

"On to Texas!" was the cry along the open trail which led to silver mines, slaves, acres of free land—and war



Bowie Knife

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CHAPTER I.

"GOING TO TEXAS!"

HUGH KENLY was sitting over his rum in one corner, when snatches of the amazing talk got his attention. This catch-all groggery at one end of the New Orleans

waterfront was miscalled the Hotel Beausejour; a rough and roaring place.

The night, of September, 1835, was thick and close; infernally so, thought Kenly. He was drinking down his heartsick disaster and loneliness. He was ripe for anything, careless of everything. The challenge of his



"We'll tame you proper!"

brown eyes under shaggy brows, of his scarred, hard features, was surly. Heavy jaw, heavy hand, heavy heart. There was none in this guzzling, tobacco-chewing, smoking throng to discern any tender light in those brooding dark eyes, any softer touch of chivalry in his high-boned features. This night weighed upon him frightfully. It frightened him with old memories.

Thick outside and thick inside was the night. Outside, thick with heavy fog that rolled in off the river, up over the levee and the boats, to saturate

everything with its swampy, viscous reek. Gutters dripped as with rain. Window lights and the glazed lanterns beaconing the hotel signs glimmered wanly like faces of drowning men. The black sky was low with moist warm air that had met chill river air, so that a man oozed sweat at every pore.

A sullen rumble, born of no apparent horizon, occasionally rolled through space. The air seemed weighted with a menace of quickening events, to Hugh Kenly.

Had he been up Missouri way, now, he would have been minded of earthquake. This thickness and closeness and rumbling had heralded the big quake along the river below St. Louis in the winter of 1811. Twenty-four years back—well, close to it. Kenly had been scant three years old, yet he remembered the terror of it, and had heard many yarns.

Yet this night registered memories far more poignant, more bitter, and more recent. Memories that caused him to reach again for the rum flask, with an oath.

Inside the groggery it was thick, not only with the fog but with fumes of twist tobacco, rum, whisky, dank clothing and bodies. It was murmurous with the undertones of men at drink and at confab. Undertones shot through with lightning of ribald oaths and wild, cocky whoops. Frenchmen, Americans, backwoodsmen, rivermen, Spaniards, halfbreeds, their bodies steaming. And ever the word on all lips was the same: Texas!

Hugh Kenly grunted in disgust, and drained his mug. The ribs, recently mended, encasing his powerful lungs ached. The scars of his healed burns smarted and stung, and the fiery rum failed as medicine for either spirit or body. His only visible scar was the skinned triangle high on the bridge of his nose; a scar that marked him, however.

A steamboat mate without a berth, and with sharp memories. He thought of the snag that had driven through the hull of the *Amos G. Dunn*, exploding her boiler and lifting him halfway to shore with his ribs caved in and his hide scalded. As far as he knew, the steamboat was still hung up on that treacherous sawyer below old Natchez. He himself was still hung up in New

Orleans, out of bandages at last, and out of hope to boot, scowling at the world.

A night like this, he mused, thick and clammy as this, with him taking a trick at the wheel on a forced run for a tie-up place. Then—the stars came again and fell and he was in the water. Not to blame for that sawyer, one minute under water, next minute above water; but they had blamed him all the same. Drunk, they had said. Drunk! The damned liars! Well, here was Hugh Kenly, none the less, heaving lead for soundings and finding none, except with the rum. Done for. Finished.

As a snag-end sawing up and down on the river surfaces catches the eye, so the smatterings of talk about him caught his ear. Texas, eh? Texas! There might be something in that, for a broken man. He listened deliberately, attentively.

"Land by the hundred of acres, I tell you, to be had freely!"

"But they say them Mexicans bears down on the settlers mortal bad."

"Cain't come it over Americans, you h'ar me orate? Who's to stop us?"

"No man's trail and every man's trail; that's the truth of it. Horses, trade goods, negroes . . . big profits in smuggling, lemme tell you! Lafitte lands slaves anywheres . . . trading with them Mexicans and—"

The voices died. Others took their places, striking Kenly's ear in curious sequence, unrelated apparently and yet with the snatches of talk rousing interest, provocative.

"Bound to declare for freedom. Americans won't stand being chiseled out'n their rights. No representation any more, and we ain't standing for it—"

"Volunteers . . . organizing to fight for Texas? Count me in, sure. Any gals for part of the plunder?"

And again, in more cultured tones curious to hear in such surroundings, yet impossible to assign to any certain speaker:

"I tell you, Santa Anna won't admit any state constitution. He's set himself up as dictator. Texas won't hear of such a thing. Now the settlers will have to go the whole hog and cut loose . . . aim at liberty. Liberty, understand?"

"Men enough in the United States to help her do it, too. We can't see our own blood ground down . . . new country thrown open. Mines, too, I hear. Silver mines . . ."

Provocative, yes, to a broken man. Kenly glanced around.

The room, murky with smoke and fog, was fairly large, its muddled plank floor occupied by chipped and stained deal tables crowded with sitters in leather, wool, and homespun. This was the front room of the two-storied hotel. Back along the hall extended other rooms devoted to sundry purposes, and on the second floor were lodgings. Hugh Kenly would not sleep here tonight, however. He was down to his last sou; or, in the local parlance, his last picayune.

Again and again his eyes drifted curiously to the table in that counter-ing corner by this rear wall, beyond the threshold of the hallway. Three men sat there, bent forward in low and secretive poise. There were two profiles, and a back. Why they attracted him, Kenly did not know; unless it was that they were niched off there to themselves in a defensive manner. They appeared to be intent upon certain objects laid on the table, which they examined and discussed.

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So intent was Kenly's gaze that it was noticed; the man of the back turned suddenly about and regarded Kenly with a cold, who-the-devil-are-you sort of stare. A slender man, yet muscular and square-shouldered, in short, lapelled jacket, linen roll collar and planter's black hat. The face leaped out at Kenly angrily.

A smooth countenance flanked by dark hair down either temple; a countenance marked by bold, challenging blue eyes. The straight nose and straight determined lips, the broad forehead, denoted plainly enough a masterful man, one who might be the noblest of friends and the deadliest of enemies. No one would forget him, and those stark blue eyes would forget no one.

IN his prickle of resentment under that blue stare, Kenly was relieved by a more friendly salute, as a man came to his table and kicked out one of the stools, and spoke in soft Spanish.

"With your permission, *señor*? Good evening to you."

A Spaniard, this, or Mexican, enveloped in a serape; by his barb, of the lower class, with a strongly pock-marked face, yet not unpleasing. He had come with velvet step and seated himself with feline grace. Now he smiled on Hugh Kenly.

"You are alone, *señor*? You speak the Spanish?"

"A little," returned Kenly, by no means glad of the intrusion.

"*Bueno!* I thought you were alone, *señor*. You are not of these others; they are not your friends?" and the speaker swept his hand toward the room.

Kenly eyed him dourly. "I don't know them, nor you either."

"Good, good! Then you are not 'for Texas,' as their saying goes."

Kenly laughed curtly, savagely. "I'm for an honest job, *amigo*. Anywhere. If that's being for Texas, then I call the main, and devil take who likes it or doesn't!"

Unconsciously, his voice had lifted. Again the blue-eyed man had looked his way, other faces were turned. The pockmarked man leaned forward earnestly. He began to speak rapidly, as though rattling off something he had learned.

"I, too, am an honest man, *señor*; these people are fools. When they talk of Texas, to them it rains packsaddles. They think in miracles! *Señor*, Texas is a part of Mexico and remains so. Those *Americanos* who go in there to plunder and fight will be no more than outlaws, men without a country."

An ironic grunt broke from Kenly. "Maybe they'll take a country, my friend."

"Bah! The United States will not protect pirates who come from its own borders," rattled on the other. "Mexico will deal with them, and with all in Texas who rebel against her. There is a great man in Mexico now! Santa Anna is president and general, Mexico is now one people—and welcomes the brave and honest. What does your heart desire, *señor*? Money, honors, women? Listen, *señor*; a fire is discovered by its own light. Let me lead you to one who—*diablo*! Your servant, *señor*; we shall meet again, later—"

Even as he spoke, he was gone. Gone with the agile spring of a startled buck.

He disappeared into the hallway and was lost to sight. In his place loomed another figure, bulking out the smoky lights.

"Stranger, my compliments!"

With scrape of legs, the stool was again occupied, and Hugh Kenly stared at the taker. No Spaniard here. Quite the contrary, in fact.

A swart, black-haired, shrewd-eyed man, to be sure, but withal a beak-nosed man, Indian-visaged, in coon-skin cap and fringed buckskin; a white man who carried a prodigiously long and silver-mounted rifle, leaning it against the table.

"Friend of your'n?" and he nodded in the direction of the vanished Mexican.

"First met, sir, the same as yourself," said Kenly, who was beginning to be amused. He was not certain whether to be angry or interested in this visitor; his amusement was apt to a swift and irritable change. Other faces were again turned in this direction.

"Meaning I'm barking up the wrong tree?" inquired this backwoodsman, with so ingratiating and honest a smile that Kenly's irritation melted.

"I wouldn't say that," he rejoined. "You're welcome to poor company if you like it, stranger."

"As the coon in the tree said to the hound in the canebrake," observed the other, with a whimsical twitch of his long, square chin. "Well, I expect poor company may be better than none, seeing as you just had it afore I come. I don't ask you to kick afore you're spurred, but we may's well go straight ahead. I'm delegated to inquire how you are on the G.T.T., stranger."

"Gone to Texas, eh?" Kenly had picked up enough talk to know what these initials meant in local parlance. "Well, my friend, you can see for yourself. I haven't gone." The other chuckled.

"Neat as a possum's tail. That's

sufficient, as Tom Haynes said when he saw the elephant. You don't need to cover up on me, stranger. I'm Davy Crockett from Tennessee, seeing the sights with Betsy, here," and he patted the long rifle affectionately. "Not gone to Texas—Going To Texas! There's a motto to hang on your door, blast my old shoes if it ain't! You're a likely feller; what d'you say? Another horn of liquor, and the honor's mine! Will you crack the heads of a few dons for the sake of liberty?"

CROCKETT from Tennessee? Hugh Kenly had heard the name; everyone had heard of the deadly shooting Tennessean.

"Well, why not?" he answered. "I'm flattened out and open to a berth of any paying kind. What's the offer?"

"To go with me to Texas," said Crockett.

"With you?" Kenly's dark eyes lit up suddenly.

"Right you are," said Crockett. "Dog me if I don't know a man when I see one! I'm here to talk with Jim Bowie and get the news. He's busy right now, but I'll fetch him over when he comes back. He's a high-toned gentleman, fresh out of Texas, and can argufy with you better'n Davy Crockett, any day."

Crockett stretched out his legs comfortably. Kenly had him spotted now. One of the three men from that corner table. He glanced over at it, and found the table empty. The man with the hot blue eyes had disappeared.

"Y'know," went on Crockett, "Jim's the popularist man in that there country, and a screamer in a fight. The way he laid into them Injuns when he was looking for his silver mine was something to holler about."

"Silver mine?" repeated Hugh Kenly, blankly.

"Yep. Somewhere in Texas. He's rich enough already, but it'll make him richer than a congressman if he can find it again," and Crockett exploded in a laugh. "Me, I been in congress, and the most I got out of it was a trip on them new railroad cars. Seventeen mile in fifty-five minutes—yes, sir! Hell in harness, as the feller said when his horses run away. Well, what was I talking about?"

"Jim Bowie."

"Oh, sure! Him and his mine. The cowards would give a pretty penny to get the gouge holt on that mine! But Jim'll talk Texas to you till the trail's as plain as a b'ar's path in a canebrake. If you want to travel with Davy Crockett, you and me can 'list in the cause of liberty together."

"If I want to!" exclaimed Kenly eagerly. "Why, Colonel Crockett, I—"

At this instant he heard a scream, echoing down the dark hallway.

There had been other voices of womankind, voices both gay and angry, bruited through these entertainment-precincts of the shaggy little hotel. These ribaldries had been an accepted feature of the evening. But this single note of frantic appeal startled him—though no one else seemed to notice it.

Kenly leaped to his feet, darted into the hall, and went plunging along, guided only by the threads of light glimmering through the cracks of the warped and loosely fitted doors to either hand. At the hall's end, however, there was a broader slant of yellow light that beckoned him on.

As he sped away, he heard roars of laughter from the big room behind, at some sally from Davy Crockett. Then

he heard sounds ahead, also. His senses focused upon the scuffle and stamp of feet, the gusty oaths and laughs of men, the quick desperate cries of a woman. All coming from that slant of light, as though it were a signal of distress.

The door stood ajar, and coming to it, Kenly shouldered it aside and burst in.

The room, as revealed by a tipsy lamp in a wall bracket, was in a wild disorder of upset table and stools. All in a flashing glance, Hugh Kenly caught the full gist of it. The Spaniard with the pockmarked face lying senseless in one corner; an old woman, huddled against the wall and piping frantically. Two men wrestling with and wresting at a young woman—one man leather-capped, in greasy river-jerkin, a faded kerchief knotted about his neck; the other a blazing carrot-thatch, cursing furiously.

Then Kenly saw the woman, young, of bright hair and pale angry lips parted over clenched teeth. Her upper dress was torn. Her hand gripped a knife, but carrot-thatch held it high and useless as she strained and fought the two men.

"The she-devil! Gouge her!"

"We'll tame you proper—"

"*Señor*, help, help me!" shrilled her voice, as she saw Kenly there in the doorway.

The straight appeal was explanation enough; the answer was swift.

Kenly's right arm crooked about the kerchief and throat of the jerkined man, his bent knee jammed into the fellow's spine. To a drag and a twist, the rascal went reeling to fall all asprawl outside the doorway. Kenly caught up a stool for weapon, but stood holding it.

For, her knife-hand released, the

young woman lashed out viciously. A wild oath burst from carrot-thatch; then, his retreat cut off by Kenly, he went headfirst through the crashing window.

"Behind you, *señor*—behind you!"

THE woman's voice brought Kenly around, stool in hand. Things were dim and dazed. The room wavered in the flickers of the draft-blown lamp. The woman, the shadows, the lust of combat, the thick dust from the stamped floor, were in his eyes.

That looming figure in the doorway—the man he had flung out, of course! Kenly leaped, and the stool in his hand whirled.

"What's the matter in here—"

The voice was keen and hard, level, impetuous. It died out under the crash of the heavy stool, as the edge of the wood thudded home.

Too late, too late! Kenly could not halt the blow, though he realized his mistake in that frightful moment. Nor could the swiftly uplifted arm of the other man parry it. For an instant Kenly recoiled under the stabbing blaze of those stark blue eyes. Something clattered and fell across the floor, from that upflung arm. Then the intruder pitched forward, full length, to lie face down and without movement.

"He has it! He has it!" The cry came from the young woman. "Now we must be quick, quick!"

She hurled herself forward, caught at the door, slammed it shut and ran home the bar. Then she whirled around.

Outside and in had fallen silence, save for the rapid panting of the younger woman as she eyed Kenly, and the babblings of the crone huddled

in fear and trembling against the wall.

The lamp had steadied now. Its flame rose full and bright. Kenly's vision came clear again. He could scarce believe her real, in this his first intelligent view of her. Shaken over her shoulders, her hair gleamed like silken floss of gold. Her wide eyes were the hue of the bluebird at mating time, her lips were vivid red, her skin was very white, and soft to the sight. She was all whiteness, softness, ruddy tenderness, save for the knife that glittered cold in her hand. No less a woman than a girl.

"Ah, *señor*, thanks, a thousand thanks!" Her breath still came fast, her breasts were heaving under the torn, rent stuff of her gown. "These ruffians, these Americans, they would have—ah, Matilde! Quick! And you, *señor*—we must go, we must go before those others return. Matilde!"

This to the crone, who now scrambled forward hurriedly.

"A thousand curses on them!" she breathed. "Look at the pretty stone—this one, that fell from his hand! So he would pay us by throwing it at my feet, eh?" And hideous laughter cackled from her lips, as she gathered up a bit of rock from the floor. It was this that had clattered down, ere the intruder fell.

Swiftly, the girl flung herself upon the prostrate figure, while Kenly stared.

"True, true! He may have more, then. Help me, *señor*! Help me turn him over, before others come. Search him, Matilde!"

Kenly lent a hand. They turned the still figure upon its back, and the features stared up at them with bold and fixed blue eyes. The eyes, and the deadly, oozing bruise upon the uncovered forehead! Kenly started back

with a sudden chill from the look of those accusing eyes, eyes well remembered, eyes that had not forgotten. Yes, this was the man of the blue eyes, the fine garments, the hat that now lay crushed on the floor. Then Kenly felt the girl clutch his arm.

"You have killed him, *señor*; no time now—with me, quickly, or you also are dead. Make haste, Matilde."

The crone, Matilde, had made deft and swiftly accomplished search. Now she tottered up from her knees with a wild flutter of old laughter.

"The very man indeed, my pet. A knife, tucked under his shirt. This bit of paper. A few coins. I thought so great a man would be richer by far. The knife for you, *señor*?"

Mechanically, Hugh Kenly accepted the heavy knife thrust into his hand.

"I did not mean to strike him down," he muttered, stammering out the words. "I thought he was the other—"

SUDDENLY his senses, still dulled by the rum, awoke. He became aware of breaking tumult outside; voices were sounding, feet were trampling, and there came a hammering thud of fists at the door, with deep resounding shouts to open.

"With me, *señor*!" The girl caught at his arm. Kenly looked at her.

"Where?"

"I'll show you. Come."

"But this man here?" He indicated the senseless Mexican of the pock-marked face, the man who had spoken to him at the table.

"Bah! Only a peon. Leave him for them to kill."

"I will not."

The girl had snatched up a cloak and was throwing it around her shoulders. The old woman had darted to an un-

seen, flush, small door in the farther side of the room, a door contrived for secret use. Matilde disappeared, the girl following hurriedly.

Leave the man for them to kill? With a grunt, Kenly stooped and lifted. For some reason he liked that pockmarked fellow. The man was half conscious. At first he feebly resisted, then lent himself to the effort. He got the man through the little door, and instantly the girl, who was waiting, slammed and locked it.

"Follow!"

Somehow he stumbled through the darkness with the weight of pock-face, and emerged into a muddy lane, thick with the moist night and the fog.

The flitting glimmer of the girl's white ankles below her cloak could just be seen. This, and the stressed whinnies of the crone, whose legs were better than her lungs, provided guidance. Their steps were sped by the growing, gathering clamor of voices and angry shouts behind.

The lane was long and crooked. It brought them into a street. Save for the few sickly lights above entrance ways and behind dingy panes, the street was dark and lifeless. The girl, with the crone at her heels, led on, brushing close against the fronting buildings while her slippers clicked upon the cobbles.

Abruptly, she turned into an entrance, her cloak whipping from sight beneath the grilled light. The old woman scuttled after, nimbly enough. Kenly followed, only half-supporting the supposed Spaniard, who was manfully working his legs now.

A paved court was overlooked by a railed balcony, soft lights burning dimly. Kenly followed the others up a stairway which brought him to the balcony. Ahead, the girl had halted

at a door scrolled with iron-work, rapping repeatedly, quickly.

"It is I, Rodrigo! Open, open!"

The door flung back, and she slipped through upon a shaft of light. The hag followed. Kenly guided in his peon, and as he did so, the girl shut the door and shot a bolt.

"Well, my cousin, all is over," said the girl calmly. She caught up a chair, brought it over to the fire, and seated herself, thrusting soggy slippers to the blaze. "Heavens, what an escape!"

Then she burst into laughter, as Kenly stood gaping at the scene which met his eye.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAP.

IT was, indeed, a strange scene that greeted Hugh Kenly, by contrast to that which he had so recently left. Yet he was not the only one to stand in staring surprise.

In New Orleans, this city half-Spanish and half-French, such a room was not uncommon, with its glittering old furniture, carved tables, ornate chandelier, dressed cowhide rugs upon the floors and heavy brocaded curtains covering the windows. In a wide hearth blazed a warm and ruddy fire, grateful to see despite the steaming moisture of the night; its warmth, at least, was good honest warmth. The cloudy marble mantelpiece held various knickknacks.

On the central table was a tray of food, with glasses and a large decanter of wine.

The duenna, if such were the old crone, huddled at one side of the fireplace, babbling thanks to the saints. The peon, for he seemed to be rather a peon of humble birth than any proud

Spaniard, leaned against the wall. Kenly caught his mumble.

"I will remember, *señor*. You have saved me; I will remember."

The American paid no heed, for he was looking at the startled man, surprised by their abrupt entry.

This man had been seated at a writing desk against the wall. He, very obviously, was a true Spaniard. A man of thirty, well-favored, albeit of eyes a little close, of ruddy olive complexion, aquiline features, thin-bridged nose. His black mustache turned up from full lips, his chin was deeply cleft, and curly black hair framed his visage. He wore an embroidered black velvet jacket over a fine linen shirt, a yellow waist sash, and boots of soft leather, fancifully stitched, coming above the knees. A fine fellow, this Spaniard, and his black eyes reminded Kenly of the knife still in his hand.

The soft laughter of the girl broke upon the silence.

"Well, Rodrigo, you might ask the *señor* to sit down! I do not have his name, so introductions must wait. You are not hospitable, good cousin! What, food and wine to hand, and you offer us none, when this *señor* has saved us all?"

She laughed again, as in soft mockery. She had stowed her hair in a glossy pile, and now sat, luxurious as a basking cat, all unconcerned over her torn upper garment. She was not unmindful of certain effects, as Kenly could dimly sense.

The man Rodrigo was obviously disconcerted by Kenly's presence, a prey to awkward uncertainty. At these words from the girl, he seemed to recollect himself. He bowed, and spoke with a certain stiffness.

"Your pardon, Conchita. And yours, *señor*. Surprise, I fear, caused

by my unintentional rudeness. Will you be pleased to sit down, *señor*? Before the fire; it is yours. At least it banishes the dampness of this fog-ridden night. For the love of the saints, Pablo, do quit rubbing your head like a jackass against a wall, and take a seat. Pour wine, Matilde."

About the man was a briskness, a hearty quality, which invited no denial.

"Yes, my captain," Pablo faltered. He gingerly perched on the edge of a chair and held his head between his hands. An aching, thrumming head, no doubt. The old woman began to pour wine from the decanter into the glasses.

Kenly, with a nod, seated himself at the end of the fireplace opposite the girl. She fascinated him. This warmth was grateful to his aching ribs; but the warmth that pervaded him was not all from the fire.

The girl—Conchita, the Spaniard had called her—threw glances at him. Her hands arranged stray tendrils of her hair with deft touches, her eyes insisted that he appraise her. Above small slippers, her ankles were slender and shapely. The flash of her white skin, the lovely curve of her cheek and throat, the slight smile resting upon those red lips, the deep blue of her eyes framed in long lashes and crescent brows, the amazing pile of amber sunset hair—yes, she was worth looking at, this girl.

Hugh Kenly became conscious of his harsh garb of riverman. He bethought himself to lay down the knife and cover it with his hat; it was out of place here, at a hearth which seemed domestic.

A suspense was in the air, a sensation of waiting, as though no one dared be the first to speak. Matilde

was handing about the glasses of wine. Rodrigo pulled up a chair and seated himself. The girl took her glass. She poised it, with glance aside and the quick, half-mocking utterance: "To Mexico, *señor!*" She brought the glass to her lips, a smile flashing forth at Kenly.

He tasted the wine, making no other reply. The tang of the rich, molten gold was grateful to his throat. The smile from her lips warmed him, permeated him with a friendliness, a promise of cheer. Then, abruptly, the wrinkled old woman shattered the silence with her senile, evil twitter.

"There, my captain; I wiped every glass with my skirt. You can trust old Matilde! I was not well brought up for nothing. And now see what I have for you; it will gladden your heart, my captain! Here, from my pocket; this, and this. You see the treasure, my captain? I cannot read the paper, but I know what it is, and I can read the pretty stone, for that talks plainly enough."

Thus saying, she fished out the piece of rock and the folded square of paper taken from the dead man, if indeed he were dead. She laid them under Rodrigo's nose and stood back triumphant, a grin splitting her toothless face.

"What the devil! What nonsense is here, you old witch?" broke out the captain, his wine still untasted. "There is much to explain, true, but you make a poor beginning. Come, Conchita! What is the meaning of all this absurdity?"

Matilde took the word and bristled.

"Absurdity indeed!" she squawked out in shrill anger. "I have just told you the wine won't poison you, and neither will these things. If the captain will finger the rock and look into the paper, he will count this night the

most blessed of his life. He calls me names, eh? Well, one who finds he cannot bite should not show his teeth."

SUCH sayings were the stock in trade of all Spanish folk. Don

Rodrigo grunted in response, and turned the rock over in his hand. He put teeth to it and wiped his lips. He examined into the paper, and sat back in his chair, frowning.

"Well, devil take you! What's the answer?"

"*Plata bruta*—pure ore of silver," and old Matilde almost snarled the words in her excitement. "And that paper should be a map."

"Well? What of it?" demanded the other, staring at her.

"What of it? The mines of San Saba lie in your hand, little general, and you say what of it?" Shrill laughter put mockery into her words. "I know. I have had ore like this in my hands before; but not enough to fill a cart. Anyway, both the ore and the map come from the right place, the right man. It is San Saba silver—is it not, my little one?"

She turned, appealing swiftly to the girl, who merely shrugged and nodded.

"San Saba! The San Saba mines? Holy saints!" Now excitement seized upon the captain, and no mistake. He tossed off his wine and thrust the glass on the table. "I do not believe it. You are trying to jest with me, all of you—come! Let's have an explanation of all this—who is this *señor*, whence come this ore and paper?"

Without pause for answer, he turned to Kenly.

"*Señor*, pardon my remissness. I am Captain Don Rodrigo Estremadura. The lady is my cousin, Doña Maria de la Concepcion Villamar. And you?"

"My name is Kenly—Hugh Kenly. Hugo, in the Spanish."

"Ah, Hugo!" exclaimed Doña Maria, mouthing it prettily as she leaned forward. "It is a brave, harsh name, well fitting a brave man. A brave man is known by his deeds and his scars—a true caballero, my Hugo!"

"Curse your fine phrases!" exclaimed Don Rodrigo, riding the saddle of impatience. "Tell me what happened, do you hear? To the story, and quickly."

"Why, my cousin, two men attacked me—"

"Where was this?"

"In the room at the hotel. Where else? You should know very well."

"What!" cried Don Rodrigo. "I ordered that only one man should be brought to you at a time. How was this, Pablo? You dared to disobey me?"

"Pardon, my captain," said the pock-faced Pablo. "The two *Americanos* were friends and in company. They said it was both or none—how could I prevent them?"

"You're a fool. All right, Conchita; go on."

Doña Maria shrugged. "They struck Pablo down. They were not so much for Mexico as for a pretty face, it proved. They had drunk heavily, and they were ruffians."

One hand touched her knife significantly.

"Two ruffians and using force, you comprehend. And then came Don Hugo. He alone paid heed to my scream; in that place, no one cares what happens. He is a man indeed; He picked up one and actually hurled him out! The other fled through the window. Then in walked a third, and him Don Hugo left lying on the floor with a cracked skull, dead. Beauti-

fully dead, Rodrigo! A pretty blow."

Kenly shivered slightly at her tone, at the memory. That mistaken blow irked him.

"And the pretty stone for proof," cackled old Matilde. "Right at my feet the fine *señor* threw it, for safe-keeping while he slept. May he never waken!"

"But the map?" rapped out Don Rodrigo.

"Oh, he gave us that also," and the crone chuckled. "And a fine knife to Don Hugo."

"Plague take you!" broke out Don Rodrigo angrily. "Be done with your cursed riddles; I've no time to bother with them. Speak plainly! Who were the two men?"

"Ruffians, my cousin," said Doña Maria. She spoke now with an Andalusian lisp, which obviously irritated Don Rodrigo. "No matter; they were not for us in any case, though I should have liked to mark them with my knife—"

"The third? He of the map, of this ore?"

"Your wits are slow tonight, Rodrigo. Who should he be, but Don Santiago Bowie?"

"Exactly," and Matilde put in her cackle. "The fine gentleman of the San Saba mines, the rich man, the politician—grr! May he rot in hell!"

"Jim Bowie? That man? No, no! It could not be—"

Kenly's voice rose in wild force as he sprang to his feet, his chair falling back, his wineglass tinkling and shivering on the hearth. The wine spread red like blood at his feet. He stood wide-eyed, astounded, dismayed, a paralysis seizing upon him.

"You did not know?" The girl's brows lifted as she eyed him. "*Dios*, what a blow you struck! It would

have killed an ox. What matter? You are safe with us."

"**D**EAD? This *señor* killed that man, that Hercules?" exclaimed Don Rodrigo, no less aghast than Kenly himself. Then his dark eyes warmed, and a smile of delight rushed to his full lips. "The greatest fighter of all the border—dead! This will be good news for *El Presidente*. Señor Bui, dead!" He gave the name its usual pronunciation, alike in both Spanish and English. "The Bowie of the San Saba mines, the traitor to Mexico—and he has given us the mines! Oh, a great stroke, Señor Kenly, and Mexico will reward you well!"

"Bowie!" muttered Kenly. "A traitor, you say? But he was no Mexican."

"But yes," and Don Rodrigo nodded. "A Mexican citizen, *amigo*, like all those who settled in Texas. Pablo! You knew the man. Are you certain it was Bowie?"

The pock-marked Pablo looked up and assented. "Yes, my captain; I did not see him dead, but I knew him in life. He had been in the tavern room, with two other men, examining bits of rock. I said to myself then that it might be a matter of the San Saba treasure; but Don Santiago would be carrying his name-knife."

The knife—the famous type invented by Bowie's brother? The ore and the map? The man at the table with Crockett, those challenging, hot blue eyes? Hugh Kenly groped for his chair again and sank down in it. He saw it all now, with horrible precision. Bowie showing the ore, talking with those other two men. Then the scream, and Bowie, the famous chivalric Bowie, to the room, still hold-

ing the ore in his hand. The convulsive release of the ore when the blow fell. A shiver ran through Kenly, a shiver of repulsion, of self-horror. Not at death. He was used to that on the river. But at the hideous mistake which had caused him to kill a man famed throughout the southwest for his noble chivalry no less than for his dreaded fighting ability.

The girl was speaking, and her musing words sank into him.

"Jeem Bowie, yes. I have seen him often enough. Everyone in San Antonio de Bejar knows Jeem Bowie. Did he not marry one of the Vera-mendi girls, whose father was vice-governor? And he had cotton mills in the south, until cholera carried off his wife and children. A Mexican citizen, of course. Don Hugo, have no fear! Mexico will thank you for ridding her of this traitor, this man who calls himself a Texan."

"That is well said, my heart," commended Don Rodrigo, with a nod of approval. "This Bowie left Bejar to join the plotters here, raising men and money; he was not here for his San Saba mines alone." A short laugh broke from him, as his keen black eyes leaped to the American.

"I do not ask, Señor Kenly, what your own plans may have been; whether you were for the Texas rebels or not, is immaterial now. You are, you must be, to Mexico with us. That is to say, to Bejar. There you are safe, honored, a hero!"

"I have already invited the caballero to listen to us, my captain," proffered the pock-marked Pablo. "I was about to take him back to the room to see Doña Maria and talk with her, but another intervened. Then I picked up those ruffians, and they rushed along with me—"

"Never mind," and Don Rodrigo waved his hand airily. "Señor Kenly, matters have turned out well for you, marvelously well! There are great things ahead for you. We have many Americans in our army, from generals to drill-sergeants. But for you, also, there are now things to be avoided, since you have killed Jim Bowie, a man of note among his people.

"He has brothers and friends; you cannot go back to that hotel, you cannot venture into the streets. You cannot stay in this part of the United States, and you will assuredly be safe among Americans in Texas. For, *señor*, pardon my reference, but you are a marked man. You bear a scar upon your nose which is unusual, impossible to conceal. Well! Mexico will not only offer you protection, but honors and wealth. *Señor*, to your health."

And Don Rodrigo drained his glass, which old Matilde had refilled. The crone uttered her evil twittering laugh, so shot through with venom, with vindictive malice, that the recurrent sound of its mirth sent a chill down Kenly's spine. He sat there with hopeless realization growing upon him, liking his company less every moment and yet fully conscious that Don Rodrigo spoke the truth.

"The great Don Santiago brought low!" cackled the old woman. "One who they say rode alligators like horses, and picked his teeth with a knife as long as my arm. Ha! Toothless as a cock now is he, but one who was dreaded while living may well be feared after he is dead, my fine *señor* of the marked nose!"

"Shut up," snapped Don Rodrigo. "*Señor*, let us look at this map together. You may help me with this American writing—"

KENLY rose, wakening his sluggish faculties. The captain had pulled up a small table. With heavy head and heavy heart, Kenly joined him there.

His brain was racing the while. How swiftly things had happened; how incredible that he should have killed Jim Bowie, even stricken him down! Jim Bowie, of the brothers made forever popular and respected by their bowie-knife, made more famous by valiant deeds of a kind dear to common talk and hearts!

Kenly saw that he was not to join Davy Crockett on the Texas road. He had sat alone and aloof; he had been observed and regarded suspiciously. The covert Pablo had approached him. Then Crockett, quickly, to sound him out. Opportunity, in that scream, had been wrested from him. And now Bowie, found struck down and rifled, mayhap dead as the girl said! Those two other men in the room would know him again. Damnation, what a coil! Whether or not for Texas, now he was for himself, in deadly peril, and a marked man. Crockett had eyed him well, and those shrewd eyes would know him under any disguise.

Beside Don Rodrigo he bent over the map, translated the few English words and terms showing there. A map carefully drawn, that came clear enough to the eye under the exclamations of the worthy captain.

"Now I see it plainly; look you, Señor Kenly," he said, tracing with well-kept finger; a finger somewhat blunted, but with spade-nail trimmed and polished. "A cross, here. Las Minas de Nuevo Almagres or in your tongue the new Almagres Mines. Plain enough. And here the Rio San Saba—creek, it says, eh? The old San Saba mission should be somewhere

about. Here mountains, and the trail from Bejar; by marches, seventy leagues. Two hundred miles or so—*pouf!* A mere nothing to hard legs. The ore speaks for itself." He leaned back and looked up at Kenly. "You know of the New Almagres mines, *amigo?*"

Kenly frowned. "Seems to me I heard something about it at Natchez, quite a while back. Some Injun fight, wasn't it?"

"Precisely. Four years ago, in 1831; a famous battle, *señor*, and famous mines. They are almost pure silver, and had been worked by the viceroys of Spain. Miners from Almagres, Mexico, were sent to work them under protection of the San Saba mission, there on the river of the same name, in the Apache country."

"Apaches? I've heard a lot about that," Kenly said, "from the Santa Fe traders at St. Louis. They're devils, by all accounts."

"Devils; may God preserve us from them!" and the good captain signed himself furtively. "Yes. Those red devils, who prefer their patron to God, killed all the miners and put the mission to fire and knife. The mines were lost for many years, the Indians closing all that country. But our Santiago Bowie came into Texas on filibuster business; Lafitte the pirate was his partner, and to better affairs he turned good citizen of Mexico. He had found those mines again, he said, and he led a party of Americans into the Indian country to open them up."

Don Rodrigo twisted his trim mustache and gestured suavely.

"Well, they came back again," he pursued. "He and his party, bringing no silver at all, lucky to bring their lives. Not yet were those mines for Señor Bowie! Now, it is well known

to us of Bejar, to General Cos and others, that the valorous *señor* was about to try again. Thanks to the Americans, the Indians are not so strong as once they were. But those mines are not for Texas and the rebellious Texans. They are for Mexico. *Cáspita!* We must go and go at once. You comprehend?"

"We?" Kenly echoed.

"We," and Don Rodrigo smiled. With a gesture of finality, of decision, he folded up the map and pocketed it, with the bit of ore. "The map is ours, the ore is ours; there lies ahead only the trail. You, *señor*, are guest of honor, aid, assistant, friend. You will not be lonely in the service of Mexico, of *El Presidente*, I promise you! If these rebels are raising men, why, so are we. Riflemen, American recruits, to fight fire with fire! Here, Pablo. Your report. You had success?"

The pock-face stood up, with a shambling salute and a grin. Kenly found himself liking the fellow once more. Something resolute and honest and shrewd in that brown, pocked face. Good, sure eyes.

"Yes, my captain. Of those we had seen before, and one or two new ones. As Doña Maria will tell you, we sent them on to the boat. All will not come who promised, of course, but there will be some at least."

"SO it is to be hoped. Go you, at once, and see that the way is clear and those aboard the boat ready. We shall leave immediately. Thanks be to the saints, our affairs here in New Orleans cause no delay! You, Matilde, pack the few things of ours which have not gone to the boat, and pay our bill here at this place. As for you, Don Kenly—"

"And as for me," broke in Doña

Maria, with a silvery laugh, "I think we may all have a bit more wine. Pity to waste good wine, Rodrigo. Besides, our friend here does not comprehend. There are questions in his eyes. Eh, *señor*?"

"Questions, yes," replied Kenly, frowning slightly. "I don't quite understand it, why I should go, what is there for me. I'm not worried about the rights of it; but fighting against my own people—that's different."

"Ah, no, no!" exclaimed the girl impulsively. "That is not it. Come, Rodrigo; there is no haste to be off. Come, explain to our good *señor*, who has done so much for us!"

Rodrigo nodded, produced a small cigar, and lighted it at a candle. Kenly found his chair again, and the fire, and accepted the glass the girl handed him. She touched her own to it with a little clink. "To the tomorrow!" she murmured, but with her eyes she said; "To our tomorrow!" She seated herself, sipping the wine, with sidelong glances at the two men.

"You shall go with us to Bejar, *amigo*," said Don Rodrigo. "There is no other way, no better way, for you. I am on the staff of General Cos, commanding at San Antonio of Texas. What am I doing here in New Orleans, and Doña Maria? We are doing what so many Texans are doing, recruiting—but our recruits are for Mexico. We have more to offer, eh, Conchita?"

He broke into a laugh, then his gaze came back to Kenly.

"My friend, Mexico welcomes good citizens. On all who obey her laws she bestows land, privileges, and beautiful women who can be very kind if one has the right touch. Yes, *señor*, we have place for Americans who help us. As for the rebel Texans, what of them?" and he shrugged lightly. "Men with-

out a country, once they rebel. How can they fight Mexico—eight million people, two hundred and fifty thousand soldiers, with the valiant Santa Anna to lead us? And with the savages on their own borders!"

"But are they fighting?" said Kenly, cutting with his cold prosaic query into the bombastic speech. "Fighting has not begun?"

"Even now, perhaps; at any moment the fools may begin! Texas is like the donkey of many owners. The Americans there dispute and fight among themselves. Many among them know that this cause, born of ingratitude, is hopeless. Here, let me read you what one of them says—a *pronunciamento* by Don John Williams—a man of good sense and standing, not one of the riffraff who invite the firing squad!"

From the desk against the wall, Don Rodrigo plucked a printed sheet, moved a candle closer, and read in his precise, clipped English.

"The yawning jaws of a hopeless war . . . so daring, so ungrateful, and so unprovoked . . . to protect the frontiers, to sustain our position against the combined forces of the Mexican United States—O Vanity! O Ignorance! The prey of political jugglers—"

"You see what your own people think?" The reader tucked away the paper with a graceful gesture. "The Texans who so foolishly take up arms will lose all—all! It will not be a war, however. We do not ask that you fight against your own people, *amigo*. We seek you, not as a fighter, but as one to deserve gratitude, as one who gives a great gift, here!" and he slapped the pocket which held the map and the bit of ore.

Kenly reflected grimly that he had

not given either one. This don was too slick altogether, too glib with his words; yet he was a man to win respect. Now the girl leaned forward. Her voice came softly, warmly, as though for Kenly's ear alone.

"Ah, my Don Hugo! You will find all this and more to be the truth, when we see Bejar. There lies your future, my friend!"

"Assuredly," spoke Don Rodrigo, with his air of grand courtesy. "We take you to Bejar for your own safety, *caballero*. I have shown you how things are in Texas, were you already inclined that way. Further, we owe you a debt for your rescue of Doña Maria from those pigs who attacked her.

"Here you are in peril, in Bejar you are safe, honored. Mexico will be generous with brave gentlemen who serve the tricolor. Lands, bounty, honor, love of women, position! You wish land? *Pouf!* A grant of a thousand, ten thousand, acres is nothing! You understand, I speak freely; your interests and those of Mexico are the same. I'll take you to General Cos, where we may speak again of these silver mines you've given us."

Now the pock-faced Pablo made hasty entrance. "All clear, my captain! The inn is like a beehive with stings out, but the streets are quiet. I cannot answer for the recruits. They have not all come to the boat. Some have come and then gone away to get more liquor—"

"No matter." Don Rodrigo rose. "We bring Mexico what is more important than men—money! The richest silver mines in the world! Your pardon, *amigo*; I must get my things together. Conchita, dress quickly!"

He caught up belt and pistols, began to ram papers into a portfolio. The

girl slipped quietly out of the room.

Kenly sat there fingering the knife he had drawn from beneath his hat. No doubt one of those bowie-knives of which he had heard, invented by Rezin Bowie, brother of the man he had struck down. Heavy, razor-edged, the point tipped upward in a curve, of great length. The haft was crudely inlaid with massive silver. Altogether, a most distinctive knife, one in a thousand. Jim Bowie's knife! He shivered again at thought of those blue, magnetic eyes, all astare in death.

Well he knew how to discount the honeyed words of Don Rodrigo. Yet, though he could shed them, they held enough truth to burn deeply into him. He had little or no choice in the matter. And why not? As he knew, the Mexican army, Mexico itself, was the happy hunting ground of American backwoodsmen, soldiers, gentlemen. His fingers closed on the inlaid haft of the knife.

"You will come, Hugo *mio*?" The girl, now more darkly clad, a cloak bound around her figure, had reappeared and was coming to his side, her hand upon his arm like a caress. She was very close to him; he could feel the glow of her, the warm friendliness. He doubted it, he disliked her overt appeal, yet she was not to be denied.

"Don Hugo!" The elegant Rodrigo was fastening a long cloak about his throat, and spoke brusquely, with military authority. "Do you come with us?"

"Aye," said Kenly. He had found himself now, had come to a decision. It was his one chance, his only hope. Fortune drew him, bright eyes, the future that lay over the horizon. A laugh came to his lips, and his brown eyes lit up. "Aye, cap'n! I'm with you, right enough."

"Good!" Don Rodrigo clapped him heartily on the shoulder. "Matilde?"

"Ready and waiting, my captain," said Pablo. "I'll answer for her valise."

"Forward, then. I'll follow. *Señor*, will you bring Doña Maria? The rearguard to you, the post of honor!"

CHAPTER III.

MATT DEVORE.

KENLY felt the girl's hand on his arm, hugged it against his breast, met her smile with a quick, eager laugh. The repressed vitality of him leaped forth, the energy in his brown, aquiline visage. Well or ill, he was for Texas now, sure enough!

A rear hall led them through the building. Dim lights, but the hand and tongue of the girl guided Kenly. Now down a stair or two, a rear balcony opened before them, and stairs descending into the open of a rear court. Thence, by an iron gate, unlighted, into the pent darkness of a thickly misted lane. The foggy mist was as wet as a drizzle.

The lane cut through into a street. A bracketed light, pale as a phantom, marked the exit. The girl was light but firm upon the American's arm; she was panting a little, more with eagerness and excitement than with effort. Kenly divined the quick, passionate spirit of her; at the moment it thrilled him, though at the back of his head he was not so sure about this tiger-girl.

So they made exit into the street. Pablo and Matilde were well in the lead. Don Rodrigo had fallen back, just ahead of Kenly and the girl. Scarcely did they set foot on the banquette when a voice leaped out.

"Stand! Halt, thar!"

The challenge was swift and sharp as a knife-thrust. There were three men with a lantern, materializing from a sunken doorway, blocking the path, pressing in, peering by the light of their lantern. The exultant cry of wolves at the kill pealed up.

"It's the Spanish girl! And the man, by the 'Tarnal—the very man!"

"Over goes their apple cart—take 'em, boys—"

Even in the rush of bodies and grappling hands, the scene changed, plunged into obscurity. With flutter of cloak and shrewd, agile kick, Don Rodrigo shivered the lantern; his clubbed pistol rose and fell. Kenly was clutched. By riverman's trick his boot heel impacted on a knee of the man who grappled him. The fellow lurched half about and pitched down, floundering in the slime.

A cry from Doña Maria, a savage, exultant cry. A wild oath, a scream; her knife had driven home. Two more figures had loomed out of the fog, hurling themselves into the fight. Too late, for them. Kenly smashed into one, thudded in with fists and boots, sent the man gasping and staggering away. Don Rodrigo flung himself upon the other, long clubbed pistol at work. He could fight, this Spaniard.

"To the boat, Conchita—all of you!" lifted his voice. "I follow. Quickly!"

"With me, Don Hugo!" and she was at Kenly's side, grasping his arm, knife in her hand glimmering dully under the bracketed street light.

They ran, dodging among curses and scrambling forms, shouts lifting to them from farther along the street. The fog had thinned out spottily here. They scurried from cover to cover, not knowing what might be in the ambush or the open ahead. The girl was

nimble. She ran lightly, swiftly, needing Kenly's arm less than he had need of her guidance.

Pablo and Matilde fell to their rear, thudding and pattering along. And further in the rear lifted the hard, savage American shouts, dully echoing. Other shouts made reply ahead. The alarm had spread. With quick swerve, the girl shunted the chase into another lane, and here the crooked trail was one of darkness, obscurity. She must have the senses of a cat, thought Kenly.

Now she slackened pace. There were twists and corners, sudden turnings, wild bawdy voices bursting from tavern and inn where lights tokened cross streets. But the revelers were snug under roof, and the lights shone dimly; the fog, down here along the river, was thick again and dense. These, Kenly could guess, were not the precincts of the Hotel Beausejour.

Yet the smells of the wharves and the river-miasma hung in the air. Suddenly they broke out upon the levee street, merging with the fog and the night; the dank breath of the river, flowing darkly below them and lapping the pilings of the plank landings, was chill to the face. The girl guided surely, mounting to the levee and sensing all obstruction.

The tethered crafts lay ghostly and silent.

Her figure halted at a gang-plank, signaled by a dim light at the inboard end.

"Your hand, Don Hugo! We are here." Then her voice pierced ahead, urgent yet guarded. "*Alerta! Alerta! Santa Anna!*"

Dim ghostly forms stirred upon the boat, already warned by Pablo. Kenly piloted her down the incline of the narrow bridge and they halted, panting.

She was speaking rapidly to the dim figures around, giving orders. After a moment, Pablo and the old dame hove into sight, scrambling along with curses and wheezy breaths. Then the clatter of boot heels on wood, and Captain Estremadura bore in and briskly drove at them with his voice. Finding all here, he snapped orders.

"In with the plank! Cast loose a little and float free—quickly, there. What a cursed fog! But it welcomes us, it enfolds us."

The boat swung to slacked hawsers, lines were hauled in, vague curses and oaths slobbered down along the bulwarks as men worked. A small schooner, as Kenly now became aware. He laughed softly, as he could still hear the bayings of pursuit, muffled by distance, sounding at random. Let them hunt him now! No returning for him; the way back was closed by destiny. Mexico it had to be, whether or no.

Ghostly, silent, the wharves and levee melted away, floated into obscurity and mist. Lights flickered and grew. At the girl's voice Kenly descended a companionway and welcome radiance beckoned him on into the cabin.

Damp and musty here. A large lamp swung in gimbals over the center table. Berths on either side, garments hung up, racks at one end, divided by the door. At the other, oddly enough, was a brick-rimmed hearth with a grated brazier. A fireplace on a ship—Kenly laughed at this. A dark, bronzed man with gold rings in his ears was kneeling before this brazier, rousing it to a glow with working bellows, so that fierce little flames began to surge up among the chunks of black coal, and whiffs of sulphurous charcoal rose pungent on the cabin.

The girl swung a chair from the table toward the hearth, and took seat, huddling in her cloak and extending her feet to the blaze. Now, in the light, the silk lining of her dark cloak showed a smear of blood, but she heeded it not. The yellow flames were gaining. The dark man stood up and rested his bellows.

"Float with the tide," said Don Rodrigo. "As soon as we have a breeze, lift sail. Watch with sweeps."

"Mad navigation for river nights," spoke out Kenly, frowning. "That's my business. I tell you—"

THE other swept him a keen look. "Needs must when the devil drives, *señor*. Would you stay tied up to the bank, then?"

Kenly nodded comprehension. The dark man spoke, smilingly, urbane.

"There is little danger, *señores*. Already we can see stars; the fog is lifting out here on the water."

"Have men come?" asked Don Rodrigo.

"Three, *señor*. Others came and went again, for liquor or whatnot. Three remained. They are below, in the extra cabins."

"Very well. There is nothing more. Take charge above."

The man went out, closing the door behind him. Don Rodrigo threw off his cloak and hat and stood with his back to the fire, hands hooked in his pistol-belt. His gaze dwelt upon Kenly. A new authority was in his bearing, a curt crispness in his tone.

"I have decided, *amigo*, that once in Bejar it will be best for you to enlist; as an officer, of course. The Mexican uniform will protect you from the past. There we may find Americans, friends and relatives of our Santiago Bowie; and, you know,

word flies like the arrow. Besides, he has many friends in Bejar of Mexican blood. It is now a feud, you comprehend; a life for a life."

"I'm not worried over that," and Kenly smiled grimly.

"But I am," said Don Rodrigo. "What I propose is merely for your own interest. I shall report of you to General Cos, and at first opportunity—well, you have already done Mexico a service. There is nothing you may not expect. Meantime, you will receive a dollar and a quarter per diem; Mexico is generous with her soldiers. As an officer, you may receive more. As for tonight, and the few nights to come," and Don Rodrigo spread his hands helplessly, "you see that these quarters are rather limited. What to do? We must make the best of things. Pablo will show you where you may sleep in all comfort, the best we can arrange. Good night, *señor*."

Doña Maria had tossed away her cloak now, holding her hands out to the brazier. Her hair gleamed with the warm gold of promise, and her flashing smile.

"Until tomorrow, *señor*; go with God!" she said.

There was but one reply to these finalities. Kenly left her to the snug cabin and to her cousin Captain Rodrigo Estremadura. He left her, not without an ugly twist to his thoughts, a quick hot glance at the good captain; but Don Rodrigo was musingly twirling his black mustache, black eyes adrift.

Kenly found the deck listless, lit by lanterns, men at work here and there in slovenly fashion. The fog showed signs of breaking, and a breeze was stirring it into slow whirls. Kenly walked forward, and near a lantern a figure turned to welcome him. A bluff,

slatternly fellow, hat pulled down over whiskered face.

"One of us, mister? Viva Santy Anny and hooray for good pickin's!" came the thick, hoarse voice. "I seen you come aboard with that purty baggage. Me, I was a step ahead of you. A fetching dodge, wan't it? A word in a feller's ear, a little tour up the hall to a tidy room, a *señorita* all eyes and smiles to make a man forget his gal! Plenty more like her for the havin' in Mexico, says she, taking 'em light or dark. Cripes! If it hadn't been for that rumpus—but what's your handle, mister?"

"Kenly's the name."

"I'm Matt Devore. Glad to get acquainted, comrade. Sojer, ain't you? If it hadn't been for that rumpus, the gal would ha' bagged a full company. Hey, did ye know that somebody done for Jim Bowie? Yes, sir." Devore peered more closely at Kenly's profile, his breath sodden with liquor fumes. "By the token, I'm damned if you ain't the feller yourself! You—"

The sharp exclamation broke from him, broke off sharp. Awe was in his voice, incredulity, accusation.

"Be damned to you then, and sheer off," said Kenly. "You're drunk. Take yourself off or I'll handle you, my friend."

"Aye?"

Devore laughed an ugly laugh, and planted defiant legs. "I'm not so swizzled, mister; damn me, will you? Happens — wan't born in the woods to be scared by no owl. Not me. It's all right, now. I see you setting in the Beausejour, and you wasn't there when next I looked in. The place was in a gabble and the search on for somebody special. I cut stick for the levee, and next I see, you're leading the *señorita* down the plank.

"Ho, you're the feller, all right, I know your mug! But it's hoss and hoss, comrade. You're for t'other side the fence and you've got good reason, including the gal no doubt. So am I. Now look'ee, comrade! Done for Jim Bowie, and your name's up from Tennessee to Nachitoches, ain't it? Well, me the same. I've quit the bloody army, and it's me to drill dragoons. Sergeant major, and a dollar and a quarter a day or more, and stripes down the legs instead of down the back."

THE man's assumption of enforced friendliness, of criminal association, angered Kenly. The fog was into him again, the musty night; the thing most of all burning in his mind was thought of the cabin below. Cousins, indeed!

"I don't care who the devil you are or what you've been," he snapped. "Make yourself scarce or you'll be hanging on a sawyer you won't like."

"Riverman, huh?" Devore sneered, and spat thickly over the rail. "Been in the pilot house, huh? Don't you try to come the officer over Matt Devore; it's no go. You ain't in the cabin now, nor me either, and we're all in the same boat. We'll be sojering for Santy Anny, and ye needn't take no brag about doing for Jim Bowie, neither. You're a better man than him, and there's better'n you."

Kenly turned to the rail, getting a grip on himself, and held silence.

"It happens I'm in a snarl. If I get in another, or Texas gets the gouge holt on Santy Anny," growled on the man, "and if a swap of sides looks convenient for one or t'other of us, or both, you play fair! Understand? You play fair and keep mum, and the same goes for me. Happen we go over

to the Texans, you may get the stripes and the drumhead for me, but it'll be the rope or a slit gizzard for you. Them Bowie boys are screamers, and they ain't the only fellers to use a knife, neither. Mind me."

With this, Devore swaggered away and was swallowed up. Kenly leaned over the rail, a little sick at heart over the whole thing. Then he was aware of another figure, of a friendly voice. The second time that this same voice had reached into his sick soul.

"It is Pablo, *señor*, Pablo Saccaplata, and I have prepared a bed for the *señor*, on the ropes and canvas down the other hatch. The *señor* will be more comfortable than among those men forward; they are not of his kind. Ah, *señor*," and for an instant Pablo hesitated, then plunged on. "I am an honest man. They would have left me; I heard the words but my legs would not work. You saved my life, and my life is yours, *señor*. You will pardon, but—"

Again the man hesitated. Kenly had swung around.

"Well, what is it? Go ahead; I'll repeat nothing. Something you want to tell me?"

"But yes." Pablo dropped his

voice. "It is Doña Maria, *señor*. In Bejar you will find her no doña, no fine lady, but known as Conchita la Blonda. She is good to look upon, *señor*, as far as the eye may see; but in Bejar the *señor* may learn much—"

Pablo hesitated again. Kenly smiled grimly.

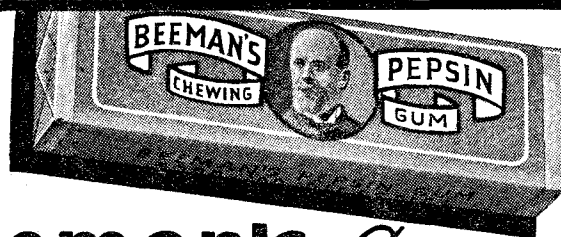
"Go ahead, *hombre*. I'm getting in debt to you, if I mistake not. Go on."

"*Diablo!* Well, Don Rodrigo may do what he has doubtless promised to do, but one does not expect meat from the wolf. The *señor* is going to be enlisted? Better so. I, too, am of the ranks of Mexico, a soldier. We shall be fellow soldiers, perhaps. I will tell my mother and step-sister about you, *señor*. She is a good girl, *señor*, that step-sister of mine, and she has all the brains that I, Pablo Saccaplata, lack so sadly. Now, if the *señor* wishes to go to bed, I will lead him. The *señor* is not angry?"

Kenly, for answer, put his arm about the wide shoulders, his fingers pressed the serape; he felt a quick, unaccustomed burst of affection for this fellow of honesty and blunt words. Somehow he sensed true friendship here, a rare thing, unwonted loyalty in the pocked visage.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Keeps right on
satisfying . . .

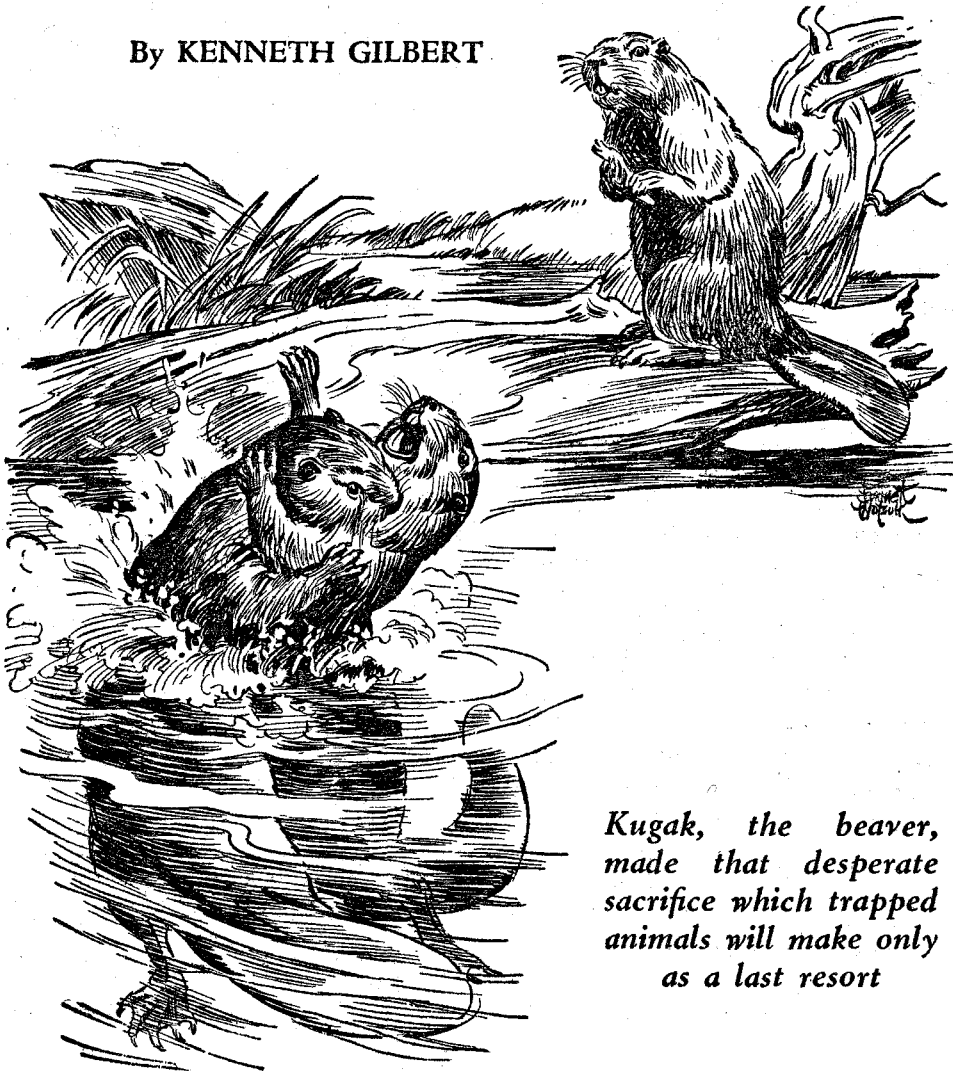


Enjoy Beeman's Gum

. . . AIDS DIGESTION

Beaver Moon

By KENNETH GILBERT



*Kugak, the beaver,
made that desperate
sacrifice which trapped
animals will make only
as a last resort*

BELOW the falls, the Skygak swirled in a deep, dark pool, then ran like liquefied glass to a small cascade a hundred yards downstream. There were no signs of life in the pool; no trout leaped there; only the swift, silent flow of the river as though it paused for breath ere it took another wild dive off a rocky shelf. Shores of the stream were still banked with

snow, and the encroaching forest stood starkly motionless, the spired spruces outlined against a sky flaming with the sunset of early spring.

Yet now some darker thing moved in the shadowy depths of the pool, and the surface was broken abruptly. A rounded, whiskered face with jet-black, beady eyes lifted from the water; then was visible a short and