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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# The Cyclops of Xoatl

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE and E. HOFFMANN PRICE

*What was the weird monster that spread death and panic terror over a peaceful Mexican countryside?—a grim tale of a gruesome horror*

AS BART LESLIE nosed his dust-coated, twelve-cylinder roadster across the railroad tracks, his rugged face expanded in a good-humored grin at the grotesque fancy of the founders of that excrescence that was marked on the maps of northern Mexico as Xoatl. They had named the main street Avenida de las Palmas; but in lieu of palms, it was lined with thick-walled adobe houses as alike in their squat, squarish ugliness as monstrous dice cast into the desert by some giant gamester. One heap, however, broke the monotony as well as the darkness of Avenida de las Palmas. It was two stories high, and a second-floor gallery overhung the street. Bart Leslie braked his car to a halt just short of the patch of light that blazed from the arched entrance, slid from the wheel behind which he had been cramped for something like fourteen hours, and stretched the kinks from his lean, rangy body.

Leslie—better known along the Rio Grande as Two-Gun Bart, formerly of the Border Patrol—was in enemy territory. Arturo Hernandez's urgent message spoke for itself—but Leslie, true to form, made no attempt to conceal his presence. After an unobtrusive but all-seeing glance of his gray eyes, he stepped into the smoke-fogged, kerosene-illuminated tap room of the tavern. That swift scrutiny sufficed to assure him that among the loungers who had regarded his entry with curiosity there was one whose interest was intense and personal; and as Leslie ad-

dressed the bartender in intentionally halting Spanish, he watched the fly-specked mirrors of the back bar.

"I am waiting for Don Arturo of Hacienda de la Plata," he announced. "If he should call, be pleased to tell him that I will be in that last booth. Over there, in the corner. And in the meanwhile, get me a plate of *tacos* and a cold beer."

The scarcely perceptible change in the expression of the sharp-faced, swarthy fellow who had been watching him convinced Leslie that the contents of his telegram to Hernandez had been fairly well circulated about Xoatl; and this hinted that the one-eyed cannibal who was terrorizing the peons of Don Arturo's hacienda in the foothills of the Xoatl Mountains had human allies, despite the current reports of his satanic origin.

Leslie picked his way among the tables, parted the greasy blue curtains that screened the booths reserved for patrons who dropped in from the adjoining dance hall, and planted himself on the bare wooden bench that paralleled either wall of the cubicle. He could thus continue his scrutiny of the hangers-on.

THE *tacos* were excellent, and the beer was better. Leslie tossed the waiter a silver peso, and declined his change.

"*Gracias, señor!*" Then, gesturing toward the door that opened from the booth into the alley between the tavern and the dance hall, the waiter proposed,

"Perhaps your excellency would like company, yes? Very beautiful girls. And most amiable, *señor*."

He twisted his mustache, beamed, and made an ecstatic grimace that left little doubt as to the amiability of the ladies who would be most delighted to forsake the dance hall; but Leslie yawned prodigiously, cocked his feet on the opposite bench, and said, "Hell, no! I'm so tired I could sleep standing up! Now beat it—but don't forget to tell Don Arturo I'm here."

Another mighty yawn. The *mozo* could see with one eye that Leslie's bronzed face was dust-caked and weary. He pocketed the change, bowed, and solicitously drew the curtains so that the chatter of the loungers would be less disturbing. He and others, however, would have been amazed at Leslie's ensuing alertness and humorous grin. Leslie's view of the tap room had been shut off, and he did not wish to break the illusion; so he drew a heavy-bladed jack-knife and with a few deft jabs pierced the front



"Leslie halted at the tip of the opening, and grimaced wryly at the charnel stench that filtered from the gloom."

wall of the booth. And as he washed the *tacos* down with the excellent beer, he maintained keen observation through his improvised loophole. Leslie rolled a cigarette, slouched into the angle of the cubicle and relaxed for a cat-nap, but despite his seeming torpor, the suggestion of a smile twitched at the corners of his broad mouth. The man who had been watching him had just vanished into the darkness of Avenida de las Palmas.

"Monkey Face," said Leslie to himself as he hitched his single-action, frontier-model .45's into position for a fast draw, "is too damn' obvious to be interesting."

Whereat Leslie renewed his pondering on Don Arturo's alarming letter. But finally his chin sagged down to his chest, and the cigarette stump dropped from his relaxed fingers. Floorboarding it from Bonita, north of the Rio Grande, all the way to Xoatl was more than a man's task for one day. Presently Leslie was asleep; but he was not entirely oblivious of the gentle draft of cool air that began to filter in from his left. He lifted one eyelid, and noticed that the door of the booth was very slowly swinging outward. He emitted a subdued snore, and waited. But though he had not changed his posture Leslie's body had become tense and ready for action.

Through his eyelashes, Leslie recognized Monkey Face, and caught the chilly gleam of a broad-bladed machete. It was all to be discreet and quiet. A machete parts head and shoulders so swiftly that the victim has no chance to emit even one dying gasp.

Monkey Face had paused to make sure of things. He listened for a moment, noted Leslie's folded arms and the distance to the butts of his revolvers. Despite Leslie's seemingly conveniently averted head, the narrow confines of the booth and the need for stealth necessitated nice work for a decapitating

stroke. Monkey Face noiselessly crossed the threshold, poised himself—and then things opened up in Xoatl.

As the glittering, two-foot shard of steel lashed out, Leslie's tense muscles exploded in a lunge that catapulted him headlong at his assailant and well inside his guard. The machete sizzled through air instead of an averted neck. Monkey Face howled with pain. Steel clattered to the floor, wrenched from his numbed fingers by Leslie's grip; and simultaneously there was a sharp, smacking report—not a pistol shot, but Two-Gun Bart's fist hammering home like the kick of a mule. Monkey Face pitched back in a graceful arc and landed like a bag of meal in the patch of light that filtered from the open door into the alley.

There were other cries, and a shuffle of scurrying bare feet. From the tap room came a confused muttering and the scrape of chairs. Leslie whirled as the blue curtains jerked aside. A .45 had blossomed in each hand; but it was not the mass attack he had expected.

A tall, handsome Mexican, resplendent in purple velvet that glittered with silver braid and buttons the size of tea-cups, extended a powerful hand as he exclaimed, "Don Bart! *Por amor de Dios*, what is it?"

LESLIE holstered his revolvers, chuckled amiably, and accepted the extended hand.

"Don't ask me, Don Arturo. I didn't ask that machete artist." He indicated the groaning Monkey Face who had recovered sufficiently from a long count to struggle to his knees. "And he didn't take time to explain."

Don Arturo cursed with Latin vigor, jerked a pistol from his gaudy sash. Leslie's hand flashed out as the weapon spurted flame. The shot missed; but it hastened Monkey Face's recovery. He

howled as he scrambled to his feet and bounded into the darkness.

"W'at those hell, my fran'?" demanded Don Arturo, outraged at Leslie's unexpected gesture. "I weel keel him——"

"Aw, nuts!" laughed Leslie. "I could have killed him myself, but I cold-calked him instead, so he'd go back to his boss and tell him that a sleeping man took his machete away from him and knocked him for a row. The moral effect, what?"

"Son of wan gun! That ees good," admitted Don Arturo. Then he somberly shook his head, twisted his black mustache to an even finer point, and said, "But I am afraid you 'ave been make conspicuous already. I did my best to impress you weeth—how should I say?—weeth the peril—you should not have wire' me. That advertise your mission."

"The worst peril about this country," laughed Leslie, "is the danger of dying of thirst. Let's have a drink while you tell me about the large doings you promised in your letter. But unless it's more exciting than bandits, I'm going back to Bonita. I'm busy as a one-armed paper-hanger——"

"You weel be busier as a two-armed paper-hanger! Listen, *amigo*——" Then he remembered the obligations of hospitality, called for Leslie's favorite, a Bacardi cocktail, and resumed, "I weel explain. I 'ave buy the Hacienda de la Plata from Romualdo Pacheco. Wan grand bargain. Very cheap. But before I move out there more than three months, I find the nigger in the woods. No wonder that Pacheco offered me the bargain. That accursed hacienda is haunted by a devil. A cannibal. He 'ave keel three men and drink their blood. My peons are leaving. I cannot work the property. It is a total loss, but if I abandon it, I am what you call busted! Clean' out."

"Hmmm . . . well, so I gathered from your letter, but frankly, it didn't

make any too much sense," said Leslie as the *mozo* set glasses and a well-frosted shaker on the table. "Now, this cannibal stuff——"

"I 'ave not seen him," admitted Don Arturo. "But the peons say he is fully eleven feet tall. I would not believe them, but those footprints—they are bigger as a suitcase. But that is not the worst. Listen—that devil has one big blazing eye in the middle of his forehead. It is——"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Leslie, "this is getting too strong. Eleven feet tall, one over-sized eye, and he's been ganging up on the hired help and eating them?"

"*Seguramente*," affirmed Don Arturo. "Several 'ave disappear'. But two we found. The throat bitten out. The blood all drunk. If that is not Satanás at work, what is it?"

He piously crossed himself and unceremoniously gulped his drink. Leslie frowned as he sampled the Bacardi. Don Arturo was a fighter. Revolutionists, bandits, or agrarians, the pests of northern Mexico, looked all alike to him. If Don Arturo was getting shaky, something sinister and evil must have taken possession of the hacienda. On the other hand, the reception committee that had lost so little time in waiting on Leslie had certainly given little evidence of satanic origin.

"When do we head out for your hacienda?" wondered Leslie as he set down his empty glass. "The more I think of it, the more it looks as though this will be interesting."

"We leave at midnight. It is a long march."

"Nothing doing," protested Leslie. "I've been blistering the road for the past fourteen hours and I'd prefer to grab some sleep before I start interviewing cannibals. Let your men return with the

horses. You and I will drive out in my car."

"That is wan excellent idea," agreed Don Arturo. "But I think it would be dangerous. Already there has been one attempt to murder you."

"Til chance that," was Leslie's careless reply. "And come to think of it, *tacos* and beer isn't a square meal. I could do pretty well with some chicken and chile. And in the meanwhile you might as well have them fix us up with sleeping-quarters and drag my luggage out of the car."

## 2

**D**ON ARTURO summoned the proprietor, handed him Leslie's keys, and issued the necessary orders. Despite the weeks that had made the Mexican's dark eyes haggard and worried, Don Arturo brightened up at Leslie's hearty appreciation of the blistering native cookery and caught a touch of his free and easy approach to the sinister riddle of the hacienda; and as the platters were finally cleaned down to the last drop of savory gravy, Don Arturo called for coffee, and slid cigars across the greasy table.

Leslie, however, had not forgotten the assassin he had thwarted. And thus, throughout the meal, he had contrived to peep through the loophole he had cut into the wall of the booth. Neither Don Arturo nor the waiter had noticed that unobtrusive, sharp-eyed scrutiny; and thus both were amazed when Leslie, after tasting a spoonful of the steaming beverage, smiled oddly and said, "I'm as tired as hell. Bring this coffee up to my room—come on, Arturo!"

Hernandez was perplexed, but the *mozo* grinned, picked up the tray, and led the way to the second floor, where rooms had been prepared. But before he could leave, Leslie detained him.

"Just a second here, boy! Is this fresh

coffee, made to our order, as Don Arturo demanded?"

The waiter's eyes widened. For an instant he seemed embarrassed; then he assured, "*Si, señor!* I prepared it myself. With my own hands. Indeed, it is absolutely fresh. But yes, of course."

"Hmmm. . . . I thought so. . . ." He spoke very quietly, but his eyes narrowed to wrathful, blazing, steel-gray slits. The waiter squirmed and fidgeted during the interminable scrutiny. Then Leslie commanded, "All right, drink mine. Every damn' drop of it!"

"But, *señor*—"

"Drink it!" reiterated Leslie. The muzzle of his .45 was pointed straight at the waiter's stomach. "Right now. Before I blow your guts around your backbone."

The waiter was perspiring profusely, despite the chill of the night. His trembling hand reached for the cup.

"And don't drop it," warned Leslie, "or I'll drop you. Bottoms up!"

He obeyed. And then Leslie, still covering the waiter with his Colt, sampled Don Arturo's coffee.

"That's all okey," he declared. "I'm beginning to figure that I'll have a pleasant visit at your hacienda, Don Arturo."

The Mexican cursed in a low, wrathful voice, drew his pistol, and said, "*Por Dios*, I will keel this peeg! It is an outrage to my hospitality."

He leveled the weapon. The waiter voiced an incoherent, terrified protest. And then Don Arturo smiled thinly, lowered the pistol, and said, "No. On second thought, I will wait. I will be sure, first."

That was reasonable enough, Leslie conceded, for though he was convinced that the coffee had been drugged, he could not be certain until sufficient time had elapsed to prove his contention.

They did not wait long. At the end of twenty minutes, the waiter had

slumped into a chair; and presently the opiate had completely overcome him. Don Arturo twisted his mustache and said with a grim smile, "Now I weel play the joke. Let us put this excellent fellow to sleep in your bed. And you, my fran', weel do me the honor of sharing my room. You need the rest. I will stand guard until morning."

"Go ahead," said Leslie. "But if I wasn't so damn' sleepy, I'd sit up myself to watch for the flabbergasted look on the face of the bird that figures he'll slip into my room with a machete."

He followed Arturo to the adjoining room, kicked off his boots, and in a moment was sound asleep.

Leslie's sleep, however, was not interrupted in the way he had expected. Instead of a crackle of pistol fire and Hernandez's wrathful voice, he heard a horrible, gurgling scream that was cut short before it had fairly penetrated his consciousness. He bounded to his feet, revolvers in hand. In the darkness he collided with Hernandez. An instant later a tongue of light pierced the gloom.

"Watch it!" warned Leslie, catching his friend by the shoulder.

But the hall was empty. They heard a stirring and a thrashing in the adjoining room, and then silence. Valdez, the proprietor, came bounding up the stairs with a lantern. The rooms at the farther end of the hall disgorged a handful of guests.

"In here," said Don Arturo, indicating the room which his ally was to have occupied.

"*Madre de Dios!*" groaned Valdez. "They have killed him——"

"Like hell they have!" interrupted Leslie, crossing the threshold.

He tried the door. He had left it unlocked; but now it was barred. Leslie retreated a pace, hurled himself at the barrier. It groaned at the impact of his

shoulder. Leslie recovered, and again flung himself forward. Wood splintered, and the bolt tore loose from its socket.

Guided by the flashlight he had given Hernandez, Leslie entered the room. It was empty save for a man lying on the bed.

"Good God!" muttered Leslie. "Look at his throat!"

He saw now why that horrified yell had been so suddenly cut short. And Leslie also knew what Hernandez had had in mind in proposing the substitution of the unconscious waiter for the intended victim. He chuckled grimly, and turned toward his friend with an approving nod; and he was amazed to note Don Arturo's pallor.

That mangled, torn throat was a ghastly spectacle, but the Mexican had a strong stomach. Leslie wondered for a moment at Hernandez's horrified expression.

"Look! I tell you, *look!* That one-eyed cannibal—that devil has followed me to Xoatl—that ees exactly how he kills my peons—tears their throat—*Maria Madre!* We are not hunting him. *He is hunting you.* And now he has vanished—like smoke."

But Leslie shook his head.

"He could have escaped through that window that opens into the court. And it's a pretty low-class devil that has to bribe a waiter to drug me so I'll be easy meat."

THE proprietor was crossing himself with almost as much vigor as Don Arturo. Leslie glanced at his watch.

"I've had a pretty good snooze," he said. "Let's head out for the hacienda before the one-eyed devil discovers his mistake."

As Bart Leslie was drawing on his boots, there was a tap at the door.

"Let 'em in," said Leslie. "I don't think we'll have any more assassins to-night."

A man with blond, bristling hair, blue eyes that peered owlshly from horn-rimmed spectacles, and a woolen bathrobe drawn about his tall, burly body was at the door. He bowed with military precision and announced with a barely perceptible Teutonic accent, "I am Doctor Johana Ludwig Blauvelt. I witnessed the aftermath of this deplorable occurrence."

"Come in, Doctor," invited Leslie. "But you're too late to help that poor devil."

"I am not a surgeon but a doctor of philosophy," explained Blauvelt. "And I trust that you will pardon the liberty I take in intruding. Earlier in the evening, I was sitting in the booth adjoining yours. I could scarcely avoid overhearing your remarks concerning the monster that is terrorizing the hacienda of ——"

"Arturo Jesús Esteban Hernandez y Casablanca, *señor*," announced Leslie's friend. "And you are right. It is no less than Satan himself trying to drive me from my property."

"All of which," wondered Leslie, "is apropos of what?"

"Just this, gentlemen," explained Doctor Blauvelt. "I have spent the past year in Mexico, engaged in field work, mainly archeological and anthropological. I would be very grateful for an opportunity to make some observations about your hacienda. I would be too glad to share, in the interests of science, the dangers which you gentlemen were discussing."

"But certainly, *señor*! Perhaps with the aid of science we will all the sooner hunt down this one-eyed monster," assured Don Arturo. Then, to Leslie: "My fran', you do not object?"

"Hell's fire, no!" said Leslie. "The

more, the merrier. Just shake it up, Doctor, and pack your baggage. We're about ready to ride."

Blauvelt expressed his thanks, and hastened to his room. Don Arturo quizzically regarded Leslie.

"Science weel perhaps help," he murmured, "but me, I put more faith in those two guns which you wear so gracefully. But what do you say?"

Leslie shrugged, grinned, and rolled a cigarette.

"He'll probably be a bit of a pest," he replied carelessly, "but I don't think he'll hamper us. Unless I'm mistaken, he'll damn' soon confine his efforts to butterfly-chasing."

They carried Leslie's luggage to the car. Blauvelt presently joined them with his traveling-kit; and with Leslie at the wheel, they set out into the chilly darkness toward the Xoatl range. Hernandez lapsed into a brown, moody silence, but Blauvelt maintained a running fire of ponderously learned discourse.

"It is my opinion," he concluded, rounding out an elaborate theory, "that this is another outcropping of native superstition. I am certain that my contention will be verified."

Leslie held his own counsel. He had heard similar discourses, and had seen them startlingly refuted; and while Leslie did not go so far as admitting the supernatural, he had often seen enough science take the short end of the deal to regard it as skeptically as he did outright superstition. Yet he did not anticipate the ghastly refutation that awaited Blauvelt's claims when they arrived at the hacienda, shortly after daybreak.

As they cleared a clump of cottonwoods, just beyond which Leslie could distinguish the square, squat adobe shacks of the peons, he heard a yell of terror, the report of a rifle, and the whine of a ricochet bullet.



"Pedro, you jackass!" roared Hernandez, leaping clear of the running-board.

A peon, rifle at the ready, emerged from the door of the nearest adobe.

"*Cristo del Grao!*" he exclaimed in dismay, recognizing his master's voice. "Thank God—Don Arturo! I thought it was the devil coming back again. Look!"

He gestured toward the roadster. Leslie laughed as he caught the point. One of the headlights was out; and the car, zooming up to the crest of a steep rise in the road, had given Pedro the illusion of a blazing eye staring down from a considerable height. The peon's incoherent remarks confirmed his guess.

"He was here again, tonight," concluded Pedro. "*Madre de Dios!* We are lost! There is no hope. He killed José. Come. I will show you."

The frantic population of the adobe shacks emerged from shelter. Blauvelt joined the group, and followed Pedro, the foreman, to the house where they had placed the body of their hapless comrade.

THE dead man's face was a mask of helpless terror. His throat was hideously lacerated; but scarcely a drop of blood had been splashed to his chest, despite the torn jugular and arteries. As the light strengthened, Leslie saw that the body had been drained of blood, and that the ghastly wound gave evidence of suction applied to extract the vital fluid. He shook his head perplexedly as he regarded the gruesome evidence that confirmed Don Arturo's story; then he turned to Blauvelt, who was solemnly scrutinizing the body.

"Well, Doctor, how do you like that for an ignorant peon's hallucination?"

Blauvelt shrugged and imperturbably replied, "This still does not prove that the monster is supernatural. If you will glance about, Mr. Leslie, you will see

ample confirmation of my contention. And now that the light is stronger, it will be plain enough."

He led the way to the door, crossed the hard surface of the drive, and indicated a dusty patch that lay on the farther side.

"I noticed it by the glow of the headlight," he explained.

"Holy smoke!" muttered Leslie, regarding the monstrous print. It bore only a distorted similarity to a human foot; but the heel was unmistakable, and the toes, six in number, left no doubt that the monster must be at least approximately anthropoid. The length of stride indicated prodigious stature.

"By heaven," muttered Leslie, "he must be eleven feet tall if he's an inch!" Then, to Pedro, "How did it happen? And when?"

"How should I know, *señor?*" countered the swarthy peon. "I heard a noise, then a terrible cry—just like the last time. I did not look out for a long time. I was frightened. Then I heard another noise, and saw it running into the darkness. But when—how can I say?"

And that settled it. Leslie knew that no peon has more than a vague conception of time. Blauvelt, however, solved the difficulty as they returned to the adobe for another look at the corpse.

"Rigor mortis is just about complete," he announced. "That would make it——"

"Hell's bells!" interrupted Leslie, "that would make it about the time that that poor devil was killed in the tavern at Xoatl!"

"Precisely, my fran'," said Don Arturo. "Eef that does not prove it to be the work of Satanás, what else will? Who but the devil could kill a man in Xoatl and at the same time drenk José's blood? Now what you think, *señor el Doctor?*"

Blauvelt's face lengthened, and after a pause he countered dubiously, "I still maintain that there is a scientific explanation."

But the effort fell flat; which Blauvelt realized when no one bothered to contradict him. And they were all relieved when Hernandez finally said, "Pedro, tell Lizeta to get us some breakfast. The sun is rising, and Satanás will not walk——"

"Not until another night, Don Arturo," was the peon's somber response. "We live another day. And that day we will spend in leaving this accursed hacienda. All of us."

"So," said Hernandez to Leslie as he led the way to the broad veranda at the front of the ranch house. "You see what I have to contend with? Thees bargain—bah! Eef I am not myself keel some evening, I am busted. Which ees as bad."

## 3

**D**ESPITE the successful efforts of Lizeta, the *mestiza* housekeeper, to turn out an American style breakfast in honor of Two-Gun Bart, the meal was as depressing as the dining-hall. The early morning sun accentuated the decrepitude of the hacienda which Don Arturo had not yet had time to modernize. And despite the new proprietor's efforts at being the gracious host, he was obviously worried at the somber words of Pedro.

"They will all walk out on me," Hernandez repeated. "And news travels fast. I weel not for love or money be able to keep any peons here."

"*Señor*," interposed Lizeta, "I am not afraid. And I will talk to the servants."

"If you do as good a job with them as you did with breakfast, they'll all stay," approved Leslie. Then, to his host: "Round up all the laborers and give them something to do. That'll keep them from

getting morbid. And organizing a hunt to track down the monster will suggest the idea that the thing isn't such a terror after all. Sell them that notion, and then keep them moving. Right?"

Don Arturo brightened perceptibly.

"*Seguramente!* That should work. I weel try it."

He reached for his sombrero, took one of the Winchester rifles from the wall, and led the way toward the adobe stacks. The peons had already begun to collect their families and their scanty belongings. A dozen swarthy, stalwart men, square, chunky women, and a horde of half-naked children were milling about the area when Hernandez picked Pedro from the crowd.

"What sort of foolishness is this?" he demanded. "It is well enough to send the women and children away. But you, Pedro—are you one of them?"

Pedro sullenly regarded Hernandez and replied, "The devil is eating us, one by one. We do not stay any longer. This place is accursed."

"And so you forget your friends—your brothers—their children who were killed by the monster? You leave Don Bart to hunt the devil single-headed, do you?"

At the mention of Leslie's name, murmurs of interest swept the shaly throng. There were few of them who had not heard of Bart Leslie's reckless feat along the Rio Grande.

"Is that Don Bart?" countered Pedro, eyeing Leslie.

"But of course. And you make me very much ashamed. I told him last night that I had men on my hacienda, and now I find a pack of frightened girls. Last night the man-killer broke into Don Bart's room in Xoatl to drink his blood. To keep him away from here. But Don Bart sent him howling into the darkness;

and now he is here to hunt him down and avenge your dead comrades.

"And before you leave, saddle some horses. Or would you have Don Bart hunt the devil on foot as well as single-handed? Or will only the household servants follow him? Lizeta and the *criadas*, they are staying."

Pedro's dark eyes narrowed and his swarthy face hardened. Then he said, "Me, I was going to stay. It is these others who were leaving. Tomas! Gregorio! Saddle up some horses. And one for me. I am going with Don Arturo."

Another added his voice to Pedro's; and in a moment the exodus was broken up.

"They are joost like children," whispered Hernandez. "So far, so good. But we must do something, queeck! Or they will finally leave."

"They're good for a day or so," assured Leslie. "But they'll be difficult to handle if there is another killing."

A few moments later, Pedro and Tomas returned with horses.

"How about it, Blauvelt?" demanded Leslie as he swung into the saddle. "Joining the hunt?"

"Certainly. I would not miss it for anything. But I'll not bother with a rifle. That, I gather, is your specialty. So I will devote myself to the interests of science."

And that, decided Leslie, as they filed from the corral in column of troopers, was more than satisfactory. Amateurs with firearms were more dangerous to the hunters than to the hunted.

**H**ERNANDEZ wheeled his horse about, circled the adobe shacks, reined in his mount, and announced, "Here is a second set of tracks. His approach to José's house."

Judging from the shorter stride, the creature had been stalking its prey. They saw how it had been lurking behind a

cottonwood, and how the hapless José's footprints ended in a confused thrashing.

"The monster's flight," reasoned Leslie, "should carry him by the most direct route to his den, whereas while he was on the prowl he would be zigzagging about, hunting his prey."

"That is reasonable," agreed Hernandez. "But I doubt that he does any hunting. He is accustomed to finding his food here."

Leslie spurred his mount forward so that for a moment he rode boot to boot with Hernandez.

"For hell's sweet sake, cut out cracks like that!" he warned in a low voice. "That'll scare the peons silly. And what's more, you're wrong. The brute must and probably does eat every day, and if it didn't have some other source of prey, the hacienda would have been depopulated months ago."

"Hmmm . . . that ees right," admitted Hernandez. "In fact, while there have for the past ten years been rumors of mysterious disappearances, as I learned too late—they did not become terrifyingly frequent until shortly after the earthquake."

"Ah—an earthquake?" This from Blauvelt, who had maneuvered his horse to Don Arturo's left flank. "I heard of it while I was in Oaxaca, at the hot springs. But was it serious?"

Hernandez shook his head.

"It cracked the adobe walls of the ranch house in a few places. The main force seems to have been in the mountains. Strangely enough, it greatly alarmed the peons. It was as though they had a premonition."

Blauvelt laughed. "Superstitious fancies—although the intuition of the savage is keen."

A clatter of hoofs interrupted the impending discourse on anthropology.

Pedro and half a dozen laborers came charging up.

"We are joining the hunt, *señor*," he announced. "The rest—they are staying to guard the hacienda."

"Very good," acknowledged Hernandez. "Now fall back, so Don Bart can follow the trail."

THE footprints of the monster led southwest from the ranch house and toward the Xoatl range. Leslie, backtracking, followed the trail readily enough across the tilled patches; but as he progressed into the open range, it was becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish the gross, shapeless footprints.

"Seems to have made a bee-line," he observed, "heading directly from that pass in the foothills to the hacienda."

"And that weel make it difficult," muttered Hernandez. "The Xoatl range and its foothills have a mos' unsavory reputation among the Indians. When Hernan Cortez conquer' Mexico, some of the Nahua people, led by a chief call' Xoatl, fled from the invader and made their home in the caves with which those hill are honeycomb'. Even to this day, the peons can not be persuaded to go near those cave. They claim it is haunted by devils, by the ghosts of the Nahuas."

"Just as I said," interpolated Blauvelt. "That shows the extent of native superstition. Those Nahuas are undoubtedly the ancestors of your peons. In fact——"

"Hold it!" snapped Leslie, reining his horse back to its haunches.

He raised his hand, halting the cavalcade, then leaped from the saddle. A large silver button lay directly in the monster's trail. It was untarnished, and unfilmed with dust; but Leslie saw at a glance that the hand-hammered disk of silver did not match those that had made Don Arturo's gala costume resplendent.

"What distinguished visitors have you

had around here lately?" demanded Leslie.

"None," replied the Mexican.

"This does not necessarily prove anything," continued Leslie. "But it hasn't been lying here long, and if the cannibal monster isn't wearing the finery of one of his victims, then some well-dressed gentleman crossed his trail quite recently."

"Or else," suggested Blauvelt, "someone is perpetrating a hoax, and is disguising himself as a monster."

"But who could walk with a stride that long?" countered Leslie.

"Stilts," was the prompt reply, "would solve that difficulty."

Leslie's answer was noncommittal: "We'll save the button, and maybe we'll find out who lost it."

They followed the trail for half a mile. It disappeared on stony ground; and despite his efforts, Leslie could not again pick it up.

"We're stuck," he finally announced, "though I'm sure he came from the foothills. Are there any bloodhounds near?"

"Not closer than ninety or a hundred miles," replied Hernandez.

Leslie wheeled his horse about.

"Tonight we'll post a guard about the peons' quarters," he said. "And when I get through filling him with lead, the extra weight will keep him from running so fast. In the meanwhile, we'd better grab a siesta so we'll be ready for an all-night watch."

## 4

LATE that afternoon the yipping of dogs, the excited chatter of the peons, and a stir and bustling in the patio of the ranch house penetrated into Leslie's room on the second floor. He stepped out to the gallery, and found that the cause of the disturbance was as lovely a girl as he had ever seen south of the Rio

Grande, or north of it. She was slender, shapely and colorful despite the severely simple tweed sports costume she had donned for a long trip from Monterey or Mexico City, Leslie decided, as he tried to picture her in the infinitely more striking garb which ladies of her class would wear in town.

"And look at Gorgeous go for Hernandez," was Leslie's half-jealous comment. Then he noted that despite the modernity of her costume, she had made a concession to old Mexican traditions: a bent, white-haired woman in black accompanied her, the inevitable duenna.

Hernandez, glancing up toward the gallery, hailed his friend; and in a moment Leslie was presented to the visitors: Don Arturo's sister Maria, and her duenna, Señora Gomez. But Leslie had scarcely paid his respects when Hernandez interposed:

"You must leave at once, Maria. It is dangerous. Last night——"

"Dangerous?" She regarded Leslie with keen interest, laughed and said, "You speak of danger when Don Bart is with us? Ridiculous!"

Hernandez detailed the nature of the peril. Maria's dark eyes widened, and her lovely face became grave, but only for a moment.

"I am not afraid. And if I were, I would stay anyhow. I knew something was wrong. I sensed it from your letters, but of course I could not guess. Señora Gomez and I decided that it was financial worries, so I insisted on leaving Monterey to join you at the hacienda. You have been too generous, Arturo, and you can not afford to have me playing around the city while this impending loss faces you. I will not return. And besides, it is too late."

"Don Bart can drive you back to Xoatl to catch the next train——"

"Don Bart," she countered, "will make

an everlasting enemy if he does not immediately develop tire trouble or run out of gas, or something of the sort. Quick, Don Bart—must I begin hating you, or will you be so obliging?"

Leslie, who had at first agreed with Hernandez, found his resolution melting before those smoldering dark eyes and cajoling, crimson smile.

"Lord, yes, Miss Hernandez!" he laughed. "The old tub's ready to fall to pieces, and I couldn't make it tonight—much as I'd enjoy a moonlight drive."

"Ah, that is much better! Arturo, what would the peons think if you sent your precious sister back to Monterey? What a splendid example, when those poor people are in such a panic!"

"Oh, all right," conceded Hernandez. "I'll tell Lizeta she has a new boss. And you will have a delightful time tyrannizing it over the servants, and I shall be worried silly. So get your things unpacked and be ready for dinner in an hour or so."

But before dinner was announced, the arrival of another visitor distracted the hacienda from the lurking menace that made each sunset the prelude for nightmare terror. A grizzled, white-bearded man mounted on a coal-black stallion and weighted down with silver braid came clinking toward the house. Leslie wondered at Hernandez's suddenly wrathful, somber expression as he regarded the latest arrival.

"That's Pacheco," muttered Hernandez. "The fellow who sold me this mare's-nest of a place!"

But while Hernandez was not offensively cordial, his greeting was courtly as he advanced to meet the leather-faced old fellow whose trailing spurs jingled like the sabers of a troop of cavalry as he strode toward the new owner of Hacienda de la Plata.

"We have just time for one of these

cocktail' *Americano*," said Hernandez at the conclusion of the three-cornered exchange of compliments. Then, seeing Blauvelt lounging in the arcade, he added, "Be pleased to join us, *señor el Doctor*."

And, true to type, Hernandez spoke of everything except the terror that was depopulating the hacienda. Leslie, instead of joining in the courteous circumlocution that inevitably preceded getting down to business, unobtrusively scrutinized the grizzled old fellow who had for years owned the hacienda. Pacheco, he decided, was shrewd, but on the level; and then Leslie began to wonder.

One of the silver buttons that ran in treble rows down the legs of Pacheco's tight-fitting trousers was missing; and the one that Leslie had picked up while trailing the monster perfectly matched those that remained in place.

"This old geezer," was Leslie's mental note, "will explain a few things to me before he's through swapping compliments with Hernandez. He might have been walking for his health last night, but if he did, he came a long way for a moonlight *paseo* . . ."

And then things began to happen. It kept Leslie busy recording the rapid succession of instantaneous impressions.

LIZETA, the housekeeper, approached with a massive silver cocktail-shaker, one of the relics of Don Arturo's town house in Monterey. The look that passed between Pacheco and the *mestiza* housekeeper was flickering, but pointed. That set Leslie wondering. Lizeta's Spanish blood enlivened the heaviness of her features. She was still pleasant-faced and shapely, and not many years ago she must have been uncommonly handsome. . . .

Blauvelt, Leslie noted, was regarding Pacheco with unusual intentness for a scientist.

And then Pacheco dropped a bomb.

"Don Arturo," he said, breaking a pause in the flow of courtly nothings, "I wish to buy this hacienda from you. I won the capital prize in the lottery. My affairs have been shaky these past few years, or I would never have sold. But now I can afford to offer you a handsome profit."

Hernandez's face was an impassive brazen mask; but Leslie sensed his amazement. And then, ever vigilant, Leslie's eyes shifted like swords in swift play. He caught the momentary change in Blauvelt's scholarly features and pale blue eyes, and wondered why for an instant the German's glance crossed Lizeta's as she withdrew with the empty cocktail-shaker; and he wondered still more at the smoldering sullenness that marred her face as she shot a final look at Pacheco.

All in an instant; and the lightning succession of impressions left Leslie groping. Then he saw that Hernandez was smiling and making an evasive gesture as he replied to Pacheco's startling remark: "Don Romualdo, your remarks interest me. But be so good as to let me ponder on the matter. In the morning, perhaps, I will be more prepared to consider your generosity."

But the brusque old fellow laid his cards on the table: "My friend, I will be frank with you. I am a gambler, a speculator. You, I believe, are not. Therefore our interests are diverse. As for me, I want this hacienda mainly for the sake of the abandoned mine in the foothills. With the sharp rise of silver caused by the United States Government, I can profitably operate the mine. Not as profitably as my grandfather did, but well enough. There are countless tons of low-grade ore which the low price of silver made useless. Now it is otherwise.

"I am frank with you. If you wish to

operate the mine, I have nothing more to say. But the profit I can give you—double the price you paid me—will be more than this hacienda would yield in years.

"There has been a cloud over this place. I had difficulty with my peons. You will have the same. But my offer will——"

"You are too generous, Don Romualdo," evaded Hernandez. "And you are neglecting your drink. *A su salud, caballeros!*"

As he rolled a cigarette, Leslie tried to fit the jig-saw puzzle together. Pacheco, he was certain, had been stealthily prowling about the hacienda, despite his bluntness in declaring his aims. Pacheco must know more about the nightmare monster than anyone suspected; yet in view of the price of silver, he was ready to risk troubles of his own. Miners, with a dozen superstitions to every one of the peon, would be even more difficult to handle.

"I wonder," said Leslie to himself, "if Pacheco's yarn about the mine is pure hoovey, and he has promoted this one-eyed monster to regain the hacienda he had to sell to raise money? And finally, why did Lizeta nail him with such a look?"

But before he could mull over the hastily gathered impressions, dinner was announced, and Hernandez led his guests to the dining-hall.

**D**ESPITE the sparkling presence of Maria Hernandez, the meal was gloomy. There were no lamps, and the unshaded candles cast long, ominous shadows that reached into those that lurked in every corner of the great dining-hall. A shadow, reasoned Leslie, is only a shadow; nevertheless, he was glad he had worn his .45's to dinner. And as the meal dragged on, with forced socia-

bility competing with Blauvelt's ponderous discourses, Leslie felt that the sooner he could break away and take his post among the peons, the better. The poor devils were depending on him to fight the monster single-handed; and moreover, another raid by the beast would finish Hernandez.

"Don Arturo—Miss Hernandez," he began, "it is dark outside. And if you will excuse——"

But Leslie did not complete his request, Maria's eyes, shifting toward some distraction beyond the dining-table, suddenly widened; and even before she cried out, Leslie knew that she had looked fear full in the face. He jerked his chair aside, half turned. For an instant he himself was paralyzed with amazement.

A monstrous, shapeless head was framed by one of the windows that pierced the two-foot thickness of the adobe wall. The face of the Thing was but vaguely human. By the dim outdoor light Leslie saw that in lieu of a nose the creature had gill-like slits; but the most terrifying aspect was the single monstrous eye that glared baleful and phosphorescent.

Shrill screams drowned hoarse exclamations and scraping of chairs; and then Bart Leslie's .45 stirred up thundering echoes in the spacious hall.

The head disappeared as fire spurted from his revolver. Leslie bounded clear of the table, dashed to the door, and swung around the corner of the house; but despite his speed, the monster had vanished. As Leslie circled about, seeking a footprint or possible splash of blood that would indicate the direction of flight, a woman ran screaming toward him. It was Lizeta, the *mestiza* housekeeper.

"Which way did it go? Did you see it?"

"*Si, si! Por allá, señor!*" Her excited gestures indicated the north. "It seized

me, but by the grace of God, I managed to break loose before it got a fair hold."

Leslie observed that Lizeta's face was scratched, her clothing torn, her eyes round and frightened. But before he could question her and get more explicit directions, Hernandez, Blauvelt and Pacheco rounded the farther corner of the ranch house.

"This way, Don Bart!" yelled Hernandez, catching sight of Leslie. He turned to head south.

"Hell," muttered Leslie, "they're all nutty—is it north, or is it south?"

But Hernandez would be more nearly right; and as Leslie caught up with the trio, he called them to halt to survey the level ground that stretched out into the shifting twilight. The peons, swarming from their cabins, joined the group.

"Look, *señor!*" muttered Pedro, who led them. "Over there. By the cottonwoods."

Leslie noted a stirring in the shadows, and for an instant saw a monstrous hulk go shambling from the shelter of one tree to the next. Despite its grotesque awkwardness, it moved with cat-like speed. Leslie bounded forward.

"*Por Dios!*" yelled Pedro. "He will kill you."

The monster vanished. Leslie halted, revolver ready. He caught a fresh glimpse of that gigantic mockery of humanity. His .45 crackled. They heard a hair-raising howl and a bestial bellowing. But as Leslie dashed forward to follow up his advantage, the crashing and crackling, and pounding of footsteps, told him that his fire had no more than frightened the creature. By the time that Leslie cleared the cottonwoods, it was bounding across the range like a kangaroo; and in the dusk, Leslie knew that even his marksmanship could not touch a moving target at that distance. He hol-

stered his smoking revolver and retraced his steps.

"*Olé! Olé! Don Bart!*" applauded the peons.

"What did I tell you, idiots!" chuckled Hernandez. "Is not the devil himself afraid of Don Bart? And now maybe you will believe me and stay here, yes?"

"WELL, that's something," said Leslie as they returned to the house. "The *mazos* are convinced that the Thing can have the fear of God shot into its hide. And I'll admit I wasn't any too steady myself."

Then, as Blauvelt and Pacheco crossed the threshold to re-enter the dining-room, Leslie added in an undertone: "It looks as if I'll have to revamp my suspicions. It's a cinch Pacheco isn't wearing stilts and playing devil to scare you out of here."

"Nevertheless," was Hernandez's somber retort, "his offer to buy back the hacienda comes at a significant moment. He may know more about the monster than we think. He has lived for years in this region. And the good God alone knows what terrible things may not have come out of the countless caves of the Xoatl range. I am sorely tempted to accept his offer before he changes his mind."

"That," said Leslie, "is your business. But whether it's man, beast, or devil, I'm getting to the bottom of things or else you will be speaking of your friend the late Bart Leslie."

"God forbid!" was the devout wish. Then, resuming his place at the table, Hernandez said to Maria, "Well, little sister—do you think it would be wise to let Don Bart drive you back to Xoatl?"

"Positively not!" she declared. "I will stay here."

Leslie saw the futility of trying to reason with her. He turned to Blauvelt:



and said, "Doctor, have you changed your opinion, or do you still insist it's all native superstition?"

Blauvelt was far from composed, and his scientific stubbornness was sagging.

"There is no doubt that there actually is such a monster. I could scarcely dispute it, after that hideous apparition. You remember the legend of the Cyclops—the one-eyed giant of the *Odyssey*?"

Leslie nodded.

"It is by no means impossible," continued Blauvelt, "that we have seen a reversion to type, an example of atavism. Science, while to a degree discounting legend and superstition, has finally come to the conclusion that many of the classical fables did in the dim mists of antiquity have an origin in truth. And thus I am willing to concede that perhaps this monster could be one of that fabled race of one-eyed giants. In that case we have but seen the beginning of terror. The creature may be of such primitive nervous organization that unless you literally chopped it to pieces with bullets, you could scarcely harm it."

Leslie smiled grimly; but before Blauvelt could carry on to offer scientific proof of the existence of the terror he had so stubbornly denied, Hernandez abruptly interrupted, "We will all sleep under arms tonight. While I scarcely anticipate a return of the monster, having our guns handy will promote rest."

"And in the meanwhile," said Leslie, "I'll stand watch with the *mozos*. Lord knows I'd not want any of them killed. Not after the big hand they gave me for my bum shooting."

But before he left the room, he stepped to Blauvelt's place and whispered in his ear, "Listen, friend: one more word from you about Cyclops legends, and I'll tie you in knots. I can appreciate your fair-mindedness in admitting a change of heart, but Miss Hernandez is familiar

enough with mythology to be scared silly by scientific proof that Ulysses probably did watch a one-eyed giant eat his comrades one by one. Talk about botany for a change!"

And while the learned doctor was digesting that, Leslie was stalking toward the door.

5

WHEN Leslie reached his post, he found Pedro, armed with a machete and a shotgun, sitting at the foot of a huge cottonwood.

"*Que tal, Pedro?*"

"*'Sta bueno, señor,*" was the big fellow's response, quite in contrast to his earlier gloom. "Me, I am afraid of nothing. But these other fellows——"

His contemptuous gesture indicated the peons who had retired to adobe shacks. But Leslie could in no wise relax his own vigilance, for now that Pedro was inflated with new-found valor, he would in all probability fall soundly asleep and thus be an easy victim of the Cyclops.

Several hours passed, and the voices from within the ranch house at last subsided. The silence, however, was presently broken by footsteps, and Leslie, in response to his low-voiced challenge, heard Hernandez say, "It is I—Arturo."

"What do you make of it all? Particularly Pacheco. He's a sour note if there ever was one."

Hernandez shrugged and replied, "It is true that he may be using the one-eyed devil to further his plans. But I can hardly see how he could be responsible for the beast. And while your finding that silver button proves that he was spying around here, we certainly cannot claim that he is masquerading as a cannibal. He was with us when the Cyclops looked

in through the window. "But what is your thought, *amigo*?"

"It's damn' confused, and getting more so. I sense a dirty mess of trickery; yet I can't for the life of me see how anyone can be more than just making use of circumstances. But now that you're here—halt!"

Hernandez ducked to the shadow of a cottonwood. Leslie drew his .45 and whirled to face the figure that loomed up in the dark; but a voice reassured him.

"Never mind cocking your revolver. This is Blauvelt. I have finally arranged my argument, and perhaps while you're on watch, you'd have time to listen to me prove that the recent earthquake quite conceivably has something to do with the recrudescence of this one-eyed monster. As you remember, the Cyclops of legend dwelt in caverns, and——"

"Mighty damn' interesting, Doctor," interrupted Leslie, holstering his Colt. "But suppose you explain it to Don Arturo while you're helping him stand watch. He just came out to relieve me while I went on the prowl."

Whereupon Leslie entered the patio of the ranch house and ascended the stairs to the second floor. He was already familiar with the assignment of rooms and lost no time in stealing through the darkness toward Pacheco's door. His intent was no more than to check up and see whether the old fellow was asleep, sitting up, or perhaps already engaged in another nocturnal promenade around the hacienda; but as he approached the door, he learned that he had another, though not entirely unexpected factor to take into account.

There was no streak of light reaching out from the threshold, but Pacheco was neither asleep nor alone. And the voice was that of Lizeta, the housekeeper.

"Then increase your offer," she was

saying. "If Don Arturo won't take your first bid, try again."

"No, *por Dios!*" growled Pacheco. "And even if I doubled my offer—which I can't and won't—he wouldn't take it, now that this never too much to be accursed Gringo has that monster on the run. That Bart Leslie will surely kill him. If not today, then tomorrow. Hernandez knows that, and he will not sell except at a ruinous price.

"Now get out! You are a damned pest, and you forget your place. By-gones are by-gones, and why drag up ancient history——"

Lizeta's wrathful reply was inarticulate, then distinctly profane, and finally, threatening.

"You white-bearded old goat," she snarled, "if you'll do nothing about it, then I will."

She started toward the door. Leslie shrank into the shadow of a pilaster and watched Lizeta burst wrathfully into the hallway, and thence to the lower floor. Presently Leslie descended to the patio. He could no longer doubt that Lizeta and Pacheco were plotting against Hernandez; but the *mestiza's* threat perplexed him. Leslie hoped that that pest of a scientist would not be too difficult to side-track, as a few confidential words with Hernandez were then and there in order. It was with considerable relief that he learned, as Hernandez accented him near the laborers' shacks, that Blauvelt had left but a moment ago.

"He held forth charmingly as to the reality of that eleven-foot man-eating monster," said Hernandez. "Which of course we have had terrible proof. And I remarked to that effect, which——"

"Nuts for him!" chuckled Leslie. "You'd better tell me a bit about Pacheco, and a lot about your housekeeper. Among other things, she gave me a bum steer when I took after the Cyclops

this evening, which set me thinking. Then I just overheard her reading the riot act to Pacheco."

Leslie detailed his impressions, then concluded, "And now what do you make of it?"

"It is no secret," replied Hernandez, "that Pacheco and his pretty *mestiza* housekeeper were quite friendly, years ago. It would seem that Lizeta hopes to regain her lost status as unofficial lady of the hacienda, which of course would be impossible unless I sell out to Pacheco. But, *sangre de Cristo!* You surely can't believe that Lizeta is engineering a monstrous hoax, and impersonating this awful beast? Impossible, my fran'!"

"Nothing is impossible," countered Leslie. "Of course she's not impersonating it. But she lied like hell when I dashed out looking for it. And I can't find any signs of the struggle she described. And she's on the war-path. So——"

**B**UT Leslie's conclusion was not enunciated. He was interrupted by a shrill scream. Only a woman in extreme terror could thus cry out. Leslie's first thought was that Lizeta had returned to resume the quarrel with Pacheco, and that the brusque old fellow was trying to kill her, and that he knew that some woman was in fear of more than death.

"It's the Cyclops!" yelled Leslie as he dashed toward the house. "It's broken in! Rout out the peons! Saddle up horses, while I——"

And as he ran, Leslie saw Hernandez had booted Pedro to his feet, and heard him shouting orders. He bounded across the patio and up the stairs. The second floor was in a turmoil. He heard a woman sobbing, heard Blauvelt's demand, "Vot iss?"

The disturbance came from Maria's

room. Leslie cleared the threshold at a leap, and saw Blauvelt striking light to a candle. Old Señora Gomez lay writhing and screaming on the floor. Maria's bed was empty. The heavy window-bars had been wrenched from their sockets as though they had been tallow candles instead of three-quarter inch, hand-wrought iron.

"The devil—the one-eyed monster," cried the old woman. "He broke in—seized her—I tried to stop him—my arm is broken—Don Bart, save her——"

"Which way did he go?" demanded Leslie.

Señora Gomez indicated the window.

"Blauvelt, round up Lizeta to take care of the old lady!" commanded Leslie. "Then join us at the corrals. We'll track the beast down if we have to climb hell's back stairs barefooted. Get Pacheco, too!"

Leslie descended the stairs, three steps at a time. He tore through the dining-room, swept three rifles from their pegs as he ran, and continued his rush toward the corral.

"Hernandez!" he shouted. "It got Maria! I'm going out on foot. You follow on horse. Moon's rising, and maybe I can keep it in sight!"

He dropped his load of rifles, turned and sprinted toward the direction taken by the Cyclops earlier in the evening. As he passed beneath Maria's window, he saw, distinct in the moonlight, the monstrous footprints of the beast. Revolver in hand, he plowed through a truck garden, toward the outer fringe of trees in which the beast had played hide and seek while favored by twilight gloom.

Leslie noted with relief that there was no trail of blood. Profiting by its earlier experience, the Cyclops was not pausing to kill his victims. That would give Maria a chance; and despite its prodigious strength, the beast could scarcely be so fleet of foot when burdened by its prey.

A despairing, half-strangled shriek guided Leslie. And then Maria's outcry ceased.

Leslie, clearing the intervening trees, caught his first full, unobstructed view of the blood-thirsty terror. It towered monstrously in the moon-glow, a lurching, nightmare figure all the more hideous for its semblance to humanity. Under one arm it carried Maria Hernandez as though she were a kitten. The other arm swung free, a great, misshapen appendage that reached to the creature's knees. Its long, annihilating strides as it struck out across the open range and toward the Xoatl foothills were gaining on Leslie, gaining at a dismaying rate, despite his heart-breaking sprint. Behind him he heard shouts and the snorting of horses, the clatter of hoofs, the excited yells of the aroused peons—but he wondered, as he pushed on, whether the pursuit could be organized in time.

He halted, forced his shaking muscles to obey, and leveled his .45. Moonlight, and a moving target at that range made the attempt dangerous, despite the bulk of the creature; but Leslie aimed low. For a moment the roar and thunder of the heavy revolver drowned the tumult in the rear. Leslie heard the monster bellow, stagger, lurch forward, and then recover.

"Hit him, by heaven!" he growled, renewing the pursuit. But despite Leslie's sniping, the Cyclops was gaining. Terror urged him to greater speed. And then the rushing horsemen caught up with Leslie. Hernandez yelled. Leslie turned, saw an unmounted mustang, and swung himself into the saddle as the cavalcade swept past him. He booted his horse into the press of the peons.

"Gangway!" he shouted, charging through.

The calico mustang was swift. Leslie forged into the lead, Hernandez following in his trace. They were gaining; and

the peons, seeing the marauder in full flight, were yelling and shooting. Leslie turned in the saddle.

"Cut that out, you damn' fools!" he yelled. "Hold your fire! You'll kill the girl!"

But there was no controlling their exultant wrath. They mistook his shout for an exhortation to fire faster and ride harder. Jets of dust rose white in the moonlight, and lead sizzled dismayingly, from every side.

"Block 'em, Arturo! For hell's sweet sake, block 'em while I loop around and flank the beast so I can plug him!" yelled Leslie. "They'll kill her!"

Hernandez cursed wrathfully, reined his horse to its haunches and wheeled about as Leslie, sweeping to the flank and clear of the spray of lead, leaned across his horse's neck, leveled his pistol, and blasted a screaming streak of slugs at the monster. The beast bellowed, bounded erratically, dropped its victim, and settled down to run at a terrific pace. They were nearing the rocky outcropping at the base of the foothills. The Cyclops had the advantage now. Horses would go down like nine-pins in that treacherous surface. Leslie booted his mustang forward, belted it across the hindquarters with the barrel of his smoking revolver, and as the Cyclops bounded from the cover of one gigantic boulder toward the shelter of the next, Leslie wheeled his beast for a broad-side shot.

But as his finger contracted on the trigger, he felt a searing stab in his shoulder. His shot went wild. And then his horse faltered, missed a stride, and crumpled in a kicking heap, pitching Leslie to the rocks. As he struggled to his feet, the yelling cavalcade closed in, and reined to a halt.

Don Bart's fall had sapped their enthusiasm. And before Leslie could commandeer a horse, he heard Hernandez

yelling from the rear. The peons wheeled about.

"——— —— jugheads!" Leslie cursed. He knew that before he could get a mount and resume the pursuit, the Cyclops would be safely in its lair. Then he remembered the sturdy mustang that had carried him to a fall. He retrieved his pistol to put the beast out of its misery. But as he turned, he saw the horse was motionless. Slightly to the rear of the shoulder was a round, black spot: a bullet hole. And oozing from the other side was a dark pool of blood. He knew then that his horse had been shot from under him.

"Pacheco, by heaven!" muttered Leslie as he set out on foot to join the group that had gathered about Hernandez. "And when I get a quiet word with him——"

## 6

**M**ARIA HERNANDEZ, though bruised, shaken and hysterical, was none the worse for her terrifying experience.

"Mount up, Arturo!" said Leslie. Then he swung the disheveled girl up to the saddle in front of her brother. That done, he mounted a horse that Pedro had taken from one of the *moxos*, and joined his friend. Blauvelt was at Hernandez's left, but Leslie had thus far seen no sign of Pacheco. Something was off color; but Leslie had to admit that one of the excited *moxos* could have fired a wild shot.

Leslie therefore decided to hold his peace until further investigation would justify an accusation. Moreover, he had stumbled across a query that was even more baffling: why had the invading monster made its second unprecedented attack on the house, and why had it picked Maria Hernandez? Pure chance, he admitted, was a logical answer; and that would have been acceptable had it

not been for one detail he had noted as he had gathered the girl in his arms to lift her to the saddle: knotted to a strand of her streaming black hair was a tuft of some pungent, aromatic herb. And while the odor was not unpleasant, it was certainly not one which a city-bred girl would favor as a scent, and least of all employ in such primitive form.

"Oh, by the way, Miss Hernandez," was Leslie's casual remark, "do you find mosquitos troublesome out here?"

She eyed him quizzically, then regarded her bare feet and arms, laughed, and said, "Why, no, of course not. But whatever makes you think of mosquitos, at a time like this?"

"I was just wondering," evaded Leslie. Maria, he concluded, had certainly not tied that tuft of aromatic herbs to her hair to discourage mosquitos. And then Leslie addressed Don Asturo:

"I'm sure I winged the beast at least once. I think that if we start a little before daybreak, we can track it to its lair by following the blood splashes."

"*Bueno*," Hernandez replied. "And once we smoke it out, there will be an end to Señor Pacheco's generous offers."

"Hmmm . . . so you think he's behind it?"

"*Quien sabe?* Its depredations certainly favor him, though that may prove nothing after all." Then, feeling that he had overstepped himself, he turned to Blauvelt and said, "*Señor el Doctor*, be pleased to forget that careless remark. I would not for anything do Pacheco an injustice. And I trust that you have made sufficient observations in the interests of science? Or perhaps you would like to accompany us on the hunt?"

"It would be a rare privilege," declared Blauvelt. "In fact, I would insist. I would even like to capture the beast alive. It would be a rare acquisition for a zoo or museum."

**L**ESLIE and Hernandez accompanied Maria to her room. Señora Gomez, they learned, had not been injured as seriously as she had said; her arm was but wrenched, and not broken. But Leslie was more interested in the now familiar aroma that pervaded the room occupied by Maria and her ancient duenna.

"Miss Hernandez," said Leslie in a low voice, as he plucked a strand of the girl's dark hair and drew it forward so that she could see it. "I have an excellent reason for asking you an odd question: why do you wear this tuft of herbs in your hair?"

"Why—why, good Lord, Don Bart— who put it there? I surely didn't."

"I thought not," was Leslie's comment. "Say nothing about it. But take it off, right now. I begin to see why you were selected by the monster. This strange, pungent odor marked you in the dark."

And before Maria or her brother could comment, Leslie was striding down the hall toward Pacheco's room. He was certain that the inhuman ogre had human devilishness to aid him; but Leslie's wrath fled as he kicked the door open and played his flashlight into the darkness.

He had half expected to find that Pacheco had fled; but the spectacle that confronted Leslie left him dazed and horrified. Pacheco, sprawled crosswise in his disordered bed, lay face up and drenched with blood. His throat had been gouged out as though gigantic, iron fingers had torn loose a handful of flesh.

"Hernandez! Good heaven, look at this!" shouted Leslie.

Blauvelt and the Mexican came running.

"*Madre de Cristo!*" muttered Hernandez, crossing himself. "And to think that I suspected him of this villainy. But how do you account——"

"At the best," interposed Blauvelt, "we can no more than guess. But it seems that the beast killed Pacheco. Then,

startled—it would be timid, you recollect, on account of our having pursued it earlier in the evening—it left before drinking the blood of its victim, and on its way out, it seized Miss Hernandez, whom it hoped to devour at its leisure."

"Reasonable," conceded Leslie. "Or else it's another example of the creature's diabolical dexterity. You remember it raided my room in the tavern at Xoatl, and almost at the same time, it killed one of Don Arturo's peons, miles away. Obviously, there must be more than one of the monsters."

"Precisely, Mr. Leslie," said Blauvelt. "And that substantiates my contentions to the effect that there is a nest of them. A tribe, perhaps, of man-eating Cyclops. They may for centuries have been imprisoned in some inaccessible valley in the Xoatl range, but now, due to the shifting of the terrain, caused by the recent earthquake, an exit has been provided for them."

"And," muttered Hernandez, "they will make this hacienda a delightful place."

"Anyhow," said Leslie, "the beast hasn't eaten tonight. Hunger will drive it out again, soon, despite its hot reception. I'm going back on post and stand guard until it's time to renew the pursuit. The rest of you may as well get a bit of sleep."

Shortly before the first signs of dawn, Leslie heard a door slam; and before he could challenge the shapeless figure in the gloom, he heard a familiar voice saying, "This is Blauvelt, Leslie. I'm not taking any chances on your resuming the chase alone, and it'll soon be time to set out."

"Fair enough, Doctor," agreed Leslie. "And the more I think of it, the more I'm convinced that a couple of us quietly tracking the beast on foot will be a lot more successful than the Mexican version

of a steeplechase. With all the yelling *moxos*, and one horse shot out from under me already, I'd prefer to be certain that the danger is in front and not behind me."

Blauvelt chuckled and asked, "When do you start?"

"Right now. As quickly as I can wake Hernandez and tell him to stand watch during our absence. I've got my flashlight, but you may as well bring yours, and a revolver."

A few minutes later they set out on foot in the general direction of the last unsuccessful pursuit. The carcass of the calico mustang, stripped of saddle and bridle, marked the spot where the chase had ended, Circling about, and playing the beams of their flashlights on the rocky slope, they soon picked up traces of the monster's footprints, and splashes of blood spilled by Leslie's long-range shot.

"Not bleeding heavily," said Leslie, "but his exertions will make the flow continue."

**H**E LED the way up the slope. The general direction of the trail was leading toward an arroyo. Rocks recently knocked loose from their bed of earth showed where the Cyclops had crossed with two prodigious leaps. Fifty yards farther, a handprint, and greasewood half uprooted, guided Leslie.

"He stumbled. Pretty well corked," Leslie diagnosed. "Too bad someone plugged my pinto. Hell of a fine marksman in the crowd, only his gun wasn't pointed the right way!"

And then the lay of the land began to aid Leslie. A cleft in the hills widened out into a small valley just beyond; and the first signs of daybreak made the tracking faster. Blauvelt, stumbling and puffing, had to conserve his breath and desist from scientific comment. But at

the end of another two odd miles, Leslie halted.

"Get your wind, Blauvelt," he said in a tense voice. "And give your hand a chance to steady a bit. We may both have to do some fast shooting when we rout him out. He's big as a box car, and Lord knows how many .45's he may assimilate before he takes the count."

"Ach, so you haff dee game tracked down?" wondered the scientist, lapsing into a thick accent. Leslie's suppressed excitement was contagious.

"Yes. See that dark blot half-way up the hillside? A cave, sure as the Lord made little apples. And his prints head that way."

"Mmm . . . that is so," admitted Blauvelt. "And now vot?"

"Smoke him out! Let's go!" snapped Leslie, anticipating and blocking a reflective pause in the interest of science. Blauvelt scrambled after him. As he scaled the slope, Leslie pocketed his flashlight. The tracks were plain in the gray dawn.

"Easy," he cautioned in a whisper. Soundlessly they covered the last fifty yards, picking their way among bleached bones scattered near the entrance of a blackly gaping cavern from the mouth of which a human skull grieved hideous warning of the cannibal who lurked somewhere in the honeycombed heart of the hill.

Leslie halted at the lip of the opening, and grimaced wryly at the charnel stench that filtered from the gloom. He heard a vague stirring and an asthmatic wheezing, but the deceptive acoustics of the cave distorted the sound and robbed it of direction; and Leslie, though straining his eyes, could not pick the monster's bulk from the enveloping gloom, despite the steadily increasing brightness without. He drew and cocked his .45, and crouched, ready to fire; but the odor of death, and

that ominous wheezing snore, shook even Leslie's iron nerves.

"Hell with this waiting!" he muttered. Then, glancing back for an instant, he whispered, "Pass me your flashlight. Mine's a bit dim."

Blauvelt's face was gray, and his hand trembled as he fumbled for the light.

Leslie jerked his eyes back into line, and with his left hand reached over his shoulder. The monster might be alert and lurking, warned by its beast-instinct that danger was present.

As Leslie's fingers closed on the nicked cylinder, he felt the transmitted tremor of the scientist's hand. And then, an instant too late, he sensed that peril was behind him as well as in the darkness ahead. A numbing blow crushed his Stetson down to his ears, and a vigorous thrust from the rear sent him pitching headlong into the gaping mouth of the cavern. Leslie, though conscious, was momentarily paralyzed by the impact that would have brained him but for the cushioning of his hat. His sluggish, instinctive effort to break his fall resulted in nothing but the loss of his revolver. He crashed against a ledge, dropped another yard into blackness, and then thumped sprawling to a gently sloping, rocky floor. In this tumbling descent, his second revolver, loosened for action, slid from its holster and clattered into the gloom.

Leslie's involuntary yell of dismay echoed in the cavern, and masked the rattle of rocks dislodged by Blauvelt's precipitate flight down the hillside. Leslie licked his dry lips, gritted his teeth, and forced his numbed body to obey; but as he struggled to his feet, he heard a hoarse grunt and a ponderous stirring in the darkness at his right. Before he could jerk his flashlight into play and locate one of his revolvers, a bestial bellowing shook the cavern, and dislodged fragments of rock clattered to the floor.

Heavy feet shuffled, and then a single monstrous eye glowed phosphorescently from the gloom. It was too late for Leslie to collect himself and attempt to scramble toward the mouth of the cave, some two yards above the floor. He saw that his retreat was cut off.

A gigantic, scarcely human shape was for an instant silhouetted against the increasing outer brilliance. Then it lurched forward, sniffing and mewling and whining. Leslie knew that it had scented him. The blazing eye shifted, and as it picked him out of the shadows, in blind desperation Leslie groped for a stone, and hurled it.

The monster charged. Leslie ducked, felt sharp talons rip his coat; and then a second flailing sweep, missing its grasp, sent him crashing against the cavern wall. He flattened to the floor as the Cyclops wheeled, and before the enraged, hungry beast could crush him, Leslie shot himself forward between the monster's legs. His hands seized another jagged rock, recovered, and hurled the missile, catching the brute full in the chest as it turned to close in. The impact for an instant checked the charge, but Leslie knew that the end was near. His head was splitting, his breath came in sharp, agonized gasps, and the veins at his temples were distended like fire hose. He knew that he could not possibly dash toward the entrance and clamber up the steep, shelved ascent, nor could he reach the revolver that gleamed dully near the opening. One more rush, and—

Leslie whirled, tripped on the half-stripped thigh-bone of one of the victims whose fate he was about to share. The beast lunged; but instead of dodging, Leslie plunged headlong into the narrow crevice he had just perceived. He felt the monster's nails dig into his ankle, kicked clear, before the fingers could



close, and wormed his way into the cleft, a yard beyond the enemy's reach.

FOR the moment he was safe, for the Cyclops could not force his bulk into the crevice; but he crouched at the mouth of the opening, glaring at his trapped prey, and fingering the thwarting tongues of rock. In the dim light Leslie for the first time had a clear view of the Cyclops, and shivered as he regarded the creature he had fought in the darkness. The entire body was deep purple, with a spongy texture like the comb and wattles of a rooster. Beneath the single eye that glared from the low forehead were two slits, vestigial nostrils; but the crowning horror was the sphincter-like mouth that twitched and drooled saliva as it alternately covered and exposed four long gleaming fangs that would at one bite slash a man's throat to ribbons.

That twitching, hideous mockery of a mouth, that hungry, infantile mewling for Leslie's blood told him why the victims had been drained dry of their vital fluid; and as he struggled to keep his stomach under control, he sensed the reason for the beast's blood-drinking: its lower jaw was so undeveloped that it could not masticate solid food.

"And it must have been a sub-human monster, like this one," he said, forcing his eyes away from the sickening, thirsty mouth, "that originated the Cyclops legend of ancient days. Blauvelt was right." Then with a grim thin smile, "And if I ever get out of here alive, I'll give that boy a demonstration in the interests of science!"

He was certain that Blauvelt had not struck him in a blind panic induced by the proximity of the monster. Blauvelt had deliberately thrown him to the beast; but Leslie had no time to ponder on the doctor's motives. The Cyclops, though baffled, had not given up. He was now

wrenching and tugging at the rocks that obstructed the mouth of Leslie's refuge.

A fragment separated. It was not large enough materially to widen the opening, but the beast took hope; and Leslie, recoiling, wondered whether the giant would be intelligent enough to use a lever, or a chunk of rock as an improvised hammer.

"Lucky he's too dumb to throw rocks at me," he muttered as he watched the expansion and contraction of the brute's incredible muscles. "But killing me's no good, unless he can reach me. I'm just groceries to him."

Another fragment broke loose.

"God!" muttered Leslie, stunned by the explosion of energy.

As he watched the gradual march of doom, he became aware of a curiously familiar, pungent odor. It was undeniably a breath of that same odd herb which someone had tied to Maria's hair. Leslie hastily dug into his pockets. He found a small packet. He had not previously noted its odor on account of the sickening stench of the unconsumed remains of the monster's victims, but now his nostrils were becoming accustomed to it.

"Hmmm . . . someone tagged me with this so the beast would be sure and pick me, even in the dark . . . and in the excitement of tracking, I wouldn't notice it . . . that was either Blauvelt, or—who else?"

He tossed the packet past the Cyclops. The monster abandoned his efforts, picked up the aromatic herb, pawed it like a kitten mauling a ball of catnip, gurgled and drooled as it thrust the packet into its mouth. But the distraction did not give Leslie a chance to dash for his revolvers; and for the instant, he was too wrathful to have ventured a break.

"The —— ——!" he cursed. "Planted that stuff on Maria so the beast

would get her! It goes for that stuff like a dog for anise, or a cat for valerian."

And then the Cyclops, mumbling and drooling, returned to his task with renewed vigor, as though stimulated by the herb. Grunting, heaving, clawing, it tugged at the tongue of rock which was the key to Leslie's refuge. Once that yielded, the jig was up. And the beast seemed to sense, finally, that he was on the right track.

A cold sweat cropped out on Leslie as he watched the rock perceptibly yielding. A dozen men could never have budged it, but the Cyclops could concentrate his strength. That one fantastic eye now glowed with triumph. That eye—

And then Leslie tore a page from an ancient book. Thirty centuries ago, a man had thwarted a similar monster. Leslie had no sharpened stake to char to a red heat; but the principle was good. He jerked his flashlight from his pocket, extracted the three cells, broke them open against the sharp rocks. He gathered the corrosive chemicals, powdered carbon and sal ammoniac moistened with acid, and crumbled them to granules.

The rock lurched an inch as the monster's mighty back arched. The Cyclops grunted, looked up—but before he could renew his prodigious assault, Leslie bounded forward, hurling the double handful of chemicals squarely into the ferociously blazing eye.

The blinded beast howled with pain and clawed his burning orb. Leslie cleared the crevice, dodged a flailing, sightless sweep, crashed against the wall of the cavern, and leaped for his revolver. The Cyclops turned, but his charge was erratic. Leslie's .45 crackled like a machine-gun. The Cyclops staggered, roared, and lurched forward, bleeding but vengeful and unweakened. Leslie whirled, but missed his footing. A stunning blow knocked him into a corner; but as the

monster followed, Leslie's gun snapped into line. For an instant he held his fire. Only two cartridges remained, and they had to count. . . .

"Smack-smack!" The beast halted, tottered, and *chunked* ponderously to the floor, drilled through the eye and brain.

"By heaven, I should have brought a cannon!" muttered Leslie, attempting to rise. But his knees were weak, and he crawled to the mouth of the cavern, where he retrieved his second revolver. Then he slumped in a heap, staring at the hulk that lay huddled and still twitching when it should be stone-dead.

"NERVES like a turtle," said Leslie, wondering if peril was finally over. Then, as his strength returned, he pulled himself to the first shelf. But before he could hoist himself over the lip of the cavern, he heard a voice, and drew back to listen.

"*Hombrecito! Hombrecito!*" called a woman.

"What *little man* can she be looking for?" wondered Leslie.

He peeped over the lip of the entrance. Lizeta was a few yards from the cave. Near her were two earthenware ollas apparently full of milk. And then he saw Blauvelt dashing up the slope. Leslie cursed, cocked his .45, then controlled his wrath.

"*Hombrecito!*" repeated Lizeta, as though hailing someone in the cave. Leslie was perplexed, and then the hideous truth dawned on him.

"Never mind feeding him," shouted Blauvelt. Lizeta started as though prodded with hot irons.

"Oh—*Señor el Doctor!* But why not? He is hungry. He will come out and Don Bart will kill him."

"He's not hungry," was Blauvelt's retort. "And Don Bart won't kill anyone. Now that your *hombrecito* has attended

to that meddler, Hernandez will sell out, *muy pronto*."

"And then——"

"Don't worry, Lizeta—you'll be the new mistress of the hacienda. All I want is the old silver mine. Now hurry back to the house, before someone misses you. You fool, didn't I tell you——"

"But I thought——"

And then Leslie emerged from the cavern, grim, white-faced, his eyes cold as sword-points. His pistols were holstered.

"Wait a minute, Blauvelt!" he challenged.

Lizeta screamed. Blauvelt stood nailed in his tracks. His face had become pistachio-green in the early morning light. He tried to speak and gesture, but his mouth moved soundlessly.

"Draw your gun, Blauvelt," Leslie commanded. "The gun you knocked me on the head with."

"But—what do you mean?—how——"

"Draw your gun," reiterated Leslie. "I'll give you a fair start. I'm too old to start killing unarmed men. Except for that *hombrecito* in the cave, and that wasn't a man——"

Lizeta's comprehension was instant. Her scream of grief and anguish shook Leslie's frayed nerves. The distraction was but an instant, yet that instant was deadly. Blauvelt saw his chance. His revolver jerked from its holster and into line. Lizeta leaped raging toward Leslie. All in a confusing whirl—and then Two-Gun Bart reached for his gun. He made it by a hair. The prolonged roar of Leslie's .45 blended with the crackle of Blauvelt's weapon.

Blauvelt bent in the middle as though he had run into a waist-high fence, convulsively jerked a second shot, and collapsed like a Japanese lantern. It was not until a moment later that Leslie saw that

Lizeta had not tripped, but that Blauvelt's wild shot had struck her as she rushed Leslie. As he knelt beside the comely *mestiza*, Leslie saw that she was not fatally wounded; but this he kept to himself.

"Better tell me what it's about, Lizeta," he urged. "Why——"

"Get a priest," she moaned.

"Too late," was Leslie's grim retort; but even before she explained, he sensed the tragedy that Lizeta was about to reveal. Then he heard a clatter of hoofs, and saw Hernandez galloping up the draw. Maria and a pair of *mozos* followed. They dismounted in time to catch the essentials of Lizeta's explanation.

"He was my son," she said. "Don Romualdo—Pacheco—was his father. Eighteen years ago—when I was a girl—he was born in this cave. *Madre de Dios!*—It was God's punishment for our sin. But he was mine. What could I do? Abandon him? He had no jaws to eat solid food. So I fed him milk for a dozen years. But once he killed a chicken and sucked its blood. He liked it, the blood. Then—he was enormous for his age—he learned to kill larger animals—then people—and I could not always carry milk to the cave."

"*Cristo del Grao!*" exclaimed the horrified Hernandez. "I wondered why she set out with two ollas so early this morning. So we followed her. And that——"

"But why——" resumed Leslie.

Lizeta anticipated his question, and explained in a steadier voice, "If Don Arturo kept the hacienda, my *hombrecito* would sooner or later be hunted down and killed. So I helped the Doctor Blauvelt, who said that the earthquake had uncovered a new, rich vein in the old silver mine. But I did not kill Pacheco. I often wanted to, but I

didn't. That was Blauvelt, who did not want Pacheco to buy back the hacienda. Me, I would have been glad, even if he would not have given me the house where I used to be young and beautiful, years ago."

The grimness faded from Leslie's face. He gestured to Hernandez and Maria. As they withdrew, he whispered in Lizeta's ear, "Tell me why you put that strange-smelling herb in Doña Maria's hair. You have been punished long enough—I will say nothing to anyone."

"Because she was young and beautiful, and I feared that Blauvelt would rob me of the house he promised me, and let her——"

"Forget it. There's a good chance that you'll live," said Leslie. Then, hailing the *mozos*, "Carry her back to the house."

**B**UT how could such an awful brute be born to any human woman?" was Hernandez's query as Leslie joined him and Maria. "Satan, and not Pacheco, was its father—or some beast——"

Leslie shook his head.

"If Blauvelt had lived to explain, he could do better than I can. This Cyclops is an extreme example of a rare but not unknown abnormality. And as nearly as I can mangle the Britannica—under the heading of 'monster'—it is an example of teratology, caused by a deficiency in formative power in the embryo, and resulting in what the doctors call 'imperfect separation of symmetrical parts.'

"And now I can see the fine hand of

Blauvelt from the beginning. That poor devil of a waiter we put in my room in the tavern at Xoatl was not killed by the Cyclops, but by Blauvelt or a native accomplice, thinking of course he was butchering me and putting the fear of God into you.

"And Pacheco's death was similarly motivated. Blauvelt, having rediscovered a fresh outcropping of silver in the old mine, was without doubt prowling around before we met him in Xoatl, and had both opportunity and motive for trying to cast suspicion on Pacheco and thwart his attempted repurchase of the hacienda. Now let's get going. I need a drink."

But before Leslie could swing into the saddle, Doña Maria caught him by the arm.

"Oh, Don Bart—I was too frightened and dazed to realize, last night, what a horrible fate you saved me from—that your shot made the beast drop me——"

And before Leslie could think of a suitable Spanish assurance to the effect that it was less than nothing, Maria's arms encircled his neck, and her lips sought his mouth.

"Holy smoke, Maria!" he finally gasped, catching his breath. "One more like that—anyway, your brother——"

"Theenk nothing of it, Don Bart," assured Hernandez. "Eef there is any chance that thees weel become a habit, I weel continue looking the other way, and ride like wan hell to the house to equip the excellent Señora Gomez weeth a blindfold."

