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ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

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TELL IT TO THE MARINES

by
Roy P Churchill

Author of "Esprit de Corps," "Mixing In," etc.

MAYBE Mickey Dolan didn't mean to start anything when he opened up on Gabe Sykes from the corner of the gun-deck where the marines had their mess-table, and maybe he did, but a good seed in a handful of dirt on a bare rock sometimes grows into a tree, and the spark at the end of a long fuse gets down to business in time just the same as a short one. It was rocks and shoals to say the least, and every gob and leatherneck in hearing lost interest in his chow to take notice.

"Morning, Gabe," said Mickey. "I thought you fellows expected company for breakfast."

The boatswain's mate eased a slice of fried potato in between a pair of swollen lips and made no reply except to glint his unswollen eye at the marine sergeant.

"Morning, I said, not mourning," continued Mickey calmly. "What slipped, old-timer? The bunch of you look as if you'd run foul of a Treat 'Em Rough society, and been initiated into the order. Who was it said one bean-fed gob was good for six spigoties?"

"Who says he ain't?" growled Sykes. "We're all back, able to wriggle a fork, nobody even down for a chance at a count for being overtime."

"Yes, you are all back," said Mickey Dolan, grinning tactlessly. "All back, and I see you've been decorated most as liberal as they passed out D. S. C.'s a while back. But where's this old shipmate that you love so much, and that the gang aimed to take out of jail? You're bearing all the marks of the conflict, but none of the spoils of war."

"Somebody tipped 'em off," spoke Fred Gillum, and Gabe Sykes turned on him fiercely.

"That'll do," said he. "What's this bunch of saluting leather-necks got to do with a gob's affairs, except to butt in and have him to the mast for taking a drink of water out of hours

or some such awful crime? They couldn't trifle with little things like scrapping for a shipmate. Not in a thousand years."

"Tell it to the marines," taunted Tom Bogley, glaring from under a knob on his forehead which looked like a horn. "Some motto, some hot advertising!"

"Ship ahoy," said Mickey Dolan, his tone showing mild surprise. "Do I get you—sort of challenge? You fellows can't do it, and neither can anybody. There's a hundred and fifty husky fatfeet aboard this wagon and they pass the buck up to us. This is the coast of Mexico, and the good ship *Pegasus*. Over in Guadalupe City, half a mile away, Tony Rierson, good American gob, sailor, citizen and shipmate, is in jail.

"These hundred and fifty tarry sea-dogs try to pry him out, all kinds of ways, from force to fudge. The skipper uses diplomacy according to Hoyle and strict orders. The Consul figures to speed up a hearing in the courts. They all fall down, fall back, strategically retreat, like Gabe and his bunch last night. What do you say, marine guard? Shall we go get him? There's four off duty at a time. Eight of us altogether. That ought to be plenty."

"Tell it to the marines!" repeated Fred Gillum, and Gabe Sykes laughed though the sarcasm through bruised lips was painful.

Mickey Dolan left it at that, finished his breakfast and went on deck. He and the marine guard of the *Pegasus* had not had an easy time aboard the ship. To them fell the guard duty about the decks and the honors at the gangway, sentry duty at the door of the captain's office, and the guarding of prisoners.

Politicians, the sailors called them, and officers' pets and regulation valets, with the old rivalry between two branches of the same service, where one has to play policeman to the

other, until Mickey Dolan and his squad had grown close together and clannish, anxious to show the sailors of the *Pegasus* that the marines were as good as any outfit and a little better.

Nevertheless, as Mickey sat on a sea chest on the top side, with his short legs stretched comfortably before him, and a well browned clay pipe afire with ship's tobacco, going as a pipe should, he reflected that perhaps he had given his squad a large order and had kidded himself into the middle of a knotty problem, if, as he had boasted, Tony Rierson was to come free by the efforts of the marine guard.

Tony was a good guy and all that, but what right had he to run foul of the spiggoty police and get himself in jail? True, there was old Carlos Molino's daughter Maria, and Tony was one of the California Riersons, a fourth Spanish himself, olive-skinned, warm-blooded, speaking the language and savvying the customs; but blame the bonehead, weren't there enough good lookers in his own country?

"Tony should have known better," complained Mickey, when Corporal Touchy Pike joined him.

The long-legged corporal shot smoke from both nostrils and took issue with spirit.

"Why blame Tony?" he accused. "He's just comfortably in jail. You've let the guard in for getting him out."

"So I have," said Mickey. "So I have. And what made you ship in the marines?"

"Looking for peace and quiet," said Touchy Pike, scowling. "When do we start?"

"That's better," said Mickey. "You can sit down. Let's you and me go ashore and practise up some on the spig language, architecture, and present state of cussedness."



GUADALUPE CITY lay asleep in the sun as the liberty party climbed from the ship's launch to the rickety dock. In the shade of the weather-stained buildings lining the narrow dirt street the men made their way in little groups of two and three toward the plaza and the larger buildings facing it. Some few who had been more careful with their last pay-day climbed into pony-drawn carriages and went noisily away in clouds of dust.

Mickey Dolan and Touchy Pike took a carriage.

"To the jail," said Pike when they reached the plaza and the driver looked back at them expectantly.

"Not that way," said Mickey. "Make it snappy. Show 'em we're here for business only. Every one of these fellows knows he's good for a stand-in with the high-ups if he can deliver any underground American news."

He turned to the driver.

"You savvy *carcel*?" And at the driver's affirmative, though somewhat puzzled nod,

waved his hand and added an imperative "*Pronto!*"

The driver knew enough about marines to associate their uniforms with formal calls from the captains of ships, and the rounding up of an occasional liberty-breaker ashore. Consequently he at once linked these two with duty and drew up at the jail with an important flourish of his pony steeds.

Climbing out, Mickey told the driver to wait, and the two walked briskly by a sentry who lounged on the sidewalk, came to a second who stood at the entrance to the building, brushed by him importantly, and demanded "*Comandante*" of another inside of a sort of office.

Mickey used the same tone of authority with which he gave a recruit the monkey drill, and presently while they waited with outward confidence and some inward tremblings as to whether right off the bat they were to share this bare stone dwelling with Tony Rierson, there appeared a carefully groomed young person in red and gold uniform who demanded their business while he corrected the angle of a small but spiked mustache.

Mickey Dolan was very polite. He found that the captain could speak passable English, and did himself proud, matching a few bows and flattering remarks. Touchy Pike fanned himself with his hat and wondered if it would come to kissing; but Mickey stopped in time, unrolled a package and took from it half a dozen packs of the best cigars that the canteen on the *Pegasus* carried.

"A gift to our shipmate," he explained, "who must find the days lonely even in this delightful place. Also, if the good *capitan* will honor us, some for him as well."

The gold-striped one smiled affably. The *Americanos* were indeed funny. To think that good cigars would be wasted on a prisoner. But Mickey seemed entirely without wit. He went even further. Pay-day was about due on the ship, and if the prisoner was to draw his money, he must sign the receipt the friends had brought.

"And to him here you will bring the money?" inquired the officer.

"*Si, señor,*" said Mickey complacently. "There are little things he may wish to buy for himself, trifling comforts—and without money one is embarrassed, even among friends."

The captain hastened to agree. Of a certainty the ways of *Americanos* were rich and foolish. He began again a careful finishing of the left spike so that his hand hid half his smile. He wondered how much in gold Rierson's check would be, and which of the many ways he knew would be best to get it.

"We'll have it cashed into hard money," Mickey Dolan was saying, "so he can get any little extra he needs. But we'll have to

see him long enough to sign and witness the pay-check."

The officer touched a bell on the wall near him. There came a faint tinkle outside, and soon a soldier appeared wearing a girdle of heavy keys.

"The *Americano* from the tower," he ordered, as if the key-bearer were to blame for living, and a few minutes later Rierson came in guarded by two soldiers.

"Hello, fellows!" he said, brightening when he saw the familiar faces and uniforms, and a wild hope springing into his mind. "What is it? Orders to take me back to the ship?"

"Not yet, old man," said Mickey Dolan. "Just a little friendly call. Tomorrow is payday, and we thought you might want to draw some money. Here's the slip to sign. We'll bring it out to you."

Tony Rierson looked at the two marines steadily. What was underneath this play? It sounded as if they were trying to kid him, and if they were, he'd get even with this bunch of jokers if it took him a lifetime.

His disappointment that they had no news of release, and suspicion of a rival outfit, flared into quick anger. Hot words rushed to his lips and cooled unuttered, for Mickey Dolan had thrust a regular printed blank form into his hand, and he saw something.

"Could we borrow a pen, *señor capitán*?" asked Mickey, reaching across the desk toward one.

"Have a cigaret, Tony. How much money?"

Tony thought a moment, looking at the slip.

"Make it fifty dollars," he said. "Don't care if I do have a cigaret. Good old ship's brand."

Then with a quick flourish he signed his name to the paper, obscuring a part of it with his left hand as he held it on the table.

Mickey Dolan waved the slip in the air to dry the signature, then folded it and thrust it back into his pocket. Tony Rierson lighted a cigaret and forgot to give the package back.

The spiked mustached, tightly uniformed young captain had really meant to be magnanimous and let the prisoner have one of the six packages of cigarets, but now since he had pocketed one already, what was the use? And tomorrow these fools would bring fifty dollars gold, which he knew exactly how to spend. He was well content.

Content, too, was Mickey Dolan as he and Touchy Pike started toward the plaza and a cold drink. And hopeful was Tony Rierson, for the sudden check to his rising wrath had been the discovery of a series of unobtrusive dots and dashes on the requisition paper, spelling the words—

"Don't smoke these cigarets, read 'em."

Consequently, when Tony Rierson was safe in the seclusion of his cell at the top of the

tower, he hurriedly pinched out the fire of the half burned cigaret and broke it open. There was nothing in it, and nothing as well in the next whole one that he slit with his finger nail and examined carefully. But the bottom row was different, and the first one he tried yielded a wisp of cigaret-paper rolled fine and drawn through the tobacco.

This was covered with Navy code dots and dashes, and when he had read and reread the message, Tony made it serve a double purpose by rerolling the loose tobacco into a passable cigaret borrowing a match from the sentry who paced the circular balcony outside, and lighting up.



THE two marines stopped at the café near the plaza, and partook of the mild joy of a cold brown bottle labeled one and one-half per cent. Touchy Pike, who had begun the adventure bouyantly, confident of Mickey Dolan's scheming, was now silent and skeptical. It seemed to Touchy that Mickey was doing too much fooling with the sights for real good shooting.

Direct action appealed to Touchy, like rapping the spiked mustached captain over the head with some of the office furniture when Tony Rierson was with them, and then making a running jump through the crowd of spiggoty guards for the waiting carriage, trusting to good luck, poor shooting, and long legs for a get-away.

He didn't have to mention his disappointment, for Mickey read his mind as a marine has to in order to keep his rating badge safe on his sleeve.

"We've got to use brains and maneuvering," said Mickey, helping to fill Touchy's glass from his own bottle. "I hate to do it, it's like gambling with the cards nicked. But look what happened to Gabe Sykes and his bunch of buckos. A crowd of them is in here, trying to fool themselves with watered stock, and noisier than a litter of bull-pups."

"Along comes Tony Rierson on the way to one of his mock hearings, and they figure they'll go right out and take their old shipmate away from this bunch of spig guards in broad daylight. They get all warmed up to the idea, and try to pull it off, even after some of these spig bartenders had slipped in the back way and spilled an earful. You know what happened. They're lucky, and deserve credit for not all being in jail, but they never had a chance to get Tony."

Touchy Pike nodded gloomily.

"Look where they got him now," he said. "Up high with a view all around, walls two feet thick and iron bars to the windows. Then there's a sentry walking around on the little balcony just outside. I looked her over today after we'd found out he was in there, and where

the tower comes up from the corner of the wall there's not a hand-hold a monkey could climb on. Forty feet straight, if it's an inch, and this spigotty up there with a rifle.

"They've been telling around Guadalupe about a general or something that got in wrong and was put in this same place. All his friends tried to get him out—underhand and straight rushing. But he waited up there fifteen years and died of old age."

Mickey grinned and emptied his glass.

"Old Gibraltar has been took," he said. "Having them think he's all safe makes it just that much easier for us."

"We've got so many cogs that if one slips the whole works will go overboard like an anchor chain," said Touchy, somewhat heartened by Mickey's assurance, "but I'm with you. It would be something to hand down to our wide-collared bunch of boasting gobs if half a dozen doggone marines took a prisoner out of Guadalupe tower."

"You're saying something," said Mickey. "Only of course we've got to make it plain that Rierson gets out mostly by his own efforts and what outside help he gets has to be unknown to the spigs. Far as that goes, the old *Pegasus* could fire a couple of salvos into this jail, send a landing party ashore with fixings on and take Tony out like a white man. That's the way I'd do it, if I had my say so, and a couple of doses would make these spigs behave all over. But the job has to be done the other way, under cover and no comebacks."



MICKEY DOLAN and Touchy Pike slept aboard that night, and Mickey bought some more things at the canteen and made a couple of trips to the sick-bay, where he consulted learnedly with his friend Pills, the hospital steward. The next day at the same hour and with the same pony rig he and Touchy Pike appeared at the Guadalupe jail. Pico Andera, the captain in charge, had on a new resplendent uniform, and the spikes of his mustache were needle-like.

Yet Señor Andera had a disappointment. It seemed that Tony Rierson had too hurriedly signed the pay-requisition, and that the paymaster's yeoman was fussy about details. It must be done over with the full name spelled out, instead of with the initials.

Rierson appeared, happy at first, and then scowling.

"It's bad enough to be shut up in jail," he grumbled, "without having an ink-slinging typewriter hound interfere with a man's few comforts. I had my teeth set for a little candy, and a couple of tins of peanut butter. It would go mighty good with this fancy Mexican chow I'm getting."

"We'll bring it out," soothed Mickey. "Could have today if we'd remembered."

It seemed that Touchy Pike had been more thoughtful. Hurriedly with the nervousness of one friend trying to serve another in need he produced a small box and offered candy mints around. Tony took a liberal handful and thrust them into his pocket, and put another in his mouth. Andera took one daintily.

Not to be outdone, Mickey produced cigarettes, graciously offering the box to Andera first and then to Rierson. Andera's keen black eyes were watching. He remembered that the day before the prisoner had accepted a full box. But Mickey Dolan was too wise to play the same game twice in the same way. Withdrawing the cigarettes from Rierson's eager fingers, he scooped up a few from the lower layer, handed them over, and put the box in his pocket. Rierson glared at him.

"What else can we bring you besides the money and candy?" asked Mickey calmly.

"That'll be all, I guess," said Rierson. "I'll buy my own smokes after this."

A few minutes later he was being escorted back to the tower while Pico Andera bowed the two marines out.

Touchy Pike had left the open box of mints on the table, and Andera helped himself, smiling. Doubtless they had left the box for Rierson, but American candy was very good indeed.

Up in the cell that night just after the watch had been changed after supper, Tony Rierson stood at the small iron-barred window and very slowly and deliberately smoked a cigaret, timing the beat of the sentry's footsteps so that when he passed in his circle of the narrow balcony Tony could blow out a cloud of smoke and catch the other's nostrils.

It was a black night. The air heavy and motionless and moist. Rierson counted the steps around and around the thick wall. He waited until the monotony of the circle began to wear on the sentry. Then cautiously he offered the man a cigaret. There was no answer. Punishment was severe in Guadalupe, and a certain adobe wall was well flayed with bullets from the firing squad. Still, it was a good hour until relief would come, and the night was lonely. If the glow of a cigaret were seen, it could be laid to the prisoner.

At the third turn after the offer the sentry took a cigaret. While it was smoked, Tony Rierson did a few simple things in the darkness, according to the instructions already received, part of which in dots and dashes on cigaret papers now burned between the sentry's lips.

"I have candy," he said in Spanish after a time, and with slight reluctance a brown hand took the offering from the stone sill of the window. Indeed the American candy was satisfying, for the hand felt along the window-ledge for more, hearing from within the reassuring

crunch of Tony Rierson's teeth on duplicates of the same.

Very soon the footsteps outside grew jerky and staggering, and when they stopped, Tony tied the tiny vial which had come to him inside a cigaret, to a linen thread which had spoiled another smoke, and standing on a chair with his hand and arm out the window, tossed it over the balcony. A few drops from the vial had gone on the last offering of candy.

He waited until a slight tug came, and hauled in first a sail twine, then a length of white line, and following that, a new piece of one and one-half inch manila rope which would bear the weight of several men.

Rierson knotted it securely around a couple of window bars, and a moment later when he had signalled with a jerk that it was fast, he felt it grow taut with the weight of a climber. Then peering out into the darkness, ears strained for the sound of an alarm, feeling the jerking strain on the rope, he waited tensely until a form appeared out of the blackness, hatless and shoeless.

"All right, Tony?" came a questioning whisper through the bars, and Rierson hastened to answer. It was Mickey Dolan.

"Wait until I get the spig's rifle," said Mickey "Between us we ought to pry one of the bars loose before a relief comes."

"I've got the mortar picked from around one of them," said Rierson. "Thought it might help a little, whatever you had in mind."

"Good work," approved Mickey, and was gone to feel along the balcony for the drugged sentry. He was back in a moment with the old-fashioned heavy barreled weapon.

"If we make a noise and she pops," directed the rescuer, "be ready to sing out whatever the guard says for 'All's well.' How much time before the watch is relieved?"

"Nearly an hour, as far as I can figure," said Rierson, and Mickey thrust the bayonet of the rifle between the bars.

"If we've got that much time, see if you can loosen it up a little more before we try to pry it out. I'll put a few lashings on our sleeping friend, just in case Pills' dope plays out on him.

Rierson had done what he could with the bayonet by the time Mickey returned, and putting it aside the two pried together on the loosened bar, using the rifle as a lever. The first heave brought a gratifying crunch from the rusty iron.

"Next time I ship, it's going to be under a 'top-of-the-world' cap," promised Rierson.

"You're not out yet," whispered Mickey. "I heard something. Belay a minute."

Rierson heard too. He had grown accustomed to the sounds around his cell and knew that the muffled footsteps from below were made by someone climbing the tower stairs.

Hardly breathing he wondered what the interruption meant, and if the attempt to free him had been discovered. Noiselessly Mickey Dolan slipped the rifle from the window-sill and crouched in the darkness at the far side of the tower.

There were two men, one carrying a lantern, and behind him Captain Pico Andera. Tony Rierson spoke sharply in Spanish, and Mickey Dolan took the cue instantly, repeating guffily what would have been the sentry's challenge. He did it rather well, considering everything, and Pico Andera did not notice the deception since it was hardly possible that he should know the voices of all his men.

He answered sharply, and Mickey kept out of sight, thumping his gun against the wall occasionally to show his presence. He hoped Andera had not heard anything to make him suspicious, and that Touchy Pike would have sense enough to keep quiet down below.

As for the cause, if this fellow Andera and his helper started any investigating, they might get something more painful than drugged candy to remember the night by. He could crack at least one of them over the head with the gun barrel, and have a chance at the other; but he didn't just see how Tony Rierson was to get out, and the two of them make a getaway before the noise brought help.

Mickey did not like the plan, yet there might be a chance for the rough stuff to take hold where the brain work stopped, and two pulls on the rope would bring Touchy Pike to his aid. Two could work faster than one.



ANDERA and his man stood at the door to the cell, and Andera made speech with his prisoner through the small iron grill in the heavy oaken door. He seemed in excellent good humor, and chancing that the conversation would cloak Touchy Pike's climbing, Mickey gave the rope two pulls and crouched closer to listen to Andera. He understood enough Spanish to get nearly everything.

"A pleasant evening, *señor*," Andera was saying, the words hissing out with caressing softness. "A night for lovers and for dreamers. I go to keep tryst with fair Maria, who is waiting in impatience until I come."

"To — with that stuff," answered Rierson, using the good Americanism with angry force. "Maria would spit in your face if you got close enough to her."

Mickey Dolan thought he could hear Pico Andera's teeth snap but it might have been Touchy Pike shinnying up the rope. Andera's voice was not so pleasant as he answered.

"It is easy to make insult when one is safe, *señor*," he said. "But tonight I am indeed forgiving. I go to the wedding feast at the house of Carlos Molino. The priest waits,

and the rich gifts and the wine. The carriage, also to take me and my bride away."

"What are you wasting time here for, then?" said Rierson, trying hard to keep the choke from his voice and to hold in his anger, for Andera's words rang too true to suit him, and he knew that Maria had too been bedeviled with every force possible to make her promise marriage to Andera.

"For more than one thing, *señor*," went on Andera. "First I wish greatly that you should know of my happiness and of Maria's. And also I have come for the little gold trinket, the ring which she gave you, and which you wear on your finger."

"So that's it," cut in Rierson. "Nothing doing, you yellow-bellied sneak. Get away from there and let a man sleep."

"We shall see," said Andera. "I much desire the ring. It will show the lovely Maria with how much faith the *Americano* holds her regard."

Mickey Dolan put a hand over Touchy Pike's mouth as his long-legged companion joined him on the balcony.

"Easy," he cautioned, with his lips at Touchy's ear. "I'll give the sign for the rough stuff."

Andera had given an order to the man with him, and Mickey heard the rattle of a key in the cell door. As the bolt was ready to be thrown Andera halted him, gave another order, and the man with the lantern called in Spanish. Mickey Dolan knew that he was summoning the drugged sentry. They meant to take the ring from Rierson's finger by force.

So far there had been no sign of anything out of the ordinary from the tower. The captain had gone to speak to the prisoner. Rierson's voice had often been loud and angry when he and the captain were together. The sentry had challenged and been answered.

Before Andera and his man had a chance to wonder at the slight delay, what appeared to be the sentry on beat came to them, saluted, and stood just outside the circle of light from the lantern. He wore the sentry's cap, and the faded khaki coat trimmed with red and green, but he was barefoot except for Navy issue socks, and his trousers were of a material entirely too heavy to be worn in a tropical climate. Mickey believed in strategy and in the element of surprize in attack, until it failed utterly.

Turning the key, large enough in itself to make a fair weapon, the door swung outward on squeaky hinges and Mickey Dolan and the soldier stepped inside, followed closely by Andera.

Tony Rierson was ready to believe that what Andera said of Maria and of the wedding might be true. There was a certain quality of exultant triumph in his tone which had not been

there in previous interviews. Also, Andera was dressed in his new uniform, resplendent with gold lace, and bright trimmings. A desperate fear struck Tony that the story was true, after all. He resolved that nothing short of death would make him give up the ring.

On Andera's coming, Rierson had hidden the bayonet in his bunk. He wondered what had become of Mickey, and reasoned that fearing discovery, he must have gone down the rope and gotten away. It had been taut and was now slack. He hauled it in while Andera waited for his other man, and while the door was being unlocked. He might find use for it later.

What he saw now was a big raw-boned soldier carrying a lantern, and a shorter, bow-legged, long armed one whose jacket sleeves were too short for him, advancing across the stone floor of the cell toward him. Pico Andera stood behind them, an automatic ready to save his own skin from hurt, if need be, but confident that his two soldiers would make its use unnecessary.

Rierson backed away for a step as if to get to the circular wall, stopped suddenly and kicked the lantern from the soldier's hand, making a dive in the almost instant darkness for his bunk, and the hidden bayonet. The sight of Andera's sneering face had set Tony on fire with rage, Andera had told him the truth, and he preferred to die rather than live and see Maria Molino married to his rival.

But a pair of long arms caught him close around the shoulders, and a face prickly with rough, day-old bristles ground against his. He tried to shake loose, but the bigger soldier had him now, further down the hips, pulling him down.

"It's me, Mickey Dolan," came words in his ear. "Give up. Take it easy. Save your strength." And at a repetition of the essentials the meaning got through to his consciousness.

"That'll do, Andera," Tony cried. "Take the ring. You're lying, anyhow."

Andera gave an order, and the big soldier let go and straightened up, holding one of Tony Rierson's arms with both hands, and instructing Mickey Dolan to do the same with the other. This was Mickey's chance. He leaned forward a little until he felt and heard the panting breath of the larger man.

"And so the *señor* has decided to have good sense?" Andera was saying, so contemptuously that Tony writhed. "He will permit the ring to be withdrawn and place it in my hand. So it is with triflers—great words and small struggles. One moment until the lantern is lighted."

It was then, while Pico Andera righted the upturned lantern, and sought a match, that Mickey Dolan drove upward from well below

his waist in a smashing punch toward the big soldier's jaw. The blow struck clean with all the weight of his hard springy body under it, and the soldier hardly grunted as he went over backward against the stone floor.

Touchy Pike beside the doorway, waiting for his signal, joined the gang rush on Andera, who was smothered where he stood, his one startled cry stopped at his lips by a vengeful thrust of Tony Rierson's bony fist.

"No noise," ordered Mickey Dolan, holding first his broad hand and then the sentry's cap over Andera's mouth, while Rierson sat on his chest holding his arms spread-eagled with his knees, and Touchy Pike was wrapped around his legs. Andera could only squirm a little and groan, and the bare stone floor of the cell was a poor sounding board for what small noise of his conquering there had been.

"Take a piece of the white line we had and tie his legs," Mickey instructed Pike. "Make a good quick job of it, and shift over to the big guy. He might be coming out of it soon. I had to guess in the dark."

The light strong line used to haul up the rope made lashings and Andera and his man were soon tied into helpless bundles. Parts of the uniform which Mickey Dolan now discarded, made effectual gags. The drugged sentry was brought in and secured with the other two, and finally all three were locked in the cell.



SO FAR Tony Rierson had obeyed without question every order that Mickey Dolan gave, but now when escape seemed certain, a disconcerting thought made him hang back for a last turn at the rope over the parapet. He had the key to the cell, and when the two marines had disappeared down the rope, he went back, opened the heavy door, and went in.

Mickey Dolan and Touchy Pike crouched in the shadow of the wall and grew impatient at the length of time it took Tony to join them.

"Must love the place," growled Mickey. "Seems like he'd burn his fingers coming down instead of making us wait for him."

But as he whispered the rope gave notice of Tony's belated coming and a moment later he had joined them. Without further words and one at a time they slipped from the shelter of the shrubbery along the wall and came down together again on the dark side of the street towards town.

"There used to be a sentry outside the wall," said Tony.

"So there was," chuckled Mickey Dolan, running lightly on the balls of his feet, and well pleased with himself, "but he fell in love with Touchy Pike, and took a drink out of a bottle. Touchy used to be a confidence man before he joined the marines."

"You did the lingo slinging," denied Pike,

panting a little and trying to make one reach of his long legs equal two of Mickey's. Soon Mickey turned in at right angles from the street and led the way down a steep alley which led directly to the beach.

"Keeping away from the regular landing," he explained. "Gring, Hampton and Flint are laying off the foot of this street in the dingey. Figured if we had to make a hot trail they'd be handy for us. Then somebody might run into that little tangle we left up in the tower, and telephone to the custom guards on the dock to get us."

But Tony Rierson had no intention of following down the short cut to the sea. He had other plans.

"Wait a minute," he said now. "I'm going to leave you fellows."

Mickey halted, amazed, and by the dim light of a small street globe saw at last why it had taken Rierson so long to make his getaway down the rope. He had on Pico Andera's resplendent uniform, even to the gold-stripped, tightly fitting trousers. He and Pico Andera were of the same build, and they fitted well.

Mickey gasped, took a step forward, and almost expected to see the spiked mustache.

"Well, I'm a horse-trading Baptist," said he. "What have I got now?"

"I'm going after Maria," announced Tony.

"You're going bugs," said Mickey. "Look at the way luck has been with us. What do you want to do, make a fool of yourself and us at the last minute?"

"You don't get the idea," said Tony. "I'm out, yes; and you two did it. I'm grateful. But unless I can help Maria, nothing you did matters. Andera wasn't lying. The marriage papers are in his pocket. If I run off and leave her, he'll get her, and you might as well have left me in jail."

"Wish I had," said Mickey. "Lead on, brainless, we'll all go to jail."

Tony Rierson caught the implication instantly. Mickey had not read all the fine lines in this contract, but now that he had signed on he would help carry it out to the last comma.

"I thought you'd be gone," said Tony happily. "We can do it. I've got a simple plan. The household will be expecting Andera, and in this get-up I can pass for him in the dark at the gate. I'll go up boldly as if in a great hurry over some detail to be arranged at the last moment, send a note in to Maria by one of the servants, have her slip away and meet me outside the little gate to the grounds."

"And then what're you going to do with her?" asked the practical Mickey Dolan.

"Marry her tonight," said Tony. "Find a priest, use Andera's papers. Leave her at the American Consul's until a steamer sails north. She can stay with my sisters in California until

I'm out of the outfit. Even her dad and Andera wouldn't dare make trouble after we are once married. You know how our church regards marriage."

"It may work," sighed Mickey. "Anybody that's got a luck piece, grip it hard, and let's get started before we forget some of the details, or Andera works that wad of clothing out of his mouth."

Tony Rierison had been inside the pretentious grounds of Señor Carlos Molino, and at the watchman's gate outside the high stone wall he spoke imperative sentences in correct, unflinching Spanish to the gateman who answered his knock. The servant opened up at once, and stood well back as if he expected Señor Pico Andera to be nervous and angry.

"The *señor* has heard then?" he inquired with nervous servility.

"Enough from you," said Tony sharply. "Take this message to the *Señorita* Maria with dispatch."

The gateman stepped still farther back, but made no move to obey. From the house up the white driveway lights flashed through the trees, and there came the murmur of excited voices.

"What is wrong, fool?" demanded Rierison, a vague fear gripping him. "Quick! Or your ears shall be slit like a pig's."

"The beautiful *señorita* is not to be found since *siesta*," whined the gateman. "The master is wild with anger. He rages as a lion in a cage. A messenger has been sent to you, *señor*. I thought you knew already, and came to assist."

The gateman expected an outburst from the young captain, and Tony Rierison did not disappoint him. All his plans went tumbling in a dizzy whirl, and he stepped forward much as Pico Andera might have done.

"Maria gone!" he challenged. "Where. When? Don't stand there grimacing, monkey!"

As the man broke into a frightened explanation, offering to call his master, and then begging to escort the madman to the house, Tony had wit enough to turn and slam the gate and join Mickey Dolan and Touchy Pike where they stood hiding behind a hedge of banana plants half a block away.

"Maria's gone," he said dazedly. "Old Molino has sent word to Andera. Where do you suppose she could have gone? What shall we do to find her?"

"Very first shot a dud," grumbled Mickey, and reassumed command.

"First thing, let's get out of this," he said. "We can't do her any good if we're in jail, and besides, a girl that's got sense enough and spirit enough to run away must have had some place picked out to run to. We'll make it out to the ship. Try to think of any friends she might have gone to who wouldn't be afraid of Carlos Molino."

Rierison hesitated and Mickey went on:

"You'll be getting a message from her likely, and with the ship as a base there will be a chance to do something. Any way you figure it, there's not going to be a wedding tonight, with Andera minus his best uniform, the marriage papers and the girl."

Tony didn't want to do it, and his mind was full of wild schemes to try and dodge the aroused police of the city on the bare chance that he might get some clue of Maria. But Mickey Dolan talked him out of it, and at last after dodging through dark alleys and on the shady side of buildings with the shrill whistles of police and soldiers behind them and about them, the three knelt among the rocks along a deserted part of the beach opposite where the *Pegasus* lay and made cautious whistled signals for the dingey.

While they waited a couple of soldiers came to search that part of the beach, for Carlos Molino's messenger seeking for Pico Andera at the jail, had caused an early discovery of the prisoners in the tower. The orders were to arrest all Americans and particularly one who wore a Mexican captain's uniform, and called himself Pico Andera.



THE fugitives waded into the water and swam out beyond the line of vision from the shore. Floating noiselessly they could hear the conversation of the passing soldiers. What Mickey Dolan could not understand Tony Rierison interpreted for him in a cautious whisper.

"They've escaped surely," said one of the soldiers.

"But no," said the other. "I have just spoken to a servant of Señor Molino, and he who wears the stolen uniform was seen there since the boats began patrolling. They will be caught at daylight or before. The gringo boats have been counted also, and all swing from their davits."

There was more, but this was enough to make it certain that the dingey had been driven off.

"We've got to swim for it," said Mickey Dolan. "It's nearly a mile but the tide is with us. How about it, you fellows? Want to take the chance? We can dive under the boats if we have to, but it's so dark I doubt if they can see us."

Half an hour later Spud Hampton, sentry on the fore-castle, spotted three figures as they crept dripping down the deck from where they had come aboard by way of the anchor chain.

"Good work," whispered Spud. "I see you got him."

"What's the matter you didn't meet us?" demanded Mickey Dolan. "Who fell down?"

"Nobody," whispered Hampton. "You fellows get into your bunks before you get me

into trouble. We got chased in after we had picked up a girl out there half drowned. We've got her in the sick-bay now. The doc says we picked her up just about in time. The old man wanted to know what we were doing out in the dingy and we had to tell him we heard a cry for help. What did he do then but go and have the boat hoisted. There's been no chance, Mickey, honest. You know how the falls squeak, and the boat hangs aft there by the old man's cabin."

"What did the girl look like?" asked Tony Rierson.

"How do I know?" said Spud. "Wasn't it dark as a coal bunker? Ben Flint carried her on deck. Ask him. But she was a slim young thing, like some of these high class spig girls that peep out at you over a black veil. She fought like a cat, though, and didn't want to be saved until she found out we were Americans."

"I want to see her," insisted Tony Rierson, and since Mickey Dolan was a pal and cronic of Pills, the hospital steward, Tony had his chance to look even before he reported his escape to the officer of the deck.

The girl was Maria. She had taken a maid's clothing, slipped away from the house, and tried to get across the bay to one of her mother's old servants. But the boat she found unlocked began to leak, and swamped before she was halfway over. As she struggled in the water the dingy came up and thinking the men in it were pursuers she had preferred to drown rather than be caught.

Mickey Dolan went outside the sick-bay door and scratched stubby fingers through his hair, standing bow-legged and thoughtful, while Tony told the story, so happy and relieved at finding Maria that he had not yet realized the certain duty of the captain of the *Pegasus* to put the girl ashore as soon as her father called for her, or the native officials were on duty.

Mickey shut him off by putting a hand over the excited lover's mouth, and half dragging him up on deck.

"Listen to me, and listen good," he said, shaking Tony's shoulders. "They will be swarming out here like gulls over a school of sardines, just as soon as day comes. We can't keep this girl on board the ship. Can't you savvy that much?"

"That's so," said Tony, sort of helpless. "What can I do?"

"Don't you move from this chest," ordered Mickey. "I've got a plan. Stay here like you was tied. I'm going down and break out the sky-pilot. I know it's no time to wake a man up and ask a favor, but the bird's writing a book, and he has his weaknesses also. Pills is a friend of mine. You sit right here quiet, and let me have it out with the chaplain.

Maybe I can talk him into marrying you two right now.

"He's got the papers and everything. This ship being a part of the good old U. S. and you a citizen in good standing, once the fatal words are said it makes Maria an American, too. After that it's up to the captain and the high diplomats at Washington. They can do the figuring."



THE next morning there appeared before the captain of the *Pegasus* just after his Chinese boy had delivered his crisp toast and steaming coffee, Tony Rierson, seaman first class, and Maria his wife, stating their case in simple words, mostly of Mickey Dolan's choosing.

After the captain had looked them over up one side and down the other, he caught the hopeful flash of Maria's eyes and decided.

"Escaped, did you, Rierson, with this girl's help? Chaplain married you last night. Do you love her?"

"Yes, sir," said Tony.

"And you, Madam?"

"Yes, sir," said Maria with a soft little Spanish trill to the words.

"All right," said the captain. "Go forward, Rierson, and take up your duties. You, Mrs. Rierson, will take the chaplain's room and he can bunk wherever he finds space. Rierson, tell the first lieutenant to up anchor and proceed to sea at once."

This was the captain's way out of a tangle. The buck had been passed to him. Now he'd do some passing himself. Let the heathen rage.

In the course of events the matter was straightened out. Tony Rierson got a summary court martial and lost three month's pay, which he didn't particularly need. His wife, as an American citizen, had a right under the law to take asylum on an American ship. Extradition was denied. Put ashore at the first home port, she went to live with Tony Rierson's sisters in the big house overlooking the California bean fields and walnut groves which had been the Rierson's from the days of Frémont. In a few months Tony's enlistment expired, and he went home to her.

Then when the priest in the mission had rebound them and the excitement of the wedding feast and the wedding journey were over, Maria and Tony fixed up such a box of California fruit as the good ship *Pegasus* had never seen before. Certainly nothing like it had ever before fallen to the lot of Mickey Dolan, Touchy Pike and their mates. They called in the gobs to help, and Gabe Sykes paid tribute where tribute was due, as he bit into an orange.

"Tell it to the marines," he said, blinking the juice out of his eyes. And "Tell it to the marines" was what Mickey wrote to Maria and Tony.