned face paled and his black eyes glittered. "So the soil of a Piedrahita is not even fit for a dead gringo to lie in." He flung his cigarette onto the tiles of the *patio* and ground it savagely with his heel.

"It is a custom, Carlos. His people have never even heard your name, so they could intend no slight to you. The Americans ship their dead home, like the Chinese." Just the same I cursed the stupid provincial fools to want a body shipped

to America from Gachala. Days on a mule . . . The body was ripe enough by this time to advertise its passing. A day on a bus—God help its fellow passengers. A day in a train. A week on a river steamer. All this before the body even reached the coast.

Carlos grinned, his anger gone. "Thank the Virgin you are here to direct the affair. We know nothing of embalming in Gachala."

"Great God!" I hadn't thought of that. We'd have to embalm him of course. What to do? I could cable a refusal, of course, but that would add to the grief of two poor old people. Somehow I must manage to get that body shipped back to them.

"What do they use in your country for embalming?" asked Carlos, rolling a cigarette expertly with one hand.

"We don't embalm in my country. We just bury them like you do."

"But your great men? The ones that sleep in your Westminster Abbey? Like your Nelson, the great *Almirante* who died in battle far from home. They must have embalmed him. He leaned back in his chair and puffed a ring of smoke at the blue sky which seemed to hold down the walls of the *patio*.

I laughed. "They put Nelson's body in a barrel of rum and the story goes that the sailors tapped the barrel on the voyage home and that the Admiral did not keep too well." "*Valgame Dios!*" Carlos tipped his chair forward and gazed at me with wide-open eyes. "Rum! So simple! I have many casks of rum from my own sugar plantation. But a barrel is hard to carry on a mule—a barrel big enough to house that dead *pobre*."

Rum! It was an idea. I had been trying to think of an embalming fluid. I had no idea what fluid the undertakers used in the States, but, whatever they used, I was sure it would not be available in such a far-flung Andean outpost as the village of Gachala. Why, there wasn't a doctor even

within a long day's ride. But to pickle the body in a cask of rum! What a shock the poor relatives would get! That would raise complications with the customs people too, as the States were still in the throes of prohibition.

"We won't put him in a cask," I pronounced. "We'll pump him full of rum and seal him in an airtight coffin."

Some unpleasant days followed.

To begin with, the village priest objected strongly to the disinterment of a corpse which he had just successfully buried. It took quite a donation to Mother Church before he would give his consent.

We had another coffin made and got the village tinker to make a tin lining for it, joints soldered tight, all but the lid.

We had the disinterred coffin carried into the inn—against the heated protests of the publican—into the same room where the poor chap had died.

The rest Carlos and I had to do ourselves because the local Indians refused to have anything to do with it—not even Carlos' feudal authority could coerce them. They dropped the coffin on the floor and ran for it, crossing themselves with vigor.

There was the occupied coffin on the floor. Beside it the empty tin-lined one, a five-gallon keg of rum and the pump which Carlos used for spraying his orange trees.

Carlos found a mug on the washstand and we each took a bracer.

We took another after I had unscrewed the lid of the tenanted coffin. We had to. Then we moved the body.

After that we opened the window and leaned out. When we had recovered we faced the gruesome job again.

Carlos dropped the suction end of the pump hose through the bunghole of the keg and began to pump vigorously. The slender hose jerked up and down, waving its slack in the air under the pressure of the liquid that was being forced through it.

When about half of the keg of rum had been injected I

stopped Carlos. The pressure seemed to be getting a bit high. Then we soldered the lid down, screwed down the wooden top, painted on it the address, took a last, much-needed drink and staggered out.

The publican saw to the safe stowage of the coffin on the back of a protesting mule—he must have been damned glad to get it clear of his house, although the news of what we had been doing had filled his bar to overflowing. Carlos and I watched the mule clatter down the cobbled street and thanked God we had heard the last of its cargo.

When the coffin arrived in Bogota the American consul shipped it down-river. Unfortunately, the river steamer on which it traveled ran aground for a week or so on a sand-bank, unduly prolonging the voyage. Having been stowed too near the boilers the coffin exploded and made itself damned unpopular on board.

A scandal ensued. Apparently, there had been some local regulation against shipping bodies on government river steamers so the resourceful Consul had consigned the corpse as a marble statue. The police scented a murder and conducted an investigation. It was months before Carlos and I heard the last of our one and only essay at undertaking.

On my way home to Chivor from Gachala a forestbound trail led me down the right bank of the Guavio river for thirty miles, as it sped toward its transmutation in the gorge ahead. Below me to my left the furious torrent moaned and bellowed in lesser gorges as it felt the birth travail of the great river it was about to become. On my right the land rose in a series of forested terraces to the ridge six thousand feet above. From the high places of that ridge crystal-clear streams descended the gigantic staircase of terraces, falling in lacelike cascades from step to step toward the river below. Those terraces! Grand farmland. What an estate this tract of country would make! Cheap water power. Soil rich enough to choke a cornstalk. Thousands of acres of giant timber. Perfect climate. God, what a place!

Joaquin the Bandit

THERE was trouble of some kind at the mine when I got back. That I could tell from Marco's face as he held my stirrup for me to dismount. He looked even more grim than usual. That granite face of his was expressive in spite of its immobility. He shook his head mournfully from side to side as I greeted him.

"Well, Marco, how goes it?" I stamped my booted feet to get the blood circulating after the long day in the saddle.

"For the mining it is good, *gracias a Dios*. The pit goes down well and the formation is favorable. My mare has foaled a colt. A sow has littered ten piglings. The price of *yuca* is down by one *centavo* the *arroba*. The water ditch has been cleaned and my family is well."

"Why so solemn then?"

He shook his head again. "A bad thing has happened."

"What kind of a thing? Some Indian knifed another?" I lifted my saddle bags from the saddle preparatory to entering my house, but Duka, my Indian maid-of-all-work took

them quietly from my hand and disappeared with them, her black hair swinging under the brim of the tiny, village-made straw hat she always affected.

"No, Señor. When one Indian knifes another it is bad only for the Indian that is knifed."

"Let's hear it then." Resignedly I took my pipe from my pocket and began to fill it. Marco might have kept his troubles till I had fed, drunk and rested, I felt.

"Joaquin is giving trouble." Marco clamped his lips shut after the sentence, as though Joaquin had been after his gold teeth.

"What kind of trouble?" I struck a match to my pipe. This was something new. Up till now Joaquin and his gang had contented themselves with small game—robbing a drunken Indian or stealing horses.

"He is laying claim to the Chivor mine." I laughed out loud at this. Joaquin did seem to be flying high. Wrestling an emerald mine from a powerful group of financiers was somewhat different from minor banditry.

Marco flushed. He never could stand being laughed at. "The Señor is foolish to laugh. Joaquin is bad. A *demonio*. In the civil war he fought on the Conservative side."

Again I laughed. I couldn't help it. The hatred between the Colombian political parties always seemed to me such a comical, childish emotion for strong virile men to indulge in. Marco was a staunch Liberal, and the hatred of a Colombian Liberal for a Conservative is only matched by the hatred of a Conservative for a Liberal. "Marco, you've let your politics run away with you again," I cried.

"No, Señor." My foreman clenched his big fist. "Joaquin is worse than the other *Conservadores*. It is said that when his men took a *Liberal* village in the civil war they cut the heads off children and played bowls with them. Joaquin is Indian. He is *politico* too. The white *politico* is bad enough, but one may foretell his moves because his mind works like

ours does. But the Indian *politico*! It is like giving the black panther of the forest the brain of a man."

"Get on with your story, Marco. But I don't believe that yarn about rolling heads." I didn't believe it. But I was comparatively new to the country then. Now I don't know. Since then I've seen some awful things done by the Boyaca Indians when their blood was up. There are all sorts of Indians in Colombia, ranging from inhuman demons to domestic pets. The Motilones of the northern Venezuelan border country are easily the worst. They still shoot white men on sight, so ill-treated have they been in the past by the Spaniards. The scattered remnant of the Muzo Indians in the Carare forest are reputedly treacherous—the Muzos fought the Spaniards to a standstill for a decade in the early days—but I was to make contact later with the Muzos without trouble. The Guahariboes of the *llanos*—I had just parted good friends with them. The Sabandija River Indians are grand fellows—gallant gentlemen I found them later. The Sinu Indians of the lower Magdalena run to women more than war. The peaceful inhabitants of the Gachala region think a mild binge on *guarapo* the acme of crime—but they are good workers. But the Boyaca Indians around the Chivor peak have just sufficient mixture of white blood in them to add refinements to their natural cruelty. Some of them were quite capable of cutting off heads and playing bowls with them.

"Joaquin served notice on me the other day that we were working on his property. Said he would take possession of it shortly."

"How does he expect to get possession?" To oust us from the Chivor mine was likely to be quite a task, I felt, whatever the method used—be it legal or by fire and sword.

The big Antioqueñian waved his hands helplessly. "*Quien sabe?* Who knows, with a man like that? Not only has he all the bad Indians at his call, but he has powerful friends in

Bogota also. The man is *politico*, I tell you. He plays the game of politics—a game in which the votes of his Indian followers count for much. With enough votes for capital such a man could almost dispossess the Piedrahitas from the land they have held for generations, if he wanted it badly enough. If Joaquin has decided to claim the Chivor mine there is a fight ahead.”

I whistled. Ever since we had begun to do well in Chivor I had been wondering how soon some sharpshooter would try to snipe our title. In the rough and tumble of business in the States it would have been tried before now, I felt certain. I wondered what tactics the Colombian sharpshooter would employ. I expected they would tend more toward direct action and be less effective than the more insidious methods of their prototypes in the States. Those Yankee title-sharks were efficient, pure dynamite, as I knew from bitter experience.

“What did you do?”

“Nothing. He said he would see you on your return.” Marco wiped some drops of sweat off his brow with a multi-colored handkerchief, although the day was cool.

Poor devil. Marco valued his job. I paid him a high salary. Fabulous by his simple standards. But he earned it. If Joaquin should gain possession of the mine, Marco’s job was gone.

“You are afraid, Marco.” I watched him closely.

His face went pallid—the blank white pallor of rage without the green tinge of fear. His eyes blazed for a second. Then he flushed red and drew himself up proudly.

“Yes, I am afraid, but you are the only man who could have told me so.” I believed that. He liked me, I knew. After all, for the best part of two years each of us had been almost the only social contact the other had known.

“If you are afraid, you had better keep out of it. If you want to leave the mine, I shall give you such a good recommendation that you will soon get another good job. I will

pay you three months' salary as bonus also." If Marco were scared enough to leave he had better go, much as I should miss his honest and efficient supervision. However, if there was a fight ahead I must have no half-hearted co-operation from my second-in-command. The man that guarded my left shoulder in battle must have a ready blade.

But I needn't have worried.

"*Carajo!*" He clenched his fists. "I stay, of course." He whipped round on his heel and stalked away, outrage vibrating from every scissorlike stride.

Feeling irked with my own lack of faith, I entered my house to find a sulky Duka, because I had talked to Marco so long that the hot water for my bath had cooled. For nearly two years I had been fighting Duka for the right to take cold baths. She considered them injurious and would dash into the bathroom with a pail of hot water—regardless of my nudity—if I sneaked in and set the water running through the hollow *guarumo* stems that served our primitive establishment as pipes.

Sure enough, a day or two later, the notorious Joaquin appeared. A little man. Obviously a rodent. One of the kind that persistently gnaws its way into the heart of any prize. Jet-black hair and mustache. Small black eyes that bored like gimlets for the split seconds they rested in their eternal peregrinations about you. Beaklike nose—a buzzard's. But the most arresting feature of the man was his chin—or the lack of it. From the tip of his buzzard's beak to his dancing Adam's apple his features made almost a straight line. There was something almost physically slimy about the man. When he held out his hand in greeting I had to force myself to take it. I would as soon have grasped a toad. Like handling a snake. Cold and evil.

I placed a bottle of *aguardiente* on my dining-room table and, facing one another, we discussed his claim.

"Your foreman has told you of my business?" he queried insolently. There was contempt in his reference to Don

Marco. For foreman he used the word *sobrestante* instead of the *mayor-domo* which would have been more fitting to an employee of Marco's standing.

I nodded.

"I intend to take possession." He tossed down a drink in Colombian fashion, holding his throat muscles open and shooting the neat spirit from the glass, so that it barely seemed to touch the sides of his skinny throat in its passage.

Devilish sure of himself, I considered—or a good bluffer.

Then he took from his pocket a paper and tossed it contemptuously across the table to me. "It's only a copy," he remarked, as though to forestall any intention on my part to destroy it.

I examined the document. It purported to be a copy of a contract for the sale of a tract of land. Signed by one Manuel Peraza whom I knew to have been the father of Elias Peraza who lived in the Sinai. The old man had died long before my advent in the district, and therefore was useless for evidence. With some care I scrutinized the description of the land in question. Some of the landmarks mentioned were familiar to me as being adjacent to the mine boundaries. If the authenticity of this document could be established, I believed that the tract of land might overlap part of the area of the mine, although the description of the boundaries was so vague as to take a deal of proving. As far as the authenticity of the document went—that was a matter for our agent in Bogota to judge. He was a lawyer.

I handed the document back. Refilled his empty glass because he was fiddling with it. "Just how much of the mine do you consider this document gives you rights over?" I asked him.

He brightened at the question and his hitherto overbearing manner became ingratiating, like a hyena puppy. "Only part, Senor. That part where the mine workings are. And for that we can make an arrangement."

The motive was out now. Just as I had thought. Blackmail.

"What kind of an arrangement?" Under the table my fingers were gripping my thighs hard. They itched to close on that monstrous Adam's apple which bobbed and danced in his long skinny neck. It reminded me of the orange which I had once seen an ostrich swallow, only the bulge in the bird's neck had soon passed away while this one seemed suspended from the man's back teeth on a piece of rubber.

"By compensation. Small compensation. *Muy moderada.*"

"Why should we compensate you? If you own the mine, then it is yours. If you don't own it, we owe you nothing. Your proper course is to talk to our lawyer in Bogota. I mine emeralds. I know nothing of law."

He smiled till I saw the glint of yellow teeth through the drooping black veil of mustache, shook his head.

"The Senor does not understand. Long ago I buy this land. I think to build myself a house on it some day. Up here in the high *sierras* where it is cool. For years I do not see my land. When I come to see it I find the Meester has dug holes in it. Such big holes. Such rich holes. No matter for lawyers, this. A small arrangement between *caballeros.*"

"What do you propose?" Damn that bobbing Adam's apple, it was getting on my nerves.

"The Meesters make much profit out of my land. They should pay me a small proportion of that profit." He tipped his chair back, the better to watch the effect of his proposal, his fingers drumming the table nervously.

What fools we should be, I reasoned, if we agreed to pay this human vulture any portion of our profits. There was only one way to handle a blackmailer, and I was going to take that way. A declaration of war.

"I've met men like you before, Joaquin."

"What does the Senor mean?" His black brows drew together, and his chair dropped forward onto its forelegs as he leaned toward me.

"I mean this." In my turn I tipped my chair back and watched him closely, my hand fingering the neck of the bot-

tle. I was about to insult this man mortally, and he had a gun in his belt. That might mean nothing. Most Colombians carried one. I carried one myself whenever I stirred from home. But Indian blood is explosive, especially when there is a dash of Spanish in the racial cocktail. Sitting back as I was, I could either drop under the table or smash the bottle in his face, whichever way I should react, if his hand dropped to his belt. "I mean that there is always some *sin verguenza* to try and steal the reward of those who have worked for it."

His face went pallid and his lips drew back like those of a cornered rat. He snarled. His long fingers clenched as they lay on the table and I heard his dirty fingernails scrape the wood. The whole man shivered as the head of a snake shivers when it poises for a second, flung back to strike.

I gripped the neck of the bottle tight, tilted my chair forward and leaned across the narrow table till my face was within a foot from his. My arm ached to crash the heavy bottle against his head.

"*Sin verguenza*," he spluttered. "You call me *sin verguenza*. Me! Joaquin! A 'man without shame.'"

I relaxed. I had the man's measure now, I felt. If there had been open fight in him he'd have drawn his gun at once and talked to my dead body afterward. I had given him plenty of provocation. *Sin verguenza*—literally, "man without shame" is a term applied in earnest only to the lowest of the low in Colombia—a far greater insult than its literal translation would imply.

"*Sin verguenza*," he continued to mutter to himself. The man had had the simple Indians of the district terrorized for so long that he could hardly credit a direct insult to his face. But finally he pulled himself together with a visible effort and resumed his ingratiating manner which riled me even worse than the insolence with which he had begun the interview.

"I pardon the Senor because he is Meester and does not understand too well the Spanish. I do not seek to take the

mine from you. Only some small compensation." His eyes rested on mine for a second. Deadly. No forgiveness there.

"Write me a proposition then," I suggested.

But he was too wily to fall into that trap. I had heard that the Colombian law was hard on blackmailers.

He threw out his hands. "But it is so easy for the Senor to pay. Then there will be no trouble."

"Not one *centavo*." I rose to my feet.

He rose and faced me. His upper teeth covered his lower lip for a moment. Then he stalked out, mounted his horse and galloped away.

I had won the first round, but I felt uneasy. I didn't like what I had seen his eyes saying in that last minute. I had met some bad men in my time, but I felt that Joaquin was something new in my experience. Most men have some good in them, even the worst of them, but Joaquin seemed to me bad all the way through.

The first thing I did after Joaquin's departure was to write our Bogota agent a full account of the interview. Juan Dog-Foot was on his way with the letter before Joaquin had had time to top the Sauchi Pass, two hours' ride away. I had no illusions about Joaquin the bandit. He would not rest content with losing the first round. A dangerous man without one single scruple in his make-up, or I missed my guess. No wonder Marco had felt queasy at the thought of a fight with him.

My next act was to dig out of our files a copy of old Pacho Restrepo's title deed to the mine—a copy of the original discovery claim he had filed with the competent authorities after his long years of search had been crowned with success. There was no record of the ancient Spanish boundaries, of course. Those had lapsed into dust or smoke in the four centuries since the first steel-corseleted Spaniards had trodden the Chivor ridge. As I waded through Pacho's complicated description of the boundaries, in his own cumbersome Spanish wording, I tried to visualize the country covered as I

went along. But after an hour or so my brain rebelled. Pacho had obviously been a most competent explorer—the proof was that he had found what he went looking for, the object of all exploration—but as a lawyer or surveyor he left much to be desired. His description of the boundaries was vague to say the least of it—damned vague.

After a smoke and a drink I went at it again. “Beginning at the rock called *El Pulpito* . . .” He could not have begun his boundary description better. *El Pulpito* was a landmark which everyone could recognize. It was as obvious on the mountainside as a wart on a society beauty’s nose—a pulpit-shaped rock which jutted from the east flank of the Chivor ridge. So natural, that one could imagine in it some gigantic acolyte of the sun-god, thundering from it denunciation of a thunder storm for dimming the sunshine. But from a good beginning Pacho had lapsed into a list of landmarks which would have made a good surveyor weep and a lawyer howl. “The spring called *La Cristilina*” was one. I knew that spring. I knew also that in the rainy season it gushed from the flank of the peak several hundred feet higher up than it trickled forth in the dry. Trees he mentioned might since have fallen, their trunks buried deep in the network of parasitic vines which creep swiftly to the deathbed of a fallen forest giant, to raven on his carcass. Rocks. The mountainside was littered with them. To make the whole problem worse he gave no precise compass bearings. “In a northerly direction” might mean anything from northeast to northwest.

There was no question of the legality of Pacho’s title as rediscoverer of the mine. But the difficulty was to determine what precise area of ground the title covered, to establish the boundaries. The company’s first manager should have seen that they were properly marked. So should I, for that matter. But who would have imagined that there would be chance of boundary litigation where one little cleared island of civilization lay lapped in leagues of virgin forest? True, the

Sinai valley below us was inhabited, but we were separated from it by a line of almost unscalable cliffs. I decided that I must do at once what I should have done before. Survey that boundary and mark it clearly.

Next day I began. Scrambling down the precipitous slope to *El Pulpito*, I had a hole drilled in the flat surface of the rock—about where the parson's notes would have rested in a church pulpit—and sunk a six-foot crowbar in the hole, almost to its full length. Then grouted it in with cement. The point of that bar protruded six inches. Immovable, except by blasting the pulpit rock to pieces with explosive. Over the point of the bar I set up my instrument and began a couple of weeks of heavy work. With a dozen Indians clearing a line ahead I worked round the mine boundary as I envisaged it. Putting myself in the place of old Pacho, the discoverer, I tried to lay out the mine as though I had just discovered it and was anxious to include the likeliest ground. Make a plainly-to-be-seen boundary and stick to it. That was my idea. I could not prove each point on my boundary was correct because old Pacho's description had been too vague, but on the other hand, no one could prove it incorrect for the very same reason, and, if Joaquin should bring claim to part of the mine area, the burden of proof would be on him. Furthermore, I was in possession. I did not know much about Colombian law, but possession counts for a lot in any country. Especially if the possessor is prepared to fight in the courts or out of them. By the time I had finished my two hectic weeks of scrambling, a wide swath through the forest marked the mine boundary for a great part of its perimeter. Where there was no forest it was marked by cliffs or streams—natural boundaries which I considered to be the landmarks Pacho would most probably have selected to bound his discovery.

It was not till the survey was almost complete that I had a reply from the Bogota agent—for days the delay in the expected letter had caused me some misgivings and I had been

metaphorically working with one eye on the skyline to catch the first view of Dog-Foot's speeding, one-armed figure.

"I have not replied before to your esteemed communication," the stately document went, written on a creamy paper so thick that it had the feel of parchment, "because I first wished thoroughly to investigate the claim of the man Joaquin. I am glad to be able to inform you that I am convinced of victory, should he bring the matter to our courts. But I do not think he will put his case to the test of law because the man is an expert *tinterillo* and surely knows that such a course would be fruitless." I loved that word *tinterillo*. Its nearest precise translation in English would be "ink-slinger." It is the Colombian name for the small fry of the legal profession who hang round the courts of the village *alcaldes* to snap up clients who cannot afford the fees of competent counsel—mere *caribe* fish of the legal profession as opposed to the properly established sharks of the larger cities. "But nevertheless we must beware of Joaquin," the letter continued. "He is of evil reputation and has powerful friends. There are many ways in which he can annoy us without taking his case to court. His plan, no doubt, is to create such a nuisance value that we will pay him what he asks. At the moment he is in this city petitioning the government to close down the mine pending a thorough investigation of our rights. Therefore be sure your boundaries are well marked. Stand by them. Admit nothing. Sign nothing. Refer all legal matters to me." At the bottom of the page, written in the agent's own straggling handwriting, was a line. "Be careful of your own safety."

I patted myself on the back that I had thought of the right move. The boundaries were now marked clearly enough, at any rate. As regards my own safety—I'd lived through some troublous times in my career, troublous enough to make me fairly wary. A man who had ridden with Demilion's Scouts against the Germans could probably teach a South American

bandit a thing or two, if it came to a physical test, a contingency which I didn't at that time really anticipate.

I had not long to wait for Joaquin's next demonstration. Within a week of the arrival of the agent's letter he appeared once more at the mine and, with him, was a stranger.

The stranger introduced himself as Miguel Alvarez. A slender man with frank, gray eyes, a long, clever face and the hooked nose of the true Antioqueñian. Marco had a nose just like that.

As soon as Alvarez had dismounted, he turned to face me, one hand still holding the reins of his horse. "I am sent by the Mining Department to investigate the matter of Don Joaquin's claim," he stated, slipping off the mud-stained *samaras*—waist-high leggings which one affects during the rainy season.

I waved them into the house.

Alvarez hesitated and glanced at his companion, who, in turn, was gazing at the scenery in an obvious attempt to disclaim the interest he must have felt in every word of our conversation.

"I will gladly be your guest," stated the government man, "provided you will deem it no breach of hospitality if I should have to decide the claim against you."

I laughed. This man was square, I felt. "Let the best man win. You can stay in my house 'without prejudice,' as the lawyers say."

"Have you a copy of the mine title?" he asked, when we were seated at the table.

I passed him the document.

His brow wrinkled as he read it carefully. Then re-read and read again. "*Vaga. Muy vaga.* Very vague. No true compass bearings given. That line was never run with any accurate instrument."

I congratulated myself silently. None but an engineer would have put the remark just like that. As a member of

my own profession we should at least talk the same language. My luck was in.

"Are the mine boundaries marked?" asked Alvarez, abstractedly taking a cigarette from a silver case as he still pored over the document spread out on the table before him.

"No." Joaquin's features assumed a righteous expression as the negative shot from his lips like a champagne cork from a bottle.

"Yes," I contradicted flatly. Thank Heaven I had thought of it. There would have been no time to do it after the receipt of the agent's letter.

"Since when?" Joaquin glared at me.

"Since you were here last." I barely repressed a smile.

Alvarez glanced keenly from one to the other of us. I watched Joaquin's face as his fingers played scales on his knee.

"Did you survey from this?" asked Alvarez, touching the document.

"I did the best I could with it and tried to interpret what I imagined to be the intentions of the discoverer, as you will see if you care to travel the line with me tomorrow. I believe it to be the correct boundary. I am in possession of the area within it and stand on my rights as possessor."

Alvarez frowned at the document. It was enough to make any surveyor frown.

"You have not yet asked Joaquin if his alleged line is marked," I suggested.

"Is it?" The government engineer gazed fixedly at the rat-like little man.

"No, Senor . . ." Joaquin began a long explanation as to why he had not marked his boundary in the long years since he alleged to have purchased the land, but I cut him short.

"Neither is he in possession of the land he says he owns."

Joaquin gulped. He could hardly deny that fact.

Alvarez now rose to his feet and threw the stub of his cigarette out of the door. "I should like to walk over the ground

tomorrow, if it is convenient to both of you," he remarked.

When I had shown Alvarez his room I found Joaquin still standing by the table. "We'll meet you at *El Pulpito* in the morning," I told him as I ushered him to the door. My roof wasn't going to house that devil all night, not if I knew it. If Joaquin had slept under the same roof I should have wrapped my purse up in a blanket and sat on it all night.

For several days the three of us scrambled round that boundary line. When we had finished, Alvarez turned to Joaquin. We happened to be standing on the Chivor peak at the moment. Through the gap in the outer ranges was the vast sea of the *llanos* which I had been treading only a few weeks before. Dark cloud shadows hurried across the majestic landscape. One moment the brilliant sunshine would be drawing a sheen from the bright leaves of the square leagues of forest spread out below us, but as soon as the dark cloud shadow touched the forest the gladsome sheen melted into gloom. We stood on the tip of the peak while the roar of the Sinai River a mile below us floated up as the roar of a busy street must float up to an eagle circling high in the blue. Joaquin's hands were clasped across his lean stomach. On his sallow features was an expression of sublime respectability as he gazed over the scene. He looked self-satisfied, as though he had made it.

"Would you compromise, Don Joaquin?" asked the government man.

The bandit rolled his eyes till the whites showed. "*Si, Senor*. I am always ready to compromise. Joaquin is always reasonable."

Alvarez turned to me. I was going to give him a very different answer when he asked me the question. I'd see Joaquin in hell before I compromised with him. I braced myself to word a reply that would be firm without being insulting.

But I never had to make that reply. With an enigmatic expression Alvarez glanced at me, then turned and walked back toward the house.

"Why?" I asked myself as I followed him. Why did he not ask me the same question? Then the answer flashed on me. Alvarez was playing the game my way. Convinced that I was honest, he had leaned to my side and laid a trap for my opponent. Joaquin had swallowed the bait. No man who was sure of his claim would agree to compromise.

The next day they left.

A few days later I received a telegram from our agent.

GOVERNMENT DECIDED JOAQUIN'S CLAIM GROUNDLESS

No further move came from Joaquin for several months, although we heard that he was stirring public opinion against us in the valleys below. He was preaching to the Indians the iniquity of allowing the foreign "meester" to steal from true Colombians the wealth that God had placed in the Colombian mountains exclusively for the use of the Colombian people. He even got as far as persuading the Somondoco priest to preach sermons against me. Red-hot sermons too, by the accounts I got of them. But the man that holds the purse usually controls the situation. I was employing three hundred miners from the neighborhood and paying them damned good wages, too. A bit of subversive propaganda and a sermon or two didn't count much against that. A few *pesos* in the hand every Saturday night takes a deal of talking round.

During those months we bottomed with good success on another emerald pit, and I carried another valuable cargo of emeralds to Bogota.

But on my return Marco's face once again showed trouble.

"What's happened Marco?" I guessed at once that Joaquin had struck at us.

"That *bandido*, Joaquin." My foreman shook a big fist at the countryside.

"What's he done now?"

"Taken possession."

"What of?"

"His land."

"He doesn't own any land round here."

"The land he is claiming. Part of the mine."

Apparently, that very day, a dozen strange Indians had secretly constructed a rough lean-to hut at the edge of the forest, well within the mine boundary I had recently run. The news had just been brought to Marco by one of the mine watchmen who had stated that the intruders were all armed with revolvers and had threatened to shoot anyone who approached. Joaquin, evidently determined that he would be as much in possession of his claim as I, pushed in a gang of toughs to hold it. Now, if no one ejected them he would have established at least the basis of a claim on the land in dispute, countering my argument that I was in possession of the property.

"How did you know they were Joaquin's men?" I asked the excited old Indian watchman.

"The misbegotten robbers told me so, *Su Merced*. They said that Joaquin was paying them to take *posesion* of the land the Meester was trying to steal from him."

"We've got to throw them off, Marco, or Joaquin will be able to establish a claim by remaining in undisputed possession." Wearily I turned from my horse from which I had just dismounted. It had been a long day's ride through the smoke-laden wind of the dry season.

Marco nodded vehement assent. His eyes were ablaze. "If you had not arrived tonight, Senor, I should have armed some of the men and attacked them—driven the cursed *ladrones* away—killed what I could."

Marco was full of fight, I reflected, now that he had overcome his first almost superstitious belief in the invincibility of Joaquin. I would never ask for a better man to stand in a tight place with than old Marco. Honest, obstinate, but utterly loyal.

But a shooting match! I didn't like that idea. Someone would get hurt and there would be endless official inquiries

—not that the Colombian village authorities in the frontier districts bothered unduly about a stray killing. But if any of Joaquin's men were killed there would be publicity. Joaquin would raise an outcry in high places about "the foreign capitalists shooting down good Colombian citizens when they demanded their rights." On the other hand, if any of my men got hit—well, I didn't want any of my men hurt nor did I want to stop a bullet myself. My brain felt tired that night and a solution of the problem would not come.

My gaze wandered westward to where the great Farallone range blocked the end of the Guavio valley sixty miles away. The sun was just setting behind the saw-toothed peaks, almost obscured by the smoke-haze from the Indian clearings in the middle distance. It was the "burning moon" of the Indians, the last few weeks of the dry season. Three months ago, at the end of the rains, they had felled forest to enlarge their clearings and left it to lie during the three months drought. Now they were burning it. When the first rains came—they were about due now—they would plant their corn among the ashes and charred timber. The country was bone-dry, and a harsh dry wind was fanning embers into flame in each of the tiny chessboard squares that dotted the sweep of sixty miles of forest. Then the idea came.

"What kind of a hut did you say they had built?" I asked the watchman as he stood crumpling a dilapidated fifth-hand felt hat between his gnarled yellow fingers.

"Oh palm leaves, *Su Merced*." The old man's smoke-bleared eyes rolled nervously.

"Dry or green?"

Marco glanced at me curiously as I asked the question, a puzzled expression on his face.

"Dry, *Su Merced*. Those bandits were too lazy to cut new palm leaves so they used the leaves of the palms that were felled when the Senor ran the line with the telescope on three legs. That hut is as dry as the bed of a man who sleeps alone."

I turned to Marco. "We'll burn them out. We'll do it now. This is the hour when they will be inside cooking their food. Besides, they won't yet have heard that I am back from Bogota and so will be less on their guard."

He nodded. "But we will go armed, just in case . . ." His long legs stalked the distance to his house. When he returned there was a bottle of petrol in his hand and his revolver was strapped to his middle. I was already armed. I hadn't even entered my house after my long ride, much less discarded the revolver I wore habitually on a journey.

Dusk was falling as we crept up behind the hut. It loomed brown against the somber green of the darkening forest. It was dry, tinder dry. Smoke seeped through the interstices of the palm-leaf thatch and the smell of meat grilling on hot embers twisted my hungry stomach. No fear of the gang inside hearing us. They were making noise enough for a hundred men. Passing round a bottle, from the odd words I could distinguish among the babel of voices.

I tipped the petrol bottle up, walking rapidly along the back wall of the hut as I did so. Then I stepped back.

Beside me Marco struck a match, his mouth yawning wide with excitement till his gold-filled teeth glittered in the tiny flare.

He flipped the match forward.

With almost the roar of an explosion the petrol caught. Flames shot up the dry palm-leaf wall before us and, in a second, the whole back of the hut was a blazing mass. A cataract of terrified Indians shot out of the opening and cascaded down the precipitous slope in front. To speed the departure of our unwanted tenants Marco and I emptied our revolvers over their heads, but it was hopeless to try and move them any faster. They were traveling all-out already, like rocks in a landslide. Their yells of terror receded downward through the darkening gloom. An occasional crash of broken branches, a yelp of pain when one of them slipped and fell. Meantime the cartridges in their now red-hot re-

volvers popped merrily within the glowing remnant of their hut. Not only had we routed the enemy but put most of his armament out of commission. Joaquin's men had evidently laid aside their revolvers while they caroused and had not waited to retrieve them. Now their red-hot weapons peppered the landscape and sent us to cover.

That was the end of Joaquin's "*posesion*" party.

After that I thought Joaquin would surely lie low for a while but, much to my surprise, he came to see me next day. My blood raced when I saw his ubiquitous little form dismount from his horse and approach me where I stood close to my office. Impudence. His sallow face seemed to dance up and down in a haze. I held tight to myself. If I were to let myself go, I knew I'd twist the slimy devil's neck. But, just the same, I decided it was time we took the gloves off. I had played the smooth Latin game of courtesy as long as I could stand it.

He walked toward me and stopped about five paces off. When he stopped I advanced. Close up. So close that, if his hand should drop to his weapon, I could hit him under the chin before he could draw. How my fingers were itching to grasp the skinny throat with the big Adam's apple that began dancing up and down at my approach.

When our faces were almost touching, I halted. One corner of my eye was fixed on his right hand with the thumb hooked over his belt just behind the pearl-handled revolver. He had casually dropped that hand there after I had ignored it when he had held it out in greeting.

I watched that hand closely. If it should grasp the butt and draw the weapon, there was a trick I knew. The quick grasp of the opponent's weapon as it leaves the holster, the fingers closing over the hammer as it travels back to cock. The twist of the wrist which turns the barrel up into the face of the man who drew it. The quick release which looses the hammer and sends the bullet crashing into the face of

the assailant. That would be better than my fist under his jaw. Murder, maybe—or next thing to it. But safe murder. With Joaquin's dead hand still grasping the butt of his own weapon which he had drawn on an unarmed man—what court in all the world would not acquit me? Self-defense would be the verdict. Certain. Self-evident. But it would really have been murder. Knowing the trick as I did, the man with the gun had not a ghost of a chance as long as he allowed me within reach. I blessed the man who had taught me that trick. His name was Bob Limpert, and he claimed to be the world's best pistol shot. When I knew him we had been living at the Explorers' Club together, in New York, and he had been teaching the New York Police the science of revolver marksmanship and the tricks of disarming an opponent.

So, for a long minute, Joaquin and I stood breast to breast, while his Adam's apple oscillated violently. Then he moved back slightly.

I followed at once. If he should attain distance from me I was sunk. Once his revolver was out of reach of my hand he would have me at his mercy. Did he know the trick?

But no. He was breaking. That was all. He took one more step back. Then his hand came away from his gun butt. He did not actually raise his hands over his head but crossed them on his breast. The implication to me was the same as if he had raised them, but it saved his pride from any on-lookers. How should I have reacted if Joaquin had drawn his weapon? Should I have used my fist on him or killed him with his own gun? I do not know, but I think I should have killed him.

"Vaya, sin verguenza ladrone. Get out you shameless thief. If I catch you at the mine again I'll have my Indians throw you off." I clenched my fist.

Without a word he turned. Watching me apprehensively over one shoulder he scuttled toward his horse, mounted

and rode away. I felt he was broken. That would be the last of the annoying business. However tough a man thinks he is, he sooner or later meets a tougher one.

But I had grievously underestimated Joaquin the bandit. The very next day brought me a telegram from him. Once out of range of my fist his courage had returned.

YOUR INSULT INSUPPORTABLE STOP CHALLENGE YOU TO DUEL STOP
NAME PLACE AND WEAPON

That made me laugh for a moment but, on further reflection I began to scratch my head. A duel! This wasn't the Middle Ages. And yet in this outlying part of Colombia we still lived in an atmosphere of the seventeenth century. Feudal system. Primitive conditions. Horseback travel. The general blessed freedom from the roar and racket of industrialized life. And duels were still fought in Colombia. I had heard of one or two, although the custom was dying out and was frowned on by the authorities. I knew too that this was a serious challenge. Joaquin had had to do something to re-establish his credit with the local firebrands, to counteract the series of reverses he had suffered at my hands. So, in a fit of fury he had challenged me to a duel and would have to see it through or risk losing his influence, although, by now, he was probably heartily wishing that he had never sent the telegram.

The devil of it was that I was in exactly the same fix as Joaquin. I couldn't refuse, any more than he could retract his challenge, and for the same reason. Up till now by sheer bluff I had been holding down a whole districtful of wild Indians. Now, should I show the white feather, the whole district would blow up. The population would get out of hand. Should I discharge a workman, he would lie in ambush to snipe me. Attacks might even be made on the camp with loot in prospect. All this was more than probable once my carefully fostered prestige as a fighting man was shown to be the bluff it really was. No. I must accept the challenge.

If I refused it my control of the region would be gone and riot would rule. I must accept. That my deductions were correct is proved by the fact that, as soon as my rule of the Chivor district was later relaxed by my absence from the country, armed men swarmed into the mine area and blood ran. I know that if I had not accepted Joaquin's challenge the Chivor mine would have promptly closed down.

But I definitely did not want to fight a duel. True, the choice of place and weapon were mine by long-established custom. Any place at all would do, provided it held no cover for a hidden marksman behind my back. Joaquin, in my opinion, was quite capable of making sure of things by that means. Weapon! What weapon? Knife! I shuddered. No knife fighting for me. I had seen more than one set of entrails trailing on the ground since I had lived in Colombia. If I had to die, I wanted to do so in one piece. Revolver! I was a good and fairly quick shot with the short gun, but Joaquin was probably better, and he'd be sure to jump the signal to fire. I crumpled the flimsy message form. I was standing outside my house, where every object carried the familiar aspect of a friend. Workmen had been building a stove in my kitchen, and homely building materials lay around. It was a pile of bricks that gave me the inspiration. The idea struck me all of a heap, and I hastened to show Joaquin's challenge to Marco.

Old Marco waved his hand and raved. "*Barbaro*. Barbarous. You must refuse."

"I'm going to fight." I laughed at him, although his manifest anxiety was exhibited on my behalf.

Marco spluttered. "No. No. Rather will I report the matter to the *Alcalde* and have it stopped."

Taking out my pencil, I scribbled a draft of my acceptance on the back of the telegraph form and held it out for Marco to read. Several times he read the message and my answer to it, his lips moving, before their implication dawned on him. Then, for almost the only time in our many years of

acquaintance, he burst out laughing. A harsh, grating sound as though his risible machinery was rusty from disuse.

I had written the following:

ACCEPT CHALLENGE STOP GUATEQUE MARKET PLACE STOP BRICKS
AT FIVE PACES

Joaquin did not deign to reply, and for some weeks we heard nothing further from him. Then one morning a messenger brought a letter.

Honored Senor Meester,

It is hard for a man of spirit to admit defeat, but you have defeated me. This would I tell you in person, but you have forbidden me the mine. It is my intention to abandon my claim and to leave this district where things have not gone luckily for me. But before I go there are many things I can tell you of your employees which will interest you. Emeralds are being stolen from your mine, and I can name the evil ones who steal them. I will await you on the *Alto del Guyo* at any time you name.

I kiss your hands,

JOAQUIN

When I showed the letter to Marco, that staunch friend nearly threw a fit. "Car-r-r-ramba—car-r-r-rajo—car-r-r-racas . . . !" he rolled the r's in the crackling Spanish expletives like the rattling of a Gatling gun. "An *embusacdo*. An ambush. It smells plainly of that. He promises to tell you of emerald thieves to draw you to him."

"It fairly stinks of an ambush," I agreed. "The few emeralds that go missing between the toes of our Indians aren't enough to interest anyone, and he knows it."

"You will not go then? The Virgin be thanked." His sigh of relief fairly whistled.

"I must go, Marco. How long do you think we could operate this mine once I had admitted fear of Joaquin?"

"But the danger! Not so much from Joaquin as from some hidden *bandolero* near him."

"Not so much danger as you might think. Besides, something tells me this is the last round of the fight. If we let up

on Joaquin we may encourage him to carry on. On the other hand if he really tries to ambush me and fails, he may really leave the district. I'll take plenty of precautions. We'll put some military tactics to work."

Marco's face cleared when I explained in detail my plan. He nodded vehemently and his eyes glittered.

It was the next day when I rode to the *Alto del Guyo*, the "Beak of the Cock." It was a round green height that jutted from the Chivor ridge like the breast of the forest spirit. Short green turf clothed it as it seemingly floated on the sea of forest which fell away from it on all sides.

Fifty yards behind me rode Marco. A grim rearguard with a big pistol at his belt. Slightly in front of me, one on either side, young Miguel and old Epaminondas, armed with shot-guns. Invisible those two were. Inaudible. Two dim shadows which slipped through the forest on either side the trail.

I estimated the distance as three miles from my house to the *Alto del Guyo*. The first half of it passed without incident.

Then, in the solid mass of the forest on my right front, there came the boom of a shot gun. Epaminondas. A howl of pain. Two strange Indians dashed across my front not fifty paces ahead. One of them carried a rifle while the other held both hands clapped to his behind as he sped howling.

I put Moro after them at the gallop, firing from the saddle. Galloping behind me, Marco opened up a regular fusillade till the sound of our firing echoed from the still peaks that watched us scornfully, sweeping the cloud wisps from their faces, none the less, that they might see the better.

The feet of those fleeing *embuscaderos* seemed scarcely to touch the ground, so fast did they flee as panic rode their shoulders. Unharméd, apparently, by our revolver shots they flashed across the trail and into the forest on the farther side—almost on top of the waiting Miguel.

"Boom! Boom!" Miguel's twelve-bore bellowed twice. A right and left which was punctuated by another howl of

agony. There was a violent crashing in the undergrowth, a crashing which rapidly receded.

Now Epaminondas appeared speeding from the direction of his first shot. He carried two guns. One he cast from him on the trail as he crossed it—the gun which a few moments before had been in the hands of the Indian on whom he had scored a hit. With the long, earth-devouring stride of the hunting cheetah Epaminondas crossed my front, his tongue hanging out like a hound's and his mouth drooling. God help those snipers if either Epaminondas or Miguel caught them. I didn't think they would catch them. Terror is fleetier than the blood thirst.

As Marco and I reloaded our revolvers we heard one more distant report. Then silence.

"Those *condinado* Indians shoot worse than we do," remarked Marco, closing the breech of his weapon with a jerk. "With shotguns too." He flipped his revolver into the air, caught it neatly by the butt and holstered it with one swift smooth movement, a trick he was fond of displaying.

I laughed as I holstered my Colt. "They're shooting straight enough. Hitting the mark every time, but I only gave them bird-shot. Didn't want a murder case on my hands. Even so those snipers will be picking lead out of their behinds for weeks."

"They won't stop this side of the Sauchi Pass." Marco gazed to where the gap in the Sauchi Range, two hours' ride away, peeped at us from under the skirt of a trailing cloud. "That *bandido*, Joaquin, will be gone too. Gone to make more trouble." He turned his horse toward home.

"We'll try the *Alto del Guyo*, to make sure. I'm willing to bet that Joaquin is sitting there through all this commotion, trying to look as though he hadn't heard it, smug and righteous-looking." I gathered up my reins.

"Better wait for our Indians." Marco frowned.

"No. I can handle Joaquin as long as he has no more

snipers about, and that's not likely. If he's still there I'll ride out of the forest alone to meet him. You stay hidden at the edge of the forest. Keep him covered, but don't shoot unless I am in danger."

Fifteen minutes later I rode out of the forest gloom into the clear daylight of the turf-clad peak. Joaquin was there. About thirty feet from the edge of the forest. Thirty feet. Close range. That must have been his plan. Those snipers my Indians had flushed would have followed me up and blown a hole through my back while I talked to Joaquin. That smooth devil would have had a perfect alibi. Talking to me face to face while I was shot behind. Now I felt like shooting him in cold blood as he stood there, ankle deep in turf as green as an English lawn.

I tethered Moro on the edge of the forest and walked toward Joaquin, my hand menacingly on the butt of my heavy .38.

"Well?" Rage plugged my throat so that I could hardly speak. The word seemed to come from the back of my nostrils. Thick-sounding.

Joaquin began to speak rapidly and at length. Nervously. His hand trembled as he lit a cigarette. I hardly remember a word of what he said.

One of my eyes was on him and the other on the forest behind him as he faced me. A bush moved there. A small bush just outside the forest shadow and within twenty feet of Joaquin. Soundlessly the leaves of the small bush were being agitated. Something poked through them. Something black and shiny with a hole in the middle that seemed to point at Joaquin's back. Good old Marco. The man would have made a first-class scout in war.

"Joaquin!" I jerked the word at him.

His discourse faltered, stopped.

I pointed at the bush. He turned to follow my finger. His face turned pale green. His darting black eyes widened. The

man thought he was going to be shot from ambush just as he had planned for me. He gasped. "*Santisima Virgen!*" He began to pray. He was beaten.


I waved him to where his horse stood tethered on the far side of the open space.

"Get out. Next time you try any tricks you'll really be shot. I could have killed you half a dozen times already, but you weren't worth it."

Like a man wading through swift water he staggered to his horse and rode away. He left the district. I never set eyes on Joaquin again, although he did resume an interest in Chivor affairs after I had left the mine. But that was while I was temporarily absent from the country. When I came back to clear his bandits from the property there was no sign of him.

7.

A Wicked Doctor,
Various Surgical Operations
and a Funeral Procession

F ALL the wicked little men I have ever met I rank first in frank and pleasurable enjoyment of sin Doctor Octavio. A dapper little man with a neatly trimmed black mustache, eyes like beady black diamonds and a foot small as a woman's. He held his liquor like a gentleman, and no woman, between the ages of fourteen and sixty, was safe from him. He had a ready wit that was caustic when it flickered and flashed on non-paying patients, but he always tended them whether they paid or not and bought expensive drugs for the more poverty ridden out of his own pocket. He lashed them cruelly with his tongue, and got his money's worth out of them in that fashion. He was good company on a ride, and we had many rides together. He was good company too—this was a more drastic test—when things went wrong on a journey; when we fought mosqui-

toes and the long *chinche* bed-bug in some hot-country Indian hovel while waiting for a flooded river to subside; when a horse went lame and had to be towed for hours through ankle-deep mud till a remount could be encountered; when we were caught on the high *paramos* and spent the night, wet through and shivering with cold, huddled over the parsimonious flicker of a fire on those treeless heights.

Unheralded, Octavio rode into Chivor one day. He was dined, wined, bedded and breakfasted unquestioned, as the hospitable local custom ordained. But he seemed reluctant about departing in the morning. I knew by then he was a doctor, but I hadn't learned any more than that about him, although we had punished a bottle of rum together the night before. The sun was rising, battering holes through the filmy remnant of a cloud which clung desperately to the eastern peaks in a forlorn attempt to keep the sunshine from us. Octavio stood beside me, rolling a cigarette, his reins hooked over his arm, while before us filed three hundred Indian miners in one long orderly line. Old Marco saw to that; he drilled them like soldiers. They were emerging from the big wooden barracks where they slept, drawing their tools from the store-room near by and disappearing over the rim of the emerald pit, as though they were marching into the sunrise. Lank black hair hung over stooped shoulders, prehensile feet gripped the rough ground they trod. With a bent-kneed gait they slouched along. Short, sullen, brainless, cunning. But there was strength in them—the strength of prehistoric man.

"A sturdy lot," I remarked. They ought to be sturdy. They consumed a ten-pound ration each day.

Octavio flicked a wax vesta with his thumbnail and lit his cigarette. "Strong—*por Dios*—strong like apes. But you need a doctor here."

"A doctor? What's the matter with them?" As a matter of fact, I had long been considering the question of employing a doctor for the mine. For two years I had been sewing up

knife slashes, lancing boils, plugging occasional bullet wounds and performing all the duties of a country *medico* except obstetrics, and I'd had enough of it. I loved to heal but felt frustrated when my untrained fingers were called upon to perform beyond their powers. Yes. I wanted a doctor at the mine, but when I hired one he would have to be a good doctor. I wanted no *teguas*—charlatans who bluffed their patients out of fees. My doctor would have to be of the right type, too. The social aspect looms large when you are living two or three together in the wilds. Marco was as sound a chap as ever I had met but, socially, he did leave something to be desired.

"Matter with them?" Octavio blew a puff of smoke at the peeping sun, and his dancing black eyes began to appraise each ragged form as it passed. "Matter? That one's got syphilis—beginning to break out in sores already . . . There's a goitre—two goitres . . . That creamy-looking product of miscegenation comes from the hot country where his mother bedded with a Negro, and he's rotten with malaria. You do need a doctor."

"If I take on a doctor, he's got to be a good one."

"I'm good." The black eyes twinkled.

I laughed. "How do I know that?"

"I'll prove it to you."

"How?"

"That cyst of yours," he pointed to my forehead. "You'll be more popular with the *senoritas* if you let me take it out." He walked up to me and his wise fingers pressed the growth on my forehead. It was big as a pigeon's egg, and kept on growing. It looked as though I were sprouting a horn. I'd been meaning to have it out for months, but every time I landed in Bogota I seemed too busy.

"Where are your tools?"

He drew a small penknife from his pocket and tested the edge with his finger.

Back in my house I lay on a sofa, gripping the edge. After

half a dozen deft slashes he was dabbing iodine on my forehead while I fingered the round, useless-looking growth he had dropped into my palm. I felt envious. If I had my life to live again I would be a surgeon. I've got the hands for it, swift, sure and steady. I've got the love of curing too, and neither blood nor guts upsets me unduly.

Octavio had passed the test, I felt. A quick, clean job.

"Your teeth—let me see them." He almost pried my mouth open. Clicked his tongue in disapproval. "Who pulls teeth round here?" He began to wipe his hands on his handkerchief.

"I do." I pointed to a set of dental forceps in a small glass case.

"Your teeth, I mean. Some butcher's been at your mouth recently and torn a hole in your gums."

"The blacksmith drew one for me the other day." My teeth had bothered me for years. That dose of blackwater fever I had had nearly twenty years before in Mozambique had been the cause of it. Blackwater usually ruins the teeth. In fact I had been lucky to retain even my poor remnants so long. After blackwater my teeth had begun to ache, one by one. No use trying to get them stopped. Dentists on three continents had had a go at them without success. Once a tooth started to ache I had learned from bitter experience that there was no remedy save to have it out. My Indian blacksmith had drawn several for me in the years I had been at Chivor. He used his biceps instead of his wrist but when one has a raging toothache and is out of reach of a dentist even a blacksmith is some kind of port in a storm.

Octavio walked to the cabinet, opened it and removed the instruments. "There's another going to trouble you soon. I'll show it to you in a minute without any meat sticking to it." He opened and closed the wicked-looking forceps with a look of relish on his lips.

"I'll be damned if you will!" I clapped my hand to my

mouth. The amputation of that cyst had hurt most damvably, and I'd had enough for one morning.

Within a week Octavio was domiciled at the mine. Installed as mine doctor with the right to treat out-patients in his spare time.

In the year or two he stayed with me I often acted as his assistant in the little consulting room I had built for him near my house.

I was having lunch one day when the Indian maid, Duka, came running, breathless. "*El Medico, Su Merced . . .*" Her eyes were wide and her lips parted with what I judged to be pleasurable horror.

"Well, what about the *medico*?" I poured myself another cup of coffee.

"He asks that you come to him. *Muy pronto*. Very quick."

"What for?" I had finished my lunch and began to hunt in my pocket for a cigar, one of the cheap but excellent brands of the country. They are as good as Havanas, at one-tenth the price.

"There is a woman there." Duka's eyes twinkled and she shook with suppressed laughter till the tiny straw hat almost fell from the top of her head.

"What's the matter with the woman?" I blew a puff of smoke.

But Duka wouldn't answer that one. Clapping her hand to her mouth, she dashed off in the direction of the kitchen whence I heard a cackling as though she were giggling herself into hysterics. Some woman miscarried on Octavio's sofa, I supposed. That would seem screamingly funny to an Indian girl.

In Octavio's sanctum I found one of the mine Indians and his wife—she was reputedly popular among the men—a slender wisp of a woman, different from the usually dumpy females of the region. The Indian was standing, grim and sullen-looking. The woman lay on the couch on which I al-

ways suspected Octavio of seducing his younger female patients. The front of her dress was sodden with blood. Her face was gray and her breath came sobbingly.

"You shouldn't do your abortions at the mine," I remarked to Octavio.

"Abortion!" The doctor stood like a little cock-sparrow, both hands in his trousers pockets. "Abortion! They don't come to me for that. They only come to me to cure them after they've tried it on themselves and gone rotten. But I thought you'd be interested in this case. The man takes me for Jesus Christ."

"How's that?" I noticed that the woman's breathing was rapidly becoming easier. Octavio had evidently administered an injection just before my arrival.

From a table among the gleaming instruments he took up a small object about as large as the palm of my hand and handed it to me—a jagged lump of meat with some black hairs adhering to it. It looked as though it had been hacked off a human body.

"You made a mess of that one." The cut was jagged as though it had been sawn off with a blunt knife.

"I! That's not my work." The eternal cigarette in his mouth cocked at a rakish angle.

"Who did it then?"

"You'll get the story in a minute. Do you recognize the organ?"

"Of course." I glanced at the stain on the woman's dress. "How did it happen?"

"The lady was generous of her favors and much appreciated by other women's husbands. The other women banded together, caught her out in the *monte* and hacked it off. Now her husband has brought her here for me to sew it back on. Thinks she'll behave herself if he can keep her pregnant, I suppose. Takes me for Jesus Christ and the whole college of surgeons combined. Cursed me for a swin-

dler when I told him his fun was over, as far as she was concerned."

"*Me engano*. He has cheated me." Hoarse and menacing came the voice from the Indian in the shadows of the corner. "Ten *centavos* each month does the *Senor* deduct from our wages that the *medico* may cure us when we are sick. Now when I bring my woman to be cured he says he cannot do it."

After I had got rid of the Indian, I was about to follow him out when Octavio stopped me. "You must help me," he requested, as he took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves. "I plugged her up and stopped the hemorrhage when she got here, but there's much work to do on her yet."

"What will the husband do with her when he gets her home?" I asked Octavio as we were washing our hands after the revolting business.

"Beat her like a woman beats a carpet. But, if she were still in condition to pass her favors round, he'd chain her to a post in the hut for months. Keep her for months, chained like a dog." He tossed his towel into a corner, rammed his hands into his trousers pockets and rocked on his heels in a way he had. "*Gente rara*, these Boyaca Indians. Queer people. When the woman is in childbirth the man suffers also. Side by side they lie. For every groan of pain the woman gives the man groans also. And yet that man will beat that woman half to death almost before she's on her feet again, or chain her to a post like a dog the moment he suspects she's playing with the neighbors."

On another occasion I was riding in the Sinai valley with Octavio. There was a *cantina* there, the resort of every lawless character in the district, headquarters of the band of malefactors which Joaquin controlled. Slit bellies were as common in that Sinai *cantina* as black eyes on election day in the East End of London. As we approached the tumble-down place, shrill Indian yells were ululating down the

gorge and rebounding in echoes from the precipices across the Sinai River. Men were shouting, hoarse voices raised in drunken excitement. There was an orgy in progress and something exciting was obviously happening. Then suddenly the noise ceased.

As soon as we came into view of the crowd round the building there was a rush toward us. My hand dropped to the butt of my revolver, hidden by the low-hanging folds of my *ruana*. There were plenty in the Sinai who bore a grudge against me for one thing or another. Joaquin's men, men discharged from the mine, men inflamed against me by the rantings of the anti-foreign priest who at that time was misusing the pulpit of the Somondoco church to stir people against the man who gave a livelihood to his parish. But in a moment I relaxed. These men were drunk, true. But they were not fighting drunk, only convivial. One bleary figure with flying hair and bloodshot eyes thrust a bottle of *aguardiente* at me while a ragged-looking fiend with the family likeness of Mephistopheles raised for Octavio to drink a large brimming gourd of *guarapo*, his shaky hands spilling half of it down his own face and breast as he did so. We drank while they pressed round us. Talking each other down to their haste to tell us the news. A fight! Such a fight! Pity we had missed it. Knives. For at least fifteen minutes the two opponents had thrust and slashed at each other before one had gone down. It was just over.

Octavio cocked an eye at me as though to say, "More work for the poor *medico*."

"Is the man dead?" I asked.

"Not yet, *Senor*. But his *tripas* hung out like the guts of a sheep." They laughed, a hyena's chorus.

"Where is he?" Octavio was already unstrapping the saddle wallet in which he always carried his surgeon's kit.

We found him in the near-by stable, cast to die among piles of horse dung, his intestines spread by his struggles

among the manure. Groaning painfully. His belly was slit from side to side about the latitude of the navel.

Hands in breeches pockets, Octavio leaned over him, whistling through pursed lips. Daintily he inserted one neatly shod toe under a coil of tripe and raised it slightly. "I ought to charge him by the yard for stuffing it back," he remarked, "but not one centavo will I ever see."

"Give the poor devil a shot of something and let him die in peace. You can't cure him." It seemed to me that such a scattering of the human internal arrangements could not be cured by human hands.

"Die!" Octavio chuckled. "That devil won't die. He'll live to owe me my fee till a ripe old age. Within a month I'll have him walking about. Baring his belly to show the scar. Bragging about how he got it. He'll show it to me. Grateful, but not grateful enough to pay the bill."

Then we slipped off our gun belts and went to work.

At last the foot-long gash was sewed, and we straightened our tired backs. I was afraid we had sewed pounds of horse manure into the man because it stuck to the intestines and was difficult to get off. None of the roistering crowd outside was even interested enough to watch us, let alone to help. But the doctor was right. The man did live and was swaggering around the mine a month later, his shirt open at the navel to show the wicked, pallid scar.

On still another occasion I traveled all the way down to the foothills with Octavio to succor a man who had been hurt while fishing. His brother had made the long day's ride to summon the doctor.

We found the patient lying on the floor of a rough, grass hut. The evening light barely penetrated the place. It was almost pitch dark, and it stank like a charnel house.

We called for a light. By the feeble glimmer of a home-made candle we examined the patient. Both hands shattered, also his jaw. Over his left breast the ragged shirt seemed to

have been driven into the great hole through his collar bone. The man stank. He was rotting. Hurt fishing, his brother had said. I could visualize the scene. Fishing with dynamite. A short fuse lit in the sunshine which drowned the glow of the sputtering sparks. The man holding the deadly charge in both hands while his mouth blew to kindle that very spark which, unsuspected, was already creeping downward to the charge. A dull report. The charge had exploded in the man's face instead of beneath the surface of the river as he had intended.

"How long since this *pobre* was hurt?" Octavio's gay nonchalance was gone for once. His face looked green in the candlelight.

"A week, Senor. At first we thought he would die. If a man is going to die he is going to die, and it is no use trying to thwart the will of God by stopping him. But as he would not die we sent for the *medico* because it seemed the will of the Blessed Virgin that he should be cured."

A week! That mutilated body had been existing a week without attention in the tropic heat of the foothills. No wonder he stank.

Octavio slipped his gun-belt off. "Bring us *aguardiente*. A bottle of it. Then bring me boards to make a table." He spat disgustedly.

"I will begin to think you are Jesus Christ if you can cure that one," I remarked, puffing hard at my pipe to get the stench out of my nostrils.

"Cure him! *Santisima Virgen!* What do you call cure? I'll make him live, maybe, if that hole in his chest has not gone too low. But cure! To cure him I'd have to give him new hands and a new jaw."

When the *aguardiente* arrived he drank it in great gulps. Raw. Then he handed me the bottle. "Drink heavy. You'll need it before this job is finished."

We worked on an improvised table of rough boards while the bulk of the population of the little outpost

crowded round us in the confined space of the hut. While I held steady one of the shattered hands Octavio whittled off lumps of decayed flesh by the light of the tallow dip. Pruned and trimmed and bandaged. The dense-packed crowd of sweating Indian humanity kept pressing forward to see the operation, crowding me against the table. Every few minutes I had to swing an elbow or kick backward to keep space enough for us to move. The pruned bits of rotten flesh dropped to the floor. Hungry Indian curs growled and fought for them between my feet. Added to the stench of sweating humanity was the stench of decaying flesh in a room without ventilation under the almost palpable heat of the tropic night. A nightmare.

When both hands were done Octavio and I staggered outside and drank heavily from the bottle again. The fiery spirit had no more taste to us than water.

Then the jaw. Nothing much left to do there. A little trimming. The lower jaw had been blown clean away. The man would never eat solids again even if, by combination of the skill of the surgeon, the uncanny tenacity to life of the Indian and a miracle, he should survive.

But the hole in his chest was the worst. I directed my flashlight into it and saw something pulsating deep down. That put the lid on it. Even as I tried to hold the flashlight steady for Octavio to look, I turned my head and vomited over my shoulder.

At last it was over. We finished the rest of the bottle in a couple of gulps apiece, washed our hands and staggered to bed. The thought of food nauseated us, although we had begun the operation the moment of our arrival and had eaten nothing since daybreak that morning.

The man did live. Months later I rode through the place and saw him. A horrid remnant of a man. He could still earn his living, though. When I saw him he was seated at a table grading coffee beans with the solitary finger the doctor had saved for him.

Octavio got some payment, too. When the moon of "new corn" arrived, the patient's brother walked the forty miles to the mine with half a dozen ears of corn for the *medico*.

Emerald mining is a hazardous occupation. The green gems round the neck of a beautiful woman are sometimes stained with blood. Men have paid the ultimate price to wrest them from the womb of the mountain. Often there is death in them. Death from malaria and yellow fever in the steaming forests of the Carare valley where the great Muzo mine is situated. That was one hazard we were spared in Chivor because our climate was healthy. Death from knife or bullet as two miners would flare to sudden battle even while perched perilously at their work, high up the sides of a deep emerald pit. But the most common death of all in emerald mining is death from landslides. In the season of the heavy rains the earth becomes sodden and slips unexpectedly away from the rim of a pit, burying the working parties below. There is a legend of the early days of Muzo when two hundred miners were thus overwhelmed, snuffed out in a moment. So far in Chivor I had been lucky about accidents from slides. Early in my administration of the mine I had instituted a morning patrol round the edges of the pit to search for the tell-tale cracks in the surface which give warning of a slide impending. In the years of my administration of Chivor I had only one fatal occasion from slides. Four men were overwhelmed.

What to do with the bodies? They had been buried in a worked-out area where they had no business to have been walking at all. No need to disturb them there. Buried they were and buried they could remain. That was the simplest solution and the one that first occurred to me. Then a second thought struck me. The Somondoco priest had for some time been raving against me, incited in the first place by Joaquin. Joaquin had long since been defeated and left the district, but still the priest ranted on from the sanctuary of his pulpit. True, I was holding the district down in spite

of the priest's attempt to stir it against me. My word was law among the Indians. But it was a rule of fear, and there were plenty of firebrands among them. If the priest would change his tune there would be less chance of some wild spirit trying to call my bluff and getting me into a position of having to kill him or myself be killed. The idea occurred to me that it would please the priest if I should disinter the bodies from where they lay crushed beneath tons of rock and earth, make them coffins and send them into Somondoco for Christian burial.

We dug them up and made good coffins out of our store of hand-sawed wood. I detailed a hundred men to carry the four coffins over the mountainous thirty miles to Somondoco, under the charge of one of my Indian headmen. But those Indian devils defeated my object. No sooner out of sight of the mine than they broke up the coffins and stole the wood. They dragged the bodies into Somondoco with ropes to which the carriers yoked themselves like oxen. Sacrilege to send poor human corpses in for burial in such a state—so raved the priest in his next sermon. My well-intentioned scheme had merely given him fresh ammunition to use against me. That was the first and only time I ever tried to placate him. For at least a year he preached fire and damnation for me until he was moved to another sphere. He died, and I was damned glad of it.

8.

My Family
Arrives
in Colombia

THE Pacific port of Buenaventura. The port of "Good Adventure." Named by some early Spanish adventurer, I suppose, although what good adventures he could have found in the surrounding mangrove swamps God alone knows. Whatever the luck of the old *conquistador* in that spot, there was certainly nothing good about the settlement which had grown up there since the Spaniards had wallowed in the adjacent morasses seeking what they could find. At the time of my first visit to the place most of the buildings were constructed of wood from petrol boxes, eked out by sheets made from flattened petrol tins. Rotting. Rusty. Stinking to high heaven from the piles of filth which littered the streets and from the surrounding square leagues of mud-flats on which the sun worked furiously at low tide. The annual rainfall was about three hundred and fifty

inches, and the daily inch seemed to decant itself at the most inconvenient times of day—after your first change of whites in the morning, for instance, or after your third change before sitting down to serious drinking in the evening. There was one thing about the rain, though. It did drown the smell of the place when it came sheeting down without a moment's warning.

Buenaventura was a stinking hole. Some years ahead yet were the two cataclysms which were to vastly improve this really important Cinderella of a Colombian port.

The first of these was when the *Triton* blew up. The rusty old tramp was moored in close. Loaded with dynamite, she blew a swath clear through the town, swept a broad avenue clear of the filthy shanties with their filthy and unpleasant inhabitants and blasted them into the swamps. The Republic of Colombia should have erected a statue to the *Triton*, although a bit of her boilers did wreck the customs office and cause the hasty demise of an important, if venal, official. The second great benefit to befall the port was the fire which came some months after the *Triton* affair and left the ground clear for a modern building program, an opportunity of which the Colombian government was not slow to avail itself.

On this, my first visit, I was in Buenaventura to meet my family. Margaret and the children were on that white Grace liner which even now was nosing her way into sight between the mangrove-covered headlands which did their best to close in Buenaventura Bay and keep its almost viscous aroma from poisoning the whole of the Pacific Ocean.

By virtue of the consular launch which I had borrowed, I succeeded in getting on board even before the port officials arrived on the scene. I climbed the trailing gangplank and stepped on deck. Two freckled fair-haired little girls stared at me, indecisive. Then the elder dashed at me. Margaret. Marge, we had got into the habit of calling her to distinguish her from her mother. After a moment's hesita-

tion Dorothy followed her big sister's lead, but I don't think Dorothy really would have recognized me if left to her own devices.

Then I saw Margaret.

When we had finished greeting one another my attention was called to a little boy who had been watching the scene with the utmost disgust registering on his pink and white features. Peter. My son. Neither of us recognized the other. He had been a bediapered, crawling infant when I had last seen him two years before.

"Muvver"—he pointed an accusing finger which he extracted from his mouth for the purpose—"Muvver, who's zat man you're kissing?"

"That's your daddy, silly. Give him a kiss." Margaret swept an arm to gather him up, but he eluded her grasp. Standing back he appraised me gravely, impartiality struggling with disapproval on his expressive child's face. Disapproval won. Then turned to disgust.

Again the accusing finger. "I don't like you." Pale but steadfast, he hurled defiance at me.

Quickly I bundled my family and their baggage over the side into the launch. Peter refused to have anything to do with me. Refused even to follow his mother in my wake. So I picked him up and carried him down the gangplank under one arm. The end of his first sea voyage rose to heaven in a volume which told of a healthy pair of lungs.

Next morning we started for Chivor. When we reached our destination we would have passed from the Pacific Ocean across three major chains of mountains and two great navigable rivers, ending up on the edge of the great *llanos* whose waters drained into the Atlantic-flowing Orinoco River.

For the first thirty miles the train scuttled through dense, wooded swampland. Three hundred and fifty inches of rain each year would make a swamp out of a slate roof. Then,

panting as though fatigued by chase, the diminutive engine began to breast the first spurs of the western *cordillera* of the Andes. Beginning at Cape Horn in the Antarctic, the Andean range forms a single chain of mountains until it reaches the borders of Colombia, just after it has hurdled the equator. Then, spouting several live volcanoes at the shock of the dismemberment, it splits into three distinct ranges, between which run the great navigable rivers of the Cauca and Magdalena.

We had climbed hardly an hour till we had left behind the lush green of the coastal strip and entered a desert—not a wide one but as real as Arizona while it lasted. Cactus and thorny plants with barren sand and rock between. On the Pacific side of Colombia the low-flying coastal rain-clouds sluice their contents over the coastal plain and the lower buttresses of the range. High above these low rain-clouds is an upper rain stratum which does not turn the tap on till the higher peaks of the western *cordillera* chill it into disgorging its moisture. Between the two lies a strip of mountain slope which receives no rain at all. Desert.

An hour took us through the desert, climbing all the time. Then green again. The cool verdure of the temperate zone this time, not the anthropophagous vegetation of the tropics. Rounded hills whose slopes were bright green turf, alternating with the dark green and red of coffee plantations. Our overcoats came off the racks and onto our backs with the first chill of the highlands.

Over the top. A scant hour's fast run down to the hot-country city of Cali in the Cauca valley. Our overcoats had gone back on the racks long before we reached there, and we sweated great dew-drops at the mere sight of them.

A first-class modern hotel in Cali. Margaret went to the desk while I attended to the baggage. She wanted to air her Spanish and get some results from the lessons she had taken at some school of languages in Florida. The hotel clerk

leaned attentively across the desk to hear her requirements.

She enunciated a sentence slowly. The clerk looked puzzled.

She repeated the sentence. The clerk was so anxious to understand that his expression became anguished.

Slightly flushed, Margaret essayed a third attempt. Then the clerk's brow cleared.

"Do you speak English, madame?" he asked with a distinct Oxford accent.

"Of course." Margaret was crimson now.

"Then please do so." The clerk leaned forward once more.

Out of Cali next morning. The mine was calling and I had no time for sightseeing. Marco was about due to bottom on another emerald pit and my presence would be necessary. In the gamble of emerald mining one cannot afford to be absent when there is a chance that fortune may drop a cascade of green fire into your hands. Many months of dull slave-driving, many months of heavy expenditure without hope of reward save at the bottom of the vast pit that is being torn in the mountainside. Then, when the pit bottoms, a few weeks of nerve-twisting tension when one has to be all eyes through every waking hour; trying to watch three hundred unscrupulous savages as the sharp points of their bars pry blocks of emerald formation from the floor of the pit; one eye on the rock to see if it is streaked with green; one eye on the man to watch for the surreptitious sliding movement of the foot as the prehensile toes slither forward to grasp something the bar has uncovered. That's emerald mining. An emerald mine is as hard a master to its manager as a battleship to its captain.

So out of Cali early into the fifty-mile-wide Cauca valley with the red ribbon of the Cauca River meandering through it. That valley is as level as the top of a billiard table and just as green. Fat cattle ruminating the cud of contentment engendered by the belly-deep green grass in which they stood. Squares of red-brown earth ready for the planting.

The whole diversified by frequent feathery tufts of bamboo with the graceful drooping stance of giant ferns.

At the little foothill town of Armenia we left the train because the line ended. Chartered one of a waiting line of cars and sped into the buttresses of a vast green mountain range—the central *cordillera* of the Andes, the highest range in Colombia, from whose crest sprang that noble line of snow-caps which I had seen from the plane on my first day's journey in the country, two years before. Up and up. A corkscrew course. At each bend of the corkscrew we spun one twist nearer the point where the white spiral of the road reached into the clouds above, one twist higher above the sun-drenched valley below. At each bend the Cauca valley increased in perspective and its details became less distinct. The great bamboo clumps began to look the size of ferns, the square fields like matchboxes and the cattle were not visible at all.

Then the cloud ceiling swallowed us, gulped us. The valley was gone. Cold mist wreaths swirled round us in the icy blast from the near-by but invisible snow-cap of Mt. Tolima. Through the clouds we climbed steadily toward the Quindio Pass. The road was new, recently completed, the first connection possible for wheels between the Cauca and Magdalena valleys. Had we essayed our journey three short months before, it would have taken us ten long saddle-weary days to make the passage of the central *cordillera*. Ten days in the saddle, ploughing through the mud of the high *paramos*, ten nights of flea-haunted misery in the primitive *posadas* along the trail.

Speed. I needed speed. The responsibility of bottoming on an emerald pit was too much for Marco alone to bear and there were many chances of delay. But on a new road especially is there danger of landslides. The deep gash of the road-cutting disturbs the equilibrium of those league-long mountain slopes which nature has spent eternity in establishing, and landslides in Colombia often block the

roads for days on end. There was one place where the road-cutting was particularly deep. As we swept through it a great boulder burst from the cloud ceiling overhead and bounded across the road.

With a squealing of brakes the car stopped.

"*Adelante, Bobo.* Ahead, you fool. Step on it or we'll be swept away when the rest of it comes down." I pounded the chauffeur on the back from my seat behind him.

With a clash of gears the car bounded forward as small pebbles rattled on its top, precursors of the landslide which, somewhere in the cloud-enshrouded heights above us, was even then tearing itself loose from the precipitous mountain slope, like a chunk of wet plaster from a wall, and beginning to gather momentum for the plunge downward across the road into the invisible river which we could hear moaning in some gorge below.

After hours of climbing we reached the Quindio Pass, fifteen thousand feet above the level of the Pacific Ocean which we had left the day before. The car halted, its radiator steaming. Swathed in our overcoats, we huddled together inside while sleet fell in long pencil-like darts. Somewhere above us and to our left Mt. Tolima was brooding, rearing its white head still five thousand feet higher, dreaming perhaps of the days when flame spouted from the hole in its cone-shaped summit and lava flowed to melt the snow which even then must have begun to coat its shoulders. Old Tolima must have been warm then. But, God, how cold a neighbor Tolima was now! Then came a wild blast of wind and the cloud and sleet were gone. The frosty light of the mountain sun now half-blinded us, reflected as it was from the snow-white cloud floor through which we had climbed. For a few seconds the sun blazed at us, then another cloud enveloped us and we descended into the Magdalena basin through sleet which changed to rain as the altitude lessened.

Four hours after crossing the sleet-pelted Quindio Pass we were again in hot country, in the considerable city of Ibaguë

on the edge of the Magdalena flats. A primitive hotel and overcrowded. The hotel accommodation of Ibagué had been caught napping by the influx of travelers that the new road had brought. Now that the journey between Armenia and Ibagué could be comfortably encompassed in one single day, a hundred people were making the journey for every one who had been Homeric enough to essay the former ten-day ordeal in the saddle. In the Ibagué hotel we were compelled to share a room with a Colombian family of two women and four small children. With our own five that made eleven humans in one fairly large room on a warmish tropic night.

Having been lucky enough to stake our claim first, we dug our toes in on the question of keeping windows open. As last-comers they had to acquiesce after a heated argument. If Margaret had understood one-half of the epithets those women cast at her she would have had their hair out by the roots.

When at last they began to lay themselves out in rows on the floor they counter-attacked by using the commode successively and copiously—the kind of commode you keep under the bed.

I complained to the proprietor. Clucking sympathetically, he bustled in and placed a fire-screen in front of the offending article of furniture!

The next night we were in Bogota, toasting ourselves in front of a rousing fire in the big fireplace of the Regina Hotel. Around us lounged fashionably dressed people drinking cocktails.

After only two days in Bogota we left for Chivor. I had to be there when that emerald pit bottomed. With only one man to watch the mine, some of those hard-won emeralds would stick between the toes of my rascally miners for certain.

Mr. and Mrs. Foster-Bain were in Bogota. Mrs. Foster-Bain accompanied us for a visit to the mine while her husband stayed behind with the international committee of

which he was a member. Drafting a new code of oil laws for the country was their job. Mrs. Foster-Bain was the youngest-looking grandmother I ever met. Merry as a bird on a spring day and a good horsewoman.

Some years later I called her on the phone to announce my arrival in New York City.

"Oh, Mr. Rainier," her voice came back over the wire. "I'm so glad you've come. I've just got my flying certificate and I want you to be my first passenger."

Great guns! The lady was fifty-five or thereabouts. It wasn't decent for a grandmother to learn to fly, let alone offer to take up innocent visitors. Now my first act in New York would have to be a desperate adventure because I couldn't think of any plausible excuse for refusing to fly with her, except my real reason—that I was afraid.

However, next day she took me up and gave me a couple of hours in the air, handling her little Moth like a veteran. Soon afterward she made a flying tour of the States and the exploits of "the Flying Grandmother" made headline news for a while in the American press.

On this journey to Chivor with my family I had, before my departure, arranged with Marco for quite a band of Indians to meet us. None of the children had ever ridden as yet, and the two long days in the saddle would be too abrupt an introduction to the most natural method of travel, I had felt. Therefore, I had instructed Marco to arrange for them to travel in cages on the backs of Indians. He had contrived light wooden cages, perfect for the two smaller children but cramped for the hefty girl young Marge had become in the two years since I had seen her last. I had gone wildly astray in my estimation of her dimensions, and her two beefy legs stuck so far out of her cage that I took pity on her. She traveled in front of my saddle on Moro for the first day.

The Indians surged around us as we alighted from the bus in Choconta. Shrill Indian yells arose. Wild ululations of a barbaric welcome. Long black hair flapped on ragged

shoulders and long *penilla* bush-knives swung from leather belts as they stormed the boot behind the bus to get at our baggage. The scent of their unwashed bodies lay heavy on the air.

Marge drew close to me. "Why do they smell like that, Daddy?" she whispered discreetly.

But Peter struck up a friendship with old Epaminondas at once. I think the old ruffian's red sash caught the child's eye. Anyway, it was Epaminondas who carried the boy throughout the two days' journey, refusing to be relieved, although Marco had provided two Indians for each child so that the carriers might have relief.

On the first day's ride all went well—except for a tendency toward the end for Margaret to ride standing in the stirrups because the saddle felt hot—until just before we reached the outskirts of Guatemala, where we planned to spend the night. Then poor Moro trod on a nail and lamed himself. With some difficulty I drew the long spike from his foot. He could still walk, haltingly. But when I began to lead him into town the game old devil nudged my side with his nose as he had a habit of doing when he thought I had traveled dismounted too long on a journey and he wanted me to mount. But there would be no mounting Moro for weeks until his foot was cured. Hard enough on him that he must limp unriden to distant Chivor on the morrow.

"I need a mount for tomorrow," I announced to Don Miguel, the hotel proprietor as he prepared to usher our party into the bougainvillea-shaded veranda of his *posada*.

"A mount! *Valgame Dios!* God make me worthy! What a pity I did not know before!" Don Miguel rumped his bushy black beard with his stubby fingers and rolled his eyes. "There is not a mount to be had in Guatemala, nor will there be till the government expedition to the *llanos* returns those they hired yesterday. They combed the town, as though they were riding to the Orinoco instead of to the edge of the foothills."

"But I must have something to ride, Don Miguel. My Moro is lame."

Don Miguel clucked his tongue sympathetically. The black hairs on his chin stuck out between his fingers like lichen growing through cracks in a wall. He picked up Moro's foot and examined the hole the spike had made.

"I can hire a *macho* to the Meester." The voice came from a slender Indian youth lounging against the doorpost of the courtyard.

I turned to him hopefully. "Where is your he-mule?"

With a wave of his hand he indicated a black mule engaged in vacuum cleaning the corners of a manger for the odd bits of grain the last feeder there had missed. A well-turned little beast, but there was a pack saddle on his back.

"Will he carry a rider?"

The youth flashed white teeth behind the promise of a black mustache. "*Si, Senor*. If he can carry a pack he can carry a man."

"But has he ever been bitted? Has anyone ever ridden him?" The little black brute of a mule had an explosive look about the very compactness of his build, now that I examined him closely.

The young Indian shook his head. "I tried once and he threw me, but then I am no horseman."

I shook my head. I was in process of taking my family sedately home—not looking for Broncho Bill stunts. Besides I had never tried breaking a mule, although I had broken plenty of horses in my African days.

"Better take him, Meester," the youth argued. "If you ride him to Chivor I will charge no hire because he will then be to the saddle broken. The Meester will have to ride some pack mule, anyway, because there is not one riding animal in town. Better to ride a pack mule that is wild than one so broken by heavy loads that it plods like an ox."

The *macho* stood steady as a rock while we saddled him next morning, but it took four strong men to hold him while

I prized his mouth open for the bit. Normally, I should have bitted the tender, unbroken mouth for a week before mounting him, but there was no time for gentling methods now. Within an hour I must be leaving with my family on the long day's ride, and in that hour the brute must at least be taught to answer the helm. Brute force and rodeo methods were the only recourse. I must stay on his back till I tired him or take a toss into the hard cobbles of the village *plaza*.

Day had just broken and the bell of the great white church was tolling for mass. But the mass was being neglected for once. People were running to line the edges of the *plaza*. There was an *amansado* in prospect. A horsebreaking. The Meester was going to back young Ansaldo's *macho*, the black *macho* that had once thrown Ansaldo himself and had also bitten Ansaldo's brother in the leg when he had tried to mount him. Bets began to wing their way back and forth across the *plaza*. My thoughts weren't much on the betting, but I did notice that the *macho* seemed an odds-on favorite.

One more sharp jerk at the girth and I was ready. A wicked little brute to break, active as a cat and no withers . . . I'd once seen a pony of that build buck the saddle clear over his head without breaking the girth. He rolled the whites of his eyes at me. God, how I wished he was an honest, upstanding horse.

With a spring I vaulted into the saddle and sat down tight, ready for squalls.

The *macho* shivered and his long ears lowered themselves back onto his neck like the arms of a semaphore, but he made no further move.

But as soon as I tightened the rein he galvanized, reared high on his hind legs, so high that he would have fallen back on top of me had I not smitten him between the ears with my clenched fist. That brought him down on all fours again, shaking his head, but hardly had his forefeet touched the ground when his wide open mouth menaced my leg with great yellow teeth.

A swift kick in the nose countered that one.

Then I assumed the initiative. Rammed home in his belly the great, long-rowelled spurs I had borrowed from Don Miguel.

The *macho* almost shot out from under me, so quickly did he move. He was as quick as a scalded cat. He leaped from zero to full gallop in a second, straight across the cobbled *plaza*, wide-open mouth braying his discordant rage. I dragged on the reins to check him but the only effect was to drag back his head till I thought his neck would break and his long ears were tickling my face. I couldn't steer him. It was like handling a launch in a choppy sea without a rudder.

We clattered the full round of the *plaza*. Once the *macho* tried to dive down a side alley, but one of the spectators heroically turned him back by waving a *ruana* in his face. We rode twice around, the mule braying like an air-raid siren. On his third round the *macho* again tried to escape the arena, this time by making a dive for the church. Still braying, he scampered up the shallow flight of steps, straight for the black opening of the church door. Desperately I sawed at his mouth—unavailingly—and thanked Heaven that the door looked high enough to clear my head.

Inside the church was blackness after the sudden transition from bright daylight outside. The *macho* stopped dead, hoofs slithering on the smooth tiled floor. He stood trembling. Then, even as I shook one foot free from the stirrup to dismount and lead him from that sacred place, something white dashed at us from the shadows, screeching. It was the *cura*, screaming mad at our profanation of his church. He charged at us as though we were the Beast from the Pit in person, come to wrest souls from him. At that moment I felt so embarrassed that I would have given my best shirt to get away from there. The mule apparently felt the same. The priest had exorcised him all right. With a wild snort of terror he backed frantically through the doorway he had just

entered, spun round like a polo pony, and stampeded down the steps.

Once back in the *plaza* he showed signs of flagging and it became my turn now. Round and round I spurred him, gaining more control of his head with every round. Finally I rode him quietly into the hotel patio, broken to the bit, if not thoroughly, at least well enough to assure me of a reasonably decorous day's journey.

Then I sent him to the stable for a rest and a feed while I went to make my peace with Mother Church.

By noon that day we were well past the last village, Somondoco, and heading into the wild forests of the Chivor region. From my place at the head of our long procession I dismounted and led the now docile *macho* to one side of the narrow trail in order to allow the others to pass while I noted how they were standing the journey. Behind me in a little clearing two Indian women were hoeing corn. They straightened their bent backs and watched the procession pass in amazement.

First came Mrs. Foster-Bain and Margaret, breeched and riding astride.

"*Carraie!*" exclaimed one old beldame. "What are these?"

The other spat eloquently. "Wives of the devil. Shameless."

Peter came next. Asleep in his cage on old Epaminondas' back, his pink and white complexion harmonizing with the long fair ringlets which I had not yet prevailed on Margaret to let me clip.

"And this?" queried the first beldame.

The other crossed herself reverently. "*El Nino Dios*. The Christ Child."

On the whole my family stood manfully the two long days of primitive travel from the end of the bus line in Choconta, although I noticed that Margaret slept on her tummy for the first few nights after her arrival at the

mine. Once at Chivor the children took to their new life as though born to it. Peter celebrated his first day as an emerald miner by getting at the *guarapo* barrel—we called it that, although it wasn't really a barrel but a huge length of tree trunk hollowed out from one side. The sweetish taste of the Indian drink proved just to his fancy and he got gloriously tight. Staggered home like an old toper, sitting down hard every few yards, much to his mother's horror.

The children picked up Spanish with a rapidity which astounded me. How well I remembered those tedious months of intense study on my first arrival. Within a few weeks they were chattering it fluently. Within a few weeks also, Peter, at least, had forgotten what little English his short three years had taught him. As his mother was slow to acquire the new language the situation arose in which she was for a while unable to converse with her child and had to call someone in as interpreter.

Margaret, however, did not at first take kindly to life in the wilds. The change from the home life of an American woman had been too abrupt. At Chivor there were neither vacuum cleaners, autos nor movies, nor the need of them, thank God. Finally, after she had been with me about six months without appearing to adapt herself, I suggested that she take a six months' vacation back in the States, leaving the children with me. She agreed, demurring only sufficiently to fulfil her idea of the proprieties. When she left on the two days' journey to the bus line, Marge and I rode with her to see her off.

About five o'clock in the evening of our first day out we rode into the *patio* of the Guateque hotel—that same *patio* in which I had hired my church-going *macho* six months before. There was an unaccustomed air of gloom about the place, we noted. The small boy who took charge of our animals wore a sullen look. The very chickens about the yard seemed to do their scratching furtively and the yard dog had a hang-dog air. Instead of the usual bustling welcome from

Don Miguel, an Indian domestic ushered us to our room with a finger on her lips. Don Miguel was dead, it seemed. Buried that very morning.

Hardly had the maid left us when she was back on an afterthought. "Would the *senores* like some ice-cream?" she whispered, smiling pleasantly.

"*Si, si.*" Both my wife and daughter nodded vehemently. Not since they had arrived in Colombia six months before had they tasted the American national dish.

But, knowing the country better, I was suspicious. Ice-cream in Guatemala! Good God! Why there was no ice nearer that primitive village than the snow-cap of Cucuy, fifty miles to the northward.

"Bring me a *tinto*," I ordered. I wasn't very fond of ice-cream, anyway.

The other two wolfed their ice-creams hungrily, then two more. When they had surfeited themselves I turned to the maid.

"Where did you get the ice?" I asked.

Tossing her long pigtail she flashed a toothy smile at me. "You see, *Su Merced*, when Don Miguel died we had to keep him for two days till his brother could get here for the funeral. So we sent a telegram to Bogota and a mule-load of ice arrived. Just in time it was, too. Well we packed him in it and he kept like butter in fresh spring water. Then this morning when they were nailing up the coffin I noticed that there was still some ice left unmelted. So much had we troubled to get that ice that it seemed a pity to waste it. So I made ice-cream as the *Americano* woman in Bogota taught me when I worked in her kitchen."

Margaret was back in less than three months, although she had gone for six. What I had hoped would happen had happened. The trammled and conventional joys of industrialized life had soon pallied on her after the freedom of the wilds. It is always quite a jolt too, to revert to being a tiny cog in a vast machine after one has lorded it over a primi-

tive people. She was glad to get back, and I was glad to see her. I felt that she had stood the test and got life now in a better perspective.

On the first night of her return she put an astounding question to me as we sat alone together before the fire. "Why don't we buy land in Colombia and settle here?" she queried, as she prodded a glowing log into a shower of sparks.

Buy land! I'd had that in mind for long but if I had propounded the idea before she would have thrown a fit at "being buried." Buy land! I knew the tract I wanted. We'd buy it fast enough now that I knew she was willing. That would be the life for her. When I had first met her she had been working a small farm of her own in Pennsylvania. She would fit on land. She was the right type.

A Blaze of Green

EACH emerald pit sunk on Chivor was a gambler's throw. On each pit I bet the cost of many men for many months—to say nothing of a good slice of my own reputation—against the haphazard, untidy methods nature uses when she deposits her minerals. The more valuable the mineral the more haphazard its deposition seems. Common minerals like iron and copper occur in masses, and their problem lies less in finding the mineral than in its removal and treatment. Easy. Gold again is more difficult. The gold values run unevenly in the vein of gold-bearing quartz bounded by the wall rocks that enclose it, sometimes rich and sometimes poor. But even in gold you have the vein to follow: a milky white streak of rock, usually several feet thick, running through other rocks of totally different texture. Somewhere in that vein the little yellow particles are concealed. Crush the quartz to powder, treat it properly and you will recover most of the values in it even though they have been invisible to the eye until separated from their

matrix. But emeralds! The most valuable of all the minerals of my acquaintance. The emerald vein is but a tiny crack in the rock, seldom wider than a finger's breadth. Furthermore the rock in which the insignificant crack lies is usually several hundred feet below the surface and covered by barren rock formations which give no clue to what may be below them. Therefore mining the emerald is incomparably more difficult than mining gold. The elusiveness of the emerald would fill a volume of romance, if the history of emerald mining in Colombia could be written.

Now in the middle of my fourth year on Chivor I was prospecting. Hunting new emerald formations. Not that there was any urgent reason for a change of mine policy. Each year since I had been at the mine it had shown a handsome profit, although we had never found anything really spectacular in the half dozen pits in which we had bottomed since old Epaminondas had picked up with his toes that first gem of value, the one Margaret now wore on her breast on the rare occasions when we had visitors at the mine. And yet I had a feeling that I was not getting the best out of the property. Somewhere in that stratum of yellow rock hundreds of feet below the surface there must be concentrations of the green hexagonal crystals which would make Cleopatra squirm in her grave. By all the laws of averages the green emerald mineral in its ancient flow must have found some places favorable to its crystallization, places where it would have crystallized in quantity, places compared to which the veins and pockets which our efforts had as yet uncovered would show as mere samples. To find those rich spots—that was the difficulty. The mine area covered about two square miles while even a fabulously rich spot would cover less than the area of a dining-room carpet. Now I was looking for some favorable indication to guide me in sinking a pit some distance from the mine area in which our pits had been sunk hitherto. If I could find some clue to the new area's possible

productivity I was willing to gamble up to a year's work on it.

I was clambering down the precipitous sides of Chivor peak—hardly one square yard of that stark upthrusting peak failed to feel the impress of my foot during the years I ran the mine. Along the face of a yellow, semi-precipitous rock I was making a traverse like an Alpine climber, feeling for handholds. That yellow rock face was composed of emerald formation, and I was looking for a streak of green in it—even a speck of green, something to give me logical grounds for a decision. With the geologist's pick from my belt I was chipping off pieces here and there along the face carefully, because there was a nasty drop between me and where the next patch of forest clung precariously to the slope, its strong gnarled roots wrapping themselves round the very bones of the mountain for support. That face was undoubtedly mineralized. There were tiny seams of a white, saltlike mineral—albite, which was often associated with the emerald but not always. Then there was plenty of talcum—that was what gave the silky texture to the emerald-bearing rocks. But not a speck of green. However, as I worked along, I turned into a sort of natural bay in the straight face of the cliff. A ledge here. Easy to walk, although just ahead of me the ledge was covered with debris, crumbled rock upon which creepers grew. In places the face of the cliff seemed to have crumbled unnaturally. I examined the nearest of these places. *The top of it was roughly circular.* A tunnel filled with debris from the fallen roof. The others were tunnels too. I noticed scores of them as I continued my search. Placed so close together that the rock between them had barely sufficed to hold up the mountain above. By God, the old Spaniards had mined this spot. Mined it intensively. It must have been a good producer for them to have concentrated on it, otherwise they would have contented themselves with a mere tunnel or two for exploration.

I went at once for Marco and together we scrambled down to the scene of my find.

His eyes danced as his fingers caressed the silky texture of the rock. "*Muy buena formacion*. Very good formation," was his first verdict.

Then, leaning over carefully, he peered into the void below. "*Caracas! Que tonga!* What a fall! When we turn the water on to clear the spoil we won't even notice where it went. Very good. *Muy bueno*."

Then he gazed upward to where, hundreds of feet above us, some overhanging tree limbs denoted the top of the slope. His teeth bared in his concentration as he estimated the height. "*Carajo!* If we open a pit here it will be the deepest we have dug."

But he shook his head when he noted the number of tunnels with which the rock face was studded. "Those *diabolos* of Spaniards have mined it already. The emeralds are gone."

"Plenty of emeralds left, Marco. The Spaniards must have got some of them, or they wouldn't have driven so many tunnels. But there's plenty of ground left to produce and the tunnels may not be driven deep."

He shrugged his big shoulders. "*Quien sabe?* Who knows?"

"Give me your opinion, Marco."

Again he shrugged. "Who knows what is in the bowels of a mountain? But what is outside the mountain I can tell you." He picked up a bit of rock. "This is good formation." He pitched the rock outwards and watched it disappear after bounding down the mountain slope. "The *tonga* is good. The spoil we wash away will clear itself and not block the channel as it sometimes does. On the other hand the formation here is very deep and the pit will be costly. Only the good God knows what we shall find in the pit if we dig it."

Then I made my decision. "We will open a pit here. Put every man we've got on it. Dig like blazes and trust to luck."

His face cleared as I took the load. "*Bueno, Señor.* Tomorrow the dirt will be flying into the river below."

Many months later I sat on the edge of the new pit, watching those ant-like figures in its bottom striking and prying with their bars in the yellow emerald formation which was beginning to appear. The crisis was approaching. If I had guessed right, all would be well. But if I had guessed wrong—well, I would have to do a lot of explaining in my annual report to the company and the Board, with half a year wasted on unproductive work. But we would find emeralds when that new pit bottomed, if my years of experience in the mine counted for anything. Not far to go now, I felt certain. Any day now we might break into a vein or pocket. How valuable? That was the question. The emeralds might be off-color on this side of the mine. Or they might have been shattered by rock movements, ground to splinters between two walls of rock in one of the many earth movements of this strongly seismic zone in which Chivor was situated. That had already happened in one of the earlier pits, and only a bit of luck in discovering an unusually valuable pocket in the subsequent pit had saved the mine from a financial loss that year. On the other hand, we might conceivably have picked on the very spot where nature had gone haywire, sluiced gallons of emerald mineral into a cavity and crystallized perfect gems from all of it. That was my hope, of course. It is always the hope of the miner. The next stroke of the pick may uncover the big nugget. The next emerald pit may bottom onto a mass of green valuable enough to swamp the world's market. But still I hoped. If miners ever cease to hope, the mining industry will cease and most of the world's industries with it.

Margaret and I had a strong personal interest in that pit too. Much depended on it. The land which a year ago we had decided to buy was still unbought. Our capital was as yet too slender to make the venture, we had decided. The

purchase of the land was easy—it was cheap enough—but its development would be costly. Forest must be cleared and the clearing planted. Long years to fight the encroaching forest before the new industry we hoped to implant on Colombian soil could mature enough to carry its own expenses. Night after night we had discussed the problem. Figured expenses. Our land venture so absorbed our thoughts that it had become an obsession—an obsession which I, for my part, kept shut up tight during the day and only took the lid off when I came home at dark and kicked my muddy boots off on the veranda, because my daylight hours were devoted to another obsession—the making famous of the mine to which I had devoted all my energies in the last few years. Yes. Our capital was still too small to venture. But if that new pit should be lucky! God! The resultant bonus would give us all the capital we needed. Then, a few years of work on our own land would give us independence. We should become land barons with feudal dependents.

Slowly the pit deepened. Steadily the appearance of the rock formation improved. Better and better. And yet not one sign of emeralds. Not one tiny speck of green to bolster my courage . . . Damn the beautiful, elusive green things! How they racked a man's fortitude! Marco and the veteran miners were shaking their heads secretly, I knew. Those Meesters! Pig-headed. Clever people in their way, but apt to take the bit in their teeth when they had been in the country a year or two. How could a Meester know as much about emerald mining as men who were born in emerald country? Any man could see that the old Spaniards had mined all the emeralds in that pit. Were not remains of their tunnels apparent in the bottom of it? But I still remained sanguine. The rock formation of that pit spelt emeralds or I was no emerald miner. Even the Spanish tunnels had penetrated less deeply than I had anticipated. They had gutted some of the emerald formation, true, but there

was plenty left for us to exploit. I'd bottom on that pit if I had to bust the mine sky high to do it. There must be emeralds there. I knew it, just as surely as though I had held them in my hands.

Still the bottom of the pit lowered itself into the bowels of the mountain. Slowly, in spite of the exertions of three hundred men. A few inches daily was the most they could encompass. Still the favorable formation persisted and still there were no signs of green in the yellow rock strata.

At last we found a cavity. It was just an opening in the rock with one end of it opened to daylight by a stroke of a miner's bar. Lying flat I peered in. A ray of sunlight shone past my head and flooded with light that small cavity which had never seen light before. When the Andean range was being built, long aeons before, a nodule of iron ore had occupied that cavity. Then acid had been loosed by the long process of decomposition. The acid had consumed the iron and left the cavity all but empty of its original contents. There was only loose red iron dust to be seen as dry as dry could be. I could not see a trace of green about it—only a hole, one-third filled with iron oxide dust, the residue of the original nodule of iron ore. While there was not a hint of green about it, I remembered that always the most prolific of my previous finds had lain loose in dusty-looking iron oxide.

With the pick from my belt I enlarged the hole till I could insert my hand and forearm. My fingers raked the loose-lying iron particles inside, blindly, because my forearm filled the hole to the exclusion of my vision. Christ! There were hard things lying loose in the soft dust. Long things with angular sides. My fingers explored them. Hexagons. *Emeralds*, by the miners' god! They must be emeralds, although they had shown no glint of green when I had looked into the hole.

My finger tips selected one and my fingers closed on it. Out into the sunlight I drew it. A good-sized hexagonal crystal that might be a valuable emerald or might be flawed,

colorless, opaque, white-hearted, without brilliance or any several of a dozen terrible things. During this, my greatest gamble on Chivor, Nature kept me guessing till the last. To sink that emerald pit had cost roughly one hundred thousand dollars. Hundreds of men had toiled for many months at it. Now I held a sample of our reward in my hands and could not tell whether it was what we hoped for or barely worth the effort of throwing it away, because the hexagon in my hand was coated with a hard layer of red-iron solution, dried. An ordinary-looking object. But were there an emerald under that coating it would be a big one—about forty carats—almost half the size of my thumb. I remembered too that the few rust-covered emeralds I had previously unearthed during my years at the mine had usually been perfectly preserved. God! If that still held true. *There were scores of them in that cavity.* While my hand had been inside, it had grasped a handful and only dropped them because I couldn't get my closed fist out of the hole which had barely allowed passage to my open hand. In a second I would scrape the rust off and get the answer.

Still lying prone, my hand went to my trousers pocket for my penknife. The movement of my body brought my gaze to bear over my shoulder. Work had apparently stopped all over the pit, I noticed, and hundreds of Indian miners were clustered behind me. Tense. Hundreds of eyes were fixed on that small hole and on the object which I had extracted from it.

"Que lastima! What a pity! Spoiled emerald." Old Epaminondas shook his head sadly.

The veteran miner's remark brought me sharply to a realization of the situation. The emerald obviously appeared worthless to the miners. What a chance to keep its value secret if I should really have my hand on a valuable pocket! True, I had already had at times valuable parcels of emeralds in the mine safe and as yet no one had tried to hold up the mine for them. But if this should really be a big find? It

might well be fabulous if the quality of the gems was right because there were many large emeralds in this one cavity, and it was unlikely that the cavity would occur alone. There would be others in the pit. If that should prove true and should we come to hold a king's ransom in our flimsy safe . . . Men's courage varies in proportion to the prize to be won. A really valuable find might stimulate some of the more daring of the local bandit fraternity to take a chance and hold up the mine. But if I could only conceal the value of the find, if value there were.

Affecting a nonchalance I was far from feeling, I tossed the hexagon to Epaminondas. "*Mala suerte*. Bad luck." I agreed.

From hand to hand the miners passed it, clucking their tongues and shaking their heads. Then one took out his knife and made as though to scrape the paintlike covering from it.

"Stop that," I cried. "You'll break it. I want to put it in acid to clean the muck off it. Bits of it may be worth saving."

As I slipped the hexagon back into my pocket I caught sight of Marco's grim countenance above the heads of the crowd.

"Get me a sack and a shovel," I ordered. "We'll shovel up all that loose dust with the emeralds in it. I'll work over it in my office and see what we can save."

Marco shouldered his way to me through the press, bent down and peered into the cavity. Straightened again, shaking his head in sympathy.

My back to the rest of them, I winked at him. Saw his jaw set suddenly till little lumps of muscle jumped into sight along his lean jawl. Quick on the uptake as always, he knew my play now.

"*Si, Senor,*" he agreed, quite calmly, although his eyes danced. "You are right. Some of the bits may be worth saving. Under that red paint who can tell? May the Virgin

grant we get enough out of them to pay the cost of this great pit."

As soon as I could get clear I scrambled up the side of that emerald pit like a cat with a dog on its tail. I wanted to be alone with that little hexagon that was burning a hole in my pocket. Once out of sight of the miners, I whipped out my pocket knife and began to scrape feverishly at the rusty covering. It was hard, as though it had been melted on. It took me several minutes to work a small spot clear on one side. That told me there was an emerald under the paint . . . but I knew that already. What kind of emerald was the question! Frantically I began to scrape a corresponding little window on the opposite side. I must see through the damned thing. Let the light shine through it to determine the color.

At last I held it up to the light with a hand that trembled so violently that I had to look several times to make sure. A green ray shone through the little object between my finger and thumb. *Dark green*. A hint of fire. Not for some seconds did the realization dawn on me that I was holding a first-grade emerald in my hand and that there were dozens more emeralds in the hole that one had come from. They would all be of the same color—emeralds run like that. One might almost parody a proverb and say, "Gems of a color flock together." I had outguessed Nature in spite of the many times the damned jade had flirted her skirts at me. God! A fortune for that New York crowd's company and a bonus for me which would be big enough to carry our land development to a triumphant conclusion. That one cavity would not be the end of it. There would be others. . . . I knew the habits of the pretty green gem by this time.

And so it proved. In the ensuing weeks hardly had we exhausted one pocket when another was discovered—like a miniature set of caves. Those weeks were heavy ones for me.

By day I supervised the shoveling up of the rusty-looking substance into sacks which were dumped on the floor of my office. By night I worked on them, cleaning, grading and locking them in the safe before I went to bed. What a find that was! Before that series of pockets had been worked out the high-grade emeralds alone had filled the capacious mine safe and the less valuable gems had been relegated to the less distinguished accommodation of an old tin trunk of mine.

At last the pit had bottomed—worked out. Time to carry my emeralds to Bogota. The strain of that journey still makes me shudder. By daylight, because the sheer bulk of my findings precluded the usual night-flying tactics which had brought me safely through so many journeys with valuable cargo. This time only the very pick of the gems could be carried in my saddle bags. It took a mule to carry the rest. A slow-plodding mule, whereas I longed to gallop Moro through the danger zone at night and get clear quickly as I had done so many times before.

That was the one journey on which I took an escort with me—two Indians armed with shotguns. But I made them walk ahead of me, one in front of the mule and one behind it while I took care that Moro did not outstrip them. . . . I didn't want two armed Indians walking behind me while I was in charge of a mule-load of green fire. Slowly we plodded through the forest-shrouded trail—a mere tunnel in the almost solid vegetation—which climbed slowly to the Sauchi Pass. I kept one eye on the Indians ahead of me and the other roving the thick green walls on either side, alert for the movement which would tell of a hidden sniper beside our path. Mile after mile passed without untoward happening, except that the mule-pack slipped—mule packs always do slip at the wrong moment—at the spot most likely for a hold-up, and I had to wait fifteen minutes in badly simulated patience while the load was adjusted. But either I had hidden effectively the value of my find or the local

light-fingered gentry had shirked the issue. As for my Indian escort, they thought they were carrying only my baggage, or at least I comforted myself with that hope.

I breathed lighter once we were over the pass and plunging downward into more settled country. There was still risk, but much less chance of a hold-up among smiling farmlands than there had been in the grim, forest-shrouded slopes on the Chivor side of the range. Even so, that night in Guateque village I feigned sickness as an excuse to keep to the room where I had shoved my precious mule-packs under my bed. I slept with one eye open and my revolver under my pillow.

On the second night I slept in Bogota with the more valuable and less bulky part of my cargo locked in the safe of the Europa Hotel.

On the third day I accompanied the mule-packs in a taxi to the office of our agent and felt ten years younger when he gave me a receipt for the table-load of sealed canvas bags.

This time I took a different route on my way back to Chivor. The first night out of the capital I slept in the considerable country town of Gacheta. On the second night I was back with my old friend Carlos Piedrahita in the feudal village of Gachala—the same village in which Carlos and I had made our debut as undertakers nearly two years before. Poor Carlos! He was already sickening with the stomach ulcer which was soon to destroy him.

On the third day, on my last lap home, I once more rode down the right bank of the Guavio River, through those forested terraces down which clear mountain torrents leaped in white foam. With the bonus due me on that last emerald shipment we could now buy that coveted tract of land and still have ample capital over for its development.

I felt triumphant. For almost four years I had fought for this hour. First I had fought the company for the life of the mine. Then I had waged a long campaign against Joaquin the bandit that the life of the mine should not be bled from

it. All those years I had, almost unaided, imposed my will on the unruly Indians of the Chivor region. Held them down by bluff. Ruled them far more strictly than the loosely administered laws of a frontier district could ever rule them. Nowadays, I held that wild and beautiful Chivor country in the grip of one hand while, with the other, I wrested its treasure from it. Yes. I had earned that bonus, I felt. Earned too, the peace and security which the ultimate development of our estate would bring.

But there was one small flaw in my happiness that day. My memory would keep harping on the remark the agent had made when I was about to leave him. "Do you think anyone can sell this table-load of emeralds? You've dug enough emeralds to set the world's market rocking on its heels."

But I cast the flaw from me as I rode through the sunlit Guavio valley through which quick cloud shadows trailed. Sell those emeralds! Of course they would sell them. Of all the women in the world there was not one but desired more emeralds than she possessed. Even if he didn't sell them at once he still owed me the bonus.

2. The Offensive

1.

The Birth of "Las Cascadas"

HARDLY had I reached the Chivor mine on my return from Bogota when I got New York's reaction to the news of the king's ransom in green gems which I had just delivered—news which I had announced by cable only after their safe delivery to our agent. The reaction was expressed in a cable.

REDUCE LABOR FORCE TO ONE HUNDRED MEN

That jolted me. In my varied mining experience I had found that the manager usually had to put the brakes on when he had been lucky enough to make a pot of money for the mine owners. The manager had to counsel caution in an endeavor to prevent them from expanding the mine organization to dimensions so unwieldy that the limited development of the mine could have no hope of carrying them. The first reaction of most of the mining companies of my acquaintance would have been to cable the manager a vote

of thanks from the board of directors; second, officially to announce a vastly increased establishment and a proposed scale of expenditure beyond all reason; third, I should have received from the directors and more important stockholders a flock of private letters suggesting various sons and nephews for the various new posts created.

But not that crowd who directed Chivor's destinies in New York. All the thanks I got from them was a curt order to reduce the establishment to the uneconomic minimum which had existed when I had taken over the mine nearly four years previously. *One hundred men!* Why, the mine had never produced effectively when only one hundred men had been employed. True I had bottomed on my first pit with one hundred men, but that had only been possible in a reasonable period because I had been lucky enough to strike emerald formation nearer the surface than usual.

I cabled New York a heated protest.

Like lightning the answer flashed back.

CONFIRM ORIGINAL INSTRUCTIONS

Then I shrugged my shoulders, metaphorically. After all, Chivor was their mine, even if I had injected so much of my life-essence into it that it felt like my own. I could appreciate too that things were a bit difficult just now in the States, with the tragic Wall Street crash only a few months old. Chivor's difficulties, seemed to make our new land venture even more alluring. That hacienda would give us a platform of refuge, should the mine eventually fail. Then, with so few men to supervise at the mine, I should have plenty of leisure to supervise the preliminaries of our own private venture.

Within the month I had bought and paid for that series of forested terraces that had been in my mind so long. *Las Cascades* we called it. The Waterfalls. I estimated the tract at five thousand acres. Five thousand acres of valuable timber land for the price of a building lot in a moderate sub-

urban development. No surveyor's instrument had ever set its steel shod tripod on that land. In fact, some of the upper, wilder part of it had probably never felt the foot of man. Not even the Indian hunters ever penetrated among those forbidding peaks of the Monte Cristo range whose faces frowned eastward over the boundless *llanos* while the backs of their forest-green cloaks dipped their hems in the rushing waters of the Guavio River. That was my lower boundary, the Guavio River. Hot country there. If at that lower end of the property we should build our house, strange tropical flowers would grace our garden and our meals would be taken the year round on a mosquito-screened veranda. The upper boundary was the watershed of the Monte Cristo range, that row of saw-tooth peaks, stark and naked above timberline, which jutted skyward from the uppermost of those forested terraces which had first attracted my attention to the place. If our house should be built on that upper section we should dine every night of the year in a room in which a fire roared and the flowers which graced our garden would be those of the colder northern climes. Our western boundary was the *Cano Blanco*—the White Torrent—a highly mineralized stream, milky white, which issued from a vast bed of iron ore near our upper boundary and sped toward the Guavio through a narrow cleft. That cleft was hundreds of feet deep in places, but so narrow that it could be jumped here and there, a rift in the mountain where thousands of night-flying birds nested in the black caverns deep below the forested surface of the ground. On the east we were bounded by *Cano Claro*—the Clear Torrent—which leaped from the black mouth of a cleft in an upper terrace and dropped in a feathery white fall to a still round pool beside the trail that was our only road. Every grain of sand was visible in the bottom of that pool. On my first passage of the stream—while I was returning home from the *llanos*—I had blithely ridden Moro into that pool to let him drink and only realized its depth when he was swimming and I



Sketch Map of the **GUAVIO VALLEY** *by the Author*

was submerged to the waist as I sat in the saddle. Six feet of water and the little grains of sand visible in the bottom—so clear the water was, and God, how cold! But we selected neither the hot nor the cold climates for our house. We would build it in the middle—about five thousand feet above sea level. That is the world's best climate, in my opinion. The latitude of the equator or thereabouts and a mile above the level of the sea. Warm sun by day and a chill that justifies a small fire by night. Coffee grows in that climate too, and coffee was to be the mainstay of *Las Cascadas* until our new industry was established. That new industry was to be tea—the one crop which no one in the Western Hemisphere was producing commercially. There would be no competition for our product in the Colombian markets, except from imported teas which paid a heavy customs duty. *Las Cascadas* was to be a tea and coffee plantation with the emphasis on the tea, and we would only put down enough grassland, when we had cleared the forest, to feed our riding stock and enough cattle to supply us with milk and beef.

Within a month Margaret and the children had moved from Chivor—moving house by pack-mule was a new one on Margaret—and taken up temporary quarters on our land. *Our land!* Bought and paid for. We had well christened the place The Waterfalls because their music was in our ears that first night I spent with my family in their rough camp in the forest, and it remained as an accompaniment to our every action during the years we lived there. *Pianissimo* when the falls were mere feathery wisps in the dry season, a roaring *crescendo* when the rains of the wet season lashed the peaks above and the mountain torrents leaped from the terraces in solid columns of water.

In the Chivor region I would as soon have allowed my family to live without armed protection as I would have installed them in a den of wolves. But the *Las Cascadas* side of the Guavio River was different. So impassable a barrier had that river constituted through the ages that the Indians

who lived on the *Las Cascadas* bank—in the *Departamento* of Cundinamarca—differed radically from those who inhabited its Chivor side in the *Departamento* of Boyaca. The Indians round *Las Cascadas* were decent, hard-working folk. Nothing of the swashbuckler in their make-up, and banditry was unknown among them. Their ambitions centered in the little clearings they cultivated along the river bank. Their crimes seemed limited to the theft of a rake, a hoe or some article of household ware. . . . Articles of personal use seemed sacred to them. You could leave your coat hanging up beside the trail for days and find it there on your return with the contents of the pockets intact. But sexually their morals were pretty awful, if one judges by accepted standards. In fact they hadn't any morals. They copulated freely and almost openly on every possible occasion. Seduction ruled among them as a favorite hobby, not rape. When a woman is willing, there can be no rape. At *Las Cascadas* we had two Indian maids who slept in one bed in their little room next to the kitchen. It was quite a common occurrence for one of them to entertain her lover in the common bed while the other presumably slept or even for both of them to entertain their lovers in the same bed at the same time. But our Indians had their virtues, too. Loyalty was one. They served us very faithfully for the years we lived among them. They were kind and hospitable and had a great love for children.

Once back in Chivor my eye wandered often to the terraced sweep of mountain slope which was *Las Cascadas*. With quickened pulse I watched the brownish patch of forest clearing as it grew daily before the axes of Margaret's Indians who were cutting a wide swath into the wilderness. They were felling valuable timber. Red cedar and white. Black walnut and oak. Ash, yellow laurel and a score of beautiful other woods unknown in northern lands. But we had five thousand acres of such timber and some of it must be sacrificed to clear land for our plantations and pastures. The

rest of it would remain standing until such time as a motor road made economically possible its transportation to the cold timberless plateau round Bogota, where building timber was at a premium. Such a road must come some day because the Guavio valley offered the only feasible northern route for a road between the capital city of Bogota and those fertile plains which could not long remain as empty as when I had ridden across them a couple of years before. At first, lack of transportation would be our main difficulty, but both tea and coffee were high-priced enough commodities to stand the cost of mule-back carriage across the eastern *cordillera* of the Andes to the markets of the Magdalena River valley. In addition, we could expect three years of hard work and expenditure before our coffee bushes could be expected to bear and help our slimming pocketbooks. As for tea. First, we must secure tea seed from India, China or Japan. Then four years to wait till our first plucking. After that we must devise our own methods of preparation. Labor too, must be trained for tea. Those dumpy-looking Indian women must have their stubby fingers suppld so that with their nails they could nip off a tiny lush green tea leaf without damaging the stem on which it grew. Yes. The development of a tea plantation would be slow and costly, but once successfully developed it would put the world at our feet.

At last Margaret's two-hundred-acre patch was cleared, sufficient acreage for our needs. From the mine the hundred-foot boles of the larger trees looked like jumbled matchsticks scattered over the clearing. From the mine I could watch clearly the progress of our development and at night Margaret and I winked friendly flashes across the gulf of the Guavio valley with our flashlights, and yet I had to ride hard from dawn to dark to reach the place on my week-end visits, so tortured was the trail.

Hardly had the first great forest giants crashed on *Las Cascadas* when a dozen pairs of sawyers had set to work sawing by hand the timber for the house. According to the

plans we had drawn before Margaret had left Chivor, the house would be built of wood. How many evenings had we discussed those plans, adding here and subtracting there till we had the house we both desired!

Then one day, a momentous day, I drove four pegs into the ground on *Las Cascadas*—the four corners of our house. It was set so that from our broad veranda our gaze would travel up the valley into which white waters leaped from the mountain sides as the Guavio's tributaries rushed to join her—over a hundred miles of mountain and forest. *Las Cascadas* was the most beautiful place my eyes ever rested on in a lifetime of wandering.

Meantime, at the mine with my now scanty force of labor—what foolishness it was that the richest emerald mine in the world should employ fewer hands than we did on our own land—Marco and I worried down an emerald pit near the one which had proved so successful and given us the blaze of green fire which had set the world's emerald market rocking. God! One hundred men sunk the pit so slowly as compared to the pace of the three hundred.

Then another bombshell burst. Another cable from New York, unheralded by any warning:

CLOSE MINE DOWN IMMEDIATELY LEAVING ONE WATCHMAN IN CHARGE STOP RETURN AT ONCE TO NEW YORK

Great Heavens! Close the mine down with one watchman only to protect it! God help that watchman, be he ever so valiant. Those Boyaca Indian devils would have him run off and the mine looted before I had been away for long. First, they'd loot the portable property. Then, becoming bolder, they would organize themselves into a mining gang and root for emeralds at the bottom of the new pit. They might find emeralds there, too. Already we had reached emerald formation, and I was looking for production to begin any day now. With its smaller area, our pit had bottomed more quickly than I had at first dared to hope.

Return at once to New York! What the devil did they need me for in New York? Still, they had a right to order me wherever they wanted so long as I was in their pay. There were things I could do on my own account in New York. Collect that bonus, for instance. I had another scheme, too. For months it had been revolving in my mind.

I knew emeralds now. I knew more of emerald mining than any man living probably. What the emerald mining industry needed was organization. Another De Beers Consolidated such as Cecil Rhodes had formed fifty years before when the Kimberley discoveries had threatened to swamp the world's diamond market. I was no Rhodes in stature, but I probably had as good financial connections in New York as had Rhodes in London when he started. I had better connections, probably, because I was known by reputation to a good many people in the New York financial world while Cecil Rhodes had been quite unknown when he had landed in London and wheedled half a million pounds out of the astute Otto Beit with which to start off Kimberley on the right foot.

If my employers forced me to go to New York, I'd spend some time trying to get a combine going to mine emeralds in Colombia on a really large scale. But Margaret! Could she handle that *Las Cascadas* job during my absence? I might be absent months because in business when you have a new deal by the tail you must hang onto it lest it turn and bite you. It was a tall order for a woman to hack a home for the family out of virgin forest. But Margaret . . . By God, she could do it. She was dauntless. My heart swelled with pride for the woman she had grown to be. How Colombia had developed her, made her competent to face and conquer the problems of the pioneer, to rise to any occasion. Why, two years before she would have fainted at the very thought of living alone with her children in a primitive shelter while, day by day, she supervised the labor of a hundred savages as they hewed a home for us out of the wilderness. Now she

revelled in it to the point that she was jealous of my least attempt at supervision. She was even keener on *Las Cascadas* than I.

Still I put up one more fight for the Chivor mine before I obeyed the orders which, in my opinion rang its death-knell. I sent another cable to the New York office.

ONE WATCHMAN UTTERLY INEFFECTIVE PROTECT MINE STOP WE ARE IN EMERALD FORMATION EXPECTING PRODUCTION DAILY STOP IF YOU INSIST ON CLOSING MINE ALLOW ME APPROACH COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT FOR POLICE PROTECTION DURING MY ABSENCE OR LOCAL INHABITANTS WILL LOOT PIT AND YOU WILL LOSE RESULTS THIS YEAR'S EXPENDITURE

Back flashed the reply. Curt.

OBEY INSTRUCTIONS

God, what fools the men were, I reflected. How utterly ignorant of our local conditions in spite of the dozens of reports I had sent them! They probably thought my reports of difficulties were deliberately colored in order to exaggerate my achievement. But I fired one last shot for the mine I had put so much of myself into.

ADVISE YOU REFLECT STOP I DISCLAIM ALL RESPONSIBILITY IF YOU INSIST

Again the reply was prompt. Insulting, too, this time.

DO AS YOU ARE TOLD STOP ALL FURTHER CABLES WILL BE CHARGED TO YOUR PERSONAL ACCOUNT

There was gratitude, I reflected bitterly. I had made that mine just as surely as the sculptor makes the marble figure out of a rough-hewn block of stone. And the owners were wrecking it without winking an eyelash for reasons which I could not understand. Hundreds of men had toiled for years to make that mine fecund. Millions of women throughout the world ached for the fiery green gems which it produced through our travail. Heartaches had gone into the making of it. Sweat, tears. No blood had been shed yet; that was to

come later when an attempt would be made to retrieve the error. And a group of well-dressed men in a New York office studied columns of figures and struck the life from the mine with the stroke of a pen.

Marco wrung my hand before he mounted, and his gray-headed wife wept openly as she rode away. With a heavy heart I watched them riding up the trail, their son, the product of so many mine candles burned to St. Christopher, sitting proudly in front of his father on the saddle.

Then I packed up all the stores. Locked them in the buildings and gave old Epaminondas the key. The old boy's dull black eyes brightened when he took it from my hand. His farm plot would be well stocked with tools, I judged, before his fellows ran him off the property and looted the rest. I had selected Epaminondas as the watchman because I had always had a soft spot for the old ruffian since he had found me the first good emerald which Chivor had produced in modern times and, by giving him the key, I insured his having the pick of the tools. Those tools would be looted anyway, select what watchman I might.

When the last of the men had been paid off, I mounted Moro and rode sadly down the trail, preceded by a pack-mule with my personal effects. At *El Alto del Guyo* I halted a moment, living once more the scene which had ended my feud with Joaquin the bandit. I had risked my life that day for those New York directors. I had handled the mine four years for them. In those four years I had handled cash and emeralds worth more than a million dollars, and in all that time there had been no semblance of a check on me. The ingenuity of suspicious man could have devised no workable check—conditions being what they had been. The pick of the emerald production might have stuck to my fingers and the mine owners would have been none the wiser. Half of the crooks in Colombia had approached me at one time or another, shown me how they could dispose of the gems if I would pass them on. What a fool I had been! And yet, were

conditions to repeat themselves I should probably do the same again. When a man puts his life into a mine he can hardly steal from it, any more than a woman can steal from the child she bears. And a man does have to look himself in the face every morning when he shaves.

With a heavy heart I turned Moro to the *Las Cascadas* trail which he was beginning to take naturally by this time, so often did he travel it. Into the vast green abyss of the Guavio valley I rode, facing toward the blue, serrated peaks of the Farallones range which guarded the western end of it, mysterious and, as far as I then knew, untrodden by man. Little could I guess that adventure was even then plodding slowly toward me from those frowning cliffs which brooded in the sunlight fifty miles away.

After a couple of days with Margaret at *Las Cascadas*, Moro bore me to Gachala, where I spent the night with Carlos Piedrahita on the first stage of my long journey to New York.

2.

Subtler Methods
of Banditry than
Joaquin's

NEXT morning when I mounted Moro under the big *guayabo* tree in Carlos Piedrahita's stable yard the gray devil kicked up his heels and made a benevolent attempt at bucking as soon as he felt me so firmly seated in the saddle that I wouldn't mind, waltzed out of the gate sideways and stretched himself at a gallop along the Murca meadows. He was feeling good that morning, better than his master, who had been depressed ever since his forced abandonment of the Chivor mine. No man who is keen on his job can see four years of effort kicked into the gutter without feeling it, even though the effort were made in the employ of someone else. But my low spirits failed to survive a quarter of a mile of Moro's smooth career through the lush green meadows of the Murca valley. White water fussing at the river boulders, grass green as English turf, blue sky and

bright mountain sunshine would have made Job cheerful. Besides I had not gone far when a curious sight made me rein Moro to a halt.

There was a queer little procession crossing the ford of the river from the farther side where the mountain slope swept upward in a thirty-mile curve of forest to the grim, turreted peaks of the Farallone range. First came a bedraggled-looking Indian, leading a skinny packmule. Holding to the mule's tail to steady himself against the waist-high current, was a white man. Ragged, bearded and dirty, a tuft or two of flaxen hair sticking through the holes in his battered felt hat, like wisps of hay from a badly thatched rick. Dripping, the trio emerged on my side of the ford. Once across, the Indian subsided dejectedly on the sunny side of a great river-worn boulder while the mule began to wolf the lush pasture, as though it hadn't savored such fare for months. The white man sat down on a rock, took off one dilapidated boot and began to rub the sole of his sockless foot with the delicate touch one uses to salute a blister.

I knew that white man. He was a Swiss by the name of Gotz. Some years back he had made a moderate pile out of oil land options and then bunged it all into a copper mine that was no good. Lost the lot, as any competent mining engineer could have told him he would, had Gotz liked to pay the fee. After that, the Swiss had gone in for prospecting and acquired a reputation, unusual among prospectors, for reliability. Gotz was of the stolid type, without enough imagination to foster the self-delusion to which most prospectors become subject. At least, that's how the mining fraternity judged him and what little I had seen of him tended to confirm the judgment. The last I had heard of Gotz was that he had hurt his head in a fall and been taken into hospital for an operation. He had recovered, evidently. Now he looked to be on his way back from a prospecting trip, a hard one, obviously. From the foot-hill country, I guessed, because there was a trail leading back from Murca ford, past the

Farallone range to the plains. The same trail I had followed on my way up from those plains a couple of years before.

"Hullo, Gotz. Where have you sprung from?" I heeled Moro over to where the Swiss sat rubbing his foot, a look of self-pity on his once round but now emaciated face.

Gotz glanced up sharply, looking oddly like a bear with his long nose and remnants of a once pudgy figure, like a bear that has just hibernated through a damned tough winter.

"Don Pedro!" He jumped to his feet and hobbled eagerly toward me. "This lucky is. I coming to look for you was when my foot better got."

"What did you want with me?"

"I found something have." He put one paw on my knee.

"Gotz, you know I don't speculate in mining. You'd better get hold of some Antioquian chap to back your find, if you've made one. They are the lads to gamble on a prospect."

"But this too big is for Colombians. To you I bring it because you in New York have connections with big mining people."

"You're in luck then. I happen to be on my way to New York now."

"By Gott!" His face brightened for a moment, but he was too worn out to be cheerful for long. Wearily he lifted his bare foot and began prodding at a big white blister with the discolored nail of his thumb.

I slipped off my horse. "Sit down on that rock while I fix that blister for you." With the point of my penknife I drilled a small hole in the blister to let the water out. "When you get to the village rub some tallow on the sole of your foot and you'll be as right as rain in a few days. Now tell me what you've found. I've a long day's ride ahead of me, so don't take too long."

I lit my pipe and sent a fragrant white puff of smoke into the cool morning air. Gotz sniffed the smoke so hungrily that I rummaged in my saddle bags for a packet of cigarettes that I usually carried for the purpose of regaling any deserv-

ing Indian who might render me service on my travels. I rarely smoked the flimsy things myself.

"Now tell me."

Gotz drew a long draught of cigarette smoke into his lungs. "I have found something." His hand fumbled in a ragged pocket. In a moment he would extract a mineral sample for my dazzlement and begin to extol the richness of his find. I knew the ways of prospectors too well. I'd been one myself not so many years back. Still, Gotz should be worth listening to, with his reputation for reliability. His story should be worth more than that of most prospectors whose romancing must usually be taken with whole handfuls of salt. But even the best fiction-mongers of the fraternity should be listened to, as even the most self-hypnotized among them do stumble on valuable mines at times.

Sure enough, Gotz' hand came out of his pocket and passed me a small lump of quartzite. It was a formation like that of the famous Johannesburg reef. Gray quartz with tiny pure white quartz pebbles embedded in it. By the look of it, Gotz might have picked it out of the fabulous South African formation which, for more than a generation, had produced about half the gold output of the world. My eyes popped for a moment. But had it gold in it? Similarity of appearance was no criterion. I fumbled in my pocket for the lens I always carried, turned till the sunlight fell at the right angle, and scrutinized the small piece of rock with care. By God, it did carry gold! Here and there a tiny dull yellow pinpoint or streak showed under the powerful glass. For a second, it almost hypnotized me, as though I were a greenhorn. Strange, how the mere sight of gold makes a man lose his sense of proportion, unless he has handled a lot of the lovely yellow metal. But it took more than a rich bit of ore to make a mine.

"How much of this kind of stuff is in sight?" I asked the Swiss as I handed the specimen back. You must have quantity—tens of thousands of tons of quantity—to make even the richest ore worth the while of capital to develop it.

"Millions of tons in sight," Gotz spoke solemnly, as though reciting a litany.

"Get along man, talk sense." I laughed even in my exasperation. A virgin vein with millions of tons in sight! He'd be telling me he had found the Philosopher's Stone next. Why, it took mile-deep shafts and league-long tunnels to develop that amount of tonnage. Very few of even the biggest mines in the world had millions of tons in sight. A virgin vein usually consists of a streak of white quartz sticking out of a mountainside. A few tons in sight, and the rest might or might not exist underground. Disgustedly, I reached for Moro's stirrup. I had no time to listen to fairy stories. If I had mounted and ridden off then, when I intended to, the mining world would have missed a flutter which rocked it to its foundations.

But Gotz held onto me, gripped me so tight by the arm that his long dirty fingernails pressed into my flesh. "Listen, Don Pedro. You think I lie about millions of tons. If you was to tell me about millions of tons, I think you lie, too. But this time the lie the truth is. The vein twenty foot wide is, and I follow her for fifteen miles. Millions right is. I swear—*palabra ingles*—by the word of an Englishman." His protruding blue eyes were moist and pleading.

"Where the hell is this marvel of yours?" I was still exasperated. But, whereas a minute before I had been exasperated at Gotz for lying, I was now exasperated with myself for half believing him.

"The Farallones."

God! The Farallones! From where I stood I could see their cold blue peaks riding serene on the sea of all but untrodden forest which lapped their stark rocky buttresses. Those wild peaks might be hiding anything. And what a trip the man must have had! That region was uninhabited. Unexplored even, as far as I knew. No local supplies. No wonder Gotz' Indian sat dejectedly in the sunshine while Gotz rubbed a blistered foot and was unable to display the prospector's

usual enthusiasm in his find. They must have been half starved.

As though he had read my thoughts, the Swiss continued, "Damn cold. Cold hell is the Farallones. This sample I took at fifteen thousand feet where water every night freezes. Beans we eat. More beans. Every day beans, but not enough beans. Then one day a bear I kill. Then we plenty eat for a while."

"Any more samples?"

"Four more in the mule-pack. From the same place I take them."

"You should have taken them some distance apart. Taken like that they would have given a better average value."

Gotz waved one paw in a dejected motion. "The dynamite we lose while we cross a river. All but one stick. So I must four samples from one shot take."

The upshot of the meeting was that Gotz agreed to have his four samples assayed by a reputable assayer of my acquaintance in Bogota. As soon as the assayer should deliver to him the certificates of value, Gotz was to airmail them to me in New York with a full report on the property. He also agreed to give me a percentage on any sale I should effect for him with New York mining groups.

It took me three weeks to reach New York although a plane service had recently been inaugurated which could have landed me there in two days. But, instead of flying, I decided to take a river steamer to the coast and catch one of the United Fruit Company's liners there. I had always hankered to see at close quarters the river life on Colombia's great artery of traffic, but hitherto had only flashed over it in a plane. Besides, I did need a rest after four strenuous years, and this was my chance. The only time a mining engineer ever gets to dawdle on the way is during his return to headquarters—and then not often. On his way from headquarters to tackle a new property he is always too anxious to get his teeth into the new job. As it happened in this case

my river steamer went aground for a day or two on a sand-bank and caused me to miss by an hour the Fruit Company's boat on which my passage was booked from Barranquilla. I still had a chance to catch her, however, while she loaded bananas at Santa Marta, her next port of call. This entailed spending the night on a filthy little steamer which traversed nightly the inland lagoons between the two ports.

Warted with *chinche* bites, I boarded my steamer next morning, where she lay at her berth under that amazing Santa Marta snowcap. Millions of bananas were coming aboard in a steady stream over half a dozen mechanical conveyors, on their way also to the New York market.

I traveled second class. I usually did so, out of preference. In this case my choice was rewarded by meeting immediately in the second-class bar Lord William Percy, whom I had last met in the Anglo-American Club in Bogota. That distinguished descendent of Henry Hotspur traveled second for the same reason I did—because he preferred the company there. Lord William was a “doer.” Birds were his hobby. The war of 1914 had caught him on a whaler, frozen in, north of the Arctic Circle, where he had gone to study some kind of bird life. Like the rest of us soon-to-be-disillusioned youths of that generation, he had been frantic to get into the show before it was over, so he had chartered a dog-team from some Eskimos and trekked a thousand miles or so down into Canada. He got into the show just in time to get pipped at First Ypres.

I've noticed that most of the “doers” who deal in tangible things, like mines, ships, wild animals and savages travel second. In the second-class bar that red-faced seafaring man at the bar is the skipper of a tramp which got beached in a hurricane and lost half her crew. The shabby-looking man with the sallow complexion has been prospecting for years round the headwaters of the Amazon, made a bit of a strike and is on his way to blow it before the malaria in his veins can rob him of his appetite for wine and women. While the

quiet-looking man in the corner is an oil geologist just back from the Sinu country—that wilderness of swampland where the Magdalena River meets her twin sister, the Cauca. In his battered kit-bag are some rough rolls of dried bark, the fabled aphrodisiac of the Sinu Indians which medical science has been crazy to get its hands on for years. He can tell, too, some hair-raising yarns of the sexual orgies the Sinu Indians indulge in when their medicine men have dosed them up with it. Yes, give me the second-class for good company. The society in the first class can be met in any expensive hotel ashore. The second class does things. The first class only pays to have them done.

Lord William and I whiled away a good part of the voyage arguing about the correct species of a queer-looking waterfowl I had once seen on Lake Guatavita. We made a pact to go together sometime to that cold, God-forsaken sheet of mountain water to settle the point. We never did go, although we were to meet now and then during the years ahead and at each meeting remind one another of the promise.

We docked in New York early on a cold November morning. An hour or two later I was reviewing my program over bacon and eggs in the cosy restaurant of the Explorers' Club.

The office first, I decided, to collect what was due me. I had a shrewd idea the management would want to terminate my contract too. The amount I expected would see *Las Cascadas* more than sufficiently financed and leave enough over to cover my expenses in New York while I worked on the two propositions I had in mind. These were of course the sale of Gotz' new discovery—if it should prove to be worth anything—and some kind of amalgamation of the emerald-mining industry. I had devoted a lot of thought to emeralds since I had made the big strike at the Chivor mine. What I wanted to accomplish was something like Rhodes had done in the diamond industry in my father's time. By getting the industry under single control he had so manipu-

lated the market that there was always a good price to be obtained for diamond production. It seemed to me that the emerald industry was just ripe for such a scheme. What reason could anyone have for closing down the Chivor mine in the hour of its triumph, except that they found it hard to sell the suddenly enhanced production? Yes. I had proved that Chivor could produce emeralds in large quantities. Now, if I could gain control of both Chivor and Muzo—the two mines which had produced most of the emeralds in the world—and raise enough capital so that their production could be fed to the market gradually without the mines having to live from hand to mouth . . . I had no set scheme, and my ideas were nebulous as yet, but I wanted to sound the possibilities of the scheme while I was in New York.

I chartered a taxi for downtown, and reviewed the situation as I saw it. Fancy, shutting down such a money-maker as Chivor because there was a temporary slump in the emerald market. I wondered how long old Epaminondas had held the bandits off and was willing to bet that he had never even tried but had taken his pick of the mine tools as soon as I had gone, loaded up a mule with them and gone home, leaving the mine completely abandoned. Small blame to him either, I felt. Why should he risk his life? I was willing to bet that a horde of Indians were already scraping and rummaging round the bottom of that last emerald pit before I had even got clear of the country. But, if that were so, it would take weeks for the people in far-away New York to get the news.

Of my dealings with the owners * of the Chivor mine, the least said the better. To say that I was bitterly disappointed would be a master stroke of understatement. Suffice it to note that, after consulting a lawyer of my acquaintance, I accepted the cancellation of my employment contract and the depres-

* I understand that the financial control of the Chivor mine is now in other hands.—*The Author*.

sion settlement of my bonus based upon the price at which the company had sold the emeralds. I was in no position to undertake a long and involved legal battle, particularly as the depression had wrought dire changes in many business arrangements. Therefore, with what good grace I could, I set about putting into effect my dream of an emerald combine which would control the world supply.

I thought out my program in New York. First, the check they had given me, was big enough to see me through a stay of several months, time enough to determine whether my two schemes had meat in them or not. I'd gamble the money against the chance of making on those two deals at least the sum which I had been counting on getting from my erstwhile employers. Gold and emeralds. Gotz' gold strike and the chance of getting a lease on Chivor as a preliminary to an emerald merger. That merger scheme would need capital—big capital. Gotz' gold proposition must wait, of course, until I had more information about it—till I received the assay certificates he had promised to send me.

The emerald merger was predicated on my being able to get a lease on the Chivor and the Muzo mines. Ambitious? Yes, very, but it was a sound scheme, well within the bounds of practical business. These two mines produced the bulk of the world's emerald supply and the man who controlled them both had a corner on these gems for the world market. Both mines were in Colombia and could be operated by the same management. I was sure that the owners of Chivor would part with their property once they realized that bandits were looting it—as I was confident they were doing even now. As for Muzo, the Colombian government owned it, but had shut it down some years ago because they couldn't make it show a profit. But that fact didn't worry me. Chivor had been about to shut down for the same reason when I had taken on the management of it. What I had done to Chivor I could do to Muzo, if ever I got my hands on it. No

need to expatiate on Chivor's possibilities as I had just proved them.

Yes, I decided. I would concentrate on getting the capital for the emerald merger till more information was forthcoming about the gold strike in the Farallones, and at the same time keep my eyes peeled for a chance at a lease on Chivor. But I needed help. My lawyer's remark about the fate of "suckers" in New York had had a deal of truth in it. I must find a man who knew the ropes in New York, a man who had the right of way into the offices of the big financiers, a guide to see me safely past the thickets where the financial tigers laired. I knew the man I wanted, too, if I could only get him to throw in with me.

3.

Mining Deals

MACFARLANE was the man I had in mind. He knew the ropes. With him beside me, my emerald promotion stood a sporting chance of success. An oil operator originally, Macfarlane had been one of the pioneers of the Oklahoma field. He got into the game with Sinclair, Doheny and the rest, but, unlike them, Macfarlane had retired when he had made what he considered enough millions, and amused himself by playing the stock market when he wasn't racing Mercedes cars in Europe against King Alfonso of Spain.

If I could interest this man in the nebulous scheme for an emerald merger which for months had been revolving in my brain, he stood a better chance of steering it to success than anyone I could think of. Macfarlane was already interested in Colombia, too. Although I had never chanced to meet him there, I knew that he frequently flew between New York and Bogota. I had heard of him from many sources and knew more about him than he was liable to suspect. As far as I knew he had never heard of me.

As I seated myself across the desk from him, I saw that he was kindly, brilliant, and courageous. I felt that nothing life could concoct in the way of catastrophes would ever daunt this little bulldog of a man already in his sixties.

He leaned back in a huge swivel chair while he eyed my card. Then, unexpectedly, he grinned. I liked that friendly attitude. "I'd give a dollar to know what you said to those fellows yesterday," he remarked, his faded blue eyes twinkling and a network of wrinkles altering the contours of his face as a set of white teeth flashed for a second at me.

I almost rose from my chair in my astonishment. "How the devil did you know I said anything to anyone yesterday?"

Again the teeth flashed. "No mystery about it. I was waiting in the outer office when you stalked out as though you owned it. Our friend was almost in a state of collapse when I saw him.

"I know a good deal about you, Mr. Rainier," he continued. "I know something of your relations with that crowd. Also I have followed with interest the history of the Chivor mine since you first began to squeeze emeralds from it about four years ago. You haven't called on me to discuss the weather. Now what can I do for you?"

I did not answer for a moment. The man's apparent omniscience had disconcerted me. I must collect my thoughts and not blurt out my proposition like a schoolboy. As I hesitated, my eyes wandered to the wall of the office opposite me. A bow hung there—the kind that the Motilone Indians of Colombia used. Those Indians were bad. They shot white men on sight. They were little stunted chaps, yet their bow staves were so heavy that, strong man though I was, my strength did not suffice to draw an arrow to the feather. The Motilones, I believed, must draw their bows with their feet, lying on their backs, to drive a five-foot arrow through a man so that the wicked barbed shaft protruded a foot behind his back. Macfarlane must have collected that bow when he had led an expedition through the Motilone country ten years

before; when he had discovered one of the world's great oil fields, a field which had set the crown of fame on the wealth he had previously acquired in Oklahoma. Somehow, the sight of that bow put me into focus with the man across the desk from me. He had once been of my totem, although now he haunted this bandit-ridden city of New York.

As clearly as I could, I laid before him my scheme for the amalgamation of the emerald industry. In effect it was simple. We must acquire control of both the Chivor and Muzo mines, either by purchase or lease, raise the capital to exploit them and organize sales so that the market would absorb the vastly increased emerald production that a scientific development of the Colombian emerald formations would throw on it.

Puffing gently at an aromatic cigar Macfarlane heard me out in silence. "Have you any reason to believe that you can get hold of those two mines?" he asked. "The Colombian government always used to sit as tight on Muzo as a hen on eggs."

"Even so, if we made an attractive offer the Colombian government ought to be ripe for any proposal that would give them some revenue out of it."

"Do you think it will produce?" His eyes rose to mine.

I shrugged my shoulders. "Naturally, I should like to examine the mine before we commit ourselves to anything. Chivor was supposed to be worked out when I first went to it four years ago."

"How about Chivor? Plenty more emeralds?"

"Plenty."

"Chivor will be hard to get hold of at the moment."

"Why? It's shut down, too. Besides, it is already overrun with bandits, unless I miss my guess."

"Because there's a split among the stockholders, there is a fight for control. We'll have to wait till one side or other is firmly in the saddle before we put up a proposition."

I whistled. So that was it! I suddenly saw the reason for

many things that had been happening regarding the Chivor mine. The blessed property had become so valuable that the owners had started to fight about it and in the fight I had been squeezed out. But wait! Wait till they had news of bandits on the mine. I was just as sure that would happen as I was that emeralds are green. Whichever side had the control when that news came would be wondering what to do with the prize they had won.

"Yes." Macfarlane gazed fixedly at the white ash of his cigar. "We'll have to wait a week or two before we tackle the emerald merger. We can't do anything about Muzo, in any case, till you get back to Colombia. Tomorrow I'll scout round and see what the situation really is among the Chivor stockholders."

"You say 'we.' Do you mean it?"

Mac nodded. "I've often thought about such a merger myself, but I needed some one with detailed information on emerald mining before I could tackle it. Now, have you got anything else on your mind? Any other proposition we could work on?"

There was the Gotz discovery, of course, although it was not ripe yet. Half hesitatingly I outlined my conversation with the Swiss beside Murca ford on that morning I had ridden Moro on the first stage of my journey to New York. Mac's cigar went out as he listened, and the white ash dropped in a flowery streak down the front of his immaculate waistcoat without his noticing it.

"Do you think there is anything in his story?" he asked. I thought his voice sounded studiously controlled.

"God knows." I threw out my hands. "You know what prospectors are. But if what he claims is true about the property it should be a world-beater, with all that tonnage in sight."

"A world-beater. You've said it." He re-lit his cigar with a hand that trembled slightly. Then he faced me impressively. "Do you realize that such a discovery would change the finan-

cial center of gravity of the world? Switch the preponderance of gold production from the Eastern to the Western hemispheres? Put an end to this financial crisis which is rocking the world to its foundations?"

"Put an end to the depression?" I had never thought of gold in that connection.

"God, yes." He waved the stump of his cigar at me and then threw it into the wastepaper basket. "Lack of blood in the arteries of business. Low-blood pressure. That's what is making the business world sick. Double the world's gold production—the Farallones thing would come close to doing that if what Gotz claims is correct—and you've given business a blood transfusion and saved the patient's life."

I made no answer. Economics were not my strong point. But some years later when the price of gold in the world's markets was arbitrarily almost doubled by raising its value—the same amount of gold at twice the price is the same thing as twice the amount of gold output at the same price—I thought of Mac's diagnosis and knew he had been correct.

"Will you work on Gotz' gold proposition with me?"

"Great God, yes." Mac rose and paced the room. "Get those assay figures and the report here as soon as the Lord will let you. If they prove anywhere near as good as your wild man's story I'll sell the property for more money than you've ever heard of."

As soon as I left Mac's office I cabled Gotz in Bogota.

RUSH FARALLONES ASSAY CERTIFICATES AND REPORT

Gotz must have been sitting on the end of the wire in Bogota because I had his reply within an hour or two.

SAMPLES ASSAYED FAVORABLY AIRMAILED CERTIFICATES WITH REPORT YESTERDAY

The very next day I had them, so close had modern airlines knit the two American continents together. Five little squares of paper. Printed forms with a few figures inked in

and at the bottom of them a signature. I knew that assayer so well that I could almost see his long slender fingers tracing the flourish. I was satisfied with the signature, but more than satisfied with the values the assayer had found in Gotz' ore. He certified the average gold value of the five samples as just a little over sixteen dollars per ton. *Sixteen dollars!* Why, the great goldfield of Johannesburg averaged little more than half of that, and yet it supplied more than half the gold output of the world each year. Sixteen dollars! Not what you'd call rich ore . . . I'd seen ore that assayed more than ten times that value, aye, and seen the mine go broke because of lack of tonnage. . . . Not enough ore to pay for the costly plant the high ore-value had hypnotized the mine-owners into supplying. But sixteen-dollar ore with a big tonnage was a real proposition.

Anxiously I studied Gotz' report which had arrived in the same envelope. Encouraging. Not a scientific report such as a trained engineer would make, but perhaps all the more convincing for that. It was more like a diary. A story of hardship. Of one man and one Indian hacking their way through impenetrable jungle just below snowline, in almost arctic conditions, while they followed a great wall of quartzite—the same wall from which their samples had come. From handhold to handhold of quartzite they swung themselves down the side of precipitous canyons, bottomless gashes in the great Farallones *massif*. Day after day. Mile after mile. And still that great white wall of quartzite persisted. They had taken five samples only on their return journey, because they had lost their slender store of explosive in a rushing mountain torrent. True, those samples had been taken from one single spot instead of at intervals along the quartzite wall but, even so, those samples seemed to indicate the presence of one of the world's great gold discoveries. I felt awed after reading that simple, badly written narrative. If all that huge reef of quartzite carried as much gold as the five assay certificates had indicated, I was a prime mover in one of the

world's epochal mining discoveries. Alaska's Eldorado Creek—Australia's Coolgardie—California of '49—Johannesburg's Golden City—none of them would have made more mining history than the Farallones in Colombia, if only my information were correct.

I told Mac the news over the telephone and he came hot-footing over to the Explorers' Club. After he had read the report, he studied the assay certificates and stabbed at the signature with his forefinger. "Know this assayer?" He looked pugnacious. A cocky little sparrow of a man, his big cigar sticking out of his face like the bowspirit of a ship.

I nodded. "He's all right."

Into his pocket he crammed the papers. "Fifty-fifty split on your commission all right with you?"

"Fair enough."

"Then I'm off to sell this mine." He moved toward the door with purposeful strides of his short legs.

"Who to?"

"Tell you when I've sold it." He was gone.

In the course of my perigrinations in New York, I learned things which pointed to one move I could make in the game I had started to gain control of the Chivor mine. Suffice it to say that I wrote my old friend Chris Dixon an air mail letter. If anyone wanted to clear Chivor of bandits, he was their man. He was seventy years old and most of those years had been passed in Colombia. He was as tough and active as most men of thirty and he had three sons who were roistering blades but all fearless and good with the short gun. I couldn't conceive of a situation that would daunt those four. If anyone could hire Chris, that person might be able to handle the situation which the Chivor group had wished on itself. But if, on the other hand, Chris thought there was a chance of a play with me at Chivor, why, Chris and I were pals of years standing.

So I sat down then and there and wrote Chris a letter. After describing what had happened to me I ended up the

letter with a sentence. *Pass on to me any news you get of bandit activities on Chivor and scrutinize closely any offers from this town because they may be crossing my wires.*

Hardly had I closed the letter when the club call-boy once more herded me to the telephone. Mac's voice this time. It was fairly snowing events.

"Pete, I've got a bite already." His voice sounded husky.

"A bite?" My mind was still on the letter to Chris I'd just finished.

"Yes, by Jumping Jehosephat. No little nibble either. A real bite, by a big fish too. X—— of Y—— Z—— Mining will pay cash for the Farallones wild-cat, if further sampling proves as good as those first samples would indicate."

"Good Lord! You are a fast worker, Mac." I was a bit dazed. Things were moving almost too fast for me.

"I knew where to go, of course. Knew that X—— was hungry for a big gold property." The suppressed excitement in Mac's voice was fairly making the phone vibrate. "But it's not sold yet. Not till we've got more assay certificates. He wants fifty more samples taken. How long will it take Gotz to do it?"

I made a mental calculation. The samples must be at least a couple of hundred yards apart to give as fair an average value as possible. Fifty samples two hundred yards apart meant over six miles of the vein to be sampled. My mind's eye could see the slow procession of men and mules creeping through the swampy undergrowth that clothes the high *paramos* round the Farallones—stunted timberline growth. Bedding down in wet brush shelters every night, wet through, shivering in the bitter blasts which sweep those high altitudes, rising at daybreak from sodden beds, stiff with cold and wet, to build a smoky fire of damp straw and sodden twigs. Their hands trembling with eagerness as they gripped the steaming cup of coffee which would put at least a little life into them for the next hour or two. Then moving on, slowly, God, how slowly, because the body rebels against ex-

ertion in that rarefied air. Laboriously drilling holes in rock for the charge that would blast their samples out. Selecting from the debris of the blast a few little pieces which must be wrapped and labeled before being placed in the mule-pack. Fifty such samples. Taken by men who would be half dead with fatigue and hardship even as they worked. One sample a day was the most they would accomplish.

"He can't do it under two months if he takes his samples properly."

"*Two months!*" Mac's voice almost screeched over the wire. "Two months! Why I promised them in a couple of weeks."

"Better unpromise then. You don't know that high country like I do. It's tough. We'll be lucky if we get our fifty assays two months from now."

"Huh." Mac grunted into the phone. "Guess you're right," he admitted after a pause. "I've been away from that sort of thing for so long that I've reverted to the city point of view. I'll fix it."

Immediately I drafted Gotz a cable to Bogota.

YOUR PROPERTY SALABLE PROVIDED YOU CAN SUBSTANTIATE FIRST ASSAYS BY FIFTY MORE SAMPLES STOP PROCEED IMMEDIATELY FARALLONES STOP RUSH STOP THIS IS HOT BUSINESS WITH EXTREMELY STRONG GROUP DEFINITELY INTERESTED

Next day I received Gotz' reply.

LEAVING FOR FARALLONES TOMORROW

God help that tough Swiss on those bleak barren ridges. The rainy season was beginning up there too. Gotz would earn every cent he made out of this deal, even if it amounted to a million dollars. Now Gotz would be out of touch with humankind for the next two months at least, so Mac and I must possess our souls in patience for that length of time. Two months till the news came which would bring me either a very large sum of money or dash my hopes. How slowly the time would pass!

But about a week later a letter from Chris livened me up considerably.

Dear Peter,

A certain man cabled the Colombian government for soldiers to run the bandits off. The government has taken the matter under consideration. If forty-five years in Colombia have taught me anything, the government will deliver their decision *after* someone else has cleared the mine of vermin.

I, too, received a cable the other day. The sender offered me the management of Chivor, but omitted to tell me about the bandits being in possession. I suppose he didn't realize that the whole of Colombia is laughing about the *Americanos* who left a valuable emerald mine lying about without protection. I cabled back: *Will consider offer after mine freed of bandits*. That'll hold him for a bit. I wouldn't mind a go at those bandits. Hope you'll take the muzzle off soon.

Saludas,
CHRIS

My heart warmed as I read the letter. It was just like old Chris. Solid and to the point. In my mind's eye I could see the old boy. Six foot four of him and as straight as a dart, in spite of his seventy years. Every bit of him a man. He had to be to have survived some of the experiences in the wild days of his youth on the Colombian frontiers. There was that time he went down into the Vaupes country after rubber during the rubber boom at the beginning of the century. He was away so long that his friends began to watch for his shriveled head to appear for sale, but he fooled them and showed up on the Amazon River a year later. Then again in the Colombian civil war one of the insurgent bands had looted the safe of the Muzo emerald mine. Chris was running Muzo then, had just made a big strike and the safe was packed with emeralds. Chris had followed the rebels, ridden boldly into their camp that night and bluffed their ragamuffin general into returning everything he had stolen. Chris was a good man to tie to although, by the standards of the Anglo-American colony in Bogota, he had "gone native" because he had married a

Colombian wife—a very gracious high-born lady, I always thought her—and he didn't frequent the Anglo-American club and the tight little Anglo-American circle. As bad luck would have it, I had never at that time done a trip into the blue with Chris, although we were to do several hard trips together before the end came to it all.

I felt good about the Chivor situation now. If Mac and I were ever lucky enough to get control of the Chivor mine, whether by purchase or by lease, I now knew that I could depend on Chris to stand by me in ejecting the bandits. There was nothing more that Mac and I could do for a while. We must just sit tight and let the Chivor situation ripen while Gotz crept slowly along the sky-scraping ridges of the Farallones, laboriously chipping off samples of gold-bearing rock. But Mac and I did prowl a little among the big financiers, sounding them, so that when the time came we should know where to get capital for any emerald proposition we might be able to build up.

We interviewed Charles Schwab, the steel magnate. He wasn't interested in emeralds but paid me the compliment of remembering the Moshannon coal mine and the railway I had built up to it. It seems we had acquired the property just one jump ahead of him, although neither my then partner, Bill Bitard, nor I had been aware of the fact.

With Chester Beatty, the Rhodesian copper king, we had hard luck. Through a peculiar combination of circumstances, we only got to him just as he was dashing to catch a boat for England to plug some leak or other in his interests over there.

I found Mac invaluable. Everyone knew him, from the financier in his ornate office down to the corner barber.

In the evenings I frequented Bohemia where I met many people who interested me. The Deming family—old Ed Deming was one of the leading painters of Indian life in the country. Mrs. Karl Akeley—little did either of us imagine that many years later she was to review a book of mine. A

damned good review it was—flattering enough to make me re-read the book over which I had spent so much effort before it went to the publishers that I hated the sight of it. My last recollection of Mrs. Akeley was of discussing with her the relationship—if any—of the Kalahari Bushman to the pigmy of the Stanley forest. That was about six in the morning in somebody's penthouse on a Central Park South skyscraper while a whole party of us finished up a night with a breakfast of ham and eggs.

Some weeks had passed before Mac and I were able to interest a group in our scheme for emerald-mine control. It was beryllium that these people were really interested in, the new element which was becoming to copper products what chromium had some years before become to steel. But being interested in beryllium they were automatically interested in emeralds because they were produced from the same formations. To digress, I have previously mentioned the connection between emeralds and beryl, mother ore of beryllium, but have not stated that during the last two years I had spent on Chivor I had been shipping to the Siemens Halske interests in Germany enough beryl to enable them to conduct that series of experiments which proved the commercial possibilities of beryllium when alloyed with copper, experiments which opened for world usage a wide new vista in the use of copper. Siemens Halske were to bob back into my life under curious circumstances not long after.

During our hunt for finance I received a letter from Chris which made me laugh.

Dear Peter,

Latest development on Chivor is that that party apparently persuaded the Bogota agent to send two private detectives into the Chivor district to get evidence against the bandits. Incidentally it looks like the *bandidos* have got into emerald formation because emeralds are becoming quite common tender in that part of the world. Better get a move on with whatever scheme you have or you'll have to bottom on a new pit to get emeralds.

But to return to the detectives. The *Alcalde* of Somondoco, a friend of Joaquin's, as you know, promptly juggled both of the 'tecs as soon as they arrived in his territory and the Bogota agent is having a hell of a time trying to get them out of jail because Joaquin's gunmen look worse to the *Alcalde* than the writ of the Bogota courts.

Cheerio,
CHRIS

I wasn't too worried about what Chris had written concerning the theft of emeralds from the mine. It was evident that the bandits had stumbled on a pocket which we must have been on the point of uncovering when the mine had been closed down. It would, I knew, take more than the sporadic efforts of an unorganized band to rape the bottom of even that last small pit we had sunk. Once we could get control of the mine and get an organized band of miners to work we'd find emeralds soon enough, I felt sure.

Two months had gone. In that two months the Chivor situation had shown no sign of ripening. Just as I was beginning to get worried about Gotz a cable arrived. From the Swiss himself, I hoped, as I twisted the flimsy envelope in my hands, almost afraid to open it. It was from Gotz, by the miners' god! The contents blurred for a second and then my eyes focused, although my hand was trembling still.

FIFTY-TWO ADDITIONAL SAMPLES ASSAYED STOP AVERAGE ABOUT
SAME AS FIRST LOT STOP ALL CERTIFICATES AIRMAILED TODAY

I sat down weakly in a chair. The Farallones proposition was changing from a mining engineer's pipe dream of good values with unlimited tonnage into a reality. Some of Mac's phrases began ringing in my ears. "Change the center of gravity of gold production." "Cure the world's business depression." But it couldn't be true. There must be something wrong. Such things didn't happen to a man except in story books.

I called Mac on the phone and he came rushing over.

He read the cable, stuffed it into his pocket, all crumpled, and dragged me by the arm to a taxi. Then up in a crowded elevator at a speed which reminded me of one of the main hoists in a Johannesburg deep-level mine. Into an ornate office where sat a little square-faced man who controlled the destinies of one of the world's great mining groups.

The man we shall call X—— read the cable and laid it on his desk. "Bring me the assay certificates when they come." He spoke quite casually. How could a man be casual when such issues were involved, when a deal was on that might make mining history? "I'll have a talk with the boys meantime, and we'll decide on an offer in case the certificates tally in value with the last lot you gave me."

Two days later we handed him a fat airmail envelope.

With a gold-encased pencil he made some calculations on the back of the envelope, frowned, cleared his brow and laid the envelope down.

"You've done business with me before, Mac. You know how I deal." Steel-blue eyes pierced each of us in turn.

Mac took the long cigar from his mouth. Looked at the snow-white ash. Nodded.

"I offer a fair price." X——'s eyes seemed to burn my face. "But I don't bargain. You can take my price, but, if you want to better it, you must go elsewhere." He picked up the envelope with his figures on it.

"I want one thing clear before I go any further," I said. There was a thick feeling in my tonsils and my voice sounded hoarse in my own ears.

X—— swiveled his chair so that he faced me. Raised his bushy eyebrows. Waiting.

"I want to make clear that I have never seen this mine." My voice came more easily now. "I know the discoverer well. His reputation is good, but I take no responsibility beyond that." Suppose—how awful was the thought—just suppose there was something wrong, there must be no misunderstanding about my good faith.

X—— nodded. Impatiently, I thought. "Mac made all that clear when he talked to me before."

I breathed a sigh of relief as I subsided once more into my chair. Let the deal ride now. Let it ride, high, wide and handsome.

X—— pierced Mac with that gaze of his. It seemed to me as though two visible blue rays left his eyes and pierced Mac's paler blue optics. "I will pay two million dollars cash for your mine, provided that the samples that will be taken by my engineers come up to the average value of your assay certificates. I want from the owner a six months' option at that figure. My engineers will leave for the mine as soon as the owner's acceptance of my offer is made legal."

Two million dollars! Two million dollars cash. Payable in six months if the mine stood up to examination. Of all the deals I had ever touched this was easily the biggest. How near the mark had Mac been when, at our first meeting, he had stressed the importance of the find. If Gotz' find were not of vital importance this hard-headed business magnate would not be offering such a price for it. My split on that commission would put me on easy street for life—life on that beautiful place of ours. Mac's share of it would send him sky-rocketing into the flight of high-circling eagles where he belonged.

Meanwhile Mac puffed imperturbably at his cigar. I wondered if his pulses were not pounding like mine for all his imperturbable exterior.

"We've got to get the owner's confirmation, of course." Mac held up his cigar and again carefully examined the ash.

"Of course. Do it by cable." X—— reached for a bundle of papers on his desk and we marched out.

But Gotz was difficult. The crazy loon. It seemed unbelievable to me that any man in Gotz' circumstances would boggle at a purchase price of two million dollars cash, even though he had involved himself in considerable hardship to

get it. But Gotz did haggle. I sent him cable after cable, spending more money than I like to think of in trying to convince him that he must accept this offer or go and look for another buyer himself. The thing that seemed to worry Gotz was that the prospective purchaser was not paying any cash in advance.

After about the third cable from Bogota which insisted on an advance payment Mac shook his head. "If you hadn't sworn that Gotz was square," he remarked with brows wrinkled, "I should begin to think that he had a fake proposition and was angling for an advance payment because he knew his property wouldn't stand examination."

I shook my head. "I've thought of that too, but it doesn't seem to fit. If Gotz had faked his proposition he'd never have gone on that second expedition into so tough a region. He'd have stayed in Bogota in comfort. If a man wanted to fake samples he could do it in Bogota without half killing himself with hardship."

"But are you sure he did make that last trip to the Farallones?" Mac gazed at me earnestly.

"I am sure of it. I checked up on him." I had done just that. In those two months of waiting all sorts of doubts used to assail me in the night hours. After one particularly sleepless night of worrying I had written Chris to check on Gotz' movements. Chris had replied that Gotz had left for the Farallones right after he had received my instructions to get more samples. Chris had also checked the fact that Gotz had passed through Carlos Piedrahita's place into the wilderness and not returned.

Mac's face cleared when I explained what I had done. "The silly square-head is just dumb then. Shake him up with an ultimatum."

So I cabled Gotz.

OFFER EXPIRES TOMORROW NIGHT UNLESS YOU ACCEPT PREVIOUSLY

That rocked him. Back came the reply.

ACCEPT

X—— grunted with satisfaction when we laid the cable before him. Then he consulted a pad of notes which lay before him on his desk. "You," he glanced at me, "will leave for Colombia on tomorrow's plane. Before you leave I will have delivered to you at your club a legal option contract which you will have Gotz sign before witnesses. As soon as the contract is signed you will airmail it to me and cable me that you have done so. I will then despatch by plane two mining engineers to examine the property. You will be responsible for making the arrangements for their journey from Bogota to the Farallones." His eyes wandered back to a pile of papers which were obviously awaiting signature on his desk.

"Just a minute, Mr. X——." He glanced up impatiently at my interruption. "I should first like to make a preliminary examination of the property, before you send out your own men. I have never examined it personally, as I told you at our other meeting, and I should feel better if I checked up on Gotz' figures before allowing you to begin spending money." I had to get that out. Somehow, I still didn't feel right about this Farallones thing. It had all come too easy, and mining deals don't come like that in my experience. But once I had seen the property with my own eyes and sampled the ore myself, I felt that X—— could spend all the money he wanted on it without causing me any qualms of conscience.

X—— shook his head, however. "You are, in a sense, Gotz' partner. Therefore you are an interested party and your report would carry no weight for that reason."

That evening I packed a suitcase at the club. While I was packing it a messenger delivered to me the document from X—— for Gotz' signature. Mac would be along any minute

now—Mac and Norma, that attractive young wife of his. A last dinner and we should part. My stay in New York had not been altogether unsuccessful, I congratulated myself. One of my deals looked like it was going over—was practically over. I wished I could rid my mind of that last particle of doubt which persisted in giving me twinges of misery. True, the Chivor business had hung fire, and we hadn't even got started on a plan to acquire control of the Muzo mine. But Mac could watch the Chivor thing ripen while, once in Colombia and with the Farallones thing settled, I could begin to maneuver with the Colombian government for Muzo.

Just then Mac walked into my room. Without a word he pulled a paper out of his pocket and handed it to me. When I glanced through it my breath caught. It was a letter offering a lease on the Chivor mine, to be substantiated later by a more formal contract.

"How the devil did you get that?" I gazed in admiration at my partner. What a "doer" he was and how I did love a "doer."

He grinned through his cigar smoke. "Of course," said Mac, "this isn't final nor is it even official, since it does not come from an officer of the company." I must explain here that the letter was a move in the game I was playing. Obviously it is not possible at this time to give the details or to mention the persons involved.

"I told this gentleman you were fed up with New York," continued Mac, "and were leaving tomorrow on the business of one of the big mining groups. I said that if you didn't get that letter tonight the bandits could probably keep Chivor as far as you were concerned."

I studied the letter more carefully. One of the conditions was that Chivor had to be cleared of bandits and "the operator established in peaceful possession of the mine" before the letter was translated into a more formal contract. That seemed fair enough. The only reason they had for giving me

a lease was that they had failed of their own efforts to clear out the bandits. The letter guaranteed a lease for two years once the mine was clear of bandits.

"Looks all right to me," I remarked, as I put the envelope carefully away in my pocket.

"It's right enough." Mac nodded. "When you send me a cable that the mine is once more at peace I'll see that the deal is put into proper legal form."

Before I went to bed that night I sent Chris a cable.

PREPARE ACCOMPANY ME CHIVOR IMMEDIATELY AFTER MY ARRIVAL DAY AFTER TOMORROW'S PLANE

The cable I sent to Gotz read as follows:

DEAL CLOSED STOP ARRIVING BOGOTA DAY AFTER TOMORROW WITH LEGAL CONTRACT FOR YOUR SIGNATURE

Gotz, I had no doubt, would sign his document, and I would immediately airmail it to Mac. That would leave me free for a quick dash to Chivor with Chris and such of his roistering brood as happened to be available. We'd soon have those bandits on the run. Then another dash back to Bogota to meet the visiting experts, leaving Chris to guard Chivor. Once I had delivered those engineers into the Farallones country I could afford to go home for a week or two. How I longed to see the place. Margaret's weekly letters on progress made me itch to be there to take some of the load off her shoulders.

Just as I was falling asleep I felt myself chuckling to think of X——'s men threading the stunted thickets of the high *paramos* on the way to that cold hell of the Farallones. I hoped they were inured to hardship, or they'd never stand that trip.

4.

Homecoming

A FEW nights after my departure from New York, Chris Dixon and I were seated in my room in the Granada Hotel. They had completed that hostelry during my absence. It was palatial, although I have always considered that the slightly more modest Regina had given more comfort. As Chris seated himself the numberless church bells of Bogota were vying with one another in the cold darkness outside, announcing the hour of ten to the Montserrate peaks above.

"Well, young feller. What cheer?" Chris straightened the crease in an immaculate pair of gray flannel trousers.

I held my reply till the attendant had finished depositing two whiskies and sodas on the small table between us. "I've got a lease on the Chivor mine," I announced, as soon as the door had closed behind the retreating flunkey.

"Congrats." Chris raised his sparkling glass to me. "Here's to many of the green ones and may they be of the best."

"Thanks. What news of the mine?"

Chris showed white teeth under his neatly trimmed gray mustache. "Joaquin's *bandidos* are still in possession and emeralds have become fairly common tender in the Chivor country. With a big one you can buy a woman for keeps. A drink of beer costs a little splinter. The devils seem to have struck a medium-sized pocket in that last pit you bottomed."

I laughed. "Plenty more where they came from."

Chris nodded his white mane of hair. "You ought to know."

"What about Joaquin himself?" I asked. It would be fun, I felt, to get that slimy devil in the open at last where one could shoot him without compunction.

"No signs of that blighter, but I expect he's directing operations from somewhere in the background. Open warfare is not much in Joaquin's line."

"What more in the way of news from Chivor?"

"Those two 'tecs the agent sent out. They're still in jail."

I laughed again. That was Colombia for you, I reflected. In the more developed parts, it was as law-ridden as any other civilized land. But the law's writ began to lose its impetus when it left the highways and cities. By the time that writ had traversed days of dim mule trails to the outposts any local official could divert its passage into the wastepaper basket with more or less impunity. "The Somondoco *Alcalde* will be our man once more when we're again sitting on top. He'll let the 'tecs go the moment he hears that Joaquin's men have been cleared off the mine."

Chris' blue eyes sparkled. "You're going to need me then? I've been hanging fire ever since I got your letter from New York."

"Yes, I want you. Those boys of yours, too. With about five good guns we can clean up the Chivor mess in no time."

The big Englishman grinned. "That's right enough. But Albert's the only one of the boys in town."

"Damn. I was counting on the three of them."

"No matter. I can pick you up a brace of stout Colombian

lads who'd give their shirts for a bit of excitement. Good shots too."

I shook my head. "Greenhorns are no good, even if they can shoot quick and straight. We've got to have lads who have already stood fire. Those wild Indians of Joaquin's will put up a stiff fight unless we can throw the fear of God into them by a surprise."

"My two *bravos* will fill the bill."

"Who are they?"

"Young Fernandez, for one."

I nodded my satisfaction. I knew that young blade. Not many months before he had shot it out with an Indian outlaw and killed his man.

"And the other?"

"Alfonso Garcia."

I shook my head. I had never heard of him.

"He's all right." Chris' lips twitched as though at some joke. "I guarantee him to stand fire and shoot quick and straight."

"If you recommend him, Chris, he's all right with me."

Then I passed the letter to Chris which guaranteed the lease on the mine, once we had cleared the vermin off it.

He read it carefully. "Reads good. If you are satisfied, so am I."

"Will you operate the mine for me after we've got things pacified?" With such an experienced emerald miner at Chivor, I would have no worries about the place.

He agreed after we had discussed a suitable split of the profits.

"When do we start?" he asked, rising to his feet and flexing his long arms over his head till I thought his waistcoat buttons across the bulging chest would give under the strain.

"How soon can you get your men together?"

"We can leave day after tomorrow, as far as my part of it is concerned."

"Righto." I rose also. "Tomorrow I'll hunt up Gotz and

get him to sign a document that will net him a fortune if his mine is any good. Then I'm with you." I should have hunted up Gotz first, I reflected. But, after all, I had only landed in Bogota late that same afternoon after my trip by air from New York.

"Gotz!" Chris opened his eyes wide. "Gotz! But he has just left on another trip to the Farallones."

"What!"

"Left a couple of days ago. We all thought he'd gone out there again because you'd sent him. Everyone knows, of course, that you've put his deal over and got him a colossal price for his mine. He's been spreading the story in every pub in town. Pouring his millions down his throat in anticipation. He took a chap named Brenner out to the Farallones with him. My own private impression is that Gotz is short of money and trying to raise some from Brenner."

"Brenner?" I had never heard of the man.

"A decent young Swiss with a bit of money."

Good Lord! Gotz gone. His contract in my pocket ready for him to sign. This did mess things up. The Farallones deal was too vital to shelve for anything, and to proceed further I must get Gotz' signature on that bit of paper. Not even my lease on Chivor—God knows that was important enough to me—could justify my delaying the Farallones affair on which such momentous issues hung. What to do? There was but one course which I could follow and that was to trail Gotz into the fastnesses of the Farallones *massif*. Find him there and make him sign. But Chivor? Must we abandon our plan for the recovery of the mine until I could get back from the Farallones? No. Every day the bandits remained in possession meant the theft of more emeralds stolen that should be bringing in revenue for the development of *Las Cascadas*. Chris must do his best to gain and hold a footing in Chivor till I got back to civilization with Gotz' signature on that precious document. Then I could airmail the document to Mr. X—— and dash to Chris' assist-

ance in Chivor, if assistance were needed. . . . There would surely be an interim of a week or two between the time when I should airmail the document and the date of arrival of X——'s engineers in the capital where I was committed to meet them. That would give enough time for us to consolidate our hold on Chivor.

So it was finally arranged. Chris seemed disappointed at not having me with him on his hazardous expedition but not in the least dismayed. If Satan in all his panoply had suddenly confronted old Chris Dixon it would be the devil who experienced dismay. In fact, the prospect of a battle with bandits seemed to make Chris as happy as a kid with a Sunday school picnic in prospect. But I was far from happy. Why had Gotz suddenly rushed off for a third journey to the property when he had been advised by me of the date of my arrival with a contract for him to sign? It might be that he was trying to raise funds from Brenner and that Brenner had insisted on seeing the property before he invested. Gotz probably was short of money. He was always short of money. He poured it down his throat when he had it. But, on the other hand, suppose—the mere thought made me shudder—just suppose that Gotz had faked his samples in some way and was trying to avoid the commitment of a signed contract! What a mess that would be! What a position I should be in, quite apart from the loss of my fat commission. The loss of that commission I could stand better than the loss of credit, although the money was badly needed for the *Las Cascadas* development which had become the ruling motive in the lives of both Margaret and myself. The loss of credit would be staggering. I had played the mining game for twenty-five years with a clean slate, and I would sooner lose a leg than be mixed up in a dubious deal now. True, I had disclaimed all first-hand knowledge of the mine. I had tried to persuade X—— to let me examine it before he committed himself. But all that would be forgotten if things turned out wrong. Financiers take dislikes to men who bring them losing deals,

and X—— was a prince in the hierarchy of the mining world which had given me a living through most of my life. Now I was worried enough to hunt up the assayer, my friend Don Anselmo, late though the hour was when Chris left me.

Seemingly unperturbed at my peeling of his bell, Don Anselmo came down to see me in a pair of sky-blue pajamas which contrasted oddly with his swarthy complexion and jet-black beard.

After I had apologized for dragging him away from the arms of an attractive young wife at such an hour—my apology did not give these details of course—I broached my perplexity.

"You have been doing some assays for Gotz, Don Anselmo."

"Si, Don Pedro." He nodded as he stroked his beard with the long sensitive fingers of a man who habitually uses delicate tools.

"I should like you to answer a few questions about them."

He shook his black head. "You know I could not answer them, Don Pedro. The work of an assayer is as confidential as that of a lawyer or a doctor."

That was true enough. An assayer who disclosed details of his clients' business would soon starve to death.

"Listen, Don Anselmo. I have just sold Gotz' mine to very important people for a huge sum of money on the strength of your assay certificates, which are, of course, above question."

Don Anselmo bowed. "What is troubling you then, Don Pedro?"

"I want to reassure myself because the affair is so big."

"If I can help you I will do so."

"Do you believe that Gotz is acting in good faith?"

"Si, *Senor*. I do."

"If you were suspicious that Gotz were not acting in good faith would you tell me?"

The Colombian hesitated, combing his beard gently with

one slender finger. "Si, Don Pedro. In this case I should tell you, because I have known you so long and because important people are involved in the issue. In most cases I should not mention any suspicions I might have. They are none of my business. A man brings to me a piece of rock. I calculate for him the gold value in it. I do not ask him where he got it—that is his business."

"Tell me, Don Anselmo. If Gotz is acting in good faith why should he avoid meeting me and dash off once more to the Farallones when he knew I was arriving with a contract for him to sign?"

There was a flash of white teeth in the middle of the black beard. "That! Lose no sleep over that, my friend. Gotz took a man out to the mine in order to raise some money."

"How do you know?" I leaned forward eagerly. I should sleep easier if I could be sure that had been Gotz' reason.

"I know because three days ago Gotz brought to my office a young Swiss by the name of Brenner. He brought Brenner here to reassure him about gold values. Right here in my office he was offering Brenner a share in the mine for a few thousand pesos. Brenner refused to invest till he had seen the mine from which the samples came."

Phe-e-e-w. I heaved a sigh of relief.

Next morning I caught a bus on my way home to *Las Cascadas*. I had cabled Margaret from New York to have Moro waiting for me in Guasca, the little town on the *paramos* which was then the end of traffic on wheels. Moro knew me as soon as I walked into the tumbledown stable of the little hotel where he was busy vacuum-cleaning the manger. The gray devil stopped feeding when he saw me and rubbed his dappled gray head against my knee in the way he had when he wanted me to mount.

I glanced upward at the sun. It was about midday. Above me the white corkscrew of the trail zig-zagged its way up the *paramo* and lost itself in the clouds that hung around the topmost peaks of the Continental Divide, the great moun-

tain chain of the Eastern Cordillera which still lay between me and home. Just below me in the placid meadows meandered a little stream. That stream ran westward into the Magdalena River and the Caribbean Sea. But beyond those cloud-capped peaks of the Continental Divide another stream had birth . . . the Gacheta, mulatto-colored mother of the fierce Guavio whose waters roared past our *Las Cascadas* boundary and burst through the ramparts of the outer ranges into the mile-wide river Meta, while the vast Meta itself emptied its muddy waters into the still vaster Orinoco and the Atlantic Ocean. Yes. To get home my way lay from the Magdalena basin to that of the Orinoco. Two days' ride on an average beast at a normal pace. But Moro was no average beast and I had need for haste. By the Four Horsemen, I would leave at once instead of waiting for the morning as most travelers did. By riding hard I could, with luck, get clear of the high passes before dark. Then a night ride down the Gacheta valley and home for breakfast. Two days' journey in one—but Moro was good for it. I saddled and mounted.

It was four that afternoon before we topped the pass in bellying cloud wreaths and driving sleet. Once on the down grade, I hooked the reins over the saddle and raced on foot down the stony trail that zigzagged downward through the somber, dripping rain-forest that clothed that flank of the Divide. Exultant. Behind me were the months of battle against intangible forces—feather-pillow opponents that threatened to smother me. The stones that tripped my feet and the blasts that swayed me—these were tangible—elemental opponents that I was well equipped to meet. Somewhere below my right side in the cloud-rack the young river Gacheta made eager music as she too raced downward. I sang aloud in my exaltation as I ran, little recking that I was due for a bellyful of those same elemental forces on my journey to the grim ranges of the Farallones. Meanwhile, Moro slithered down the trail behind me, scandalized that

I should travel on foot while his back was aching to carry me. But Moro had many leagues to travel that night. Once below the cloud layer I again swung into the saddle.

About seven that night I dismounted at the hospitable door of the Gacheta hotel. A good dinner of boiled chicken and *yuca* for me. For Moro a feed of corn, washed down with a bucketful of water in which had been dissolved several pounds of the coarse black cane sugar which the Indians call *panela*. Grand stuff, *panela*. If you are tired and hungry eat a small chunk of it and take a drink of water. Within five minutes you can feel strength flowing back into your over-taxed system like water seeping into a dry well.

At eight o'clock we clattered off into the darkness.

Somewhere about midnight. Pitch black. There was a bridge out on one of the tributaries of the Gacheta which lay across our path. I didn't know about it but Moro did. My first inkling was when he turned unexpectedly from the trail before it reached the bridge and plunged down a bank. Cold mountain water swirled round my knees as he ploughed through the swift-flowing current.

About four o'clock in the morning we were passing through the valley of the Murca toward the ford where I had first met Gotz and the Farallones mining deal had been born. Little lights began to spring into being all around. Like bright stars reflected from black water, only here was no water. These were lights from hundreds of little Indian dwellings. Hundreds of Indian women had just kindled their little fires to cook their husbands' breakfasts, so that their men could be at work in the fields with first daylight without wasting the precious light hours in eating.

Just as full daylight leaped on us from the east Moro and I topped the last ridge with Moro still going strong. There was *Las Cascadas*! By Heavens, Margaret had got the house built. The light caught the dew on the galvanized iron roof so that the house seemed roofed with silver. A column of white smoke rose above the long wooden building that

crouched on the outer edge of a mountain shelf, as though trying to peer into the foaming white waters of the Guavio that thundered through the canon two thousand feet below. Great tree trunks still lay criss-crossed about the clearing round the house, but among them I could distinguish long orderly rows of growing things. Coffee plants, they must be. The tea was yet to come. From the Guavio River below the house the ground rose in gigantic steps to the cloud-capped peaks that made our upper boundary. Land. Our land. Bought and paid for. With a few years' development that land would put us beyond care for the future. Even as I watched from the ridge across the valley—gloated—a white figure walked out onto the veranda of the house. Margaret—I was certain. So close in that clear air that I could almost recognize her figure. And yet I must still ride two hours round by the ford of the *Rio Negro* before I could sample the breakfast which that column of smoke portended. Before me lay our home and the courageous woman who had hewn it for us out of the wilderness. That column of smoke made my hungry belly twist. I mounted and pressed on.

5.

A Clamorous Inferno

I ALLOWED myself only one day at home, the day I had won for myself from time by riding all night. But that day was a happy one and to crown it was a letter waiting from Gotz, an ill-spelled epistle which nevertheless relieved me of the germ of suspicion which would persist in lingering in my mind, even after my visit to Don Anselmo. In the letter Gotz apologized for his failure to await me in Bogota and gave as an excuse his urgent need of funds. Would I follow him and Brenner into the Farallones? Bring the contract with me? He gave me long-winded directions for finding the trail and, as a postscript, added in his almost illegible scrawl "You can now a horse ride to the mine. The trail not goot is but the wust part first comes so be not afraid when the first part not goot is."

The next morning I left for Carlos Piedrahita's hacienda, the nearest civilized point of departure.

The following morning I was in the saddle before day-

break—not on Moro this journey. The trail which Gotz had apparently hacked through those high *paramos* would most certainly be mud and below the muddy surface would lie a network of the roots of scrub timber. Not the most sure-footed beast in the world would be immune from the risk of a broken leg in such going. Moro was too valuable to risk in such a venture. Besides, Moro had just cheerfully accomplished two days' trek in one and should not be ridden again for at least a week.

I reckoned thirty miles for the trip from Carlos' place to the camp which Gotz claimed to have established on the buttresses of the main peak. An easy day's journey with average going, but I felt that I would need every minute of daylight to cover the fiendish going which I anticipated. Gotz' finances were not strong enough to have accomplished a real road. It was essential too, that I should get to shelter before dark. There is danger in travel on the high Andean *paramos*. Pneumonia. One is dripping wet with sweat after the first half hour of exertion in the rarified air of twelve to fifteen thousand feet, even if there is not rain falling to make one wetter. Stop for a rest! Within five minutes after halting, the chill of the high altitudes is striking inward through sodden clothing. Once get chilled through and pneumonia follows. Pneumonia in such a place means death within a space of hours. No. I must get in by daylight. No traveling by night on such a trail, for to be trapped on the *paramos* at night is often a death sentence.

For the first couple of hours the going was no worse than the average rough Andean trail, the same trail it was which led to the *llanos*, the trail which I had followed on the last lap of my journey from the Orinoco years before. At last I topped the divide and the boundless plains stretched below me. How the view of those plains always twisted my heart. The last ridge, Gotz had written, and I was on it. Here, following his directions I began to scan the undergrowth for a sign of the turn-off he had hacked toward the Farallones. I

soon found it. A narrow cutting in the gnarled and stunted vegetation. But what a thing to call a trail. "You can now a horse ride to the mine." Poor horse. All the man had done was to cut down a tree when it blocked his bear-like passage. No attempt to even clear the surface roots which spider-webbed across the muddy ground. As I sat my horse and gazed at it, I thought it the worst going I had ever in my life asked a horse to tackle. The horse thought so too, apparently. When I put his head to it he balked and snorted. I was glad that Moro was not under me that day. Glad for his sake because the trail did not exist that could have daunted that reckless devil. Moro would have plunged unhesitant into the Styx itself at the pressure of my heel. He would have fought this evil going of the *paramos* till it broke his willing heart.

Dismounted, I began to lead my horse forward. Hard going. Between the surface roots the mud was soft and a large proportion of the roots lay hidden below the surface. The result was that one step would be arrested ankle-deep while at the next I would unexpectedly sink to the knee. Foul. After a few yards I was sweating profusely. But Gotz had written "the wust part first comes so be not afraid when the first part not goot is." As I ploughed laboriously forward, stumbling continuously, I prayed that he was right.

But my spirits began to rise after I had painfully traversed a mile or two. The trail was definitely improving. Rocks began to appear through the muddy surface and the roots became infrequent as the trail skirted a minor peak whose upper story was hidden in the dripping cloud which hung just overhead. Here I mounted and rode at a walking pace for a couple of miles.

Then the trail deteriorated once more. More roots and mud. Doggedly I pushed forward with the horse hanging back on the reins by which I was leading him. Hour after hour. The same fiendish going, varied only here and there by firmer patches where I could mount and rest my aching legs. The sweat poured from me. A thin drizzling rain envel-

oped me, so near to freezing that the drops on my rubber raincoat felt glutinous. How I cursed Gotz! I should never have thought of taking a horse on that trip had it not been for his letter. It would have been far better to organize for a trip on foot.

Then the horse stopped. Nose to the ground. Foundered. The combination of altitude and hard going had been too much for him. I stripped the saddle and bridle from him, got his head with difficulty turned homeward and flogged his rump with the reins till he stumblingly moved back down the trail we had traversed. I hope he had sense enough to keep going till he reached a lower altitude. A night up there in that cold hell would be the end of him. When the horse had disappeared into the driving rain clouds I turned my face toward the invisible Farallones and plodded on.

Down to elementals now. My watch showed about noon and I reckoned that I was about halfway on my journey. With luck I should do it but there was no margin to spare. Fifteen miles to go and six hours to do it in. Six hours of daylight. I plodded on, in my pocket the precious piece of paper wrapped in oiled silk against the wet. If people who used the precious metals only knew the cost in sweat and pain which the finding of them often entails.

After long hours of stumbling almost blindly through mud and over tree roots the ground suddenly took a definite downward slant. Encouraging. I had been hoping for that because, according to Gotz, he had built his camp near his first find, on the slopes of the first great peak of the Farallones and considerably below the serrated ridge along which I had been traveling all day.

My legs were numb with fatigue. I halted. My watch said five o'clock. One more hour of daylight. But Gotz' cabin should now be within a mile or two. Damn this thick weather. If it would only clear sufficiently for me to see the Farallones peak I should have my whereabouts in a moment.

It seemed that the weather heard my malediction, which was really a prayer. Or else some freak of the mountain wind-god puffed a strong blast of ice-cold air. The clouds rent asunder. The mist curtains parted. The lowering sun suddenly blazed in my face. There, right above me, was the peak. How well I knew it! From Chivor I had watched it daily as it brooded over the plains on which its rocky feet were planted. Now I stood on its easternmost slope with its flattened summit only five hundred feet above my head, a summit no man had as yet trodden. White men had never been there before Gotz. Gotz, I knew, had never climbed it while Indians have too much sense to go climbing mountains unless there is something to eat on top. I felt elated. Fatigue was entirely forgotten. I was exactly where I thought I stood.

It was just about dusk when I almost stumbled over a primitive palm-thatch shelter out of which a thin wreath of smoke was blending with the mist wreaths outside.

I pushed open the primitive door and entered. Inside were two Indians and a cheery-looking round-faced youth. Brenner, evidently. There was a fog of smoke inside from the green-wood fire over which the three were huddled. But the inside of that cabin was warm, and the fragrance of coffee rose from the blackened tin upon the fire. How good that coffee tasted!

"Where's Gotz?" I asked, as soon as the hot coffee had percolated through my system.

Brenner's round face looked worried. "This morning we left here together, following the gold reef. After some miles we came to a canyon. Climbed down it. *Mein Gott*, what a place! Two thousand foot deep and a stream rushing through it as fast as the mill-tails of Hell. I came back from there. But Gotz went on. Wanted to make a *cache* of provisions further on against the time he takes samples over there. Gotz should be here by now. But maybe the river has washed away the tree he felled to cross on."

"But surely he could fell another tree to cross on his way back?

Brenner's frank brow wrinkled. "There is only one áxe in the Farallones and we brought it back with us."

I felt sorry for Gotz, although he had misled me about the trail and probably cost me a useful horse. His night would not be a comfortable one, even provided he was only marooned the other side of a river and not lying somewhere with a broken leg. But he would not suffer unduly from exposure. In those rugged mountain canyons there was shelter which the high, bleak *paramos* denied. Caves there must be in plenty in the canyon side and he would contrive a fire. He had food. But I did not waste much sympathy on him. What a chase the damned fool was leading me. It seemed I had to chase him half across the Andes to get his signature on a document which would make him wealthy if his mine were as good as he claimed it was.

We left next morning in search of Gotz, although I was stiff and sore after my battle with the elemental forces which had raged against me on the Andes tops. Through dripping undergrowth we threaded our way along a dim trace that had obviously been recently cut by hand. Gotz' trail. By Heavens he would surely have made it along the edge of the gold-bearing formations as he followed them to take samples. To my right I glanced up-hill. There it was. A wide strip of whitish speckled rock cut cleanly through the gray formation of the mountain slope along which we were traveling.

"Twenty feet wide is." Gotz' voice seemed to ring in my ears, and I could see him standing that day by Murca ford, while with one hand he caressed a blister. He had been right. That quartzite vein was all of twenty feet wide. It varied, of course. But it was seldom less and often more. No time to examine it today. Tomorrow I'd go over it superficially. X——'s engineers would have to spend at least a month on it when they should arrive. A month in that cold, wet purgatory—I didn't envy them. For several miles our

course followed that white river of rock which might be instrumental even in changing the destiny of nations. Scrambling over precipitous ridges, hand-holding along the face of precipices, always it ran beside us.

Then the world seemed to end. Abruptly. Bottomless space seemed to gape before my feet as I led our little procession. A deep yawning cleft whose jaws spouted such a roaring as though all the cataracts in the world were fighting in its depths. Narrow. Through upflung mist wreaths I could glimpse its further side not a quarter of a mile away.

"Let me go first. I know the way." Lashing to his back the axe he had been carrying over his shoulder, Brenner brushed past me, caught a slippery tree trunk which jutted over the abyss and swung himself out of sight.

I hated the sight of that chasm. Still, men had descended its rocky walls. Where men went I could follow. I swung myself over.

After about an hour of hair-raising rock-work we stood at the bottom. In twenty years of wandering through the rougher portions of the earth I had seen many awe-inspiring manifestations of nature. Victoria Falls. Niagara. The Grand Canyon. But this one was unique, and I never again expect to see anything to equal it. Awesome. As I stood there agape, the original of the hackneyed word *awful* drove home to me.

We stood clustered at the bottom of the cliff we had descended, to which I am willing to concede all of the two thousand feet of height which Brenner had ascribed to it. A few hundred yards before us towered its counterpart, the other wall of the canyon. Between us and the other wall a river raced. White foaming water which seemed to travel at the speed of a galloping horse. Fifty feet wide I guessed it. Irresistible force. Hissing and foaming between smooth walls of rock. Near us stood the stump of a new-felled tree, evidently the tree which Gotz had felled to form a bridge on his passage outward. But the bridge was gone now. Whisked away by those white-maned demons racing plainsward.

From our right came the bellowing. My eyes sought its cause. A hundred yards upstream the canyon ended. There—the marvel of it—two torrents leaped from the opposing sides and thundered into the same boiling pool at the head of the canyon. Two white spouts of water falling each two thousand feet sheer. No wonder bellowings and thunderings rose from their marriage at the bottom.

The torrent swept past us, foaming, hissing, leaping through the narrow embrasure where the canyon ended a few score yards to our left. Through the narrow cleft at the end of the gorge I could see the plains as one sees a green lawn through the loophole set high in a castle's turret. But the plains lay so far below—ten thousand feet below me—that my eye caught the smooth curvature of the earth as one catches it from a high-flying plane above flat country. Through the vast green sweep of those plains a yellow river meandered. The river Meta. Mile-wide. In this bellowing inferno of noise wherein I stood one of the hitherto unmapped tributaries of the Meta was bred by Pandemonium out of Chaos with sore travail. Those were the same vast plains on which I had ridden years before. From where I stood in this clamorous Gehenna that silent Paradise was clearly visible.

Brenner caught my arm. Shook it. Pointing with one hand across the torrent. Three figures were slowly ploughing toward us across the rocky ground at the foot of the opposing canyon wall. Gotz and two Indians, marooned across that impassable shoot of water. But we must try to bridge it by the precarious means of a felled tree—quickly too—because the deafening turmoil was already making my senses reel.

Only two trees of sufficient size grew on our side of the water.

Brenner sprang to one of them. His axe-head flashed amid the spray wreaths and white chips flew from the widening gap in the long slender tree trunk. The tall tree swayed.

Fell with slowly gathering momentum till its crown splintered on the rocks of the farther shore. But some of its larger branches were touching the foaming water. In a moment the angry torrent had whipped that tree from its prone position, shaken it as a playful terrier shakes a stick, upended it with its crown downwards and its new-gashed bole in air, then shot it out of the embrasure butt as the forest Indian expels his tiny dart from his blowpipe. That tree would land as splintered matchwood at the foot of the fall below and the Lord alone knew the height of that fall.

Undaunted, Brenner attacked the second and last available tree. The torrent seemed to leap at it as it fell, whisked it away. There were now no more suitable trees on our side. On the other brink of the river several large trees grew, but the only axe in the Farallones was on our side of the river. I noted that Gotz' Indians had bush knives in their belts—wicked-looking *penillas*—but they were too light and flimsy to sever a two-foot tree trunk.

Gotz was standing just beyond the raging strip of white water that kept him from us. He waved his thick arms excitedly. I could see his mouth opening and shutting. The damned fool was trying to shout something to us. Why, a snowball would stand as much chance of being propelled intact through the fires of Hell as a human word through that vibrating noise-charged medium in which we stood. Up-roar pressed against our bodies like a tangible force, maddening us.

Now Brenner stepped back from the edge of the torrent, axe helve gripped tight in two big hands. Rapidly he began to whirl the axe round his head from which the felt hat had fallen, whirled it as the athlete whirls the hammer before he throws it. Faster and faster spun the bright steel blade till it made a shining circle. His long fair hair waved in the mist-charged blast from the twin falls beyond him. His habitually smiling lips were pressed tight.

God! If that axe should fall in the water Gotz and his Indians would die. There could be no way out to civilization from the far side of that cold racing Styx.

But the axe sped true. It fell yards beyond the farther edge of the watery barrier.

One of Gotz' Indians seized it and attacked a tree. By the interposition of some angel against the demons of the place that tree lodged high enough to clear the torrent. Across it the two Indians nimbly sped, grinning their satisfaction. Like a burly father-bear Gotz clawed his way after them along the slippery trunk.

Then, by silent common accord, we turned and ascended the cliff.

Once at the top and clear of the din Gotz caught me by the arm. "Look, Don Pedro." His voice sounded faint and distant on ears attuned to the hellish noise in which we had existed for hours. His finger pointed to the opposite side of the canyon.

"What the hell are you pointing at?" I had had enough of that place. Even the cold purgatory of the Farallones ridges was preferable to the clamorous inferno some freakish demon of a younger world had fashioned in the heart of them. I wanted to get away from even the faintest echo of those bellowing falls.

"The reef. The gold reef there is. Two-thousand-foot depth it has, right to the bottom of the canyon."

Great Heavens! I had temporarily forgotten all about the gold-bearing formation whose birth pangs were causing me so much hardship. But the man was right. My exasperation against him was lost in a wave of admiration for his steadfastness of purpose. Few men would have endured what Gotz had endured, even for millions. I could see the reef. A well-defined white ribbon down the opposite canyon wall showed that it persisted at least to the depth of the canyon. Two thousand feet deep. Twenty feet wide, and I had seen it persist along the surface for miles. "Millions of tons in sight is."

By Heavens, Gotz had not been far wrong. The unbelievable had happened. Here was a virgin vein with enough tonnage in sight to warrant an investment of almost astronomical figures, provided always the vein carried the gold values which the assay certificates attributed to it. Yes. If this colossal vein really carried sixteen dollars worth of gold to the ton Gotz had realized the prospectors' pipe dream. Furthermore, I felt that he had earned his triumph.

When we arrived at the cabin Gotz signed the contract as soon as he had read it through. He used the stub of an indelible pencil which I had wrapped up in oiled silk along with the document in case there was no instrument of writing to be found in the Farallones country. If I had not brought that bit of pencil he would have had to sign it with his own blood or some such piratical and spectacular fluid.

The next day I devoted to examining the vein. First Gotz took me to a point adjacent to the cabin, the point at which he had made his first discovery, the point from which he had taken those first samples, the ones with the gold flecks in them, of which I had examined one that day months before at the ford of the Murca river.

I examined the white streak of rock where a cavity and scattered fragments evidenced the charge of explosive he had used to shatter loose his sample. When I picked up the rock fragments I could see with my glass gold specks in them. The gold was there all right. But the vein. Why was it so narrow here?

"Where's your twenty-foot vein here, Gotz?" I queried.

"The reef there is." He pointed up the mountain slope. "This nothing but a 'pup' is. But here I first find gold. Then I try the big father reef. There the gold not seen is but Don Anselmo he find him in his assays."

Sure enough. A few yards farther up the slope the great white reef was staring at us through the stunted timber. Massive. Reassuring.

All through that day I scrambled with Gotz along the face

of the white out-cropping. Here and there he showed me the unmistakable cavities from which he had blasted his later samples, the samples which had convinced X—— of the consistent value of the formation. One thing perturbed me, though. I could never pick from that massive formation a fragment of rock in which the gold was visible. The only visible gold I had seen on the property was from the stringer which Gotz had called a "pup," an insignificant branch of the main formation and in itself of little significance. But the fact that no gold was visible in the main reef did not necessarily mean that no gold was there. Gold allies itself with many minerals and rarely allows its rich yellow hue to betray its presence. A timid, shrinking mineral. The fact that the gold values did not impinge on sight by no means meant that the rock carried no gold, although the sight of gold in it would have finally killed that faint suspicion which persisted in my mind.

That night in the smoke-laden atmosphere of the cabin I tried to consider the situation impartially, to kill the suspicion of false dealing which would keep recurring to my mind like the continual return of the jackal to the lion's kill which has long since been picked clean. In the end Gotz' picture came to reassure me. Picking his way, bear-like, toward that hellish piece of water which had marooned him from his kind. The affair must be straight, I reasoned. No man in his proper senses would incur the hardships and dangers of life in the Farallones a second time, much less a third, unless he was fanatically a believer in the value of his discovery there. That settled it. I rolled over on the hard floor and slept.

Next morning Brenner and I departed on foot for civilization, leaving Gotz and his Indians to enlarge the cabin somewhat for the accommodation of the expected mining engineers.

Before the first light we were already plodding up the slope toward that terrible ridge whose length we should

have to traverse before reaching the shelter of Carlos Piedrahita's place. Above us towered the peak, clear-cut in the morning light. Five hundred feet or so of easy rockwork.

Brenner was Swiss, mountaineer born, young and energetic. There was longing in his eyes as he gazed upward. That virgin peak was pulling at me too. Without a word I turned from the faint trail and began to climb. Together we worked our way up and finally stood on the restricted flat summit, covered with dwarf Alpine growths, the first men to conquer the summit of the Farallones.

To the eastward the horizon of the plains was sharply defined against the glow of the coming sun, but the plains themselves were in darkness. Then the vast sweep of the plains took shape—darkness coagulating into the form of twisting yellow rivers which meandered through endless green flatness. The sun leaped above the horizon as though propelled from a catapult. It was full day.

Awed. Wordless. We scrambled down once more to the trail and began to plod through the mud toward civilization.

In late morning we found my saddle where I had stripped it from the horse. We left it there.

Not a mile beyond the saddle we found the horse. Dead. The cold of the high *paramos* had killed him.

It was eleven that night before we were hammering at the great gate of Carlos' *hacienda*, feet blistered, reeling with fatigue. A good man, Brenner. Never do I expect to meet a stouter companion for a rough trail.

The next morning on my way home I called in at the village telegraph office and sent a cable to Mac.

CONTRACT SIGNED STOP AIRMAILED STOP HAVE EXAMINED PROPERTY STOP GUARANTEE TONNAGE AS REPORTED BY GOTZ BUT HAVE NO FURTHER INFORMATION GOLD VALUES HAVING TAKEN NO SAMPLES STOP CABLE PROBABLE DATE DEPARTURE PURCHASER'S ENGINEERS

I mounted my borrowed horse and turned his head toward *Las Cascadas*. Now for Chivor. Good Lord, I had

hardly thought of Chris in the stress of the last few days, but no sooner had I got the cable off than I began to worry about him. It was a perilous task he had undertaken in my interest. I must get to Chivor at once. No time for the rest at home my body craved. My being ached with fatigue. I was forty-two years old, but I had just withstood a week of the most sustained and violent exertion which had ever fallen to my lot. Self-satisfaction eased the pains in my bones quite a lot.

6.

A Fight
with Bandits on
Chivor

I WAS a bit disappointed at lack of news from Chris when I arrived at *Las Cascadas*. Still, I had not really expected any because he would not want to weaken his meager forces by detaching one as messenger, and he probably had not succeeded in finding an Indian messenger of trust. In normal conditions one would expect such a venture as the clearing of bandits from a mine by fire and sword to flood the countryside with rumors. But no gossip version of Chivor events had reached *Las Cascadas*, although our *hacienda* lay in plain view of the mine. Still, the Guavio River would account for that. Rumors didn't jump that river much. It was an impassable barrier to intercourse, and its opposing banks were separate worlds.

That afternoon I lounged on a homemade easy chair on our wide veranda, watching those scattered white dots on the

Chivor peak which were the mine buildings. If all had gone well with Chris he would be in possession of those buildings now. While I watched them he might well be looking at *Las Cascadas*, wondering whether I had yet returned from the Farallones. He and his party might be in dire straits even, hoping day by day for a sign that I was on the way to reinforce them. If only I could signal to him across the void of the Guavio valley.

I fetched a mirror from the bedroom and tried flashing. It was an afternoon of scattered cloud and my signals were feeble. At any rate, they brought no response.

After dark I tried again, this time with a strong flashlight. At regular intervals I swept the blinding white beam in the direction of the mine. Again and again. Surely one of those four adventurers would chance to glance into the black sea of the Guavio valley before going to bed. If one of them saw my flashes he would surely answer them. For a long time I persisted without response.

Then suddenly I saw an answering flash, or thought I did.

With a trembling hand I flashed three times.

Back came three answering flashes. By Heavens! It must be Chris or one of his gang. No Indian would think of answering such a signal. If only I knew the Morse code! But even if I had known it the chances were against Chris ever having learned it. That wild blade would have had little opportunity of learning telegraphic codes in his lifetime of adventuring along the Colombian frontiers.

Now I flashed five times. Five answering flashes winked at me through the black night.

I flashed five long beams, then two quick ones. Like a visible echo through the darkness they came back to me. That sealed the proof in my mind.

Then I went to bed with a light heart. Chris's party still lived. Some of them, at any rate, had survived their first encounter with the dangerous band of Indians who had occupied the mine by force of arms. Chris, furthermore, must

now know that I had arrived home from the Farallones and he would be certain that I should come to him at once.

The very next morning I was on my way, alone. Those peaceful Indians who worked for Margaret would be worse than useless on such an errand. I was probably riding into trouble, true, but it was safer to face it alone than with men whom I could not trust to stand fast if powder began to burn and bullets to fly.

It was by the rickety bridge over the Guavio near the Monte Cristo *hacienda* that I got my first news of the mine from a passing cattle-buyer on his way to the plains. The news perturbed me. The cattle-buyer said he had heard firing from the direction of the mine as he had passed down the Sinai valley an hour or two before.

Just at the entrance of the Sinai valley, a few miles farther on, I met an Indian whose face I knew. He recognized me at once. His jaw dropped. Apparently petrified with surprise, he goggled at me as though I were the ghost of some ancient enemy long since disposed of. Then, without a sound, he whipped into the undergrowth and disappeared. From his astonishment I judged the news of my return to Colombia had not yet penetrated to the frontier region of Chivor. Well! I had been spotted now. I was willing to bet that the Indian was legging it already for the mine to give Joaquin's men the news. Now to ride on toward Chivor by the usual trail would be to invite an ambush, and the chances would be against my getting through alive. Only two courses seemed open to me. Either I could wait for darkness to cover a dash through by the usual route or I could make my way through the trackless forest on foot.

I halted my horse to consider the situation. I had arrived almost under the Chivor peak which towered five thousand feet above me to my left. From where I sat in the saddle I could see the rock *El Pulpito* standing out from the rugged slope about halfway up. That slope could be climbed. I had climbed it before when surveying the mine at the beginning

of my long-drawn-out campaign against Joaquin the bandit, the same Joaquin who was the real, although unseen, driving force behind the Indians who had overrun the mine.

Dismounting, I tied my reins to the saddle bow, wrote a short note of reassurance to Margaret on a loose leaf of my pocket notebook, slipped the note into my saddle wallet and gave the horse a resounding slap on the rump. I had selected a steady old plug from Margaret's stable for this trip. I knew him of old. Once turned loose he would find his way back to his own manger in quick time. Now he snorted with a note of outrage at the mistreatment of his rump, lifted high his head and trotted smartly down the trail.

Shifting my belt so that my holstered Colt hung behind me out of the way I put my face to the climb.

After two hours' hefty scrambling I had reached the fringe of the forest which on this side encircled the green reclaimed meadow on which the mine buildings stood. I parted carefully the undergrowth and peered out.

Dead silence reigned. My gaze traveled over the scattered group of whitewashed wooden buildings, most of which had been constructed under my own eye. There was the house in which I had lived with Margaret and the children. A bit below it was the building where Don Marco and his aging spouse had consumed candles to St. Christopher for a son. One by one my eye roved over the buildings. They were battered. Doors and windows gone out of most of them . . . Those doors and windows were probably gracing Indian hovels all over the district. Lifeless. Only one building seemed unsabotaged—the one nearest me. It was an odd building which I used to use as a carpenter's shop and a store room for odds and ends. This building seemed to have doors and windows and they were all closed. My heart sank. If Chris and his crew were in possession of the mine there would surely be some sign of life somewhere. The firing which the cattle-buyer had reported. Who would be firing at whom in this abandoned place? Had Chris been able to

re-take the mine when he had reached it? If so it seemed as though he had been driven out.

I was just on the point of stepping into the open to investigate when rifles began to speak from the top of the peak beyond the mine buildings. Several bullets sang over my head while others whanged through the steep, pitched, iron roof of the carpenter's shop near me.

That noise of battle heartened me. Those bullets had not been directed at me because I was completely hidden by the undergrowth. They were obviously directed at the building. The walls were heavily built of thick wooden slabs. Just the sort of fort to retire to if one were hard pressed. . . . I suddenly realized that Chris must be besieged in that building, only a few yards away.

"Chris! Hey—Chris Dixon," I shouted.

No answer, except more shots from the peak.

"Chris Dixon!" This time I bellowed.

Slowly the wooden shutter of one window opened and the shiny twin muzzle of a shotgun peeped out.

"*Quien llama, carajo?* Who the hell is calling?" Even being besieged hadn't taken the lilt of laughter from that well-known voice.

"Damn you, Chris! Point that gun somewhere else and I'll come across to you," I shouted back in English.

The shutter swung wide open and a white head looked out. "Christ Almighty, Peter Rainier! I knew you'd be along soon—ever since we spotted you flashing last night—but I didn't expect you to come like a monkey through the forest."

In a moment I had sprinted across the open space and was inside the building. Chris closed and barred the door after my entry. Three other forms were reclining on the floor on outspread blankets, smoking cigarettes. All well, it seemed, to my relief.

Burly young Albert Dixon rolled up to wring my hand with a grip that made the bones crack. "You disturbed our *siesta*," he laughingly complained.

A stocky young man of swarthy complexion came and put one arm round me, his hand patting me between the shoulder blades in the Colombian *abrazo*. Fernandez. Just then a couple more rifle bullets clanged through the flimsy iron roof—lucky the wooden walls were stout enough to be bullet proof—wailing like banshees on their way into the Sinai valley from which I had just climbed. Fernandez laughed delightedly. "*Carajo, es el sueno que me gusta mas*. Hell, that's the sound I most like to hear." Then the crazy young fool flung open one of the shutters in the back of the building and waved his hat toward the riflemen on the peak whence the bullets had come.

"Come away from that window, you crazy young *loco*." Chris slammed the shutter and pushed the young fire-eater out of line with it.

Now the fourth member of the party was introduced to me. A slender, melancholy-faced youth by the name of Alfonso Garcia. He looked boyish, shy in manner, but his long tapering hand looked speedy, and the pearl-handled butt which protruded from a worn leather holster appeared businesslike enough.

"Now tell me what the devil has happened," I demanded, seating myself on the old carpenters' bench on which most of the mine furniture had been manufactured at one time or another.

"We timed our first arrival just after dark." Chris fished a cigar from his pocket, bit the end off and lighted it. "Found a score or so of *bandidos* occupying the mine buildings. Most of them were sitting round a fire cooking their dinner in the open. We crept up within shot-gun range and gave them a peppering. By God, how they ran." He chuckled like a schoolboy who has just pulled off a practical joke and slapped his long leg with a shapely hand.

"After that we had two days undisputed possession of the mine," he continued. "Then a couple of dozen of the blighters came back armed with rifles." I remembered the

persistent rumor that Joaquin always kept a stock of rifles—unlicensed rifles are forbidden in Colombia and licenses almost impossible to obtain—buried, just in case there might be a revolution in which he could join for plunder.

"We were outranged then," continued Chris. "Being law-abiding citizens, we carried nothing but our shotguns and revolvers. We nipped into this building when they began to snipe us and here we have stayed because they are top dogs during daylight hours. They have posted some snipers on the peak to see that we stay here while the others are at work in the emerald pit."

"They don't seem to worry you much." My gaze swept the blankets on the floor where the three young men had obviously been taking life easy.

"We sleep by day because we work by night." Chris blew happy puffs of smoke at the rough rafters over head.

"How so?"

"As soon as it gets dark it's our turn. We go after them as soon as they can no longer see the sights of their rifles. We prowl the surface part of the mine and pepper anything we see. But we haven't tackled them where they camp in the pit yet. The sides are too steep to climb down in the darkness. The devils know enough to sleep close under the sides of the pit so we can't shoot at them from the top, and they've put up stone barricades to give them cover if we try from the opposite side. We've tried rolling stones down on them, and I expect we've spoiled their sleep a bit." He flicked the ash off his cigar.

My heart warmed to the four of them. Outnumbered at least six to one by a better-armed opponent they had still fought him to a stalemate. How to break that stalemate? That was the question.

"We ought to find some way of going after them tonight," Chris remarked after a pause. "They know you are here now, by your account, and that'll make them jittery because you did put the fear of God into the blighters in the

years you've been handling them." He wrinkled his brow. "But the job is to get at them in the bottom of that pit without being killed ourselves."

Bombs. Hand grenades. A few of the old Mills variety would rout those bandits out of the pit in quick time, I reflected. In my perplexity I began to wander round the building. How well I knew it! Every knot-hole seemed an old friend. The bandits for some reason hadn't looted it either. Everything seemed about as I remembered it.

"If only we had thought to bring some dynamite." Chris was walking up and down with his hands in his pockets.

Dynamite! The word stimulated my memory. My eye went to a dark corner. I was in that corner with a couple of strides. I lifted an unobtrusive loose bit of floor board and illuminated the dark cavity by the light of a match. Then I put the match out quickly. What I had seen in the hole didn't mix well with fire.

"What the devil have you got there?" Albert came and peered over my shoulder.

"Bombs, young fellow." That hole was where I had always kept a small stock of dynamite in case anything should happen to the main magazine on the peak. In the light of the match I had seen that my store was intact. Fuse and detonators, too. If you take a stick of dynamite and wrap around it some heavy nails you've got a damned good substitute for a hand grenade. And there were plenty of nails in that 'old carpenters' shop of mine.

Soon after dark we started on our offensive. Each of us carried four handmade grenades besides our weapons. In open order we advanced cautiously across the meadow to the bushes which screened the mouth of the emerald pit in which the bandits were encamped. Once among the bushes we lit our cigars, drawing steadily at them till they glowed like the *cucuy* fireflies which the Indians capture and carry in bottles for a light along the road at night. Then we took

up our positions about twenty yards apart along the edge of the pit. Not a sign of the enemy had we seen so far. Chris's night patrols had taught them that the pit was the only safe refuge after dark. We could hear them now, though, two hundred feet below us. Boisterous voices. I could see, too, the reflected glow of several fires, although the fires themselves were too close under the wall of the pit to be visible.

Then I gave the signal by waving the glowing end of my cigar above my head.

Five glowing cigar tips were then immediately applied to five of the short fuses which projected from five sticks of dynamite, each one wrapped round with a pound of rusty nails. As soon as the fuses spluttered their bright sparks we lobbed the dangerous contraptions outward into the black abyss of the pit and applied our cigar tips to another five. In a moment the sides of the dark pit below us became illuminated by spluttering trails of fire which curved in parabolas downward or bounced off rocky protrusions in miniature showers of sparks.

"*Caracas!*" There was an awestruck note in the blistering Spanish oath which floated upward through the darkness. The clamor below stilled as abruptly as though its makers had been swallowed by the earth.

Most of our grenades were now on the way down and the whole side of the pit seemed to be spitting fire. Ghostly. It even startled me, myself.

"*El Demonio! The Devil!*" a fear-stricken screech from below. The clatter of cooking pots overturned in wild stampede. Frantic oaths as men trampled one another in panic.

Just then the first hand grenade burst with an explosion that reverberated between the vertical walls of the pit and echoed from the ring of mountain peaks which stood sentinel in the darkness round us. That fuse at least had been cut too short, but the grenade burst like shrapnel just above the

heads of the stampeding crowd who were illuminated in its momentary red flash, and I heard the evil singing of the bits of rusty metal in which the explosive had been wrapped.

Boom! Boom! Bang! They were bursting now as quickly as battery fire. Some, at least, landed right among the panic-stricken mob and all burst close to them. Shrieks of pain as rusty metal tore through copper-colored flesh. Yells of panic.

Suddenly, with a wild yell of triumph Fernandez raised his arm above his head and, against the stars, I saw him hurl something after the fleeing mob.

"What the hell was that you threw?" I heard young Albert Dixon's query.

"A *ranca-puntillos*—a nail-puller—that I found in the carpenters' shop. *Santisima Virgen!* By the Mother of God, how badly they'll need it!" Fernandez doubled up in his mirth and rolled on the ground.

"That's all of that." Chris Dixon's tall figure loomed up beside me.

"Think they'll ever come back?" I threw my half-smoked cigar away. The powder fumes from the fuse lighting had made it taste like the fouled muzzle of a gun.

"Not they. Not till they come asking for their jobs back again." Chris spat and threw his cigar away also. "If we'd shot it out in orthodox fashion with powder and lead they'd have come back fighting as soon as they had recovered from their surprise. But this has scared them blue. Supernatural. Devil-magic. They'll be at the feet of the parish priest and confessing their sins as soon as their frightened legs can get them there."

The parish priest! I was glad that my old enemy who used to preach against me had been transferred to—I hoped—a hotter sphere, and that the present incumbent had more liberal tendencies. This priest would send them back to work and back to work they'd come after a few pagan rites had been added to the Christian ones, just in case it had been other than a Christian devil which had assailed them.

With the bandits suddenly reformed into more or less peaceable miners, we'd have the Chivor mine producing emeralds before many weeks had passed. My share would provide all the capital needed for *Las Cascadas*, or I was no emerald miner. Besides, there was the Farallones property. I should be leaving shortly to escort X——'s engineers to that cold hell, and I now had no doubt as to what their opinion of its wealth would be.

7.

The Peace
Which Comes with
Success

AT DAYLIGHT I awoke. The paneled wooden walls told my sleep-clogged senses that I was in bed in my own room at *Las Cascadas*. I reached for my pipe on the homemade table. It was made of red cedar the color of mahogany, and the Indian carpenter who had fashioned it had registered his love for his craft by carving little scrolls and circles on it. Those first few puffs in bed of last night's dottle always served to blast sleep from me and set my brain functioning for the problems of a new day. Then, with a furtive tap at the door, an Indian maid entered, a ridiculous little straw hat perched above the sweep of her low-hanging black hair. Her eyes were downcast bashfully because she was not yet used to wait on this *patron* who had so recently taken up residence on his *hacienda*.

As I sipped the tea which she had brought me, my gaze

traveled through the door which she had left open at my request. The first thing I saw was a waterfall about a mile away. *El Chinchorro*, the Indians called it, "The Hammock." From the top of a cliff it issued in a thick spout of water, struck the smooth face of the rock ledge below and spread in the graceful curve of an outstretched hammock, then contracted again, hammocklike, at the bottom. Only I couldn't see the bottom this morning because about half way down the fall disappeared in a cloud which was hanging low over the Guavio River, as though to confine that turbulent dragon of a stream to the gorge through which I could hear it booming. That hammocklike fall was one thousand five hundred feet high. Beyond the valley widened, then, in the far distance, contracted once more. Both sides of the valley were rimmed with mountain peaks, their rocky tips blushing at the caress of the still invisible sun. The furthest of those peaks in view was well over a hundred miles away. So, as I lay in my bed and enjoyed my tobacco and tea, I could enjoy also one of the grandest views which had ever gladdened my eyes. There was music in the air too. The tinkling note of many minor waterfalls with the more distant booming of the river in the gorge for overtone. We had called the place *Las Cascadas*—"The Waterfalls"—because half a dozen streams of clear mountain water decanted themselves from the plateau above us onto the lower plateau on which our house was built.

I got out of bed and into a shower of ice-cold mountain water, which made me howl when I stepped under it. Then I breakfasted. After that I lounged on the wide, trellised veranda and dreamed over the long rows of young coffee bushes which formed geometrical patterns on the mountain slope below. It was a good world, I felt, as I revelled in that pleasant lethargy which falls on one after long sustained exertion.

The day before I had returned from escorting the X—engineers into that cold purgatory. I did not envy them their

job in that place of elemental demons, and I had been overjoyed when they had expressed their willingness to allow Gotz to escort them back to Bogota when they had finished their work. A damnable place, the Farallones, for all its potential wealth, and my heart sang that I should not have to adventure a third heart-breaking journey there. That deal was as good as in the bag, I felt. The commission from that sale would put us on easy street.

Then there was Chivor. Things had gone smoothly there since that night when we had bombed the bandits out of the emerald pit. There had been quite a procession to the mine a day or two later, headed by that old ruffian Epaminondas, asking for their jobs back—the jobs they had held prior to my departure from Colombia. Epaminondas had had a blood-stained bandage round one stringy calf. Scratched by a thorn, so he had explained it, but no thorn ever grew which could have made the deep, ragged gash disclosed when I forced him to remove the filthy rag. It was with none too gentle a touch that I opened with my fingers the ragged lips of the wound and poured raw iodine into it. The sting of that iodine made the old devil howl and call on the Virgin for fortitude. I was willing to swear that the wound had been caused by a nail from one of our home-made grenades. I was willing to swear too, that most of those who followed Epaminondas to the mine had been among the stampede in the emerald pit. Chris enrolled them for work, however. They were none the worse emerald miners for having tried their hands unsuccessfully at banditry. It was no good to pick and choose when the whole district was implicated.

Now Chivor was working once more, only for us this time. True, the re-opening of the mine had made a dent in the all-too-scarce capital which Margaret and I had so laboriously saved for the development of *Las Cascadas*. I had to dip deeper than I liked to meet the mine expenses. But, on the other hand, Chris was already on an emerald vein, the one

the bandits had just begun to exploit when we interrupted them. Any night now Chris would be announcing production in the simple flashlight code we had worked out between us.

Peace. That was what *Las Cascadas* meant to me. Peace after many years of strife. The fulfilment of ambition. All my life I had striven that I might buy land. Now the land was mine.

After breakfast Margaret and I mounted our horses and rode about the place. White clouds floated across the rugged valley. Between the clouds the sun shone brightly and made the dark green leaves of our coffee bushes glisten. Around us mountain peaks brooded under their mantle of virgin forest. The cool mountain air was like wine. To expand the lungs fully was to feel an exhilaration akin to drunkenness.

8.

Once Again Strife

I HAD three weeks at home with wife and children. They were three weeks of tranquility, broken by nothing more serious than Jesus, the gardener, cutting his foot with a bush-knife, Maria, the cook, putting too much salt in the weekly twenty-five pound batch of homemade bread or one of the pack mules getting a sore back from a misplaced load. Then trouble started.

It was with considerable anticipation that I went to the veranda that night for my usual communication with Chris. The night before he had given me the signal in long and short flashes that the vein was "hot"—about to produce. If tonight he should flash me three long beams it would mean that he was actually putting emeralds in the mine safe. By the miners' god, it might even mean that he had already raped a pocket. It didn't take more than an hour or two to clean out a rich hole, once you'd found it.

Sitting down on the veranda steps I flashed my torch to-

ward Chivor. Back came an answering flash within a second. Chris had obviously been waiting for my signal.

Then he began to communicate. Long beams. One—two—three . . . Three was the signal I'd been hoping for—but wait . . . He was still flashing. . . . Four. . . . Four was not in our code. . . . If he were to give a short flash now, it would merely be the repetition of last night's news. But if it were a fifth long flash—five—it was a long one. . . . Five long flashes meant *trouble, come over*.

Rapidly I flashed back our signal for *repeat*.

He repeated the message. There had been no mistake. Chris was in trouble. What kind of trouble was anybody's guess, because our code was too primitive for detailed explanations, but I was willing to bet that he hadn't again been troubled with Indians. Those Boyaca devils had had too stiff a lesson to bother the mine again while Chris and his *bravos* were in possession of it.

Arriving tomorrow. After flashing that message I went inside to prepare for my journey.

I was so sure that the trail would be clear that I rode openly to the mine and reached it about noon after a dark-of-the-morning start.

To my astonishment, as I arrived, I noticed a number of Colombian police lounging in the shade of one of the buildings. They eyed me curiously as I rode past them but made no move.

Dismounting outside my former house I joined a group of men whom I had noticed on the veranda. Chris and his three retainers were there and with them three others. One of those three sported the neat uniform of an officer of police. The other two, Americans evidently, wore city clothes. When I joined them the seven men were seated in silence, and I could sense tension—evidently the "trouble" which Chris had communicated to me across the Guavio valley with his flashlight.

"Well, Chris?" I merely waved a greeting to the others. Better get a lead from Chris before I talked to them.

Chris waved his hand in the direction of our visitors. "He's got something to give you." Chris's laughter-loving face was grim. He and the three young men were seated on the edge of the veranda floor, facing outward. The others occupied chairs on the veranda behind them.

"Well?" I turned to one of the Americans who handed me a letter.

I burned with rage when I had digested that letter. My hand began to tremble so that the typewritten page blurred. Its contents were so unbelievable that I read it again to make sure. I read it several times, fighting for self-control before I should speak. The letter was short. It was a revocation of that letter which Mac had obtained on the night before my departure from New York. In that previous letter I had been promised a lease on the Chivor mine, the letter to be replaced by a formal contract as soon as I had regained peaceful possession. The letter now in my hand cancelled that one without explanation, and required me to hand over the mine to these men.

What to do? Standing with the letter in my hand, I debated with myself. Before I opened my mouth I ought to have decided on some course of action. Should we tamely give up the mine after we had risked our lives for it? By the God of Battles, *No!* We had fought for it once; we could fight for it again. That was my first reaction as I slowly folded the letter and placed it in my pocket while my eyes assessed the situation, marked the position of the men who in a few moments might be tangled in a fight.

The two New Yorkers I dismissed as negligible, although each of them had a tell-tale bulge in his coat pocket. They undoubtedly were armed, but they would stand no more chance in the kind of play that was impending than did I, apparently, in debating intangibles with their principals in New York. Next, I assessed the police officer. Armed, of

course, and competent-looking. Then there were a dozen police troopers lounging not fifty yards away. We were outnumbered heavily and therefore must depend on surprise to overcome that disadvantage if we should resort to arms to settle the issue in Colombian frontier style. Were my men ready? From the corner of my eye I could see all four still sitting quietly on the edge of the veranda. The butts of their revolvers were protruding most handily, I noticed, from their holsters. Their eyes caught my glance. Their eyes were inquiring. A slight incident occurred as though designed to reassure me of their readiness. One of the Americans had been filling a cigarette case out of a tin. Having emptied the tin he casually threw it away, so that it began to roll down the slope in front of the house. Slowly the tin bounced forward, about twenty yards away. There was a lightning movement at young Alfonso Garcia's hip. His hand moved too fast for me to say truthfully that I saw it move. His pearl-handled gun belched once and the tin bounded high in the air. When I looked back from the tin to the gun-man, his gun was back in its holster and he was still smoking a cigarette while his melancholy eyes roved the horizon. That boy could shoot! No wonder Chris had smiled that night in the Granada Hotel when I had queried young Alfonso's competence for a fight. Yes, Alfonso Garcia was ready. The others? That fire-eater, Fernandez, looked at me, his dark eyes pleading for action. Young Albert Dixon, too, was sitting with his legs drawn up under him, ready to spring to his feet. Chris was peacefully smoking one of his interminable cigars, but I noticed that the flap of his holster had somehow come unbuttoned. Yes. My men were ready to strike as soon as I should give the signal.

"Haw . . . haw . . ." guffawed one of our visitors, "that's some shooting—better than a circus."

The poor fool! He didn't even know that as he sat and laughed the toes of his boots were sticking out over the brink of eternity.

But the other one knew. The pallor of his face told me that. He had lived in Colombia and knew the temper of its people.

The group of policemen near the other building could obviously be surprised. They were laughing and joking together, some of them asleep. But not so their officer. His hand was resting very close to his hip, with the fingers drumming nervously against the open flap of his holster, and his beady eyes were fixed on me intently. That man was keyed to action for all his sallow features carried such an impassive look. He knew—and he was ready to fight, the nerve center without whom the rest of them would be like sheep.

The plan of action jumped into my mind full-fledged. If I smote the police officer under the jaw I should have him eliminated before he could draw his weapon. The two New Yorkers would probably almost die of heart failure at the sight of the four gun muzzles which would menace them almost before my blow was well delivered. With their officer knocked out the police troopers wouldn't fight. If they did, those four falcons of mine, perched ready to swoop on the edge of the veranda, would take care of them. Then we'd kick the New Yorkers off the property and let their principals use the Colombian law to oust us from it. That would take months, years maybe. . . . Meanwhile, the mine would be producing emeralds with which to pay legal expenses and plenty over. Yes. That would work. There would be complications afterward, of course, especially if any police should be killed. Dead policemen would make it awkward. But no worse than awkward. In Colombia, human life is rightly regarded as less precious than in more developed and less virile lands. The sympathy of the country would be with us as soon as the full facts were known. Chris, for his part, would have enough influence to get himself and his son clear with no more trouble than a lot of tiresome formalities. I, too, had plenty of influential Colombian friends. As for the two young Colombian gun-men, it would please

them mightily to become outlaws for a time. . . . A year or two adventuring in one of the more remote frontiers of the Republic, then an officially connived-at return to their usual haunts . . . Heroes—Robin Hoods—admiration would shine at them from every female eye.

"*Un momento, Senor*—one moment." The police officer spoke. His sallow face was pallid, but there was resolution in the clean-cut lines of it. His eyes met mine, and they told me he had read somewhat of my purpose. His hand was very steady as he took a folded paper from his breast pocket and handed it to me. "The *Senor* should read this before he commits any action which he might regret."

A glance at the Spanish typing on the legal-looking document told me what it was—an order from the Bogota court to hand the mine over to the representative of its owners. Damnation! If the officer had drawn his weapon on me, I should have shot it out with him, or, more likely, the lightning hand of Alfonso Garcia would have blasted him before my slower-moving hand had cleared my weapon. But that cursed piece of paper! I had no defense against that.

I handed the paper to Chris. He shrugged his shoulders when he had read it. Then he buttoned his holster. We were beaten. Our adversaries trained the big guns of the law on us before they had made any move. It was one thing to contemplate resistance against a party whose legal status was doubtful—we could have got away with that even if men had been killed—but to resist the order of the Colombian court . . . That would be regarded as no light-hearted, casual shooting such as occurred with reasonable frequency on the outer fringes of Colombian civilized life. No. If we killed a Colombian in the face of that order we should all be outlawed, hunted down if we ever put ourselves within civilized circles again. No influential friends could save us.

I handed the paper back to the officer and made a gesture with my hands.

His set expression relaxed. "The *Senor* understands that I have to obey orders—however my sympathy may lie?"

I nodded.

"The *Senor* has recourse at law, if he so wishes." He was regarding me gravely. Then he turned his back on the two New Yorkers, so abruptly that the movement was an insult.

Recourse at law! A suit that would drag on for years. Why, I had already dipped too deep into my capital and jeopardized the *Las Cascadas* development to get the mine going once more. No. Let them operate the mine. Some day they would find that it was not so easy to make the Chivor mine pay. Men were scarce who would pump their life-blood into the mine as I had done for years. Sooner or later that New York crowd would ask me to take it over again.

I was right. Not many months were to pass before the Boyaca Indians chased the new manager off Chivor. He barely escaped, by sneaking on foot into the forest. A day or two later he showed up at *Las Cascadas*. After we had fed and clothed him—he was half naked—he asked me to undertake the clearing of the bandits from the mine once more. I laughed at him. Colombian soldiers eventually cleared the mine, after the bandits had gutted it.

Since then I have regarded Chivor as nothing more than the memory of a five-year struggle. But, to my surprise, only a few weeks ago, after a ten-year interval, a letter reached me here in the Libyan Desert where I am serving with the Army of the Nile. A letter from Mac. To quote a passage from it: "If you should consider a visit to New York after the war, I am authorized to tell you that someone might make you a very interesting proposition." An interesting proposition! Well, who knows? The green Andean slopes have been calling to eyes made bloodshot by years of sand-swept, sun-cursed desert. Who knows what may happen when the Hun has been rolled back to the heap of blood-stained ruins which once was Berlin? I do know this: that proposition would have to be armor-plated before I accepted it.

9.

Gall

and Wormwood

THIS will be a short chapter. A man has the right to recount his struggles to his friends, to make them happy by an account of his success. He may tell them, too, of his defeats, but he must cut their accounting very short, lest his friends should share his sorrow.

My heart was bitter for at least a week after I arrived back at *Las Cascadas* from my defeat at the Chivor mine. I had acted in good faith when I had accepted what I took to be a valid lease on the mine, on condition that I cleared out the bandits. But the men with whom I dealt had used me to gain their own ends—used me as a catspaw to clear the mine of the marauders they had been unwilling to face. My pride had suffered from that thought. I had taken financial loss too, but that worried me less. There is always sufficient money to be made in this world, if you put your heart and soul into the making of it.

But the broad mountain plateau which was our home

soon rinsed the acid from me. How could a man feel bitter when it was his privilege to look down on a white, fleecy cloud in the valley below; see the inside of that cloud turn black; hear thunder booming from it and watch the rapier play of the lightning as the cloud thrust and parried with the mountain slope it had so recently been caressing; in other words, get a balcony view of the top-side of a thunderstorm. And anyway there was the Farallones deal. Gotz had written me that he had escorted X——'s engineers to the capital and seen them take plane for New York together with their samples. It could not be long now before Mac would be cabling me the results of those samples. If the Farallones deal clicked they could blow that damned Chivor mine off its peak for all I now cared. The Farallones would put us on easy street, and what a beautiful place we could make of *Las Cascadas* with a fortune to spend on it.

About the time the blessed peace of *Las Cascadas* had soothed me into a reasonable frame of mind Mac's anxiously awaited cable arrived. My hand trembled a bit as I tore the end off the flimsy envelope. My eyes devoured the few lines inside. I gasped.

ENGINEERS RETURNED WITH FORTY SAMPLES STOP ONE SAMPLE ONLY ASSAYED AS PER BOGOTA ASSAYS STOP THIRTYNINE SHOWED NO TRACE GOLD STOP PROSPECTIVE PURCHASER INCENSED STOP MOST URGENT YOU FORWARD REASONABLE EXPLANATION

Cables kept flashing to and fro between Mac and myself. For months I conducted an investigation which left me none the wiser. Then Gotz fell ill and was rushed to the hospital.

That, in effect, ended the dream of the great Farallones gold strike. It was not the first time a fabulous mining deal had fallen through, nor will it be the last. Mining men are optimists at heart and gamblers of necessity. A thousand factors can upset the most rosy-looking prospect. Regardless of the reasons for the failure, it was a dream that stirred the

mining world to its foundations, with the hope of a new gold discovery of Johannesburgian proportions, risked the lives of a number of us in the rain-drenched purgatory of the Farallones and caused several of us a packet of trouble—to say nothing of the useful horse and first-class saddle I had lost.

3. *The Defensive*

1.

A Feudal Existence

AGAIN it took some weeks of peaceful routine at *Las Cascadas* to steer me into a true perspective of life. But the peace of that blessed place would have eventually made an optimist out of Job himself and things finally began to settle in my mind into their right proportions. After all, *Las Cascadas* was ours. That meant more to Margaret and me than any other thing on earth, except the children. The place had got into our blood. Either of us by now would have been willing to pay any price at all to hold it. We did pay eventually, paid high, but I expect that if another chance were given us we should do the same over again.

True, we were short of the necessary capital to develop *Las Cascadas* to the point where its coffee and tea production—we hadn't even succeeded in getting any tea seed yet—would pay for the education of our family and the scale of life we thought our efforts should entitle us to. A yearly

trip to Africa or the States with about half of the year spent at home on our land—that was the kind of thing we were aiming at, and that was the scale of life which *Las Cascadas* could easily give us, if we could soothe its growing pains with enough cash during the next six or seven years.

Education for the children was already a problem. For some years we had been maintaining in our establishment a Colombian governess who was drumming the Spanish equivalent of the three R's into our three riotous offspring. As the governess spoke no English we had all unconsciously got into the habit of speaking Spanish at home, and it was not till I settled down to home life on *Las Cascadas* that I suddenly realized not one of our three fair-haired, Anglo-Saxon children could speak English. They had forgotten it. The governess went forthwith and a tutor was imported from the States. But the tutor was only a stop-gap. Those kids would have to go away to boarding school before they were much older.

Our most immediate problem, however, was the obtaining of tea seed. We had already found that neither India nor China would export it—afraid of new countries coming into competition with them, I suppose. We had eventually succeeded in getting some from Japan, but the Japs had apparently baked it before they shipped it. At any rate, out of some hundred pounds' weight of the little nut-like seeds not one sprouted.

At length, in despair, I rode over to see Carlos Piedrahita. Chris Dixon had once told me that some former president of the Republic had imported tea seed some twenty years before in an attempt to foster a new industry in the country. But the Colombian landowner had proved coffee-minded. No tea for him. So nothing more had been done about it. My hope was that there might be some little plantation somewhere in Colombia, growing neglected, where some tea seed could be obtained. If so, Carlos might know of it.

When I reached the Murca meadows near Carlos' house I found a picnic in progress. An ox was being barbecued. A row of juicy dripping pigs was turning on spits and set my hungry tummy squirming at the odor of roasting pork. In the shade of a small grove, which I had often casually noticed, a makeshift wooden table carried a huge array of bottles from which an Indian was dispensing liquid to the gentry, while at the other end of the meadow a crowd of the commoners were swilling *guarapo* from semi-spherical *totuma* drinking vessels.

Carlos grabbed me forcibly by the arm as I dismounted. "*Bien venida* . . . Welcome . . . Drink with me—wheesky and soda—coktels—any of your damned English drinks you like. . . ." There was a falter in his gait which seemed to indicate that the picnic had already been in progress for some time.

The Indian barman immediately attracted my attention by his activities. With the usual wicked-looking belt-knife swinging from his middle, he was dancing to and fro behind the rough boards which made his bar. From the bottle in his hand he was serving all and sundry.

Wheesky-soda—rum—*aguardiente*—were only a fraction of the variety of demands that were fired at that bartender from forty or fifty of the local frontiersmen while Carlos escorted me toward him, leaning intermittently on my arm. Unperturbed, the copper-colored savage was filling them all from the same bottle.

"I'll take rum," I decided. It was a rum bottle the bartender held in his hand. That rum from Carlos' own sugar plantation was well worth the sinking.

"Rum for Don Pedro," bellowed Carlos. "*Aguardiente* for me . . . *Carajo!* How savory the anis in it!"

Without turning a hair the copper devil poured both drinks from the same bottle. Mine was rum all right. Viscous and fruity.

Carlos smacked his lips audibly. "*Aguardiente* forever

. . . The Colombian drink for Colombian men . . . The drink that breeds heroes. . . .”

I felt that I had better ask him about the tea seed while he was still in shape to answer my question.

“Carlos, I want to grow tea on *Las Cascadas*. Where can I get some seed?” I adroitly frustrated the Indian bartender’s attempt to fill up my rum glass from a whisky bottle he had picked up as soon as the rum bottle was emptied.

Carlos turned to face me, rocking on his heels. “Tea—tea! Why grow that filthy stuff when Colombian soil grows coffee?”

“But I want to grow it, Carlos.”

“Well, grow tea if you want to. You Meesters are all mad.”

“But, damn it, I can’t grow it without seed. Where can I get some tea seed?”

“Tea seed? Why, I’ll give you all the tea seed you want if you swear never to ask me to drink the filthy stuff.”

Damnation! Carlos was already too far gone in his picnic to talk sense. I’d have to make the four-hour ride over to his place again some other time and catch him when he was sober. But Carlos persisted in reaching unsteadily for a twig of the tree under which we were standing. He grasped it, finally, broke it off, and handed it to me.

I took it, uncomprehending. Then suddenly the shiny, pointed leaf stirred recollection in me. It was a tea leaf, by Heavens, and those round, nutlike fruit on the twig were green tea seed. This grove of trees was tea—and I had ridden by it a score of times without knowing it. Not tea bushes—trees, thirty feet high. For twenty years they had rioted unpruned where Carlos had flung contemptuously that tea seed which a progressive president of Colombia had given him to try. The problem of tea seed was solved miraculously, and, by the size of those trees, the plant seemed to flourish exceedingly in our Guavio climate. True, the supply was limited. The amount of seed which I could get

from Carlos would not grow the tens of thousands of bushes which our *Las Cascadas* plans envisioned. But at least they would supply us with a small plantation for experimental purposes and from that plantation we could, in a few years, obtain all the seed we needed.

As I rode Moro home through the darkness that night I thanked Heaven that he was teetotal. If his legs had been as wobbly as mine felt, we should have both broken our necks before we had traveled Andean roads a mile.

After tea seed our next problem was roads. We needed better roads in the Guavio country. If we only had a motor road running through the Guavio valley the product of our *Las Cascadas* forests could supply most of the building trade for the thriving half million inhabitants of the treeless Bogota *sabana*. A motor road would develop the country, too, bring new settlers in. We should need motor roads, too, to move the tea and coffee which a full development of *Las Cascadas* would produce. A narrow, twisty mule track was good enough for small producers, but Margaret and I were planning broadly. Colombia had embarked already on an ambitious road program, and roads were being built rapidly through the more settled areas. But to get a motor road built into our thinly settled district I'd have to pull some strings. Roads are sops to voters, and politicians are apt to build them where the votes are thickest. I must see the Governor. The Guavio valley was situated in the *Departamento* of Cundinamarca and the governor of that department was the man for whom I must go gunning.

Don Guillermo Federico Obregon was a red-headed Irishman, although his ancestors had known no tongue but Spanish for four generations. One Bill O'Brien had been his forebear and Bill O'Brien had come over with the British Legion which had been in the forefront of most of the battles of Bolivar the Liberator, when he fought to free Colombia from Spanish rule. After the defeat of the Spanish,

Bill O'Brien, like many another *legionario*, had taken a Colombian wife, and it must have been that same wife who had made him change his name to Obregon, something her Spanish tongue could better compass than the barbarous syllables of O'Brien. Now Don Guillermo, of the fifth generation, had given up the family profession of cattle raising and taken to politics. So it was Don Guillermo who held the future of the Guavio region in his big freckled hand.

He greeted me heartily when I was ushered into his ornate office in the big *Gobernacion* building in Bogota. He knew me well. I had trimmed him at poker in the Jockey Club one night years before, and we had tippled sympathetically together on our rare meetings since.

"*Carajo, el ingles loco*—the mad Englishman. They tell me you've gone and bought a lot of precipices in the Guavio wilderness—that you're going to grow tea there—or some such outlandish swill." Don Guillermo's voice boomed till the window panes rattled.

"*Si, Senor Gobernador*," I bowed with a flourish of my hat. "But the Guavio wouldn't be a wilderness if your department was governed properly. Alas! We have a cattleman for governor. So the cattlemen flourish and the poor planters of the Guavio starve."

"Starve! *Hijo del diablo!* Son of the devil! I never knew a Meester to starve yet, although I've known them die of thirst when I put a tax on whisky." His big belly quivered as he pressed a button on his desk for coffee.

"What can I do for the mad Englishman?" he asked as we sipped our *tinto*.

"The unjust governor can come and pay the oppressed Guavio country a visit."

His shrewd fat face puckered. "How is the hook baited?" he asked.

"With the hospitality of the Guavio region."

"Come. Be frank." He was frowning now.

"Have you ever seen that part of your domain known as the Guavio valley, Don Guillermo?" I parried.

He shook his head. "I've worries enough nearer home." He drank his *tinto* at a gulp.

"Come and see it then. You will be welcomed."

"Welcomed! Yes. Welcomed with a hundred requests for a hundred improvements for which no money is available. You have come here for something yourself. Vomit up your wish. If I can do so, I will gratify it. It is easier to grant one man's request."

"True, *Senor Gobernador*, I have a request in mind. But I am not going to broach it until you have seen our Guavio country. If I should ask you now, you would refuse. After you have seen our Guavio I do not think you will."

After some more sparring he finally agreed to pay a formal visit to Gachala, the little village near Carlos' place and the capital of the Guavio country.

Two weeks later we met him at the upper bridge over the Guavio. The Guavio had only two bridges in those days before I built one across its middle—the old rickety wooden bridge at Monte Cristo, which was soon to fall down, and the suspension bridge forty miles higher up near Gachala.

One hundred horsemen met the governor. One hundred horsemen mounted on the best horseflesh the district could provide. One hundred landowners from our frontier region.

After formal greetings the governor set his big gray on the narrow cobbled trail which wound upward from the bridge toward the village of Gachala, perched on its crag, two miles away. The rainy season was at its height and the green mounain slopes on either side the six-foot trail were quagmires.

"*Viva el Gobernador!* Long Live the Governor!" the crags echoed the shout from a hundred bronzed throats.

"*Viva el Guavio,*" came back the governor's bellow, as he

set spurs to his horse and galloped upward. Bang! Bang! Bang! He was emptying his revolver in the air as he pounded on.

"*Adelante—adelante—on—on,*" roared the hundred throats as their owners jockeyed and maneuvered for a footing on the trail, while a fusilade from a hundred pistols set the rock pigeons wheeling from their nests in the cliffs.

What a race! A hundred horsemen roweling their high-spirited mounts as they jostled one another on the six-foot trail, while they emptied their guns skyward. "*Viva el Guavio!*" we roared. The pure, bracing air of that vast Andean valley made my blood race while I reloaded my Colt from my cartridge belt and rode one horseman after another out of my way. We were drunk—drunk with oxygen, our own clamor and the smell of powder smoke. Only three horsemen between me and the governor now. How that fat devil of a governor could ride! But my Moro was a match for his gray, or I'd eat my hat. Etiquette forbade my racing the governor into Gachala, but I could thunder into the village on his tail without causing him to lose face.

The mob was already thinning, I noted. Horses, forced off the road by the press, were floundering and plunging in the green meadows beside the trail. More than one man was picking his bemuddled self out of the ditch, and I caught one brief glimpse of a pair of huge spurs waving wildly out of a mud-hole.

Just ahead of me two horsemen were racing neck and neck after the governor—Gavriel Valencia, the tax-collector, long and skinny, on that shiny black brute he was always bragging about and Antonio Morales, the publican, short and tubby, on a rangy piebald. Those two horsemen just ahead of me, galloping side by side along a six-foot trail with a bare six-inch gap between the rumps of their horses. They blocked my way to the governor. My heels pressed Moro's ribs—I never wore spurs on him—and a touch of the reins against his neck guided his nose between those two rumps. Like a

wedge cleaving a log, Moro's shoulders drove those two horses apart. Valencia's black missed his footing on the edge of the cobblestones, turned a somersault into the mud and catapulted his rider into a puddle. The publican's piebald faltered along the other edge of the cobbles for a few yards, then lost his nerve and leaped blindly outward.

One horseman only between me and the governor now—Carlos on that vicious chestnut brute of his. Slowly Moro overhauled the chestnut until they were galloping side by side, their shoes striking sparks from the hard cobbles of the road, right on the heels of the governor's gray.

The governor turned his face back to us, white teeth shining under his tawny mustache, blue eyes blazing. "Oieeee—oieeee—oieeee!" He was yodeling the long-drawn cattle yell he had learned in his youth punching steers among the foothills, firing his pistol as fast as he could reload it from the wide leather cartridge belt round his big belly.

So we clattered into Gachala market-place and stopped at the *cantina* for a bracer before we should tackle the more serious business of knocking the top off a hogshead of rum down at Carlos' *hacienda*.

Early next morning the governor and I rode alone to a tall peak within a mile or two of Carlos' great house. We dismounted on its top and sat and smoked without a word as the sun topped that far ridge which was my *Las Cascadas* boundary. From where we sat we could see the vast sweep of the Guavio valley, from its birth in the high Guasca *paramo*, beyond which were motor roads and busses, down to its end where the Guavio turned from it to cut a short-cut through the outermost range to the plains and the Orinoco River beyond.

"Where is your place?" asked the governor at last.

I showed him the series of terraces. We could not see the house from where we sat.

"*Carramba!*" The big man said. "Not bad. The Englishman is not as mad as they say he is."

"I am glad I came," he continued after a pause. "Why did you ask me to come?"

"I want something for this country you are looking at."

"What is it you want?"

"What do you think it needs most?"

He gazed for a while at the vast sweep of forest-clad valley, checkerboarded here and there with little Indian clearings. "*Santisima Virgen!* What a piece of country! Coffee land, most of it. *Por Dios*, you could grow more coffee in this valley than all the mules in the district could transport to market." Then he turned sharply on me. "It is a motor road you want."

I nodded. "A motor road. Each year in your *Departamento* of Cundinamarca there is money appropriated for motor roads. Each year the roads are built where people need them less than we do. Look at that timber. Square leagues of it. Valueless now, because you can't carry boards far on the back of a mule. Tea—that is a new industry for Colombia that I am starting. Coffee . . . Besides, a road will bring in settlers, make more revenue with which to build more roads."

"The Englishman turned orator," he laughed. "But you are convincing. I promise you that the Guavio will have its share of road money for as long as I am governor."

The old cattleman was as good as his word. Each year thereafter some road was built toward Gachala. Slowly it topped the *paramo* of Guasca and crept downward beside the tawny rushing waters of the river Gacheta. Some years many miles were built. Some years few. But each year saw the big busses closer to *Las Cascadas* and the horseback journey shortened.

When the governor had promised me the road we mounted and rode back to hack our breakfast from the barbecued ox which Carlos was providing for his hundred guests under the tea trees in the meadows of the Murca River.

2.

Back to
Emerald Mining
Again

MUZO—the famous old emerald mine which had produced fairly consistently for three hundred years until about the time this story opened in 1927 with my arrival in Colombia . . . More women wear emeralds mined in Muzo than from all the other emerald mines in the world combined. I was going to mine emeralds in Muzo now, the mine with a history even more colorful than that of Chivor. The recorded history of Muzo began at the end of the sixteenth century, when the Spanish *conquistadores* first heard rumors of emerald formations, richer even than those of Chivor, in the steaming low-lying forests of the Carare valley. Indians of the Muzo tribe inhabited those forests. The Muzos were wild little men, very different from those peaceful Chibcha Indians who had some seventy years before

disclosed, with a mere minimum of torture, the whereabouts of the Chivor source of the green fiery gem.

For a decade the Muzos held off the Spaniards by guerrilla tactics until the rash little warriors made the fatal mistake of accepting a pitched battle, such as their wild hearts loved. The Muzos lost the battle, of course. Their chief, Itoko, was captured, together with his two daughters, Ibama and Quipama. The flower of the tribe was slain and the battered remnant took refuge deep in the forests, far from the white man's death-dealing guns. But, in spite of their victory, the Spaniards had no immediate benefit from it. Land for colonization was not the motive of their invasion of the Carare valley. The only interest the Spaniards had in that deadly climate was to discover the source of the emerald formations from which the Muzos extracted those green gems which they were known to trade for gold with the tribes across the Magdalena River. For this those iron-souled, lustful *conquistadores* had sacrificed men for a decade: men whom torrential flooded rivers had swept to their doom; men who had fallen victim to the flashing stroke of the deadly *fer-de-lance* or that still deadlier ten-foot snake which we call the *bush-master* and the Spaniard, more graphic in nomenclature, calls simply *verdugo*, the "executioner"; men who had died in the stealthy forest Indian's ambush; and, more deadly still, the scores who must have perished in those frightful epidemics which, through all time which history records, have swept periodically through that low-lying country, decimating its inhabitants. The "Muzo fever" that disease was called, when I first went to live in its domain. As yet there was no more scientific name for a disease that was so deadly that few cared to investigate it. A scientific expedition had once been sent to investigate it. Half of them had died, and the others fled. I was to know more about Muzo fever shortly. It was to be my lot to solve its mystery and—unscientific as I am—to get it classified in the long list of scourges of mankind. But that came later.

In that pitched battle which I have mentioned, the Spaniards had defeated the Muzo Indians on the very spot which was later to become the Muzo emerald mine, but the Spaniards did not know it then. Unaware of the riches beneath their feet, the mailed horsemen had charged again and again across the spot where now the great Muzo crater sinks its sides to the emerald formations below. They had tortured to death the Muzo chief and his two daughters. But neither father nor daughters had divulged the location of the emerald formations before death gave peace to their racked and twisted bronze bodies.

It was almost a decade later before the mine was found by accident. A horseman riding through the now depopulated Indian country felt his horse go lame. He dismounted and extracted the offending stone from the frog of his horse's hoof. Only when he found that the stone was green beryl—mother mineral of the emerald—did he realize that he must have ridden over the long-sought source of Indian supply. Retracing his horse's hoof-prints he found the mine which has given to the world the greater part of its emerald production.

I was now bound for Muzo. All had happened very suddenly. A telegram had reached *Las Cascadas*.

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE WILL BE OBLIGED IF DON PEDRO RAINIER WILL CALL ON HIM AT HIS EARLIEST CONVENIENCE

I sensed a job. I needed a job, too. Somehow, I must supplement our depleted capital for development.

Two days later I reached Bogota. As soon as I was washed and decently clothed I sent my card into the Minister of Finance—Doctor Esteban Jaramillo—the most astute financier that Colombia has produced for generations—the man who could always raise somehow an extra million or two when the great President, Olaya Herrera, needed it for his program of reconstruction.

With a minimum of delay I was ushered into the great

man's office. He was square-faced, with a jutting chin and black eyes that pierced through me.

"Mr. Rainier?" His English was as good as mine and almost without trace of an accent. He waved me to one of the red-leather upholstered chairs which stood around the vast mahogany table in his office.

"Yes. You sent me a telegram."

He nodded, took out a gold cigarette case and offered me a cigarette.

"You operated Chivor for a number of years?" he glanced at a piece of paper in his hand.

"Yes."

"After the mine closed down you obtained the promise of a lease on it but lost possession?"

"Yes." What was the man driving at, I wondered?

"You are now resident on your property in the Guavio valley?"

"Yes."

"Are you open for employment?"

"Yes." How I should hate to leave *Las Cascadas* and go back to mining! But I must earn a salary for the next few years to put our plantation over the top.

He leaned back in his chair and joined well-manicured finger tips together. "Mr. Rainier, I have decided to appoint a consulting engineer for the government emerald-mining industry. If such a position appeals to you let us get down to the details."

The upshot of the interview was that I named a figure somewhat higher than the one I was prepared to accept; that he accepted it without demur; that within an hour of my returning to my hotel I received a contract from him for my signature. All that within two hours of my having met him. . . . And the common conception of the Colombian is that he suffers from a *manana* complex, that he never does today what he can do tomorrow. That conception is rot. When the Colombian sees his way clear before him he travels along it

faster than most people. When he begins to stall and put things off till *manana*—well, if you are dealing with him, that's the time to sit up all night and look for weak spots in your plan of campaign because he has something up his sleeve.

The part I liked least about the contract was that it entailed my residence on Muzo until I had got the property into profitable production. That might take months. But once Muzo was into a good supply of emeralds it looked as though my consulting job for the government would develop into something like a well-paid sinecure with only an occasional visit to the mine to offset the handsome salary I should be receiving.

3.

Feudal Hospitality,
Snakes
and Epidemics

MUZO was a two-day journey from Bogotá. At some nameless little village at the end of the bus run I hired a mule—a vile, long-eared demon which refused to budge beyond a walking pace and lashed out with both heels every time I rammed home the long-roweled spurs with which the innkeeper had provided me. For hours the mule plodded downward from the high freezing *paramo* of Sumanga toward the hot country, through sluicing rain, over roads that were quagmires. Then the mule went lame. I wished she had broken her neck before I ever met her. Hour after hour I trudged, on foot now, over deserted roads with the tops of the somber Carare forest meeting overhead. Crossed a river which foamed waist-high. Breasted an upward slope, my riding boots sinking to the ankle with each step.

On the crest of that ridge the forest ceased for a space. Here an ornate white gate closed a side road which led upward through rows of pink-berried coffee bushes. At the end of the side road, overlooking the coffee bushes, was a great white house, just such another feudal-looking keep as that of my friend Carlos Piedrahita. But alas! Carlos' house lay on the other side of the Continental Divide, hundreds of miles away. With a longing glance I passed the gate and plodded onward toward the next village where I might hire a riding animal, some hours distant.

But I had hardly traversed a quarter of a mile when my morose meditations were interrupted by the sound of galloping horse's hoofs. A big upstanding bay galloped alongside and halted with a slither and a splash. From an ornate silver-mounted saddle an Indian lad leaped nimbly to the ground and saluted me with a flourish of his battered straw hat.

"*Que pasa, joven?* What's the matter, young man?" I could feel my feet sinking deeper in the mire as I stood wearily on them.

Without a word he placed in my hands the reins of the beautiful animal from which he had just dismounted.

"Whose is this horse?" I stared, amazed.

"It is the horse of the *patron*." The lad's white teeth flashed in a smile.

"What are you doing with it here?"

"It's like this, *Senor Meester*," he scratched one calf with a still muddier bare toe. "The big house up there belong to the *patron*, Don Ignacio Juan de Dios Valencia."

"Well, what have Don Ignacio Valencia and his horse to do with me?" The big bay had reached over to me and was rubbing his nose against my arm. My hand went up automatically and began to rub him behind the ear.

"Why, *Senor Meester*," the lad flashed another smile. "The *patron* likes to sit on his veranda and watch the passers-by. Just now he called me from my seat by the kitchen fire. 'Manuel, Manuel,' shouted the *patron*. 'Catch a horse

quickly. A gentleman has just walked past my gate, leading a mule which is lame. No gentleman can walk on foot past the gate of Ignacio Juan de Dios Valencia. Put a saddle on the horse and take it to the gentleman.' "

"But how am I going to return the horse?" I asked.

"The *patron* said you could return it when next you pass this way. Keep it till then."

It was some weeks before I had time to ride the horse back from Muzo to its owner. When I finally did so my benefactor refused to let me leave before the completion of a round of celebrating to which he bade the neighborhood in my honor. The only price I paid for a month's use of one of the best animals I ever threw a leg over was a bit of a hangover and the knowledge that it is foolish for any foreign Meester to endeavor to out-tipple any Colombian coffee baron from his own cellar.

At the end of my second day from Bogota I passed the tumbledown village of Muzo, crossed the muddy Carare River and entered the gaping canyon from which the muddy Itoko issued—the tributary river named after the old Muzo chieftain who had died with his two daughters rather than reveal the secret of the emerald formations through which the stream passed. Backward and forward twisted the turbulent little Itoko, viscous with black mud from the mine upstream. Backward and forward twisted the narrow mule trail on its banks. At last the canyon opened to a circular amphitheatre ringed by high mountains, forest clothed. At the bottom of the amphitheatre was a black gaping crater—the Muzo emerald pit in which men had toiled and died for three hundred years. Chivor had been cool and invigorating, open to all the winds that blew, the boundless *llanos* spread carpet-like before it. Muzo was stifling, breathless. No breeze could leap the encircling mountains nor creep in through the narrow twisting canyon. The eye longed to cast its vision toward a distant view, but a mile was the limit of one's vision in

Muzo. In Chivor the emerald formations had been yellow. In Muzo they were black, funereal.

But I had one pleasant surprise when I arrived in Muzo camp. The mine manager was no other than Miguel Alvarez, the same mining engineer who had acted as government umpire in my feud with Joaquin the bandit, years before.

Before many weeks had passed we had three hundred miners toiling in the Muzo crater, and it was not long before we began to produce emeralds.

In Chivor, Don Marco Hincapie and I had ruled, pistol on hip, holding down the disorderly district and, by the sharpness of our vision, reducing the theft of emeralds to a minimum. In Muzo I also wore my pistol, true, but not to hold down the district. The police did that. Muzo was a government mine and therefore must be run according to the rules laid down in Congress by the lawyers, cattle and coffee barons who governed the country. So, in addition to the miners and staff, there were a hundred police resident on the place. Each working gang of miners was overseen by a squad of police with loaded rifles.

Before I had been on the property very long I had begun to wonder whether I had not better appoint an additional force of super-police to watch the police who were watching the miners. Yes, Muzo was run by rote and rule. Not much chance to exercise initiative. As consulting engineer, my duties were confined to advising young Miguel Alvare, the manager. I suppose it was a soft job. But the only palliative to life in such a place as Muzo is to have every daylight hour so filled with work that you have no time to be sorry for yourself. Even at first my "soft" job in Muzo was the toughest I have ever tackled because I was bored stiff. It was the first serious boredom my active life had ever subjected me to, and I didn't like it. Later, when the *peste* struck us . . . Well, I liked that less, although no one could then have called existence boring.

But Muzo marks one landmark in my career, of vast importance to me. It was from Muzo that I sold my first short story. For years I had been plastering unfortunate editors with my effusions, but without success. I felt frustrated. My life had been not uneventful as most lives go, and I felt that I did have something to write about. But not one story had I sold so far. It was a stray English paper that turned the tide for me. Hungry for reading matter, I had read the news part through and through and then begun to read the advertisements. The Regent Institute advertised a course in short-story writing. I sent for the course. The first big foolscap envelope arrived some months later. By the same mail, too, came a slimmer envelope, whose shape I recognized only too easily. It was one of my rejected stories. Tossing that rejected story disgustedly aside, I dug into the big envelope, the first lesson of the correspondence course.

That first lesson dealt with such things as "How to begin a story," "How to select a title," "What the editor looks for, etc." Having digested the first lesson I picked up my rejected MS. and re-read it. With the lesson still hot in my mind, I changed the title and re-wrote the first paragraph. Then, without changing a word of the rest of it, I mailed it to the literary agent whom the Regent Institute had recommended. By return of mail I received a check—the first from the product of my pen. In my career I have handled some large checks, but that small one gave me more satisfaction than any other. In the first place, it was the first fruit of many years of effort, the proof that I should yet succeed in teaching myself this fascinating new trade I had set myself to learn. In the second place, that astonishing literary agent, John Farquharson, had succeeded in selling the story to the very editor who had just rejected it.

It was not long before I began to feel that the Muzo police resented my presence at the mine. Possibly my ideas of emerald theft prevention did not coincide with theirs. For my part, I thought them a poor lot. . . . The unhealthy Muzo

district was a sort of penal station for the Colombian police and did not get the pick of the force. I could sense tension. Like the tension between two thunderclouds which produces the electric spark. I could sense trouble ahead if I did not watch my step. The police wanted me out of the way. It was not a question of a shot in the back as it had been in Chivor in Joaquin's time. The police were no murderers. But there were some wild blades among them. Some day I might clash with one of them. When he drew on me I should have to shoot it out. So far the saving feature of the situation was the unknown factor of my marksmanship. They could see the big pistol that swung always on my hip. Could I use it? They tried hard to find out. One or other of them was always challenging me to shoot at a mark against them, but always I refused. I knew myself for a fair enough shot, but I was not sure enough of my skill to rely on it to overawe them. So long as I succeeded in remaining unclassified, I felt fairly safe, because they could never be sure they were not tackling a good gunman unawares if they clashed with me. So the weeks passed. The tension grew. The police trod warily round me as a pack of curs circles warily a sleek tomcat, dozing in the sun. Will the cat flash his claws if they close in, or will he scamper for a tree? How long are the claws?

Then, at last, the crisis. An Indian came running. A snake! A huge one! A *tailla*—the deadly *fer-de-lance*—down where the gang was clearing bush. . . . Would the Meester come and shoot it so that the gang could carry on their work?

I reached the spot on the Indian's heels. The first thing I noticed was that a dozen police were lounging in the shade of a tree, obviously spectators. A trap, by God, and I had fallen into it. Those police had sent the Indian to call me to kill the snake, although each police holster carried a gun. But, if I could get at the snake with a stick, there would be no need to shoot. That would leave them still guessing.

"Where is the snake?" I asked the Indian, ignoring the police.

He pointed to a narrow ledge halfway up a low cliff. The ledge was about twenty feet above the bottom of the cliff and in the middle of it a small bush grew. "The *tailla* went under that bush, Meester."

I looked at the ledge, and I didn't like it. No room to use a stick up there. If I was going to kill the snake I should have to scramble up the cliff and shoot it. But to face a big *fer-de-lance* on that narrow ledge! No room to dodge should my first shot miss. Well, the longer I considered it the less I should like it and I must either kill the snake or lose face, which I couldn't afford. So I scrambled up till I stood on one end of the ledge, a twenty-foot drop almost under my heels. I stood about six feet from the bush where the snake lay hidden. Too close. But I could stand no further away because there was nothing to stand on.

Holding onto a small tuft of grass with my left hand to steady myself, I drew my gun with my right, my eyes fixed on the base of that little green bush with the deep shadow under it. As my vision gradually pierced the shadow I could make out a dark coiled object. A big snake. The thick part of him looked thicker than my forearm. His details became clearer as I continued to gaze. At last I thought I could distinguish the head. I raised my gun and fired. Christ! The wicked flat head shot into view far from the point I had aimed at. It swung back, then lashed out at me like the flash of a cracking whiplash. Short, thank God! But only inches short. So vicious the stroke that the evil triangular head thudded audibly on the ground at my feet, so close that my toes tried to shrink into my heels as they flinched. I was astounded at the size of him as his full length became exposed. I was so astonished that I missed my chance of a shot at the head as it lay motionless for a minute fraction of a second on the ground at my feet. Back swung the head like an inverted pendulum, with a lightning recovery from its lunge. If I failed to counter the next lunge those wicked fangs

would pierce my flesh, because the force of his lunge had dragged the snake's body forward till he was now within easy striking distance. I could almost feel those fangs. An hour or two of agony, should they pierce me and after that death—horrible and bloated. Back swung the head, poised to deliver the death stroke. But at the limit of its backward swing my heavy pistol seemed to explode involuntarily in my hand. The horrifying head was whisked away as though by some unseen agency and the loathesome, bloated body dropped to the bottom of the cliff where it lay writhing. For what must have been a full minute I stood motionless because my knees felt so weak that I could not essay the descent. Then I holstered my gun and scrambled down.

Once down, the police parted respectfully where they had clustered round the carcass. I examined the still writhing object with its beautiful zigzag mottlings. That first shot had not been a miss. But it had pierced the snake near the tail. Even so, it must have crippled him partially, causing his first lunge to fall short. That first shot had probably saved my life as much as the second and more spectacular one.

I had no more trouble from the police during my months on the Muzo mine. That last lucky shot from the hip had put the fear of God into the most reckless of them. They couldn't be sure it was a fluke and didn't fancy a gamble to make certain.

By the time I had been at Muzo some five months I felt that I could leave it with a clear conscience and open the consulting office I had decided on in Bogota, returning occasionally for an inspection of Muzo as provided for in my contract with the government. The mine organization was swinging along nicely by that time and plenty of green fire was coming to light, to refute those political enemies of Doctor Esteban's, who were trying to make capital in Congress about his having employed a foreigner for one of the best-paid jobs Colombia had at her bestowal.

But just about then the *peste* struck us. The plague. *Vomito negro*. "Black vomit." What science, from a safe, long-distance standpoint called "Muzo fever."

Muzo fever, my hat! I hadn't examined half a dozen of the poor, pain-racked Indian miners with whom our little mine hospital at once became crammed before I was as certain as I could be that it was yellow fever. I'd seen yellow fever before, in West Africa, and this had all the earmarks of it. What a time I had for the next few weeks! Our Colombian doctor panicked. He disappeared. I heard afterward that he had gone on a binge in the village and drunk himself into a stupor from which he only recovered when the epidemic had died out. That damned *peste* struck us down like the wrath of God. Two out of every three patients admitted to the hospital died. The rest of the miners stampeded to their distant homes and many of them died along the way. The mine shut down.

Weeks later, when I had got the mine going once more, I journeyed to Bogota to consult my friend Doctor Bevier of the Rockefeller Foundation.

"Doc, we've had an epidemic of yellow fever at Muzo," I announced, as I eased myself into a well-upholstered chair which felt grateful to a behind fatigued by two days on a hard saddle.

"Rot!" The doctor waggled his neatly trimmed beard and fussed with a soda syphon. "Rot! We stamped yellow fever out of Colombia ten years ago. What you've been through is Muzo fever. Something quite different."

"Different be damned. If your Muzo fever is not the old yellow-jack, why, I'll lick your boots in public on the Plaza Bolivar." I took a big gulp of whisky and soda. I felt jaded. The last few weeks had been wearing.

We argued for some time, but I stuck to my point.

"Just to convince yourself"—the Doc fired the parting shot as I was leaving, hours later, with one of Mrs. Bevier's famous chicken and waffle dinners under my belt—"just to

convince yourself, send me up one or two bits of liver, if you should happen to have another epidemic. I'll pass them on to be tested in our lab in Rio. That'll convince you—you and your yellow fever." He waved me into the still, black starlight of the Bogota night.

Not so long after we did have another epidemic. A bad one. Each morning at daybreak I would step onto the veranda of my house and glance down at a little plateau where lay our mine graveyard. Four graves this morning—we were holding our own. Six graves—the damned *peste* was gaining on us. Two graves only—it was abating. If there were only something I could do to help the poor devils who were dying in agony. Livers! Doc Bevier had asked for bits of liver. Our Muzo doctor had once more gone into another flat spin in the Muzo pubs so, perforce, I conducted amateur autopsies on several of the deceased. I found their livers after some groping, snipped a bit off each with my nail scissors and sent them in alcohol to Doc Bevier.

But I felt futile. What matter if the *peste* were yellow fever or some other obscure tropical disease. My men were dying, and I could not help them. God, how I wished in those black days that I had had a chance to become a doctor in my youth. Many times before had I wished it, when the grim necessities of the frontier had forced my unskilled hands to attempt what only the skilled hands of the surgeon should have been asked to do—but never had I wished it as I did in those Muzo epidemics. With most tropical diseases I could at least have made some show with the simpler remedies. But the yellow-jack had me helpless. I knew something about measures for its prevention but nothing of its cure—if there were any. I had done all I could after the first epidemic to prevent its recurrence. I had gone gunning for the *stegomyia* mosquito. I had waged bitter war against the singing pest. I had cleared the forest round the mine. I had drained stagnant pools. By the time the second epidemic stalked with grim steps among us I had so depleted insect

pests that I could read a book by a strong light on my open veranda at night with no more noxious visitant than a silly blundering moth. I had definitely eliminated all mosquitoes from the mine precincts, and yet my men were dying in the hospital, dragging their poor tortured bodies round the floor to ease their agony while they spewed up a filthy black stinking mess to foul still further the already reeking place. Great God! After an hour in that inferno I would go outside and retch my heart up—peeping furtively at my vomit after, to see whether it were tinged with black. Something was bringing that epidemic. But what?

About the end of the second epidemic I received a letter from Doc Bevier which is still one of my treasured possessions. An apology from Rockefeller Foundation. Two typewritten pages of it. Each of those little bits of human liver I had so laboriously quarried from stiffening bloated corpses had shown positive results. Muzo fever was yellow fever. I was vindicated. But although that gave me some satisfaction it did not save the victims.

At last the death rate began to wane. Again the remnants of my labor force drifted back to work and again the mine operated. Once more I traveled to Bogota.

"What is the cure for yellow fever?" I asked Doc Bevier.

"Cure! Treatment!" His beard bristled. "Keep the patient quiet and give him plenty of liquid. If you should ever get the disease, go to bed at once, drink plenty, order your coffin made and pray to God you won't need it."

Cheerful counsel. "Have your coffin made!" I was to remember that before many weeks were over.

"By the way," remarked Bevier, just as I was leaving, "there's one of our Rockefeller boys staying over at the Granada. By the name of Rickard. You might like to meet him. Just up from Rio, he is, and got the latest on yellow-jack right out of the mosquito's mouth."

A few minutes later I was introducing myself to Dr. Rick-

ard. A youngish man, with one of those long faces which look wise, rather than merely clever.

"Look here, Rickard," I requested, as soon as we had by casual conversation probed each other's minds enough to become acquainted. "Tell me what can be the carrier of this yellow-jack in Muzo."

"Stegomyia, probably."

"I'll be damned if it's stegomyia." I recounted what I had accomplished in eliminating that death-carrying species of mosquito.

He wrinkled a broad brow. Then suddenly his eyes flashed and he jumped to his feet and paced rapidly to and fro. "By God! It might be . . . But that's unproven yet. . . ." He slumped again into his chair.

"What's unproven?"

He shook his head. "Just an experiment we have been making in our big yellow-fever lab in Rio. Can't divulge it until it's proven. We might be on the wrong track, although I'm personally convinced we have made a new discovery."

"To hell with your 'proven.'" I jumped to my feet. "While you're proving it I'll be losing lives. For the love of Heaven tell me what you've been trying. I'll try it. I'll try anything. This damned *peste* has got me beat."

He lit a cigarette and puffed thoughtfully at it while I watched the little bluish balls of smoke float toward the ornate ceiling of his hotel bedroom. Then finally he spoke. "The *chinche*. The long South American bedbug. Have you got any of them in Muzo?"

"*Chinches*? We've got millions of them."

"Well, I am practically certain that through the *chinche* we have succeeded in infecting apes with yellow fever."

The *chinche*! A great light dawned on me. Our Indian barracks were infested with *chinches*, as was every other Indian dwelling in the hot-country districts of Colombia. During the epidemics I had noticed too, subconsciously, that

each epidemic had seemed to favor one or other of those long wooden buildings in which our Indian miners slept in tiers of wooden bunks. Rickard's suggested theory fitted the facts. The *chinch*es in a certain building became infected. In that building the occupants died in much greater numbers than those of the other buildings. By Jove, it must be the *chinch*es. It could be nothing else. My heart leaped with relief. That foul-smelling insect was an old enemy of mine—if only for the great welts he raised on me when I slept in Indian huts—and I knew how to defeat him. Flit was the answer to that villain. The common household commodity that housewives use when they go gunning for houseflies.

The very next day I left Bogota with all the Flit that was for sale in the city—about two hundred gallons of it. Four mule-loads of Flit, when I should load my mules at the end of the motor road.

As soon as I arrived at the mine my campaign began. We literally sluiced those barracks down with Flit. Poured it into cracks. Sprayed the hordes of loathsome insects which scuttled from their lairs at the smell of it. Slaughtered them by thousands. When we had finished I felt sure that we had eliminated the *chinche* from the living quarters of the mine. True, he would breed there again if we allowed him. But a weekly housecleaning with Flit should take care of that.

It was the *chinche* which had been infecting the Muzo mine with the disease for centuries. I am sure of it, although several Rockefeller doctors about the world have laughed at me when I told them this story. The proof of it is that, to my knowledge, there have been no more epidemics on the Muzo mine since that day ten years ago. Let the wise scientists laugh that off.

No more epidemics. But there was one more isolated case. A case that carries proof still further, if more proof were needed. Some of those *chinch*es at our housecleaning had bitten me and raised great welts. I was the last, I believe, to contract yellow fever on the Muzo mine. The less said about

the experience the better. After days—I have no idea how many—I emerged from a sea of pain. The mine doctor stood beside my bed, his eyes still bloodshot from the binge he always indulged in when the *peste* spread its black wings over the camp. Beside him stood my friend, Miguel Alvarez, the mine manager. His young face grim. He had dragged the doctor from his cups, and forced him to my bedside.

The doctor's grubby hand was on my wrist, feeling my pulse. My head was clear now. But weakness held me paralyzed.

"How is he doing?" Alvarez' eyes looked anxious and his sallow face looked grave.

"Dying." The doctor shook his tousled black head.

"Lies." I tried to refute the verdict. I was not dying. I knew it. But my lips were too slack to mouth the words my brain had ordered.

"No hope?" Alvarez grasped one of my hands that was lying outside the sheet. I felt the friendly pressure and tried to return it but again my body was in rebellion against the orders of my mind and my fingers remained inert.

The doctor listened to my breathing. "*Carajo*. What a fortress is the body of the Englishman! Strong like a mule. But he cannot last." My unnaturally active brain told me that the doctor's heart was not as sorry as his tone would imply. I had tongue-lashed him unmercifully for deserting his post through those two epidemics.

Then my visitors were gone. I began to doze. A healthy longing for sleep pervaded me. But a continuous noise of hammering in the distance kept me awake for a while. Hammering! Who in the name of Lucifer would be driving nails into wooden boards at this time of the evening, long after the working hours of the mine had ended?

For some time I puzzled about the mine carpenter who was working overtime. Then the solution dawned on me. I was hearing my own coffin being made.

4.

Rediscovering

a Lost

Emerald Mine

I DETESTED Muzo as much as I had loved Chivor. The Muzo climate was deadly, as my semi-rotted liver kept reminding me for many months after my bout of yellow fever. Congenial company in Muzo there was none, now that young Miguel Alvarez had become infected with malaria and got himself a job in some more salubrious place. With the police I had nothing in common, although they had treated me with great respect ever since my lucky shot at the *fer-de-lance*. I hated the damned black crater and its encircling amphitheatre of somber forest. But there was now no longer reason for my continuous residence in Muzo, and I felt that I had done a good job for the government on the cursed place. Scotched were those deadly epidemics which had disorganized the mine's economy for the past three centuries. The mine was paying, too, for the first time

in a generation. I could leave it with a clear conscience, returning only for occasional visits to keep its feet in the straight and narrow path that leads to profits—as was clearly set out in my contract with the government.

Incidentally, my conscience as regards what I had accomplished on Muzo was doubly clear because, by making the mine pay, I had, with my own hands, driven the last nail in the coffin of that deal on which Mac and I had worked in New York: acquiring of control of both the Muzo and Chivor emerald mines in order to gain control of the emerald industry of the country. As long as Muzo remained unproductive, there was a chance of our acquiring control of the property, but once Muzo began to show a profit our chance had gone.

I was ready to leave Muzo, my work there accomplished. I was ready for the next step in my program to earn money for *Las Cascadas*. For the next few years I planned to earn my living as a consulting engineer. I would open an office in Bogota. The kudos of having the government of the country as my first client would bring other clients to my door. I would work hard for the next five or six years till our plantation was self-supporting, then retire to *Las Cascadas* and found a dynasty of tea barons. Cattle and coffee dynasties Colombia already had in plenty. Lord, how many months since I had seen *Las Cascadas*? My being ached for the blessed peace of the place. Tea was flourishing, judging by Margaret's letters. Coffee was doing well.

But just as I was preparing to leave for a life in a more agreeable atmosphere than the steaming Muzo forests I received a telegram from Dr. Esteban, the Minister of Finance.

PROCEED COSCUEZ MINE MAKE FULL REPORT

Coscuez! The emerald mine which had been operated by the Spaniards for years with good success, had then been abandoned and lost during the revolutionary wars at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Coscuez had been re-

cently re-discovered, or so the story went. At any rate, the government had posted a detachment of police to guard the spot where some Indian prospector, probably half-baked, had alleged to have found the Coscuez emerald formations.

The journey to Coscuez would be a hard one—two days beyond Muzo in the heart of the Carare forest. I wired for Chris Dixon to join me. It was no kind of journey to take unaccompanied and I hankered, too, for the sound of an English laugh and the English tongue after long months with only the Colombian staff of Muzo for company.

With three pack mules and three Indians Chris and I rode into those somber forests where a few remnants of the once numerous Muzo tribe of Indians were still reputed to lead their untamed existence. There was only the merest trace of a trail, and the going was fiendish. The funereal boles of the forest supported a high leafy roof which leaked badly and dripped steadily on us. The rains were on. So saturated was the air with moisture that a crop of mold formed on our boots each night as we slept.

Toward sundown on the first day out from Muzo we reached an abandoned Indian clearing. There stood a dilapidated palm-leaf hut, surrounded by waist-high brushwood which was striving upward to fill the gap in the forest caused by the original clearing. This was no Muzo clearing. The Muzos were food-gatherers, not cultivators. It was the relic of some ambitious "civilized" Indian colonist who had settled on the fringe of the Muzo country, fought the forest for a year or two and then given up the struggle. Neither was the shanty any paradise in which to spend the night, but at least, in it, we should be clear of that damned dismal forest.

I swung off my riding mule and began to stamp my feet to restore the circulation in legs cramped from hours in the saddle. Hardly had I set foot on ground when a movement in the brushwood caught my eye. Red, black and yellow—A coral snake. Deadly. With my riding whip I soon dispatched him, then another. The place seemed infested with

them. Before we had lifted the mule packs off the mules we had killed half a dozen of the beautifully marked little reptiles. None more than about a foot long, but a bite from one of them would likely mean death unless prompt remedies were available.

Once our snake hunt was over Chris, as usual, assumed charge of the domestic arrangements of camp.

"*Anden, anden, diabolos*. Get a move on, you devils. Two of you lead the mules to water while Miguel gets that hut swept out." The big Englishman shooed them off with motions of his hands and began to bite the end off a cigar.

"*Es malo punto, Senor*. It's a bad place, sir. Better to camp in the forest than among these snakes." Miguel crumpled his battered hat in both hands and looked uneasily around him.

"Get along with you, *Bobo*. See that the snakes are cleaned out of that hut, or they'll be biting you while you sleep." Chris lit his cigar and blew a puff of smoke at the surrounding forest.

Miguel shuffled off to obey and a cloud of dust from the door of the hut reassured us of its dryness and testified to the use Miguel was putting the bundle of twigs which he had collected before entering.

Then a sudden anguished cry. "*Coral—coral—a coral snake has bitten me.*" Miguel came staggering toward us, one forefinger clasped tight between the fingers of his other hand.

We acted fast. Seconds count after a snake-bite from a deadly species. I grabbed Miguel's hand and pressed the already swelling forefinger onto a conveniently situated log. Chris drew his belt *penilla* and with one sure stroke sliced the finger off above the second joint.

Miguel fainted as I held the stump out to let the spurting blood clear the poison. Then I tied a string tightly round the stump while Chris slit a pistol cartridge with his *penilla* and sifted the charge into a little heap on the log. Over the little pile I held the red raw stump. Chris applied a lighted match. A flash. A puff of smoke. The red stump now showed black.

Seared. There was no further bleeding when I loosed the string. We laid Miguel back and pillowed his head on a saddle cloth.

Chris picked up the remnant of his cigar which he had carefully laid on a log as Miguel had come staggering toward us, rubbed the white ash off and eyed the blackened end of the butt ruefully. Then he relit it. "He'll be all right," remarked my veteran companion, jerking his white head toward the Indian's inanimate form. "We got him in time. Couldn't have been a minute after he had been bitten before you had his finger laid out and I sliced it off."

"How about that damned snake?" I queried. If we were going to sleep in the hut I didn't want any snakes as bed-fellows.

Miguel had apparently almost finished his job of sweeping out the ramshackle building. Through the remnants of daylight which flowed in softly through the door we could see that the floor was swept clean. It was bare, except for a short section of log in one corner which the former occupant had probably used as a stool.

I held my riding whip ready while Chris gingerly rolled the log over with a stick he had cut outside. The snake must be behind that log. The rest of the floor was bare and the *coral* is a ground lover, not given to infesting the walls of buildings.

The log rolled toward me. No snake appeared, but, riding on the back of the log, was an *abijone*—one of those out-size Colombian bumblebees whose bite is agony for a few minutes but otherwise harmless.

"Christ Almighty!" I ejaculated.

Chris and I gazed at one another. Miguel had had his finger amputated for a bumblebee sting.

Chris shook his white head. "The poor devil was obsessed by coral snakes. Jumping to conclusions cost him a finger. It would break his heart if we told him. Spoil the story he'll be telling for the rest of his life."

Just then a feeble voice hailed us from outside. "*Senores, Senores*, have you killed the snake?"

"*Carajo, que si* . . . Hell, yes—a big one he was."

"*Gracias a Dios*—thank God," came the reply.

The following evening we arrived at the allegedly rediscovered mine of Coscuez. But the first day's examination told us the true tale. It was no mine. Never had been. There was not a trace of emerald formation in the neighborhood. No old workings either. For months the police had been guarding an old landslide scar on the mountainside. They were not pleased when we convinced them of the fact. I did not blame them for their indignation. Life in that God-forsaken outpost must have been deadly. No society save for the monkeys and macaws which provided their sole diet on the not infrequent occasions when flooded rivers cut their line of communications. If they could have caught the prospector who was the cause of their exile by mistaking a landslide for a mine they would have flayed him alive.

"Now what?" Chris grinned at me as we sat by our camp fire that night.

"Find the mine, of course. We can't make a report on it till we do find it."

"Plenty of room to look for it." He waved a well-tended hand—Chris always wore gloves while riding, and his hands were as well kept as any woman's—to indicate the hundreds of square leagues of virgin forest which surrounded us.

"Indians," I cried. "We've got to find some Indians. If we can make friends with one Muzo Indian we're all set to find the mine. You bet they know where the mine was."

So from the police post we headed into the forest without any fixed objective, except to encounter some of the scattered remnant of Muzo Indians whom we knew to inhabit the forest. A few score shy little forest dwellers in an area of dense forest some hundreds of miles square. We traveled north for a day or two, then veered westerly. The great Magdalena River lay west of us. We were just as likely to find

Muzo Indians in that direction as any other, and on the river were passenger steamers—a possible source of help should any jungle disaster overwhelm any member of our party. Slow travel through the pathless forest. Five miles of hacking through that jungle was a good day's journey. Supplies soon gave out. We had come provisioned for a mine examination, not for a journey of exploration. Macaws and monkeys provided our diet. The gorgeous blue and red super-parrots flew over us in thousands when we disturbed their feeding among the tree tops. The howler monkeys invaded the precincts of our nightly bivouacs at daybreak, shrieking their indignation at our presence. Our nights were comfortable enough. Five minutes' work made a rain-tight shelter of the leaves of the giant *macana* palm, whose straight cylindrical stems shot skyward in every direction. But our days were uneasy. The *abejuela*. The sweat fly. Shaped like a bee. Stingless, but forever thirsty. As soon as we began to sweat in the steaming undergrowth the *abejuela* appeared in swarms, settled on any exposed flesh and sucked, drinking the sweat. They drove our sweating mules frantic and ourselves as well.

Day after day without sight of Indians. But there were Indians in that forest. Occasionally, we would come on remains of a primitive palm-leaf shelter, the blackened remnant of a fire, a cabbage palm whose heart had been cut out by steel and not clawed out by one of the bears which we never encountered but whose traces were frequent. I felt that the Indians must know of our noisy passage through their country but, if so, they remained invisible.

However, in the end we made a discovery without the help of the Indians we were so laboriously seeking. It must have been ten days or so since we had left the police post. We were heading for the Magdalena River by that time, hoping to replenish our supplies from some passing river steamer. It had fallen to my lot that morning to break trail first. We gave ourselves two-hour shifts. Thus, in ten hours' marching, each of us would have two hours of the heart-breaking work

of clearing trail. So I hacked at creepers as tough as wire, felled saplings where the trees grew too thick to allow passage for a loaded pack mule, slashed through surface roots which writhed along the ground like serpents and might break the leg of one of our precious mules. The sweat poured from me as I strove to keep our progress above the snail's pace of one mile in two hours, while the others led the beasts behind.

Suddenly I stopped. I straightened my aching back and wiped the sweat from my eyes. My feet told me that I was standing on level ground, although, to my eyes, the slope ahead and behind seemed steep. Yes, I could swear it. Beneath the mat of rotted vegetation on which the soles of my boots rested the ground was level. A glance to right and left confirmed it. A distinct level shelf traversed the slope. It must be man-made. Feverishly I hacked and hewed to clear a patch of it. A road. A long disused road. A narrow graded mule trail such as the Spaniards used to make to their far-flung settlements.

The vegetation thinned somewhat as we followed the road, still hacking and hewing to clear our way. Soon we were able to mount and ride in places. All that day we slowly followed the ancient road which could only lead to the Coscuez mine for which we were searching. Damn the Indians! We were finding what we sought without their help. By sheer luck we had struck the clue.

But late that afternoon misfortune struck us without warning, as misfortunes have a habit of doing on the frontier. For some time the road had been clearly defined through thick-growing small timber. Chris was riding ahead, behind him in single file the three pack mules with their three attendant Indians. I was bringing up the rear. So thick the undergrowth hereabouts that I could seldom see the sleek bay rump of the nearest mule ten paces ahead of me. The silence of the eternal forest was broken only by the crashing of our passage.

Suddenly a wild yell of alarm from Chris at the head of the column. Such a yell as a man gives when, traveling at ease, he finds grim death reaching at him from a thicket. I rammed in my spurs, pressed forward. Traveling in that primitive wilderness, there were many ways in which death might strike at a man: the black panther's spring from ambush; a coiled bushmaster beside the road, his black, forked tongue flickering as he swung his evil head back for the stroke; the arrow of a startled forest Indian; still more likely, a mule's false step—mule and rider rolling down the slope.

Another howl of dismay. From an Indian throat this time. Two more Indian howls. Whatever might be the danger our three Indians were involved as well as Chris. I spurred wildly forward, my hand on the hilt of my gun, branches slashing me across the face, blinding me.

Then I felt myself falling and involuntarily a wild yell of dismay left my lips, the same yell that I had heard from the mouths of my four companions. Right through a matted overhang of roots my mule and I fell onto the almost vertical slope, bared by a recent landslide. The wise old mule sat back on her haunches and we slithered rapidly downward toward the succession of fast receding figures which were the rest of my party, sliding ahead of me, all of us caught in the trap the forest demons had so cunningly set.

For fifty yards or so my mule and I crashed down. So steep the slope that the mule's out-stretched forefeet were unable to check our progress. Right on her haunches she sat, with her long ears tickling my face. Christ! There was a log lying across our path. That log would catch her forefeet and set us rolling. But the mule saw the danger, contrived a leap, and cleared the log, landing many yards below. But, once having started leaping, her pace was too great to sit back on her haunches again. Leap after leap. Great plunging bounds . . . The wind whistled in my ears. . . . If the mule once missed her footing in one of those gigantic plunges I should be catapulted out of the saddle and finish the descent turning end

over end, probably with a broken neck. I leaned so far back that the mule's plunging rump pounded me between the shoulder blades.

At last we were down beside the white-faced cluster of my companions. Even Chris' hand trembled as he lit his eternal cigar. No harm done, except that each of the mules had raw patches worn on their behinds.

We camped where we were, the road lost for the moment. A pleasant enough place where great feathery clumps of bamboos rimmed a rushing stream of clear water. We had had enough for that day—but more was yet to come.

Taking the shotgun I strolled into the forest to shoot something for the pot. A short distance from camp I succeeded in dropping a great blue and red macaw. I walked across an open glade to pick it up. I turned with the bird in my hand and jumped back in amazement. There was an Indian standing within a yard or two of me. But he seemed friendly enough, although over one shoulder peeped the end of a bow and over the other the hafts of a quiverful of arrows. A wizened little man with black beady eyes which seemed very much alive.

"Guto hungry." It was a guttural Spanish ptaois that he spoke. Barely intelligible. But the claw that he was pointing at the bird in my hand made his meaning plain enough.

I tossed the brilliantly colored bird across to him and he caught it with both clawlike hands, holding it tight to the bare little chest which showed through a ragged shirt.

"*Tabac. Give Guto tabac.*"

"I'll give Guto *tabac*, but first Guto must tell me something."

"Guto talk to *Blanco* (white man)."

"*Blanco* has been hunting Guto to ask him a question."

The wizened little face puckered and yellow fangs showed. From between the fangs came a grating noise which sounded like a chuckle. "Guto follow *Blanco* five days."

I might have known it. He, and maybe others, had been

on our trail all the time we had been hunting them. "Why did not Guto come and ask for meat—ask for *tabac*?"

The little Muzo Indian shook his head. "Five days Guto look for *Blanco's* eyes. Not see eyes. Now when *Blanco* lift gun to shoot, Guto see eyes. Then Guto come because Guto know *Blanco* good."

"What the devil have my eyes got to do with it?"

Guto grinned happily. "Blue eyes—good *Blanco*. Black eyes"—he whipped his bow from over one shoulder and fitted an arrow with a movement like light—"bad *Blanco*."

Then I understood. Race complex. The old Spanish oppressors of his race were mostly dark-complected men and probably had dark eyes.

Now I put my question, the question we had traveled ten days to ask. "Guto show *Blanco* place where bad *Blanco* live long ago—hole where bad *Blanco* dig long ago?"

Guto nodded, bright intelligence on his little face. Into the undergrowth he slipped like a shadow, looking back over one shoulder to see if I were following.

For a moment I hesitated. How far was the lost mine? Whether it were a week's journey or an hour's walk Guto would still have started off to it with no more equipment than his bow and arrow. With that bow and arrow he could live indefinitely in the forest, but I was more tied down to my supplies, scanty as they had been of late.

I need not have worried. Guto turned toward the extension of the ridge we had just descended in such an unorthodox manner. Just as the foot of the ridge showed up between the towering *macana* palm boles he stopped and pointed to the dense jungle on his left. At first I could see nothing. Then something square and gray took shape among the tops of the low jungle trees. Masonry. Some sort of tower. A church tower, by Heavens! Overgrown by jungle creepers. Near by were the remains of many other buildings, and I found the face of the slope pitted with the half-defaced scars of tunnels. We had found the lost Coscuez mine. A real

mine, too. This was no fiction of the imagination like that bare scar the police were still guarding a score or two of miles away.

Chris and I spent a week there. Cleared our way into the tunnels and made a full report on the mine. Then back to civilization, sick to death of the taste of monkeys and macaws.

5.
Life
as a Mining
Consultant

WITH the sole interim of a couple of weeks' holiday at *Las Cascadas* I opened my office in the big *Banco de la Republica* building in Bogota as soon as I removed my place of residence from the Muzo mine.

By curious coincidence the first matter placed before me for consideration by the Colombian government was an application for a beryllium concession. My eyes nearly popped out of my head when I read the name of the applicant. Siemens Halske, the German firm. Mentally, I consigned them to that hottest corner of hell which is reserved for those who double-cross their partners. These were the people whom I had kept supplied with the green Colombian beryl which alone had made their experiments possible. In return, they had agreed that, should their experiments succeed in establishing commercial uses for beryllium, I should

participate with them in obtaining a concession and have the handling of the resultant mining business in Colombia. Now they were sneaking in behind my back to get the concession for themselves. But what a joke! Little did those traitorous Huns imagine, when they penned their application, that the decision on it would rest with the very man they were attempting to defraud. With the stroke of a pen I settled their business. Not recommended. If they would double-cross me, they would later double-cross the government in their dealings. That put Siemens Halske in a fix. With the Colombian beryl I had supplied, they had succeeded in developing beryllium and its alloys with copper till the scientific journals hailed the new element as "the wonder mineral of our generation." With my beryl they had learned to temper copper till it was as hard as steel. Now I withheld the source of supply from them, because, up till that time, the Colombian ore was the only one which had given practical results. Foiled, Siemens Halske eventually sold out their patents to an American group. These, in turn, made an application for a concession in Colombia. I recommended that one. But the Americans did not get their concession either for the government squashed my recommendation. Americans still had a lot to learn about dealing with South American aristocrats.

Soon clients began to drift into my office. My business began to prosper, but its limiting factor was the slowness of horse or mule transportation for a business which lay mostly in reporting on undeveloped mining prospects far from civilized centers. To do one day's work in assessing the chances of some white quartz outcropping, I might have to ride two days to it and two days back. If only the Colombian terrain had better lent itself to air transportation I could have trebled my business. But, even so, my income assumed respectable proportions.

I needed that income, too. It did cost money to develop a tea and coffee plantation on a somewhat ambitious scale.

Both Margaret and I were working all-out for the place. *Las Cascadas* was worth it. There, under our very eyes, was taking shape the paradise we would make of it if we were spared to work a few years longer. Out of the raw block of frontier wilderness the home of our dreams was being sculpted by our own efforts. The front flower garden sloped downward in little rock terraces now. Terraces on which green flashing jewels—the humming birds—darted in and out among roses almost as large as small cabbages. From the wide front veranda the once chaotic clearing showed long symmetrical rows of tea and coffee bushes, growing phenomenally in that rich virgin soil which the hand of no man had ever cultivated since the world began. True, at times my courage flagged a bit with the long days in the saddle, the cold of the high *paramos* and the heat of steaming valleys. Then, a few days' rest at *Las Cascadas*. What I saw there would send me back into the battle strengthened.

Years passed. I made many friends in Bogota. There were Douglas Hubbard, a retired banker, and Peggy, his wife. One of the most indefatigable workers it has ever been my good fortune to work with. I handled at one time or another a good deal of mining business for him. And Peggy! When I longed for a home atmosphere, I would go and sit by the fire in Peggy's living room. In star-scraping Bogota fires are *de rigueur* every night of the changeless equatorial year. I fell in love with Peggy's daughter Joan, aged ten. What a life that child led me! God help the youth of her generation when Joan Hubbard is matured. She once tempted me onto a Ferris wheel in one of the Bogota parks. The cable broke when we were at the top and we stayed there for hours, until the cable could be repaired. But Peggy! True as tempered steel and with a wit as sharp as Excalibur. When trouble came later I could not have seen it through, but for Peggy.

The home of Tim and Doris Harris was another home to me. Tim had been in Gough's Fifth Army when the Huns

broke it in March of '18. When Tim was halfway in his cups he could tell a hair-raising story of that retreat.

There was Frank Storms, representative of one of the big American manufacturers. Never a crazy stunt took place among the foreign colony but Frank was in it. While his watch was being repaired he used to carry a kitchen-size alarm clock in his overcoat pocket. Once I wound the alarm when he wasn't looking and thereby livened up considerably an important directors' meeting Frank happened to be attending.

It was during those years that I got a shock. A cable from Egypt.

RALPH DIED OF DYSENTERY

Ruth Chesbrough was left alone. My mind leaped back across the years to the times we had spent together. The shoal water off Poinciana with the pelicans fishing—the crimson glory of sunsets over the Gulf of Mexico . . .

Queer people used to drift in through my office door at times. There was the dealer in shrunken Indian heads, the kind that the Amazon Indians contrive to cure, shrinking them to the size of an orange while still managing to preserve the individuality of feature. The trade in those heads had been forbidden by the Colombian government ever since there had appeared for sale the head of an eminent scientist who had visited the Amazon to investigate the process. This dealer struck up a mild friendship with me—a great swashbuckling Colombian he was, with black mustaches like one of Morgan's buccaneers.

He got in the habit of using my office as a repository for his wares. If the heads in my office could have talked, I could have written a history of the inter-tribal wars of that weird semi-submerged forest region which is the basin of the upper Amazon.

Eventually I had to put a stop to this business because

some of the heads weren't cured too well. There was one long-haired beauty particularly. She putrified in my filing cabinet. I had been away for a week or two on mine examinations, my office locked up. Then I opened the door of my steel filing cabinet on my return. . . ! What to do? The head was contraband, and I was liable to a fine for being in possession of it. Should I throw it in the wastepaper basket my charwoman would inform on me. . . . Besides, I had to live with that wastepaper basket all through a long day's work. Happy thought! Frank Storms was in town. A hasty telephone call established the fact that he was not in his room at the Granada Hotel. Wrapping the head in enough layers of paper to prevent it becoming much more obvious in the street than a ripe Gorgonzola cheese, I dashed over to the Granada with it. Thank Heavens! The careless devil had left the key in his door. Silently I slipped in, opened the lid of Frank's trunk and deposited the parcel. Judging by the aroma that clung to Frank for some days the head must have reposed among his clean shirts for some time. But when Frank did discover it, he played up by slipping the now almost explosive object into someone else's trunk. For some days the head was bandied from trunk to trunk in the hotel, and Frank's friends began to be distinguished by the strong perfume they took to using while the poor Indian woman's head found no better resting place than her body had found in the bellies of her conquerors after they had raped her. Finally someone, in desperation, got rid of the head by throwing it out of the window at night into the street, probably to the consternation of the sanitary inspector.

All sorts of curious wares used to find their way into my office. Motilone Indian bows and arrows. Little gold *tunja* images, dug from ancient Indian graves. Burial jars . . . A Swedish archaeologist left them and they kept me continually embarrassed. They were the kind used by the little, almost nameless tribelets along the great rivers who rot their corpses after death, tear the flesh off the bones and bury the

bones in large earthenware jars to await the reawakening in the happy fishing grounds. On the outside of the jar is a portrait in high relief of the dear departed—presumably for identification in the next world—whose bones comprise the contents. Highly embarrassing things those portraits. The sexual organs are stressed to many times their proper scale—no Indian wants to run the risk in the spirit world of pursuing a woman only to find on capture that she is a man. If the jars are any criterion, they run no risk at all. I used to keep the portrait part of the jars turned to the wall but people would keep turning them round.

One day an Australian blew in and sold me on the idea of publishing in Spanish a weekly illustrated paper, competitive to the two that already existed in the capital. I fell for it. My love of writing was my undoing. For some months all went well as Allsopp, the Australian, knew the printing business. We got out a better paper than either of our two long-established competitors and always sold out as soon as we got on the street. However there was no profit in it and I threw up the sponge. I was lucky enough to unload onto one of our competitors who was glad enough to see us out of the way.

About this time came a landmark in the history of *Las Cascadas*. The first shipment of tea. A mule load of neat cellophane packages with an elegant-looking waterfall on the red label, a trade mark we hoped to make famous. Good tea. I sold it easily. There was no doubt that the country provided a market for all the tea we could ever hope to produce. That first mule load was an earnest of many more shipments. For some years they would be small ones because the scarcity of tea seed had limited the size of the original plantation. But that original plantation was producing tea seed now, and Margaret was planting seedlings by the tens of thousands. When those seedlings began to produce—then freedom—economic independence. Only four more years for us to struggle. . . . Why, we had already been holding our

Las Cascadas fort for four years. I myself could stand four more years of even the strenuous life which the need for capital had imposed on me. How many times had I ridden across the sky-scraping Andean ranges to look at mines! By God, if all my Colombian horseback journeys were put on end they would reach to the moon. But I was worried about Margaret. On my last visit she had seemed pale and listless, utterly unlike her usually dynamic self. On my return to Bogota from that visit I had sent a doctor out to her and a few days later I had had his verdict. "Overdoing it." The same verdict which the same doctor always passed on me when he met me at the club. Margaret obviously needed a rest and change, but how can you give a woman a change who utterly refuses to leave her plantation, except for a week-end in the capital about twice a year? So I sent Allsopp out to her. The husky Colonial was a good worker and he could help her with the plantation and teach the children too. . . . He was a fine scholar with a degree from some Australian university. The tutor we had imported from the States had recently returned whence he came. Young Marge had been his Waterloo. He had foolishly tried to thrash the well-grown girl of fourteen. He had caught a panther by the tail that time. It needs a heavy preponderance of bone and muscle to thrash one of her breed. In a minute she had had him down and had been pounding his face on the floor when her mother had rescued him.

6.

Tragedy

THE goal was in sight. The way seemed clear. The time till the fulfilment of our *Las Cascadas* dream was measurable. Then out of the blue sky fell the thunderbolt. Fortunately, I was in Bogota when the telegram arrived. Still more tragic the disaster had I been away on one of my frequent journeys into the snow-capped blue ranges where few communications existed.

The telegram read:

BRINGING MARGARET IN STOP SERIOUSLY ILL STOP MEET US WITH
CAR AT END OF MOTOR ROAD MIDDAY MONDAY

I did not receive the telegram till I opened my office that Monday morning. The end of the motor road was three hours' hard driving from Bogota. Hurriedly I borrowed Douglas Hubbard's car and chauffeur, telephoned the hospital and left.

When I reached the limit of wheeled traffic—how many miles farther toward *Las Cascadas* we could drive now than on that day, years back, when Don Guillermo, the governor,

had promised me this road—I could see a cavalcade winding through the plots of Indian cultivation just below us. Indians carrying an improvised stretcher. Two riders accompanying it. Margaret was in the stretcher, her face pinched and pallid from a hemorrhage—some woman's complaint. Marge and Allsopp rode horses beside her, their faces gray with fatigue.

Allsopp rode back to *Las Cascadas*, but Marge accompanied us to Bogota. I held Margaret on my lap in the back seat all the way to ease the jolting, while our daughter slept sitting in the front seat beside the chauffeur. The child had been in the saddle continuously for twenty hours,

At the hospital an immediate operation was pronounced imperative, but there must be a blood transfusion first. My blood proved unsuitable. Marge did not flinch an atom when the glittering instrument of the surgeon pierced her forearm and made the red blood squirt.

Margaret died on the operating table that night, in spite of the transfusion. The gallant partner, who had tamed a wilderness that we and ours might dwell the rest of our lives in peace, was gone. *Las Cascadas* was without a mistress now. But *Las Cascadas* must go on. A heritage for the children.

More years passed. I tried one manager after another for *Las Cascadas* while the children lived in my bachelor apartment in Bogota. Allsopp, left to his own devices, soon drifted to another job. Another local product sold all the livestock, put the money in his pocket, and departed for points unknown.

Still I fought on for the children's sake. A hopeless fight, because the goal that had once been within measurable distance had receded out of sight.

Then I became engaged to Ruth. She wrote that she would come out at once to marry me. That gave me new life. With her beside me, I knew I could carry the fight through to a finish.

Then she cabled me that she could not leave till the following year. That broke me. I went through the motions of carrying on, but they were purely mechanical. My nights began to be sleepless. In the end I could only sleep sitting up, because I felt desperately afraid of feeling breathless should I lie down. For a time I kept away from doctors because I anticipated what their verdict would be. At last I threw up the sponge.

"How old are you?" asked the doctor when he had vetted me.

"Forty-eight."

"You won't live to be forty-nine, unless you do as I tell you."

I threw out my hands. "I'll do it. I know when I'm beat. What's wrong with me?" I pressed my nails into my palms as I waited for his verdict.

"You've overtaxed the grandest fortress of a constitution I ever put my ear to. It's good yet, but something may crack at any minute. Get down to sea level. Stay there two or three years. Live soft. Become a townsman for a while. If you do that, you'll be a better man in a couple of years than any one of your age has a right to be. If not . . ." He threw his palms outward.

"How soon must I go?"

"At once. You're taking a chance every minute you stay."

"I can't go at once."

"Why not?"

"Obligations. I've contracted to make reports on several mines."

"How long will that take you?"

I made a swift mental calculation. "A month."

He shrugged his shoulders.

I felt better after my talk with the doctor. I flexed my muscles as I walked back to my office. Strange how strong my body felt while my mind was full of imaginings, almost useless for work. I knew that I would be well again, if I fol-

lowed the doctor's orders. Well in body—but life had seemed such a dull, drab place of late. Only my responsibility to the children had made me carry on. Leave Colombia! For more than eleven years I had reveled in this green, hospitable land, and I hated to leave it. But I must go.

On my way to the office I stopped at the Scadta Airlines and booked my passage to the coast on one of their fast Boeing planes a month hence. I also booked passage from Barranquilla on the Italian liner *Oracio*. Then I cabled Ruth the date of my arrival in Egypt and bade her fix a wedding date.

The children? Peggy Hubbard would keep an eye on them for the few weeks before I sent for them. Bless true-hearted Peggy.

7.

One Last Wild Ride

TWENTY-SEVEN days later I found myself on the banks of the flooded Saldana River in the *Departamento* of Tolima. My work was done. My last mine examination completed. My career in Colombia closed. That morning I had turned my face toward Bogota. Against the lee of the primitive hut in which I was sheltering stood two be-draggled hired horses and their attendant village Indian, be-draggled too, in ragged sodden shirt and trousers. We were blocked by the sudden onslaught of the rainy season which had swollen the savage Saldana and made it impassable. It was three hundred yards wide, running swiftly and purposefully between green banks fringed with bamboo clumps and *balsa* trees. Even if I should raft the horses over it would do me no good. Sixty miles lay between us and the railway, and at six o'clock next morning would pass the last train to enable me to make my connections for the coast. Sixty miles in eighteen hours would be impossible for those hired runts. There was only one conceivable way in which I could reach

the railway in time to catch my train. I must be rafted down the river. On the banks of the upper Saldana the almost amphibious river Indians made their scanty living from the coffee they rafted down when the river was low.

"Juancho," I called to the Indian who owned the primitive shelter in which I was resting. As he strode toward me the rain splashed off his copper skin under which lithe muscles leaped and slithered like snakes at play. A single clout was his only covering.

"Juancho, I want you to build a raft and get me to Saldana bridge before the train leaves tomorrow morning."

The copper god turned his head slowly. He studied the surge and boil of the muddy current. Then he shook his head. "Rain stop today. Three more days river angry. After three days Juancho raft *Blanco* to Saldana bridge."

"But I must go today. Now."

He shook his head till his long black hair flapped.

"Juancho is afraid." I tried to goad him.

The light copper of his complexion darkened. He frowned. "Juancho brave. Not fear."

"If Juancho is brave he will take me."

He struck both palms against his naked thighs with a resounding smack. "Juancho take *Blanco*. *Blanco* is big fool. River devil in gorge angry when river runs high. When *Blanco* hear river devil shouting, he cry out with fear. Then Juancho laugh."

I was afraid already. On my way into this wilderness I had ridden for miles along the edge of that narrow, thirty-mile gorge, whose sides rose a thousand foot sheer above the rock-riven river bed between them. Whirlpools were there as well as rapids.

Without another word Juancho shouldered an axe and strode to a near-by grove of *balsa* trees, the tree whose green wood is lighter than cork.

The raft was triangular when finished. Two stout *balsa* logs set like the uprights of the letter A, but their ends pro-

jected a foot or so beyond the point of their crossing. Between them Juancho lashed crosspieces like the crosspiece of the A to form a deck—lashed them with strips of *verjuco* bark from the same green grove.

By four o'clock the raft was ready. I paid my tattered Indian for his work and the hire of the horses. He could get them home when the river quieted.

"Strip, *Blanco*, Strip," cried Juancho, waving his heart-shaped paddle. When I had stripped, he wrapped my clothes and gun in my rubber raincoat and lashed the bundle firmly to the light round poles that decked our craft. Then I leaped on board the flimsy thing, naked as Adam before Eve came. Juancho straddled the crossed poles at the apex of the A, gripping with his flexible legs the intersecting logs, twisting his feet under till he became as immovable as any part of the structure. A couple of strong strokes of his paddle drove us from the bank.

The wide current gripped us in its swift race toward the gorge. The tree-lined banks slipped past us. True to Juancho's prophecy, the rain stopped and the sun shone strong. I dived overboard and swam beside Juancho, washing from me the filth of many days' journey.

"*Blanco* swim strong like otter. But river-devil in gorge too strong for man to swim there." Juancho's legs and thighs were submerged as he rode the prow of the raft like some great copper figurehead.

I climbed aboard, refreshed.

Just before dark we came in sight of the entrance to the gorge whose thundering we had already heard for miles. The wide river suddenly constricted to a mere hundred feet in width. The narrow cleft of the canyon loomed ahead like the portals of eternity, banking up the swift current so that it poured down into the gorge like water running over a weir.

Down that steep watery slope we shot. The roaring of the rapids ahead reverberated from the high vertical walls of

rock on either side. Ahead, through the gathering gloom between the cliffs, something white leaped upward. More white leaping shapes. I gripped the flimsy decking, lying flat on my belly, digging my toes into the interstices between the logs.

"Hold tight, *Blanco*." There was challenge in Juancho's bellow which reached me only faintly above the hubbub—challenge to the hungry white shapes ahead.

My fear had left me. Hot blood surged through my veins at the sight of battle as it had not done for years. I knew in that moment that it would be possible for me to recapture sometime that lilting tempo of life which alone makes existence really pleasurable. "Live soft in Egypt." What a prospect! But I would do it that I might once more become the man I had been before overstrain and worry had threatened to break me.

With flashing paddle Juancho charged the white monsters ahead. The first one caught us, flung the light raft aloft, held it high, then tossed it to the next. That one drove us down. Submerged. Frothy water pressed on me. Legions of strong hands under water seemed to be tearing the raft apart. Its timbers shifted under my naked, clinging body—but the lashings held. Now up again. Through the first rapids and riding a smooth racing shoot of water toward the next. Rapids kept alternating with those swift shoots that swept us smoothly forward at the speed of a galloping horse. The Saldana River sensed the Magdalena plains ahead where her tortured body could cease its turmoil and flow gently. She was rushing toward them. After a long time the moon rose and flooded that eerie place with silver light. Little moon rainbows showed in the spray which hovered above the white turmoil of the rapids.

It must have been about midnight when the canyon seemed to come to a dead end where the current flung itself against a rocky wall at right angles to the course of the river. But Juancho's paddle flashed as he drove the raft at the very spot where the water was breaking against the rocky wall

ahead. The stark rock cliff leaped at us, then the breaking wave caught us and swept us round the bend. Once round the bend there was almost silence. Uncanny after the turmoil in which we had been involved for many hours. The river widened here into a circular amphitheatre whose walls seemed to reach the stars overhead. But there was no peace here—only horror. In the center of that swirling pool was an ugly hole in the water, twisting this way and that. A whirlpool. A monster. Slowly we coasted round and round that horrid cavity which was swallowing a stream of driftwood and never spewing it up.

"Afraid, *Blanco?*" Juancho's tone mocked me.

"Yes, Juancho. I have never been so much afraid in my life." It was the truth. That obscene mouth horrified me as it moved irregularly from side to side, as though feeling blindly for us.

With deft strokes of his broad wooden paddle Juancho was keeping us away from the center, awaiting some outward swirl which would give him a chance to dash for the outlet and the lesser danger of the rapids beyond. "River devil live in that hole," he remarked conversationally.

Just then something heaved itself from the water between us and the swirling center. A great log rose suddenly and stood butt upward, twenty feet of its length in the air. From the upended base of it hung a mass of roots which streamed water on us, so close it was. For a second or two it menaced us. Then the swirling center caught it and sucked it swiftly down. Juancho's nonchalance left him at the sight of it. He howled with fear and plied his paddle desperately. The outgoing current caught us and whirled us on down the gorge.

A little later we were out of the gorge, riding a wide placid river which meandered contentedly through the plain. The Saldana had attained peace.

At daybreak we beached our raft above the dimly seen skeleton of a great steel railway bridge and stiffly walked up the street of the little settlement. I pounded on the publi-

can's door till he came out in his pajamas and set a bottle of rum before us.

"Thank you, Juancho. How much do I owe you for the trip?" I gulped my rum. It tasted good. I was chilled from a night of periodic immersion, even though the water had been fairly warm. The journey would not have been possible had the water been cold, I reflected.

Juancho rubbed one water-bleached foot against a shin-bone. "Juancho now must walk home. . . . Two days Juancho must walk."

"I know that, Juancho. You can add the two days to the price."

"Juancho built raft."

"I know all that. Throw in the price of a raft."

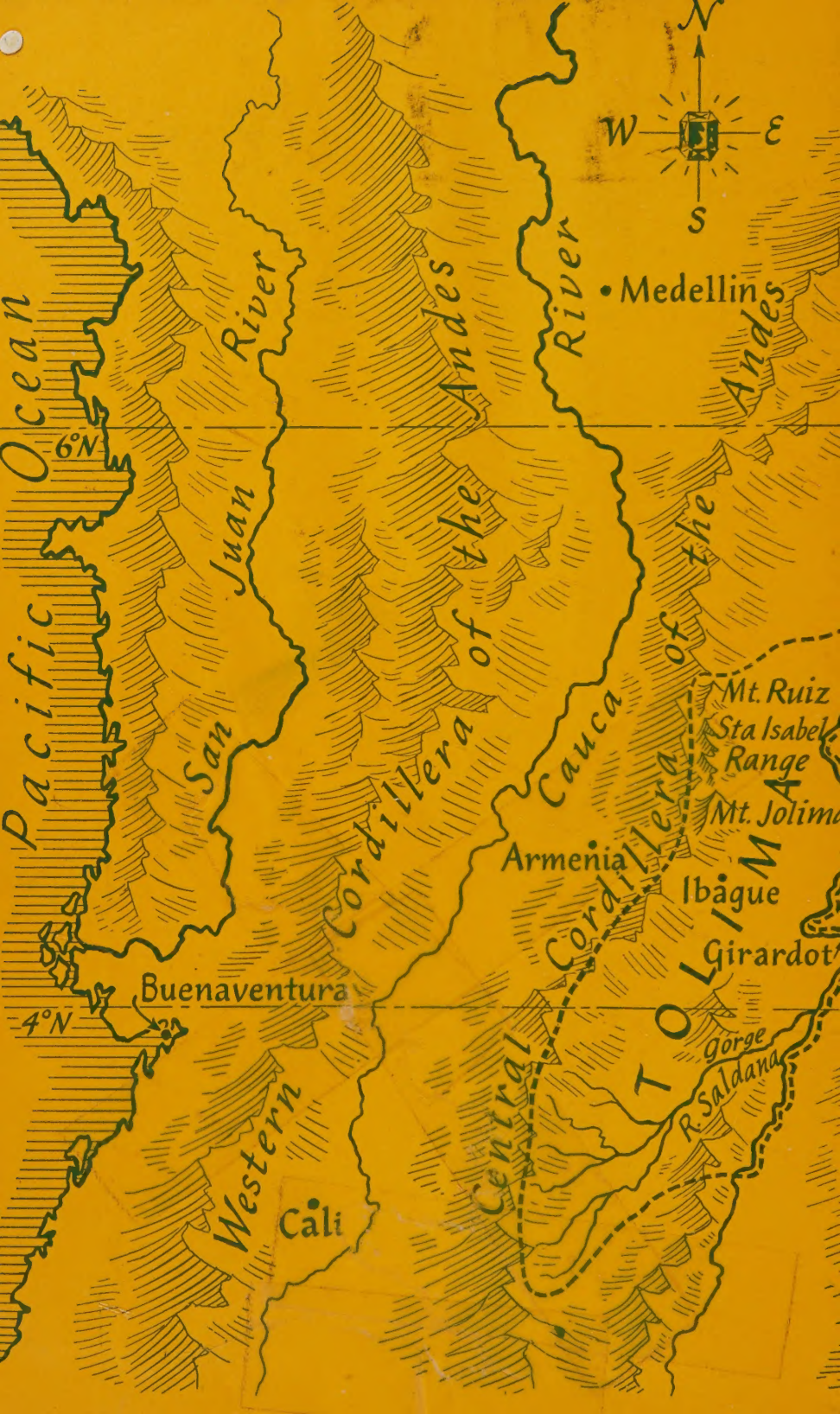
"Five *pesos* too much, *Blanco*?" His eyes refused to meet mine for the first time in our short acquaintance.

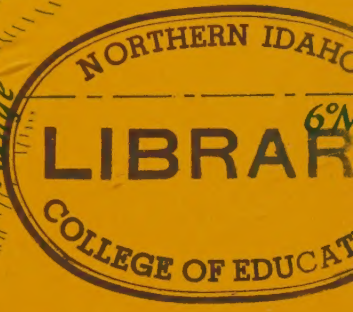
Five *pesos*! Less than five dollars! The man had been risking his life every minute for hours and he obviously thought he was over-charging me at five *pesos*.

I took some sodden bills from my pocket and paid him five-fold.

His copper-colored face darkened with emotion. "*Blanco* good man. Juancho hope *Blanco* come back some day. But, if *Blanco* come back, please not tell Juancho's people that Juancho cry with fear when river devil reach for him."







Sketch Map of
CENTRAL COLOMBIA
by the Author

