



**T**ANSY took a sack of rice from his saddle-bags, poured a cupful of it into a saucepan, added water, and set it on the embers of our fire.

“I like rice best when it is steamed, not boiled,” he said. “It won’t boil on these embers, and we’ll let this sit here till supper time and you’ll find it tender as cheese.”

I laughed.

“I thought I was the only ex-service man living who still cared for rice,” I said. “Didn’t your division get much of it?”

“I’ll say we did! But not so much till we got up into Germany; and then *beaucoup*—*trés beaucoup*. And the way those slum-burners used to cook it! A thick paste it was, so solid you could cut it into slices mostly. But it isn’t the army I think of when I eat rice. It’s something else.”

Tansy and I were prospecting for silver in the Tuscarora Mountains in the northern part of Nevada. His horse had gone lame, so we were resting up for a day or two. Our camp was at the bottom of a little gulch between boulder-strewn hills with a little brook of ice-cold water running through it and abundant grass for our animals.

Having lighted his pipe from a coal which he lifted from the fire between two

twigs, chopstick fashion, Tansy puffed thoughtfully for a minute and then said:

“See here. Did I ever tell you about the mutiny on the *Melilla*? Then I’ll tell you about it now because it was rice that started that mutiny. What I mean is, the crew wanted rice, and there wasn’t any. The ship’s officers had eaten it. So the crew thought they would start something; and they did, believe me.

“English ship, the *Melilla*, an ocean tramps with sickness in her guts. By that I mean rotten engines. And a Chinese crew. I don’t know what she brought out from Leith. I wasn’t with her then. My chance came when the third officer took violently sick at Valparaiso and had to be sent ashore.

“We took on nitrates for Baltimore and went south. That was before the Panama Canal was opened—just, a few weeks before. Everything tight so far. The captain was Scotch, a white-haired chap, very profane, except on Sundays when he read his Bible. First and second officers, young Englishmen, nice fellows, but quiet.

“So we would have been a silent bunch except for the passenger. Cameron his name was, or so he said. But I never knew a Cameron to carry around a Yiddish newspaper, which this man did when he came

aboard. At that, you couldn't help liking him. He was jolly and clean-minded, lost money with the rest of us at poker and didn't worry over it. Good company, you'd have said, on a long trip like that.

"This Cameron had a dog, fox terrier size, only she was dark gray, and he had her trimmed spaniel fashion. Hair cut close all over her body except for a tuft on the tip of her tail, and ruffs around her ankles, and from her shoulders forward the hair was natural length. You've seen 'em like that. He called her 'Panama.' He said she was pedigreed and he had been offered fifteen hundred dollars for her. But the skipper couldn't believe that. He said he wouldn't give five pounds for the best dog ever littered.

"The bitch wore a collar as remarkable as herself, a broad steel band lined with soft leather and studded with spikes half an inch long, and sharp, too. On the buckle-plate was a rosette of cut glass as big around as a silver dollar. The centerpiece was a blob of color. You know what a pecan nut is? Well, it was as big as that, and then some. It was a dark wine-red. I've seen rubies just that clear color.

"Around it was a circle of smaller glasses, three of white, then one of green; but they were much smaller. It was just tinsel—a pretty bauble. The weight of the ornament held it always at the lowest point of the collar, that is, under the dog's throat where it wasn't very noticeable on account of the long hair.

"Panama wasn't a dog to make friends easily. I don't mean she was surly—nothing like that—just reserved. She never fawned to be petted, the way most dogs do when they get to know you; never followed you around the ship. Even Cameron she didn't follow much; and seldom came on the bridge even when he was there. She didn't seem to like the ladder—open stairs, you know, with a steep pitch.

"Her favorite napping-place was on the raised deck in the bow over the galley where she would lie for hours at a stretch. Maybe she

found it cooler there. I don't know. But she didn't seem to mind the chinks at all, and they got a lot of fun out of her on account of the way she was tailored.

"One day a group of them discovered the ornament on her collar and one fellow tried to twist the collar around where they could see it better. But Panama bared her teeth at him, and they all pushed back from her in a hurry.

"**I** SAID the Melilla had rotten engines. Well, halfway to the Magellan the old lady got pains in her insides and we shut down to doctor her up. Nothing short of a general overhauling would do the chief engineer said, and it was three days before we got going again. She ran for sixteen hours and lay down and quit. The chief was only a day patching her up this time, and we got clear of the Straits and were off Cape Virgin before we had more trouble. It seemed then as if we'd never get going again.

"After two-three day's tinkering they got the shaft to turning and we started. And then—say, you remember that hike to the Rhine? 'Fall out! Fall in! Fall out! Fall in!' Well, that was us for the next four or five days. The old lady would twist her tail for a few hours, and then rest for another half day. Then at some unexpected minute she would start off again. Just like that. No more reason to her than a balky mule. Two weeks later we were only off the coast of Uruguay, more than thirty degrees down from the Line.

"It was then we began to husband our provisions. When the choicest of them went, it became a question of 'burgoo' or rice.

"Burgoo—any old sailor can tell you what that is; oatmeal gruel with a dash of butter and sugar to take the curse from it—if you have the butter and sugar. If you haven't, salt is the only seasoning you get with it. The cook, under orders from the skipper, was conserving the sugar for our drinkables. So the

burgoo got no sweetening. As for butter, that had gone the way of all flesh with sinful disregard of our necessities.

“We voted for burgoo. The young English officers had a silly prejudice against rice, a sort of racial antipathy for it. It was chink food. It was bad enough, they thought, to eat Scotch burgoo; but that at least was a white man’s dish.

“They stood it for four days while the old *Melilla* limped along at about nine knots. Then they declared a lurid preference for rice, and that began to give out, so the crew was put on burgoo.

“That ship’s larder was shamefully understocked. But you know how it is. No matter how decrepit a ship is, or how miserly her owners are, there’ll always be some one to take her out. The only emergency rations we carried were oatmeal and hardtack. Both deck and fire-room were undermanned. The skipper told us the *Melilla* was owned by two Leith merchants of small means who wanted a little adventure and took it by proxy, sending the ship out, a torment to all concerned with her. We would have given considerable to have had the owners on that trip with us.

“The chinks, it seemed, didn’t take kindly to the burgoo. Three meals of it were enough to convince them of its undesirability as a diet. They got the cook, who was one of themselves, to speak to the captain about it. He sent back word that the rice was practically gone, and burgoo it would be, or nothing, till we found a port. But he promised to put in at Rio for supplies.

“I didn’t blame the chinks for sickening of the porridge. My stomach refused it after three days’ fillings of it, and I was never noted for a delicate gizzard. But the skipper! ‘I can’t see what the heathen are complaining for,’ he said. ‘In Scotland, now-’

“‘Aye, in Scotland!’ growled the chief engineer, who was half Scotch himself but had a vast preference for Irish potatoes. ‘Every

people to their own taste,’ he said. ‘How would you like a diet of bird’s nests, sir, or macaroni, say, three times a day world without end? And if I live to set foot in Leith again, there’s going to be murder done there of two gentlemen.’

“‘Tush, William!’ the skipper said reprovingly. ‘That’s no way to speak of our employers.’

“‘Tush, Tammas!’ the chief said back at him with a grin. ‘You’ve already murdered them in your heart, and that’s almost the same thing, as the Good Book shows.’

“Well, the days passed pretty slow for us, as you can well imagine. Of course, the chief and his assistants were busy enough with the engines. They didn’t dare turn them over very fast for fear they would shake themselves to pieces. The first and second officers, the passenger Cameron, and I, killed time playing poker. There wasn’t anything else to do. We played penny ante and got a lot of fun out of it.

“The second officer, Ward—I got to like him very well. He wasn’t what you would call gay, but he was keen-minded, had been around quite a bit, and could talk about anything from Thackeray to submarines. He and I planned to go out together in another ship after we got to Leith. But the mutiny changed all that.

“IT WAS about that time that Panama disappeared. Cameron used to feed her when he first came on deck in the morning. She usually went up into the bows then. When he called her one morning she didn’t come to him. We combed the ship from the fo’c’sle to the bunkers but never saw her again. We thought she had fallen overboard; all but Cameron, who insisted that the chinks had thrown her over. He was much upset over it.

“‘Why should the crew drown her?’ we asked.

“‘Revenge,’ he said. ‘They’ve turned

ugly from having no rice. I'm merely supercargo, so they vent their spite on me.'

'He got Captain MacNair's permission to search the crew's quarters again and asked me to go with him. He was so disturbed over Panama's loss that we all humored him. When he began opening the gunny bags that the chinks kept their belongings in, I said, 'You don't expect to find her in there, do you?'

'No,' he said. 'Panama is gone. But I thought maybe they might have kept her collar. If I should find her collar I would know that they killed her.'

'But he didn't find the collar.'

'He brooded over the loss of that dog for three days, and on the third day at supper, nobody having mentioned the dog, he broke out suddenly, 'You men think it's queer, my feeling so badly over losing a dog.'

'He said it tensely, accusingly; as if we had been blaming him for his sorrow over the animal's death. He looked defiantly at Captain MacNair and went on:

'But it isn't the dog I care so much about as her collar. I can tell you now that pigeon blood stone in her collar was a ruby. Some archeologists are excavating an Inca temple over in northern Chile. A peon found that ruby and ran away with it. It worked its way down to the coast where I got hold of it. I don't know what it's worth—several thousand dollars, maybe. I had planned to smuggle it into Baltimore where you unload. Now you know why I feel so badly about losing that dog.'

'Toward the end of the speech his voice lost its vigorous defiance. It took on a complaining tone as if he held us responsible in some way for his misfortune.'

'Besides myself there were only Captain MacNair, the chief engineer and Ward at the table. Welling, the chief officer, was on the bridge, and the assistant engineers were below. No one spoke for a moment. My first feeling was one of resentment against

Cameron for breaking into our calm with his innuendos of stolen gems.

'I felt uneasy, slightly dismayed. Next thing, I thought, he will be accusing one of us directly with having killed his dog for the sake of the jewel. His words were the first discordant note to enter any of our conversations. He had placed us all under a cloud of suspicion, and at that moment I almost hated him. A restraint fell between us all. We, who only a moment before had been confident and trustful, were now self-conscious, doubtful of each other.'

'Some men show disapproval by their silence. Captain MacNair was such a man. No doubt he felt outraged that this Cameron whom he had taken as a passenger as a personal favor, should abuse his hospitality by planning to smuggle gems into a friendly country, making the *Melilla*, as it were, a party to the crime.'

'Cameron continued to look from one to the other of us, but we were too busy with our own thoughts to notice him. I can't say how long we would have sat there, waiting for something to relieve the situation, had not the chinks chosen that special moment to start their roughhouse. We heard a shout from Welling and a revolver shot, and almost immediately the shutting down of the engines.'

'The chief was the first on deck. I was at his heels. Cameron got in MacNair's way, and I heard the skipper cursing like a stoker. The ladder to the bridge was under the raised deck aft. We saw Welling standing at the top of it holding his revolver on the crew which was packed tight around the bottom. The chinks broke away from the stairs when they saw us, retreating silently, their faces toward us, to the maindeck.'

'My ——, don't shoot them!' the chief yelled. 'We're shorthanded now.'

'We went up on the bridge.'

'What is it, Mr. Welling?' the captain asked.

“I don’t know, sir. They came running along the deck shoulder to shoulder like a pack of wolves. I ordered them forward. They paid no heed to me. They tried to rush the stairs and I shot into the air. It looks to me like mutiny, sir. Some of them have knives.’

“‘There are some of my boys there,’ the chief engineer said. ‘I hope they haven’t hurt my assistants. I’m going below.’

“‘Wait a minute, chief. We don’t want to divide our forces,’ the skipper said.

“He leaned over the rail and told the men to go to their quarters, and to send the cook to the bridge. The bosun, who could speak pidgin English, looked up and said:

“‘Sailor boys wantee rice, cap’n. Alice want rice, sabe?’

“‘Tell them,’ the skipper replied, ‘that there is no rice. If they will work the ship to the next port I will get some. Now go forward.’

“‘Officers eat rice, cap’n,’ the bosun said.

“I saw a knife or two come out.

“MacNair turned back to us.

“‘Chief,’ he said, ‘we’ll start the show. Don’t shoot, men. They haven’t any guns.’

“The engineer ripped off his coat and flung it into the wheelhouse. He was smiling. We went down the stairs. Reaching, the main deck we spread out. MacNair, Welling, and the chief took the middle. Ward and I on the flanks. The chinks stood their ground. They had reached that state of senseless fury when men do unaccountable, irrational things. They didn’t know what they wanted to do. Suppose they killed us all. That wouldn’t get them any rice.

“We read a lot nowadays about self-expression. Well, fighting is a form of self-expression. If those chinks had been we, they might have written a burning letter to the press declaring that the country was going to the dogs because they couldn’t have rice. Then they would have gone back to their work

feeling happy and virtuous. Not being so effete and sophisticated, they tried to cut us into ribbons with their knives. It was their brutish way of expressing their grievance.

“They seemed to be all there, the sixteen men of the deck crew and the twenty-four of the ‘black squad.’ As we closed in, several knives flashed up. We were outnumbered eight to one, but they couldn’t break our front. When we struck them they gave back slightly, but rebounded. Those behind reached over those in front to stick us with their knives or claw our faces with their vile nails.

“I got my first one on the jaw and he went down. I swung again but the second chink stepped inside the blow and got his arms around my neck. I felt his putrid breath on my face. I gave him my knee below the belt. He went down squealing, thrashing on the deck under our feet.

“Welling fell with a man on top of him. The chief and I closed the gap. What the first officer did to that chink I don’t know, but all the facial surgery in the world couldn’t make that chink look like himself again. When Welling got up, his nose was streaming claret, and he was berserk. He charged through that squirming mass like a bat through ——. But as he turned, a chink rocked him with a blow on the head and he fell senseless.

“You see that scar?” Tansy asked, holding up his left forearm.

I nodded. It was like a long white burn and as wide as a thick pencil.

“That saved my windpipe,” he went on, “and I’ve never regretted it, though it’s marked me for life.”

“We were fighting on a line running from the main hatch to the rail,” Tansy continued. “Ward’s flank was protected by the rail. My end was up in the air. Finally three or four chinks thought to scramble up on the hatch. But it didn’t get them anything. If they came close enough to strike, I dragged them

down by the legs.

“There’s no denying it was going hard with us. Welling was out of it. The skipper’s right arm was no longer any good except as a guard. He’d got a wicked slash near the shoulder that severed the muscles. The arm was never quite good after that. The chief engineer was as good as three ordinary men while his wind held, but years of quiet boozing had rotted his bellows. He was bleeding in half a dozen places and sobbing for breath. Ward was the only one of us who hadn’t lost blood, but he had paralyzed his right arm with a swing on some chink’s coco.

“I always thought it was a mistake that we hadn’t got our guns first and done a little shooting. Nothing breaks the spirit of a mob like hot lead. But it was the Old Man’s orders not to shoot. I am sure, though, that he hadn’t expected the crew to put up much of a fight.

“Five men are no match for forty, any way you look at it, and the forty with knives and as crazy as only an obsessed Chinaman can be. They might have got us. I’m not saying. But just as that white-haired skipper was dragged down by three insane chinks, the assistant engineers bobbed up the forward companion. The way they tore into those pagans was a caution. They were fresh, and every blow knocked a Chinaman for a broken nose or a mouthful of loose teeth.

“The chinks broke and scuttled for the fo’csle. One of them never left the deck till Ward and I heaved him overboard. The chief had killed him with a short arm chop below the ear. Two others crawled away on all fours. But they stoked us into Rio.

“The captain called a truce then, and Cameron patched us up. He was some surgeon. He had watched the fight from the bridge, ready to shoot up the rebels if they gained a distinct advantage over us. He was just going to unlimber, he said, when the engineers got into the game.

“AND then began the queerest sport I ever bet money on. Ward and I played it. We called it ‘chink-snatching.’ It consisted of sneaking down to the fo’csle, grabbing off a chink and beating it before the others stuck us with their knives. If we got one we turned him over to the engineers, and Heaven help him if he didn’t shovel coal. Great sport while it lasted, but it came to a sorry end. Before each raid we would lay wagers with Welling and Cameron on our chances of capturing a Chinaman. The chinks had to keep the bulkhead open for air, but after we pounced in on them a few times they learned to set a guard. They wouldn’t come out of themselves to work the ship. Too stubborn.

“It makes me think of the night raids on the German trenches over there in the Toul sector. Was your division ever there?” Tansy asked.

“No,” I said. “But we used to slip across the Marne opposite Jaulgonne, just before the Germans came across on the fifteenth, and bring back a squarehead or two for our intelligence section to question. I know what you mean. It must have been something like that, going down into the forecabin expecting them to pass you a grenade any minute. Go on.”

“Yes, it was something like that,” Tansy said, “only we didn’t want the chinks for any information we could get out of ’em. Just wanted them for fire-room work. First time down we got two. That was because we took them so by surprise. After ten or a dozen raids we got enough to fire one boiler with a shift.

“And then we learned that the chinks were sneaking up on deck at night for water, and we began stalking them. That was how Ward got killed. And that put an end to chink-snatching.

“It was the second night after the mutiny. We were getting close to Rio and the skipper said he might turn off the crew there

and get a white crew.

“Well, Ward and I were down on deck, laying for a chink. It was quite dark. We thought we saw a shadow come up the companion. It vanished, going aft.

“‘You take the starboard side,’ Ward whispered.

“The chink went up the port side ahead of Ward, turned across under the bridge, and came down my side. I couldn’t understand what he was after. Just prowling, I suppose. I was crouching close to the rail and when he came opposite, I grabbed him.

“‘I’ve got him, Ward,’ I said. ‘One more for the stokehole.’

“But Ward didn’t answer. I took the chink below and turned him over to the engineer on duty.

“I wondered about Ward and returned to the deck and began looking for him. I found him face down on the main deck. He had been stabbed through the neck from behind and must have fallen just as I grabbed that chink because I didn’t hear him hit the deck. A second Chinaman must have come up and stalked Ward while he was stalking the first man.

“Ward’s death made us all pretty blue. The skipper didn’t say much to me about it, but to Welling he seemed to assume that I was to blame for the second officer’s death. Which was rather strange, because it was Ward who proposed the chink-snatching and was so keen about it. I missed him more than I care to say.

“**W**HEN we got to Rio the skipper turned the crew over to the authorities, charging them with mutiny and murder. We made our depositions, shipped a white crew, replaced some machinery parts and sailed for Baltimore.

“But something happened there at Rio that puzzled the skipper and me for months. I can’t explain it all yet.

“Learning that we were getting rid of

the Chinese crew, Cameron decided against going on to Baltimore with us. He was confident that the Chinamen had the big ruby, so he was going to stop in Rio for a while to see if he could recover it. The day that the Brazilian authorities took the Chinamen ashore, he asked if he might search the crew before they left the ship. The captain couldn’t well refuse the request, though none of us had felt the same toward Cameron after he told us that he intended to smuggle the ruby into the United States. So when the crew lined up on deck with their baggage, he went through them, even made them remove their shoes.

“Of course, he didn’t find the jewel, but after he had gone ashore, I went down to the fo’c’sle to look at the ports, and there sticking out from under a gunnysack away up in the peak, I saw an end of Panama’s collar. Dragging it out, I found the ruby still in its setting. Later, following up a suspicion of mine, I found some bones in the ash pit in the galley that certainly were not beef bones.

“The skipper and I concluded that the chinks, tiring of eating burgoo, had killed and eaten Panama. The cook probably saved the collar because of its gaudy prettiness. Of course he didn’t know its value or he would not have discarded it. He had doubtless planned to carry it away with him, till he learned that he was under arrest. Then, fearing that possession of the collar would complicate matters for him, he hid it hastily where I found it.

“For a long hour the skipper and I debated what to do with it, finally deciding that the only right thing was to return it to Cameron. I spent the most of three days on shore looking for him, but he seemed to have vanished.

“When I went to see the captain a year later at Leith he still had the ruby, but was anxious to sell it for anything it would bring as he needed money. I agreed, and we made a trip to London where we got three hundred

and fifty pounds for it. I took a hundred and fifty and made him keep the two hundred.”

Tansy sighed.

“If I had all that money now! But I had a smoking good time while it lasted.

“So,” he concluded, “it isn’t the army I

think about now when I eat rice. It’s nitrates I think of, and burgoo, and that big ruby that Panama wore on her collar, and engine-trouble, and the mutiny, with the crazy chinks crawling all over us and slashing us with their wicked knives. Those were the days!”