

A close-up photograph of an American flag draped over a stone wall. The flag's blue field with white stars is prominent in the foreground, while the red and white stripes are visible below. The background shows the textured surface of the stone wall.

***CHARLES  
KING***

***FOES  
IN AMBUSH***

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# **Foes in Ambush**

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The sun was just going down, a hissing globe of fire and torment. Already the lower limb was in contact with the jagged backbone of the mountain chain that rimmed the desert with purple and gold. Out on the barren, hard-baked flat in front of the corral, just where it had been unhitched when the paymaster and his safe were dumped soon after dawn, a weather-beaten ambulance was throwing unbroken a mile-long shadow towards the distant Christobal. The gateway to the east through the Santa Maria, sharply notched in the gleaming range, stood a day's march away,—a day's march now only made by night, for this was Arizona, and from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same anywhere south of that curdling mud-bath, the Gila, the only human beings impervious to the fierceness of its rays were the Apaches. "And they," growled the paymaster, as he petulantly snapped the lock of his little safe, "they're no more human than so many hyenas."

A big man physically was the custodian and disburser of government greenbacks,—so big that, as he stepped forth through the aperture in the hot adobe wall, he ducked his head to avert unwilling contact with its upper edge. Green-glass goggles, a broad-brimmed straw hat, a pongee shirt, loose trousers of brown linen, and dust-colored canvas shoes made up the outer man of a personality as distinctly unmilitary as it was ponderous. Slow and labored in movement, the major was correspondingly sluggish in speech. He sauntered out into the glare of the evening

sunshine and became slowly conscious of a desire to swear at what he saw: that, though in a minute or two the day-god would "douse his glim" behind the black horizon, no preparation whatever had been made for a start. There stood the ambulance, every bolt and link and tire hot as a stove-lid, but not a mule in sight. Turning to his left, he strolled along towards a gap in the adobe wall, and entered the dusty interior of the corral. One of the four quadrupeds drowsing under the brush shelter languidly turned an inquiring eye and interrogative ear in his direction, and conveyed, after the manner of the mule, a suggestion as to supper. A Mexican boy sprawling in the shade of a bale of government hay, and clad in cotton shirt and trousers well-nigh as brown as the skin that peeped through occasional gaps, glanced up at him with languid interest an instant, and then resumed the more agreeable contemplation of the writhings of an impaled tarantula. Under another section of the shed two placid little burros were dreamily blinking at vacancy, their grizzled fronts expressive of that ineffable peace found only in the faces of saints and donkeys. In the middle of the enclosure a rude windlass coiled with rope stood stretching forth a decrepit lever-arm. The whippetree, dangling from the end over the beaten circular track, seemed cracked with heat and age. The stout rope that stretched tautly from the coil passed over a wooden wheel, and disappeared through a broad-framed aperture into the bowels of the earth. Close at hand in the shade of a brush-covered "leanto" hung three or four huge *ollas*, earthen water-jars, swathed in gunny sack and blanket. Beyond them, warped out of all possibility of future usefulness,

stood what had once been the running gear of a California buck-board. Behind it dangled from dusty pegs portions of leather harness, which all the neat's-foot oil of the military pharmacopœia could never again restore to softness or pliability. A newer edition of the same class of vehicle was covered by a canvas "paulin." A huge stack of barley bags was piled at the far end of the corral, guarded from depredation (quadrupedal) by a barrier of wooden slats, mostly down, and by a tattered biped, very sound asleep.

"Where's the sergeant?" queried the paymaster, slowly, addressing no one in particular, but looking plaintively around him.

Still leaning a brown chin on a nearly black hand, and stirring up his spider with the forked stick he held in the other paw, the boy simply tilted his head towards the dark opening under the farther end of the shed, an aperture that seemed to lead to nothing but blackness beyond.

"What's he doing?"

"No sa-a-abe," drawled the boy, never lifting his handsome eyes from the joys before him.

"Why hasn't he harnessed up?"

A shrug of the shoulders was the only reply.

"Hey?"

"No sa-a-abe," slowly as before.

"What's your name?"

"José."

"Well, here, José, you go and tell him I want him."

The boy slowly pulled himself together and found his feet; started reluctantly to obey; glanced back at his captive, now scuttling off for freedom; turned again,

scotched him with his forked stick, and then with a vicious "huh!" drove the struggling Araneid into the sandy soil. This done, he lounged off towards the dark corner in the wall of the ranch and dove out of sight.

Presently there slowly issued from this recess a sturdy form in dusty blue blouse, the sleeves of which were decorated with chevrons in far-faded yellow. Under the shabby slouch hat a round, sun-blistered, freckled face, bristling with a week-old beard, peered forth at the staff official with an expression half of languid tolerance, half of mild irritation. In most perfunctory fashion the soldier just touched the hat-rim with his forefinger, then dropped the hand into a convenient pocket. It was plain that he felt but faint respect for the staff rank and station of the man in goggles and authority.

"Sergeant Feeny, I thought I told you I wanted everything ready to start at sunset."

"You did, sir, and then you undid it," was the prompt and sturdy reply.

The paymaster stood irresolute. Through the shading spectacles of green his eyes seemed devoid of any expression. His attitude remained unchanged, thumbs in the low-cut pockets of his wide-flapping trousers, shoulders meek and drooping.

"W-e-ll," he finally drawled, "you understood I wanted to get on to Camp Stoneman by sunrise, didn't you? Didn't my clerk, Mr. Dawes, tell you?"

"He did, yes, sir, and you don't want to get there no more than I do, major. But I told you flat-footed if you let Donovan and those other men go back on the trail they'd find some

excuse to stop at Ceralvo's, and, damn 'em, they've done it."

"Don't you s'pose they'll be along presently?"

"S'pose?" and the sun-blistered face of the cavalryman seemed to grow a shade redder as he echoed almost contemptuously the word of his superior. "S'pose? Why, major, look here!" And the short, swart trooper took three quick strides, then pointed through the western gap in the adobe wall to the gilded edge of the range where the sun had just slipped from view. "It's ten mile to that ridge, it's ten minutes since I got the last wig-wag of the signal-flag at the pass. They hadn't come through then. What chance is there of their getting here in time to light out at dark? You did tell me to have everything ready to start, and then you undid it by sending half the escort back. You've been here in hell's half-acre three days and I've been here three years. You've never been through Cañon Diablo; I've been through a dozen times and never yet without a fight or a mighty good chance of one. Now you may think it's fun to run your head into an ambushade, but I don't. You can get 'em too easy without trying here. I'm an old soldier, major, and too free spoken, perhaps, but I mean no disrespect, only I wish to God you'd listen to me next time."

"You wouldn't have had me leave those women in the lurch back at the crossing, would you?" queried the paymaster, half apologetically.

"Why, I don't believe that story at all," flatly answered Feeny; "it's some damned plant that fellow Donovan's springing on you,—a mere excuse to ride back so they could drink and gamble with those thugs at Ceralvo's. They've just

been paid off and had no chance for any fun at all before they were ordered out on this escort duty. That money's been burning in their pockets now for three whole nights, and they just can't stand it so long as a drop of liquor's to be had by hard riding. No soldier is happy till he's dead broke, major, leastwise none I ever see."

"What makes you doubt the story, sergeant? It came straight enough."

"It came too damned straight, sir; that's just the trouble. It came straight from Chihuahua Pete's monte mill. It's only a hook to draw 'em back, and they played it on you because they saw you were new to the country and they knew I was asleep; and now, unless Lieutenant Drummond should happen in with his troop, there's no help for it but to wait for to-morrow night, and no certainty of getting away then."

"Well, if Mr. Drummond were here, don't you suppose he'd have gone or sent back to protect those people?"

"Oh, he'd have gone,—certainly,—that's his business, but it isn't yours, major. You've got government money there enough to buy up every rum-hole south of the Gila. You're expected to pay at Stoneman, Grant and Goodwin and Crittenden and Bowie, where they haven't had a cent since last Christmas and here it is the middle of May. You ought to have pushed through with all speed, so none of these jay-hawkers could get wind of your going, let alone the Apaches. Every hour you halt is clear gain to them, and here you've simply got to stay twenty-four hours all along of a cock-and-bull story about some stage-load of frightened women fifteen miles back at Gila Bend. It's a plant, major, that's what I believe."

Old Plummer kicked the toe of his shoe into the sandy soil and hung a reflective head. "I wish you hadn't shut your eyes," he drawled at length.

"I wouldn't, sir, if I hadn't thought you'd keep yours open. You slept all night, sir, you and Mr. Dawes, while I rode alongside with finger on trigger every minute."

Absorbed in their gloomy conversation, neither man noticed that the wooden shutter in the adobe wall close at hand had been noiselessly opened from within, just an inch or two. Neither knew, neither could see that behind it, in the gathering darkness of the short summer evening, a shadowy form was crouching.

"Then you think we must stay here, do you?" queried the paymaster.

"Think? I know it. Why, the range ahead is alive with Apaches, and we can't stand 'em off with only half a dozen men. Your clerk's no 'count, major."

Old Plummer stood irresolute. His clerk, a consumptive and broken-down relative, was at that moment lying nerveless on a rude bunk within the ranch, bemoaning the fate that had impelled him to seek Arizona in search of health. He was indeed of little "'count," as the paymaster well knew. After a moment's painful thought the words rose slowly to his lips.

"Well, perhaps you know best, so here we stay till tomorrow night, or at least until they get back."

One could almost hear the whisper in the deep recess of the retaining wall,—sibilant, gasping. Some one crouching still farther back in the black depths of the interior *did* hear.

"*Santa Maria!*"

But when a moment later the proprietor of this roadside ranch, this artificial oasis in a land of desolation, strolled into the big bare room where half a dozen troopers were dozing or gambling, it was with an air of confidential joviality that he whispered to the corporal in charge,—

"Our fren', the major, he riffuse me sell you aguardiente, —mescal; but wait—to-night."

"Oh, damn it, Moreno, we'll be half-way to Stoneman by that time," interrupted the trooper, savagely. "Who's to know where we got the stuff? We'll make 'em believe Donovan's squad brought it in from Ceralvo's. Give me a drink now anyhow, you infernal Greaser; I'm all burnt out with such a day as this. We've got to start the moment they get back, and there won't be any time then."

"Hush, caballero; they come not to-night. You will rest here."

"Why, how in blazes do you know?"

"Softly!—I know not. I know noting; yet, *mira!*—I know. They talk long in the corral,—the major and that pig of a sergeant;—for him I snap my finger. Look you!" And Moreno gave a flip indicative of combined defiance and disdain.

"Don't you count on his not finding out, Moreno. It's all easy enough so far as the major's concerned, but that blackguard Feeny's different, I tell you. He'd hear the gurgle of the spigot if he were ten miles across the Gila, and be here to bust things before you could serve out a gill,—damn him! He's been keen enough to put that psalm-singing Yankee on guard over your liquor. How're you going to get at it, anyhow?"

For all answer the Mexican placed the forefinger of his left hand upon his lips and with that of the right hand pointed significantly to the hard-beaten earthen floor.

"Ah—I have a mine," he whispered. "You will not betray, eh? Shu-u! Hush! He comes now."

The gruff voice of Sergeant Feeny broke up the colloquy.

"Corporal Murphy, take what men you have here and groom at once. Feed and water too.—Moreno, I want supper cooked for eight in thirty minutes.—Drop those cards now, you men; you should have been sleeping as I told you, so as to be ready for work to-night."

"Shure we don't go to-night, sergeant?"

"Who says that?" demanded Feeny, quickly, whirling upon his subordinates. The corporal looked embarrassed and turned to Moreno for support. Moreno, profoundly calm, was as profoundly oblivious.

"Moreno there," began Murphy, finding himself compelled to speak.

"I?" gravely, courteously protested the Mexican, with deprecatory shrug of his shoulders and upward lift of eyebrow. "I? What know I? I do but say the Corporal Donovan is not come. How know I you go not out to-night?"

"Neither you nor the likes of you knows," was Feeny's stern retort. "We go when we will and no questions asked. As for you, Murphy, you be ready, and it's me you'll ask, not any outsider, when we go. I've had enough to swear at to-day without you fellows playing off on me. Go or no go—no liquor, mind you. The first man I catch drinking I'll tie by the thumbs to the back of the ambulance, and he'll foot it to Stoneman."

No words were wasted in remonstrance or reply. These were indeed "the days of the empire" in Arizona,—days soon after the great war of the rebellion, when men drank and swore and fought and gambled in the rough life of their exile, but obeyed, and obeyed without question, the officers appointed over them. These were the days when veteran sergeants like Feeny—men who had served under St. George Cooke and Sumner and Harney on the wide frontier before the war, who had ridden with the starry guidons in many a wild, whirling charge under Sheridan and Merritt and Custer in the valley of Virginia—held almost despotic powers among the troopers who spent that enlistment in the isolation of Arizona. Rare were the cases when they abused their privilege. Stern was their rule, rude their speech, but by officers and men alike they were trusted and respected. As for Feeny, there were not lacking those who declared him spoiled. Twice that day had the paymaster been on the point of rebuking his apparent indifference. Twice had he withheld his censure, knowing, after all, Feeny to be in the right and himself in the wrong. And now in the gathering shades of night, as he stood in silence watching the brisk process of grooming, and noted how thorough and business-like, even though sharp and stern, was Feeny, the paymaster was wishing he had not ventured to disregard the caution of so skilled a veteran.

And yet the paymaster, having a human heart in his breast, had been sorely tried, for the appeal that came for help was one he could not well resist. Passing Ceralvo's at midnight and pushing relentlessly ahead instead of halting

there as the men had hoped, the party was challenged in the Mexican tongue.

"*Que viene?*"

To which unlooked-for and uncalled-for demand the leading trooper, scorning Greaser interference in American territory, promptly answered,—

"Go to hell!"

All the same he heard the click of lock and was prompt to draw his own Colt, as did likewise the little squad riding ahead of the creaking ambulance. The two leaders of the mules whirled instantly about and became tangled up with the wheel team, and the paymaster was pitched out of a dream into a doubled-up mass on the opposite seat. To his startled questions the driver could only make reply that he didn't know what was the matter; the sergeant had gone ahead to see. Presently Feeny shouted "Forward!" and on they went again, and not until Ceralvo's was a mile behind could the major learn the cause of the detention. "Some of Ceralvo's people," answered Feeny, "damn their impudence! They thought to stop us and turn us in there by stories of Indian raids just below us,—three prospectors murdered twenty-four miles this side of the Sonora line. Cochises's people never came this far west of the Chiricahua Range. It's white cut-throats maybe, and we'll need our whole command."

And yet in the glaring sunshine of that May morning, after they had unsaddled at Moreno's, after the sergeant, wearied with the vigils of two successive nights, had gone to sleep in the coolest shade he could find, there came riding across the sun-baked, cactus-dotted plain at the west a

young man who had the features of the American and the grave, courteous bearing of the Mexican.

"My name is Harvey," said he. "My sisters, who have been in San Francisco at school, are with me on the way to visit our parents in Tucson. Father was to have met us at the Bend with relays of mules. We have waited forty-eight hours and can wait no longer. For God's sake let half a dozen of your men ride out and escort them down here. There is no doubt in the world the Apaches are in the mountains on both sides, and I'm trembling for fear they've already found our camp. None of my party dared make the ride, so I had to come."

What was Plummer to do? He didn't want to rouse the sergeant. This wasn't going back to Ceralvo's, but riding northward to the rescue of imperilled beauty. He simply couldn't refuse, especially when Donovan and others were eager to go. From Mr. Harvey he learned that his father had married into an old Spanish Mexican family at Havana, had been induced by them to take charge of certain business in Matamoras, and that long afterwards he had removed to Guaymas and thence to Tucson. The children had been educated at San Francisco, and the sisters, now seventeen and fifteen years of age respectively, were soon to go to Cuba to visit relatives of their mother, but were determined once more to see the quaint old home at Tucson before so doing; hence this journey under his charge. The story seemed straight enough. Plummer had never yet been to Tucson, but at Drum Barracks and Wilmington he had often heard of the Harveys, and Donovan swore he knew them all by sight, especially the old man. The matter was settled

before Plummer really knew whether to take the responsibility or not, and the cavalry corporal with five men rode back into the fiery heat of the Arizona day and was miles away towards the Gila before Feeny awoke to a realizing sense of what had happened. Then he came out and blasphemed. There in that wretched little green safe were locked up thousands enough of dollars to tempt all the outlawry of the Occident to any deed of desperation that might lead to the capture of the booty, and with Donovan and his party away Feeny saw he had but half a dozen men for defence.

At his interposition the major had at least done one thing,—warned Moreno not to sell a drop of his fiery mescal to any one of the men; and, when the Mexican expressed entire willingness to acquiesce, Feeny's suspicions were redoubled, and he picked out Trooper Latham, a New Englander whom some strange and untoward fate had led into the ranks, and stationed him in the bullet-scarred bar-room of the ranch, with strict orders to allow not a drop to be drawn or served to any one without the sanction of Sergeant Feeny or his superior officer, the major. Even the humiliation of this proceeding had in no wise disturbed Moreno's suavity. "All I possess is at your feet," he had said to the major, with Castilian grace and gravity; "take or withhold it as you will."

"Infernal old hypocrite!" swore Feeny, between his strong, set teeth. "I believe he'd like nothing better than to get the escort drunk and turn us over bag and baggage to the Morales gang."

Thrice during the hot afternoon had Feeny scouted the premises and striven to find what number and manner of men Moreno might have in concealment there. Questioning was of little use. Moreno was ready to answer to anything, and was never known to halt at a lie. Old Miguel, the half-breed, who did odd jobs about the well and the corral, expressed profound ignorance both of the situation and Feeny's English. The Mexican boy had but one answer to all queries: "No sa-a-abe." Other occupants there were, but these even Feeny's sense of duty could not prompt him to disturb. Somewhere in the depths of the domestic portion of the ranch, where the brush on the flat roof was piled most heavily and the walls were jealously thick, all scouting-parties or escorts well knew that Moreno's wife and daughter were hidden from prying eyes, and rumor had it that often there were more than two feminine occupants; that these were sometimes joined by three or four others,—wives or sweethearts of outlawed men who rode with Pasqual Morales, and all Arizona knew that Pasqual Morales had little more Mexican blood in his veins than had Feeny himself. He was an Americano, a cursed Gringo for whom long years ago the sheriffs of California and Nevada had chased in vain, who had sought refuge and a mate in Sonora, and whose swarthy features found no difficulty in masquerading under a Mexican name when the language of love had made him familiar with the Mexican tongue.

Slow to action, slow of speech as was the paymaster, he was not slow to see that Sergeant Feeny was anxious and ill at ease, and if a veteran trooper whom his captain had pronounced the coolest, pluckiest, and most reliable man in

the regiment, could be so disturbed over the indications, it was high time to take precaution. What was the threatened danger? Apaches? They would never assault the ranch with its guard of soldiers, whatsoever they might do in the cañons in the range beyond. Outlaws? They had not been heard of for months. He had inquired into all this at Yuma, at the stage stations, by mail of the commanding officers at Lowell and Bowie and Grant. Not for six months had a stage been "held up" or a buck-board "jumped" south of the turbid Gila. True, there was rumor of riot and lawlessness among the miners at Castle Dome and the customary shooting scrape at Ehrenberg and La Paz, but these were river towns, far behind him now as he looked back over the desert trail and aloft into the star-studded, cloudless sky. Nothing could be more placid, nothing less prophetic of peril or ambush than this exquisite summer night. Somewhere within the forbidden region of Moreno's harem a guitar was beginning to tinkle softly. That was all very well, but then a woman's voice, anything but soft, took up a strange, monotonous refrain. Line after line, verse after verse it ran, harsh, changeless. He could not distinguish the words,—he did not wish to; the music was bad enough in all conscience, whatsoever it might become when sung by youth or beauty. As it fell from the lips of Señora Moreno the air was a succession of vocal nasal disharmonies, high-pitched, strident, nerve-wracking.



Unable to listen after the third repetition, Plummer slowly retired from the corral and once more appeared at the front, just in time for a sensation. Two troopers, two of the men who had ridden back with Donovan, came lurching into the lighted space before the main entrance. At sight of the paymaster one of them stiffened up and with preternatural gravity of mien executed the salute. The other, with an envelope in his hand, reeled out of saddle, failed to catch his balance, plunged heavily into the sand and lay there. Corporal Murphy sprang eagerly forward, the first man to reach him, and turned the prostrate trooper over on his back.

"What's the matter?" queried Plummer. "Is he sick?"

"Sick is it?" was the quick retort, as the corporal sniffed at the tainted breath of the sufferer. "Be the powers! I only wish I had half his disayse."

And then came Feeny, glaring, wrathful.

"Come down off the top of that horse, Mullan," he ordered, fiercely. "How—how'd ye get here? Which way'd ye come? Where's the rest?"

With the ponderous dignity of inebriety, Mullan slowly pointed up the desert under the spot where the pole-star glowed in the northern skies.

"Sarsh'nt," he hiccoughed, "we're—we're too late; 'Paches got there—first."

"Hwat! hwat!" thundered Feeny. "D'ye mean there *were* women,—that it wasn't a plant?"

"Fack."

"Hware's your despatches, you drunken lout? How dare you dhrink when there was fight ahead? Hware's your

despatches? and may heaven blast the souls of you both!"

"Here, sergeant," said Murphy, wrenching the soiled envelope from the loose grasp of the prostrate trooper.

"It's to you, sir," said Feeny, with one glance at the sprawling superscription. "In God's name read and let us know what devil's work's abroad to-night."

Even Plummer's pudgy fingers trembled as he tore open the dingy packet. Old Moreno came forth with a light, his white teeth gleaming, his black eyes flashing from one to another of the group. Holding the pencilled page close to the lantern, the paymaster read aloud,—

"Camp burned. One man killed; others scattered; mules and buck-board gone. For God's sake help in the pursuit. Strike for Raton Pass. The Indians have run away my poor sisters.

"EDWARD HARVEY."

The major dropped the paper, fairly stunned with dismay. Feeny sprang forward, picked it up, and eagerly scrutinized the page. Mullan, standing unsteadily at the head of his wearied and dejected horse, was looking on with glassy eyes, his lips vainly striving to frame further particulars. Leaving their supper unfinished, the other men of the little squad had come tumbling out into the summer night. No one paid other heed to the trooper sprawling in the sand. Already in deep, drunken slumber, he was breathing stertorously. Feeny's eyes seemed fastened to the letter. Line by line, word by word, again and again he spelled it through. Suddenly he leaped forward and clutched Mullan at the throat, shaking him violently.

"Answer now. Hware'd you get your liquor? Didn't this fellow give it to you?"

"On my honor—no, sarsh'nt, 'pon my 'on—"

"Oh, to hell with your honor and you with it! Hware'd you get it if it wasn't from him? Shure you've not been near Ceralvo's?"

"No, sarsh'nt, no Ceralvo's. We met couple gen'l'men—perfec' gen'l'men, ranchers; they were going after the Indians. They gave us jus' o-one drink—'piece. Jus' five minutes—go."

"How far away was this? Hware were they? Answer or, damn you, I'll shake the truth out of you!" shouted Feeny, suiting action to word. "Spake before you, too, are lying like that other hog. Did you ever see the camp? Did you ever get to the crossing at all? Douse a dipper of water over him, you Latham, quick. Wake up, I say, Mullan. For the love of God, major, I believe they're both drugged. I believe it's all a damned lie. I believe it's only a skame to get you to send out the rest of your escort, so they can tackle you alone. Kick him, Murphy, kick him; throt him round; don't let him get to sleep. Answer me, you scoundrel!" he fairly yelled, for Mullan's head was drooping on his breast and every lurch promised to land him on his face. Twice his knees doubled up like a foot-rule and the stout little sergeant had to jerk him to his feet.

"Search 'em both. See if they've a flask betune 'em, Latham. Answer me, Mullan, did you see the burned camp? Did you see the dead man? Did—Oh, murther! he's gone! There's never a word to be got out of aither of them this night. But don't you believe that letther, major. Don't you