



The Great God Gold and — Stub

by Edwin L. Sabin

HEFFLESTEINER had inherited the map, somehow, some way, from an uncle, he said. It was dirty enough to be the original, but, of course, it wasn't the original. Peg-Leg Smith, the trapper, couldn't read or write, and this map was fairly lettered under the thumbmarks.

The age of the map really cut little figure; as long as the three black knobs were there: three black knobs, bursting with gold and assaying eighty per cent pure.

Let me spell that out. Eighty per cent pure stuff—black spar running some \$385,000 to the ton. All waiting there, in the waiting desert, ever since in '37 or '38 old Peg-Leg had stumped on his wooden prop.

And now, again, here were we, three more white men, a burro and a bulldog, hotfooting on the trail to the Great God Gold and his secret hangout in the otherwise God-forsaken desert—the trickiest desert on the American Continent. Believe me!

According to the laws of chance as they prevail anywhere else we should have got along very well. We went in early. We had Heff's uncle's map with the arrow pointing to the lost Peg-Legs. We had a government map with washes and water-holes supposed to be corraled and snubbed tight—and we reckoned that we knew considerable, ourselves.

The burro packed for us, and Stub packed for himself. By the looks of him he'd been doing this, several years.

Yuma didn't claim him. He must have wandered in from some desert rat's camp or have been dropped behind by a passing outfit. A brindle-faced, red-eyed, ragged-eared, bobbed-tailed white bulldog, who took up with the heels of Hefflesteiner's boots and dodged the toes.

Strange how a dog will choose for his god one of kicks and curses when he might have a better. But Stub insisted upon coming along, although Heff kicked him twice into the opposite direction.

At first the desert was pretty good to us. It doled out trails and water and let the black knobs stay anchored on Heff's map.

Stub, he had a great time. Never mind the burro; some rustler, of course, that being the nature of the beast; but Stub proved out a first-class rustler. The burro earned her keep; Stub, he was the supercargo, and he tried his best to furnish his own subsistence—rabbits, rats, lizards (actually, ate lizards), dried bones—and Lord, how dry bones can get, on the desert, the drying-est out place under the canopy. Set my teeth on edge to hear him crunch.

Stub asked no favors; properly thankful for bacon scraps, but asked no favors except a tin cupful or two of water, occasionally, by day, or in a dry camp, and the privilege at night of sleeping on Heff's stomach. Usually began a little way off, and as the chill keened sneaked to Heff's legs, and then on up.

"Damn that dog! Some night I'll kill him," bawled Heff.

And that might be. The desert law reduces to the law of self-preservation, and Heff had a weak stomach. Also, being Stub's god, he was entitled to exercise a god's right over life and death.

Furthermore, he didn't love Stub nearly so much as Stub loved him, and Stub had taken the chances.

As for Frazier and me, we sort of catered to Stub, who didn't particularly cater to us. But I know dog, and here was a true, brave-hearted little bull; a one-man's dog, no matter the kind of man.

Well, Stub furnished us some entertainment, if men chasing a lost Peg-Leg mine across the desert require any other entertainment. And presently the desert bucked up—taking, as it were, a more decided interest, in its large, aloof, imperialistic way, now that it saw we were actually bound on by direct attack.

I don't say that the government map was wrong when it was made. I don't say that Heff's map had been wrong when it was made—although these amateur maps made by somebody blinded with local color, especially when that color is yellow, are too free and easy for me.

But I do say that the desert is no fit terrain to be listed and filed in any war portfolio. It changes—it swaps ends faster than an outlaw horse.

The desert is powerful cunning; you wouldn't guess that anything so big and silent could be so cunning.

I'll pass over those devilish preliminaries by which, just irregular and gradual enough to provoke us on, it tolled us through the everlasting dunes, the cactuses, the powdery sand, the graveled washes, the alkali sinks, poison white, teased us with sudden ridges that proved to be bare rock as hopeless as the bark of the Ancient Mariner, with wavering mirages, with water-holes long dry, with side-winders, centipedes, Gila monsters—bed fellows worse than Stub; sucked at us all the hot days and all the cold nights; but ever fed us on expectation, expectation.

The burro got bit by something or other; at least, we found her in the morning, dead

and swelled up and bad. We didn't dare eat her, we didn't dare drink her.

This was the eleventh or twelfth day, I think. We ought to be sighting those three black knobs, soon now, according to Heff's map. The map said: "Water here," at the base of the middle knob.

The spot had been getting greener and greener (on the map), and we left most of our stuff with the burro, and pushed ahead. The time had come when we were seeing green and sparkly blue instead of yellow. The country closed in behind and opened out before; shimmered with the desert's silent laugh.

Stub was still with us. Queer, too, as I look back upon it. Pickings were mighty poor, for a dog. He carried no canteen, and it was tough to have the canteens always in somebody else's possession, especially when somebody else will fight rather than surrender a drop.

But somehow Stub hung on. He was such a roustabout that he had ways and means. I know that we neglected him shamefully—yet no more than is natural when men become crafty brutes; each for himself, jealous of the others.

During the day Stub would lag behind, to rest and pant in the penciled shade of a cactus or a narrowed rock. He was thin enough for that. But he always tottered into camp, sometimes late. Frazier and I doled out to him a mouthful or two, perhaps; Hefflesteiner never, and yet Stub scarcely thanked us, but loved Heff.

In the cool of the night he usually made off; might be gone till dawn, only to toil waveringly in, for a nap on Heff's stomach until Heff cursed him and threw him off. Other things lived, in this desert; night prowlers, also; and I suppose he caught a bite, here and there. Probably knew where to dig for water, like a fox or coyote, and chewed out moisture.

Now that we all were down to the instinct level, he was smarter than we, and had the confidence to cover more territory.

You've read of people trapped by the desert, and kept mad, sheer mad, with thirst? The details aren't at all pleasant, yet they never have all been told, for only the desert knows. At any rate, we were it.

We hadn't struck water in—maybe three days. I'm not certain as to the length of time. I'm not certain whether this was the third day, or what. Three days doesn't seem a very long stretch, when you've started with a canteen, I'll admit—except on the desert. But let me impress upon you this fact: that what you don't drink, on the desert, the desert drinks, and it won't quit. It's merely a race to see which will empty the canteen.

Toward evening of the last day Hefflesteiner flopped down first, locating camp where he landed. He was the largest man of the bunch, and had the smallest heart. I understand that on the desert the largest man generally peters out the earliest. We straggled in Frazier and I, and flopped down, too.

Camp didn't amount to much. We weren't eating, any more. The tongues of all of us were pretty thick—and that sort of story.

We'd been seeing things, of course. Stub wasn't with us. It occurred to me, I wasn't sure that he'd been with us for a day or two.

Not sure, you understand. There were times when I had seen him: plain, trotting at Heff's heels—but I had seen horses, emigrant outfits, trees, lakes, camps, and such impossible truck, and so I couldn't be sure of Stub.

The same old desert lay around us: yellow-white sand absolutely trackless except for claw and pad; rolling, billowy sand, broken by mock oases of dry sinks, leafless brush, cactus and Joshua trees, and low little rock outcrops.

There was no direction, other than by the sun—or when, occasionally, we lined a course by a peak that we saw or thought we saw, until the peak swung like a slow pendulum and we knew that it was wrong. Odd, when a peak ahead on your right gets over on your left; but that's desert magic.

Compass? Oh, yes; Heff had a compass, but the compass went wrong, too, and in a huff he threw it away. It weighed heavy, he claimed; chafed his bones, and was no good anyhow.

We lightened ourselves fast. Shelled off

blankets, fry-pan, tin cups, coffee-pot, revolvers—no, Heff kept his. The government map was wrong—absolutely worthless. I believe that we started a fire with it, and gloated to watch it burn.

Hung hard to our canteens—force of habit, like a dog guards an old bone lest another dog will swipe it; shook them, gloated over them, cursed them, hugged them, slept on them, loved them, feared them, hoped for the miracle of the loaves and-fishes done over into water, begrudged every mouthful, and coveted every mouthful. Just lived from little swig to little swig.

Hung hard to that infernal fetish of Heff's map, too. For without the map we were plumb lost. Even the sun was loco. So the map was the only thing left that we could depend on. Heff knew it was right, because it showed the Peg-Leg knobs (eighty per cent pure stuff) and said: "Water here."

Even the sun was loco. The sun was going to set in the north, due north. We lay and wheezed, waiting. When the sun set I, for one, was to have another little swig; the very instant that it set, I mean.

Heff and Frazier might object, in a peevish way; but they'd swig also, as long as they had something to swig with. We were always trying to swig on the sly, and scolding when we caught the other fellow.

"God, boys!" mumbled Frazier, turning over. "This is hell, ain't it!"

It was, with a slow sun.

"We got to find water to-morrow," rasped Heff, "or—"

"Well?" challenged Frazier. "Say it." There was an ugly pause. "Nobody draws lots on me, for anything," mumbled Frazier.

Where did he get that idea? Was he remembering stories that he'd read?

Heff, half sitting, half sprawling, had out his infernal map again, squinting at it in the blotch of his body on the sand. His big, cracked finger-nail wandered over it.

"Those Peg-Leg knobs ought to be right there," he pronounced painfully. "They ought to be right yonder. They got to be yonder."

He scrambled to his knees and to his feet, and stood swaying and peering. He looked very tall. His revolver belt had been drawn to the limit, but hung loose and dangling, making him look taller still. It seemed to me, he must be getting a good view from away up there.

All around, beyond him, the horizon writhed and pulsated, and the desert surface heaved like a pacific ocean before a storm; fairly turned one dizzy. Heff staggered and set his foot square upon the map, crunching it. The map was so brittle that his foot cut clean through. But nobody cared.

I was too sick to care—and, besides, something was coming for us across the sand; something monstrous and near.

"Look at that!" wheezed Frazier, interested. "By golly, a lion—ain't it?"

"No, you fool!" I corrected. "It's a camel." He sort of irritated me, with his "lion," when camel was better. And couldn't he see?

"A Nubian lion, by golly," breathed Frazier. "Keep quiet, everybody. Have your gun ready, Heff. Quiet, everybody. He's a raw Nubian lion."

"I see 'em," was announcing Heff, above.

"It's a camel, I tell you!" I corrected, "A camel, with water in its stomach. Don't you know what water is? Let it come. Quiet, everybody."

"Quiet, everybody," reiterated Frazier. "Sh! A raw Nubian lion. We can"—and suddenly he lapsed. "Oh, hell!"

For the thing had dwindled, dwindled, down, down—cleared, and I saw that it was only Stub, poor little Stub, afar, low to the ground, trailing in again, by spurts, on blistered feet, from his last resting-place.

Yes, we had been sucking at raw lion-flesh, and opening a camel, and here out of that devilish desert came only poor little Stub.

But Hefflesteiner was talking on, peering in another direction entirely.

"I see 'em, boys! It's just as I thought. They're there."

"What?"

"The three knobs. You can see 'em

plain now. Get up here and look where I'm looking. The three knobs, sure."

Up we scrambled, also.

"Where?"

"There." Heff pointed with wavering arm. "Straight yonder. —Goōd God, haven't you eyes? Come on. We can make 'em by night."

We peered, from under shading hands, toward the sun. The desert surface rocked and shimmered, and the horizon swam hither-thither, distorted as if viewed through faulty glass.

"Yes, I see 'em," gasped Frazier. "That's right," he babbled. "You're right, Heff. Dead right. The three of 'em, like the map says. Black and yellow. Seems to me there's yellow. Wonder we didn't see 'em before. Hurrah!"

And I saw them, too—slightly quartering with the sun: three blackish knobs, hazily up-jutting, afloat on the heat stratum like buoys swinging at their moorings.

"They're north, though," babbled Frazier, crazily suspicious. "Wait. Let's figger. The map says west. The sun's setting north, ain't it?"

"Can't tell where it 'll set yet," rebuked Hefflesteiner. "Doesn't matter. What the hell does the sun matter? You see the knobs. Those are the Peg-Legs. Come on, or stay here. Got to make 'em."

He lurched forward, stepping hard.

"Got to make 'em," echoed Frazier, lurching after. "Ought to 've seen 'em before. Wasted time."

Pshaw! I followed Frazier, and in single file we three trudged. The sand squeaked beneath our uneven tread.

"Water at that middle knob," croaked Heff encouragingly.

"Water at that middle knob," repeated Frazier and I.

Water! Cool water! The three blackish knobs floated, now well atop, now nigh submerged, borne up and down on the heat sea. Water! Real water, at the farther edge, in the haven of the lost Peg-Legs.

Presently Hefflesteiner stopped short, and we almost ran into him. He worked at his canteen.

"Plumb forgot," he maundered thickly.

"Ought to have had a drink. We didn't drink, did we? No use packing this stuff when there's more right ahead. Little swig all around, boys, and we'll travel faster."

"Little swig all round," we obediently repeated.

Heff tilted his canteen; Frazier tilted his; I tilted mine. Ah! That wetness—but warm, insipid, tasteless. Yet I couldn't let go—gulped, gulped, sucked, drained to the last drop. Ah! I was dry again.

The gurglings ceased. We gravely replaced the plugs, much as if we had drunk a silent toast.

"Get there now," uttered Hefflesteiner. "Little drink helpsh."

"Little drink helpsh." We plowed on. However, the little drink didn't help very much. It was gone, all sensation of it vanished.

The canteens dangled, Hefflesteiner's revolver thumped against his thigh; the sands squeaked, the sun sank lower, to flare into our eyes. Under it the three blackish knobs floated, floated, advancing, receding, now plain, now faint, but waiting, beckoning, promising.

Water at the middle one! The map said; "Water here." And the gold, the Great God Gold. Water first, then gold.

Trudge, trudge, trudge; squeak, squeak, squeak. How far were those damned knobs, anyway? Hefflesteiner's shadow stretched clear to my feet, and with bent head I stepped carefully on his hat brim. If I didn't, I'd be left.

That was my charm, my salvation. Frazier was stepping on his middle.

The sun had swallowed the knobs, drunk them up, one might think. At least, one could not see them through the dazzle. They were off there, of course—we were heading for them. No doubt about that. They were there, in the dazzle. If we might only stop, again, for a bit—

Heff pitched aside, and crouched panting, hand against his eyes; blind, he acted.

"Can't shee," he complained. "That damn' sun. Let'sh wait." He fumbled for his canteen. "Little drink," he murmured.

Down pitched Frazier and I, willingly

enough. Hefflesteiner unscrewed his canteen plug; I unscrewed mine; we tilted and sucked. Not a drop for me; not a single drop perceptible. The very mouth of the canteen was hot, to my lips, but my tongue felt nothing as I licked with it, to invite the uttermost vestige of draining moisture.

"Who's got some water?" was demanding Hefflesteiner. "Little water. There'sh water at middle knob. Want to borrow shome now. Pay it back."

Nobody answered, except—

"God, how my eyes hurt!" groaned Frazier.

Hurt? Whew! Burning, boring, torturing coals—they, too, crying for water, cool water. So we lay, lax and miserable, twitching eyes closed tight to the glare, the air hot above, the sand hot beneath, and Hefflesteiner spasmodically implored, begged, cursed.

"Nice set of pardners," finally he babbled. "Nice shet of pardners—won't share canteen—no drink—no little drink."

We let him grumble and berate. I didn't have energy enough to dispute. What difference? Frazier occasionally groaned, otherwise was dumb. So we lay. Heff murmured fitfully. Perhaps we all dozed off.

The desert slightly breathed, with an infinitesimal waft of air like the passage of a mighty pinion. That is what aroused me. It was a call. We stirred, and unclosed our eyes about together.

The sun had set, the air no longer was glary and dazzling—it was cool and tenuous, and save for the yellow glow yonder where bided the Great God Gold, all the horizon was darkling purplish.

Frazier had set up, to rub his reddened eyes with a stiff hand, and to blink around.

"Looking for those knobs," he explained. "Don't see 'em. Do you?"

"See 'em if stand up," croaked Heff. "Sure. Over there. Got to be." And—"Who'll gimme drink? Jus' little drink," he begged.

Doubtless we might see the knobs if we stood up, but a languor chained us where we were. The coolness of the swiftly gathering night was momentarily delicious.

Each waited for the other to do the reconnoitering. Frazier decided tersely.

"Couldn't reach 'em to-night, anyhow. Not in dark. You fellows go on, if you want to. I'm all in."

His voice was clearer than ours—had a little more precision to it.

"Can't reach 'em to-night," agreed Hefflesteiner. "Might lose losht Peg-Legs again. Start early in the morning. Wish I had drink," he added.

So did I; a drink for myself. What fools we had been to drain our canteens on a mere venture! Desert distances are so deceptive. We should have known. Crazy Hefflesteiner was to blame—the big boob. He set the example.

The short twilight deepened rapidly, the horizons narrowed their circle around us, and extended their veiled circumference nearer, nearer; a released night-bird darted over. Frazier nodded down the back trail.

"Stub," he said, "I'll be darned. Still a coming, poor little devil."

And Stub it was, again, tracking wearily on, through the brooding purple by which the desert night was exorcising the desert day.

Stub seemed powerful tired. He could just about navigate, and that was all. Took him a long time to arrive, but arrive he did; sank down flat, mouth open (like a panting chicken); surveyed us in dim, sick manner; began to crawl forward on his belly; tried to wag his stump of a tail as he sniffed at me and at Frazier—withdrew from Frazier's hand-pat and sought Heff. I noted that his chops were stained.

Heff savagely kicked out at him, caught him full, and sent him sliding.

"Damn' cur! What's sneaking 'round here for? Go off and die somewhere else," snarled Heff.

"That's a fine way to treat a dog," blurted Frazier.

"Not my dog. Didn't invite him," grumbled Heff. "Wish he'd croak and be done with it. Follows us like coyote."

"You brute!" growled Frazier.

We were too inert to do more. Stub had stuck where he had stopped; stayed exactly as he was, crumpled, limp, and heaving. He hadn't uttered a yelp. If the

kick hadn't broken his back, it might well have broken his heart.

The shadows thickened. I guess I dozed off again, for the next thing I noticed was Frazier kneeling over Stub, in the half-light of desert night, fussing with him. Kneeling over him with a canteen—what? Water! Who had water? Frazier! He'd been holding out on us.

The idea was astounding, stunning. Sometimes a fellow can be so eager that he is paralyzed, like a bird-dog at a stand in a bunch of quail. My voice didn't work; neither would my muscles; I only trembled and yearned and peered, hot where before I was cold.

Frazier was clearly outlined in the star-shine; he was kneeling, and he tilted his canteen, and he squeezed from a rag into Stub's mouth. I could hear them both wheeze. Lord, if I might but have a mouthful from that rag!

There was a rush and a hoarse bawl, and Hefflesteiner was upon them. I'd forgotten Hefflesteiner. He'd waked up, too. Now a fight! Stub yelped—he was underfoot. A drop of water hit my face. Down went Heff and Frazier in a heap; tumbled, squirmed, staggered up together—the canteen between them, Heff jerking at it, Frazier doubled over it to keep it, and gasping, "Wait! Wait!"

Heff tore it free (broke the strap) and, whirling, glued his lips to it—dashed it into the sand with one of his curses, and stamped on it.

Frazier picked it up.

"Well," he panted, "that's the limit! You've done it now, you dub! You go dry, and so do we!"

"I'll kill you!" screamed Hefflesteiner. "You were holding out on us. I been watching. I knew you had water. You thought you'd phony on us—calculated—to—"

"You're a liar!" answered Frazier clearly. "I didn't drink. There was half a pint of water in that canteen; enough to carry us through, and the dog, too, if we went easy. Easy, mind you; sensible man's way, not your way. You've been drinking twice to my once. I wouldn't have cared; now—" and he shrugged his

shoulders. "Oh, heck! Plumb wasted, after all. Why didn't you wait?"

"I'll kill that dog," rasped Heff. "Where is he? Come here, you!"

"You go to bed," pronounced Frazier. "What do you want to kill a dog for? Go to bed."

He stooped and picked up the rag—his handkerchief; methodically wrung it to the last drop over the mouth of the canteen. Hefflesteiner grabbed it from him and sucked at it ravenously.

Frazier came back past me with his battered canteen.

"I wasn't holding out," he said, lying down. "It was to be share alike to-morrow. I staved off drinking on purpose. Didn't mind. But I had to help the dog a little. He was in bad shape. He's such a plucky rascal."

"None left?" I begged.

Frazier grimly laughed.

"Ten drops—and they won't be there by morning. Good night."

Mumbling and cursing, Hefflesteiner lunged to bed. Stub was weakly sitting. This night he did not sleep on Heff's stomach.

The torturing hours drifted by, and, as is apt to be the case, the heaviest sleep came toward morning. I reckon a fellow is most exhausted then. However, I waked to a thunderous noise; so did Frazier, by his action—popping bolt upright on hands and haunches.

It took a minute for me to get my addled wits together. The sun was in the sky once more; I lay in the scorching, fuming desert, being shriveled to a crisp. And Hefflesteiner, red, unkempt, was leaning on an elbow and squinting along his revolver-barrel.

The muzzle described curious figures—eights and jig-saw puzzles—in the air. Beyond, fifty yards maybe, was Stub, on his way out or on his way in again, but standing, quartering, with tentative, inquiring mien, head low and turned, to face our direction.

Hefflesteiner squinted more intense, his upper lip lifted avidly.

"Bang!" The sand flew in a spurt, far wide of Stub.

"Come 'ere, you!" yelled Hefflesteiner. "You blankety blank, come 'ere!"

But after momentary pause, as though dully uncertain, Stub was away, head down, haunches drooped; trot, trot, with never another backward glance, out into the desert.

Hefflesteiner shot wildly once again, and swore.

"Nice invitation," remarked Frazier. "What you trying to do, shooting up the country that way?"

Heff raved.

"I'll get him yet. Did you see his mouth? I caught him sneaking in, the devil! That's what keeps him up—that! And he figgers on us when he goes dry. Savvy? But I'll beat him to it. I got to have a drink, man. A drink! He knows, rot his hide! He couldn't come close, where I could lay my hands on him. I'll drill him, though, next time."

"You'll never see that dog again," muttered Frazier.

"By God, if it isn't him, then, it 'll be somebody else."

The ugliest words ever uttered. Stub or us, did he mean—and he had the gun! So it had come to that, had it? There'd be no more sleep for me. Even vision of lion or camel dwindled, repugnant and nauseous, down to little Stub—or us.

Frazier sprang right up.

"None of that, Heff," he ordered. "Cut it out. We're going to the Peg-Legs. Reach 'em by noon. Let's start, boys. Come on, Heff. Water at the middle butte, you know. Come on. We're good for it. Sure we are. Water and the eighty per cent stuff. I can see the knobs plain. They aren't far. There they are; can't you see 'em?"

Heff muttered something; rose staggeringly. My joints creaked like saddle-leather when I followed suit. Ah! Phew! Oh, for a drink—of water! The Peg-Leg knobs? Where now?

Giddy, we swayed and blinked, Heff and I, staring about with those hot, weak eyes to invite the horizon nearer; to conjure out the throne of water, and of the Great God Gold.

Gradually I saw them. They were there,

the three blackish knobs—closer, I fancied, bobbing again or swimming idly upon the heat ripples. No? Yes! Of course they were there. We all saw them.

"Lead us to 'em, Heff," bade Frazier. "You're the trail-maker. You found 'em first. Bert and I'll back you up. Strike out."

So we started on, Hefflesteiner before. That was well.

Trudge, trudge, trudge, and the dry sand squeaked, and our blistered feet had no feeling, and our tongues flopped in our open mouths, and our breath whistled through our husky throats. Mummies, we moved; time-parched, air-cured, desiccated Aztec mummies, ghastly resurrections of this southwest desert; new-world, old-world wandering Jews.

The three blackish knobs stayed where they were.

Too much. No go. We had to quit for a spell. Sun beating down. Sand beating up. Air-waves scorching us like the stings of a centipede's claws. And not a drop of sweat for moisture.

We had halted beside one of those three-branched candelabra cactuses—not the sappy kind, but thorny, pithy, juiceless as a Joshua tree—and in that mockery of shade gasped and reeled and waited. The three Peg-Leg knobs swam and floated, hazy, light, waiting. Some distance they were yet—but seemed to me they were nearer.

Frazier silently pointed, behind Hefflesteiner's hulking back, as signal to me. Eh? What? That thing? Why, yes—another camel; or, no, Stub, riding in from our left atop one of those desert sand-billows.

Surely poor little Stub, coming slowly down and up amidst the dunes, shipwrecked and carried, as it were, from billow to billow, until I at last comprehended that it was he who was moving, outfooting the treadmill waves.

And somehow his jog had the gait of a homing. But he hadn't forgotten his send-off. He began to hesitate; heart sort of failed him.

Friends, or enemies? Or, rather, friend or enemy, for his mind, as anybody might

sense, was all on his one god, Heff; therefore, friend or enemy?

He paused, sheer wistful; sidled farther, hoping; kept stopping and sidling—wagging, asking. Heff had not made a sign—by George, though, look at those hands twitch—and Stub *felt*. He was almost to us when he dodged and shrank as though from a lash-cut just missing him.

Heff blared out at him.

"Come 'ere!"

"Easy. Let him alone," warned Frazier.

"Come 'ere, you!"

That was enough for Stub. His god was still angry; he wavered an instant; turned around, headed away, was bound out once more, trotting at a slink, the heart of him crushed—he had no place in the party.

With an oath Heff clapped hand to gun.

"No, I don't," he snarled thickly at us—and what a face! "I save those shells, but I get that dog. Dog has nothing on me—nothing on me, I tell you, when I want drink."

He ran, tottering, reaching, summoning, cursing, imploring—grotesque—on the trail of Stub. I thought that he was going to make it with the first dash.

Stub did indeed halt; stood hesitant, eying him, obedience to love and law striving against instinct; stood until with a lurching charge of that ravenous body those curving clawlike fingers grabbed for his dingy hide, when, thank Heaven, he slipped from under in a startled swerve and broke to his trot again.

Thank Heaven, I say. Seemed to me, sick as I was, that I couldn't stomach those fingers closing on that dog, and the rest that might happen.

Hefflesteiner, bellowing, raving, went lurching on, blood mad. Frazier's quick voice shattered the horrid spell.

"That won't do. He'll kill himself, he'll be down and out." He ran, calling: "Heff! Man, man! Quit it! Never mind the dog. You don't want the dog. Let him go. We're for the Peg-Legs. They're not there; they're yonder."

I tried to run. In a crooked, drunken line we lumbered on this new course set for us by the trotting Stub. Frazier continued to call, hoarse and frantic.

"Not that way. We'll lose the Peg-Legs, Heff." He reckoned on scaring him. "Don't get among the dunes. Let the dog go. Wait a minute, man."

Stub was keeping out of reach—just out of reach. You'd think he was playing a game. Lord, he ought to be more careful! And we were veering off—veering off from the knobs, when every step meant so much.

Damn the dog, and Heff. We couldn't afford it. We'd be dead men; this was no way to do now, throw away the chance of the Peg-Legs—and water at the middle knob—for a dog, even Stub.

Stub, breaking into a lope, tolled on and disappeared among the rolling dunes. Heff plunged down in after him. Frazier followed.

Queer how a man's legs will carry him along when he doesn't know that they're working—like a chicken flopping when its head has been cut off, I suppose; but I got there, too; pretty soon sensed that I'd somehow found Frazier in a hollow kneeling over Hefflesteiner, who was flat.

I think that Frazier was trying to turn him over, and maybe I started to help. For a few moments things went black on me. It was terrible hot in here; hot and hopeless.

When I came to, Heff had been turned. We all were sprawling together, Frazier half up and holding his hat over for shade; and next, while we wheezed and babbled, Stub's head was thrust in between, sniffing, and he licked Heff's face.

Licked that face the dog; licked the face of his brute god! Do you comprehend what it meant? I didn't fully; I mainly watched and wondered, in stupid fashion, but Frazier's voice exploded highly.

"Water! He's licking his face! See that? Water!"

"Eh?"

"He can't lick unless his tongue's been wet. It is wet! There's water near, sure. We got to get it."

Of course. The fact dawned upon me while Frazier was struggling to his feet. He even helped me to mine. A marvel, that man. We tottered dizzily.

"Stub! Here, Stub!"

He would show us. No. He refused to

budge—wriggled his stump, but crouched beside Hefflesteiner and whined.

"Track him," muttered Frazier, and set out, along the sand swale.

We set out. Oddly enough, at this crisis, so far gone was I that the word water didn't picture to me; I only had the vague idea that we must bring some to Heff in our hats—give him a wash and a drink. To me water didn't especially matter. I couldn't imagine water.

Frazier led; I merely reeled after. The sand was soft, seemed to be dotted with innumerable tracks, descending, ascending, wandering; of coyotes and foxes, naturally, but same as dog tracks. If we'd had the pep we might have cast about and struck the main trail, but we were near blind. I didn't realize how hopeful all those tracks were; they confused and teased us, that was all. Frazier turned around.

"Won't do," he rapped harshly. "Have to drag Heff. Dog'll come them."

We toiled back. We wrestled with Heff. The thing had to be done. We were like two ants, at labor interminable. Dragged, panted, wheezed; paused to sink and breathe; dragged again, weaving by inches through the enclosing slopes of the fuming furnaces.

"I'd like to say that Stub knew. I believe that he did. At any rate, he went ahead; wanted more water for himself, no doubt. Now and then was lost to us; came to look us up; the last time, came with his jaws dripping; disappeared, but that lent us the final spurt, and we emerged.

Water! Sparkling, limpid water, and spots of green! I felt the call.

Frazier broke. He uttered a sharp, animal sound, dropped Heff, and careened forward, and by the time I got there, just as crazed, he was in, wallowing, stomach down, crying, fighting for breath.

Even then—

"Easy. Easy, lad. Take it slow," he gulped, head and heart true, as always.

Slow! I expect we absorbed a gallon in a few minutes through throat and skin. It's a wonder that it didn't sicken us; but we moved fast and, swishing the half-filled barrels, doused Heff from our hats, fetched him on and between drinks limbered him up by

degrees under a tree. Stub lay soaked and blissful, watching.

It was one of those bottom-side-up little rivers which had here flopped and showed its face for perhaps fifty yards before it dived again; about four inches of water rippled over sand and gravel between high banks; a few low trees of strange kind—Lord knows how they got there, but water in the desert seems to create vegetation; a sprinkling of bunchy grass; above and below, dry washes, and on either side the bare dunes.

Drink, tēnd Hefflesteiner, drink, loll, doze—and swell like those Chinese bulbs set in a jar. This we did. By evening Heff was pretty well his natural self; we killed a couple of rabbits—Stub caught his own, the rascal—and that night we all slept sweet and sound, while the water rippled, rippled.

When I wakened in the morning Frazier was already up and out and limned on top of a high dune, surveying about. I joined him.

"Looking for the Peg-Legs?" he said simply. "We'll be good for it now. Do you see 'em?"

The morning was splendidly clear, as after a rain. Clean-cut stretched the desert—fresh, brilliant, beautiful, stretched on, and on, and on, until rimmed by the azure horizon.

And no Peg-Legs were there, nor there, nor there, nor there. A few single uplifts broke; but the horizon rimmed absolutely void of any triple peaks.

'Twas unbelievable, nevertheless.

"Reckon it's well we followed the dog," quoth Frazier.

After breakfast we climbed again, Heff and Stub with us. The heat stratum was shimmering and flowing as of old—so old; and upon its molten surface bobbed and floated no three blackish knobs anywhere.

Sane once more, our canteens full, we turned our backs on the Great God Gold, and with Stub ambling contentedly, now before, now at Heff's heels, we trudged along the river-bed for the out-country.

TWO GIRLS

AS I was walking down the street,
A little girl I chanced to meet.
Her hat was trimmed with ostrich-plumes
Entwined with rhododendron blooms;
Her gloves, they were immaculate
And, I should judge, a perfect fit;
The stylish skirt that matched her waist
Was in the very best of taste;
Her dainty boots, I must concede,
Were very, very smart indeed.
Her face? Well, now, I couldn't say;
Perhaps her veil was in the way.
I didn't notice—and, what's more,
I only thought of what she wore!

As I was walking up the street,
Another girl I chanced to meet.
No hat adorned her lovely hair;
Her dimpled hands and arms were bare;
But heavenly blue was in her eyes—
She seemed an angel from the skies.
The dogwood blossoms in her arms
But added to her many charms;
And, oh, the sunshine of her smile!
Its sweetness made life seem worth while.
Her dress? Well, now, I couldn't say;
I didn't notice, anyway.
I only saw her face—no more;
I never thought of what she wore!

Georgina Billings-King.

Pirate Wings



by Stephen Chalmers

Author of "Fear," "The Frozen Beauty," "The Castle on the Crag," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED.

WHEN old Jim Thorp, keeper of the Whorl Key Light, was ordered to keep the light dark, because of the war, he obeyed the order; but to him it was as if the eye of England had been put out. His granddaughter, Grace Thorp, took a more philosophical view of things; but she was young and lived in the daytime, relieving the monotony of life at Whorl Key by reveling in the possession of a "mermaid's cave," the existence of which she alone knew.

But when old Jim began "seeing things" at night in the sea below the cliffs; when two strange Americans, who called themselves Mr. Binkie and Mr. Porpus, suddenly appeared at Whorl Key; when Grace found that her mermaid cave was no longer her secret, but had undoubtedly been desecrated by the Binkie-Porpus combination, Grace began to wonder mightily.

And in the mean time the Film Star was drawing nearer and nearer to Whorl Key, bringing the human and inanimate ingredients for "The Great Ten-Reel Million-Dollar Bernstein-Whittaker Production of the Sea and Smuggling." The British navy, through the medium of Lieutenant Olmsted, looked the Film Star over pretty thoroughly—though not thoroughly enough to satisfy "Mother" McCree—and the movie ship, passing muster, finally arrived at Whorl Key, making Grace Thorp's eyes widen with excitement.

Grace saw her grandfather come from the lighthouse cottage and level an old brass telescope at the strange vessel. And then, to her great alarm, a snarling voice right behind her, said:

"So there ye are, lass? I've been watchin' for ye!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A WELCOME OVERCOAT.

GRACE turned quickly and beheld in Snare Burges the most evil-appearing creature she had ever laid maiden eyes upon. His ferret face and weasel eyes were alight with a sensuous satisfaction, and she noted that his bony, prehensile fingers were slightly incurved, as if awaiting his almost uncontrolled will to clutch.

Snare had not seen the steamer. From the high edge of the cliff his eyes had been riveted solely upon the Slot and what he discovered there. The rope-ladder, of

which he knew, had been down when he took up his espionage.

It had puzzled him at first to note that it was not made fast in the grotto, that the white maid of his desire was not there in her sirenlike beauty, and that the ladder extended from the top of the opposite cliff to the base of the one on which he crouched.

Then the truth had dawned upon him. The girl was on this side of the chasm, and, turning to explore, he had so found her, her back to him and her shaded eyes scanning the North Sea.

Even when he spoke to her he did not see the ship. His eyes were fixed upon her,

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