

Glorious! Glorious!

by Louis L'Amour, 1908-1988

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The four men crouched together in the narrow shadow of the parapet. The sun was setting slowly behind a curtain of greasy cloud, and the air, as always at twilight, was very clear and still. A hundred and fifty yards away was the dirty gray earth where the Riffs were hidden. The declining sun threw long fingers of queer, brassy light across the rise of the hill behind them.

On their left the trench was blown away by artillery fire; here and there a foot or a shoulder showed above the dirt thrown up by explosions. They had marched, eaten, and fought beside those men, dead now.

„Better keep your head away from that opening, kid, or you'll get it blown away.“

Dugan pulled his head back, and almost on the instant a spout of sand leaped from the sandbag and splattered over his face.

Slim smiled wryly, and the Biscayan looked up from the knife he was sharpening. He was always sharpening his knife and kept it with a razor edge.

Short, thick-bodied, he had a square-jawed, pock-marked face and small eyes. Dugan was glad they were fighting on the same side.

„You got anything to eat?“ Slim asked suddenly, looking over at Dugan.

„Nothing. I ate my last biscuit before that last attack,“ he said. „I could have eaten forty.“

„You?“ Slim looked at the Irishman.

Jerry shrugged. „I ate mine so long ago I’ve forgotten.“

He was bandaging his foot with a soiled piece of his shirt. A bullet had clipped the butt of his heel the day before, making a nasty wound.

Somewhere down the broken line of trenches there was a brief volley followed by several spaced rifle shots, then another brief spatter of firing.

Slim was wiping the dust from his rifle, testing the action. Then he reloaded, taking his time. „They’re tough,“ he said, „real tough.“

„I figured they’d be A-rabs or black,“ Jerry said, „and they ain’t either one.“

„North Africa was never black,“ Dugan said. „Nearly all the country north of the Niger is Berber country, and Berbers are white. These Riffs—there’s as many redheaded ones as in Scotland.“

„I was in Carthage once,“ Slim said. „It’s all busted up—ruins.“

„They were Semitic,“ Dugan said. „Phoenicians originally.“

„How you know so much about it?“ Slim asked.

„There was a book somebody left in the barracks all about this country and the Sahara.“

„You can have it,“ Jerry said. „This country, I mean.“

„Book belonged to that colonel—the fat one.“ Dugan moved a small stone, settled himself more comfortably. „He let it lay one time, and somebody swiped it.“

„Hey!“ Jerry sat up suddenly. He held the bandage tight to survey the job he was doing, then continued with it. „That reminds me. I know where there’s some wine.“

Slim turned his long neck. „Some what?“

He looked gaunt and gloomy in his dirty, ill-fitting uniform. One shoulder was stained with blood, and the threads had begun to ravel around a bullet hole. He had been hit nine times since the fighting began, but mostly they were scratches. He’d lost one shoe, and the foot was wrapped in canvas. It was a swell war.

Jerry continued to wrap his foot, and nobody said anything. Dugan watched him, thinking of the wine. Then he looked across at the neat row of men lying side by side near the far parapet. As he looked, a bullet struck one of them, and the body jerked stiffly. It did not matter. They were all dead.

„Over there in the cellar,“ Jerry said. He nodded his head to indicate a squat gray stone building on the peak of a conical hill about a quarter of a mile off. „The colonel found a cellar the monks had. He brought his own wine with him and a lot of canned meat and cheese. He stored it in that cellar—just like in an icebox. I helped pack some of it in not over two weeks ago. He kept me on patrol duty three days extra just for breaking a bottle. He brought in a lot of grub, too.“

The Biscayan glanced up, mumbling something in Spanish. He pulled a hair from his head and tested the edge of the blade, showing his teeth when the hair cut neatly.

„What’s he say?“

„He says it may still be there.“ Jerry shifted his rifle and glanced speculatively at the low hill. „Shall we have a look?“

„They'd blow our heads off before we could get there,“ Slim protested, „night or no night.“

„Look,“ Jerry said, „we're liable to get it, anyway. This is going to be like Anual, where they wiped them all out. Look how long we've been here and no relief. I think they've written us off.“

„It's been seventy-five days,“ Dugan agreed.

„Look what happened at Chentafa. The officer in command saw they'd had it and set fire to the post; then he died with his men.“

„That's more than these will do.“

„Hell,“ Jerry said, „I think they're already dead. I haven't seen an officer in a week. Only that corporal.“

„They pick them off first. Those Moors can shoot.“ Slim looked at Dugan. „How'd you get into this outfit, anyway?“

„My ship was in Barcelona. I came ashore and was shanghaied. I mean an army patrol just gathered in a lot of us, and when I said I was an American citizen, they just paid no attention.“

„Did you get any training?“

„A week. That was it. They asked me if I'd ever fired a gun, and like a damned fool I told them I had. Hell, I grew up with a gun. I was twelve years old before I found out it wasn't part of me. So here I am.“

„They wanted men, and they didn't care where or how they got them. Me, I've no excuse,“ Slim said. „I joined the Spanish Foreign Legion on my own. I was broke, hungry, and in a different country. It looked like an easy way out.“

Far off to the left there was an outburst of firing, then silence.

„What happened to the colonel? The fat one who had all that wine brought in?“

„Killed himself. Look, they tell me there's a general for every twenty-five men in this army. This colonel had connections. They told him spend a month over there and we'll promote you to general, so he came, and then we got pinned down, and he couldn't get out. From Tetuan to Chaouen there's a whole line of posts like this one here at Seriya. There's no way to get supplies, no way to communicate.“

The talk died away. It was very hot even though the sun was setting.

A big Russian came up and joined them. He looked like a big schoolboy with his close-cropped yellow hair and his pink cheeks. „They come,“ he said.

There was a crackle of shots, and the four climbed to their feet. Dugan lurched from weariness, caught himself, and faced about. The Russian was already firing.

A long line of Moors was coming down the opposite slope, their advance covered by a barrage of machine-gun fire from the trenches farther up the hill. Here and there a captured field gun boomed. Dugan broke open a box of cartridges and laid them out on a sandbag close at hand. Slowly and methodically, making each shot count, he began to fire.

The Biscayan was muttering curses and firing rapidly. He did not like long-range fighting. Jerry leaned against the sandbags, resting his forehead on one. Dugan could see a trickle of sweat cutting a trail through the dust.

Somewhere down the parapet one of their own machine guns opened up, the gray and white line before them melted like wax, and the attack broke. Slim

grounded his rifle butt and leaned against the sandbags, fumbling for a cigarette. His narrow, cadaverous features looked yellow in the pale light. He looked around at Dugan. „How d'you like it, kid? Had enough?“

Dugan shrugged and reloaded his rifle, then stuffed his pockets with cartridges. The powder smoke made his head ache, or maybe it was hunger and the sound of guns. His cheek was swollen from the rifle stock, and his gums were sore and swollen. All of them were indescribably dirty. For seventy-five days they had held the outpost against a steady, unrelenting, consistent, energy-draining attack that seemed to take no thought of men lost. Their food was gone; only a little of the brackish water remained, and there would be no relief.

„They've written us off,“ Slim said. „We're dead.“ He was hollow eyed and sagging, yet he was still a fighting man. He looked at Jerry. „How about that wine?“

„Let's go get it. There's a machine gun there, too, and enough ammo to fight the battle of the Marne.“

„Does the sergeant major know?“

„He did.“ Jerry indicated the line of dead bodies. „He's over there.“

„Who's in command?“ Dugan asked.

„Maybe nobody. The lieutenant was killed several days ago, shot from behind. He was a fool to hit that Turk. He slugged one guy too many.“

The sun was gone, and darkness was falling over the low hills. There was no movement in the trenches across the way. The Russian stood up, then sat down abruptly, his throat shot away. He started to rise again, then just sat back down and slowly rolled over.

Slim picked him up as though he were a child and carried him to the line of bodies, placing him gently on the ground. Then he unbuckled his cartridge pouches and hung them around his own waist. Dugan looked through an opening in the sandbagged parapet at the broad shoulders of shadow along the slope. A dead Moor hung head down over the barbed wire about fifty feet away, and a slight breeze made his burnoose swell.

When it was dark, the corporal came along the trench. He looked old. His thin, haggard face was expressionless. He said what they all knew.

„There won't be any relief. I think everything behind us is wiped out, too. We wouldn't stand a chance in trying to get away. They're out there waiting, hoping we try it.“

„There'll be at least one night attack, but with daybreak they'll come. There's thirty-eight of us left. Fire as long as you can, and when they get through the wire, it's every man for himself.“

He looked around vacantly, then started back up the line. His shoes were broken, and one leg was bandaged. He looked tired. He stopped suddenly, looking back. „If any of you have the guts to try it, go ahead.“ He looked from Jerry to Slim, then at Dugan. „We're through.“

Slim walked over to the dead officer and took his automatic, then the cartridges for it. He took some money, too, then dropped it into the sand. Having a second thought, he picked it up.

„If a man could get away,“ he said, looking over at Dugan, „this would pay a boatman. Gibraltar—that would be the place.“

Dugan sat down, his back to the parapet. He glanced along the trench. Far down he could see movement.

Thirty-eight left! There had been 374 when they occupied the post. He tilted his head back and looked at the stars. They had looked the same way at home. How long ago was that?

Jerry got up. He glanced at Slim, and the Texan shrugged. „Let's go,“ he said. And they went.

Jerry pointed. „We'll go down that shallow place, and there's a ditch. Follow that to the right and it takes you right up to the building. If we get into that ditch, we've got it made.“

There was no moon, but the stars were bright. The rear parapet had been partly knocked down by the explosion of a shell. They went over fast, Jerry first, then Dugan. Flat on their faces, they wormed across the dark ground, moving fast but silently. The ground was still hot. In the darkness his hand touched something warm. It was a gun, an automatic. He thought of Slim and felt suddenly sick; then he remembered the sergeant who had been killed out here a few days before. He took the gun but turned at right angles. The Biscayan was close behind him, his knife in his teeth, his rifle lying across his forearms.

Dugan heard a slight movement and looked up suddenly into the eyes of a Moor. For a split second they both stared, and then Dugan jerked his rifle forward, and the muzzle struck the Moor right below the eye. The Moor rolled back and then came up, very fast, with a knife. Dugan kicked him on the kneecap, then hit him with the butt and followed with the barrel. He went down, but another loomed up.

There was a scream as the Biscayan ripped one up, and then Slim broke into the fight with an automatic. Then there was a roar of shots from all along the parapet. It was the expected night attack, sooner than believed and almost successful.

Dugan came up running, saw a Moor loom up before him, and shot without lifting the rifle above his belt line. The Moor spun out of the way and fell, and Dugan fell into the ditch just one jump ahead of the Biscayan. Then Slim and Jerry joined them. Jerry was carrying three rifles and a bandoleer of cartridges.

They went along the ditch at a stumbling run. Dugan slipped once and almost fell, but when he straightened up, the stone house was looming above them. Jerry led them to the trap door at the end of the ditch.

The room was empty except for a desk and a couple of chairs. One chair was tipped on its side, and there were papers scattered about. The room had a musty smell, as the door and windows were heavily shuttered and barred. Both openings could be covered by rifles from the trenches below, and as the position was not a good one, the Moors had not taken it.

Jerry dragged the heavy desk aside and struck a match to find the iron ring concealed in a crack. With a heave he opened the cellar. In the flare of the match Dugan saw that Jerry's scalp was deeply lacerated and dried blood matted his hair on one side.

Slim slid into the hole and a moment later was handing up bottles. Then he sent up a magnum of champagne, and the Biscayan came up with some canned fruit and cheese.

„This guy had a taste for knickknacks,“ Slim said. „There’s everything down here that you could get into a can.“

„He took three hot ones right through the belly on the first day,“ Jerry said. „He was scared and crying like a baby. I don’t believe he’d ever done a day’s duty in his life.“

Dugan took a bottle of Château Margaux and a can of the cheese. The wine tasted good. After a bit he crawled into a corner, made a pillow of some cartridge pouches, and went to sleep. When he awakened, light was filtering into the room from around the shutters. Jerry was sitting wide legged near the cellar door, and he was drunk. Slim was at the desk.

„Kid,“ Slim said, „come here.“

He had a map laid out. „See? If you get the chance, take the ditch to here, then down along that dry creek. It’s not far to the coast, and most of those boat guys will give you a lift for money. You got any money?“

„About twenty bucks. I’ve been hiding it in case.“

„Here.“ Slim took the money he’d taken from the dead officer. „You take this.“

„What about you?“

„I ain’t goin’ to make it, kid. I got a hunch. If I do, we’ll go together. If you board that boat, they may take your rifle, but you keep your sidearm, you hear? Keep it hidden. You may need it before you get across.“

He turned to look at Dugan. „How old are you, kid?“

„Twenty-two,“ Dugan said, and he lied. He was just past sixteen.

„You look younger. Anyway, go through their pockets, whoever’s dead. They won’t mind, and you’ll need whatever there is.

„Don’t go near the army or a big town. Head for the seacoast and stay out of sight. Anybody you meet out here will try to stop you. Don’t let it happen. You get away—you hear?“

Jerry lifted the bottle in a toast. „Tomorrow we die!“ he said.

„Today, you mean,“ Slim said.

The Biscayan came up from the cellar with a machine gun. It was brand-spanking-new. He went down again and came up with several belts of ammo, then a box of them. He set the machine gun up at a shuttered window and fed a belt into it.

Dugan looked at the automatic he had picked up. It was in good shape. He found another in the cellar and several spare clips. He loaded them.

Scattered shooting broke into a steady roar. A shell exploded not too far away.

Slim had found two Spanish versions of the Colt pistols and loaded them. He strapped them on, pleased. „You know what I’m going to do? I’m going to get good and drunk, and then I’m going to open that door and show them how we do it down in Texas!“

He emptied half a bottle of the wine and looked at Dugan. „You ever been in Texas, kid?“

„I worked on a ranch there—in the Panhandle.“

„I grew up on a ranch,“ Slim said. „Rode for a couple of outfits in New Mexico before I started out to see the world. I knew this would happen sometime. Just never figured it would be here, in a place like this.“

He picked up the bottle of wine and looked at it. „What I need is some tequila. This here is a she-male’s drink! Or some bourbon an’ branch water.“

Dugan took his rifle and walked to the window. He helped the Biscayan move the machine gun to a more advantageous position, a little closer, a little more to the left. He checked his rifle again and loaded two more and stood them close by. From a crack in the shutters he studied the route he might get a chance to take. It must be done before the whole country was overrun by the Moors.

Suddenly Jerry moved, the dried blood still caked in his stubble of beard. He crawled on hands and knees to the edge of the trapdoor from the ditch. Then he stopped, breathing hoarsely, waiting.

Dugan had heard nothing above the occasional rattle of distant rifle fire as the Riffs began to mop up. Suddenly the trapdoor began to lift, very cautiously, then with more confidence. When it had lifted about a foot, a big Riff thrust his head up and stared into the room. All the occupants were out of his immediate range, and he lifted his head higher, peering into the semidarkness. In that instant Jerry swung the empty magnum. The solid bop of the blow was loud in the room, and the man vanished, the door falling into place. Jerry jerked it open, slammed it back, and leaped down into the hole. There was a brief scuffle, and then Jerry came back through the trapdoor, carrying a new rifle and a bandoleer.

Now the crescendo of firing had lifted to a loud and continuous roar, and Slim started to sing. In the tight stone room his voice boomed loudly.

*Glorious! Glorious!
One keg o’ beer for the four of us!
Glory be to heaven that there isn’t
Ten or ‘leven,
For the four of us can drink it all alone!*

The Biscayan took down the bar and threw the shutters wide. Below them and away across the tawny hill the Riffian trench was suddenly vomiting up a long line of men. From behind the parapet before them a scattering fire threw a pitiful challenge at the charging line.

Dugan wiped the sweat from his eyebrows and leaned against the edge of the window. He was sagging with incredible exhaustion, and his body stank from the unwashed weeks, the sweat and the dirt. He lifted the rifle and held it against his swollen cheek and began to fire.

Behind him Jerry and Slim were singing *Casey Jones*. Dugan looked down at the Biscayan, a solid chunk of man who lived to fight. Hunched behind the machine gun, he waited, watching the line as an angler watches a big fish approaching the hook.

Suddenly the firing stopped, waiting for a killing volley at close quarters.

Dugan had stopped, too. One man, a tall Moor on a fine-looking horse, had ridden out on a point a good six hundred yards away, watching the attack. He stood in his stirrups, lifting a hand to shout a command, unheard at the distance. For what seemed a long minute Dugan held his aim, then squeezed off the shot, and the man stood tall in his stirrups, then fell from the saddle to the dust and lay there. Then the Biscayan opened fire.

Dugan looked down at him, aware for the first time that the Biscayan was drunk. The gray line melted before him, and the Biscayan lifted the bottle for another drink.

The unexpected fire from the stone house, cutting a wide swath in their ranks, paralyzed the attack. Then a bunch of the Riffs broke away from the main attack and started toward the stone house. Jerry was up, firing slowly, methodically. Suddenly the machine gun swung, fired three short bursts, and the bunch of attackers melted away. From behind the parapet came a wavering cheer. Dugan winced at the few voices. So many were gone!

Dugan squinted his eyes against the sun, remembering the line of silent men beside the parapet and the big Russian with the schoolboy pink in his cheeks.

The Biscayan lifted his bottle to drink, and it shattered in his hand, spilling wine over him. With a lurid burst of Spanish he dropped the neck of the bottle and reached for another. And he had never been a drinking man.

Slim sat on the floor, muttering. „I'm goin' to get damn good an' drunk an' go out there and show 'em how we do it down in Texas.“

He started to rise and sat down hard, a long red furrow along his jaw. He swore in a dull, monotonous voice.

Dugan saw the line of Moors sweep forward and across the parapet. There was scattered shooting, some rising dust, then silence. He blinked, feeling a lump in his throat. He had known few of them, for they had been together too short a time. Only weeks had passed since he lay in his bunk aboard ship, feeling the gentle roll as it steamed west from Port Said.

The sunlight was bright and clear. Outside, except for the scattered bodies of the slain, all was quiet and peaceful under the morning sun. Dugan looked across the valley, thinking of what he would do. There was little time. Perhaps time had already run out.

The afternoon was waning before they attacked again. This time they were careful, taking advantage of the slight roll of the hill to get closer. The last hundred yards was in the open, and they seemed unaware of the ditch, which would be hidden from them until they were almost fallen into it.

Dugan's face was swollen and sore from the kick of the rifle. He was hot and tired, and he switched rifles again.

A single shot sounded, lonely against the hills, and something gasped beside him. He turned to see Jerry fall across the sill. Before he could pull him back, three more bullets chugged into his body.

„Kid,“ Slim said, „you better go. It's time.“

He took the bar down from the door and looked down the sunlit hill. A knot of Moors was coming toward him, good men, fighting men, dangerous men. Slim stepped out with a pistol in each hand and started down toward them.

He was drunk. Magnificently, roaring drunk, and he had a pistol in either hand. „I'm a-goin' to show them how we do it down in Texas!“ He opened fire, then his body jerked, and he went to his knees.

Dugan snapped a quick shot at a Moor running up with a rifle ready to fire, and then Slim got up. He had lost one gun, but he started to fire from waist level. His whole left side was bloody.

Dugan turned to yell at the Biscayan, but the man was slumped across his machine gun. He had been shot between the eyes.

Dugan pushed him away from the gun and swung it toward the front of the house. In the distance, against the pale-blue sky, above the heat waves dancing, a vulture swung in slow circles against the sky. Slim was down, all sprawled out, and the enemy was closing in.

He pointed the gun toward them and opened up, singing in a hoarse, toneless voice.

*Glorious! Glorious!
One keg o' beer for the four of us!
Glory be to heaven that there isn't
Ten or 'leven,
For the four of us can drink it all alone!*

His belt went empty, and the hill was bare of all but the bodies. He got up and closed the heavy plank door.

He caught up a bandoleer and another pistol. Then he dropped through the trapdoor.

All was still. He stepped over the dead Moor and went out into the shadowed stillness of the ditch.

And then he began to run.

