

Sink of Iniquity

By HULBERT FOOTNER

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CHAPTER I.

DARLING OF THE TENDERLOIN.

WHEN he was released from Sing Sing he would not look up any of his old friends. He slouched along the water front in New

York, trying for a berth on a ship. Something he had read in a newspaper a year before had given him the idea that Fay had taken a theatrical engagement in South America. He had not answered her letters in prison because he thought it better

for her to break away from him clean. He had no hope of being reunited with her, but was stirred by a blind impulse to seek the same part of the world where she was.

Now he had been in Manaos for upwards of a year and was down and out. What chance had a man in a new country, he asked himself, without money or friends or a trade? As long as he kept shoes on his feet he had a hope of coming back, but when they finally dropped off, hope died. Once a white man went barefoot in the tropics he was done for, they said.

Somewhere or another he had picked up the name of Leggy because he could outrun anything on two feet. All he possessed in the world was a pair of cotton dungarees rolled up to the knees because the bottoms were tattered, a ragged cotton singlet, and a

Killing was too merciful. So Leggy devoted his life to bringing revenge — a death-in-life—to Jack Beatty, boss of Bom Successo

straw hat with part of the crown out. Gaunt, bearded, and black, he no longer knew himself when he happened to pass a mirror. Well, he felt comfortable in his disguise.

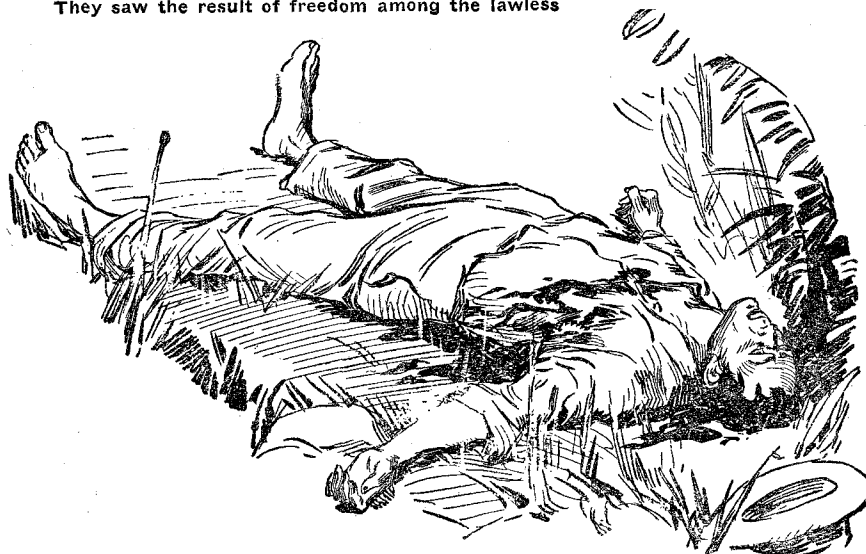
Late one afternoon while Leggy was lying half asleep in

the shade of a warehouse commanding a view of the floating dock, he saw a trim new steamboat come up river and prepare to make fast.

She was loaded to the guards with balls of black rubber. Fifty tons, he figured, at six thousand dollars a ton! He groaned in bitterness. So much money in the world, and himself without a shirt to cover his nakedness! However, he sat up eagerly. There might be something in it if the owner was aboard.

A single passenger disembarked from the steamboat. Leggy sized him up with a beggar's sharpness. A

They saw the result of freedom among the lawless



tall man, elegantly dressed in a frock coat and silk hat. There was something vaguely familiar about him. He was undoubtedly the owner of the rubber and also the steamboat; he walked as if the earth was his. Leggy moved to the other end of the warehouse, where he could intercept him as he passed.

When Leggy got a good look at the hard, handsome face, he pulled back as if he had been struck, and the beggar's whine died on his lips. It was Jack Beatty! Jack Beatty of all men on earth here in Manaos! As for the tall man, he looked right through Leggy, as if he didn't exist, and strode on his way.

Leggy's head whirled around. A hot resentment frothed up in him. Jack Beatty rich and free with diamonds in his shirt front and a steamboat full of rubber. Leggy started to follow him with no purpose beyond the need of feeding his hate. He always had hated Jack Beatty, even when he was taking his money. And Beatty had always hated him.

Oh, God! How he hated him! There walked the man who had wrecked his life! So strong was the feeling that it made Leggy come alive. He forgot himself. Beatty didn't recognize me, he thought with a cunning grin. If a weapon had been thrust in Leggy's hand at that moment he wouldn't have used it. Killing was too merciful. What he desired was to bring Beatty to a death-in-life such as he had known.

The tall man never looked behind him. He made his way to the main avenue. It was the hour of the promenade, and the pavement under the arcades was crowded with Brazilian officers, elegantly dressed women with the complexions of magnolia petals,

frock-coated politicians, and foreign millionaires. Beatty strode along, head and shoulders above all, a contemptuous half-smile on his lips. Some persons of consequence greeted him respectfully.

He went into a jewelry store. According to gossip, more diamonds were being sold in Manaos at this time than in any city in the world. Leggy loitered in the gutter outside the arcade. Soon his man came to the door of the shop, accompanied by the jeweler, to examine a superb diamond bracelet that he held; three rows of solitaires set in platinum.

THE sight lighted a fire in Leggy. Jack Beatty can buy diamonds for his girl, while my belly is empty! Beatty bought the bracelet with a casual nod.

As he was coming out of the shop, a greasy Brazilian roustabout known as Bullmouth happened by in the gutter. Bullmouth occasionally served as runner for one of the cheaper houses, and was pretty well informed.

"Who is he?" asked Leggy.

"Torrenegro," said Bullmouth, with an admiring grin. "What you call Blacktower. He's one big man in Amazonas."

"What's his graft here?"

"They call him King of Bom Successo. He runs the town."

Leggy hurried on, fearful of losing his man.

Bom Successo; Portuguese for Good Success, generally shortened in American to Bum Success. Leggy had heard plenty about the place. A mysterious town buried in the jungle. In a side channel off the main traveled routes, they said; but easy enough to get to if you knew the way. Outlaws, absconders, wanted men from all

over the world, had come together there to make a town where they could live as they pleased. No laws, no police, no government.

Men came all the way from Bolivia and Peru to spend their money there. Naturally the merchants of Manaus resented what they termed the unfair competition, and they were always after the Governor of Amazonas to clean up the place. But nothing had been done. It was said the Governor was making a good thing out of it on the "q.t." And Jack Beatty was the boss of Bom Sucesso! He would be, thought Leggy.

Blacktower went into the Hotel Inghilterra. Presently he came out again and sat down at a table on the sidewalk. Leggy lurked behind one of the pillars of the arcade, watching him. He ordered an *apéritif*, and surveyed the passing crowd with good-humored scorn. Sitting there stiff and buttoned up in the frock coat he looked just as he had looked at Martin's in New York, only here the frock coat was made of silk out of respect to the climate. There was a quality in his gaze that made men cringe.

By and by he spotted Leggy behind the pillar.

"Who are you looking at?" he demanded, with a cold stare.

An hour before Leggy would have taken to his heels, but something was changing him. He stood his ground. "No offense meant," he mumbled.

"Get the hell away from here," said Blacktower coolly. "You're spoiling the view."

Still Leggy made no move to obey. Blacktower rose suddenly, and an ominous furrow appeared in his forehead. His face was terrible in anger.

"Beat it," he said; "before I give you the boot! Barefooted dog!"

Leggy ran then. Darting across the street, he lost himself in a maze of alleys to the south, running blindly with his head down. Blacktower had touched him in his tenderest spot.

Barefooted! Barefooted!

HE passed a squalid little open space known as Prago dos Castanhas, though there were no castanha trees there, only a muddy rectangle with an adobe wall down one side and a row of cheap stores on the other. He passed a bench displaying rows of wooden sandals, and his flesh yearned like a starving man at the sight of food.

The *caboclo* proprietor was sitting beside his stock, and his eyes became sharp with suspicion at the sight of the barefooted man. The sandals sold for the equivalent of a dime a pair, but a dime was as far out of Leggy's reach as a gold eagle.

Down at the end of the row, out of sight of the *caboclo*, he stopped to take counsel with himself. If he didn't get shoes he couldn't face Blacktower again. The man would pass out of his life, and all would be the same tomorrow as it had been yesterday. Leggy felt himself sinking. Blacktower was his last straw. He turned and walked back again. At least he possessed one advantage; he could outrun any low-lifer in Brazil.

Stopping by the bench, he asked the price of the sandals. This was to give him time to pick out a pair big enough for him. His heart was beating fast. The *caboclo* was lazily swinging forward and back on the hind legs of his chair. Stooping suddenly, Leggy grasped the front leg of the chair and threw him over backwards. He then snatched up the sandals and ran.

The *caboclo* raised an ungodly noise.

People darted out of the little shops in front of Leggy, and he veered out into the middle of the square. None dared to lay hands on the tall American. They fell in behind, yelling like a pack of fiends. At the bottom of the square Leggy darted into the darkest alley that offered itself. As he had figured, the *caboclo* had small stomach for running. After he had turned three corners he knew he was going to get away, and his breast was flooded with joy.

In a minute or two the sounds of pursuit died away, and he slowed down. He was drenched with sweat, and his heart was hammering. But his breast swelled with pride. I've got shoes!

HE returned to the Hotel Inghilterra. The sidewalk café was empty now, but in the course of time Blacktower came out of the hotel and sat down at a table. A waiter put a cup of coffee and a pony of cognac before him. Leggy arose and moved up and down the street filled with a thick excitement; longing to approach the man; afraid to show himself. Up and down, always drifting a little nearer, until finally the lights of the café fell on him, and Blacktower saw him.

He was in a better humor now, having dined.

"Well, damned if here isn't the hairy ape again!" he said with his contemptuous grin.

"You—you called me barefoot dog," Leggy stammered. "See, I got shoes."

Blacktower laughed heartily. "Well, what of it?" he asked. "It doesn't make much difference to you, does it?"

Leggy was silent.

"Much obliged for giving me a

look," said Blacktower, with heavy sarcasm. "You can beat it now."

Leggy stood his ground.

"I'm an American, like yourself," he mumbled.

"You're no credit to your country," said Blacktower.

"I don't want to take money off you."

"What do you want, then?"

"I want a leg-up. I want you to give me a job."

Blacktower laughed again in pure amusement.

"Fellow," he said, "I got to have *men* to serve me."

Leggy said nothing.

However, Blacktower did not order him away again.

"What sort of job?" he asked.

"Anything at all."

"I might put you to work in the kitchen with the Chinese," he said, grinning.

"All right," said Leggy.

There was a silence. Blacktower rolled his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, and bored Leggy through and through with his hard black eyes. Finally he thrust a lazy hand in his pocket and drew out some coins. Choosing an American silver dollar, he threw it on the pavement at Leggy's feet.

"Go and get your face mown," he said; "if I can stand looking at it I may take you on."

Leggy picked up the coin and ran off. He knew of an humble barber in the Rua Vasca whose shop would still be open. Suddenly he stopped short. If he cleaned himself up, Blacktower would recognize him. Why hadn't he thought of that? He shivered and sweat in fear, but his legs automatically started moving again.

He staggered into the shop and,

pressing the dollar on the surprised barber, said, "Give me a haircut and a shave."

Half an hour later he presented himself at Blacktower's table with a hang-dog scowl. Blacktower started to say something sarcastic, but the grin froze in his face. He half rose out of his chair, and fell back again.

"Matt McArdle!" he exclaimed softly. "Well, I'm damned! I'm damned!"

Leggy said nothing.

Blacktower quickly recovered himself.

"So you had your bit of fun with me!" he said, with his usual grin. "How in hell did you get down to this part of the world?"

"What does it matter?" said Leggy.

Blacktower suddenly snarled, "I don't owe you nothing!"

Leggy saw that behind his mask he was afraid. Full of hatred and afraid. They were predestined enemies. Their fates were crossed. And in a flash it came to Leggy: I'm as good a man as he. And at one stroke he entered on a new existence.

DO you figure that I owe you anything?" Blacktower demanded.

"No," said Leggy. "It was just my rotten lot to get caught."

"And my luck not to get caught," Blacktower retorted with an ugly grin. "You always were a soft fool. Why didn't you brazen it out?"

Leggy shrugged.

"Well, if I don't owe you anything, what are you coming after me for?" Blacktower demanded.

"I didn't come after you," said Leggy. "It was just accident that I saw you."

"What do you want of me?"

"You said you'd give me a job."

Blacktower laughed in a surprised way.

"Man!" he said. "Bom Successo is no place for a policeman! There are men there from New York who remember you. They'd make it worse for you than Sing Sing."

"I'll chance it," said Leggy.

Once more Blacktower was silent, holding his head on one side to keep the smoke out of his eyes, and studying Leggy.

"All right," he said at last. "It'll be a kind of novelty to have an ex-sergeant of detectives for a kitchen mechanic. Matt McArdle, the darling of the Tenderloin, to black my shoes! You're hired. If you don't like it later, don't blame me."

Leggy lowered his eyes to prevent Blacktower from reading anything there.

"Come round in the morning," Blacktower went on carelessly, "and I'll stake you to an outfit. You can wear a pair of dark glasses around camp. I won't give you away. We're sailing tomorrow evening."

"I haven't eaten since morning," muttered Leggy.

Blacktower tossed him another coin.

CHAPTER II.

DREGS OF THE CUP.

BLACKTOWER and Leggy went aboard the steamboat Rio Purus at sunset next day. Leggy was wearing a natty white drill suit and a pair of white canvas shoes. New clothes made a big difference in his feelings. He could look anybody in the eye.

Crossing the dock, they passed a

couple of beach combers known as Melba and Flat-car, who held out their hands, whining. Leggy made believe to haul off with his fist, and they beat it. Gosh! What a pair of dirty bums, thought Leggy.

The Rio Purus had a dandified Brazilian skipper, a rough Scots engineer, and a crew of *caboclos*. It was clear that Blacktower was the boss on board. The ordinary passengers swung their hammocks between stanchions on deck, but Blacktower had a private deck above, all screened in with copper mesh, and Leggy, as his servant, shared it.

Lying in his hammock with his hands under his head, and his long legs hanging out on either side, Blacktower said with an ugly smile, "Let's talk about old times. Did they give you hell up in Sing Sing?"

Leggy's flesh crawled at the recollection, but he kept a mask over his face.

"No worse than ordinary."

"They tell me it's jam to the convicts when they get their hands on a cop," Blacktower went on. "They find ways of making him sweat right under the eyes of the keepers, I hear. Is that a fact?"

"You can't prove it by me," said Leggy.

"You're a liar," laughed Blacktower. "I know."

A full stomach gives a man courage. However, Leggy was careful not to let it appear that he was becoming less in awe of Blacktower. If I make out he's got me scared, it will put him off his guard, he thought.

When they issued out of the Rio Negro, he noticed that they turned down the Amazon. Later, in the dark, he saw that the steamboat was bucking the current again. A deck hand

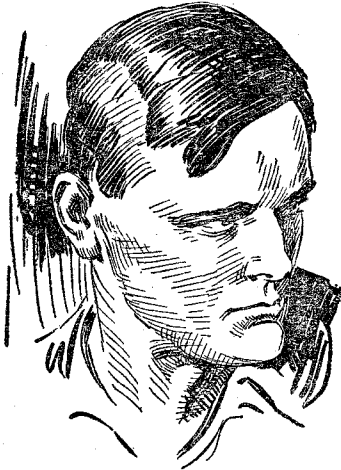
told him they were ascending the Madeira River. This was where the worst fevers came from, he had heard.

During the night the steamboat left the broad river, and with the aid of her searchlight started pushing at half speed through a stream so narrow that the branches of the lofty trees laced overhead. The searchlight created a little false day in the thick night. The gigantic trees seemed to march out of the dark with a stare of surprise before disappearing into the dark astern. There was no visible land anywhere; the trees were rooted in the black water. Except for the slow heartbeat of the propeller, it was as still as a burial vault. Thick vines hanging from nowhere—bushrope, Leggy had heard them called, occasionally slapped against the sides of the vessel or dragged like snakes over the roof. Leggy slept and woke and slept again, as men do in hot countries.

When the sun rose the steamboat was still threading her way through the forest. Flocks of screaming parrots flashed overhead like broken bits of rainbow, and families of monkeys swung themselves out of sight like bunches of brown rope. Occasionally in an opening a gigantic orchid plant hung down a cascade of flame. A delicious morning freshness filled the air, and Leggy felt something that he had long forgotten: the sense of being young. After all he wasn't thirty yet. The old world wasn't so bad. A phrase out of the Bible kept running through his head: Born again! Born again!

AT evening their destination revealed itself with a dramatic suddenness. Rounding a bend, the narrow waterway opened into a broad pool, and a wooden pier supported on piles lay before them. A

pier, an open space of bare earth, a cluster of houses around it, a crowd of men watching the steamboats. After the day-long solitude it was astonishing to discover that other little



LEGGY

humans besides themselves frequented this large-scale world.

WHILE the steamboat was maneuvering alongside the pier, Leggy looked over Bom Successo. It was built on a promontory of firm ground coming to a point at the river, having a creek flowing in at one side and a dry gully on the other. To the left of the pier rose a big warehouse with an iron roof, and beyond it a street of 'dobe houses straggled along the bank of the creek, with bigger buildings of wood sticking up here and there, and an occasional giant tree. A rickety bridge hung over the creek on the left, supported by bushrope from the trees above; and at the farther end of it was a crazy huddle of palm shacks, leaning this way and that on piles in the swamp.

"That's Brooklyn," said Blacktower.

The camp seemed quiet enough; nevertheless, before going ashore Blacktower opened his valise, and taking out his gun, dropped it in a special pocket in the tail of his coat. Leggy put on the dark glasses with a quickening pulse. I must get me a gun somehow, he thought, as he picked up his master's valise.

What seemed to be the entire population of the place had gathered at the shore end of the pier to watch the steamboat land. A rough looking crowd, but quiet; too quiet, somehow. There were no women amongst them. Blacktower walked down the pier like a king returning to his capital. There were no cheers to greet him. Over the tree tops to the right Leggy had a glimpse of gorgeous sunset clouds in orange and purple. The whole effect was queer.

There was a stir in the crowd. Suddenly every man had turned his face towards the center. Leggy saw a confused milling there; a man's shriek shattered the evening stillness. At the sound the crowd seemed to explode in pieces, every man running for dear life. By the time Blacktower reached the spot no one was there. No one, that is, except a single figure lying on the beaten earth with a wet and crimson shirt. His mouth was still open for that final shriek; he stared at the sky.

Blacktower looked down at him with a bored expression. A white man joined him, English by the look of him—a queer looking specimen, young but already bald as an egg, and cynical.

"Here's a nice thing!" drawled Blacktower. "Saluting the steamboat with a murder!"

"What do you expect?" said the Englishman. "It's one of the by-products of freedom."

Blacktower ignored the flip answer. "Who is he?" he asked.

"A native from the upper Purus."

"Has he got anybody belonging to him?"

"No. He came alone."

"So much the better," said Blacktower. "Get rid of him."

Some of the *caboclos* were drifting back, registering innocence for the benefit of the white men. The Englishman gave an order, and four of them picked up the dead man by his arms and legs and, carrying him a little way out on the pier, swung him over the rail, still warm.

All leaned over the rail to look. The instant the dead man struck the water, a furious commotion took place. Leggy had a glimpse of flashing silver sides, and the river was whipped up into crimson foam.

The Englishman, observing Leggy's staring eyes, remarked in his cynical manner:

"Piranhas—in case you think of taking a swim."

Blacktower and the Englishman proceeded, and Leggy followed with the bag, in a daze. All over so quick! And all so casual and matter-of-fact.

"The trouble started over in Brooklyn," said the Englishman to Blacktower. "Two days ago. As I heard the story, a fellow called Archie came down the Madeira with a little bag of gold dust he had washed on the bars. He gave it to the woman called Black Amelie to keep for him. You know her. When he asked for it again, she said he had drunk it up in her house.

"Archie went away and collected his friends, and they hitched a rope to Amelie's shack, and started to pull it over in the swamp. But a friend of Amelie's shot into them out of the win-

dow, and they beat it. Ever since there has been scattered shooting over there, not to speak of knifings. I don't know which side that bloke was on."

"WELL, let them shoot it out," said Blacktower indifferently.

"But warn them to keep to their own side of the creek."

They were crossing the open space of hard-packed earth. On their left a narrow street made a way, following the course of the creek in an S-shaped curve. Along it the close-built shacks had porches thatched with palm in crude imitation of the arcades of Manaos.

The whole effect was flimsy like theatrical scenery. As you went back from the river the promontory of high ground widened, giving room for a confusion of crooked lanes on the right.

Darkness was falling, and all at once hundreds of colored lights were turned on, giving the curving arcade a festive air. Coney Island, thought Leggy; Coney Island in the jungle. It was queer. Overhead you could see the gigantic still trees, brooding.

Blacktower turned to the right. At the end of a short side passage rose a more pretentious building than any in the neighborhood. It was square in shape, built of lumber, and surrounded by a broad veranda. They entered a brightly lighted hall; a roulette table at one side, smaller tables for loo, faro, *et cetera*, on the other. Jack Beatty has not changed his business, thought Leggy. There were no players at this hour.

At a cash desk just inside the entrance sat an elegantly dressed young man with a face as smooth and expressionless as wax. Leggy knew him.

It was "Duke" Hammill, wanted by the New York police for murder. He and Leggy had had more than one run-in in the past, and the latter stiffened warily. A pair of dark glasses does not provide much of a disguise.

Hammill and Blacktower greeted each other casually.

"Hello, Duke."

"Hello, Black."

"How's business?"

"So-so."

Hammill looked at Leggy, and Blacktower said indifferently: "This is a servant I hired in Manaos. Answers to the name of Leggy."

"Why the blinders?" asked Hammill.

"Ophthalmia," said Blacktower blandly.

Hammill accepted it; and Leggy relaxed. This guy would think no more of shooting me than rolling over in bed, he thought. I must get me a gun.

BLACKTOWER'S dwelling was in a separate building at the rear of the gambling hall. The ground fell away into the gully here, and the smaller house was built up on piles to bring it on a level with its neighbor. They were connected by a bridge. The piles were surrounded by an impenetrable thicket of bamboo, and even in the dark it struck Leggy how well suited the place was for defense.

He got a start upon entering it. It had been Blacktower's fancy to make the house look as much as possible like his famous place in New York. After the dirt and squalor outside, the oriental rugs, the oil paintings in heavy gold frames, the statuary, the deeply cushioned divans struck strangely on the eye. He had even brought the bronze statue of "Fortune" into the jungle. Every sporting character in

New York was familiar with it. Leggy looked at the naked lady with an unfriendly eye. Heretofore she had brought him no good.

Leggy was handed over to the care of a grinning Hawaiian boy called George. Blacktower said:

"Tomorrow we'll start breaking you in. Tonight you can do what you please." The smile seemed to add: "If you get your damned throat cut, so much the worse for you!"

George showed Leggy where to sling his hammock on the veranda, and took him into the kitchen for his dinner. Leggy laid himself out to win the good will of his fellow servants. Particularly Chou, the fat Chinese cook. Fond of the bottle, Leggy saw. A timorous soul; afraid of the rowdy main street. Chou was not unwilling to be placated. It flattered him to have a white man serving in the kitchen.

After dinner a great restlessness seized Leggy. He was burning up for a drink. The town drew him. He could hear the shouting and the singing in the distance; the pounding of out-of-tune pianos and the plucking of guitars. He hadn't a cent of money, but he was accustomed to cadging drinks. He stole across the bridge and circled the veranda surrounding the gambling hall.

The place was oddly quiet, yet when he peeped through the slats of the blinds he saw that the tables were well filled.

A minute later he was in the main street. The din was terrific. Fights were of momentary occurrence. In one dive or another the music would be interrupted by a sudden uproar. Somebody would be thrown into the street; the music would recommence exactly where it had left off.

A white man standing at one of the

open bars hailed Leggy. This was what he was looking for, and he went in. It was a fellow of his own age, half drunk, with a powerful and embittered glance. He was leaning on the bar, surrounded by half a dozen fawning *caboclos* for whom he was buying. He turned on them.

"Get out! Don't you see I've invited a gentleman to drink with me?" They faded.

"A new white stiff in town! Who the hell are you?"

"I work for Blacktower."

"We all work for Blacktower."

He suddenly leaned forward and, lifting Leggy's glasses, peered into his eyes. Startling. However, it appeared that his interest was a professional one. "White as milk," he said. "You come to this pesthole like a lamb to the slaughter. I'm the doctor here. Gene Buckles. Graduate of Johns Hopkins. Very brilliant fellow. Don't I look it?" He suddenly smashed his glass down on the bar. "What you drinking?"

"Rum," said Leggy.

"Rum for the gentleman!" shouted the doctor. "Genuine St. Croix, and none of your rotgut!"

Leggy downed it and felt like a new man. He was drawn to the doctor. This man gave utterance to feelings that were festering in his own breast.

"What you call yourself?" demanded the doctor.

"Leggy."

"GOOD! Nothing could be briefer or more descriptive."

He glanced down. "You have the look of a sprinter. That's all right. But why hide your bonny blue eyes? There's no danger in being recognized by the law here."

"There are other reasons."

"Well, you're safe with me," said

the doctor. "Have another." Presently he asked, "Where did Blacktower pick you up, Leggy?"

"In Manaos."

"Look! Did that black devil buy diamonds in Manaos?"

Leggy looked stupid. "How should I know?"

"He did! He did! Damn him!"

"What's he want diamonds for?"

The doctor grinned at Leggy derisively. "To stick up his nose." Leggy waited, sure that more would be forthcoming.

The doctor bared his teeth in a grimace of drunken, savage pain. "She sings in the theater here. Last turn. I'll show her to you directly... Oh, God!" he cried. "Here we are, sunk in this cesspool. Well, we become permeated with the stink and nobody gives a damn." He swallowed his rum at a gulp. "Then this girl comes. She brings to mind the things every man wants to forget. She looks like somebody's sister. Who is she? Nobody knows! They call her La Rosadora, but she's from God's country, like you and me, Leggy. How did she get in with this bunch of dames from Para? Nobody knows!

"She's never let outside the theater. It costs five dollars just to have a drink with her at the table. And what do you get out of it? She smiles in a way that would break a man's heart and talks about the weather!" The doctor ground his teeth together. "Well, if she falls for Blacktower, we'll know what she is," he muttered.

Presently he started for the street. "Come on!" he said over his shoulder.

They turned up the street. The last building but one on the left-hand side was a big, unpainted wooden shed, boarded up all round to a height of

seven or eight feet, open above to permit the circulation of air. There was a wooden screen inside the entrance to keep anybody from seeing in. No advertising was necessary. Men were streaming in. The sound of a raucous female voice could be heard. Is that the wonderful star? Leggy thought, grinning to himself.

At the ticket office Buckles said over his shoulder, "Costs five dollars."

"Haven't got it," muttered Leggy.

"Well, to hell with you, then. I need my money inside."

He disappeared. It was all one to Leggy. He drifted back into the crowded street looking for another buyer.

It appeared that a well-dressed white man had not to look far. It made a drunken *caboclo* feel big to treat such a one. It didn't trouble Leggy that there was something insolent in such hospitality. All he wanted was the rum. He lined up at another bar with a little fat brown man who gesticulated with a big diamond on his forefinger and boasted that he had three wives on the Rio Purus. Leggy let him run on. He didn't feel like talking.

As he was conveying his drink to his lips, he heard a sound that caused him to put the glass down again. A vagrant sound that for a second seemed to find a little hole in the surrounding babel and was then lost again. Far off, a woman's voice singing a song that he knew. He thought his senses must be tricking him. But he had only had one drink. Swallowing his rum, he listened with nerves at a stretch. He heard it again. His *caboclo* friend had turned to harangue somebody on the other side. Leggy slipped out into the street.

He walked along under the side wall of the building, gazing up at the open-

ing like a soul barred from Paradise. He knew now that there could be but one voice in the world able so to tear his breast—he heard the slightly husky quality that had always prevented her from getting a principal part. A huskiness sweeter to him than silver bells. He *had* to see. He gauged the distance, sprang, and hooking his fingers over the top of the wall, drew his head over it.

He saw Fay on the stage. She had scarcely changed at all. The flaming red hair, the pale cheeks without rouge, shadowy eyes and wistful lips; what an apparition to rise in *Bom Sucesso*! Suddenly weak, he dropped to the foot of the wall and pressed his head between his hands. Such a violent emotion as he experienced exceeded both pleasure and pain. It was the sensation of flying to pieces.

After the song was over his faculties began to work. He saw things in a new way; the curving street with the colored lights, drunken crowd, high-arching trees. He was Matt McArdle again. He recollected with a shock that this was what he had come to South America for. He had found her after he had forgotten his search.

Fay in *Bom Sucesso*! The delicate Fay with her nice ways that he used to laugh at long ago, trapped in this hell-hole! Fay on the stage for these brutes to gape at! If I had not failed her she wouldn't be here, he thought, and tasted the dregs of the cup.

CHAPTER III.

HIS ONLY CARD.

FOOD was coming in all day at Blacktower's. Hampers from the steamboat with caviar, marrons, truffles and other delicacies of the great

world. Cases of champagne and liqueurs. Also the best that the country could provide: turtles to make soup; a big bird called ungaruru that was to be roasted—the *caboclos* who brought it groaned and rubbed their bellies; a basket of silvery piranhas. Leggy wondered idly if these could be some of the same fish that had feasted on the dead *caboclo* last night.

When Chou was not requiring their services, the flat-faced George undertook to drill Leggy in waiting on table properly.

"God help you if you spill anything!" he said, grinning.

"What's all the excitement about?" asked Leggy.

"Big bonton dinner tonight. Boss gonna have his girl here!"

Leggy lowered his eyes. "Who's his girl?"

"La Rosadora."

Leggy thought of the diamond bracelet. "Who's she?" he asked off-hand.

"She's the star singer in the show. Most beautiful woman in South America!"

The Hawaiian boy made sounds of rapture and kissed his fingers.

"Has she been here long?"

"Two weeks. Manoel Carvalho brought her up from Para."

"Tough place for a woman," ventured Leggy.

George shrugged. "She don't need to worry. She's took care of."

"What does she do all day?"

"I don't know. She's never seen."

"What do you mean, never seen?"

"Well, Manoel keeps her close, you bet."

Rage made Leggy's blood thicken. He skirted around the subject. "Who is this Manoel? Tell me about him."

"He runs the show. He's a smart feller. He don't have to take nothin' from Blacktower or nobody, because he's a friend of the Governor's—see?"

"What sort of fellow is he?"

"A regular low-lifer. You can see for yourself tonight. He'll be here. And Pepita

will most certainly be with him."

"Who's Pepita?"

"His wife."

"So he has a wife."

"You and me'll be waitin' on 'em," said George.

Leggy stiffened all over.

"What's the matter with you?" asked George, staring.

"Nothing."

"You look as if you had a sudden bellyache."

"I was trying to remember," said Leggy quickly. "I must always come to the left of a person, you said, and offer the dish on the flat of my hand."

The lesson proceeded.

Leggy realized that there was no way of avoiding the ordeal. He was thankful for the dark glasses. Nobody looks at a waiter, he told himself.

The table was set for ten persons. As the dinner hour approached, Blacktower himself came to look it over. Leggy beheld him with new and burning feelings. Blacktower was fifty



FAY

years old, it was true; but there was a vigor and power in him that a woman might find irresistible. He looked his best in evening clothes. So he had been dressed the first time Leggy had met him—and so had Leggy been dressed. Now Leggy was the waiter. Moreover, there was the diamond bracelet. Leggy had never come within a thousand miles of presenting Fay with such a bracelet.

Blacktower arranged bowls of orchids for the table. "Nobody else in the dump to do it," he grumbled, shamefacedly. He placed two rows of candles in pink shades. "When dinner is served, put out the other lights," he ordered.

Leggy's anxiety lightened a little. I'll be in the shadow, he thought.

At a moment when George was out of the room Blacktower looked at Leggy with a hard and quizzical smile.

"Well, how goes it?" he asked.

"All right," said Leggy.

"Call me 'sir,' said Blacktower.

"Very well, sir."

"Tonight I'll call you William," Blacktower went on, grinning. "Leggy would hardly be the thing with ladies at the table."

GEORGE was stationed at the front door when the guests entered, consequently Leggy's ordeal did not begin until they came in to dinner. When Fay appeared in the doorway hanging to Blacktower's arm, the room rocked in front of his eyes. He clenched his teeth to steady himself. She did not look at him, but at the table decorations. She had a blue and silver dress on.

"How pretty!" she murmured in the voice that knocked on Leggy's naked heart. "I haven't seen anything like that since—"

She didn't finish the sentence.

She was seated at Blacktower's right. George and Leggy had already fixed it up between them that George was to serve the left side of the table and Leggy the right. This enabled George to get a good look at the beauty, while Leggy kept out of the direct line of her vision.

In the beginning he could see nobody else at the table. By degrees they began to register. A fat Brazilian, all dressed up, but fat and greasy still; a heavy dark woman his wife, once a beauty, perhaps, but now adorned with a mustache; two girls from the company, haggard under their rouge; Duke Hammill and another employee of the tables known as Frenchy; the cynical Englishman whom they addressed as Osman, and Dr. Buckles. Buckles sat on Leggy's side, and as Leggy served him he murmured softly:

"So this is your job! New to it, ain't you?"

Leggy smiled as a servant might. A feeling of uneasiness went through him. This man was too noticing.

Leggy's observations of Fay were necessarily confined to her profile and back. Her thinness hurt him. It was no climate for white women. Her bright red hair was rolled up on top of her head, and the sight of the escaped tendrils curling at the nape of her neck almost brought the tears to his eyes. That soft and childish neck that he had once been used to enclose within his hands!

The whole thing seemed like a dream, it was so unreal. All this phony elegance in the depths of the jungle; men and women in evening dress, sipping champagne out of hollow-stemmed glasses, with the crude roar of the camp coming faintly through the windows.

The discipline imposed on a waiter steadied Leggy. As the meal went on and he realized that there was almost no chance of being recognized by Fay, his head cleared. It was necessary for him to learn the inwardness of the situation and he applied himself to watching and listening.

By degrees a number of things became evident. Firstly, the terrible Blacktower was hard hit. He lowered his head when he addressed Fay and his rocky face softened in spite of himself. Secondly, all the other men, Duke Hammill, Frenchy, Osman, and Buckles, were likewise in love with her and jealous of Blacktower. Thirdly, Manoel and Pepita were keenly aware of Fay's value to themselves, and were on the alert to prevent any man from stealing her. They were full of greasy confidence. Fourthly, and this made Leggy burn inside, Manoel himself was infatuated with Fay, and was only restrained by fear of his wife, who was as jealous as only an aging woman can be.

AS to Fay's own feelings, he could not tell. He had never understood her. All he could see was that she was enjoying the moment like a child. She was like a pale plant brought out of the cellar into the sun. Occasionally he saw her checking her laughter, and glancing uneasily at either Manoel or Pepita. She was no better than a prisoner. What was he himself but a prisoner?

During the meal Blacktower endeavored to keep Fay engaged in low-voiced talk with himself, but the other men would not stand for it. One or another of them was continually drawing her into the general conversation. A thing that comforted Leggy was that they all treated her with re-

spect. There was no loose talk around the table. He heard Blacktower murmur to her:

"Having a good time?"

"Oh, yes!" breathed Fay.

"Only—"

"Only what?"

"It will be over so soon."

"It needn't be," he murmured meaningly.

Leggy felt as if somebody had squeezed his heart strings, so real was the pain. How can she stand out against him? he thought.

"Oh, Miss Rosadora," Buckles sang out from the foot of the table, "you ought to come see my menagerie. One of my patients brought me a little black monkey today. Serious-minded chap. Would you like to have him for a pet?"

Fay did not answer immediately, but looked at Manoel.

"That would be very nice," said Manoel with his oily grin.

Buckles scowled.

"What do you say?" he asked, pointedly addressing Fay.

"I should love it."

None of the men paid any attention to the other two girls. They seemed not to resent it, but drank more champagne than anybody else, and babbled to each other back and forth across the table.

Blacktower got Fay's ear again.

"This camp is no place for a woman like you," he murmured.

"I know it," she said simply.

"How did you happen to come here?"

"I didn't know we were coming here. My contract with Manoel said the leading cities of Brazil."

"Before signing the contract you ought to have found out if he was a scoundrel."

"I had no one to go to...and he offered a good salary."

"Is he paying it?"

"No. He says he's keeping it for me."

Blacktower scowled. "Do they ill-treat you?"

"Oh, no. They leave me alone." Leggy saw a little shiver pass through her. "But it's horrible!" she murmured.

"Manoel will never pay you a cent," said Blacktower.

"Then what am I to do?"

"Leave it to me."

These low-voiced talks made Manoel restive. His wife was watching him like a lynx from across the table. His yellow eyeballs rolled viciously towards Blacktower. Finally he said, "Rosadora, sing a little song for the company, dearie."

"Be quiet," said his wife. "It is not the time for singing."

Manoel subsided, flushing darkly.

Nobody wanted music, it appeared.

THEN there was Duke Hamill, the handsome skinny little gambler, trained to a finish by danger. He raised his glass. "Drink with me, Miss Rosadora," Blacktower scowled, but Hammill coolly faced him out. "Happy days!" he said with a conceited air.

The continual interruptions made Blacktower sore, and as soon as the ices were eaten he pushed back his chair. They all went into the main room that Blacktower called "the salon," and George served coffee there. Leggy cleared the table. Soon afterwards he heard them drift across the bridge to take a flyer at the tables in the front building.

Leggy was gathering up the coffee cups in the salon when Blacktower and

La Rosadora unexpectedly returned. His retreat was cut off and he began to shake. But the girl never looked at him.

"Bring fresh coffee, a bottle of Benedictine and glasses upstairs," ordered Blacktower.

Leggy's head reeled. Upstairs! He couldn't face it. In the pantry he tried to persuade George to go.

"Not on your life!" said the Hawaiian.

"It won't make any difference to him."

"Sure, it won't make any difference to him. But he told you to bring it, and if everything is not done exactly as he says, he raises all hell."

Leggy climbed the stairs with his knees giving under him. There was only one room on the second floor, surrounded by a narrow balcony and open to the air on all four sides. This was Blacktower's private apartment. It was lighted only by a single lamp under a colored shade. Fay was sitting in an easy chair under the lamp, and Blacktower had drawn up a small chair where he could look into her face. His back was to the stairs. Fay had the diamond bracelet in her hands and was examining it wistfully.

Leggy had to put his tray down on a large table by the head of the stairs, fetch a small table and place it before them; then return for the tray. The couple were oblivious to him.

Fay handed the bracelet back. "I'm very sorry. I can't take it," she murmured.

"I went all the way to Manaos to get it for you, you know," said Blacktower.

"Oh, you only say that," she returned, with a bleak smile.

"It's the truth!"

"There would be no use in my ac-

cepting it. They would only take it from me."

"Take it from you?"

"Oh, on one excuse or another... For the sake of keeping it safe," she added, with her wry smile.

"How long are you going to put up with this?" asked Blacktower.

"Will you pay my fare to New York?" she countered.

"You ask too much of me," muttered Blacktower. "I'm only flesh and blood."

"Then, what else can I do?" she said, spreading out her hands, "except put up with it?"

"Come to me," said Blacktower.

Leggy, with lowered head, was in the act of placing the tray on the small table before them. He wondered that they did not hear the loud beating of his heart.

Fay did not answer immediately.

"Isn't this a nice room?" asked Blacktower. "Away from all the filthy muck."

She mutely nodded.

"THIS should be your room," he went on. "All yours. You would be provided with a key to the door, too. Could a man offer you more? Here you would be safe from Manoel and his like. You would be surrounded with all the comforts that a pretty woman is entitled to. Plenty of servants to wait on you..."

Including me, thought Leggy.

"No, I cannot," said Fay.

There was no further excuse for Leggy to linger. He started slowly down the narrow stairs.

Blacktower said, "Don't you want your coffee?... Perhaps you'd rather have an ice?" He raised his voice. "William!"

Leggy returned.

"Fetch Madame an ice."

Leggy flew to the pantry. Chou and George were eating their dinner. When he gave his order, his breathlessness made them stare. Chou's deliberate movements nearly drove him mad. In two or three minutes he was back in the upstairs room.

They were sitting as before. He judged, from Blacktower's attitude, that he was pleading his case hard. Fay was listening with downcast face. Her hand lay limply in Blacktower's. She's going to give in! Leggy thought, with a stab in his breast. Well... what else can she do?

Blacktower was saying, "Manoel enjoys power here because of his connection with the Governor of Amazonas. We have to keep the Governor in a good humor. So we send him a handsome present every month through Manoel. If you come to me, Manoel will run to the Governor with his complaints. It's risky because these grafters can always raise up race prejudice against us Americans; but I'll chance it. I can prove that Manoel is grafting off his boss. And On Kai Ling will stand by me. He pays a bigger export tax than anybody in the state."

"I am not worth so much risk," murmured Fay.

"You are worth all a man has!" murmured Blacktower.

There was a silence. Leggy, between the two of them, was removing the coffee cups and placing the ice before Fay.

"Manoel is a foul beast," Blacktower resumed. "He means you no good. If it were not for Pepita... I guess you know it. Women have their instincts."

"Yes, I know it," said Fay, very low.

Another silence. Leggy had finished his task.

"Then you must come to me," said Blacktower with quiet assurance. "The present situation is impossible."

Leggy, behind Blacktower's chair, paused for a second, glancing at Fay. He saw her lips tremble. He knew she was about to give in. Yielding to a desperate impulse, he took off the dark glasses, and holding them up, he made believe to be looking through them. The fluttering of his hands attracted the girl's attention. She looked into his face...

He had thought her pale before, but now her face became as white as paper. Even her lips changed color. But she was game; no cry escaped her.

Leggy, afraid that Blacktower might turn around, walked slowly to the stairs and went down. He had played his only card. The thing was out of his hands now.

CHAPTER IV.

A SILVER DOLLAR.

LEGGY was not sent for again. The party broke up early because La Rosadora had to do her turn before the show ended. Blacktower went across the bridge with the guests, and did not return; consequently Leggy had no way of knowing how the situation had turned out.

The uncertainty was more than a man could bear. Sleep was out of the question. Having marked the kitchen shelf where Chou kept his private store of rum, Leggy took a long pull while the Chinaman slept. But there was no forgetfulness in the stuff now. This thing had to be faced out. He tossed in his hammock while the night

dragged through, his hot brain endlessly traveling the same ground like a squirrel in a revolving cage. He did not return to the bottle. In the end the sun came up, as it will do.

On ordinary occasions Blacktower remained in the gambling hall most of the night, and did not show himself downstairs until noon. Today he appeared before eight o'clock. Leggy was still sweeping the salon, while George gathered up cigarette butts. A single glance in Blacktower's sour and yellowed face was enough. The boss had not slept either. Leggy's heart rose up like a balloon cut loose. Everything was all right so far!

Out of pure viciousness Blacktower launched a stream of curses at the heads of his two servants. He had a searching tongue.

"Kitchen lice! Lard bellies!"—these were the mildest terms he used—"Are



JACK BEATTY

you obliged to raise hell down here in the mornings? Do you think it's funny to spoil my sleep?"

George and Leggy silently faded through the pantry door. This did not suit Blacktower.

"Leggy! Come back here!" he roared.

Leggy returned to the room.

"Did you hear me speaking to you?"

At the moment Leggy felt no fear of him.

"I heard you," he said.

"Say *sir*, when you speak to me!"

"Sir," said Leggy, keeping a straight face. He was thinking: That's all right, old man; you got turned down last night! You got turned down, and you're sore!

"Don't give me any lip!" shouted Blacktower. "You're only here at my pleasure. You got no rights. If you rile me I'll step on you like a centipede or any other vermin!"

Leggy said nothing.

"I asked you a question when I came downstairs."

"I didn't know we were making any noise," said Leggy, adding "sir" after a couple of seconds.

"You didn't know it! Hell, what *do* you know? I ought to have left you swilling in the gutter, you sewer rat! You were at home there!" And so on. And so on.

Leggy kept his eyes lowered. It was sweet after his night of anxiety to hear the big boss giving himself away.

When Blacktower had exhausted his vocabulary he strode across the bridge. "I want my coffee in ten minutes," he called back.

When they heard him shouting for his coffee, Chou said with a grin, "Which boy goin' carry it?"

"I stood up to him before," said Leggy.

"Aw, go on," pleaded George, turning yellowish. "I'd spill it all over him, my hand trembles so."

"All right. I'm not afraid of him."

Blacktower's mood had changed.

He paid no attention to Leggy, when the coffee was brought to him.

He sat at the dining table, staring down at the cloth with knitted forehead. Leggy put the coffee cup down beside him, and he started stirring it without looking up. His thin lips worked on themselves.

Plotting, thought Leggy, and his sense of satisfaction was suddenly chilled. Blacktower had men and money behind him; he was practically the king of the place. Who was to stop him from doing what he pleased?

"What the hell are you standing around for?" snarled Blacktower.

Leggy went back to the kitchen. In an hour or so Blacktower shouted for Leggy from upstairs. Leggy found him sitting at his desk. He had written two letters which lay sealed and addressed beside him. There were two small packages with them. Blacktower's confidence had returned. He said, with his usual sarcastic grin, "I want you to deliver these two letters and packages."

One of the letters was addressed to Senhora Pepita Carvalho; the other to Senhorina La Rosadora.

Leggy turned wary. "Where do they live?"

"Where do you suppose, you fool?" said Blacktower. "In the hotel back of the theater."

"Do you want answers?"

"That is as may be."

LEGGY picked up the letters and packages and turned to go.

"Wait a minute," said Blacktower. "There's more to it than that. You are not to hand that stuff over to any servant, see? You are to say that you can only put it in the hands of the ladies themselves. You will not be allowed to see Rosadora, but you can say

it anyhow. You are to keep your eyes open when you're inside the place; that is what I'm sending you for.

"The letters are only a stall. I don't give a damn whether they're delivered or not. But when you come back I'll expect a full description of the layout of the place. Use your detective skill. I want to know where Pepita's room is, and the girl's room. I want to know if Rosadora is allowed any freedom, or if they keep her locked up. And especially what other ways there may be of getting into the house and of getting into her room besides the front door. Do you get me?"

Leggy nodded. "If I had a little money I might pick up something from the servants."

"Good," said Blacktower, grinning. "You show almost human intelligence." He poured a handful of coins on the edge of the desk, and Leggy scooped them up. "Go on," said Blacktower. "Say nothing about where you are going to the other servants."

Leggy smiled to himself as he went over the bridge.

The street of Bom Sucesso at eleven o'clock in the morning was not a pretty sight. The fierce still heat had already descended. The drinking places were all open, but though Leggy had money jingling in his pocket it did not occur to him to enter one of them. Other things on his mind. No one appeared to be stirring but the *caboclo* water-carrier. Men lay in every corner sleeping it off. Their own mothers would have turned from them in disgust.

Some were stretched across the middle of the road, and Leggy stepped over them.

Just beyond the wooden theater the street took a turn to the right, and Leggy was faced by a heavy wooden

gateway. It stood in the middle of a stockade of palm trunks taller than a man's head, plastered with mud. Alongside the gate was nailed a crudely lettered sign reading: HOTEL. Leggy pounded on the gate and waited. No sound came from the yard within. He alternately pounded and kicked on the gate. Blacktower's commission gave him the assurance to make plenty of noise.

While he waited he looked about him, fixing everything in his mind. Over the top of the stockade he could see the second story of a long adobe building with a row of windows having no sashes, but filled in with dirty mosquito netting. Outside the middle window there was a small balcony. This building joined on obliquely to the rear of the wooden theater. From the configuration of the land it was evident that both buildings overhung the creek on the other side.

The hotel was the last building in camp. Beyond the gate the road lost itself in a patch of waste land, then the forest wall.

The gate was finally opened by a native girl. To Leggy they all looked alike: brown masklike faces, glassy eyes, dumpy figure in a faded cotton dress, bare feet which left a print almost rectangular in the dust. Before he could speak she said, "Too early. Come back tonight."

Leggy saw red. So that was the sort of joint where Fay was kept prisoner! He hesitated until he could steady his voice. "I've got a letter for Senhora Carvalho. From Torrenegro."

The girl merely looked blank.

"For Pepita," he said.

She showed a spark of intelligence, and held out her hand.

He shook his head. "I got to give it to her myself."

HER face became like wood again. They stared at each other until Leggy thought to produce an American half-dollar. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Ria." She snatched the coin and put it in her mouth. She let him in and fastened the gate by dropping a bar across it.

The narrow courtyard was empty, and filled with a rank growth of dusty weeds in the corners. One side of it was bounded obliquely by the back of the theater, one side by the squalid hotel, and the other two by the stockade of palm logs.

As he followed the girl into the house, the beating of Leggy's heart made him dizzy. He was afraid of suddenly coming face to face with Fay. They entered a good-sized room with windows on the far side overlooking the creek. When the building had been a bona-fide hotel, this had been the lobby and dining room. Fay was not in it, and Leggy got a grip on himself.

Telling him to wait, the native girl disappeared through a doorway on the left. The door hung by one hinge, and could not be closed. Judging by the smell that came through, the kitchen lay that way. The room was full of flies. At a long table in the back two slatternly white girls were sitting, one picking at her food in an indifferent way, one humped in her chair staring into space. They cast a look of dislike at Leggy, in which there was nothing personal, and paid no further attention to him.

A corridor opened in the side of the room opposite the kitchen door, and by making a step forward Leggy could look down it. Four doors, all closed, opened off it on the creek side of the building. Opposite the doors a dilapidated stairway ran up alongside the

wall; Leggy could not see up it. There was a bend in the corridor at the far end. He figured that this must lead into the back premises of the theater.

Presently he became aware that Pepita was squinting at him through the crack of the kitchen door. Making up her mind that he was a person of no account, she came forward, brazening out her appearance. Without stays or make-up she looked horrible. She paused to curse the girls for showing themselves in such a state. They got up listlessly and Leggy presently heard them going upstairs.

With a suspicious look, Pepita demanded to know what Leggy wanted. They talked together in the mixture of Portuguese, English and Quichua that passed current in Amazonas. He handed over the package and envelope that were addressed to her. She looked at the other package.

Glancing over her note indifferently, she sneered when she opened up a little silver gilt box with an enameled cover. Blacktower's ruse did not deceive her.

"What's that?" she demanded.

"For La Rosadora."

"Give it to me."

"Blacktower said I was to give it to her."

"You can't see her. She's sleeping."

"I'll come back later," he said woodenly.

The fear that he might have to meet Fay under the eyes of this woman turned him clammy.

"You can't see her any time," she said. "She don't want to see anybody."

He breathed more freely.

"Well, give it to me," she said, holding out her hand.

"Will you give me some writing from La Rosadora to show Blacktower?"

"Sure."

PEPITA carried the girl's package back into the kitchen. From the shape of it, it was a book. Is Fay in there? thought Leggy. No! The woman wanted to take time to read the note and run over the pages of the book to make sure there was not a second note hidden in it.

He was now alone in the dining room, and he moved a few steps towards the corridor with the idea of exploring a little further. He wanted to see what was upstairs. But the sound of a turning handle made him draw back quickly. The first door in the corridor opened, and the fat figure of Manoel appeared wearing pajamas; yawning and scratching his bald pate. Leggy's bristles rose at the sight; Manoel, taken aback by the stranger, snarled silently.

He paddled on to the kitchen with an ugly look. A loud quarrel arose out there. It was carried on in Portuguese, but it was not difficult to comprehend that Manoel was accusing his wife of carrying on an intrigue behind his back. Her answers were contemptuous.

After a while Pepita reappeared with Manoel shuffling after her. Pepita was carrying the book, now unwrapped, with Blacktower's note sticking in it. Leggy could read the title as she passed: "The Cardinal's Snuff-Box." Strange, coming from Blacktower! But the gambler was full of contradictions. For a pet he kept a little Pekinese spaniel, as if he were some society dame. Anyhow, Blacktower was a gentleman alongside the beast Manoel.

They passed Leggy without looking

at him and entered the corridor. Stopping before the last door, Pepita took a key from her pocket; and Leggy shook as if he had a chill. *That* was Fay's room! She was literally a prisoner! He could picture the face of terror that she turned, hearing the key in the lock!...Keep cool! Keep cool! he thought. You'll have to stand for worse than this!

Pepita and Manoel were quarreling again. They kept their voices too low for him to hear, but he understood that Manoel wanted to go in with her, and Pepita was forbidding it. Leggy was all for the woman then. He moved closer, keeping behind the corner of the opening.

Listening hard, he heard Pepita say, low-voiced and furious, "You go into your room or I'll take the girl to Blacktower myself, and who's going to stop me!"

Taking a slant around the corner, Leggy saw Manoel slouching back to his own door. Pepita went into Fay's room. A surge of relief flooded through him. For a moment the coarse figure of Pepita appeared to him in a beautiful light.

He waited, standing in the musty dining room with his senses all alert. Time passed. Myriads of flies crawled over the littered table. Overhead he heard a pair of listless feet dragging themselves across the floor.

Later, Ria came in from the kitchen and started gathering up the dirty dishes. Leggy thought: I ought to leave a friend behind me in this house. He drew out the rest of the coins Blacktower had given him and poured them into the girl's hands.

She promptly transferred them to her mouth since she had neither pocket nor stocking, and a sparkle of intelligence came into her glassy eyes.

From that time Leggy never had any difficulty in distinguishing her from the other native girls. She was bought.

Nothing was said between them. She went out with the dishes, and he continued to wait.

FINALLY Pepita appeared with an envelope addressed to Blacktower. At sight of the angular, ladylike characters that he knew so well, Leggy shivered. She had addressed it to "Mr. Blacktower." The ink was scarcely dry. The note came almost warm from her fingers to his. Luckily, his dark glasses baffled Pepita's hard glance. He bowed to her politely, and left.

Ria followed him across the yard to bar the gate.

Back under the crazy palm awnings of the "Avenida," as they called the main street, Leggy loafed along to give himself time to think things out before facing Blacktower. As noon approached, the camp was coming to life. Men lined up at the bars for a hair of the dog. Finding an unoccupied keg in front of a rum shop, Leggy sat down on it. Loafing never made you conspicuous in Bom Successo. He would have been glad of a drink, but had neglected to save out the price.

He decided to give Blacktower an exact and truthful account of all he had observed. Unless he did so, his boss would not continue to employ him in this matter; and unless he knew what Blacktower was up to he couldn't hope to block him.

Before going home Leggy struck down the path in front of the theater, and slouched across the swaying bridge. On the other side lived the lowest type of *caboclos* in their squalid palm huts built on shaky

platforms in the mud. It was said to be as much as a white man's life was worth to venture amongst them alone.

Leggy did not linger, but came back over the bridge, covertly studying the hotel from the rear.

Simple enough to pick out Fay's room. It was the first on the ground floor next to the theater. The rooms on the back had no doubt been planned as the best in the hotel. There was a double gallery running along outside, divided by heavy, ventilated partitions. Thus each room had its private veranda. This gallery was built out from the bank on tall piles driven into the mud. Fay undoubtedly slept on her veranda.

The creek, at this season of falling water, was no more than a sluggish ditch winding through a wide expanse of stinking mud, littered with rusty tin cans. However, there was sufficient water to float a canoe. No easy job



MANOEL

to climb up to the gallery, but it could be done. It was screened in, but metal screening offers no serious resistance to a good knife.

Back at home, Leggy gave Blacktower a matter-of-fact account of all

he had observed. The tall man listened, leaning back in his chair with his hands clasped behind his head and his feet on the desk.

He gazed out of the window as if the matter was of no great interest. But apparently he was pleased with the morning's work, because in the end he produced a silver dollar and flipped it in Leggy's direction.

Leggy let it lie where it fell. Something hardened inside him. He thought: I've made myself necessary to this brute; it's time now to make a stand.

Blacktower stared at him in amazement.

"Aren't you going to pick it up?"

"No."

Blacktower turned pale with rage, and his eyes glittered like a snake's. He sprang up with raised fist as if to strike Leggy down. Leggy faced him out, and the blow never fell. Once again a suggestion of fear appeared in Blacktower's eyes. It was gone immediately; his look became calculating and propitiatory.

"Well, after all, you're a white man," he said. "Living amongst these greasy swine, a fellow forgets the difference."

"Go get your dinner," said Blacktower. His voice was smooth, his glance murderous.

Leggy was not deceived by the voice. He went out, leaving the silver dollar lying on the floor.

CHAPTER V.

STRANGE WHITE MAN.

LEGGY as a house servant had the best possible opportunities for watching Blacktower. He was nearly always in a position to say where his boss was and whom he was

with. As a matter of fact, the gambler seldom left his own establishment except between the hours of nine and eleven at night. That was before heavy play began at the tables. At this time he would be in the theater. Leggy never succeeded in scraping together the price of admission to the theater, but he had the camp gossip as passed on by the Hawaiian boy to go by.

"La Rosadora's straight as a string. Manoel and Pepita figure that she pays them better so. Every night when she's not singing she sits at a table in the hall with Pepita beside her. Pepita never leaves her. It's what they call a duenna in this country. Any white man who has the price is free to sit down at the table and talk to La Rosadora."

"Drinks at that table cost five dollars gold. Lately, they say, our old man has been engaging the whole table and keeping the others off. There's trouble brewing with the other white men because of it."

"Why do they stand for it?" asked Leggy.

George looked at him in surprise. "Blacktower is the boss of Bom Successo."

Always in the back of his mind Leggy was mulling over the complicated situation. For the moment Blacktower appeared to be pretty well up against it. He was in a position to pay a price for the girl that would square Pepita; and as for the other white men he was undoubtedly ready to tell them to go to hell; but Manoel's infatuation for Fay stood in the way of his making a deal.

Manoel, in his turn, couldn't reach her because of Pepita. A man's own wife is his most formidable antagonist. She has his number. Obviously, Pepita was the key to the situation. But for

how long? In a place like Bom Successo what was there to prevent a man from suddenly removing a person who stood in his way?

Leggy wondered if the woman was alive to her danger.

Powerful as he might be, Blacktower could expect no help in this project from any other white man in camp. Leggy took a certain comfort in that thought. If there's a kidnaping plot afoot, he'll have to use me! It brought him squarely up against his job.

The first essential was to procure a gun. It was in his mind every hour. Gun seemed to come between him and everything he looked at. Blacktower's extensive arsenal was under careful lock and key. No hope of priggling a weapon from him. There was a brisk barter in guns always going on in camp, but Leggy had nothing to swap with. Well, when a man's pockets are empty, he must trade with personal service.

He set about making friends.

The Hawaiian boy, the Chinese cook, the four gamblers who lodged in the house—you never knew who might be useful—he studied them all with a view to winning their good will. Not by sucking up to them; that would only have been to get himself kicked; but by facing them out, and taking everything in good part. Not too easy a job for a man who had come into the house despised by all.

On the outside, the two white men with whom he came oftenest in contact were the Englishman, Osman, who ran the ice and electric plant, and Doc Buckles. The first-named fancied himself as a wit, and the way to get next to him was to show a keen appreciation of his humor.

Buckles was too sharp to have any-

thing like that put over on him, but as Leggy had a real liking for Doc it wasn't necessary to study how to make friends with him.

When he was drunk Doc was a valuable source of information. He seemed to recognize by instinct that the close-mouthed Leggy wouldn't give him away. He liked to have Leggy come drink with him in his stifling little laboratory between two rum shops on the Avenida. There he could rail against Blacktower without any danger of being overheard. Doc often worked in his laboratory far into the night. He was trying to isolate the organisms that caused the diverse and dizzy fevers of that country.

Always Doc's tirades would end with a similar cry: "But you can't touch him! He has us dead to rights!"

"Why?" Leggy asked him one day.

The answer was the same as he had received before: "Blacktower's the boss here."

"How did he get to be boss?"

Doc grinned sardonically. "Ever read Darwin, sprinter?"

"No."

"Case of natural selection. There ain't a man in camp can face Blacktower out when his black eyes glitter. And every other white man is obliged to back him up."

"Why?"

"TO keep the *caboclos* under. God, how they hate us! And there is only a handful of us. If they got out of hand and stormed the rum shops, the camp would go up in smoke and we'd all get our gizzards slit." He illustrated graphically. "Come on, drink up! I'm two ahead of you."

Leggy only sipped his rum. He

couldn't afford to get drunk any more.

"A year ago last Christmas," Doc went on, "things got so bad here we had to take measures. There were twenty-two men killed here in twenty-four hours. Made quite a scandal. The Governor sent word popular opinion would force him to clean us up if we didn't put on the brakes. So we formed a law-and-order committee.

"Every American and Englishman, except the bums, is on it. All the Brazilians with money in the camp are with us too, but we don't let them on the committee. Blacktower was elected chairman or mayor or what you will. He has the power, and we are pledged to support him. Everybody in business pays the committee for protection."

"Just like home," said Leggy dryly. "Who gets it?"

"The committee hands it to Manoel Carvalho for the Governor. Manoel is the Governor's spy here. Tries to put the fear of God in us by holding the troops over our heads. But as Blacktower has evidence that Manoel himself is grafting off the Governor, it preserves a kind of even balance—see?"

"And if the balance is ever disturbed?"

"All hell will break loose," said Doc cheerfully. He tossed off his rum. "What are you grinning at, prancer?"

"I was thinking that in Manaos they call Bom Successo the free town," said Leggy.

"Yeah. And when those poor chumps arrive here, they find a cast-iron government; of Blacktower, by Blacktower, and for Blacktower!"

"If he takes this girl, will the committee stand for it?" asked Leggy with an indifferent air.

"If she goes to him willingly, no-

body can say anything," said Doc gloomily. "If he undertook to take her by force—"

"Well, what?"

"God knows! Reckon we'd all blow up together in one big bang!"

"Well, she's turned him down," said Leggy, glancing up to see how Doc would take it.

He put down his glass carefully; his glance sharpened.

"How do you know that?" he demanded.

"She's refused the diamond bracelet; he still has it."

Doc grabbed up Leggy's hand. His eyes were shining.

"Boy, that's the best news I've heard in a month of Sundays! I knew she was on the square!" He suddenly burst out in wild laughter. "Jeeze, what a bloody fool I am! One would think I stood some chance there myself! What is it to me either way?" His voice broke; his head dropped on his arms, and his shoulders began to shake.

"I'm drunk!" he muttered. "I'm drunk!"

"Well, I know how it is," said Leggy woodenly.

SOMEbody from Blacktower's had to go often to the store, and

Leggy took over the job from the lazy Chou. There were twenty-five rum shops, more or less, in Bom Successo, and one general store, On Kai Ling's. The rubber warehouse was his also; the store adjoined it. Originally a crude 'dobe hovel, it had been added to from time to time until the buildings covered upwards of an acre. Somewhere in the middle of it the old Chinaman lived in oriental splendor, it was said, but no white man had ever been in to see.

On Kai Ling weighed more than three hundred pounds, but he could carry it, for he was six feet four inches tall. An elephant of a man in his long robe of blue brocade and round black cap. His face was good-humored, his hands soft and well kept. All day long, whether there was any business going or not, he sat inside the door with a little table before him bearing fan, tobacco pipe, and writing materials, ready to issue his scrip for rubber. The rubber was handled in the warehouse next door. On Kai Ling's little I. O. Us. could be exchanged for gold in any bank in Brazil, it was said. Or he would pay gold if it was demanded.

He employed an indefinite number of felt-shod clerks who could not be told apart. They were said to be his nephews. Outside of business they had not a word to say, and they were never seen off the premises. Amidst all the disorder of trade goods that stacked the place, they could instantly put hand on anything that was asked for. It seemed as if a man could buy anything in the world at On Kai Ling's, even rich velvets, silks, ivory fans, ostrich feathers, and gold jewelry, if he happened to get stuck on a girl.

Leggy eyed the old man every time he went in and out, wondering how he could get next to him. On Kai Ling and Blacktower were said to be in partnership on almost everything—steamboat, rubber business, gambling house—but their relations when they met were merely formal. The one partner paid gold or scrip for rubber; and the other took most of it back in his gambling house. Very convenient arrangement. The exact terms of the partnership were not known.

Leggy thought: If I could once get him talking, he might take a liking to

me. Old men love to talk. But, naturally, being only a house servant, he had to watch his step.

One afternoon Blacktower sent him with a note to On Kai Ling. The merchant dictated an answer to a clerk; and while they waited for it to be written out he started talking of his own accord.

"Blacktower treat you good?" he asked, with a sly Chinese smile.

Pulling my leg, thought Leggy.

"Nothing to complain of," he said.

"Got sore eyes? I got eye medicine."

Leggy reflected that a good way to make friends with a man is to offer him your confidence.

"It's only a stall," he said. "Don't give me away. There are men here who have it in for me."

"Merchant never give away," said On Kai Ling, laughing silently.

Leggy tried a little flattery. "You do a big business here, Uncle Ling." (Such was the common pronunciation of his name.)

The Chinaman shrugged. "Business is good while it's good!"

"I hear the men say that the rubber comes to you because it is known on all the rivers that your scales are true."

"I got give good weight," said On Kai Ling, smiling, "because I too fat to run away."

"You were the first one here, weren't you?"

"Yes. I build store on this point because it is hidden, but not hard to find. On right Madeira River; on left Purus; little way in front Amazon. Nobody come in this little river unless they lookin' for me. I build up my business quiet. When the big men get on to me, see? I am as big as them. Now"—with an expressive wave of

his hand Uncle Ling included the whole camp—"the purse-suckers are here. That is nothing to me. I buy rubber."

The next time Leggy came into the store On Kai Ling said without any preamble, "What Blacktower pay you."

"Nothing," said Leggy.

"You work for me I give two hundred dollar a month; board you outside."

Leggy slowly shook his head.

"Can't do it, Uncle Ling. But it certainly is white of you."

"I not white," he retorted, with his Chinese smile; "I yellow."

Leggy was embarrassed. "Well, you know what I mean."

"Why you won't work for me?"

Naturally, Leggy was not giving his real reason. "When Blacktower picked me up in Manaos I was down and out," he said. "It don't seem quite square to shake him the first chance I get."

"You good boy," said On Kai Ling. "I tell Blacktower you good, loyal servant."

"Better not," said Leggy cautiously. "You can't be sure how he'll take a thing."

"All right. I say nothing. You pretty smart boy," he added, smiling. "Know your master."

"When a man's up against it," said Leggy, "he'd damn well better sharpen up his wits."

"Sure," said the old man, coolly, "but few do."

"Well, it took a hell of a kick in the pants to bring me to."

Uncle Ling shook in silent mirth.

"You good boy. I like."

Leggy struck then and there.

"Will you sell me a gun?" he asked

eagerly. "I'll pay for it as quick as I can. Blacktower shells out a dollar from time to time. And you know I can't get away from here."

UNCLE LING looked at him, screwing up his eyes until they almost disappeared, and rubbing his chin.

"You know how it is here," Leggy pleaded. "A man has got to look out for himself. Blacktower sends me all around camp for one thing or another. I never know when I'm going to hit trouble. Without any means of defending myself, I feel like a woman."

"All right," said Uncle Ling. "I sell."

He spoke to one of his nephews in Chinese, and Leggy left the store with a practically new Smith & Wesson .32. Big enough to do his business, but not big enough to look boastful. He felt like a man made over.

One of Leggy's jobs was to fetch ice in a wheelbarrow morning and night. On his night trip, as he turned out of the ice plant with his load, he heard a creature breathing in distress, and set the barrow down. This lower end of the camp, with its little plaza between the Chinese outfit and the ice plant, was quiet and deserted after nightfall. The hum of the generator was louder than the racket up street.

He saw a man lying on the ground pressing himself against the ice-house wall in an attempt to hold the terrible shaking that had him in its grip. It was not an unusual sight in Bom Successo.

He had only a few dirty rags of clothing on his body. He was sunbaked to such a degree that it was only by his matted beard that Leggy knew him for a white man.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



"Your name?" demanded
Oyster-Eye

Sorcerer's Treasure

Long Novelette

By ANTHONY M. RUD

Author of "The Stained Tabu,"
"White Fires," etc.

*He played a grim game of
murder—in a country where
there was little chance of
vengeance of the law—for
a stake beyond price*

CHAPTER I.

FEAR OF THE OGRE.

ROCKY GHEE might have beaten me to death that time, for he was drunk. Tied to the whipping post back of the sawmill, I had fainted under blows of the blacksnake.

It was by no means my first beating, but it was my last at the hands of Rocky Ghee. I was fourteen years old, big for my age, bound out (or as they say in Alabama, "bonded") to work at a wage of \$5 for Rocky, all the months until I turned twenty-one. He never paid me one cent.

There were no reasons for the beatings, outside of the fact that about