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Vol. VI, No. 1

ACTION STORIES

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Rawlins and Simons melted like ghosts into the ominous maw of Ngami

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OCT. ACTION STORIES on the Stands SEPT. 1



“He Used to Belong to Our Crowd”

“He’s the only one of the old gang who made good”

“THAT’S Bob Thompson, sales manager for Boyd & Snyder. They say he makes \$15,000 a year.

“Yet it hasn’t been long since he wasn’t making more than \$35 a week. I know, because he used to belong to our crowd. There were six of us and there was hardly a night that we didn’t bowl or shoot pool or play cards together.

“Lots of times we would sit down and talk about earning more money, but that’s all it ever amounted to—talk! Bob was the only one who really did anything.

“I’m through wasting my spare time like this,” he said one night. “I’m going to take up a course with the International Correspondence Schools and try to make something of myself before it is too late.”

“We didn’t see much of Bob after that—he’d always laugh and say he was ‘too busy’ when we’d ask him to join a party.

“Look at him now. A big man in a big job. Making five times as much as I’ll ever make. Oh, what a fool I was not to send in that I. C. S. coupon when he did!”

Are you like this man? Are you standing still while other men get ahead of you? Are you idling away your time in small and fleeting pleasures instead of building for the future?

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Jesse G. Vincent was a toolmaker before he enrolled with the I. C. S. He is now Vice-president of the Packard Motor Car Company. Walter Chrysler, President of the Chrysler Corporation, is also a former I. C. S. student. So is “Eddie” Rickenbacker, the famous flying ace, who is now Vice-president and Director of Sales for the Rickenbacker Motor Company.

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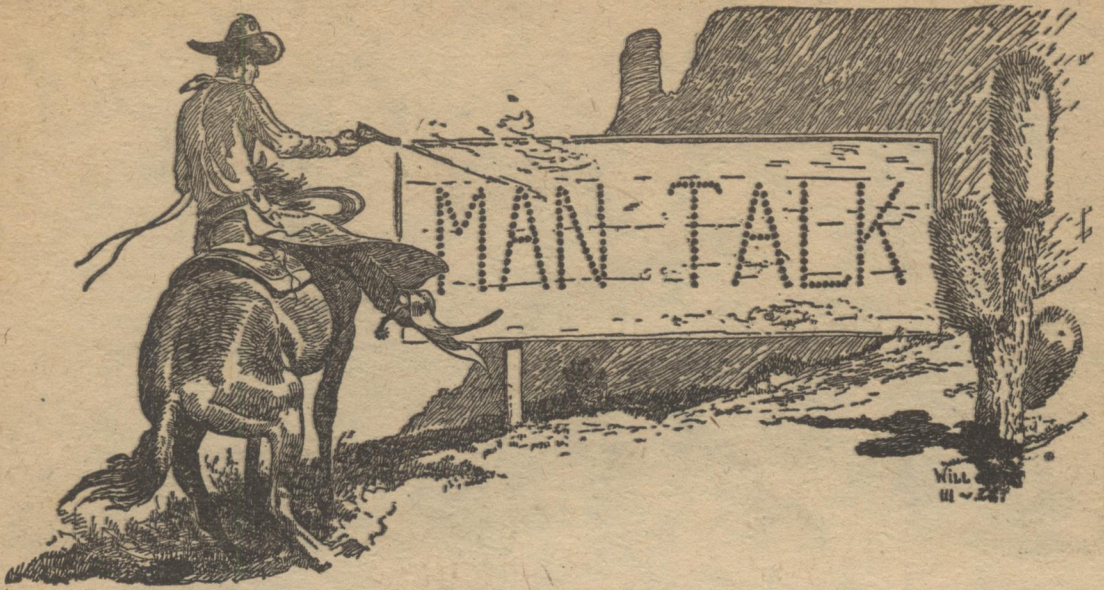
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A new writer comes riding into the pages of *Action Stories*. He's Tom Roan of Alabam', Montana, Mexico or wherever he hangs his hat. As his two *Action* novels, "The Painted Trail," and "Wild Born," will soon be making these pages crackle, it's up to us to get you acquainted. Tom is a born story-teller, as his yarns will soon prove to you. And his "finger-prints" leave no doubt that he's a man of Action. Here's Tom, himself, talking:

"I have witnessed several sprees of gun-fighting and man-killing, seeing much of it in old Bloody Beat Twenty-Two, a few miles West of Birmingham, Alabama, as late as 1912. Too, I spent a certain length of time saddle-tramping about in Old Mexico, following up the drag-end of the last revolution. There, we had lots of it, knife-fighting, shooting-scrapes, and general hell-raising affairs.

"For my part I was born in Alabama, a few miles North of Birmingham, at a little cross-roads place called Snead. That was in '93 or '94. Sounds funny that I can't say just which, but people in that part of the world failed to keep records. A youngster just entered the world and started growing up in catch-as-catch-can fashion.

"That was the way of my schooling, too. Willie Lee Robb, a sweet little school ma'am, taught me how to read and write, but I shook loose at twelve and strayed West, winding up in San Antonio, Texas. I wanted to be a man! And by a streak of good fortune, I landed with a lanky old Westerner who chewed Granger's Twist and could out-swear a Congressman. He gave me a job at his corrals. One morning, a week later, I "topped" Redheaded Dan, an outlaw, and pulled leather all over the state of Texas. But when the dust settled, I was still in the saddle, glued on with both hands. Just as the show was over, my boss galloped up, hit the ground with whizzing spurs, and pro-

ceeded to cuss-out the whole world in general.

"You're jist a plain damn fool!" he barked in my direction. "All these birds what put you on that hoss is worse'n damn fools! Hits a plum' wonder you hain't done dead!"

"Nevertheless, after one of the meanest cursings man or boy ever received, I started riding from that day on. I even went on the road for my old boss as a bronco-buster, and we shipped horses all over Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee, breaking and selling the stock at the railroad corrals.

"Three years later found me banging about the Mexican Border, packing a .45 six-gun, wearing Justin boots, a big John B., and bell-spurs,—a kid of fifteen, knowing darn little about the world or what made it go round. But I was trying to get along in man-fashion. Had to. Home life had gone by the board at twelve. There wasn't any left for me. And men treated me as a man. I looked older than my age, and I was admitted everywhere—and saw a lot of things, good and bad, and I learned. Had it to do!

"At sixteen, I was trick riding, doing big-catch roping and rope-spinning for a wild west circus. Oh, I was farming the world, alright! But a couple of years of the circus was enough for me. When they Winter-quartered, they left me out, but somehow I managed to get along. One Winter, I even went in to become a lion-trainer. I made a fair stab at that and was getting along well until the manager of the show found out my age. He fired me on the spot, and I went back to the Border, playing around in that country for a year and taking part in a wild-horse round-up, up Arizona way.

"At nineteen, I went into the Army 'to see the world.' They shot me to Honolulu for three years as a Scout in the 2nd Infantry, assigned to Company A. Coming out of that, I landed in the Seattle Police Department as a raider. Six months of that was

(Continued on page 120)

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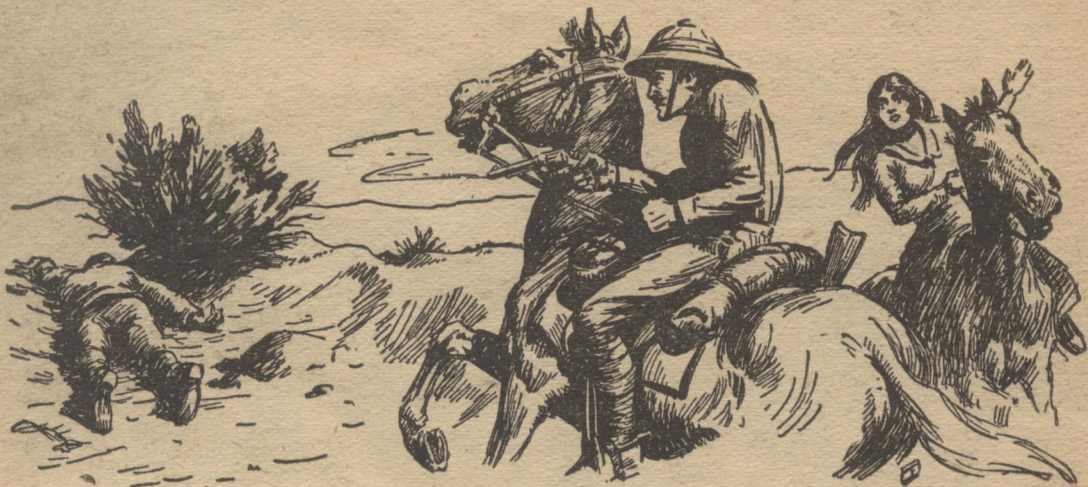
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Sand and Diamonds

By Victor Rousseau

Like ghosts of the night, Rawlins and Simons, of the Bechuanaland Mounted, melted forever into the ominous maw of Ngami

Complete South African Action Novelet



LIEUTENANT CONNELL, of the Bechuanaland Mounted Police, South Africa, frowned as Sergeant Luke Evans stepped into the office of the barracks at Boskop.

"Read that, Evans!" He tossed a telegram across the table to the sergeant, who picked it up and read:

Kiss Boskop good-bye for me. Not coming back. Johannesburg's as fine as ever. Rawlins.

The sergeant raised his eyebrows.

"You think Rawlins has deserted the Force, too, sir, like—"

"Like Simons? What do you think, Evans? You knew Simons and Rawlins intimately. Each of them was sent to patrol the Ngami district. A week or two later each of them sends an impudent wire in turn, announcing his desertion."

"I don't believe either of them deserted, sir, or sent that wire."

"What is your theory, then? Who sent that wire from Johannesburg in Rawlins's name, and who sent that one from Cape Town, signed Simons, tell-

ing us that he was sailing for England? What is there in the Ngami district?" he went on, without waiting for the sergeant's answer to his first question.

"Sand, baboons, thorn scrub, and thirst."

"You're right, Evans. You know the district as well as it can be known. A lot of it is included in that enormous block of land that old Duplessis holds, but it'll never see any humans except a few wandering Bushmen. Still, it's in our district, and—"

He paused. "You don't think Rawlins and Simons quit because they didn't want to patrol the desert, do you, Evans? You know the natives have queer stories about its being peopled by ghosts, and so on. Of course that wouldn't have scared our men. Still, when a man's been riding week after week with only thirst for a companion . . .

"I want you to go up there at once," Connell finished abruptly. "Report back to me after you've thoroughly covered the district. Try to get on the tracks of Simon and Rawlins, that's to say, learn whether they actually went to the Ngami or not. And don't you send me a wire from down country telling me that you've deserted, because I won't believe it."

He grinned at Evans, who grinned back at him. No one would believe that of Sergeant Evans, with five wounds and half-a-dozen medals gained on the battlefields of France.

"You'd best start right away," continued Connell. "And when you reach old Duplessis's farm stop in and pay him your respects. We've got to keep in with him, however much he hates us."

Evans was just at the door when Connell called after him:

"I wish we could get hold of old Pete Flanagan. If any man knows the Ngami from end to end it's Pete. Haven't heard anything of him of late, have you, Evans?"

"Haven't seen or heard of him for months, Lieutenant. I s'pose he's off

looking for more of those diamond mines."

The other nodded, and Evans left the office. His preparations were simple, and occupied almost no time at all. Into his saddle-bags he stuffed a few tins of bully beef, a quantity of flour, a small bottle of effervescent saline, as a substitute for yeast, and a roll of sun-dried beef, biltong, of the appearance and consistency of blackened sole-leather. In addition he took tea, matches, sugar, salt, and a quantity of compressed vegetables. He had also a double billy, for cooking, two large water-flasks, and, besides his service revolver, a carbine, grounded in the leather bucket that was suspended from the off side of his saddle.

Three miles down-hill from the police post lay the settlement of Boskop. It consisted of the usual large market square, common to all South African towns, and three or four wide streets criss-crossing each other at right angles, lined with one-story brick buildings roofed with galvanized iron; stores, old clothes shops, and "ice-cold drinks" emporiums devoted to the native trade.

All about lay the half-desert country, at present a uniform brown, though when the rains began—if they began—it would be transformed almost overnight into an expanse of emerald. The *spruits* would run water, the empty dams and cisterns would be brimming, crops would be sown—if the rains came.

Boskop was on the fringe of the desert. Usually the four months' down-pour materialized in Boskop. Sometimes it did not. It never rained in the Ngami country, over beyond the fringe of *kopjes* on the horizon, or only enough to maintain the stunted thorn scrub that dotted the land like the wool fibres on a native's head.

That was Luke's destination, a land where no one lived except the wandering Bushman and his cousin, the baboon. A few had traversed it, among them Pete Flanagan, the oldest and most sanguine diamond prospector in the

district. According to Pete, the Ngami region was thickly sprinkled with diamond "pipes," the volcanic outlets in which the stones were made. Pete's volubility had long since been discouraged, and nowadays it was only under the stimulus of a few drinks that he would repeat the old story for the amusement of his entertainers. For some time past nothing had been seen of the old man.

Diamonds had been found near Boskop. Twenty miles away two men, Hart and Van Reenen, had found stones two years before. A rush had followed, but the supply had proved to be only a single pocket.

Hart was the district money-lender, and had his hands on everything negotiable. Van Reenen was his chief satellite, an adventurer who was probably wanted under various aliases in many parts of the country.

Sergeant Luke rode through Boskop, past the line of stores, with their crowds of chattering natives pawing over the second-hand clothes and bargaining with the gesticulating proprietors; past the market square, with its few teams of longhorns inspanned to heavy Dutch wagons, out into the land beyond. Just on the other side of the town was Jacob's Hotel, Hart's headquarters.

On the *stoep* Sergeant Luke saw Hart sitting, tilted back in his chair, his thumbs in his armholes. Though it was not yet noon he was already drunk. He sprawled there, a drunken blotch in the sun, fanned by a Sechuana boy with a palm leaf. Upon the little table at his elbow stood a bottle of whiskey, and a tumbler, half-full.

Seated beside him, leaning forward and gesticulating, was "Baldy" Smith, one of Hart's crowd, and one of the hard characters left stranded in Boskop after the diamond rush had petered out and the disgruntled prospectors had removed to other haunts.

Inside the store adjacent to the hotel Sergeant Luke saw the mean, wizened face of Jacobs as he bent over a roll of

cloth from which he was measuring a short yard for a colored woman.

"Hello, Sergeant!" called Hart from his chair, as Luke rode up. "Looks like you're starting off on patrol somewhere. Going to meet Rawlins, I suppose, and bring him back with you?"

Luke saw the furtive glance that "Baldy" Smith shot at the other. Hart's gross face assumed an expression of infantile blandness.

For the first time the idea came into Luke's brain that Hart might know something about the two troopers' disappearance. But though the police had proved a thorn in Hart's side, notably in curbing some of the grosser evils of frontier life in whose existence Hart was pecuniarily interested, he could not imagine that Hart had been so mad as to set himself in open opposition to the Force.

The sudden impulse was killed by the flash of reason.

"Maybe," Luke answered non-committally. "I hear Van Reenen's left town," he continued casually.

Hart guffawed. "Oh, yes, after big game, sergeant. Him and old Duplessis have gone after a herd of springbok out in the Ngami."

This speech gave Luke food for thought. Prodigious herds of these antelopes migrate periodically through the desert regions, armies of several hundred thousand sometimes covering hundreds of miles on those strange *treks* that are the peculiar characteristic of this animal. Luke knew that old Duplessis's passion for hunting was almost on a par with his hatred of Englishmen—one of his two dominant passions, in fact.

Still Luke also was aware that Hart and Duplessis were at odds. Hart held a mortgage on the old man's lands and was pressing him hard. Three thousand *morgen*—six thousand acres of the old Dutchman's holdings—were fair ranching land, and worth all that Hart had advanced on the total, composed preponderatingly of thorn scrub. Duplessis

had acted queerly in going off hunting with the associate of his bitterest enemy.

"So?" Luke commented. "Well, so long, Hart."

He touched the reins and the stocky Basuto pony set off upon his tireless gait, known as the "triple," which bore a close resemblance to that of a rocking-chair.

Hart and Baldy watched him till he had disappeared below the dip of the road. Jacobs came out of the store and joined them. The three broke into guffaws.

"Another of them damn policemen on the trail," said the hotel-keeper. "One arter another, like flies going into a jam-trap."

Hart cursed volubly. "That'll be the last," he said. "We've got to make that clean-up and get down country in the next two weeks now, or hell won't have nothing on Bechuanaland for hotness."

Baldy grinned at his employer. "Don't worry, Hart," he answered. "We'll pick him up where we landed the other two."

"How about wiring one of our agents to send another telegram?" suggested Hart, turning to Jacobs.

"Give 'um time. We'll wire the post from Kimberley arter we git there."

"I'll leave that part to you, Jacobs." Hart leaned back in his chair, drained the glass of whiskey, and cursed the boy with the fan in Zulu, the lingua franca of the country.

"Get on the job, Baldy," he told his henchman.

He uttered a grunt of satisfaction as he saw Baldy riding back into town a few minutes later.

"Well," he said to Jacobs, "we've got that feller Evans, and we'll worry along for two weeks more without any more damn policemen mixing in."

The hotel-keeper's face took on a saturnine expression.

"If Van Reenen don't spill the beans by fooling with that Duplessis girl," he observed.

"Hell!" exploded Hart. "I've warned him that this is business."

"Well, Van Reenen ain't the kind of man who keeps his pleasure and his business separate enough," responded Jacobs.

CHAPTER II

INTO THE DESERT

AS he rode on toward the desert through the scorching sunlight Sergeant Luke was anticipating his reception at the Duplessis farm with mixed feelings.

The farm was some sixty miles from Boskop, on the very fringe of the desert, a goodish way, but only a day's journey for one of the hardy native horses such as he rode. Here years before Jan Duplessis had built up a flourishing ranch, with a string of dams fed by a *spruit* in the wet season, and substantial enough to defy the eight months of drouth that succeeded it.

Of course there would be a welcome for him, a meal, coffee, a bed if he cared to stay. No South African would deny that even to his bitterest enemy without feeling himself disgraced forever, provided he came with the necessary emblem of respectability—to wit, a horse. The horseless white man would be invited to eat alone and sleep among the natives.

Sergeant Luke had met pretty Emmy Duplessis several times. She always had a smile and a blush for him, which had sometimes made him dream of the date of his discharge, when, with his savings and a small legacy that had come to him, he meant to take up land and start out for himself with a small flock of sheep.

On the other hand, Jan Duplessis's reception of him had been, to say the least, devoid of warmth. The old man, who came of an old Boer family with a strain of French Huguenot blood, had always been an irreconcilable enemy of

the British. He had migrated to the edge of the desert after the War, a generation before, and vowed that no Englishman should cross his threshold again. If time and circumstance had forced him to modify that vow he none the less retained his ancient prejudices. As he had told Sergeant Luke the last time he had visited the ranch-house:

"I've got nothing against you as a man, Sergeant. But I won't have any *verdommte Engelsmans* buzzing around my girl. When she marries it will be one of our own people."

Luke had wondered if the old man was thinking of Van Reenen. Adventurer as the fellow was, he had a superficial air of breeding, and was insinuating enough to have acquired a certain ascendancy over the simple-minded old farmer, in spite of his being Hart's right-hand man. Besides, two almost rainless seasons succeeding each other had brought the Duplessis ranch to the verge of ruin, and Duplessis might have hoped to win favor with Van Reenen with the idea of placating Hart, who held the mortgage.

At any rate, Van Reenen, as Duplessis's son-in-law, would probably avert ruin. Luke thought that Emmy had hinted as much the last time they had met, when there were tears in her eyes, but he had not felt justified in speaking to the girl then—not without his discharge in his pocket.

The sergeant decided not to make the ranch-house that night, with a view to saving his horse for the long desert marches that were to come. When the sun dipped under the horizon, and darkness was a matter of minutes he off-saddled, knee-haltered the animal, built a little fire of dead branches of thorn, and cooked his supper. He rolled up in his blanket, and was asleep almost immediately.

He was astir at sunrise, shivering in the icy wind that would change to a burning sirocco inside of two hours. He upsaddled after a breakfast of coffee, *biltong*, and a couple of cakes made

hastily on the ashes of his fire, and rode on at a leisurely gait. Time had lost much of its meaning for him in those wastes. He calculated on striking the Duplessis ranch about mid-afternoon.

All that morning he rode steadily. A bite of lunch, and on again through the heat of the afternoon. The line of *kopjes* marking the fringe of the desert loomed nearer. Now he was among them, low, single hills emerging from the plain, their tops heaped fantastically with boulders, and crowned with solitary cacti. Baboons barked at him and scampered away as he threaded the narrow cart track that at last emerged into the Duplessis ranch, the last outpost of civilization.

Luke saw the homestead in the far distance set beside the series of great dams, around which the thirsty cattle crowded under the grateful shade of the immense eucalyptus trees. Reaching the cluster of native huts two miles from the house Sergeant Luke was surprised to discover that they were empty. In place of the smiling native women, eternally washing rags or sweeping the mud floors, was solitude.

The sergeant pulled in sharply. He shouted, but there came no answer.

This wholesale abandonment of the native quarters meant that something untoward had happened. He spurred his horse up past the dams, in which a little water still remained, and dismounted at the entrance to the *stoep*, throwing the reins.

He strode up and hammered on the door. No sound came from the house, which was already in the long shadows cast by the *kopjes*. There was no sign of life anywhere.

Luke tried the door and found that it was open. He stamped inside, calling. No sound came but the echo of his own voice.

The big living-room, which Emmy had furnished tastefully from Cape Town was in disorder. The rugs were disarranged, the table pushed into a corner, three chairs overturned. Indi-

cation were that a struggle had taken place.

What had happened? A marauding raid from some wandering tribes? The natives had been at peace for years, and, if such a thing had happened, old Duplessis would not have been caught napping.

Sergeant Luke strode through the house, shouting. He stopped. He thought that he heard a moaning sound in answer.

He stepped into the kitchen and called again. This time he heard the answering moan distinctly. It came from a small cellar that Duplessis had hollowed out for a larder.

Luke made his way down the rickety wooden stairs. Hams and dried peaches hung from the roof of the little place, barrels of flour and crates of groceries were ranged along the sides.

The moaning came from a far corner. Fighting down his terror, the sergeant made his way there.

He was conscious of intense relief. Among a heap of old rags and rubbish he saw the wizened body and monkey-like face of old Jantje, Miss Emmy's Hottentot body-servant. The Hottentot, being of a higher or more adaptable mentality than the negro, is usually attached to the house in a personal capacity, generally as groom. Jantje had always accompanied Miss Emmy when she went abroad. He had been with her since she was a baby.

The sergeant saw that the yellow man was unconscious, though he was moaning. He had been shot or stabbed. His rags were streaked and stained with blood. Stooping, he raised the man in his arms and carried him up to the living-room. A quick examination showed that Jantje had been shot twice in the head. Both bullets had glanced off his forehead without shattering the bone, but had traveled around the scalp, causing considerable loss of blood.

Administering water and binding up his wounds, Luke soon had the Tottie restored to consciousness. Jantje recog-

nized him and sat up, jabbering incoherently in Dutch.

"Where's Miss Emmy?" demanded Luke in the same language.

"That devil-man Van Reenen take her. She fight. No good. Plenty mans along with Van Reenen," Jantje muttered with an effort.

"When? Tell me all that happened as quick as you can!" Luke cried.

Jantje seemed to pull himself together. "Yesterday afternoon Van Reenen come and tell Baas Jan there's a big herd of springbok out in the Ngami country. Baas Jan go mad. He stuff a roll of *biltong* into his saddlebag, strap on bandolier, take his rifle, and jump on his horse. In five minutes they both gone together toward the Ngami."

"Go on!"

"Last night late Van Reenen come back, with him that man Brouwer Miss Emmy always scared of and two more. Van Reenen say Baas Jan fell off his horse and hurt himself. Miss Emmy to go back with him while Brouwer ride for the doctor. Miss Emmy is getting ready when I tell her Van Reenen is lying. Then she says she won't go.

"She asks questions and sees that Van Reenen is lying. He catches hold of her, and she fights him. I ran to get gun to shoot them, but Van Reenen shot me in the head twice and I fell down. They thought I was dead because I lay still. They carried me downstairs and threw me into a corner. When they were gone I tried to get up, but I remembered nothing more till you came, Baas Luke."

"Where have they taken her?"

"Into the Ngami. They doing something there, I don't know what."

"Jantje, I'm going to leave for there at once. As soon as you are able, hurry to the police camp and tell Lieutenant Connell.

"No use, baas. Too long. Jantje go with you. White man cannot follow their *spoor* through the desert without

Tottie man. We go together. See, Jantje strong now."

Making a great effort, the little yellow man got on his feet and stood looking up into the sergeant's face with a twisted grin.

"Jantje strong now. No time to go back to police camp for help when that devil-man and his other devil-mans have got Miss Emmy."

CHAPTER III

THE VALLEY OF GHOSTS

SERGEANT LUKE reflected quickly. He decided that the Hottentot's advice was sound. It would be hopeless for any white man to attempt to follow the tracks of horses through the scrub and over the sun-baked ground. Only a Hottentot or a Bushman could do that.

He realized that Hart and the rest of his crew had been in the conspiracy. Hart had told him that Van Reenen had invited Jan Duplessis to accompany him on the hunting trip several hours before the invitation had actually been extended. Hart must, therefore, have known of Van Reenen's intention.

"But can you travel?" Luke asked the Tottie.

"You feed horse; when you finished, Jantje strong again."

Luke knew enough of the recuperative powers of the natives to believe that Jantje would prove as good as his word. In spite of the urgent need of haste, he must feed his horse, also pack some oats on his saddle; he had intended to procure a small sack at the Duplessis ranch in any event. He offsaddled the animal, watered him, and fed him in the stable, where he filled a small sack with oats, which he strapped to the saddle. A handful or two a day would sufficiently supplement what the hardy little beast could pick up in the desert.

Jantje, meanwhile, had proceeded to dig a small tunnel, about nine inches long, in the hard ground outside the

house. Kindling a handful of a native herb in one end, he ran a quill through the opening and inhaled the smoke until the last embers had burned away. Then, blear-eyed and choking but apparently quite restored to strength by the drug, a species of hemp, he sauntered up to the sergeant, who was ready for the journey.

"You get a horse, Jantje?"

"Me go on foot."

It had grown dark, but there was a brilliant moon which shed a bright light over the face of the country. Luke let his horse proceed at its comfortable triple. Jantje ran beside it like a dog, picking up the *spoor* of the horses as rapidly as was necessary. An hour or two passed, during which Jantje changed the course two or three times, before Luke reined in.

"Jantje, you say Van Reenen and his gang are doing something out in the Ngami country?" he asked. "What is it?"

Jantje only clicked gutturally in answer.

"Are they on Baas Duplessis's land?"

"All his land everywhere."

Luke knew that the old Boer's holdings covered an immense extent of territory. Like the old-fashioned men of his nation he lived in dread of being crowded by his neighbors, and being crowded, in the Boer idea, is being able to see the smoke of your neighbor's chimney anywhere from your property. The land in question had been purchased from a native chief years before at about a penny for ten acres.

They went on steadily, while the terrain grew rougher, threading deep defiles among the *kopjes*. Luke did not know whether Jantje was following the tracks all the way, or whether he had only divined the direction that the kidnapers had taken. It was well on toward morning when he told Luke that they were ready to camp for the remainder of the night.

Luke knew that there was water here and there in the Ngami, and his patrol

route was mapped out to enable him to halt at various pools that never ran quite dry, being fed by subterranean streams. Here, however, being off his course, he was trusting entirely to Jantje. He was about to drink from his water-bottle when the Tottie signed to him to put it away, and disappeared with a guttural warning.

Ten minutes later he was back with an armful of wild melons, bitter gourds with roots that extended twenty or thirty feet below the ground and tapped the subterranean water supply. The horse devoured them greedily, and Luke, scooping out the pulp, as he had learned to do on patrol, quenched his thirst.

He dozed at intervals during the remainder of the night, feverishly impatient to get on, yet knowing that in the desert it is literally a case of the more haste the less speed. His mind was tortured with fears for Emmy. He started up from an uneasy doze at dawn, to see Jantje on his hands and knees beside him, puffing at his remedial herb, while the billy boiled on the fire.

A feed for the horse, coffee made of the bitter fluid from the interior of the melons, and they were off again. Luke asked no more questions; he could see no trace of *spoor* upon the sun-baked ground, and it seemed impossible that the Tottie could be following one—yet as Jantje ran before him he scanned the ground ceaselessly, turning now to the right, now to the left.

All the morning they traveled through the howling desert of sand and stones, with here and there a stunted thorn or mimosa tree. At noon they halted.

"Van Reenen six hours ahead," the Tottie volunteered. "Another man join them an hour back."

"Let's push on!"

"When the afternoon grows cool, Baas."

Fuming, Luke was forced to acquiesce. He had only a little water

left in one of the bottles, and the last of the melons was gone.

In mid-afternoon, when the sun's heat had begun almost imperceptibly to decline, they set off again.

This was the worst stage of the journey. It was less hot, but nevertheless an inferno. Luke had finished the water, of which the little dried-up Tottie had refused to drink. Jantje skipped agilely ahead of the panting horse, which labored over the stones of that desolate route. Not a vestige of vegetation was to be seen as they threaded their way from one shallow depression into another.

Toward sunset a line of *kopjes* sprang up suddenly before them. They were approaching them as the sun dipped under the edge of the sky.

"They go through there," said Jantje, indicating a narrow defile in front of them. "No go farther."

"What do you mean?"

"Ghosts walk in that valley, Baas. Tottie man no go on. Ghosts kill Tottie man, no harm white man."

Without much hope, knowing the strength of native superstitions, Luke tried to persuade his companion. The Hottentot, trembling and mute, refused to go farther. Not even for his beloved Miss Emmy would he enter the valley ahead, where he believed the spirits of the dead to dwell.

"All right, make camp," said Luke. "I'll go on. Wait here for me. You think they're in there, do you?"

"Three hours ago they pass here," said the Tottie. "Me wait, Baas."

Luke climbed back into his saddle and rode on into the defile. The sun was down by the time he reached it. Dark-rode on into the defile. The sun was the moon was already lighting up the sky. The chill night wind made the sergeant shiver after the heat of the day.

Reaching the crest of the narrow pass, Luke reined in and looked down into the valley beneath him. He was surprised

to see that here the desert yielded to a long extent of densely set thorn scrub, indicating that there was water. The entrance was a winding path hardly more than three yards across, between two massive walls of rock.

Luke dismounted to survey the valley in front of him the better. Leaving his horse he went on afoot for fifty—a hundred yards. It was surprising how long the defile was. At last, however, it ended abruptly in the large crater-like bowl of the valley.

Something glittering in the moonlight at his feet arrested his attention. Luke stooped and picked it up. It was a metal badge of the Bechuanaland Police. Attached to it were a few shreds of khaki tunic.

The discovery instantly put him on the alert. That badge must have been worn by either Simons or Rawlins. The presence of the shreds of cloth indicated that it had been torn by force from the wearer's shoulder.

One of his two men had been there, then. The little piece of metal spoke as clearly of foul play as if Luke had himself witnessed the scene. The trooper must have been murdered, and the badge thrown away by his murderer to prevent identification of the remains.

Half-involuntarily gripping his revolver, Luke began the descent of the little incline leading from the pass into the valley. He followed a narrow trail amid the thorn scrub. The discovery had accentuated Emmy's peril in his mind. He meant to solve the mystery before the night was much older.

He reached the level flat of the valley. In front of him two fallen trees formed a knee-high barrier, the trail winding around it. Luke stepped aside to follow it.

As he did so, the ground yielded underfoot. He felt himself falling, clutched at the surface of the ground, missed it, and went sliding down amid a shower of sand into emptiness.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEATH TRAP

FOR just a few moments Luke lay unconscious, though this was more by reason of the swiftness and unexpectedness of the fall than from the depth into which he had fallen. Half-buried by the mass of sand that had accompanied him, and by the sandy bottom into which he had plunged, he finally struggled out, blowing the grains from his mouth and nostrils, and got upon his feet.

He saw that he was standing in a circular sandpit, not very much larger than a spacious room, and perhaps twenty to twenty-five feet deep. All around it rose the rock walls of soft, crumbly sandstone, emerging out of banks of shelving sand and gravel. The floor was strewn with masses of some substance gleaming white in the moonlight.

Assuring himself that he still had his revolver, and still under the impression that what had happened to him was no more than an accident, Luke made his way toward the wall. He looked about him for some means of ascent. He began to make a detour of the pit.

Presently he paused, turning his attention to the white things that he had seen on the floor. They were the bones of animals. Then he identified the place into which he had fallen. It was no natural pit, but a trap hollowed out by the Bushmen, perhaps a hundred, perhaps five hundred, years before. It was one of those pitfalls made by a whole generation of those indefatigable little hunters, in which they caught their game—the antelope, the bush-hog, even the elephant.

One might have expected the floor of the pit to be covered with bones, but the game had long since ceased to frequent that region, so that the greater part of the bones had pulverized and disinte-

grated, strewing the floor with silvery, glistening flakes.

At the farther side of the pit, however, a heap of fresh bones was gleaming white in the moonlight. As Luke approached them he started back at the sight of a glistening skull.

No skull of baboon, that—a human skull unmistakably. Piled up about it were the ribs, the long thigh-bones, the bones of human arms. Shreds of clothing still clung to this human framework. But it did not need the presence of those wisps of cloth, fluttering to and fro in the night wind, to tell Luke it was all that remained of Rawlins and Simons.

Now he began to realize that it was no accident, this fall of his into the sand-pit, but a cunning trap devised just at the spot where one who was unwarned must inevitably step into it. Caught in the same trap as himself, the skeletons of the two troopers lay hunched up together—but in horrible disarray.

Surely no man, however hard the death agony might have been, could have twisted his limbs like that . . . and that!

It looked as if ghouls had descended into the pit and hacked the two troopers limb from limb. Even the bones were splintered and horribly mutilated. Yet surely no human fiend would have committed this sacrilege on men who were already dead.

No *human* fiend! The explanation came to Luke next moment when, from a little shallow recess at the base of the rocks behind the pile of bones, without a sound, a hideous shape launched itself at his throat.

It was a striped hyena, one of the few denizens of those wastes, which had fallen into the pit weeks before, and had gorged itself, like the vampire that this creature is, upon the bodies of the dead men. Now, famished by its long fast, and mad with terror, it had forgotten the instincts that make it the most cowardly of all the creatures of prey, the offal-eater that follows the lion to feast on what the killer leaves. Famished

and desperate, the huge grey bulk launched itself at Luke's throat.

It was Luke's backward stumble over the heap of bones that saved him from the crunching jaws that snapped together as the lean shape shot past and over him. Before it had recovered itself Luke was upon his feet again. He turned to face it, and realized what it was.

Again the hyena leaped. Luke's revolver barked too late. The bullet, shot without aiming, merely glanced off the great dome of the rounded skull. The weapon was knocked from Luke's hand as the beast shot past him again, the outward thrust of its feet sending him sprawling.

Luke scrambled desperately to his feet. At its next spring, quick as a flash, the monster smashed against Luke's body. Both went sprawling to the floor of the pit. There ensued a nightmare of struggle.

With the fetid breath of the foul animal nauseating and choking him, Luke managed to get a grip on the upper and jawer jaws, wrenching and straining to get the head back and dislocate the vertebræ. Man and beast rolled over and over among the bones, but Luke never relaxed his hold.

Failing to break the shaggy neck, fortified with its masses of matted hair, Luke suddenly shifted his grasp and caught the hyena by the throat. There he clung, with the jaws spouting venom over him, and the great body threshing in an agony of pain.

Beaten almost into unconsciousness by the monster's convulsive struggles, dashed to and fro across the heaps of bleaching bones, Luke never relaxed his hold. At length the struggles of the beast grew fainter.

With the last power of his muscles Luke tightened his grip to the uttermost, flinging the entire weight and tension of his body into that grip of his hands, till, after a convulsive shudder, the creature ceased to struggle.

Staggering to his feet, the sergeant

found his revolver, and extinguished the remnants of life with a bullet through the brain.

He sank back exhausted. With reviving strength there came to him again the problem of escape. He began circling the pit, seeking an egress. His attempts to scramble up the side merely precipitated the fall of a cloud of sand. There was no niche in the soft rock in which he could set his foot. An attempt to hack a foothold with his jack-knife broke away the crumbling surface of the rock as fast as he indented it.

It was maddening to be trapped like that, with the upper ground and the thorn scrub clearly visible in the light of the moon. Sometimes Luke would manage to win a few feet upward, and, clinging there like a fly on a wall, would work with infinite care to carve out a footrest a little above him. With four or five such niches he could attain the surface. Just when hope began to rise the rock would crumble. Losing his balance he would roll over and over into the heap of bones beneath.

Time and again Luke tried, while the night wore on, doggedly, desperately, and always in vain. As he realized the hopeless nature of his situation it became difficult to preserve his sanity, to check an impulse to hurl himself against those walls and beat his fists against them.

There was a brief interval when he did yield to this weakness. He pictured Emmy in the power of Van Reenen and realized that, come what might, he could hardly hope to save her.

There was another interval when, lying exhausted among the bones in the moonless second half of the night, he heard the jingle of horses' bits above him, the creak of leather, the voices of men.

He sprang to his feet and stumbled forward, shouting for aid. Mocking laughter came back to him from the edge of the pit. He recognized Hart's voice.

"Hello, sergeant," called the other. "Met Rawlins yet?"

Hoarse guffaws of mirth met this sally. Looking up, Luke distinguished two or three other horsemen dimly outlined at Hart's side.

"Looks pretty, Rawlins does, eh, sergeant?" Hart shouted. "That feller without the head is Simons. Hyenas got into the pit and made a meal of him. They'll be coming back for you, sergeant."

With a shout of fury Luke loosed a shot into the dark. He heard cries of alarm. The figures disappeared abruptly.

"Put up that gun!" he heard Hart yelling. "We ain't going to shoot the feller. Let him stew there in the sun tomorrer. Good-bye, sergeant," he called mockingly. "We'll be back to see you when the hyenas and the ants have picked you clean. You'll look as pretty as Rawlins and Simons, sergeant."

More guffaws, and the cavalcade receded into the darkness. Luke raged to and fro like the trapped beast that he was, till at last he succumbed to utter weariness.

Dawn came, in splendor of red and gold, across the desert. The sun rose. Luke made another survey of his prison. With the new day his sanity had come back to him. Everywhere were the same walls of sandstone and the loose sand.

He spent the morning in a succession of dogged attempts to scale the walls. At last he gave up hope, sat down in the bottom of the pit, and awaited the inevitable.

Rawlins and Simons must have made the same efforts too, builded the same hopes, and sunk back into the same despair.

He knew he would not have very long to wait. As the incredible heat of the desert sun beat down upon his head he felt his senses leaving him. He heard himself babbling. He had a curious sense of being two persons, the one collected and resigned, watching and listening to the other one, demented,

now raging to and fro, now sunk upon the floor among the bones and calling Emmy's name.

How quiet that other man was lying at last! The thirst that filled the swollen mouth like red-hot, searing iron—what had that to do with him?

The icy cold of the night wind came at last, and the two beings were welded into one again. Sick and faint, Luke lay on the floor of the pit, shivering in his sweat-soaked clothes, knowing that only one more day of torture lay between himself and death.

He had already lapsed into a coma when through the dark he fancied that he heard a voice calling. Through the dark of unconsciousness, by a supreme effort, he struggled back to reality.

A voice *was* calling him, although not by name, from the edge of the pit above. Luke sat up dizzily. He was sure it was Hart and his crew, come back to finish him off. But better that than another day of such torment as he had endured!

Pulling himself together, he took out his revolver and crept forward, crying out of his swollen throat, and peering craftily about him for a sight of his persecutors.

He heard something swish softly at his feet. His fingers encountered the strands of a rope.

Half-incredulous, he pulled at it. It was fastened to something above, and held tight. He thought this must be Jantje.

"Make a noose and sling it about ye. I'll pull ye up," he heard a familiar voice, although he could not place it.

Luke knotted the rope about his body. Slowly he felt himself being dragged up the slippery ascent, amid a cloud of sand. Another moment, and he sank down exhausted upon the surface under the thorn scrub.

He looked into the face peering into his own and recognized it as that of the half-mad, wandering prospector, Pete Flanagan.

CHAPTER V

THE RENDEZVOUS

THE contents of Pete's flask of water liberally mixed with raw Cape spirit, soon brought Luke back to complete consciousness. He staggered to his feet and caught his rescuer by the arm.

"Emmy Duplessis!" he cried.

"Hurray!" yelled Pete. "Emmy and old Jan and diamonds! They got the diamonds, policeman, but they won't have them long. You and me and Emmy and old Jan, and the big, shining diamonds! You're lucky not to be rotting with them two poor fellows, policeman. If I hadn't heard 'em talking, and guessed they had another policeman here, the hyenas would be crunching your bones now, like them poor fellows."

Luke pulled himself together and observed his companion. Old Pete was drunk, incoherently drunk, and in that condition he was a sort of childish madman. He tapped him on the shoulder.

"Listen, Flanagan. You've seen Emmy?"

"I've seen her. Van Reenen's got her and old Jan in the nice house I builded me long ago. He thinks he's got the diamonds, too, but old Pete Flanagan was too clever for 'em. Those two poor fellows was calling for days, but Van Reenen wouldn't let me go to them."

Luke shuddered at the words.

"Ya! They thought Pete Flanagan was a harmless old drunkard, so they didn't kill him, only fed him brandy and locked him in the room. Tonight I heard them saying they'd got another policeman in the pit, and I gave them the slip, because I knew you'd help me get the diamonds." His voice took on a note of frenzy. "Diamonds, big yellow boys I found, policeman! We'll get them, you and me and Van Reenen, and share them. That's why I come to

you, so as you'll clean up that nest of thieves and get the diamonds."

"Where is it? Where's this place they're holding Emmy?"

"Not far. We're going to get them now. You and me, and then the diamonds. Big, fine, white, shining stones, policeman! You and me, and old Jan—"

He went on babbling incoherently. Luke shook off the last traces of his mental confusion. He was feeling stronger now. Old Pete's horse was standing near, and that reminded Luke of his own. He had no hope of finding the animal, of course. Either it had strayed or Hart and his crowd had roped it in. Nevertheless, he decided to go back to the pass.

Explaining to Flanagan, who regarded him with a look of suspicion, then followed him, Luke went back. Of course there was no sign of the horse. Dawn was not far away and the moon was down. It was impossible to see far despite the brilliance of the stars. He would not wait till day; he was burning to get on and find Emmy.

He had left his carbine on the saddle. He carried only his service revolver and three or four dozen rounds of ammunition. Moreover, he was one man against seven or eight. But delay was not to be thought of.

"Come, Pete, show me where they are," he insisted.

Pete urged him to ride.

"You'll need the horse for fighting," he hiccupped. "I ain't going to fight. I'm only showing you where the diamonds is, and you divide with old Pete. You won't keep them all?" he pleaded anxiously, upturning a face as woeful as a child's.

"I'll see that they're divided fairly, according to the law," answered Luke, and Pete seemed satisfied. Chuckling and staggering, the old man took up the trail, first past that awful pit of death, then through the scrub.

How far it was, Luke had no idea, but they had not gone more than a mile

or two, and there was only the faintest tinge of saffron in the east when the flicker of a campfire appeared through the scrub, at the base of a low *kopje*.

Pete indicated to Luke to dismount, and he did so, fastening the horse to a thorn tree. Silently the two crept forward, not going directly toward the fire, however, but circling it. Luke pushed through the scrub in the old man's wake, until he reached a clearing.

In the distant foreground, outlined by the fire, he could see a queer little brick house, composed of hand-pressed bricks, which Flanagan had fashioned in the simplest manner with a wooden square out of earth and water, evidently the structure that he had made for himself during the years that he haunted the desert. Immediately before him, in the centre of the clearing, Luke saw a wide hole in the ground. At the top was a crude windlass for letting down a bucket.

Cautiously he went forward. The pit was of blue earth—the famous diamond earth that decomposes into a yellow clay after exposure to sunlight for a lengthy period, revealing the stones embedded within. Beside the pit was a long, leveled stretch of ground, covered with decomposing clay.

Luke looked at it and was completely enlightened as to the motives that had led to the murder of his companions, and the kidnapping of Emmy and her father. There was no doubt but that Hart and his men had discovered the diamond pipe on old Jan's land; and had kidnaped him in order to force from him a deed to the property. The two murdered policemen must have nosed out the trail of the conspirators.

As Luke looked down he felt a tug at his arm. Pete Flanagan was at his side once more.

"They've got the stones!" he whimpered. "Big, white, shining stones, as good as De Beers. They're going to make their escape with them. My stones that I found when everybody laughed at old Pete and called him a madman!

Kill them, policeman, and we'll divide the stones between ourselves. We'll be rich! We'll have everything we want. I tell you they are the finest stones that ever came out of South Africa!"

Suddenly, from the house, came an outburst of oaths and drunken laughter. Instantly Luke was all alert. Shaking off the old man, who vanished, still whimpering, into the darkness, Luke turned his steps toward the house, his hand gripping his revolver. As he approached he heard a renewed outburst of quarreling, more distinct.

As he began to round the structure, he caught the faint reflected light of a candle upon the ground outside. Creeping nearer, Luke perceived that the building was divided into two rooms, to judge from a tiny window at the rear, but there seemed to be only a single door, with another window beside it.

Advancing softly to the rear window, Luke raised himself on tiptoes and looked inside. A single candle was guttering in its socket. Luke could make out an iron cot, and old Jan Duplessis stretched out upon it. From the posture in which the old man was lying Luke surmised that he was bound. It was impossible to see anything clearly.

Beside her father crouched Emmy, with ropes about her body. The sight awakened all the sergeant's indignation, and it was with difficulty that he succeeded in keeping in control his impulse to rush in upon the kidnapers in the outer room. He must act cautiously, he realized, if he was not to encounter disaster. How many of them there were he could not know for sure, but there would be, in addition to Brouwer and his two confederates, Van Reenen and the party he had brought with him and which had mocked the policeman from the edge of the pit.

If only Pete Flanagan could be relied on! But Luke realized that the old man would be worse than useless in an emergency.

He made his way around the house to the little window beside the door, and

peered through the sheets of mica that covered it. Dimly he could see that there were seven men in the room. Four of them, Hart, Van Reenen, Brouwer, and Baldy Smith, were seated around a table, thumbing a pack of greasy cards by the light of a candle stuck into the neck of a bottle. The three others were stretched out upon the floor asleep. Each of the players had a bottle of Cape smoke and a tin mug before him, and a pile of money at his side.

As the sergeant hesitated, preparing for the leap through the doorway beside the window, the wrangle broke out again, and he awaited the propitious moment.

Hart and Van Reenen were facing each other across the table, snarling savagely. Baldy Smith and Brouwer, upon opposite sides, looked on at the dispute impassively to outward appearances, yet their unconscious attitude showed that the former was with Hart, as the latter was with the Dutchman.

"You've won that pot, Hart," Van Reenen shouted, "but I want my revenge! I'll play you for the mine. The whole damn mine and all the stones we've got to go to the winner of the next pot! Are you game, Hart? Or are you afraid? All to the winner of the next pot, I say, after Baldy and Brouwer here have had their share. If you win the stones, I'll be satisfied with the girl!"

CHAPTER VI

RED BATTLE!

"I'LL go you, Van Reenen!"

Hart's face was livid with excitement. Luke saw Brouwer glance at Van Reenen, lean toward him, and whisper something.

"You keep out of it, Brouwer!" Hart shouted. "This here's between Van Reenen and me. All or none—that's the game I've played all my life, and by God I'll play it now! First pot, the

winner takes the stones. If either of you two blokes wins, it's off till the next one."

"Stones or the girl!" Van Reenen affirmed. "The winner gets his choice, the loser takes the other."

"To hell with her! If you win the stones, you can have her, too!" shouted Hart. "Cut the cards, Baldy. Van Reenen deals."

The play began. Brouwer opened on the second deal. He drew two cards. Van Reenen drew three, Hart one, and Baldy Smith sat out. Brouwer bet five pounds, and Van Reenen raised him five. Hart raised five more.

The betting grew faster and more furious. Luke, completely absorbed in the spectacle, and concluding his moment had not yet come, crouched between the window and the doorway, listening. One of the three drunken men upon the floor staggered to his feet and came up to the table, blinking in the light of the candle. The two others sat up.

"And ten!" yelled Van Reenen, pushing forward two five-pound notes into the great heap in the centre of the table. "That's the last of my money. Never mind raising me no more. See me, if you ain't afraid!"

"I'll see you!" Hart shouted.

Brouwer, though he had opened, had withdrawn from the game in the beginning. His eyes were watching the three men like a hawk's, Baldy more than either Hart or Van Reenen. The gold formed a pyramid, prevented from toppling over by the crumpled five-pound notes that banked it up.

Slowly Hart laid down two pairs, queens up. Van Reenen, with a savage shout, revealed two pairs, aces up, on his side of the table.

The shouting gave place to absolute silence. The three men were standing watching. Luke felt his heart thumping. In a moment . . .

With a snarl, Van Reenen dropped his fifth card, a deuce. He had been playing with two pairs.

Hart, with a shout of triumph, disclosed another queen, giving him a full house, queens and tens.

"It's mine! My game, and my stones!" he yelled, and reached for the kitty.

As if the others had been awaiting that precise movement on Hart's part, Van Reenen's and Brouwer's guns roared out their death-message simultaneously. It was at Baldy Smith that Brouwer fired, Van Reenen at Hart.

Baldy's gun alone answered. He had been waiting for that move. But he was a second late. Brouwer's bullet caught him between the eyes. He crumpled forward in his chair, collapsed, and rolled to the floor.

With a terrible cry Hart staggered back, upsetting the table, Van Reenen's bullet in his throat. A wild, inhuman scream broke from his lips as he pressed his fingers to the wound, from which the blood came spurting.

There was the bitter foretaste of death in the wild cry that bubbled from Hart's lips. Holding his wound, he rocked to and fro, while Van Reenen, knocked to the floor by the overturned table, deliberately picked himself up and walked toward him.

Deliberately he shot Hart through the brain. The bloated body crashed down among the gold that strewed the floor. Even as it fell the inner door burst open and Emmy Duplessis appeared upon the threshold, screaming.

Her arms were bound to her sides. She was struggling desperately to free herself. At the sight of the two dead men she screamed again.

With a howl of triumph Van Reenen leaped forward and seized her in his arms.

"I've got the stones, and I've got you, too, Emmy!"

By the light of the flickering candle in the little room behind, Sergeant Luke could see old Jan Duplessis struggling with his bonds as he tried to free himself from the iron cot to which he was bound.

The sergeant stepped inside the house, his revolver leveled at Van Reenen.

"Throw up your hands!"

At the sight of the man whom he had supposed to be lying in the death-pit, Van Reenen released Emmy and started back with a cry. His hands went up instinctively.

Brouwer was more quick-witted. Luke saw him, crouching over the overturned table, draw rapidly. Both men fired together.

Luke had made an instinctive movement sidewise. He felt the other's bullet sear his cheek, like a red-hot iron. Brouwer pitched forward, regained his feet, and came stumbling forward, yelling like a maniac. But the words that poured from his lips were meaningless babble.

He stopped, twitched, and began to spin like a teetotum, his arms extended, his fingers twitching. Then he collapsed over the body of Hart. Cries and movements had all been purely reflex, for he had been shot through the brain.

The only light that now afforded was that of the single candle in the small inner room. It went out, upset by old Jan's frantic struggles to free himself. Outside the day was breaking, it was still night inside. Luke ran to where he thought Emmy was standing. He heard the girl's frightened gasps, but it was Van Reenen into whom he stumbled.

Like a flash the Dutchman wheeled upon him and fired. The bullet passed through Luke's sleeve, grazing the flesh. Luke fired and missed. Before he could fire again, Van Reenen had flung his arms around him, bearing him to the ground, howling to the three drunken men to come and finish the job.

Luke succeeded in gripping the other by the wrist and pointing the gun toward the floor. More he was unable to do. Van Reenen was at least as strong as he, and fighting desperately as he saw himself deprived of the diamonds for which he had staked everything.

In a moment the three confederates had precipitated themselves upon the sergeant.

"*Schiet hem!** *Schiet, schiet!*" yelled Van Reenen, as he disengaged himself from the mêlée.

The four were struggling on the floor, rolling over and over. Luke's hand came in contact with his gun, which had been knocked out of it by the impact of Van Reenen's body. His fingers closed upon it. He fired into the body of the man immediately above him, who was pinning him down, clutching him by the throat.

The grip relaxed. Luke struggled to his feet and fired again. The hammer fell upon a spent cartridge. He brought the muzzle smashing down upon the head of another of his assailants, heard the gurgle that came from the man's throat, and found himself free.

As he turned to face the last man and Van Reenen, a stunning blow fell on his head. He staggered backward, groping for consciousness. He heard a rifle roar, had a glimpse of old Jan Duplessis faintly outlined against the growing light, felt the wall against him, and, grasping for a hold, subsided into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER VII

FINALE!

THE taste of raw spirit in his mouth, the sound of an insistent voice in his ears brought Luke back to reality. He opened his eyes, staring at the bright sunlight that lay in a mottled pattern on the floor and walls of the cabin.

For a moment or two his mind went groping backward for a clue to his situation; then he saw the dead men huddled upon the floor and remembered.

He was lying half-propped against the wall. Old Jan Duplessis was bending over him, pouring the last drops of brandy down his throat.

* Shoot.

The old man was still in the ropes that had fastened him. Only his right arm was free. Hampering him was a part of the iron cot from which he had broken away in his struggle. He was covered with blood from a wound in the upper part of the right arm, which hung helpless at his side.

Luke started up.

"Emmy!" he cried.

"He's got her, the *verdommte swart-sel!* He has taken her away, with the diamonds!"

"How long ago?"

"One hour. I have been trying to restore you. How is your head? Can you stand?"

Sergeant Luke forced himself to his feet with a groan. Although his wounded cheek had bled a good deal it was the blow on the head that had put him out of action. The room was whirling round him. Nevertheless he succeeded in standing without support.

"I'm going after him. Which way did he go?"

"Into the desert. There is a water-hole twenty miles away, but it is a hard ride—too hard for you. Once there he can circle back to the road that runs south thirty miles east of Boskop. If you untie these ropes, we can go together."

The sergeant tugged at the ropes, which had become knotted fast by the old man's struggles. He worked furiously. Each moment was carrying Emmy farther away from him. In five minutes he succeeded in loosening the main strand. After that it was not a difficult matter to free Duplessis from the remainder of the cot.

"We shall go. There are horses—" Duplessis began, but suddenly toppled backward in a dead faint. The loss of blood had overcome him.

A glance into the old man's pallid face showed Luke that Duplessis was in no condition to take up the pursuit. He must follow alone. He must key up all his strength and enterprise to that last accomplishment.

He lifted Duplessis up and staggered with him into the smaller room where he laid him upon the mattress from the cot. The old man opened his eyes and fixed them on Luke's face with intense anxiety.

"You'll get her?"

"I'll get her and bring her back safe," Luke promised him.

The brandy had revived his strength, though his head was still swimming, and ached abominably. He staggered out of the cabin. Three or four horses were standing a little distance away, grazing on a few blades of grass that grew around a small, sandy pool of water in a dry *nullah*. Luke, to his delight, recognized his own mount among them.

It came at his whistle. He led it back to a small shed in which were saddles, stores and equipment. He had it saddled and bridled in a few moments. Then he filled his water-flasks, found and reloaded his revolver and picked up the rifle lying on the floor with which Duplessis had shot the last of his assailants.

"I'll get her!" he told the old man. Mounting, he took up the trail indicated by the horse's hoofs in the heavy sand.

There was only one route Van Reenen could have taken. It ran straight between the two ranges of low, flanking hills toward the water-hole of which Duplessis had spoken, and of which Luke had heard, though it had never been patrolled. This was the most hideous part of the Ngami. Not a scrap of vegetation grew amid these parched and shifting sands.

From the water-hole there ran an old Bushman trail toward civilization. This was the trail by which Van Reenen hoped to return with the diamonds.

And Emmy?

The thought made Luke quicken his horse's gait despite the heat which, at eight in the morning, had already become insupportable. He rode toward the neck of the hills, feeling more comfortable than he had expected in spite

of the dull ache in his head. He was forced to drink repeatedly from the water-bottle, for all his resolution not to use the precious supply until it became essential. The heat seemed to suck every drop of moisture out of his body.

Long before noon the desert had become a shimmering waste alive with mirages. Here on the horizon was a lake of sparkling water, there a great mountain where was nothing but the flat. The sand, stirred by a hot wind, rose up and filled his nostrils.

Luke felt himself a part of this mirage. It all seemed like a dream to him, that ride, or a play which he was witnessing. Only the realization of the prize at stake kept him upon his course.

At last, when he had surmounted the low rise of land at the neck, where the lines of *kopjes* came together, he came back to reality. There, far in the distance, were two little black specks, outlined against the vast face of the desert.

Emmy and Van Reenen!

He urged his tired horse on. He had drunk one of his canteens, but now, seeing that the beast was faltering for lack of water, he unscrewed the top of the other, and, after moistening his own lips, poured the whole contents down the horse's throat.

How far the water-hole was he could not know, but from that moment he lived only in the two figures an immeasurable distance ahead of him.

There was no possibility of taking cover in the flat of the desert, smooth as a billiard table save where the winds ruffled it, that now unveiled itself before him. They must have seen him.

Again he urged on his horse, but the distance between himself and the fugitives seemed hardly to decrease, and he had a nightmare feeling of standing still.

It was not until of a sudden, a shifting of the wind cleared away the haze and the mirage that he realized he had been steadily gaining on them. They were perhaps a little over half-a-mile distant.

Luke spurred his horse recklessly, driving it to the utmost.

A puff of smoke, the whistle of a bullet past his head, the distant crack of the discharge a moment later. Again—again! Van Reenen was shooting wildly through the mirage. How far away was he?

Even as the horse made his last spurt Van Reenen appeared, looming immense through the wavering air, with Emmy on the horse beside him, her hands bound to her sides.

Next moment the two horses crashed together. Both went down. Luke felt the sting of the powder as Van Reenen's bullet brushed his cheek. He fired into the Dutchman's savage face, that grinned with bared teeth into his own. He saw the blue hole that suddenly appeared between the mouth and nostrils. Van Reenen's body crumpled.

After that Luke was only dimly aware of Emmy beside him, calling to him, shaking him. Several times he tried to rise, but the raging thirst and fever that had hold of him were stronger than his limbs.

Hours must have passed under that inferno of burning blue sky, with the inferno of molten copper blazing down. Then it was night. Emmy lay very quiet beside him. She still breathed faintly, but her lips were swollen out of all recognition, as he knew his own must be.

Hours of half-consciousness mixed with coma, then the terror of the dawn, now flooding the east with gold.

The sun was coming up. His last day, and Emmy's. Even if he had known the secret of the water-hole, he could not have risen to his feet. And that secret was hidden in the pulseless brain of that bloated thing not far away.

Shouts rang in Luke's ears. He closed his eyes, not to credit that hallucination. But they were strangely persistent.

Out of the depths of coma Luke came to himself as water was poured down,

his throat, to find himself looking into the face of Lieutenant Connell.

"It's all right, old man. Keep still. Yes, she's recovering, and we've brought spare horses. We'll start back tonight. Jantje's putting up the tent. He came back and notified the post just as I was opening a wire saying you'd gone to

Kimberley. Here's the clue. The pipe was on Duplessis' land, and they tried to force him to assign it."

Weak as he was Luke gaped at the bag of stones, brilliant even in their uncut state, that Connell displayed.

But he forgot them as his eyes met Emmy's.

An Indian Dessert

Ever Smell a Freight-Car Axle on a Warm Day?

Many jokes are told about "hubby" when he sits down to the first meal prepared by "wifey" in their new home. It may all be indigestible, it may be raw or overcooked, but one thing "hubby" can gamble on—it's at least clean. He may have a stomach-ache, but he doesn't have any trouble in swallowing or keeping it down.

Suppose for a moment that you were sitting in a smoky, salmon-smelling Indian shack, dogs and dirty kids playing around on the dirt floor. In the center is a fire sending a portion of its smoke through a hole in the roof. Plenty of it hovers inside to smart your eyes and make you cough!

My partner and I had been prospecting for several months in a certain vicinity, and had become very friendly with the old Indian and his *klooch*. We were about to "mush" to the coast for the winter. We had to travel light, taking just the few necessities we had to have, including of course our blankets.

The poor old couple had been mighty decent to us in many ways. Their lot was a hard one, and among the odd bits of grub and various articles that we could not take with us, was much that would help to give them a comfortable winter.

They were overjoyed when we called them into our tent and told them that the outfit was theirs. The old girl was especially profuse in her thanks and insisted upon our dining with them the night before we left. In self-protection we furnished most of the grub, including a big batch of fresh biscuits.

Probably many a delicious confection, so attractive to the eye, would fail to tempt us if we saw it made. This rule held good in connection with the "dessert" which the squaw was preparing. Comfortably full of real grub, we sat back and watched the operation.

Seated on the ground with a grimy bucket

between her knees, she stirred and mashed and pounded the oily mass. The bucket was coated inside and out with grease from former concoctions. On one side was a smaller bucket full of native cranberries. On the other side another bucket held salmon roe, floating in their natural oil.

Pounding away with her paddle, she stopped now and then to grab a handful of berries which she added to the mess before her. Shifting the paddle to the other hand, she reached for a fist full of the roe, dropping them into the big bucket. Industriously chewing tobacco, she spat out over the bucket at regular intervals.

We watched the little dew-drop on the end of her nose, wondering if that, too, would land in the bucket.

On a clean plate, the mess sure did look appetizing. It stood up rich and creamy. It would pass in appearance for ice cream with fresh berries.

Bill and I looked at each other. The question was how to pass it up and not hurt the old gal's feelings. It couldn't be done. She was right proud of the result of her exertions.

Well, Bill and I were game. It slipped down easily.

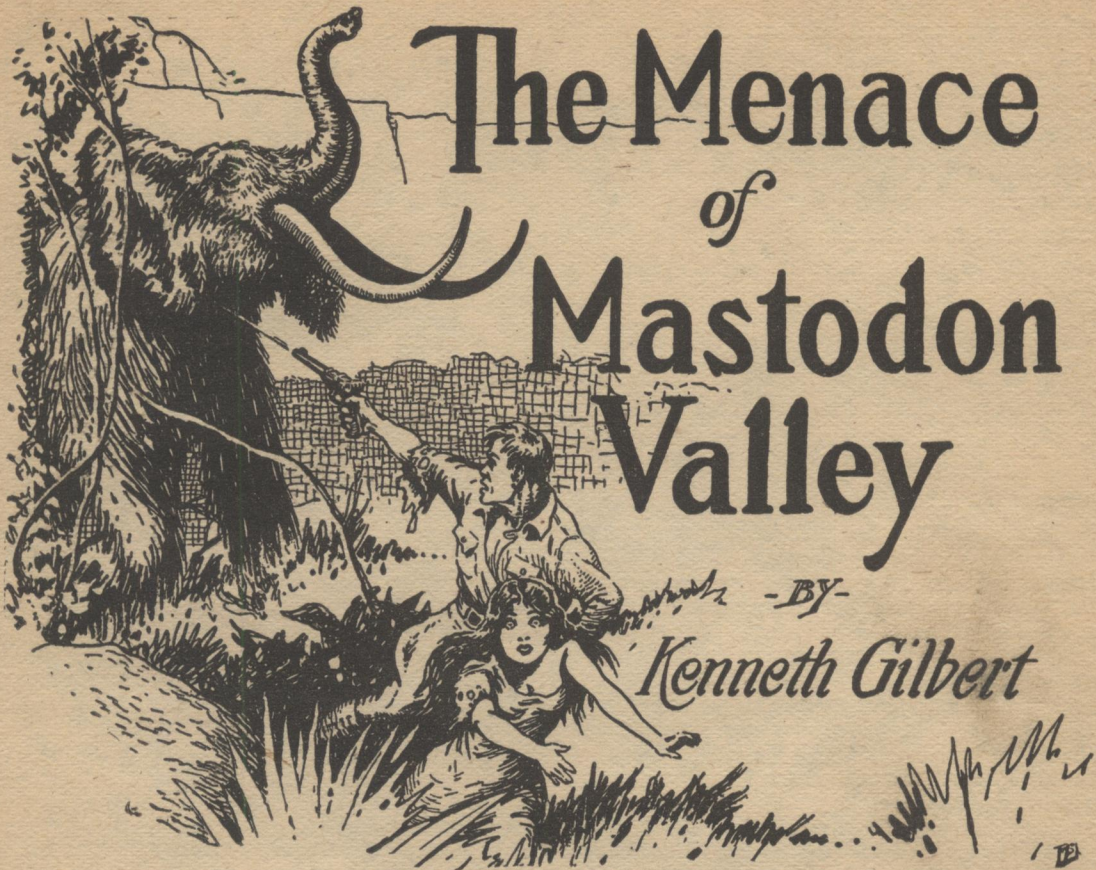
But it didn't want to stay there. I remembered what Bill Nye once said about his breakfast "the morning after." He ordered three grains of oat-meal and some sticking plaster to hold it down.

We watched our chance and spilled aplenty on the ground, grinding it in with a foot.

The kids just revelled and wallowed in their share.

If you asked me what it smelled like, my answer would be "get the odor of warm grease from a freight-car axle on a red hot August day, and you'll know all about it."

—FRED H. CHASE.



White man's pluck in the nightmare mazes of a prehistoric jungle—with precious lives the stake!

Complete Feature Adventure Action Novel



THE big seaplane, like a wounded bird, was shoot-earthward to its destruction. The three persons taking that whizzing plunge to death—the pilot, who sat in his cockpit ahead, frozen to his controls, and the man and the girl strapped side by side in the seat behind—were white-faced, tense, yet it may have been the terrific downward rush through the air that drew the blood from their cheeks, rather than that they were blanched with fear. They gripped the edge of the fuselage, while eternity seemed to fling itself at them.

Scarcely a minute before the heavy machine, cumbersome with its weighty pontoons, had lifted above the fog-bank which lay like a thick-piled rug above this northern wilderness of mountain

peaks, gigantic chasms, vast stands of spruce, and booming rivers of white-water. Then, with its motor roaring wide open, it had pointed its up-rounded nose at the gunsight notch of a mountain-pass sharply outlined against the horizon.

Through that break in the serrated skyline, a "williwaw," fierce northern gale, was pouring its whirling air-currents like water escaping from the lifted gates of a great dam; a torrent of cyclonic force. It smote the seaplane suddenly, literally stopping the machine in mid-air, so that the craft hung motionless, poised there like a huge bird, a mile high. So steady was the wind-pressure and so heavy the machine that it held its position, doggedly fighting against the invisible stream, while its smoking engine thundered in defiant

anger at the unseen obstacle. For ten seconds the struggle lasted. Then the "williwaw" demon, riding on the wings of his howling, shrieking courses, played a trump card. He sent along a vast air-pocket!

One moment the seaplane was bucking a gale. The next it was in a near-vacuum, for such is the manner of the "williwaw." Its wings relieved suddenly of the air-force, the machine went down like a stone, in a sickening nose-dive.

A thousand feet from earth it struck an air-layer, and "pan-caked" wildly as it came out of the plunge. That shock of stopping had almost the violence of striking the ground itself. Struts gave forth shrill protest, disheartening squeaks. With a musical "ping-g-g!" a stay-wire snapped. The motor sputtered chokingly—and stopped!

Then the girl had uttered a faint scream of fear which was literally wrenched from her lips by the force of the wind. Edith Gresham was a courageous girl, but this was a moment to try the stoutest heart. Lanning Beardslee, beside her, plainly was terror-stricken, and without shame. He struggled frantically with the straps that held him to the seat, as though by freeing himself he could escape death. If anything, his sudden display of fear steadied the girl.

Up ahead in the pilot's seat, Tom Franklin kept his head, every faculty directed toward extricating the machine from this predicament. He had no way of knowing what was wrong with the motor. Possibly the feed-line had been torn loose in that instant of terrific strain. There was a minute grain of comfort in the realization that the end, whatever it was, would not be long delayed.

The machine was shooting forward some seven or eight feet for every single foot that it dropped, and with its heavy bulk urging it on, it had attained a tremendous velocity. Strut-rods and the wing-edges, splitting the air, whistled a demoniac accompaniment to the imminent disaster.

They were in fog now, and there was no way of telling what lay beneath that grimly opaque screen. Its swirling spirals wreathed about the machine as though to cloak the nearing tragedy. Franklin did not relax, but sat stiffly at the controls, determined to keep the nose of the plane up as far as he dared. The air had a chill dankness.

Suddenly he saw something which made him lean forward hopefully. It seemed to be an irregular fragment of dark glass, visible for but an instant through the mist. Water—a lake, possibly!

It lay ahead, and to the left. He veered the planes sharply, and lost precious altitude. Now they were very close. It was an even chance whether they would strike land before water. Another dense bank of fog that shut off vision. They were going it blindly. Then Edith saw the water, for she gave a startled exclamation. The next instant the pontoons struck with a slithering splash. The plane rocked a little, then settled, as the momentum slacked rapidly. Safe!

Sandy beach just ahead, and then came the crunch of gravel as the pontoons slid over the shingle, and the plane shuddered to a stop.

Tom, unstrapping himself, was out of the machine and beside the after cockpit, freeing the girl. She was still a little pale, but she managed to smile bravely.

"It was great while it lasted!"

She barely whispered the words, yet Tom Franklin inwardly applauded her for the courage she was displaying. Beardslee still hung slumped in his seat, face ashen. Seemingly he could not yet comprehend that by the veriest chance, coupled with the level-headedness and skill of the pilot, they were actually safe. His fingers fumbled at the straps, and Tom Franklin, after he had lifted the girl over the fuselage, helped him. Presently the three of them stood by the side of the machine.

Then, with her goggles and helmet removed, it was to be seen that Edith Gresham was strikingly pretty. Tom

Franklin's broad shoulders were at a level with the top of her head, and his heavy flying-coat seemed to give his six-foot-two the stature and breadth of a giant. Of about the same age were these two. And Beardslee, shorter and stockier, was fully ten years the eldest. If youth, which lives very much in the present, enabled Tom Franklin and Edith Gresham to feel buoyantly happy that they were safe, it was Beardslee who realized that triumph was but momentary.

Saved they were, yet forced down in this unknown wilderness hundreds of miles, perhaps more than a thousand, from civilization. Death, beaten in one form, had merely reappeared in another. Beardslee shivered a little. He said no word of thanks. Perhaps he felt that it was unnecessary.

In silence they stood there, listening, for the fog had settled more thickly upon the water. It was very still, as though nature herself slept beneath this misty quilt. So still that the three of them heard the slight waves raised by the impact of the machine on the water, go lap-lapping along the beach until the sound died away in the distance. Then the lake was asleep again.

"Well, what next?"

It was Beardslee, a trifle querulous and impatient now that he had recovered something of his poise. It was a proper question, too. They had supplies sufficient to last them for two weeks at the utmost; not long enough for the weary trek through the northern jungle to the nearest outpost.

Yet there was the plane. There was the possibility that it could be repaired, and if their gasoline supply was ample, they could resume their quest, or even turn back, assuming that the body of water was large enough for the machine to get a start in taking-off. Their altitude above sea-level was another important angle to the situation, also. A heavy seaplane is hard to get off the water up in the mountains where the air is rarefied.

Before Tom could reply, there came to the ears of all a weird cry, something like demoniac laughter, utterly wild and suggestive of this spot. It floated to them over the water, and Beardslee started nervously. But Tom merely laughed.

"Only a loon," he said. "He heard you speak, and is sounding his warning. It's a good sign, too, for it means that there are fish in this lake, which, in turn, signifies that it's a sizable body of water."

Yet he stepped around to the engine, and drew himself up on the wings, to look for the cause of trouble. As he did so, the call of the loon was answered from farther away. Then, from close at hand, came another cry, unlike that of the bird. It was more like a disguised wolf-howl, a ululation that rose quaveringly, and fell to a sobbing note.

Edith drew a little closer to the side of the machine, and the three of them tensed, listening, until the silence of the enshrouding fog seemed to bear down overwhelmingly. Then, stealthily, a twig cracked, close at hand.

Without making a sound, Tom slid down from the machine, threw back his coat, and drew a long-barreled automatic pistol. Unconsciously, the others pulled a little behind him, and again all listened.

A footstep on the gravel. Then there was conjured from the mist the figure of an Indian; a very old man, stooped, and wearing oddly-contrived garments of moosehide. He had no hat, yet bound around his forehead, so that the wisps of his stringy gray hair half-covered his eyes, was a beadwork band. In his right hand was a rifle of large caliber, the kind greatly in vogue among northern natives a generation ago. A long-bladed Hudson's Bay knife, in a sheath worked with porcupine quills, rested on his left hip.

Astonishment showed in his face. At the moment he saw the trio, his left hand was at his mouth, as though he was about to repeat or answer the weird, summoning cry they had just heard.

But as he came out of the fog, he stopped as though stricken, his black eyes alight with questioning. The plane, these queerly garbed figures—never had he seen the like before. Surely they must be demons from another world.

Around his neck, swung from a moosehide thong, was the bear's ear charm of the Liard Indians, a potent talisman against evil. Involuntarily, he touched it, to gain assurance. Then his rifle went to his shoulder.

From the gray curtain beyond him, came an answer to the eerie wail which the three had heard. There was the light rattle of gravel. He was not alone.

His weapon steadied.

Then the tallest of these strangely-clad beings, the one who stood well in front of the devil-bird by the water, leaped forward. The Indian read it for a move to draw danger from the other two newcomers. The stranger had sprung aside, and dropped to knee.

But the menacing gun-muzzle followed him. With an ear-shattering report, it belched flame.

CHAPTER II

THE QUEST OF THE HIDDEN VALLEY

TOM FRANKLIN was of that adventurous clan which has sprung up since the world war ended—an aerial gypsy. Born in Alaska, he had gone "outside" for the first time when echoes of the thunders of conflict overseas reached even to the far-flung northland. He had joined the flying corps, become a skilled aviator, and just when the going got good, to use his own phrase, the armistice was signed.

But he was not done with flying. Mustered out of service, he spent practically his last dollar for an obsolete seaplane, which he put into shape, and thereafter he took to "playing" fairs and carnivals along the west coast, from Mexico to Canada. The seaplane did not lend itself to stunts, but Tom was

as daring as he was adept in handling the machine, and he managed to give the customers their money's worth in thrills. So it was that he had wound up at last in Seattle, intending to follow commercial flying on Lake Washington, and to forego the uncertain income but wholly thrilling existence of "gypsying" the fairs.

And it was in Seattle that fate had dealt to him a hand which seemed to be worth playing.

He was putting up at an old-time hotel popular with Alaskans for a quarter of a century, and still patronized by them for the dimming traditions which it suggested. It was there that he met old Tanana Pete Simmons, a Yukoner who had whittled out toy dog-sleds for Tom when the boy still lisped baby-talk.

"Jest the feller I wanted to see, Tom," declared old Tanana, when the joyous greetings were over. "If I was twenty year younger, I'd grab it in a minute, but my rheumatism's been-raisin' Tophet with me, and I reckon that I'm all through pannin' the creeks. This gal is a peach, I'm tellin' yuh. As for the man. Wal, I'm not so warmed-up about him. Maybe he's all right, but he's *chechahco* all the way through."

So it was that Tom met Edith Gresham and Lanning Beardslee. Tom decided that old Tanana's frank appraisal of the two was the essence of wisdom. A girl in ten thousand was Edith. But as for Beardslee, Tom fought with instant dislike. Somehow the man didn't ring true; he gave the impression of being standoffish, distrustful, and without reason. Likewise, he had a condescending air designed to be particularly offensive to a man of the north, accustomed to a footing of equality at all times.

"Mr. Simmons, here, recommends you highly," Beardslee told Tom, when the four of them had gathered at lunch to discuss the matter. "I had heard that he was very familiar with the upper Cassiar country, where we intend to go, and it seemed advisable to engage him

rather than depend on getting a guide at Telegraph Creek. But now he tells me that you have an old seaplane with which you might take us where we want to go, with a minimum of discomfort and loss of time."

Old Tanana broke in hastily.

"I didn't say it thataway at all, Tom!" he cried. "Me, I never run down another feller's belongings; leastwise not a friend's. I told him that yuh had a tip-top machine, and yuh were the best flyer turned out durin' the war."

Tom laughed, a little grimly however. Pride of possession is a factor to be reckoned with in some men.

"Thanks, Tanana," he replied. "But Mr. Beardslee meant well, I am sure. The plane is a little old, but there's many a flop in her wings yet.

"However, about going into that country in a flying machine. Well, I'd have to think that over. I'm fairly familiar with the general run of the region, although Tanana, here, knows it better. But there's hundreds of miles of it that have never been explored. None of the rivers are sluggish enough for us to land. We'd have to depend on finding a lake, of which there are plenty, by the way.

"But I'd like to know just where you are going, and why, before I give you my answer."

It was then that Edith Gresham spoke for the first time since she had acknowledged introduction to him. He had liked her instantly, and her quiet reserve had only served to enhance his respectful admiration. He saw that her eyes were blue, and troubled a little, although she smiled as she looked at him. Beardslee was staring down at the table-cloth, nervously creasing it with his thumbnail.

"Have you ever heard of Thomas Wentworth?" she asked.

Tom pondered. The name, somehow, was familiar.

"The old scientist who went into the north seeking the tropical valley reported up there two years ago?" she pursued.

Tom looked up, as recollection dawned upon him. The coast papers had been full of the story at the time.

"Into the upper Cassiar, too," he mused. "And just the other day I read a story which stated that he was believed to be dead, lost somewhere up there in those wilds."

"He was my uncle," said the girl. "The only relative I had when he left. Or," she added quickly, with a wistful smile, "perhaps I should say 'have.' For I do not believe that he is dead."

Tom regarded her with curiosity. It seemed, too, that he felt Beardslee's gaze upon him. But whatever the latter's thoughts, they were inscrutable.

"I didn't think you were going to hunt for gold," Tom nodded.

Beardslee half-opened his mouth as though to speak, but closed it again with a snap.

"But why did he go in there, and what makes you think he is still alive?" went on Tom. "I believe the guide reported that Prof. Wentworth had wandered away."

The girl looked down for a moment. Old Tanana broke in:

"The word of the guide ain't worth much," he declared. "One of them Fort Nelson Injuns, I'm told. They're full of witchcraft and superstition, and the chances are he quit the professor cold before they got to the valley, if there's any sech place exists up there."

"I have no proof that uncle is still alive," said the girl. "Yet I cannot believe that he is dead. He was a remarkable man. For two years he lived with savages on the upper Amazon, and when everybody believed that he was dead, he reappeared in civilization, bringing with him many interesting and valuable relics of the ancient Maya race. But, alive or dead, I won't rest until I have been satisfied as to what has actually happened to him!"

"Good gal!" put in old Tanana.

Tom likewise nodded approval. Yet Beardslee yawned. Then he shook his head.

"How can a white man live alone in those wilds without an outside food supply for nearly a year?" he demanded. "I've been of the opinion all along that Prof. Wentworth will never be seen again. However, if we must search for him, we must, I suppose."

"Pardon me," put in Tom, "but I'd like to understand your connection with this matter, Mr. Beardslee. Are you a relative of Miss Gresham's, or perhaps Prof. Wentworth's?"

Beardslee stiffened a little in his chair. Tom saw a blush creep over Edith's face.

"Miss Gresham," announced Beardslee ponderously, "has done me the honor of promising to be my wife!"

It was the girl who saved Tom from his own confusion.

"You were asking why Prof. Wentworth went in there to locate the tropical valley," she said. "It was reported by the man who discovered it that the place contained large fossil deposits. Naturally, the professor was anxious to study them, and bring out some specimens.

"But I think the suggestion about going in there by means of your seaplane is a capital one, don't you? Will you take us there?"

Tom Franklin hesitated a moment. Better than these two, he knew the risks that must be encountered in braving the dangers of the unknown wilderness. A storm or an accident might force them down, and unless they could land in a lake large enough for them to gain headway for another take-off, it would probably mean slow death. But, on the other hand, could he refuse to go? Somehow, he had the feeling that this winsome girl, who was all womanly sweetness, nevertheless possessed inflexible determination, and that if he did not go, she would find some other means, even though she had to make the journey on foot.

Likewise, there was Beardslee. The dislike which Tom had felt at first sight of the man, was not tempered. Beardslee seemed loath to make the trip, whether because of fear or some motive

which he alone understood. That opposition did as much as anything to crystallize Tom's decision.

"I'll go!" he told Edith Gresham.

THE plane was shipped by steamer to Telegraph Creek. There, the outfit which Tom had selected with some care at Seattle, was gone over again, some items discarded, and others added. Then, after the plane had been uncrated, set up, and fully tuned on the surface of the Stikine River, the three of them climbed aboard one morning just before dawn, and, with the motor sending thundering echoes chasing up and downstream, they took off. On the shore, a handful of Tahltan Indians, and a few other inhabitants of Telegraph Creek who had risen early to see the start, waved them goodbye. Over the broken hills, and toward the rising peaks of the north they went.

For hours the journey proceeded smoothly. The engine, which Tom had given the loving care a true mechanic bestows upon a favored piece of machinery, worked perfectly. Higher and still north they went, passing over many valleys, yet none of them which seemed to resemble in any manner the tropic spot which Prof. Wentworth had sought months ago.

It was fully as thrilling to Tom Franklin as it doubtless was to his passengers. A northerner born, it was good to see once more the wild fastnesses, craggy valleys and tall peaks so like his own Alaska. Likewise, he was seeing them from a new angle. All their obstacles to a foot-traveler were miraculously dissolved by the magic of flight, yet danger was increased a thousand-fold. A forced landing here was almost certain to mean death but the adventure was worth the hazard.

On the way to Telegraph Creek, and during their subsequent preparations for the flight, Tom had learned something more. Beardslee had accompanied Prof. Wentworth as far as this little frontier post, and had bidden the old scientist

goodbye as the latter plunged into the wilderness. Tom, however, did not learn this from Beardslee. It was Edith Gresham who had spoken of it casually. A small matter, truly, yet somehow it struck Tom as being odd.

Edith, with the prospect of seeing her uncle safe and sound once more, rapidly shaping itself into a possibility, was buoyantly eager, yet Beardslee had lapsed into a moody silence.

So they had gone, while hour after hour clicked off, and their destination, wherever it was up in this unknown land, drew nearer at the rate of a mile a minute. The last mountain pass which Tom believed they would have to negotiate, loomed before them, and he headed the seaplane toward it with confidence. But as though Fate, after smiling on them so benignly thus far, had insisted on having her grim just at the last, she sent along the "williwaw." Safe one instant, the next they were on their way to death, the mysterious valley still un-found.

CHAPTER III

THE RIVER WITHOUT END

WITH the gaping muzzle of the trade-gun staring him in the face, and the Indian's brown finger on the trigger, Tom Franklin knew that he was very close to death. Only agility of body, coupled with quickness of thought, saved him. Perhaps he could have shot down the Indian before the latter could pull trigger, but Tom did not wish to kill the native, or even harm him. The Liard offered the possibility of escape from this wilderness.

So, at the moment when the gun-muzzle loomed squarely before his eyes, Tom hurled himself aside, and the thunder of the gun's discharge almost deafened him, yet the bullet buried itself harmlessly in the sand. Before the Indian could recover, the white man had sprung to his feet, closed in, and with

a blow of the long-barreled pistol, send the Liard sprawling. The trade-gun, ancient single-shot muzzle-loader, went clattering on the stones.

Then Tom had him pinioned, before the Liard could draw a knife. The man, despite his age, was supple and incredibly strong, but he was no match for the young aviator. Like a trapped wildcat, he lay helplessly on the sand, glaring balefully up at his captor.

Silence had fallen again, the fog settling down more thickly than before. At the instance of the Indian's appearance, the three white persons by the seaplane had been certain that others, possibly red men, too, were close to hand, but now there was nothing more to be heard of them. Fearful that his prisoner would make an outcry, Tom had twisted him around, face downward, holding both of the Indian's wrists in a single grip, while with his right hand he effectively stoppered the man's mouth.

Beardslee stood there watching as though fascinated, yet he made no move to help. It was Edith Gresham who more readily grasped the situation. From the seaplane she brought a short length of rope and a big handful of waste. A minute later, and the Indian was neatly trussed up, and silenced.

"Into the machine!" whispered Tom to the girl.

Beardslee would have followed, too, but the pilot stopped him.

"I'll need your help," he told the passenger shortly.

The Indian was deposited carefully in the cockpit, then Tom motioned Beardslee to bear a hand in shoving the plane off the shingle and back into the water again.

"We'll have to work fast!" Franklin urged. "Got to get away from shore and do our repair work there. Let's hope, too, that this fog holds."

At last the machine was clear of the beach, and the two men clambered aboard. Then, with the aid of a pole Tom had dragged from among the driftwood at the edge of the water, it was

given a final shove, and with this impetus it went moving slowly out into the lake. It was at this moment that they heard back on the beach that wolfish ululation again. Their prisoner stirred, and made muffled sounds, but could not answer.

"They've found his gun by this time," decided Tom in a low voice. "We've got to get farther out before I tackle the job of repairing the machine."

They still had the pole, and by means of it, the seaplane was paddled still farther into the fog and toward the unknown shore. It made a light splashing despite the care Tom used, and suddenly there was a heavy report on shore, and a bullet went skipping by them. This shot was followed by a cry as of disappointed rage. Beardslee shivered, but said nothing, and no more shots came.

Tom turned his attention to the seaplane. A stay-wire or so had been snapped, and, as he had suspected, the feed-line was sprung. A considerable quantity of gasoline had been lost, but when the engine had stopped, he had closed the valve leading from the gas-tank, to avoid fire. If nothing more was wrong with the engine, a half-hour's work should enable them to proceed. And if they were able to fly out of the place, they wouldn't need the Indian they had captured. In the meantime, however, they'd keep him, to make sure. He might become useful as a hostage.

It was a job calling for but little mechanical skill, and Tom set about it swiftly, yet quietly as possible, to avoid attracting further shots from the beach they had just left. The lake itself had lapsed into slumber again. Beside the plane the water, crystal-clear and undoubtedly ice-cold was as smooth as plate-glass. Minutes passed, and then at last Edith spoke. She had been peering over the side of the machine down into the pellucid depths.

"Look!" she said. "I can see weeds growing down there, and they all seem to be pointing one way."

Tom stopped work, and stared down into the water for a moment.

"We're caught in a current of some kind," he decided. "Must be a river that drains this lake." He was thoughtful a moment. "I don't like that, either."

"Listen!" said Edith again. "Can't you hear a faint murmur from up there?"

She pointed.

"From the same direction that the weeds are bent. The water is growing more shallow, too."

Tom dropped his tools.

"You're right!" he exclaimed. "Probably a rapids, or maybe a falls. We've got to anchor, until we find out where we are."

He began rummaging under the fuselage for a rope. The plane carried no anchor, but there was a kit of tools, comparatively a slight weight. It might serve, yet—

Even as he toiled the murmur rose to a purring and then to a muffled roar. The plane was moving more rapidly, and was slowly revolving as the current eddied. The water was now not more than five or six feet deep, and very swift. Tom worked frantically with the improvised anchor. At last it was ready and he threw it over the side. It caught, and for a moment the big seaplane paused. Then it went dragging the anchor behind it, and still the hollow booming that came from the fog somewhere ahead grew louder.

Now the water was scarcely four feet deep, and Tom Franklin knew that he'd have to take a desperate chance. He'd have to add his weight to that of the anchor. Without hesitation, he plunged overboard, all but went under as the current gripped at his feet. Then with might and main he sought to stay that onward rush of the huge, mechanical bird. Twice it pulled him off his feet, but his fighting blood was up now, and he came out of the icy water, gasping, but still keeping hold of the rope.

"Beardslee!" he called. "Give me a hand here! Your weight—"

At that moment, he heard a terrified scream from Edith Gresham.

"Tom! Tom!" she cried, and he was to remember afterward that it was the first time she had called him by his first name—*we're going into a mountain!*"

He lifted his eyes to see less than a hundred feet from them through the thinning fog, the forbidding face of a great cliff, whose summit was lost in the mist above. The river disappeared straight into it, entering beneath a huge fault in the rock that was arched over the surface of the stream. Out of the mouth of it, as from the muzzle of a giant gun, came the ominous thunder they had heard.

Full in the grip of the current, the seaplane was driving straight at the tunnel, and Tom Franklin knew that he was as powerless to stop it as though he had been a mere chip fastened to the end of the rope.

Shore was not far from either side. There was only one chance for them.

"Jump!" he yelled to his passengers.

Beardslee needed no second invitation. Indeed, he was already half way over the fuselage when Tom spoke. Edith took one look at the boiling current, set her lips, and would have followed, but her eyes caught sight of the bound Indian lying in the cockpit. Potential enemy though he was, it was not human that he should go to his death helplessly. In one swift movement, the girl leaned over him, and with his knife, which she drew from its sheath, severed the cords which secured his wrists. He came to life instantly, terrifiedly.

Tom saw her take the plunge then, and after her went the Indian. He had a vision of them struggling with the current, their feet touching bottom, as the stream, pulling strongly at the seaplane, dragged him past, for he had not yet given up hope but kept his grip on the line.

The plane meant life to them. Better for him to die fighting to save it than to perish miserably afterward, even if, with the machine smashed, they should

escape from the river. He heard them shouting frantically behind him, and then, without warning, the river bottom dropped from beneath his feet, and the seaplane shot into the dark depths of the cavern, whose roof and sides were high and wide enough to give it ample clearance. As though a shutter had been pulled down suddenly, daylight changed to the dark of a moonless night, and he was swimming at the end of the rope behind the machine, while in his ears was that awe-inspiring thunder he had heard.

CHAPTER IV

THE WORLD BEYOND

SECONDS passed like hours, with that terrifying roaring that beat upon his ear-drums, and then, as suddenly as it was dark, it was daylight again. Tom, eyes closed involuntarily, half-believing that he was already dead, felt the daylight, gray though it was, before he saw it. At the same instant something struck him a violent blow in the face, almost dazing him.

It was the plane, and the daylight was no more than the duskiest sort of twilight. The machine had grounded and he, at the end of the rope, had been hurled by the river full against the side of a pontoon. At that instant he felt bottom under his feet.

The machine was stuck on a wide rock-ledge over which the water poured thinly. It was lodged fast, if he could judge. From far overhead light filtered down over the spot. He was in a cavern of mighty proportions, greater than that through which he had just passed. Beyond him, the river went thundering off into the darkness. And as he clung to the side of the machine, saved for the moment, he had the feeling that it would have been better if he had died. There seemed no reason to hope that either of the three who were behind, could have been saved.

And just then he heard a sputtering and blowing behind, and something bumped him violently. Without releasing his hold on the plane, he groped in the semi-darkness, and his fingers caught in a coat-collar.

"God! Is that you, Franklin?"

Beardslee! He was half-drowned, and his eyes rolled in terror. Tom clutched him more firmly.

"Where's Edith?" he demanded.

"Don't!" protested the man, squirming in Tom's grip. Then, as Tom released him a little: "They're both hanging to a rock back there a little way. I could just make 'em out as I went by—Edith and the Indian. We tried to get ashore outside the tunnel, but the current swept us off our feet. Edith was the first to go, right after you disappeared. Then the old Indian. I thought you were all dead."

Tom, without waiting to talk it over further, was pulling himself out of the water, onto the pontoon. The plane was solidly jammed on the rock-shelf, and held there by the force of the stream. There seemed to be every reason to expect that it would remain there, unless something caused the river to rise.

"Come up here!" Tom commanded Beardslee.

A few seconds later they were both free of the water. Beardslee, however, did not stop there, but crawled over the fuselage into the pontoon.

"How're we going to get up there to save her?" he demanded. "The Indian doesn't count, but Edith—"

"We'll save both of 'em!" declared Tom. "We'll need that Indian before we get out of this place. How far upstream do you think they are?"

"Not more than a hundred yards," guessed Beardslee. "Just at the edge of darkness, I'd say. I could see light ahead, and then I could see them."

He stared up at the great rocky dome over their head.

"God, what a place! Must be in the heart of a mountain."

"Part of an old volcano-crater, I think," said Tom. "But it makes no difference for the time being."

As he spoke he was crawling out along the edge of a wing, on the end of the plane which projected farthest into the stream. Here the river narrowed slightly, so that from the point where Tom stood on the wing to the opposite shore, a smooth, perpendicular wall of rock, was not more than twenty feet. He cupped his hands, and called at the top of his voice:

"Let go, and float downstream! I'll get you!"

But in the fearful din of echoes, the sound of rushing water being hurled against rock-faces, and the noise of its impact imprisoned within the immense hollow cone, his shouts seemed mere whispers. He tried it again and again, and then decided that Edith could not hear him. He worked his way back to the cockpit, suddenly remembering that there was a flashlight hidden there. Then, once more on the end of the wing, he made this glowing pencil of light descry figures in the air. Indeed, it seemed that its beam once revealed something white far upstream that might have been the face of the girl.

And then he saw something splashing weakly toward him out of the darkness. It was Edith Gresham, trying bravely to swim in that chill water which struck at the marrow of anything immersed in it for long. Swiftly she came toward him, and the force of the current held her up, but at the same time it sought to hold her against the opposite rock-wall, out of Tom's reach. He knew in that moment that he would lose her.

Yet, fastened to the under-rigging of the plane was the same length of rope with which he had trailed into this place. Quickly he drew it from beneath the machine, where the water had sucked it, took a half-turn around his hand, and jumped into the water, swimming at top speed to intercept her.

The rope was perhaps twenty-five feet long, and it was paid out nearly to full

length before his free hand caught in her coat. The next instant he had a good grip on her, and then came the shock when the weight of their two bodies, under the urge of the current, came to the end of their line.

For one horrifying moment, Tom felt that his arm gripping the rope would be torn from its socket, and they would go on to certain death down there somewhere in the darkness. But he clung there.

"Beardslee!" he called hoarsely.

But whether the sound of his voice was drowned in the tumult of sound so that the man in the cockpit of the plane could not hear, or whether the man was afraid, he could not know. Beardslee, huddled there fearfully, made no move to help. It was Edith herself who steadied him, gave him new strength.

"I—can—hang—on!" she called in his ear. "Get—to—plane—and—pull me up!"

Relieved of her weight, it was easy enough for him to literally climb the rope hand over hand back to the plane, but he did not attempt it before he saw that she was secured with the rope. Then, a few seconds later, she, too, was aboard the machine. For the first time, then, Edith collapsed. She sank down in the cockpit beside Beardslee, who seemed awed into a state of dumb terror in this fearsome place. Tom couldn't let go of himself yet, although he was near the point of exhaustion.

There was a wild splashing beside the plane, and an inarticulate cry. In the dim twilight, Tom could see that it was the Indian who, torn loose at last from the rock to which he and Edith Gresham had clung up in the tunnel, had overcome his fear of this devil-bird by swimming toward it rather than risk the demons who were hiding in the unknown darkness beyond. Tom jumped down, and pulled him up. The Indian was half-dead from the water and exertion he had been put to, but his eyes gleamed at sight of his savior without any light of gratitude in them.

A brief survey convinced Tom that the plane would remain stranded with or without the weight of all of them. Yet in his examination, he made another discovery fully as important. This was the fact that the rock-shelf, on which the plane rested, hugged one side of the tunnel for a considerable distance, as far as the flashlight would reveal. In some places it was out of water entirely. In others, it was submerged for several inches, perhaps.

But a fearless, surefooted person could follow it. Worth investigating, for it offered a glimmer of hope. There could be no other way out of the place. Surely they could not go upstream again. And as for reaching that faint glow of light far above, which evidently marked an opening to this vast rock-chamber, it was as unattainable as the moon.

Tom shook Beardslee alive, and explained the situation to him. The girl already had a grip on herself, and although she was shivering with cold, her composure had returned.

"We'll have to chance it," the pilot said. "We'll take as much grub as we can safely carry without endangering ourselves. No telling how far we may get before we stop. But I have a hunch that this river comes out into daylight pretty soon, and although we may have to swim for it again, we'll at least be out of this place."

"And what then?" demanded Beardslee petulantly. "Supposing we do get out of the mountain. All we have to do is to walk several hundred miles back to civilization, through an unbroken wilderness, eh?"

Tom shrugged.

"Would you rather try that than die here?" he asked. "You won't last long in those wet clothes in this cold spot, Beardslee. I'll bet Miss Gresham will go."

"Anything you say, Mr. Franklin," said the girl quickly. "Lanning doesn't understand. We'll take that poor Indian, too?"

Tom nodded.

"We may need him yet," he answered.

And then he busied himself dividing up food into loads which each could carry. Then they ate, even handing an opened can of corned-beef to the Indian, who regarded the strange food with suspicion at first, but quickly gave his approval by wolfing down the contents of the container.

Led by the Indian, who was made by Tom to understand what was wanted, although his language was different than any native jargon with which the young Alaskan was familiar, they set off. Tom had a two-fold purpose in sending the Indian ahead. First, it would give him a chance to watch the red man, and thereby guard against treachery. And second, the Liard was perhaps the most surefooted one of the party, and his intuition, if nothing else, would probably warn him of a pitfall in the uncertain trail. Tom kept the flashlight trained on the Indian ahead of him. Behind the pilot came the girl, and bringing up the rear, over his protest that he could not see to walk, was Beardslee. The strange procession moved off.

"Not a bad trail after all," said Tom aloud, after they had gone on for five minutes without encountering any obstruction.

Just at the left of the party, and almost at a level with their feet, the river ran swiftly, with a sibilant, hissing noise, for there were no obstructions to its passage here. The thunder which they had been hearing seemed to come from yet farther on. Tom reached back, and caught the girl's hand, to reassure her. The Indian moved on slowly, cautiously, with an apparent resignation in his manner. Tom wished that he knew what was going on in the red man's head.

"Isn't that light ahead?" asked Edith at last.

It was, Tom saw; merely a pin-prick of it, but light, nevertheless! The Indian had seen it, too, for he had quickened his pace. Beardslee made a sound intended, no doubt, to express relief, joy. At the same time the muttering thun-

der which had grown deeper as they advanced, became louder, now that they were around the bend in the tunnel.

The light grew as they kept on, until Tom could see at last that it was the true mouth of the bore under the mountain which they had been drawn into. And then it seemed that he could see curling clouds of steam just beyond that half-round patch of light. Fog, doubtless, yet the light ahead seemed to be too bright to go with a misty day. He guessed then that it was the source of this thunder they had been hearing. Some tremendous waterfall! And he blessed the good fortune which had permitted the plane to ground inside the tunnel rather than allow it to float through and over this watery precipice. A minute later, and they were standing at the very brink of it.

It was a cataract fully four hundred feet in height, and fell almost straight down without a break after pouring out of the face of the mountain. It dropped with a persistent thunder of sound that echoed hollowly in the cavern behind them. After forming a wide pool at its base, it wound down a green, vegetation-choked valley, dashing wildly against rocks and through gorges until it was churned milk-white with the fury of its descent. Tom had time only to note this fact when a curious thing happened.

The ancient Laird who had led them from the place, suddenly crouched on his knees, hands clutching at the bear's-ear charm about his neck to ward off evil, while he made an odd sound that was very much like a wail. Edith, too, gave a little cry, and drew closer to Tom. The valley before them seemed to be burning!

CHAPTER V

WHERE TIME STOOD STILL

THE place itself was perhaps ten miles long and three miles wide, a vast pocket in the earth, and rimmed with serrated

mountain peaks that were capped with snow, all save the lowest ones. Through the center of it, from end to end, ran the stream down which they had just come. The trees grew rankly, in a veritable jungle, hiding the river in places. Moreover they seemed of some unusual species which Tom had never seen before this far north. Many of them were palmated, like giant ferns.

Where the sides of the valley began to climb steeply, however, there were no trees, only rocks, some of them stained in bright hues through the action of oxidized minerals. They seemed to be burning! But it could be seen that in reality it was steam, oozing lazily from yawning fissures. Here and there, however, there was evidence of strong pressure, for the vapor shot upward with a steady, whistling sound, audible even through the roar of the falls, and spreading out like some huge flower unfolding. As far as the eye could see in the valley, it was the same.

There was something about the place which suggested a world in the making. Or it might have been that by reason of subterranean conditions which a beholder could only surmise, it was a spot where time had stopped still, where the drama of the planet was being lived eternally as it had been since the earth's crust first began to cool. A semi-volcanic region, perhaps, yet it had about it an atmosphere of an era long past.

Edith Gresham clutched Tom's arm.

"Mastodon Valley!" she exclaimed. "It is the place Professor Wentworth was searching for. I remember the description as it was given to him by a man who discovered it two years ago. But the discoverer never was in the valley, itself. He merely saw it from the rim of those peaks."

Tom Franklin, imagination fired by her words, regarded the place with new interest, and for a minute they continued to drink in the panorama spread before them. It was Beardslee who finally broke their silence.

"But there is no proof that Professor

Wentworth ever reached here," he pointed out to Edith. "There may be no other way into the place except the one we came, and he could never have come that way."

Yet she shook her head, unconvinced.

"We don't know that," she replied. "The man who first reported this place could find no way of getting down into it. The cliffs were too steep. Maybe he didn't care to do so, anyway. But maybe this Indian could tell us something, if he would and if he could understand."

Tom shrugged.

"Either he doesn't speak any tongue I've ever heard used by northern natives, or else he prefers not to talk with us," he said. "I've tried him in Chinook, Tahltan and everything else. But, you know, these Liards, if that's what he is, are different from other Indians up in this country. They are not true Northerners. Formerly, they roamed the Great Plains of the United States, and followed the buffalo northward, to settle in this new country. Their language, customs and superstitions are different. They even look different, for they are of another breed. I've heard they're in reality an offshoot of the Sioux tribes."

"Sioux?" asked Edith suddenly. "I learned a few words of the language when I was with uncle inspecting fossil deposits in the Bad Lands of North Dakota a few years ago. I could even speak a little Cree and Blackfoot."

"Try him!" urged Tom.

The effect on the old Indian was electric, as the girl haltingly addressed him. He glared at her for an instant, then jabbered in fierce gutturals, pointing at the valley, then to himself, holding up his hand, palm outward, and twisting his fingers queerly in the sign language. The girl tried again. At last she turned to Franklin, an odd look in her eyes.

"As near as I can make out," she said, "he regards the place as accursed. His people, who live well back of the lake where we landed, have known of this spot for a long time, and used to come

here on rare occasions to be cured of illness. There is—or was, rather—another trail into the place, at the opposite end of the valley, to which he pointed. But a rock-slide wiped it out, for which his people are glad. A great, hairy devil lives here, he says, which used to come out once in a while, before the rock-slide closed the trail, and attack his people.”

The Indian was jabbering at her again. It seemed that he was relieved to find one who could understand something of his language. The girl listened intently and asked him further questions, growing a little excited. At last she turned to the others.

“I was right!” she exclaimed. “He says that several months ago, as many ‘moons’ as he has fingers, his tribe saw a white man, an old one, along the shore of the lake. They tried to capture him, but he escaped. They believed he was carried into the current of the river, and drawn into the tunnel, and drowned. But it was uncle, I know! And I believe now that he did not drown, that somewhere in this valley, he is still living!”

Beardslee grunted.

“Edith, you jump to conclusions too rapidly!” he chided. “The fact that we were able to escape death in the tunnel doesn’t prove that anybody else could do it. Luck played with us. What do you think, Franklin?”

The pilot shook his head dubiously.

“It’s hard to believe,” he said, “but it is not impossible. Yet it should not be a hard matter to find track of him, if he is here. If we can only get down from this cliff, which seems easier said than done, I’m for having a look at the place. Why did the Indian attack us?” he asked of the girl.

“He explained that he believed we were from this valley,” she replied. “The devil-bird, as he calls our plane, convinced him that we were demons, that it was merely a form taken by this hairy devil to get out of the valley and kill the Indians.”

Beardslee laughed outright.

“Superstitious bosh!” he exclaimed. “I fancy that these ignorant natives see a devil behind each stump.”

Even Tom smiled. But the girl’s eyes were troubled.

“I’m not so sure that he isn’t right after all,” she said. “Uncle expected to find some wonderful fossil deposits in this valley. The man who found the place said that at one point he could see what appeared to be acres and acres of bones protruding from an ancient marsh. Uncle had a theory of his own. A wild hope, perhaps, yet—”

But Tom, who had been watching the Indian, suddenly gave an exclamation, and stepped forward. The Liard had been peering intently in the grass and mud at the edge of the stream, and had now bent over until his face all but touched the earth. Yet the trained eye of Franklin, used to wilderness signs, had caught sight of what the Indian had observed.

“What is it?” cried the girl breathlessly.

Franklin looked up, triumph in his eyes.

“A track,” he replied, “and it was made by a shoe, not a moccasin.”

“Then, it—” began the girl hopefully.

Franklin shook his head, smiling.

“It may have been made by your uncle,” he said. “Certainly it was made by a white man. But it is an old track, and is all but washed away by the rains, as you can see. Fortunately, it was made in drying mud, which helped preserve it. Yet it may be the track of the man who discovered this valley, although he said that he merely came to the rim of the peaks, and looked down, and could find no way to descend. That would indicate that he wasn’t in this spot, for unless I’m badly mistaken, we can get down this cliff without great trouble.

“But we’re going to need this Indian, I can see. Tell him that we’ll make a truce with him, that we wish him no harm, anyway, even though he did try to kill us. If he’ll help us, we’ll get him out of this place, give him anything he

wants. If he doesn't, I'll kill him the first break he makes," concluded Franklin grimly. "I see that he's already got back the knife with which you cut him loose."

The girl smiled.

"I don't think that you're as savage as you would have him believe," she said, "but I'll try to scare him properly."

She began addressing the Liard.

He answered after a moment, doubtfully, his eyes resting in speculative fashion on the tall young man who had worsted him in that struggle on the lake shore, but who had later helped pull him from the river. Finally, he nodded.

"He'll help," said the girl. "He thinks, however, that you are a powerful wizard who can make the devil-bird fly. His name is Anak, and he is one of the elders of the Liard tride. But—"

It was Beardslee, however, who in this day of surprises gave them a new start. He was pointing excitedly at a spot almost below them, at the edge of the pool formed where the river struck rock after plunging off the cliff.

CHAPTER VI

THE MOTTLED SLAYER

WHAT they saw down there was an albino deer, a magnificent buck and a rare specimen because of his color and size, although white deer are not unknown as far north as the breed usually ranges. Tom Franklin would not have believed that a deer could be found in these latitudes. Yet there was one, beyond question. He was browsing by the side of the pool.

Yet that was not what had excited Beardslee, nor the others, as they watched. They saw that the deer was working in close to a peculiarly-shaped, flat-topped tree which, if it were not a giant fern properly belonging to a bygone age, or an equatorial jungle, certainly had the appearance of one. And something was lying in wait in the top

of the tree, something all but hidden from the view of the people on the cliff, and wholly concealed from the deer beneath the tree. Even at they watched, they saw the body in the tree-top move slightly.

Seemingly, then, the deer sensed danger. For he paused in his feeding and stood statuesquely motionless, apparently listening. At that moment, a mottled thunderbolt launched at him.

Yet the white deer, his immaculate coat sharply-contrasted against the lush green of the undergrowth, was already underway. He took one broad jump for cover, and the thing which had leaped at him fell short of its mark, and paused an instant, setting itself for another spring.

It was a cat, but no such cat as Tom Franklin had ever seen. From where they stood on the cliff, he could not gauge its size accurately, but it seemed to be nearly the size of a cougar. It was oddly-striped, and mottled with dark patches. Even at that distance he could see long, curving white fangs projecting downward from its upper jaw. Although he knew that he had never seen anything quite like it before, there was something about it that was vaguely familiar. Maybe he had seen a picture.

Edith Gresham was beside him, trembling. Although she had to raise her voice to be heard above the roar of the falls, still it seemed that she was whispering in her excitement.

"Uncle had hoped for this very thing!" she exclaimed. "It—it is a hold-over from the Stone Age!"

"Not a saber-toothed tiger!" cried Franklin incredulously.

She shook her head.

"No, but a direct descendant of that cat, and perhaps the nearest living kinsman of it.

"Look!"

Even while they spoke the deer had vanished with long bounds through the green verdure of the tropic-like jungle, and the cat, instead of charging in pursuit, was still crouched there, apparently

at bay. It was facing something which they could not see from their height. Nor could they hear it. But from the manner in which the cat's mouth was savagely opened, it was easy to believe that it was screaming defiance at an unknown enemy. Now it was retreating, backing slowly, keeping up its pantomime of hatred intermingled with fear. At last it stopped short, flattened itself on the ground, as though determined that it would give way no more. At that instant an odd thing happened.

The cat leaped suddenly, although not ahead. Rather, it was a spring straight up in the air, and Tom's quick eyes noted that something like a great quill was imbedded in its side. Rolling over and over on the ground, it slashed savagely at the shaft. An arrow, it might have been, or a short spear. Then it gave a wide spring into the brush, and vanished.

But there was still something moving down among the trees by the pool. The watchers could not tell what manner of thing it was, for it could scarcely be seen. And presently, as they watched, it was gone, too.

"W-what was it?" demanded Beardslee, in an awed voice. "Looked something like a hairy ape to me! Maybe it was the hairy devil this Indian has been telling about.

"Ask him!" he urged the girl.

The Indian, up to that moment, had been speechless with awe, staring at the spectacle they had all seen as though he could not believe his eyes. But at the girl's question he shook his head decidedly, and held his hands widely apart, then above his head.

"Bigger than that thing," guessed Tom. "Then it wasn't the hairy devil that he fears, after all."

"I knew that it wasn't," said Edith. "In fact, I'm pretty sure that I know just what he does mean, but it seems so incredible that I hardly dare speak of it."

She shivered a little, and drew her soggy coat more closely around her.

"I'm cold, and the sun is going down.

Have you decided what is the best plan for the night?"

"I vote that we stay up here!" put in Beardslee promptly. "No use going down there in the dark, now that we know there are dangerous beasts abroad."

But Tom shook his head.

"There's scarcely room up here to make a camp," he pointed out, "and there's no trees, no wood. What we want is a fire. I think that the four of us ought to be able to cope with anything we are apt to meet down there. Besides," he added, "I won't sleep to-night until I've had a look at the tracks down there by the pool. I'm armed, and so are you, Beardslee, and I think that our new-found ally, Anak, can give some account of himself with that knife. What do you think, Miss Gresham?"

She was thoughtful for but a moment.

"The idea of having a fire down there appeals to me more than camping in wet clothes up here on this rocky shelf," she said. "And I am just as curious as you are to know what we shall find down there by the pool. The cat seems to be wounded; it is not likely to trouble us again. And as for the other thing that we saw, I am not afraid with three men on guard. I vote that we go down."

Beardslee was not assured, however.

"It was some kind of an ape," he declared. "I got a good glimpse of it. If this valley is all that Professor Wentworth believed it to be, filled with strange animals, we're just as apt as not to meet up with a full-grown gorilla down there!"

Tom Franklin laughed.

"I'll guarantee to stop a gorilla with this Luger," he declared. "And I've been out in the woods before, Beardslee. What might worry me, however, is—a man!"

The girl stared at him, as the portent of his words struck home.

"You mean—" she began incredulously.

He nodded.

"We've seen one beast which you say

is a holdover from the Stone Age," he explained. "Isn't it just possible that we'll find one of our own tribe down there? It was an arrow or a spear that struck the cat. Who ever heard of an ape, as Beardslee seems to think it is, using that kind of weapon?"

"If, as it seems, we have been transported back to the Stone Age, let's keep our eyes open for a human being of that period!"

CHAPTER VII

THE RENDEZVOUS

IT was the Liard who led the way down the cliff-side, albeit it was against his will, for he was plainly in terror of the place. Yet he unerringly sought out a way which might have escaped even Tom Franklin, experienced though the latter was in the ways of the woods. It took them half an hour to get down, however, and the last few hundred yards were the worst. Time after time they were forced to turn aside and find a new route, when the way which they would liked to have taken led across or dangerously close to steam-fissures. Likewise, their progress was impeded even more when they encountered timber. The underbrush was appalling with a luxuriant growth of creepers and clinging vines which had wound themselves chokingly about the trees, or barred the clear spaces between.

Now the atmosphere had changed. High up as they had been before, the air was chill, while down here it had a sort of warm, sticky dampness. There was, too, a not unpleasing, mellow aroma of vegetation. It was easy to see that in this spot, hemmed in by a wall of high peaks and kept warm by the steam-jets, was a tropical jungle in aspect as equatorial as one, thousands of miles to the southward. Nor had it been created recently. The trunks of such trees as had not been strangled by creepers were of enormous size, with wide-spreading branches.

To add to the illusion, once they were down in the valley, night came swiftly, for with the sinking of the sun behind the peaks, the place became almost instantly shrouded in deepest shadow.

Before that happened, however, Tom Franklin had made some progress, taking the lead through the fast-thickening gloom. The flashlight helped, and presently they reached the edge of the pool. Down here the thunder of the falls was less marked, and there was a clear grassy spot beside the water. So they made camp, and set about drying their clothes, although they were less uncomfortable now, for the air was balmy. With a cheery blaze roaring its way upward, and lighting the clearing, the spirits of the party rose. The affair seemed more like a pleasant adventure, although they were not certain at times that it wasn't all a dream. They had food, they were warm, and they had even erected a small lean-to shelter; and, seemingly, they had nothing to fear, for they were armed. Edith Gresham, as though sensing that the end of her quest was not far off, seemed brighter and happier.

Only the Indian, Anak, was silent, morose, and contented himself with sitting close to the fire, and now and then casting backward glances at the encroaching ring of darkness. To him, it was a place of devils, and he was fearful. The purring rumble of the falls drowning all minor sounds, he did not like either. It gave an enemy a better opportunity to approach without warning.

What Tom thought, he did not disclose, but sat by the fire, smoking, having succeeded in drying out his damp tobacco. He had laid aside his coat, and his gun, in its holster, rested on his right hip. Perhaps he did not like the sound of the waterfall, no more than did Anak, yet he said nothing. Edith at last retired to the shelter, where a rude couch of boughs had been prepared for her. Beardslee, after considerable fidgeting, had managed to make himself comfortable by the fire, for Tom had announced

that the first watch would be taken by himself. Anak was left to his own devices. They were not ready to entrust themselves to his care by going to sleep, although it is probable that he would have kept faith, finding comfort in their presence, for his fear of the place was great.

At last, however, he too stretched on the ground. Beardslee was already snoring fitfully, for the hardships of the day had told on him. Tom continued to smoke, now and then getting up to replenish the fire. Once, as he glanced toward the shelter where the girl slept, he saw that she was awake, and watching him, but she closed her eyes again before he could speak.

How long he kept the vigil, he could not tell, save that it must have been well past midnight before he felt his eyelids growing heavy. The fire, the sleeping forms of his companions, the cheery warmth of the air—all these gave him a feeling of security. It seemed incredible that within a short distance of this spot by the pool, that there had been enacted the tragedy which they had witnessed. He bethought himself that in the hurry of making camp, he had not taken a look at the tracks, which was one of his purposes in coming down here tonight. He knew about where the place was, and if darkness had not come so suddenly, he would have made the examination before this. Thinking more of it, he decided to take the flashlight and see if he couldn't locate it.

All was quiet at the camp, and before leaving he piled more wood on the fire, tiptoed over to where the girl lay and saw that she was sleeping now. Then, with flashlight in hand, he began working his way cautiously through the undergrowth. Yet he need have no fear of making noise, for the sound of his progress was quenched by the unceasing rumble of the falls.

He came out at the water's edge again, and stood for some time watching the dark, swirling currents, and the dim, white curtain where the river, after

plunging off the cliff, struck rock at the bottom. Back through the trees, from the direction he had come, a reddish dot marked the location of the fire. Overhead it seemed to him that a sudden paleness had spread across the sky. He knew that it must be the moon. And then, suddenly, there came to him vaguely yet unmistakably, a warning!

He could not have told what it was, or from what quarter it threatened. Yet he sensed it as surely as though someone had spoken in his ear. He stood very still, listening, with the flashlight turned off, wishing that the falls would be silent for a moment, so that he could hear.

Higher rose the moon, flooding the valley with pale yellow light. Then Tom's eyes were drawn to a spot among reeds along shore, perhaps twenty feet from him, where there was a faint ripple on the surface. Instantly he snapped on the flashlight, and its white shaft stabbed the gloom at that spot. It struck glowing response. Twin balls of reddish fire showed there for an instant, and then vanished beneath the surface with a light splash. Involuntarily, he stepped back away from the water's edge.

The pool was inhabited by some large amphibious beast. Just what it was he could not guess. If he had been in some jungle four thousand miles south of this place, his conjecture would have been that it was a crocodile, but in a land not many hundreds of miles below the Arctic Circle, the thought seemed absurd. Yet there was something big, and perhaps dangerous out there. It had been swimming toward him at the moment he caught it with the flashlight. A few seconds later, and he might have been at grips with it.

Back in the edge of the brush now, he listened again, with his light turned off. Yet whatever the thing that had been stalking him, apparently it had been alarmed. Once, it seemed, he heard from far behind him in the brush, an odd, grunting sound, but he could not be sure that it was not a trick of his

imagination, or perhaps an echo from the falls.

But he was not satisfied, for he wanted to see the tracks of the beasts that had fought just before dusk. And now his eyes, growing more accustomed to the darkness, and aided by the flood-glare of the moon, revealed the clear space just a little way ahead. Cautiously, he approached it, watchful, with his hand on the butt of the automatic. He found the tracks of the deer very easily. It seemed that on the wet grass he could see a smear of blood where the cat had been stricken.

But the greatest discovery of all he made in a clump of salal which grew along the edge of a muddy depression. There, in the soft loam, its depressions already filled with water that had oozed in, was the track of a man!

There could be no mistake about it. No ape had made that trail. It was sharply imprinted, plainly a human foot-mark, not particularly large either, and whoever had made it was not wearing a shoe or a moccasin. Tom pondered on what it could mean.

And while he stared down at the track which could tell a secret if one could but read, he heard a sound which stiffened him, and a moment later sent him plunging back toward the fire, which still glowed dimly through the trees. Faintly to his ears there had come the sound of a scream. Then a series of short, bellowing roars.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MENACE OF THE VALLEY

TERROR reigned by the campfire. Beardslee, pistol in hand, was crouching by the blaze, on which he had piled fresh fuel, and Edith was with him. As Tom came crashing through the brush toward them, Beardslee would have lifted the gun and fired, but the girl stopped him. Both were pale, and Beardslee's teeth were chattering in abject fear.

"Where's the Indian?" demanded Tom, seeing that Anak's place by the fire was empty.

Beardslee's arm jerked nervously as he pointed to the darkness beyond him. Edith got up and came closer to Franklin.

"Something—we don't know what it was—got him!" she whispered. "We were sleeping soundly. I awoke with a jump when it seemed that there was some roaring, bellowing thing charging right through the camp. Yet it was gone before we could see what it was. We heard Anak's cry. We saw you were gone. I thought it had taken you, too!"

Briefly he told her where he had been, what he had seen. Then, as a sudden thought struck him, he walked over to where the Indian had been sleeping, and peered at the ground.

"Look!" he called to them, awe in his voice.

On the ground was an impression, almost round, and perhaps two feet in diameter. Beyond it, in softer earth, was another. And then Tom pointed to what seemed to be a sort of avenue that had been cleared through the trees. Brush and creepers had been broken off, as though by the passage of some huge body.

Edith gave an odd little exclamation, and looked up at him with a queer expression in her eyes.

"Will you believe, then, when I tell you what the monster is?" she asked. "My uncle hoped to make the discovery. That is the principal reason why he came here, when he heard that this valley was a great fossil deposit.

"From what the discoverer of the place told him, my uncle was convinced that this was an ancient burial-ground of the mastodons, and the great hairy mammoths who vanished many thousands of years ago. You have heard of similar burial-grounds of elephants in Africa? No one has yet been able to find where the elephants go when death overtakes them. Whoever does find the

place will have wealth beyond imagination, for it will be an ivory mine.

"These mastodons and mammoths were the ancestors of the elephants of today, and my uncle's theory was that they had the same habits of going off to some secluded spot when they felt death approaching. In this valley some place is a great marsh filled with their bones. Or so it was reported by the man who saw this place from the rim of the peaks about it. Uncle's theory was that with the preservation of the valley in its historic state, through the action of the steam-jets, which kept it warm, there was a chance in a million that a miracle might have occurred. He believed—"

"Then the thing that charged through here was a—a—" began Tom.

The girl nodded.

"A mastadon!"

Both men looked at her incredulously. The thing was too stupendously unbelievable! Yet how could that giant track beside the campfire be accounted for otherwise? Tom looked at the track again. Clearly the footprint of an elephant—or the father of elephants. No other animal roaming the wilds left a mark like that.

"But if there is one, there must be others," remarked Beardslee.

It seemed logical, yet Edith shook her head.

"Uncle never hoped for that," she replied. "If this is truly a mastodon, a holdover, in type at least, it may be five hundred or even a thousand years old. Perhaps not so many thousands of years ago, there was a herd of them in this valley. But uncle was inclined to think he would find only one."

Their excited comments had been quick, brief. Perhaps not more than a minute had passed since the beast, whatever it was, had passed through the camp. Tom now pulled out his automatic.

"Come along, Beardslee," he said. "Let's follow this thing. We've got to find out what become of Anak."

"Not for me!" answered the other

firmly, hurriedly. "I don't move from this spot until daylight, and then I'm in favor of moving fast. If you had followed my advice and stayed up there on the cliff, we wouldn't have been endangered. An Indian more or less is nothing compared to my own life."

Tom shrugged.

"Suit yourself," he commented. "I'm going to have a look at this. We brought the Indian into this; it's up to us to see it through."

With gun in hand, and flashlight finding the way, he moved off down the trail which the beast that had passed, had forced through the underbrush.

They watched him go. As he drew farther away, the light now and then vanished behind clumps of brush. But they saw it stop at last. Then, as it resumed flickering here and there, they realized that he was coming back.

He traveled slowly, the light swinging from side to side. Now and then he paused. But at last he reached the circle of firelight. And then they saw that he was carrying on his back the limp form of the Indian, Anak.

CHAPTER IX

THE FEUD OF THE VALLEY

THE Liard was seriously hurt, but he was still conscious. It was apparent that he was in pain, but in the stocial manner of his breed, he refused even to moan. Quickly they made a bed for him, and then Franklin set about examining him to determine the extent of his injuries.

"Pretty badly smashed up," Tom remarked. "Chances are that he has several broken bones, but let's hope not. We don't want to be handicapped any more than we are."

Water was brought from the river, and presently the glassy look in the Indian's eyes, faded. He mumbled haltingly in his own language, and Edith bent closer to hear him. At last Anak

was silent, and the girl looked up at Tom, a queer look in her face.

"He says it was the hairy devil which his people have feared, that carried him off," she explained. "It has declared war on his tribesmen, he insists. But he does not believe it is a living thing; he thinks it is a spirit.

"I can't make out all that he said. There is some weird story mixed in it that he tried to explain. This hairy beast is the spirit of a devil which his tribe once cast out, he says.

"He awakened just in time to see it on top of him. Then it caught him up and carried him into the woods. Somehow he managed to wriggle free, and it went charging on, as though it did not know it had lost him."

"But why did it select him, instead of one of you. Beardslee, for example?" asked Tom curiously.

Beardslee scarcely masked a shudder at the suggestion. The girl put the question to the injured Liard.

"He doesn't know, of course," she replied, "but he thinks it was because we are of a different race. This 'hairy devil,' as he calls it, is the particular curse laid on his tribe."

Silence fell between them, then, while the steady muttering of the great waterfall came louder. Tom stepped over to the fire, and began stirring it up, feeding it generously from the pile of wood they had gathered when they made camp. He had thrust his gun back into its holster, and now stood there with his back to the blaze, thinking. At last he spoke.

"We can be sure of one thing, and that's about all," he said. "We have, through sheerest chance, landed in a little section of the world that is utterly different from anything we've ever seen. No wonder this valley has never been discovered until recently. Probably it will never be fully explored, save by ourselves, for I'm not going to stop until I've unraveled every mystery in the infernal place. We may never live to tell the world what we find, but that won't

stop us from going ahead. In fact, there's no other course for us to take.

"I'm commencing to understand something of the situation. Probably this 'hairy devil' which Anak told us about, and which materialized, has made this place its home, coming out now and then to harass the natives. You remember he said that it had not made its appearance outside since the one trail to this place which the Indians knew, had been blocked by a slide.

"And who or what is the human being which is in this same valley with us? Is there but just one? It was no ape that Beardslee caught a fleeting glimpse of. It was a man! And I'd advise both of you to keep away from the pool. There's something there, too.

"You believe that your uncle is still alive. We can't be sure of that, of course. To be frank," he went on, addressing Edith, "I'm afraid the chances are against it. We haven't been in this spot but a few hours, yet we've had a taste of what life here must be. It seems impossible to believe that your uncle could have survived here for nearly a year, alone. Why, the solitude alone would have killed him!"

Beardslee broke in:

"You're talking sense now! And if it is so certain that Professor Wentworth is dead, what is the use of trying to explore the place further? We'll only court danger. I'm pretty well fed up right now. Ugh! I'll never forget this night, even if I live to be a hundred!"

Franklin regarded him in silence for a moment.

"Tell you what, Beardslee. When daylight comes, and it isn't far away now, I'll help you move the Indian back up on the cliff. You can stay with him, while Miss Gresham and I probe the mystery of this place further. You can get more food by walking back through the tunnel to the plane. Nothing is likely to come up that cliff after you, and the Indian will keep you company. What say?"

Beardslee's eyes narrowed.

"You seem to have taken charge here, all of a sudden," he said. "Have you forgotten that we hired you to carry us to some spot in this country where we could start a search for Professor Wentworth?"

Tom shrugged.

"Right you are, but—"

Edith Gresham broke in.

"Let's not quarrel," she said. "All of us are in the same predicament here, and only by working together can we ever hope to get out.

"I think Mr. Franklin's plan is splendid, Lanning. I, for one, am not ready to give up the search, now that we've found the valley for which my uncle was seeking. We can't leave this poor Indian behind, and you say that you don't wish to go along. Let *me* take charge of the party," she added, with a smile, "inasmuch as that honor seems to be in dispute. I decide in favor of Mr. Franklin's plan."

She reached over and patted Beardslee's arm.

"There's not much else to do, is there? We can't stay up in that cave until our food is gone. We've got to find some way of getting out of this place before long."

Beardslee looked at her for a moment, and then turned away, and stared off into the darkness.

"Well, that's settled!" cried the girl cheerfully. "We'll start at dawn—and it's almost dawn now."

She pointed to the rim of the eastern peaks, where the sky was already taking on the salmon-fleshed tints which heralded a new day.

"Before the sun sets again, we'll know more of this strange place than we know now."

She looked up bravely at Franklin.

"Just think," she remarked with a smile, "we'll be tracking a real mastodon!"

"Right back to the Stone Age!" responded Tom, eyes alight with thought of the coming adventure.

CHAPTER X

THE TRAIL OF THE MONSTER

THE world seemed very silent. A sort of breathless hush hung over the valley, although the sun, lifted above the rim of the peaks, was sucking up the night vapors which had clung close to earth down in the depression, and the morning was bright save for this rising haze.

Tom Franklin, followed by the girl, had penetrated through the jungle almost to the center of the valley. The way had not been hard going, for the beast they were tracking had broken a fair trail, yet they were proceeding cautiously, not sure just what to expect.

Along the soft banks of the river, the trail was easy enough to follow, but presently they observed that it was swinging off to the right, more among the rocks. In one place, in fact, it skirted close to a cliff, on the face of which was a yawning fissure with steam rolling slowly from it in a dense cloud. From here, it cut well above timberline, edging along rockslides, where there was no hard earth to leave a tell-tale mark, nor brush to break down as it passed through. And then they saw that they had twisted off into a side-valley, the existence of which they had not expected before. Here the ground was clearly volcanic, covered with lava rubble—and suddenly they became aware that they had lost the trail.

A table-land spread before them, and what seemed to be the edge of it, a half mile distant, sloped off to the floor of the valley again. Across this the thing had gone, and it had left no trail.

"Looks as if we're up against it for a moment, doesn't it?" ventured Tom, removing his cap to wipe his perspiring forehead. "But we'll see what lies on the other side of this table-land, eh?"

The girl nodded.

"Do you think Mr. Beardslee will be all right while we are gone?" she asked.

"Why not?" replied Franklin. "Certainly he's in a safe place with that Indian up on the cliff. If I'd known what it meant to help pack that Liard back up the mountain-side, I think I'd have suggested some other plan."

"I didn't mean just that," the girl continued. "I was wondering if, after all, it was wisdom to leave the two of them together. Lanning has been against the search from the beginning. And while the Indian is temporarily helpless, he's a potential enemy at heart, I think."

Tom looked at her curiously. Then he burst out laughing.

"Anyway," he said, "they'll have a hard time understanding each other. You see—"

But the girl smiled wisely.

"Don't plan too much on that," she counseled. "Lanning is a very strange sort of person, and I feel that there are plenty of times when I cannot understand him at all. He seems very much of a tenderfoot, a *chechahco*, I believe you would say. Yet he's not wholly inexperienced in the North, even though he may appear to be. I told you that he'd been at Telegraph Creek before, just previous to my uncle's start into the wilderness in search for this valley. Lanning once told me that he had gone over Chilkoot Pass, into the Klondike, in ninety-seven."

Franklin's eyes widened a little, then hardened a little.

"You don't think that he's trying to block us, do you?" he queried.

The girl shrugged.

"I don't know what to think. But he's been opposed to this search, as I said, from the beginning. You can see how he's acted. I think he's very loyal to me, but at the same time I feel that it would suit him better if we'd turn around now and try to get out of the valley without exploring it further.

"Understand," she added quickly, "I'm not saying this to raise suspicion against him, but I have a feeling that it's not fear of what danger we are apt to encounter here that holds him back. Maybe

he knows a secret about this valley which we—"

"Look!" interrupted Tom suddenly, pointing.

Everywhere in the valley jets of steam were rising, until the place appeared like the skyline of some busy industrial center. Tom and Edith were now a good five miles from the waterfall, so that its muffled thunder was no longer heard. The only sound which broke the stillness was the subdued hiss of a nearby jet whose steam was under pressure.

Tom was pointing at a distant plume-like cloud, one that seemed to rise from a mountain-side, over the tops of trees. It was much like the other jets, save that it had a bluish tinge, unlike the pearly whiteness of steam in the morning light.

"Smoke!" he said.

The girl looked at him a trifle apprehensively at first, then eagerly. Tom interpreted what was going on in her mind.

"It *might* be the professor," he remarked, "but there's no certainty that but one man was in this valley when we came. Anyway, we'll have a look?" She nodded agreement.

Not more than two miles away was that rising column of smoke, if Tom was any judge, yet he knew how deceptive distance can appear to be. The way lay across the rocky table-land, and the walking wouldn't be easy, yet that did not worry him as much as the thought that their approach would be noted by anybody who had a view of the mesa. They would be out in plain sight. He led the way, conscious of the fact that their presence undoubtedly was known to the person or persons already within the confines of this strange bowl in the hills.

The sun was wheeling near the zenith, with the last of the night fog long since dispelled, when they came out at last to the far edge of the mesa. Here the table-land dropped away abruptly in great rock-slides. But there was no other way of getting down. They had, for the moment, lost sight of the smoke-column

which had guided them. It seemed to be screened behind rising clouds of steam from fumaroles here and there on the face of the mountain. Nor had they seen anything further of the trail of the strange beast which they had followed. It was half an hour later that they reached the foot of the rock-slide.

They were now in another jungle, through which ran a little stream. They worked along the bank of this for a time, and suddenly the thicket fell away before them. They were on a trail which crossed the creek and wound away up a canyon.

Tom stopped, and stood there pointing, his hand on the girl's arm. Not more than a thousand yards distant, on the face of the mountain was a cave, and from in front of it the smoke of a fire rose lazily. A man was crouched before the blaze. What he looked like could not be told at that distance, but he seemed to be dressed in rough garments that might have been the skins of animals.

And at their feet in the trail, they saw those same, great round depressions which they had followed so long, and then lost. The mastodon, if such it was, had come this way.

Cautiously, Tom leading, they began moving along the trail, wading through the shallow creek. They went on but a short distance when a turn in it brought to their view another valley. Here it seemed that the peculiar blight which sometimes attacks stands of timber had struck, for they saw a marsh which was literally covered for acres and acres with what appeared to be the bleached trunks of trees—a land of "ghost-trees," as the Indians call such a spot. As they stopped to conjecture on what this meant, there was a sudden noise off in the brush to their left.

A grunting, bellowing sound, followed by crashing of dead sticks. Abruptly this changed to a shrill trumpeting, and Tom Franklin caught hold of the girl's hand.

"Run!" he cried.

Act.—Sept.—4

CHAPTER XI

CORNERED!

THERE was no opportunity to choose the direction they wished to go. The menacing bellow which they had heard seemed to come from behind them as well as to the left. They had rounded a turn in the trail, and whatever it was had apparently come out on the path in such fashion as to cut them off from returning the way they had come. There was nothing to do but go ahead.

Franklin, his automatic pistol out and ready, had dropped to the rear after the first dash, and was following close behind the girl. Somewhere behind them, how far they could not tell, for they could not spare time for even the briefest of backward glances, there was pounding along in pursuit a gigantic body whose progress fairly made the earth tremble. It roared defiance and anger as it came on.

What lay ahead, neither Franklin nor Edith Gresham, could even hazard a guess. Flight was the pressing thing of the moment, until they could reach some vantage point of safety. The automatic pistol Tom carried, a high-powered weapon, would hardly be powerful enough to stop the beast pursuing them, if it was indeed a mastodon. And the man was not foolish enough to make a stand until there was no other way out.

A hundred yards, two hundred they had gone at top speed, and now both observed that the trail was leading upward, but they did not hesitate. They were nearly as fast on foot as the thing rushing along after them, but their endurance perhaps was not so great.

Up and up went the trail, growing steeper and steeper at every step, and now the strain was beginning to tell on the girl. She began to lag, and Tom, catching up, sought to help her. But the stiff climb and the speed they were making tired him, and their pace slackened. At the same time the way grew

rougher. Boulders appeared here and there in their path, which they had to circumvent. Far down below the roaring of the great beast trailing them indicated that it was still coming on, though likewise slowed by the obstacles which had bothered them.

Slower and slower they went, and at last the girl stumbled and fell. Instantly Tom had caught her up, urging her to keep on, but her knees refused to function, and she collapsed again.

"I—can't—run—"

She tried to say it, but her breath gave out. Grimly, Tom Franklin's jaw set. He knew that the time had come to make their stand.

"Just a little farther!" he pleaded, as his eyes caught sight of a rock-shelf perhaps twenty feet high, and along which the trail ran.

If there was only some way to get up there, they might be beyond reach of the demon after them. But the girl was too far gone to respond. Summoning all his strength for a final effort, Tom caught her in his arms, and toiled ahead.

He saw a foothold, a small projecting corner of rock, perhaps five feet above ground. If he could only get up there, he believed that he could reach a crack in the rock-face higher up. Once up that far, it would be comparatively easy to attain the ledge. Yet it was useless to attempt to lift the girl up and at the same time climb himself. Quickly he leaned her against the rock-face, reached up and caught the projection. Then, stooping down, he pulled her up to a level with him.

The seam above offered more of a problem, yet the girl was gamely trying to help now. After that momentary weakness, some of her courage had returned, and, getting a grip on herself, she signified that she could hang on unaided. He reached the seam above, and, clinging to the lip of the ledge, lifted her clear. Half a minute later they were both on the ledge, exhausted. It was the girl, looking back for an instant, who screamed.

Just below them was a beast which seemed to have come into reality from some horrid dream. An elephant, perhaps, yet not one. It stood perhaps twelve feet high, covered all over with coarse, reddish hair. What had been tusks, curving upward like huge scimitars, had been broken off and worn away. An ancient beast, so old and emaciated that its bony frame all but protruded through the leathery, seamed skin. Its ears suggested an elephant, and its piggish eyes, flaming redly, were very much like those of an enraged pachyderm. But it was the snake-like trunk, reaching upward for them, that made both Tom and the girl draw back in sudden fear.

The "hairy devil" of which the Indian had spoken, was a reality after all. Here in this spot, where the clock of the ages seemed to have halted all progress and development, had this gigantic brute, no doubt the survivor of what had once been a mighty herd, persisted in its tenacious hold on life. For perhaps five hundred years, even longer, it had held sway in the prehistoric valley, one of the freaks in which nature likes to indulge herself.

Both the girl and Franklin had scrambled to their feet, and drew back as far as possible from that groping trunk. Fortune favored them, for so close did the brute stand to the edge of the cliff that he could not see them, but was compelled to reach up with the trunk and search them out.

Gun in hand, Tom hesitated for a moment as he debated what was best to do. The ledge on which they stood was no more than four feet wide, and ran back to nothingness on the face of the cliff. They could back up just so far, and no more. But there was an even chance that the mastodon, or whatever it was, could not reach them, and Tom hoped that by not enraging the beast further, it might go away and leave them in peace.

What had aroused it, sent it charging after them, the man could scarcely guess.

No doubt it had been standing hidden in the brush when they passed along the trail, and, with the cunning that distinguishes the rogue elephant of modern times, had waited until retreat was cut off and they were trapped on the side of the mountain.

Groping futilely for them a minute, while they stood breathlessly watching, the trunk disappeared. They could still hear the heavy breathing of the monster down below, but from where they crouched against the rock-face, they could not see it. Probably it was puzzled, bewildered as to what had become of them. Then they heard it moving heavily, grunting. Suddenly Edith cried out again, and shrank back closer to the rock, for the beast, as though guessing where they were, had merely moved along the ledge until opposite them, then suddenly reached upward with his trunk.

Tom had a brief vision of that twisting, groping arm, then his automatic spoke twice. He could see where the bullets struck the trunk, the red spurts of blood. Then the most fearsome sounds either of the two beleagured beings on the ledge had ever heard, struck terror in their hearts. Fiendish bellowing mixed with a shrill trumpeting, and then the ground under them seemed to quake. The wounded beast apparently had butted the rock-wall with his head.

But they saw an instant later what he was doing, for his head appeared almost on a level with the ledge, and again his trunk shot forth. Tom fired quickly, as coolly as he could take aim, straight for those reddened, inflamed eyes. The sharp bark of the automatic seemed to sound faint and faraway in that fearful turmoil. Blood showed on the beast's head, and it vanished, just as the click of Tom's automatic told him that the weapon was empty.

Hastily he ejected the used cartridge clip and was cramming in another when the beast below, now insane with rage and pain, reared itself again, with a terrifying bellow. The weapon leveled for another shot directly at the eyes, but

at that instant something struck Franklin smartly on the head. Startled, he looked up.

A looped rope was dangling just above him. Peering over the edge of another ledge above, he could see the head and shoulders of a grizzled old man, who gripped the other end of the rope.

"Quick!" called the man above. "He'll get you this time!"

CHAPTER XII

BESIEGED

THERE was no time to ponder over the miracle of it. Somehow the monster below had managed to elevate himself more than ever, probably with one foot on a large rock, for his wildly swinging trunk struck Franklin's arm, sought to grip it. Tom shot twice, swiftly, and in the momentary confusion that he caused the frantic beast, he seized Edith around the waist, jammed the pistol back in its holster, and caught hold of the loop.

Instantly the rope tautened, and, looking up, he could see the man above pulling away with all his might, yet the double load was too much. Tom kicked at the flailing trunk of the beast trying to reach them, and lifted both himself and Edith part way up the rock-face, temporarily out of reach of the monster. He saw that she, too, had glimpsed the man above, and was shouting something, but the din was so great that he could not hear.

Yet Tom found a foothold and, lifting the girl and himself by sheer strength, he eased some of the strain on the rope, so that their savior could take up slack. Again they tried it, and again, while below them the baffled mastodon, half-blinded and with steel-jacketed bullets embedded in its flesh, raged in new fury. Yet they were safe, if only the rope held, and the strength of the man on the cliff did not fail.

Still upward they worked by degrees,

and Tom knew by the dead weight in his arms that the girl had fainted. Now but a scant six feet remained of the thirty they had come from the rock-ledge. How he managed the last lap, Tom never remembered afterward. Through a haze it seemed that he was being pulled up, still holding tight to the girl, and then momentary blackness came just as the terrific strain on his arms eased, and he felt himself lying on another ledge. Presently, he was awake again, while from a distance now came the furious rumblings of the beast they had outwitted. But what brought him to his senses quickest was the sight of Edith in the stranger's arms. She was crying, and he was trying to console her, with fatherly pats on the shoulder. Weakly, Tom struggled to his feet.

They saw him then, and the girl, smiling through her tears, held out her hands.

"Mr. Franklin—this is Professor Wentworth, my uncle!"

The old man gripped Tom's hand with a curious kind of eagerness, as one will who has not seen the face of his own kind for a long time. He was asking questions, talking rapidly, as though joyous in the sound of his own voice. Tom saw that he was a man of perhaps sixty, yet hardships had added twenty years to the lines of his face. He was clad in rags reinforced and patched with the skins of animals. His feet and head were bare, and his long hair and beard were streaked with white. In a few words Franklin explained how they had come to the valley, and trekked across the mesa when they glimpsed the smoke of Wentworth's fire.

It was him they had seen crouched in front of the cave, and this was the cave. He had made the trail from the creek, in bringing water. For eight months he had lived here, and during that time he only dared venture from the cave when he was certain that the mastodon was elsewhere in the valley. A shade of worry showed in his eyes when he spoke of the great beast. At that moment he

was not an old man, unarmed and cut off from the world in an almost inaccessible spot, but a scientist, a discoverer.

"You may have severely wounded him," he told Tom worriedly. "You realize, sir, that my discovery exceeds any paleontological or anthropological find the world has ever known. I had planned to capture this monster, and take him alive to civilization, but he may die, now."

"Then there is a way out of this place which you know, uncle?" queried the girl eagerly.

The professor shook his head, and smiled.

"There is a way out, but I do not know it—yet," he replied. "I came in through the same river which drew you through the mountain. How I managed to escape drowning, I am not quite sure, but I crawled ashore just in time to escape going over the falls. The Liards had pursued me, until I got on a log, and struck out in the lake. The current drew me into the tunnel."

"Then it was your track we saw in the mud up by the falls!" decided Tom.

Again Wentworth shook his head.

"It may have been, but I am not alone here, you know. There is—. But let us clear up other details first."

He told them of his strange life in the valley, of how, fearful of the mastodon, he had only ventured from the cave in the heat of the day, to trap small animals nearby, and take fish from the creek by means of a crude weir he had constructed. The cave he had found in seeking a way out of the valley. His eyes shone as he told them of the amazing things he had seen in the place. He knew there were white deer there, but never had he succeeded in killing one. From afar he had glimpsed the saber-toothed cat which they had seen; had likewise discovered that in the valley was a species of small buffalo.

Without food other than that which he could gather in furtive sorties from the cave, living in constant fear of being caught away from the protection of the

cave by some of the strange beasts of the valley, he had managed to exist. It was on the tip of Tom's tongue to ask the professor how he expected to capture the mastodon alive and take it through many hundreds of miles of unbroken wilderness to civilization, but he forebore the question. Doubtless the professor's plan would be revealed in time.

"Who was it that wounded the big cat over by the pool?" demanded Tom, suddenly.

They had described that scene to the professor.

The professor looked at him for a moment as though about to reply, then shook his head. At last he said:

"Wait until tonight, and you shall meet him."

"Tonight?" echoed the girl. "We had planned to be back to the falls, where Lanning Beardslee and the Indian, Anak, are waiting for us. I had thought that when the mastodon went away, the three of us could get through. Mr. Franklin has his gun. It is different than when you were here alone."

The old man smiled, patted her affectionately on the shoulder.

"My dear, the mastodon will *not* go away, until he, this man of whom I spoke, comes here. Then the great beast is harmless, for this man is his friend. If he kills it, this man, we may go safely then."

The girl's eyes widened in a thrill of anticipation.

"A real cave-man, uncle? From the Stone Age?"

But Professor Wentworth merely smiled mysteriously, and shook his head. Then he turned away to replenish the fire.

Below the ledge, Tom and the girl could still hear the angry mutterings of the wounded beast. But apparently the mastodon's flare of temper was passing, as though it understood the futility of trying to get at these human beings. The professor spoke again.

"You've wounded him severely," he

told Tom. "I'm not sure just how that will affect our future. Our lives at this moment are in the hands of the human being who rules this valley, and if the mastodon dies, we all may be forfeit. Without the help of this man, we are in a state of siege."

The fire going well once more, he addressed the girl.

"Don't worry about Lanning Beardslee," he said soberly. "It might be better for him if he actually deserted us, and made his way out of the valley, if the Indian you captured can help him."

CHAPTER XIII

RULER OF THE ANCIENTS

BY now the afternoon sun was striking into the mouth of the cave, and Tom and the girl took stock of the place.

It was a low-ceilinged cavern perhaps twenty feet wide and forty feet deep, a natural grotto formed by the bending of solid rock during some terrific volcanic upheaval in an age long past. Before it was a ledge some fifteen feet wide, which ran to the edge of a little cliff, dropping straight downward for thirty feet to the ledge where Tom and the girl had made their stand against the mastodon. From the trail below, any active wild animal could reach that first ledge, but to gain the one higher up, where the cave was located, was another matter. How Professor Wentworth had managed to scale it the first time, whereupon he could let down the rope he had contrived of woven inner-bark of cedar, was not apparent at first glance.

In the far end of the cave was a rude couch of spruce boughs which the old scientist had brought back from his trips into the valley. Crude pottery had been fashioned from clay which he had obtained from some nearby deposit, and baked in the sun or by the fire. One of these jugs contained water. He had succeeded in drying the flesh of some of the small animals he had trapped, and

strips of it were suspended from the roof of the cave. The only weapon which he seemed to possess was a stone-axe he had made by chipping a small block of flint, and fastening it to a split stick of some hardwood like hickory.

"He uses a bow and arrow, and even a spear," said the professor, speaking of the absent one, "but I could never shoot accurately with a bow and arrow, and a spear seems to me to be a clumsy weapon. Once you have thrown it, you are unarmed, helpless. The stone-axe, on which our prehistoric ancestors relied so much, is the better weapon."

Tom and the girl had brought as much food with them as they could carry, and this they shared with the professor. His eyes glistened at sight of the tinned meat, the pilot-bread. Indeed, he had an appetite that could easily have consumed it all at a sitting, yet he took only his share.

"You do not know what real hunger means," he told them. "I have dreamed of civilized food. Yet I have not done so badly with my traps, and the straight diet of cured meat has seemed to be good for me."

In the cave, too, was a collection of small fossil bones, such as Professor Wentworth had been able to carry up there unaided. These he handled reverently, explaining them, gloating over them. The valley was a veritable seventh heaven to any scientist interested in vanished forms of life.

"We shall get out of here," he predicted, "and some day we'll come back with an expedition and open this place to the world. It is one of those rare spots, of which perhaps two or three still exist in remote, almost inaccessible parts of the earth, seldom if ever seen by man, much less civilized man. It will be our contribution to the world's knowledge of its beginning, and the honor will be ours!"

Heartening indeed to Tom Franklin were the professor's words, yet there was in the young man's mind the thought that perhaps after all the old

scientist, in his enthusiasm, was counting his chickens before they appeared sure of being hatched. The prehistoric valley seemed to have over it the shadow of death. It was impossible to Tom to feel that before they escaped from the place, if they did at all, the grim menace which it suggested, would not take its toll.

And then the sun went down, and darkness came over the valley like a black pall. The cave was lighted only by the fitful glow from their fire, which they huddled around, Tom, for one, glad that Wentworth still had a goodly supply of wood on hand.

With night came silence more pronounced than before. The mastodon had long since departed, but if Professor Wentworth's opinion was to be relied upon in the matter, the gigantic beast was still watching somewhere down there, patiently keeping up the siege.

The hours wore on, with no thought of sleep, yet the professor told them that he would keep watch. He did not know how long they would have to wait. Their visitor had no fixed time for his arrival. He might not appear until dawn. The girl remained awake with the others for a full hour longer, then, wearied with the strain of her experiences that day, she fell asleep, her head pillowed on the shoulder of Wentworth. Tom fixed a bed for her with his coat and some of the spruce boughs from the professor's couch, and returned to the fire and his vigil with the old man.

They did not talk. It seemed that the professor desired silence, although there were many questions Franklin would have liked to ask. Always the old man kept the fire going brightly, and the flames and smoke rose straight up in the unstirred air.

By and by the moon rose, peering hesitantly over the rim of the western peaks as though half-fearful of what she expected to find in the valley. Directly thereafter life seemed to awaken in the

spot. A huge bat shot past them on the cliff, its wings hissing through the air. Far aloft a nighthawk, as though moved to speech at sight of the moon dissolving the shadow-pools on earth, boomed sepulchraly as it went on with its incessant wheeling through space. Somewhere down in the valley, an Arctic owl voiced his hollow hunting-call.

Silence again, and then the quiet was split by a sharp, drawn-out cry almost a wail, that began on a low, sobbing note, and soared up the scale to a high crescendo. Tom glanced at the professor, but the old man was staring into the flames, as though he had not heard. A trifle uneasy, Tom hitched his automatic forward on his hip, and stirred the fire, until it blazed up brightly. He refilled his pipe, and gave himself over to drowsy contemplation under the soothing effect of the weed.

It may have been that his tired body, rebelling at the refusal of its demands for rest, at last insidiously overcame his resistance, so that slumber came to his eyes, for suddenly he was wide-awake, tense, watchful, and conscious that many minutes had slipped by without his being aware. He had, too, a curious tingling along his spine, a strange apprehension of something he knew not what. A feeling that a presence of some sort was near him.

All this passed before he saw, through the smoke and flame of the campfire, the professor sitting opposite to him.

And now that he glimpsed the professor's face, the feeling of uncanniness was intensified, for the old man was sitting very straight and erect, staring at something beyond — *behind* Franklin! Tom started and would have turned, when Wentworth spoke.

"Sit still! He is here, watching you!"

And when Tom obeyed, the professor said again, still in the same calm, dispassionate voice:

"Stand up, slowly, and turn around. *And keep your hand away from your gun!*"

CHAPTER XIV

THE MASTER OF MASTODON VALLEY

WONDERINGLY, still with that prickly feeling along his backbone, Tom Franklin did as he was told, rising with assumed carelessness, arms from his side as he turned his head. He was prepared for a shock at what he should see. Nevertheless, he could not repress a gasp.

Half-crouched there, a six-foot spear gripped, ready to hurl, was an odd, misshapen human being. Or *was* it human? Tom's mind in that instant fled back to the scene at the pool, and Beardslee's words—"an ape." The short, squat body, long arms, the prognathous under-jaw and receding forehead suggested the anthropoid. Yet the high cheek-bones, wide, and the sunken, cavernous eyes, eyes that gleamed malignantly in the half-light from the fire, these told Franklin the truth. An Indian!

A very old Indian, he decided in that same fleeting instant of appraisal. The skin was wrinkled and leathery, with a certain copperish pigmentation. The newcomer was half-covered with what appeared to be the skin of a huge timber-wolf. Behind his back was secured a bow and arrows in a quiver. The spear had a long shank and rather wide head made of curiously-stained bone or ivory.

Involuntarily, Tom stepped back, and Wentworth said something sharply in queer-sounding gutturals. It had instant effect, for the spear was lowered, although the glowing eyes still regarded Franklin watchfully.

Now Professor Wentworth himself had risen, and was standing there passively.

"He speaks the Liard tongue," said the old scientist. "It is very similar to the Sioux, of which I have an understanding. It has proved very fortunate for me."

Once more he spoke rapidly to the newcomer, and now the latter replied, volubly, his eyes straying now and then to Franklin. Tom listened in silence. Edith Gresham, awakened by the dialogue, came up and stood behind her uncle. Although the stranger's eyes fell upon her with interest, her presence apparently caused him no concern. He did not regard her as an enemy.

Wentworth finished at last, and turned to Tom with something like a sigh of relief.

"He is very bitter," he explained. "I feared he would be. The mastodon is sorely wounded. I told him of the circumstances, of how you were forced to shoot to defend your life. But he says that you must leave the valley."

Tom smiled wryly. He was beginning to get back something of his normal poise after that first shock.

"That of course, is agreeable to me," he said. "He means that all of you will go with me?"

The professor shook his head.

"He does not mean that," he replied. "Edith, of course, he regarded as belonging to your party, and he wishes her to accompany you. He knows of the presence of Beardslee and your Indian, too, but does not know where they are now. The Indian he will kill, if he finds him. Beardslee may return with you."

"But, about yourself," put in Edith. "Surely, you are not proposing that we go and leave you here? Why, we came here to rescue you."

Wentworth nodded.

"It is a strange situation," he said. "He will not permit me to leave. He regards me as a friend upon whom he can rely, and, I dare say, he is lonely. I must confess, too, that I am not ready to leave just yet. I told you that I wanted to capture that mastodon, and take him outside. Then I'll bring back an expedition, and collect other specimens of life in the valley. Why, do you know that less than two miles from here is the most wonderful fossil deposit in the world? Acres and acres of masto-

don bones in a great marsh. It was the burial-ground of the huge beasts, the place where they went when they felt death approaching.

"He," went on the professor, indicating the stranger, "knows the only way through the quick-sands to that fossil-deposit. He will take me there, if I will remain. He goes everywhere in the valley. All its wild inhabitants know him, and fear him. He is master here."

Their eyes were on Wentworth as he spoke, and now both Tom and the girl turned to regard once more the curious creature who stood on the opposite side of the fire. The man was gone!

Wentworth shrugged, as they asked him the mental question, wonderingly. They had heard no sound. An instant before, the beast-man, for only as such could Franklin think of him, had been there, silently watching them. Now he had vanished.

"It is his way," said the professor simply. "He comes as suddenly as he departs. I was staring into the fire a moment ago, and looked up casually to see him standing behind you, ready to kill if you made the slightest overt move."

"But who and what is he?" asked the girl. "I could understand what you were saying to him. It was in the same tongue which the Indian we captured uses."

Wentworth nodded.

"This man is a Liard, too, but now has an undying feud against his race. Many years ago—how many perhaps even he doesn't know—he was tried for witchcraft by his tribe. They left him in the forest, tied head downward to a tree, to be purged of witches and live, or to die with the demons which they believed possessed him. Always he had been under suspicion, even from a child. As you see for yourself, he is a sort of throw-back of the race. They could not understand him, so he was accused of witchcraft, tortured, and then left in the woods.

"He escaped, and came to this valley.

There is no question but that he is insane, yet somehow he managed to gain dominance over the wild beasts here. He discovered the mastodon, bent it to his will, so that it obeys him. Then he set out to revenge himself on his tribesmen. At times when the Liards least suspected his coming he would force the mastodon to come out of the valley, and lay waste thir villages.

"Our Indian told us of a 'hairy devil' which haunted them," put in the girl.

Her uncle nodded.

"It was the mastodon," he said. "Akut, for that is this Indian's name, taught the beast to kill every human being it could lay hold of. And it is probable that the mastodon particularly hated Liards, having slain them. That may account for the reason that, as you told me, the beast charged through your camp, but only seized your Indian. What caused the mastodon to drop his prey before carrying it to its master, as it has been taught to do, I cannot say. Perhaps it was accidental. The beast brings every one of its human victims to Akut, who wreaks his own vengeance on them.

"You will understand what will happen if Akut gets on the trail of your Liard."

"And Lanning?" asked Edith worriedly.

The old professor's face grew stern.

"He will not be harmed," he said. "I have told Akut that Beardslee is to be brought to me."

"Why, uncle!" exclaimed Edith. "You know, don't you, that I have promised to marry him? And yet you hint that he is guilty—"

"Edith!" said the old man, catching hold of her shoulders, and regarding her earnestly. "I didn't know! But if I have any influence with you as the only father you've ever known, it will never be!"

Tom Franklin felt a sudden thrill at the words. He had wondered why Beardslee had been so hesitant about pursuing this search. Apparently the man had been willing to let it appear

that he was afraid of dangers that lay in the valley. Yet now Tom was beginning to suspect that this was merely a pose. The man didn't want to face Professor Wentworth for some reason.

"But, why?" persisted the girl.

The scientist shook his head.

"In good time you shall know," he answered. "Akut told me something that I did not know. Beyond the marsh where the mastodon bones lie is a trail out of the valley. He says that it leads through the mountains to the shore of the lake on which you landed. Although it is practically closed now, due to a rock-slide, that is the reason the mastodon has not been out of the valley for some time in a foray against the Liards, a person can cross it. By following the shore of the lake for about twenty miles, you will reach the headquarters of a stream which flows into Findlay River which, in turn, empties into the Peace at Findlay Forks. There is a trading-post at Findlay Forks. You can get men and canoes to take you down-river to Peace River Landing, the end of the railroad. I'll rely on you, Franklin, with your woodcraft, to take Edith through safely.

"Once out in civilization, you can organize an expedition to come in here, bringing horses, and dynamite with which to blast a trail into the valley. At that time I shall be ready to leave with the mastodon."

"And you want us to leave Beardslee behind?" interposed Tom. "I don't like—"

"No!" cried the girl vehemently. "Uncle, I would not believe that you could have suggested such a thing!"

He held up his hand, as though to stop her saying more.

"Don't worry about Beardslee," he counseled, yet there was an undercurrent of grimness in his tones. "Akut won't harm him. He shall merely remain here until it is time for me to leave. When you understand what his purpose is, what he did to me, you will waste no more pity on him.

"Yet I promise you that he shall not

be harmed. Only I want him to live the life I have lived here in this valley, until you return."

But Tom Franklin shook his head.

"I respect you, Professor Wentworth," he said, "and while I have no love for Beardslee, I can't bring myself to the idea of running away and leaving him to the mercies of that devilish beast and the crazy Indian that controls it."

"I told you," said the professor calmly "that Akut won't harm him."

Yet Tom shook his head firmly.

"Nevertheless, I'm going to stay and see this through," he said.

And then he felt a sudden, gentle pressure of his hand. Edith Gresham was standing beside him.

Professor Wentworth stared at him for a moment, then held out his hand abruptly. There was frank admiration in his eyes.

"So be it," he said. "Franklin, you're a man, anyway, although a stubborn one."

He raised his eyes to the eastern peaks.

"It will be daylight within an hour. Akut and the mastodon are gone, probably hunting your Liard and Beardslee. I think it will be safe for us to pay a visit to the falls, and that cavern there. Besides," he added with a smile, "you have more food there and I'm ready to confess that I'm hungry."

CHAPTER XV

CONFLICT

VERY dark and damp it was down in the valley, once the three of them had left the shelter of the cave and the cheerful fire. Steam from the fumaroles, instead of rising straight up as it did during the daylight hours, when the sun was beating down strongly, now hung in vast layers of fog over the spot, so that every leaf and twig of the trees was dripping.

Accustomed as he was to the woods,

Tom Franklin would have confessed that he could not proceed far in the impenetrable gloom without Wentworth to guide him. The old scientist, by reason of his enforced existence in the valley, practically every moment of which had been spent in ready watchfulness, had developed almost phenomenal faculties of sight, touch and instinct. Literally, he could see in the dark like a cat. Tom came to believe. The professor led the way; Edith came next; and Tom, with gun drawn, brought up the rear.

Wentworth counseled silence, and there was no disposition to flout the warning. They were passing along a trail, practically invisible beyond the creek, through the jungle, and there was every probability that they might confront some predatory inhabitants of these wilds. Besides, there was ever the mastodon to consider, although Wentworth had expressed the opinion that the monster was elsewhere in the valley, aiding its equally wild master to track down Beardslee and the Indian, Anak. Tom was glad that he had made the decision to remain and "see it through," not alone for that squeeze of approval that Edith Gresham had given him, but likewise in sheer sympathy for Beardslee and the Indian accompanying him.

Professor Wentworth might believe that the crazed master of the valley was sincere in his promise that Beardslee should not be harmed, but there was no certainty that the mastodon, aroused as it was by his wounds, would not wreak vengeance on the first man it came across. Besides, Tom was by no means assured as to what would happen to the Indian, Anak. It was true that Anak had tried to assassinate him, yet having brought the Indian into this valley, it seemed no more than right and proper that he should be protected. Still, as it occurred to him how weak and futile he had appeared in the face of the enraged mastodon, Tom wondered as to what possible use he could be. The principle was unchanged, however.

They came out of the jungle at last,

and, with Wentworth still leading the way, began the arduous climb to the mesa. This was for two reasons. The way around the table-land was longer and led through the jungle, and at the same time on the treeless plain of broken rock, they would be less likely to encounter one of the furred preys of the valley, as the professor explained. But likewise, it placed them at a decided disadvantage should they encounter the mastodon. There would be no escape then. Yet they must take the chance.

As they went on, the east flamed redly, and then through the rising mist the sun presently hung at the edge of the horizon like a glowing ball of fire. The fog was all about them, distorting the shapes of the huge rocks with which the plain was strewn, until they seemed the size of houses built after some weird, crazy plan that harmonized with the scheme of the whole place. At last Wentworth called a halt.

"Not for months have I been this far away from my cave," he explained, pitching his voice in an undertone. "Sounds carry far in this fog, and it might be well if we stopped to listen and take bearings as well as we can. Old as I am, I believe that my ears are more sharply-attuned than yours. I've learned how to use them since I came here.

"Just now I heard something—up ahead, and to the left. Listen!"

They had drawn over beside a big boulder, and now stood there with the silence bearing down on them. Presently, Tom became aware of a far-off murmuring sound, very subdued, like the wash of a distant sea. His first thought was that the sound was made by escaping steam from a fumarole. And then it came to him that what he heard was the sound of his own blood, pulsing through the arteries of his brain.

But on the heels of it there came to his ears a rhythmical beat, sharp, quick, and from the direction the professor had indicated—ahead and to the left. He looked at the old man, but the latter shook his head, and put his fingers to

lips to indicate silence. Nearer and nearer it came, while they shrank more closely to the lee of the rock. Suddenly, Professor Wentworth caught hold of Tom's arm, and pointed.

It was a herd of what appeared to be caribou, perhaps twenty or thirty of them, strung out in single file behind a leader who was the biggest of all. Yet no caribou such as Tom had ever seen before. These were small animals, not much taller than Shetland ponies, yet proportionately they were the same as the large animals Franklin had hunted in Alaska. The route they were taking led close to the rock where the three stood in hiding. Tom's thought was that caribou meat would be welcome, yet he knew that he dare not shoot. At that instant, Edith gave a little scream of fear, and pointed back down the trail she and the two men had been following across the mesa.

Standing there less than thirty yards away, watching them, was a counterpart of the mottled cat they had seen by the pool when they first glimpsed the valley. Motionless and statuesque it stood, except for an incessant twitching of its long, rounded tail. They could plainly see the long incisors, like white knives, as the animal drew back its lips in a soundless snarl. Beyond question, it had come across their trail in passing through the jungle, and had followed them, hoping for a chance to draw close and attack under cover of the fog. The fact that they had halted was puzzling at first, but the hunger of the animal was overcoming its fears, for of a sudden it trotted to within thirty feet of them, and then flattened on the ground.

Behind them in the fog, the two men and the girl heard a sudden clatter of hoofs. Seemingly the caribou, alarmed by the outcry Edith had given, had either detected the presence of human beings, or the cat, for they went hurrying away in the fog. The cat, which now lay with head held low, suddenly tensed, and the nervously-lashing tail stiffened. Then, before Wentworth or Edith could scarce

tell what was happening, Franklin had whipped out his automatic, and was sending shot after shot into the striped, mottled thunder-bolt launched at them.

So quickly did he fire that the successive shots of the weapon seemed blended into a single roar, and then the three sprang apart as the cat, snarling horribly, literally riddled with metal-jacketed bullets, skidded to a stop almost at their feet, and lay there dying, screaming defiance to the last.

Hastily, Franklin refilled his gun, remarking to himself that he was using his last clip of cartridges, although there was more ammunition in the plane if they were fortunate to reach it once more. Over the mesa went the echoes of the gun-fire rolling sonorously like thunder, to be caught up by the distant cliffs and flung back again, echo upon echo, the sound sustained by the fog, and even intensified. But at last all was silent again, and the saber-toothed killer was stiffening where it had fallen.

"Listen!" said Professor Wentworth suddenly.

But there was no need of the adjuration. They had heard the same thing he did; a distant, bellowing, trumpeting note. The mastodon, somewhere out in the fog, had been attracted by the sound of gun-fire. His cunning old brain associated the sound with but one thing—the human beings who had hurt him so grievously the day before. He was coming now to destroy them utterly so that they would never harm him again.

CHAPTER XVI

FLIGHT

A GAIN he blared forth hate, and they fixed the direction this time—off to the right, where the mesa joined up with the cliffs that formed an unscalable wall. The next moment, led by Wentworth, they were running, not back toward the cave which they had left, it was too far away, and they were cut off

but ahead, on the trail they had already chosen.

What the old scientist had in mind, Tom did not know, but guessed that once they had crossed the mesa and were in the jungle again, they might manage to outwit the great beast seeking their lives. It could not be more than a mile farther to the edge of the rock-plain, where the trees began, and Tom prayed to himself that the mastodon would be temporarily disconcerted in finding the direction they had gone. As they fled, they heard him come thundering on, directly toward the spot they had left.

Still they ran, although the girl was panting now, and her pace was slowing. Tom's heart sank. If she tired out completely before they made the trees, the three of them would have to make their last stand there.

"Take it easy!" he counseled, running beside her. "We've still got time and it's not far now!"

She nodded that she understood, and slowed her pace still more. Tom could see that she was breathing heavily, although determined not to give up the fight yet. The rocky surface made the going hard at best. Suddenly, the girl screamed and fell.

Wentworth, still leading, stopped, and came back. Tom was beside her in a moment.

"I've turned my ankle!" she moaned.

At that moment, the roaring of the mastodon in the fog far behind, and which had come to them intermittently, changed to fiendish squeals and trumpeting. Tom guessed instantly that the beast had found the dead saber-tooth, and was probably venting its hatred upon it. This momentary distraction would give them a few precious seconds, yet it would not be long now until the beast would pick up their trail.

"Stand up!" Tom begged the girl, and she complied, although she was unable to put weight on her injured ankle.

Then, with the old professor on one side and Tom on the other, the girl's arms around their necks, the three went

on. Desperate though their plight was, Tom nevertheless was thrilled by her clinging to him. Come what might, he knew then what he had surmised from the instant he had met Edith Gresham. He loved her. Yet there was Beardslee, and the man must be given his chance. That she loved Beardslee, Tom hardly could doubt. He had seen the way in which she had rallied to the absent one's defense when her uncle had denounced him. Yes, Beardslee should have his chance, if only for Edith's sake.

These thoughts raced through his head as the three made stumbling progress toward the distant jungle, and possible safety. Only once did Professor Wentworth speak. He, too, was sadly winded, but realization of their danger buoyed him up.

"If—only—Akut—were—here?" he gasped. "Could—control—"

But at that moment Tom knew that no such miracle could occur. The insane master of the valley was elsewhere, and the monster which he had taught to hunt down and kill men, was amuck to trample them lifeless.

And now his ears told him that the orgy which the mastodon had plunged into at sight of the dead saber-tooth was past, for they heard no more loud bellowsings, only silence. Tom guessed that the beast was working out the puzzle of where they had gone. Even as the three of them hurried on, however, there came to them a single, fierce blast of triumph, which said to them unmistakably that the giant had solved the mystery of their disappearance, and was coming on.

"Not—far—now!" cried Wentworth hoarsely, and lifted his hand.

Through the fog scarcely two hundred yards distant, they could see the first of the trees. But if the beast could trail them with ease over the rocky mesa, the matted jungle, with its undergrowth to catch and hold their scent, should prove no difficulty for him at all. Yet, somehow, it seemed to offer sanctuary. They went on faster.

As the trees closed after them, Tom

guessed that the mastodon was no more than a thousand yards behind, and charging at top-speed. Now a new difficulty faced them. Here in the jungle, with its interlaced creepers, they were forced to go more slowly than when they had been out in the open. Wentworth, barefooted, but apparently inured to it, plunged ahead, breaking trail through the thickets as best he could, while Tom, half-carrying the girl, followed closely.

The old professor was twisting and turning through the maze, apparently relying on the fact that the aroused mastodon, caring nothing for thickets, would go plunging ahead, to discover too late that it was off the trail. That chance of confusing the beast, giving it a problem to work out slowly, was their only hope. A crash far behind them announced that the beast had struck the first line of undergrowth.

Now the professor bore off at right angles to the general direction in which they had been going. Seemingly some plan had occurred to him, for he went ahead faster than ever, and Tom, with the now practically exhausted girl, was put to it to keep up. Thicker and thicker grew the jungle, and their pace slowed, while disappointed trumpeting and flailing of brush far to the rear indicated that the mastodon had fallen victim to their ruse and was confused.

Suddenly the professor, just ahead, gave a little cry and plunged out of sight. Before Tom, pressing close behind, could tell what had happened, the ground seemed to sink from under him, and both he and the girl dropped. Then a shock of icy water, and they went under, to come up gasping. Instantly the current caught them, whirled them away.

Tom understood now what the old scientist had in mind when he had turned aside. He had known of the river, and counted on it to throw the mastodon off the track.

Still holding the girl in his left arm, although the chill of the water had revived her, for she was trying to swim,

Tom stroked as best he could for Professor Wentworth, whose bobbing head showed above the surface. The old man was beating frantically with his arms, as though he knew little of the art of keeping afloat. Even the girl saw, for she roused suddenly and cried out:

"I can keep up! Help him! He's drowning!"

Indeed, the girl was proving now that she could swim, for she struck out bravely. Tom let her go and started out for the man. Quickly he reached him, caught him by the arm and started for shore. Behind him came the girl, slowly, for the twisted ankle and her heavy clothing hampered her. But soon they were at the edge of the high bank of the stream, and in a little eddy Tom found a foothold on the clayey bottom. Together the three of them stood, gasping from their exertions, until the chill of the water struck home.

Although they had landed less than two hundred feet below the point where they had gone into the river, they heard no more of the mastodon. Apparently the beast had been baffled, thrown off the track.

"We could swim across the river," said Tom at last, "but we would then be on the opposite side from where we left Beardslee and Anak. Say," he asked suddenly, as a new thought struck him, "doesn't this river flow out of the valley? Why couldn't we escape in that direction, if necessary."

"Akut told me that it leaves the valley through a rocky, steep-walled canyon that runs for miles, a wild, broken rapids that no living thing could exist in for more than a minute," replied the professor.

"Brr-rr-rrr! I'm chilled. I'd rather go back in the woods and face the mastodon than stay here much longer."

"Perhaps we can work our way along the edge of the stream until we come to a place where the bank is low enough for us to climb," suggested the girl.

It seemed a good suggestion, and

Tom led the way. Although the beach shelved off steeply into deep water, by staying close to the bank and hanging hold of roots that had been exposed by the cutting of the river, they proceeded slowly upstream, the exercise helping to restore circulation and fight off the numbing cold of the icy water. Three hundred yards from the spot where they had gone in they found what they had been looking for—a break in the bank up which they climbed.

At the top of the bank, in the jungle once more, they paused, ready to plunge back into the water again if the mastodon should appear. But they heard nothing of him.

"The falls can't be more than a mile upstream from here," said Tom. "We can make it through the woods. Wonder what has happened to Beardslee and the Indian? And I wonder where *your* friend is, professor!"

The old scientist did not reply, but shook his head negatively as he led off through the undergrowth. What had happened, and what the insane ruler of the valley had been doing since he had left them so abruptly the night before, was a question that was uppermost in the minds of all three.

CHAPTER XVII

THE VENGEANCE OF AKUT!

ONCE out of the water, and with the sun lifting the mist, the atmosphere of the valley was pleasantly warm, so that the enforced icy plunge now gave them almost a pleasant reaction of new energy. The girl's twisted ankle seemed less painful, and she was enabled to use it a little, still leaning on Tom for support, however. They went on and on through the silent, seemingly empty woods. Yet Tom Franklin, wise in the ways of the outdoors, knew that their progress was watched. Doubtless scores of eyes of the smaller furred clan noted the passage of the humans, but did it from cover. Tom's hope was

that they would not encounter another of the saber-toothed cats, who, seemingly, had yet to learn that man is by far the most dangerous of animals.

True, these prayers might respect Akut, the master of their realm, yet somehow they understood that these three white persons were of another world, and therefore, perhaps, not to be dreaded. Only by such reasoning could Franklin account for the attack by the saber-tooth back on the mesa. And there was still the mastodon to consider. Somewhere in this jungle he was still at large, probably searching for them.

As they went on, the thunder of the falls, which at first had seemed but a murmur, became louder, particularly when the three would reach a break in the trees. Now they reached the pool, not far from where Tom had stood that first night and discovered the fiery-eyed thing in the water. He told the professor about it.

"I'd swear it was an alligator!" Franklin declared.

But Wentworth shook his head in negation.

"This water is icy, too cold," he said. "Yet there are many strange forms of life in the valley, and it may be that this stream is the home of creatures not ordinarily found in such northerly latitudes. But your camp was near here, wasn't it? Let us see it?"

The camp-site, however, was just as they had left it. Apparently Beardslee and the Indian had not returned. It was only logical to suppose that they were still up there in the cave awaiting the return of Tom and Edith Gresham.

"We'll go up there," decided the professor.

A few minutes later they had reached the foot of the cliff, and began the climb. The falls, thundering away as they had been doing for centuries, were now almost over the trio, tons upon tons of icy water falling straight downward, crashing upon rocks at the bottom and spreading out into the great pool, draining away into the river.

It was the rattle of gravel from above that halted them, drew their attention to the heights. What they saw was the figure of a man coming down. Hatless, coatless, he was slipping and sliding from one rock to another, apparently in desperate haste.

"Beardslee!" cried Tom wonderingly.

And then he exclaimed again:

"Look! On the cliff!"

Two pygmy-like figures were struggling up there, on the very brink of the precipice. The height was so great and they seemed so small that it was almost impossible to distinguish whether they were humans or some wild beasts locked in combat. For fighting they were. There could be no mistaking the desperate earnestness of their efforts, as they swayed back and forth. Even as Tom and the others watched, Beardslee, his dust-streaked face white with terror, arrived among them.

Startled for a moment at sight of the three, he paused. Then, his fear still strong upon him, he pointed up at the cliff.

"The Indian!" he cried. "He's fighting a wild man!"

Akut! The master of the valley! There could be no doubt of it.

"We were in the cave," babbled Beardslee. "The plane— Anak had recovered from his injuries, and we were in the cave—. Suddenly we saw this thing creeping upon us.

"It made straight for Anak, a knife or some other weapon in its hand. It paid no attention to me. Then they were fighting their way along the narrow ledge inside the cave, and into the open. I managed to get by!"

"Without waiting to help Anak," finished Franklin. "Come on, professor, we've got to get up there!"

But Wentworth laid a restraining hand on the young man's arm.

"This is the feud of which I told you," he said. "Akut had sworn vengeance against the Liards, and your Indian is one of the tribe. Besides, you would be too late.

"Look!"

As he spoke, the battlers on the cliff broke apart, as though to gather fresh strength for a final effort. They were half-crouched like animals, eager for an opening. Clearly, Anak, injured though he had been in his affray with the mastodon, and likewise old, still possessed prodigious strength. Or perhaps it was courage born of deadly fear, the valor of the cornered rat. For it was he who leaped first, his right hand upraised, and the bright sunlight glistened on something he gripped there. The two figures locked, swayed, and then Edith Gresham screamed and turned her head.

What Tom Franklin saw was two bodies that seemed as one in a death embrace, falling straight downward. Now and then legs and an arm were outflung grotesquely as the two foes dropped. But, dying as they were, if not dead already, neither relaxed that last grim clutch.

As though it kindly sought to hide the tragedy, the falls caught them. At one point, half way to the bottom, the cataract struck on a projecting shoulder of rock and spurted outward at almost right angles to the perpendicular fall. Into this fury of water the two went, nor reappeared, for in the white froth they were no more than the veriest piece of driftwood. The falls still boiled and thundered where the water struck at the foot of the cliff, while the wide pool, with its sucking, swirling eddies, gave no sign that it had claimed human victims.

For a long minute the horror-stricken group stood, still watching. But the omnipotent rush of the waters went on as though nothing had happened. Tom looked at the professor, saw the old man's face working with emotion.

"Akut was a friend," said the scientist soberly. "But it is better, perhaps, that he has gone, in this way.

"With him has gone the thing I was hoping for. He promised me that with

his control over the mastodon he would secure it for me when the time came for me to leave. Now we must capture it as best we can—if we can.

"Edith, I'm ready to go with you. My work here is finished for the time being. To go back to civilization, organize an expedition to return and open this valley, with its scientific wonders. That will be my purpose now."

He paused, and his eyes rested on Beardslee, as if he had observed the man for the first time. But he said nothing.

Tom, however, had caught a hint in the incoherent words Beardslee had uttered after that flight down the cliff.

"Just what were you and Anak doing to the plane?" demanded the flyer.

Beardslee stared at him for a moment, as though in surprise over the question. Then, with a shrug and a show of frankness:

"Merely looking it over, seeing if there was any way in which it could be taken from the cavern. But there wasn't. It will stay there until doomsday, I'm afraid."

He turned to Professor Wentworth.

"In all this excitement, I've been unable to say how surprised I am to see you. But I knew that if you were still in the valley, Franklin and Edith would find you. Yet it's astonishing."

The old scientist nodded.

"It would be—to you," he replied dryly. "But there is more important work in sight just now than discussion. We'll need what food there is left in the plane, and then we'll strike across the valley, for the 'outside.' Between us and the pass which will take us out to the lake is the mastodon. We've avoided him once. Perhaps we can do it again. You'll go with us, Beardslee?"

The man looked startled.

"Why, of course!" he said hastily. "I've seen all I want of this cursed place! I'm as anxious to get out of it as anybody."

"Then we'll go!" replied Wentworth.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRAIL OF DANGERS

FOUR of them now, and the three men were loaded with what food they could carry, while Edith Gresham, carrying a staff which Franklin had cut for her, got along without their aid. Professor Wentworth, as usual, led the way, for it was upon him they relied to lead them out of the place. Much of the route would retrace the route they had taken in escaping from the mastodon, particularly across the mesa. The latter territory would be more hazardous than ever now, for the sun had drunk up the vapors, and they would be in plain sight of the beast.

The scientist, however, assured them that the mastodon, after the manner of elephants of today, could see no great distance. Yet nature had endowed him with acute hearing and a highly developed sense of smell. One factor in their favor was that there was no wind. They might even pass within a short distance of him without being detected, provided that they moved without noise.

In the cave, Tom had found the plane intact, still held fast on the shallow ledge, where it would likely remain without harm until the water in the tunnel became high enough to float it. Indeed, it seemed that it was in a safer location now, turned around so that the force of the wind did not strike against the side of its pontoons, than it had been at the start. Tom wondered if it were the work of Beardslee. He wondered, too, how the man had succeeded in overcoming the fears of Anak, for beyond question the Indian had assisted. Beardslee could not have accomplished the work alone. Some day, Tom promised himself, he would come back and rescue the machine, although just how he would go about it he did not know at this time.

And what had Beardslee in mind, assuming that he had actually tried to get the plane out of the tunnel? Tom did

not trouble to ask. There was a more important question facing them just now, as Professor Wentworth had said, escaping from the valley. His thoughts were of conjecture, as he went along, now and then helping the girl over a rough spot in the trail that Wentworth was following. Probably it was an old pathway which the mastodon itself had blazed in its aimless ramblings to and fro in the jungle. Suddenly he saw that the scientist had stopped, and was listening.

Very faintly there came to them from a great distance, it seemed, a moaning cry, not unlike the wail of a steam siren, a rough, nasal note, yet one which had in it a certain mournful plaint. It was unlike anything Tom had heard before, differing markedly from the sobbing cry which he had heard while waiting up in the professor's cave for the arrival of the mysterious master of the valley.

"What is it?" breathed Beardslee, in a hoarse whisper.

He had been following closely behind the professor. Wentworth scowled at him, but did not reply at once. While they waited there, listening, the moaning cry was heard again, *nearer* than before. There was the indistinct crackle of brush, off to the left.

Wentworth signaled silence. Then he whispered:

"The mastodon! He has missed his master and is mourning for him!"

Thereupon Wentworth, moving as quietly as possible, changed their course, leading them away from the direction whence the sound seemed to come. For a full fifteen minutes they went on, before they stopped once more.

"It sounded far off," whispered Tom, "but if I'm any judge, it was closer than we really suspected."

Wentworth nodded.

"Probably but three or four hundred yards from us," he replied, in the same cautious manner. "Coming in our direction, too. Lucky there is no wind, or it would have scented us.

"The mesa is just ahead. Once we

make it, we can scatter, if necessary, to throw the beast off our trail—”

He broke off as to their ears came the dread trumpeting sound which had so terrified them earlier that day. The mastodon, prowling aimlessly through the jungle in search of its vanished master, had cut into the trail of the fugitives, and, fury aroused once more, was now in full pursuit.

They did not need Wentworth's example or command to run. Even Edith Gresham did well, while Franklin, although carrying a bulkier load than either Beardslee or the professor, helped her somewhat. Since Beardslee had joined them at the foot of the cliff, she had been strangely silent, although he seemed anxious to favor her in every little way possible. Yet it had been Franklin whom she had called upon to help her through the jungle, and it was Franklin who came to her aid now.

A hundred yards and the trees thinned out. They were on the mesa once more. Over his shoulder Wentworth cried:

“We'll hold together as long as we can, but we may have to scatter to confuse him.”

A moment later, as though addressing himself, he was complaining that the route led away from the direction of his cave on the mountain-side. Scientist to the last as he would be, he could not forget the precious collection of fossil specimens he had there. But he seemed to decide that breath was more valuable than futile yearning, for he jogged along ahead, in silence.

Beardslee, apparently short-winded, who had been ahead with the professor when the mesa was reached, began to drop back slowly, until he was even with the girl and Franklin. Now and then he sent a terrified glance over his shoulder, expecting to see the prehistoric monster following close behind, but mostly he glared unmistakable hatred at Tom. If the latter observed it, he gave no sign.

Panting with exertion, Beardslee dropped farther back, until Tom no

longer saw him. Presently, however, he was up with the pair again, and Tom observed with angry surprise that Beardslee had cast away his pack of food.

“You'll go on short rations for that,” vowed Franklin.

Then all thought of Beardslee was driven from his mind by the mighty trumpeting of the mastodon, which had successfully worked out the trail in the jungle, and was out on the mesa.

The professor took one horrified look, and swung off to the left.

“We can't make the pass this way!” he called back to them. “But there is a short-cut to the marsh. Quicksands there—but it's our only hope.”

And a few moments later Franklin, glancing behind, was grateful for Beardslee's act in throwing away the pack of food, for the mastodon was venting its fury upon the harmless thing which had about it the hated man-smell. A momentary diversion when seconds were precious. It was doubtful if the great beast had seen them as yet. They were eight or nine hundred yards in advance, but it would trail them and, once sure in which direction the prey was running, it would come on like a tornado.

Rougher ground, with the boulders scattered over the lava-field becoming larger, and then Franklin saw not far ahead that vast marsh which seemed dotted with dead-white trees. Beardslee, too, saw it, and seemed to forget his weariness, for he lifted his head with sudden eagerness. But the girl was now staggering along at a snail's pace, game to the last, for the agony of traveling on her injured foot had been excruciating.

“Just a little way now, Edith!” urged Franklin.

Beardslee heard, and shot a malignant glance at him. And then came a cry from the professor. The mesa was giving way to clumps of willows and stunted trees, and here and there could be seen patches of water.

They followed him, observing that he zigzagged here and there unaccountably, and Tom remembered what the old man had said of quicksands. It was the trained eyes of the scientist, rather than the practical man of the outdoors, upon whom they needed to rely in the crisis.

Then even the willow clumps gave way to curious cairns of stone, perhaps the work of some long-vanished glacier, and with them the "niggerheads" of the northern tundra. Behind them, pursuing in its blind rage, the mastodon was coming, blaring hatred with every lurching step. Beneath their feet now and then the ground quaked tremblingly, and Tom saw that they were among the dead-white stumps, or "ghost-trees," as he had believed them to be.

But they were not dead trees. They were gigantic bones, the skeletons of thousands and thousands of mastodons. It was the burial-ground of the ancient beasts, the spot where they had come to die. Perhaps they understood, had these forefathers of the elephants, that it was a quick and easy death here. Merely the quicksands took them down and, in the cycle of many years, through the changing movement of this slowly churning muck, slower even than the action of a glacier, they had been lifted to the sunlight once more. Perfect skeletons most of them were, with their great, curved tusks still intact, although now turned to stone by some petrifying element in the watery soil.

Wentworth was going more slowly now, as though sensing that the least misstep might plunge him into a sandy death-trap. Beardslee had somehow dropped behind; and of a sudden, they heard him cry out. Tom turned to see the man standing still, off to one side of the trail, waving his arms.

"Watch her!" cried Franklin to the professor, as he dropped Edith's arm and put down his pack. "He's caught!"

"You can't save him!" called Wentworth. "The mastodon has already seen us."

But Franklin did not hear him. He was running back over the shaky trail he had just come.

"Throw yourself flat!" he ordered Beardslee, "and reach toward me as far as you can."

The sand was no more than half-way to Beardslee's knees, yet it held him as though in a vise. He had attempted to cut across a loop in the winding trail the old scientist had made, and suddenly an unseen hand from below had laid hold of him.

Terrified, Beardslee complied. Franklin likewise flattened, and working carefully toward the other, gripped his hands. It took time, caution, and then Franklin's strength came into play. Inch by inch he drew Beardslee toward him, the man's face drained of all color in his abject terror. Suddenly Beardslee turned his head, then screamed, and sought to bury his face in the muck. His cry was echoed by a blast as from some mighty, toneless bugle. The mastodon was almost upon them!

CHAPTER XIX

FULFILLMENT OF DESTINY

INVOLUNTARILY, Tom released his hold of Beardslee, and struggled to his feet, drawing his automatic. A puny figure he stood there, armed with what amounted to no more than a peashooter. Countless thousands of years ago, some cave-man ancestor, trapped, might have confronted such a monster in this fashion. Given a crude stone-axe, instead of a modern, high-powered weapon such as the automatic pistol, Franklin doubtless would have been just as effective. Yet no prehistoric man ever displayed more coolness and courage. With the mastodon scarcely thirty feet away, coming on with trunk upraised, its reddish hair literally standing on end, Tom fired shot after shot, each painstakingly, for he knew there would be no time for others, even though fresh

clips of cartridges which he had brought from the plane were in his pocket.

The effect was startling. Seemingly, one of the bullets must have penetrated the beast's eye, for with a deafening bellow it slewed sideways, trunk flailing wildly. An instant later, however, it had recovered, and had once more located its foe. It half-reared, with a grunting roar. Involuntarily Franklin blinked, flinched under the impending death-stroke, for there was no time to run.

But the mastodon did not move!

And then in that moment of near-incredibility, when he could scarcely believe the evidence of his own eyes, Franklin knew that miraculous chance had stepped in as the last second ticked off, and had saved him. Caught in the same quicksand pool which had trapped Beardslee, its tremendous weight was forced down, aided by the sinister sucking, drawing power of the sands. Realizing its helplessness, the doomed beast lunged back and forth on its shortening legs, but every moment only made it sink deeper.

An inarticulate cry from Beardslee roused Tom. The trapped man was likewise going down in that bottomless pit swallowing the mastodon. Tom once more threw himself flat. With a will he tugged now, and then he knew that Wentworth and Edith had come back, and were helping. Presently Beardslee was free, panting, exhausted, but free.

Not twenty feet away was a frightened old relic from the Stone Age, a holdover by Nature from an era long lost in oblivion, who did not belong in this world of the present, yet the only living link with that dim and hoary past. And he was going to join the mighty host of his ancestors who had drawn their last breath in this same spot. Ten thousand years from now his bones, hardened in petrification, might be cast up on the surface of this same swamp, to be studied by scientists of the future.

It might have been, too, that with death upon him, he welcomed the long sleep, the freedom forever from the

curse of loneliness that had been so long laid upon him in this valley. The one human being he had loved was gone, probably dead, as he may have reasoned. There was nothing to live for, and he had but contempt for these puny creatures who stood there watching his last moments.

He had ceased trumpeting, and as his heavy body sank more rapidly with the pull of the quicksands growing stronger every second, he lifted his trunk as high as he could. He blew a final, whistling blast, which might have been defiance of these human enemies who had brought about his undoing. Or it might have been his self-voiced requiem, a farewell to the world. Involuntarily the little group turned away. When, a minute later, they looked at the spot where the mastodon had been, it was all smooth sand and treacherous-looking black muck, with only a few bubbles on the surface to mark the spot.

Edith was crying convulsively, and the old professor's arms were around her. He was talking soothingly to her, yet there were tears on his cheeks. It was the abrupt reaction from danger to safety that moved the girl to give way to her feelings, Tom guessed. Yet he divined that the old scientist was mourning the passing of what, to him, would have been a priceless thing to give to the world, the live mastodon.

Then Tom found that Beardslee had struggled to his feet and had gripped his hand.

"Franklin," he said, "you're more of a man than I can ever hope to be! You could have left me to die with that beast, but you didn't. I've been a cad, a scoundrel, Wentworth knows, but I think I can face the world after this with a new outlook.

"I—I want you to know the truth. Edith, you must know, too, although I'm sure that you already suspect.

"I knew of this valley before the professor attempted to find it, and I wanted to keep the thing secret until I could handle it in my own way. You

see this fossil ivory all about us? It's worth sixteen dollars a pound, if the market is not glutted, and there are countless tons of it here. An old trapper who penetrated the place told me about it. He also saw the mastodon, and fled, although I believed he was lying at the time.

"When Professor Wentworth set out to find this spot it was only after I had done everything to dissuade him. I followed him to Telegraph Creek and, when he still insisted on going, I bribed the guide to take him in a wrong direction. But the professor would not be fooled, so the guide told me later, and struck out alone for this place."

"The Indian confessed the truth to me, Beardslee," put in Professor Wentworth.

Beardslee nodded unhappily.

"I guessed as much," he resumed, "although I had hoped to make you believe, if we found you at all, that I was not guilty.

"The Indian, Anak, and I tried to work some scheme of getting the plane out of the cavern. I had a wild plan of taking Edith and flying away. I understand a machine nearly as well as you do, Franklin. I was desperate, crazy at the thought that this vast mine of fossil ivory would be seized by somebody else. I could have left both you, Franklin, and Professor Wentworth to die in this valley or revert to cavemen.

"Yet you, Franklin, risked your life for me, although I know that you hated me!

"All I want now is to get away from this accursed spot. You, all of you, or the world, too, for that matter, can have all the wealth lying here in this marsh!"

Edith put her hand on his arm.

"Lanning," she said earnestly, "I've never liked you better than I do at this moment!"

Professor Wentworth cleared his throat.

"I forgive you, Beardslee," he declared. "I hold no grudge against you, and none should be held at a time like

this. We're not out of this place yet, and we may never be. The dangers of this place may be nothing compared to those which lie ahead. But—let's be going!"

CHAPTER XX

CAPTURED

IT was nightfall by the time they reached the other side of the marsh and, grateful that they had escaped its quicksands, they threw themselves down, the professor vowing that he could not take another step. Soon Tom had a roaring fire going, and they ate sparingly of their meager store. Beardslee at first vowed he would not share this meal with them, to expiate his offense of throwing away his precious pack of food, but Wentworth pointed out with considerable asperity that this was no time or place for a martyr. Yet he did insist on standing watch, however, declaring that he had slept soundly the night before. The others, almost without sleep for forty-eight hours, consented.

Yet it was a series of fitful naps Franklin took. Each time he awakened, however, he saw Beardslee sitting there, still faithful to his trust, keeping the fire going, and now and then staring off into the darkness beyond the ring of light. Tom gave himself to sounder slumber.

Suddenly he was wide awake, conscious that something was wrong. Before he could open his eyes, something jolted his ribs, and like lightning he rolled over and tried to leap to his feet, but a form landed on his back and he went down again. Then he saw that the spot was peopled with strange men; that Beardslee, the professor and even Edith were captives. The Liards!

They were armed with rifles, knives and on the cheeks of some were daubs of blue and red paint. Twenty or twenty-five of them, Franklin guessed.

The tallest of them, evidently in command, shot a question at Tom, but the latter shook his head. Wentworth, however, began speaking volubly in the same language, and the Liard chieftain, with something like a flicker of pleased surprise on his face, faced the old scientist.

More guttural questions by the chief, and Wentworth answered at length. Then, at a word from the chief, the wrists of the prisoners were bound with moosehide thongs, and they were told, by means of sign language, to sit by the fire.

"I must have fallen asleep—" began Beardslee, but an Indian kicked him into silence.

Wentworth, however, who sat nearest to Tom, leaned over slightly and whispered swiftly into the younger man's ear:

"They have come to declare war on the 'hairy devil' which inhabits the valley, as they believe. The leader, there, is their most powerful medicine man, and they have been wrought up to a pitch where they are even willing to tackle the mastodon. The disappearance of Anak has aroused them. They say that the 'hairy devil,' disguised as a huge bird, that's your plane, alighted on the lake shore, took Anak, and disappeared into the cavern.

"I have told them the truth, or as much of the truth as I think they will believe. I have told them that the 'hairy devil' has disappeared into the earth, and that if they will retrace our trail across the marsh they will see his tracks, ending at the pool. They are waiting until daylight to prove if we are right. If they find the tracks as I said, they will believe what I told them, that we tolled the 'hairy devil' to its death. These Indians hate all white men, and probably have killed more than one prospector who has ventured alone into their country. They're utterly savage—"

Just then one of their captors snarled

at the professor, and he stopped whispering.

Dawn came, and four men, the chief or medicine man with them, departed swiftly across the marsh. They were strong, fresh and tireless, and the way they followed the plain trail in the soft, mucky ground suggested to the watching captives that these were bloodhounds rather than human trackers. Within two hours they were back, the medicine man strangely exalted, for he himself went up and struck the bonds from the prisoners. Then he began a long harangue, to which Wentworth listened intently. Presently it was ended, the medicine man gave an order, and then the Liards began to file back over the way they had come.

The four prisoners were still under guard, however. Indians in front of them, and behind, yet the captives were treated with a certain respect. All of the Liards kept up an excited jabbering as they walked. Apparently the miracle of how these four white persons had slain the monster of the valley was something worthy of wildest conjecture.

"They do not yet know that Anak is dead," remarked the professor, "or, if they surmise it, they are apparently willing to lay the crime to the 'hairy devil' instead of us. What will become of us I do not know yet, but in a way this is a stroke of good fortune; we might not have found the trail leading out of the valley."

The way was growing more rugged now, and it was plain that the party was climbing. Closer and closer they came to the looming peaks, and at last they were able to discern that the great valley, with its countless plumes of vapor, lay below them, like the panorama of a tropical jungle. Then, suddenly, they were confronted with a great rock-slide, where a shoulder of the mountain they were climbing had fallen away.

It seemed an insurmountable obstacle, but the Indians knew the way. An hour of hazardous scaling of mighty boulders that had been cleaved away

from the cliffside and they were through it and on what appeared to be a rather well-marked trail. At last they came to the lake, and stopped.

Professor Wentworth began addressing the medicine-man, speaking slowly at first, but rising gradually into a flow of oratory, while the Liards listened intently. For a full five minutes he spoke, and then there were grunts of approval from the braves. Even the medicine-man came closer, and tapped his finger over Wentworth's heart, and nodded his head in solemn affirmation.

"I told them," said the professor, "that the devil-bird is still in the cavern, and so long as we are alive to control it it will do them no harm. Likewise, I said that with the aid of a canoe and a couple of long and stout rawhide lines, we could get down to where it is lodged on the rock-shelf and haul it back into the lake again. This being done, I have promised them that the devil-bird will leave this lake, never to return, and that with the 'hairy devil' now gone, there is no reason why the Liards cannot enjoy peace and content to the rest of their days.

"These things I have promised them, if they will deliver us the plane. *And they're going to do it!*"

Steamer day at Telegraph Creek, but the interest aroused at the down-river trip of the craft was wholly lacking. What stirred the inhabitants of the little frontier post just now was the sight of a big seaplane which lay nosed against the beach. In it were a young man and a young woman, seated side by side in the pilot's cockpit forward. A trifle crowded, but they did not seem to mind.

Uptown, an old man was making arrangements to cast off his amazing garments of untanned skins and rags, and attire himself in the habiliments of civilized man. On the beach, however, stood another white man, haggard, unshaved, and trying to smile, although it was plain that the effort was forced.

"Good-bye, Edith," he said, extending his hand. "God bless you! And you, too, Franklin. I hope that both of you will always be happy.

"The steamer leaves within a few minutes, and I'm going with her. I've just got time to get aboard. I'm going somewhere in the world and try to forget this nightmare I've been through—and forget other things.

"One suggestion," and for a moment his eyes twinkled. "You've got a good, staunch plane there, Franklin. Why don't you folks fly down the coast to Seattle? You can put the professor in the back seat, and I dare say he'll be asleep all the way, dreaming of the wonderful opportunity he missed when he lost that mastodon."

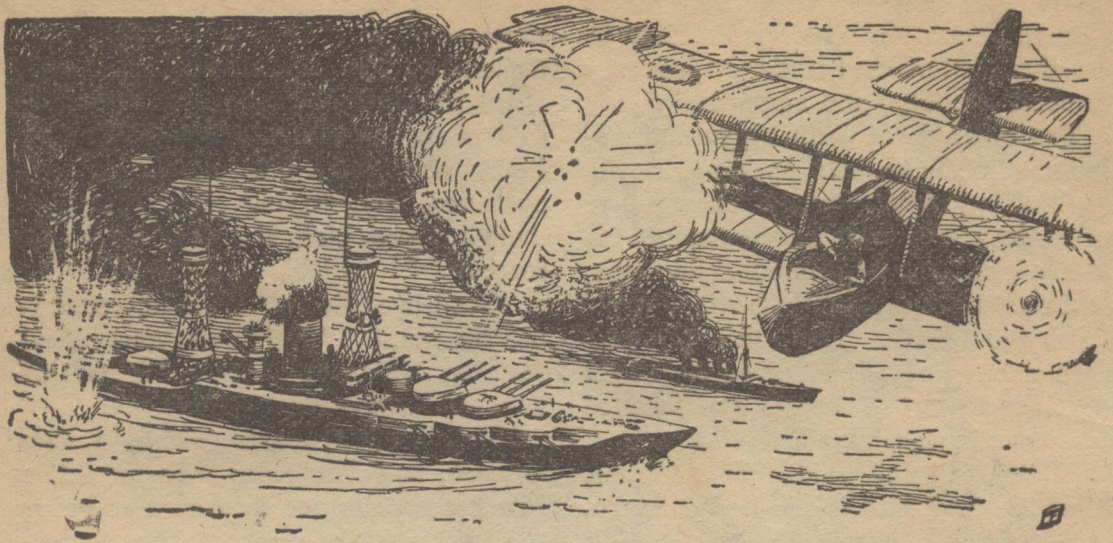
With that he was gone. Tom Franklin looked at the girl beside him, and whispered:

"It's a hunch!"

Thereupon, somehow, their lips met, and lingered despite the giggling of Tahltan squaws and others who stood on the beach watching the actions of these strange people of the air. And it was only when the long-drawn-out parting whistle of the steamer as it announced its departure, a sound which suggested away back dimly in their consciousness the infuriated trumpeting of a prehistoric monster, that they came back suddenly to earth.

THE END

During 1925 the Mounted Police in Canada's Northwest Territories paid the government bounty of \$30 a head on 382 timber wolves.



Pink Lady

By Frank Richardson Pierce

An Irish feud, a practical joke—and the decks of a dreadnaught run red!



HE feud between the Moriartys and the O'Sheas dated from the battle of Manila Bay. Apprentice Seaman Moriarty, enjoying his first liberty ashore after many long, cramped months aboard ship, had taken on a quantity of Beno and Hong Kong Scotch. Due to improper stowage of cargo, Moriarty listed heavily to starboard. Presently he sighted another craft steaming toward him. Alcoholic fog blurred his vision somewhat, but he hazily recalled the rules of the road in such an emergency:

**When both side lights you see ahead
Port your helm and show your red.**

He executed this maneuver and muttered as he checked up on the situation:

**Green to green or red to red
Perfect safety—go ahead.**

"Let's see, the craft bearing down is Ensign Michael O'Shea. Rah for the Irish!" Under the emboldening influence of his cargo he hurled the barriers of regulations and hailed the ensign in the

most chummy manner. "It's a fine night for a murder, sir," he observed and saluted carelessly.

Dewey would have returned the salute and passed on without comment, but an ensign fresh from the Academy is steeped in tradition. Ensign O'Shea frowned. Besides he knew nothing of the potency of Beno; also the weather was very oppressive. In setting the genial seaman in his proper place he loosened a flow of language that fairly withered him.

Seaman Moriarty's alcoholic gesture was intended as a salute no doubt.

"It's all right with me, brother, only the American Navy sticks to its guns and it's the bes' dam' navy afloat or ashore. It is a fine night for a murder."

Moriarty wandered away until at length he beached himself in an abandoned hut. He awakened the following morning in his right mind, harried by an unquenchable thirst. Thanks to the lingering powers of Beno, quantities of water served merely to create a beautiful hangover. It was during the reflective period of the hangover that

he recalled an O'Shea had insulted a Moriarty.

"I'll square accounts with that fresh young 'boot' if it takes a lifetime," he vowed.

IN the years that followed Ensign O'Shea became Captain O'Shea and lost none of his youthful ideas of the fitness of things. Traditions of the Academy became unbreakable laws. His two-fisted tactics and a voice any second mate would have envied gave him the justly deserved title, "Roaring Mike."

Seaman Moriarty became Gunner Moriarty, one of the best gunnery technicians in the Navy. Many years' devotion to the work he loved had given him a practical knowledge of guns, torpedoes, shells, bombs and their intricate mechanisms that many a commissioned officer envied. The native ingenuity of many Moriartys has made the Navy what it is today.

On a balmy Spring afternoon Gunner Moriarty viewed the torpedo handling room in the depths of the dreadnaught with pardonable pride. His critical gaze wandered from racks holding slim steel torpedoes to the compressors that filled the air flasks supplying the torpedoes with motive power. Everything was in perfect order.

"Business before pleasure," he commented aloud, "and the business is over with. Now for pleasure."

The dreadnaught was slumbering in a quiet harbor, a goodly number of her crew ashore, enjoying liberty. Moriarty was alone with little prospect of intrusion by either officer or man. Even so he would be amply warned. To reach the compartment one must descend a long ladder. His immediate superior, Lieutenant Gridley, was aboard but he was doubtless deep in some problem of gunnery or aeronautics. Besides Gridley was a mustang officer. He had come up from the ranks. His sympathetic viewpoint as regards enlisted men was

something no Academy man could hope to acquire.

Moriarty opened a steel locker and removed a quart bottle containing fluid of pinkish hue. The same ingenuity that had served his country so well for nearly three decades was now to be applied to a strictly personal problem. The bottle contained grain alcohol required on shipboard for mechanical purposes. To insure its application to mechanical rather than social use a thoughtful Government had diluted it with potassium permanganate, a most effective deterrent. Shock-proof stomachs that accepted White Mule, Moonshine, or weird concoctions of the home distiller in suffering silence, broke forth in red revolution when introduced to "Pink Lady."

Moriarty connected an electric percolator to a convenient socket and poured a portion of the Pink Lady into a receptacle intended originally for orthodox coffee. A small glass was wired into position just above the liquid and above the glass he suspended a smooth glass bowl filled with ice. The vapor from the boiling fluid encountered the cold bowl, condensed and trickled into the glass—good grain alcohol fit for any man with an iron constitution. Moriarty's constitution ran heavily to iron.

The process was somewhat slow and Moriarty filled in the time humming an appealing little ditty of the Puget Sound Country:

Four and Twenty Yankees
Feeling mighty dry,
Motored to Vancouver
For a shot of rye.
When the rye was open
The Yanks began to sing,
To the devil with Volstead
God save the King.

He cooled the glass with ice, then downed the contents with an appreciative exclamation. Presently the atmosphere in the handling room became warm and genial, life for the sole occupant took on a rosy hue. Usually reserved and thoughtful, he became loquacious.

The immediate outlook was viewed charitably.

"Got to give credit where credit is due," he announced thickly. This is the best dam' Navy in the world." This was followed by a period of grave reflection. "Yes, sir, I'm here to tell yuh my ship is the best dam' ship in the best dam' Navy in the world!" He brought the palms of his hands together with a resounding crack of conviction. "My division is the best dam' division of the best dam' ship of the best dam' . . ."

He stopped suddenly as a pair of feet descended the ladder. He blinked a moment and recognized the shoes. His voice lifted musically:

"Lieutenant Gridley came up through the hawse pipe and there's tar in his hair. He's the best dam' gun'ry officer of the best dam' ship in the . . ."

The descending feet paused at this point and rapidly ascended. That was one of the many fine qualities about Gridley, he made due allowance for the weakness and falls from grace of efficient men, if not too frequent. He managed to miss seeing a lot he was in duty bound to report if he saw.

Moriarty again glanced approvingly about the handling room. His gaze stopped at the loud speaker. By speaking in a normal tone his voice would boom forth in every compartment in the ship. His expression changed slowly from geniality to firm resolution. He stepped to the instrument, squared off and announced:

"It's a fine afternoon for a murder, sir!"

Like a voice from the mysterious beyond the words beat against Lieutenant Gridley's ear drums. He left the compartment hurriedly and peered down upon the culprit.

"Pipe down, Moriarty," he ordered sharply. "The captain might have heard you."

"That was my intention, sir, this being a private affair between the Mo-

riarty and the O'Sheas datin' back to the shindy at Manila Bay."

Moriarty stood stiffly at attention when Gridley stepped from the ladder, though it was apparent a warm friendship existed. Many an experiment in gunnery improvement devices had been worked out with Gridley's inventiveness and Moriarty's practical experience.

"I hope . . ." Gridley began. The skipper's voice on the loud speaker interrupted authoritatively.

"Gunner Moriarty report to the captain immediately!"

Hot coffee, cold water and fright combined could not have sobered Moriarty as quickly. He hopped to obey. The wardroom country seemed depressingly gloomy as he entered the sacred precincts. He progressed by a series of mental thrusts and a prayer on his lips. The prayer was answered. Respite came! Unconsciously he muttered, "Pink Lady!"

But a different sort of a lady was Kathleen O'Shea. She went in for delicate shades and tints of pink as exquisite as herself. In addition to her mother's vivid beauty she had more than a dash of Old Roaring Mike's fire and spirit in her makeup. The wills of father and daughter clashed on occasion. Ultra-feminine she might be in appearance, yet she could do a hundred yards in a swimming tank close to the record and had once swum Golden Gate. In Navy circles she proved to be a disturbing element. Ensigns hovered in the distance, lieutenants made romantic love, and captains regretted the passing of time.

It might be guessed Miss Kathleen was difficult to manage, unless she wished to be managed. She was! Roaring Michael O'Shea could manage a dreadnaught and a thousand men, or a battleship division, but he had tough sledding with either his wife or daughter.

Gunner Moriarty steamed by the skipper's door at full speed and permitted Miss Kathleen to enter. There was no

ceremony. She merely thrust her head through the opening and said, "Hello, Old Dear!"

"Old Dear" grunted.

"Be seated, Kathleen," he rumbled. "I wish to have a serious talk with you."

"Fire when ready, Gridley!" she lightly invited.

"It's concerning that damned mustang, Kathleen, that I sent for you!"

Into the word "mustang" the skipper put all the aversion an Academy man of the old school has for the officer who comes from the ranks, or the hawse pipe. There was a fine blending of contempt, indignation and rage in his tone. Except for a fleeting flash of fire in her eyes the daughter seemed unruffled.

"Them's harsh words, Dad," she said sweetly.

"Roarin' Mike hasn't got the range at all," mused Moriarty, "but she's putting him in a frame of mind that'll make it tough for me, or kill his spirit for the time being."

"Very harsh words, Dad," the girl repeated.

"Gridley's worse than a mustang. He had his chance in the Academy but was kicked out."

"I believe the Academic diagnosis of the malady was ineptitude," she replied, "but I am told the real reason was because the fires of inventive genius consumed hours intended for study. However, he came into the wardroom through the hawse pipe, thanks to the war. I believe he did a number of thrilling things with a seaplane and annexed a medal or two to wear along with his cocked hat on formal occasions."

The skipper made a brave effort to be calm and succeeded temporarily.

"Kathleen, be serious. This is a serious matter, yet you seem utterly shameless! Don't you realize this service has traditions? Why do you flaunt yourself brazenly in public with the damned cuss, when any number of

Academy men are standing by awaiting the word to come alongside?"

"Really, Dad, much as I dislike to ruffle your feelings, the traditions of service are nothing in my young life where that big boy is concerned."

"Hell's delight!" groaned the skipper. "Are you engaged?"

"No such luck. He hasn't asked me." She managed to say it without blushing, thanks to pent-up rage.

"Dam' his impudence! He's the only officer footloose and in his right mind that hasn't. Why hasn't he?" He had always known Gridley was a dreaming ass. This proved it.

"Why hasn't he?" she repeated. "How should I know? I've done my best with the few charms nature has given me, plus a moonlight night, waving palms and soft music, but he won't give me a tumble. I think perhaps I shall have to throw myself at him."

"Kathleen!" Roaring Mike stood up and paced the room. "Don't make light of this affair!"

"I'm not. Far be it from such. It is a tragedy when a girl throws her heart at a man's feet and he can't even see it."

"I've tried to approach this affair with my usual diplomacy." At this point Kathleen repressed a giggle. "Now I shall assert my authority. You can go to the dance with him tonight as you planned, but that ends it! He's through for all time. Make it plain to him. Emphatic! If he still persists, then who knows but he'll be ordered to Guam or some jungle post for extended duty?"

She caught the threat and the feminine counterpart of Old Roaring Mike's jaw hardened, then relaxed in a soft smile. Something told the skipper this last salvo was a misfire. Following regulations he elevated his guns and waited the prescribed time before pulling the charge.

"If you weren't such a lovable old bluff," she said softly, "I should be angry at the bare suggestion of such un-

fair tactics as a transfer, but . . .” She again smiled as she fired a salvo of her own, every projectile of which found its mark. “Lieutenant Gridley has resigned from the Navy!”

“Resigned, eh? Boys made it too hot for him!” The skipper rubbed his hands in satisfaction.

“Quite the contrary. I rather think the feeling toward mustang officers has died down since the war. Lawrence Gridley resigned because rules and regulations cramp his style. He can’t argue with superior officers very well, so he is returning to the attack as a civilian. When he has proved to certain stubborn staff and line officers that it is possible to bomb a battleship out of the water with his new type of plane and gear and his rather interesting system of range finding, I think he will then return to the service.”

“He mentioned certain stubborn officers, did he? Hah! I’m one of ’em. I told him he’d better make good as a lieutenant before tackling problems a staff of veterans is working on.”

“He has spent a considerable part of his private fortune in this work. There are two people who have faith in him, and the most important one is Lieutenant Gridley. Recognition is due him and he is clever enough to force it.”

“Hmmm! Just let him tread on my toes with his recognition forcing and see what happens! I’ve never been beaten yet and I don’t propose to spoil a lifetime record by yielding to a damned mustang.” With this deft the skipper looked for a loophole of escape and found it. “Come here and kiss your old Dad and stop arguing with me. There, that’s better. Now shove off. Can’t you see I’m busy?”

Because she knew this Dad of hers Kathleen O’Shea obeyed. She knew there would be no relenting where Gridley and his ideas were concerned. Each belonged to a school of clashing military thought, the one believing the battleship was doomed, the other regarding planes as merely valuable aids.

Roaring Mike O’Shea was silent for several moments after his daughter’s departure. Then, becoming conscious of an alien presence, he glanced up.

“What the devil do you want, Moriarty?”

“You passed the word for me, sir!” Moriarty awaited the deluge.

“Huh! The devil! That girl knocked it out of my head. Get out!”

Moriarty did not wait for a second order. He silently faded away.

He found Lieutenant Gridley in dungarees working on a range-finding device that would permit a man two miles in the air to direct the fire of a battleship at a target below the horizon.

• “What happened?” queried the lieutenant with keen interest. “You’ve been gone long enough.”

“Miss O’Shea slipped in ahead of me. She was the target for the Old Man’s guns, but he didn’t have the range. She left him a shattered, smouldering hulk. He treated me almost decently and forgot what he wanted me for.” Into Moriarty’s eyes crept an expression of reproach. “You’ve resigned!”

“Yes, it takes effect tomorrow. I thought I told you. Don’t look so glum about it, I’ve got it figured out. You are due to retire a month hence. Very well, retire and come work for me. Even after I have proved a number of things there will be plenty of work for you. But you’ve got to lay off the hooch, Moriarty.”

“That’s fine, sir. I swore off!”

“When?”

“About five minutes ago, when Roarin’ Mike was trying to recall what he wanted me for. Terrible sensation!”

“Swearing off?”

“No, wondering if the old boy was a mind reader. I’m through for good. I’ve said it a couple of hundred times in my life, but this time goes. No more Pink Lady unless . . . well, I might want to celebrate some big day, but it’ll

have to be a bigger day than the Fourth of July or New Year's."

Moriarty, as usual, was very serious. All men are serious about swearing off. It is a serious thing at the time.

THE O'Sheas had leased a comfortable home during the period of the ship's overhaul at the Navy Yard. Lieutenant Gridley in formal dress, medals and all, stepped from his car and was duly announced. He wondered if the old skipper would be at home, but he did not care much.

The skipper was.

"Come in," he ordered, "and sit down. Kathleen will be ready in fifteen minutes."

He regarded Gridley critically and grudgingly admitted he was handsome and looked like an Academy man. Roaring Mike tapped an article he had been reading in a Navy publication.

"You're the author of this damned libel!" he shouted.

"Aircraft vs. Seacraft," read Gridley. "My honest opinion, sir!"

"How the devil can the Navy Department get a decent appropriation from Congress for the improvement of yards, the elevation of guns to a par with those of foreign fleets, when stuff like this comes out? One would think the battleship was ready for the junk heap. It's piffle and bunk and you know it!"

"I can . . . Gridley began.

"You can do nothing," interrupted Roaring Mike, tapping his contentions into the younger man's knee. "Granted bombers destroyed the battleships *Virginia* and *New Jersey*; neither was manned nor attempted a defense. The Allies bombed the Zeebrugge flood gate for four years and never hit it, while the Germans bombed the flood gate at Dunkirk with no better success. A German battle-cruiser was bombed a thousand times when she was aground, hit sixteen times, then shoved off for the Black Sea."

"Which gets us down to the matter

of efficient devices in range-finding," replied Gridley calmly enough. "It is no idle boast when I say I can take my light bomber out any time and give your ship a fine old pelting. I can even give you advance warning and do it. I'll go further. You can send your airplanes up and if they can outmaneuver me I'll call it a day and not drop a bomb."

"Huh! Is that a challenge?" There was plenty of fight in Old Roaring Mike's attitude now. He was leaning forward, his gray mustache seemed to bristle, his teeth set. "Is it a challenge?"

"Most assuredly, if you wish to take it as such?"

"Hah! Then I accept! Do your damndest, and let me tell you I'll have several newspaper men aboard when we sail to join the fleet. I propose to settle this once and for all!"

"And if you lose?"

"I won't lose! You'll have to step like hell to convince me. Nothing in the way of a perfunctory demonstration goes. You've got to drive your facts home and make 'em stick. If you do all that, I'll back water. Yes, by the eternal I'll . . ."

He glanced toward Kathleen O'Shea, who stood in the doorway waiting, then back to Gridley. A flash of understanding seemed to pass between them.

"Yes," said the skipper, "if you do all you claim, you're entitled to anything in the world."

Long after the sound of Gridley's motor had died Roaring Mike puffed angrily at his pipe. Presently he chuckled.

"I'll get two of the best newspaper men I know, let 'em see what happens with their own eyes, and they'll set that chump in his place. One thing Kathleen can't stand is a person who makes himself ridiculous."

RED TAPE upset plans, as it frequently does, and Moriarty did not quit the dreadnaught until a day previous to sailing. Two tight-lipped,

keenly observing individuals had taken quarters aboard. Moriarty recognized them as newspaper writers who would have made fine umpires. In all they did they called the play as they saw it, regardless of who might be hit by chips they scattered.

Moriarty found the hangar deserted, but Gridley's seaplane was in readiness for the test. The gunner was moved to boundless admiration as he inspected the laboratory. Everything had the stamp of the Navy about it.

In the plane itself he found dual controls and the most compact range finder he had ever seen. The service had nothing to equal it as yet. Mirrors and lenses combined to reflect what lay below. The scene appeared on a square of ground glass. There were cranks to turn and indicators that changed numbers with every movement. Altitude, drift, speed of plane, speed of target, were all taken care of. Gridley had gone straight to the heart of things and devised instruments comprehensive to even an untrained mind. The delicate combination of trained operators and complicated instruments had been eliminated.

"He's got to win," Moriarty muttered. "Those newspaper boys have got to be impressed with what's taking place over their heads. Now . . . if I hadn't taken the pledge, I'd give my mind a bit of stimulant and there'd be things doing tomorrow. A mind sure sparks when encouraged a bit. Then there's the grudge of the Moriartys against the O'Sheas. If I was a bit clever I'd tie the two together."

He indulged in a period of reflection. Five minutes later it dawned upon him this was one of the greatest days of his life. Retirement from the service with an honorable record of duties well performed! The thought was so pleasant he unconsciously hummed a tune:

Four and twenty Yankees,
Feeling mighty dry,
Motored to Vancouver. . . .

This gave him an idea. Navy habits

are difficult to shake, hence Gridley must have a bit of grain alcohol for mechanical purposes. The search was lengthy and thorough. Gridley did have grain alcohol for mechanical purposes. Incidentally it had been diluted as a matter of course.

Moriarty hesitated briefly, very briefly, then searched the Gridley apartment close at hand. He returned with a percolator, glass, bowl and cracked ice. Some minutes later he turned on the switch and awaited results. The result was held up for inspection.

"Well, as the Governor of North Carolina said to the Governor of South Carolina . . . Ahh! Here's another to the conclusion of long and honorable service in the best dam' Navy in the world. Ahh!"

A period of reflection, then:

"And still another to all officers that come up through the hawse pipe. May they never get the tar out of their hair. Ahh! Boy, you're going strong to-night."

He glanced about the hangar until he caught sight of the telephone directory. This gave him a brilliant idea. Failing to find the number, he called information and was rewarded in due time with a gruff hello.

"Gunner Moriarty, U. S. N., retired, sends his compliments to Cap'n Michael O'Shea, U. S. N., unretired, an' reminds him *'t's a fine night for a murder!*"

The click of the receiver on the other end of the line nearly took Moriarty's head off.

True to his prediction the Moriarty mind commenced to spark under encouragement. With dignity born of the occasion he inspected the practice bombs in the plane's magazine. They were designed to hit, but not harm. Moriarty shook his head.

"No good. It'll take more'n that to dent Roarin' Mike's hide. It's tougher'n the skin of a conning tower. No sense in a man like Gridley awaiting to be re-

warded in heaven. I'm in favor of making the decks run red, yep, red! I'll incorp . . . incorp . . . I'll corporate ideas of my own!"

In the gray of dawn he refilled the plane's magazine with bombs of his own choosing, then blissfully fell asleep, where Gridley found him a half-hour later. Gridley read the signs correctly and dismissed the incident with a crisp, "Might have known he'd celebrate. He'll be all right in the morning."

STIRRED into wakefulness, Moriarty licked dry lips with a tongue suggestive of a wad of cotton and looked about.

"How'd I get here?" he queried.

"Climbed there, I suppose," replied Gridley. "Found you asleep in the plane last night. Figured the way you felt you'd sleep as well there as anywhere. We're ready to shove off as soon as we eat a bite."

"I'll be ready as soon as I drink a gallon of water and spill another gallon over my head."

Swearing cheerfully, Moriarty loosened cramped joints and adjusted his clothing. The percolator reminded him in part of the night's doings, but only in part. The highest lights did not intrude just then. They came later with brilliance little short of blinding.

The hangar was located on a quiet lake, one of thousands along the sea-coast from which a seaplane might be launched in smooth water and return to in safety after a raid. Moriarty was cold even when garbed for the flight. Somewhat hazily he recalled tucking a bottle into his overcoat pocket the previous night. He investigated and presently drained a half-filled pint flask. Hidden fires in his being kindled. He felt warmer and cracked the palms of his hands together.

"Let's go!" he shouted. "The enemy awaits."

Gridley eyed him hopelessly, then grinned.

"Might have known you had an eye opener cached away. Oh, well, climb in, but don't fool with the controls until I pass the word."

The plane taxied down the mirroring waters of the lake, cleared, circled, skimmed the tree tops and shot straight seaward. Within a few minutes a range of mountains came over the horizon and vanished beneath their wings as if they remained moveless in midair while the world turned with velvet smoothness below.

It was dark in the valley when the sun caught their wings. By the time the light line had crept from crested peak to valley floor the sea was dead ahead. From their elevation it seemed placid, except where land and water met—a line of seething surf, smothering, irregular, like a swan's-down boa carelessly flung aside.

The section directly below moved in natural colors across the ground glass field of the range finder as if fed in at one edge and spilled out the other. Here and there surf-fringed rocks stood bleakly alone. Once a flock of startled ducks, dangerously close to the plane, yet indicated on the field by tiny black dots in V-formation, came and vanished.

The battleship had evidently entered fully into the spirit of the game. No tell-tale wisp of smoke drifted above the horizon to betray her position. When at last Gridley located her she was steaming full speed southward.

A reckless smile flashed across his face. A thrill akin to that he had known in the North Sea swept through him.

The world below turned rapidly and brought the great ship nearer and nearer. Like the bleak rocks, she was ringed with white. Foam spreading fanlike from her clipper bow seethed along her beams and spread astern.

Gridley was too high for them to spot him except by sheer accident. He intended to remain so until the moment of attack. Forward, neatly toggled,

swung two bombs filled with chemicals similar to those used in life buoy markers.

Contact with water started both a flare and smoke cloud. The plane swooped down. A moment later two white smudges marked the spot where the bombs had struck. He checked up on his range in a series of swift movements. The battleship blurred, then focused sharply on the ground glass field.

"Let 'em go, Gridley!" shouted Moriarty over the telephone. In his tone was repressed excitement and utter elation.

"My string has gone. We'll check up and cut yours loose," Gridley replied.

THE dreadnaught's quarterdeck had once been a joy to Captain O'Shea's eyes. It was spotless and roomy. Then the madness or planes came and yard workmen built a catapult down the center, a device that profaned the gaze of one who loved quarterdeck traditions. It was an outrage, a crime and an abomination, but an order, and that settled it. Like birds poised for flight two planes rested on either side.

The drone of Gridley's plane as it dropped from the blue sent a tingle of excitement through the battleship. Aft, the skipper peered through binoculars with skeptical eyes. He mistook the chemical bombs for misses and an exclamation of satisfaction escaped him.

No one was prepared for what took place when the plane swept back to the attack. Officers and men alike were dumfounded. Then training told and a number of things took place swiftly. Two men rushed forward and picked up a seaman knocked to the deck by a descending missile. His head and shoulders were a gory mass.

The officer of the deck swore furiously. From the ship's funnel came the dense black plumes of the smoke screen. The dreadnaught veered from

its course in an effort to get out of range.

Forward a bosun's mate lay groaning, his head and white hat stained deeply. At the skipper's elbow his messenger suddenly crumpled. The skipper himself was stricken by the same blast from the blue.

A newspaper man with rare presence of mind dove headlong for a turret. In one second he had seen enough to spread through eight columns, but as dead men tell no tales he wanted to live to relate this smashing story.

High above the plane banked and returned for the final attack. The radiophone brought a frantic message to Gridley's ears.

"For God's sake, Gridley, cease firing!"

They came into range at that moment and Moriarty released the contents of the second magazine. A brief interval and they had cleared the smoke screen. Again, the voice:

"Gridley, are you mad?"

An AA gun suddenly let go and a shell burst near enough to rock them. This was the real thing. Gridley tensed with excitement and utter joy. Of course they wouldn't hit him, but they intended to give him some real action, perhaps frighten him into descending alongside to be laughed at, then hauled aboard.

A shift in the breeze cleared the battleship's stern. One plane had been shot from the catapult, the second was preparing to follow. Gridley banked and watched the result. The plane left the ship perfectly and winged its way swiftly aloft.

"That puts a crust on the whole thing," said Moriarty. "We can show 'em the getaway now."

Gridley fled, the other plane in hot pursuit. Twenty miles down the coast he alighted in a protected cove and taxied to the beach. Within two minutes the pursuing plane came alongside. When the pilot stepped ashore he carried a service pistol in his hand. On his

face was written lingering amazement and present determination. Here was a young man who meant business.

He covered the pair without hesitation.

"Are you crazy, Gridley?" he cried, watching them narrowly. "You've convinced the world of your ability to hit a ship, but man, oh, man, our decks ran red with brave American blood! From bow to stern they died like flies. They were carrying the captain below when I left."

"What do you mean, Stuart?" Gridley realized the other was in deadly earnest. In some way his experiment had resulted in horrible tragedy.

Stuart was convinced he faced madness now.

"What do I mean? Man alive you bombed us with those infernal bombs of yours and scored hit after hit. The ship is a shambles." He came closer. You are under arrest, of course!"

Gridley ignored the pilot and his pis-

tol. He recalled the empty bottles of Pink Lady, the damning percolator and . . . Moriarty. He whirled on his assistant furiously.

"Moriarty, did you tamper with my bombs?"

Moriarty seemed suddenly to realize that he had, and inwardly he thanked God for the American sense of humor.

"Aye-aye, Sir, now that you mention it, I did. I wanted you to score hits they'd remember, hits the higher ups couldn't pigeonhole when reported, and I loaded the magazines with the biggest bombs I could get of their kind."

"Go on, man. What were they?" Both officers looked at Moriarty with drawn faces.

"Mr. Stuart, will you present the Moriarty compliments to the O'Sheas on your return to the ship, and just mention this was a fine day for a murder? The bombs were very red, over-ripe tomatoes."

Forest Ranger Battles Bear

Battling for their lives with a huge grizzly in a dark cabin, Neil Allen of the Forest Service and a sixteen-year-old boy named Walter Wrigley came near obtaining free one-way tickets to the Happy Hunting Grounds last spring.

They were out in the Brazau country and had taken refuge for the night in a cabin frame on which tar paper had been hung to exclude the spring snows. At about 2 a. m. Allen was awakened by what he took to be a porcupine. He started to climb out of his blankets, when suddenly he became aware that he had a bear for company. Trying to get away the animal became entangled in the ranger's blankets, and stood upright endeavoring to free itself.

Allen shot bruin in the neck. The bear commenced a rapid tour of the cabin, meanwhile being riddled with bullets by the two men as the maddened animal charged over them. Finally Allen found that his magazine was empty, but the bear still "doing business." Then the ranger jumped for the bear, and slashing at its throat succeeded in killing it.

So close had the bear been to the two men on the ground that his fur was singed with the discharges from the rifles, while for the same reason the bed clothes had been set afire, which added to the thrills of the encounter.

—A. De Herries Smith.



Carry On!

By John C. Cudoba

Swirling bolos, biting deep, cannot clean the slate of the man who weakens in the Service

THE first storm of the rainy season had increased to a typhoon of howling wind and steady drum-fire of rain when Captain McRae collided with the last man of the khaki-clad patrol, then trudged past the panting men to pause at the river's edge.

He turned and raised his hand. Back of him, in the cavernous depths of the jungle trail, the long line of Philippine Constabulary came to a halt; beady black eyes blinked at him expectantly, grins flashed across the fatigue-distorted faces of his men.

"You spunky little devils," he muttered in admiration, "you don't know when you're licked. Rest!"

Fifty bayoneted carbines thudded to the muddy ground; the Filipinos relaxed, with subdued voices and occasional glances to the rear.

McRae again faced the snarling stream that barred their path. Three weeks before they had crossed the

bridge of bamboos, spliced end to end, thirty feet above a bone-dry watercourse; now, in the afternoon gloom, only the liana of rattan—precarious life-line—was visible, an arc of safety that bucked the maddened torrent.

After a backward glance that brought the carbines across shoulders with a rattle of gun-slings, McRae grasped the liana with both hands and stepped into the stream. His hemp-soled *alparagatas* slid along the slippery bamboo underfoot as he waded out into the tugging current. The raw bolo-slash that traversed bare forearm from wrist to elbow twinged with augmented pain at the touch of icy water. Near midstream, where the life-line was ever and anon submerged, the captain squinted back across his shoulder; strung out along the liana were the little brown men, heads and shoulders barely above water, battling doggedly against wind and current.

McRae held his breath as the

swirling mill-race engulfed him and tore his feet out from under. Hand over hand he pulled himself ashore as the line sagged under the weight of men.

He leaned heavily against a tree as the soldiers began to emerge, muddy rivulets running down their torn, blood-streaked shirts and trousers. He slapped his dripping campaign hat against his leg and waited until the gasping Filipinos had recovered their breath.

They staggered into line at his command and once more floundered over fallen trees, rocks and other debris that blocked the trail. McRae slackened his pace and swore under his breath as a corporal directly behind him touched his arm. He faced about. Several men had fallen but were gamely scrambling erect.

"Poco mas, you hellions," he urged.

A feeble cheer answered his encouraging grin as the line continued to stumble along. The trail swerved, then opened upon a large clearing, on the other side of which stood long low barracks with walls of bamboo wattle and grass-thatched roofs beside the small shack that served as officers' quarters.

McRae, quickening his step, drew his Colt and fired several shots into the air. At an answering shot from a sentry the flimsy door of the barracks swung inward, khaki-uniformed figures shot out in groups down the short rickety ladder—each man slipping on haversack or buckling ammunition belt as he joined the company forming before the *cuartel*. An old sergeant, his blouse and trousers darkening under the sluicing rain to the color of his dusky face as he raced across the plaza, joined McRae and saluted.

"Every man available, Toribio," snapped the captain. "A week's rations and a hundred rounds for each man. Have the *practicante* look to the wounded immediately." He

nodded toward the patrol that wheezed and wavered in his wake. "Where's the *teniente*?" he demanded.

They had arrived in front of the *cuartel* under the eyes of the lined-up soldiers.

"Seguro, *teniente* take siesta," answered the sergeant.

He saluted, then bellowed swift commands as McRae turned and strode toward the officers' quarters. The *cuartel* shook with the tramp of feet as each soldier rushed to get ready for the hike. McRae stumbled up the short ladder and slid back the panel of bamboo that served as door to his shack.

"Hell!" he ejaculated.

Festooned over a rattan chair beside a table littered with cards and currency, was Lieutenant Trask breathing heavily, his smooth, flushed face under touseled yellow hair looking very immature in the dim light. Sprawled in a steamer chair near the shuttered window snored a fat civilian in soiled white duck. One look at the apoplectic face brought another explosion from McRae.

"Piggott! The damned tin-horn!" he cried, "*muchacho!*" His angry call filled the shack. A door leading to the lean-to kitchen slid back; a frightened house-boy peered in.

"*Agua, pronto!*" McRae ordered. "Then throw together some commissaries and togs for the *teniente*."

He snatched the bucket of icy water from the servant and poured half its contents on the upturned face of his aide. As an afterthought he dashed the rest into the moon face of Mr. Piggott. Then he watched sardonically while the men gagged and spluttered to returning consciousness.

"Snap out of it, Trask!" he barked, watching the young officer rub the water out of his baby-blue eyes. "Speed counts!"

Trask dived into his bedroom and

returned buckling on belt and holster. McRae's black eyes snapped ominously as his aide stooped to re-wind a loosened spiral leggin.

"Your men are waiting," he prodded. "Hop to it!"

Trask, still only half awake, looked at him with maddening hesitation.

"Been shooting up Ti-Dukduk's outfit a week," vouchsafed McRae; "had to return because the men were all in. You'll pick up the signs—he's got a couple o' hundred men—five miles east of here, just where the trail forks for the East Coast and south."

"All right, sir," saluted Trask, turning to go.

"Just a second"—McRae's roving eye rested on an iron chest in a corner of the room—"Why is the pay chest open?"

Trask started, ran to the chest, and fumbled about its contents.

"My God!" he cried, springing erect with several long envelopes in his hand. "I must have played the pay funds!"

"Huh?" blurted McRae, looking from the agonized face of Trask to Piggott who was seated on the edge of his chair, still gulping after the impromptu shower bath.

"We had a li'l game, captain," leered the gambler, his mud-colored pop-eyes and flaming face giving him the look of a surprised gold fish. "But I think the shave—er—the lieutenant is mistaken about—"

"Was that medicine doped, you hound?" interrupted Trask, pointing to a small bottle on the table and fingering his holster. "Speak up, or—"

"That'll do, Trask!" ordered McRae. "No time for that now. Hike!"

Trask, with haggard face, dropped the envelopes back into the chest and slammed down the lid.

"You're right, sir," he acknowledged miserably. "There's no other way out."

"You young idiot!" McRae hissed into his ear. "That's no way to go into a scrap. Forget the tin-horn until you come back. Then we'll see."

"I'll stand the gaff," Trask assured him, and started for the door.

"One thing more," McRae added, following him. "This is your first trip into the bosque, so listen to Toribio and follow his hunch every time."

He stood in the doorway, watching the Constabulary double across the plaza with the tall lieutenant leading. As the long line hit the trail he shrugged his shoulders and turned to face the gambler.

"About that game, captain," began Piggott ingratiatingly, stuffing his loot into a capacious pocket.

"Time enough for that after chow," McRae cut him short.

While the boys cleared the table, he left the shack and visited the *cuartel*. The men, except the corporal's guard, were stretched out on cots, dead to the world; some showed signs of fever, others were liberally plastered and bandaged. McRae returned the *practicante's* salute.

"When you're through here, Pedro, come to the shack and fix up my arm," he said to the man, and returned to his quarters.

A shower and a complete change edged his appetite for the meal which proved a miserable affair, under the smoky lamp, with the uneasy Piggott as companion. The table cleared, one of the boys followed by the *practicante* brought in a basin of hot water and permanganate. Piggott turned a sickly green as McRae sat stolidly on a stool while the native surgeon stitched the slash now blackened by the disinfectant and edged with angry red.

"I'm hitting the trail, captain," whined Piggott. "Thanks for your hospitality."

McRae stared speculatively at the gambler, who had covered his bald

head with a dingy sun helmet and was waiting for his *cargador* to finish packing their outfit.

"How did you come to drift up here?" demanded the captain. "Did they run you out of the coast towns at last?"

Piggott deprecatingly waved a pudgy hand.

"I have business in Robongan," he explained. "Important business."

"Business, huh?" repeated McRae. "How the deuce you get up the nerve to travel in a Pulahan-infested jungle gets me. Don't you know Ti-Dukduk's on the war path and you're fifty kilometers from the nearest pueblo? You've been in Samar long enough to realize the risk."

Piggott hesitated. "Would they harm an inoffensive civilian?" he asked.

"They wouldn't do a thing to him; just scatter his carcass along the trail after relieving him of his wad. Hike if you want to, but you'll never reach the coast."

"I'll stay a while, then," Piggott decided. "That is, if I'm not imposing on your good nature."

"Not by a long shot; it'll be a pleasure," McRae assured him with well-feigned heartiness. "What say to a game?"

"Ga-me? Gu-hood Lord!" stutted Piggott. "Why you've got the name of never touching a card!"

"Just to pass the time," was McRae's off-hand rejoinder. "Are you on?"

"Oh, sure!" Piggott agreed, still frankly puzzled.

Out of a dirty duffle bag he fished a fresh pack while the captain lifted the lid of the chest and scrutinized its contents.

"Poor son of a gun," mused McRae as he examined each docketed envelope. "That skunk sure trimmed him—cleaned out half the pay funds as well as his private roll. Thank the Lord mine wasn't touched."

They sat down and played in tense silence. Whenever the roar of the storm died down nothing was heard save the flip of card or the rustle of currency. McRae covertly watched Piggott's every move but grew more glum as the game progressed. Piggott was playing his best, his slickest; slowly but surely he depleted his opponent's funds, until the whole pile reposed before him.

"Whew!" Piggott whistled, mopping his inflamed face with a dirty bandanna. "For a rookie you sure did give me a run."

McRae rose, his face drawn and lined under the yellow light.

"If the game's over, let's hit the hay," suggested Piggott. "I call this a good day's work."

"It's not!" McRae curtly informed him.

Walking to the chest he stooped, paused, then deliberately extracted the remaining pay funds.

"Here's some more," he declared, slapping the bills down on the table.

Piggott eyed the money with a glint in his fishy eyes.

"Not the pay funds, m'boy?" he asked maliciously.

"What's that to you?" retorted McRae.

"Nothing, but I can't put up—"

"Put up or shut up!" snarled the desperate officer.

"Don't get red-headed," placated Piggott. "It's your funeral."

McRae resumed his seat while Piggott shuffled the cards. Mechanically the captain cut the deck, then waited for the deal.

"Let's make it worth while," invited Piggott. "I'm fed up on playing for chicken feed; that's all right for pikers." McRae looked at him questioningly. "How much have you got there?" Piggott nodded toward the bills.

"Four hundred pesos," answered McRae after a swift count.

"All right. That'll make four draw

—a hundred apiece. Each feller draws a card; high man wins. Got the nerve?"

McRae's jaw muscles tautened. He nodded, drew a card from the proffered deck and laid it face down. As Piggott was drawing his card, a leg of his stool slipped down between the bamboo floor slats, causing him to fumble and half topple over. McRae rose and caught the gambler's wrist in an iron grip. His right hand shot down, then up with leveled Colt. A twist of the gambler's wrist shook four cards from his sleeve to the table.

"Got you, you swine!" gloated the captain. "Sit tight!"

He turned the cards face up—two aces and two kings. His own card, when he flipped it over, was a queen.

"Now talk!" invited McRae, jarring the gambler down to his stool.

Piggott cowered before the steady circlet of steel that had assumed monstrous proportions before his goggling eyes. He cleared his throat, endeavored to speak, but merely gurgled, with lower lip sagging.

"You doped the kid!" McRae accused.

Piggott nodded dumbly.

"Trimmed him?"

Again the nod.

"Cough up!" growled McRae.

Piggott pulled out a hugh pouch. "Everything?" he quavered.

"No, just ours."

McRae watched the gambler count the bills with trembling fingers and shove across the amount demanded. A quick tally assured him that the money, personal and pay, was all there.

He rose, threw the bills into the chest, then faced the cringing man. Slowly he replaced his gun, drew a whistle from the pocket of his O. D. shirt and blew a shrill blast. A thud of feet, the door slid back and

a corporal stood blinking before them.

"Place this man under"—McRae hesitated the fraction of a moment—"under your protection. Give him a cot in the *cuartel*."

Piggott got to his feet and waddled in haste after the soldier. McRae followed them out, inspected sentry posts, returned to the shack and tumbled in his wet clothing on the welcome cot.

For an hour he slept in the dead silence that precedes dawn in the jungle. The storm had died down utterly.

Suddenly a wild yell broke the stillness—a shot—a scattering volley. Then pandemonium broke loose in the barracks. High above the bedlam rose a screeching raucous wail, like the bagpipes of a mad piper.

"Sweltering hellions!" cried McRae, up and sliding back the door before he was half awake. "That damned fox has doubled on his trail!"

Out of the shack he tumbled, down the swaying ladder, into the open. Stumbling along in the half-light, he discerned the ramshackle *cuartel* rocking from the fracas within; windows and door belched Pulahans and Constabulary locked in close embrace, wielding deadly bolo and bayonet. The only rifle fire emanated from a group in the center of the clearing where cooler heads had rallied to the corporal.

"The only chance!" muttered McRae, making for the group and vaguely aware of shadowy figures converging toward him.

"Fire at will," he ordered as he joined the soldiers and picked off the leader of a pack rushing toward them, each Pulahan screeching and honing his bolo on a whetstone strapped to his wrist.

As a misty ray of sunlight pierced the jungle wall, the uproar in the barracks ceased. From all around

sprang up dwarfed figures in scarlet breeches and dark blue blouses edged with red, dancing some hellish dance and keeping up a hideous yowling. At a blare from the war conchs, the mob rushed up and closed in on the doomed soldiers who had formed a circle of bristling bayonets. Several volleys thinned the ranks of the charging bandits but failed to check them. Bolo met bayonet with angry clash.

In a nightmare McRae grappled breast-to-breast with a sweating Pulahan and bashed his empty Colt into the distorted, upturned face. Bolos flashed about him; he seemed alone amid the frenzied snarling bandits.

A high-pitched yell sounded from the forest. McRae, lashing about with his heavy, copper-toed brogans as he clutched two Pulahans by the throat and crashed their skulls together, glimpsed a wave of Constabulary breaking into the clearing, with Trask and Toribio in the van.

A slither of light side-swiped his temple, the tumult of battle grew faint, and he knew no more.

It was twilight when McRae sat up in his cot, his bandaged head throbbing villainously, his muscles stiff and aching. Shakily he rose and tottered into the central room. Trask, industriously gorging on salt horse and steamed yams, rose, saluting with a grin.

"Well?" questioned McRae.

"Pulahans cleaned up," reported Trask. "Piggott killed, twenty men cashed in and a bunch wounded."

McRae nodded silently and poured himself a tin cup of steaming black coffee.

"How did you happen to get next to their maneuver?" he asked.

"Credit all goes to Toribio," declared Trask. "He soon found we were on the trail of a small decoy party and insisted we make a bee-line for the post, after detailing a

squad to run down the bunch that had led us astray. But say, captain, won't this make 'em sit up in Manila!"

"Will it offset your loss of the pay funds?" McRae inquired dryly.

"The devil!" Trask held his fork suspended in mid-air. "What a chump to have let that slip my mind!" He regarded his commander with dumb misery.

"Better lock the safe hereafter," suggested McRae. "I couldn't resist tampering with the funds."

With a startled cry Trask leaped to his feet, opened the chest and felt about the envelopes. He sprang erect with a loud whoop.

"Holy gosh, it's all there!" he cried, hastily counting the cash. "How did you do it?"

"Dumb luck mostly; smoked out Piggott and made him cough up. Narrow squeak, though."

"So I'm cleared," Trask chuckled.

"Think so?" countered McRae. "Remember, you're technically guilty."

"And so—" Trask dared not finish.

"And so, boy, we quit!" McRae completed the sentence.

"Quit! We?" Trask fell rather than sat on his stool. "Why, for Mike's sake?"

McRae gave him a summary of the preceding night's events.

"You see," he emphasized, "we're both guilty of gambling with government funds."

"I can't see it," Trask insisted stubbornly. "But, good Lord, captain, why did you take such a chance?"

"Because the record of the Service was clean before your fool break!" exploded McRae.

"Even though I haven't touched a card for ten years and never tampered with government money, I couldn't have this mess mentioned in the Gazette for all the world to read."

"No one will ever know," protested Trask with trembling voice.

"You're damned whistling, they won't!" retorted his chief. "But that's no alibi for us. If we don't quit I'll have to report it. We'd get cold comfort from 'Resignation requested for the good of the Service.'"

"I guess you're right," admitted Trask. "But it sure is hell, more'n hell, for you. Can't we begin over again somewhere else?"

McRae jumped to his feet and clutched a wisp of drab-colored hair as he reacted to the suggestion.

"Must have missed too many boats or gone loco not to have thought of that," he answered Trask's look of astonishment, "but you sure gave me an idea. Remember the letter I got from Major Anstruthers before going on the last patrol?"

Trask nodded.

"We came over as rookies with Hell-Roaring Jake," continued McRae, "then signed up with this outfit. The climate got Anstruthers. Last I heard of him he was with the Royal Mounted."

"And—" Trask prompted as the captain paused.

"He's organizing a regiment in Calgary for the Limies in Flanders. Wrote he's got all the two-fisted Canucks he wants but is shy on trained officers. How about it? Are you on? I guess I can promise you a commission."

"Am I on?" Trask fervently echoed. "Lead me to it!"

"It's a go then," declared McRae, grasping the hand of his grinning aide. "Anyway," he concluded, "now that Ti-Dukduk's gone, a feller'd die of Filipinitis or old age waiting for something to happen out there."

A Dangerous Bird's-eye View

The First National Bank of El Paso, Texas, usually sends about \$20,000 to its Octavia Street office on the first and fifteenth of every month to cash the pay checks of the men of the G. H. and S. A. Railroad.

One fifteenth of January I was putting a steam line about fifty feet in the air, and was sitting in a sling tightening hangers to the steam line cable that ran across Octavia Street.

I had just told my Mexican helper to take the tools to the car when the pay car drove up closely followed by another car bristling with armed bandits. The holdup men started shooting as soon as the guards stepped to the ground. The bank cashier was killed instantly; and the man carrying the money bag dropped it and ran like a deer.

My helper recognized one of the bandits and shouted out: "It's Carrasso!"

Carrasso turned in a flash and sent a bullet through the boy's heart. Before I could control myself I seized the 36-inch Stilson wrench that lay at my side and threw it at his head. The wrench missed Carrasso by ten feet and smashed the top of the car down over the driver. He, not knowing what was coming off, threw in the clutch and speeded off toward the Jaurez road, while the third bank guard who was lying in the street with a bullet through his thigh propped himself high enough to pick off Carrasso and another thug who was making a getaway by clinging to the spare. All the while the money bag reposed in the middle of the street in solitary grandeur.

The police arrived in time to get the wounded men and to start a futile pursuit of the bandit car; people flocked to the scene by the score; doctors rushed up to offer first aid to the maimed—and there I sat in my fifty-foot perch and howled for half an hour before they paid enough attention to pull my sling over and let me down.—Ward Drysdale.



The Winged Ones

By H. Field Leslie

Blood flows on the Treasure Trail—and Splint Moraine settles with fate!



FROM the dim thread of an ancient trail that wound its way among grim skeletons of tortured desert growths, a pallid cloud of dust rose and hovered and moved slowly on.

Stirred by the plodding hoofs of a pony, it lifted up in soft gray puffs to mingle in a choking drift that kept even pace with horse and rider—and with the two dark specks high above in the burnished arch of sky that were two patient buzzards wheeling.

The rider's eyes were bloodshot from the sting of dust and the fierce glare of sunlight that set all that silent world aflame. He kept his gaze grimly fixed upon another dust cloud weaving among distant low pinnacles of jagged rock where Roth and the Mexican, Vasquez, carrying with them a scrap of paper that was the key to a fabulous treasure, rode south ahead of him along that forgotten *Camino Real*.

His name was Splint Moraine, this lone rider on the old King's Road. He

was small and thin and wiry. His visage was dark and his eyes were as bright and hard and cruel as any ferret's. His hands, when they moved, were like two brown, restless snakes. He was—or had been until some thirty hours ago—a jackal of the race tracks, a follower of the crowds, a pickpocket. But these thirty hours since he had swung into saddle at Tia Juana in stealthy pursuit of Roth and the Mexican, less than two days of contact with the hot savagery of the desert, had been sufficient to transform him from a slinking pickpocket, intent only upon watching his chance to steal, to a reptile as deadly as any that crawled in all that arid vastness.

Thirst had played its part in that transformation. The only water hole encountered had been dry. Now his canteen was empty. He tried to kick his patient pony into faster pace, and he cursed aloud the blasting heat, the dust, the fantastic leering skeletons of gray-green vegetation. Soulfully he con-

signed the whole of Baja California to perdition.

Yet he kept doggedly on, held unchanging the distance between himself and that drifting dust cloud ahead that seemed ever on the point of vanishing from his ken. And as he rode he found a measure of solace in reviewing mentally that chance conversation he had overheard at the bar of the Ultima Chanza between the huge and evil-visaged Roth and the slender Mexican, Vasquez. Unguarded words were they that had set avarice flaming in Splint Moraine's twisted little soul.

"Of a certainty there is treasure there," the Mexican was saying to Roth when Splint came unnoticed to the bar beside them and ordered his fiery brew. "Treasure enough to make any two men rich beyond their wildest hopes—and all to be had for the finding and carrying away!"

The big man toyed with his glass for a moment, considering.

"If I did not know you for a man of your word, Carlos," he rumbled finally, "I should call you a liar and the story a fairy tale. Exactly where is this forgotten shrine?"

The men were conversing in Spanish. Splint understood the tongue and he listened eagerly while the Mexican made answer to the other's question.

"One does not reach it in a day, señor. It lies deep in the wild and lonely Sierra San Pedro Matir, far beyond the tumbled ruins of the ancient Mission San Borja. And that holy edifice was once considered one of the most inaccessible places on the face of the earth. Although I have never been beyond San Borja I think I know well the trail and the location of the shrine, for often have I heard my father describe both when speaking of boyhood pilgrimages, carrying offerings of silver. Legend has it that the good padres secreted all the offerings of gold and silver and jewels that came to the shrine in some nearby cavern. And there the treasure lies, intact to this day."

"Do none know where the stuff is hidden?"

"But few living, señor. I think perhaps my father knows. Some of our old——"

"Then why has it never been disturbed?" interrupted Roth.

"Because our people of the mountains are simple people and most devout," explained the Mexican. "They have fear."

"And you?" inquired Roth. "Have you no fear?"

"Of a certainty, my friend! Not for worlds would I commit such sacrilege. But I have learned much since I came down from the mountains. Were I to guide a good friend to this ruined shrine and then my back should happen to be conveniently turned——" The man Carlos shrugged expressively. "Could I be held responsible?"

Roth laughed.

"Carlos Vasquez, you are a damned hypocrite and a rascal. We shall start for that treasure in the morning. Now show me the route we must travel."

Upon the back of a manila envelope that Roth took from his pocket and tossed down upon the bar, Vasquez began to make lines. Splint Moraine cursed softly then because the great bulk of the man Roth prevented him from watching the progress of the Mexican's silver pencil.

"We ride south along the old Camino Real, señor," Vasquez explained as he sketched the route. "Here, two days down, is the deserted Mine of the Three Shafts. I make a cross for that. We should find water there—but one must carry a pail and a long rope to reach it. Next we come to the mission hamlet of San Gorgonio. There we may procure both food and lodging if we should wish. Several miles beyond the mission and a little aside from the trail to Borja is the house of my father. We will send an Indian runner ahead from the hamlet with word of our coming, so that my venerable sire may have mules in readiness for our pilgrimage

into the deep mountains, where horses would be useless. This he will be glad to do, for it is now twelve years since he has looked upon my face."

"Twelve years," commented Roth. "Think you, Carlos, he will know his rascally son?"

"He will know." The Mexican placed the tip of a slender forefinger upon a zig-zag scar that lay across his swarthy cheek. "He did that, my gentle father, with his mule whip when I was a boy—and suffered contrition ever after."

"Humph! Go on with your map!"

"From my father's house, here," continued the Mexican, "the trail leads to old San Borja. Another cross for those ancient ruins. From there a dim trail leads off into the mountains in this direction. Follow my pencil carefully, señor. . . ."

Again Splint Moraine, attention strained to fiddle pitch that he might miss no word of that explanation, cursed under his breath because he could not look upon the map at this tantalizing moment.

"A long day's journey over the roughest trail imaginable brings you to a mighty gorge among the mountains—like this, señor. It is here, midway of the gorge as I remember my father's words, that the shrine was located. And somewhere within this circle is the treasure we seek."

"And how are we to find it, once we get there?" demanded Roth.

"By searching carefully, señor. Unless my father knows its hiding place and may be persuaded to speak."

Roth picked up the envelope with its penciled lines and dots and crosses and restored it to his pocket.

"I'll keep the map, Carlos, in case something should befall you and I be left upon my own resources in that God-forsaken country. And now let's have another drink on it."

Splint fancied he detected in these last words of Roth's an undercurrent of sinister meaning, a significance that

boded ill for Carlos Vasquez. And as he slipped away and took up his station near the wide doorway where he could keep an eye upon the two men lingering under the brilliant lights at the bar, Splint chuckled grimly to himself.

Certainly the Mexican would never look upon that treasure. And neither would the evil Roth if he, Splint Moraine, could manage to get his fingers on the map and beat them to it. And so, when the two men left the Ultima Chanza together, Splint was upon their heels like a shadow.

Bad luck had been against him. He had found no opportunity that night to lift the map. . . . And so here was Splint Moraine, riding saddle-galled upon the old King's Road, cursing dust and buzzards and blasting heat, yet holding grimly to the trail. . . .

The afternoon hours wore away and the sun swung low in a bank of purple and crimson haze. Twilight came, and the darkness swiftly. Soon a pinpoint flicker of light far ahead on the trail told Splint that Roth and the Mexican had halted and built their supper fire. Splint dismounted and stretched his stiffened legs. He was devilishly thirsty. That would be the Mine of the Three Shafts where the two men were camped, he reflected.

Water there. But there would be no quenching thirst for him until Roth and Vasquez should be soundly asleep, so that he might safely accomplish his purpose.

In the beginning he had intended only to steal the map and reach the treasure before them. But the drag of each weary mile he had traveled this day had served to convince him of the futility of that plan. It had been all he could do to keep in view the dust cloud that marked the going of the two riders. They were accustomed to the saddle and traveled fast. Those two must be removed entirely from his path. . . . So, while the great stars grew overhead and the moon came up to soften the harshness of the land with a green and

ghostly radiance, he chafed away the hours until midnight.

The distant campfire had long since died. Splint rode on a little way, then dismounted and tied his horse to a cactus and crept forward on stealthy feet. Taking full advantage of every bit of shadow afforded by rock or hummock or fluted giant columns of *cardones*, he drew near the camp unchallenged. An automatic of small caliber was in Splint's pocket. But he was an indifferent shot and dared not chance its use until he should be close enough to be sure his work would be good. He knew full well that one bungled shot would mean for him the end of the treasure trail.

The two men lay in shadow at the base of a low backbone of rock. Foot by slow foot, crawling belly down upon the sand now, Splint wormed his way toward them. In the tenuous shadow cast by a clump of *ocatilla* whips he paused to reconnoiter—and at what he saw a chill of fear struck him immobile. Winking like a dull crimson firefly afloat in the pool of darkness where the men lay, glowed the burn of a cigaret.

One of the two was awake! Splint flattened like a lizard hiding. He had not reckoned on the pair keeping a night watch. With infinite caution, daring scarcely to breathe, he retreated until distance made it safe for him to get to his feet. He quickly found his horse and rode back up the trail until gaunt pinnacles of naked stone beside the way gave him hiding. Here he rolled himself in his blanket against the chill of the desert night. He slept fitfully, nursing thirst until the dawn, for he had no means of knowing that Vasquez, a light sleeper, had merely chanced to awaken and was enjoying a midnight cigaret before drifting off to slumber again.

Splint dared build no morning fire. He ate his unsavory breakfast cold. And after he had waited until he was reasonably certain that the two men

had broken camp and gone, he swung out into the trail.

Splint reached the mine shortly, and the smoking embers of a breakfast fire. The gray timbers of all three shaft houses were fallen into wreckage, leaving the black pits open to receive moisture in the season of rains. He found the shaft where Roth and the Mexican had drawn water. He blessed that chance remark of Vasquez's concerning the need of a rope and pail. He had brought both. Eagerly he sunk his pail into the dark depths and drew it brimming. The water was brackish and carried the odor of stagnation, but Splint drank it in great gulps. After his thirst had been appeased he filled his canteen, watered his horse and pressed on.

Twice during that forenoon Splint Moraine caught a view of the two mounted men, tiny figures crawling far ahead. The character of the country changed as he progressed, growing rough and broken. He entered at last a great gorge walled on either side with scoured cliffs. At mid-afternoon he came suddenly out upon a wider space and saw ahead the green of irrigated fields and orchards and the great bulk of a bell-towered mission.

For a while he debated whether to linger here where he had halted or to go boldly into the little hamlet as any honest traveler along the King's Road might go. He finally decided to tarry a while before showing himself. For he guessed that Roth and Vasquez having reached the mission so early in the afternoon, would probably not stay there the night but would replenish supplies and go on. He retraced his way into the throat of the gorge, withdrew behind a litter of boulders at one side of the trail. There he made himself comfortable until the sun was close to setting.

Splint rode into the one street of the little town in time to see his quarry riding out the other end. He bought *tortillas* and coffee, idled a while over the lunch, then followed through the dusk.

Throughout that day Roth and the Mexican had set a pace that taxed all Splint Moraine's resources to maintain. He hoped they would make camp early, for he was saddle sore and weary. He was taunted, too, by the growing fear that he would not be able to carry out his evil designs, that he would be cheated out of the treasure that lay at the end of the rapidly shortening trail. That disturbing thought roused him to desperation. Again tonight he would attempt to get the map, would try to finish those two who stood between him and uncounted riches. He shut his thin lips grimly. If he had half a chance, the deed would be done!

Roth and Vasquez did make camp soon. When their fire had died to a dull red glow of embers, Splint stalked the pair again, crept upon them with all the silence of a snake slipping from cover to cover. He reached a screen of boulders that lay a scant dozen feet away from the recumbent men. He listened keenly. Deep and steady breathing told him that both Roth and the Mexican were sleeping soundly. So sure of their treasure, now, thought Splint, that they were not troubling to keep guard. He left the boulders, breathing a fervent hope that the horses hobbled at no great distance away would not wind him and snort an alarm.

On he crept. The distance between himself and the sleeping men narrowed to a body's length. And then the sharp streaking flash of Splint's automatic cut into the night.

That first bullet caught the Mexican, Vasquez, fair and true in the temple. Beyond a convulsive flexing of muscles he never moved. But Roth, at that first crashing report, flung his blankets aside and was half erect, cursing, before Splint could swing the muzzle of his pistol on the shadowy bulk of the man's big body. In a blind panic of fear Splint fired until the magazine of his weapon was empty. Roth lunged forward, choking horribly under that deadly stream of bullets, striving to get his

great hands upon the thing that had struck so viciously in the night. He fell with the life twitching out of his ponderous frame at Splint's very feet.

When Splint realized that both the men were dead, realized the ease with which the deed had been accomplished, his panic left him and he smiled a grim, cold smile. With swiftly moving hands he explored Roth's pockets and found the map. Kicking the embers of the dying fire into life, he fed the flame with handy sticks until it gave him light enough to study the route laid out by the dead Mexican's pencil.

Splint was absorbed in this task when his ears caught the faint tinkle of a mule bell coming down the trail from the direction in which the treasure seekers had been headed. Swiftly, he considered what to do. If he should leave the fire and flee in the darkness the traveler would discover the bodies and raise a hue and cry that would hound him far beyond hope of ever reaching the treasure. Better to hide the bodies. Then whoever might be approaching would suspect nothing.

Spurred to action by the growing music of the bell, the murderer dragged the bodies of Roth and the Mexican out of sight behind the nearby boulders. He was smoking calmly beside the fire when the traveler came within its radiance. He was an old man, this wayfarer, with skin like wrinkled leather and hair as white as mountain snow. He wore a tall sombrero of straw and a dingy serape. He was mounted on a scrawny mule. And Splint discerned two or three more of the beasts, without riders, in the shadowy dark behind the old Mexican.

The old man greeted Splint courteously.

"I beg the warmth of your fire, señor, for an old man. The night is chill."

Splint grunted inhospitably. He had no desire for this man to linger. The weary ancient might elect to stay the night! He must get rid of the unwell-

come caller as quickly as might be possible.

"You have far to go, old man?" he queried as the venerable Mexican dismounted and spread his bony hands to the blaze.

"Not far, señor. I go to meet my son. A runner from the mission brought me word of his coming, with another man, and also a request that I have mules in readiness for a journey into the mountains. I bring the mules now, for I could not wait his arrival. When I saw your fire in the distance I thought it might be the place of his camping, and my heart beat faster, señor. I have not looked upon the face of my son for twelve long years."

Surprise flashed across the dark face of Splint Moraine—surprise that quickly gave way to glint of cunning in his hard eyes. Here was luck indeed. Old Vasquez himself a possible guide to the treasure!

"I, too, am headed into the mountains," said Splint. "I seek the old shrine beyond San Borja."

The old Mexican regarded him curiously across the flickering fire.

"It is in ruins, señor. No man goes there now!"

Splint said nothing for a moment. He occupied the interval of silence by refilling the magazine of his automatic. When he had finished he laid the weapon across his knee so that its muzzle pointed at the lank midriff of the old man.

"I seek not alone the shrine," declared Splint coldly. "I seek also the hidden treasure there. The offerings! Gold, silver, jewels . . .! I have a map, old one, but you shall guide me there and save me time and trouble."

A look of fear leaped into the old man's eyes.

"No! No!" he protested. "Señor, there is no treasure!"

"That is a lie," said Splint coldly.

His beady eyes narrowed upon the old man's countenance.

"A lie. And you know well the hid-

ing place of that treasure. You shall reveal it to me!"

"No, señor. There is no treasure," repeated the old Mexican. "Long since has the chest been despoiled by some vandal, and the place is accursed. It is now but the abode of the Winged Ones! No man ventures there. The wrath of the Winged Ones—"

"Hell take your Winged Ones," interrupted Splint. "I fear nothing! You shall guide me to that treasure."

"Señor, there is no—"

"Enough! That lie will not save you from going with me."

"But I cannot go, señor. I am on my way to meet my son. It is twelve years—"

"Look you, old one!" snarled Splint.

He seized a brand from the fire and got to his feet and took the old man by his skinny arm.

"Come with me!"

Splint led the old man, who protested feebly, to the rocks where he had dragged the bodies of his victims. He whirled the brand into fire and thrust it close to illumine the face of the dead Mexican—the face of Vasquez with the bullet hole in his temple and the livid scar across his cheek.

"*Amor di Dios!*" cried the old man. "It is my son!"

He would have fallen to his knees, praying, but Splint rammed the muzzle of the automatic into his ribs and jerked him roughly upright.

"Your son, yes," he spat out viciously. "And you will go with great speed to join him in hell if you refuse to do as I wish. An hour ago he lived. An hour ago I shot him. And there is another bullet waiting for you if you prove obstinate. You will lead me to the treasure, now?"

The old Mexican gazed fixedly for a long moment into the crafty eyes of his son's murderer. Finally he said softly:

"It shall be as you command, señor."

Splint grunted his satisfaction and led the old man back to the fire. With

the strong cord he had used to draw water at the Mine of the Three Shafts, he bound the unresisting Mexican securely.

"I tie you, old one, so that you may not play me false while I sleep," said Splint as he tightened the last knot. "We start at dawn."

At the first hint of morning light Splint Moraine was awake and had the old man free. Beyond a suggestion that his captor abandon his horse for a mount on one of the mules, the old Mexican held silence unbroken.

Before the falling of dark they came to the tumbled ruins of the old Mission San Borja. Here they spent the night, corralling the mules within the still standing remnants of adobe walls, and themselves spreading blankets in the ruined nave. Again Splint carefully tied the old man as a measure of safety.

In the gray chill of early dawn the old Mexican indicated to Splint the trail they must take away from the ruined mission into the somber mountains. And Splint assured himself by a glance at the map that the old man was guiding him aright.

Hour after weary hour the dim trail wormed its way into the heart of the mighty splintered hills. It led them now toiling up the boulder-studded bottom of some rough-hewed canyon, now whipsawing their way up along the bold face of some sheer precipice by a way that was no more than a path for a mountain goat.

Time after time Splint caught glimpses of tawny cougars slinking away to vanish in some high cavern among the rocks. In that forbidding world of jagged peaks and dark gorges the very silence of his patient guide began to work upon Splint Moraine's nerves. A vague and indefinable foreboding of evil hovering, of death lurking in the mysteries ahead, began to lay hold upon his overwrought imagination. But thought of fabulous treasure almost within his grasp was an anchor

to hold him fast to the grim realities of the journey.

Dusk was not far distant when they came into the shadow of a mighty gorge flanked on either hand by towering cliffs and bleak mountains upthrust to the darkening sky. Midway of the gorge the old Mexican called a halt. Pointing to worn steps cut in the wall of the cliff, steps leading up to a great niche where fallen timbers were tangled like the bones of long dead men, he said:

"The shrine, señor."

"Never mind the shrine. Show me the place of the treasure!" commanded Splint.

Without more words the old man led the way along the bottom of the gorge for what seemed to Splint Moraine an interminable distance. At last he paused and directed Splint's attention to a dusky orifice high up on the face of a cracked and wind-cut cliff.

"A deep cavern is there, señor. Within is the Chest of the Offerings."

Splint Moraine's blood was hammering in his veins.

"How do you reach it? Show me the way!"

With the point of a bony forefinger the old man picked out for Splint the faint cracks and seams and inequalities of stone that would give him hold for hands and feet. Eager to be at the treasure, Splint began to climb.

It required the exercise of all Splint Moraine's wiry agility to make his way up that bold face of cliff until he at last stood upon the lip of stone at the mouth of the cavern. Looking down, he saw the face of the old man upturned, watching him with a curious intentness.

Splint had a fleeting moment of apprehension. He remembered vividly those tawny cougars he had glimpsed along the trail. He wondered if this cave might be the den of such beasts. But the lure of treasure was strong. It overrode his momentary fears and drew him on into the shadows that filled the cavern.

Once inside that vault of stone, Splint struck a match to dispel the dusky shadows and looked eagerly about him. Ah! The old Mexican had not played him false! The chest, a massive receptacle of hewed wood bound and studded with hand-wrought iron of quaint design, stood upon a low shelf of rock at the far end of the cavern. The chest was old, very old, and holes of boring insects large as a finger were in profusion all along its front. This much Splint saw before the match burned out.

He did not pause to light another. He leaped swiftly forward and threw back the ponderous lid of the chest. With an inarticulate cry of triumph he plunged both arms deep in its interior, groping hands tearing feverishly at a substance that had the feel of tough and ancient parchment. . . .

AT the base of the great cliff, face upturned and eyes burning with a strange smoldering fire upon the opening where the murderer of his son had disappeared, stood the old man, watching . . . listening. . . . And a smile of calm satisfaction stole over his wrinkled face as there came to his ears from the depths of the cavern a muffled shriek—the cry of a man in deadly agony.

With a swift agility that belied his

hoary years the old man herded the mules a little way down the gorge. He halted where he had full view of the cavern's mouth. And quickly the murderer appeared there, screaming and desperately fighting, beating at the air about his face.

He threshed wildly about upon the high lip of stone. Suddenly he lost his balance, pitched over the edge, and came whirling down the cliff face to meet the stony floor of the gorge with bone-breaking impact.

Behind him, all about him, settling to attack until their numbers hid face and hands and grotesquely floundering body, streamed an angry horde of *moscardones*—those great vicious black and yellow hornets of Baja California.

After half an hour had passed and the swarm of *moscardones* had returned to their ruined home in the long-empty Chest of the Offerings, the old man came in the twilight and stood looking down upon the blotched and swollen face of the broken thing that had been Splint Moraine.

"Carlos, thou art avenged!" he whispered softly.

Then he spurned with his boot the body of the murderer.

"And thou, *animale!* Didst like those caresses of the Winged Ones?"

Fur Crimes

A movement is on foot in northern Canada to lease out certain areas of the country inhabited by the fur bearers to offset the competition of the rival trappers and preserve the forests. It is claimed that rival hunters deliberately set fire to large areas of territory to keep their competitors out and that in this manner last season some of the most productive beaver meadows were ruined. The Indians blame the white men and the half-breeds, the white men the 'breeds, and the latter the whites.

Hitherto a trapper never locked his cabin door—but times are changing. Of recent years cabins have been mysteriously burnt, furs have been stolen from the traps and the

"good old days" are a thing of the past.

Some of the hunters are very wasteful as well. It is claimed that some of the native families kill a moose for their own use every week all the year round—being unable, of course, to use all the meat. In contrast to this it is stated that two white trappers will live for a whole winter on one moose carcass.

"Burn the whole dang country so's the other fellow can't get it," appears to be the motto, and for this reason it is advocated that the trapping areas be leased, so that there will be no encroachment. It will be to the trapper's interest as well to see that the green timber does not go up in smoke.—

A. De Herries Smith.



All Clear

By Douglas Oliver

The swivel-chair captain thought all lieutenants made good cannon-fodder, so that's the way he used them



WITH a tight-lipped grace borne of respect for seniority—and, that only, in this instance—Bill Greene swallowed the nasty talk of old Mothball, his company commander, dragged himself out of the battered pump-station, and, with what little celerity swelling resentment and a swelling knee permitted, hobbled homeward.

Greene had got his, hours back, on the Merracel Road. He had been lucky to get the flat side of a brick instead of a hunk of H. E.; especially lucky, for the shell had slammed on his immediate right and had whisked away, like crumbs from a table, the three men on his immediate left.

The home to which he stumbled eventually and into which willing hands assisted him was a box-like business sunk in the wall of the cutting that served the Canadians as a reserve line. This box was con-

creted without, metal-lined within, and had been built, originally, for a purpose as far removed from the use to which it now was being put as the Phillies are from a world's championship. Greene had discovered it the night the Canadians had come in, when, after ship-shaping things for his platoon, he had gone funk-hole hunting for himself. By daylight he had seen the advantages of the thing, and had called, unhesitatingly, for the approval of the other subs. From the younger of the two he had expected—to say the least—mild opposition, but the younger had merely grinned, remarking:

“Go to it. I’m a third-year Med. I should worry.”

So they had cut into the box-thing; with resolute faces had strewn its contents to the winds; had been liberal with disinfectants; and, lastly, had uprooted the German general’s cross which stood over the thing lest it influence compunction,

contrition, or whatever-it-is, to sneak in at some unguarded moment and take a wallop at their conscience.

The point is, Greene and his pals weren't sidestepping Merracel.

As long as orders were orders and luck was luck, they'd go up the confounded road, and to hell with the consequences. They weren't ditching duty, lying down on the job, or backtracking when things got a bit warm. Old Mothball might sneeringly infer what he liked.

Bill Greene found old Mothball's nasty talk hard to keep down.

"It's all right," said Greene to the occupants of the box-thing, "for old Mothball to slur the way he does. To talk of the Bluff and the way they did things those days. That was then. This is now. And damn few company commanders, that I can see, do their little working parties now."

"You're right, Greenie," declared the third-year Med. "He sure has the bulge on us. But—Greenie—you hobble back to the Doc with that knee. Get stuck, I tell you. It'd mean another gold stripe for you."

Greene snorted. "Like blazes I will," he snapped. "And have old Mothball accuse me of more lead-swinging? Not on your life."

To the brazier which burned in one corner of the place, Sad Sam, the third subaltern, who hailed from Missouri, added more fuel. Flames leaped upward making strange, sucking sounds as they licked through the hole in the roof.

With an air of contentment Sad Sam said:

"Jake, here, ain't it? Can you 'member any other place where we could let sparks go sailin' into the night—like that? Home! That's what I call this dump. A real home!"

"You'd better tack 'For the Friendless' onto that talk," Greene flared. "Once you've hooked up with old Mothball you'll get what I mean."

"Mean? Was he rotten, tonight?" the third-year Med asked.

"Mean as dirt," replied Greene, gingerly rubbing his bruised leg. "And, as we all can see, more concerned about his own hide than the troops' welfare. Blast his camphorated soul, but I came mighty near slugging him when he wanted to know why the devil I hadn't reorganized the party and gone on. Hell! Lot he knows about working parties."

Said the third-year Med: "You wouldn't expect him to know much, would you? Out here through pull. Steals a job that belongs to a better fellow. Greenie, you should have had the company. We know that. You would have had it, too, but for this cease-firer turning up like some hired girl with a fistful of references from the powers in Blighty. God! I'll bet if he ever saw the Bluff it was a bluff he made of seeing it. An overnight call! Cook's tour! That's his speed."

Greene raised a deprecating hand. "Can that company chatter," he said. "I'm perfectly satisfied with old Seven—his platoon was No. 7—what's left of it, dammit!"

There was a moment of silence while he turned his face away. An odd sound came from his throat. Casualties hit good officers hard. Bill Greene had been hit hard; had got it, he and his men. Everybody was getting it on the Merracel Road.

By map, getting to and through Merracel was a leadpipe cinch. From the reserve line one followed the light railway to the chuchyard. From there a half-left jog of a hundred yards carried one to the pavé which ran, string-straight, through the town and beyond. Unfortunate, the map in question had been made at a time when Merracel was British back country and before Heinie had commenced his extensive spring cleaning. No allowance had been

made, quite naturally, for the topographical changes German gunnery might make and had made in the short space of two weeks. Now there were great gaps in the railway line, the old church and most of the churchyard had been removed from the landscape, the half-left hundred was a honeycomb into which men stumbled by darkness, and the Merracel Road—Wowie!

Beyond Merracel, English troops, few and fagged, held the line or what remained of a line, wondering where and when Heinie would go for them next. While they held bull-doggedly to the little they had, Canadians were ordered up, nightly, from the reserve line, some distance back, to clean out old ditches of trenches and to dig, revet and berm fresh lines so that there might be had adequate cover, at least, from which to stay the next onslaught of the grey Hun hordes.

Now for the Merracel Road. It was a shambles. Carts here. Black skeletons of lorries there. Bloated horses everywhere. In the town, both sides the street, house walls tottered, ready at the first smoke of a shell about their feet to clatter down with their spill of abomination. Brick and mortar, ankle-deep, over everything.

Heinie was giving the place all he had. Big crumps. Little crumps. They banged in any time. All the time. Here. There. One end the town, one minute. The other end the next. Whistlers. Howlers. Whizzbangs. Five-nines. Over and over. On and on. Steady stream. Keeping it up. Never stopping.

"Hell hole!" Bill Greene was saying of the place. "That's the right name for it. A miracle if you get through."

He hadn't got through.

"Run?" he said to his companions. "Why, you double the moment you reach the edge of that brickpile. It's

heads down, equipment jerked up, a full breath, and say your prayers. Then right straight through. No halts. Of your own will?—oh, no! Heinie's got enough stop signals set, and ten to one he'll stop you as he stopped me.

"Blam!" Just like that! There I was down in the middle of the road with Joe Harmer, best sarge I ever had, flung across me like a bag of chop. And Bent and Carder and Hedding, three cracking chaps on the guns, with their prayers said for the last time. Two of that new draft bumped off before they'd even smelled the front line. More hit, and down. The rest, wind up, spread all over the country. Get 'em together? Hell!"

With a bitterness that all his respect of seniority could not camouflage, Greene jerked his pipe from between his teeth.

"Then to have that fireside lancer in that pumphouse tell me—tell me I—I—"

For the second time he choked and averted his gaze. Sad Sam, unnaturally fiery, rushed in with:

"I'd like to see the old humbug on one of these trips."

"Catch him," spat the third-year Med. "Catch him going up there—the decoration hunter. Decoration? Sure thing! That's why he's out here. Looking for a D. S. O., prob'ly. Once he gets it he'll be back in Blighty so fast it'll make our heads swim. He doesn't give a hang what happens to us or the troops as long as he can further his own interests. No wonder he hammers it into us. He's afraid because these parties have been unlucky that his stand-in with the C. O.—his chances for a recommendation—may suffer. Did you ever notice how he hangs 'round the C. O.? Plays up to him? Sticks closer than burrs to a setter? Belongs to the same lodge, I wouldn't be surprised."

Sad Sam chipped in again. Said he: "There's only one thing to do. We've just *got* to catch him. Put up a job on him. Give him a taste of that Merracel stuff. Show him up."

"That's all right," his listeners chorused. "But how?"

A sharp tap sounded on the door. A voice called:

"The captain directs you officers to put out that fire at once. Sparks are showing above ground. No need, the major says, to aggravate the enemy."

"How?" mumbled Sad Sam, as if he hadn't heard the warning. "I don't know how. But surely to Gawd we can try somethin'. We're not stuck for tryin'."

MEN had been complaining of sore feet, and the Doc was down to look them over.

Beyond the pump-station he met Bill Greene and two others sniping with a rifle at partridge which strutted in and out of brushpiles that once had served as a picnicking woods for Sunday holidayers from Arras.

"Nailed that baby," Greene cried triumphantly. "Clipped his neck for him, too."

The Doc looked on amusedly while the third-year Med and Sad Sam took their turns at squinting down the barrel of the Enfield and pulling trigger.

"What about those sore feet?" the Doc presently asked. And added, pointedly: "Those sore heads, also?"

Greene jerked about, saying, "Just what do you know, Doc—and why?"

The Doc grinned a wide grin. He had known these chaps for quite a spell. He liked them. He knew there was more behind their grumbling than the mere satisfaction of hearing themselves talk.

"Why, I guess I know everything," he remarked. "That answers your first question, Greenie. Secondly: Let me warn you that mausoleum of yours isn't soundproof by any means.

If you must shut yourselves and your ruffled feelings up within it, for the Lord's sake keep your mouths shut too."

Purred the third-year Med: "Well, Doc, old-timer, now that you know I trust you know how to treat it."

The Doc continued to smile. He knew how to treat it as he knew how to treat sore feet. For half a cent, he told himself, he'd give these subs a boost.

Furnished with any kind of provocation, he'd be with them hand over fist.

The door of the long-unoperated pump-station creaked on its rusty hinges. From this company headquarters old Mothball, as he was called, emerged and made for the little group. He had just fixed his eyes on the partridge in Greene's possession when "Zap!" went a rifle at his elbow. Over by the brushpiles another bird did a hop, step, and a last jump.

"Spiffy shot, Sam," Greene enthused.

Old Mothball cast an apprehensive glance at the sky across which a Heinie 'plane crawled fly-like.

"Stop that shooting," he curtly commanded.

"But—but why, sir?" Sad Sam voiced mild protest.

"Why?" whined old Mothball, with a second squint at the far-up Fokker. "Because I say so. Isn't that sufficient reason?"

For some reason or other Bill Greene's lips curled. Old Mothball noted the curling; hastened to correct matters.

"But," he said, and affably enough now, "if you want the real reason I'll give it to you. Those birds you have there aren't fit for consumption. Not at this season of the year. The mating season. Weather's too warm for another thing. Am I not right, captain?"

The Doc, who was a blamed good

M. O. but who knew little about game birds, replied: "Possibly, captain, possibly."

Old Mothball continued to expound.

"As I was remarking," said he, "you'd take a long chance on eating those. A very dear friend of mine died from experimenting as you were about to do."

As the three subs moved off, Bill Greene muttered for his friends' ears:

"Can you beat it? Stops us potting for the same reason he stopped our funkhole fire. Afraid the boche may be aggravated. The old ass! And then drags in all that guff to cover himself up."

"Irresponsible lot, that trio," Old Mothball, in turn, sniffed judgment. "No stability whatever. Undependable. Every trip they've made up into that town there—" he leisurely indicated distant Merracel, from which clouds of salmon-red were billowing up against the blue and white of the May sky—"has counted for nothing. Why? I'd hate to state why, captain. Perhaps you can guess."

"Perhaps," said the Doc, quietly, one eye cocked on the town from which increased banging sounded; over which the heavens were being flooded anew with brickdust.

"They don't think," Old Mothball went on, whiningly. "No initiative. In that respect they're not much better than those half-wit Englishmen—"

"Wh-who?" said the Doc, abruptly. "What Englishmen?"

"Those brainless Engineer officers to whom our working parties are supposed to report; those second-loots, those one-star-wonders in charge of the defense line job." Old Mothball paused for breath, then continued: "God help our corps if ever its junior officers sink to the low standards of efficiency represented by

these poor nit-willies of whom I've been speaking."

The Doc turned away, spitting savagely. From casualties, straggling back to him for succor, he had learned of Merracel's misery. He realized that if these English one-pippers were the half-wits they'd been branded shelling had made them that way; shelling which everlastingly tumbled walls down upon the cellars in which they were forced to make their headquarters.

Something else bit the Doc, suddenly, violently. Red-faced, breathing hard, he turned to have his say. But there was none to whom to say it. Old Mothball was striding toward the pump-station wherein Division awaited him on the 'phone.

"The dirty shyster!" fumed the Doc, once he got his breathing regulated. "Talking like that of my— Blast him! Talking like that of fellows who've been spilling, sweating blood for weeks. Help? Help those subs? Watch me!"

A RUNNER from Battalion H. Q. left a message with Old Mothball. It was the same old message. It read:

Please detail working party of 1 Officer and 30 O. R. to report by 20.00 K to Engineer guide at N. 10 b. 44.70 for work on Merracel defense line.

Unconcernedly, Old Mothball read the order, turned it over, scrawled on it, "For your action," and relayed it by one of his own runners to the third-year Med whose turn it was to go up the confounded road. The third-year Med's reply ran:

Sick, sir. Unfit for job. Please excuse me.

Old Mothball frowned and sent the runner scampering back with the written demand that Sad Sam substitute for the ailing one. Sad Sam's response was:

Must ask for relief, sir. Doggone sick. Too sick to take party over.

In ten minutes' time Old Mothball learned, and not so delightedly one could notice it, that he hadn't a subaltern who could lift his head, let alone lift his hands to the night's digging detail. Fretting, he plunged down to his meal of horse steak and apricots. The non-appearance of Greene and the others didn't relieve matters any. Old Mothball termed it insubordination of the rankest type and made up his mind to demand of the C. O. that his fractious juniors be trimmed speedily and after a fashion they would long remember.

So, to the C. O. he later complained:

"I looked in on these lead-swingers as I came along. Plenty of groaning, but it didn't fool me a bit. Did you ever before hear, sir, of three of your officers going sick at one crack?"

"No," said the C. O. emphatically. "I never did. Call the Doc. We'll see if these fellows are shamming or not."

The Doc came, and with Old Mothball setting the pace the three of them hiked overland to the roost of the sick. The C. O. was eyeing the box-thing when Old Mothball gibed sarcastically:

"If they're going to die they've been thoughtful enough, as you can see, sir, to pick their plots beforehand. But—dead places for dead ones. Of course, sir."

The Doc swung back the door of the place and motioned for the C. O. to enter.

"Not on your life," said the C. O., stepping aside. "Not until you learn what's the matter in there."

The Doc crawled in, and, after awhile—out. His face was very grave.

"Sick," he said dully. "Quite a sick crowd. Some sort of stomach trouble I'd say offhand. Now, if I had a pump I might fix them up in a jiffy, but pumps are too much of a

luxury for this war. Let me see"—he tapped his head professionally—"what can they have contracted? What can the matter be?"

Old Mothball pulled at his mustache, wailing: "Nothing very much the matter with those birds."

The Doc hopped like he'd stepped on a garter snake.

"Birds?" he chirped. "Birds, did you say? I wonder!" Again the professional pose. One long minute of meditation. "Got it," he finally enthused. "Got it, captain. Those birds. Those partridge. Out of season. Warm weather. Poisoned. These chaps ate those birds and have been poisoned. That's the trouble; sure as the Lord made little apples!"

The C. O.'s eyes were snapping.

"What partridge?" he bluntly demanded.

The Doc explained in short order. Once or twice he slapped Old Mothball on the back.

"Hot stuff, captain," he wound up. "But for you I'm afraid I would have fallen down on my diagnosis of this case. I'm afraid I would."

Old Mothball's face registered little elation. He said imploringly: "But—but can't you do something—fix one of them up, at least? That working party tonight! It's got to be officered."

"Fix them up?" cried the Doc. "Not this day. Moreover, if the situation hasn't cleared by tomorrow they'll have to be evacuated. Nothing else but."

"Hm-mh!" said the C. O.

Back at battalion headquarters the C. O., blunt as ever, explained the situation to old Mothball.

"No, captain," he asseverated, "it has always been my policy to let each company take care of its own difficulties. That policy must be adhered to. As you suggest, we might easily borrow a platoon officer for some other company. But then, the other companies have their own troubles to

work out. No, captain, I'm afraid it's up to you to take that party forward this evening. And, captain, before you go, let me whisper to you. Do your damndest. One good night's work would go a long way toward smoothing down the present ruffled feelings of Brigade. You understand to what I refer? Of course! An old head often triumphs where younger ones falter. Now, let's see what you can do, captain."

DUSK had settled on the reserve line.

In the Home For The Friendless Bill Greene chuckled.

"Some stall," he grunted to his companions. "And so far, so good. But we're a rotten lot of actors. How far would we have got with this sick dodge but for the Doc? Answer me! Didn't he rush to our rescue nicely? Didn't he save the day? That's a habit he and his breed have—saving the day at critical moments."

Overhead, along the rim of the cutting, feet stamped. From the railway line came sounds of the assembling working party. Shovels banged. A whistle blew.

"There they go," said Sad Sam who had his eyes to a crack in the door. "An' by Judas, if our wise-guy skipper ain't doing the skipping, too! We've put it over."

Sounds of the upbound crowd grew fainter.

"I hope," said the third-year Med, "that a Heinie whizz-bang gets on Old Mothball's tail and runs him up and down till he gets whooping cough. I couldn't wish him anything worse than that."

Sad Sam cleared his throat. Said he:

"I can't think of anythin' bad enough. But I hope, whatever happens, the old ass'll learn this miracle 'bout Merracel. But say, guys, we've been forgettin' the men. What about the troops?"

Bill Greene smiled oddly. "I hope," he declared, "the men will know enough to beat it if things get too hot. Still, I don't need to hope that. I *know* they will. I've fixed that part of it."

Toward dawn the working party dragged in with a jangle of accoutrement and hoarse talk.

"Work?" someone groused, as he stumbled past the box-thing in the cutting. "I'll say we worked. Making up for lost time, I 'spose. Funny, wasn't it, that ol' Fritz should pick it for an off-night? Not one shell near us. Not a damn shell."

The third-year Med started the cussing which flared spasmodically until long after stand-to. When the subs glimpsed Old Mothball strutting in the direction of headquarters they realized acutely that a far different 'finis' from the one they had anticipated had been written to their plans.

"Look at him," snapped Sad Sam, disgustedly. "Goin' down for a bouquet. The lucky stiff!"

"And the next thing," said the third-year Med, gloomily, "he'll learn we never even bothered with those partridge, but gave them away. Then charges of malingering—courts-martial—and a whole lot sicker we'll be."

"Stave it," Greene flung out. "Stave it. While there's life there's hope."

Down at H. Q. Old Mothball was all smiles.

"Quite easy," he purred to the C. O. "Easy enough for the old-stager. Going up, last night, I made up my mind I'd show what could be accomplished by the application of a few brains. Heretofore my subalterns have allowed themselves to be run into trouble—if trouble you call it—by these stupid Imperials. Last night, when I came on the Engineer guide—at least half a mile from the right map location, as one would expect of him—I more or less took mat-

ters in my own hands. Ran the little show to suit myself. I told this fuzzy-lipped one-star wonder who I was and what I intended doing; told him I'd stand for no back talk. He did try to argue at first but gave up when he saw he couldn't fazz me. I wound up by ordering him to avoid the main street through the town and to take a roundabout route to the job. That's all there was to it; the whole story, Colonel."

The C. O. sat silent. He seemed to be breathing with difficulty. He looked as though he was the recipient of bad news. Three times the on-duty Sig had to call him before he came to sufficiently to clap the phone receivers to his head. But he quickly perked up. For over the singing wire was borne to his ears all the wintry scorn an irate Brigadier, just out of bed, could put into words.

"Why—why?" stammered the C.O.

"Don't why me?" came the Brigadier's boom. "You keep still. I'll do the talking. You listen. Right away, see, you shake things up over there. Why? Here's why. Listen!"

IN the dim light of the funkhole, Bill Greene stared wide-eyed at the C. O.'s chit:

Lieut. Greene: You will take command of D. Company this date on.

"What the dickens?" said Greene, his fingers playing nervously with the message form.

"Cheers," called Sad Sam, who'd been squinting over Greene's shoulder.

Greene pushed Sad Sam away.

"Save them, Sam," he cautioned, "until we get to the bottom of this funny business.

An hour later, the Doc, grinning broadly, stuck his head in the doorway, asking:

"All clear?"

"Not quite," said Greene, still staring at the chit.

"Perhaps I can be of help," said the Doc, bumping within.

"Here's how," he explained, once he had a Goldflake going. "Now that our friend, the captain, has accepted an appointment with Division—"

"What's that?" A chorus from the subs.

"Precisely," said the Doc. "With Division. I repeat it. Division's been after the captain for some time. Only the other day they phoned him, I believe. And, more, the colonel made it clear to him he was wasting his time and talent around these parts. So now he's gone."

"How come, Doc?" Second shrill chorus.

Chuckling, the Doc continued:

"It appears that last night one of these much-abused one-star wonders got hold of the captain and played a downright mean trick on him.

"But," Greene intervened, "he did the job, all right. We've heard the troops discussing it."

"Certainly," said the Doc, merrily. "The captain did the job—but all wrong. He did the wrong job."

"No!" This chorus almost lifted the metal roof from the roost.

"But, yes," the Doc went on. "The major, it appears, got all tangled up in the topography. Lost his way. When he finally met up with an Engineer officer he met up with the wrong man. And, finding the captain so keen on the idea of working, this crazy one-star wonder leads the party into an area a long way from that in which they should have been digging. Quiet spot? Sure! But the wrong one. The consequence is our Brigade is raising merry Cain because its job was never done—because the party never showed up; somewhere else some other Brigade is chuckling up its sleeve over credit given them for a task they, themselves, didn't perform. As for that cuckoo Englishman—"

A snort from Sad Sam interrupted.

"No, you don't," he said. "Anyone who pulls a stunt like that Woodbine did is crazy, perhaps, but crazy like a fox."

The Doc bowed low. "Thanks, Sammie," he smiled. "Pleased to have you talk that way. I'm English-born myself."

"As I thought," murmured Bill Greene.

Sad Sam grabbed for the Doc's hand.

"Boy," he said, "I take a lot of showing. In some ways plenty. But if you ever again hear me make light of an 'Arfamo' it'll be your priv'lege, Doc, when the war's 'fini', to boot me all the way back to Jefferson City, an' farther if you like."

Presently the Doc uncovered a bottle of "Three Star." "With the Colonel's compliments, gentlemen," he said, plunking the bottle on a box. "Also, with this reminder that brandy, when you're sick, makes you well."

The third-year Med cried: "A toast to Old Mothball. May his job at Division be 'mongst the old clothing. That's all he's fit for."

Gurgles!

Bill Greene downed a stiff hoist.

"All clear," he said, eyes sparkling.

"And now—" said Sad Sam, reaching for the crock—"those cheers!"

SAID the C. O. to the Doc, "What was all that noise, down the line there, a few minutes ago? Cheering?"

"Sure, sir," said the Doc. "Cheers."

"For that Three-Star?"

"No, sir! For that one-star."

"Oh?" The C. O. grinned knowingly. By and by he said: "You know, Doc, I've been trying for ages to get rid of that probationer captain. I'd have tied the can to him long ago but for the sake of appear-

ances. In the case of a fellow with his connections, his pull, and so on—the can must be tied tactfully. D'you think I did it neatly, Doc?"

"I think you did, sir."

"Nobody wise as to how I helped—what little I did!"

"Not a soul, sir."

"Not even Greene?"

"No, sir!"

Momentary lull. Then the Doc craned his neck to whisper:

"But tell me, sir, when did you first get 'hep' to what those subs were up to?"

"Why," chortled the C. O., "it was the moment you diagnosed their ailment. Funny thing, that. You see I'd eaten two or three partridge, myself. No ill effects. Never felt better in my life. That fact aroused my suspicion for one thing. For another, the partridge I ate were birds supplied by my batman. He, I knew, had been given them by Greene and his friends. Do you wonder I sniffed a bit at your diagnosis? Your poor sick patients couldn't have been poisoned by food that I swallowed. Something's up, I said to myself. The Doc isn't stumping for those kids for no reason at all. Dirty stick, somewhere. Better look into matters, and, if necessary, help any good work along.

"But enough of that. We won't talk of that any more. It doesn't look well for the C. O., any unit, to appear too 'matey' with his junior officers. So, as I say, let's bury that talk. Forget it."

"Certainly, sir," grinned the Doc.

"Not a peep."

"No, sir. Not a peep."

Why should the Doc peep? He belonged to the same lodge as the C. O., and of course, with lodge members there's no peeping. Mum is the word.



The Killing at Dead Man's Run

By Howard E. Morgan

The cards were stacked against this Mountie, but he stepped into death's pitfalls, both fists swinging like a man

"**SILAS RATHBUN**, Government Ethnologist, killed, at French settlement, called Dead Man's Run, border northern Yukon, near Boldrewood Mountain. Apprehend murderer. Secure complete information re mysterious settlement—Dead Man's Run."

might have been interpreted as fear had not the firm-set lips carried a definite hint of grim humor which gave the lie to the veiled message in his bloodshot eyes and to the evident fatigue written large on his haggard countenance.



O read the instructions placed in the hands of Corporal John Steele of the Royal Canadian Mounted, by Inspector Garroway at Norton.

A month later, Steele, crouched behind a head-high drift, squinted along an icy ridge top toward a towering, snow-capped, rock-pile, that was Boldrewood Mountain. His bearded face was haggard and drawn; his body thin almost to the point of emaciation. His bloodshot eyes were red-rimmed and swollen. His clothes were torn. From time to time he looked down over the backward trail, and in his eyes there was a hunted expression that

Suddenly a rifle shot sounded, awakening sharp, staccato echoes, back and forth across the little valley. The bullet hissed through the upper branches of a snow-covered spruce scrub, not a dozen inches above Steele's head. He promptly dropped flat on his face behind a sheltering spruce. Another miss. Close though! Too close for comfort. He grinned, wryly, then as a second shot crashed through the ice-brittle brush tangle within a few inches of his outstretched hand, he swore, caught up his rifle, and groped to his knees. Time an end was put to this tomfoolery. He refused to act as a target any longer. But no, not just yet. His unknown shadow was not shooting to kill, yet. Time something was done though. It

was getting on his nerves. He dropped wearily in the soft snow and for a long minute lay very still, breathing hard, pondering ways and means.

For days this seemingly inexpert marksman had trailed him. The man had fired, dozens of shots. But, from the first, Steele had judged that his mysterious shadow was trying merely to intimidate him—a childish business, but damned unpleasant, nevertheless. Ordinarily, he would have circled back on his trail and found out what it was all about. So far, however, he had not done so. This for various reasons. The first and most important was, that his ammunition was practically gone. Second, he had not yet located his objective, the little settlement at Dead Man's Run—the maps had proved worse than useless and he had no desire to stumble upon that sinister settlement, unarmed.

A week ago he had lost his dogs through an air hole in Great Tollyo Lake. His food had gone with the dogs. It was early spring; the sun was high; the snow soft; and traveling was difficult. He had not eaten for two days, and now snowblindness threatened. Despite all of which, he intended to reach his objective, the settlement of Dead Man's Run, or die in the attempt. Hence, having become convinced that his unknown shadow did not intend to kill, he had pushed boldly on, devoting his every effort to search for the mysterious settlement in the hills. Once within certain reach of his goal, he would deal with his unsavory trail mate.

Despite his unpleasant situation, which was becoming momentarily more unpleasant, this conclusion persisted as being the most logical one. Directly before him, just beyond the next height of land, lay Boldrewood Mountain. Somewhere, in the valley at the base of the mountain should be Dead Man's Run. To reach that valley it was necessary to follow along the semi-open ridge top for some distance. Would the man with the rifle suffer him to

cross that open space? Somehow, Steele doubted it. It seemed foolhardy to attempt it. Like tempting fate. He would be silhouetted clearly against the grey horizon.

But there was no alternative. He had traveled many weary miles to see what was in that little valley at the base of that mountain and he did not intend to be cheated of that doubtful pleasure, now. Not by a damned sight! To hell with the slinking devil. He couldn't shoot anyhow!

Steele pressed a mittened hand over his smarting eyes, lurched slowly to his feet and stumbled out upon the open ridge top.

Although he was weak and sick and the sun-lit trail was but a red blur before his eyes, his step was firm and a half grin wreathed his white lips.

"Why don't you shoot, you damned Siwash? Now's your—"

A snapping report cut short his mumbling defy. The bullet struck his pack. Its smashing impact whirled him about. He stumbled and fell heavily, sprawling headforemost in the soft snow.

For a time he lay where he had fallen, striving dizzily to collect his senses. He was not badly injured; he was certain of that. The bullet had pierced his pack and his heavy mackinaw, just grazing the skin along his ribs. He could feel the warm blood trickling down his side. The peak of the ridge was but a dozen yards away. Steele wriggled toward a clump of stunted spruce.

He reached the welcome screen safely. There were no more shots. For a moment he rested his smarting eyes. He dreaded somehow, to look. Directly below him was the valley. If the little settlement of Dead Man's Run, was *not* there, he, John Steele, would be in a bad way. He was all in. Harassed from the rear and with no relief in sight, the only thing left for him to do, was to tackle his shadow and trust to luck for the future. Which outlook, in his weakened state, was far from en-

couraging. But he refused to admit defeat. Swearing softly at the clinging limbs that obscured his vision, he thrust them aside with a sweep of his arm, and peered forth.

Below him, in a cup-shaped valley, lay the little settlement of Dead Man's Run! The dozen or more log shacks swam in a formless blur before his eyes. Streaks of red shot through this blur. His tortured vision failed him for the moment, but, despite the pain, he grinned. The end of the trail!

He was not yet ready to trust himself to the doubtful hospitality of the inhabitants of Dead Man's Run, however. Now that his first objective had been reached, the next step was to rid himself of the man with the rifle.

He crawled slowly on hands and knees through the scant spruce thicket, then, reaching the edge of the steep ridge wall, allowed his body to relax, and slid, stretched out at full length, down the snow-covered bank, into the valley. At the bottom he crept out of sight behind a fallen log, freed his rifle, and peered upward. His shadow would, without doubt, follow him up to make sure of the accuracy of that last shot. Sooner or later, he would appear up there on the ridge top. And then—Steele grinned and steadied his rifle against the ice-covered log.

He had not long to wait. The tip of a fur parka appeared abruptly above the strip of whiteness that was the ridge top. Steele focused his rifle on the fur-clad figure. With his finger crooked around the trigger, he hesitated, waiting for his erratic vision to clear. He must not, dare not, miss. The figure danced and blurred before his smarting eyes. It moved away, slowly. Steele fired.

Then he closed his burning eyes and waited. He had absolutely no assurance that his shot had found its mark. He couldn't see. Finally, he squinted upward.

The fur-clad figure, accompanied by a small avalanche of snow and brush, was sweeping down the bank toward

him. He cried out. A hit! Pulling himself erect as the soft snow piled up about his knees, his long fingers sought and found the furry figure's throat. It squirmed beneath his grip, cried out. And Steele released his hold abruptly.

A girl! A frightened white face peered up at him from out the fur parka. Steele swore under his breath. Had he made a mistake? But no! There was her rifle, still tightly gripped in a mittened hand; and that was *the* rifle that had all but ended his life. It was an old-fashioned Sharps, single-shot affair. There could be none other like it in this remote wilderness.

She came to her knees and watched him with round, frightened eyes, like a dog expecting a blow. She was French, Steele decided, and pretty, exceedingly pretty, with big brown eyes, full red lips and nice teeth. Observing his critical inspection, she adjusted the parka and tucked several stray strands of hair back into place.

Steele grinned. She could not be badly injured. He sprang forward suddenly and caught her in his arms as she swayed forward. He rested her gently against the fallen log and knelt beside her. A trickle of blood appeared on her forehead. He unloosed the parka. A shallow groove had been formed by his bullet, along her temple. Not deep enough to be dangerous. Her eyes fluttered open while he was still exploring the wound. Her gaze fastened on his mackinaw, which was open at the throat. She cried out and drew away.

"Oh! Eet ees right. You are heem! Oh! Oh! Oh! For why did I not shoot to keel?"

She leaned against an alder sapling, breathing hard, her eyes staring.

Steele fidgeted uneasily.

"I don't know what you're talkin' about, miss. Howsomever, me, I'm right sorry I plugged you."

The startled stare left her eyes. And then, as though talking to herself:

"Maybe, eet ees not so? The talk ees strange? But the red coat, yes."

Steele decided that glimpse of his red coat had had something to do with her confusion. Why?

"You talk funny, m'sieu. But, you are of the Mounted, no?"

"Yes, I am a Mountie, and I expect I do talk funny. I'm a Yankee. Hail from Texas, I do."

Then he shrugged disgustedly. What in Sam Hill was he bandying words with this woman for? She had made his life miserable for days. Had doggone near killed him. The fact that she was a woman, and young, and pretty, had nothing to do with it.

"Listen here, lady—er—er—I'm plumb sorry I creased you and all that. It ain't my line t' go around shootin' up women—but—on the other hand, I figure it's up to you to do some talkin'. You've been taggin' me for days. You doggone near got me, up there on the ridge top. You can't git away with that stuff!"

She observed him doubtfully. The fear had gone out of her eyes.

"What would you, m'sieu?"

Steele could have sworn that there was a suspicion of laughter in her voice. He was nonplused for the moment. Did even the women kill people, with a laugh, up in this frozen hell?

"Well, why did you follow me?"

She shrugged noncommittally.

"You aimed to kill me up there on the ridge top?"

"Non, m'sieu! I shoot the pack. I would scare you."

"Why did you want to scare me?"

Her eyes left his face, circled about until they rested on the log walled little settlement of Dead Man's Run.

"You go—there?"

She gestured toward the cabins.

"Dead Man's Run? Yes."

"You should not!"

"Oh, so that's it, eh?"

Steele thought quickly. Perhaps he could make use of this girl. He needed information, lots of it.

"Suppose you tell me all about it. I won't hurt you. Talk right up."

She hesitated, briefly. Then, shook her head.

"Non, I weel tell you—noting."

Steele cursed inwardly. A spasm of sickness swept over him suddenly. He leaned dizzily on his rifle. With a mighty effort he fought off the blackness that sought to envelop him.

"You are seeck, m'sieu?"

She came to him and steadied his weaving body with strong hands.

"Naw, I ain't sick."

He pushed her gently away and slumped down on the log.

"It's like this, miss. I'm tired and hungry. Now, I'll strike a deal with you. You—you don't want me to go to Dead Man's Run. All right, I won't go for a while anyhow, provided you steer me to some grub and a place where I can sleep for a week, undisturbed. After that, you and me'll have another talk. What say?"

Her face brightened.

"And after you have eaten, and slept, you will go away?"

"I won't promise. It's up to you. Work with me, not against me! Answer my questions and we'll see. Somehow or other I figure you're a right decent kid and probably are on the right side of the fence! Tell me your story, on the level, and I feel pretty sure you won't find yourself in trouble."

She pondered his words, the while her eyes searched his face.

"They say all men with the red coats are bad. I do not tink you are bad. I weel do what you ask, m'sieu. You an' me—we weel be frends, no? Maybe all will yet be well."

"Fair enough. Shake."

She took his hand gravely.

The quick winter dusk had enveloped them suddenly.

"Soon it weel be dark. We go slow. Come!"

She led him directly into the town, but he was too weary to protest. Threading about the cabins, they saw

no living thing. Not even a dog heralded their arrival. Steele wondered vaguely at this. The girl stopped before a big cabin on the far edge of the settlement. She left him at the door after first cautioning silence with finger on pursed lips.

Steele leaned wearily against the massive log door. He heard her voice, inside, high pitched, pleading.

The dim figure of a man abruptly appeared on the trail which would lead past the cabin. Steele shrank back in the shadows at the side of the building. The man stopped at the cabin, opened the door and called a gruff greeting. He was answered from inside the cabin by a man's voice. Then, as he turned away, a finger of light struck diagonally downward across his face and breast. And Steele gasped, involuntarily. The man wore the red uniform of the Mounted! There was not a policeman within five hundred miles of Dead Man's Run, to his knowledge. The red coated man peered into the shadows where Steele crouched, then turned away muttering.

The girl peered cautiously out and beckoned.

As Steele entered the cabin a man was just leaving by a back door.

"Yore husband?"

"My brudder, m'sieu. He weel watch."

Steele ate sparingly of the food she put before him. It was not well to overeat, after being on starvation rations for a week. He watched her, under lowered lids, as she moved purposefully here and there. She was pretty. A downright beauty, in fact. Anywhere she would be a beauty. Such hair. And hands, small and shapely. Something troubled her. Always she seemed to be listening. She made no answer when he questioned her. Some measure of her apprehension was communicated to him.

He hearkened tensely. There was no sound, nothing but the dismal soughing of a Chinook wind through the nearby

thicket. And still, something *was* wrong. The girl could not control her perturbation. Perhaps she had planned a frame-up, and didn't quite have the nerve to see it through? But no! She was not deep enough for that. A daughter of the wilderness, simple, child-like, in her motivations. There was something else. He nodded drowsily in response to the heat from a roaring open fire. There was nothing further from his mind than sleep, and yet, again and again his chin sagged on his breast.

"You mus' sleep, m'sieu. All will be well. Me, Julie Reevar, makes the promise. An' the Reevar do not lie. Francois weel watch."

Steele was asleep the moment his head touched the pillow.

It seemed but an instant later that he came awake to the accompaniment of a persistent shrilling in his very ears. His sleep-hungry senses combated his efforts to waken. Something had him by the throat. He breathed with difficulty. Then the brightly lighted little room appeared, suddenly, before him.

The girl crouched at his side. Her arms were about his neck. She was crying out shrill-voiced defiance to a big, black whiskered man, who stood not three feet away, hands on hips, laughing. Black Whiskers' right hand caressed the hilt of a knife in his belt. He talked in French now so rapidly that Steele could not understand. The girl clung the tighter. She was shielding his body with her own! So much Steele discovered within the first fleeting instant as he came awake.

Then he saw, on the floor across the room, a man lying in a pool of blood. A young man. His face was very white. A splotch of red streaked his temple. He was just struggling back to consciousness. A red-haired man stood over him, in his hand a rifle, held club-fashion, by the barrel. The young man on the floor was Francois, Julie Reevar's brother. They had done their best

to protect him, but something had gone wrong.

Black Whiskers whipped the knife from his belt with a flourish and caught the girl by the hair.

Then, John Steele went into action.

Freed of the girl's weight, he came to his feet with a bound, steadied his aching body and swung savagely, right and left in quick succession. Despite the hardships of a month-long winter trail, there was still two hundred pounds of sheer bone and muscle behind those blows. Both landed solidly on Black Whiskers' jaw. The black head jolted backward as though propelled by some irresistible force. Again Steele struck out, again and still again, smashing, full-armed wallops. Black Whiskers collided solidly with the wall. The knife dropped clattering from his nerveless fingers, and he slid, gently to the floor. All this within a brace of seconds. Then, his pale grey eyes gleaming with the joy of combat, Steele turned toward Francois' assailant. But, this individual, despite his red hair, had apparently decided that he did not care to argue with the two-fisted man in the red coat, who had come so energetically to the front. The big door, half open, gave mute evidence of his hurried departure.

The girl, observing Black Whiskers' erasement from the struggle now knelt beside her brother.

She turned her white face to Steele.

"Come, we mus' go queeck! You weel help me with Francois?"

Francois was able, and willing to help himself, however.

Once outside, the cold air revived him, and he led the way, followed by his sister, toward the hills. Steele brought up the rear. He kept close watch on the backward trail as they made swiftly across the moonlit open, toward a strip of blackness, which he judged, rightly, to be the foothills of Boldewood Mountain. There was no question in his mind, now, in regard to the loyalty of Julie Reevar, and despite

the confusion and their very evident danger, his thoughts returned persistently to the little drama recently enacted back there in the cabin. He understood French, after a fashion, and Julie Reevar had been protesting to Black Whiskers that she loved him, John Steele. She had shielded his body with her own.

They abruptly entered a dense thicket. The girl led Steele by the hand. The narrow pathway was devious and ice rutted. He stumbled along in silence at her heels. Suddenly he realized that the snow and ice was gone from underfoot. The air became close, and he knew that they had entered a cave of some sort.

"Grandpere!" the girl called, softly.

A light flared in the near distance, and a man appeared, shielding a candle light within a cupped palm. Grandpere evidently. And what a man! Steele had never seen such another. He was neither short nor tall, but a mighty sweep of shoulder made him appear almost square. Long, thick muscled arms, the size of a big man's upper leg, reached to his knees. Long, white hair covered a well shaped, massive head. Keen black eyes peered out from beneath bushy, white brows, and yet, Grandpere Reevar's face was not the face of an old man. There was a keenness, an alertness, there, that did not belong with age. His step was springy; his hand firm.

"This is he of whom I spoke, grandpere."

The old man guided the candle light up into Steele's face. Steele could feel those keen eyes boring into his own, and, despite himself, tiny chills of trepidation spidered up and down his back. It was all so weird.

Finally he shrugged and laughed.

"My name is John Steele."

He extended his hand. The old man gripped it firmly.

"And mine is Gaspard Reevar."

The depths of that rumbling voice!

"Men call me mad, M'sieu. They,

fear me. But no. I am not mad, and, only my enemies have cause to fear me."

Steele swallowed hard.

"Well, here's hopin' as how you an' me gits along right sociable."

Gaspard Reevar observed Steele's smiling face doubtfully, then he passed the candle to the girl and turned abruptly away.

"You are safe here, M'sieu Steele. No man comes to this place. They fear heem—Grandpere Reevar. An' now the night ees still yong. You would feenish the sleep, no?"

BUT John Steele could not sleep.

For endless hours, it seemed, he rolled and tossed on the comfortable bunk to which Francois had led him. A thousand questions clamored for answer. What outlandish fix had he gotten into?

The crazy stuff had begun when Julie Reevar had trailed him for days, seeking, in her simple way, to frighten him into keeping away from Dead Man's Run. Then the man in the uniform of the Mounted? Was it possible that this man *was* of the police. A year since, Corporal Johnson had started for Dead Man's Run, trailing a fur thief. He had not returned, which, in itself, was not unusual. Disappearances of this sort were of everyday occurrence in the ranks of the Mounted. But, this man was *not* Corporal Johnson. Steele had known Johnson, well.

The inspector had said that Dead Man's Run was a place of mystery, and surely his experiences to date bore this out. Why had he been attacked in the cabin? How did those men know of his arrival? Who were they? And this old man who apparently lived, hermit-like, in his cave? Men called him mad. They feared him. And well they might. There must be the strength of a dozen men in those mighty arms. And why had the girl—? Here Steele called a halt to his imaginings. It was not good that he should think about

Julie Reevar, not until his job was done, at any rate.

He had come to Dead Man's Run to investigate the killing of Silas Rathbun, government ethnologist. When last seen alive, Rathbun had been headed toward Dead Man's Run. Of course, he might have met his death in any one of a thousand natural ways, but the vague but evil reputation of the Run had directed suspicion in that direction. And too, headquarters was anxious to find out something about the settlement itself. This double mission had been put up to him. He intended to see it through.

He had no way of determining, as yet, just where Julie Reevar fitted into the scheme of things. He suspected, he was afraid, that she would prove to be a vital factor. Chances were, he would cross her in the the line of duty. He disliked to even consider this possibility. The simple little French girl moved him strangely. Never before had any woman so impressed him. His sensations were new ones, quite. Was he in love? He didn't know. At any rate, duty came first. His disturbing reactions to Julie Reevar's black eyes would have to wait. The job came first.

Steele did not know when he slept.

He awoke much refreshed. His first thought was of food. An appetizing aroma added to his hunger. He searched out this delectable odor along a dark passageway, and rounding a corner, he came upon Julie Reevar. She was turning a haunch of moose veal on a spit over an open fire. Steele's mouth watered. She looked up, smiling.

"M'sieu has the great hunger, no?"

"Woman, you said it!"

He sat, cross-legged, beside her.

"Sleep long, did I?"

She laughed merrily.

"You could never guess, m'sieu. You go to sleep las' night an' now eet ees night again."

"No? You don't say?"

Her face was flushed from the heat. He watched the quick lights play about

her dark cheeks and his heart took to throbbing violently. He pulled his gaze away from her, reluctantly.

"Well now, maybe you an' me kin have a little talk, eh?"

She stole a quick glance at his flushed face.

"Eef you weesh, m'sieu."

Her eyes refused to meet his.

He fidgeted uneasily, cleared his throat unnecessarily.

"Well now. Let's see! That red-coated fellow? Who— who— what about him?"

"Oh! You know about heem?"

"Well, yes, a little. I want to know more."

Fright replaced the softness in her eyes.

"I do not know—" She hesitated.

"Perhaps I'm goin' at this thing all wrong—er—ah—Julie. I trust you, after last night, an' so, I'll put my cards on the table, face up. Then if you're a good sport, you'll do the same. A man named Rathbun was killed here. I'm after the feller that killed him."

Undoubted relief flooded her face.

"And too, this here place, this settlement, don't seem to have no reason for existence, if you git me. There is, mebbe, fifty people here? What do they do for a livin'?"

Her face clouded. She transferred the meat skillfully to a wooden platter. Not until they were seated at a little rough-hewn table, the food between them, did she speak. Then:

"You have the many deeficult question, m'sieu. I answer the las' one firs' because he ees the mos' hard."

John Steele listened, spellbound, to a tale stranger than the strangest fiction.

The girl talked quickly, half in French, half in the queer English-French-Indian patois peculiar to the Northwest. As the story progressed he rearranged it, mentally, in chronological order.

Dead Man's Run, named from the treacherous, mountain stream that split the little settlement in twain, had origi-

nally been the wilderness home of but two families, honest French traders and trappers. These two families had intermarried and the settlement had grown and prospered through several generations.

The only business of these simple pioneers was trapping. They sold their furs to one of their own men by the name of Teebo, who disposed of them at the Grand Lac fur station five hundred miles away. This fur buying had been in the hands of the Teebo family for three generations. Teebo was the only man who regularly visited civilization; the majority of the rest had never been outside the valley.

It hardly seemed possible to Steele that such simple, child-like people existed.

All had gone well for many years, then the latest representative of the Teebo family, who, it developed, was none other than Black Whiskers—who with the red-haired man had attacked Steele the night before—had come upon some modern notions during his frequent visits to the outside world. Not satisfied with the splendid profits he made, legitimately, in Dead Man's Run, he extended his activities, which took the form of fur stealing on a large scale. A choice collection of thieves and cut-throats soon gathered about him.

Then had come the man in the red coat, called Kivlin, and, with Kivlin, complete destruction of the happy, simple life which the little settlement had enjoyed for over a century. Kivlin claimed to be a representative of the little known but much feared government. He levied taxes, payable in furs, on all; and he stayed on and with them, gradually, through his aggressiveness and superior intelligence, replacing Teebo as head man of the village.

Kivlin brought another trouble to the Reevars. Francois and his brother Jean had witnessed the killing of Corporal Johnson by Kivlin. Jean, a fighter like his grandfather, accused Kivlin. Jean's dead body was soon thereafter discovered

in the hills, picked clean by the wolves. Francois would have followed his brother had it not been that Francois was well loved by all and Kivlin feared to take a chance of incurring the combined enmity of all his gentle victims.

Rathbun had entered the village, but he had never left it. The ethnologist had foolishly displayed considerable money. Chances were he had been robbed and killed by the Kivlin-Teebo gang. There was no definite evidence to substantiate this, however.

Following the Rathbun murder Kivlin had evolved a new scheme, the object being his own protection. He said that he was not collecting enough tax from them to suit the government which he represented. Other red coated men would soon appear. These men would displace him and would claim exorbitant tax from the people. Hence all should be on constant lookout to prevent men wearing red coats from reaching Dead Man's Run.

He rendered this warning still more potent to the Reevars by claiming that Francois would be accused of killing Rathbun and would be promptly hung by the red coats. True, Francois had acted as the ethnologist's guide, but the lad knew nothing of the man's death.

All of this the majority of the simple folk believed. The little settlement was voluntarily patrolled by the half-frantic people, men, women and children, all joining in the carrying out of Kivlin's preposterous demands. Thus it was that, in the line of duty as she saw it, Julie Reevar had all but ended Steele's life. Of them all, old Gaspard Reevar openly gave Kivlin the lie. Even Kivlin was afraid of Gaspard Reevar. The old man had something up his sleeve. None knew what.

It took many hours of patient inquiry for Steele to get this story, complete and intelligible, from Julie Reevar. One other thing he discovered, which somewhat amused him at the time—he was in high favor with Gaspard Reevar. Immediately Steele had appeared the old

man had set about some mysterious preparations. The girl didn't know what he intended doing, neither did Francois; and Steele didn't care. With the facts in his possession, he acted promptly, and he acted alone. That is, he thought he acted alone.

Just as the first steel grey shafts of light were streaking the east, he left the cave. Almost at the same instant Julie Reevar, too, left the cave. She carried a rifle and was dressed for the trail. Steele did not see her.

Guided by Julie Reevar's minute directions, Steele sought out the big double cabin occupied by Kivlin and Teebo. A dense fog hid the trail a dozen feet away. Secure in the screen to his movements afforded by this heavy morning mist, he boldly approached the settlement.

Nearing the Kivlin cabin, he paused often, looking and listening, the suspicion growing upon him that he was being followed. Before he could prove or disprove these suspicions, however, the Kivlin cabin appeared before him.

A single glance assured him that it was deserted. The door swung wide open. Within, all was disorder, evidencing hasty flight. Sled tracks led away from the cabin, heading along the stream. There were two sleds, Steele decided, both heavily laden. Evidently Kivlin and Teebo had taken their ill-gotten spoils with them.

Steele wasted no time in futile ravings over the fact that the birds had flown; it was not yet too late. The snow was shallow and soft. He could make as good time on foot as they could with the heavy sleds. Pausing only to free his rifle from its protective casing of caribou skin he started away, running easily, swiftly.

According to Julie Reevar the only exit from the valley was at that point where Dead Man's Run nosed its irresistible way through the hills. The sled tracks followed the stream.

Many times within the first half-hour Steele slackened his pace, to listen in-

tently; he was obsessed with the idea that he was being followed. As no living thing appeared, however, he finally laid it to nerves, and hastened his pace.

For the better part of a mile Steele followed along a wooded ridge top. Below, enclosed by precipitous walls, roared and tumbled the ice-freighted stream of Dead Man's Run. Along this stream ran the trail, the only trail leading out of the valley. Steele purposely kept out of sight of this trail, holding to the far rim of the ridge. A wall of shale finally appeared before him, hung with gigantic icicles and lined with mighty hummocks of ice.

Steele dropped behind a stunted spruce scrub.

Just below, Dead Man's Run fought its resistless way through a mountain of shale. The trail, wide enough to accommodate no more than two average men abreast, closely followed the roaring torrent on through the wall. The stream was flood-high, filled with slush-ice and debris. Where it narrowed to accommodate the more slender opening through the wall, the white waters swept high up. An impressive sight, but it was not this that brought Steele to his feet, a groan of dismay on his lips.

He had arrived too late! There were two dog teams down there. The first, driven by a tall man in a red coat, already approached the opening in the wall. He urged the dogs with reckless haste along the narrow trail. The heavily laden sled careened wildly. Kivlin! And up the slope a short distance—Teebo—and Julie! Teebo had surprised her from the rear. She struggled in the big man's arms. What—what was she doing here?

A half-sob surged up into John Steele's throat. Kivlin was out of rifle shot. He dared not shoot at Teebo. Without shooting he could get one of them. But not both. Leaving Teebo, he could overtake Kivlin before the latter reached the firm snow beyond the valley, and, by allowing Kivlin to es-

cape, he could help Julie and get Teebo. Which should it be?

In this split second of indecision a startling truth was brought home to him. He loved Julie Reevar! Beyond all else he desired to help her. But he shouldn't do it. Kivlin was his man. Kivlin had killed Corporal Johnson, and Silas Rathbun, too, without doubt, Kivlin! Kivlin! He should get Kivlin!

His frantic uncertainty found answer in an unexpected manner.

Gaspard Reevar appeared, jinni-like.

"I get Kivlin," he said. With a bound he was gone, making his way down the slippery, boulder-strewn ridge wall with the agility of a mountain goat, his long white hair streaming down over his wide shoulders.

Making no attempt at concealment Steele cut at a sharp angle down the hill toward the struggling forms of Teebo and the girl.

Julie saw him a split second before Teebo. When her assailant sought to draw the gun from his belt she threw her arms about him and clung tightly.

Steele saw and redoubled his speed.

"Thata girl! Stay with it!"

He vaulted a head high clump of sumach scrub and sprawled headlong into a drift twenty feet down the bank.

Teebo redoubled his efforts to fight free of the frantically clinging girl, but she fought now for the life of the man she loved. In her slender arms was a great strength.

Finally, Teebo freed an arm. He braced against the wall at his back and struck downward with his clubbed fist at the girl's head. Again and again he struck. She fell limply away. He snatched at his gun.

For an infinitesimal fraction of an instant it stuck. In that instant John Steele negotiated another twenty foot drop and landed, white to the lips with rage, at Teebo's feet.

He bounced upward like a rubber ball.

"Yah!" he said. His fist struck Teebo in the mouth.

The fur thief was a different man than had fought in the cabin two nights before. The desperation of a cornered animal was his. He came to his feet spitting blood, caught a knife from his belt, and lunged headlong down the bank at Steele.

Steele sought to grasp that upflung hand. Slipped on the ice. Went to his knees.

The down-sweeping knife glanced off his shoulder, slitting his coat from shoulder to wrist. Carried on by the force of the blow, Teebo fell forward. Steele turned aside, and as his opponent sprawled upon him he caught the arm holding the knife.

Teebo was a big man, heavier by far than Steele. Desperation added to his strength. Even so, his limit in endurance was reached much sooner than Steele's.

This sort of thing was John Steele's business in life. Despite his righteous rage he fought calmly, with calculating, deadly surety. There was no question in his mind as to the outcome. He had fought men like this one before. Rough and tumble fighting held no secrets from him.

He pulled Teebo upright. High in the air his left hand clutched his opponent's right wrist. He pulled that wrist and the knife steadily downward. With his right arm he held Teebo close. At intervals he loosed this arm and struck, savage, short-arm jolts to the big man's unprotected stomach.

With each blow Teebo was jolted backward, his feet leaving the ground; with each blow Steele lowered the knife arm.

Finally, with a mighty heave, he threw the fur thief to the ground, knelt upon him, and turned the glistening blade downward toward the gasping man's heart.

"Yore through—right now—big boy. Say yer prayers!"

"No, no, John—you mus' not!" Julie Reevar caught at Steele's coat.

"Go away, girlie. I'm sure enough goin' t' cut this bird's heart out."

Terror gleamed in Teebo's eyes. The fear of death. Steele grinned inwardly.

"You killed Rathbun, a friend of mine. And now I'm goin' t' kill you. Save the government—the price o' hanging you."

"No, no, no, no!" Teebo's eyes were pleading. "No, no. Not me! Before God I swear it. Kivlin! It was Kivlin!"

"S'that so? Well, that's what I wanted to hear."

Steele shook the knife free of Teebo's palsied fingers and surged to his feet, bringing the beaten man with him.

"There's a piece o' rope around my waist, Julie. Untie it an' we'll truss this fellow up."

"What would you do, m'sieu? Before God, I have kill nobody!"

"Maybe you ain't killed nobody, but headquarters has been looking fer a certain fur thief up in this here neck o' the woods fer a long time. I expect as how you're prob'ly him. They'll be plumb glad to see you."

With the now docile Teebo trussed up like a Christmas turkey, Steele turned to the girl.

She stood hand pressed tightly across her lips as though to stifle a scream, tense-bodied, eyes wide with horror. John Steele followed her gaze. He cried out, involuntarily. Started forward. Stopped. No, there was nothing he could do. Already it was too late.

Gaspard Reevar and Kivlin, locked in each other's arms, had fallen into the stream, into Dead Man's Run; no living thing could survive that ice-freighted flood. They would be dashed to their death unless a miracle happened. Perhaps there was a chance, though just a chance.

Steele caught up the remainder of the coil of rope which he had used in tying Teebo, thrust the thief's gun in the girl's

hand, and started running along the icy trail bordering the stream.

Rounding a bend he came to a sliding stop, amazement written large on his face. Coming along the trail toward him, dripping water like a drenched shaggy-haired dog, was Gaspard Reevar, and slung over his shoulder was the limp body of the murderer, Kivlin.

The old man's ice-coated beard parted in a smile when he saw Steele.

"This feller not much good, now. He is ver' sick. We had the swim, he and I."

"Doggone, I'll say you did! But how in Sam Hill did you make it?"

"A log wedged across the way. It stopped us, all right."

Steele would have relieved the old man of his burden, but Gaspard Reevar would not permit it.

His eyes lighted when he saw Teebo.

"So, we get them both, eh? You and me? And now all will again be well. All because, m'sieu, that night when you came I see the love light in my Julie's eyes. Voila! It is so. I say this red coat, John Steele, is the good man;

Julie loves him. I will help him. And lo, it is done, m'sieu, that which we both desired!"

Gaspard Reevar spoke loudly. His black eyes twinkled.

Julie Reevar feigned not to hear. She busied herself collecting wood for a fire which Steele had hastily built. Now, as Gaspard Reevar and the revived Kivlin dried themselves, Steele took the girl's arm and guided her away along the stream.

For some distance they walked in silence, side by side. Then—

"Expect as how I'll have to ask Francois t' come back with me. He—he—saw Kivlin kill Johnson. And—I you—"

Words failed him. He glimpsed at her face, half turned. She was smiling. Her cheeks were flushed. He squared his shoulders determinedly.

"How about it, Julie? Will you come back—with me—an' Francois?"

"You would marry me—John?"

"Yeah, sure enough. That's jest what I meant. Will you?"

"Yes." Her hand found his.

A North American Dish

I was freighting with six oxen between Oak Point, Manitoba, and Dog Lake—a distance of about ninety miles—in the dead of winter with the thermometer wavering between 20 and 40 below zero.

My oxen were making hard weather of the trip, and as I was about all in myself, I was mighty glad to spy an Indian encampment in the woods just before nightfall. I pulled in and asked if I could stay all night.

The brave agreed; and after I had fed the oxen, he led me into the tent to receive a steaming bowl of hot stew from his squaw. I made a hearty meal of the stew and enjoyed it so much that I passed my bowl back for more.

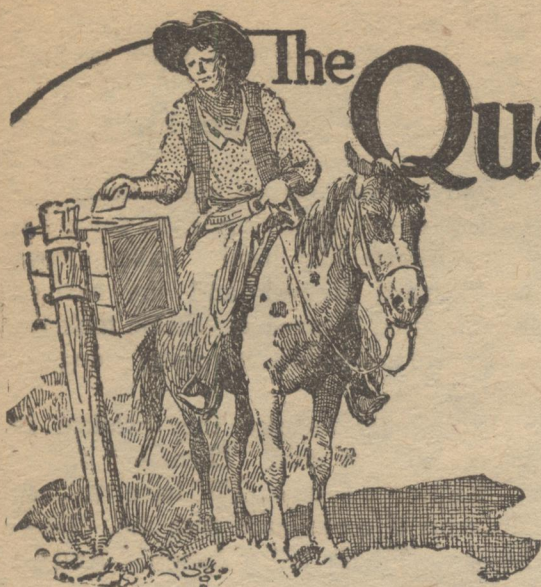
After I had finished I passed around the tobacco and we were soon puffing away. Suddenly the brave looked over my way and said:

"You like um supper, huh?"

"Sure," I replied, "that's the best rabbit I ever ate."

"Huh," said the Indian, "that no rabbit—that muskrat!"

So I went out and bedded down with my oxen.—Ward Drysdale.



The Question Trail

Here the editorial staff of "Action Stories" and its field correspondents in the four corners of the world, answer adventure questions for our readers. Send yours, but be sure to make your question a specific one. This quality is necessary as we aim to serve as many readers as our limited space permits

O. V. R., Hartford, Conn.

Q. Are the sled-dogs of the North kindly treated by their owners?

A. Dogs owned by white traders and trappers are usually well treated, but the northern Indian is, as a rule, unnecessarily cruel to his team. A real affection between an Indian driver and his dogs is seldom. Most Indian dogs have a cringing attitude toward their masters, a sure dog sign the world over of mistreatment.

B. F., Watertown, N. Y.

Q. Are there any records of buried treasure in the Philippine Islands?

A. Yes, there have come out from the islands various and strange stories of pirate trove. In the June issue of *Action Stories*, a member of the "World Adventurers" (under the auspices of *Action Stories*), gives a most interesting account of buried treasure in the Philippine Islands, that has come under his observation. We suggest that you read this story as it answers your question 100%.

F. D. D., Knoxville, Tenn.

Q. What is the biggest liner in the service today?

A. The White Star *Majestic* is the longest liner while the *Leviathan*, though eight feet shorter, exceeds the *Majestic* in tonnage.

W. W., Seattle, Washington.

Q. Is reindeer meat good eating?

A. Yes, splendid. It is juicy and tasty. A market is now being built for it in the West by a company which is bringing it down from Alaska.

James Emmons, Bridgeport, Conn.

Q. What precaution did the old-time prospectors and cowboys take to prevent being bitten by rattlesnakes when they slept on the open trail?

A. The old-time cowboys and prospectors of the West used to believe that a rough hair, hand-twisted *mécate* rope laid round the bedrolls protected them from snakes. It should be explained that a *mécate* rope is not a lariat as so many people think. The *mécate* is a hand-twisted rope made from the manes and tails of horses. It runs from fifteen to twenty feet in length and varies in diameter generally half an inch. It is used as a lead rope and to tie up your horse with. Also used in conjunction with the *jacquima* or hackamore for breaking and training green colts to the saddle.

These ropes are still made and used in various parts of the West. If you want one, you can get one from the Porter Saddlery Co., Phoenix, Arizona; prices run from \$3.50 to \$5, according to length and finish. A nice one would be twenty feet in length and made from white and black hair in alternate strands.

As to whether a hair rope makes any real protection or not is a matter which is frequently and variously discussed.

Mike O'Hagan, Rattlesnake Gulch, Wyoming.

Q. Who was Captain Benjamin McCulloch?

A. An able Army man who joined Colonel Davy Crockett in the Mexican Revolution. Captain McCulloch later became a famed Texas Ranger early in 1835. His name is well known today along the Rio Grande.

H. T., Detroit, Mich.

Q. Can some one tell me where Mona Island is located and whether it is of any importance?

A. Mona is a small island adjacent to the westward shores of Porto Rico in the West Indies. It is six miles long by four miles wide. It is of no commercial importance, being but a picturesque spot for scientists. Of volcanic formation, it is full of curious caves of considerable size and interest; huge stalactites hang from the cave walls. Wild goats, hogs, cattle and tortoises are found there. The shores are fringed by dangerous outlying coral reefs.

Eugene Englar, Pasadena, California.

Q. Who was Mary Read and what was her connection with the history of the West India Islands?

A. Mary Read was a notorious pirate who was born in England. She served several years on a pirate ship and successfully masqueraded as a man for considerable time. She became famous for reply to a possible hanging for her bloody misdeeds which was:

"As to hanging, it is no great hardship. If it were not for that, every coward would become a pirate and worthy men of courage would starve."

Pete Foley, Deming, New Mexico.

Q. Will you please tell me what the sailor's jargon, "backstays of the sun," refer to?

A. This is a sailor's name for the long, illuminating rays that extend toward the earth from the sun and clouds. The technical name is crepuscular rays.

Frank Lewis, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Q. Awhile ago I read a story mentioning the "Phansigar people of the East." Can you tell me anything of their origin or habitat?

A. The "Phansigar people" are from Hindustan; they were several generations of clever criminals that infested the highroads of India terminating in 1820. They are accredited with being the world's first highway robbers of any consequence.

R. V., Ithaca, New York.

Q. How much forest land is protected by New York State?

A. There are fourteen million acres of forest land protected by the state.

Horace Bradley, Little Rock, Arkansas.

Q. Am contemplating a trip to Yellowstone Park. What is the best time of the year to go?

A. July or the early part of September is the best time to visit the park. At this time you will miss the height of the season's rush.

A. Beelin, Albany, New York.

Q. What is the best type of small boat for all-around use on the average Adirondack lake?

A. Either a wooden flat-bottom or else a round-bottom steel boat which is non-sinkable. The first is the better for a tenderfoot unaccustomed to boats, since it is a steady craft, hard to overturn. The steel round-bottom is a fine boat, lighter and easier to handle than the former. The steel boats can be procured in non-sinkable models.

Rod Bevins, Huntington, West Va.

Q. Why does the Easterner ride with the horse, or post, while the Westerner sticks on the horse?

A. The Eastern method is easier on the animal but tiring for the rider. In the West, where horseflesh is plentiful, and the rider is in the saddle for long stretches of time, it is a case of spare the rider rather than the horse.

Robert Newman, Pontiac, Michigan.

Q. Can some one on Action Stories tell me the part of the world that the Caribs came from?

A. The Caribs were the original native people of the West Indian Islands. Columbus is said to have first brought them to the light of history. There has been some dissension over this point as some scientists claim that the Arawaks were first. It is generally conceded that the Caribs were the first people, however, as the name Caribbean (pronounced *ker-ee bayen* in the Islands) was the first that was attached to these people.

S. P. V., San Francisco, California.

Q. What is a Chinook?

A. A Chinook is a wind that blows down the Eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains and adjacent plains of the U. S. and Canada. In winter this warm, dry wind causes the snow to disappear with remarkable rapidity, and for this reason it has been nicknamed the "snow-eater."

R. W. Hale, Atlanta, Georgia.

Q. In reading an adventure novel I came across the name "Lampedusa." Can you tell me where it is?

A. Lampedusa is a small island in the Mediterranean, belonging to the province of Grigenti. It is now an Italian penal colony of four hundred convicts.

E. L., Chicago, Ill.

Q. What are Sikhs?

A. Sikhs are followers of the Sikh religion of India. They are found chiefly in Punjab, United Provinces, Sind, Jammu and Kashmir. They are notorious for their fierce rebellion against British rule.

World Adventurers



"World Adventurers" is a fraternal band of brother adventurers. We believe that wanderers and adventurers from the four lanes of the world have many interests in common.

We want to bring you all together. In "World Adventurers" we have a genuine association of all-world adventurers under one common meeting point—*Action Stories*, a meeting point and, as well, a jumping-off point.

Membership requires that a man have the true heart of an adventurer, or the desire to be a true-hearted adventurer and at the same time possessing certain qualifications. Members of the American Expeditionary Force—from our greatest adventure in history—are eligible; and allied armies; also members of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and the Merchant Marine.

All others must show that they are adventurers of real cloth. How? If you have had some adventure; been where few men have ever been; close to shipwreck; traveled foreign lands; taken long treks anywhere; had exciting hunting trips;

expeditions to far-off places, service in the merchant marine before the mast; railroaded; blazed new trails in aerial flight, or experienced thrilling escapades with life in the raw and close "squeaks" with death. ANY of these or similar experiences will make you eligible for membership to the fraternity of "World Adventurers."

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A Roamer of the Seas

I served four and one-half years in the U. S. N., seeing service in California, Panama, Mexico and Virginia.

Was held up twice, first in Middletown, N. Y.; second time in New Orleans. While

riding atop a box car on the West Shore R. R., was made a target for soldiers standing on a bluff at West Point, N. Y. Was concealed in a boiler on a flat car going through Hattiesburg, Miss., when said boiler was the target of several persons, identity unknown. While in the Navy, I was detailed as coxwain of a motor-sailing-launch and was twice in collision with other small boats, getting the worst end of the deal both times. Also had an amusing adventure, which made me sore at the time it happened. Here's the way it was. While on board the U. S. S. *Aroostook* at Salina Cruz, Mexico, in August, 1919, I bought two quarts of "vino" from a Mexican woman, price \$1.50. The vino came aboard in a basket, via the port-hole route, and was covered with various kinds of fruit. I pulled the cork out of one bottle and found the contents to be very bad Mexican beer. I then pulled the cork out of the other and found the contents to be the same, only worse.

I just read a letter signed "Vagabond" in *Action Stories* for February, which reminded me of an incident which happened

on our ship. While we were tied up at the dock at Salina Cruz, a man in dungarees threw a bundle of clothes through a porthole, and then jumped in himself. He was a stowaway, and stayed with the ship till we reached San Diego. He ate at the crew's mess all through the trip. His presence was known by everybody except the officers. At least he was never bothered by anybody.

Hoping to hear from you in the near future, and wishing all kinds of success to *Action Stories*.

Walter C. Zeigin,
Co. 4, National Military Home,
Leavenworth, Kansas.

Wants a He-Man Partner

Brother Adventurers: Look at the map of South America, find Coary, Brazil, and look southwest from that point. What do you say boys? Does it look good or not? I have full tropical equipment from a hammock to a mosquito net. This will be my second attempt in that direction, the biggest drawback being the climate and the native's careless use of the poison arrow. I will be glad to give more precise information on personal inquiry. Brother F. Jouget, your ideas are O. K. Let's go.

EMDON W. LYNDE,
1635 Pontiac St.,
East Cleveland, Ohio.

A Maverick's Tale

Here's the slip cut from latest copy *Action Stories*. Not sure I can pass on what little I have time to sketch over, but anyway I started out a bit young—when one year old! Fact! Not by my lonesome, of course, but with my parents who moved from Kentucky (yes, a native of that once grand old state—a good old state until the new creed "Volsteadism" was crammed down their throats).

We crossed the Mississippi River at St. Louis on a ferry long before a bridge was thought of. We finally landed in Indian Territory. My father operated a pumping station for the M. K. & T. R. R., and when I was ten I helped him, and at twelve I had a position, myself, as pump operator. Those were the days in which the "pay car" passed along monthly, and I felt pretty big when I climbed up the steps to draw my money. I remember that the paymaster stated I was by far the youngest pumper in the employ of the system. When eighteen I had charge of two pumping stations some distance apart, one at Caney Switch and one at Blue River, the latter being 26 miles North of the Texas line—Red River. And, by the way, I had an adventure at Blue River Station that might be of interest to some of our pals—a mixup with an African black panther that escaped from a circus train. Maybe, if I'm allowed the space, will write about it shortly.

Again was I "all swelled up" with importance, for I had an annual pass good on any train. I could even flag the Katy Flier if

I thought it necessary in order to reach any point from Denison, Texas to Muskogee, Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). Every night at Blue River I heard the same old concert coyotes from darkness until dawn, seconded occasionally by the screech of a bobcat or the hair-raising scream of a panther.

The "Territory" was really wild in those days—bandits galore. Train robberies were common affairs. Another little adventure at Blue River was with some of those gentry. I had been across the river hunting a wild turkey roost. Getting back about nightfall, I found the bridge held by holdups, with a red light ready to flag the Northbound Flyer coming from Texas. I went to an old gravel switch back a ways (down grade to the river), threw the switch, got into one of two empty gravel cars, let off the brakes and we started "hell bent for leather" down the track, over the bridge at about 50 miles per, on through the shooting, scattering outlaws and I braked the cars down some five miles beyond, got off and managed to flag the Flyer in time. Got a neat little stake out of this.

Well, not much space left here. Went to state of Washington, back to the "Territory," then to California and Nevada where I worked in gold mines near Searchlight, Nevada. Back to Texas, then to Wisconsin, then to Wyoming where I worked in tunnel of Sherman Hill "cut-off" for the "U. P." Then to Mexico, then back to Wyoming where I had several rather exciting small adventures, one of which appeared in *Denver Great Divide*. Back and forth until I finally located for time being here in Kansas. Still make occasional trips, though.

J. R. HENDERSON,
Galena, Kansas.

A Warrior Joins the Clan

I am a new reader of your magazine but think I can class myself as an *Action Stories* fan. The men here in the Battery all like your magazine very much and there's always a scramble to see who reads it first when it hits the day room.

I am very much interested in your *World Adventurers* department, as I've sort of got the wanderlust myself. I've seen quite a bit of the world and intend to see a lot more before I cash in my chips. Am enclosing my application and a buddy's for an enrolment blank for *World Adventurers*. He served through the World War and was in a company which received the Fourragere of the Croix de Guerre as an individual decoration for bravery under fire. I was with the Canadian Dragoons during the war but never got across.

I surely enjoyed, Walter J. Coburn's story, "Written in Fire," in the June issue. I've been in Mexico and I've known lots of Top Kicks, and this story shows 'em both pretty much as they are.

CHARLES WORTHINGTON,
Fort Bragg, N. C.



Tattooing the Philippine Hillman

Here's a real tip for trail tip readers if they intend to seek action in the mountains of the Philippines or even in the lowlands for that matter. Take a tattooing outfit along with plenty of red and green ink. You will make friends everywhere and you'll be able to eat when you're wondering where the next meal is coming from.

I've tattooed wild tribesmen in northern Luzon and still wilder jungle dwellers in Mindoro, and although my work was crude my patients liked it and came back for more. Incidentally these people are pagan and simple designs such as the rising sun, the moon, dogs' heads, etc., appeal to them.

The majority of the hillmen, and the hill-women for that matter, of the Islands are tattooed in their own fashion, but like the gobs and marines of our Navy are fascinated by something new. And yet their skin artists have attempted nothing but bracelets, chains and zig-zag work and this has been done with soot or a blue pigment. That's the reason bright colors attract them.

There are firms in the States which deal in tattooing supplies and which offer for a small sum designs of cardboard through which a novice can work. For the rest, only needles and ink are necessary. The wild man will not holler at a bit of pain and while electric machines are fine for civilized communities the old-fashioned hand method goes best in the hills.

In 1915 I was in the Manyan *barrio* or village of Darac in Mindoro on a prospecting trip and profiting by previous experience elsewhere took along my tattooing gear. Being pretty well covered with ink myself and not wearing many more clothes than my savage hosts I at once became the object of much admiration.

Old Chief Bituin (Star) inquired if I could fix him up in the same manner. Of course I could—and did. And then I had the whole tribe to decorate. While I tattooed, details of hunters scoured the hills for game, women wove me native blankets, and the tuba or palm wine gatherers brought me in plenty of liquid refreshment. When I wished to prospect I had dozens of volunteer *cargadores* to carry my goods or to ply pick and shovel. Quite a delightful arrangement I assure you and one that will be applicable in many out of the way places.

My greatest trouble was to get the patients to scour their hides previous to the operation. As they were unfamiliar with soap and I wasn't "putting out" any, certain oily roots

and sharp stones were called into service. Go to Darac today and note my handiwork. Old Bituin, if he's still alive, has a red star on his forehead and his family all bear the same brand on their cheeks. His pet wife who was extremely fond of roast pork insisted on having a wild boar's head inscribed on her matronly bosom and hubby looked on approvingly while I did the job in green ink. A regular D. T. pig it was but it suited the lady to perfection.

But the biggest hit of all was made with the tribal medicine man who most appropriately picked out a skull and cross bones from my design book and who probably bears that emblem on his back today that being the largest available field for the masterpiece. He nearly dislocated his neck by trying to glimpse the "study" in a pool of water which served all hands for a mirror.

Si, Señores—by all means learn something of tattooing if you wish to wander in strange places.

CHARLES A. FREEMAN.



Here's a Real Border Yarn!

I have already sent in my application for a place in the roster of your World-wide Adventurers, so I feel safe in telling this somewhat unusual story. It happened two years ago:

My pal, Stan Street, and myself had just returned from a trip to Manitoba and had landed in Montreal about 2 a. m. We were ravenously hungry, so we drove to a place on upper St. Denis Street which served beer and lunches all night; a pretty tough joint in a respectable neighborhood.

Our total possessions were one 1919 Buick touring car and \$22 in cash.

We went in and sat down at a table, with a lantern-jawed chap of about thirty, and ordered two beers and some sandwiches.

We finished our meal and arose to go, when the man at the table spoke. His voice, low-pitched, had a trace of steel in it.

"Sit down and order more beer. It's worth your while."

I glanced at Stan and he nodded. We sat down and ordered two more beers and then Stan turned to the stranger.

"Well?"

"How are you fixed for money?"

"Damn!" said I. "It's not your business, what is——"

But Stan broke in:

"Why is that interesting you?"

"Are you willing to make a few hundred dollars?" asked the stranger, ignoring Stan's question completely.

"Maybe," said Stan tersely. "What's in it? What's the game?"

"Just this," said the stranger. "I want to get out of here *fast!* Just as fast as possible, and yours is the only car I've seen tonight outside of —. But never mind. Have you gas enough to get to Rouse's Point?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then I'll give you two hundred dollars for your services and three hundred for your car! O.K.?"

Five hundred looked pretty good then, as we had bought the car from a down-and-outer for \$50. We accepted.

"But," said Stan, "what's the idea?"

"None of your damned business, and let me say that if you are cowards don't accept, as you will smell powder before you are done. Now listen: Walk out, start the car and wait for me. When I get in stop for nobody!"

We arose, mystified, and did as directed. I soon had the engine purring and then turned to Stan. He grinned,

"Looks like a wild night for the sailors!"

Before I could answer, hell broke loose in the Golden Gate. A pistol roared twice, voices thundered and the crash of furniture reached our ears.

As the dip reached its height I heard a low voice grit,

"Shoot!"

We did. I jammed my feet on the gas and damned near stripped my gears in my hurry to vacate that vicinity.

As we flashed by the house a pistol barked three times. I heard one zip over my head. Another smashed a new radium-dial light on the dashboard and the third buried itself in the seat just below the back of my neck.

We flashed down St. Denis, skidded onto Craig, and then shot down St. James. We swung left at Bonaventure Station to the Victoria Bridge.

I started to slow down for the Toll House, but a round muzzle jabbed into my side and "Beat it! Don't stop!"

Well, the muzzle of a .38 is a good persuader. I didn't stop.

As we turned to head for the line, I was told in no gentle tone to "give 'er all she's got."

About ten miles from the line the stranger snapped, "Stop here!"

I pulled her up and turned to him.

"Why, —!"

"Shut up and get out!"

A dark muzzle menaced Stan and myself. We got.

He slid into my seat, and my heart sank. Ta-ta car. Then I got the surprise of my life. He handed me a roll of bills.

"Here y'are. Good luck. Now fade!"

We walked into the bushes on the roadside and watched our car shoot off.

Stan burst into a laugh.

"Yeh! Funny, ain't it? Here we are, miles from Montreal, no car, and a bunch of counterfeit bills to show for it!"

We started up the road, but had not gone twenty feet when the headlights of a car

showed far up the road, coming at tremendous speed. Stan hauled me back into the bushes and as the car whirled by I blessed his forethought, for that car had its tonneau crowded with men, and I had seen the flash of steel.

We bummed a ride from a tourist to Montreal and the first thing we did was to find out if the bills were good. They were.

Although we scanned the papers daily for two weeks, we found nothing concerning the story I have just told.

Who the stranger was, crook, hi-jacker, bootlegger or a pawn in some bigger game we never knew. We only know that if he was a crook, there is honor among thieves.

Yours truly, L. E. EDWARDS.

Knows His Horses

Guess you hombres won't mind if I string along with you a little, will you? I feel the urge to get in with a few of the others that have been places and seen things.

I started out by serving a couple of years on the fourmast barque "Spring Bank," but decided that horses were more in my line. Rode some in the Argentine and Africa, and did a bit of adventuring in Peru during the revolution of 1914-1915. Guess maybe I've traveled about 30,000 miles astraddle from the Athabasca range down to the Chihuahua.

They produce some wild horses in the Nevada mountains, and I've chased my share. I want to tell you folks that there's no thrill like feeling a wild one begin to weaken and knowing that you have him where you want him.

Hope I've qualified to trail along with the other World Adventurers.

Edwin Anger,
Forest Service,
Crown King, Ariz.

South of the Rio Grande

I hereby enclose my application to the World Adventurers. I think it is great.

Well, I have had a few adventures.

Left home when I was 14. Joined the old Harris Nickle-Plate Shows. With them two seasons. Next dredged oysters on old Chesapeake Bay, where they paid you off with a belaying pin. In 1898 joined the Army, in 1899 went to Philippines. Discharged 1901 at Manila. Went to China, stayed there 2 years. Stopped in Japan on way back. From 1905 to 1917 was in Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Mexico. Was lost on the plains 4 days. Nothing to eat but jack rabbits, with no salt.

Came very near joining General Villa. I knew General Lee Cristmas, also met Richard Harding Davis. Haven't been in one town over 2 years since I was 14. When U. S. went in the war tried to get in the Army. Turned down. Signed on board Russian S. S. Umps., at Galveston, Tex., for Liverpool. Went in to Norfolk, Va., for coal. The crew of the Russian were Bolsheviks. Tried to take ship out of Norfolk. Was paid off in Norfolk. Then went to work for Shipping Board. Carried

food and ammunition across. Made 8 trips; torpedoed once. Married 4 times. None took. Expect to try 4 more. Am in Tampa now, but will leave here soon. Too D—M hot! Well, guess this is enough. If not got a lot more.

H. D. Smith,
Tampa, Florida.

Jack of all Trails

Have just arrived home from a long trip. Saw your offer to adventurers and thought I would reserve a front seat in your big round up, if you would accept a jack of all trails, anything from handling cows to washing babies, run anything from a washing machine to a John Henry. I have had a few adventures in different parts of the country, unless I have to I had rather not recount them, some of them are not very pleasant. When a fellow pal is killed before his eyes by Mexican outlaws and he himself is strung up by the thumbs and then tied on the end of a rope behind a half wild horse and turned out in the desert he is not so very anxious to talk about it. If I have to I could say more but do not care to talk on that subject. I have done a very great deal of traveling on trains, autos, horses and foot and by ship. I am now home after a very long absence and would like very much to join your bunch of World Adventurers. Am enclosing coupon from your *Action Story Magazine*, it is a No. 1 book, I have read several issues of it and like it just fine. Please send application to:

"Honey Boy"
Stoneville, N. C.
R. No. 1.

From an Ex-Mountie

Have been a reader of your magazine since coming down from the North and I trust that the following information will enable me to become a member of your World Adventurers.

Am an American, served in France with the First Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade also served my time with the Royal North-West Mounted Police, was shipwrecked in the Devil's Hole (in the Atlantic). Have had several brushes with timber wolves in the North Woods of Canada.

I am not extravagant with my praise when I say your magazine is the best.

Best of luck to your magazine and the World Adventurers.

Sincerely yours,
E. J. M. Wood,
Winnipeg, Canada.

Railroading Thrills

Greetings: from a regular reader of *Action Stories*, and at the same time, I am going to put in my "bid" for membership in the Adventurers Club. Will give you some of my experiences so that you may judge as to whether I am eligible or not.

Was a member of Co. D 144, Machine

Gun Battalion, 40th Division, went into the Army at Camp Kearney, Calif., and was there only twenty-six days when I started overseas. Twelve months in the Army and had eleven months at over-seas pay, which was very good, as I was not an Ex-Army man.

Have railroaded over the South-west; very few parts of the States of Arkansas, Mississippi, (my home State), Louisiana, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Oregon, Washington and California that I do not know as I have railroaded over the States, as well as motored around them too, fished, some hunting, not much of a hunter but do like to fish, where the fishing is good.

Drove a truck around Los Angeles for a year and a half, worked in five different studios. Had several machines of my own, and for knowing Los Angeles, allow me to get seven miles from the Court House in Los Angeles, and out of the fifty two Sundays in the year I will take you over a new road each Sunday, never using the same road twice in the same year, and will not get you off the concrete, will visit a new spot each Sunday.

Have worked two hundred and ten feet below sea-level, in the famous Death Valley, as I was on construction train and helped build a twenty mile branch into the Borax fields at Ryan, where she "wuz one hundred and twenty-two and -five, and thar warn't no shade" only eight white men on the job, the others were Japs and Mexicans, and after the day's work was finished had to run forty-eight miles for water to run us the next day, and within the forty-eight miles there was not a section house or tree.

Have railroaded over the Summit on the Santa Fe, around San Bernardino, Calif., and also for the S. P. over the summit where we crossed at nine thousand and seven hundred feet high, and had forty miles of snow-shed to go through, also over the mountains in Washington and Oregon.

Have been up on top of Mount Wilson several times as that was a favorite hike for the bunch from Los Angeles. Have been over eleven thousand feet high on Mount Whitney, which is the highest point in California. However, I did not get to the top, as the wind was too strong and cold.

Came to Chicago, in a machine and made the trip camping out, lost several times and was attacked by timber wolves one time while we were lost.

There is not hardly a part of the States mentioned that I can't give some pointers on, whether it is fishing, trapping, hunting, farming or mining, as I have always made it a practice to make the best of my trips for the information that was there.

If there is any one seeking the information, you may send them to me, if you think I am eligible for the membership, and answering the questions.

R. H. Mills,
2126 Sheffield Ave.,
Chicago, Ill.

Puncher and Lumberjack

When I read of some of the experiences that other *Action Stories* readers have had, I feel that the prosaic life of the cow-puncher and lumberjack are somewhat dull. However, one night that I passed in the Rockies makes me better able to appreciate the predicaments of the characters in the stories.

I was trapping back in about 100 miles and decided to come out for supplies over the new trail. Of course, I had a general idea of the direction and all that, but somehow I soon found that I didn't know where I was. I took a header down a slope and lost my grub in a gorge. Then to cap the climax, my snowshoes wore through.

I finally decided to follow the river which I knew would eventually bring me out someplace that I recognized, but one of those north blizzards came up and I did well to keep moving in any direction. I don't know what happened that night, but the next morning two trappers found me crawling along the bank on my hands and knees. Thanks to some kind of fool's luck, I guess, I've never felt even the least result of that night.

I'm glad it happened, however, since now when I read about those fellows who are in a tough spot like I was, I can feel a sort of fellow feeling for them. I've lived a man's life and I like to read stories that tell about that kind of people and life. That's why I read *Action Stories*.

Tom Ford,
McBride,
B. C., Canada.

Action in the Adirondacks

About the most exciting thing that I ever experienced, was a frolic in the Adirondacks

with a lunatic. I wouldn't sell the thrill now, but I'd have given plenty to be someplace while it was happening.

This fellow was sure in bad shape. He had lived up in the mountains in a solitary cabin so long that I guess going crazy was sort of a relief to him. Anyway they sent us up to bring him in after a report of his condition had reached town, and we went laughing.

It took a day to get to his place, and we had no trouble in getting him to agree to come with us. However, we decided to start at once for home instead of waiting for morning. It was a bright night and we knew all the trails so we weren't a bit troubled. We didn't even bother to tie him up.

Everything went along fine for a while until suddenly this fellow let out a terrific howl, jumped up the slope and began to pepper us with rocks, sticks, dirt and everything that came to his hand. All the time he kept up a continuous stream of the funniest howls I ever heard.

Well, we chased that bird for over an hour and finally cornered him. He smacked us with all he could gather up, but we finally bound his hands together and got back on the trail. Once he was bound up he relaxed and went to the ways of peace. He never made a rash move or opened his mouth until we came to town in the morning. Then he looked at my eye where he had landed with an extra large hunk of log and sort of grinned.

"Good shot, ain't I," he said; and they dragged him away before I could answer.

The next time there are any jobs like that to be done, I'm going to leave town.

Ralph B. Baum,
405 Forman Ave.,
Syracuse, N. Y.

Letter Buddies. If you want to strike up correspondence with members of World Adventurers write in your idea and we will publish your request in *Action Stories*. If you are looking for a new partner or a lost buddy—if you want a job or are looking for adventure—if you want to make a swap—tell us and in your letter goes. This is a free service to members of World Adventurers only.

Secretary, WORLD ADVENTURERS,
Action Stories, 461 Eighth Avenue, New York City

7-26

Please send me an application blank for membership enrollment in the World Adventurers. No initiation charge, no membership fee. Everything free to me as a reader of Action Stories.

Name.....
Street.....
City.....State.....

(Continued from page IV)

enough, and I drifted over in old Montana to ride broncos with Paddy Ryan, Jimmie The Tough, Denver Sherman, Slim Riley, Jim Lynch, Powder-Face Tom, and the Coleman brothers. However, I was out of my class there. Those boys were the world's best. Paddy Ryan was lately the winner of the All-Round Cowboy Championship of the World, and if you will believe me, Paddy certainly had to put up a cowboy ride to win.

"The rest of my time had been spent here and there, roaming all over, a deputy sheriff, detective, a ranger for stockmen's associations, soldier of fortune,—and the devil only knows what. It was six years ago that I started to write, and have, so far, made a fair success of it.

"If any of the oldtimers want to get in touch with me, do it through *Action Stories*. I'm the same as ever—always moving!

"Now, the chinook is over. Thanks, cowboys, for allowing an old han' from the stray spreads of the big outdoors to tarry by your brush-fire.

TOM ROAN.

LIKES THE "ACTION" PUNCH

Action EDITOR: Your April issue was read in our Big Brotherhood Organization, and over eighty of our boys attended. Your stories were read aloud and I can assure you were greatly enjoyed by all.

I want to bring to your attention "The Fast Workers Way," written by J. T. Kescei. He surely knows and has had experience with Western life. This story is full of punch and action

J. J. FRUNKEL,
Los Angeles, Calif.

MASTODON VALLEY DOES EXIST!

You've probably just read, "The Menace of Mastodon Valley," a great, complete novel by Kenneth Gilbert. It's a genuine he-man's yarn. But did you imagine there was such a prehistoric spot on the face of the world? Let Gilbert take you behind the scenes:

"It may be interesting to know that some 900 miles north of Seattle, in the wilds of British Columbia, there is a spot such as I have described in "The Menace of Mastodon Valley." It was discovered about four years ago by Capt. Sam C. Scotte, who explored it to some extent. Due to the numerous hot-springs, and probably likewise because of warm Chinook winds, the place rarely if ever has snow. It is about twenty miles long and three miles wide, and Captain Scotte is authority for the statement that it is inhabited by white deer, small buffalo and other animals of unusual species. A year or two ago, an effort was made to reach the place—which is almost inaccessible—by seaplane, but the attempt failed. Captain Scotte, who lives in Vancouver, B. C., I think, and who is a highly-respected man, declares that it is a hunter's paradise.

"That is not only the so-called tropical, or temperate, valley in the North, is well-known. In the region near Fairbanks, Alaska, there is a similar place, a fertile valley which is being farmed. My understanding is that during the dead of winter, there is a difference in temperature of thirty to forty degrees inside and outside of the valley. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the figures, but the fact remains that because of its hot-springs and other semi-volcanic manifestations, it has a comparatively mild climate, although inside or near the Arctic Circle.

"It is too unreasonable to suppose, then, that in a vast region so little explored as the Cassiar, that similar valleys exist? We know that the North was once the great range of the mastodon. They were merely prehistoric elephants, and, in the opinion of scientists, they had the same characteristic of hunting a common place to die. Could it not have happened that in a protected valley such as I have described, a herd of these monsters, who undoubtedly lived to a great age, endured thousands of years beyond the rest of their kind, situated in less fortunate regions? That was the thought I had in mind when I wrote this story.

"As for the Liard Indians, their hatred of white men, and their fanatical witchcraft practices are well-known in the North. They are, as I have said in the story, wanderers from more southern tribes, such as the Sioux and other plains Indians. They avoid white men, live by themselves in the more remote regions, and are generally regarded as bad actors, savage to the core. Last year a Northwest Mounted constable went into their territory to bring out a woman who had killed a man. One of the aboriginies took a shot at the "mounty," just to see if the latter had the power to turn aside bullets.

KENNETH GILBERT.

A HE-MAN O.K.'S ACTION

Action EDITOR: Have just picked up the July *Action Stories* and I'm here to tell you it is some book. "He-Men's Game," by William Colt MacDonald was a knockout. Let's see some more of his stuff. "The Box Car Mission," by De Herries Smith is another he-man yarn. I was at Ypres with the Canadians, so I know the war. Stopped a stray piece of Heine shrapnel in that mix-up.

I'm a dyed-in-the-wool *Action* fan, and if a copy gets by me, God help the news-stands!

HAROLD MANGIN,
Fort Worth, Texas.

ANOTHER AUTHOR OWNS UP

Strange as it seems, the greatest stories come from fact. Most all the *Action* hands admit they draw their yarns from life, when we get 'em on the stand. "The Killing at Dead Man's Run," by Howard E. Morgan, in this issue, is taken from an actual occurrence in the baliwick of the Mounties. Here you are.

Years ago, while on a hunting trip, I was joined one night by two men, a grey-haired, hard-boiled old chap, called Footman, and a youngster. I forget the kid's name. The old fellow had been a member of the Mounties in the days when all of Northwestern Canada was patrolled by a mere handful of men. Curiously enough perhaps, his experiences had not been nearly as exciting as might be imagined. I know I was disappointed. However, he did tell me one story that stayed with me.

The Police had arrested a man for murder in a little French settlement. The man was promptly convicted and hung. Two of his sons sought to avenge his death. The sons were taken, too,—each for specific crimes—and likewise summarily dealt with. All of which set the fear of the Police strongly before the people in this remote little settlement. A fur thief, fleeing into the North, took advantage of this situation. He secured a red uniform and successfully blackmailed the simple French folks, similar to the way Kivlin works it in the story, for sometime, before the thing came to the attention of the Police.

HOWARD E. MORGAN.

"CARRY ON"

"Carry On," the crack Cudoba yarn in this issue, is a swirling piece of action-drama taken from the jungle depths of the distant Philippines. And there's more truth than fiction behind it.

While one of the many hiking maestros sent from the States to educate the Little Brown Brothers, the writer often had occasion to wonder why no one ever wrote up the officers of the Philippine Constabulary. They were as fine a bunch of clean-lived, two-fisted Americans as ever held a far-flung frontier.

Captain McRae is a pretty faithful sketch of a Constabulary officer with whom the writer messed for months in various pueblos of Samar. When eighteen years old, McRae hit the P. I. with the —th Cavalry, was one of the first to receive a commission with the then newly organized P. C., helped to police up Samar and other provinces, signed up with the "Limies" at Gallipoli and later, after Uncle Sam entered the World War, transferred to the A. E. F. and was shot down leading his men in a charge across No Man's Land.

In Trask an attempt was made to depict the young shave-tail; a callow American youth blithely bucking danger, sickness and countless temptations of the tropics with the fervent hope of surviving every gruelling test of manhood and becoming a full-fledged officer of the Philippine Constabulary—an organization of which the average American never heard.

The incidents—the raid, gambling, etc.—are founded on fact. Though not taken from the life of the so-called Captain McRae, they serve to illustrate the physical and moral stamina of the main character of "Carry On."

JOHN C. CUDOBA.

BULLETS—BUT HE DODGED 'EM

About the toughest spot I was ever in came about one night in the peaceful hills of West Virginia. We had been out on a fishing trip and were walking over the hills to make a short-cut to the railroad. Finally we found the tracks and followed them along. It was about eleven o'clock at night, and though there were no passenger trains due we thought we might catch a freight.

It began to drizzle a little, and as the wind grew stronger the rain began to pour down in sheets. We dashed up the bank to find shelter among the scrub trees, but that was no use. Finally we discovered an old mine entrance, and even though we didn't like to go in, it was better than getting wet to the skin. We smoked some and, as it was still raining we decided to explore the mine a bit. It was full of water and the roof wasn't any too solid, but we moped along flashing our light in corners now and then.

As our light flashed in one cranny we noticed something there and on closer investigation discovered a couple of barrels of mash that had been left to ferment. Aha! thought we, and we scuttled from hole to hole looking for better things.

Just as the search was getting warm we heard someone splashing in one of the water holes. The three of us switched out our lights and crouched against the wall.

Down the cave walked two big fellows, their bright miner's lamps flashing on the shotguns they carried in their hands. We could hear them talking as they drew closer and those boys sure were threatening what they would do if they caught that fellow that was snooping around. They came within thirty feet of us—and then turned down another tunnel that branched off from ours, still talking.

We hustled away from there even before they got out of hearing and ran for the entrance. They must have heard our noise as we could see their lights coming on from behind.

It seemed like miles to the mouth of the mine but we finally got there and scurried behind an old stable. The three of us huddled together and pressed as tight as we could against the boards. Soon we saw the lights burst out of the mine. They ran into the woods a way and then turned back. Here came the big moment.

They were both together in front of the old stable. They looked around a bit there, and then they started to come our way—one on one side of the barn and the other on the other side. We could see the light coming, coming closer and closer as we huddled down.

They came to view simultaneously and stood looking in the brush in all directions. If either of them had turned his head we would have been spotted as quick as a flash. Those guns sure did look ugly in the yellow glare.

Finally, however, they turned without a word and walked back the way they came.

Their lights finally grew dim in the distance and we got courage enough to get up and move away. And, boy, I'll say we did move. We ran and walked through the rain for an hour or so—and we didn't care if it was wet. Better wet than salivated.

M. X. MEREDITH,
Fairmont, W. Va.

A REAL FISH STORY

We were lying at the ship-yard at Cristobal for repairs, and my mate and I decided we'd do a little fishing. We got an open boat anchored off the island of Toboca.

They kept telling me to be sure and have an open jack-knife handy, but although I knew about the octopi that were in those waters. I told them that I was out for fishing and that I did my whittling on the porch of the country store.

Well, we were doing pretty well as far

as fish were concerned, but I was sort of disgusted since my mate was getting all the big ones. I let my line trail over the side and started to scoop some water over my lucky buddy.

My hand had just touched the water when something slimy curled around my wrist and almost pulled me out of the boat. I yelled like an Indian and my mate grabbed an oar almost upsetting the boat. He took a wild swing and almost cracked me on the head, and that boat did ship a lot of water. I was pulled back so hard that when his second swing connected and the darn thing let loose, I almost went over the other side. The water turned an inky black and we turned pale gray. We also turned the boat around and headed for the shore as fast as we could.

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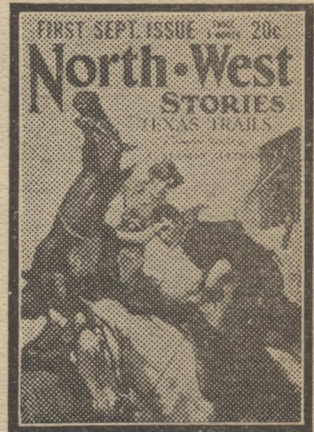
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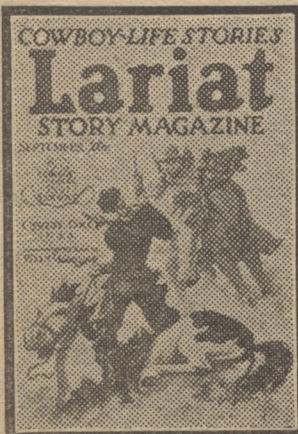
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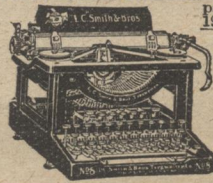
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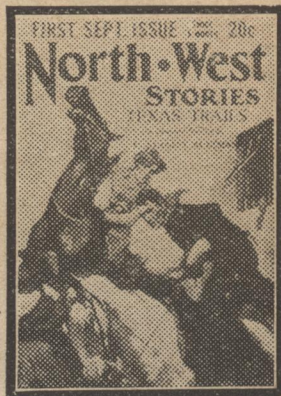
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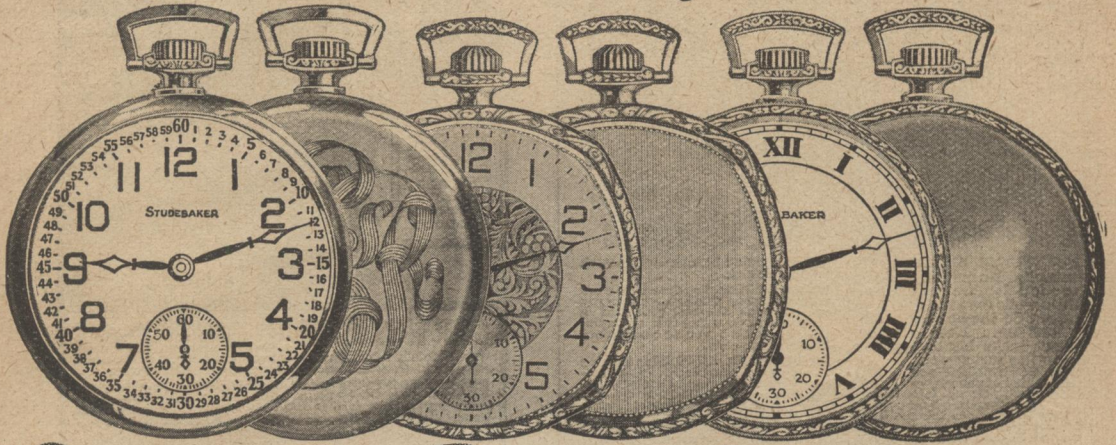
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31x4-ss-cl	4.50	2.00	36x4 1/2	7.25	3.35
32x4	4.95	2.25	33x5	7.50	3.50
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32x3 1/2	6.50	1.80	34x4	9.15	2.90
34x4	7.00	1.95	36x4 1/2	9.25	3.00
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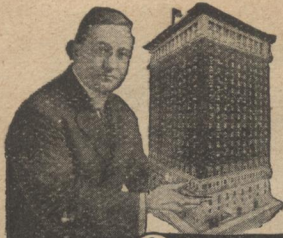
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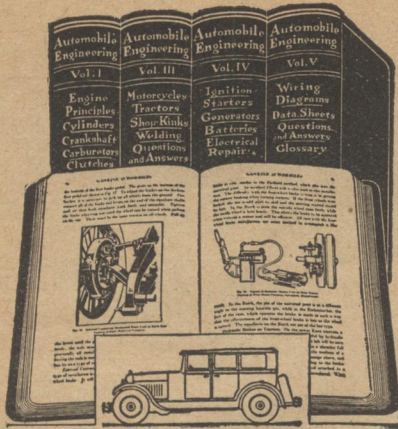
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