



Through a slit Shorty
could see the Arabs
closing in

The Burning Road

*It was a duel of courage from the day the colonel of that
Foreign Legion outfit asked driver Shorty Graw for
speed—a duel with a wholly unforeseen victory*

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Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

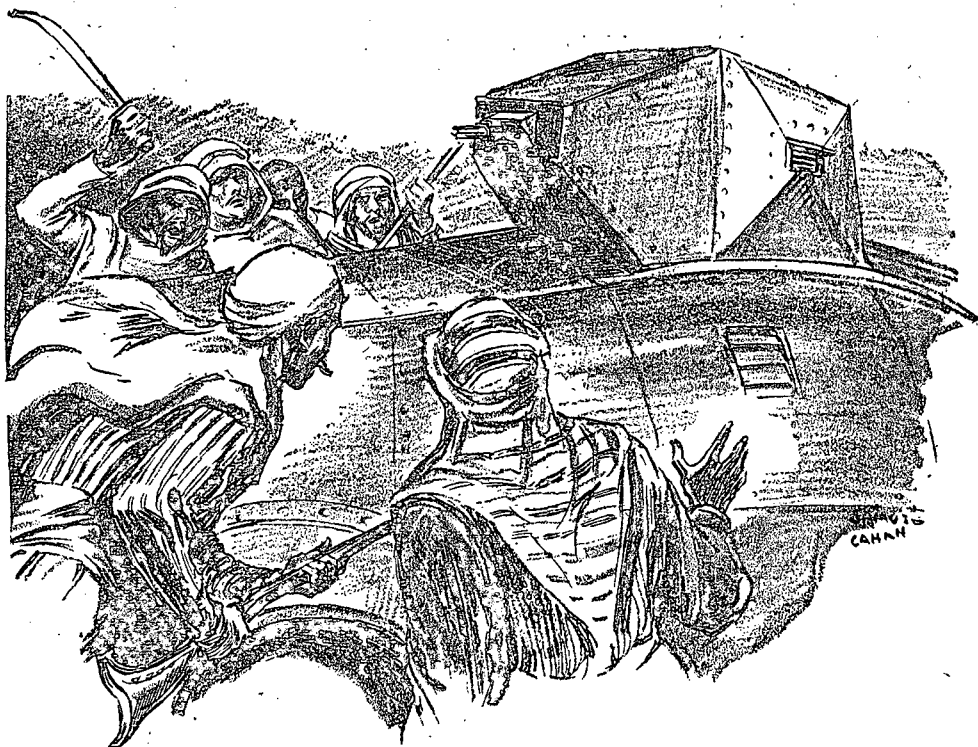
WINNER.

GRAW came into that last corner by the Casino wide open. Rezzi, the long, lean Italian who had beaten him the week before in the Paris-Nice race, was on his left hand, close in against the curb. He could see the Italian's face now, turned swiftly toward his, streaked with grease and sweat inside his white racing helmet.

Graw laughed, then cursed, slamming his job at the corner.

"Afraid, huh, Rezzi? Afraid you'll hit the curbing. Well, you will!"

He did not speak any more; he did not look at the Italian. He slid farther down in the hot leather of the seat and whacked both feet upon clutch and brake. Rubber screamed then, and in his hands the big white-taped steering wheel of his Bugatti jumped and twisted while he fought it back and down. But he was around that cor-



ner now, and ahead of him was the white cord of the finish line, and behind another screaming sound, that from the crowd, as Rezzi hit the curbing, blew a tire, skidded full across the narrow roadway, and almost into the steps of the Casino and the crowd.

As Graw leaned forward to cut his switch, he grinned: it was his now; he had won. Won the Monte Carlo Road Race, and won plenty chips.

He repeated the same words two hours later when he stood in the bar of the Casino. They had just figured up and given him his check—thirty-seven laps that he had led, and on top of that, the first prize, which he had walked into when Rezzi had lost his nerve and cracked on the corner.

Rezzi was behind him now, Rezzi and a lot of the others, some of the judges of the committee, some of the

drivers and fans who had bet big. Glass in hand he turned, pressing one foot against the bar rail, so that they could see him above the others.

"How about it?" he asked hoarsely in English; "how about another drink with Shorty Graw?"

Hornby, the fat and red-faced English driver, was close to him, leaned forward and placed a restraining hand on his arm.

"Steady on, you," he whispered, showing bad, yellow teeth as he smiled. "Ain't enough enough? These mokes, 'as they bought you more'n one? They 'as not. An' you got the road back yet, you got the road into Nice. Steady, Yank, leave be, an' stay 'ere for the night. She's a bad 'un, that road down t' Nice. You're a bit—"

Quickly, Graw reached out; his hands caught the little cockney by the

shoulders, lifted him bodily up and aside.

"Steady yourself," he said in his hoarse, quick voice, "and see how you like it! I'm bound for Nice; I got mine and I go."

He started to move with that, forward through the crowd. Others, many of them, tried to stop him, talk with him, tell him that it would be better if he stayed here, in Monte Carlo, for the night. He handled them, those who came close enough to him, as he had handled Hornby. And after a few minutes of it he stood alone before the darkened side door of the Casino, looking down at the low, snub-nosed, underhung job which had won for him that day.

Standing there, he talked to it, almost as he would talk to another man, and a close friend:

"Hung it on 'em to-day, didn't we, kid? Showed these guys that an American can twist these short races as well as the rest? Huh? Well, anyhow we go. To the devil with this town. Me, I'm fed up. And a little drunk, too. Sure. But we'll get there, baby, we'll hit Nice on the nose. And then Paree, huh, and New York. Come on, roll, baby, roll!"

SOMEWHERE down at the foot of the hill, in the Condamine, a *gendarme* waved a white stick and shrieked at him to stop. But he just laughed at that man and went on, pushing the button closer to the floor. After that, he noticed no man on foot, and very few cars.

His intention when he had left the Casino had been to take the Grande Corniche, the high, narrow, dangerous and beautiful road which flanked the mountains above him now. But he was not quite that drunk now.

Anyhow, he told himself, there wasn't enough flat up there to do your stuff; not even on the Lower Corniche. This, the shore road, was the place. Boy—look at the face of that guy driving the truck! Almost into the telegraph pillar, hey, Frenchie? Well, almost is good enough.

The rest of that drive from then on, even the end of it, was a dark, dim sort of dream. He remembered driving, of course, and driving wide open, as fast as she would take it. But, that, to him, was as common and as easy as breathing. If a bit more dangerous.

The man and car he hit coming out of Villefranche and on the last lap into Nice, he never really saw. He saw the side road, and the swift, yellow stab of the headlights on his right side and a little in front, and that was all. He heard the other's brakes; he heard his own. In a sort of jerking flash he could recall the other car skidding, jumping the rough, rotten macadam and the car tracks, then skidding back, just as he, laughing, cursing, tried to wing on through.

What happened afterward, his lawyer, a smart American, told him in the ward of the Nice city hospital at St. Roch, a watchful *gendarme* seated beside the bed.

"Almost killed the other man—killed him from fright. Broke one leg. He's the son of the mayor of Villefranche, young chap with a wife and two or three kids. What? Yes, of course it looks bad. What? Bail, yes. But it will take about all that prize money you won in Monte Carlo. The local French papers, and the Villefranche mayor have been making quite a thing out of it: 'Drunken American.' 'Utter disregard of law, of advice.' 'Are the roads of France to be made into permanent race tracks for mad or

drunken foreigners?' 'The example, the precedent, must be established now.'"

"Yeah." Graw twitched his unbruised shoulder on the hard pillow. "Baloney! This copper here," he jerked his head toward the staring *gendarme*, "he speak any English?"

"No."

"Good." Graw almost grinned. "What we going to do about it, then?"

The smart lawyer almost smiled, too.

"One of two things. But, you're not the sort to take handily to eighteen months or two years in prison, so that's out. The other is this: quietly pay off the injured man, and his family, with all you've got. And right now I'll tell you they want plenty. Then I'll get you out on bail, and you—"

"Yeah." Graw did grin. "Where to? Home? The States?"

The lawyer's face had become tense, serious, his voice grave.

"No." He looked quickly at the *gendarme*, and then away again. "There has been too much violent and unfavorable publicity for you to do that; the French government would find it necessary to make an appeal to the State Department as soon as you entered any American port, and then you would be in for it. . . . How much money have you got?"

"How much money do you want?"

"Well, according to the reports in the papers, and to the demands made upon me for you, I'll need just about all your prize money from that Monte Carlo race."

"Uh-huh." Graw was still smiling. "That, and my buggy which won it for me, were just about all I had."

"You mean you're broke, or will be?"

"You were right the first time."

"But—"

"Leave out them 'buts' and listen

to me: how soon do I get out of this joint?"

"In less than a week; you're suffering from nothing but severe bruises."

"All right, in less than two weeks I'll be over there in Africa and trying out that outfit they call the Foreign Legion. I hear it's tough; well, so is Shorty Graw."

"Yes." The lawyer had risen to his feet. "I believe both. And I think that after the initial shock of the irresistible force of Shorty Graw against the immovable object of the Legion, both will get along very well. Now, good night; I'll be around to-morrow and bring a check for you to sign. By the way, Oran is a free port, and a man, even a man named Graw, would not need a passport there."

CHAPTER II.

AN ACCIDENT.

TEN days later, as he had been promised, Shorty Graw stood in a native bazaar in the African city of Oran. Twelve days later he stood in the white and terrible heat of the main drill field of the Legion at Sidi-bel-Abbes. He was, he told himself, meeting what his smart lawyer in Nice had called the immovable object. Slowly, beneath the sweat-lined dust on his face, he grinned; if this was the Legion, he liked it.

Shorty Graw's first six months in the Legion composed for him a gray, uneventful drill and labor filled period. In those months he learned to shoot a rifle, to carry a hundredweight pack for thirty miles a day without fainting, to drink like a Legionnaire, and to fight like one. The last two things came quite easily; his advance knowledge had been considerable.

But at the end of that period Shorty's outfit went into action for the first time, and for the first time he personally came in contact with the colonel of his regiment. Both these things happened while the regiment, broken into *compagnies de marche*, was trekking up from Sidi-bel-Abbes to Camp Bedeau for the annual maneuvers and athletic competitions conducted on Camerone Day.

That was peaceful country between Bel-Abbes and Bedeau, peaceful with the exception of one Berber who had found a little too much liquid trouble in the form of native rum, and a rifle which would actually shoot. Some several kilometers outside of Camp Bedeau the rum-and-rifle-loaded native, Graw's company, and the colonel of the regiment all met. The native was in some scrub brush alongside the road. Graw and his company were upon the road, as was the colonel, seated in the rear of his staff car which crawled in low gear slowly past the silent, stiff companies of marching Legionnaires.

Seeing the colonel, the sheen of his *képi* gold braid and the medals on his chest, the native whooped and shot. He only shot twice, his first bullet missing the colonel by inches and smashing the adjustable windshield in front of that man, the second cleanly killing the colonel's chauffeur.

Then Shorty Graw, three other men of his squad, the *ajutant-chef* and two sergeants and a lieutenant were upon the native. Who really killed him was never fully determined. All of that group got credit, and out of it Shorty Graw got his new job as the colonel's chauffeur.

Standing there beside what was left of the native, the colonel studied Shorty Graw.

"So," he said in sharp and clear

English, "we have the winner of the Monte Carlo Tirage with us?"

With his neck and head Shorty stiffly made a very short motion which might have been interpreted as a nod.

"Is it that I must tell another of you thick-heads that this is the Legion, and that a man's past is his own headache and not mine? I ask you a question; you do not answer me, your colonel. Needing a chauffeur and not liking this *sacré vache* sun, I ask it again! You are the man who won the last road race at Monte Carlo?"

Shorty's answer was a whisper, and was "Yes." The colonel turned then, mopping his square, blocklike face with a silk handkerchief, and bawling for the captain of the company. That man had once, years before, worked under the colonel. He moved very fast now. Without direct orders from the colonel he had the dead man lifted from the front seat of the car, had Shorty relieved of his pack and rifle, held open the rear door for the colonel, and smiled and saluted that officer as he told him he would send through the correct transferral papers when he reached Camp Bedeau.

"And now, you"—the colonel leaned forward and tapped Shorty on the shoulder—"I'm late, as it is. Let's see you drive!"

Shorty did not audibly answer; from a flat start he flung the big Delage into second gear and went roaring down the road past the companies, wreathing them in dust, exhaust smoke and oil fumes, for which they cursed him all of the rest of the way into Bedeau.

IN the next few weeks Shorty got to know his colonel very well. That man was without doubt the finest soldier Shorty had ever seen, and one of the best in the foreign regiments

serving the tri-color of France. Behind him stretched thirty years of service in the Legion, through Madagascar, Indo-China, Syria, four years of the World War at the western front, and more than a score of "areas of danger" in Africa. The colonel wore practically every medal that a soldier serving France could possess and still live.

He openly boasted that he feared no man alive. That Shorty Graw did not doubt. But the colonel feared automobiles. And this last fact Shorty soon discovered.

He made his discovery three weeks after he had begun driving for the colonel. Bugles had wakened him in the middle of the night; staff officers and non-coms had pounded past his door, arousing first his anger and curses, then his curiosity. At last he rose, dressed by pulling on his pants, *képi* and boots, and went out.

The first battalion of the regiment, in which was included his old company, was forming up in the moonlit wastes of the drill field. They were dressed in service khaki. They were strangely silent and obedient for men who had been broken from well-earned sleep in the middle of the night. They carried full marching pack, and he could see one or two belated sergeants slipping rifle ammunition clips into their belt pouches.

Slowly, softly, Shorty swore. The battalion was going out. It was going into action. There was the colonel now, reading the outfit's orders while the adjutant held a flash light over the typewritten pages. The Baar-Ghazir tribe again, up in the High Atlas. That meant real action for the boys. And he, Shorty Graw, would have to stay here.

A bugle blew. The *commandant* of

the battalion called an order that was as clear and sharp as a sword. In company fronts, then in squads and at last in column formation, the battalion wheeled and marched before the colonel. The drums of the *clique*, then the fifes, then the men of the ranks, took up the old, stirring and somehow savage marching song of the Legion, "La Sauscisse."

In the pale silver wash of that moonlight Shorty Graw could see the faces of the rank and file. All of them, every man, was smiling.

"And me"—his voice was hoarse with emotion that surprised him—"me, I'll hang around back here, pushing old Hot Shot back and forth in his buggy!"

BUT Shorty was wrong. For eighteen hours later he and the colonel, in the big staff Delage, followed the route that battalion had taken. They went, for the most part, in low gear. Against their car came a steady stream of slow traffic, horse and camel litters, carrying the Legionnaires who had been killed or wounded in the first skirmish of what was now a full-sized battle.

Shorty stared at those wounded men; tried to talk with those who seemed as if they could hear, and talk back. But the colonel brusquely put an end to that; tapped him on the shoulder, reminded him that, as usual, he was late, and to drive this sacred cow of a car a bit faster.

Shorty made no answer; knowing that there was none that he could make. He hunched lower down in the seat, cursing bitterly and constantly under his breath, wheeling the Delage on along that winding, steep trail, contenting himself with one thing, the promise that there was a real battle up

ahead, and when he got there he was going to see it at least, if not somehow join in it.

An hour or so later, at the end of a dark and short pass, the colonel ordered him to halt. Rapidly, Shorty pulled up his hand brake, cut his switch and jumped out, to hold open the door for the colonel. That man descended silently, sweeping back his heavy cape from his shoulders, bringing his gun more forward on his belt. Without a word he moved past Shorty and forward, into the darkness of the valley. Without a word, Shorty followed him, grinning at the flat and pulsant reiteration of machine guns, Lebel's and mountain guns up ahead. Then the colonel stopped in his tracks and wheeled on him.

"Where," he asked in that voice which Shorty knew so well, "do you think you are going?"

"*Mais, mon colonel—*" he protested.

The colonel lifted his right hand and, with the index finger of it, pointed back to the car. "That's your detail, watching that car; to have it ready when I need it. Nothing else. *Est-ce compris?* Understand? Then, run!"

Shorty ran, for a few paces. Then stopped, to swear. He cursed the colonel, he cursed the Legion, he cursed Monte Carlo, Nice and the whole of France, to go on from there and unfavorably describe the day when he had first seen an automobile and even thought of driving one for pleasure.

It was a long job, and when he was through, most of his rage had left him. But some of it was still with him when he returned to the car, slid in under the driving wheel and put his head on his arms, trying to sleep in self-defense. Only once he raised it up from his arms. Then he spoke slowly aloud.

"So that's it, huh? All the time, I got to nurse this crate in back of the fun. Yeah. Yeah! Maybe you think, Hot Shot, that I joined this outfit just to wheel a gas-buggy around? Well, yes er no, Hot Shot... When you come outa this place, me takin' you, you'll want a new chauffeur. Boy, how you'll want a new chauffeur! And then, maybe, huh, little Shorty 'll see what he come to this outfit to see!"

With that, peacefully, Shorty put his head on his arms and slept.

THEY still talk about that ride in the Legion. Perhaps, when its memory is gone, they will still talk about the colonel and Shorty. But, for months, for years, afterward, it was one of the best and most famous barracks-room and wineshop stories in the Legion.

That ride began about two hours after dawn, a gray, cold and misty dawn in which the Baar-Ghazir, shouting, eager, mad, had charged right into the Legion machine guns, been hammered back and then all but exterminated by the Legion counter-attack. Standing beside a red-glowing Hotchkiss gun, the colonel had personally started and directed that counter-attack. It went perfectly; never again would the Baar-Ghazir bother the French. That tribe was through; next week, probably, headquarters would send outfits in here to build *postes*; consolidate the district and permanently take possession. All of which would do no harm to his own personal record and the record of the regiment.

The colonel was pleasantly smiling as he returned to the Delage.

"You," he said, brusquely, and tapped Shorty Graw upon the shoulder. "Wake up! I want to be in Marrakesh by eight o'clock, so that they'll hear

about this at G. Q. G. at Rabat by nine. Fast, now!"

"Yes, sir," repeated Shorty softly, "'fast.'"

The colonel did not see Shorty's brief, wide smile as that man stirred the big motor into life, backed, cut and turned the car.

Under ordinary conditions, for the ordinary driver, the course down those steep and treacherous mountains into Marrakesh took four hours' driving. Under extraordinary conditions, those of a military nature, the drive had once or twice been made in three. Shorty Graw made it in just seven minutes over two.

How he did it, he himself later could not clearly remember. And how it was done, the colonel could never exactly say, for, after the first six or seven kilometers he, the colonel, was seated on the rear floorboards of the car, his *képi* jammed down over his brow, his eyes tightly shut and his hands more tightly clasped about the long robe rack handle on the back of the front seat.

The trail Shorty took had never been designed for automobiles and seldom used by them. In places, even the litter-camels had found trouble in getting by. But, argued Shorty, taking those same corners with a sheer cliff on one side and a sheer drop of hundreds of meters on the other, a camel couldn't go so fast. That kept you up; that kept you going, where a colonel could still get a little breath with which to make squawking noises that you could hardly hear.

He was a little over an hour on those mountain trails, Shorty. When he came out of them and hit the flat sand of the open *bled*, his brakes stank and cast off little black wisps of smoke, but his motor was cool and his gas tank was still more than half full. Mar-

velously straight, a thin white line before him, the caravan route stretched out of sight over the horizon to Marrakesh.

"O. K.!" whispered Shorty. "O. K.!"

Then he let the Delage full out.

The next time that car did less than forty-five miles an hour was when Shorty hit all four brakes to it, did a full racing turn and cut his switch before the amazed sentries and headquarters clerks standing outside the entrance of the *carré militaire* in Marrakesh. As he got out to open the door for the colonel, he looked back, the way he had come. No, that camel still lived. It might be a bit lame, and there might be a bit of paint off his front right fender, but, what the devil? Turning a bit, he looked down at the colonel.

HIS colonel still sat on the floor of the car. He was panting heavily.

Both his hands were lifted to break loose the grip of his *képi*, still jammed hard down over his ears. Somewhere during the journey, probably during one of those hairpin mountain turns, a heavy leather map case had been flung up by the motion of the car and struck him hard under the eye, which was now blue, and swollen. As Shorty silently and slowly opened the rear door and assisted the colonel to his feet, he saw that the stopper had been jerked loose from the colonel's *bidon*, and that more than a pint of extra-fine cognac now decorated the colonel's moleskin riding breeches. But he had time to notice no more; the colonel was talking to him, in a hoarse and uneven voice that was almost a croak.

"You, you—" The colonel had the *képi* free now; it had left a deep red

ring about his bald head. "Crazy, are you? Out of your head? A dozen times, there . . ." His voice died out as he noticed the gawping group of sentries and clerks by the entrance gate. He stepped down from the car, he stood close to Shorty Graw, looking into Graw's eyes. And then, suddenly, the colonel laughed.

"No, I won't bust you, send you to the rock pile. I understand you. You're dissatisfied, fed up with this job, *n'est-ce pas?* You want to be back with a combat outfit, in the fighting, the action. So— And just for that, you'll stay here, doing this. I'm old-fashioned; I damn to Hades all automobiles, and give me a horse. But I'm just old-fashioned enough to keep you on as my driver, and wait for the chance when you do crack something up. Then—*pfut!*" The colonel smiled, and snapped to his full height. His voice rose, and had the crack of a lash. "Dismissed!"

CHAPTER III.

WILL AGAINST WILL.

FROM that day on it was a tacit and silent duel between the two, a duel which Shorty Graw was almost certain to lose. They told him so in the drivers' room at headquarters, and in the *postes* along the desert routes. Some of the drivers at headquarters, recognizing Shorty's type and knowing the colonel, even volunteered to swap places with him, effect a transfer. But Shorty Graw only smiled bleakly and shook his head at that.

"Naw," he told them quietly, "the old war horse wouldn't listen to it, any way it was put. Him; he lost three inches off his height an' ten years off

his life, during that one. And I've give him a couple of honeys since. Medals, what the devil are they, when a guy's afraid of a crate like he is? I'll get him yet, I'll make him crack, or maybe he'll get me. Who cares, huh, after all?"

But, as they had told him there in the drivers' room at headquarters, it had to end some time. That end came about three months after the epic ride into Marrakesh. The colonel was on inspection, far south into the district his regiment held and he commanded. Alone except for Shorty Graw, he had toured the regimental *postes*, keeping steadily on toward the last and most southern, the recently captured and large caravan town of Abd-Mal-Mauk.

South from Abd-Mal-Mauk stretched the open, blazing *bled*, the real Sahara. The town was a key position in the control of the Sahara. Two weeks before, six sections of the Legion had stormed the place, taken it from its hereditary sheikh, put up the tri-color and barbed wire and some machine guns as the first signs of the "French peace."

From that town, the colonel had dreams of going on, to conquer the virgin territory which lay to the south, which had never been held by any white man in the history of the world. Those dreams ran bright and magnificent through the colonel's brain as he rode south with Shorty Graw toward Abd-Mal-Mauk. Shorty was driving fast, far faster than the colonel liked. But Shorty always drove fast; between them still that silent, relentless feud burned, and was never quiet.

Idly now, the colonel watched the head and shoulders of Graw, hunched before him in the driver's seat. The man could drive, all right. No ques-

tion about that. There was no other chauffeur like him in the colonial forces of France. He was even famous; some of the younger staff officers in the other units had brought pressure upon him, the colonel, to have the man transferred to them for their use. The colonel smiled at that, remembering the tart, short words of his refusals. This man was his; between them there was a big debt yet to be settled.

The colonel's eyes rose from Shorty's khaki-clad back and took in the desert ahead. Squat against the horizon now he could see the dried mud walls of the town, the tapered bulb of the mosque minaret, and, very faint and small, the tri-colored flag of France. Leaning forward, he tapped Shorty Graw on the shoulder.

"Easy through the town, you! I want no coming back and looking up and down alleys for headquarters. I want to find that place right away."

IF the man at the wheel answered, the colonel did not hear him; there was only the great throbbing sound of the motor and the tires there. Donkeys, mules and dromedaries were on the sandy road now, coming in with loads of wood, fodder, food and water from the wells and small irrigated areas outside the town walls. In and around them Shorty hurtled the big Delage, motor still wide open, siren braying mournfully.

Twice, three times, sitting nervously on the edge of his seat, the colonel almost spoke out to tell him to go more slowly, but each time he just caught and held it back. Not until he saw the narrow, arched and traffic-filled gateway of the town did he speak, breaking his great promise to himself, which he had held ever since that day in Marakesh.

"Easy, you! Slow! You'll never get through that gate alive! You—Ah!"

Shorty Graw had begun to brake. The Delage bucked, steadied, jumped again as the brake drums bit in, and then went on, at something very close to forty miles an hour. Almost miraculously, that gate had cleared. Where, a split second before, there had been a mass of bare-shanked, dirty Berbers, donkeys and overloaded women, there was now only one shaggy, dolorous-looking dromedary in charge of a naked and staring boy.

Dromedary and boy stood to the right side of the narrow arch. For the big car, they left inches of clearance space, and no more. Calmly, smoothly, Shorty shot the Delage at that space. And as he did so, for some reason he was never to find out, both boy and dromedary moved. In that moment, there was just one thing for Shorty Graw to do. He did it—he picked the dromedary, and missed the boy.

The Delage went right on through, and with it went the dromedary, one front hoof through the windshield. On the other side of the arch, against the wall of a native house, the Delage stopped, finishing the dromedary, and all but finishing the Delage. Slowly, Shorty lifted himself from under the dashboard, took his *képi* off from over his face, shook the broken glass away from his neck and back and looked over the back of the seat at where the colonel should have been.

The colonel was not there. He was, in fact, seated in the middle of the dusty but cobbled road. Low, slow and choked moaning noises came from the colonel. His hands were held over his face, and down from them blood trickled. Hearing Shorty's hoarse and incoherent mutter of inquiry, he lowered one hand to speak, and so allowed

Shorty to see that the bridge of his nose had been quite severely flattened across his face by impact with the adjustable windshield in the rear of the car.

And then the colonel spoke, despite his unfortunate position and condition.

"You," he said hoarsely in the English he had learned thoroughly twenty years before, "when I get you, and I'm through, you'll look like one of your American picture puzzles, with half the pieces lost! You'll fry in hell but you'll fry in Biribi first, and— Call the guard! Call it quick! '*Cré nom d'un cré nom*, what I'll do to you!'"

"Yes, sir," whispered Shorty; "yes, sir!" Then he turned and fled.

SHORTY GRAW knew nothing whatsoever of the old, dirty and evil town of Abd-Mal-Mauk. He just took the first turning and the first alley he came to, and continued on along it. It was a dark and narrow place, the buildings on each side leaning in so that they almost met above, thus forming a noisome sort of tunnel. Dogs, children, chickens and old men and women were in that place. He stumbled kicking and cursing past them, arousing a hurricane of curses in his wake. But just as he came to the end of that place, where it debouched into a wider and brighter alley, a voice called to him in coarse Legion French, and he slowed his pace.

A big and fat man stood in the dark depths of a doorway there. That man was clad in khaki, his collar tabs were the singular green of the Legion, the *képi* he held in one broad hand bore the exploding grenade device which definitely proved him a Legionnaire. In the other hand, he held a bottle of wine, which he companionably waved at Shorty Graw.

"Too hot to run, guy. Where you bound for? Why the rush?"

For just a minute, remembering the colonel and what lay behind him, Shorty studied the other, and then he advanced, and stood beside him, quickly told him. At that the fat man laughed, laughed until Shorty thought the whole street would hear, and the whole town of Abd-Mal-Mauk along with it. But at last the fat man raised and passed to him the wine bottle.

"Come in, come in! Graw, *n'est-ce pas?* The guy that made that trip from the High Atlas to Marrakesh. Come in!"

They went in then, to the cool and dark native wineshop. They sat and talked and drank. Mostly, they drank. The fat man, it seemed, was a comparative newcomer to Abd-Mal-Mauk and was not a member of the regular Legion *poste* garrison here. He and his *copain*, his buddy, compromised the members of a Renault armored car crew. They had been here in this hole of perdition for ten days now.

"A dirty, rotten hole," reiterated the fat man. "My buddy got the fever the day we hit the place from up north. And I got in the next day. Yes, a nice place. That wrecked what plans they had for us; they had enough sense to figure that you couldn't send two birds full of fever germs alone out into the desert, not with the kind of water they have around here. So to-morrow I'm going out north, and when my buddy's well, he hauls north, too. Luck, huh?"

Shorty Graw, working on a new bottle, halted for a space in which he admitted that as far as he saw it, it was luck. The fat Legionnaire shook his head at that.

"But you don't know just how much luck. Name of a cow, you don't! You know what they had whipped up for

us? A two-man scouting patrol, a tour of over a thousand kilometers, out into the open *bled*, the Sahara. And they wanted to send the two of us, alone in an armored car, and not the dirty camel corps!"

"Huh?" said Shorty Graw, and gave the other a bottle. "Why did they want to throw that one at yuh? There ain't nothing out in there but sand and jackals, and a few Arabs who ain't no better than the jackals."

OVER the neck of the bottle the fat man grinned and winked at him.

"Ain't there, though? That's the big secret. You ever hear of the railway they want to run down, right smack into the heart of Afrique Centrale? Sure; every guy who's served out here knows about that. Well, they got their damn' railroad as far south as Marrakesh now, and they'll run it right on down through, you just wait and see. Then they'll tap the richest, biggest district in the world, and it'll be '*la belle France*' for fair."

The fat man halted, to order another bottle of wine, of which he had drunk a good half before he continued:

"But what they didn't figure out until a year ago was how to get in there and make their surveys for the railroad, airplanes doin' 'em no real good. So they let this guy Citroen, who makes all those little French cars, like that American guy Ford, take a flyer at the country. It was good stuff for Citroen and his cars, and it was good stuff for the French government.

"Well, they ran two fleets of about eight cars each in, one down past here, the other farther east. Right down to the ivory country, and out again. Special cars, of course. Those boys

dumped a lot of air-tight cans of gas, oil and water down in there, buried it under the sand." Caressingly the fat man, addressed the bottle, passed the balance to Shorty Graw. "So the guys at headquarters study these Citroen party reports, and they study their maps, and they figure out that it is possible to send automobiles down in there. And they dope it out that, first, they had better send some other birds in to look over the rest of the country, check on the Citroen maps, and make a full military report, to say nothin' about them A-rabs. Look—"

From an inside pocket of his tunic the fat man drew forth a many-times folded and creased map. On it, very faintly penciled, were a series of small cross marks running almost down to Lake Tchad and the southernmost boundary of French Equatorial Africa.

"Them are the gas and oil caches the birds in the Citroen parties made. O. K. Well, look here. Here's Abd-Mal-Mauk, this bum town we're in now. There's no town, and no water, no wells, farther south for something like six hundred kilometers. Right down there—see?—six hundred kilometers from here, there's more wells, and a couple of big, rough A-rab tribes who have done nothin' but shoot at every French peace agent they ever saw. So it comes right down to this: the French ain't goin' to get any farther south, and they ain't goin' to get their railway, unless they can take care of them two tribes . . . Aw, heck! Talkin' makes me sober!"

Loudly the fat man called for another bottle, drank a fair half before he handed it over to Shorty Graw and went on:

"Those two tribes down in there, they control the desert, and they hate the French, but they hate each other,

too. Hate each other like the devil; they're always fightin'. So headquarters figures it like this: send an armored Renault job down in there, using them gas and oil caches that's down in there now, look over the country and look over them two A-rab tribes, and see just where their villages and their wells are. Then—the rest is up to the Legion and the Camel Corps

"A dirty job it 'll be, too. For one tribe's run by an old guy named Sheikh Gifarg, and the other's run by an old buzzard named Sheikh Ilail-Aubn. All them two old guys and their tribes do and know is fight with each other, and against anybody else, meanin' the French in particular. And that's the nice little bit me and my buddy missed, just because we was lucky enough to catch a little fever . . . Le's have a drink!"

FOR a moment Shorty Graw regarded him in silence, feeling the raw, tart wine working within him, heating his pulses, heating his brain. He began to see some hope for a man stranded as he was, stranded hundreds of kilometers from nowhere, with a now murderously inclined colonel combing the town for him, no doubt. Shorty's slightly fuddled brain pictured the armored Renault as a chariot sent from heaven even though it would bear him only across an Arab-infested desert.

He demanded, "You and your partner are pulling out without doing anything on the job?"

"You're just right."

"How about your bus, the car you brought in with you for the job?"

"Local *commandant de poste* ordered me to leave it here for the next unlucky pair of dogs they pick out to ride it down in there. They'll probably

find a pair in a week or so—unless they decide to give us another shot at it. But why?"

Then Shorty Graw laughed and held out his hand.

"Give us that ignition key," he said, "and where is this tin-covered job? I ain't never seen that part of Africa."

"Zowie!" said the fat man. "We're saved! If you swipe that car, then I'll feel sure my buddy an' I won't get shot across the Sahara!" He was more than a bit drunk; he got to his feet and embraced Shorty Graw, throwing his arms around him. "Here—here!" He pressed the light steel key into Shorty's hands. "But wait until it's good and dark, and for another bottle, and until the patrol your colonel has sent out is through looking for you. It 'll never find you here, no. Not them guys; I know. And get good and drunk before you go, and take plenty; you'll need it."

The shiny little key in his stub, strong fingers, Shorty Graw studied the other man.

"But how about you, *copain*? This ain't going to put you in a box?"

"Me? No. I ain't supposed to have this key, anyhow; it's supposed to be in the sergeant-chief's desk, in the *poste*. I just picked it up, thinkin' I might want to take a little ride. And that map, it's only a copy I made from the original when I thought I was goin' south. Nobody has to worry about that car now but the sergeant-chief . . . Now come on—one more drink!"

They were both very drunk when Shorty Graw left at midnight. It was the fat man who insisted that he go alone.

"Heck, you can drive anything on four wheels, or on three. Don't need me around. I'm *en permission* right now, waitin' for the next convoy of

supply trucks to come in and take me north; I can stay here in this dump all night if I want. You just keep straight on down this alley until you come to the place where they knocked all them buildin's down. Then you'll see the *poste*, and the crate. She's right there, alongside the barbed wire, full o' gas, and water, and oil... So long, soldier! And give my best to Capetown!"

CHAPTER IV.

ROARING WHEELS.

IT was, found Shorty Graw, just as the fat man had said. There were the houses, smashed flat to give the Legion machine gunners and riflemen a commanding sweep of the rest of the town. There was the barbed wire, and there was the camouflaged Renault armored car, just within the wire.

Squatted there in the shadows of the last half-demolished native house, Shorty took off one of his wrap puttees and with it made a bundle of the wine bottles he had bought, wrapping them in his tunic and then slipping it packwise on his back. He made no other preparation; he just went flat on his stomach and climbed forward, across the open space, and in, under the unelectrified barbed wire.

There were no lights in the white-washed buildings of the *poste*. It was silent there. Clumsy-footed sentries pounded back and forth within the alignments of the wire, and that was all. Lying there, inside the wire and behind the bulk of the armored car, Shorty counted and timed the footsteps of the sentry who passed his way. Funny, he thought, how drunk a man could be, and still be sober.

The sentry clumped off toward the other end of his beat, humming softly

a mournful tune in low German. Shorty Graw rose to his feet and ran, around the armored car and to the door on the other side. He was clumsy then, in his eagerness, and made quite a bit of noise getting it open. But then he was in the thing, and had slammed the door clanging shut, locked it, fumbled for and found the light switch.

Through the observation slits in the sides and turret above, he could hear loud shouts then, and an order or so, but he paid them no attention, very busy in starting his new prize on its way. Once again, he found that the fat man had been no liar; the ignition lock was just where he had said it would be, as were the gas, starter, spark and brakes.

There was some one hammering at the door now, and shouting in French. There was another man on the other side trying to mount up and thrust a Ruby pistol muzzle through one of the deflected observation slits. Shorty Graw laughed at that, primed his motor, kicked the starter. The motor caught, tremored, roared. His head back, his mouth open to let forth a loud, taunting and warning yowl, Shorty let off the brake, threw in the clutch and gears, and swung sharp left, right into the loose barb wire.

For a moment or so, it dragged and twanged along the solid rubber tires and hood, then it snapped and broke, and he was free, shifting from low into second, and then into high, his motor all but drowning out the hollow slam of the bullets against the steel side plates. He slowed down once, when he was free of the *poste* and out on the actual edge of the desert. He tuned the motor to a soft hum, rose, opened the door a crack and through it yelled, in English, and then in Legion French.

"So long, gents! See you in jail!"

The knowledge was with him when he started the car forward once more that he was awfully tired, and equally drunk, now that the enforced moments of sobriety were behind him. But he laughed at that, reached for another bottle of wine, knocked the neck from it against a red-glowing exhaust pipe, and drove on.

A moon rose, green-gold and huge, soon after he started out across that desert. On that serried, limitless stretch of sand dunes, it set a pale and gorgeous light, making, for him, a sea of this place, the desert. That, coupled with the wine, his mad success and the moonlight, roused him to song. With the Renault throbbing along wide-open under him, he sang "Frankie and Johnny," "Working on the Railroad," and all of the old barroom and corner-minstrel songs of his youth back in Akron, Ohio. It was dry work; he had drunk again and again, hurling the empties out into the sand through the partly open door, at last knocking aside the regular ration supplies and water bottles of the fat man and his mate to search for more wine.

NONE was there. Up across the desert, as huge and as beautiful as the moon but far more terrible, a red, broad disk, the sun, was rising. It was no longer pleasant inside the car. It was hot. Steam rose from the hood of the car; hot oil fumes drifted back to him. He stopped, and tried in vain to study the exquisite and extremely valuable little American gyroscopic compass fixed behind him in the van of the car.

But the needle of it danced before his eyes, blurring with the compass card marks, and the marks on the map the fat man had given him.

"No sense goin' on," he muttered to himself. "Might's well park here. Go on, when I get me some shut-eye, an' a bit o' food."

Suddenly, as if in answer to his words, the smooth sound of the motor became a choked sputter, then died completely. Looking down at his gas gauge on the dash, he saw the tank was empty, and the spare, carefully insulated tanks behind him would have to be connected up before he went on.

"O. K. Suits me, huh, baby?" He cut the ignition switch, and with what he dully thought was extreme carefulness, shut and strongly locked the door, slid all the protective shutters in to place, even in the gun turret above. There, with the same idea behind his actions, he ran a belt into the big, dull-shining Hotchkiss gun and left it wholly ready for action. Beside the gunner's bucket seat there he also found an issue revolver, loaded and holstered to the side-wall of the car. This he took down and thrust into a trouser pocket before descending to the greater room and comfort of the van of the car.

Then, as he had done so many times before in his life, he stretched his arms on the steering wheel, placed his head upon them, and quite peacefully slept.

REPEATED and almost regular clanging noises and the sounds of voices that spoke a tongue he had never before heard, awoke him. That did not bother him at first; his initial thought was that he was in some sort of extremely bad and hot Turkish bath, and that somewhere, during the past night, he had been struck over the head with some quite heavy and quite hard object. Then it all came back to him as he saw the fat man's map in the little bracket beside him for

that purpose, and he laughed until his head hurt again, and he cursed, and stopped.

Blunderingly, stumbling and cursing, he reached up for one of the insulated water bottles in the rack in the rear of the van. The sounds he made in doing so must have been heard by the men outside, for as he drank, he heard them talking among themselves in loud, excited voices and several bullets were fired clanging at close range against the side-plates, to go whining off in ricochet into the desert.

"Ah, what th' devil?" he muttered, slapping in the stopper of the big *bidon* with the heel of his palm. "Cut it out; one o' you might get hurt, and then blame me or old Hot Shot."

He crawled up then into the turret, his revolver in one hand, and very cautiously pulled back one of the steel covering slits just a very little bit. Close beside the car, right in against its almost red-hot sides, were gathered perhaps twenty booted, bearded and spurred Arabs. They were thin-faced, keen and fine-looking men, and one of them, who wore a beautiful silk *djellaba* of solid crimson, bore the green turban of the Meccan pilgrim.

"Uh, huh?" whispered Shorty Graw, staring down. "That must be old Sheikh Gifarg, one o' the two guys that my fat drinking companion spoke of, back in Abd-Mal-Mauk. And when the sheikh finds out, it'll tickle him to beat the devil, because he's got all his boys and himself so close in alongside that I couldn't hit 'em with a spare spark plug, or the Hotchkiss there, or this gat, even. These damn' peepholes won't let me." He was silent for a moment, thinking of something else, and then he laughed.

"Course they ain't going to do me no harm. But they ain't going to do

me no good, either. I got to get out to connect up them fuel lines, and to put more water and oil into the crate. And when I do, old Sheikh Whatever's-your-name is going to catch me off third with the bases full. Ain't that funny!"

MOST of the morning he sat there, pondering just that. There was no solution to it. They had him, and, equally, he had them. When he opened that door and attempted to get out, no matter under what conditions, he would instantly be shot dead. And when they, for any reason, broke more than five feet away from the sides of the car, he could deflect first his pistol, then the Hotchkiss gun, and do considerable immediate damage.

And around noon, his clothes sopped through with sweat, half of them discarded, he summoned all his logic and his few terms of Berber and carefully approached a loophole, slid the shutter over just a very little bit and haltingly made known his ideas on the subject. His immediate answer was a rifle shot right at the loophole, and the right end of the loophole, which sprayed him, ducking back, with a sting of powdered lead.

"All right!" he called forth in his most indignant Berber. "You birds wait and see!"

He delayed there for no further answer, slammed to the shutter and climbed up into the gunner's seat above, set the piece for instant fire. Near four o'clock in the afternoon, when the armored car broiled like an iron oven cast adrift in the burning sea of the desert, one of the young warriors, thirsty since morning and a bit dazed now from sunstroke, broke from the small strip of shade beside the car and raced for the nearest sand dune.

Shorty Graw had quite a lot of fun with that man. He sprayed machine gun lead ahead of him, behind him and on both sides of him. And as he topped the ridge and was within yards of safety, he let him have it, drilled him through and through. From below, where the rest of the warriors lay, he could hear rumbled comments and curses.

"O. K.," he whispered; "now you're gettin' sensible."

He dropped down as he whispered that, to the floor of the van, and crossed over to an observation slit.

"Sheikh Gifarg," he whispered through it; "Sheikh Gifarg!"

"And what does the unclean *roumi* dog want now?" asked a voice in startlingly passable French.

"Is it that the sheikh is not content," continued Shorty in French, "that he and all his men will be killed off as soon as they go more than two steps from the side of this fort?"

"No." There was a sort of half chuckle behind that word. "For I, Gifarg, and my warriors know that the *roumi* jackal cannot move his fort without coming forth from it, else he would have moved it long ago. Also, he may kill all of us now here, one by one, but there are hundreds of our tribesmen in the dunes there, masked from your fire, and they would kill you now, or seven days from now, when you, too, are forced to come forth."

"Huh!" Slowly, Shorty closed the shutter, and returned to the gunner's seat in the turret to think. "Maybe," he said softly, "maybe that guy ain't right, though! But even then—" He looked down at the revolver in his hand; he crouched, so that he could see out of one of the narrow slits. Darkness was spreading there on the desert. It would soon be night, and there

would be a great chance that his one threat would be no good—that this bearded old duck and his warriors could get off and back into the dunes, alive.

"You're sober now, you lunk," said Shorty Graw slowly, aloud. "Pushing the button and pushing the rum has got you so far, and no more. And now you're through. Boy, this'll sure make a swell coffin! Yeah, and you even walked out on old Hot Shot. Left him there, knocked for a goal and with a broken nose, for a lotta natives to stare at. A fine guy you didn't turn out to be!"

SLOWLY, quite slowly, Shorty Graw got to his feet and then slid down into the van of the car, to go to the same slit where he had stood before. Through it, he once more called out to the old sheikh there.

"I want to talk to you."

"I, Gifarg?"

"So."

"How?"

"Here, inside. And just to make sure I'm not lying, let the rest o' your men start back now. Let them go one by one; the second one not starting until the first one's safe. How about it?"

"I will see."

"See quick, then!"

Outside that slit, he could hear old Gifarg's deep, clear voice and the more excited, shrill voices of his warriors. But then, suddenly, one, an old and lame man with a long muzzle-loading *moukhala* slung over his shoulders, stepped out from the patch of shadow flung by the Renault and went on, straight but without haste, across the desert flatness and to the dunes. Another and another followed him.

Something heavy and metal, the butt

plate of a gun, hammered on the door of the car.

"Open," said Sheikh Gifarg, "and let me in!"

In that dark and confined place, those two men sat and talked. Shorty Graw at last summed it all up.

"I'm a deserter. I beat it, *en promenade*. If they ever catch me, I'm through. All I wanta do is live, get me? Live. I got nothin' against you or yours, or any other guys out here. I just want—"

"Be still!" said the old and straight man across from him suddenly. "Be still, *roumi*, and listen to me. You have just admitted defeat; admitted that you are through, are trapped. And that, it is true; for even if you killed me here, now, it would be just the same for you. The rest of my tribe would stake out your half-dead body on some ant-hill. But, listen to me. . . ."

Easily, the old Berber leaned closer to Shorty Graw; he placed a strong, long hand on that man's knee.

"There is south of here another tribe, who control the two oases toward the far desert. For centuries, as far back as our tribal history goes, our men have battled those men. They are our blood enemies, and their sheikh, Ilail-Aubn, I have sworn to kill with my own hands. But that, for us, is hard to do. They are a strong tribe, they have more guns, more warriors and camels than ourselves; their village is on higher, better protected ground—"

"And so?" There was a nervous, husky tremor in Shorty Graw's voice.

"If you will fight with me and my tribe, against the Ilaili, you will go as you came, safe and alone."

"Yeah!" Shorty Graw's laugh was a rasping sound. "And how much good is your word?"

"This good—that I will stay here with you in this fort—that-moves until that battle is over and you are free to go wherever you wish to go."

For a time, then, Shorty Graw did not answer; he sat staring at the other man in silence, a weird and confused train of thoughts flashing through his brain. But finally he agreed.

"All right. *Ça va*. But you'd have to stick along with me in this can anyhow; it takes two men in battle: one to run it, one to handle the machine gun. Come up, and I'll show you how she goes. But, first, give me yer hand on that, sheikh, old sock!"

CHAPTER V.

CHARGE!

AN hour later, strangely content and without emotion, Shorty

Graw sat before the black, peaked tent of Sheikh Gifarg and watched a slow procession of camels climb the slope leading to the tent village of the tribe. Old Gifarg himself led that procession, and in his hand he held the oil-stained map Shorty Graw had given him an hour ago, the map which Graw in his turn had received from the fat and drunken man in Abd-Mal-Mauk. And on those swaying, neighing camels now, lashed cleverly in place, were a dozen hermetically sealed cases of gasoline and oil, taken from the nearest cache made by the Citroen party a year before.

Shorty smiled and rose. "I wish, fat guy," he whispered, going toward old Gifarg and the kneeling camels, "that you was here, because this is sure going to be a battle as soon as I pour in that oil and gas. What comes after that, I dunno, or care one heck of a lot. We'll find out then, anyhow."

Six hours later, at dawn, Shorty Graw had his battle. Afterward, every detail, every shot and yell of it, was to remain clear and undimmed in his brain. It began swiftly, savagely, and it ended the same way. Throughout those night hours, between the time that Shorty got his precious gasoline and oil, up until the first ruddy flush of the dawn, old Gifarg craftily encompassed the village of the Ilaili with his camelmen.

Then, standing at the open door of the Renault, Shorty crouched nervously at the wheel within, the old Berber made a shrill whistling sound with his two forefingers. At that sound a score of his warriors, spread out on the lip of the hill flanking the tent village above, fired, yelled, ran forward, went flat, and fired again.

In that village dogs yapped, men cursed, and women screamed. Then those sounds were wiped out by another burst from those eager riflemen, crawling closer now, firing faster. There was a great, wild grin on Gifarg's face as he turned and climbed up into the armored car.

"Now," he whispered, "in a moment, *roumi*, it will be our time. They will rush out of the village, those Ilaili, and make a break for the open desert. And then my camelmen will fall upon them, beat them back, back here. And then we, in our turn, will fall upon them, you and I, and I will let them taste of that sweet, swift-talking little gun up above. *Aiecah! Inch'Allah!* I and mine have waited long for this day! Now go—go!"

"Yes, sir, guy!" said Shorty huskily, slamming shut the door, flinging in his gears. "You can't hold me back!"

It was, they found, very much as Gifarg had said. The Ilaili, fleeing

from that shrewd fire of the score or so of riflemen, had rushed off into the open desert. And there Gifarg's camelmen had smashed upon them with the lance, the sword, the rifle. Once more, back into the village the Ilaili had retreated, not broken yet, still savage, still fighting bitterly and well against these men who had never in centuries defeated them.

But then Shorty Graw and the Renault were upon them. Never had the Ilaili seen anything like it, and against it they could do nothing. Through their ranks, through their tents and mad camel lines Shorty Graw turned and smashed time, time again, the Hotchkiss leaping and flaming in the hands of old Gifarg in the turret above.

FINALLY the Ilaili broke and ran off into the desert. Those of them who were left died there, at the hands and weapons of Gifarg's tribesmen. Sitting there in the midst of that smashed village, motor and machine gun silent, Graw and the old sheikh heard and could visualize all that.

"It is done," said Gifarg. He had come down from the turret and stood now at the door of the car, peering out through one of the slits.

"No," said Shorty Graw, sitting there at the wheel; "it's just begun."

Gifarg turned swiftly at those soft words. But not swiftly enough. His big, old-fashioned pistol was in his hand, yes, but the small, red-eyed *roumi* held a gun in his hand, too, and that gun was trained full on his, Sheikh Gifarg's, lean stomach.

"Now," said Shorty Graw, and grinned, "you listen to me, mister. My life ain't worth anything. Yours, though, it's worth a lot, about double what it was an hour ago. *N'est-ce*

pas? Maybe you'll plug me with that cannon o' yours, but I'll sure plug you plenty back. Except fer one thing."

He paused; he waited for old Gifarg to speak, and when that man did not, went on again.

"You guys have been fighting out here for centuries like this. One tribe against the other, never two tribes together. And every year you've lost more in taxes, in flocks stole and good young warriors killed than you'd lose in ten years paying taxes to the French."

"You mean—" said Gifarg, his voice just above a whisper.

"I mean," said Shorty Graw, "what you think. I just had a big and sudden change of mind. I've had my fun, I've had my battle, and now I'm going back. I want my old job again. And if you're wise, if you want to live, you're going with me, to tell 'em you're a good, smart boy and know just how much harm a fort-that-moves can do. Right?"

For a long time then, inside that dark and oil-reeking car, there was a silence. It was broken by Sheikh Gifarg.

"Yes," he agreed quietly.

"Tell 'em, then," said Shorty Graw quietly, "and tell 'em quick!"

IT was noon, and the colonel was seated at the head of the officers' mess in the Legion *poste* in Abd-Mal-Mauk. Flies buzzed lazily about the table and the eaters. In a corner, stiff and statue-like, the German mess orderly stood without motion, the sun shining on his pink, closely shaven skull. The only sounds there were those of the flies, and of knives, forks and glasses. For days the colonel had been silent; and respecting him, the younger men had been wordless also.

Suddenly, though, the colonel raised his head and dropped his fork. He came to his feet, ran to the narrow window, and stared through it at the white desert beyond. He swore then, as no man there had ever heard him swear before, and wheeled around, facing the room and the staring knot of officers there.

"He's back!" he husked at them thickly. "He has brought it back!"

All of them could hear and see it then, for, smashing at full speed, steam and oil smoke rising from its hood, it was raking through the barbed wire barriers before the *poste*.

"Down!" yelled the colonel. His eyes still on that dusty, bullet-pocked Renault, he reached out a hand behind him, whispering, "Give me a gun, damn you! Give me a gun!"

But, oddly, when they were all armed and positioned, the colonel gave them no command to shoot; just kept his eyes fixed on that bucketing armored car.

It was close to the *poste* building now, rushing right up against it, up against the window where they crouched. There, feet from it, with a screaming of brakes and rubber, it slashed to a sliding stop and the roar of the motor choked out. Thinly, hardly audible, a voice came to them from inside the car.

"Hey, you guys inside! The colonel there? The colonel?"

"You!" said the colonel, recognizing that voice and forgetting everything else. "Wait until I get my hands on you!"

"Now, listen, colonel, listen!" pleaded Shorty Graw. "I got a friend o' yours here, or at least a guy who wants to be a friend o' yours. An old bird, a guy named Sheikh Gifarg. Him and me is buddies; we just won a bat-

tle together, out there in the *bled*. I just give him a lotta sales talk on the Legion and armored cars, and he's all set to sign up with you and the rest of the boys. You better let him come out; it's getting damn' hot in here again, and he might melt away before you could get him to sign . . . Now, no potting at him, colonel; he's a buddy o' mine, and—and you know me!"

FOR several minutes the colonel was totally devoid of the powers of coherent speech. It was the senior officer of the *poste* who ordered the aligned and fully armed platoons back from around the car, and then told Shorty Graw to open the door and let Gifarg forth.

Quite swiftly and easily it was done, and old Gifarg, black with oil fumes from the motor, his clothing stuck to his sweaty body, staggered forth into the arms of the senior officer of the *poste*. Standing there, the senior officer stared within at Shorty Graw.

"You," he said, trying his best to keep his voice level, "had better come,

too. The colonel will want to talk to you, later."

Inside the mess room, the doors and windows shut and locked, the company sent back to its regular duties, the colonel regained his powers and spoke. He talked first with Sheikh Gifarg, and then with the senior officers.

Lastly, the colonel spoke with Shorty Graw.

"What," he asked, his voice still quite hoarse, "can I do for you, seeing that you have taken the—road back?"

"Why"—Shorty Graw cleared his throat, shuffled his feet—"if the colonel would permit it, I'd like my old job as driver for the colonel again."

The colonel was perhaps one of the finest soldiers serving in the foreign regiments of France; he possessed practically every medal given for bravery that a man could gain, and still live. His answer was immediate and affirmative. But as he heard that answer, Shorty Graw could not hold back a quick smile. For as the colonel said that one word, Shorty Graw noticed that the colonel's fingers were tightly crossed.

THE END.

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The Floating Gardens of Kashmir

POOOR farmers residing in the vicinity of Dal Lake in Kashmir use a novel system of raising crops without having to face the problem of paying rent. Using long handled tongs and working from a boat they drag mud from the bottom of the lake. This they bring ashore and mix with rafts of loosely woven withes. When the mud dries the rafts are eased into the water. Melons, cucumbers and other vegetables are planted and the raft is allowed to drift, the roots of the vegetables drawing water from beneath.

When the crops are ripe, the farmer hooks his garden to a canoe and paddles away to market. And then the customer may be assured of fresh vegetables, for he may indicate those he wishes plucked. There are many house boat dwellers on Dal Lake, and these frequently complain after storms because a floating garden has collided with their residences.

C. A. Freeman.