

THE HAND OF DANJOU

By
ROBERT CARSE

THERE was a surf-like roar now in the firing. It never stopped. The new carbines of the Legion had a flat-slapping crack sharper than the reports of the officers' revolvers, and the muskets the Mexicans used pounded with a rough, protracted concussion. Waldemar Karig sat against the far wall

hunched low in the blue-gray waver of powder smoke and told himself once more that he didn't like it.

If you live, Waldemar, you'll remember the date and the place a long time. You're as drunk as a herd of goats. You've got a crease from a Juarista musket slug along your shoulder. But still



you know that you're in a village called Camerone. It's somewhere up the *Camino Real* from Vera Cruz in Mexico. The date is the thirtieth of April, 1863, and you're much too old to be here. You should have retired the last time your enlistment was out.

His big, splay fingers reached for the

As the Legionnaires made a bayonet rush across the patio, a cross enfilade met them.

ILLUSTRATED BY ROGER L. THOMAS

canteen at his side and in sorrow he drank from it. The *pulque* was green, very foul, and he shuddered. Nobody had seen him take the drink, though; for that he was glad. The stuff would go fast among them in the room.

He shoved up a bit higher against the adobe wall and watched the others. They stood erect, shoulder to shoulder, to meet the Mexicans. The Mexicans rushed mounted and on foot. A screaming young officer in a silver-spangled jacket once flung himself headlong from his horse nearly into the room. Machete blows racked upon bayonets. There were repeated visions of dark faces and eyes wild with the anguish of death. They went from sight with the speed of a dream and only the Legionnaires were there in the early morning sunlight of the window squares. Wounded were eased down. Ramrods were run through carbine barrels, cartridges brought from rear belt boxes to front. Men shifted from foot to foot, quietly waiting.

It was much the same at the opposite end of the room. The plank doors and the breach ripped through the far wall were defended by unbroken groups. A man killed or wounded was instantly replaced. Even the wounded were calm, tended to themselves.

Waldemar had the idea that in the smoke obscurity the figures of the Legionnaires took heroic size. You're just an old drunk, he told himself. The mule, Suzy, is your only friend, and the best you can do is care for her and the rest of her kind. But you're proud of these men and the way they fight. Look at Danjou.



CAPTAIN DANJOU stood in the middle of the room to direct the defense. He was a slender and pale man, almost foppish-seeming in his long tunic and trousers that bagged widely above his varnished boots. He wore his kepi cocked on the side of his skull and so far the fighting hadn't disarranged his pointed collar or soiled his white kid gloves. The cross of the Legion of Honour glinted on his chest, and from time to time, with an habitual gesture, he raised his right hand to give emphasis to an order. The captain can't forget that right

hand, Waldemar thought. He lost the real one with us there before Sevastopol in the old days. What he's got is a wooden one to replace it. So he waves the false hand around; he'd like to make believe it was real. But you've known many soldiers, and he's just about the best. You can trust him and all he does.

Outside and in the patio behind the Mexican firing abruptly stopped. The Legion for the first time could hear the moans of their wounded, the bubbling of blood from the lungs of a man with a chest wound, the slow, soft little cries of one about to die. Waldemar straightened; mules brayed in the distance, and he recognized the sound of Suzy and the rest of his charges. You should either be with them, he decided, or do some fighting here. Your wound is no longer an excuse for you to sit still.

But Captain Danjou had gone forward to one of the windows. He sent back the men who defended it, stood alone. A strong, confident voice called in at him, "*Oiga, el Capitan de Tercio!*" Danjou turned. He motioned to the sub-lieutenants, Maudet and Vilain, then to bow-legged Bartolotte, the Spaniard. "They seem to want to treat with us," he said. "What is it the man calls, Legionnaire?"

Bartolotte's face gathered in a tight frown under the sweep of his kepi visor. "Surrender or get wiped out, *mon Capitaine.*"

"Tell him the Legion doesn't surrender."

Bartolotte must have said more than that, for a fierce chorus of yells caught over the last of his words and musket balls hacked into the room in a heavy fusillade. Maudet and Vilain were starting back to their own places, but Danjou halted them.

"We were warned before we left Chiquihite," Danjou said. "We're up against a force of almost four thousand. It may go very badly for us here. So I'm asking all of you to swear to me that you won't surrender."

"But certainly, Captain," Vilain said, and to him Danjou held out the stiff right hand. Maudet took it, turned, and one by one the men came up and swore the oath. Waldemar was last. Emotion rose high in his throat, made him very

hoarse as he pronounced the words. Danjou was keenly staring at him. "You're about ready to get back into the fight, aren't you, oldtimer?" Danjou asked.

"My shoulder's been bothering me," Waldemar mumbled. "But I'm in shape again to give them a few, *mon Capitaine*."

"Good," Danjou said, and smiled. "You're a man who knows how."

Waldemar had gone across the room to pick up his carbine, take a quick pull on the *pulque*. His back was turned when Danjou was hit. Yet somehow he sensed it and turned around. The ball had struck the captain in the upper body. Dark arterial blood spurted over the broad blue waistcloth and the flopping trousers. It was a death blow, Waldemar knew, and sprang to the captain. But Danjou was down, supine. The thin-featured face closed in the final rigor; life left the eyes and the body was still.

Waldemar waited for Lieutenant Vilain to cover the face, arrange the clothing over the great, ragged hole of the wound. Then he went to a window, tapped one of the men there on the shoulder. "Move over," he shouted through the crash of the firing. "I've got a bill I want to pay."

He was told later in a lull between charges that it was at half-past nine the captain was killed. But time meant nothing to him, or the fact that all around him death constantly pressed. He was filled by a fury of hatred aroused by Danjou's loss. Across his memory in often surprisingly clear passage went memories of his years of service with the captain.

He recalled Presqu'Île at Gallipoli when the Legion had landed from the transports at the start of the Crimean campaign. Danjou had been his platoon officer then, found a place for him in the boat, helped him down from the ladder, taken his pack. In the action at Alma he had gone in right behind Danjou, scrambling, running, yelling, shooting and always ahead of him was the slender, immaculate figure. At the siege of Sevastopol even Danjou had lost his foppishness. Like the rest, he draped blankets around his shoulders against the cold,



Waldemar Karig

wore leather gaiters instead of his fancy boots. But Waldemar had shown him a couple of peasant tricks about keeping warm.

"Stuff my old man taught me when I was a kid in Strasbourg," Waldemar said. "First, wooden shoes. No snow, no slush is going to come through those. Here, I've made you a pair. And pack them with straw and change the straw every day. If it gets wet it rots, and so do your feet."

Danjou had grinned back at him in answer, disappeared down the trench to return with a flask of Turkish plum brandy. "To us," Danjou said as they drank. "To us and to the Legion."

But after that Danjou had got the wound that cost him his hand. Then it had been back to Africa and the mountain fighting against the Kabyle tribesmen. Out of Africa at Napoleon's own order and they marched the Lombardy plains in the high-fluttering dust of the white roads that led to the Austrians. The battles there were Magenta and Solferino, and at Solferino it had been

a bitter business, house-to-house and from wall to wall. He'd followed Danjou again, close up behind the tails of the long tunic, shouting the old Legion yells and cursing himself and the others forward.



VICTORY had come, of course, and the big parade of celebration in Paris, Danjou out in front of the company sporting the crimson ribbon and white lacquer cross of the Legion of Honour. You were happy for him and proud of yourself; still, in the rear of your head, was the idea that it couldn't go on forever. You were in the Legion because you had no other home. Go back to Strasbourg and you wouldn't last six weeks on the old man's little tenant farm. Picking hops and working the land from dawn until late after dark wasn't a way to live when almost half of what you made went to the nobleman who owned the land. You had your own kind in the Legion, most of them former peasant lads like yourself, and always in battle and out you could find a drink.

Danjou had talked to him about his drinking, asked him to cut down on it. But he never missed a formation; he was there every time the captain wanted him, and in the last couple of years the assignment as company muleteer had made the work a lot easier for him.

The carbine had become so hot that in reloading Waldemar scorched his hand, shocked himself back into reality. Mexican dead made a weird and terrible parapet before the window where he stood. Out in the open *zopilotes* flapped over the corpses of men and horses, and flies were everywhere. His front cartridge box was empty. The numbness of his shoulder and side told him how steadily he had been firing, and in surprise he looked around at Bartolotte.

Bartolotte had the appearance of being prepared for some children's prank. Powder had blackened his face until only his eye sockets showed clear. A clay pipe packed with scafferati shag was in his mouth, tilted at an angle, and around his head was a gaudy bandana handkerchief he had taken from some *cantina* girl in Vera Cruz.

"You're a lot better with a carbine," Bartolotte croaked at him, "than you are with that string of mules. You should have been serving as a *voltigeur* all along. But the Mexicans have got your mules. Only your sweetheart, Suzy, broke loose a while ago. She streaked across right in front of here. Didn't you see her?"

"Maybe I did," Waldemar said. "But I've been busy paying off for the captain, and I'm kind of confused in my head. I got to thinking of old days. Things haven't been very straight."

"If it was just you alone," Bartolotte said, "I'd put it down to the *pulque* you got in the canteen. But others have been off their heads. Back around noon they heard drums and fifes. They thought it was the Regiment, come to haul us out. Instead, it was a lot more of the Juarista infantry. That's why the firing has slacked off; they're getting ready for a big new charge."

Waldemar restrained himself from looking back into the room. He searched the cactus-studded plain for sight of Suzy and the other mules. But there were only Mexicans on their stocky cayuses, the loose ranks of infantry in cotton pants and sombreros. He counted and cursed. "Not good," he told Bartolotte.

"Not good at all," Bartolotte said. He nudged Waldemar's arm. "Take a look inside. Vilain has got his and so have many of the rest. Each charge, they knock off more of us, and we only started out with sixty-two men and three officers."

Waldemar slowly turned, and it was as if he stared into a concentrate of all his worst battle memories. The wounded and dead lay in rows, or hunched where they had fallen. Powder smoke was low along the floor; it stung the eyes and nose, gagged the throat. Above it, lighter, soft pearl in color, drifted the smoke from the burning thatch of the roof. Legionnaires had defended the loft to save the roof from being set afire, but obviously they were all dead. Bits of burning straw, of flaming wood glanced down upon the bodies of the men below. Those who had the strength pushed the fragments away; the rest lay still, muttering for water, water.

"We got none," Bartolotte said. "Every *bidon* in the place is empty except for that slop of yours. Most of the guys are a bit crazy. They've been trying to drink their own blood, their own urine."

"They can have the *pulque*," Waldemar said.

"If it was any good for a wounded man," Bartolotte said, "I would have taken it from you a time back. We're just stuck, that's all."

"But we can't surrender," Waldemar said. "We swore holding the hand of Danjou that we wouldn't."

"Don't worry," Bartolotte said. He tapped out his pipe, slid it into his tunic. "We won't have a chance. Here's the Mexicans."



THE CAVALRY started the charge. They came at the lope and then the canter and full gallop. Waldemar could see the bent bodies of the riders, the broad stirrup hoods, the slant of afternoon sunlight on machete and saber blades, bits and silver-mounted bridles. He had brought all of his remaining cartridges into his front belt box, braced ready to shoot. But Lieutenant Maudet called from behind, "Hold your fire until sixty paces. Then shoot low, for the horses."

It did something to Waldemar to see the horses go down. He had been a muleteer too long, he thought strangely; his affection for four-legged animals was too great. He wondered for an instant if Suzy were still alive, if he would see her again. Then Mexicans, men who ran on foot and shot from the hip, were right before him.

He used the narrow Legion bayonet, the stock and butt of the carbine. He killed to save himself, in a desperation where no thought was clear and action itself was subconscious. He fell, rose, was knocked back, rose again and found the window open to the dusk.

But some of the Mexicans had stayed close under the walls of the house. They had brought piles of faggots with them and those were already alight. The splintered and cracked planks of the doors were touched by flame. A jagged cast of carmine light was through the room, and Maudet called an order.

It was Corporal Berg, the last of his squad, who responded first, and after him Corporal Maine, and Katau, Wenzel, Constantin and Leonhart. They made a bayonet rush to free the door and the patio beyond.

A cross enfilade met them. They went reeling and sprawling down and past them in the lurid light sprang Mexicans. Their tight trousers and big hats made them look ludicrous in Waldemar's feverish thought, but they came to kill, he knew. He strode over the bodies of the Legion towards them with the carbine clubbed.

He didn't see the man who struck him. There was just the blow, the machete blade screeching off the carbine trigger guard and then against his skull. The thick patent leather of his kepi visor took part of the force, and yet he went backward, supine, blinded at once by the shock.

This was the end; even in the pain and blindness he could sense it. He heard Maudet yell, and Cotteau. Cotteau said, "No, Lieutenant, no! They'll kill you!" His words were smashed away by a volley. Stillness came afterwards, broken by a few shots, the slurred thud of steel against flesh, but then it was only the wounded and the sounds of the burning house.

Waldemar wiped the blood from his face and slowly his sight returned. You have to get out of here, he forced himself to think. Find your musette bag. There's ammunition in it and the map Danjou let you copy, and you'll need both. Then find the captain. Take his wooden hand on which we all swore; take his *Légion d'Honneur*. These Juaristas will just dump him in a hole in the ground without a look. Hurry, stupid. You'll fry if you stay in here . . .

He scrambled with an old soldier's skill to where he had left the musette bag and back unerringly to where Danjou lay. He stripped off the glove, loosened the straps that held the artificial hand in place. But as he started to unpin the medal Mexicans came to the doorways and fired at everything that moved within.

Waldemar was already flat, stayed so until they were gone. But there was no more time; the loft beams were buckling

and falling. He put his hand into his side tunic pocket, muttered, "*Au revoir, mon Capitaine,*" and crawled for the window.

No Mexicans were near it. They were all busy with the prisoners. He slid over the sill and belly-down out into the darkness. The Mexican dead kept him from sight for perhaps a hundred yards and then he took shelter behind a giant yucca plant. You're lucky, Waldemar, he thought. You're among the very few to get away.

He glanced back at the house. The widening flare of flame showed him the Legion wounded and prisoners. Lieutenant Maudet lay on a stretcher, but his face, his body were convulsed by pain. It won't be long for him, Waldemar thought, or for those beside him. They're so bad off they're sure to die. But the tough little corporal, Berg, isn't there, and neither is that other *cabo*, Maine. That's good; it means they got away, because they weren't in the room at the end. About twenty of us survived, and now, friend, get going before some Mexican spots you and puts your name on the dead list.

CHAPTER II

VAYA CON DIOS



HE BELIEVED for a while as he worked his way from the farmhouse that he might meet some of the other escaped Legionnaires. He came upon nobody, though, despite the fact he kept close to the *Camino Real*. The stars sent brilliance across the sky, made of the plain a faintly shimmering lake of light where the aloe plants, the cactus and yucca reared enormous in shadow. A profound melancholy whose elements were battle shock and knowledge of the loss of his comrades came over him. When he disturbed an owl among the mesquite and it hooted at him, he jumped and shouted back angry curses.

Suzy must have heard that, for in another minute or so the tall, nimble-footed mule came trotting up the road. Waldemar stood out in the middle of the way to greet her. He put his arms around her neck, patted the softness of

the ears, the rounded withers. Suzy was unharmed. She had missed being hurt in the skirmishes before the battle and the battle itself, and for that he was very grateful. He needed Suzy. She meant for him a great deal that was gone and could never return.

He ran his hands over the equipment she carried; his pack roll was still in place, so were his spare canteen and the beautifully worked goatskin sack he had taken from a Kabyle chieftain in the African fighting. Inside the sack he had food and a Colt revolver carefully wrapped in a clean cloth. He had played at dice for the Colt with a Confederate Navy deserter in Vera Cruz, won it and fifty rounds of ammunition. It was a most modern type of weapon, the new Navy model, and he drew it out, slipped it in his belt. "You're doing better, Waldemar," he said aloud, and took a short drag on the canteen that contained the *pulque*.

The drink lifted his spirit, yet he knew that he was far from being safe. He was somewhere between Chiquihite and Palo Verde, and the next town up the road was Huatrisco. But it was quite certain that the Mexicans had patrols out between the towns and he was in no shape for further fighting.

He climbed up on Suzy, closed his knees against her ribs and wheeled her off into the shadow of a shallow arroyo beside the road. There he studied the rough map he had copied days ago from Captain Danjou's at headquarters. Your best bet is to keep west towards Palo Verde, he decided. Our garrison must still be there; we were bound for it with the convoys last night when we left Chiquihite. So head that way. Keep off the road and watch yourself. And remember you haven't only yourself to worry about. You have Suzy, and a whole lot more, you have the hand of Danjou. It's something sacred, his hand. It should be kept safe . . .

Suzy moved without sound, seeming to understand the proximity of danger. Waldemar checked the map from time to time, and watched the stars, but increasingly he put his confidence in Suzy. Exhaustion set in upon him; his gaunt head lowered forward on his chest and his body went lax in the saddle. He

half slept, dreaming that he was back in Strasbourg and that it was harvest festival time and the prettiest of the village girls danced with him.

Suzy's quick, light whinny warned him. He straightened, boot soles down hard against the stirrup irons, the Colt up in his hand. "Come out," he said in French, then in Spanish. "Come out! I see you."

It was a boy of fourteen. He wore a sagging straw sombrero and cotton pants, and although there was a sack that might carry musket balls and powder slung from his shoulder, he bore no weapon. One hand grasped the stick that supported him and the other was high in a sign of surrender. "Don't shoot," he said in Spanish that was thick with an Indian accent.

Waldemar brought Suzy along the road to him. He stared down into the boy's face. "Who are you?"

"Pablo Chubic."

"Where are you from?"

"Up there." A thin shoulder lifted under the torn shirt. "The mountains."

"How did you break your leg?"

The boy glanced at the point of bone thrusting through the blood-stained cloth, then back up at Waldemar. "In the fighting this morning."

"You mean you're a Juarista."

"I—" the boy breathed harshly as he tried to find the right words—"I was taken from my village to fight with the Colonel Milan."

"Milan was in command of the outfit that attacked mine. What are you doing here?"

The boy blinked, but the tears came down anyhow, rolling brightly along his cheeks in the starshine. "A horse fell on my leg in the first charge at that house. Nobody would help me. They were all in the fighting, or helping those with worse wounds. So I came away."

"You deserted," Waldemar said. He was dismounting from Suzy. "If *el Coronel Milan* catches you, you'll be shot." The tone of his voice changed, softened. "Sit down. Pull up your pants. I'll fix your leg."

He made a splint with two straight pieces of wood, snapped the bone easily back into place. "You work like a *med-*

With one hand the boy grasped the stick that supported him—the other was high in a sign of surrender.



ico," the boy said, gasping a bit with the pain.

"Shut up," Waldemar said. "I've been in hospital too often not to know this." He cut strips from the pants bottom, securely bound the splint. "Now you'll be able to walk straight again. But before you do, you and I are going for a ride."

"To my village?"

"Si, si, your village," Waldemar said with impatience. "Take a look at this map. Can you find your way to it?"

"Without the map, even," the boy said. He smiled. "It is far in the mountains and there they have no fighting."

"I'd like some of that," Waldemar said. "I've spent more years fighting than you have living." He opened the sack on the saddle, brought out cheese, black bread and sausage. "Go ahead, have some. We'll need it before we're up in the mountains."

"*Muchas gracias*," the boy said and grasped eagerly for the food. But when Waldemar pulled the stopper from the *pulque* canteen and the other smelled the stuff, he flinched back. "You have very bad stuff," he told Waldemar, "if you don't mind my saying so. In my village, they make much better."

Waldemar took a long and thoughtful drink. "I may stay in your village quite a while, Pablo," he said.



WALDEMAR and the boy became close friends as they rode up into the mountains, Suzy bearing them both. It was a time of almost complete relaxation for Waldemar in which he recouped from his wounds and got his nerves back into shape. He trusted Suzy to take him where he was going and Pablo Chubic to lead the way.

Day by slow, sun-heavy day they climbed up out of the Tierra Caliente into the Tierra Templada. Here it was cooler, the sun much more bearable, and there were no signs of war. Pablo had swung out around both Tomalto and Puebla over a series of side roads and trails, Waldemar recognized. The boy knew the country as he had said, and no more than twice had he looked at the map.

Along the route they followed they

met nobody but easily moving, slowly spoken peasants. Those people came from Oaxaca with burros laden with vanilla that sweetened the dusty air. Ox carts that had huge, solid wooden wheels hauled maguey to the presses of the distant plantations, and in the ditches women hunkered making the oval-shaped *tortilla* cakes out of maize. The greetings were always the same, "*Que tal, hombres?*" Then, when they had answered, "*Vaya con Dios.*"

You're far from the Legion, Waldemar mused. These are a peaceful people who know little if anything about war. He began to wonder why he was in Mexico. You came to serve an Austrian emperor and a Belgian empress, put on their throne by Napoleon of France and the same Franz Josef whose troops you fought against in Lombardy. It's a strange business, soldier. The Mexicans don't want you or any foreigners here. This country belongs to them and they fight for it like mountain lions . . .

The thought disturbed him. He kept his mind away from it by talking with Pablo about the region ahead. There, Pablo said, was the great cordillera of Las Combres. His home village was in the high reaches behind the first range. It was the ancient, fabulous Aztec land, named Anahuac. The trees were pines and firs, the air clear and sharp, eagles as the keenest machete. Eagles soared the gorges; hawks fell straight in drumming descent upon the village chickens. "I will be happy to get back there, *Legionario.*"

"Don't call me Legionnaire," Waldemar grunted. "Not for a while, anyhow." He had discarded his blue, gold-buttoned tunic, put it and his kepi in a haversack. His loose white trousers and thick *brodequins* were covered with dust and not particularly noticeable as military, and he wore on the back of his bald skull a felt sombrero, the decorated draw-cord dangling beneath his chin. "You and I are just a couple of friends out for a ride," he went on. "Tell me some more about this Anahuac."

Pablo's somber eyes lightened. "First," he said, "I must tell you that I wasn't conscripted from my village. I heard of the war up there and I ran away to the fighting."

"There you go!" Waldemar snapped at him. "Back on the same damned subject. How about the mountains?"

The mountains were magnificent, Pablo admitted. Where two of them met together, the dead passed, but the road was guarded by the spirits of the great snake and the great alligator, the eight deserts and the eight hills. A small dog was put by a dead man's side to carry him across the nine waters.

"You're real cheerful," Waldemar said. "You start talking about war and end up talking about the dead."

Pablo grinned, understanding Waldemar very well. He stroked Suzy's neck where he rode ahead of the other tandem style. "Tell me again the story of the hand of Danjou," he said. "Then of how you got the goatskin bag from the chieftain in those other mountains."

"All right," Waldemar said. "But it's dry work. You sure your people make good *pulque*?"

"The best in all of Las Combres," Pablo said. "My father keeps his own supply, always a big jugful."

"*Ca y est!*" Waldemar said, and wet his lips with anticipation. "You know how the captain was killed, and why I took the hand with me, have it there in the haversack. I explained to you, too, about Sevastopol, and the cold weather we had during the siege. Danjou was wounded by a sniper one night, and his hand froze. The *medicos* were forced to amputate it. But the Beni-Snassen, they're another story. They're over in Africa, a tribe of the Kabyle people, and tough. I was lucky to get the bag from the chieftain. They're big men, who carry knives in their teeth while they fight, and whose women come after them to finish off the wounded."

Pablo swung around on the mule's broad back to look at Waldemar. "In truth, you're a lucky man to be alive."

"Too much so to want to go back to my outfit," Waldemar said. Then he was silent, caught in morose thought, remembering the hand of Danjou. He must take it back, he knew. If he didn't, all his life would be without meaning. He was old and tired, stiff with his wounds and sick of war, still he would hate himself if the captain's hand wasn't returned to the Legion . . .

The thought became more and more insistent in the days after Pablo brought him to the village of Miramente high in the Las Combres cordillera. The village people had believed Pablo lost, and his family gave a huge party of celebration. Waldemar ate roast pig and *tamales* stuffed with chicken and beans, drank *mescal* in preparation for the *pulque*. He took the *pulque* jug to the hut Pablo's folks had given to him, drank himself into numbness, woke up to repeat.

He was drunk for a week. At the end of that he had the shakes so badly his teeth clattered like loose piano keys and he lived in a gray world of abysmal misery. It was his impression that he was going blind due to the effects of the head wound he had received at Cameron. He got out the Colt to shoot himself, and only the thought of the hand of Danjou restrained him. He stumbled, stooped and groaning, to the door of the hut and called for Pablo.

The boy came running. "I've taken care of Suzy," he told Waldemar before he was aware of the man's condition. "I watered her and fed her, and just now I beat the fastest mule in the village in a race. The prize was a jugful of *pulque* and you can have it."

"Don't mention that word," Waldemar said, and collapsed against the wall of the hut. "Listen to me. I'm an old man, blind and dying of my wounds."

"You aren't sure it isn't—" Pablo began.

"No!" Waldemar shouted and added several new curses to Pablo's vocabulary. "Get this straight. You're to take Suzy and go down to Puebla. You'll find the Legion, and not just the Legion but the First Battalion. Look for Lieutenant Ganz. He was sick the day of Cameron, so he missed the action and he's all right. Tell the Lieutenant's what happened and where I am. Make him know that I have the hand of Danjou on which we all swore the oath. If you don't meet up with him, look for Corporal Maine or Corporal Berg. They survived from my company, the Third, and they'll understand what should be done."

"But how am I going to find the Legion?" Pablo said. "And who'll believe me if I do?"

"Suzy will be with you," Waldemar

muttered, up through the depths of his misery. "She has the Legion brand on her quarter, and anyhow everybody in the regiment knows her."

"My father would be angry if I left," Pablo said. "He still doesn't like it that I went away last time."

Waldemar groped across the hut and took down from the wall pegs the Kabyle goatskin sack. He drew out from it the long-barreled Colt revolver. "The sack's yours if you make the trip," he said. "And you can carry the revolver. All right?"

"*Muy bien*," Pablo said. He smoothed his fingers over the scrolled work of the sack, hung it from his shoulder by the braided strap. Then he took the Colt and with a flick of the wrist killed half a dozen imaginary enemies. "Tonight, after my father is asleep . . ."

"Sleep, that's what I need," Waldemar said. He flopped down upon the pile of pine boughs in the corner. "But tell them in the battalion to hurry back here. I'll be dead unless they do. I'm an old and a sick and blind man."

Pablo leaned over to pat his shoulder, but Waldemar was already asleep.

CHAPTER III

THE ASSAULT



IT WAS great delight for Pablo to ride Suzy. Always before Waldemar had been aboard the big sorrel animal with him. Now he could move at a fast canter along the Las Combres trails and out on the plain below on the open road he could keep to a trot hour after hour.

But in Puebla they told him that the Legion had gone south. It was engaged in the siege of Oaxaca, and he had better get out of town before somebody took that mule from him. Pablo thought that over, then decided on Oaxaca.

He had deserted in fright from his first battle, he remembered, and here was a chance to test himself again. More, he had become romantically impressed by Waldemar's possession of the hand of Danjou, wanted to share the thrill the Legion would have when he told them of it. He kept Suzy steadily moving south.

Headquarters for the Oaxacan campaign was at a place called Hacienda Blanca. He came to it on foot leading a scrawny and very jaded Suzy. The last few days had passed with little water and no food for him and the mule. In front of the thick-walled headquarters building, though, he recognized the short tunics and flat kepis of the Legion, sneaked past the sentries and asked an orderly for Lieutenant Ganz of the First Battalion.

Lieutenant Ganz was a broad man become swarthy with the southern sun, a beard down over his tunic collar. He eyed Suzy thoughtfully and then Pablo Chubic. "You were sent by Legionnaire Waldemar Karig?" he said.

"*Si, Teniente*," Pablo said. "He is sick and at my home in the mountains."

"Sick, or drunk?" Ganz said.

Pablo shrugged. "Maybe one from the other. But he was wounded at Camerone and it was near there I met him. He charged me to come and see you or somebody of the Legion. It is that he wants you to know that he has the hand of the Captain Danjou."

"I might have you put in the guard-house, *chico*," Ganz said in a slow voice. "It would be easy for me to think that you're a liar or a spy. But Captain Danjou served with me for years. We were together at—"

"—the Malakoff works in front of Sevastopol," Pablo said. "Then in Lombardy, then against the Beni-Snassen in Algeria."

Ganz took a quick stride. He grasped the boy by the shoulder. "You know a lot," he said.

"But yes, *Teniente*. And I tell it to you so that you'll believe me. A spy, though, I'm not that . . . They wouldn't send one as innocent as me."

Ganz put back his bearded chin and laughed. "Wait here," he said. "I want to get Berg and Maine to talk to you."

Both Berg and Maine were hard-faced men. They looked Pablo Chubic over closely, studied Suzy, the Kabyle sack and the Colt. "He's been wherever old Leather Gut was," Maine finally murmured. "This is Karig's mule and gear."

"Listen, young one," Berg said, his glance intense. "The names of Danjou and Maudet and Vilain have been put

in gold on the wall of the Palais des Invalides at Paris. The word Camerone is on our battle flag. For us, the hand of Danjou is a very great thing."

"I understand so," Pablo said. "That's why I'm here. Waldemar wants you to come to my village of Miramente for the hand of Danjou."

Berg began to speak again and stopped. A trumpeter ran from the door of headquarters, swung up his instrument and blew a swift, stirring call which Pablo knew to be Assembly. The Legionnaires stared at each other; more trumpets were sounding and out in the encampment beyond orders were shouted, repeated. "Time we went," Ganz told Maine and Berg. "It's the assault."

"You think that I should stay here?" Pablo asked, worried that they had forgotten him.

"Get back off the road with Suzy," Ganz said. "Don't bother with anybody and don't let anybody bother you. Be sure and wait for us."

The regiments moved out at the double, the Legion, the Zouaves, the Chasseurs d'Afrique, some few cavalry, and after them the sappers and heavy artillery. Pablo watched wide-eyed, holding Suzy tight by the hackamore. This was war such as he had never known it. Here was the beginning of a tremendous engagement.

But a Legionnaire with the red *galons* and emblems of a supply sergeant had noticed him and Suzy. The sergeant crossed the road between the pounding columns. "Where did you get that mule?" he said.

"Belongs to a friend of mine," Pablo said. "Waldemar Karig of the Third Company of the First Battalion."

"Like hell," the sergeant said. "The First's already gone up to the attack. Give me the mule, *chiquito*, if you like keeping healthy. Animals are valuable around here."

Pablo thought of the Colt; he thought of wheeling Suzy around and making a flying leap for her back, then a galloped retreat. But the sergeant seemed to understand his notion, stood ready to strike. Pablo released the hackamore. "Waldemar will be very angry," he said confusedly. "It's his mule."

When the sergeant went along the road with Suzy, he followed at a discreet distance. Maybe in the battle, he thought, he could get a chance to claim Suzy again, ride away with her. But right ahead now were the gun pits and the entrenchments and he could see through the flare of battle smoke the walls of the fortress of Oaxaca.

Howitzers and siege cannon flung forward their destruction around him. Wounded were already coming back from the first assault, some blind, some without arms and legs. Pablo's stomach muscles began to quiver. He hadn't liked battle at Camerone, he recalled, and his feeling hadn't changed.

A red-glowing solid shot suddenly plunged from one of the Oaxaca battlements and sighed through the air. Pablo ducked, his hands about his head. There was a frightful shock, a clang of iron, screams, low cries. He looked up to see what was left of the French siege gun and its crew beside him. His new-found sense of maturity and all his curiosity left him. He wheeled around and ran out across the fields, back from the battle, anywhere that he might be safe.



PABLO'S father had a determined expression and a machete in his belt. With him were the *cacique* of the village and six or seven other men. They stood at the door of the hut and beckoned to Waldemar to come out. "Sure, friends," Waldemar said. "Right away."

He knew what they wanted, he told himself, and he was ready. His terrible headache had disappeared, his sight returned a few days after he had finished the *pulque*. Since then he had recognized how wrong he was to have sent Pablo off on Suzy, and he had taken great care to bury the hand of Danjou at night. He had made a tight, weather-proof box for the hand, stolen out in the darkness to dig a hole beneath a great fir tree at the edge of the village. With things as uncertain as they were, it was much better to leave it there. He might lose it on the trail or have it taken from him when the villagers chased him out . . .

"Where is my son?" Pablo's father asked.

"No *sabe*," Waldemar said, blinking.

"But your mule is gone. Pablo took it. You sent him some place on it." That was the *cacique*, the top man in the village talking, and Waldemar intently listened. "You can tell his father where he is gone?"

"No," Waldemar said, "except that I sent him to find my outfit."

The *cacique* frowned. He indicated one of the young men in the group. "That one," he told Waldemar, "has just come back from outside the mountains. Your lot is marching north in the direction of Monterey. You had better go meet it. Leave us. This is no place for you any more."

"Maybe you're right," Waldemar said cautiously, thinking of the mountain trails without Suzy to carry him. "I'll go tomorrow, in full daylight."

"Now and not tomorrow," the *cacique* said. "You understand what I mean?"

Waldemar tried to smile. "Sure," he said. "Sure, friend . . ."

He came upon the Legion at the foot of the mountains, headed for the northeastern states and the fighting there. He had rehearsed his story many times while he waited alongside the road, wasn't afraid when the advance patrol sent him back to the colonel.

"I've heard all that before," the colonel said. He tugged at his little white beard and watched Waldemar with baleful eyes. "Lieutenant Ganz told it to me at Oaxaca; some Mexican boy came around with it and then disappeared. I don't believe a word. Of course if you could produce for me the hand of Danjou, that would be a different thing."

"But, *mon Colonel*, if you—"

"If I wasn't short of men," the colonel said, "I'd have you shot. But the man handling your company's mules is a worse drunk even than yourself. Take over from him, and no more drunkenness, lying or malingering. Dismissed!"

Waldemar hoarsely sighed to show that vast injustice was being done him, but then gave the colonel his smartest salute, banged his heels with precision as he about-faced.

Suzy was among the company animals. She stamped and neighed in joy at sight of him, put her muzzle up against his neck, and he felt much better. But Lieutenant Ganz was riding down the line

and he stared hard-eyed at Waldemar. "Don't make any mistake, Leather Gut," Ganz said. "The colonel let you get away with it once, but it won't happen again. I'll be watching you all the while, and so will Maine and Berg. Where's the hand of Danjou?"

"Up in the Las Combres mountains, in the village that boy came from. I buried it there to keep it safe."

"Why did you send him, and not bring it back yourself?"

"Because I was afraid I'd lose it if I carried it any more. You see, I'm not in very good shape, Lieutenant, and I wasn't sure I could make the trip."

"You'll be in a lot worse unless you start to do some work," Ganz said. "Now get those mules up the road. And don't ride Suzy. She's a pack animal, not your special mount."

"*Oui, m'sieu le Lieutenant*," Waldemar said, and saluted. But inside him the rage hotly rose. So this is the treatment they give you, he thought. Names and insults when you swear on your word of honor as a Legionnaire that you saved for them the hand of Danjou. Just because you drink occasionally, and spent a few weeks in the mountains getting in shape. But they forget that you're a soldier, Waldemar. You'll have to show them, and then they'll believe all you've said . . .

For him, though, there was little actual combat in the north. He tried it once at Vittoria after bringing Suzy to a forward unit with a load of ammunition. He left her and joined the assault wave, rushed far out in front beside the color bearer. When he came back across the plaza he passed the colonel. The colonel gestured to him, and his hope sprang high. Now, he told himself, the man will listen.



THE colonel leaned down from his horse. His saber as he swung it almost nicked the end off Waldemar's nose. "Your duty is as a muleteer," he said. "Keep out of the assault ranks. Try anything more like that and you go to prison for at least five years."

"*Oui, mon Colonel*," Waldemar said, and Suzy stepping neatly behind him, swung to the rear.

But he found half a gallon or so of *pulque* that night, hid in among the mules on the picket line while he drank it. His despair was complete. Pablo had disappeared leaving no trace, he realized. If you don't have the boy to guide you, you'll never get back to Miramente. And instead of praise or trust from the colonel, you get slapped with talk about a prison piece. The men here in the company think you're good for nothing except as a target for their stupid jokes. You're all through, Waldemar. It was a damned bad day when you decided to take the hand of Danjou . . . He rolled down finally in a stupor and pitched under Suzy's belly, slept there until at daylight she nudged him awake.

His head seemed to contract and expand as though his temples were part of huge, slamming bellows. His mouth felt as if a fire made of old scraps of leather and rubber burned there. He saw three Suzies and six picket lines; the supply sergeant's face was like a comet that was about to explode against his own. "Saddle and pack," the supply sergeant said. "We're pulling out."

"Coffee," Waldemar whispered through the volcano that was his throat. "Coffee, in the name of God."

Somebody he barely saw put a coffee tin in his hand and he drank. The stuff fell down the collapsing cavern of his

stomach, then hit like a load of logs off a cliff. He staggered and swayed from side to side, and the supply sergeant said, "Look at Leather Gut. He's practicing to go in the ballet."

But the column was in motion, and he clung to Suzy's harness and moved along to keep from being trampled. He counted at least a thousand times during the morning when he thought he had taken his last stride, and at noon there was no halt. He gazed in black horror at the man ahead of him and croaked, "Where are we going?"

"Monterey," the other said. "We're supposed to relieve the place. That means thirty of these leagues—more than a hundred and fifty miles—that we march without a break."

Waldemar lacked the strength to speak further; he was too weak to remember how to pray. He just kept lifting one boot and putting it down in front of the other and in the hammering sunlight the fumes of the *pulque* he exuded set up around his head a little silver cloud like a halo.

Suzy was hauling him in the saddle, all but unconscious, at the end. When the order to halt was given, Waldemar slumped at her sweat-streaked side, fumbled to release the pack and harness straps. The familiar motions returned a bit of clarity to his thinking and he



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stared gloomily out over Suzy's back in the dusk.

The horizon held the vast purple peaks of the Las Combres cordillera. He was going there tonight, he and Suzy. Maybe they'd get to Miramente without Pablo, and maybe they wouldn't. But they'd try. He'd had enough of this. Unless he could prove he had saved the hand of Captain Danjou, he was finished in the Legion . . .

The chill mists before dawn awakened him. He recalled his promise to himself and silently saddled Suzy, loaded his sacks with food and water and fodder while around him the company lay in deep sleep. He eased Suzy away pace by soft pace towards a small depression at the edge of the bivouac. Along that and then he came to the road.

He crossed it and headed for the mountains.

But a sentry from another company challenged him as he cut across the road, fired a shot when he didn't answer. He was already mounted. Flattened down upon Suzy's neck, he went into the mesquite at a quick gallop. The sentry failed to fire again, although there were some

shouts from the bivouac. You're all right, Waldemar, he thought. Just keep on going.

Ganz heard the shot, pulled himself cursing out of his blankets. It was as he had suspected; both Karig and Suzy were gone.

"You should have known it was getting too tough for the oldtimer," he muttered as he strode through the mists to Captain Saussier, the commander of the column.

"A man has deserted my outfit," he told Saussier. "It's old Leather Gut Karig, the one who swears he took the hand of Danjou and hid it up in the mountains."

"Go and get him and bring him back," Saussier said. "We don't want any deserters. Also, to have the hand of Danjou later would be a fine thing. I can only let you detach a small patrol. But choose men you trust. That's bad country out there. And there is no sense in taking unnecessary risks."

"Thanks," Ganz said. "Danjou was a personal friend of mine, and all the men who'll go with me are survivors of his company."



Waldemar lacked the strength to speak and he was too weak to remember how to pray. Susy was hauling him in the saddle, all but unconscious, at the end.

CHAPTER IV

SAFE CONDUCT



WALDEMAR was asleep in the saddle before mid-morning. Despite all his usual wariness and his great desire to get to Miramonte and regain the hand of Danjou, the effects of the march just past were too much for him. He nodded and yawned, attempted to hold his aching body upright, and still he could not remain awake. He slid over further and

further in the saddle, lost the last of his balance and fell. He pitched asprawl within the shade of a big yucca plant and when he began to arise fatigue held him down.

Suzy had halted, he noticed with some relief, and that was a good sign. A real campaigner like her didn't halt if danger was nearby. His eyelids sagged shut, his mouth open, and he returned fully to sleep.

But Suzy was nervous, kept watching the way they had come, at last kicked him firmly in the ribs. He sat up and de-

scribed her parentage, then saw the dust clouds out on the plain. There were two. One was made by a band of mounted men and it was large, moved fast. The other was between it and him, and beneath the tawny dust swirl he could distinguish Legion kepis and bayonet points. No more than ten men were in the Legion group, though, and they turned to fire upon the mounted band behind.

A feeling of profound regret came to Waldemar. Fear wasn't the source; he had known too much of death to be influenced by its presence. But he recognized what was going on out there and the effect it would have on his chances to reach Miramente. A Legion unit had been sent out to bring him back. That had been intercepted and cut off from the column by a roaming force of Juarista horsemen.

If he missed being captured by the Legion, he'd be caught by the Juaristas, and they took no prisoners.

"What a hell of a war," he said to Suzy. "The French pass an order to shoot all prisoners, so the Juaristas do the same. Now a man can't go on a little trip without getting his head banged in one way or the other." But Suzy was wheeling around. She was starting at a smart trot towards the Legion. Waldemar grasped the reins, swung stiffly into the saddle. "You and I go together, Suzy, no matter where . . ."

Lieutenant Ganz had a hard time restraining the men of the patrol. They dumped Waldemar prone, gathered around him with their carbines clubbed and raised. "No," Ganz snapped at them. "Giving him the cure won't help us. We'll hold him for later when we can get some pleasure out of it. Our job is to shake loose from that bunch behind."

"Won't Captain Saussier send a relieving force after us, sir?" Corporal Maine inquired.

Ganz faintly smiled. "Saussier is in the middle of a battle over there. We can't get back and we'll have to try for the mountains."

"That's only about five miles away," Waldemar said, remembering the meaning that the hand of Danjou was supposed to have for these men. "I know

the trails, and I'll take you right to where—"

"Shut up, you!" Maine swung his carbine against Waldemar's skull with a jouncing crack. "The time we'll trust you is when you're dead."

"Trust Suzy, then, and not me," Waldemar said stubbornly. The ragged, dark-faced horsemen were on the nearest ridge. Musket balls kicked through the air and over the stones. "I know what I'm in for, but she's a good mule."

"All right," Ganz said. "We go up in the mountains. We'll be cleaned out if we make a stand here in the open. Sling the old slob up on the mule and let her lead the way. She should be able to find the trail."

Waldemar had nothing but disordered and vague impressions of that journey into the mountains. He rode dully forward on Suzy, head-down, eyes often shut, all of his spirit gone from him. But Ganz was a fine soldier, and obviously Suzy knew the trail, for at dusk they were free of pursuit by the Juaristas.

They camped and sentries were posted. A small fire was made, food cooked. The tough corporal, Berg, brought Waldemar his ration, put it down beside him in silence. "I don't want it," Waldemar said. "I want to take care of the mule."

"Lieutenant's orders," Berg said, and touched the pistol at his hip. "You move, you get shot. Don't worry—we'll tend to the mule."

Waldemar lay awake all night. He listened through the wind in the pines to the snuffing sound Suzy made when she slept. He returned in memory to the first time he had seen Suzy. It had been at the remount stables of the base at Sidi-bel-Abbes. Suzy was young then, sleek and handsome, had brought a fine price for the Arab who had sold her. She had served well in the mountain campaigns, carrying the wounded with great skill and tenderness. At Sevastopol she had been stoic under fire, motionless when being unloaded, afterwards making her way easily along the narrow turnings of the entrenchments where men ducked and crawled to evade the enemy sniper fire. During Solferino he had been in charge of her part of the time, and she had made many trips through the wicked cross enfilades in the streets to bring out

wounded and come back again with badly needed ammunition.

Suzy was his only friend. Now, though, he was denied even her care. Life wasn't only finished for him in the Legion. It was finished for good. Lying there, he tried to discover the reasons. You were mistaken in leaving the hand of Danjou up on the mountain. If you had brought it with you, there wouldn't be any trouble. But you didn't, and so you're going to be shot. And who'll explain to Suzy when they take you out before the firing squad?

That thought, of Suzy left without him, sent tears against his eyes. You can't get shot, he repeated over and over to himself until the hour of dawn.



GANZ was up with the dawn. He ordered camp struck and Suzy saddled. But when Berg, at the lieutenant's command, started to head her down the trail, she whirled and kicked the corporal in the belly. Maine jumped forward and she gave him a perfect sample of the same treatment. Berg, panting and prostrate, pulled out his pistol. "I'll fix her," he yelled.

"Wait a minute," Waldemar called in a furious voice from where he stood at the rear of the little column. "Suzy knows what she's doing. There must be somebody down below on the trail."

Ganz crept to the edge of the trail, stared down into the misty valley. "The oldtimer's right," he said. "That bunch caught up to us during the night. Their scouts are out among the trees below." He turned, and his face was stern, drawn. "How far to the village where you stayed, Legionnaire?"

"Another four hours' climb," Waldemar said, startled and pleased that the lieutenant had called him Legionnaire. "The folks in it aren't the scrappy kind. They won't bother us and we'll be safe."

"If you're wrong—" Ganz began, and stopped himself. "Fall in! Let's go!"

The people of the village of Miramente stood sullen, wordless as they came up the short street. But Waldemar, his confidence restored by Ganz, called out, "Where's my friend, Pablo? I want to see him."

"You ask for Pablo," the *cacique* an-

swered, "and it was you who tricked him into going away from here. He took the mule you ride, and if he's back it's no fault of yours."

"Listen," Waldemar said. "I did Pablo no harm. He went away because he felt like it. But we're not here to bother you. I want to get something I left under a tree, and then we're going to help you. A band of armed men is coming up the trail."

The *cacique's* glance was hard and narrow. "What is under a tree?" he said. "Who are the men coming up the trail?" He made a quick gesture and the village elders disappeared into the huts, returned with machetes and flintlocks, a huge horse pistol.

"We seek a hand," Waldemar said, beginning to feel confused again. "It belonged to our dead captain."

"Here is a wild one," the *cacique* said. "He is either a liar or mad."

But Waldemar paid him no attention. He turned, hearing the shout. Pablo was at the end of the village street; he loped its length with a rapid stride. "*Como, hombre?*" he said to Waldemar and lifted the old man down out of the saddle. "It's fine you and the other Legionnaires are here. This day we need you. I saw you coming, but I waited to make sure of the lot that was behind you."

"Talk now to me!" the *cacique* said, and grasped Pablo by the shirtfront.

"Those who came from Mesa Alta last month and stole our sheep are on the trail again. They were close in back of the Legion."

"But they're Juaristas, your own troops," Ganz said. He had moved beside the *cacique* and Pablo. "They shouldn't harm you."

A strange, bitter smile tightened the lines of the *cacique's* face. "Juaristas down on the plain," he said, "outlaws in the mountains. They are men who have gone to the war to rob. When they were here before, we killed three, and they will want a lot of vengeance from us. But we'll stop them on the trail, roll boulders down on their heads."

"Let us handle this for you," Ganz said. "We're professional soldiers."

The *cacique* took a backward pace. He lifted the antique horse pistol and a machete from the grasp of one of the

elders. "How do we know," he said, "that you aren't part of that lot?"

"I'm a lieutenant of the Legion," Ganz said. "Of the Third Company of the First Battalion." Rage had sent a spread of color across his face and his voice was harsh.

"Come on, sir," Maine said. "Let these sports get murdered their own way. We can take care of ourselves out in the woods."

Nobody there watched Waldemar. He dropped the reins over Suzy's head to keep her still, slipped away past the huts. Now's your time, Waldemar, he told himself. Now you must do it. These people gave you shelter. They took care of you. Pablo is one of them; they have a nice village. It's the place where you hid the hand of Danjou . . .



HE WAS at the end of the street. Ahead of him, majestic with the sun upon its branches, was the tall fir tree.

He knelt down and lifted the flat stone between two roots. The soil beneath the stone was sandy, came loose as he clawed at it with every bit of his strength. The cavity became deeper, wider, but for a moment he couldn't see the box, thought with a shock of fear that it wasn't there.

But then he had his fingers on it, was lifting it out. He fumbled open the crude latch he had made, pushed back the lid. The hand of Danjou lay within just as he had left it, and he murmured, "Bon! How very good . . ." The box like that, open in his grasp, he sprinted back up the street.

Men were behind him, he sensed, but he didn't slow down to turn and look at them. They were the outlaws; he was sure of that, and it was enough. What counted was to show the hand of Danjou to the Legionnaires.

Ganz and the *cacique* faced each other in an extreme tension of nervous fury. The *cacique* had the horse pistol raised like a miniature cannon, and Ganz was clasping the grip of the holstered revolver on his belt. On either side of the street but still no more than a few paces apart, the Legionnaires and the villagers stood in the same poses and with the same intention as their leaders. Waldemar came between them, his glance down

upon the box and the hand of Danjou.

"You want to fight these folks," he said to Ganz, "when it's in their village this has been kept?"

Ganz started to speak and a sort of grunting noise came from him. He stared down into the earth-crusted box. His fingers touched it, slowly, with delicate care, then moved within, brought forth the hand of Danjou. "So," he whispered. "So it is true."

Maine came forward, hearing him and seeing what he held, and after Maine there was Berg and the others who had survived. It was Waldemar's impression that they stood gazing down at the hand of Danjou for a long time. But later he knew that it was only for a very few seconds. The outlaws had moved up from the head of the trail to the fir tree. They spread out there in a fan-shaped fashion to throw a careless volley into the village street.

The women and the children scampered for the doors of the huts. The *cacique* and the rest of the men very wisely flung themselves flat. But Ganz and the Legionnaires who had been studying the hand of Danjou acted with deliberation. Ganz dropped the hand back in the box, gave the box to Waldemar. "Keep this safe," he said. "Get in one of those houses." Then he took his sword from the scabbard, unholstered his pistol. There was no order called; he and the other Legionnaires simply charged at the full run along the street.

Waldemar was conscious of bayonets being locked to carbine muzzles, of flopping, torn trousers and faded blue tunics that were far too big as targets. But the villagers were joining the Legion. The *cacique* and the elders were also racing down the street.

"In here, Waldemar." That was Pablo. "I have already brought in Suzy and in the corner is a jug of *pulque*. Later, I will see you. If you lose the hand, though, things will be very bad for you."

Waldemar sat and drank with the box held tight between his knees. Suzy whinnied and stamped once or twice when the fighting got close, but when he tried to get to his feet she blocked the way to the door. "Needn't worry," he muttered at her. "You're Legion, too, and you know I have my orders."



DOWN at the foot of Las Combres where Pablo left them the next day there was a large and well-uniformed force of Mexican regular cavalry. The young colonel put his mustang forward at the canter, offered Ganz an easy salute. "I have been sent, *Teniente*," he said, "to take you and your group to Puebla."

Ganz gazed bleakly at his weary, sagging files and Pablo standing tense-faced where he led Suzy. "You mean surrender?"

"No." The colonel stroked his mustang's neck. "We're here to give you safe conduct to Puebla, from where you are to be sent out to the coast. All French troops have been ordered to leave Mexico, including the Legion."

"*Muy bien*," Ganz said. "But allow me to pass that on to my men. They're—a lot who like to fight."

"So I understand," the colonel said dryly. "Yesterday, up at Miramente, you did quite well indeed against the bandit forces."

"Thank you," Ganz said.

"The thanks should be shared," the colonel said, and bowed.

Waldemar was far down in the misery of his *pulque* hangover. The other Legionnaires bawled the news at him, but he didn't get it straight until almost into

Puebla. Then Ganz came and rode at his side. Ganz touched the box which was secured inside his tunic. "I have it here, Leather Gut," he said. "We'll take it back with us to our Salle d'Honneur at Sidi-bel-Abbes."

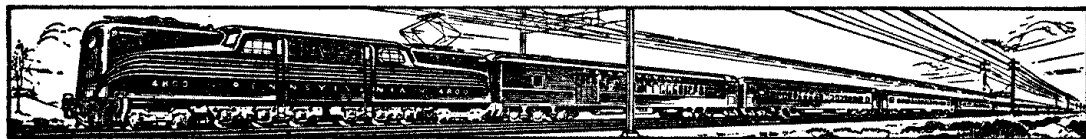
"Well, all right, we're going back," Waldemar mumbled. "But you know what's going to happen to me."

"Sure," Ganz said. "You'll get the Military Medal and you and Suzy will be retired. You're both finished with the duty."

"That's the trouble," Waldemar said, a tragic look in his bleary eyes. "The regiment throws me out and I go to Strasbourg because I haven't any other place to go. Who believes me, though, when I tell them about Camerone? The hand of Danjou will be in the Salle d'Honneur and I'll just be another drunken old soldier with a story nobody can believe."

"You're wrong," Ganz said. "When you're discharged, there'll be a good pay-off coming to you. If you don't drink it up, you'll have more than enough to buy Suzy."

Waldemar straightened in the saddle. He laughed so hard that Suzy cocked her ears in surprise. "I hadn't figured that way," he said. "If they don't believe me back in Strasbourg, she'll just kick the hell out of them . . ."



End of the Line

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