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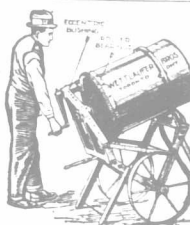
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sees a good chance to get himself killed.

"I've always remembered that morning—how you crossed the river for him. They would have had him but for you. I liked that—more than you know."

"I didn't see how he could live—"

"Nor I, at first. . . He's apt not to speak of it. You won't mind, will you?"

"I'd much rather he wouldn't," said I, and inquired how many men were in the valley.

"There are over two hundred miners below. With Viringhy's force and the garrisons along the trail—about three hundred in all. I think there's a fight in nearly every man," he added. . . . "A rifle and a dozen rounds of ammunition—positively no mining tool is so important."

Huntoon was coming toward us. Plainly on the gain he was.

After breakfast, the old Master led us through the ruined city. Huntoon was quick to see the possibilities for pits and emplacements. . . . Two machine-guns, which we did not see, but which Romany commented on in blithe fashion, were ready to command the approaches to the mines. The slopes everywhere, Huntoon remarked, should be ruffled with intrenchments.

"They don't breed 'em down here, that could force a couple of hundred white men into your Vatican," he said. "That is, given guns, plenty of rounds and a system of rifle-pits."

Romany appeared absorbed in modern defensive possibilities.

"I'd like to spend a day here, and show you the arsenal in the Vatican," he said. "But I'm off for the Headland. Perhaps you would ride with me."

Huntoon nodded. I eagerly assented.

The fourth of the party was Leek—whether orderly, armor-bearer, personal servant or partner, I was unable yet to make out. He might have been just American, but the tendency of my mind was to make a mystery of him. Leek had nothing to say, external to the day's work, appeared abroad at all times, and second in swiftness only to Romany's thought. He was short, forty at least, but athletic. His face was intelligent, if inscrutable. . . .

We had traveled leisurely for an hour and a half, and the Pass was behind, when Leek, who was riding in the lead, reined up and raised his hand. Directly as the ring of hoofs subsided, the sound of firing reached us from ahead. The look of Romany's profile was a shock to me. More bloodless than ever, it had become in a second flinty—so hard it seemed a stone would glance from it, leaving no mark. Leek held his mule stiff in her tracks, and twisted around, watching his chief for the first command. "What day is this?" Romany asked suddenly.

Leek answered.

Huntoon and I were asked to stay where we were. The other pair spurred out of ear-shot. . . . It occurred to me that I had something to say in private to my companion at this juncture, which Romany had chosen for a covered conference with his second. I swung my mule about in front of Huntoon, so that my back was toward the two below, leaned over and touched his knee. "Huntoon—what have you got on—with that other outfit?"

He looked white and sick. It was worse than I thought.

"Have you spoken to the Old Man?" he asked.

"No."

"Don't. I'm in trouble—but I'll get out. . . . Oh, don't worry to-day. I won't wobble to-day—"

I liked his look when he said that.

"I've got to think a bit—that's all," he added.

This sufficed. Romany beckoned.

Leek passed as we spurred forward. He did not appear to observe that we were on the trail but quickened his mule back toward the settlement.

"If it's a skirmish down on the shore," Romany remarked quietly, as we joined him, "it's only just begun, or Viringhy would have a courier on the way back to us."

He had hardly finished when we heard the drum of hoofs, and a running mule darted around a bend of the trail a few hundred yards ahead. The rider was Santell.

To be continued.



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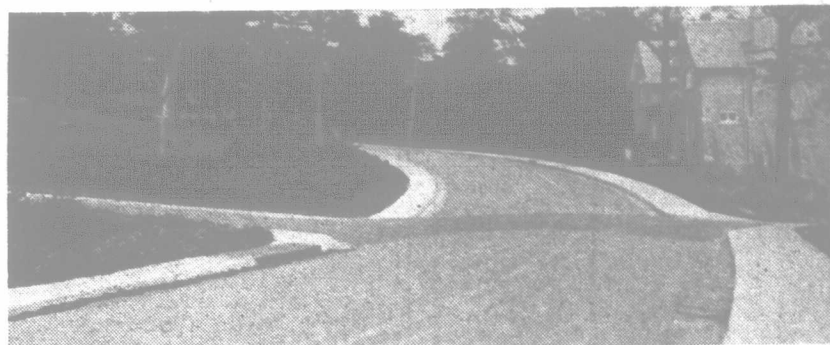
dust and protect the surface, we recommend "Tarvia-B."

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