

GOLDEN FLEECE

20¢

DECEMBER

HISTORICAL
ADVENTURE



Two Against the Gods
by E. Hoffmann Price

• ALL STORIES COMPLETE •

GOLDEN CHAINS
by Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr.

DEAD MAN ALIVE by H. BEDFORD-JONES

Harold

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HISTORICAL ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

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Vol. 1 No. 3

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by Harold S. Delay and Jay Jackson.

These stories are fiction. If any character bears the name of a living person, it is purely a coincidence.

A. J. Gontier, Jr.

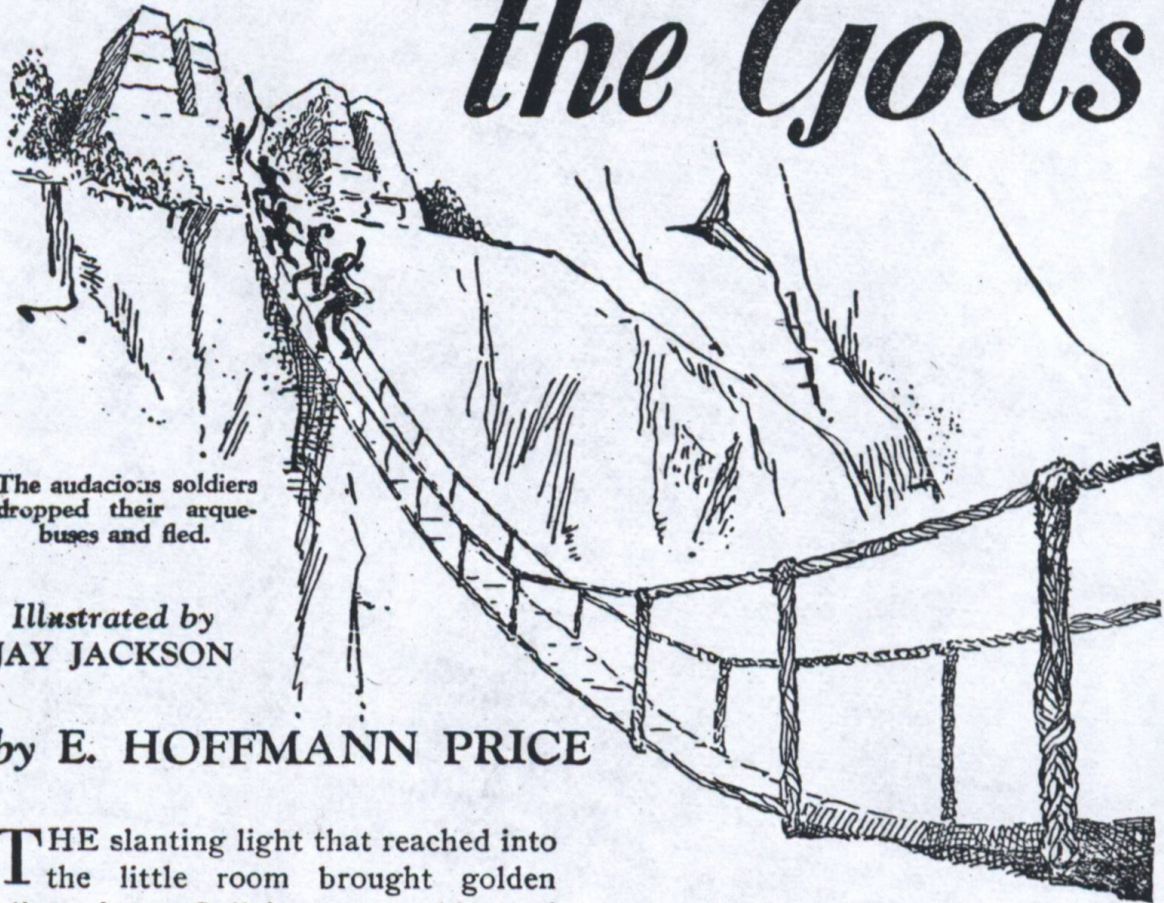
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Two Against the Gods



The audacious soldiers dropped their arquebuses and fled.

Illustrated by
JAY JACKSON

by E. HOFFMANN PRICE

THE slanting light that reached into the little room brought golden glints from Oello's tawny skin and brought a cool green glitter from the emerald collar that circled her slender throat. Her face remained lovely and untroubled as she turned from the narrow window, but all the splendor that Felipe's kisses had coaxed to her dark eyes was gone.

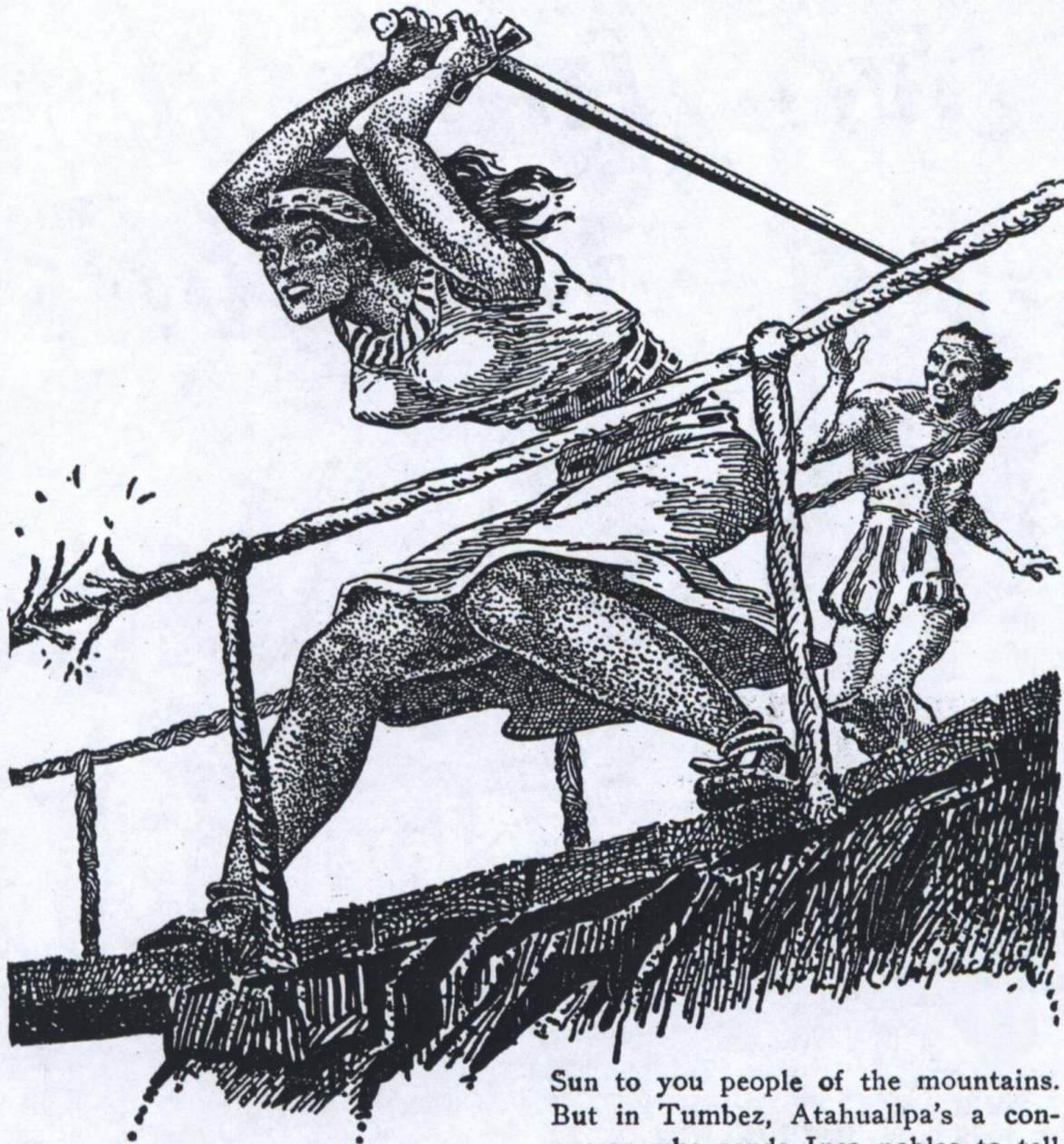
"Ten more llamas," she sighed, "and loaded until they can hardly walk."

Francisco Pizarro's interpreter sombrely regarded the caravan that was adding to Atahuallpa's ransom. In another few days, Oello and all the other wives of the captive Inca would go with him to freedom.

"Suppose Pizarro does turn him loose?" Felipe challenged. "You and I can go to the coast. Atahuallpa can't reach us, there."

Oello did not answer. Felipe caught her arms and drew her from the sill. He repeated, "Pizarro and the Inca can do without us!"

He was an Indian from Tumbez, but only his crisp black hair and swarthy skin marked him apart from the Spanish invaders whom he served; he wore a purple doublet and hose, none the worse for having been discarded by Ferdinand de Soto, who was second in



command. A sword and a wine colored cape hung across the foot of the low couch.

The Inca's wife regarded her lover with widening eyes. He was about the age of Atahualpa, and though his features lacked the fine modelling of the sacred Inca clan, he had a strong face and resolute mouth. His chin thrust out as he sensed Oello's blend of dismay and horror.

Felipe answered her unspoken exclamation: "He may be the Child of the

Sun to you people of the mountains. But in Tumbes, Atahualpa's a conqueror who sends Inca nobles to tell us what to wear, what to think, what crops to raise."

She was young and shapely. Beneath her flowing mantle of silk-soft vicuña fleece she wore a skirt and blouse of fragile cotton. The embroidery that enriched the frail fabric was heavier than the garments themselves. And though the heart beat of her close pressed body whipped his own pulse, Oello's beauty could not distract him from his wrath.

The heightened color of her olive

tinted cheeks, the misting of her long lashed eyes confirmed his resolution. As their lips parted, he said, "Atahualpa's an upstart. Huascar's the lawful Inca. You know that."

Oello smoothed her rumpled blouse, then flung back her heavy black braids. Stolen kisses were in themselves a high crime against the Inca; but somehow, outright desertion seemed even more sacrilegious.

Outside, a trumpet drowned the wrangling and gambling of the Spanish soldiers. Felipe picked up his cloak and sword and said to Oello, "There's a way of doing this. I'll tell you more tonight. Now, you'd better go back. The officers will be meeting Pizarro."

FERDINAND DE SOTO, the only one of that hard bitten lot who had any pity for Atahualpa, spent each afternoon rolling dice and playing chess with the captive Inca. But now that the trumpet summoned Pizarro's officers, Atahualpa would turn to the wives who had accompanied him in captivity. It was time for Oello to leave.

Felipe watched her slip stealthily down a shadowy passageway. If Atahualpa died before he won his freedom, Oello would have no further qualms.

Later, the interpreter saw his chance. There are more ways than one to kill a captive king. But neither tall Pizarro nor his assembled captains knew what a stake Felipe had in this deadly game of gold and kingdoms.

Torchlight gleamed on their full armor. Ever since that fatal half hour in which Atahualpa had become a prisoner, Pizarro's small force had slept under arms, lest sudden revolt catch them off guard.

"The Inca," said Pizarro, "says we ought to turn him loose."

He spoke slowly, weighing every word. His thin face was strengthened by a long, straight nose; a slow, patient man, immovable and remorseless as the Andes. Though born a swineherd, and for all his sixty years unable to write his own name, Francisco Pizarro commanded the respect of *hidalgo* and ruffian alike.

"Turn him loose? *Por dios!* You're crazy if you don't kill him!"

A short, one eyed man waddled forward a pace. Diego Almagro had spoken it all in a breath. Standing beside the handsome Ferdinand de Soto, Almagro seemed more toad than man. His broad shoulders and stocky legs made him appear shorter than he actually was. A twisted nose, somewhat the worse for having been broken and crudely set, combined with his one protruding eye to make him the ugliest man of the army.

"Blood of God!" seconded several others. "Almagro's right! The quicker you kill him, the sooner we can go to Cuzco."

Pizarro gravely stroked his beard. De Soto's generous mouth hardened. Felipe's eyes brightened. Thank God for Almagro!

Finally de Soto found a lull. He said, "Don Francisco, the Inca has paid for his freedom. He has done us no harm, only favors. You can't kill him, after accepting the biggest ransom ever offered by any king."

"*Caballeros,*" resumed Pizarro, "when reinforcements arrive from Panama, we can march to Cuzco. And safely release the Inca. Right now, we can't risk it with our small army, going so far inland."

"Sangre de Cristo!" Almagro raised

a warty fist. "You've hogged all the first loot, just because my men weren't here when you blundered into Cajamalca to grab the Inca, mainly by fool luck! Listen, Don Francisco! I've got two hundred men—good ones, and more than you have. We're marching to Cuzco, whether you do or not. How do you like that?"

Pizarro's face did not change, yet his presence abashed all but the volatile Almagro. "That is foolish, Diego. If we divide our force—even if we went together, through those dangerous mountain passes, the Indios could ambush us to the last man, and rescue the Inca."

"That's why," stormed Almagro, "you've got to kill him!" He turned to his own captains. "What do you say?"

"*Por dios*, you have already said it, Don Diego!"

Then Felipe's smile faded. Ferdinand de Soto took the floor. Though not yet thirty, he was grave and lordly; even self sufficient Pizarro respected the young lieutenant-general.

"This is a crime you plan! Worse, it is needless. God gave us the right to capture a pagan king, but murdering him is something else. Now, listen to this, *caballeros y muy señores!*

"Huascar, the lawful ruler, is locked up in a fortress somewhat north of here. Atahualpa is very much hated in some parts, being an usurper. Thus we can deal with Huascar, who is now the captive of a captive."

"What do you mean?" grumbled Almagro. "That's a bun for a loaf!"

De Soto's slow smile made Almagro redden and stutter. "Don Diego, perhaps I can make this clear. If we liberate Huascar, he will pledge allegiance to the King of Spain. He will be bound

to us by gratitude. Huascar will make things easy for us. Half of Peru hates Atahualpa; all Peru will obey Huascar!"

"*Santiago!*" Pizarro's sombre eyes gleamed. "Don Ferdinand, you have spared me an unpleasant necessity. How did you hit upon that idea?"

De Soto gracefully declined his chief's compliment. "It was simple enough, playing chess with the prisoner, to piece together enough casual remarks to learn where Huascar is kept under guard."

FROM that moment, Felipe hated the man whose rich garments he wore. Atahualpa, though deposed, would go free with all his wives.

He came forward, saying, "Don Francisco, there is more to this than *Señor de Soto* realizes. With all respect, he does not as well understand the Quichua language as a native would. Atahualpa and the nobles who wait on him are plotting revolt. An army is gathering in Huamachuco, making the most of the sixty days you gave Atahualpa to collect the ransom."

"*Por dios*, I told you!" Almagro cut in.

"Name me the nobles who discussed this with the Inca," de Soto demanded.

Felipe met de Soto's stern challenge, and readily: "My lord, even I do not pretend to know the names of all the Inca's officers." Then, to Pizarro, "When I hear more, I will report."

He was glad enough to be dismissed by his chief. Felipe did not like de Soto's unspoken questions, and the suspicion that clouded his eyes.

On his way from the officers' conference, Felipe took heart. Almagro and the two hundred men who had not shared the initial loot would over-

whelm de Soto's pleas for the captive emperor. . . .

That night, Felipe slipped back to the cubicle where he and Oello had exchanged so many stolen kisses. Finally, when moonlight crept across the three cornered plaza, and reached in through the narrow window, he heard the soft tinkle of her anklets.

Felipe caught her in his arms, and his kiss cut short her murmur of endearment. Then, suddenly, she broke from his embrace.

"I shouldn't have met you again. We can't see each other anymore."

He laughed softly. "I've found a way to free you."

She sat bolt upright. "But—why—that's impossible!"

"It isn't. They're going to depose Atahuallpa, and put the Huascar on the throne. He'll wear the sacred red *borla*, and so Atahuallpa won't be Child of the Sun. It won't be sacrilege if you leave him then!"

That was plausible, particularly in these troubled times. Before the civil war which had reached its gory conclusion some months before Pizarro arrived, such logic would have been impossible; but now, many tribes did mutter against Atahuallpa, calling him an usurper. Moreover, if the Gods had not forsaken Atahuallpa, Pizarro could not have seized him. Oello wavered; being one of many wives, she had never until now known one man's undivided love.

Felipe, moreover, though not of the lordly Inca clan, was a friend of the conquering Spaniards who could lay violent hands on the Child of the Sun and yet not be blasted by divine vengeance.

"But how can we stay in the clear till we're out of reach of Atahuallpa?"

Having made up her mind, she was practical.

No Indian had ever dared form a plan like Felipe's. He had learned from Pizarro's daring and grim purpose. He said, "It's easy. You can get clothing for me, so I can go as one of the Inca's personal couriers. No one will dare question us."

"I'll have all that by tomorrow night." Oello's voice trembled from the enormity of the venture. "Now I'd better go."

But Felipe detained her. He sensed that she would weaken. As he drew her toward him, he said, "No one'll miss you tonight."

"No," she said, trying to break from his embrace. "I'm afraid. I've been afraid, these last few days—"

But she could not overcome his insistence. . . .

THE moon patch had not quite shifted from Oello's golden beauty when the lovers realized how sound her qualms had been. There was a sudden metallic sound, and a glare of torchlight from the low doorway. Had Oello's Indian nerves retained their usual steadiness, all might have been well; but dismay brought a cry from her lips as she bounded to her feet, wrapping her *vicuña* mantle about her.

Ferdinand de Soto and one of his soldiers blocked the way. He recognized Oello's high rank; her jewels and the fine fabric that only an Inca was allowed to wear betrayed her.

That one cry of dismay echoed down the dark hallway. Then de Soto said, "So this is how you learn Atahuallpa's secrets? You misbegotten dog, a king is a king, even if he is a captive!"

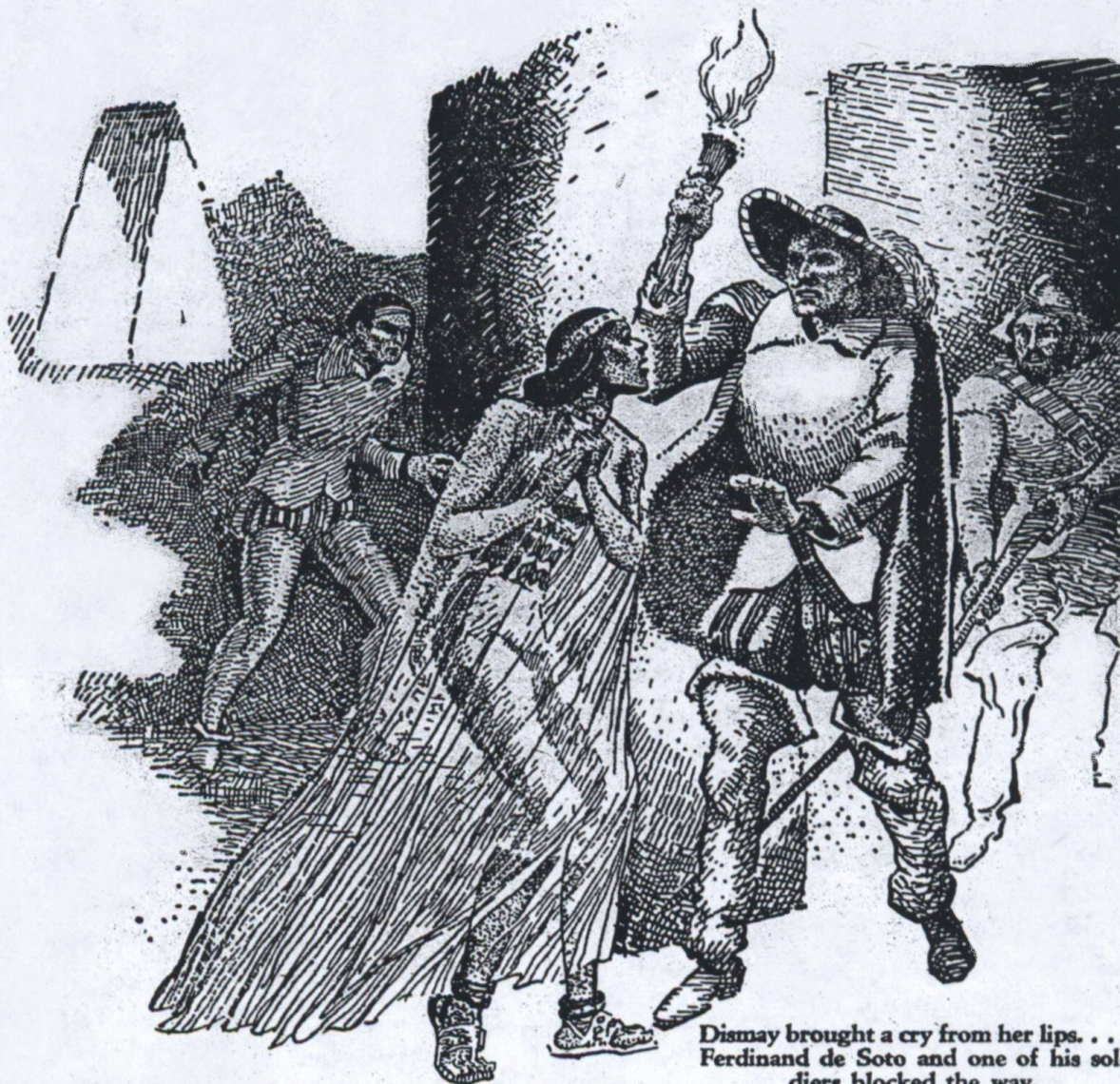
Felipe said, "All you fine lords have women of your own! I warned Pizarro

of an insurrection. See if he condemns me!"

Oello stood there, lovely and motionless. Her one cry was beyond recall. As de Soto groped for words, sandalled feet made soft, slapping sounds in the hall.

officers, knowing him as the Inca's friend and seeing his wrath, made no move to pass him. They bowed, then retired; but what they said in their own language made Felipe's mouth tighten.

De Soto said to his orderly, "Get



Dismay brought a cry from her lips. . . . Ferdinand de Soto and one of his soldiers blocked the way.

Yupanqui, one of the Inca's officers, had arrived on the run. Another dignitary was on his heels. When they were able to believe what they saw before them, Yupanqui said in broken Spanish, "Kill him. Kill her."

De Soto interposed. The unarmed

Don Francisco's orders at once." Then, to Felipe: "Maybe you can save yourself by giving all the details of that revolt. When you came forward to contribute your bit to my plan, I smelled a native perfume on you, and I began to understand. No common

woman uses such a scent."

Moments dragged. The guard came, and marched the two prisoners into the Inca's reception room. There Atahuallpa sat, and Pizarro with him.

The Inca's eyes blazed from beneath the long red fringed *borla* that reached to his lashes. He was tall for his race, and somewhat swarthy. This was the first time within the memory of man that anyone had dared look at a woman of an Inca's seraglio; yet his face was placid. Being a god in human form, he did not display emotion as men did.

"You saw this, Don Ferdinand?" he calmly asked. When the indignant officer assented, the Inca turned to the nobles who knelt, barefooted, before the chair on the dais. "Yupanqui? Sinchi?"

"We could not believe this thing," they answered, "without seeing. We beg pardon for having seen."

Atahuallpa brushed aside the red fringe of his *borla* and turned to Pizarro. "They should both die."

"The interpreter," Pizarro said, mustering up his command of Quichua, "is mine. The girl is yours to do with as you please."

"*Sanctissima madre!*" de Soto's courtesy reached its limit. "You take that dog's part? You deny the Inca his just vengeance?"

"Felipe," was the deliberate answer, "is my man."

The captive king understood enough to know that one of the lovers would escape him. He said to his officers, "take her out, and do what is fitting."

Oello knew well what that meant: having offended the Sun, she would be buried alive, so that his rays could no longer bless her. Being one of the sacred Inca clan, her blood could not be shed. She cast one glance at Felipe:

this was farewell, without any hope.

The interpreter bounded forward. "Don Francisco," he demanded, "this woman is mine! She has become a Christian. I have converted her to your faith and mine. The Inca has no more claim on her!"

He had said that in Spanish. He turned to Oello and demanded in Quichua, "Is that true? Haven't you denied the Inca? Make this sign as I do—"

Scarcely understanding, she imitated him as he crossed himself.

Pizarro raised an imperative hand and said, "Father Valverde will be glad to hear of a new convert."

That settled the matter. When Felipe turned to face the Inca, Atahuallpa looked the other way.

THE following day, Felipe's plans went all awry. True, he had saved Oello from the Inca's vengeance. But Ferdinand de Soto had gone out with a picked troop to reconnoiter in the vicinity of Huamachuco and determine whether there was or was not a concentration of troops awaiting the word to swoop down on Cajamalca to annihilate the Spaniards. Worse than that, a courier was on the way with a message from Atahuallpa to the officers who guarded Huascar; the captive was to be brought to Cajamalca so that Pizarro could judge between him and the usurping Inca.

"*Cristo del Grao!*" Felipe sat hunched and frowning, studying it out. Oello watched him, sensing that this was no time for kisses. She did not know that he was thinking, "Almagro and Pizarro have snapped at the idea of putting Huascar on the throne and using him as a dummy. But de Soto will be back, saying there's not a sign of revolt any-

where. Atahualpa's going to live through this."

Felipe was not afraid of any immediate peril. Yet he knew that, sooner or later, Atahualpa's loyal retainers would stealthily seek him and Oello; the officials who had seen the affront put on their lord would not rest until they reported the death of the offenders.

To protect Oello and himself, Felipe had condemned Atahualpa to death. But to execute that sentence was another matter. Finally he looked up and smiled. "We still have to leave. Being Christians will not save us from secret vengeance. Get the clothes we need."

Although she did not understand his plan, she realized her peril and his. "While you're attending to your part," she answered, "I'll attend to mine. But I'm terribly afraid of horses."

He thrust out his chest. "I understand them. I rode de Soto's, once."

That evening, Felipe went to Pizarro's quarters and respectfully saluted him, "The holy saints alone know what *Señor* de Soto will learn about this revolt. It is possible that Atahualpa will secretly send fast couriers to have the Inca soldiers leave Huamachuco, to deceive us.

"But the worst is this—"

Diego Almagro raised his ugly face from a flagon of wine and cut in, "*Por dios*, what could be worse? Sending de Soto away from here!"

"Don Ferdinand," Pizarro slowly said, "is usually well advised."

Almagro spat. "That he may be, *verdad!* But me, I'd rather have him here. Where he can't be ambushed in the mountains. Where he can team up with us if we are attacked."

"We considered all that," Pizarro patiently replied. "Now, Felipe?"

"With your permission and Don Diego's—" The interpreter's courtly bow included them both. "Atahualpa is insane with rage—"

"About your way of making converts, eh?" Almagro laughed gustily, and Pizarro's thin face relaxed in a carefully weighed smile.

Felipe went on, "I am the faithful servant who kisses the hands of Your Excellencies. More than that, I have been foolish and the cause of Atahualpa's anger—"

"We can put up with *that!*" Almagro gulped some wine and chuckled.

Felipe continued, "I do not deserve your kindness. What I mean is this. For the affront he received in . . . ah . . . this matter of making converts to the True Faith, he is too angry to be sensible. He did send for Huascar, as you ordered. But I am afraid that Huascar won't get here."

Almagro rose so suddenly that his paunch tipped the table. The flagon crashed to the floor. "By God and Saint Jago! He'll kill Huascar just to spite us. The way he shut up, last night—he was too mad to shout. *Compadre*, you had better do something about it!"

PIZARRO dismissed Felipe with a gesture. He said to Almagro, "Send a courier after de Soto. Tell him to go to Huascar's prison and guard him closely, all the way to Cajamalca. He's too valuable to lose."

But Felipe did not hear this. Having planted new suspicion, he was eager to leave before he was too closely questioned as to details; though it was logical that the high tempered Inca, about to lose even the shadow of power, would stop at nothing to prevent Huascar from regaining the throne.

Almagro's greed and Pizarro's natural fear of a general revolt that would and could overwhelm his small army were Felipe's allies; yet a man's wits must at times direct destiny.

Indian stealth enabled the lovers to slip past the guards. Felipe had secured a horse; and at the start, he wore his Spanish costume. A mile beyond the walls of Cajamalca he met Oello, who had gone ahead to wait.

She emerged from hiding. A bundle was balanced on her head. It contained not only Felipe's disguise, but all the finery she had discarded in favor of the coarse alpaca gown of a peasant woman.

"He won't hurt you," Felipe reassured her as he reined in his borrowed horse. "Give me that bundle—put your foot in the stirrup—up you go!"

She made it, somehow. Her awkwardness at that unaccustomed exercise made the restive beast paw and snort. But Oello clung to her lover and maintained her seat behind the high cantle of the saddle. Though a clumsy rider, Felipe's triumph gave him confidence. The horse sensed that this man was not afraid; so he subsided.

That Felipe could ride at all made him splendid in Oello's eyes.

Finally she relaxed; it was now affection and not fear that kept her arms about Felipe. He half turned in the saddle, caught a swift glimpse of her beauty in the moonlight. His heart rose and choked him. No man from Tumbez had ever dreamed of such a woman!

Presently Felipe turned from the paved post road that reached twenty-two hundred miles, north and south, paralleling the one that skirted the sea.

"Hang on," he cautioned, leaning forward as the panting beast lowered his

head and dug into the nasty climb up a trail that followed a gloomy *quebrada*.

"What's the matter?" Oello was puzzled. "This isn't the way—is someone chasing us already?"

Felipe evaded, "Just to make certain."

There was no use telling her too much. Only those vague Christian saints could predict the outcome of his venture. They must be more powerful than Inca gods, and Felipe wished he knew them better. For luck, he muttered a prayer to Pachacamac, who was greater even than the Sun.

Before dawn, Felipe halted. Oello, cramped and shaken, slid stiffly to the ground. "Aren't you going to put on those clothes I brought you?"

He shook his head and smiled. "Not for a while. Now rest up, because we're going on, as soon as the horse gets his strength back."

Toward the end of the second day, Oello recognized the foaming Andamarca, far below them. But before they reached its banks, they would have to go afoot. The horse, improperly cared for and carrying double, had little strength left, so Felipe led the beast, and Oello trudged along, holding a stirrup for support.

A HEAD was a suspension bridge that swayed in the wind. Its cables were made of osiers and maguey fibre. They supported the narrow catwalk that crossed the thousand foot cleft which gaped beneath. Due to the sag of the cable, the drop was steep, and so was the ascent to the opposite lip of the ravine.

It took an hour of struggle to get the horse past the center. Pizarro's cavalry knew a few tricks that Felipe had not learned. Then, beaten and frantic, the beast bolted, shouldering

Oello off balance. Clawing for support, she slowly slid back, and between the guard cables. Each oscillation of the bridge robbed her of a bit more than she had gained.

Felipe, flung in the opposite direction, yelled hoarsely. "Quit kicking! Flatten out!"

He recovered enough to drop belly down. His toes laced in the strands that bound the floor boards. He caught Oello's wrist; but her weight, mainly unsupported, threatened to pull him loose with each deadly sway of the long main cable. They were facing each other from the edges of a devil's hammock. They had outwitted a god; he had made a toy of Pizarro's suspicions; but the mountain wind and a horse's panic mocked all that success.

Sweat made his fingers slippery. He could not risk trying for a better grip. Oello had ceased kicking in her efforts to get a knee back over the edge.

"Let go," she sighed. "I'll pull you with me. The gods hate us."

That was Indian fatalism. She was right. Felipe knew that, but he had marched with Pizarro, in whose iron heart was not one grain of resignation to fate.

A flash of that thin, remorseless face for an instant blotted out Oello's relaxing features. Felipe cried, "Wait till the next swing, you little fool! Hold on!"



The pendulum dip now tended to spill him through the guards; but the rise of the opposite edge supported Oello at the waist. He let go her wrist. His hand moved, an eye-tricking flicker during which he was slowly sliding back. But he made it; he caught her braided hair.

That gave him the advantage he needed, and likewise freed her hands, so that she could use them to draw herself back over the edge.

They crawled up the slope. When they reached the abutments, they crumpled against the cold rocks, panting and quivering. Later, when Felipe recaptured the horse, Oello said, "The Gods tried us, and you did not fail."

But Felipe did not hear. He was peering into the sunset haze, and toward the highway that ran north and south a thousand feet below. Oello clung to him, and wondered what could draw his thoughts so far away.

"Quick!" he said. "Open that bundle. I'm becoming an Inca courier."

HE seated himself on a rock at the opposite side of the trail and unbuckled his sword belt. He tossed her the weapon and said, "Hide it carefully, along with the rest of this truck."

He flung his doublet after the blade. As a second thought, he corrected, "And find a hiding place for yourself."

"For myself?" Her eyes became dark and troubled. "Why—"

"There's something down there I want to look into," he evaded.

Then Oello saw the black spots that moved along the highway right where it skirted the Andamarca's bank. She caught the gleam of bronze lance heads, the ruddy glint of copper loaded maces, the glitter of gilt against the quilted armor of Inca soldiers.

"Oh—" She began to understand. "We're near the fort where Huascar was locked up." She stood there, sword and scabbard in hand. "But don't worry. They're going south. Do you know, I'm certain that must be the convoy that's taking Huascar to Cajamalca. They won't notice us."

"Maybe," said Felipe, smiling oddly, "Huascar is with that convoy."

He was struggling with his boots. Sweat made them cling. Oello, her back toward the bridge, still strained her eyes, trying to identify the devices on the gaudy pennons the troops displayed.

"It must be Huascar! His standard—he'd fly it, even as a prisoner."

But Felipe's smile froze. He whirled about, hearing a clank of steel, the ring of horse's hoofs, the tinkle of curb chains. A deep voice shouted in Spanish, "You, there!"

Oello turned. On the other side was Ferdinand de Soto, splendid on his horse. A dozen men were behind him. They were about to cross the bridge. The girl moaned, "Runners from Cajamalca told him to chase us!"

Felipe, neither in nor out of his boots, pitched in a heap. His untethered horse, some yards off the trail, bolted at the crash of brush. There was no chance of flight. De Soto's skittish stallion shied from the bridge, but the lordly Spaniard wheeled him for another trial. He would make it, Felipe knew.

As he struggled with the damning boots, Felipe did not know whether to pray to Pachacamac or to the saints. De Soto repeated his shout, but the wind distorted his words; neither fugitive could understand.

Oello defiantly screamed, "We won't come back!"

Her legs stretched in a bound that brought her skirt swirling about her hips. She had the sword out of its scabbard. On the other side, the Spaniards muttered in amazement. Too late, they understood. An arquebus jerked into line, and another. "Fire!" shouted de Soto.

The keen blade chopped into the cable. The arquebuses coughed flame and smoke. Slugs spattered about Oello. Felipe cried, "Get back—I'll cut it!"

As he hobbled toward her, one foot half shod, the other bare, two soldiers dismounted and dashed toward the bridge. "Back, you fool!" de Soto shouted.

A crackling had followed Oello's final cut; then a popping, as each snapping cord put greater strain on the others. The audacious soldiers dropped their arquebuses and fled.

The cable parted. Though the other held, the bridge was impassable except to a man with the courage and strength to crawl down its dip, and then up.

"We've gained hours," said Felipe. "*Por dios*, who'd think Pizarro would pull de Soto from reconnoitering and set him to trailing us?"

Oello did not know. She was too happy to care. Twice in an hour, the gods had helped them out of peril.

THE purple shadow of the Andes had blotted out all details below. Camp fires now winked from the darkness of the highway. Huascar Inca was eating, and his respectful escort was drinking *chicha*. He would be happy, going from prison to a throne. . . .

An hour . . . two hours—descent of a crude trail. Then Felipe said, "Wait here, while I find out whether this is a searching party, or Huascar's escort."

Darkness and firelight favored him when he approached the sentries of the camp. Both officers and common soldiers were bivouacked about the rest house beside the highway. This assured him that the building must be reserved for Huascar.

He presented the wand that identified him as one of Atahualpa's personal couriers. Though the lowest peasant came with that token, he was for the moment entitled to the respect of the Inca's own presence. The sacrilege of imposture made deception inconceivable; but Felipe had learned from Pizarro.

The man who approached to bow before the sacred symbol was tall and sharp faced and commanding. The golden discs in his ears were so large that they made the lobes touch his shoulders. He was one of that sacred clan that could do no wrong; there was no life he could not take, no woman he could not demand, and yet be beyond criticism. But even he would be barefooted when he approached Atahualpa; he would have on his shoulder some small burden as a token of servility.

And that stately man in the crimson *vicuña* robe listened respectfully. He accepted the wand that made him the Inca's hand, for the execution of that order. He said, "It will be done as Atahualpa commands. Runners will go at once to tell him that the body is in the river. And that we return to our starting point."

He did not question Felipe, nor offer him refreshment. He knew that Felipe, who could command whatever was needed, was leaving the camp because there were duties other than witnessing the strangling of Huascar.

"Only Pachacamac or the saints," mused Felipe, "could take an Inca

woman, and put a king to death."

That thought made him light headed. The whine of the mountain wind became exalting music. When he rejoined Oello, he had to steady his voice to say, "It is well with those soldiers. But it is better that you and I return to Cajamalca. I didn't expect de Soto to hunt us in these mountains, for the sake of Atahuallpa. Pizarro and Father Valverde are our best protectors."

"But the assassins who'll kill us for offending the Inca?"

He smiled, patted her hair as she helped him into his Spanish garments. He said, "He will have no one touch us. It has come to me, suddenly."

Intuition could give her no details. She knew only that Felipe had become more than a man. That he had ordered the soldiers to retrace their course proved that.

"Isn't Huascar going to Cajamalca?" She was diffident now.

"He is not. I forbade that, also."

She was almost afraid when she kissed him. The divine Atahuallpa had never been half as much a king of men and a child of the gods.

So they rode to Cajamalca, not knowing that Ferdinand de Soto had not even recognized them, or known of their flight. Nor could they know that de Soto, finally finding another bridge, had crossed the stream and was now hastening to find Huascar's escort.

Felipe was weary. Oello was too ecstatic to be aware of fatigue. The runners who went to report Huascar's death to Atahuallpa were far swifter than the jaded horse that carried double . . .

When Felipe and Oello approached the Valley of Cajamalca, sunset reddened the white walls, and long golden lances of light reached out the clouds

that swathed the *sierra*. Drums rolled, and the mountains flung back their thunder. Trumpets brayed; then the notes became shrill and soul shaking, so that Oello shivered, and Felipe's pulse began to hammer.

The barbaric sound beat and stabbed him; it was tragic, it was exultant, and strangely, it brought tears to his eyes. Yet for all the whimsical feeling that this fanfare welcomed him, apprehension made him flinch.

Oello whispered, "I'm afraid of that sound."

The trumpets ceased as suddenly as they had spoken. For moments, the lovers waited, and the ruddy glow became lavender and eerie before their eyes. Then a mumble of voices came from the city.

Felipe and Oello were troubled as they went on; nor did they know why.

"I'd think someone had died," she whispered.

"Maybe someone has," said Felipe. It had happened sooner than he had believed possible. He was dazed, now that it was done.

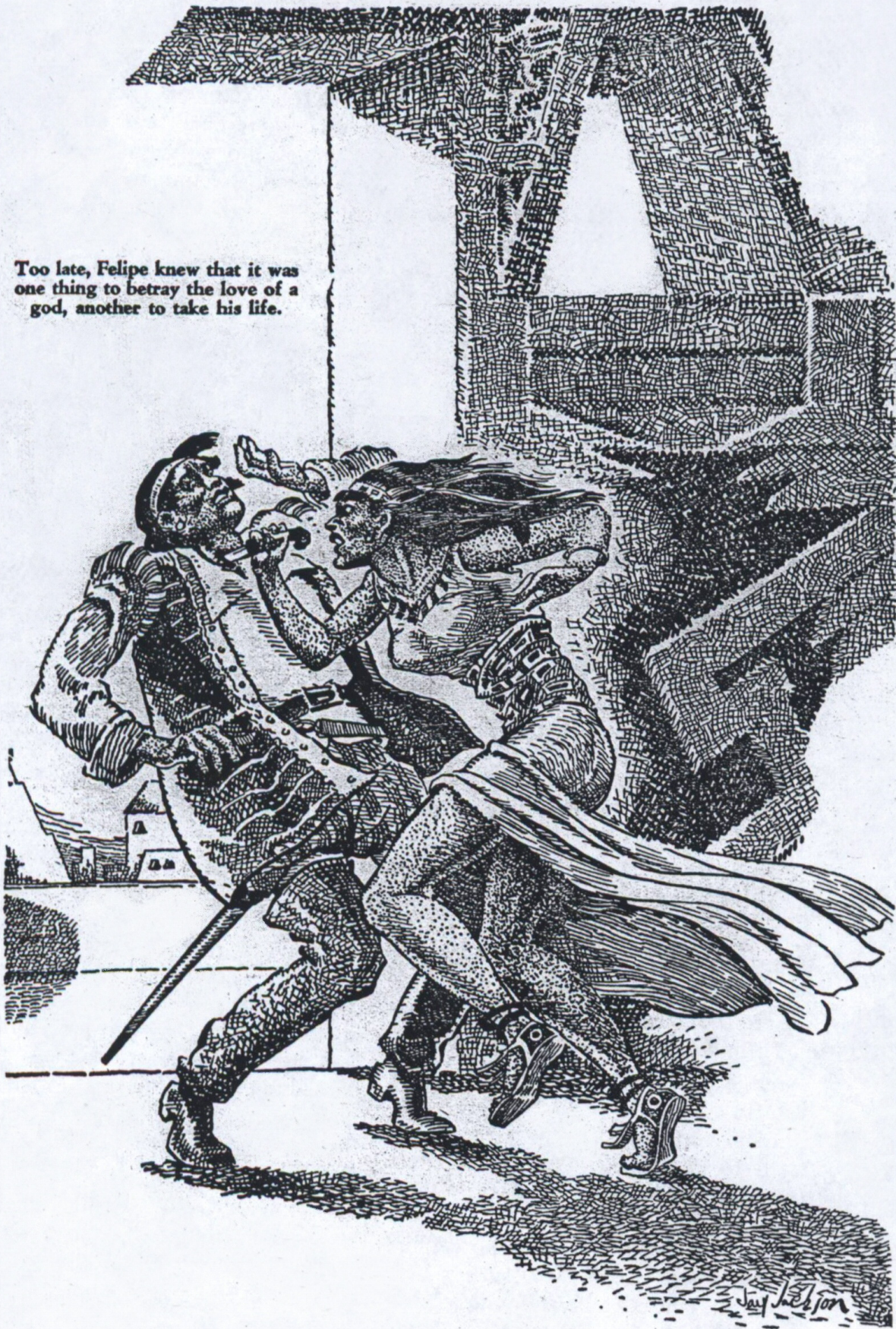
No one noticed the two who came into Cajamalca. The wailing of women tore the sullen silence. Two musketeers stood watch beside a stake in the center of the plaza.

A man was bound to that stake. His head slumped to his chest. There were faggots heaped about his legs, but there was no odor of burning. A soldier passed by with a flaring torch. The momentary glow revealed the plumes of the sacred *coraquenque* which the man at the stake wore in his headdress.

"Oh . . ." A quavering exhalation, and Oello faltered, "Atahuallpa's dead. They've killed him—strangled him—"

"As he would have done to you," Felipe told her.

Too late, Felipe knew that it was one thing to betray the love of a god, another to take his life.



They were entering the quarters of the Spaniards when Almagro boomed from the door of the officers' salon, "*Por dios!* It's time you came back, you and your wench! Death and damnation, if we'd not had another interpreter, we'd have been let down nicely at the trial."

Horses' hoofs were drumming in the distance. A platoon of cavalry rode bell-bent. De Soto must be returning. Felipe wanted to keep out of his sight. He said, "*Señor*, I was afraid of Atahualpa's wrath—I—"

"Bring him in, Diego!" Francisco Pizarro was now speaking. "Since we're in trim for court proceedings, we might as well try this loafer!"

The monotonous wailing of Atahualpa's widows was for a moment blotted by the clatter of horses slowing down to a walk as they were reined in on the flagstones of the plaza. Sentries challenged, purely as a matter of form; a familiar voice answered, "De Soto and his troop!"

The guard turned out. The sounds gave Felipe the picture. His lips were dry, and he could feel the sudden fear that gripped Oello. No one kept her from accompanying him as he slowly advanced toward Pizarro's table at the far end of the hall.

Then Pizarro smiled. "Here, here! Don't look that way, man! Almagro's just having his fun. But if you were a soldier, I'd have you flogged." He eyed Oello; she was lovely, despite her fatigue. "I don't blame you—"

But that pleasantry was cut short when de Soto stamped into the hall.

"**B**Y GOD—you, Francisco! You Diego—" His outthrust arm was like a lance ready to impale the two leaders. "The saints forgive me for serving with you assassins! The min-

ute my back's turned, you murder Atahualpa! Reconnoiter—Christ's blood, there wasn't a sign of insurrection!" His blazing eye nailed Felipe. "Your trickery, you son of several dogs!"

Almagro's one eye fell before de Soto's accusation. Pizarro stuttered, "He was legally tried and condemned. Diego insisted."

"I? *Señor*—"

"Condemned for stirring up insurrection, and ordering the death of Huascar," said Pizarro, regaining his self possession. "But since he became a Christian, he was not burned at the stake. And if you were not his friend, moved by grief, I would hold you accountable for your unmilitary conduct."

"Why," demanded Almagro, "didn't you guard Huascar, as you were ordered?"

"Why," countered de Soto, "didn't you give Atahualpa at least a dog's chance? He was a king. Only our lord, the King of Spain, could try him for the murder of Huascar. This night's work makes me ashamed of my fellowship with you. How do you know Atahualpa ordered his brother's death?"

Pizarro answered, "A runner came to tell Atahualpa that his orders had been obeyed. That Huascar's body had been thrown into the Andamarca only a few minutes after the courier who ordered the execution had left. And then the escort moved north, as ordered. Does that answer you?"

"*Sanctissima madre!*" de Soto bitterly exclaimed. "If you were not my chief, I would question that. God forgive me, had not a frightened native cut a bridge under my very feet, I could have saved Huascar. And so saved Atahualpa, a king and a friend who served us well!"

He bowed his head. The grief that displaced his wrath distracted every

man's eye from Oello. She stood so close to de Soto that she could reach the dagger that gleamed from his belt.

No one saw her draw the weapon. Her eyes blazed with red fury. She screamed, "It is my fault that Atahualpa died!"

She spoke Quichua; but every Spaniard saw the flashing blade, the swift motion of body and arm as she turned on her lover. The dagger cut over his fending arm and bit home. It tore his throat, then sank into his chest. As she followed him to the floor, she screamed, "You ordered Huascar's death—to strike at Atahualpa—"

Too late, Felipe knew that to Oello, it was one thing to betray the love of a god, another to take his life. Choking and coughing, he tried to fight; but his wounds and her insane rage were too much.

Almagro's blade was out. It had killed many a woman and unarmed man before now. And Oello was Atahualpa's widow, going berserk. He struck before de Soto could intervene.

The lovers were in each other's arms; a quivering red huddle in which little life remained. Almagro's warty face twisted. "*Por dios!* She might have killed a couple of us."

"He'd have been a good interpreter," Pizarro finally said, "if he'd had sense enough to leave women alone."

He gravely shook his head, and wondered why hot headed de Soto stalked from the hall without reclaiming his dagger. But Almagro's thoughts went further. "Buck up, Francisco!" he chuckled. "With both Incas dead, we've got Peru in our pocket, and it'll be easy sacking Cuzco before these disorganized Indios get over the shock!"



NEXT MONTH

GATES OF EMPIRE

by **ROBERT E. HOWARD**

Rogue and Liar, Giles Hobson Became a Hero in Spite of Himself

DON'T MISS IT!

