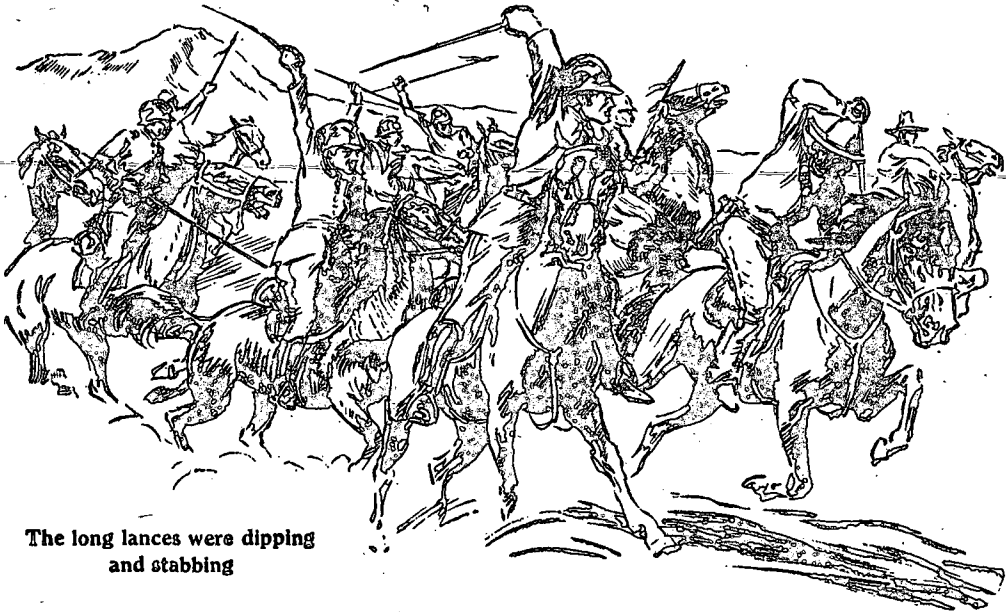


# ARGOSY

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The long lances were dipping  
and stabbing

## Always Obey Orders

By F. V. W. MASON

Author of "Captain Judas," "Captain Renegade," etc.

*Because the family motto had always been "Obey orders," Major Mike Lockheed was defending the ford against his own brother, who had been sent back to Mexico by Napoleon III*

### CHAPTER I.

#### RETREAT.

"NO two ways about it, Spurr, we've got to get that ammunition back," panted Major Mike Lockheed, turning a red and dusty face over his tarnished silver epaulette.

Then he peered ahead again, his long, red-uniformed body swaying easily to his charger's powerful gallop.

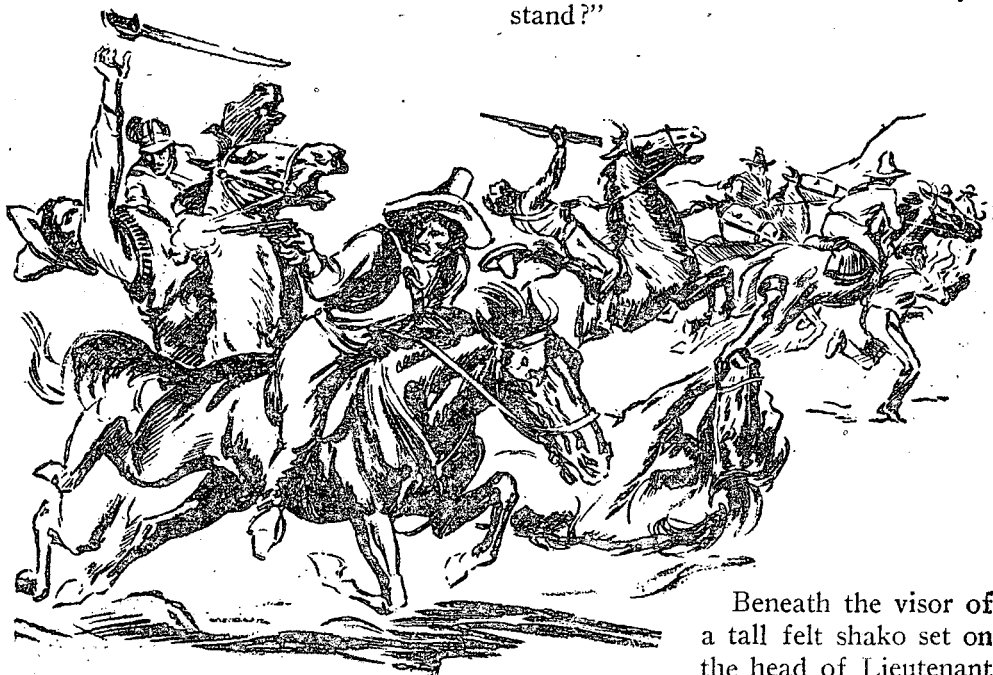
"Yep." A bronze-featured rider who, in a faded brown uniform, was riding a horse's length behind, nodded vigorously. "We shore got to get it back, or them Frenchies will just nach-

erally massacre us if we try to hold them fords."

Major Mike Lockheed, the foremost horseman, looked very young and lithe in his dusty and spotted red uniform; but his strong features were set, and he kept his singularly clear blue eyes

shakes now, and they'll outnumber us quite a heap."

"Zapatos and Ribera are better off out of the way, Lieutenant Spurr." And at the mention of the names, the young commander's features darkened momentarily. Then he called out over the clatter of hoofs: "Think they'll stand?"



Beneath the visor of a tall felt shako set on the head of Lieutenant Spurr, ex-sergeant of

thoughtfully fixed on a lazy pillar of dust that arose from the hot, sunlit plain perhaps a half mile ahead. When he peered back over his broad left shoulder again, he found that he could see the first view of his sixty-odd Jalisco lancers very clearly. Further back, the whirling dust only permitted glimpses of tossing manes, flaring red nostrils, the shimmer of helmets and the quick flick and snap of the yellow and red pennons on the tips of long yellow-shafted lances.

"Wish to hell we hadn't split forces, sir," growled the leathery faced rider galloping at Mike's elbow. "We'll be onto these here *mal hombres* in two

the Second United States Dragoons, narrow black eyes studied the billowing dust ahead.

"Reckon so, sir; with them pack loads of ammunition, them guerrillas can't keep up this speed much longer. But they's got nigh a hundred men and us less'n sixty. What'll you do if they try to stand us off?"

"We'll charge 'em like hell!" briefly returned the red-uniformed leader as he slowed his powerful golden bay to a gallop more nearly the average speed of the small, wiry mustangs ridden by the little red-and-yellow-clad lancers.

Pursuers and pursued were now pounding along over a broad mesa

where grass, burnt yellow-brown by the hot sun of Oaxaca, made a smooth, endless carpet. But the heavy golden brown dust was just as thick here as anywhere else. Straight toward a line of jagged blue mountains the marauders were retiring, followed by a comet-like trail of dust.

As the interval narrowed, Mike suddenly found himself wondering why el Hiena, that brutal scourge of Republicans and Imperialists alike, had sent such a small force to pounce upon the pack train of ammunition so vital for a defense of the fords of the San Gorgio.

The dust in the air grew steadily thicker, and soon the sweating pursuers thundered past an abandoned pack horse which limped feebly along, lathered from crest to fetlock; then a second and a third.

"They'll stop soon," Spurr cried.

Slowly, Mike Lockheed reined in his horse and motioned back the foremost of his followers. Better to close up his ranks before charging upon these savage marauders. He glanced back again, saw his men riding in to form a loose triple rank, their lance points twinkling in the sun and their helmet-shaded faces eager and tensed.

Good soldiers. Yes, old Colonel Lockheed, his father, had been right. Mexicans, when properly led, made as good cavalry as any in the world. In fact they were quite a likeable people when a fellow got to know them the way he and Andy had, since their father's return to Mexico after that unhappy war between the two republics.

**G**RIM pleasure filled him as he beheld the fugitive guerrillas flogging the pack horses in a last and vain effort to urge more speed out of them. One of the bandits, a huge fel-

low in a towering sombrero and a brilliant green sash, suddenly drew rein and began waving his arms, signalling certain of his followers to the rear, while the pack horses kept up their lumbering flight.

As he perceived the bandits' preparation for battle, Mike's breath began to come shorter. With a grim smile, he loosened and drew from its scabbard the heavy American saber that was securely tucked beneath his left knee.

Blinking in the swirling, sun-lit dust, he beheld Spurr, looking like nothing so much as a fierce old eagle. He was directing the lancers to close in, and Mike felt a sudden lifting surge of joy—here was war at its best. A level field, a strong horse between his knees, good men at his back, and a vital mission to perform. For get that ammunition he must, before the momentarily-expected soldiers of Napoleon III came bearing down to attack the tactically vital fords of the San Gorgio.

Amid the dusty haze ahead, he could distinguish certain shadowy forms, where el Hiena's rear guard was forming for a stand. He glimpsed two or three varieties of uniforms which lent credence to the rumor that this bold and ferocious bandit mob was being daily strengthened by deserters from the Republican as well as the Imperial and the French forces.

Fierce delight filled Mike's heart. Rising in his stirrups he turned, and with his saber swung in a glittering arc, signalled his men to form line. Quickly, the tireless lancer mustangs galloped out to either flank, a few strides behind those of the big, whiskered sergeants who spurred to the front, their red-crested brass helmets gleaming in the bright hot sun of Lower Mexico.

The young major's blue eyes flick-

ered ahead again. Ha! El Hiena's rear guard was forming up fast.—Better get going before they were well set. Lord, but there were a lot of them over yonder, and they looked as though they intended to keep the ammunition at all costs! That made it interesting, since he also intended to have it at all costs. The defense of the fords was on his shoulders, and on a successful defense of the fords depended the security of General Benito Juarez's whole army.

"Going to be one hell of a good ruckus in a minute," yelled Spurr, above the jangle of equipment and the trample of many hoofs. "Wish your brother Andy was here.—He'd like this."

**M**IKE, bareheaded and looking very big and powerful on his golden bay, nodded vigorously as he raised the saber again and filled his lungs.

"Ready-y-y!" His voice rang out like the peal of a war trumpet; and amid a mad flutter of pennons, sixty-odd lancers swept to the horizontal, as in a single motion. In their saddles the brown-faced, black-haired Republican cavalrymen settled themselves more solidly behind their lance butts.

"Ch-a-a-rge!" Mike's saber flashed downward. The *encurados*—so called because at one time Mexican lancers had worn leather breast plates—were now in a compact line. They spurred their mounts and raised a long drawn yell of "*Viva la República!*"

Forward they raced, each man low in his saddle, like a jockey, and carrying his blue-white spear point well out in front. Off to the left, Lieutenant Sarolla, in direct command of the Jaliscans, was yelling like mad. He had lost his helmet, and his long blue-

black hair was snapping in the air like a sable war flag amid the red horse-hair crests of his men.

"Hi-yah! Yah! Yah!" Mike leaned low over his saddle pommel, just as his father had taught him, extended the long saber to full reach, and then touched his thoroughbred's flanks with his spurs. Outraged, el Aquila gathered his powerful quarters under him and sped forward, heading towards the center of that dense, vari-colored throng ahead.

"Hi-yah!" Again Mike's voice, much deeper than that of any Mexican, yelled out the old Second Dragoon war cry. El Aquila's hoofs were drumming madly now over the hard, yellow-brown earth, eating up the space like magic. Behind, the lancers were cheering with their thin, womanish voices.

Closer, closer! He could see the bandits advancing to meet the charge. Some were pulling out machetes and swords, some were unslinging carbines, and a few had lances—a motley array if ever there was one. But the guerrillas were even more numerous than he had imagined; Mike realized that with a sudden sense of apprehension.

**F**IFTY yards, ten yards. Deliberately, Mike singled out a big, black-bearded bandit who rode out in front. The rascal was still clad in a bedraggled green and yellow uniform—he was evidently a deserter from the Imperial Hussars. As old Colonel Lockheed had taught him, Mike aimed his saber point at the deserter's hairy throat, and set his whole weight behind the weapon. Black Beard saw him coming, read his intent, and levelled a huge pistol, reining aside his powerful black horse as he did so.

Two heart beats more, and that black bearded face, all yelling mouth

and staring eyes, materialized just beyond el Aquila's pointed ears. The deserter's pistol cracked as loud as the report of a field piece, and something stirred Mike's red-yellow hair. Then, a brief fraction of an instant later, came a hoarse scream and a jarring, rending impact on his sword arm.

As one receives an impression during a flash of lightning, Mike sensed, rather than saw, the marauder's green-uniformed body bending far back over his saddle cantle, saw the black beard tilt skyward. Then he flipped over his wrist, knuckles uppermost, so as to allow his charger's impetus to clear the saber point. With surprising speed, the saddle of the snorting black was emptied.

Hardly had Mike returned his saber to the "on guard" position when el Aquila carried him headlong into the bandit ranks. There, a yellow-faced mulatto in a dirtied orange velvet bolero aimed a vicious slash at him with a machete. Barely in time, the young major's saber parried. Then Mike, rising in his stirrups, slashed in return, and felt his blade bite deep into the mulatto's yellow neck. Screaming like a slaughtered hog, the guerrilla slipped sidewise in his saddle, and was lost to sight in the press of conflict.

The hot, bright air quivered with sound. From the corners of his eyes, Mike had glimpses of pistols flashing, of horses rearing, backing and snapping at each other. With deadly accuracy, the long Jalisco lances were dipping and stabbing; and Mike, raging through the guerrilla ranks like a young Mars, heard one or two lances break as falling bodies snapped the stout pine shafts.

It was a very busy three minutes that followed. Then, with astonishing suddenness, the fight was over. But to

Mike, all seemed confusion, noise—and above all, dust. Through a shifting, choking pall he could see sprawled bodies, abandoned weapons, shadowy riderless horses that galloped about, their eyes and nostrils wide with fright. A wounded bandit was squatting in the dust, rocking from side to side as he clutched his bloody head and shrieked, "*Dios! Dios! Dios!*"

Panting, thirst-tortured and sweat-bathed, Mike watched a squad of lancers engaged in running down the handful of guerrillas who had vainly sought safety in flight.

Like yellow hawks, the *encurados* swooped down on their prey. Now their yellow-and-red bodies gathered behind the lance butts as they braced for that powerful surge which would pierce the luckless guerrillas between the shoulder blades; and now came the thrust that sent them reeling out of the saddle, to roll over and over on the dusty brown grass.

"How—we fixed?" Mike gasped when Spurr cantered up through the dust haze, busily wiping his reddened saber blade on the mane of his horse.

"We ain't lost more than five or six, sir," he reported, and rubbed the dust and sweat from his forehead onto his red cuffs. "We sure gave them guerrillas a nice lacing."

"*Seguro.*" Mike grinned and beckoned his bugler. "Have the men form up, we'll resume the chase and have that damned ammunition back inside of fifteen minutes."

**B**UT it is well known that "man proposes and God disposes." Even as the triumphant lancers came trotting back to the rallying point, carefully picking their way over the fallen, tumbled bodies of their late enemies, Mike's restless blue eyes sudden-



ly ceased their habitual inspection of the horizon. He stiffened in his brass-mounted saddle, as though one of the lancers had jabbed him.

"Great God, Spurr, look at that!" he cried, flinging out his arm to the left.

The veteran officer in brown whirled about and rapped out a string of curses. "It's the Frenchies—God help us!"

With the glazed eyes of despair, Major Mike Lockheed watched a column of horsemen trot out from the shelter of a steep arroyo off to the left. The prevailing colors of their uniforms were blue, gold and green; no room for hope that these men on the flank might be friendly.

"Yes," jerked Mike, reining in el Aquila. "French and Imperial lancers. Got to git, to save our necks.—Oh, damn the luck!"

As he watched the strange horsemen appear he realized, with a pang of despair, that victory had been snatched from his fingers. To continue to pursue the stolen ammunition would be to invite the complete annihilation of his force and himself. Characteristically, he lost not an instant in handling the bewildered little lancers.

"*Son los Imperialistas! Ride for your lives! Aprisa! Back to the fords!*" Slow-witted, the dusty *encurados* in yellow and red stared in incredulous amazement at this new foe who came charging forward as soon as they had spied their enemies, in a long, glittering column. Behind these appeared an even larger mass of infantry in uniforms of blue, red and white, and the latter immediately began to deploy with a skill that commanded the respect of Spurr, that hardened veteran of the Texan and Mexican wars.

"Real *soldados* over there," he yelled as he stopped to catch a loose horse for a dismounted lancer.

"*Andamos!—Hurry!*" Mike urged in furious Spanish.

At last aware of their acute peril, the dusty *encurados* wheeled their mustangs. With many a frightened look over their shoulders, they bent low in their saddles to spur back in the direction from which they had come.

Cursing with disappointment and apprehension, Mike lingered on the scene of his recent triumph until the last man had begun his flight.

"Pick a straight course!" he called to Lieutenant Sarolla as that wild-eyed officer went racing by. "Try to—make the fords."

"Si," replied the Mexican, and galloped on, his right hand busy with the quirt. "But I—afraid—few of us—get there."

**B**ITTERNESS welled like an acid spring into Mike's heart. Hell!

The ammunition was now irreparably lost, and defeat loomed large on the horizon. For, as the thoroughbred bounded along, he foresaw how completely impossible it would be to hold the fords of the San Gorgio with the scanty supply of ammunition his men now possessed. Yet his orders had been that the fords must be held.

It wouldn't have been so bad, he told himself, if he could have been certain of one or two of his officers; but a number of things which had happened recently gave ground for bitter reflection. For instance, how could el Hiena have known by which route the ammunition was coming into the San Gorgio country? There were a dozen trails and roads, yet he had unerringly ambushed the right one.—There was a traitor somewhere, of course.

A hoarse shout from the rear lashed his thoughts back to the troubles of the present. He glanced backwards and

smothered a bitter curse. Lord, how quickly those green uniformed lancers were coming up! Theirs were fresher horses of course. There must be at least a hundred of them, behind those blue-clad French officers.

Back past the deserted pack horses pounded the desperate chase.—Sarolla led the retreat, and Mike, gloomy-eyed, reined el Aquila in to the pace of the slowest *encurado*.

Just as a group of bare, treeless hills rose from among flat little prairies that reflected the sun's heat like mirrors, the first casualty occurred. The horse of an *encurado* put its foot into a hole and fell heavily, knocking its rider senseless.

"Poor devil!" thought Mike as he galloped past the struggling horse and the inert lancer. Too bad there was no time to save him, but the enemy were now not over two hundred yards behind. He *must not* get captured or killed, he must get back to his forces on the San Gorgio. Zapatos, Ribera and the rest never could be trusted to obey orders and hold the fords.

**A**HEAD of him he saw the fleeing *encurados* strung out in a long line, the strongest horses far in the lead, heading for that row of low, green hills which marked the course of the San Gorgio river. How familiar it all was. Mike found it strange to be fleeing for life through that same countryside where he and Andy had spent their late boyhood.

Damn! Tragedy was near at hand, for just ahead of him an *encurado* on a failing horse was thrashing the poor animal with the butt of his pistol in a desperate effort to keep up with the others. No use, the mustang's sweaty legs were wavering with fatigue and his hoofs landed with heavy, lifeless

thuds. Mike caught a glimpse of a flat, brown face turning despairingly to the rear. Too well the lancer knew his fate if he fell into the hands of General Méjia's troopers.

Mike shouted to the *encurado* to pull up, but just as he did so a shot rang out, and the lancer pitched head foremost from the saddle. Only wounded, the yellow-clad fugitive staggered to his feet and started to limp off; but a pair of hussars in green veered from the main pursuit and quickly cut down the screaming wretch, in cold blood.

Mike ground his teeth in impotent fury, then reined in his charger, in spite of el Aquila's furious protests. When a gorgeous hussar sergeant came galloping up, swinging his curved sword, Mike turned and sent a pistol ball through the fellow's body. A touch of the spur, and el Aquila bounded away again, amid the furious yells of the pursuers.

"That evens the score a little," he told himself.

Only thirty-odd of the original sixty remained by the time the harried lancers dashed into a little valley where a rutted road wound between two high green hills.

"Now—our turn," Mike gasped to himself, and heaved a sigh of relief when a sudden volley from a dense clump of mesquite emptied a dozen of the hussar saddles to the rear.

Around wheeled the Imperialists, and dashed out of range amid a clatter of musket shots, leaving the hot earth littered with dead.

"First round's over," yelled Spurr, his black eyes watching the hussars' retreat to their main body. "All even—"

"Even, hell!" Mike was thoroughly alarmed. "What the devil are we going to use for ammunition?" He tried to conceal his anxiety, however, when

three or four infantry officers ran up, among them his favorite subaltern, Roberto Escandón, a handsome young lieutenant of the *caçadores*, or Mexican light infantry of the time.

"*Qué hay?*" called the foremost officers. "Where is the ammunition?"

Briefly Mike described the disastrous end to the chase.

"Then all is lost, *señor comandante!*" declared a grizzled veteran of many a revolution. "We have not thirty rounds for each man. We must retreat before the French attack."

"Silence!" Trenchant as a saber was Mike Lockheed's command. "I'm giving the orders—understand, Captain Montojo? We'll not retreat until we get orders."

"Then may the Virgin take pity on us!" was the *caçadore* officer's bitter comment.

## CHAPTER II.

### BROTHERS.

FROM his bed, Colonel Frederick Lockheed, late of the Second United States Dragoons, and now a prosperous cattle rancher, raised inquisitive steel gray eyes when his tall younger son stalked into the room. The ex-soldier was gray-haired and there were blue-black circles under his piercing eyes. A man of sixty-five cannot suffer a broken leg and three broken ribs without showing it.

"Well, Michael," snapped the master of Las Estrellas as he struggled up on one elbow, wheezing with the pain of the effort, "did you get back the ammunition?"

At the foot of the handsomely carved four-poster bed, Mike paused and shook his dusty head.

"No, sir. The French came in on

our flank just as we cut up el Hiena's rear guard. We had to ride hell for leather.—It's a hell of a war when they murder prisoners. There must be a gang of butchers over there—not soldiers!"

A bleak, reminiscent smile crossed the veteran's face. "War in Mexico never was played to rule—not since Cortez landed.—Well?"

"Looks like we'll have to give up the ford."

"You can't do that, Michael," said his father grimly. "Remember the motto of our family, 'Always obey orders.' You've been ordered to hold that ford."

"Always obey orders." Mike wondered how many times he had heard his father say that—five or six thousand times at least.

"I only wish to hell you hadn't tried to ride that blasted mustang. I'm damned if I know what to do, Dad," he said, dropping wearily into a chair by the bedside. "Méjia's expedition is already here, and we've only thirty rounds per man."

The crippled veteran stirred impatiently, a pale shadow in the darkened room. "Yes, it's too bad, son. Especially since most of old Juarez's men are ready to quit. He's a game old cuss, and he deserves more help than he'll get. If the French don't set an emperor over Mexico, Benito Juarez will be the only one to thank for it. So you'll have to do your job somehow."

"What am I going to do?" Mike repeated, weary eyes on his father's sunken features.

"Use your head," advised Colonel Lockheed. "It's by using our heads that we Lockheeds have made good soldiers ever since America was settled."

"Where's Carolina?" Mike peered



about the shadowy bedroom. "Thought she was here."

"She was, but she went out for some medicine and to have a talk with the foreman of her ranch. Naturally, he's terrified of what the French will do if they cross the San Gorgio." The old man's craggy features hardened. "Of course I didn't tell her they'll loot and burn Los Flamencos as thoroughly as they will Las Estrellas."

The young officer's reddish head lifted sharply and his sunburnt lips grew tight.

"Well, they won't burn either of them as long as I'm alive. We'll defend those fords to the last man."

Colonel Lockheed chuckled. "That's better. I only wish Andrew was here. Why the devil did you boys have to go fall in love with the same girl?"

MIKE shrugged and blinked, momentarily shutting out the wide bed, the glimmering candle and his father's pain-lined brown features. How clearly he could visualize Andy; lithe as a puma and handsome as a Roman centurion. How distinctly he could hear his brother's voice saying, "Now, look here, Mike, we both love Carolina, and it doesn't help matters that she can't make up her mind which one of us she wants. I want her so badly I know I'll get to hate you, maybe try to kill you, if I stay. We've been too close for that, Mike."

How Andy's sensitive gray eyes had shone with suffering. Mike could hear himself replying, "I feel just the same way, Andy.—What are we going to do about it?"

"One of us has got to clear out," the elder brother had said. "Then Carolina can marry the other—"

With surprising quickness the situation had been solved.

"Look there," Andy had said, pointing to a goldfish which lay drowsing beneath a lily pad in a little pool which occupied the center of the patio at Las Estrellas, "I reckon that fish will move pretty soon. If he goes to the right, I'll go away. If he goes to the left, you go."

And so they had stood there a long ten minutes, nerves brittle and eyes fixed on that gleaming little fish. At length, having spied a succulent fly which had fallen into the water, the fish gave a brief flip of its tail, thereby changing the destinies of three human lives by darting off to the right.

"So long, Bud. Be good to Carolina—she—she—" Suddenly Andy had held out his hand with a smile that had wrung the younger brother's heart. "Reckon I'd best be saddlin' up. See you in 'bout five years, maybe—Name one of 'em after Uncle Andy—won't you?"

"Surest thing you know, Bud!"

And then tall and handsome Brother Andy had quietly saddled up and loped off, to be swiftly lost among the purple-red sunset shadows of the rugged Oaxaca hills.

But Mike and Carolina had not named any children after Uncle Andy, for the very good reason that, not being married, they had no children.

In the hallway outside the bedroom sounded the resonant tramp of cavalry boots, and some one rapped softly on the carved door panel behind Mike.

"*Qué hay?*" he called.

"Captain Ribera, *Señor Comandante*, wishes to report that the French have sent a flag of truce. Their commander was brought here blindfolded and wishes to speak with you."

Mike looked up suddenly, and his shadow cast by the candle on the table by the bedside mimicked him.

"Very well," he called. "I will see him in a few minutes."

"Yes, talk to the Frenchman," advised the old man. "But be careful—those French are the best soldiers in Europe. Be careful, and use your head—it's your only chance."

"I'll try, sir. I—I want to save you and Carolina if I can. These French are said to be merciless." Mike nodded once, then he gently closed the bedroom door.

IN the main living room of Las Estrellas he found Captains Ribera, Zapatos and Martinez, those officers of his who had just returned from their fruitless search for the guerrillas along the left bank of the San Gorgio.

In the sunlit interior, the dark-featured officers seemed very ill at ease. They were staring fixedly at a huge, sunburned and bearded N. C. O. in a blue and red uniform, with crossed belts of white. He stood stiffly erect, just inside the front door of the ranch house. A red topped *képi* was clutched in his gauntleted right hand, and in the other a white flag knotted to a tree branch.

"Where is the commander?" Mike inquired of Spurr as he strode forward, his tarnished silver epaulets on a level with the eyes of his dark-faced staff officers.

"He's on his way," replied the gaunt Texan who alone approached Mike in size. Even as he spoke, a sentinel outside the door challenged with a hoarse "*Quién es?*" Voices muttered briefly, then the door latch clicked and an officer appeared in the doorway. So tall as nearly to fill the door frame, he was clad in a heavy blue uniform, on the breast of which glittered a single row of bright gold buttons. His collar was red trimmed with green, and gold epaulets rode broad, powerful shoulders.

Ex-Sergeant Spurr uttered a whistling gasp of surprise and stared as at a ghost. "God blast my eyes! Why—why, Mr. Andy, what in hell you doing in that French uniform?"

But the newcomer answered not a word. His sunburned, unshaven features, so strangely like those of the commander in red, were set in lines of iron as he stepped inside, eyes riveted on those of his brother.

With the stiff motions of a mechanical man, Andrew Lockheed raised his hand in stiff salute, his bronzed face utterly devoid of expression. As in a daze, Mike beheld a sharp-faced and bespectacled French lieutenant who now appeared at Andy's left, follow suit.

With a conscious effort, Mike returned the salute while his eyes bored into the beloved features of that brother he had not seen in four years. Mechanically, he smiled and said:

"*Buenas días, señores*, you may come in without fear. We of the Republican Army always respect the flag of truce."

IN the background Ex-Sergeant Spurr stood very still, surveying the scene with mingled emotions. He alone, of the glittering group in that low-ceiled room, fully appreciated the deep tragedy of the situation. He, as few others, knew of that inflexible code under which Colonel Lockheed had brought up his sons.

"Thank you, sir," gravely replied he in the dust-spotted blue uniform. "I am Captain Lockheed, commanding the third company of the First Regiment of the Imperial Foreign Legion; and I have the honor to bear a message for the officer commanding such troops as may be guarding the fords of San Gorgio."

Making a brief bow, Mike replied, "I am Major Lockheed, sir; and I have the honor to command the troops you mention."

The grim farce continued, and Spurr's jet eyes were stony when the man in the green-trimmed blue uniform bowed again and said stiffly, "Permit me, sir, to present my lieutenant—Andre La Marche."

"I am deeply honored, *monsieur le commandant*," quoth the lieutenant.

"And I, also," supplemented Mike with a mirthless smile. "This is Jake Spurr, my aide, late of the Second United States Dragoons, and provisional lieutenant in the Republican Army."

Mike found it hard to think, let alone to speak. Inside his head whirled a maelstrom of thoughts and emotions, which churned and seethed like working yeast. Campaigning against the French Imperial Army was one thing, but fighting a force led by his beloved brother was quite another.

How queer Andy looked in that heavy blue uniform with his gold buttons, green trimmings, rakish red-topped *képi*, and dusty, high cavalry boots. He was as lean and sunburnt as of yore, and there was the same reckless light playing at the back of those clear, gray-blue eyes. But about the mouth Mike noted some new and bitter lines, lines that might have been caused by long, lonely nights spent beneath foreign skies; lines that might have been caused by longings for a girl whom he thought to be forever lost. And Mike was aware that Andy was studying him no less curiously; no doubt finding him unfamiliar in this war-stained and theatrically gaudy red cavalry uniform.

"Well," Mike said suddenly, "please set yourselves at ease. And please for-

give our having blindfolded you. I didn't want to miss the opportunity for a very pleasant little skirmish, which might have been the case had you been overawed by our numbers," he added with the ghost of a smile.

"We are delighted, *monsieur le commandant*," said Lieutenant La Marche. "Le Capitaine Lockheed has been telling me something of this beautiful country. I believe he has spent some time here." The sunburnt and powerful Frenchman twirled a little brown moustache, and from behind his gleaming glasses shot a shrewd side-wise glance at Mike, as though to hint that he could be counted upon to carry out his part of this tragi-comedy.

STILL Andrew gave no sign of recognition. He bowed briefly to Mike's staff, which, hurriedly dusted off, stood gazing with undisguised curiosity at these self-assured and coolly superior foreigners.

"Well, Captain Lockheed, we await your message," stated Mike, standing very straight by the desk which for four years had been locked upon Andy's private papers.

"Merely this," said Andy in a loud and penetrating voice, "General Lorangez of the Imperial French Army has sent me to reestablish peace and order throughout the state of Oaxaca. Too long has Mexico been the victim of self-seeking politicians.—France has unwillingly decided, in the interests of humanity, to put a stop to this reign of lawlessness.

"I, as an officer of Napoleon III, have come to urge you to surrender peacefully the fords of San Gorgio. My column is well armed, and is accompanied by three troops of lancers; my legionaries are the best infantry in the Imperial Service—vet-

erans who can outshoot, man for man, any troops in the world."

Andy was speaking, Mike noticed, with an earnestness which held something more than the anxiety of an officer who desired to carry out successfully his mission.

"At the first practicable moment," the officer in blue continued, "my column, aided by a strong force of cavalry, will advance upon and seize the ford of San Gorgio, according to orders." He paused, as though to give additional emphasis to his next words, then dropped his voice to a solemn pitch. "If we meet with opposition, even of the slightest, I have General Loreñez's direct orders to exterminate the enemy, to ravage the entire countryside and to execute"—his voice quivered a little "*—all rebel officers found under arms* and operating against the provisional government of President Miramón."

As the Legion officer's announcement was ended, cries of mingled astonishment, resentment and fear arose from the brown-faced officers grouped behind Mike Lockheed's stalwart red form. Undoubtedly, Andy's threat had gone home.

Mike realized that his task was made no easier thereby. Fumbling furiously in his mind, he bowed ironically to his brother—a jerky little bow—and swallowed hard. God above! Andy had practically said he was going to burn Las Estrellas and hang his own brother!

How queer he felt! The long, low room seemed to have become suffocatingly hot all of a sudden . . . What devilish irony that he and one of the three beings he most loved should be thus flung at each other in merciless combat. It did not seem to be his own voice that said:

"What, then, do you advise, Captain Lockheed?"

AGAIN that burning earnestness crept into the Legion officer's manner. "Either surrender your arms, or retire beyond the Texjaco range. In the latter case," he continued, an unspoken appeal in his wide-set eyes, "I swear that the country will remain unharmed; the *haciendas* will not be burnt and peace and order will be maintained under French administration until such time as your new emperor, Maximilian I, the Hapsburg prince, who is a younger brother of Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary, reaches these shores. Then, when His Imperial Majesty is firmly installed, the troops of France will be withdrawn."

As Andy's voice fell silent, a babble of staccato Spanish burst out to one side. A half contemptuous smile spread over Lieutenant La Marche's thin, aristocratic countenance. Understanding Spanish well, he quickly sensed the eagerness of certain of Mike Lockheed's Juarista officers to avoid the conflict in the offing. Quite correctly, he assumed that many of these gayly uniformed *caballeros* owned ranches and *haciendas* in the immediate vicinity. Naturally; they thought first of their property.

For a moment, Mike stood in rigid, miserable silence. Then, clearing his voice, he said, "Sir, we thank you for your consideration and gallantry in warning us of your intent; but on the other hand, we hold orders from President-General Juarez to defend the fords of the San Gorgio to the end of our power. We are therefore"—he drew a deep breath—"determined to dispute the passage of the ford.—And since we seem to be at a stalemate, I

suggest, Señor Capitán," he nodded to his brother, "that we retire to deliberate in private."

"Very well."

A deep stillness reigned in that crowded little whitewashed room while the brothers, the one in red and the other in dusty blue, pulled aside a blue-and-white hanging and stalked in grim silence through a door to the left.

### CHAPTER III.

#### OBEDIENCE.

IT was not until the two stalwart commanding officers, so strangely alike and yet so unlike, stood in that familiar study decorated with the trophies of Colonel Lockheed's thirty years of army experience, that they unbent from their rigidly correct military manner. On the walls about them gleamed colorful Creek war bonnets, Seminole headdresses made of gorgeous egret plumes, sabers, helmets, pistols captured during the Texan war. But the two brothers saw none of these. Of equal height, they stood gazing at each other; then, without a word, they flung long, wiry arms about each other and hugged as they had when, as children, some adventure had separated them for a few days.

"Andy!" cried Mike. "You old son of a gun. Lord, I am glad to see you. I've been turning the *República* upside down, looking for you these last three years. Where in hell have you been?"

The other one sighed, and his gray eyes wandered beyond the curiously wrought iron bars of the window. "I wouldn't have come home for a while, Mike; but I suppose it's fate. When I joined the Foreign Legion in Algeria, who in hell would have thought it would be ordered to Mexico inside a couple

of years?" Andy's eyes, a little grayer and less blue than Mike's, suddenly sought his brother's, and there paused in unspoken inquiry.

"Carolina is well—lovelier than ever," Mike said, and nervously fingered his tarnished silver belt.

"I'm very glad of that.—Are there—have you any children?"

"No," replied Mike somberly. "It—Well, it was a damned big mistake, your going away—"

"What—Then—" As though a bullet had struck him, Andrew Lockheed's long body stiffened beneath the dust-powdered blue uniform, and the heavy gold epaulets on his shoulders shimmered briefly. "She didn't—you aren't—?"

Solemnly, Mike shook his sunburnt red head. "It wasn't long after you'd vamoosed that Carolina and I became engaged; but somehow, things weren't quite right. Both of us felt it, and then poor Carolina realized that it was you she really loved—" Mike choked a little.

"Please go on," said Andy, in that peculiar monotone some men use under stress of great emotion.

Mike's weatherstained silver epaulets rose under a little shrug. "Well, we stalled for time—put off the wedding to give me time to hunt for you. I looked everywhere—even up in Texas and down in Honduras—until this blasted war broke out."

"Good old Mike!" murmured the other, and his hand closed over Mike's. "You always were a good sport."

"But I didn't find you, of course. We're still officially engaged, otherwise Carolina's *padre* would have married her off to young Sandoval. You know—that smooth young *caballero* from the city. I tell you, Bud, it's been mighty hard finding excuses to postpone that wedding."



"Carolina!" In Andy's gaunt, deeply tanned face burned a feverish anxiety. "Carolina still free.—God, Mike, how I've hungered and thirsted for a sight of her these last four years! I used to lie out in the desert, back in Barbary, and wonder what you two were doing. It never occurred to me that you weren't hitched up long ago. I figured you'd have a herd of kids playing all over the house. Where—where is she?"

A RATHER grim smile lit Mike's features. "She's here, *soldado*, here nursing Dad. A mustang fell on the old *caballero* a couple of weeks ago, smashed his left leg and a couple of ribs."

"What! Carolina here at Las Estrellas? Good God, Mike, she's in danger here!—You should have sent her away."

"She wouldn't go; you know what she's like—a real thoroughbred. Besides, her *padre* moved their rancho down the San Gorgio, until it's only three kilometers below us, here on the plateau. He calls it Los Flamencos, now."

A heavy silence invaded the little library while on Andrew's sun-darkened face appeared an expression of anguish.

"Good God, Mike!" he muttered at last. "I'm in a hell of a fix.—As I've told you, I have orders to burn both Las Estrellas and Los Flamencos, and hang you and your officers, if I catch you."

"Well," remarked Mike, "I don't notice you taking that ford yet."

Andy's dark head snapped up and he looked a little taken aback. "Mike! Surely you aren't fool enough to think you can hold that ford against me? Why, I have under my command two hundred picked men of the best troops

in the world. Besides, I've two hundred troopers of the crack *fijo de Méjico* lancers."

Mike managed a confident laugh. "They aren't enough, Andy. My troops are veterans, too; and they'll fight to the last gasp. But aside from all this, whichever way the cat jumps we're in a bad way regarding each other. For you see, my orders are to hold this ford and to execute any French officers I capture, in retaliation for the orders you've been given."

"Look here," cried Andy hoarsely. "Can't we—can't we do something about this?—We can't carry out such orders. Let's both resign."

Mike slowly shook his reddish blond head, and his shadow mimicked him on the white plaster wall behind. "You wouldn't do it, and I wouldn't do it. We Lockheeds don't resign in the face of the enemy. Dad would disown us both if we did. Suppose we go in and see the old gentleman. Maybe he'll have a suggestion. It'll have to be a brief visit, Andy. Our respective officers will be wondering what the hell."

"Yes," agreed the older brother, "I've got to be getting back to my command."

THE spurs on the dusty boot heels of the brothers jingled softly on the red tile floor as they quit the library. Solemn of manner, they made their way to that spacious bedroom in which the grizzled ex-colonel of the Second United States Dragoons lay on his bed of pain. As his deep-set eyes beheld that second tall figure in the doorway, he struggled up on one elbow, then sank back with a stifled groan which prompted a tall young woman by his side to speak with gentle severity.

"*Tío Fréderico*, you must lie still. It is only Don Mike."

"No, no!" choked the old man. "Look!"

And then Carolina de Fonseca's slender, white-clad figure straightened.

"Andrew!" The exclamation was punctuated by the crash of a glass of medicine which fell from her hand to shatter itself on the antelope skin beneath her small feet. "*Madre de Dios!* It is not possible!"

She made a dramatic and unforgettable figure. Completely clad in white, though her dress was no whiter than her face, she stood gazing from enormous dark eyes at that powerful, soldierly figure filling the doorway.

"Andrew!" With a smothered cry she darted around the foot of the great bed, and an instant later Andrew Lockheed's dusty blue arms were about her and his hard, sunburned lips were pressing fierce, hungry kisses on the vivid softness of her mouth.

Mike stood to one side, gazing fixedly out of the bedroom window. Apparently he was absorbed in watching pigeons flutter from a dovecote across the patio, to drink at the edge of the fountain.

Suddenly Colonel Lockheed's voice broke in. "Mike, is that a French uniform your brother has on?"

"Yes, sir." Like a private replying to his colonel, Mike Lockheed straightened.

"Then what is he doing here?" demanded the old man, his parchment colored features set. "Since when has a Lockheed permitted an enemy to enter his quarters?"

"He came under the flag of truce, sir. We have been parleying. Since he was here, I saw no good reason why he shouldn't see you and Carolina."

It was then that Carolina sprang back, eyes wide with distress. "*Dios*

*de Dios!* What is this?—A French uniform? You must take it off, Andrew! You must never go back—never leave me again. Ah, my heart's own—!"

Slowly, Andy's black head shook. "Sorry, darling, but we don't do things that way. In a few minutes I've got to go back across the river; and then I'll have to do my best to burn this rancho—and yours, too—if Mike and his men make the least attempt at resistance."

It was to Mike, standing very tall and glum, that the poor distracted girl now fluttered.

"Mike, Mike! You who are always so generous, so gentle, so *caballero*, surely you know that our poor *soldados* cannot stand against the French. You will order the retreat and so avoid this mad encounter—no?"

And now it was the younger brother's yellow-red head that shook in sharp negation.

"Impossible, little Carolina. I have my orders from President-General Juarez himself—the ford must be held at all costs."

"This is criminal, stupid, infamous!" There was the wail of a breaking heart in Carolina's voice; and more than anything that had yet transpired, it moved the two brothers. They turned in unspoken appeal to that powerful old figure outlined beneath the bed sheets, and saw written there a reflection of the anguish which Carolina felt.

"Surely, Dad," began Andrew, "there must be some way?"

But the iron gray head shook. "Obey orders, my boy—always obey orders. I'll not hold it against you if you take this rancho and burn it to the ground. You will only be doing what

I've taught you since you were old enough to talk. All I can say is—"his voice broke a little—"all I can say is—that you must both do your duty as you see it."

"No! no! no!" Carolina flung herself upon Andy, winding white arms about his big chest and pressing her tear-stained cheek against the cold, glittering buttons there. "I will not let you go again. *Dios de Merced!* What if you were killed, now that you have come back to me? Retreat, Andrew! You must, I implore you! Why should you lay down your life to force the French emperor's rule on my people?"

With a bronzed hand that trembled a little, Andrew stroked Carolina's lustrous black hair. Then he lifted her chin and gazed a moment into her swimming eyes. "*Adios*, darling, I—I must be going."

It was then that Carolina gave a tired sigh and sagged limp in Andy's blue clad arms. Swiftly Andy roused himself, kissed the unconscious girl, and gave her over to Mike.

"Take care of her, Mike," he said in a strangely thick voice. "Get her out of the way. For, God help me, I—I am going to attack—as hard and as soon as I can."

He extended a bronzed right hand, first to the old knight on the bed, and next to his brother. Then, with a faint jangle of spurs, he executed an about-face and stalked from the room.

## CHAPTER IV.

### TRAITORS.

FIVE years older did Mike Lockheed seem as the sun, before its almost meteoric disappearance from the sky, hovered for an instant above the sharp crags of Santa Lu-

crecia. The last rays, beating in through the library windows of Las Estrellas, lit the weary features of the little council of war. A home-made map, roughly drawn by Mike Lockheed but amazingly accurate, was being studied.

Bending over the red-uniformed commandant, Spurr and el Lobo, the Yaqui chieftain, followed the frayed point of the quill pen with which Mike was emphasizing his remarks. Curiously enough, there were no Mexican officers present; Mike had deemed it wiser to be discreet about his plans.

"Now," Mike was saying, "here's what seems most likely to happen. The French will have to camp dry, or retire five miles to get water. It's a cinch they won't dare come down to the ford to-night, for fear of being ambushed; and the cañon is too steep anywhere else. Andy—er—the French commandant knows this. Right now they are halted; but I'm sure they're short of water and must fall back. Don't tell this to the rest of our crowd. I want them to think—Hello, what's that?"

From outside had sounded the clank of *accoutrement* and the trampling of many horses.

"Reckon that'll be Zapatos and Ribera and the rest, back from their wild goose chase," remarked Spurr somberly. "Hope they ain't wore out the hosses."

"They'd better not have," said Mike briskly. "Go out and order 'em not to let their men unsaddle; we're pulling out for Conino at sundown."

"Conino?"

"What?" The mahogany-faced Texan veteran nearly swallowed his quid; and even the Yaqui looked up quickly, though otherwise he betrayed no amazement.

"What the hell!" Spurr cried.

"That will do, lieutenant," cut in the red-haired commander swiftly. "I know what our men can do—and what they can't do. The French force would simply massacre us, even if we had plenty of ammunition."

"*Bueno*," grunted the Indian. "El Lobo will do as his brother commands. The Yaquis will be ready to ride at sundown."

"But, major," protested Spurr, "we could put up a good scrap maybe. It'll look bad—"

"Maybe it will," snapped Mike, "but I won't have my force annihilated. If we stood a ghost of a chance it'd be different—"

"But, but—" stammered the Texan, spreading horny hands in protest "—we got orders to hold this here ford."

"That's enough, lieutenant. Go out and transmit my orders."

Ex-Sergeant Spurr's narrow mouth shut with a click and a certain contemptuous gleam crept into his eyes, though his hand went up in salute. Then he whirled about, going through the door, his huge dragoon's saber clattering in its war-worn scabbard.

"My brother needs me no longer?" inquired the Yaqui chieftain.

"Not right now," said Mike somberly. "Go and wait for orders, Captain Lobo."

FIVE minutes later el Comandante Lockheed was announcing to the rest of his officers his determination to retreat.

"*Nombre de Dios!* But this is cowardly nonsense," angrily protested Zapatos, the captain of Jalisco lancers. "As we rode in, we saw the French turning back.—They are in full retreat."

"So much the better. They are probably going to report back to the main column," explained Mike quickly. "At present it may be they fear us. Later they may return with many cannon and reinforcements. That is why I am falling back on Conino. We must have more men, more ammunition. The fords are safe enough now."

"Ah, I see," commented Captain Ribera, and nodded his brass helmeted head thoughtfully. "But is it not unwise to leave the ford and these ranches unguarded? What of guerrillas and bandits? Does it not invite raid?"

"There is nothing to fear since el Hiena is in full flight, to the south. You yourself reported so. That is right, is it not?"

"*Pero sí.*" The burnished brass helmet nodded so that its scarlet horse-hair crest stirred lazily. "The bandit, may God blacken his face, is far down the San Gorgio valley. There is nothing to fear from him."

"Then we march in half an hour. To your units, gentlemen."

It was a bad five minutes Mike had with his father when the old man heard that he was retreating.

"Afraid of old Boney's légionnaires, eh? Or is it Carolina's whimpering that's made you forget your duty? Get out of here, you cowardly hound!" the enraged old man roared. "Get out and stay out! If I could walk, I'd kick you out. If you think you're doing me a favor by retreating, you're not. I'd rather have a hundred ranches burnt than have one coward for a son. Get to hell out of here—and don't come back!"

Red faced and furious, Mike had endured the tongue lashing, well aware that the colonel's parade ground voice was carrying out into the shady patio where his officers were taking a fare-

well drink of that cool Madeira which was Colonel Lockheed's favorite beverage.

DU SK was settling fast when the little Republican force turned their backs on the fords they had been ordered to hold at all costs and, leaving behind the hospitable golden yellow lights of Las Estrellas, set off along a winding trail which led up to distant Conino. It was all very silently done, and save for the occasional snuffing of a horse or the faint jangle of its equipment, the maneuver was well carried out.

"Why do you remain in the rear?" Ribera called out when Mike pulled rein and halted to let pass the helmeted, red-clad dragoons who acted as rear guard. These gaudily uniformed men looked like so many hawk-headed monstrosities in the gloom as, hunched forward in their high saddles, they set their shoulders against the pounding of the heavy little carbines slung across their backs.

"Just want to see that no stragglers drop behind," Mike nodded affably. "Ride on, captain; and tell the lancers up ahead to increase the pace. If we're to get to Conino by dawn we'll have to keep up a four-kilometer walk."

"Why not send an orderly?" demanded Ribera, a little truculently. "I would rather keep an eye on my men, I am no messenger boy."

"Do as I say!—And you, lieutenant," Mike called to Escandón, "ride into the center of the column and see that this eternal jamming up is stopped, or some of the horses will get kicked and put out of action."

Accompanied only by his aide, the lean Texan called Spurr, Mike gradually dropped further and further to

the rear, until a good half kilometer separated him from the last dragoons in the column. He was very alert now, for in a few minutes more the column would be among the rocky hills now looming black ahead. Once among them, there could be no turning off the trail.

"Come on," he said sharply to Spurr, "drop this damned sulkiness. I won't have it! Keep your eyes skinned—I'm expecting some fun in a minute—"

"Yes, sir," said ex-Sergeant Spurr, but his manner changed not at all.

"We'll halt here.—Now listen—"

The two horsemen stood in silence for perhaps five minutes. The clatter of hoofs in the distant column was growing fainter when all at once a solitary dragoon appeared, a black shape against the gray hillsides. He was proceeding cautiously and kept peering to the right and to the left.

"Shall I wing him, sir?" muttered Spurr, sliding his Winchester from its boot. "That hombre's a deserter."

"No," was Mike's astonishing reply. "Let him alone. I want him to get away—he's more than a deserter."

Each of the silent watchers gripped his horse's ear to prevent a possible neigh, and they hugged the shadow of a willow bush as the messenger of treachery drew nearer, letting his horse pick its own course. Not a hundred feet away the dragoon turned off the trail, spurred his mount and moved off to the south at a cautious trot.

"And there," murmured Mike, "goes Fate in the shape of a traitor. Blast his yellow soul to hell!—Keep that horse quiet!—We'll have to let this hombre get well away before we make a move. It'd spoil everything to let him suspect anything. When we re-join the column, I want you to take



the boys from the ranch and cover the head and the tail of the column. I'll give Captain Lobo orders that the Yaquis are to cover the flanks. No one is to leave the column from now on. Kill any one who tries it. Any one, understand?"

"Yessir," said Spurr, and grinned in the dark.

WHEN the little force had been on the march a long two hours, Mike made his way to the "point" and peered about, obviously in search of land marks. Presently he turned his horse off the beaten track to Conino.

"*Qué hay?*" demanded the lancer captain. "This is not the way to Conino."

"It's a new way," explained Mike briefly. "Last fall, when I was antelope shooting, I discovered this new route. It will get us into Conino two hours sooner than the old way."

"I—I protest," hotly objected Ribera, who came galloping up. "You may lose your way. I insist that we follow the regular road!"

Mike straightened in his saddle. "I'm giving the orders here.—Get back to your post, sir!"

On through the darkness blundered the little column, until all at once it dawned upon even the densest of the *muchachos* in the column that they were not headed for Conino at all, but for some point, the secret of which lay concealed in the agile brain of Mike Lockheed alone.

Great was the astonishment, and perhaps disgust, of certain of those dark-featured officers who rode with Mike when, with the rising of a waning moon, they beheld in the empty distance that deep gorge, like the Grand Cañon, through which the Rio San Gorgio

pursued its course. Presently they came to the very correct conclusion that Don Mike Lockheed had been leading them through the barren uplands in a wide circle, and that by a little brisk marching they could arrive back at the fords of the San Gorgio in a short half hour.

"*Es loco.* He is mad," the officers muttered angrily, and Captain Ribera's mahogany-hued features were furious in the shade of his helmet's visor. On the other hand, Lieutenant Spurr's frown had disappeared like dew before the sun, and at the corners of his rat trap of a mouth was the same admiring twist that had been there on the morning when, as a sergeant, he realized how cleverly old Colonel Lockheed had posted the Second Dragoons at Buena Vista.

Twice, during the hours that followed, did the watchful, panther-footed Yaquis who prowled on the outskirts of the encampment pull from the saddle certain ill-favored Mexicans. These, with masterly carelessness, had been caught in the act of straying away from the lightless bivouac. At such times, knives glimmered briefly; and after that the skulkers became quite still.

AT last, Captain Ribera drew near the stone on which Mike sat, deep in thought, his eyes on the drowsing horses and the prone figures of his infantry. Mike noted that the dragoon captain's features were quivering by the eerie light of the moon.

"This is an insult, *señor comandante*," he growled. "Why have you made fools of us this way? Why have you posted those terrible savages on our flanks? One of them nearly knifed me just now!"

Mike heaved his long frame to its feet, a dangerously tight smile curving his lips.

"Well, my dear captain, I'm sorry that my precautions against el Hiena's surprising us annoys you." He took a step forward, his curly hair tossed by the strong wind which at night swept that region. "Do you know, it's really amazing how clever that guerrilla is? A real mind reader he seems to be. So far," he emphasized the words, "he seems to have been able to foresee everything I intended to do.—It astonishes you, doesn't it, my dear captain?"

"*Madre de Dios!*" snarled Ribera. "You shall answer for this foolishness!—You will learn what it means to insult a loyal Mexican gentleman."

"Indeed?" As he spoke, Mike's hand was tapping lightly the holster of that heavy Colt which in other days had hung at the belt of his father, Colonel Lockheed, and in the moonlight his blue eyes were terrible as he said, "Loyal, eh? Then surely you won't object to my searching you?"

"No!—You shall die for this."

Clawing at his holstered pistol, Captain Ribera sprang back. But unfortunately for him, it was to land in the sinewy arms of ex-Sergeant Spurr.

"Steady, you damned grease ball, or I'll break your dirty neck!"

"Search him," directed Mike. "Guards, arrest this man!"

While the rest of the Mexican officers looked on in mingled horror and dismay, the rangy Texan fumbled beneath the dragoon's yellow uniform, presently to produce from its coat lining a few sheets of paper which bore the indubitable evidence which warranted the prompt hanging that ensued.

**B**UT all was not easy in Mike's mind when that grotesque black figure dangling from the ceiba tree at last swung quiet. In the last moments before he was swung to Eternity,

Ribera managed to push out the gag; and amid furious incriminations, he screamed:

"You to-day, but el Hiena to-morrow! El Hiena will avenge me, and you will die such a death as mothers will use for frightening their children!"

"Too bad," Mike said as he passed Escandón, the likeable young lieutenant of *caçadores* who commanded the infantry. "Don't take it too hard."

The Mexican was sitting with face buried in his hands, but he looked up when Mike halted.

"*Dios!*" he cried bitterly. "Another traitor. No wonder the Gringos despise us! What curse is there on my people that so few of them can be true to their country? Oh, *comandante*," he held out an imploring hand, "I pray you to please believe that we are not all like this swine! Hundreds of us would die a dozen deaths for the cause of our country's liberty."

"Never mind, *amigo*," Mike said gravely, "there are traitors in every army. I am trusting you as I would my father."

Already the eastern mountains were showing up with greater clarity, and as he stalked through the encampment, Mike realized that it was only a question of a short hour before he and Andrew would hurl themselves at each other's throats in a grim struggle that must end in death for one or for the other, unless—?

## CHAPTER V.

### AT THE FORD.

**A** WOOLLY, gray-white mist was still rising from that miniature grand cañon, through which flowed the Rio San Gorgio, while Comandante Lockheed strode back

and forth. He was all-seeing and all-anticipating, as he marshalled his forces. Still enclosed in that ring of silent Yaquis, the Republican force left their horses behind and moved off to the rocky heights behind the ford. There, by the fading moonlight, they deployed, some taking cover in the dry part of the river bed itself, and others sheltering themselves behind tangled heaps of stone. The main body, however, Mike concealed along the crest of that bluff which commanded not only the ford, but the trail leading upwards to Las Estrellas, some three kilometers distant.

It was with a skill and sureness which commanded the esteem of that hardy veteran ex-Sergeant Spurr, that Mike threw out an extended line of skirmishers to the rear, and well out on either flank. For that last warning of the traitorous dragoon constantly rankled in his mind. He could visualize clearly that straggler whom he and Spurr had permitted to escape, as the fellow galloped off to tell el Hiena that both French and Republicans had retreated, leaving the immensely rich rancho of Las Estrellas quite defenseless.

That el Hiena would soon come riding onto the scene with his fourteen hundred cutthroats, Mike fondly hoped. What troubled him was just when and from what direction the wily guerrilla would appear. It ought to be soon, for the blood-thirsty rascal was very fond of dawn attacks; in fact, was celebrated for them.

His plan was a good one, Mike realized, yet the very cleverness of his maneuver was its greatest weakness. Let one single element fall short of perfect achievement and his intricate calculations—well, at least he would be no worse off than he had been before mak-

ing this desperate attempt to wring victory from seemingly inevitable defeat.

Hatless, pistol in hand, he ranged back and forth above the ford, personally superintending the disposal of the barefooted little *soldados*. And when the plovers commenced to whistle in the fields and the quail began to call their cheery notes, there was nothing to indicate that in the vicinity of the ford some four hundred very apprehensive men were tightly clutching their dew-covered rifles and waiting for the last dawn that many of them would ever see.

**P**ANTING, dripping with sweat, Mike at last flung himself down on the dewy grass between Lieutenant Escandón and Captain Zapatos. To them he said:

"You understand your missions clearly, gentlemen? When White, my bugler here," he indicated another one of those men from the ranch who formed his personal bodyguard, "blows a single note, your men are to prepare to fire. When he blows a second time, they are to fire and to keep on until he sounds 'cease firing.'"

"*Si, señor comandante.*" Escandón's teeth glimmered in the fading darkness. "I am hoping that—"

"Quiet!" There was a little quiver in Mike's voice, for to his ear had come from far across the river a muffled, indistinct tramping. Was it cattle, coming down to drink?—No, a horse whickered softly, and Mike's heart surged. Undoubtedly, an armed force was advancing upon the ford.

The presence of the other force was further betrayed by the increased number of birds which, obviously alarmed, circled through the gray skies overhead, uttering frightened cries. Soon the dull, indistinct sounds commenced

to become distinguishable. A horse snuffled, a bit jangled; somewhere a man tripped, fell and cursed when his rifle clattered among the stones on the invisible further shore. Otherwise, the stillness of impending doom ruled over the ford.

Mike realized that sweat was standing out on the backs of his hands; he could feel it prickle. Andy, too, was a great believer in early attacks. Were his brother's blue-clad légionnaires creeping down to the ford, along with their mounted Mexican allies?

He strained his eyes at the writhing, fleecy mist which clung tenaciously to the swift dark water of the river, as though loath to move away. A guarded voice was heard, but in what language it spoke Mike could in no wise tell, from his vantage point among the water smoothed boulders.

He glanced sidewise, to glimpse the dark-faced Republican riflemen craning their necks where they crouched

behind stones. They were pulling cartridges from their boxes and laying them conveniently to hand on the earth. Spurr, busy on his inevitable cud of "chawing," lay comfortably sprawled out on a flat rock fiddling with the sights of the Winchester which in his hands was as deadly as the thunderbolts of an Olympian god. Young Escandón, too, was feeling the strain. His lips kept moving, and he raised a dark green cuff to wipe away the sweat which had gathered on his well-shaped forehead.

Soon the noises grew very loud. Pebbles clicked against each other, and all at once Mike made out an indistinct black mass of mingled horsemen and infantry, pouring down over the other bank. One after another, the horses stiffened their front legs, and slid down to that sandy beach in a cloud of dust and gravel, their riders leaning back in their saddles and balancing themselves with their carbines.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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### *Hot Ice*

ANY ONE who burned himself by touching a piece of ice would have reason to be surprised, yet hot ice was one of the queer results obtained by Professor P. W. Bridgman of Harvard a number of years ago when studying the behavior of different materials under extremely high pressures. In his apparatus he used pressures up to 200,000 and 300,000 pounds per square inch and sometimes higher.

Since these pressures are several times greater than those in heavy, long-range guns, the apparatus was set up behind boiler plate as a precaution. When subjected to pressure, ice behaved rather queerly. At first its melting point fell to lower and lower temperatures until at 30,000 pounds per square inch it melted at four degrees below zero. At higher pressures the ice changed to denser forms that remained solid until much higher temperatures were reached. Thus, at a pressure of 300,000 pounds, the ice inside the steel pressure cylinder remained solid up to about 180 degrees Fahrenheit. This is still ice, yet it is quite hot enough to give a bad burn if one were able to touch it.

*John H. Spicer.*