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# ARGOSY

WEEKLY



SEPT. 6

10¢

**ARGOSY**

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## *The Miracle of the BATTLESHIP MALAYA*

*Spectacular Eyewitness  
Account of Britain's  
Naval Warfare*



**E. HOFFMANN PRICE  
Faraway Loot**

*Gripping Tale  
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*The Wealth of Empire in His Hand  
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# ARGOSY



America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 310

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Coming  
Soon

HOW LONG  
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HOLD SPAIN?

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geous and Magnificent  
Story of Spain's In-  
ternal Fight for Free-  
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GUERRILLA  
WARRIOR

by ROBERT CARSE

in the September 20th

ARGOSY

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*This magazine is on sale every Wednesday*

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OCTOBER ISSUE

NOW ON THE STANDS.....10c

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AND CHAMPION



Here is the authentic crash of battle thunder! Now for the first time Argosy takes you into the raging center of today's fierce conflict in the Mediterranean. A thrilling first-hand account of action by a great battleship; of the holocaust at Bardia and at Genoa

# The Miracle of the H. M. S. MALAYA

By a Seaman Gunner



THE casemates rocked under the roar of our six-inchers. I jumped to the sighting port and put an eye to the telescope. I saw a falling plane cut a flaming swath through smoke rising from the fiery chaos of Bardia.

On a hillside tanks were hurtling into the air, spinning end over end amid a hurricane of shrapnel. Above the tanks, catapulted by the force of our projectiles, the bodies of men and mules somersaulted grotesquely.

To me it was better than a circus. You see, my dad was killed at Ypres—before I was born. A Stuka dive bomber got my kid brother at Dunkerque. My twin brother is an SS—one of England's supershock parachutists. And a row of bomb craters cut across my mother's farm in Sussex. So naturally my idea of fun differs from yours.

But what I want to tell you about is the *Malaya*—and the luck that's in her. She'd come out of scores of engagements with no damage that a dab of battleship gray wouldn't patch. And here she was again, having her own way, and blasting the enemy's stronghold into a burning scrap-heap.

Flanked by cruisers and destroyers, the *Malaya* was firing from a range of seven miles. The bugle had sounded action stations at dawn, only a few minutes before; but already it would have taken a violent earthquake to match the damage we'd done.

In the casemate the nine of us—gun layer, trainer, breech worker, sight setter, and loading numbers—ignoring anti-flash hoods, were stripped to the waist, powder-blackened and sweating to maintain the twelve-rounds-a-minute tempo set by the control top.

Mike, the rated T. M. on the breech, swung the block out of the gun. Choking, stinging gases spiraled from the bore. The loading numbers shoved in the hundredweight projectile held by a bandsman, followed it with the cordite charge in a silk bag. In five seconds we elevated, trained, sighted and loaded.

The roar of our last salvo was still echoing among Bardia's jagged cliffs when the firebell rang again. The 31,000-ton *Malaya* shuddered and rolled from a terrific broadside of eight fifteen-inch turret guns and a half dozen of our six-inchers in our secondary armament.

"That's a singe for old Electric Whiskers!" yelled Joe, the sight setter. He was talking about Bardia's commander.

More gaps appeared in the lines of mechanized units on the hills, as tanks were blown into heaps of scrap metal. Again I saw bodies flip-flopping through the air. Clouds of flame-lanced smoke poured from the cliffs, but the hidden guns of the Eyetees (*Italians*—Ed.) couldn't find our range.

The nearest geyser made by an enemy shell was short of us by a thousand yards.

Our destroyers and cruisers were strafing the outskirts of Bardia with their 4.7's. On the *Malaya's* catapult deck pompoms and ack-acks—the high-angle, four-inch anti-aircraft guns—kept the sky overhead clear of Caproni bombers. Our Hurricanes and Spitfires prevented the Macchi-Fiat fighters from hosing our upper decks with a thousand rounds a minute from their Breda-Safats. Over Bardia squadrons of Blackburn "Roc" two-seater bombers were smashing whatever our turret guns missed.

"Not so many direct hits, Master Gunner!" yelled Eddie, a loading number, after another tank-smashing salvo. "Let 'em have shrapnel. They linger longer."

But there were a lot of direct hits. At twelve thousand yards it was uncanny how the control top got the range and deflection so accurately. We were knocking tanks, supply trucks and transport vehicles off the cliffs as if they were clay ducks in a shooting gallery.

Bardia was now a tremendous bonfire, and it would have been wasteful to throw any more H. E. (*high explosive*) into the town; so the turret guns shifted to the cliffs. I've seen a fifteen-inch projee (*projectile*) blow up a destroyer; and when those big shells went to work on the pinnacles, the rock flew as if torn away by gigantic pneumatic drills.

Suddenly I heard a rumble like distant thunder. I looked through the telescope and saw a cliff, undermined by our turret guns, slowly crumbling. Tremendous fissures appeared. The rock split into massive slabs, which disintegrated into countless chunks that piled down on the enemy's last defenses in a roaring, smoking avalanche.

The siege of Bardia ended with hundreds of Eyeteer gunners crushed beneath tons of sand and rock.

NOW the bugle sounded Secure. By the time we'd got the powder off us, breakfast was ready, and we went to our mess tables where the cookies had set out porridge, bacon and eggs, rolls and tea.

No one mentioned the engagement. Eddie, the loading number, worried about his girl in Gibraltar. Mike and Joe, who'd parted brass rags—broke a friendship—over a little Syrian out Ramleh way in Alexandria, picked up their quarrel. At mess you don't talk about the fight you've just been through. It isn't done. Beer and girls are the only fit topics.

The mess is simply a table hinged to the ship's skin and suspended from the beams inboard. Stools surround the table, while overhead are the racks for our ditty boxes. These hold our personal property—except clothes, which



we stow in seabags. With twelve to fifteen men assigned to each mess, the *Malaya* requires more than a hundred messes. We called ours the Barrel House.

After breakfast I sprawled on deck with a Western story until a bosun's mate piped "Out Pipes," which meant stop smoking, and we went about our duties.

I like Westerns. Most British seamen do. We have a lot of horses on the farm, and until I joined up I almost lived in the saddle. When the war is over, a buddy and I are buying a caravan—I reckon you'd call it a trailer—and we're going to tour Blighty. No automobile. We're sick of steel and petrol.

I could see that Mike and Joe were going to tear into each other before long. I didn't want them to get logged, so at four o'clock tea I got the gloves, and our mess went up on the catapult deck. By the time the gloves were laced on, we had a crowd of seamen and marines around, and a lot of officers from the wardroom.

Both lads were solid and lean from juggling projees. I'd been with them on pub-crawling parties in Gibraltar and Alex when we'd tackled the military; to show who was going to win the war; and they could hit like pompoms. I called time, they squared off and we settled back to enjoy a proper fight when the bugle sounded Action Stations.

Mike and Joe swore bitterly, and the rest of us grumbled. That's the trouble with war. Somebody's always upsetting your plans. Even before I'd untied the gloves, our airmen were on the catapult deck.

"Submarines!"

THAT brightened us. Fighting submarines is as pleasant as grouse hunting, and sometimes you even catch them on the rise. A torpedo skimming through phosphorescent water at night looks like a fiery sea serpent. Very pretty.

With the *Malaya* steaming at twenty-five knots, a sub has to be close to have any chance with a torpedo. And any sub that's close is certain to get batted. That's flat.

Before our six-incher was ready, the Fairey Swordfish

bombers were circling overhead. As soon as orders came from the control top, I spotted a periscope on the port quarter. A line of foam and bubbles was streaking toward us.

"Torpedo!"

The firebell rang. A salvo from the six-inchers pounded at the sub, which was beginning to dive. The Fairey Swordfish bombers were dropping eggs, and columns of water were rising a hundred feet in the air. Destroyers were moving up, firing depth charges.

The *Malaya's* port engine stopped. On the bridge the helm was hard over, the ship was swinging and presently the torpedo cut through the boiling foam of our wake—a close miss.

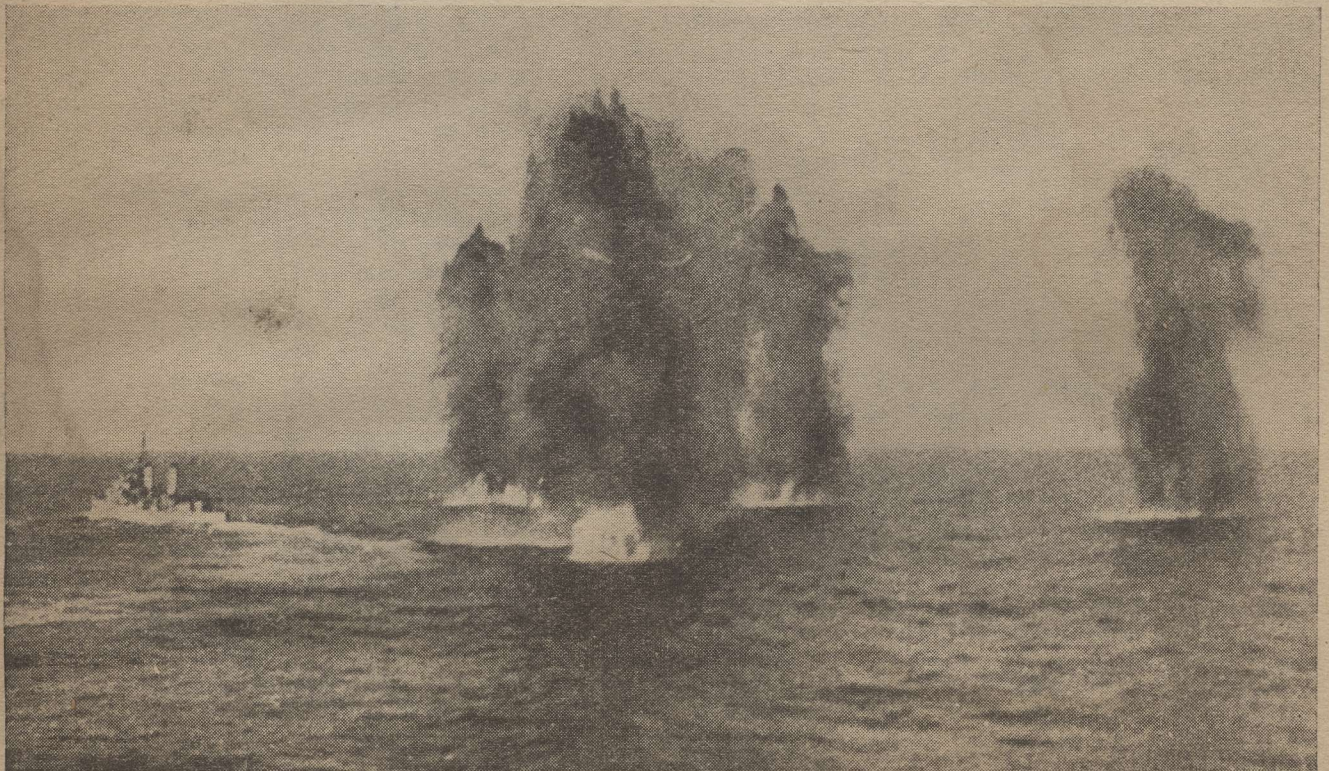
Our gun was reloaded. The firebell rang, and another seven hundred pounds of H. E. went on a hunting expedition. Who hit the sub, I don't know. Our guns, the bombs, or the depth charges? But suddenly the bow of the submarine shot out of water, poised there a second and then went down stern first. She was batted—finished.

That usually happened to submarines that tried to sink us. We seldom have a night attack, as the periscopes are almost useless then; and in the daytime, if we don't bat them with bombs or depth charges, our six-inchers send the crew jumping for the flooding levers, and they have to attack at too great a distance to be effective.

Even taking the *Malaya* by surprise, the sub commander has to get a good estimate of our speed and course before he can aim his torpedo. With the ship traveling at full speed and irregularly sheering a point or so from the true course, the Mediterranean subs so far have spoiled a lot of high-priced fish.

When we learned our course wasn't set for Gib, a groan went up. It looked as if we were heading for more convoy work, the job we all hate, except that it does take us to Gibraltar or Alexandria, where a bloke can see a girl and do some healthy pub crawling.

Nothing is more monotonous than convoying. We've



British Combine Photo

Aerial bombs churn the Mediterranean into waterspouts—and miss their British target



been the length of the Mediterranean time after time without so much as seeing one bomb-propelled waterspout. We've escorted more than sixty merchantmen at a time—tankers, food ships, grain ships. In one convoy would be some of our own P. & O. ships, and steamers under the flags of Norway, Denmark, Sweden, China, and Spain.

With the *Malaya* in the middle and twenty destroyers on the wings, we never had any trouble with submarines. Generally the subs go after isolated ships. Not many of them have the guts to tackle a big convoy.

You'd think the enemy's fleet would engage us while we were hampered by ten-knot freighters. Sometimes a battleship cut loose with its turret guns, but the range was probably fifteen miles, and it took a telescope to see where the projectiles hit.

So we were glad to learn that we were back on sea patrol, hunting the Eyetee battle fleet.



NE morning after dawn action stations, a daily routine of about two hours, during which we stand by the guns and wait, Eddie and I were on the catapult deck. Other seamen were about, and we were taking our ease.

Twelve men were standing lookout on the bridge—the captain, the officer of the watch, midshipmen, seamen, and the bugler. They'd been through raid after raid. But what happened has happened before, and will again. We got a surprise.

We on the catapult deck knew about it as soon as those on the bridge. A stick of screamers came hurtling out of the sky—Eyetee bombs with a whistle attachment to make them shriek like a score of police-car sirens would sound in downtown New York. The screamers were designed to frighten us, yet I've never seen even a midshipman flinch at the racket.

The stick—bombs released from the racks simultaneously—came close, not more than fifty yards off. Geysers plumed upwards and salt spume whipped across our decks.

At the first screech of the bombs, the siren on the bridge shrieked, announcing an air raid. The bugler sounded Action Stations. Eddie and I and the others were ducking and running, while shrapnel rattled and banged on the decks.

The pompoms were opening up, pounding a terrific drum-roll from six barrels—hundreds of shots to the minute. Above the beating of the pompoms pealed the heavier rumble of the ack-acks.

Tremendous fountains were shooting skyward, but we could see none of the planes dropping the eggs. Suddenly a billow of smoke bloomed in the sky, and out of it streaked a sheet of flame trailed by a streamer of black petrol fumes. The blazing plane was a graceful sight as it plunged seaward, but no chutes opened from the smoke, and we knew that the crew of that bomber already were charred corpses in their own private crematory.

By the time we reached our casemate, the raid was over. Perhaps fifty bombs had been dropped. No doubt some of them were 250-pounders which—if there'd been a direct hit—wouldn't have done much more than scratch our armor plate. The Eyetees knew this, so we can believe that most of the eggs were 550-pounders or more. Though our decks were covered with shrapnel, they hadn't come even close to a direct hit.

A half hour later the siren announced another raid. The squadron was coming from the west, which gave the six-inchers in our battery a whang at it. We shot down two Caproni bombers before they were close enough to drop an egg. Some of the crew beat the flames. Through the sighting port telescope I counted five parachutes.

Our anti-aircraft fire won the immediate respect of the raiders. The Capronis, with their escort of Macchi-Fiats, were soon in retreat after releasing a few eggs. Through the telescope we could see, far away and widely scattered, the bobbing heads of the five who'd bailed out. Soon a destroyer got close enough to reach one with a life ring. He was hauled aboard. Lucky chap. We were cheering for him and the others.

Again the siren shrieked. The destroyer went on steaming toward the swimming Eyetees even after the enemy started to deliver a new consignment of destruction. Except for the raid, a boat would have been put over the side. Even so, one of the bomber crew got his hands on a life ring.

An egg burst close by. A fountain of foam showered over the funnel of the destroyer. Suddenly, out of that pillar of white spume, fifty feet above the green sea, catapulted the remains of the Eyetee bomber-boy, with the life ring still around him.

His comrades perished less spectacularly, and through the day many more who bailed out died as horribly as they would have in their flaming planes. Died from the bombs of their own squadrons.

SPACED from fifteen minutes to a half hour apart, the raids went on, never giving a man time for a spot of tea or a biscuit. We were grimy and hungry and powder-blackened.

We were visited by torpedo bombers—the most formidable of all the enemy's weapons. In groups of three, which force us to scatter our fire, they have a good chance of getting us—providing they're willing to die. Because the bombers have to swoop close to the water to drop their steel fish. Two in this raid released their charges, but so far away that our captain didn't even alter course.

They were probably seven thousand yards from us, though no more than thirty feet above the water when they let go. Covered by a smoke screen part of the time, they were able to escape. But not the torpedo bomber that attacked us in the mid-afternoon.

It shot out of a cloud not more than four hundred yards off. There wasn't a chance of getting away. The pilot undoubtedly knew that, because amid a hail of machine-gun bullets, he dived low and released a steel fish that churned up a bubbling white wake directly on a line with our forward turrets.

Even before the torpedo hit the water, the bombing plane was a splintered mass. A salvo from our six-inchers blasted it to flitters, strewing the sea with smoking wreckage. At the range the torpedo itself couldn't have missed, but the miracle of the *Malaya* was still working. Something faulty in the mechanism of the steel fish retarded its speed, and the captain had time to swing ship.

From then on we had raids every few minutes. In many of them were twenty-five or thirty planes. During one attack a pattern was dropped around us. That is, all the bombers circling overhead let go sticks simultaneously. We were the center of a field of geysers. Forty-one bombs exploded—without a hit.

During the day thirty-four raids were made, which had some of the O. S.'s (*ordinary seamen*) brassed off—fed up—for fair, because they had to sweep away the shrapnel. But at day's end not a man went to sick bay. The surgeons could have been on furlough.

We brought down eleven planes—bombers and fighters—and obviously we damaged scores of others. Many of the Eyetees were able to bail out; but except for the one man our destroyers were unable to rescue them, because of the frequency of attack.

Two thousand bombs, at least, rained around us in



those thirty-four raids—and not once did the enemy score.

It was just another day's work. An hour after the last raid, ship routine went on as usual as if we'd just steamed out of Alex. Mike and Joe were bickering about the little Syrian in Ramleh. Eddie, who'd been saving his tots of rum, got drunk and promptly went to sleep. After mess I found a cozy corner and sprawled out with a Western story.



AT DAWN one day we sighted the Eyetee fleet. We closed the range to maybe twenty thousand yards before we opened up; and after a few salvos fire broke out on an enemy ship. The Eyetees gave us a few blasts, but they were short by a thousand yards.

They had four battleships, ten cruisers, and twenty destroyers—to our three battleships, three cruisers, and twenty-four destroyers. But they wouldn't hold the range and fight.

That was hard to understand. We didn't know what battleships were for, if they weren't to battle with. Here we gave them a wholly good chance to burn something besides fuel oil—and they got up full steam to put a horizon between us and them.

We gave them a smoking-hot chase half the length of the Mediterranean. We got some hits, and afterward we learned that twenty-nine Eyetees were killed and seventy-nine wounded. But the fleet gave us the slip—simply because you can't see anything at fifteen thousand yards in a pea-soup fog.

It fair gave us the hump, it did—from the vice admiral down to the last O. S. And it is the opinion of the men below decks—contrary to the press reports—that what happened at dawn on February 9th was brought about by the enemy refusing to engage us at sea.

At noon mess on Saturday Eddie brought word from topside that in the ship's daily orders was this statement: "There is a possibility that the ship may be in action tomorrow morning."

Just as simple as that. There was plenty of excitement in the messes, because we'd been bound rigid—bored stiff

—by the chase. And now we were steaming along the Italian coast—and everybody knew that statements don't get into the daily orders unless they're likely to be carried through.

Shortly after dark that night we were put on action stations, and the *Malaya* steamed up the Gulf of Genoa. Behind us were the battle cruiser *Renown*, the cruiser *Sheffield*, and the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal*, together with a flotilla of destroyers and other light warships.

The rest of the squadron remained at sea until shortly before dawn, but that night the *Malaya* steamed into the harbor of Genoa—the inner harbor, inside the curve of the long breakwater.

Afterward the press at home said this maneuver was next in daring to the Charge of the Light Brigade. I don't rightly know about that. But I do know that no one on the *Malaya*—man or boy—expected to be alive for more than a few hours.

We have engaged ships at sea at a distance of two thousand yards. That is comparable to firing at some one sitting across the dinner table from you. Being inside the Genoa breakwater was the same as having a gun held at your temple. Their shore batteries, air force and fleet could have blasted us out of the water.

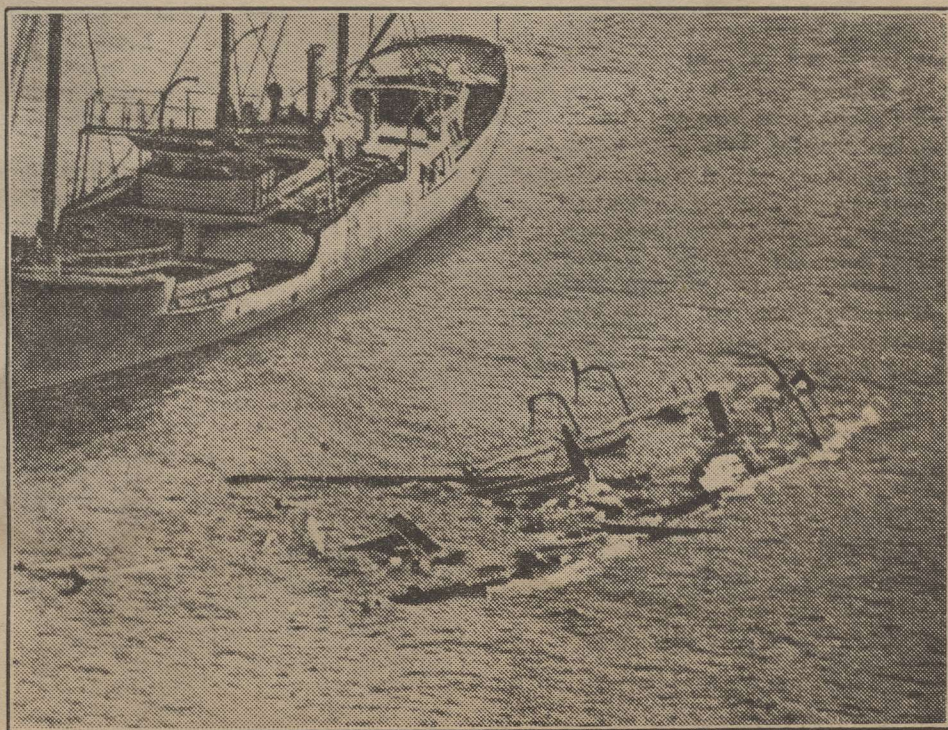
I was sure I was going to die, but the thought didn't register very strongly. At a time like this you learn not to go crazing yourself about what can happen.

Now the press said afterward that we went into Genoa to shatter a naval base from which the Nazis were soon to sail for Algeria. But the men below decks wholly think it was to bait the Eyetee fleet into an attack.

Four hours we circled around the harbor. Genoa lay peaceful and slumbering against the mountain. There was no blackout. We could see the lights of traffic moving up and down the hilly streets, the anchor lights of ships in the harbor. We heard the *chug-chug* of a launch near the steamers moored at the docks.

It was a black night and not a pinpoint of light was visible aboard the *Malaya*. But you can't convince us that the city didn't know we were there. Hell's blast, if they couldn't see us, some of the small craft must have felt the

Scene in the harbor of Bardia, showing just a spot of the immense destruction wrought there by the *Malaya* and her supporting warcraft of the British Mediterranean fleet





roll from the wake of a 31,000-ton ship. Maybe they were thinking: "That's the *Malaya*. Don't pay any attention to it, and pretty soon it'll go away."

Just as dawn was breaking, white and green shore lights flickered out the question: "Who are you?"

**W**HO were we? The *Renown* told them—with a flaming broadside from her fifteen-inchers. Then we expected the shore batteries to throw enough H. E. at the *Malaya* to sink a fleet. But nothing happened. The *Renown* and the *Sheffield* began shelling the city, while we started blasting everything in sight in the inner harbor.

The first salvo of our six-inchers blew up a warehouse. Instantly tremendous clouds of flame-ridden smoke shot skyward. We followed pointer for a new objective; and five seconds after we smashed the warehouse, a drydock was converted into a junk pile, with fire blazing away in a score of places.

We had made the freight yards look as if a dozen fast expresses had crashed head on at full speed; had sent up oil tanks in booming detonations; and had half the waterfront in flames before the shore defenses cut loose. Fifteen minutes it took Muzzy's comic opera soldiers to make up their minds.

By now our spotter planes off the *Ark Royal* were zooming through murderous anti-aircraft fire, getting the direction of objectives and signaling to the ships. The turret guns were strafing Genoa to ruins.

There were no misses, no firing short or overshooting the range. Every salvo did millions of dollars' worth of damage. Fairey Swordfish planes were pelting the city with high explosives and incendiaries. Spitfires and Hurricanes were engaging the Fiat single seaters and preventing the Capronis from dropping eggs on us.

The shore batteries pitched a few shells, but none of the projectiles dropped closer than five hundred yards. That was comparable to missing the broad side of a barn. Their aim was so bad that our destroyers stopped laying down a smoke screen and added their own 4.7's to the racket.

In the confines of Genoa's harbor that racket made the siege of Bardia sound like a pre-war Sunday afternoon in Sussex. We were choked and blinded by the cordite fumes and the smoke of burning oil. Our air-shaft was useless. We couldn't hear orders over the voice pipe. If the firebell rang, we weren't aware of it.

We followed pointer; but it was practically "Quarters Firing"—the order for a gun crew to fire on its own initiative, that usually comes when a ship is shot to pieces.

Though it was almost certain now that we were going to get out alive, I doubt if anyone was thinking about it. I reckon that at times like this, a man is about as selfless as he ever gets. He's sort of a part of the guns, the projectiles, the powder bags and the terrific hurly-burly.

With the waterfront going up, our six-inchers were trained on an anchored supply ship. At the first salvo men on the vessel were jumping overboard. By the way some

of them were struggling, it was obvious that they couldn't swim. We made firewood of the superstructure and put more than thirty hits in the hull before she turned over and went under.

The cannonading was so intense now, with the shore defenses firing at us, most of the guns in our squadron banging away, bombs raining on Genoa and munitions exploding in burning warehouses, that the concussion was blasting the doors off ships' cabins. Our own six-inchers were trained on a coastal steamer, and a moment later she was by the head, sinking rapidly, with immense, jagged holes in her and fires breaking out from poop to fo'c'sle head.

As we reloaded, Eddie shouted: "Ship duly sunk, Master Gunner!"

Under the spell of our savage concentration, sweat-grimed and black, we labored without lost motion in the stinging, choking murk of cordite fumes, talking to ourselves and cursing like East End fishmongers. Ninety rounds to the minute blasted from our smoking battery, and every hundredweight projectile earned its cost a hundredfold in the damage it did.

**I**N ALL, our squadron sank forty ships—barges, tenders and tugs not counting—and most of them got the deep six from our own six-inchers. Three hundred tons of high explosives were flung over Genoa, demolishing, we later found out, in the short space of forty-five minutes, over one thousand buildings.

And where was the Eyetee fleet all this time? It knew where to find us. We were bottled up. Attacked from shore, sea and sky, we couldn't have escaped. It would have been one of the major victories of naval history.

So we laugh when we're censured for strafing Genoa. Needless slaughter! Needless destruction! Then why didn't the enemy's fleet stop it? They could have sent us all to Davy Jones.

Well . . .

We steamed out of the harbor and down the Gulf of Genoa without a casualty, with no damage done to the *Malaya* beyond a few glass ports shattered by the concussion of our own guns. In all, the shore batteries fired no more than twenty shells at us.

The only fight we got was from the Eyetee air force as we steamed to sea; but our combat pilots, with their Vickers-K raking the enemy 1200 rounds to the minute, knocked hell out of the bomber formations. Two planes droned through our screen of machine-gun fire, but the ack-acks and the pompoms were too hot for them. Three bombs exploded half a mile away—and that was the end of the attack.

With the early sun shining over the calm Mediterranean, the course was set for our base at Gibraltar, where a bloke could get a warm pint and see a girl. We looked forward to a little excitement at Gib, because Mike and Joe were going to find out with their fists which one was to call on that little Syrian out Ramleh way, the next time we hit Alex.

There's nothing like a good fight to liven things up.







The car was flaming when Burt and Qasim leaped from one roof to the next

By **E. Hoffmann Price**

Author of "Drums of Khartoum," "Allah Sends a Reaper," etc.

# Faraway Loot

This is hidden Asia—a land of barbaric violence and exotic wealth. One American dared to claim its riches, and he found that he must fight alone—against the greed of empire, the desert storms, and the fanatic swords of Islam's warriors

## CHAPTER I

### RUBLES FOR OIL

**W**HEN the Chinese prefect of Kashgar told him to go to the Soviet consul general to sell his oil refinery, Burt Wheeler felt like a lamb trying to sell fleece to a wolf; but he went, for he had to sell. And now, sitting in Karimov's office, he did not know which he feared the most, failure, or being funny.

The big Russian was spreading caviar on a rye wafer. Wheeler considered a half-tumbler of vodka, and looked

out over the roofs of Kashgar, and across the apricot trees and melon patches and the millet fields which the arched window framed. This was all Chinese territory, but Basil Karimov told the governor what to do, and to whom to do it.

Karimov shoved home a tidbit the size of his hand, and he had big hands; for a moment, the crisp rye made sounds like a rock crusher. That effortless miracle reminded Wheeler of how easily oil refineries were swallowed. Karimov drained his tumbler, and thumped it on the table. "Harrh! Drink up! A bird can't fly with one wing."



Wheeler's bleak face brightened into an amiable grin. He couldn't resist Karimov's bearish good nature. He drank now, downing the vodka in a long swallow; and Karimov stared at him with approval.

Karimov's appraisal of Wheeler was no more offensive than a child's or an animal's. He nodded, as if checking off the man's physical equipment; the square rigged frame, lean and long and wiry; the hazel eyes, deep set under dark brows; the prominent cheek bones that gave the big nose the background it needed. "Comrade," he said, and reached for the bottle, "I am sorry you are leaving Kashgar."

Wheeler sat up straight, and must have showed his surprise, for he had not yet brought up the business of selling. "Huh—who said I'm leaving?"

Karimov grinned, used his heavy fingers to comb his heavy black beard. "You want to sell your refinery for fifty thousand dollars, gold standard, and His Excellency, Hong Li, couldn't buy on behalf of the Chinese Government, and so he told you that I might buy on behalf of mine."

Wheeler made a wry grimace. "Oh, all right. You probably read that letter from the home office before I did."

The bottle gurgled for a moment before the Russian looked up, a whimsical twinkle in his greenish eyes. "No, I didn't, but Hong Li did." Careless wave of hand. "He tells me everything."

Wheeler rose, scowling. "Damn it, you mean you tell him everything, and he does it, like that."

"Please, comrade. We each have our work to do. For five years, you worked to build and then operate that beautiful little refinery, out there at Kanjugan."

"While you—your government—has been gobbling up all the western parts of China—Kashgar—Yarkand—Khotan—and now a Chinese official can't buy a refinery his government needs for refueling munitions trucks—because you say no."

Karimov shoved Wheeler's glass a little nearer, and picked up his own. "You are the most unusual salesman I ever saw. From all I have read about American folkways, the customer is always right."

It was quite impossible for anyone with a face as big as Karimov's to work into an elfish grin, but he achieved something pretty nearly up to standard. Wheeler laughed, and lifted his glass. "All right, you big ox. How about a hundred thousand dollars?"

The Russian choked on his vodka, and the shower fairly blinded Wheeler. Karimov dug in his desk, found a soiled blouse, and tried to help his guest mop up. "Sorry, sorry. But see here, what do you mean asking me one hundred thousand when—"

Wheeler explained, "So we can bargain for a couple days or weeks and finally come down to fifty. Just because a Chinese official reads my mail before I do, am I going to be a fool and start with the final price, the one the board of directors decided was fair after weeks of solemnly muttering around that big table in New York?"

Karimov shoved the bowl of caviar and the plate of sliced limes to the star salesman. "You Americans have more humor than I ever suspected."

SOVIET supplies and money were financing the Chinese resistance to Japanese invasion, and the Soviet expected a few favors in return. Wheeler did not blame

the Russians nor the Chinese, for each had a necessity, political or otherwise, which demanded results; but a man never gets as far into Sinkiang as Wheeler had, nor stays as long, if he doesn't try the impossible every other day, and succeeds at least fifty percent of the time.

They were fools in New York, utter fools for thinking any man could sell what the Soviet could indirectly confiscate by having the governor of an isolated province assess two hundred years' taxes in advance. Then came the formality of seizure, and auctioning to the highest bidder: invariably a Russian.

"One hundred thousand, Comrade Karimov. How much do you bid? How much, and will you put it in official writing?"

Karimov shook a cigarette out of a pack, offered Wheeler one of the long, paper-tipped smokes. "I bid," he said, "fifty thousand dollars, gold standard."

It was some moments before Wheeler could speak, and then he did not know what to say. He was thinking, "It must be something I ate."

Karimov rose, and the bulk of him seemed to fill the high room of the Turki palace which was both residence and consulate general. He picked up a leather-covered mallet, and struck a gong that was somewhat larger than a carriage wheel. The brazen pealing overwhelmed the cries of the peddlers down in the *maidan*, the grunting of camels and the tolling of camel bells.

A thin-faced and flat-chested secretary came trotting in. "Yes, Comrade Consul General?"

"Draw up a bill of sale!" Karimov roared in Russian. "Fifty thousand American dollars, gold standard, for all the Sinkiang Petroleum Company's plant, properties, good will—you know the rigamarole. Hurry, hurry, hurry!"

The clerk fairly skated into the anteroom, and a typewriter began clicking like a machine gun. Karimov turned to Wheeler, and chuckled. "He'll make a Russian copy with English transcript, and you'll sign, I'll sign, and—"

"Then I get a N.S.F. check, huh?" Wheeler was sufficiently resigned to be good humored about it.

Karimov went to the big safe in the corner. "I am really sorry that you didn't call sooner. Of course, I'd still have to buy your refinery; your company would still sacrifice it at fifty thousand, because law and order and property rights become more and more insecure in Sinkiang."

"Two hundred years of taxes, payable in advance—"

"Wrong, comrade! Two hundred and forty-seven years it was. But the only tax evaders who were shot were lined up against the wall for making seditious utterances. Look here, your devalued dollars—remember—were a form of confiscation. And you know we Russians are just extremists; it's a difference in degree, not of kind. Now, for the sixth drink—"

But the clerk came in just then with the papers. Karimov signed. Wheeler signed. Each kept the appropriate copies. Caviar-smeared hands clasped. Wheeler asked, "Where's that check, comrade?"

"Check?" Karimov fitted a key into the lock of the old-fashioned strong box, and opened the heavy door. "I'm not giving anything so flimsy."

The shelves of the massive iron locker were jammed with antique bracelets, and collars and pendants, all caked with rubies and sapphires, emeralds, diamonds; a clutter of jewelry, doubtless seized in "tax foreclosures." But Karimov was pointing at two wooden chests on the bottom



shelf. They were of dark wood, bound in iron, and secured with leaden seals. He seized one, and dropped it to the floor, and set the second beside it. As he broke the seals, Karimov said, "They told you to get fifty thousand dollars, gold standard, and I am doing better than that. I am giving the actual coin, imperial rubles—two hundred odd pounds of them, net weight."

"Hey, how can I carry that stuff across the Gobi, without an army to guard it?"

"Comrade, I did not agree to furnish a convoy. If you are robbed, as you probably will be, you still go home, with your duty fully discharged. Your insurance company policies and builder's contracts all have an Act of God loophole. And while our government does not permit official recognition of acts of God, I am taking unofficial cognizance, you understand, of capitalistic superstitions. I have furnished you with a full clearance, I have paid your company, and the honor of Soviet business methods is also maintained."

The big Russian was as much as telling him he would never get the payoff beyond the limits of Kashgar, so Wheeler accepted the challenge. He had told the company, month after month, to get out while they could, and they deserved to lose; the effort he proposed to make in getting gold to the coast was for the sake of doing it.

He said, "If I'm not slugged before I get to the edge of the oasis, I'll get this stuff through, comrade. And thanks for the vodka."

"You are quite safe in Kashgar. My men will carry it to your car. Here are the keys to the chests. And—please believe me—I'm sorry we didn't meet sooner, I like the way you carry your liquor."

And the funny thing of it was that, as he followed the clerks to the street, Wheeler was convinced of the sincerity of Karimov's final words; he was as certain of that as he was of the Russian's intent to repossess the bulky treasure before it went too many miles from Kashgar.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SCOURGE OF ISLAM COMES!

QASIM, WHEELER'S chauffeur and handyman, pretended to ignore the two Russians and the cargo they put into the back of the Model A Ford. He was stocky, his head was round as any of the golden melons that were heaped in the market place; his eyes had a perceptible slant, and his grizzled beard was caked with mutton gravy. He was grimy from his little red skullcap to his felt soled boots, but aside from the Swedish Lutheran Missionary, he was Wheeler's only friend in Sinkiang; which was why Wheeler always felt foolish when Qasim addressed him as, "My lord."

"Which way now, *tura?*" as asked.

"I think we're bound for hell, but let's stop at the house first."

"Aywah, *tura.*"

He gunned the engine, and bore down on the horn. Dogs ran yelping; Turki women in embroidered tunics scattered. Qasim swooped in an S curve to loop between two heavily laden camels, and just missed a high wheeled *araba*. And then he skirted the *maidan*, heaving for the arched gate that made a horseshoe tunnel through the

thick wall of Old Kashgar, which was some six miles west of the Chinese, or New City.

The chests of gold slid from one side to the other. There was no use telling Qasim to slow down; the good man always asked, reproachfully: "Have I ever hit anything, *tura?* Except that donkey loaded with melons."

Getting away from the oasis of Kashgar was simple enough: just hire camels, and for part of the trip, wagons; then follow the road across the Gobi, a matter of ninety days to Lanchow; and during the middle stretches, one could march for seven weeks without meeting a traveler.

Wheeler, however, was sure that he could not count on such solitude. Quite aside from Karimov's plans, there was always a chance of meeting professional bandits, or nomads with an advanced amateur rating. With a draft on a Chinese banker in his pocket, a man could outride bandits he could not outfight; but a draft didn't weigh two hundred pounds, did not have to be divided among two donkeys.

More than that, he hated to leave Kashgar, the Turki city China had seized centuries ago, along with the rest of Sinkiang. The fertile yellow soil of the great oasis not only fed its eighty thousand inhabitants, but yielded plenty for export. The clean, crisp air, the bright sun; the great peaks that rose to snow caps five miles high, to the southwest; the Salarama Marshes, south of town, where he shot ducks and snipe and geese before they flew to Kashmir and Afghanistan: all these things he'd miss, as well as the refinery which he had practically built with his own hands.

All he had now was two treasure chests, and the scars on his hands, the grime under his nails, the tan on his lean cheeks. According to the book, a superintendent was not supposed to use his hands, but someone had to manage the torch that had welded together the retorts and rectifying columns and the net of piping that rose black against the sky. About all the Turki workmen could do was chop coke out of the cold stills.

And then he'd miss the Swedish Lutheran missionary. Wheeler yelled to Qasim, "Never mind going home! Swing over to Knudsen's!"

Qasim ploughed up a yard of *loess*, but managed to round the first turn, instead of waiting for the second. Half a mile north, and he was within sight of the mission, a brown, cubical mass half hidden by willows and poplars. Qasim blasted the horn, booted the throttle, and finally he kicked the brakes. After sliding the final ten yards, he set the front bumper within half an inch of a plane tree beside the gate.

THE Reverend Axel Knudsen was not working in his garden, which, at that hour, was odd; and the next unusual feature was the victoria in the courtyard. The Turki horses pawed and jingled their harness; the driver sat up, rubbing his eyes, for Wheeler's approach had broken into his siesta. Then servants came and recognized Wheeler, who was practically the only white caller at the mission.

That was why the victoria was news: socially and officially, the British consul general was unaware of either Knudsen's existence, or Wheeler's. Neither had brought letters of introduction, and neither, strictly speaking, was a gentleman. Not that Major Cyril St. John Beecham, D.S.O., F.R.S., would blame a man for that defect; he merely ignored him. And the natives who came to the



mission for medical treatment rode donkeys, or walked.

The porter said, "*Akhun*, the master is busy with an infidel woman. Be pleased to wait."

Ever since Wheeler had scandalized Kashgar by using a Stillson wrench with his own hands, Knudsen's servants called the American engineer "sir" instead of "my lord."

Wheeler stepped into the *selamlık*, a small room whose only furniture was several benches. The walls were white-washed each day, for the Turki patients would spit on the wall instead of on the hard-packed earth floor.

Then Knudsen came out, having heard the squeal of brakes, and the voices. He was tall, thin, and blue-eyed. But for his smile, he would have seemed haggard, for his cheeks were sunken, and his eyes more than deep set. There was nothing clerical about him; he was just another squarehead who was working himself to a shadow. As far as anyone knew, he was neither a D. D., nor even a full fledged M. D., and thus he was not a gentleman.

"Hello, Burt," he said. "I heard the boys tell you I was busy. They didn't understand my caller's business."

"Neither do I, Axel." Wheeler winked broadly. "An infidel woman. Now if she's young—

"She's interviewing me."

"Huh? Interview—I do not get it."

"Represents a New York syndicate. Ever since that Maillard girl went overland from Peiping to Kashgar, this—"

Wheeler cut in. "That was in '37, as I remember."

Then a clear voice chimed in, from the doorway. "Go ahead and say it, Axel. Ever since that Maillard girl made it, I've wanted to go her one better, and so I came up the Burma Road."

The newcomer was blond, and considerably better than good looking. Self-assured, competent seeming, and sensibly enough dressed in her tweed ensemble; but for all that, out of place, simply because an American newspaper woman had about as much business in this corner of Central Asia as molasses in a bowl of Karimov's caviar.

Wheeler said, "I hope you had a nice trip. You can interview me, any time."

"Why not? Though the lad I'm after is Ma Hsi Tang, the boy general."

"Now I know you're crazy. Did some fool send you here, or—"

"Your second guess, Mr. Wheeler. I came of my own accord."

Knudsen said, "Burt, maybe you can convince Miss Clayman that it would be better to interview Ma Hsi Tang by proxy."

Wheeler shook his head. Alma Clayman might be a crackpot, but she was not the girl to be talked into or out of anything. Her chin told him that; and its determination was seconded by a firm, straight nose, and a smile that always ended in a business-like closing of a full-sized mouth. There was nothing angular, nothing thin-lipped, and certainly nothing masculine about her; nor reckless, either. She was in Kashgar just because, like his own employers, she knew nothing about Sinkiang.

Alma Clayman laughed at Wheeler's dubious expression. "Why, I heard he was preparing to capture Kashgar."

"Huh?"

"That was the story when I left Lanchow. Do you mean you don't know?"

"I do not. And no one else does. If you'd ridden a camel from Lanchow, you'd know how long it takes a

courier to reach Kashgar. Ma Hsi Tang's cavalry moves twice as fast as any mail courier ever dreamed of."

"I flew to Qomul, and then to Tiwafu." Alma made a mock-dramatic gesture, appealing to the two witnesses: "And just think, bringing a scoop to Kashgar. Who's running the local paper—this is my chance."

"You may," Wheeler said, "still have a chance to get out of town. Where's your luggage, and where are you staying?"

"The British consul general didn't tell me his family would be happy to have me. And the Russian hotel's lousy. And the Turki *serais*—but I'm sure I'd be safe at a Swedish mission."

A servant came to the *selamlık* to say, "Tea is served, sir."

THEY followed him to the terrace, which was in back and overlooking a branch of the Qizil Su. The crumbling of the *loess* cliffs had taken out a fifty-foot stretch of the wall that enclosed the garden, which improved the view. Alma said, "Isn't it lovely and peaceful here, Mr. Knudsen?"

"I am afraid it will not be when Ma Hsi Tang and his Tungan rebels are through with the town."

The tea was sweetened with chunks which Knudsen hammered from the dirty brown, conical loaf. Alma sniffed the tea, then said to Wheeler, "What on earth have you been drinking?"

"Vodka, with the Russian consul general."

"Oh, socialite, aren't you?"

He held up his calloused hands. "No. Working stiff. And just out of a job."

That made Knudsen straighten up. "After all your good work, Burt?"

Wheeler eyed the American girl, caught the twinkle in her eye; it told him that they were both in the same fix, and suddenly he decided that there was no use in trying to be discreet. After all, the Chinese prefect and his staff, to say nothing of Karimov, knew more about Wheeler than he himself did. So he said, "No, not fired. I just sold the plant for fifty thousand dollars, and I collected in gold coin."

"Oh, where?" Alma nearly spilled her tea, rising to catch Knudsen's arm and Wheeler's. "Fifty thousand dollars! How lovely! Mr. Knudsen, he's taking us to dinner! Do you know of a really nice place, and awfully expensive?"

Knudsen pondered a moment before asking, "Did you, actually?"

"No fooling, I did. And it's out there, two boxes of it. Qasim's watching it, though it's too heavy to hi-jack."

Alma sighed. "The Turkis *are* lazy, aren't they?"

"I wouldn't be robbed in Kashgar. That'd cast reflections on the Chinese prefect, and on the Soviet consul general. They've probably warned the thieves' guild and the beggars' guild to keep their hands off."

"Colossal Kashgar," Alma murmured. "They even have a crooks' union."

"They do. But the point is, Axel, I won't be robbed till I get out of the oasis, because it'll look better that way, for me and for the authorities."

Alma said, "But suppose you meet General Ma Hsi Tang?"

"That, my dear, proves you are psychic," Wheeler said, bitterly. "What do you suppose I've been thinking of



ever since you popped the news? If Karimov's men don't hi-jack the stuff at the end of my first day's march, and you can bet that any camel drivers I hire will be his stooges, why Ma Hsi Tang will take it off my hands."

"And you, of course will die defending the corporation's gold?"

"In a Tungan revolt, a fellow has a swell chance of dying without defending even himself. All right, there's your news, and you'll get a bonus if you ever get to a cable office with it."

Alma closed her eyes for a moment, and looked very tired; in repose, her features showed the strain of the trip. Then she said, slowly, "Is Ma Hsi Tang as bad as all that? I heard he was young and nice looking, and a graduate of a mission school."

"He is all of that," Axel Knudsen said. "And in his first three or four revolts, say ten years ago, he killed about forty percent of the population of Kansu, and Khotan and Keriya."

Her smile and her bravado came back. "Kashgar begins with a K. too. But you must be mistaken, Mr. Knudsen. I not only read the papers. I write them."

Wheeler jerked to his feet, and upset his tea. He cursed fiercely in Turki, then shifted to English: "You and your press services! You chumps apparently don't know that all the news from Kashgaria is made in Russia and put out by Tass. The Soviet is grabbing Sinkiang, and doesn't want to be conspicuous; hence, when forty thousand Turkis and Chinese are blotted out in a raid, Tass releases a thin dime's worth of story, saying there was 'rioting in Keriya.'"

"Let's eat somewhere," Alma insisted. "Some nice, expensive place. The more you spend of that fifty grand, the less Karimov or Ma Hsi Tang can take."

"Let us eat here," Knudsen suggested. "Meanwhile, Burt, there is a chance of asking the British Consul General what he thinks of the situation."

"If his government is actually supplying Ma Hsi Tang with guns—and I'd not be surprised if they were—he'd say, 'Really, my good man, you have no cause for alarm.' And if he doesn't know about Ma Hsi Tang's plans, Major Cyril St. John Beecham would still say the very same thing. Let's eat."

### CHAPTER III

#### THE COMRADE'S WEALTH

IN THE few days that followed Alma Clayman's arrival Kashgar began to show signs of uneasiness, and as usual, Qasim came from the bazaars with rumors. He said, "The infidel woman is right, *tura*. Camel men from Yengi Hissar spoke as she did. Verily, Ma Hsi Tang is coming with an army of Moslems to drive out all the Chinese and all the Russians."

And then Major Beecham received orders to quit his post, to get all British subjects out of Kashgar, and to include in his convoy any white foreigners who wanted to leave. In view of the fact that Ma Hsi Tang's Tungan forces were concentrating east of Keriya, some five weeks march from Kashgar, this order was as incredible to Major Beecham as to Wheeler, but there it was, and not a bazaar rumor. And all these things helped Wheeler shape up his plans for making Karimov's Russian humor kick back, at least fifty thousand dollars' worth.

Having written Karimov a panicky note, he settled down to buying horses from the traders. There were stocky Kirghiz in sheepskin jackets, hook-nosed Afghans wearing monstrous turbans; bearded Turkis, dish-faced Uzbeks, offering everything from shaggy Kalmuk ponies to long-legged Turkoman stallions and Persian mares.

Qasim objected to every animal. "That vulture bait, that ewe-necked, swaybacked thing? Allah bear witness, I have eaten a hundred better horses."

As a matter of fact, the animal looked sound: straight legs, a broad chest, and close coupled enough for hard going. The trader screamed, "He is from the stable of the Khan of Tashkent, my own nephew stole him! A king's horse, O Man, and swift as the wind." He turned to Wheeler. "What say you, my lord?"

"This is my man, and what he does is well, O Pilgrim."

Meanwhile, Qasim had arranged for a Turki farmer, well out toward the edge of the oasis, to buy camels, to accumulate rations and water-skins for a desert march. And that night, after all that show of looking for swift horses, Wheeler and Qasim drove to Karimov's palace.

Alma Clayman, he kept telling himself, would be safer in Major Beecham's convoy than in any race across the desert. On the other hand, Beecham might wait for further verification of the rumors about Ma Hsi Tang's crusade, or until the Tungan liberator had invaded the city; in that case, Alma and the other white residents would find refuge in the British consulate general.

Qasim had barely pulled up in front of Karimov's palace when a watchman came to the gate. "The master is expecting you," he said, and slid the heavy bar aside.

Wheeler and Qasim took two treasure chests from the Ford, and stepped into the garden. Ahead, a hinge creaked, and a servant came to the doorway, holding a smoky kerosene lamp. He gestured, then led the way down the main hallway, and past the office.

Wheeler got passing glimpses of apartments that had been converted into store rooms. The place was packed with loot. There were saddles and bridles, inlaid with silver and turquoise; rugs piled three deep, some of silk, some of the lustrous old Kashgar wool; lacquer cabinets and shrines, crowded with porcelain and jade. And in one corner was a heap of scimitars and bucklers and high-peaked helmets, all agleam with gold inlay. Karimov had taken a personal dip, it seemed, from every foreclosed estate.

THE servant halted at the door of a room that had not yet been converted into a warehouse. A samovar was bubbling, and the air was thick from the smoke of Karimov's cigarettes. The big Russian dismissed his man, and rose from the lounge. "Welcome, comrade. Your letter interested me, though a few details were not entirely clear."

He seemed quite uninterested in the chests which Wheeler and Qasim set on the floor. Wheeler said, "This Ma Hsi Tang business leaves me in an embarrassing position. Dodging bandits is one thing, and slipping past a whole Tungan army is something else."

Karimov waited until Wheeler had dismissed Qasim before he said, "He can't capture Kashgar. Long before he can get here, there will be motor troops from Tiwafu, bombing planes, everything. This is the safest possible place. Major Beecham is crazy, evacuating British subjects."



Karimov did not bother to add that between the invading Tungsans and the troops sent to defend the town, there would be enough "atrocities" to afford an official explanation for whatever might happen to an American and his gold. The big Russian was too busy smiling and filling glasses.

Wheeler swirled his drink for a moment. "My story of getting fifty thousand dollars in gold and then losing it simply won't hold water back home. Those fools can't picture this country, and they'll accuse me of having whacked up a deal with someone, and taken a hefty payoff for surrendering peaceably."

"They won't jail you or liquidate you, will they?"

"I'll be blacklisted, and where the devil will I ever get another decent job? Unless I go into business, and that takes money." He gestured toward the two chests. "There it is. If I stay, or if I try to carry it, I am sunk. Now I appeal to your sporting instincts. Give me twenty thousand dollars in some form I have a chance of getting to the coast, and you keep the rest."

This was an approach Karimov could understand. "That will be your new start in life?"

"Naturally."

Karimov shook his head. "Giving you a draft on a Chinese banker would complicate things. Suppose I arranged for an escort?"

"If it's going to be that way, I might as well take the whole fifty thousand, and join Major Beecham's refugees."

"No, comrade, carrying treasure would be conspicuous, and someone would talk. You'd either have to get the stuff to the coast and finally turn it in, complete, or you'd be in just as bad a fix as before. And you'd probably be murdered by your fellow refugees."

Karimov was not far from the truth there; the British subjects of Kashgar were in the main Afghans, Parsis, Kashmiris and others who believed that gold belonged to whoever grabbed it. Wheeler rose, and began pacing back and forth. He made several false starts at speech, and finally said, "I've a mind to go whole hog, take my chances on carrying it."

He went to the door to call Qasim.

This was not the first time Karimov had seen a man wavering, changing his mind every minute, and oftener. He had seen many a man with the wind up, and he knew the symptoms; nor was he impatient, for however the worried American played, Karimov would be able to pocket a good piece of the repossessed gold. His own position, as to his government, would be quite secure, for no one would expect him to effect a one hundred percent salvage.

Qasim stepped in, and awaited orders. Wheeler snapped, "Wait a minute!" He turned back to Karimov. "Look here, comrade. This Ma Hsi Tang business is going to make the headlines. It'll cover me, where a yarn about bandits wouldn't. Now I got a great idea, we can both pick up a piece of change."

Karimov finger-combed his beard. "You interest me."

"It is this way." Wheeler seated himself on a treasure chest. "If I try to haul the stuff out, and I lose it, you lose, too. Play it my way, and some of this dough is yours, and who knows the difference?"

Karimov's eyes sparkled. This was the old Russian game; it had led many an official to the firing squad, but optimism and larceny were inseparable. Wheeler went on, "I'll put my seal on one of these boxes, and you give me

your official receipt for a parcel left in your care. I'll get out of here, and come back when the uprising is nicely quieted. Then I could get through with mine, and what you do with yours in your business."

"You insist on an official receipt?"

"Well . . . yes."

"In other words—" Karimov was pained, but not indignant—"you don't quite trust me, even in a gentleman's agreement?"

Wheeler jumped up. "No, that's not it! It's just in case you were transferred and another consul general had this post. With an official receipt, there'd be no questions."

In view of Wheeler's previous indecision and worry, this naive logic was convincing. Karimov nodded. "You won't have to split with my successor, if I am gone. Shrewd thinking, comrade. Come, let's fix it up now."

WHEELER and Qasim carried the chests to the office;

Karimov took the lamp himself, instead of calling a servant. Wheeler opened one chest, displayed the contents, then lowered the lid. He took a piece of sealing wax from his pocket, and likewise, a Turki signet engraved in carnelian. He chuckled happily, and as he heated the wax over the lamp, he said: "Nothing to do now but stow it in your safe, and that settles it."

Karimov unlocked the big, old-fashioned safe. "Right on that shelf, while I make the receipt."

As the wax softened, Wheeler got his second look at the contents of the heavy safe. On the face of it, it looked very much as it had the day he sold the refinery: the choicest of the loot from a Turki palace in Yarkand, and beyond any doubt, none of it listed on any official inventory. While Wheeler had only a man-on-the-street knowledge of jewelry, he was sure that Karimov would not have locked up trash. Whatever the stuff might be worth, it was better than no salvage at all.

So Wheeler drew his pistol and said to Qasim, "Tie him!"

Karimov jerked back in his chair. He simply could not understand. First the fool returned with fifty thousand dollars and cried all over the place, and now that gun! Wheeler warned, "Don't yell. Your grand larceny gags made a fool out of me, and I'm through playing. Get busy, Qasim."

It took only a minute or so to lash Karimov's ankles and forearms to the chair. Qasim had come with plenty of rope wrapped about his waist, and he used all of it. Karimov protested, "See here, you fool, this doesn't make sense. Are you crazy?"

"Gag him for luck," Wheeler ordered, and then he took from under his shirt a leather bag. "Comrade, I'm swapping gold for jewels."

The Russian had no answer, mainly because of the turban cloth that now filled his mouth. Wheeler reached into the safe and began scooping out glowing rubies, cool sapphires, and large emeralds; there were diamonds, and like the other gems they were polished in the antique fashion, instead of being faceted and cut to eliminate flaws. For all Wheeler knew, the stuff might be worth far less than the gold he was leaving, but that was a chance he had to take.

When the bag was full of pendants and bracelets and massive collars, he eyed the remainder, and shook his head. "Hell," he said, "if what I've got won't sell for fifty grand, those chumps in New York can't say I didn't try."



Qasim began stuffing his wallet with rubles.

"Lay off, lay off, we've got to move."

"Just another handful, *tura*." He dropped pieces, and they tinkled on the floor. "Just another—"

Then the door slammed open. Karimov's servant had returned, and this time he had a pistol instead of a lamp. Wheeler flung the heavy pouch of jewels, but the man fired a shot. It went wild, shattering the lamp chimney, and then Wheeler slugged him; he slammed against the door jamb, and crumpled to the floor.

The blast echoed through the house. Servants began yelling. Wheeler snatched the treasure pouch and bounded toward the door. Qasim, shedding coins at every leap, was at his heels. An unaimed shot scattered the servants who ran across the garden to cut off the retreat, but as Wheeler cleared the gate, he heard the answering yells of the *pashraps* who patrolled the town. The guard was turning out.

"Give her hell!" he shouted, as Qasim took the wheel.

For once, Wheeler did not complain about reckless driving.

## CHAPTER IV

### FLIGHT WITH BULLETS

THE light car roared and rattled and bounced down the rutted street. Ever since the news of Ma Hsi Tang's approach, the prefect had detailed squads of Chinese soldiers to patrol the city. The first of these, coming down a side street at the double time, fired as the Model A crossed an intersection.

Wheeler heard the shattering of glass in the left rear door. That was just a sample of what would be waiting at the gate. With all the shooting, there was not a chance for the surprise rush he had planned.

Qasim swung wide, and tore off a fender. Ahead was the deserted market place, with its fringe of booths and brush shelters, and beyond that the city wall loomed up. Warned by the firing and the yelling, the guard was closing the gate; but that was slow work, and Qasim shouted: "I can rush them!"

He tramped on the gas. Four soldiers, running from the archway, began firing from the hip. Qasim had more nerve than judgment, and Wheeler knew that this was no time for argument. He snatched the wheel, cutting over sharply as bullets peppered the hood and windshield. The Model A crashed through the row of booths, scattering brush-thatch and poplar cross pieces.

"Let go, you fool! I'm taking over."

Qasim was entirely too bewildered to obey. With two men at the wheel, neither had a fair hold, and a deep rut did the rest. The car went into a spin, crashing against the wall of an adjoining *serai*. That was enough to awaken the donkey boys and camel men inside the enclosure. The shock wrenched the door open, and flung Wheeler through the tangle of brush and poplar poles that the Model A had picked up on its dash through the booths. Qasim still clung to the wheel, calling on Allah, and began grinding the starter.

The guard decided that it was not necessary to close the city gate. Chinese soldiers came running down the street, toward the market place; others, following up the riot that had started in front of Karimov's palace, approached from the opposite direction.

As Wheeler scrambled to his feet and clawed his way back to seize the pouch which had dropped to the floorboards, he said: "Get out of there, even if it does start. It's too damn late!"

"Hide in the *serai*," Qasim yelled, and knocked Wheeler backward in the scramble to obey.

That would have been a good idea, had both fugitives been wearing Turki *khalats* and skullcaps; but Wheeler was conspicuous. He had to create a distraction, and he did this by firing three shots into the gas tank. The approaching soldiers halted. A volley spattered about the stalled car. Then Wheeler struck a match and bounded well clear of the wreck.

Flat on the ground, he fired three shots. Their answering volley was high, and zipped through the gate of the *serai*. Qasim, convinced that the boss was crazy, raced toward the gate. As the gasoline roared up, red and smoky, Wheeler followed. Though he was well lighted by flames, the flareup startled the soldiers. Trucks and cars were far too scarce in Sinkiang to have made them familiar with the whimsies of gasoline.

That was what saved Wheeler, for he had scarcely cleared the entrance of the *serai* when rifles began crackling again.

The courtyard was a roaring confusion. Horses, donkeys, camels were stampeding, and panicky merchants were taking cover in the cubicles that lined the wall, or behind bales of wool and bags of grain. Wheeler joined them. Camels and donkeys bolted into the market place.

All this broke into the advance of the guard, and now black smoke billowed about, inside as well as outside the high wall. Qasim recognized Wheeler by the murky glare, and caught his arm. "Put these on." He knocked off Wheeler's hat, and handed him a skullcap and a greasy *khalat*. "Hurry, hurry, this way! The second floor!"

"Grab this bag and don't lose it!"

He followed Qasim up the stairs to the runway that fronted the second floor rooms of the tavern. On the way, he not only got into the old *khalat*, but also slipped a spare clip into his automatic.

"This way!" Qasim pointed. "Over the roofs."

THE gas tank of the wreck exploded, spreading blazing fuel, which drove the soldiers back. When Wheeler followed his chauffeur to the adjoining roof, it was crowded with natives who had come below to see whether Ma Hsi Tang was sacking the city. There was too much excitement for anyone to be observing, and the smoke of burning rubber was spreading, black and choking. All this gave Wheeler the advantage he needed.

They leaped from one roof to the next; they dropped to a one-story building, and then into an alley. Already the streets were packed with natives, who yelled, "Ma Hsi Tang's here!" And most of them carried bundles hastily assembled.

Just what was happening in the plaza, and at the entrance of the *serai*, Wheeler did not know, and he had no time to find out. He ploughed through the pack of howling men and screeching women, and when he reached the city wall, he saw that the gate was still open.

There was not a soldier on duty, for the guard and the patrols had been swamped by panicky natives. Many were swarming through the gate, scattering in every direction. Qasim gasped, "Allah is saving us. They can't chase all these people."



"Lead on! And give me that bag!"

So they ran, scaling low walls and cutting across orchards; they raced through millet fields, stumbled through melon patches. When Qasim paused for breath, they were at the edge of the *loess* cliffs that overhung the Kizil Su.

"Where'd you get this *khalat*? It sure was a life saver."

Qasim answered, "A merchant was trampled in the rush, and I peeled it off before he could get on his feet."

"He sure must love mutton and garlic, but it's a swell coat, anyway."

He followed Qasim downstream to a path which went to the river, some forty feet below. It was so steep that he slid, with clods bouncing after him. The broad, flat bottom was covered by a solid thicket of willows, and until he ploughed through this, he could not see the Kizil Su.

After crossing the shallow river at a mill, Qasim then led the way up the opposite bank. "Wait here, *tura*. Turdu Bai's farm is right ahead of us. I told him I'd be leaving in a hurry, but he may have some town people that got here ahead of us, and they'd better not see you."

Wheeler had expected, of course, to win a clear start from Karimov's place; he had reasoned that Karimov's servants would return to their quarters as soon as they had admitted a late caller, and that it would take the Russian at least an hour or more to liberate himself. As it was, it would be a close race.

"After this brisk jaunt," he told himself, "I don't feel quite so much like a heel for leaving Alma out of the party." But he could not entirely convince himself on that score. For all the hardships he knew were ahead, he still felt that Major Beecham's convoy of refugees would endure worse. It was not that he doubted the British consul general's ability; it was rather that a man with a long military tradition would have the devil's own time handling a rabble of civilians, particularly if most of the several hundred were Afghans, Parsis, Hindus, Kashmiris and others who used their citizenship mainly as an aid to every illegal activity from smuggling to stealing.

His head ached from the egg-sized lump raised by the car crackup; his face was slashed from flying glass and from the brush through which he had plunged. "No," he said, "I'd be crazy, asking that girl to string along with me, and I'd be crazier trying to time this stunt to hook up with the major's convoy."

Then Qasim came back and said, "The camels are ready. Turdu Bai has robbed me, but they are good animals, I do not think they will drop dead before we get to Merket."

Wheeler had no further time to wonder if Alma would be fascinated by the consul general's guest, Mr. Aubrey Smythe-Fortescue, a big-game hunter who could think of nothing but polo and shooting. Wheeler particularly disliked Mr. Smythe-Fortescue, ever since that gentleman had asked him: "I say, my good man, if you can guide me to some good shooting, I'll pay you handsomely. These blasted Turkis are frightfully incompetent."

Wheeler wondered if his legs would carry him to the camels. He was stiff from sprinting and his ankle ached from the leap to the street, and the seat of his pants was worn thin from sliding down into the ravine of the Kizil Su. And finally, he had never ridden a camel.

"It is easy, *tura*," Qasim assured him. "You sit there. You tap his neck with this stick. You speak to him somewhat though not quite in the way you speak to a horse."

"You have something there," was the gloomy answer. "I am sure I'll say things I never said to any horse."

Qasim went on, "You never before robbed a Russian consul general, and behold!"

## CHAPTER V

### THE TERRIBLE SANDS

THE oasis was a dark blotch behind Wheeler. Ahead, scrubby tamarisks dotted the desert; poplars reached tall and black against the stars. Centuries ago, all this land had been fertile, but now there was no life except where subterranean streams threaded the waste, and no sound, except for the breathing of the camels, the padding of their feet.

Wheeler bounced and jogged. No trick of horsemanship served him. The wooden tree of the saddle was padded with sheepskin, but that made little difference; he might as well have been sitting on a saw-buck, and for good-measure every other pitch brought the high pommel against his stomach. He was battered black and blue, and he had learned of muscles whose every existence he had never before suspected.

Meanwhile, he was wondering if Karimov had ordered the Chinese governor to send cavalry patrols to spiral about the oasis, and others to follow the Kashgar River and the trail to Aksu.

At dawn, he could just distinguish the grey-green of the river bed; this was when Qasim halted to rest the animals, to make tea, and to eat a few dried apricots and barley cakes. The oasis itself was now below the horizon; and ahead the sun came up out of the Takla Makan, that vast stretch which the Mongols said was made from the powdered bones of dragons. After resuming the march, Wheeler watched the long purple shadows of low hummocks reach across the waste; partridges rose, whirring from the gray scrub that flecked the tawny sand; for a while the breeze was cool.

And then the sun lost its deep red and the sky its blue: the glare ahead was mirrored by the desert, and hot sand whipped Wheeler's cheeks, blackened his lips, reddened his eyes. By the time that his misery seemed complete, the sun had risen enough to beat through the turban he had shaped about his skullcap. Mirage made the ground dance and quiver; at times he could see no more than the rump of the pack camel which trotted after Qasim's mount.

At last, Qasim halted. "Before we reach Merket, you'll be used to this, and ready to face the bad stretch."

For six days, Wheeler faced the sun in its red rising out of desolation, and each night he helped Qasim dig for water. Sometimes at eight feet, sometimes at ten, the sand became moist; this brackish trickle, patiently dipped up, was for the camels, and when there was enough, some empty goat skins were filled.

It was near sunset when the mud walls of Merket loomed up, and Wheeler saw the willows and the reeds that fringed the Yarkand River, which went northeast to join the Tarim.

Sheep bleated, camel bells tolled. Qasim waited for Wheeler to pull up beside him. "Praise be to Allah! Whatever there is ahead, at least this much is behind."

Wheeler, who had not shaved for a week, had a beard as wiry as Qasim's. Between dirt and wind burn, he was as dark as any of the men who lounged in the market place and saluted the travelers.



Once in court of the *serai*, Qasim unsaddled the animals. "Before we eat, let us call on the *yuzbashi* and give him a present."

They found the village headman squatting under a plane tree. Turan Bek was eating apricots and flipping the pits at a sleeping dog. As the strangers approached, he licked his lips, wiped his fingers on his brown *khalat*, and returned the peace. After gravely accepting Qasim's gift—a few yards of brocade from India—he offered some of his apricots and a smoke, all the while going through the litany of questions about the road and the weather.

A HORSEMAN galloped down the street. Wheeler started, half-reached for his pistol, and relaxed when he saw that the rider was a Kirghiz in sheepskins. Turan Bek's slanting eyes had a malicious twinkle when he said, "You had good camels, *akhun*. No Chinese cavalry could have kept up with you. You are safe enough."

Wheeler was worried, nonetheless. Later, while eating mutton that a vendor grilled over a portable brazier, Qasim said: "The price of camels will go up, now that they guess how badly we need them."

"Hell with the price." Wheeler took another skewer, and used a leathery bit of bread to protect his fingers from the sizzling morsel of onion and meat. "As long as the *yuzbashi* doesn't sell us down the river."

"God does what he will do," Qasim answered, and went on eating.

The next day he bought camels. Getting guides was impossible. The village headman said, "Airplanes may come looking for you; they may be taking the news to Aksu, and soldiers may be waiting for you there."

Wheeler did not bother to say that he was not bound for Aksu, a two-weeks march up the river. And that night Qasim headed northeast, through the reed patches that skirted the stream.

"Patience, *tura*," he said. "Round about is the best way."

So Wheeler rode all night. His idea had been to tell the men of Merket that he planned crossing the Takla Makan: for he was convinced that no one would think him crazy enough to try it. But he was in Qasim's hands, at least until they reached the southern edge of the desert, behind Ma Hsi Tang's advancing forces; thereafter, the road to India would not be impossible.

At dawn a lake gleamed among tall poplars. North of it were tamarisks, gray green against the sand; and to the east were the first dunes of the Takla Makan. Qasim said, "We stop here, load up with water, let the animals stuff themselves with reeds. And once we get well into the sands, we swing back."

"The wind will fill our tracks, you mean?"

"*Aywah*. And sometimes it digs the traveler's grave."

Now that he had become accustomed to camel riding, Wheeler found time to wonder how Alma Clayman was faring, whether Axel Knudsen had joined the convoy, whether Major Beecham had actually started evacuating British subjects. He realized, finally, that his impatient objection of Qasim's detour had come largely from considering the chance, that he might, somewhere south of the road that led from Kashgar to Guma, get word of the refugees.

That evening they swung southeast, into the stretches where there was neither water nor shade. The dunes be-

came higher. They whispered, a dry, eerie murmur of shifting sand; they had swallowed up lakes and cities, and they seemed to resent the intrusion of any living thing.

The camels were restless. Time and again, Wheeler had to beat his beast into line. They sensed that they were going away from the last water, that there was no life ahead. And Wheeler was afraid, for the unease of the animals was contagious.

Lacking a compass, they could not be sure of anything but the general course; Qasim kept a southern constellation on his right. Still, they were shooting at a wide mark: they had only to arrive somewhere between Karghalik and the Karakash river bed. It was just a matter of getting there before the water supply was gone.

Wheeler had lost track of the days when a sandstorm reddened the sun. At the first far off rumbling, the camels became uneasy. Qasim pulled up, dismounted; he yelled, "Hobble them, quick!"

AN EERIE grayness blotted out the brazen glow of the sky. Sand whistled, screamed, knifing Wheeler's hands and face as he hung to both lead ropes, and tried to hold the beasts in place until he could hobble one. They snorted, groaned, they wheeled about, dragging him over the scorching earth. The sand was piling up in new dunes; it began to billow, like a stormy sea in slow motion. He could scarcely see or breathe, and the lead ropes he had twisted about him threatened to pinch him in half.

Then Qasim came running through the gloom, and gave him a hand. Half the desert was already in flight. The drumming gusts solidified into a steady roaring.

They found shelter in the lee of a slowly advancing dune. Darkness closed in, and they could no longer see the camels fighting their hobbles.

Wheeler never did know how long the storm lasted. His throat and lungs were raw, his eyes were so inflamed that he could scarcely see; and the fine particles had clogged his watch. The animals were half buried, and then, as the full fury of the wind subsided, one of them did break loose.

Qasim lurched after him but his boots and garments were logged with sand. The crazed animal stampeded across the desert.

"That's half the water, huh?"

"At least half."

But Qasim's optimism did not last long. Some of the goatskin jugs on the remaining pack animal had burst from the weight of drifting sand. "It'll be day and night now, as long as we last," Wheeler said.

He dug the bag of Turki loot out of the drift from which he had crawled. When the treasure jingled, he cursed and flung it to the ground. Then he saw Qasim's face, and that shocked him.

Wheeler forced a laugh, picked up the pouch, and shook the sand out of it. "Lot lighter now!" He sat down, drew his knife, and set to work, prying the jewels from their massive clasps. "Can't fool with gold. Here, chew an emerald if you're thirsty. Tastes better than pebbles."

Qasim grinned. And Wheeler knew that from then on, he was in charge. What he had seen on Qasim's face was Moslem resignation, but now the man was ready to ride, and chew an emerald in place of water.

Wheeler's red-rimmed eyes scanned the horizon when-



ever the weary beasts paused at the crest of a dune. There was not yet any sign of verdure to the south, nor any flights of water fowl rising from the pools that dotted the southern fringe of the Takla Makan.

Qasim said, toward sunset, "They can't go much longer. They can't live without water for more than ten days in this dryness."

"When they drop, we'll walk. Try a sapphire, here's a nice one."

That night the coolness helped, but the camels began to stagger and stumble. Once they dropped, they would not rise. Qasim croaked, "It was well to prod them. They are so far gone that there is no blood in them for us to drink."

Without halting, Wheeler slid from his mount and marched. As long as the beasts could drag their legs, they could carry a little barley. Slowly, the constellations circled; all night he waded, lifting sand with every pace, raising a bootful each step, but not daring to stop and pour out the accumulation. He no longer felt his thirst. He was dried out, and his lips were black. The roof of his mouth was like leather rotted from old age, his skin was like a reptile's, scaly and harsh; and for all his exertions, his pulse was falling off.

During the moonlight hours, he fumbled with a ruby. "There was never a stone this big, it must be a phoney." The idea amused him. Going to all this trouble just to do a job was as silly as Alma's trip to Kashgar for something that people called news.

As from a great distance, he heard Qasim croaking. Looking back, he saw that a camel was down, that the man was on his knees. Wheeler could not stop, for the beast he was prodding would collapse. He unslung the jewel pouch, and held it out. "Come up for a drink, Qasim. Here's some I've been saving."

The Turki guide got up. One camel was down to stay, but the other one still stumbled along. "Wait, *tura!*"

"I can't hold this beast on his feet, waiting for you!"

Seeing a man weaker than himself gave Wheeler strength. He baited Qasim along, since he could not carry him. He cursed and he wheedled and he mocked, always tempting him with that jewel pouch which the guide could no longer distinguish from a waterskin.

The world had become one red hell; day and night were alike. He had never heard of a pulse with a second between beats. He was not at all sure that water could now check dissolution, and he was quite indifferent to the result. But he led, and so Qasim stumbled after him.

The dunes were flattening out.

For some time, that meant nothing to Wheeler.

He did not understand until his camel bolted. The pack animal followed. Qasim made dry, wordless sounds; he gestured, and tried to run. When he fell, he picked himself up and stretched his legs until he caught up with Wheeler.

"Water—"

"Maybe we can chew the leather." Wheeler pointed at the flat goatskin hanging from the saddle.

But Qasim pointed and again said, "Water!" And now the remaining camel raised his head a little. "They—smell—water. Beat him—beat him—"

A quarter of a mile ahead, the runaway had stopped. He was trying to drink from a smudge in the hard-baked earth. The sandstorm had cut down to the seepage from one of the subterranean streams, and already wind-blown

grass seeds had begun to sprout. From now on, Wheeler knew that he could get water by digging.

AT THE end of the next day's march, Wheeler saw the green of an oasis, and later he could distinguish a stumpy minaret and a mud wall.

It was nearly dusk when dogs raced from a farm at the edge of the desert, and yapped at the heels of the camels.

There was a mud-walled inclosure for the animals, and a cubical hut of sun-dried brick. The willows were stunted, the millet crop was thin. The owner of the place was as lean as his farm. He approached, holding a bell-muzzled flintlock ready to fire. Had there been more than Wheeler and Qasim, he would have tried to escape with the bedraggled Turki woman who had a goiter and three ragged brats.

"The peace upon you, and the blessing of Allah!" Qasim raised his hands. "We are the guests of Allah, and not bandits."

The flintlock still covered the travelers; the farmer said, "Who but robbers come out of the Takla Makan?"

"Look at us and look at our camels," Wheeler retorted. "Are we desert men?"

That, and a few silver coins convinced old Arghun. He turned to his wife: "Aisha, get something to eat."

When the camels were in the inclosure, Wheeler and Qasim went into the hut and ate millet cakes and cheese, and some withered melons. Arghun said, "We are too poor for Ma Hsi Tang's men to rob us, but the desert men are poorer."

Wheeler quoted. "*There are tigers on the eastern mountain, and tigers on the western.* It is with us the way it has been with you. Has Ma Hsi Tang's army passed through?"

"Not yet, but they are near." He pointed toward the town, which was perhaps three miles south. "Guma is full of fugitives from Khotan. They are escaping with whatever they can carry or drive. They say that his advance guard is already at the Karakash River."

"Are you leaving, too?"

"No, *akhun*. This is my ground, and it was my father's, and his father's. Where else would I go?"

Qasim said, "May you live long where your ancestors lived. Now tell us, has there been a party of fugitives coming from Kashgar and from Yarkand? Perhaps two-three hundred of all races, led by an Inglesi officer with drooping yellow whiskers and a red nose? A man with a long face, like a lowbred horse. An old man who holds his head high and looks fiercely at people."

Arghun considered for a moment. "The British consul-general? A man who has other infidels with him?"

Wheeler held his breath.

Qasim said, "Doubtless there would be some such in his party."

"A big, foolish looking young man, who roars and bellows, and will not fire at birds until they take wing? And when he kills, he lets the game lie where it falls. Verily, a madman, wasting powder and shot, and laughing like a drunkard, haw-haw, when he kills things he will not eat."

This would be Cyril Smythe-Fortesque, bagging everything, edible or not, from humming birds to ostriches. Qasim nodded. "*Aywah*, there was such a man in Kashgar. And now you have heard of him?"



"A thief came to Guma with this foolish man's horse, just yesterday. Sometimes I wonder if I should not quit farming, and let other men raise the horses I sell."

"And the thief brought news of these men?"

"*Wallah*, he did, and he went back to steal more."

Wheeler's patience was in rags. Making direct inquiries about Alma would be considered undignified; so he asked, "With Ma Hsi Tang so near, who would buy horses? This is a time to sell or to ride."

"No, *akhun*." Arghun accepted another cigarette. "The rich merchants are buying fine horses to give to Ma Hsi Tang as gifts, and perhaps he will not plunder their granaries."

"What other infidels are there?" Wheeler went on.

"There is one who prays. He is crazy, but not like the man who shoots. They caught a thief robbing him while he slept, and when they wanted to shoot the thief, the madman said, let him go, is a watch worth a man's life, and does a man live longer for knowing what hour of the day it is? Verily, this must be a holy man."

THAT night, as they spread out straw and slept in the barnyard beside their animals, for the farmhouse was too small for guests, Wheeler said to Qasim: "It has already started, first the sneak thieving and horse thieving, then comes the sniping and the looting."

He was now certain that Alma must be one of the convoy, for since Axel Knudsen, the "holy man", had quit his post, she would certainly not have remained.

"We are lucky, *tura*. We can still get horses in Guma, and then ride through the Sanju Pass to India, and Allah curse General Ma Hsi Tang!"

"What of the infidels and the British subjects?"

Qasim yawned. "Those that aren't killed will starve." His snoring cut the discussion.

In the morning they left the farm, and went to Guma. There they sold the camels, and bought two shaggy Kalmuk ponies. The runty beasts had only partly shed their winter coats, they were hammer headed, tricky, and had fierce little eyes; but they were rugged, and cheap.

"They climb like goats, *tura*. Give them enough start to keep away from a long-legged horse the first day, and no blooded animal will ever overhaul them. They would not know what to do with grain. A little grass and some birch bark is enough for them."

Wheeler, riding through the one main street of Guma, scarcely heard the lecture. He was listening to the uproar in the *serais* and the tea shops and the chatter of merchants and caravan men: Ma Hsi Tang, the Scourge of God, the terror of the infidels, was rounding up every man old enough to shoulder a rifle, carry a spear, or handle a sword. Some were hurrying to the mountains to avoid the savior of Islam, others were looking forward to the grand lootings and sackings, first Karaghalik, then Yarkand, finally Kashgar.

"Yea, Genghis Khan rides again!" they shouted, some

in terror, some in glee. "Whoever does not join him, that man's head is built into a pyramid of other heads."

As he reined in, unable to press through the confusion, Wheeler watched a long line of sheep filing through the gate of Guma. There was something odd about that herd. There were too many shepherds, and they did not look as if they were accustomed to their business.

One of the Chinese sentries pointed and called for a non-com. An officer came up. The shepherds gestured. Then half a dozen pistols blazed, and curved *yataghans* flickered.

The officer dropped. A sentry fired one shot. Another tried to use his bayonet, but the shepherds had caught the guards flat-footed, and Turki loafers brained a soldier who tried to run. A sheep, winged by a wild shot, dropped near Wheeler. The heavy fleece concealed a bandolier of cartridges: munitions for Ma Hsi Tang. The town, inspired by twenty pistol-armed "shepherds", was ready to massacre the small Chinese garrison.

Wheeler booted his pony, slashed right and left with his whip, and ducked into a side street, with Qasim at his heels. When they reached the northern gate of Guma not a soldier was in sight. Rifles crackled from the loopholes of the mud-walled barracks, and bullets zinged from the adjoining buildings. As he cleared the gateway, Wheeler gasped: "They're going to give General Ma the keys to this town, you can bet on that!"

They galloped north, among the fields and orchards of the oasis. Out of rifle range, when they halted, Qasim said, "We can swing around that way, and make for Sanju Pass."

"We're going toward Karaghalik."

It was a full moment before Qasim could say: "Power is with Allah." He meant, only God could make a man so crazy.

Wheeler explained, "I am warning Major Beecham that Guma is going wild, that he's got to risk a short cut."

"There is no such pass."

"There must be some way of getting to Sujet Karaul without going through Guma."

"Shepherd's trails, yes. Not caravan trails. I have brought you to Guma, I have blackened the face of Karimov, and the Peace go with you, *tura*."

He wheeled his horse. After a few steps, he halted, and without looking back, he said: "Me, I go to help smuggle guns for Ma Hsi Tang. And if we meet on the highway of Allah, it may be that I can help you through the Sanju Pass."

Wheeler did not answer. He went alone on the caravan road that led west toward Karghalik. He did not blame Qasim for not wishing to risk his neck to help save three madmen and an infidel woman. As he rode, he said, "Maybe Major Beecham can tell me what the commanding officer is supposed to do when a one-man army mutinies."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK







By Robert Arthur

Author of "Obstinate Uncle Otis," "Just a Dreamer," etc.

# The Boys from Mars

Step right this way, ladies and gents! Step right up and meet those scaly scalawags, those roguish reptilians, those cosmic cutups—the three lads from Mars. Shake hands with them, chat with them—but don't crowd them. They'd be apt to freeze you

## I

MR. DEXTER DEXTER was a large and florid individual with a penchant for rainbow neckties, the possessor of an orotund voice and a cosmic vocabulary that had never failed him in any crisis of his life. It did not fail him now, as the ancient touring car, of which he was the sole, if seventh owner, coughed and died in its tracks.

"May this besotted conglomeration of miscalled machinery be melted down in the fires of Avernus," he remarked, as he descended and thrust a stick into the gas tank. "We're out of gas again."

He gazed about as his companion and chauffeur, Melvin Mull, slid from behind the wheel and joined him. They had ceased their travels in the heart of the Shenandoah Valley, in a region devoid of human habitation, almost on the stroke of noon. Hills rose to the right of them, to the left of them, in front of them, and behind them. Cradled in hills, they reposed now by the deserted roadside beneath the rays of an ambitious summer sun.

"We come a hunderd fifty miles on the last twenty gallons," Melvin Mull remarked, after a moment's calculation. "That's seven and a half per. Which is good for this gas-gobbling monstrosity you won't get rid of 'cause a junk dealer'd charge to haul it away."

Mr. Dexter Dexter gazed at the freight-car lines of

the ancient hulk, and his eyes mellowed. Along the side, in large red letters, was inscribed *Dexter Dexter, Entrepreneur and Press Agent Extraordinary*. Mr. Dexter had a fondness for publicity. The sight of his own name always brought on a genial mood in him.

Melvin Mull was a small man with a leathery countenance set in a permanent mold of melancholy scepticism. He said now, "We are in a hell of a mess. Almost broke, two hundred miles from Times Square, and out of gas. Furthermore—"

"Melvin, my fine feathered friend," Dexter Dexter interrupted with disapproval, "are you trying any of your ventriloqual circumlocutions upon me at this hapless moment?"

"Throwing my voice?" Mr. Mull stared at his large partner. "Why would I be? Are you nuts, Dex?"

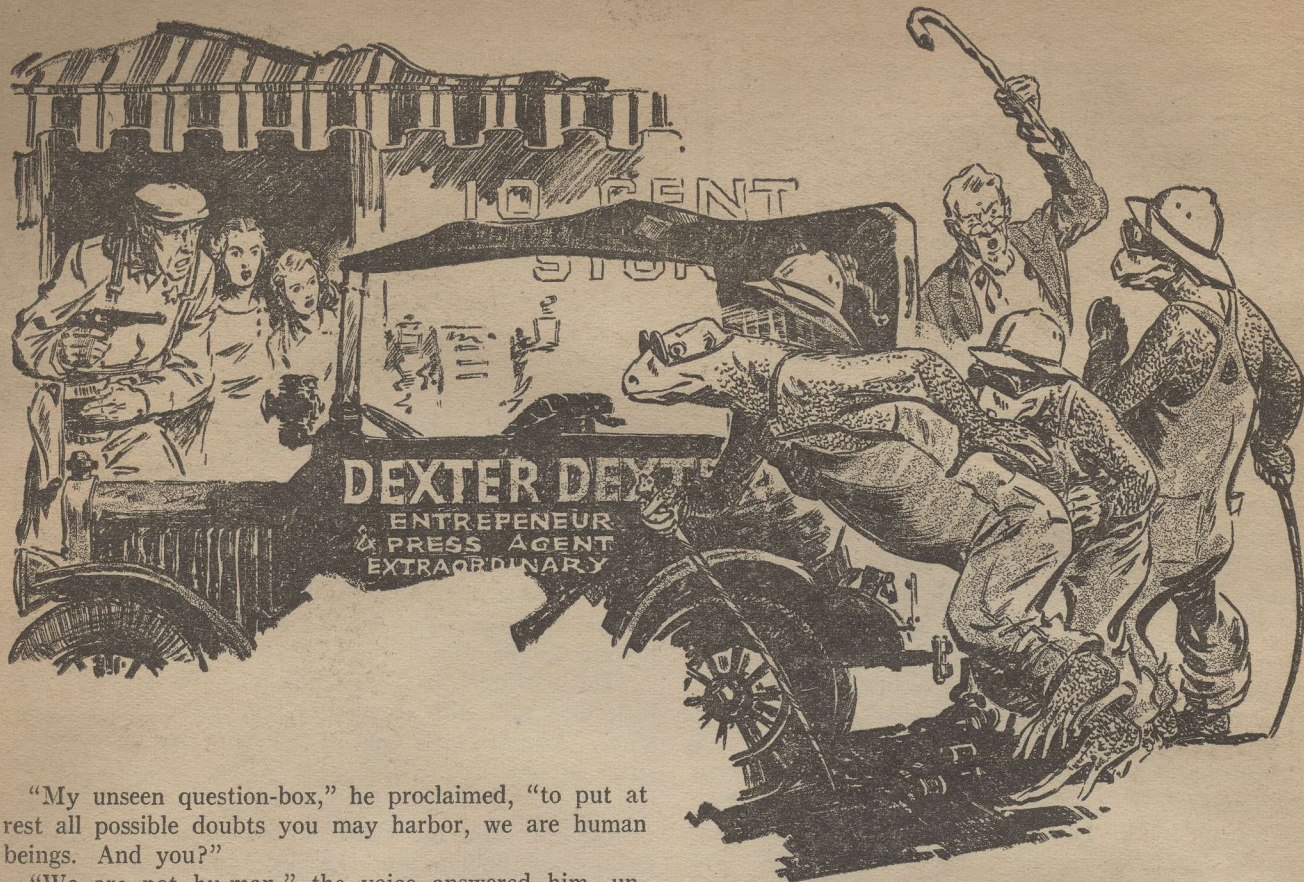
"Then," Dexter Dexter boomed, "we are being accosted by human speech from yon shrubbery."

He pointed at a thick clump of sumac at the edge of the road, and the sound of a voice from that spot proved the statement correct.

"Ex-cuse me," the voice said, in good English, but in a metallic and uninflected tone, "but are you hu-man beings?"

Melvin Mull's jaw dropped. Even Dexter Dexter's florid color rose in astonishment. But he was seldom—to be accurate, never yet—at a loss for words.





One flick of the creatures' mirrors—and the townsfolk were turned into statues

"My unseen question-box," he proclaimed, "to put at rest all possible doubts you may harbor, we are human beings. And you?"

"We are not hu-man," the voice answered him, unexpectedly. "But we wish to be fur-ends. If you will be fur-ently, we will emerge."

"Holy smoke!" Melvin Mull gobbled. "Dex, we're surrounded by screwballs. Let's get out of here."

"Pause, Melvin," Dex Dexter commanded resonantly. "Have you not heard our unseen associate announce his peaceful intent? Emerge, my invisible bushman. I will be fur-end—friendly. I have millions of friends, every one of them intimate. Step right up and call me pal."

"Thank you, Pal," the voice said, and there was movement in the sumac. They parted, and a creature stepped into the open, followed by a second and third similar to him.

"Awk!" Melvin Mull pawed at Dexter's sleeve. "Dex! Do you see what I see?"

"Ulk!" Dexter Dexter gurgled. "Kaff—kuh! Melvin, what spectacle your vision embraces I do not know, but what *I* see would appear, at a hasty glance, to be three green lizards almost as big as you are, standing up on their hind legs, wearing belts and dark cheaters. That is what *I* think I see. What, if I may ask, do you see?"

"I see all my sins catching up with me," Melvin Mull groaned. "Who ever heard of lizards wearing sun glasses and talking English? I think you've gone nuts and I've caught it. I never heard of insanity being contagious before, but—"

HIS voice trailed off. The three who had emerged from the bushes stared at them solemnly. They stood upright on short bandy legs, and had large, protuberant, unblinking eyes behind the lenses of the oddly made dark glasses they were wearing. Around their middles they wore curious, many-pocketed belts, and that was all. Their skins were scaly and greenish, and their short crooked arms ended in broad, flat hands, long-fingered.

With an effort, Melvin Mull took his gaze from the

three to look at his friend. Dexter was staring, not with horror, but with rapt and blissful wonder.

"Melvin!" It was the press agent's hoarse whisper, from the side of his mouth, that penetrated to Mr. Mull's dazed consciousness. "Don't you get it? Freaks! A million-dollar attraction! Local boys, probably. Shows you what inbreeding will do. They somehow heard I was coming through here, so they waited for me. Were going to stop me, no doubt. Knew my reputation, and wanted me to handle them. And Fate stopped us right in front of them. Praise Allah!"

"Pal," said the foremost of the trio now, "may I present my dis-tin-guished com-pat-riot, Mmm, and my as-sis-tant, Ahh, as well as my person-al self, Sss?"

"Charm-ed," said the second overgrown lizard.

"Charm-ed," echoed the third, politely bobbing his head.

Dexter Dexter swept off his broad-brimmed Panama.

"Melvin," he boomed, "I want you to meet these three gentlemen, Siss, Boom, and Bah. Boys, this is my bosom companion, Melvin Mull. Anything you can say to me, you can say to him. Where do you fine scaly lads come from, if I may ask? Are you local products, or are you like us, just passing through these somewhat uninhabited parts?"

"We come," said Sss, after a momentary pause to extract the meaning from Dexter Dexter's flow of language, "from there."

He indicated a spot in the blazing firmament above the western hills.

"If it were nigh-tuh," he stated, "you could see it. It iss the plan-et Mars from which we come. The ve-hicle in which we tra-ver-sed the miles that sep-arate our



far-flung worlds rests a short distance back from here.

"You can not see it, for we have hid-den it by means of a sim-pul op-tic-al dev-ice that pre-vents un-de-sired dis-covery. We des-cended just be-fore sun-rise, and have been hid-ing here since, seek-ing an opp-or-tunity to find a hu-man be-ing. We are the first in-div-id-u-als from our world to vis-it yours. And you are the first hu-man beings any Mar-shun has ever spoke to. We are much hon-ored."

Having finished this long speech, Sss bobbed his head and waited. The look of ecstasy on the press-agent's features grew.

"Of course!" he exclaimed. "Men from Mars! I'd have thought of it myself, if you hadn't. Melvin, don't you see it? They'll back every other Man from Mars in the world right off the boards. These boys have what it takes. They must have spent years getting themselves ready. They're artists! By the rufous beard of the praiseworthy prophet, I can hardly wait to get 'em to New York."

"Freaks?" Melvin Mull muttered. "Well, I can't dispute you there, Dex. But I got a feeling, Dex, a funny feeling there's something here that don't meet the eye. Something that ain't strictly kosher."

"Nonsense, Melvin, tosh, bosh, and twaddle," Dexter Dexter replied. "These fine scaly lads are in search of employment, and in choosing Dexter Dexter to guide their wayward destinies, they have indeed chosen well. But boys, if you'll pardon my being personal, where are your clothes?"

"Cloze?" Sss, the foremost of the trio, repeated. "Oh, yiss. We are sor-ry. We have none."

"Tut," Dex Dexter frowned. "No raiment, vestments, or pantaloons? You boys must come from somewhat primitive surroundings. Melvin, my lad, my guess is these fine fellows are Filipinos. I have heard that some queer specimens emerge from the aboriginal Philippine jungles where no white face has ever trod. We must then, as detail number one, provide garmentage for our three noble yeomen of the scaly skin and startling physique."

"Problem number one," Melvin Mull reminded him sourly, "is to get hold of some gas here in this wilderness and get the hell out of here. We're still two hundred miles from a grubstake."

"Have no fears of the future, Melvin," Dexter Dexter assured the little leathery man. "Our three Men from Mars will shower riches upon us all. But you have placed your finger upon a matter of concern. To be sure, we must have gas. Do you boys?"—he addressed the solemnly waiting three—"do you boys perchance have a supply of gasoline with you? It need not be ethyl. Common ordinary grade B is quite good enough in such a time."

"Gas-oline?" queried Sss. His neckless head nodded understanding. "Oh, yiss, gas-oline. We have heard it men-shuned much on the ra-dio. We have list-ened to the rad-io from your plan-et for many years, learn-ing the lang-uage, and this gas-oline has been much spoke of. But we do not know what it is."

"Then you shall be enlightened," Dexter Dexter responded. "Melvin, toss me that can we used last time we ran dry. These reptilian rascals have never encountered gas. I think there's a spoonful left we can show 'em."

MELVIN got the can, and there were indeed a few drops remaining. This the three lizard ones smelled

gravely. Then they tasted it, rolling a drop or two about in their mouths. At last they nodded, together.

"Oh, yiss," Sss said. "Now we know what gas-oline is. My fur-ends Mmm and Ahh will bring some from our craft."

For a moment they talked together in a foreign tongue that was mostly hisses, then Mmm and Ahh disappeared into the bushes with the can.

"Hmmm," Dex Dexter murmured, in an aside to Melvin Mull, "perhaps they're Japs, instead of Filipinos. Come to think of it, they do a lot of hissing when they talk. But the matter is of small concern. They seem resourceful lads. Here come Boom and Bah back already, and I do believe they have some gas for us."

They did—two full gallons of it which Melvin Mull decanted into the tank of the touring car. Then he and Dexter Dexter put up the rear-side curtains, to preserve their trio from the public gaze until they were clothed. After that, the three climbed in without protest, Melvin Mull started the motor, let in the clutch, and they went roaring up the valley.

"The old stoneboat never ran like this before!" the little man said with wonder as they raced up the long grade. "Wonder what kind of dynamite our three freaks stuck in their gas? Hey, look. Here's a town. What now?"

"We will pool our financial resources," Mr. Dexter Dexter said, "obtain go-juice, buy raiment for our three rascals, and I will send a telegraphic missive to Aaron Shogrub. Pull up beside yon dry-goods store, next to the five and dime emporium. The bankroll will not extend to raiment royal, but I see a window full of overalls, marked at the reasonable figure of one simoleon. Me thinks overalls it must be."

Leaving Melvin Mull to attend to the details of procuring overalls, Dexter Dexter took a dollar from their slender resources and departed in search of a telegraph office. It was early afternoon, and the little Southern town was dozing in the sun, but he roused a sleepy operator in a tiny office, and filed a telegram addressed to Aaron Shogrub, carnival impresario, in the metropolis, instructing him to send press and photographers to the Hotel General at nine that night.

That done, the press agent strolled benignly back to the car, thinking thoughts of future profit. The car, however, seemed to be the object of some attention from three or four females who thrust frightened faces out of the doorway of the ten cent store to stare at it. A passing boy on a bicycle also stopped, and a sleepy individual emerging from a doorway across the street became rigid at what he saw when he had rubbed the slumber from his eyes.

Mr. Dex Dexter, arriving closer, saw that Sss, Mmm, and Ahh were clustered about the rear of the vehicle. Melvin Mull had procured them overalls, which they had donned in the modest seclusion of the curtained car. The garments had to be turned up in the leg so as not to drag, but the bibs came almost to the trio's chins, so that they were adequately, if loosely, covered.

In addition the three now wore cheap imitations of tropical sun helmets, such as can be obtained in ten-cent stores, and carried sport canes with doghead handles, striped in red, white, and blue.

They were engaged in fitting some small contraption of wires and what seemed to be an ordinary egg-beater



into the gas tank opening when the press agent hurried up.

"Boys!" Mr. Dexter demanded sharply. "What gives?"

"The lads," Melvin Mull informed him gloomily, "gave the little ladies in the dime store something of a shock. After I'd bought 'em overalls, they informed me they had headaches from the sun. So I bought 'em the helmets—two bits each. After that I said I had to buy gas, and they asked me if I had to have it often. I told 'em practically continuous, and it kept us busted. They buzz-buzzed among themselves, then said they'd like to go into the dime store, 'cause they saw an assortment of wires and pliers and stuff in the window.

"I said okay, and they scuttled in. I lammed in after 'em, and caught up with 'em at the hardware counter. They were grabbing up wire and nuts and bolts and batteries and stuff, and shoving it into their overall pockets as fast as they could. The dames was just about to let out a yodel for the cops, when I yelled that these were just some Oriental friends of mine, new to this country, and I handed over our last fin to kill the squeal and hustled 'em out. But they wouldn't get in the car. They huddled there. I think they're inventing something. I don't dare ask.

"Listen, Dex, we're cleaned. We ain't even got a tank of gas—just those two gallons. Now what?"

"Er-hum," Dexter Dexter coughed. "I will cogitate, Melvin, I will cogitate, but first I think we should betake ourselves onward. Suspicious is the word for the glances that are being bestowed upon us by an increasing proportion of the population of this unattractive hamlet."

**H**E APPROACHED the trio in overalls decisively; for indeed, besides the three females staring from the ten-cent store, two more peering out of the dry-goods emporium, two boys on bicycles, three yellow dogs, five casual strollers, and an individual bearing a sheriff's badge were all scrutinizing them in a doubtful manner.

"Boys, boys," he said, "break it up! We must be on our way! Time flies, and we will soon be one with yesterday's ten thousand years. Avant! Onward!"

He made shooing motions with his hand, and Sss, Mmm, and Ahh straightened. But instead of heeding him, they hissed among themselves a moment. Then Ahh, smallest and youngest of the three, scuttled across the pavement and popped into the ten-cent store again, aiding his rapid gait with his gaudy cane.

He scurried out again a moment later, bearing a coil of copper wire, and behind him ran a small, white-haired gentleman with a bobbing goatee waving a cane menacingly.

"Come back here, you scaly scalawag!" he roared in wrath. "Pay me for that wire! Sheriff! Sheriff Jackson! Arrest the miscreant! Damned yankee stole a coil of wire right from under my nose!"

Instantly the temper of the gathering changed. The dogs began to bark. The small boys began to shout. The passersby who had paused shook their fists. And the wiry individual with the sheriff's badge advanced purposefully, reaching for the six-shooter slung at his hip.

"Oh oh!" Melvin Mull said in a small voice. "Calaboose, here we come!"

Dexter Dexter was already leaping into the car with surprising agility.

"In, boys, in!" he roared. "Pressing engagements call!"

But Sss, Mmm, and Ahh did not heed. They looked about, saw the cautiously approaching group, and delved busily with their hands inside their overalls. They brought out some objects that Melvin Mull and Dexter Dexter could not see clearly, but which appeared to be small mirrors. Moving with quick dexterity, Mmm and Ahh turned these mirrors so that a brilliant pin-point of light flashed from each, stabbing for a brief instant into the eyes of each of the people closing in. Sss, meanwhile, busied himself again over whatever he was shoving down into the gas tank.

The action was over in a dozen seconds, and Dexter Dexter and Melvin Mull gaped, bulging-eyed. Each of those threatening them, from sheriff to yellow dogs, had frozen into immobility. The white-haired proprietor of the dime-store stood on the pavement, cane raised above his head, features twisted in outraged anger, motionless. Only his goatee fluttered gently in the slight breeze.

The sheriff stood similarly, six-gun half drawn, and the rest formed a frozen ring of spectators in seemingly permanent attitudes.

"Gadzooks!" Dexter Dexter gurgled. "Hypnotists as well as freaks! Melvin, lad, our fortune is indeed secure. If we can get out of the state in time!"

Now Sss straightened, and he and his companions scuttled into the car, assisting themselves upwards with their sport canes. The moment they were in, Melvin Mull let in the gas and roared away from there. Skirts and trousers and the goatee rippled in the breeze their departure stirred, but no other movement followed them. Dexter Dexter, turning, gazed until distance had dimmed the scene from sight. But still no one stirred in the little group they left behind them.

"Bodkins!" he murmured hopefully. "If perchance they will remain in their cataleptic state until we are safely beyond pursuit—"

"Zay will re-cov-er," Sss assured him unexpectedly, from the rear. "In a mo-m-ent. But zay will re-mem-ber no-thing."

Dexter Dexter let out a deep breath.

"Very good, lads," he rumbled. "But in the future, please remember, no more shenanigans. Melvin, I have assorted change to the sum of seventy-one cents. We will purchase gas with that and then resort to prayer when more is needed."

## II

**B**UT prayer was not necessary. Miraculously, the old road-roamer did not run dry. The gauge remained indicating one-eighth full, and they roared along without pausing. Thus they reached New York in the early evening, and had change enough to get them through the Holland Tunnel. Once in Manhattan, Dexter Dexter made a phone call, reserving two rooms at the Hotel General; and then they went on to the hotel.

They ascended via the service elevator to their rooms, in a tower that overlooked most of mid-town Manhattan. A waiter brought five meals up promptly after Dexter Dexter had ordered—for it was early morning since he had last supped. For himself and Melvin there was steak and fried potatoes. For the boys, on the theory that they were Japs or Filipinos, Dexter Dexter ordered large bowls of rice with raw fish, and bananas for desert.

Sss, Mmm, and Ahh did not disdain the provender,



though after staring at it curiously they hissed among themselves for a moment. Before falling to, however, each produced from within the overalls, presumably from the belts they wore beneath, a small metal vial from which he took a tablet that was solemnly crunched and swallowed.

"It iss to not catch dis-ease," Sss courteously explained to Dexter and Melvin. "It iss pre-ven-tative against all mi-crobes, or ozer organ-isms. From lis-ten-ing to ra-dio, we know hu-man be-ings must fight great plagues, zat afflict them al-ways. Py-or-hea, dan-druff, B. O.—ze radio warn-ed always against them. So we are pre-pared against every-sing."

Mmm shook his head sadly.

"Just ze same, my head hurts," he sighed. "Zat is ze sun. My legs hurt, too. Zat is ze gravity."

"Too bad, boys, too bad," Dexter Dexter said solicitously, when the others sorrowfully agreed that their heads and legs hurt too. "But eat, rascals, eat, and you will feel fit as fiddles. Eat—ah!"

He plunged into the steak with gusto, and only desisted when all the food was consumed. Then, lighting a cigar, he looked around for the trio, only to discover them missing. A short search, however, uncovered them in the bathroom between the two rooms. They had removed their overalls and Sss was lying prone on the cool tiles, Mmm in the bathtub, and Ahh, the smallest, on the damp tile of the shower stall.

"Ze—heat," Sss said with an effort, looking up at Dexter Dexter. "Ze heat makes us not feel well. Alzo, we do not feel well inside. We do not under-stand it. We sought we were safe against all diz-eases. But just ze zame, we feel zick," he finished sadly.

Dexter Dexter mopped a florid brow.

"Under the weather from the heat?" he inquired, in some surprise. "I thought you boys were used to heat, down in the tropics. Maybe it's the humidity. But you'll have to pull yourselves together, lads, for I must question you concerning your antecedents. We must concoct a tale for the lads and lassies of the press. We will make a splash in the papers, my scaly scavengers. We will make the presses scream. But we must have a good story. What kind of buildup are you in the habit of giving yourselves? Or would you prefer to have me concoct one for you?"

Sss, Mmm, and Ahh conferred sibilantly among themselves. Then they arose with reluctance, donned their garments, and came in to sit down uneasily in three upholstered chairs.

"Our story," Sss began, "is quite sim-pul, Pal. Two weeks ago we were try-ing out our new atom-ic motor-ed space ve-hicle. I am ze inven-tor of it, and—"

Dex Dexter silenced him with uplifted hand.

"Melvin," he said, "didn't I tell you the boys had spent years preparing themselves? They talk just like real Martians would. Get that stuff about atomic space vehicles? Write it down. We'll work up the spiel later. Now, my reptilian companion, pray continue."

SSS continued at some length. Dexter Dexter listened with an expert's appreciation to his tale of having been testing a new space craft of which he and his companions were the builders. Impulsively during the trial run they had decided to try to reach earth, rather than wait another year until the two planets were approaching opposition again. For many years, Sss re-

counted, the scientists of Mars had been striving to build a craft to reach earth. Ever since, in fact, they became aware of intelligent life on their sister planet through the accidental reception of a radio broadcast by an apparatus meant to be an ordinary heat motor.

In the dozen years since, they had built many radio receivers, and the greatest minds of Mars had listened constantly, recording every word to come across the ether, analysing it, pondering over it, until at last the secret of earth speech had been uncovered.

Because most radio broadcasts had been in the language called English, it was that which they had chosen to learn, in preparation for the day when some intrepid Martian might actually set foot on earth.

At this point Mr. Dexter's upraised hand again halted him.

"You wanted," he stated, in the dreamy tone of one inspired, "you wanted to conquer the earth!"

Sss bobbed politely.

"Yiss," he agreed. "It hass long been in ze minds of our scien-tists zat our plan-et iss growing old. We have dis-cussed moving to zis one. We know you would object, so we have made ready to over-come your objections.

"But"—and he nodded energetically—"we do not wish to fright-en you, or to kill. Zere wass one rad-io broadcast to which we listen-ed, which said zat Martians had land-ed, and were kill-ing many wiz rays of heat and ozer sings. At first we zought in-div-iduals from anozer plan-et had invad-ed yours, but zen we under-stood it wass not true—it wass an imagin-ative pro-ject-ion of ze possible future.

"But zat iss not how it will be. We will not kill; we will use ze mirrors, as you saw. Zay do not hurt. We will not wish to fright-en you. If you have weap-ons, we will des-roy them; we know much science. But we do not be-lieve in kill-ing. After we are ruling, we will all be fur-ends. We will guide; you will learn and fol-low."

"Bravo, lads, bravo!" Dexter Dexter said enthusiastically. "Melvin, tonight you are viewing genius in hardly human form. And, boys, of course you're just here to spy out the land. You're fifth columnists from our sister planet. When you go back to report, the attack begins, eh?"

"Yiss." Again Sss bobbed his head. "Now we come in peace. When we re-turn, we will re-port to ze Supreme Coun-cil. Zey will decide. Per-haps next year, many will come from our plan-et to con-quer you. But do not be afraid. We will try not to hurt you."

Dexter Dexter scowled slightly.

"Good," he admitted, "good, but a little tame. We'll have to pep it up some. Plenty of big machines crushing people underfoot, that's what the public wants. We won't give this part of the story to the papers, Melvin. Spring it on 'em when we open, and panic 'em. Do another Orson Welles, maybe. Remind me to have a hundred-foot panorama banner painted, showing New York being cut up by heat rays, with underneath it in bright red, *Next Year—This?* However, that'll come later. Now, lads, if there is anything else you desire to add?"

"We have only a lit-tle time be-fore we must re-turn," Sss said hopefully. "We would like to talk to your scien-tists, please. We would like to discuss scien-tific matters wiz them. And zere iss one more zing we very much wish to do."



"Anything, my spatial specimens," Dexter Dexter said with high good humor. "Just name it, boys."

"It iss ze great ambition zat bass gripped every Martian since ze notion of reach-ing your planet arose," Sss told him, while Mmm and Ahh nodded eagerly. "We wish—we wish to see zee ocean!"

"See the ocean?" the entrepreneur responded largely. "Indeed you shall, lads. In fact, you shall see everything. Tomorrow Melvin will take you out and show you around while I tend to a bit of business. He will omit nothing—Grant's Tomb, the Aquarium, the Empire State Building, Radio City, the Statue of Liberty. And then you shall be taken to Jones Beach, where you may view the bounding billows of the deep and shovel in the sand the long day through.

"Now, my three Martian musketeers, in a moment I'm going to let the press in, and to save time, for to be frank your accent is not always what it might be, I shall tell them what you have just told me, plus any other artistic details I may think of. You have but to nod your wag-gish craniums and say yes at intervals. First, though—just a detail, naturally—I'd like you lads to sign these contracts that my good friend Melvin will pass among you."

Sss, Mmm, and Ahh looked with some doubt at the personal contracts Melvin Mull now gave them. But like little gentlemen they made their marks, which were witnessed by Mr. Mull. Dexter Dexter then stowed the contracts in an inner pocket and rose.

"Now, gentlemen, the Press. . . ."

### III

MR. DEXTER DEXTER, emitting clouds of cigar smoke, sat back and beamed at Mr. Aaron Shogrub, a lifelong business associate and offtime financier of Dexter enterprises. Mr. Shogrub was barricaded behind a wall of newspapers, which Dexter Dexter indicated with a sweep of his hand.

"There, Aaron," he boomed, "you have before you reams of the finest publicity, of the kind that money can not buy. I could ask for five thousand, I could ask for ten thousand, and it would still be a good investment. But I ask for only three thousand, just to get us started. Then the money will roll in so fast your bank will have to open a branch office outside the ticket window to handle it."

He picked up the nearest paper and began to read sonorously.

"Pausing briefly in town for an unscheduled stop on a trip to Coney Island, direct from Mars, Dexter Dexter, that gentleman of the untamed vocabulary, with his usual reticence permitted the local press to pry from him his most intimate secrets yesterday evening at his hotel.

"With Dexter Dexter and his business associate, Melvin Mull, were three assorted individuals also from Mars, who have generously consented to exhibit themselves at Coney Island for a limited time only under Mr. Dexter's personal guidance.

"These individuals speak with the accent of Pedro, the Voder, and look like a cross between lizards and those fellows who were sitting on the end of your bed the last time you got home at 5 A.M. They wore overalls when last seen, although Dexter Dexter is having garments suitable to their station woven for him at great cost by a local gents' outfitter.

"Dexter Dexter spoke for them, telling of their strug-

gles to reach earth in an atomic-powered space vehicle ever since first hearing Amos and Andy on the radio many years ago. They were permitted to answer questions, however, and with becoming modesty they stated they were not the genuine, the original Martians. Intelligent life rose and died on Mars two million years ago—Daylight Saving Time—they stated, and their race has risen since, under conditions of some hardship.

"They said frankly that they are reptiles, which made the members of the press feel quite at home, as many of them are personally acquainted with prominent snakes. Their forefathers, said the amiable trio, known as Siss, Boom, and Bah, were mere crawling reptiles. But the necessity to evolve or die on a Mars that was almost one great desert pushed them on to eventual scientific intelligence.

"Life evolves only when it has to," Siss, the spokesman, explained. "On Mars, it had to. So it did."

"Siss, Boom and Bah were then questioned concerning those burning scientific problems: what are the canals, and why is Mars' face red? They were about to answer when Dexter Dexter interposed. The boys from Mars, he explained, were tired from their fatiguing journey and needed a spot of slumber. Besides, they were going to answer these and many other questions for the benefit of the nation's greatest scientists, who have all been invited to assemble at Coney Island to view Earth's notable visitors, and to question them to their heart's content.

"With this, the press departed and repaired in a body to a local pub where they agreed that if Siss, Boom, and Bah do not come from Mars, they will suffice until a real Martian comes along.

"Any one who wishes to prevue our sister planet's men has only to present himself three days hence at Coney Island, with fifty cents in his palm, and he may gaze his fill. The opportunity will last for a limited time only."

Dexter Dexter put down the paper.

"And that is but a sample, Aaron my fine financial friend," he beamed. "Three thousand plunks will return to you manyfold."

Mr. Aaron Shogrub sighed and reached for his bank-book.

"From the pictures of them," he remarked, "they are not individuals I would care to meet with face to face in a dark alley, or any other time either. But they are freaks, Dex, they are novel, and I think it is a sound deal. Tell me, these scientists you are inviting to ask questions—do you not think it would be wiser—"

Mr. Dexter made a gesture with his hands.

"To tell the unvarnished truth, Aaron, to echew mendacity, the scientists have all refused to come. I telephoned to Columbia, N.Y.U., and City College. The professors just hung up on me, all except one man named Elmer Something who couldn't answer because he had a sore throat from being out looking at the stars the night before. His wife hung up for him. So I am going to hire my own scientists, and naturally the boys will have a chance to run through their lines."

"That is best, Dexter." Mr. Shogrub nodded. "That is always safest."

His phone rang. He answered, then put Dexter Dexter on. Mr. Dexter, after a brief conversation, hung up with a genial smile.

"That was Melvin," he said. "He and the lads have returned from their little jaunt to Chinatown, Radio City, and Jones Beach. Melvin desires me to return. He also says that Professor Elmer Something phoned, to say he is much interested in what he reads about the boys, and will be down tomorrow morning, when his cold is better, to give them the scientific once over.



"See, the scientists are beginning to regret their nasty attitude of doubt. Perhaps Friday even Einstein will be there for the grand opening. Do not forget—Friday, three days hence, at that great metropolis of the rare, the startling, the unusual, the educational, Coney Island. Until then, Aaron, adieu."

**I**N A GENIAL frame of mind Dexter Dexter left, and strolled uptown toward the Hotel General. It was getting dark, but he paused at a sporting-goods store and bought a portable radio set. He had promised that the lads might have one to continue, as they said, their education in English. With this under his arm, he presently entered the hotel lobby.

The lobby lights were on, and they were shining with a strange, hard white brilliance, like so many lighthouse beacons. Squinting and curious, Dexter Dexter crossed to the elevators. Bellboys were scurrying around, turning off floor lamps; it was not necessary to turn off the overheads, for even as Mr. Dexter entered they began going black, one by one.

The manager, a rotund little man with a permanent look of suspicion, pattered up to him as he waited conveyance upward.

"Mr. Dexter," he demanded, "have you any electric appliance in your rooms which might be affecting our lighting system like this? Something most baffling is happening. All our lights are burning out, and our meters are running *backward*. From somewhere current is feeding into our system, not out of it. The power house reports a surge of power backing up in their lines, and they claim this hotel is the source of it."

Dexter Dexter, having had long experience with unruly hotel managers, drew himself up.

"Certainly not," he boomed. "We have no irons, hair curlers, hot plates, chaffing dishes, or electric chairs installed without our sanctum. Seek the trouble elsewhere. I suggest that you bill the electric light company for the current you are giving them."

The manager's small eyes squinted.

"If I didn't know your reputation, Mr. Dexter," he snapped, "I'd be inclined to think those freaks you're harboring actually are from Mars, and are playing tricks with my lights. However—"

He stepped aside. Dexter Dexter marched into an elevator, and was promptly hurled upward with a velocity that left his stomach several floors behind him. The elevator zipped past his floor, the boy fighting the controls, and jockeyed back to the proper position. Dexter Dexter staggered out.

"Too much juice," the elevator boy said dubiously. "Some trip, if they don't cut it down, this birdcage is gonna go right up to th' thirtieth floor—and th' hotel ain't got but twenty."

Dexter Dexter wobbled around the corner and entered their rooms. There was a chill in the air, like that of a super-cooled movie theater, and he shivered.

"What ho!" he hailed. "Melvin, where are you?"

"Here." The bathroom door opened, revealing Melvin Mull sitting in a chair, with Sss, Mmm, and Ahh draped limply in the tub, on the tiled floor, and in the shower stall. Melvin held a magazine in one hand, with the other was rubbing salve on Mmm's shoulders, which had turned a lobster red.

"Brrr!" Dexter Dexter cried, advancing. "In the name

of seven Senegambian saints, what gives? What frigid blast is this that greets me? It's colder than a creditor's heart. If it weren't July, I'd say that the management had shut off the heat to freeze us out."

Then he became aware of the unhappy attitudes of the three lizard ones, took in Melvin's ministrations, and scowled.

"What mischance has befallen the lads?" he rapped. "Melvin, have you been lax in your guardianship?"

"One thing at a time, Dex, please." Melvin Mull sighed. "If you been through what I been through today, you wouldn't feel like answering questions either."

"First, the boys been inventing. That's why it's so cold. This morning after you left they were hitching up some wires and junk they still had in their pockets, and when we got back they plugged in the electric light socket and turned it on. Right away it began to get cold. They say it's like this all the time at home, and they couldn't stand the heat any more."

"Gadzooks!" Dexter Dexter exclaimed. "Then they're not Japs at all, but Eskimos. But that does not explain their air of lassitude, or your Florence Nightingale ministrations. Explain, Melvin."

**T**HE little, leathery man laid down the salve. Mmm put his head down on the cool tiles and closed his eyes. Melvin sighed again, deeply.

"The boys," he said, "have been height-sick, car-sick, and seasick, had muscle pains, headaches, and indigestion today already, and now they're sunburned."

"Sunburned!" Dexter Dexter clapped his hand to his brow. "How can they be sunburned?"

"Don't ask me," his partner growled sourly, "but they are. This morning when we started out, their stomachs hurt, but they pulled themselves together and we went to see the Empire State Building. When we got to the top, Boom got dizzy and fainted, and almost fell off. Then all three of them got sick from the height, and we hadda come down. I skipped the rest, and we went right to Jones Beach to see the ocean."

"We got there early. They were pretty excited when they seen the water, and wanted to try ducking the torso. There not being so many yokels around, I rented lockers and suits, found an empty spot, and the boys tried it. Only a wave come along and rolled 'em up on th' beach. They tried again. Another wave come along. They tried a third time. A third wave took 'em. They'd swallowed some water meantime, and now they gave it back."

"Dex, they were seasick!"

"So we all staggered away to a sunny spot an' lay down for an hour. But it didn't help much, because just looking at the water made 'em sick all over again. So then we dressed and come home. But we'd no sooner got here than they come down sick again—sunburn!"

"They say the sun at home is practically a shadow, compared to what it is at Jones Beach, only they were so excited at seeing an ocean they didn't think in time."

"So they started up their cooling system and lay down in here. I went out to get 'em some lotion. I bought some magazines too. I figured if I read to 'em, it would take their minds off their troubles. At first they didn't seem to understand about stories, though—turns out they don't have books back home."

"But then I got started on this one—*Super-Space Stories*, it's called—and I been reading them th' first installment of



a two-part serial about a beautiful gal from Venus who invents a space ship to come to earth to look for a husband, all the men on Venus having died from some disease. Honest, Dex, the trouble that dame is having you wouldn't believe.

"I ain't positive the boys don't think it's really happening, but anyway they're in a tizz. The skirt has a Venusian slave, built like an octopus, who is trying to save her from the pirates that've captured the space ship, and I'm kinda curious myself to know how it ends. I'm almost at th' end of th' installment, so I'll just go ahead and finish."

Moodily D. Dexter mopped his face. Melvin Mull lifted the magazine and went on reading.

IT SEEMED that the beautiful girl from Venus, named Vara, was prisoner in a storeroom on her rocket ship, held by pirates. The pirates were hovering ten miles above Fort Knox, preparing to use the space craft to get away with all the gold buried there by Uncle Sam. Then Vara's faithful slave, Mrx, an eight-armed individual, crept out of a crate, cut a hole in the side of the ship with a pocket torch, took Vara in one of his many arms, and jumped out without a parachute.

Vara and Mrx had a fall of ten miles ahead of them, and nothing to land on but a lot of gold bullion, when the installment ended.

"To be continued next month," Melvin finished.

Sss, Mmm and Ahh had seemed almost cheerful as they listened. Now child-like disappointment spread over their features.

"But what hap-pens?" Sss asked, hopeful. "How do zay es-cape dy-ing?"

"I do not under-stand what zay can do now," Mmm observed.

"Zay will be killed," Ahh, the smallest and youngest, said sadly. "I am sure of it. Please, what iss the rest?"

Melvin Mull shook his head. "We won't know till next month."

"Next month," Ahh mourned. "But we will be at home again zen. We will nev-er know."

"Nev-ver know," Mmm chimed in, unhappily.

"We will of-ten won-der, though," Sss observed. "It iss too bad we will not ever know."

All three fell into a moody silence. Dexter Dexter was about to make an observation when the light went out. At the same moment all reflected illumination coming in the windows from Times Square vanished.

D. Dexter and Melvin Mull hurried to the window. Mid-town Manhattan had gone as dark as a mole's burrow. Automobile headlights punctured a veil of jet blackness, and to their ears rose a violent honking as cabs and cars jostled for position in the pitchy streets.

"Bodkins!" Dexter Dexter exclaimed in alarm. "It's a blackout! Melvin, we're at war! We're being bombed!"

The ringing of the room phone brought them the truth. Melvin answered, then reported.

"That was the switchboard operator," he said. "She says the mid-town power house has blown out a main generator and fused all its cables. There's no light this side of Central Park, or above Fourteenth Street. No subways or street cars. No street lights. No nothing. Some kind of power surgeback in the lines. The engineers say they'll have it fixed by morning. Until then no elevators, no lights, nothing."

"Ulp!" Mr. Dexter gurgled. "Do you suppose—the boys' little cooling system—Melvin, disconnect it at once. And say nothing of it to anyone. The manager is already suspicious. I have been guilty of blowing many a boarding house fuse, cooking over an electric iron, but never have I been charged before with dousing the lights of a great metropolis.

"Melvin, my bosom companion, we must keep mum, say nothing, and stay within our rooms this evening. So, there being nothing else to do, we'll have to go to bed."

They gave to Sss, Mmm, and Ahh, who proclaimed themselves wakeful and able to see well enough in the dark anyway, the portable radio Dexter Dexter had brought them. Also, Mr. Dexter let them have the remnants of wires and bolts and nuts in their overall pockets, upon their plea they wished to construct something to demonstrate with upon meeting the scientists. Mr. Dexter's policy, when dealing with freaks, was to keep them happy at any price, freaks being notoriously temperamental.

Only making them promise not to try out any more inventions without first telling him, he bade them a fond goodnight and rolled into bed, his sleep pleasantly broken by dreams of unlimited profits.

#### IV

THE next morning New York's electrical difficulties had had apparently been ironed out, for the lights worked and the elevator ran. The lads were somewhat recovered from their day at the beach. It was necessary for them to visit Coney Island, so that an artist engaged by Mr. Dexter might paint triple life-size portraits of them to adorn the place of display the entrepreneur had negotiated for; and they got into their overalls without too much objection.

Into the overall pockets they thrust some appliances that apparently had been constructed during the night before. These were somewhat like flashlights, though longer, and seemed to consist mostly of coiled wire. Dexter Dexter, engaged in more momentous matters, paid scant attention to them.

The boys themselves were abstracted this morning. Ahh, the smallest, in particular seemed absent-minded, and once Dexter Dexter heard him murmur aloud: "I am sure zay must have been kill-ed. It wass too far to fall."

Then Melvin hearded them out, and D. Dexter, lighting an after-breakfast cigar, sat down to check upon the next necessary details.

He had barely begun when the phone rang and the desk announced that one Professor Elmer Hicks was on his way up. After some effort the press agent placed the name, and when presently a knock sounded he ushered in with booming heartiness a small, eager little man with bright eyes behind horn rims, sandy hair, and rabbit-like buck teeth.

"Come in, professor!" Dexter Dexter invited. "I remember—you phoned yesterday. Sorry that the lads are out right now. But they'll be back."

"Out?" Professor Elmer Hicks asked worriedly. "They haven't—haven't started back? To Mars, I mean. Because they'll probably have to go back in a day or two, before Mars passes its opposition point, and I—"

"Back?" Dexter Dexter chuckled. "Not so's you could notice it, professor."

Professor Hicks breathed a sigh of relief.



"I'm happy to hear that," he murmured. "You see, all my life Mars has fascinated me. I've read everything written about it. I built my own telescope, a ten-inch reflecting instrument, and I've studied Mars every chance I've had for years. My wife, though—er, she doesn't permit me many opportunities. She does not approve. She would rather go out to night spots and spend money. Hmm."

"That's life, professor," the press agent told him. "But if you're interested in Mars, you'll certainly enjoy meeting my scalawags."

"Oh, I am!" Professor Elmer Hicks exclaimed, a rapt look on his face. "There's so much I want to ask them—about the canals, and Mars' red color, and the conditions of life, and—"

"Absolutely," Dexter D. agreed. "But—purely a business matter, you understand—they can't answer any questions before the grand opening at Coney, day after tomorrow, where the entire world will have an unparalleled opportunity to see and meet them. Then they'll answer any questions you've got. But," he added, as disappointment showed in the little man's face, "they can tell you all about how they came to pick up a radio message by accident. And how they learned English, listening to the radio—"

He chuckled.

"Fond of the radio, the rascals are," he asserted, and let his hand rest on the portable receiver he had given them the night before. "Stayed awake all night listening. They been improving their English, and—Awk! Ulp! Gawk!"

Inadvertently he had clicked the switch of the radio. And his strangled exclamations were uttered as he stumbled back from it, eyes bulging, plump hands clutching at Professor Elmer Hick's shoulder.

There was a faint hum. From the side of the radio, where a hole had been cut, a faintly luminous beam shot out. It arrowed across the room toward the window. Where it touched the window was a neat round hole. Outside on the sill a pigeon had been preening itself. Before Dexter Dexter's eyes the unhappy bird burst into a bright flash of flame and was gone.

A second pigeon, circling in fright, swooped through the beam and exploded into a similar gout of light. A single singed feather floated to the windowsill. Nothing else was left.

Dexter Dexter, gaping, saw a spot on the tile roof of the apartment building across the street begin to smoke. But he could not act. His muscles would not obey. It was Professor Hicks who leaped forward and clicked the radio switch. Instantly the beam died away, and there was nothing to show it had been, except the round hole in the window glass.

"Great heavens!" the little man gasped, in joyous excitement. "Some kind of heat-induction beam! They've rewired the radio and"—he squinted into the thing's vitals—"there seems to be a small battery no bigger than a walnut in it, which might be an atomic power pack."

"They said—" Dexter Dexter mopped his pallid features. "They said they were gonna make something to demonstrate with to—to—"

He goggled at the hole in the window, and the singed feather, and words failed him.

It was that instant Melvin Mull chose to come bursting into the room, one eye black, his clothes disarranged, his voice hoarse.

"Dex!" he gasped. "Dex! The boys 've been snatched!"

**M**R. DEXTER DEXTER, Melvin Mull, and Professor Elmer Hicks hurtled through the wilds of darkest Brooklyn at a speed which gave D. Dexter no chance to get back his lost breath.

He and Melvin just held on and prayed. Professor Elmer Hicks was at the wheel of his own ancient jalopy; and Professor Hicks might look like a rabbit, but he drove like a wildcat. He zipped in and out among buses, trucks, and pedestrians as though guiding the car by mental telepathy.

It was the professor's own idea. Melvin Mull had hardly finished his tale of being forced to the curb by a big black sedan, over on Second Avenue, before Professor Hicks had gone into something like a trance.

"A mob of gorillas jumped on the runningboard," Melvin Mull gasped. "One hauled me out, poked me in the eye, and threw me in th' gutter. Three of 'em jumped in back and grabbed the lads before they knew what was happening. Another took th' wheel. Somebody told me if I squealed to the cops I'd never yip again, and off they went. Th' black sedan led th' way. Your wagon and the boys followed. They headed for Queensboro Bridge. I headed for here."

"Shh!" Professor Hicks held up a hand. "Wait! I'm getting a message. I don't quite understand how but—they're heading eastward . . . there's something been said about Sheephead Bay . . . they don't know what's happening, but they're trying to telepath a message back to you, apparently, and I seem to be in sympathetic tune with them—"

The little man whirled, eyes blazing.

"Come on!" he cried. "We can't let them be kidnaped! If anything happens to them—loss to science—my car's downstairs. *Hurry!*"

He had whirled them out of Manhattan, across the bridge, and now was on the last lap, through mile after mile of Brooklyn sameness. Sheephead Bay was just ahead. As they came closer, he lifted his head.

"He's coming through again," he cried above the rattle and roar of the jouncing jalopy. "It's the one called Sss, I think. They're in sight of the water . . . just to look at it is making them feel sick . . . they are car sick, too . . . that's why they haven't tried to escape . . . they aren't tied . . . just have weapons, guns probably, pointed at them. But they're too sick to do anything—"

"One of their captors mentioned the name Shaleen . . . waiting for them on a boat . . . take them to a hideout somewhere . . . extort secrets from them, or get ransom from scientists. Sss is feeling sicker than ever, because the waves on the water are high . . . he's too ill to try to think any more. . . ."

"Shaleen!" The name burst from Dexter Dexter. "Scorpion Shaleen!"

"If it's him snatched the lads," Melvin Mull groaned, "we're gonna turn around right now and—"

"No!" Professor Hicks' jaw was grim. "We're going to rescue them. We must! You don't realise—"

"You don't realise, chum!" Melvin Mull chattered. "We thought it was just a competitor had hi-jacked them—get 'em away from us—exhibit 'em himself. But Scorpion Shaleen! He's got a mob so tough they shave with emery wheels. If he wants 'em—"

"He can have 'em!" Dexter Dexter finished. "Turn around, professor! For three thousand simoleons' worth



of freaks I wouldn't mix with Scorpion Shaleen! Especially when it's not my own money. Think of your wife! Think of your babies! Think of—"

"The deuce with my wife!" Professor Hicks shouted. "She bosses me around all the time. And I haven't got any babies. I won't turn around. The deuce with Scorpion Shaleen, too! He can't do this. He plans to hold up the scientific world to ransom them. And to steal any secrets of scientific weapons they may possess—which they do! But we'll stop him. We'll—"

Melvin Mull and Dexter Dexter groaned hollowly and in unison. They had come out on a long stretch of road paralleling the bay at a deserted spot. The blue water was heaving up and down in an upsetting way, and half a mile ahead a large, fast craft, looking suspiciously like a former bootleg speedster, was bouncing around a few yards from a quay.

**T**WO cars were just skidding to a stop at the dock. One was a black sedan from which men poured. The second was Dexter Dexter's large red touring car, side curtains up, which screamed to a halt behind the sedan.

A thug with a gun slid from behind the wheel and swung open the door. Sss, Mmm, and Ahh, sun helmets awry, sport canes held weakly in their hands, stumbled out.

Half a dozen mobsters with ready weapons surrounded them. And looked up to see Dexter Dexter, Melvin Mull, and Professor Elmer Hicks bearing down at an unslackening fifty miles an hour.

They were not more than a hundred yards off when the lizard three went into action.

As the gorillas' attentions were distracted by the oncoming car, the trio snatched something from overall pockets. Dexter Dexter and his companions saw tiny flashes of concentrated light. And even in the act of raising their weapons to fire, the circle of men around the lads became as marble, frozen rigidly in gestures that were never completed.

Hobbling on their canes, Sss, Mmm and Ahh scuttled across the pier. From the driver of the big sedan came shots that plucked up fragments of cobblestone behind them. Professor Hicks screamed up and jammed on his brakes. The car had hardly stopped before he was out.

"Stop!" he shouted. "You mustn't! You might kill them!"

More shots boomed out as the trio scampered desperately, hampered by their overall legs, which rolled down over their feet. On the deck of the converted fisherboat twenty yards offshore a tall figure bearing a sub-machine gun appeared. Dexter Dexter and Melvin Mull ducked and prayed.

"Scorpion Shaleen himself!" Melvin Mull chattered.

"He's gonna blast th' professor!" He shook like jelly.

"Is he gonna blast us?" Dexter Dexter retorted. "That's what I want to know."

The mob leader yelled something angrily. His immobilized gorillas, maintaining their statue poses, made no reply. But the driver of the sedan, leaning out, was still throwing bullets after the departing trio of captives. And Professor Elmer Hicks, with reckless courage, raced toward the fellow, apparently to grapple him bare-handed.

Scorpion Shaleen raised the tommy-gun and let go a burst of shots that whined across the pier. And that was the moment when Sss, Mmm, and Ahh paused and turned.

Something metallic flashed from their overall pockets, pointed. The black sedan was abruptly cherry red, the upholstery flaming. The driver, just swinging around toward Professor Hicks, became a burst of steam and flame which vanished, leaving no trace of him except the gun that clattered to the stones. Then the sedan, becoming liquid, flowed down over it.

**P**ROFESSOR HICKS came to a dazed halt. On the deck of the tossing boat Scorpion Shaleen, bracing himself, fired another burst that plunked into the sides of Dexter Dexter's red rambler. And then something happened to the boat.

What, exactly, was obscure; for steam, a great boiling geyser of it, rolled up all about the craft. From the heart of the steam came an explosion; fragments of matter rained briefly about. Then the steam was drifting away into wispieness that vanished. The boat, and Scorpion Shaleen, were no longer present.

The half-dozen mobsters, grouped like a museum exhibit of typical Americana, remained in their places. But they were obviously harmless. On shaky limbs D. Dexter and Melvin Mull emerged from Professor Hicks' car. Sss, Mmm, and Ahh, approached, looking shamefaced.

"We are sor-ry, Pal," Sss said contritely. "We did not mean to hurt any-one."

"We have done wrong," Mmm sighed.

"But we were sick," Ahh put in sadly. "We could not think well."

"We are ve-ry sor-ry," Sss repeated.

Dexter Dexter shook himself and swallowed hard. He gazed from the smoking puddle that had been the black sedan, to the group of frozen gunmen, to the empty blue water where the boat had been. Then at the contrite trio.

"I will forgive you, lads," he announced. "I will overlook it. If you will promise to stop inventing. But we must depart from here in haste, before the arrival of the forces of the law. Pile in, lads, pile in. We're headed for Coney, and we know nothing."

Sss, Mmm, and Ahh shook their heads. Professor Elmer





Hicks, who had been staring at them with rapt wonder, like a man who had discovered a new continent, came up for a closer look.

"It's true!" he said aloud. "It's true! Allow me to introduce myself. Professor Hicks, a biologist. I'm an amateur astronomer, too. All my life I've studied Mars. Now—"

"Later, professor, later," Dexter Dexter rumbled. "The boys have a date at Coney to have their portraits delineated, and we must off. We fain would avoid contact with the minions of the law who will be here at any moment, and—"

"We are sor-ry." It was Sss who spoke up, regretfully. "But we cannot. We must re-turn to our ve-hicle. We have de-cid-ed to go home. We do not like your plan-et ve-ry well. We are sick all ze time. Our heads hurt; our stom-achs hurt; our legs hurt; our eyes hurt. We hurt all ov-er. So we are go-ing home."

"Boys!" Dexter Dexter was in no mood to tolerate insubordination. "You're forgetting you've signed personal contracts with me. You can't go home, wherever it is. You come and go now as I direct. Consult a lawyer if you doubt my veracity. But we must not bicker. Time presses. In, my scaly lads, in."

He gestured toward the red car. But Sss, Mmm, and Ahh were gazing at him in a manner to render him uneasy.

"You mean, Pal," Sss inquired, "you will not per-mit that we re-turn to our ve-hicle?"

"That's it," Dexter D. rumbled. "You boys are just a bit homesick for whatever distant shore you left to visit this great metropolis. In a few days, though—"

The sentence was never finished. Sss' hand came out from the pocket of his overalls. Dexter Dexter had one moment of startled foreboding. Then something intolerably bright flashed. His hand, lifting to shield his eyes, remained half-raised. Every muscle in his body stiffened. He had one last glimpse of Sss' regretful, reptilian countenance; then, like a slow fadeout at the cinema, all went dark.

## V

WHEN next Dexter Dexter felt awareness, it was to discover that he and Melvin were seated in the rear of their red touring car, which was parked beside the road in a rural spot. It was night. A cool breeze blew in their faces. The moon, pale and stately, rode high in the heavens above a range of hills. Somewhere frogs croaked.

"Melvin," Dexter Dexter grunted dizzily, as the little man stirred, "where are we? Where are the lads?"

Melvin Mull gazed about, eyes widening.

"Jeepers!" he gulped. "We're back where we were when we picked up those three freaks!"

"Gadzooks!" D. Dexter cried. "How'd we get here?"

Melvin Mull shook his head. In dawning comprehension, they stared at each other.

"Those scaly-skinned freaks hypnotized us," Melvin said at last.

"They're getting away!" Dexter Dexter roared, galvanized into action. "They said they wanted to go back home! They're running out on their contracts! Melvin, after them!"

He scrambled from the car and gazed wildly around, as if hoping to find Sss, Mmm, and Ahh hiding in the shadows of the placid summer night. Melvin clambered out after him, shaking his head. He looked awfully sad.

"It ain't no use, Dex," the little man said. "We don't know how much headstart they got. They're probably holed up in the hills some place by now."

"Ruined!" the large press agent groaned, clapping a hand to his throbbing forehead. "Ruined, Melvin, by the ingratitude of three wretches who have bitten the hand that would have fed them. The loan from Aaron! The lease I signed! The hotel bills! Who is going to pay them?"

He asked, but the night gave forth no answer. Instead there was a cracking sound in the darkness, the bushes parted, and Professor Elmer Hicks popped out beside them. In an instant Dexter Dexter had him by the collar.

"Scoundrell!" he roared. "Thief! It was you who drove my lads back here! Where are they? Return them to me, or I'll sue! I'll strip you of every penny that you may possess!"

"Wait a minute, Mr. Dexter!" the little professor rapped out, and squirmed free. "It's true I drove them back here, after they had temporarily immobilized you. They explained to me how anxious they were to leave, and how they had been sick practically every minute since they arrived, so of course I agreed to help them. But you won't lose anything. Look."

He reached into the tonneau of the touring car and brought forth a small box with a electric cord fastened to it.

"The boys' air-conditioner!" Melvin Mull exclaimed.

"Exactly," Professor Hicks agreed. "On our way, we stopped off at the hotel and I picked it up, together with the radio which they rewired into a heat-induction apparatus. I felt it would be dangerous to let such things fall into strange hands.

"They're taking the radio with them—an exhibit of their trip. But they're leaving this with you. And it isn't primarily an air conditioner. It's a heat motor. It draws energy directly from the atmospheric heat and converts it into electricity. That was why the power plant blew out last night. This heat motor, which they were using to cool the room, was pouring electricity into the system and backing up the normal flow. It was the only way they could get rid of the energy it was developing.

"But," he continued, as Dexter Dexter, looking dazed, took the small box, "since they built it entirely from materials they found in the dime store, you can duplicate it commercially. The patents will be worth millions.

"There's another gift they're leaving—the gasoline synthesizer they put in your gas tank. They tell me it converts free carbon, hydrogen and oxygen atoms in the air directly into high-test gasoline."

"That's why we haven't had to put any gas in the last five hundred miles!" Melvin Mull exclaimed.

"Exactly," the little professor agreed. "But you can't reproduce the synthesizer, because they used an artificial crystal they brought with them, which can't be duplicated. However, as long as you drive the car, you won't have to buy gas."

The little man paused for breath, his eyes shining.

"Now," he said, as they stared at him, "that's almost all. Sss, Mmm, and Ahh asked me to thank you for what you did for them, showing them our civilization. They say they don't think they or any of their race will come again, next year or any time soon. No invasion.



"Their report to the Grand Council is going to be negative—our world isn't suitable for their type of life. In spite of every precaution, they were sick the whole time. Maybe in a few centuries, when their medical science has developed new immunizers, they'll try again. But for the present, they say, they aren't at all interested in any invasion.

"And that's all—except that they are leaving in five minutes, and I'm going with them."

"Going with them?" Dexter Dexter gaped at him. Professor Elmer Hicks nodded hard.

"Yes, indeed," he said. "Please tell my wife I'm not coming back. Tell her I'm sorry. But she never would let me study Mars as much as I wanted to, so now that I actually have a chance to go there, I'm going.

"If she wants to send me any messages, tell her to buy time on a radio station and read them to me. I'll get them. But if she tries to browbeat me, I'll just shut the radio off and there isn't anything she can do about it—not from forty million miles or more away.

"But that reminds me—I have something for you to take her. Come this way. It's only fifty yards."

**H**E PLUNGED back into the bushes. Dexter Dexter and Melvin Mull, mentally muddled, plowed after him. Ahead of them the small eager figure darted through the bright moonlight, and they followed to an open field, ringed about by trees. It seemed empty. Yet not empty. In the center of it hung an indefinable haze, like thickened moonlight.

"Wait there!" Professor Hicks called back, and plunged into the heart of the haze, vanishing. Almost as rapidly as he had disappeared, he returned. He staggered out of the mistiness carrying a heavy sack, dropped it, darted back in, and appeared again with two more sacks which he piled atop the first.

"These bags are for my wife," he panted. "They're just ballast—surface dirt that was brought along in the supply lockers to give the ship balance. Since I'm going back with them, they have to discard a hundred and forty pounds of it. As it happens to be forty percent free gold dust—that's what gives Mars its red color—my wife will get enough from it to take care of her.

"And that's all. I wish I could tell you the answers to some of the things science would like to know, but there isn't much time. The canals, they say, aren't canals at all, but glassed over crevices in which the remaining water and air are retained and concentrated. They—"

The appearance of little Ahh at his side stopped him.

"I am sor-ry," Ahh said. "But it iss time." He turned to Dexter Dexter and Melvin. They saw that he had shed his overalls and dark glasses, and wore now only the belt-harness in which they had first seen the three.

"Goodbye," Ahh murmured. "We re-gret we can not stay. But we must go. We are all sor-ry. We would like so much to know what happened. If they were killed when they jump-ed ten miles. It iss such a big jump. We can not think how they could es-cape."

He sighed, hissing. Then, "Goodbye," he said again, and he and Professor Elmer Hicks backed into the haze and were gone.

Their eyes big, Dexter Dexter and Melvin Mull moved hastily away to a more distant spot, where they stopped to watch.

There was silence for a moment. Then before their gaze a pillar of blue radiance sprang upwards toward the star-studded sky.

A gust of air billowed past them. A whistle almost too high for the human ear to catch screamed in their brains. The blue streak sped upward toward the limit of vision and hung there.

Before them the odd haze was gone. There was only empty meadow, with a scorched circle of earth in the center of it.

Dexter Dexter's mouth opened and closed, like a feeding goldfish's. For the second time in twenty-four hours his rich supply of words failed him. It remained for Melvin to break the silence.

"Mars!" the little man said hollowly. "You know, Dex, all along I had a hunch there was something fishy about them, something not on the up and up. That was it. They wasn't freaks at all! An' they let us go on thinkin'—"

Dexter Dexter gave a long-drawn sigh.

"Millions!" he breathed. "That was what the professor said, wasn't it? Millions?" Melvin Mull looked rapt.

"Yeah," the leathery little man agreed. "He said millions."

"The little rascals," Dexter Dexter murmured. "The lovable little green rogues. What if they did deceive us? What if they did use us for their own purposes?

"I can't hold a grudge against them. They did something big for us, giving us their heat motor, and I'm going to do something big for them. You know what I'm going to do, Melvin?"

"No," his companion admitted. "What?"

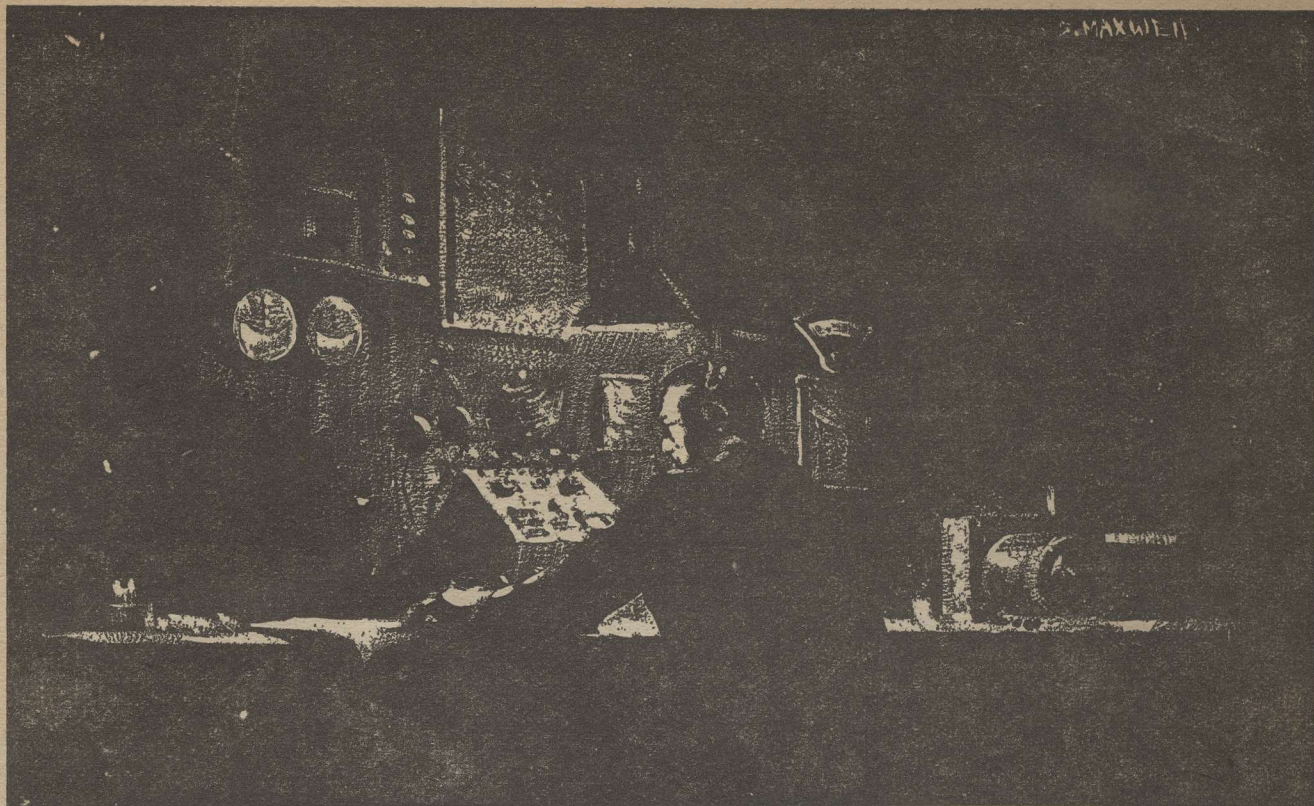
"That serial," Dexter Dexter proclaimed. "The one where the girl and the octopus jumped out, ten miles up, and the installment ceased. They wanted to know how it ended. And Dexter Dexter will see to it they do not have to remain forever in ignorance.

"Next month, when the final, the concluding installment appears, I shall purchase half an hour's time on every network in the country and read it to them. Yes, Melvin, read it to them, every word of it.

"So help me Hannah!"







When he had finished giving the direction-bearing, Kim looked at the log in dismay. The thing that had happened was impossible!

# Cape Spectre

By Richard Sale

Start now this exciting novel of black, stormy intrigue off our Florida coast

**K**IM VANCE gets anything but a hearty welcome when he arrives at Cape Spectre, off the Florida coast, to take over the radio-beacon station WAZ. He no sooner gets off the train at Big Cypress than he begins to encounter evasiveness, suspicion, and downright resentment. Something is mighty wrong at Spectre.

CLEM HANSON, the local sheriff, who inclines to be friendly, warns Kim that the cape is unsafe for strangers. The only settlement, Cayo, is inhabited mostly by ignorant, suspicious Conches, willing to shoot on sight; and there is a sinister legend concerning the old Spectre light, now unused, that stands near the radio-beacon station.

Hanson explains that somewhere around 1870 the *U. S. S. Intrepid* broke up on the jetty, losing most of the crew, because the light keeper was drunk and failed to keep the light going. And the local legend is that now, on a dark and stormy night, the dead men from the *Intrepid* come ashore and stalk to the light in search of Isaacs Stump, the faithless keeper.

But the first trouble that strikes has nothing to do with phantoms. As Hanson is taking Kim to Cape Spectre, his little boat is run down by the *Galatea*, luxurious cabin cruiser belonging to DWIGHT STERLING, who owns an estate—"the Lazarette"—on the Cape.

Sterling, all apologies, takes Kim on board; but Han-

son slips his own revolver to Kim at the last minute before parting, and warns Kim to watch out for himself.

**I**F ALL this is rather strange and disturbing, there is little reassurance in the members of Sterling's party: COLONEL DUQUES, a tall, sardonic fellow who was at the *Galatea's* helm when she ran into Hanson's boat; OLIVER NORGREN, pudgy and small, with little to say; and CAROLINE ROGERS, Sterling's secretary.

Perhaps the girl's behavior is strangest of all: she is friendly to Kim until she learns that he has come to take over the radio-beacon station; after that she is patently cool and distant.

Kim scarcely knows how to take the last member of the party—DUDLEY PEIGHTON, who meets them at the dock. A member of the English nobility, Peighton gives an impression of light-hearted foppishness; but on the way to the part of the Spit where WAZ is located he quietly warns Kim to trust no one on Cape Spectre. And he drops a hint that DuQuès is actually a German agent.

At the shack which houses the station and the operator's living quarters, Kim discovers that TOBY BASCOMB, whom he came to relieve, is gone. Yet there are indications that he has been here not longer than ten minutes ago. And Kim establishes communication with another station whose operator says he has heard mighty strange transmission from Bascomb in the past two weeks. Something to do with the sailing out of

This story began in last week's Argosy



New York of the *Queen Victoria*, largest passenger liner in the world, which is probably being put into service for the transportation of Australian troops.

Uneasy in his new situation, Kim starts to bed—and finds a diamond-back rattler beneath the covers. He shoots the snake and throws it out; but there is no sleeping in that bed for him this night. . . .

## CHAPTER VI

### THE FISHERMAN LOOKS PHONEY

THE place crawled. Even after he had gone through the shack carefully and thoroughly, Kim could not shake off the feeling of repugnance. You could feel it around you, everything wrong.

He wondered many things: who had placed the snake in the bed; where Toby Bascomb was; who had been using that transmitter before he arrived; why Clem Hanson had slipped him the gun so discreetly; why Caroline Rogers had cooled so perceptibly and suddenly; who Dudley Peighton was.

He considered the dead snake. Some one had tried to murder him. No waste of time either. He arrived to take over the d/f station and a snake was in his bed, waiting for him. Ugly devil too.

He had stretched out on a rickety, uncomfortable old sofa; fatigue finally overcame his worry and he dropped off. When he awakened, the alarm clock was ringing and it was three-twenty A.M. He turned off the alarm and turned on the receiver, got the 0100 weather observations from NAA in Arlington, Virginia. . .

Having noted them, Kim stuck out his jaw and dressed. He took Clem Hanson's revolver in his right hand and went out into the dark, picking his way with a small flashlight.

The wind had freshened; it was strong enough to extend a light flag, and it had a smell of salt in it. He stared up at the sky, dark now with the stars gone above clouds. He let his eyes rest on the old lighthouse and he followed up its length to the dark spire. Using the flashlight, he noticed that the transmission lines still went up the stucco walls on standoff insulators. The insulators were ten feet apart; impossible to climb.

He crossed to the door of the old lighthouse and tried it tentatively. It was unlocked. He opened the door, instantly heard a movement within. It turned his heart cold; he flashed the light around.

"Don't shoot," some one said.

Kim breathed more easily when he found the owner of the voice, framed the man in the flashlight's spot. The man was on the floor in a rough sleeping bag. He was an unkempt fellow with a frightened face, teeth bared, eyes gleaming with some fear. There was a leaden-meshed mullet net to one side of him, a murderous hand-gaff on the other. His clothes were frayed and dirty, and he had a black beard.

Kim said, "Get up."

The man rose hastily. His head dropped a little. He looked as if he felt naked in the cold light.

"Who the devil are you?" Kim asked.

"My name is Christal," said the man quietly. His voice was not unpleasant; and with the fear gone from his face he looked much more civilized. "Joe Christal." He was still somewhat nervous.

"What are you doing out in this property, Christal?"

"Sleeping," Christal said. "Ain't got no place to sleep

regular. I bunk here in the old light by night. Fish by day. I ain't got no folks, no home. I just try to get along. No harm meant."

THE fellow was pretty good, but no good enough. He was acting. Kim felt it. It was difficult for Christal to talk ungrammatically.

"The sign on this shell mound is big enough for a monkey to understand," Kim said. "Private property, no trespassing. This place belongs to the U. S. Lighthouse Service."

"I know, sir," said Christal. "But I got permission from Mr. Bascomb to sleep here. And before him I got permission from Mr. Rensfell. That was before the Lighthouse Service bust him outa the service and blackballed him with every radio job in the country. Ever hear of Leslie Rensfell, mister? I knew him pretty well."

"I've heard of him," Kim replied. "How do you know so much about it?"

He veiled the bright suspicion in his eyes.

"Him and me used to talk together," said Christal. "He told me things. Didn't have no one to confide in."

"We monitored him sending illegal transmissions with the WAZ transmitter," Kim said. "And as a matter of fact, it was I, personally, who broke him and turned him out of the Service. He communicated twice with a ship off shore which did not give its call letters and was suspected of being a German raiding merchantman."

"He never done that," Christal said slowly. "I know it for a fact. Maybe some one else did it, but Rensfell didn't. Rensfell wouldna done a thing like that. He liked this country sort of, and I reckon he still does. He wasn't no backbiter. If you're the guy who bust him out, then your handle is Vance."

"That's right," Kim said.

"He showed me the letter," said Christal. "I can read. But you was wrong about him, Mr. Vance. He said he'd prove it to you sometime."

"Maybe I was," Kim said sincerely. "This is a very funny kind of station. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe I'll find out for myself I was wrong. If that happens, I'd be the first to apologize and ask for his reinstatement. You're a very clever man, for a homeless Conch fisherman."

"Ain't a Conch," Christal said, smiling. "Just a fisherman. Good fishing around Cape Spectre. Can I stay here?"

"That depends," Kim said evenly. "When did you see Toby Bascomb last?"

"Ain't seen him for the last two weeks," said Christal. "He went outa here one evening to go down to Mr. Sterling's house and he never come back."

Kim was momentarily disarmed by the reply because he believed it to be true: it had been his own hunch that Bascomb had not touched the key of the transmitter since the day of the last entry in the log. He began to like Christal. "Who's been operating the station then?"

"Ain't 'a soul been operating the station," said Christal.

"That's where you're wrong," Kim said. "This station was in operation tonight before I arrived. Just before I arrived."

"That's impossible," said Christal. "Ain't been another soul on this mound tonight except me."

"That doesn't make it impossible then, does it?" Kim asked.

Christal was silent, shrugging.



KIM flashed the light around the interior of the old lighthouse. He threw the spot up into the heights of the tower and saw at once why it was impossible to work the old light and why Clem Hanson's fable was just a fable.

The old, circular iron stairs, which had followed the curve of the walls up one hundred feet into the peak, were gone. They were completely gone, not a vestige of them remained. You simply could not get up to the tower without flying up.

Christal lighted a cigarette as Kim finished his examination. Kim said, "The place really is just a relic, isn't it? Staircase gone."

"Used to be some light too," said Christal slowly. "You could spot her beam from a fishing smack ten miles off shore. But radio shut her down. I'd appreciate it if you'd let me go right on squatting here, Mr. Vance."

Kim Vance stared hard at him. "Know anything about rattlesnakes, Christal?"

"Just to keep away from them."

"That's a good idea, keeping away from them," Kim said. "But sometimes you can't help yourself. Look, Christal; suppose a rattlesnake was in my bed in the radio shack, way down by my feet under the covers, would you say he crawled in the place somehow and went down under the covers all by himself?"

Christal frowned. "Wouldn't say so, Mr. Vance. First place, that door's been locked since Bascomb left. Second place, ain't no way a snake could get in otherwise. Third place, don't think he'd go under the covers. Ain't cold around here. Fourth place, there ain't no snakes out on this shell mound. No cover for 'em. They stay on the beach."

"Then you would admit that in such a case, the snake was planted?"

"I reckon so."

"All right," said Kim. "You can squat here for the time being." He left the lighthouse and went back to the radio shack. He stared at the transmitter for a few moments, then rose and went to the work bench in the rear of the shack.

He looked very grim as he got out the tools. He cut a small spring of phosphor bronze and soldered it to the chrome arm of his wireless key so that it overlapped the front of the bakelite button on which the fingers rested while sending.

Then he cut a brass plate and screwed it into the seat of the chair. After this, he went to work on the plate current transformer. He continued to look gaunt and troubled as he worked. He did not enjoy doing it.

Everything was so damned impossible to prove. The time had come for some direct evidence.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SNAKE THAT LIVED

IT WAS broad daylight when he awoke, eight o'clock by the clock on the transmitter, the sea gray, the wind holding. Kim was surprised somewhat for the 0100 observations from NAA had promised a whopping good rainstorm from Jacksonville to the Florida Straits traveling southward: showers, cloudiness, drop in temperature. There were clouds racing in from the north but the sun still held at Cape Spectre.

He washed and dressed; then went to a window to look across at the beach and see what the place looked like. The tide was low.

While he watched, he saw Caroline Rogers come across the flat neck up onto the shell mound and walk toward his shack. But before she could pass the door of the lighthouse, Joe Christal came swaggering out with his mullet net. He tipped his hat to her and said something, presumably hello. Kim couldn't hear. He inched the window open, but the sound of the surf still drowned out their voices.

He watched them carefully. He thought they were both unusually cautious. Caroline Rogers hardly looked at Christal as she spoke to him rapidly, her mouth moving. She kept watching the beach. Christal beckoned at the radio shack once. They nodded at each other. Then she left him and came to the shack, knocked on the door.

"Yes?" Kim said.

"It's Caroline Rogers," she said. "I have an invitation for breakfast for you."

Kim opened the door and came out. "Hello," he said. "Fancy meeting you here."

"Did you have a pleasant night?" she asked. She looked worried despite her smile.

"Oh, lovely," Kim said. "Slept like a top." His voice was dry. "Do you usually come calling on radio operators at this ungodly hour? I mean, it's a good idea, braces a man for the day, but—"

"I usually do take a walk on the beach in the morning," said Caroline. "Mr. Sterling would like to have you for breakfast, if you care to come. You're free, of course, since you don't have to stand watch until one P.M. He asked me if I would ask you."

"I'll come to his breakfast," Kim replied, "if you'll tell me something."

She looked puzzled, wary. "If I can."

"What made you dislike me so suddenly yesterday? 'Kim Vance,' you said, 'I've heard of you before, I remember you', and then you dusted me off very prettily, gave me a long look at your nice back, and walked out on me."

"I'm sorry," she said, coolly. "I didn't mean to be rude."

"You were not exactly rude," said Kim. "But you were no longer overjoyed at the idea of my presence. I wish you'd tell me why." She didn't answer. "Well, anyway, thanks for the invitation. What does Sterling want me up there for?"

Caroline glanced at him sharply. "He's being courteous, that's all. He likes most of you operators who work the station."

"He must like variety then, because we sure change fast here, for one reason or another. We almost changed operators again last night. Very almost. Will you answer me something else, Caroline?"

"If I can."

"If you will, you mean. What has a dirty old fisherman like Joe Christal got that I haven't got?"

She looked frightened, instantly. "I don't know what you mean, Kim. Really I don't."

"I MEAN," he said, "why did you stop to chit-chat so earnestly with the fearsome guy on your way here? I just happened to notice it out of my window. You were screened from the shore all right by the lighthouse;



but unfortunately, I happened to be up and wide awake."

"He's an interesting character," she said. "I've known him for some time."

"I can see that. You might be interested in knowing that I am going to have him arrested some time this morning as soon as I can get in touch with Clem Hanson."

He might as well have struck her. The blood left her face and she looked stunned. "But—why?"

"He put a rattlesnake in my bed last night. Ask him about it. He'll tell you he was the only one on this shell mound. He will also tell you that the snake was planted. Whom does that leave?" He added gently, "I didn't mean to upset you."

"Christal didn't do that," she whispered. "I don't know who did, but Christal didn't. He couldn't do a thing like that. I know he couldn't."

"That's the thing. How do you know?"

"I can't tell you. Please believe me, I can't tell you now. But you've got to believe me. I'm telling the truth. I can deny that he had any part of it as much as he can himself. I know him that well."

Kim took her by the shoulders and held her firmly. "I think you'd better take down your hair."

"There's nothing I can tell you now. There's nothing that is any of your business now. Only believe me: he didn't do it. Please, Kim, promise me you won't have him arrested for a thing like that; not now when he's—" she stopped. "Please!"

"You're an odd girl," Kim said, releasing her. "And not a bit flattering. I tell you I had a rattlesnake in my bed, and you worry about a dirty Conch as if you were in love with him, and snap aside my brush with destiny as just one of those things."

"That's not true," she replied swiftly. Her eyes searched his, found them flinty, saw them soften.

Kim shrugged. "Okay, Caroline. No jail for Joe Christal today. Because you want it that way. From my point of view, and the evidence, it means taking chances with my life. You're the only one I'd do that for."

HE GLANCED away toward the beach; saw Colonel DuQuès striding along the sands southward, carrying a surf-casting rod over his shoulder.

"Better smile up, Miss Rogers; here comes a friend. Seems to be going to breakfast too. Well, let's join him, and forget about Christal. To tell you the truth, I rather like the cutthroat. He's too honest to be a rogue. Let's go."

She said quietly, "I'm glad you said that. I hope you mean it. Some day you'll be ashamed if you don't."

"I never get ashamed. I'd have made a good rogue, only I got started honest. Let's go."

He locked the radio shack and took her arm and they crossed the shell mound. "Do they have an official taster for guests? I only ask that because sometimes DuQuès reminds me of the Borgias."

Caroline said, "That's—a queer thing to say."

"No it isn't. After all, when you've found a rattlesnake in your new bed, and a radio operator missing, you begin to suspect many strange things. Bascomb wasn't there last night when I arrived. Hasn't been there for two weeks."

"But Colonel DuQuès saw him yesterday!"

"And Christal hasn't seen him for two weeks. Whose word are you going to take?"

She didn't answer that either. Before Kim could say

anything else, they had reached the beach as Colonel DuQuès came abreast of them. "Good morning," he said evenly. "Coming down to breakfast with us, Vance? Lovely morning, isn't it? Expect rain though. I have a fine old bullet wound in my right leg which is better than a barometer."

"You're right on the rain," Kim replied. "It's due." He glanced at the fishing rig as they walked south. "Any luck?"

"Not a bit."

"Did you get your sinker off the beach?"

"Now that's an odd remark," said DuQuès with an amused smile. "I am an excellent surf-caster. Indeed I excel in most games of skill."

"Then that's a fine quick-drying line you've got," Kim replied. "Seems hardly wet at all. Seems dry in fact."

DuQuès looked sharply annoyed. "It's well bleached; just looks white. Well, look here; look what we have! Hold on, Vance, Caroline. Don't get too close to that patch of scrub."

Kim paused, holding back Caroline Rogers, under the impression that DuQuès was merely trying to divert the conversation from the line. He was wrong, however. Very casually, DuQuès strode up to the scrub and poked the rod into it. A six foot diamond-back lunged out at the rod. DuQuès, who was standing only a foot or so beyond the limit of the snake's striking range, chuckled. "You see? . . . Let's get on."

THEY walked on, leaving the snake in the scrub behind. Kim found himself shivering a little. He asked, "Why didn't you kill it?"

DuQuès glanced at him with disdain. "Kill it? What sport would there be in killing the beast? Might be interesting stalking them with bow and arrow or blowgun; but with a pistol, the silly thinks strike right into the line of fire and commit suicide. No sport at all."

"I see," Kim said, still feeling cold.

"I've often said," DuQuès remarked placidly, "that one could do a tidy little business down here. One is forever stepping on one of the beasts. Why not open a rattlesnake-skin tannery? There's something for you, Vance, when you get bored with your job. Gloves, shoes bags, limitless opportunities. American women have a singular weakness for the macabre; you could make a fortune out of it." His laugh was mocking.

"Unfortunately, I don't get much chance to be bored," Kim said. "Not yet, at least. After all, I no sooner arrived than I had the good luck to meet Miss Rogers. Then you ran me down in the *Galatea*; no chance for boredom there. Then I find my radio operator, Bascomb, missing completely, absent from the station when he should have been standing watch; and finally I very nearly slept with another rattler which had climbed under the covers for warmth. So you see—"

"Yes," DuQuès smiled, his eyes glittering. "Busy day, very full day. Cape Spectre's WAZ does seem to be a Jonah in the lighthouse service. The men there have incredibly hard luck. There's Bascomb, run off without notice, as you say—"

"I said, missing."

"Oh. But of course he's run off. He wasn't built for that sort of work. He's probably en route to California to become a cinema actor. I did see him go off with bags, being furtive, terribly furtive."



"Then there was Rensfell. I didn't know him very well, only met him once, but Sterling tells me Rensfell was a splendid young man. He was dismissed in disgrace for illegal transmission of military information or some such thing to one of the belligerents.

"And before him there was Venner. I remember Venner. I never met him either, but I was the one who found him."

Kim said, "Venner? Venner was drowned, wasn't he?"

"Yes. He drowned in that little neck where you only have water at the flood. A very sad thing. I found him, you know. Just his head under water."

He gestured slowly and carelessly with the tip of the rod. "Face down, drowned. Slipped on the shell mound, hit his head, went unconscious, and drowned. Tragic thing."

"That was last November seventh," Kim said. "You've been down here some time, Colonel."

"Yes," DuQuès answered, eyeing Kim sharply. "I'm in poor health. Or rather was, when Dwight asked me down. Much better now. Well, there's the house. You've been very quiet, Caroline."

"I didn't have anything to say," she replied, avoiding his eyes.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SPANIARD IN THE RAIN

THE beach curved southwest as they came into sight of the house. Looking back, Kim found he could see the tower of the old lighthouse but no sign of the radio shack or the shell mound.

Sterling's house was a fine big place; but for all he had expected, Kim was disappointed. The house was obviously in need of repair, having run down a good deal. On the ocean front there was a shallow cove, a sort of mild anchorage; and in the center of it, in what looked to be deep water, was a buoy.

It was not a U. S. Coast & Geodetic buoy, and yet it looked like one. It was bright red, with a bell. Kim said, "Queer place for a buoy."

DuQuès glanced, uninterested. "I suppose it is. Sterling had it put in himself. Seems there's a huge chunk of granite down there dropped off a barge once when they were building that jetty you see to the southeast. Granite upended so that there's only a four-foot clearance at ebb tide.

"He sometimes brings his *Galatea* in from the sea, putting it on that old railroad carriage and hauling it up here through the surf. Just an emergency measure in case of storm when he's unable to run for the inlet. Put the buoy there so's not to crash on the granite coming in."

"A black spar would have done just as well," said Kim.

DuQuès studied the bell buoy for a moment, then nodded, detached. "Possibly. Not grandiose enough perhaps. Sterling was doubtless much richer when he put that one in.

"Now look here: there's the flower garden over the filled-in swimming pool. Makes a lovely sight, doesn't it? One would think the very concrete below the earth helped the growth of those flowering vines and hibiscus."

Dwight Sterling was waiting for them on the patio. There was no sign of Norgren. Kim asked for him out of curiosity. "Oh, Oliver remained on the *Galatea*," said

Sterling. "He loves the water." He shrugged slightly.

"And Peighton?" said Kim. "He was a very interesting cad."

DuQuès lifted his eyebrows and remarked, "Why do you say cad, Vance? Fop perhaps, but very likeable."

"He called himself a cad," Kim replied. "Said he should be fighting for England, but that, unfortunately, he preferred having a marvelous time and devil take the hindmost. Don't misunderstand me; I liked him. Is he really Marquess of Halsey?"

"I assure you," said DuQuès severely, "that I have found all of Dudley Peighton's seemingly offhand banter to be quite true."

"You checked on it?" Kim said, feigning surprise.

"Only out of curiosity," said DuQuès, annoyed at his own lameness. "After all, he has made some simply fantastic statements, you know."

"Which turned out to be true."

"Yes. Quite true. Peighton could have had a brilliant career at almost anything he chose if he had not preferred ladies to the pursuit of a profession. Where is he, Dwight?"

"Gone to Palm Beach," Sterling said, "Said his aunt or some one was arriving down there from New York and that he'd have to meet her but would be back tomorrow morning." He held DuQuès' eyes a moment and shrugged. "Shall we eat?"

IT OCCURRED to Kim when he trudged north up the beach alone, two hours later, that the breakfast had been a carefully planned thing. He had been shown the Lazarette from top to bottom. Indeed, what curiosity he had had about the place was no thoroughly washed out of him, and he had become bored with it long before Sterling had finished showing him the place.

He considered this, wondering if that had been the original idea; to keep him from prying about the place at night. Certainly he had seen nothing out of the way. Mostly he had looked for an antenna, suspicious that there might have been a transmitter around the place; but there had been none. Antennas are difficult to hide.

He had a distinct impression though, that Dwight Sterling was no longer a rich man. The house was in need of repair; it was the house of a rich man only in those obvious places where one was expected to find it so.

The land had run down a good deal. Only that quadrangle of the filled-in swimming pool flowered and was cared for expertly.

It was only ten o'clock when he reached the neck, now slowly filling as the tide came in. He did not have to stand watch at the receiver and transmitter until one. He would stand by then for any QTE from a ship off shore until ten that night.

He continued past Cape Spectre light and went on to the ridge. He crossed it, striking westward until he came down to Sterling's dock on Mosquito Lagoon. The *Galatea* was still moored at the dock, flying the black "owner absent" pennant from her masthead.

Watkins, the paid hand, was hosing the deck forward, and Oliver Norgren was lying in the cockpit astern, half asleep. Kim called hello. Norgren sprang to his feet at once, suspicion in his face. "Hello Vance. Here again?"

"Hello, Norgren," Kim said pleasantly, hoping to disarm the man. "Just had breakfast with Mr. Sterling.



Seemed too nice a day to go back to the shack with nothing to do. I thought I'd run up here and look at your rig. Sterling tells me it's a nice thing."

He implied that Sterling had said it was all right, which Sterling had certainly not done.

"All right," Norgren said reluctantly. "Come aboard. I'll show you the works."

It was a one-kilowatt Collins transmitter with everything but the kitchen sink, and Kim was impressed. "You've got something here," he said. "To most of the boys like me who throw together a haywire and nails special, this is something out of our world. I see you're crystal-controlled. No signal shifter?"

"No," said Norgren. "I don't like the frequency stability of an electron-coupled oscillator compared to a crystal-controlled. And I don't like these fellows who go swinging their signals all over the bands."

Kim nodded as if in agreement, noting the frequency on the crystal and praying he wouldn't forget it. He examined the chrome-plated receiver, hiding his dismay at such luxury, and then thanked Norgren and prepared to leave. But not before he looked at the coils inside the frame. When he left the dock, whistling cheerfully, heading back to Cape Spectre light, he felt pretty good.

AT THE shack again, he unlocked the door and went in. He searched the place thoroughly and found no more rattlers. He carefully turned on the transmitter, making sure that the new switch he had installed on the panel was at OFF.

Even then he checked the wiring. He couldn't take chances with his handiwork. Everything was all right.

He called WADX in Key West, the headquarters of the Seventh District; and when he raised them, he wirelessly—using a special cipher code so that if the *Galatea* were listening, she would understand none of it:

"Report for Bill Watersea. Put monitors on WOMJ at the following frequency and integral multiples thereof. Please call back to me any messages emanating from WOMJ until further notice. QRU? (Have you anything for me?)"

"Received," said WADX, also in ciphers. "Nothing for you. SK."

So he had a watch on the *Galatea*, and he would not have to be scouring the bands keeping tabs on her himself. He closed up shop and went outside. Joe Christal was casting the mullet net from the shell mound. He cast it very well, the mesh slapping down on the water in a pancake seven-foot circle. Christal saw him watching and smiled guardedly but said nothing.

At quarter of twelve it began to rain. The sky had been darkening, and it darkened more. Kim put on a

poncho and a hat, and came out again to watch Christal.

It was then he first noticed the paint-cracked little fishing smack wallowing along from the north. It was a catboat really, and grimy as a stockhold. It looked as if it owned a high odor.

A single man lolled at the helm astern, without a raincoat on. He did not seem to mind the heavy rain at all, though he was drenched. Kim winced now and then at the bolts of lightning and the crash of thunder; but the man in the catboat leaned against his tiller as unconcerned as if he were listening to some majestic symphony, bored.

He looked Spanish; his skin intensely dark, a scraggly mustache and faint beard around his chin. He saw Kim standing on the mound and came to life. "Hola!" he called, showing his white teeth. "I come tie up in your lee, no?"

"Come ahead," said Kim. "If your boat tears her bottom out, you'd be better off."

"You craze," said the Spaniard. "Thees ees one fine boat."

"I'll argue with you about that," Kim called, "If you ever make this piece of land alive."

"Hoho," said the Spaniard. "Ees verree fonny. I see you pronto."

THE fellow handled the catboat with dexterity, running her before the wind beyond the southern side of the shell mound, then gybing, coming about and coming in on a broad reach until he reached the shelter of the mound. He ran her bow right to the mound, threw his anchor up onto the land, pulled down his sail without furling it, and leaped ashore.

He dug in a fluke of the light anchor, using the anchor as a pickaxe. It looked most unorthodox. Then he grinned from ear to ear and said, "How you like zat, eh? Pedro de las Salinas ees one sailor, no?"

"Pedro is very lucky," Kim said, squinting at the Spaniard. Something about the man was remotely familiar. Pedro took off his hat and shook the rain from it, exposing a head of dark curls. He put the big hat on again, and it was instantly soaking wet.

"Is where?" Pedro said, gesturing at the old lighthouse. "Jupiter? I weesh to find Jupiter Eenlet."

"You've got one long way to go," said Kim. "Far south. And you'd better not try to make it today. The wind is liable to kick and the seas are building up. That rub-a-dub tub you're driving will swamp like a canoe. Where are you from?"

"Is where?" Pedro repeated.

"Cape Spectre."

"I come queeck from St. Augustine, all outside," said

## Tired Kidneys Often Bring Sleepless Nights

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. When they get tired and don't work right in the daytime, many people have to get up nights. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder. Don't neglect this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep.

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to remain in your blood, it may also cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.



Pedro. "Thees one damn fine rain, no? Pedro weel take a hot dreenk from you weeth *mucho gracias*."

"All right," Kim said. "Come on in." He led the way into the shack and closed the door. The Spaniard sat down on the bed and took off his hat. Kim stared at him, then went to the stove, put some water on to boil, and stared again.

Pedro said, "Why you geeve me fonny face, eh?"

"Peighton," Kim said, "you're lousy."

## CHAPTER IX

### DON'T STOP ANY BULLETS

THE Spaniard looked shocked, then dismayed. "My good aunt!" he exclaimed. "Don't you Americans believe anything? Why, you train your children on Santa Claus and the Easter bunny, and when a poor Englishman like myself—"

"That accent, Kim said. "Something out of a movie. You don't look like Dudley Peighton, I'll admit that. You look anything but British, I'll say that. But you shouldn't open your mouth." He was frowning, but not heavily. Peighton's expression was really amusing.

"I mean," Peighton replied cheerfully, "I didn't intend to go in for conversation. I'm only on a sort of exploratory trip down the coast. Only stopped off because the rain was thick and I wanted to have a little chat with you, and I couldn't get a decent chance while guesting with Sterling. They watch every move I make."

"Why?"

"Don't be so direct, old boy," Peighton said. "You fire like a rifle. Be more like a blunderbuss, beat around the bush a bit. Much more diplomatic. I'm really devastated. This Spanish guise of mine is really damned good, you know. Fooled hundreds with it."

"You couldn't fool Colonel P.V.H. DuQuès with it."

"You're absolutely right, but I didn't intend to meet him. . . . Rush the tea, will you? I'm dying of cold. The sacrifices one makes for his art. Rain is very chilly. But I wanted to be so carefree."

Kim made the tea and did not say anything. He sat down opposite Peighton while the latter sipped. Peighton murmured, "You do have my number, don't you? Or so you think."

"You're wrong. I don't have your number at all. Nobody could be as crazy as you are and not be clever. What's the point of the whole getup—risking your life in that boat on this ocean?"

"I want to examine a bell buoy at close range," Peighton replied. "That's all."

There was a silence. "The buoy on the shallow cove out in front of Sterling's place," Kim said presently.

Peighton put down the tea and stared at him. "So?"

Kim said, "Oh yes. I've got two eyes, two ears, and a brain. One and one makes two. I hope you're not going to be mysterious."

"Look here," Peighton replied soberly, "stay out of it. Your chances are slim enough as it is. Oh, I know who you are. Kim Vance is no mere operator coming in at Cape Spectre to run WAZ. You're assistant superintendent of the seventh district, U. S. Lighthouse Service. And if I know it, DuQuès obviously knows it."

It was Kim's turn to be surprised. "That's pretty good. I won't deny it."

"You can't," Peighton said, his voice level.

"All right, I can't." And if DuQuès knows who I am, does he know who you are?"

"Do you?"

"No. I was talking about you with him today. He seemed satisfied with your status, but still wary of you."

Peighton chuckled, looking firm. "And what is your opinion of Colonel DuQuès, Kim?"

"I would say," Kim answered, speaking carefully, "that he is the only man I ever met in my life of whom I was afraid."

"THAT is an astute confession," Peighton remarked.

"And one which surprises me. There is a quality about Americans that sometimes dismays me. They never use wisdom with their fear. They will literally burst in upon the most heinous situation in full and cocky confidence and get themselves hurt in the bargain.

"So I'm glad to hear that you are wise enough to admit he is your peer and that you will keep out of it. That is all I wanted to hear from you."

"Wait a minute," Kim said. "I said I was afraid of him. I didn't say I was out of anything. I came down here to find out what was wrong with this station—what really happened to Venner and Rensfell and now Bascomb; and I intend to do that. And if it happens to concern DuQuès, that doesn't scare me off. I've got a job here, I'm not running out on it."

"Oh my word!" said Peighton. "You're just like a chap I knew in Haiti, most obstinate fellow named Mike Heywood, ran a weather station. Now listen to me, Kim. Tonight is Omega. Live through it to see tomorrow's dawn and congratulate yourself on your good fortune.

"But your chances are poor if you don't tend to your knitting; I mean they are. Right now, just being here, you are dreadfully in DuQuès' way, and he will put you out of the way at the first opportunity."

"So I'm to keep clear of him?"

"That would be nice, but unfortunately it's impossible. You won't keep clear of him because he will come to you. My point is, you've got to hibernate here, hold the fort, so to speak, and prevent, at gun point, DuQuès getting close enough to you or your station to do either of you harm.

"I wish I could explain more, but I really can't, old man, and I've got to be on my way. But rest assured, your life and mine aren't worth a counterfeit shilling."

He rose to his feet and threw on the big hat.

"Wait a second," said Kim. "You don't get off this way. I want to know more. What goes on here? What is DuQuès doing down at Sterling's place? Norgren is the radio operator. They keep him on the *Galatea*. 'He loves the water', they told me. My eye. But what's it all about?"

Peighton sighed grimly and went to a window. He saw Christal still casting the net in the rain. He said, "Incidentally, Kim, keep a weather eye on that chap too, will you, like a good fellow?"

"Weather eye?"

"I mean, watch out for him, take care of him. He's a good man. Friend of yours. Friend of mine too. We're all on the same side."

"I wish you could prove *that*."

"Wish I could too. Dashed impossible to prove anything. I don't know it all myself. Believe me, old boy."



Something has been brewing here for three months, and I don't know the answer. Damned cleverly done. Something big, huge, good."

"You're a British agent," Kim said.

"DON'T be dull," said Peighton. "And don't interrupt. I'm getting garrulous, and it's such an infrequent phase with me. On things that count. Like you. Like all Americans. Pretty honest people when they aren't politicians. Listen to me. Off there in the rain somewhere north is a ship."

"Queen Victoria."

Peighton shrugged. "Something is going to happen to her unless Dudley Peighton, in person, prevents it."

"What's going to happen?"

"Don't know."

"How are you going to prevent it?"

"Don't know. So you see how it is, eh? You hold the fort, old man. Sanctum sanctorum. And if Caroline Rogers seeks sanctuary, do the best you can. She may need it badly. I'll be on my way. Rugged business; may have to force DuQuès' whole hand, and that's always so messy and dangerous. But what can you do? This rain will hold, won't it?"

"All night long."

"Oh, capital! Need it badly. Cheero, Kim, and please, don't stop any bullets."

"I'll see you out. I haven't any intention of stopping anything but radio waves."

They went out into the rain again. It was pouring.

"Hola," said Pedro de las Salinas, "ees thees not a fine rain? *Mucho gracias* for the dreenk, *mi amigo*, and *hasta la vista!*"

"Just don't talk that accent," said Kim dryly, "and you'll last longer. So long, Pedro. Good sailing. Keep yourself whole. I'll see you again."

"Si," said Pedro; "you weel see me again." He picked up his anchor and leaped into the catboat. He hauled up the sail and was quickly gone in the rain, southward.

Kim went back into the radio shack and peeled off the wet poncho. It was nearly time to open the 1300 watch on the air. He had some tea himself, though he preferred coffee, and he watched out through the window.

Long, hard spears of rain slanted, *rat-tat-tat*, against the streaming panes and Kim's thoughtful eyes followed the heavy drops as they slid down the glass. His mind was a disorderly basket, filled with all manner of odds and ends—sinister, colorful scraps of fact.

Christal had stopped casting and was squatting in the doorway of the lighthouse. The rain was terrific, sweeping in from the northeast as dense as smoke; and the thunder and lightning, instead of passing with the first gust of storm, stayed with them, forking across the sky, shaking the glassware in the shack with the vibration.

Kim had thrown over the antenna grounding switch in case a bolt struck the radio antenna outside. The prospect of opening a watch with that lighting all around did not appeal to him.

Even while he considered the prospect a tremendous bolt struck the top of the old lighthouse, hitting the rod up there and being conducted harmlessly into the ground; but the shock and sound of the contact were unnerving.

When it was over, Kim found Christal at the front door, knocking.

## CHAPTER X

### CALL FROM DAVEY JONES

CHRISTAL came in, a little pale, but game. "Kinda close over yonder," Christal said. "Mind if I squat here till the bolts pass?"

"Not a bit," Kim said. "It's a wonder that didn't blow your teeth out. I think the fireworks will go on south southwest before very long—" He eyed Christal speculatively. "Did you see the Spaniard who came ashore?"

"Yep," said Christal. "He was kinda foolish to be on the outside in such a little boat, but I reckon he knew how to handle it."

"Ever see him before?"

"Couldn't say so," said Christal. "Didn't look at him close."

"Christal, it seems as if I'm always asking you questions. I'll tell you what that Spaniard said to me. He said you and I were friends. He said I should look out for you, that you were in danger. And he said my own life wasn't worth a plugged nickel."

Christal looked at Kim steadily without turning away. "He sure was a queer kind of bird, wasn't he?"

Kim glanced at the time. It was time to open the 1300 watch. He was grateful that the worst of the lightning had gone on south. There were still lurid flashes in the sky, but most of these were far away, so that the sound of thunder was long delayed after the flashes. He threw over the antenna grounding switch and turned on the transmitter, standing watch on 500 kilocycles for any call to him.

Christal said, "Mr. Vance, there's some one coming over the neck from the beach." He peered through the rain. "Appears to be Clem Hanson."

"That neck must be flooded with the tide, isn't it?"

"Yep, but he's wearing hip boots, and he'll make it all right. Ain't at flood yet. It's Clem all right. Reckon I'd better get outa here, Mr. Vance. He'll want to see you."

Kim, ear phones not quite over his ears, but more forward on his head, said, "You can stay, Christal."

"No, I can't," Christal said, looking panicked. "To tell you the truth, I can't, Mr. Vance. Clem Hanson'd like to get his hooks into me for a little chicken stealing I once done down the line at Big Cypress when I was broke and hungry. So I'll be getting out until he's gone."

"You'll stay," Kim said.

CHRISTAL started for the door, but he saw he was too late now. Clem Hanson, his eyes barely visible through a slot in a poncho he had thrown over himself, came across the shell mound from the old light, smoke pouring out through the slot as he smoked a cigarette under the coating.

Christal stared at Hanson, approaching, and then retreated to the other side of the shack, where the work bench was, sitting down and averting his face as best he could. The door opened—no knock—and Clem Hanson walked in, dripping water where he stood. He shut the door and dropped the poncho on the floor. The cigarette in his mouth had an amazing ash on it despite the poncho.

"Well, sonny," he said cheerfully, "reckon you didn't expect to see me again so soon."



"No, you're wrong," Kim said. "I did expect to see you soon. I'm glad to see you. I wanted to thank you for the gun. And I can't give it back to you yet. I'll still need it."

"Uh-huh," Clem Hanson said. "Reckoned so. I got another one anyhow. Told my old woman I lost the other one overboard."

Kim asked, "What's wrong?"

"Why do you say that, boy?"

"You didn't come all the way out here to say hello," Kim said. "Furthermore, that tub of yours never could have made it in this rain. You must have known it was going to rain before you started."

"I didn't use my own skiff. I borried Ed Judson's power boat. It's got a shelter forward. . . . Well, to tell you the truth, I did come up for somethin'. I got bad news, Kim." He stared at Christal hard. "Who's your friend?"

"He's okay," Kim said. "What's the news?"

"It's Bascomb," said Clem. "Reckon you didn't find him here last night when you relieved him. He's dead."

Christal stirred uneasily. Clem glanced at him again. Kim said, "Dead?" He was listening on the air for he had found his call WAZ being wirelessly to him. Some one was calling him on the air. "Dead, Clem? Not naturally. Not down here. You don't die naturally at Cape Spectre."

"Found him over on Merritt Island," said Clem Hanson slowly. He drawled, not to be laconic, but to be careful of what he was saying. "He was shot once through the head, boy. No gun around. I brung over Doc Saturn from Big Cypress, and he allowed as how Toby Bascomb had been layin' there for two weeks. It's murder, two weeks old."

Kim glanced at Christal. "So you told the truth."

"Come over here," Clem said evenly to Christal. "You look familiar to me, mister. Don't hang you back there. Step out."

Christal sighed and rose and came forward. Clem stared at him for a moment and then said, "Rensfell!" He pounded Christal on the shoulder. "Les Rensfell! What are you doin' in that old getout? What are you doin' back here?"

Christal did not answer. He turned to Kim. Kim said, "I'd guessed, Christal. I'd really guessed. So it isn't Christal; it's Leslie Rensfell, who ought to be sore at me for breaking him out of the service."

"It wasn't your fault," Rensfell said. "You had the evidence and from where you sat, I suppose it looked

conclusive. I'm not sore at you. I'm glad you're here."

"I ought to be sore at you then," Kim said, with a faint smile. "You've got Caroline Rogers crazy about you. I wish I could say the same."

Rensfell glanced at Clem Hanson, then shrugged. "It's not exactly the way you think. She's my cousin."

**K**IM started up. "Your cousin! Of course that's it! That explains it. . . . Wait a second, you two. I've got a QTE call here from a ship at sea, and I've got to give them their bearing. Then I'll be with you again."

He listened to the incoming signal in his headphones. "WAZ WAZ DE GHS GHS GHS AR."

Kim replied, "GHS DE WAZ AR K."

GHS wirelessly, "PSE QTE? OM TNX AR K."

(Please, what is my true bearing from your station, old man? Thanks. End of message. Come back.)

Kim sent, "QSV." (Send me a series of V's.)

The ship at sea began sending a steady stream of V's, dit-dit-dit-dahs, while Kim worked the big directional finding loop on the source of the signals and noted the bearing. When the V's stopped, and GHS invited him to reply, he wirelessly. "QTE 084 DEGREES." (Your true bearing from my station is eighty-four degrees.)

"TNX," said GHS. "SK." And he went off the air.

The operator on the ship hadn't been chatty. But her call letters showed she was a British ship, and British radiomen couldn't hold forth on the air waves for fear of giving away their location to enemy raiders. Kim logged the call and looked up GHS in the callbook.

Leslie Rensfell said, "That sounded like GHS."

"It was," Kim said.

"That's impossible," said Rensfell. "You've been tricked."

"I don't get you."

"You will," said Rensfell. "Look at your callbook."

In the callbook, Kim found that GHS was listed as the call of the freighter *Beacon Wind* of the Empire Transit Limited, Liverpool, England. That was all right.

What wasn't all right, and what Rensfell had meant, was the notation under the listing in red ink which read: *November 18th. Beacon Wind torpedoed and sunk off Cape Finisterre, Portugal, all hands lost. L. R.*

Leslie Rensfell himself had made the notation three months before, when he received news of the action.

It took a long moment for all that it meant to sink in. Then it hit hard.

Kim had just finished giving a radio direction bearing to a British ship which no longer existed.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



**TOPS 'EM ALL!**

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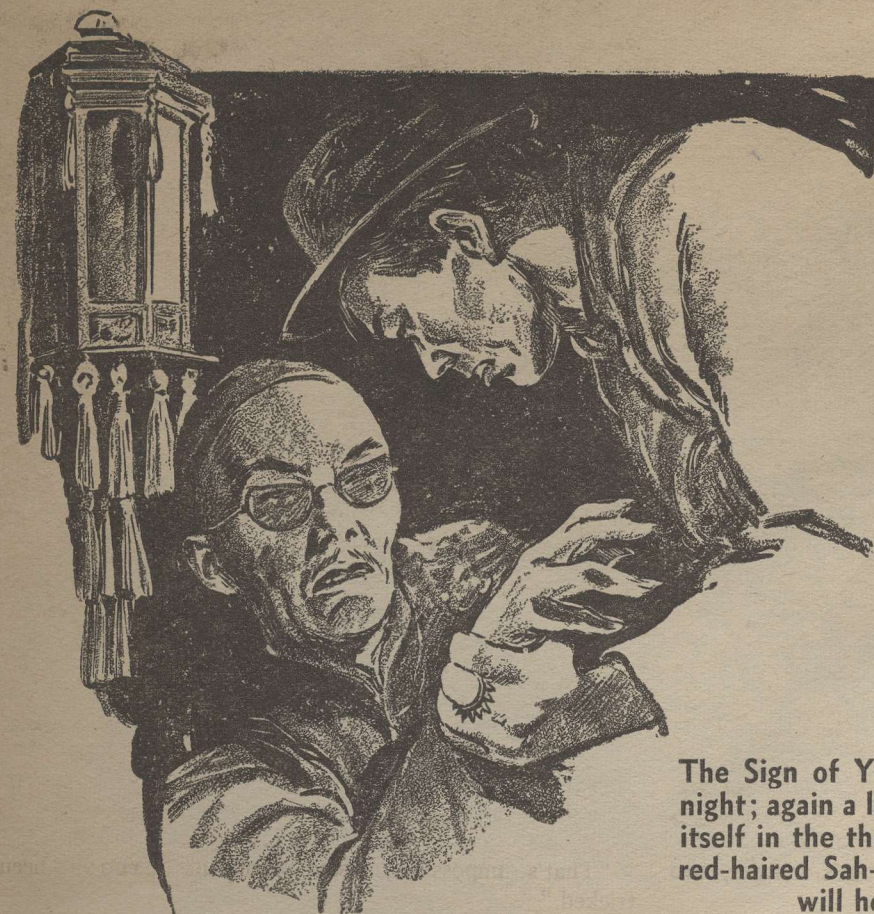


# The Shanghai Necklace

By

Walter C. Brown

Author of "The Bamboo Sword," "The Night-Devil," etc.



Mercilessly Lee Dok bore down on the blind fortune-teller's hand with the spiked ring

## I

OF ALL the strange and exotic chapters in the gaudy book of Chinatown history, none is more baffling or colorful than the fantastic series of murders whose common denominator was that malevolent device known as a Shanghai necklace.

Now a Shanghai necklace has no connection whatever with precious stones or the jeweler's art. It is a deadly form of Oriental noose—a short length of tough, wire-thin cord, with end-pieces of carved teakwood.

But in the hands of an expert, the Shanghai necklace is a lethal weapon silent as a knife and swift as a bullet. Once the deadly coil has circled the victim's neck, a twist or two with the wooden wedges will snuff out life like a blown candle.

And the silent-footed killer who plied this grim trade in the crooked street and shadowy courts of Chinatown was truly an expert. His victims were selected with cold-blooded audacity; his flawless technique left no clues except the peculiar twist of the strangling wedges which linked the crimes together as the work of one man.

Not the least remarkable feature of these weird killings was the part played by Kai Fang, the blind Teller of Fortunes, who worked out his uncanny prediction with a set of magic tiles which he said were carved from human bones, and which he "read" with sensitive fingertips.

But Kai Fang never referred to himself as a fortune teller. He denied the charge indignantly, insisting that he

The Sign of Yo Fei lowers over Chinatown tonight; again a length of wire-thin rope will imbed itself in the throat of a helpless man. And even red-haired Sah-jin O'Hara, the Blue Coat Devil, will hear the whisper of Death

was merely a poor, humble student of the Signs of Destiny.

Be that as it may, Kai Fang certainly foretold the coming of the necklace killer, almost to the hour—a fact witnessed by no less a person than red-haired Sergeant O'Hara of the Chinatown squad.

On that fateful night, Chinatown lay blanketed under a smother of smoky blue fog. O'Hara, walking slowly through Half Moon Street on his regular rounds, reached the opening to Lantern Court, a ghostly void where the flat yellow glow of a gas-lamp hung suspended like a sinister brass gong.

It was then that he heard the rhythmic *tap-tap-tap* of a cane striking on pavement. The tapping drew steadily nearer; a tall silhouette loomed up through the bluish pall, resolving itself into a Chinaman clad in a shimmering robe of Ming yellow, a wide-brimmed black hat shadowing his lean face.

"Hola, Kai Fang!" O'Hara called out as the blind man swished his bamboo cane about to locate the turning into Half Moon Street.

"Ala, wah, Sah-jin!" Kai Fang replied politely, turning on him the blank, unswerving stare of the sightless.

"Plenty of fog tonight," O'Hara remarked, and added jokingly, "Good night for a murder."

"Do not jest, Sah-jin!" The blind man's voice dropped to a sibilant whisper. "Three times today I have cast my Tiles of Destiny, and each time appeared the Sign of Yo Fei . . . Death, Sah-jin! Hoya! There is one among us who shall join his ancestors before tomorrow's sun!"

Without waiting for a reply, he turned and continued his rhythmic progress. Within ten paces the swirling blue haze had swallowed his lean figure.



"Queer bird!" O'Hara said to himself, thinking of the colorful rumors which had accumulated around this mysterious blind man, who, despite his affliction, lived in Oriental luxury worthy of a red-button mandarin. And O'Hara remembered the many accurate predictions Kai Fang had made in times past.

"It'd be damn funny if he called the turn again tonight," O'Hara muttered. Somewhere off in the darkness a bamboo flute tortured the same three notes over and over, while congealing fog dripped from invisible eaves and cornices, as if a hundred blind men were tapping their way through the shrouding night.

THEN O'Hara stiffened alertly as a thin, wailing cry for help sounded somewhere in the murky blue pall ahead. As the cry rose again he plunged forward, his solid footsteps pounding out thudding echoes in the ghostly hush of the street, his sharp eyes piercing the shifting shadows.

A shapeless blur became a figure down on hands and knees—a figure in a shimmering yellow robe.

"Kai Fang!" O'Hara exclaimed, helping the blind man to his feet. "What happened? Are you hurt?"

"I think not hurt, Sah-jin!" Kai Fang gasped, steadying himself. "A night-robber attack me! I cry out for help and hit at him with my stick. He run away—quick."

"Which way'd he go?"

The blind man made a vague gesture. "Not know, Sah-jin. He make no noise when he run."

Kai Fang's hat and bamboo cane had been dropped in the struggle, and the Ming robe was torn and disheveled. "*Ai-yeel!*" he wailed in sudden anguish as his groping fingers explored the damage. "My leather bag! He has stolen my Tiles of Destiny!"

"Hold on!" O'Hara exclaimed, flashing his electric torch over the pavement. "Here's your pouch. The tiles have been spilled out."

With an eager cry Kai Fang plumped down on his knees, groping for his precious bone markers. "Twenty-nine pieces!" he cried anxiously. "Count them, Sah-jin!"

"They're all here," O'Hara announced presently, "and here's your hat and your stick."

"I will burn nine-and-twenty prayers to Kwan Yin," Kai Fang quavered. "*Kan hsies*, Sah-jin! Most gracious thanks for your help, and the Three Blessings upon your house."

So Kai Fang resumed his interrupted journey—*tap-tap-tap* unaware that Sergeant O'Hara quietly trailed him through Half Moon Street and along Mulberry Lane to Long Jon's Tea House, whose neon lights loomed up through the fog like a gaudy string of smoldering jewels.

O'Hara stood outside for a minute, then entered the famous tea house, where Long Jon himself came bowing and smiling.

"Kai Fang came in?" O'Hara asked.

"Yiss, Sah-jin. He is upstairs, in private eating-room. Tonight he has guests: old Wing Lung the silk merchant and Kim Yao the goldsmith. I prepare a green-shell turtle, cooked in plum brandy."

O'Hara gave a brief grin. "Likes his food, doesn't he?"

"Aye, Sah-jin. Kai Fang is my Number One customer. You like speak to him?"

"Not now," O'Hara said, "but when Kai Fang leaves here, have one of your boys tag along behind him to see that he reaches home safely."

Long Jon looked surprised at the request, so O'Hara told him about the attack in Half Moon Street. "Kai Fang doesn't know what a narrow escape he had," O'Hara declared. "He thinks it was only a purse-snatcher. Look at this."

"*Ai-yeel!*" Long Jon exclaimed, his eyes round as jade buttons as Sergeant O'Hara held up a wedge noose that

dangled like a lithe black snake from his fingers. "It is a Shanghai necklace!"

"I didn't tell Kai Fang I found this," O'Hara said. "No use throwing a scare into him after the danger was over. You'll see he gets home safely? . . . Okay! With a fog over Chinatown, and a strangler on the prowl, I'll have my hands full this night!"

SERGEANT O'HARA heard midnight strike from St. Mary's belfry as he turned into Mulberry Lane. He had passed the Tong houses and the old Chinese Theatre, when a shadowy figure darted from the dark entrance to Paradise Court and went scurrying past the Mandarin Cafe, almost colliding with the policeman in his haste.

"Hey! What goes on here?" O'Hara demanded, grasping the yellow man and swinging him around so he faced the lighted windows. "Sam Sing the barber! What are you running from?"

"Sah-jin! Dead man in Paradise Court!" Sam Sing gasped, a look of pasty-hued terror on his face.

"Show me, quick," O'Hara commanded; and a few moments later his flashlight knifed the darkness of Paradise Court, focusing on a sprawled body, with glazed eyeballs staring from a contorted face.

"Looks like a strangling job," O'Hara muttered. "Ha! Another Shanghai necklace!"

Dropping down beside the body, O'Hara studied the twisted wooden wedges at the side of the victim's neck, then released the taut knot and pulled the strangling cord from its buried groove in the flesh. It came away with a faint hiss, like the tearing of thin silk.

Shrill and piercing, O'Hara's silver whistle slashed through the sullen night—one short blast, two long ones: the emergency call. An answering signal came floating back from the far side of Mulberry Lane.

The police whistles roused Paradise Court into more visible life, and blurred lights began to glow and wink as doors and windows were thrown open. Slipped feet moved through the darkness; and by the time Officer Burke arrived on the run, the scene of the crime was ringed in by slant-eyed yellow faces exchanging swift, furtive whispers.

"Is he dead, Sergeant?" Burke asked.

"As dead as mutton," O'Hara replied tersely, holding up the Shanghai necklace. "It's Mong Wei the gambler. All right, Burke, call the wagon."

As Burke made his exit, Sam Sing seized the opportunity to launch into an anxious explanation of how he had stumbled over Mong Wei's body by sheer chance.

"Okay, Sam, okay," O'Hara interrupted. "We're not trying to pin it on you."

In a few minutes the black wagon arrived. Mong Wei was lifted onto a canvas stretcher and borne away, with Officer Burke taking charge of Sam Sing, their unhappy witness. The crowd broke up and melted into the shrouding fog.

O'Hara watched their silent departure with a grim little smile. One of his most precious assets was a carefully concealed knowledge of the Cantonese dialect. When the Chinatown crowds gathered and excited gossip passed around, O'Hara kept his ears open. And tonight his ears had snared these Pearls of Knowledge:

Mong Wei had spent the evening at Mark Sin's fan-tan game. Mong Wei had won a hatful of money and left early, after some heated words with Lee Dok the tongster, who was Chinatown's Number One tough guy. Now Mong Wei was dead.

"A nod may be better than a thousand words." Sergeant O'Hara thought of that old Chinese proverb as he moved briskly across Paradise Court, on his way toward a little heart-to-heart talk with Lee Dok the tongster.



## II

LEE DOK'S lodgings were in Long Sword Alley, which serves as a link between Paradise Court and Lantern Court. A sleepy-eyed *mafoo* opened the outer door, and O'Hara ascended a dark staircase haunted by the smell of stale incense and fresh *chandoo*.

Lee Dok's own door was a solid affair, and well bolted, but the tongster opened promptly at O'Hara's heavy-handed summons. He was tall and strongly muscled, with small, cruel eyes set in a pockmarked face.

"Your old pal Mong Wei's been knocked off," O'Hara said.

Lee Dok yawned, gathering his long blue sleeping-robe about him. "Soon or late, Sah-jin, every man must ride the Dragon."

"Yeah," O'Hara snapped, "but the Lords of Destiny don't use a Shanghai necklace. Get dressed, Lee Dok. You and I are going for a walk."

Lee Dok looked at him coolly. "Where we go, Sah-jin?"

"I'll ask the questions," O'Hara growled. "Get going!"

The tongster dressed himself leisurely, calmly smoking a cigarette while O'Hara made a quick but efficient search of the room. And when they departed, he walked with his usual arrogant swagger. Lee Dok was used to being picked up at odd hours by the Blue Coat Devils. . . .

But Sergeant O'Hara's hopes for a quick solution of the Paradise Court murder dwindled considerably on his arrival at the precinct station with his prisoner. The fingerprints on the wooden wedges of the Shanghai necklace were badly smudged and altogether worthless.

"Those wedges have been roughened with a file," the laboratory officer told him. "You're up against a wise Chink this time."

"Well, that description fits Lee Dok," O'Hara said. "I'll see if I can bluff it out of him." But the tough-fibered tongster was proof against the sergeant's most skillful questioning. Entrenched behind a defense of "Know nothing, Sah-jin," he blandly parried all thrusts.

True, he freely admitted his presence at the fan-tan game, and a near-quarrel with Mong Wei, then coolly added the Chinese equivalent of "So what?" Lee Dok had picked up a working knowledge of Rice-Face Law, just as O'Hara had armed himself with a knowledge of Cantonese.

Sergeant O'Hara paced to and fro, muttering under his breath.

"Any chance of picking up an eye-witness?" Officer Burke queried.

O'Hara shook his head. "Even if there was one, he'd be scared to testify against a strong-arm guy like Lee Dok. Well, all we can do is turn that yellow so-and-so loose and hope for better luck next time."

"You think there'll be a next time?" Burke asked.

"There will, if I know my Chinatown!" was the grim reply.

THE accuracy of Sergeant O'Hara's predictions did not remain long in doubt, for just two days later an early riser in Long Sword Alley discovered the body of one Gow Yan, with the deadly coil of a Shanghai necklace buried deep in his neck, and his pockets picked clean as a coolie's rice-bowl.

Chinatown had accepted the murder of Mong Wei the gambler with passive indifference, but was roused to boiling indignation now, for Gow Yan had been collector-in-chief of the sacred funds for the China War Chest.

"It's the same killer who knocked off Mong Wei," O'Hara declared. "There's the same twist to the knotted wedges of the necklace."

House by house, street by street, Sergeant O'Hara retraced Gow Yan's route on his last round of collections. The trail led along Mulberry Lane, Orange Street, Pagoda Street, Half Moon Street—and thence into Lantern Court.

When O'Hara reached No. 11 Lantern Court in the course of his search, Kai Fang showed him the written receipt Gow Yan had given him on the fatal night. The blind Teller of Fortunes was a liberal contributor to the War Chest.

But O'Hara found that Gow Yan's trail ended abruptly in Lantern Court. The apothecary who lived in No. 17 had apparently been the last man to see Gow Yan alive, for not a single person living in Long Sword Alley or Paradise Court would admit having seen the War Chest collector on the night of the murder.

So O'Hara made a second checkup of the Lantern Court houses, and this time he struck oil. Kai Fang the blind man casually remembered that Gow Yan had said he was calling on Lee Dok, who had promised him a large contribution.

*That's the break!* O'Hara exulted to himself. Lee Dok lived in Long Sword Alley, and his name was not on the War Chest list. He had lured the collector by a false promise of money. . . .

So Lee Dok found himself face to face with another grilling by Sergeant O'Hara. But the tongster's cool arrogance remained unruffled all through that bitter session.

Kai Fang was a fork-tongued liar, Lee Dok declared venomously. He had never made a promise of money to Gow Yan, he had not seen the War Chest collector on the night of the murder; indeed, he had not been anywhere near Long Sword Alley during the hours in question. Lee Dok swore he had been out late that night, playing *pi gow* with some friends.

"Friends!" O'Hara scoffed. "Brothers of the Tsin Tien Tong! They'll swear to anything you say. . . . All right, Burke, put him in No. 4. If there's no other way, I'll sweat the truth out of him."

What took place between Lee Dok the tongster and Sergeant O'Hara behind the soundproofed walls and locked door of the dreaded "No. 4" remains unrecorded on the police blotter, but when O'Hara came out again, several hours later, he did not have the hoped-for confession.

"Damn it, Burke, I'll have to turn that Chink loose again!" O'Hara growled. "His forty-eight hours are up, and I haven't enough on him to file charges that'd stand up before a jury."

SO LEE DOK paused on the brownstone steps of the precinct station to draw a long, deep breath of free air. "That red-hair Sah-jin—*wang pu tau!*" he muttered, and spat twice over his left shoulder to make the curse doubly effective. Then the scowling tongster strode off toward his customary haunts.

Through Orange Street he went, and along Mulberry Lane, like a hungry tiger on the prowl. He dropped in at a cellar dive called the Green Peacock for a stiff jolt of pale white Chinese whiskey, gulping down the fiery liquid like a man who has urgent business ahead.

Lee Dok left the Green Peacock by a rear door, and with a sharp glance behind him at frequent intervals, made his way to No. 11 Lantern Court, whose windows were as dark and blank as the eyes of its blind master.

Having quietly tried the door, and found it locked, Lee Dok rapped briskly, then flattened his ear against the panels. No sound came from within, nor was there any response to a second and louder tattoo.

"No doubt he is taking his evening rice at Long Jon's," the tongster muttered, and proceeded to the tea house. He entered the public room, checked its occupants with a



quick glance, and passed on through to the secluded booths at the rear.

Kai Fang was not on the lower floor, so Lee Dok took the staircase to the private eating-rooms above. In the upper hall he encountered Long Jon himself, hurrying along with a laden tray. Long Jon's eyes narrowed at sight of the grim-faced tongster. "What you want?" he demanded sharply.

"I want Kai Fang the blind man," Lee Dok said.

"Kai Fang not here," Long Jon replied, but there was a betraying flicker in his eyes and the tongster snarled, "You lie! Show me—and quick!"

Long Jon grunted as a blue-barreled revolver jammed most urgently against his comfortable paunch. He backed along to the third door and reached behind him to turn the knob.

"Inside!" Lee Dok hissed, forcing him across the threshold. The tongster kicked the door shut with his foot.

The blind Teller of Fortunes was taking rice with three friends: Mark Sin the fan-tan gambler, Wing Lung the silk merchant, and Kim Yao the goldsmith.

"Kai Fang!" Lee Dok challenged in a harsh voice, and there was a widening of eyes and a sudden scraping of chairs as the blind man's guests shrank back before the threatening blue steel. Only Kai Fang remained seated, calm and unperturbed, even in the face of Mark Sin's swift whisper, "It is Lee Dok—with pointed gun!"

Only Long Jon cried out in protest as the tongster made his cat-like advance, "For shame, Lee Dok! You would not harm a blind man?"

Lee Dok's answer was a deep-throated snarl and a rough shove that sent Long Jon flying against the wall. Lee Dok's smoldering eyes swept his prisoners.

"See nothing—hear nothing—live long time!" He spat out the old Chinatown warning for silence, then turned his somber gaze on Kai Fang, who remained seated before his antique silver plate piled high with steamed Canton duck, bamboo sprouts and water-chestnuts. Little wisps of fragrant steam rose from a jade bowl filled with hot rose wine.

"**N**OW, Kai Fang, we will talk—and with short words!" Lee Dok snapped. And swept into sudden fury by the blind man's mocking calm, he reached out and clutched the shimmering yellow robe near the throat.

"You snake-tongued trickster!" he shouted. "Why you tell lies about me to the Blue Coat Devils?"

"I spoke only truth," Kai Fang answered in a steady voice. "Why should I lie, Lee Dok? There has never been quarreling between thee and me."

"But you lied!" the tongster hurled back furiously. "And now, by Tao, I will make you speak truth; and your friends shall bear witness!"

With a swift motion Lee Dok reversed the spiked "devil-ring" he always wore on his middle finger. His arm shot out and snatched the blind man's hand in a grip like an iron vise.

Kai Fang's body jerked and stiffened under the first cruel pressure of the metal spikes, but he would not permit himself to cry out. So Lee Dok slowly increased the relentless squeezing, his face a rigid mask of cruelty.

"Confess!" Lee Dok commanded, hissing with rage. "Confess the lie before I grind flesh from bone!"

The blind man writhed and twisted in futile efforts to free his tortured hand. Teeth clenched, lines of agony furrowed his contorted face; but Kai Fang still refused to yield assent.

"By Tao's Beard, you shall speak!" Lee Dok screamed, his voice shrill with a sadistic frenzy.

Beads of sweat dotted Kai Fang's forehead as the

tongster tightened his pitiless grip; the breath caught in his throat as the iron-pronged ring bit deeper into lacerated flesh. The slow crunching of bone against bone came like a sickening whisper.

"You lied!" Lee Dok thundered, eyes glaring. "Say it!"

A slow shudder rang through Kai Fang's body. Little drops of blood began to pattern the glossy rice-straw matting with crimson asterisks.

"No!" Kai Fang gasped defiantly. "I—speak—truth!" Then his eyeballs rolled upwards and he pitched forward in a limp heap.

"*Ai-yeel!*" Long Jon shrieked. "You have killed him! Help! Help!"

With a last venomous glance at the prostrate man, Lee Dok turned and fled.

### III

**L**IKE the rustle of leaves in the night wind, the story of Lee Dok's cruel testing of the blind man spread through the crooked streets of Chinatown. And the whispered tale soon reached Sergeant O'Hara's ears.

"I hear Lee Dok went out and beat up Kai Fang over that Gow Yan business," O'Hara told Burke. "I'm going around to Lantern Court for a look-see."

In response to O'Hara's knock at the dark door of No. 11, a little slot slid open and Kai Fang's silky voice inquired "Yiss?"

"It's O'Hara!" the Sergeant said. "Open up."

"*Ala wah, Sah-jin!*" The door swung open and Kai Fang made a polite bow. "My unworthy house is honored by your gracious presence. One moment, while I make light for you."

The blind man pushed back the old-fashioned sliding doors of the front room and clicked on the lights. It was a striking room which stood revealed—a study in black. The walls were paneled with a dark wood polished to satin lustre. The single chair was of carved ebony, ornate and imposing as a black throne. Before it stood a small ebony table, not more than a foot high. Paneled screens of black silk hid the windows.

Only two touches of color broke the sombre hues: the bone-white Tiles of Destiny, spread out on the little ebony table, and the gleaming bronze of a life-size Chinese mask high on the center wall.

"You've made some changes since I was last here," O'Hara remarked, looking around with interest. "All this paneling, and that mask—"

"It is the mask of Lu Tung-pin, one of the Eight Immortals," Kai Fang replied. "I have taken him for my prayer-god. He bring me good luck."

"Well, he didn't give you much help against Lee Dok, from what I hear," O'Hara said dryly. "I see you have your hand wrapped up. Let's have a look at it."

"It is nothing, Sah-jin, nothing," Kai Fang replied hastily, dropping his wide yellow sleeves.

"Let's not beat around the bush," O'Hara went on. "I know what happened over at Long Jon's place. Lee Dok can't pull off that kind of stuff and get away with it. Let's see that hand of yours."

O'Hara gave a low whistle as he examined the lacerations. "So he used a spiked ring on you, eh? The yellow rat! I wish I'd been there. Well, we'll take Mr. Lee Dok out of circulation for a while."

"No, Sah-jin," Kai Fang protested. "I seek no vengeance on Lee Dok. I will burn red paper prayers for his enlightenment to the ways of peace."

"Thirty days in jail would be more to the point," O'Hara growled, but the blind man remained adamant in his refusal to press charges against the tongster.



"At the appointed hour the deeds of Lee Dok will be weighed in the Scales of Yan Tan," Kai Fang said solemnly. "Who am I to hasten the work of the Celestial Ones? . . . Sah-jin, how you like if I give you a reading of the Tiles of Destiny—a full reading, with twenty-nine tiles?"

"Some other time," O'Hara laughed. "I'd be more interested if those magic tiles would come through with a line on the necklace killer."

Kai Fang shook his head gently. "Ten thousand regrets, Sah-jin, but the Tiles of Destiny speak only of things which are to come."

"YOU missed a bet, Sergeant," Officer Burke said when O'Hara told him about the visit to No. 11. "Maybe the Tiles of Destiny could tell us when the *next* necklace job is due."

"You know, Burke," O'Hara said slowly, "I've been thinking along that angle, and I have a hunch. This killer aims at cash hauls, and a bigger one every time. First it was Mong Wei with his fan-tan winnings. Then Gow Yan with the War Chest money. What'd be the next logical step up—for cash?"

"The Cinatown Bank?" Burke hazarded.

"No, that'd be too big a job for a solo worker to tackle. But think this over: in a few days there'll be a drawing for the Happy Word Lottery. If you were the necklace killer, wouldn't you make a try for the winner of the grand prize?"

"You've got something there!" Burke exclaimed. "If we could figure out a way to head him off this time—"

"Yeah, that's a catch," O'Hara admitted. "They won't invite us to the drawings, that's a cinch. And if my hunch is okay, the winner'll be a dead goose before we have a chance to find out his name."

. . . Sergeant O'Hara could not have made a more accurate prediction if he had used Kai Fang's famous Tiles of Destiny.

The drawings for the Happy Word Lottery took place secretly in in the tong house of the Tsin Tiens, and Sam Hoy, an obscure laundryman, held the winning ticket.

But Sergeant O'Hara had not let his hunch lie altogether fallow. A word whispered into the proper ears had brought the powerful Council of the Five Tongs into secret session to hear the red-hair Sah-jin's personal warning of danger for the Happy Word winner. As a result, the Council appointed four tongsters to serve as an armed bodyguard, in order that Sam Hoy's night of nights might not terminate with the deadly gift of a Shanghai necklace.

So, when Sam Hoy departed with his teakwood casket, crammed to bursting with precious Rice Face cash, the four tongsters escorted the Son of Fortune to his own door, where the leader pressed a pistol into his hands as an added precaution. If danger threatened during the night, Sam Hoy had only to fire the pistol to bring the whole street to his rescue.

Nevertheless, in the morning Sam Hoy was found dead—his body sprawled on the floor beside the looted money-chest, the black coil of a Shanghai necklace claspings his neck.

It was Officer Burke who telephoned the news to Sergeant O'Hara. "You sure called the turn," he said. "The lottery money's gone, but it looks like the Chink put up a scrap. And this time we get a break. Sam Hoy managed to scribble something on the corner of a screen before he passed out. . . . No, I can't read it, Sergeant. It's Chinese writing."

O'Hara arrived at Sam Hoy's shop in record time. He found Squad Car 7 drawn up at the curb, and as he elbowed his way through the slant-eyed crowd ringed

about the door he heard Officer Burke's voice booming angrily within.

Burke's face was red with rage, his tongue tripping over itself with sputtering anger as he halted his argument with the two squad car men and swung around to O'Hara.

"Look, Sergeant—I leave these two boneheads on guard here for five minutes while I telephone the precinct. And what happens? When I come back I find that Sam Hoy's writing has been pinched off the screen!"

"Prove that!" came the angry rebuttal of the squad car men. "It must've been swiped before we got here. There was half a dozen Chinks runnin' in and out—"

"Baloney!" Burke snarled. "I only went to the door to blow my whistle, then I come right back inside. You guys are just tryin' to pass the buck."

"Oh, shut up, all of you!" O'Hara commanded. "Show me the screen."

The screen lay on the floor, not six inches from Sam Hoy's outstretched hand. It had three folds, with panels of painted rice-paper, and there was a jagged circle ripped from the lower part of one of the panels.

"That's where the writing was," Burke declared. "The piece of chalk is still in Sam Hoy's fingers."

Sergeant O'Hara looked at the crumpled body on the floor, with the same familiar twist to the wedges of the Shanghai necklace. Then he glared at the yawning hole in the painted screen, where Sam Hoy had scrawled a priceless message.

"Burke, could you draw a copy of that writing from memory?"

Officer Burke made a helpless gesture. "I'm sorry, Sergeant, but that Chinese stuff is Greek to me—just a mess of criss-cross lines . . . How about pickin' up Lee Dok again?"

"Oh hell!" O'Hara said disgustedly. "What's the use?"

#### IV

LEE DOK spent a restless and uneasy day. In the first place, he had a curious feeling that his slant-eyed brethren were watching his every move with a sort of furtive hostility. In addition, he expected to feel the heavy hand of a Blue Coat Devil on his shoulder at any moment. But the hated Sah-jin did not make the expected move, and Lee Dok became prey to a mounting sense of tension that could only be soothed by repeated jolts of *samschu*.

It was dark when the surly tongster returned to his lodgings in Long Sword Alley, and as he approached the door he peered warily into the shadows. No Blue Coat Devils were lurking there, but he sucked in his breath with a sudden hiss as he flicked on the light in his own room.

There were visitors in that room—three of them—sitting in the darkness, awaiting his return with the patience of a trio of stone Buddhas. Not the expected red-hair Sah-jin and his Blue Coat Devils, but the venerable *tuchun* of the Five Tongs Council and two shaven-headed guards whose hands were buried in their wide sleeves.

"My poor house is honored," Lee Dok murmured, casting a swift glance of appraisal at these unexpected guests.

The grim-faced *tuchun* replied with a curt nod. "Lee Dok, I bring a message from the Supreme Council, which has met in secret session to pass judgment upon the evil deeds of the Necklace Devil. Lee Dok, it has been decreed that you shall steal no more shadows."

The tongster's head jerked up. "What mean you, *tuchun*? By Tao, I have stolen no man's shadow! Shall I be condemned unheard? Set me face to face with my accuser. I demand it."

"Wah!" the *tuchun* replied coldly. "It shall be as you



wish. When Mong Wei died, suspicion of your guilt was but a whisper; with Gow Yan's passing it became a pointed finger; but the murder of Sam Hoy was written in large letters for all men to read."

Swiftly the *tuchun* drew a piece of paper from his sleeve: a roughly torn fragment of rice-paper—the missing portion of Sam Hoy's screen. Swiftly his yellow fingers descended upon the fateful symbols written in its center.

"Can you deny your own name, Lee Dok?"

A look of desperation came into the tongster's eyes; beads of sweat oozed on his forehead. "I did not kill Sam Hoy!" he shrilled. "I swear it by the blood of a white rooster! This is but another lying trick put upon me by that blind devil, Kai Fang."

The *tuchun* spoke in a dry, toneless voice. "It is fortunate that one of your tong-brothers was able to keep this paper from falling into the hands of the Blue Coat Men. To save the honor of the Tsin Tien Tong from public stain, we have agreed to shield you from the Rice Face Law; but justice must be served, Lee Dok."

Whereupon the *tuchun* flung open the lid of a silver-bound casket which lay upon the table. Within nestled a neat coil of red silk rope and a small crystal bottle with a jade cork.

"You will take the death-box into the inner room," the merciless voice directed. "We will wait here until you complete your choice."

Lee Dok's face turned a sickly gray as he confronted the choice of "suicide rope" or "bitter tea" to which the Council had sentenced him. His head moved snakily, staring from one to the other in a vain search for mercy. But there was no pity in the *tuchun's* stony eyes; no hope of reprieve in the black steel muzzles he saw peeping now from the guard's wide sleeves.

With icy fingers Lee Dok touched the coil of suicide rope. A furtive glance marked the *tuchun* standing to his left, the armed guards stationed between him and the door. Then the tongster exploded into sudden action.

**S**NARLING like a cornered beast, he lashed out with the red rope as if it were a whip, slashing it across the faces of the two guards, who stumbled backward, momentarily blinded.

A split second was all Lee Dok needed to spring to the window and throw up the sash. The *tuchun* tried to intercept him, but Lee Dok shook him off with a blow to the jaw just as a shot ripped across the room. The *tuchun* gasped and sank slowly to his knees, hands pressed over his ribs.

Lee Dok scrambled out over the sill and made his escape across the back roofs despite the winging bullets of a pursuing guard. The other guard, grief-stricken at his unlucky marksmanship, had dropped to his knees beside the wounded *tuchun*. He was still there when Sergeant O'Hara and Officer Burke arrived on the scene, and it needed little urging to wring the whole story from him.

Meanwhile, Lee Dok had fled over the roofs of Long Sword Alley, made a running jump across a perilous gap between houses and disappeared among the eaves and chimney-pots of Paradise Court, leaving the baffled guard sputtering curses over the *click-click-click* of an emptied gun.

O'Hara lost no time in sending out a general alarm to the Chinatown Squad and the two patrol cars under his command. "Move fast," he ordered. "We've got to pick up Lee Dok before the tong-men get hold of him. And if you've got to shoot, aim for his legs. I want him brought in alive."

"What the idea, Sergeant?" Burke queried. "Why not let the highbinders finish the business?"

"Listen," O'Hara said, "Lee Dok isn't the necklace killer. That writing on Sam Hoy's screen was a frame-up. I've found out that Sam Hoy couldn't write anything but the numbers on his laundry tickets."

Swiftly the man-hunt got under way, complicated by the usual crop of false leads. Lee Dok had been seen running through Pagoda Street; Lee Dok had taken refuge in the Plum Blossom Joss House; Lee Dok had been seen here, there, and everywhere.

An uneasy thought began to worry Sergeant O'Hara. It was more than likely the tongster had a secret hideout prepared for just such an emergency. On the other hand, Lee Dok was a bold and headstrong man, and he held a flaming grudge against Kai Fang. Even in this hour of peril he might double back to Lantern Court to settle his account with the blind Teller of Fortunes.

**A**CTING on this hunch, O'Hara cut back to Lantern Court and pounded on the door of No. 11. There was no answer. The blind man might be at Long Jon's, or Mark Sin's fan-tan tables—or merely taking a stroll.

I'll stick around a few minutes, O'Hara decided, and stationed himself in a shadowy nook from which he could keep an eye on the openings to Long Sword Alley and to Half Moon Street.

Silence pressed down heavily on Lantern Court—a silence that seemed to grow of its own weight. Then a door closed somewhere in the darkness, softly, furtively. It could have been anywhere in the dark row from No. 1 to No. 17.

The same dead silence closed down again; but suddenly the darkness of the Court grew deeper, as if a curtain had fallen, and O'Hara straightened up alertly. The lone gas-lamp had just gone out of order—or been put out: for the sergeant had the impression of a fleeting figure melting back into the shadows.

Suspicion aroused, O'Hara moved obliquely across the court, eyes and ears straining against the wall of darkness. And quite suddenly he heard the faint whisper of slipped feet climbing a flight of stone stairs, with something that gave a soft, dragging thump at each step. Then came an abrupt grunt of satisfaction, and silence.

O'Hara pointed his flashlight and clicked the switch.

A most startling tableau stood framed by the sudden cone of light: a blue-robed Chinaman standing tiptoe on the top step, in the very act of casting a silky red rope over a high iron bar extending from the house wall: a bar which had once supported a swinging sign, but was now to serve as a gibbet, for the end of the rope was looped into a hangman's noose.

And strangest of all, the man who had been destined to swing from that gibbet was already dead! Lee Dok the tongster, limp and lifeless as a rag doll, lay sprawled out on the top step, with the twisted wedges of a Shanghai necklace under his left ear.

O'Hara whipped out his .38, covering the blue-robed figure. "Get your hands up!" he snapped. "Now turn around."

With a squeak of terror the yellow man spun around, and with the same motion launched himself in a flying leap for liberty. But O'Hara was too quick for him. He slammed the Chinaman back into the angle of the steps and gave him a clip with the gun butt that left him dazed and gasping.

"There—that'll hold you," O'Hara growled, snapping a pair of handcuffs on the Chinaman's wrist and Lee Dok's ankle. Then he turned his flash full on his prisoner's face.

O'Hara knew that furtive, slant-eyed face: Chen Shu, one of Chinatown's parasites, a hanger-on at fan-tan games, a dabbler in opium and crooked lotteries.



"So you're the necklace killer!" O'Hara grunted. "No, Sah-jin, no!" Chen Shu stammered frantically. "I kill nobody! I swear it by Tao! It is Kai Fang the fortune teller who kill Lee Dok with the Shanghai necklace! It is Kai Fang who tell me to bring his body here and hang him up so that it look like he kill himself."

"KAI FANG killed Lee Dok?" O'Hara blurted in amazement. "What kind of a pipe dream are you tryin' to sell me? Why, Kai Fang was the first victim!"

"Not so, Sah-jin," Chen Shu put in quickly. "Kai Fang only play a trick on you. That night I keep watch for you in Half Moon Street. When I hear your steps, I tell Kai Fang, and he put himself in your path. He cry out, and tear his robe, and spill the Tiles of Destiny on the ground, so you will hunt and find the Shanghai necklace."

O'Hara's face took on a look of grim intentness, for there was the ring of truth in Chen Shu's desperate earnestness. "But look here, Chen Shu, how can a blind man use the Shanghai necklace? You say he killed Lee Dok. All right, how'd he do it? How'd he get the rope around Lee Dok's neck?"

"That is Kai Fang's secret, Sah-jin. Mong Wei, Gow Yan, Sam Hoy, Lee Dok—he kill them all in the same way. He take them into his Room of Fortune. Then he shut the door tight. When the door opens again, it is another one dead with the Shanghai necklace."

O'Hara stared at him. "Begin at the beginning."

"Sah-jin, for long time I work secretly for Kai Fang. I bring him news every day, so he can make wise talk with his Tiles of Destiny. Kai Fang, he live like Number One mandarin, till feasting and gaming use up all his *cash*. Then he make the necklace scheme to get more money, and he need my help. *Wah!* Kai Fang plan everything."

"First he send me to watch the fan-tan games until there is a large winner. *Hoya!* It is Mong Wei. I follow him on street and tell him that Kai Fang has a Number One message from the Tiles of Destiny. *Wah!* Mong Wei go quick to Lantern Court—and Mong Wei die!"

"It is the same with the others, Sah-jin. But I do not kill! I do not even see the killing. All I do is carry the dead ones away from the house, so no one know where they have been kill."

"But what about Lee Dok?" O'Hara questioned. "Why did Kai Fang try to throw all the blame on him?"

"Sah-jin, when I tell Kai Fang how Lee Dok have trouble with Mong Wei, he say '*Wah!* They will think Lee Dok killed him. Already Lee Dok has a black name; we will make it blacker.' So Kai Fang tell you his lie about Gow Yan, and Kai Fang tell me to write Lee Dok's name on Sam Hoy's screen, and leave the chalk in Sam Hoy's fingers."

"Well, he almost got away with it," O'Hara said. "But I'll bet he was shaking in his shoes when he heard that Lee Dok had escaped from the tong *tuchun*."

"Sah-jin, the blind man fears nobody. Tonight I warn him that Lee Dok will try to kill him. He only smile and say 'Leave my front door unbolted, Chen Shu. I will await our angry guest in the Room of Fortune'."

Chen Shu made an eloquent gesture toward the tongster's sprawled body. "You see how Lee Dok is dead." Then he lowered his voice to a furtive whisper. "Sah-jin, I think Kai Fang is not blind!"

## V

SERGEANT O'HARA raised his silver whistle and blew until the siren of a prowling car answered from Half Moon Street. A few moments later Officers Driscoll and Faraday arrived on the run.

"Lee Dok—dead!" Driscoll exclaimed. "And Chen Shu! Don't tell me that Chen Shu is the—"

"No, no," O'Hara interrupted. "I haven't got time to explain now. Take these two over to the station and stand by for orders. Get hold of Burke and send him over here right away; tell him I've got a hurry-up job in Number 11."

O'Hara strode briskly across the court and rapped on Kai Fang's door, adding a peremptory kick against the lower panels. In a moment the wired grating slid open and the familiar silky voice said, "Yiss?"

"O'Hara!" the sergeant announced briefly.

O'Hara balanced his weight evenly on both feet, his body thrust forward a little. He flexed his fingers into fists, relaxed them, then counted his heartbeats as he waited for an answer from inside.

"*Hola, Sah-jin.*" The door swung wide and O'Hara entered, his hand resting on his gun as he followed Kai Fang to the Room of Fortune.

"You come on business matter, Sah-jin?" Kai Fang inquired politely.

"Yeah, you could call it that," O'Hara replied.

Kai Fang sank down cross-legged before the little ebony table where the Tiles of Destiny were spread out in a rough star pattern. "When you knock on the door, Sah-jin, I am at work—on a special reading for my friend Kim Yao the goldsmith. If you permit, Sah-jin, I finish it before we talk. You will seat yourself, please?"

"Okay," O'Hara said, and sat down in the ornate black chair, with his gun hand resting across his knee. "There's no hurry, Kai Fang; just a trifling matter of murder."

"Murder!" Kai Fang echoed. "Has the necklace killer struck again, Sah-jin?"

"He has," O'Hara answered dryly, "but for the last time. This trip we've got the goods on him. Kai Fang, you're under arrest for murder."

The blind man stiffened noticeably at the harsh challenge, but his face remained a smooth, unruffled mask. And O'Hara felt suddenly uneasy before the unwinking stare of those blank eyes—a sort of creeping uneasiness that made him want to look back over his shoulder.

Then Kai Fang smiled. "You make joke with me, Sah-jin?"

"You'll find it's no joke," O'Hara said. "We know all about these necklace murders, from Mong Wei right on through to Lee Dok. Chen Shu is in our hands, and he's confessed everything."

"Chen Shu?" The blind man repeated the name softly, shaking his head. "I do not even know his name, Sah-jin. *Tsai!* Am I not a blind man? Let this Chen Shu offer proof of his dragon-tale."

"Proof may be easier than you think," O'Hara said quietly. He leaned forward, staring intently into the blind man's face, then suddenly raised his arm and drove two forked fingers straight at Kai Fang's eyes.

But the blank, unswerving stare never flinched or faltered. Not the slightest flicker disturbed their dead blackness, even when O'Hara repeated the maneuver, more deliberately this time, until his fingertips all but touched the wide-open, unshrinking pupils.

O'Hara stared, amazed and utterly disconcerted at finding the whole cornerstone of his case crumbling away to sand. Kai Fang's blindness was no fraud; it was indisputable fact. Doubts and uncertainty crowded his mind; he felt how absurd it was to accuse a blind man of those murderous assaults which had thrown all Chinatown into a furore.

For the four victims, only Sam Hoy the laundryman could be counted as easy prey. There had been Mong Wei, sturdy and broad-shouldered; Gow Yan, an experi-



enced tong-fighter; and Lee Dok, who could have throttled this blind man with one hand.

No, Kai Fang could not have prevailed by force. But what about guile—treachery? O'Hara thought of hypnotism. No, Kai Fang's eyes were dead. How about a drug—drugged wine, drugged tobacco? Again no. Lee Dok, for instance, would not have accepted the slightest token of hospitality from his sworn enemy.

"SAH-JIN," Kai Fang's hands were moving in a bland gesture—"I shall be most happy to go with you to the Blue Coat *yamen*, so that I may hear the strange tale of this Chen Shu with my own ears. It is written that truth is sturdy as an oak tree, while lies are but weeds to be plucked up with one hand. No doubt the Rice Face Law has power to punish those who bring false charges?"

The silky voice of Kai Fang was calm and unhurried, but as he spoke one hand dropped quietly from sight. The furtive movement, however, did not escape the sharp-eyed O'Hara.

"Keep your hands above the table!" he snapped, leaning forward alertly.

"Yiss, Sah-jin," Kai Fang replied meekly, and smiled, for he had already jerked a small wire loop fastened between the floor-boards. Something inside the opposite wall gave a faint metallic click—and a hinged section of paneling directly behind O'Hara's chair came swooping down like a trip-hammer, its fall accelerated by the heavy metal mask of Lu Tung-pin fastened to its upper portion.

Taken completely by surprise, O'Hara escaped the full force of the blow only because of that slight forward movement as he challenged Kai Fang. Measured to the split inch, the metal mask was designed to crash on the head of any one seated in the black chair.

As it was, the glancing blow was powerful enough to send O'Hara tumbling out of the chair in a half-somersault. Dazed and gasping, he sprawled face down over the low table, his gun slithering across the floor.

"Hoyal" Kai Fang shrilled in triumph as he plucked

the thin black coil of a Shanghai necklace from his sleeve and flung himself upon the prostrate officer, expert fingers slipping the noose into place.

His head spinning from the treacherous blow, but fully conscious of the terrible danger which threatened him, O'Hara made a desperate effort to shake off the dazed numbness which seemed to paralyze his muscles. Clawing blindly, he managed to thrust one hand up between his throat and the tightening noose.

The wire-thin rope cut deep into his fingers as Kai Fang grimly twisted and twisted at the wooden wedges; but the trapped hand acted as a partial buffer and the pain helped to revive his ebbing strength. With sudden spasmodic fury he managed to fling himself over on his back, but Kai Fang still clung like a leech, even when the sergeant's free hand dug into his throat.

The Shanghai necklace twisted tighter—tighter—despite O'Hara's outward pressure with his prisoned hand. He felt as if he were trying to suck in his breath through a pin-hole; a roaring and clashing filled his ears; but his own fingers did not relax their grip on the blind man's throat. In silence broken only by gasping breaths they fought out the pitiless duel, O'Hara matching the strength of his bare hand against the deadly coil of a Shanghai necklace.

And in the end it was the yellow man who cracked. With a sudden choking "*kak-kak-kak*" Kai Fang went limp and rolled sideways. O'Hara staggered to his feet, tearing the black coil from his neck, gulping in deep drafts of air to ease his tortured lungs.

He had not yet fully recovered from his ordeal when Officer Burke arrived, to listen wide-eyed as O'Hara exhibited the simple mechanism of the panel-trap by which Kai Fang's victims were made ready for the deadly Shanghai necklace.

"Pretty smart gadget, eh?" O'Hara said, still wheezing. "Well, that's Chinatown for you. Anywhere else in the world a blind man is just a blind man; but down here he's just as likely to be a one-man murder syndicate."

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# The Hardcase Cat

A hilarious report from the West, proving that there's no moderation in cats, and also that no range is big enough to swing them in

By George Michener

Author of "No Spurs, No Gun," "As We Grow Older"

MY PARTNER, Calgary Jack, and I don't know whether Cecil gave Goliath a bath or not. It's a problem. Calgary and I don't know what to think. It's got us worried.

Calgary says I ought to be the one to set down the facts of the case because if he told it no one would believe him. I think he is right. Here are the simple facts:

Calgary Jack and I are cow nurses by trade and we batch in a shack south of Phiney Bench. Cecil was a very deceitful young dude that came out here to Wyoming to get his health back. Goliath was a cat. He turned out to be lots of cat.

Scrubbing a cat—even a common, ordinary weakling house cat—is a job. Calgary and I know! Calgary's pretty much of a man on account of good whiskey and bad horses, and I'm no peppermint myself. Personally, though, we ain't scrubbing a cat again.

I got the cat from my sister Nettie, that lives up on English Flat, to keep the rats down. He seemed to be a pleasant cat—fair sized, long-barreled, and kind of yellowish. Nettie said he'd be good for rats because he was well raised and ambitious.

Calgary was over on the Little Skookum hunting strays when I got home so I turned the cat loose to see how ambitious he was. He went under the shack and caught a skunk. That was bad. I'd thought to surprise Calgary with some rats but not a skunk.

I got the cat and some soap and water in a wash-boiler. I popped him in, but he popped out again. He was very nimble.

Calgary came into the shack and said the grass was beginning to show green. The cat ran up him and got in his hair. Calgary pulled him off and the cat bit his thumb. Then he ran up the stove-pipe and fell in the boiler by himself. I put the lid on.

"What are they?" said Calgary.

"It's a cat," I said. "I'm washing it."

"Right!" said Calgary. "I never gave the lie to a partner yet."

We let the cat wash himself a while and then drug him out slow, scrubbing from the tail up. He wasn't so lively now. We wrapped him in a towel by the stove, and Calgary sucked his thumb and studied him.

"Where'd he come from?" he said.

"I got him from Nettie on account of rats," I said.

"What's the matter with rats?"

"I don't like 'em," I said.



Calgary hove the boot at the crittur just as Cecil came in



"And I don't like cats."

I was afraid of that. Calgary's obstinate.

"Jim," he said, "I'm a patient man, but there's one thing I won't stand—that's a ranchful of cats."

"Cats in moderation are all right," I said.

"Jim, there's no moderation to cats. Look at the barnful Sam Tillman has, and old man Twilliger, and the Circle-Cross!"

"This one's a buck," I said.

Calgary shook his head very firm. "Jim—no cats!"

The scrubbing didn't do the cat so much good as I had hoped. I came around to Calgary's way of thinking. "How'll we get rid of him?" I said. "It's too far to take him back to Nettie."

"Drive over to Gleason's for the mail and drop him off."

"No," I said. "Nettie set a heap of store by that cat. We've got to see he gets a good home."

"Right!" said Calgary. "I'm a reasonable man. We'll take the long way around to Gleason's tomorrow, and I'll do the talking."

SAM TILLMAN'S was the first place we stopped with the buckboard. Calgary did the talking until he mentioned cats. Then Sam got positive.

"Calgary," he said, "I got enough cats. I got too many cats and more cats coming. You can't sell me your cat and you can't give him to me. So put him back in that sack."

"Right!" said Calgary, and he put the cat back.

"And so help me," said Sam, "if I spot that animal of yours on the place after you're gone, I'll load up every cat I got and haul 'em over to your diggings and dump 'em. Does that settle any lingering hopes you might have had?"

"It does," said Calgary.

After Tillman's, Calgary said we would stop at Whiskey Bill's. Whiskey's disposition is bad so I was glad when we found he wasn't home. Calgary set the sack down and went in and said he was going to wait. We were arguing the matter when Whiskey opened the door.

Whiskey had a gunny sack over his shoulder and a rifle in his hand. He left the sack outside and came in twiddling his rifle. From the looks of his clothes Whiskey'd been traveling through barb-wire and his disposition was very bad.

I edged in behind him toward the door.

Calgary stood his ground. "Whiskey," he said, "I got something I want to give you—free, gratis."

"Hydrophoby?" said Whiskey.

"No," said Calgary. "It's a cat—a real, high-class—"

"I got a cat," said Whiskey.

"Yes, but not like this one. This is the most—"

"I got her this morning," said Whiskey. "It's that old she lion that's been worrying Tillman. I killed her first shot."

"Whiskey," said Calgary, "you're a lunk-head. This is not a mountain lion and it's not dead. It's a house cat. It's—"

"I ain't got a house," said Whiskey. "This here is a one-man shack and it's getting crowded." Then he got a good grip on the rifle, gave us the Injun-eye, and I shouldered the sack and followed Calgary down the trail.

That took the heart out of Calgary. Gleason didn't have any trouble at all squelching him.

Calgary held up the sack. "Do you want a cat?" he said.

"No," said Gleason. "But if you're collecting them, just go out to the barn and help yourself. There's a bale of sacks in the corner."

"Jim," said Calgary, "get the mail and we'll go home."

Gleason said that if we'd wait a minute he had a dude,

name of Cecil, that was looking for a lift up to Gus Peter's big hunting lodge on Piney Bench.

"Gus is back east and the Lodge's locked up," I said.

"Cecil is Gus' nephew," said Gleason, "and he's got the key to the Lodge. He's trifling in health and wants to put in six or seven months alone at the Lodge just a-communing with nature. Bill Turner took his trunks and a load of grub up to the Lodge yesterday. Cecil himself didn't get in till today."

THE Lodge is only seven miles from our place, so we said we would take him. Cecil wasn't more'n pint size with straw hair and blue eyes as innocent and trusting as a newborn calf's.

Calgary perked up amazingly. "So you're from New York, are you?" he said as soon as we pulled out of Gleason's.

"Yes," said Cecil, and he was holding hard to the buckboard seat. "This is the first I was ever west of Pittsburgh. It seems awful wild."

Calgary licked his muttons. "It is—terrible wild! Do you like cats?"

"No," said Cecil. "At least not ordinary cats. My aunt had a cat, though—a big one. He wasn't so bad."

"Ah," said Calgary. "You'd like a big cat, would you? One as big as your aunt's?"

"I don't know," said Cecil. "I never saw another cat that big. Aunt Clarice's cat weighed fifteen pounds."

Cecil was mostly occupied with the scenery. Past old man Twilliger's place he caught sight of a coyote whisking behind a rock. "Hey! What's that?" he cried.

"That," said Calgary, very thoughtful, "was a rock squirrel."

"I've seen squirrels in the east," said Cecil.

"Yes," said Calgary, "but she's rough and tough out here. Things grow monstrous big in some places—especially up on English Flat. That's where that one must've come from."

"Oh," said Cecil.

"It's on account of the air," explained Calgary. "It's so bracing up there they have to grow big or they'd keel over just from the pure joy of living."

Calgary's got the medicine tongue and unnatural history is one of his hobbies. The more he told about the unpredicated size of the flora and fauna of English Flat, the rounder and thirstier were Cecil's eyes. He seemed very trusting.

We got to the Lodge on Piney Bench near dark and unloaded Cecil and his two suitcases from the buckboard. Then Calgary came to the point.

"Cecil," he said, "I've been studying. You're going to get powerful lonely all alone up here. What you need is a little company. Here, what do you think this is?"

Cecil looked at the sack Calgary was holding up. "I think it's a cat, Mr. Calgary. He was digging his claws into my leg all the way up here, so I think it's a cat."

"Cecil," said Calgary, "I'm a truthful man. It is a cat. It's more than a cat. It's—"

Cecil interrupted him. "I'm sorry, Mr. Calgary, but I can't stand cats. They get on my nerves."

Calgary leaned out of the buckboard, confidential. "Cecil, you can stand this one," he said. "It's an English Flat cat!"

"What?"

Calgary nodded. "It's a fact, Cecil, and very rare. A genuine English Flat house cat—a young one. His name's Goliath. By the time he gets his growth, your Aunt Clarice's cat won't look like more'n a kitten. Here—take him."

Calgary put the sack in his hands before Cecil could back off.



"Now wait!" hollered Cecil.

"Don't mention it," said Calgary. "It's a pleasure."

Cecil maybe hollered something else, but we couldn't hear for going down the trail so fast.

Calgary slowed up at the bottom of Piney Bench and said he had remorse.

"Yes," I said, "and so do I. That was a good cat."

"I was referring to Cecil," said Calgary. "He was such an innocent, trusting little pilgrim, and then we had to put a cat off on him."

"And especially after he told us cats get on his nerves."

"And him in delicate health besides."

"Calgary," I said, "this is getting serious. There's no telling what effect that cat will have on Cecil. It's liable to unbalance him."

Calgary got more remorseful than ever. "Jim, we ought to be horse-whipped. I'm plumb ashamed of ourselves."

"Calgary," I said, "there's only one thing to do. We'll go back and get the cat."

Calgary frosted over quick. "We will not!" he said. "I'm a broad-minded man, but from now on I don't want to hear nothing more about cats."

**T**WO weeks later Calgary brought up the subject himself. He asked me how old Goliath was.

"Goliath?" I said.

"Yes. Goliath—the cat we gave Cecil. How old was he?"

"A little better than a yearling," I told him.

"Got his growth yet?"

"Long ago," I said. "Why?"

"Nothing—only he's still growing. I met Cecil sitting on a rock below Piney Bench. He said Goliath put on five pounds in the last two weeks."

"He was trying to string you," I said.

"Him? Trying to string a natural-born liar like *me*?"

It didn't sound likely at that.

Calgary shook his head. "Jim," he said, "you know better than that. So help me, if ever I saw anyone sitting on a rock, sad and reproachful and thinking he was telling the truth, it was Cecil!"

"Thinking he was telling the truth?" I said.

We looked at each other. Both had the same idea.

"What was it you said about that cat being liable to unbalance him?" Calgary asked gentle.

That was bad.

"It's just his imagination and being alone with it and the cat up there," I said. "That and those tall stories you told him. He'll get over it pretty quick."

Calgary was gloomy. "Maybe," he said. "I hope so."

Calgary wasn't cheerful like he used to be. Hot weather set in and he looked peaked and worried. Pretty soon he began to cut down on his grub.

"Calgary, what's the matter?" I said.

"Nothing," he said.

"There is, too!" I said. "I'm your partner. What is it?"

Calgary nibbled his fingers. "All right," he said. "It's Cecil and that blasted cat! I've been meeting him nearly every day now when I'm riding stock. He's haunting me."

I figured that out. "You mean it's Cecil is haunting you?" I said.

"No!" said Calgary. "They both are, Cecil and the cat. But it's just Cecil I've been meeting. He takes a longer walk every day. He says when he gets healthy enough to walk this far he's going to bring the cat back."

"How is the cat?" I said.

"According to Cecil he's growing by leaps and bounds. It's a revelation. I never in my life heard anything like the way that cat's growing!"

Calgary kind of broke down then. "Jim," he said, "I listen to him and I look into those big, innocent blue eyes

of his, and I don't know what to believe—I swear I don't!"

"Calgary," I said, "your nerves are like fiddle-sticks. What you need is a good drunk."

"I know it," he said, "but I don't durst. I'd have the horrors."

The cat was getting problematic. I put my mind to it.

"Calgary," I said, "Cecil is beginning to size up to me like a very deceiving pilgrim. You're a high-strung man, and he's found it out. He's working on you. Tomorrow we'll both have a little talk with him."

**W**E FOUND Cecil sitting on a rock just this side of the Dry Gulch drift fence. He appeared sad but very healthy. I got down to brass tacks.

"Morning, Cecil," I said. "How's the cat?"

"Morning, gentlemen," said Cecil. "The cat is fine. He don't seem to be growing as fast as he was, though."

I looked at Cecil close and saw what Calgary had meant—if ever there was a natural-born truth teller, it was Cecil. My heart went out to him.

"Cecil," I said, very sympathetic, "you've been sicker than any of us thought. Now you're getting better and the cat ain't growing so fast. That's right and proper. Pretty soon you'll be all well again and the cat won't look no bigger to you than your Aunt Clarice's cat."

"I hope so," sighed Cecil. "I really do. He's getting expensive. Ten cans of milk hardly whets his appetite anymore."

"Ten?" I said.

"Yes," said Cecil. "Pint cans. I don't know where he puts it all."

I felt bad because I'd been roped in like Calgary and I felt good because Cecil had overplayed his hand. He might have had us worried about a cat that wouldn't stop growing, but when he gave facts and figures like ten pints of milk, then he didn't leave anything to the imagination and his game was up. I looked at Calgary, and he had the same idea. I gave him the wink, and he took hold.

"Cecil," he said, "you're sure about this, are you? Ten cans?"

"I am," said Cecil, and he looked straight at us with those innocent, trusting, deceiving blue eyes of his. "Ten cans, Mr. Calgary, as fast as I can open them."

"Then," said Calgary, "you can be sure of one thing, Cecil, you've got a genuine English Flat cat. He drinks so much on account of his pores."

"His pores?" said Cecil.

"Yes," said Calgary. "They're big. All English Flat cats got that handicap. It lets the milk evaporate faster'n they can drink it."

"But this milk is already evaporated," said Cecil. "It says so on the can."

Cecil hadn't cracked a smile. His eyes were as pure and hungry for information as a three-year-old's. And down inside him he was laughing fit to kill. Calgary was beat at his own game, and he knew it. We wished Cecil a polite goodmorning, and left.

**C**ALGARY said he'd feel better after that if no one reminded him of pilgrims with deceitful eyes or cats—particularly English Flat cats.

We were repairing rock-posts on the south line fence one afternoon in late autumn when Sam Tillman drove up and asked after our cat farm.

Personally, Calgary and I both jumped a little. Sam was lolling back in his buckboard and had a most peculiar grin.

"Cat farm?" I said. "What do you mean—cat farm?"

"Nothing," said Sam. "Just a slip of the tongue. Probably thinking of that visit you paid me last spring. How's tricks?"



"I'm getting a hunch they ain't so good," said Calgary. "What you doing so far off your reservation?"

"Visiting," said Sam. "Just social calls. I stopped at Gleason's and picked up a few knick-knacks and then decided to make the circle and spend the night with Lem Taser."

"Didn't happen to visit at our she-bang, did you?"

"Why, yes," said Sam, very smooth. "Yes, come to think of it, I believe I did. But you gents weren't home, so I dropped a few calling cards and came on. And if you're looking at the gunny-sacks I got in the back end there—there's nothing in 'em."

"What kind of knick-knacks did you pick up at Gleason's?"

Sam waved his hand. "Just knick-knacks. Gleason and Whiskey Bill both send their love. Whiskey says he was plumb grateful for that yellow cat you left him."

"Whiskey! Why, that black-whiskered old liar! He's got no cat of ours."

"No," said Sam, "I know he ain't. Your cat couldn't stand him more'n two days, then he pulled out for my place. I've had him ever since. I will say this, though, now I've got used to him, I've come to think a heap of that cat. He's a real ratter."

"Sam," I said, "Whiskey Bill was lying to you. We brought that cat all the way home with us that day—or pretty near home. He's no more than seven miles away right this minute."

"Maybe so," said Sam. "I'm not the one to be disputing your word. All I know is, that the cat that turned up at my place looked like your cat and Whiskey said it was your cat. Outside of that, though, there's a chance I've made a grave and unfortunate mistake."

Sam picked up the ribbons, and Calgary yelled at him to wait.

"Sorry, gents," said Sam, "but I got unusual and pressing business."

Calgary and I watched Sam go careening off down the trail. "Loco," said Calgary. "The poor critter is plumb loco. All them cats of his have made a ravening maniac out of him."

"Loco or not," I said, "I don't like that last remark of his about a grave and unfortunate mistake. Do you remember last spring when he mentioned bringing us a load of cats if our cat turned up on his premises?"

Calgary and I knocked off fence mending. We headed home.

**WE PULLED** up on the rise that fronts our shack and leaned on our saddle horns to contemplate the scenery. Mostly it was cats.

We never did see so many cats at once. And the longer we looked, the more we saw.

"Calling cards," I said finally. "Wasn't that what Sam called them?"

"Right!" said Calgary. "Calling cards and knick-knacks. There's one of the knick-knacks he got from Gleason coming out of the blacksmith shop now. See him—that big buck with the bobbed tail and chawed ear."

"I see him," I said. "The youngsters are all strangers to me, but I'm spotting the old ones right and left. How about that kind of bluish one over there—the one with the four little knick-knacks following her? Ain't that old man Twilliger's Matilda cat?"

"It is," said Calgary. "Sam's rounded up every spare cat in the country for us. Me, I'm going in the shack and brood."

We both went in. The air was close.

Calgary took a couple deep breaths and looked at me. "Smells like bay-rum, menagerie, and tar-soap."

"And a dash of something a mite mellower—skunk maybe."

Calgary did the quick-step. "Sweet disaster! You don't suppose Sam's dumped a polecat in here for good measure, do you?"

I tested the wind. "It's weak," I said. "It can't be more'n a young one."

Calgary got down and looked under my bunk.

"See anything?" I said.

He poked his head under his own bunk. "Now I do," he said. "It's a hound-dog. He's laying back in the shadows."

I got down on the floor alongside Calgary. "It's a calf," I said. "There's the end of his tail. Grab and pull."

Calgary gave the tail a heave, and what was hooked on to it came out.

Instead of a second floor in our shack, the original homesteader had built two wide shelves up under the eaves. Generally, if we wanted anything on them we got the ladder from outside. This time we went up effortless without bothering.

We peered over the shelf to make sure what had come out from under the bunk. It was a young mountain lion—no less! A young and vigorous mountain lion, prancing and throwing half-hitches with his tail.

We studied him a while. "Where do you suppose Sam got him?" Calgary said finally.

"Whiskey, most likely," I told him. "Whiskey's always hunting lions. Probably Sam had him in a crate for a month or two and got him gentled down good. Notice he's making himself right at home. No wild lion would act that way. I'll hold your legs, you reach down and pet him."

"No," said Calgary.

"Calgary," I said, "that lion is no more than a young and playful cub."

"Right!" said Calgary. "You go down and frolic with him."

Taking a bird's-eye view of him, the lion didn't look so big nor particularly vicious. Outside of his sampling a pair of boots and yawning and showing his tushes, personally Calgary and I never saw a milder behaving lion.

But we weren't sure.

"Calgary," I said, "he looks tame and acts tame, but just supposing he ain't tame."

"I am supposing it!" said Calgary. "And I aim to stay up here on the shelf and keep right on supposing it."

I grabbed Calgary. "Hist," I said. "Listen! Someone's coming. Hear? There—he's knocking at the door."

"It's Sam," whispered Calgary. "He's come back to make merry over our corpses. Watch. I'll show you how tame that lion is."

Calgary slipped off his boot and drew back his arm. "Come in," he called very friendly. "Come right in, old-timer. You are just in time for dinner."

**THE** door opened, and Calgary heaved his boot at the lion. But it wasn't Sam that walked into the shack. It was Cecil.

Cecil closed the door behind him, and the boot fetched the lion in the short ribs. The screech the lion let out showed he was shocked and riled. Cecil hung onto the door latch and stared while the lion churned furniture. Two chairs and a coffee pot in the air at once was child's play for the lion. We looked for him to r'ar up and begin chewing on Cecil's head.

"He's a-teasing him," groaned Calgary. "He's playing with him like a cat with a mouse. I can't stand to look and I can't tear my eyes away!"

"Don't move!" I hollered at Cecil. "Just look him right in the eye and don't move!"



"Here he comes!" sang out Calgary.

The lion took off, all spraddled out, for Cecil. Cecil ducked and got a tail-hold. The lion squalled and humped himself one way, and Cecil pulled the other way, his tail stretching between them like a rubber band. It was most unusual.

"Hang on!" I shouted to Cecil. "Help's coming! Calgary's coming!"

Then I told Calgary to help Cecil rattle the lion while I got the rifle, and we dropped off the shelf.

From the yowl the lion let out, the idea of re-enforcements didn't set so good. He knocked Cecil loose from his tail with a back-handed cuff and came for me stiff-legged.

The water pail was handiest, and I grabbed it.

"Don't throw it!" yelled Cecil.

I heaved the water in the lion's face.

The lion whistled, opened his drafts and carried the mail. Watching him was like twiddling a finger around a candle and watching the shadow. I reached for the rifle and scratched him three times from whisker to tail. There was a glory-come shriek, a scattering of glass, and the lion went out the window.

Calgary and I stood quiet and thankful, listening to the lion's whoops and yodels dying away in the distance.

Cecil looked sad. "He's gone," he said. "Now he's gone and he won't come back. I told you not to throw that water."

Calgary tapped his forehead significant and then took Cecil by the arm. "Now you just sit down and rest yourself, Cecil. Jim and me could lose several cats and still have enough to tide us over."

"I know," said Cecil. "I saw them. But there's none of them that can take the place of the one I brought you."

I gaped.

"What you say?"

"I say I brought him—in a laundry bag," said Cecil. "You weren't home when I got here, so I left Goliath in your shack and went to look for you. I must have missed connections, though, because when I got back—here you were."

"What you say his name was?"

"Goliath," said Cecil. "That's what you told me his name was and I didn't see any reason to change it."

"No reason at all. Turned out to be a nice cat, didn't he?"

"Very," agreed Cecil, enthusiastic. "He gave me an interest in life. The stronger he got, the stronger I got. He did wonders for my health."

Calgary looked at me. "Jim," he said, "you remember when we were at Whiskey's last spring. What kind of a lion did he say he had just killed?"

"A she lion," I said.

"And Whiskey had a sack over his shoulder. Jim, you got any idea what might have been in that sack?"

"I do now," I said.

Cecil's blue eyes were as trusting as ever. "You know," he said, "there was only once I had any real trouble with Goliath. Yesterday he caught a skunk, and if you'd seen the time I had holding him in the bath-tub! It's something to remember, gentlemen—*never* throw water on an English Flat cat!"

"Ah!" said Calgary.

"Don't mention it," said Cecil. And then he shook hands with us and went out the door, and that's the last we ever saw him.

\* \* \* So there are the facts of the case and there's the problem: Did Cecil really give Goliath a bath, or didn't he?

Calgary and I don't know what to believe. All we know for sure is that I must have grabbed the wrong sack at Whiskey's, and now we got cats.



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COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—SEPTEMBER 13





Tarzan knew that that earlier rescue would have been in vain if the Mayan girl was once more to be led to the altar

# The Quest of Tarzan

By Edgar Rice Burroughs

SHIPWRECKED on an uncharted island in the South Pacific are the survivors of the tramp *Saigon*. They are: OTTO KRAUS, who had chartered the ship to bring a cargo of wild animals to America; JANETTE LAON, who had wangled a passage at Mombasa; ABDULLAH, an Arab slave-trader whose presence on the boat had been caused by the wrecking of his *dhow* just as the *Saigon* sailed; SCHMIDT, the second mate, who had taken over command of the ship by a mutiny which he chose to call formal seizure of the British-registered vessel in the name of the German government; and DE GROOTE, the young Dutch first mate who is obviously interested in Janette.

Schmidt had also managed to seize the British yacht *Naiad*, manning it with a skeleton crew and taking its passengers and crew aboard the *Saigon* as prisoners. These include SIR WILLIAM LEIGH, the yacht's owner; LADY PENELOPE, his wife; PATRICIA, their niece; DR. CURDY, a scientist; and BRICE WRIGHT-SMITH, Patricia's fiancé.

There is still another member of the survivor's party—their leader, in fact—a huge wild man, captured by Abdullah and shipped aboard in a cage. As the result of

a wound, he had lost both the power of speech and knowledge of his own identity.

After a vicious encounter with a huge boa which the vengeful Arab had had placed in his cage, the wild man had recovered his tongue and his name; he knew that he was Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle.

TO INSURE the safety and well-being of the majority of the party, Tarzan forces the troublemakers, including Kraus, Schmidt, Abdullah and several others, to make a separate camp further down the beach.

Their island is Uxmal, populated by a tribe of Mayans, who had migrated to it in the middle of the fifteenth century, under the leadership of their ruler, Cuitok Xiu.

The Mayans have observed the arrival of the castaways, but Tarzan's first encounter with one of them is when he saves a hunter from an attack by one of the lions that Tarzan had released from the reef-struck, sinking *Saigon*.

The hunter, awed as much by his towering, powerful rescuer as by the strange beast, whose like he had never seen, decides forthwith that Tarzan is Che, Lord of the Forest; and in order that his weird adventure will be

The first installment of this three-part serial, herein concluded, was published in the *Argosy* for August 23

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believed, he leads Tarzan to the city. But the high priest is distinctly skeptical of Tarzan's divinity and orders him imprisoned.

Tarzan makes a break for freedom, but is overcome and knocked unconscious. . . .

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE PATIENT TIGER

WHEN Tarzan came to, he found himself in a wooden cage in a huge dim vault whose walls were beautifully dressed and fitted blocks of lava. He rose and moved tigerishly to test the bars of his cage; a smile broke slowly across his face and within ten seconds the bars had crushed like matchsticks in his powerful hands.

But the door of the vault was another matter; it refused to budge the least fraction of an inch in spite of all his struggles to force it. So he picked up one of the stoutest lengths of the broken cage-bars and stood by the door, and settled down to overpower the first little brown man to come through it.

Presently he heard a low murmur of voices from outside, growing louder and louder until Tarzan realized that a vast concourse of people was gathering; drums boomed and trumpets blared; there was the many-throated hum of a mighty, cadenced chanting.

Another sound, a nearer one, crept to his ears, instinctively sharpened to detect it beneath all the remoter clamor. The bolt on the other side of the door was being slowly drawn. Tarzan tightened his grip on the length of wood.

The door opened; the head of a warrior appeared. There was a swift, padded thud as wood swiftly met hair and flesh; the warrior slumped to the floor without a whisper.

Through the opening of the door Tarzan saw a harsh and breathtaking scene, lit by flares of torches, bright with barbaric splendor and barbaric cruelty.

Not twenty feet away a brown-skinned girl lay stretched on an altar; above her breast poised a glittering knife of carved obsidian, held in the hand of a magnificently panoplied master of the sacrifice. Four men in tall feathered headdresses held down the girl's slender, twisting body. Beyond the altar was a silent sea of rapt, upturned faces, hushed and sick with trancelike eagerness.

Tarzan's nostrils flared slightly; a muscle in his throat twitched. For seconds he was a carved statue of bone and sinew and sun-bronzed flesh. Then he let out a jungle-bellow of anger and sprang straight for the throat of the high priest.

He lifted the astounded dignitary and hurled him across the altar at two of the lesser priests; in a flash he whirled and clubbed down the other two before they had time to comprehend this whirlwind that swept down upon them. A mighty shout shuddered up from the throats of the celebrants but they stood transfixed. Not for long, for moments only; but it gave Tarzan all the time he needed to swing the lightly built girl over one shoulder and leap through the temple doorway.

Straight for the city's walls he sped, the mob howling now at his flying heels. The great celebration in the temple had drawn all but a few scattered guards from the city's streets, and these he eluded by the swiftness of his zigzagging dash.

The girl lay limp on his shoulder, her eyes tightly closed, too terrified to cry out her fear. To be snatched living from the altar by this powerful god was almost worse than delivering up to him her lifeless body.

When Tarzan reached the wall, he found himself far from any of the many gates; alone he could easily have scaled the naked stone, but the extra burden on his

shoulder made that impossible. He hesitated, cast a swift, exploring look around him.

Just within the wall huddled a row of buildings and low-roofed sheds. He climbed the lowest shed without difficulty and from this vaulted to the roof of the next, and slightly higher, building; then to another and another, using the roofs like a sort of staircase that brought him finally to the top of the wall.

On his shoulder, Itzl Cha fearfully opened her eyes, saw in one terrified glance that the god who bore her was flying through the air; she uttered one stifled shriek and closed her eyes as tight as she could.

Tarzan's arching leap had carried him well out from the wall; his outflung fingers gripped the bough of a huge, liana-festooned tree. For a second he swung, pendulum-fashion, then he gripped the creeper and slid down it to the earth. A moment later, with Itzl Cha still gasping for breath, he was trotting across the cultivated fields to the thick, cool shelter of the great forest.

AT THE camp, Tarzan's two-day absence had caused a good deal of speculation and uneasy comment. Lady Penelope had two theories to which she clung with equal tenacity: Tarzan had been eaten by some beast and it was rather a pity; he had joined the other camp to bring them to ruin and Lady Penelope was not in the least surprised. Tarzan was a savage and certainly not to be trusted. Dead, he was mourned; alive, he would no doubt slay and eat them all.

"If you could make up your mind," her niece observed finally, "whether you liked him or not, it would probably help."

"I do like him," Lady Penelope said. "I'm sure we'd all have drowned without his help. But," she added firmly, "he gives me the shivers."

Janette and Patricia exchanged a look. "I was in a cage with him for four days," Janette mused, "and he never touched me." Wistfulness was tinged with incredulity in her voice. Janette's mode of life had not prepared her for men who behaved as Tarzan did—and yet he was certainly the most man she had ever met.

"I'm sure that the less we dwell on that sordid episode," Lady Penelope said, "the better it will be all around. And I wish William and Brice and Captain Bolton would get back from their hunting. It's getting chilly." Lady Penelope was sitting within two feet of the stack of firewood, but it never occurred to her to replenish the fire herself. So Patricia, with a sigh, rose and crossed the clearing to do it for her.

Meanwhile the hunting party had been following the trail of what appeared to be wild boar and had penetrated the forest much deeper than they realized.

Suddenly Brice Wright-Smith muttered something and stooped to the trail. He had never done anything useful in his life; but he had hunted in Africa and India and he knew the spoor of a tiger when he saw it.

"Fresh, too," he said. "See just there where it crosses the trail of bre'r pig."

Captain Bolton nodded. "He's right, sir."

"Tarzan *would* turn the blighters loose," Brice said. "Probably be satisfied when his pets have made dinner on us all. And there, unless I'm very much mistaken"—his voice went low and tense—"is the little fellow now. Over there to the left."

"I think we should go back," Bolton said, with magnificent understatement. "We won't have a prayer, if he charges."

"Too late," said Brice, tautly. "Here he comes!" He threw down his gun and clambered up into a tree with the other two men crowding for first place. And none too



soon, for scarcely had the last booted foot left the earth when the great Bengal tiger leaped into the trail.

He stood looking around for a moment, and then, with a growl, sighted the men in the tree. His terrible yellow-green eyes, his snarling face, turned slowly up toward them. With a powerful, velvet-muscled grace, the great body leaped into the air, curved claws outstretched. Twice more he jumped, each time a little higher. Then he retreated down the trail for a little distance and lay down, watching them with the wary patience that hunger teaches.

"Well, here we all are," Brice muttered cheerfully. "Tidy little group. Supper for one, and no cover charge."

"I wish I had my gun," Captain Bolton said.

"Well, there it is, old chap. Right down below. Want to clamber down and get it? No, wait. Here's an idea." He ripped off his shirt, tore it into strips and fastened them together to make a rope. He made a slip noose at one end; then he slid down to a lower branch and dropped the noose down close to the muzzle of his gun, which, luckily was raised a couple of inches from the ground.

"If that noose catches behind the sight, I can draw the blasted thing up. Here's praying." With a deftness and patience that caused Sir William to revise a little his opinion of his future nephew-in-law, the lanky young Englishman went to work.

After much fishing, the noose slipped over the muzzle of the gun, and as Brice pulled, it tightened below the sight.

He had it within a foot of his hand when the tiger leaped to his feet with a roar and charged. As the beast sprang into the air toward Brice, Brice dropped everything and scrambled for safety. The raking talons swept within an inch of his foot.

"Whe-e-w!" he exclaimed, as he reached a higher branch.

The tiger stood looking up for a moment, growling and lashing his tail, and then he went back and lay down again.

Brice cursed, softly and with great fervor, for three full minutes.

## CHAPTER XIV

### LORD OF THE FOREST

**I**N SCHMIDT'S camp—at least he thought of it that way and tried to make the others recognize him as their leader—sullen discontent lay like a heavy fog over the steaming jungle atmosphere. It was a bitter and angry company that squatted disconsolately upon the rag of beach that separated ocean from jungle, eating the sour fruit that they made the Lascars gather for them.

Kraus and Schmidt disputed the leadership with monotonous hatred; Abdullah sat apart and glared at them both. Oubanov, the engineer, made long dreary speeches, preaching universal destruction. Only one thread bound them all—hatred for Tarzan who had driven them into this wilderness without arms or ammunition.

"We should go back and claim what is ours," declaimed Oubanov. "All men are free; there should be no monopoly of essentials."

"You go back," Schmidt jeered. "I'm no target."

"Nobody gives orders to Oubanov," the Russian said. "Oubanov is a free soul."

"Oubanov is a gasbag. *Somebody* has to go back and see how things are fixed in their camp, and where they keep the guns," said Schmidt.

"Send a Lascar," Kraus suggested.

"All right," Schmidt grumbled. "But if I had a gun, that fat loud-mouth would step around. Chuldrup!" he

called. One of the Lascars came trotting up. As he heard what he was to do, he started protesting unhappily. Schmidt shut him up with a kick, and Lascar prudence and passivity impelled at least sullen obedience. His sloe-eyes glittering resentfully, the Lascar trotted into the jungle.

The green forest swallowed him. Chuldrup was very much afraid; but he was more afraid to return to the hated Schmidt without the information he had been ordered to get. It was while he was trying to decide whether or not it would be safe just to hide here for a time and then return with an invented story, that he heard a horrible growling roar and felt the rush of fur and fang and flesh slam horribly against his body. With a shriek of terror, he went down.

It was over swiftly. The three men in the tree exchanged a sickened look. "God," said Brice, and shuddered. "He never had a chance."

There was a long silence, broken at last by the practical captain of the *Naiad*. "At least," he said, "that poor beggar has given us our chance. The tiger won't bother us if we don't go near his kill."

They descended silently and, shaken, started back to the camp, where they were greeted with a calm that they felt was somehow disappointing. What they had just been through, it seemed to them, should have stuck out all over them. Lady Penelope's only comment was that she didn't see why they hadn't shot the tiger. They had their guns, didn't they? And Sir William was too weary to explain it more than three times.

**A**FTER supper, Janette wandered down the beach, her eye struck by the vivid beauty of the tropic night, her ear hypnotically held by the sibilant wash of the water on the sparkling beach. Life, she thought, was extremely funny; she would have said that of all these people she would be the first to feel boredom, to miss the glitter and buzz of the world that she knew. And yet of them all, she was probably the one who minded this enforced imprisonment least.

Bushes parted somewhere behind; quick footsteps shuffled across the sand. "I knew you would follow me, Hans," she said, as the young Dutchman came up and stood by her shoulder. She did not turn to look at him nor lift her face. "You want to speak to me—tell me something. No, let me finish. You think you are in love with me. Maybe. Maybe not. But you mustn't say it. Not to me."

He took her hand. He was very gentle, and yet he was strong too—and enduring. "Don't you want to hear it, Janette?"

Still she did not look at him. "Oh, yes. I do. Every since Mombasa, I've wanted to. That's the reason why you mustn't."

"But why?"

"Because of me. Of what I've been. You must have guessed, Hans. Singapore, Saigon, Batavia. They're not New Amsterdam, you know. And I'm not made of glass."

"I love you," he said, simply, like that; and his arms went around her. Janette burst into tears; she couldn't remember the last time that she had really cried. She dried her eyes with his handkerchief.

"Shall we go back?" she said.

"But you haven't told me if—if—"

"No. And I never will. Come along."

... Deeper in the jungle, another girl, a girl about Janette's age, was experiencing another sort of emotional upheaval. Itzl Cha was trying very hard to adjust herself to the experience of being carried off by a god, by Che, Lord of the Forest. He was very handsome, as a god should be, and he was very fierce. On his back, with her arms pressed tightly around his neck, she found herself flying



through the very tops of the trees, as they swung from bough to bough, soaring dizzily above the ground.

Presently Che stopped and uttered a long drawn-out call—an eerie, echoing cry to which a far-off answer came. Their treetop journey was resumed. In a moment, Itzl Cha beheld something that made her wish she had never dared to open her eyes at all. Two grottsque, furry creatures came swinging through the trees to meet them, jabbering as they came. Che replied in the same jargon; and when the newcomers reached Che, all three stopped and spoke to each other at length in that strange tongue that she could not understand.

Soon, her rescuer descended and carried her to a mountain trail, and there he set her down upon the ground and let her walk. The two furry gods waddled along with them, and Itzl Cha commenced to be very proud when she thought of the company in which she was. What other girl in Chichen Itza had ever walked abroad with three gods?

**P**RESENTLY they came to a place where the trail seemed to end, disappearing over the brink of a terrifying precipice; but Che, Lord of the Forest, did not hesitate; he merely took Itzl Cha across his broad shoulder again and clambered down with as great ease as the two earth gods.

When they reached the bottom, Lord of the Forest raised his voice. What he said sounded to Itzl Cha like "*Yud, Tantor, yud!*" And that was exactly what it was: Come, Tantor, Come!

Very shortly, Itzl Cha heard a sound such as she had never heard before—a sound that no other Mayan had ever heard; the trumpeting of an elephant.

By this time, Itzl Cha thought that she had seen all the miracles that there were, but when a great bull elephant broke through the forest, toppling the trees that were in his path, Itzl Cha screamed and fainted.

When Itzl Cha regained consciousness and opened her eyes she immediately screamed and closed them again. She was sitting on the head of that terrible beast she had seen!

Lord of the Forest was sitting behind her, his arm was around her, preventing her from falling. The earth gods were swinging scoldingly in the trees beside them, and it was all too much for Itzl Cha.

They reached the camp long after darkness had fallen; and their coming caused a great stir. The elephant stopped a few paces outside the forest; the sight of all these people was too much for him, and he would come no farther. Tarzan, with the girl in his arms, slipped to the ground, and, holding her by the hand, led her toward the camp.

Itzl Cha felt that these must all be gods, but much of her fear was gone now, for Lord of the Forest had offered her no harm.

Tarzan was greeted by a sort of stunned silence. Sir William was working over his wife, who had fainted. Presently she opened her eyes. "That creature! You must get him out of camp immediately, William, he and that wanton girl with him. Both of them together didn't have on enough clothes to cover a baby decently. I suppose he went off somewhere and stole a woman."

"Oh, quiet, Penelope," said Sir William.

Tarzan walked directly to Patricia Leigh. "I want you to look after this Girl," he said.

"I?" demanded Patricia.

"Yes, you," he replied. And that was settled. Tarzan told them swiftly of his adventure of the city he had discovered, the sacrifice he had prevented.

"We must take every precaution against attack," he said; "there were many warriors in that city, a search will be made for this girl; eventually they will find our camp. Of course we have firearms, and there is little to fear."

It was good, brave talk; but Janette saw the look in the ape-man's eye as he spoke—and she heard something in his voice that made her shiver. The little brown men of the strange city were dangerous and Tarzan knew it.

## CHAPTER XV

### ISLAND OF DISCONTENT

**F**OR SIX WEEKS life in the camp dragged on monotonously and without incident; and during that time, Patricia Leigh taught Itzl Cha to speak and understand enough English so that the little Mayan girl could carry on at least a sketchy conversation with the others, while Tarzan devoted much of his time to learning the Maya tongue from her. Tarzan, alone of the company, ventured occasionally into the jungle; and, from these excursions, he often returned with a wild pig.

Dr. Curdy was very interested in what Tarzan and Pat learned from the girl. And he refused to believe that the knowledge of a survived Mayan civilization that he had won would never reach the world.

"I cannot believe that we shall never be rescued," he insisted. "And by the way, Tarzan, is this village that you visited the only one on the island?"

"I don't know about that," replied the ape man, "but these Mayans are not the only people here. At the northern end of the island, there is a settlement of what Itzl Cha calls 'very bad people'. The history of the island, handed down largely by word of mouth, indicates that survivors of a shipwreck inter-married with the aborigines of the island and it is their descendants who are the 'bad people'. We are camped on the southwestern edge of their domain. I have never gone far enough into their country to see any of them, but Itzl Cha says that they are very savage cannibals."

"What a lovely place to be marooned," remarked Patricia. "And to make it all the cozier, you had to turn a lot of lions and tigers loose in it." Tarzan smiled.

Colonel Leigh, Brice, and Bolton sauntered up; then de Groote joined the party. "Some of the men just came to me," said the Dutchman, "and wanted me to ask you if they could try to break up the *Saigon* and build a boat. They said they would rather take a chance of dying at sea than spending their lives here."

"It might be done," replied Captain Bolton.

"Anyway, it will keep them busy," said Sir William.

"There is deep water in a cove about a mile north of here," said Tarzan, "and no reef. They could build there. Or try to."

"Who's going to design the boat?" asked Sir William.

"The men have asked me to," replied de Groote; "my father is a shipbuilder, and I worked in his yard before I went to sea."

Tarzan gave the young Dutchman an appraising look. Then he nodded. If anyone could do the job de Groote could. And so it was settled.

**W**HEN TWO DAYS had passed and Chuldrup had not returned, Schmidt drove another Lascar into the forest with the same instructions. He, too, never returned. Schmidt was furious, and on the third day he ordered two men to go. They stood sullenly before him, listening. When he had finished they turned and walked back to their quarters. Schmidt cursed savagely and started after them.

But when he approached them, eight Lascars stood up to face him, armed with bows and arrows and wooden spears. This was the work that had kept them so busy for several days.



"Aren't you two men going to find out about the guns and ammunition so that we can get them?" he asked.

"No," said one of the two. "You want to know, you go. We no take orders any more. Get out. Go back to your own part of the camp."

Growling, Schmidt turned and slunk away.

"What's the matter?" asked Kraus.

"The devils have mutinied," replied Schmidt. "And they are armed—made bows and arrows and spears for themselves."

"The uprising of the proletariat!" exclaimed Oubanov. "I shall join them and lead them. The world revolution has reached even here."

He crossed jubilantly to the Lascars' huts. "Comrades!" he cried. "Congratulations! I have come to lead you on to greater victories."

Eight scowling men looked at him in silence; then one of them said, "Get out."

Oubanov hesitated until several of them started toward him; then he turned and went back to the other camp.

"Well, comrade," sneered Schmidt, "is the revolution over?"

"They are stupid fools," said Oubanov.

That night the four men had to attend to their own fire, and take turns standing guard.

"Well, comrade," said Schmidt to Oubanov, "how do you like revolutions now that you are on the other side of one?"

The Lascars, having no white man to command them, went to sleep and let their fire die out. Abdullah Abu Néjm was on guard in the other part of the camp and around midnight he heard a series of ferocious growls from the other side—then a scream of pain and terror. The other three men awoke and sprang to their feet.

"What is it?" demanded Schmidt.

"El adrea, Lord of the Broad Head," replied the Arab.

"What's that?" asked Oubanov.

"A lion," said Kraus; "he got one of the Lascars."

The screams were still blasting the night, but they were farther away now, as the lion dragged his prey into the jungle.

Kraus piled more wood upon the fire. "That damn wild-man," he said, "turning those beasts loose here."

"Serves you right," said Schmidt; "you had no business catching a white man and putting him in a cage."

"It was Abdullah's idea," whined Kraus.

There was no more sleep that night. They could hear the lion feeding until daylight, and then in the lesser darkness of dawn, they saw him rise from his kill and go to the river to drink. He disappeared into the jungle.

"He will lie up for the day," said Abdullah, "but he will come out again and feed."

As Abdullah ceased speaking, a foul sound came from the edge of the jungle, and two forms slunk out; the hyenas had scented the lion's kill, and presently they were tearing at what was left of the Lascar.

The next night, the Lascars built no fire at all; and another was taken. "The fools!" exclaimed Kraus; "that lion has got the habit by now, and none of us will ever be safe again here."

"They are fatalists," said Schmidt; "they believe that whatever is foreordained to happen must happen, and that nothing that they can do can prevent it."

"Well, I'm no fatalist," said Kraus. "I'm going to sleep in a tree after this." And he spent the next day building a platform in a tree at the edge of the forest, setting an example which the other three men were quick to follow. Even the Lascars were impressed, and that night the lion came and roared through an empty camp.

"I've stood all of this that I can," said Kraus; "I'm

going back and see Tarzan. I'll promise anything if he'll let us stay in his camp."

"I think El adrea would be kinder to us than Tarzan of the Apes," said the Arab.

"I never did anything to him," said Oubanov; "he ought to let me come back."

"He'd probably be afraid you'd start a revolution," said Schmidt. But they decided to try it; and early the next morning, they set out along the beach toward the other camp, followed by the six remaining Lascars.

IN CAMP SAIGON Tarzan ate his breakfast alone. He had arisen early, and only Lum Kip was astir. Presently Patricia Leigh joined Tarzan.

"You are early this morning," she said.

"I am always earlier than the others," he replied, "but today I had a special reason; I want to get an early start."

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Exploring," he replied. "I want to see what is on the other side of the island."

Patricia leaned forward eagerly. "May I go with you?"

From the little shelter that had been built especially for her, Itzl Cha watched them. Her black eyes narrowed and snapped, and she clenched her little hands tightly.

"You couldn't make it, Patricia," said Tarzan. "Not the way I travel. Traveling on the ground in there is too dangerous. There are wild animals there."

"If it's dangerous you shouldn't go," she said, "carrying nothing but a silly bow and some arrows. Let me go along with a rifle; I'm a good shot, and I've hunted tigers in India."

Tarzan rose, and Patricia jumped to her feet, placing her hands on his shoulders. "Please don't go," she begged, "I'm afraid for you," but he only laughed and turned and trotted off toward the jungle.

Patricia watched him until he swung into a tree and disappeared; then she swished around angrily and went to her hut. "I'll show him," she muttered under her breath.

Presently she emerged with a rifle and ammunition. Itzl Cha watched her as she entered the jungle at the same place that Tarzan had, right at the edge of the little stream. The little Mayan girl bit her lips, and the tears came to her eyes—tears of frustration and anger.

## CHAPTER XVI

### RAID!

CHAL YIP XIU, the high priest, was still furious about the theft of Itzl Cha from beneath the sacred sacrificial knife. "The temple has been defiled," he growled.

"Perhaps not," said Cit Coh Xiu, the king; "perhaps after all it was indeed Che, Lord of the Forest."

Chal Yip Xiu looked at the king, disgustedly. "He was only one of the strangers that Xatl Din saw on the beach.

"If you would not arouse the anger of the gods, you should send a force of warriors to the camp of the strangers, to bring Itzl Cha back, for that is where she will be found."

"Perhaps you are right," said the king; "At least it will do no harm." He sent for Xatl Din and ordered him to take a hundred warriors and go to the camp of the strangers and get Itzl Cha. "With a hundred warriors, you should be able to kill many of them and bring back prisoners to Chichen Itza."

... Tibbet, with a boatload of sailors, was rowing out to the reef to continue the work of salvaging lumber from the *Saigon*. Itzl Cha sat silent and sullen, eating very little; for she had lost her appetite. Janette Laon came and sat beside de Groote, and Lady Penelope Leigh looked at them down her nose.



"Is Patricia up yet, Janette?" she asked.

"Why, yes. Isn't she here?"

Lady Penelope glanced at her husband. This was what came of living like this. "And that creature is gone too! I knew that something terrible like this was going to happen sooner or later, William, if you permitted that man to remain in camp."

"Now, just what has happened, Penelope?"

"Why he's abducted her, that's what's happened."

Lum Kip, who was putting a platter of rice on the table, overheard the conversation and volunteered, "Tarzan, she go that way," pointing toward the northeast; "Plateecie, him go that way," and pointed in the same direction.

"Maybe Pat abducted him," suggested Brice.

"Don't be ridiculous," snapped Lady Penelope.

"They talked long," said Itzl Cha, suddenly. "They go different times; they meet in jungle."

"How can you sit there, William, and permit that Indian girl to intimate that your niece arranged an assignation in the jungle with that impossible creature?"

"Well," said Sir William, "if Pat's in the jungle, I pray to high heaven that Tarzan is with her."

"I SHOULD THINK some of you men would go out and look for her," said Lady Penelope.

"I'll go," said Brice. "But she'll only laugh at us." He rose.

So, for a different reason, did Dr. Curdy. "Who's that coming along the beach?"

"It's Kraus and Schmidt," said Captain Bolton. "And Oubanov and the Arab are with him." The men loosened their pistols in their holsters and waited in silence as the four approached.

Kraus came to the point immediately. "We've come to ask you to let us come back and camp near you," he said. "We have no firearms and no protection where we are. Two of our men have gone into the jungle and never returned, and two have been taken right out of camp by lions at night. We promise not to cause any trouble."

"I'm afraid it *will* cause a lot of trouble when Tarzan returns and finds you here," said Sir William.

"You should let them remain, William," said his wife. "You are in command here, not that Tarzan."

"I really think it would be inhuman to send them away," said Dr. Curdy.

"They were inhuman to us," said Janette Laon bitterly. "Young woman," exploded Penelope, "you have nothing to say about this. My husband will decide."

Janette Laon shook her head hopelessly.

"Suppose," suggested Curdy, the man of science and peace, "that we let them remain until Tarzan returns. They are more his enemies than ours."

"They are enemies to all of us," said Janette.

"You may remain, Kraus," said Sir William, wanting to be fair; "at least, until Tarzan returns; and see that you behave yourselves."

... Patricia got a view of the ocean from the ledge where she was sitting, but she could see nothing of the island; and so, after resting, she went on a little farther. It was far more open here and very beautiful; orchids clung in gorgeous sprays to the tree; ginger and hibiscus grew in profusion; birds with yellow plumage and birds with scarlet winged from tree to tree.

Her original idea that the spot might prove to be a daily haven of beautiful peace was rudely shattered by the sight of a great tiger emerging from the underbrush. The tip of his tail was twitching nervously, and his snarling muscles had drawn his lips back from his great yellow fangs.

Patricia Leigh breathed a silent prayer as she threw her rifle to her shoulder and fired twice in rapid succession.

"AND NOW LOOK!" exclaimed Janette, pointing along the beach. "Here come all those Lascars back, too. Tarzan will be furious."

As she spoke the report of two rifle shots came faintly but distinctly to their ears. "That must be Patricia!" exclaimed Sir William. "She must be in trouble."

"She has probably had to shoot that creature," said Lady Penelope hopefully.

Sir William ran to his hut and got his rifle; and when he started in the direction from which the sound of the shot had come, he was followed by de Groote, Brice, Curdy, and Captain Bolton.

As the foliage of the jungle closed about Bolton's back, Schmidt turned to Kraus and grinned. "Let's see what we can find in the way of rifles and ammunition. This looks like our day."

"What are you doing?" demanded Lady Penelope. "Don't you dare go into those huts."

Janette started to run toward her hut to get her rifle, but Schmidt hurled her aside. "No funny business," he warned.

The four men collected all the remaining firearms in the camp and then forced the Lascars to load up with the stores that Schmidt desired.

"Pretty good haul," he said to Kraus. "I think we've got about everything we want now."

"Maybe you have, but I haven't," replied Kraus. Then he walked over to Janette. "Come along Janette. We're going to start all over again right where we left off."

"No!" said Janette, pulling away. Then Kraus struck her.

Half-stunned, Janette was dragged along, while Lady Penelope watched, feeling very helpless.

XATL DIN and his hundred warriors came through the forest spread out in open order, that they might leave no well-marked trail; and as they came, they heard two sharp, loud sounds which seemed to come from but a short distance ahead of them.

None of them had ever heard the report of a gun before, and so they crept cautiously forward, their eyes and ears alert.

Xatl Din was in the lead, and as he came to a more open place in the forest, he stopped suddenly, for a strange and unaccustomed sight met his eye. On the ground lay a huge, striped beast, such as he had never seen before. It was dead, and above it stood a figure strangely garbed, holding a long black shiny thing that was neither bow, arrow, nor spear.

Presently Xatl Din realized that the creature was a woman; and that with the black thing, she had doubtless killed the huge beast which lay at her feet. Xatl Din further reasoned that if she could have killed so large and ferocious an animal, she could kill men; so he did not come out into the open, but withdrew and whispered to his men.

The Mayans slipped silently around through the jungle until they had encircled Patricia, and then while Xatl Din beat on a tree with his sword to make a noise that would attract the girl's attention, two of his men slipped out of the jungle and crept noiselessly toward her.

As Patricia stood listening intently, arms were thrown around her from behind; her rifle was snatched from her hands; then a hundred strangely garbed warriors, resplendent in feathered headdresses and embroidered loin cloths came running from the jungle to surround her.

It seemed to her that she had been suddenly carried back centuries to a long dead past, to which these little brown men belonged. She knew what her capture meant to her, for she knew the fate of Mayan prisoners.



As Patricia was led away by eight warriors, Xatl Din and the rest continued in the direction of Camp Saigon.

Sir William and his party followed, quite by accident, the same trail by which Patricia had come. They climbed the ledge which ran around the shoulder of the mountain, keeping almost at a run. Their advance was noisy and without caution, for their one thought was to find Patricia as quickly as possible; and when they were suddenly met by a band of plumed warriors, they were taken wholly by surprise. With savage war cries, the Mayans charged, hurling stones from their slings.

"Fire over their heads!" commanded Captain Bolton.

The shots momentarily stopped the Mayans, but when Xatl Din realized that it was only noise and that it had not injured any of his men, he ordered them to charge again; and once more their hideous war cries sounded in the ears of the whites.

"Shoot to kill!" snapped the Captain. "We've got to stop them before they reach us with their swords."

The rifles barked again, and four warriors fell. The others wavered, but Xatl Din urged them on.

These things that killed with a loud noise at a distance terrified the Mayans; and although some of them almost came to grips with the whites, they finally turned and fled, taking their wounded with them. Following their strategy, they scattered through the jungle so as to leave no well-marked trail to their city; and the whites, going in the wrong direction, became lost. When they came to a steep declivity down a mountain side, they thought that they had crossed the mountains and were descending the opposite slope.

After stumbling about in dense shrubbery for an hour, they came suddenly to the end of the jungle, only to stand looking at one another in amazement. Before them lay the beach and their own camp.

As they approached it, Tibbet came to meet them, a troubled look on his face.

"Something wrong?" demanded Sir William.

"Indeed there is, sir. I came back from the *Saigon* with a load of planks to find that Schmidt and his outfit have stolen all the firearms and ammunition that were left in camp, and a considerable part of our stores."

"The scoundrels!" ejaculated the Colonel.

"But that's not the worst of it," continued Tibbet. "They took Miss Laon away with them."

De Groote went white. "Which way did they go?"

"Back up the beach. Probably to their camp."

De Groote started away. "I'm going after them," he said.

"They are armed," Sir William reminded him. "You couldn't do anything alone, and we can't spare men to go with you now, with the chance that those painted devils may attack the camp at any time."

"I'm going anyway," said de Groote doggedly.

"I'll go with you," said Tibbet. Two of the sailors from the *Naiad* also volunteered.

"I wish you luck," said Sir William, "but be careful. You'd better sneak up on the camp from the jungle side and snipe them from the underbrush."

"Yes, sir," replied de Groote; and he led his little party up the beach at a dog-trot.

## CHAPTER XVII

### RETURN TO JEOPARDY

FROM A DISTANCE, Tarzan heard the firing, and immediately turned and tried to locate the shooting. But his ears, abnormally keen though they were, were confused by the echoes and reverberations started by the

mountain walls. Reasoning that any fighting was almost certain to be around either camp Saigon or Schmidt's camp and knowing he was nearer to Schmidt's camp, he decided to go there first. He knew delay might be fatal and wished he could trust to his senses rather than to logic but there was no help for it.

As he approached the end of the forest opposite Schmidt's camp, he went more slowly and carefully. Sliding through the trees like a silent shadow, he reached a vantage point from which he saw the men returning, heavily armed. Janette Laon was being dragged along by Kraus, the Las-cars were bearing heavy loads. He knew what had happened; but how it had happened, he could not guess. He assumed that the shooting he had heard had marked an engagement between these men and those at Camp Saigon; and Schmidt's party seemed to have been victorious. Perhaps all the other whites had been killed; but where was Patricia? And where was Itzl Cha? Waiting might bring him the answer; there was little else he could do.

**A**CROSS THE jungle, in the walled Mayan city, word of the capture of the white girl quickly spread. Through a curious, chattering crowd, Patricia Leigh was led into the palace, to throne room of Cit Coh Xiu, King of Uxmal Island. The leader of her escort bowed and addressed the king.

"The noble Xatl Din ordered us to bring this prisoner to his King and Master, as Xatl Din and his warriors are continuing the attack on the camp of the strangers. There was a battle, and we heard the strange noises with which these white men kill, but more we do not know."

The king nodded. "Xatl Din has done well," he said.

"He has done excellently," said Chal Yip Xiu, the high priest. "This woman will make a fit offering to our gods."

Cit Coh Xiu's eyes appraised the white girl and found her beautiful. She was the first white woman that he had ever seen, and it suddenly occurred to him that it would be a shame to give her to some god that might not want her. He didn't dare say so aloud, but he thought that the girl was too beautiful for any god.

"I think," said the king, carelessly, "that I shall keep her as one of my hand-maidens for a time."

The high priest looked at the king with little surprise for his king had already robbed the gods of several pulchritudinous offerings. "If she should be chosen for the gods," he said savagely, "the gods would be angry with Cit Coh Xiu for refusing her to them."

"Perhaps it would be well," said the king, "if you were to see what she is not chosen—at least for the present."

Patricia had been able to understand at least the gist of this conversation. "A god has already chosen me," she said, "and he will be angry if you harm me."

Cit Coh Xiu looked at her in surprise. "She speaks the language of the Maya," he said to the high priest.

"The gods speak their own language," said Patricia; "they have little use for the language of mortals."

"Can it be that she is a goddess?" demanded the king.

"I am the mate of Che, Lord of the Forest," said Patricia. "He is already very angry with you for the way you treated him when he came to Chichen Itza. If you are wise, you will send me back to him. If you don't, he will certainly destroy you."

The king scratched his head and looked at his high priest questioningly. "Well," he said, "you should know all about gods, Chal Yip Xiu; was it indeed Che, Lord of the Forest, who came to Chichen Itza? Was it a god that you put in a wooden cage? Was it a god who stole the offering from the sacrificial altar?"

"It was not," snapped the high priest. "He was mortal."

"Nevertheless, we must not act hastily," said the king.



"You may keep the girl temporarily. Have her taken to the Temple of the Virgins, and see that she is well treated."

Chal Yip Xiu summoned two lesser priests and told them to conduct the prisoner to the Temple.

Patricia felt that while she had not made much of an impression on the high priest, she had upon the king; and that at least she had won a reprieve which might give Tarzan and the others time to rescue her. As she was led from the palace, her mind was sufficiently at ease to permit her to note the wonders of Chichen Itza.

Before her loomed a mighty pyramid of lava blocks, and up the steep stairs on one side of this she was led to an ornately carved temple at the summit—the Temple of the Virgins. Here she was turned over to the high priestess who was in charge of the temple, in which were housed some fifty girls, mostly of noble families; for this service was considered a great honor. They kept the sacred fires alight and swept the temple floors. When they wished to, they might resign and marry; and they were always sought after by warriors and nobles.

Patricia stood in the temple colonnade and looked out over the city of Chichen Itza. She could see its palaces and temples clustered about the foot of the pyramid and the thatched huts of the common people beyond the wall, and beyond these the fields which extended to the edge of the jungle; and she fancied that she had been carried back many centuries to ancient Yucatan.

AS TARZAN watched through the concealing foliage, he realized the futility of attempting to come out in the open and face four men heavily armed, while he himself had only a hunter's bow.

He waited until they had come closer, and the Lascars had thrown down their loads; then he fitted an arrow to his bow, and bending it until the point of the arrow rested against his left thumb, he took careful aim. The bow string twanged; Kraus screamed and pitched forward upon his face.

The others looked wildly about. "What happened?" demanded Oubanov. "What's the matter with Kraus?"

"He's dead," said Schmidt. "Shot with an arrow."

"The ape man," said Abdullah Abu Néjm. "Who else could have done it?"

"Where is he?" demanded Schmidt.

"Here," called Tarzan, "and I have more arrows. Come straight toward my voice, Janette, and into the forest; if anyone tries to stop you, I will shoot him down."

Janette walked quickly toward the forest, and no hand was raised to detain her.

"That damn wildman!" shouted Schmidt. He raised his rifle and fired wildly into the forest.

Again the bow-string twanged; and Schmidt, clutching at an arrow in his chest, dropped to his knees, then rolled over on his side. Janette ran into the forest, and Tarzan dropped to the ground beside her.

"What happened at the camp?" She told him briefly.

"Come," said Tarzan. "We must get back there as quickly as we can." Swinging Janette to his shoulder, he took to the trees.

Less than ten minutes later, de Groote, Tibbet, and the two sailors came into sight of Schmidt's camp. A quick glance around the camp did not reveal Janette, but they saw two men lying on the ground, and the Lascars huddled to one side, apparently terrified.

Abdullah was the first to see them and, knowing that they had come for revenge and would show no mercy, he swung his rifle to his shoulder and fired. He missed, and de Groote and Tibbet ran forward, firing, the two sailors at their heels.

Random shots were exchanged without casualty; then de

Groote dropped to one knee and took careful aim. Tibbet followed his example. "Take Oubanov," said de Groote; "I'll get the Arab."

The two rifles spoke almost simultaneously, and Oubanov and Abdullah Abu Néjm dropped in their tracks.

De Groote and Tibbet ran forward, followed by the sailors, ready to finish off any of the Lascars who showed fight. The Russian, the Arab, and Kraus were dead; Schmidt was writhing and screaming in helpless agony.

De Groote bent over him. "Where is Miss Laon?"

Cursing so that his words were almost unintelligible, Schmidt mumbled, "The wild-man, damn him. He took her." Presently his shrill blasphemies were hushed; the writhing form lay still.

WHEN TARZAN and Janette approached the camp, they were greeted by a disheartened and hopeless company, only one of whom found anything to be thankful for. It was Penelope Leigh. When she saw them, she said to Brice, "At least Patricia was not with that creature."

"Oh, come now, Aunt Pen," said Brice impatiently. "I suppose you think that Tarzan and Janette arranged all this so that they could meet in the jungle."

"I should not have been at all surprised," replied Lady Penelope. "A man who would carry on with an Indian girl might do anything."

Tarzan said only: "They should never have been permitted within pistol shot of this camp."

"It was my fault," said Sir William. "I did it against my judgment, because it did seem inhuman to send them back there unarmed, with a man-eater hanging around their camp."

"What has been done has been done," said Tarzan. "The important thing now is to find Patricia. Are you positive that she was captured by the Mayans?"

"We heard two shots," explained Sir William, "and when we went to investigate, we were met by fully a hundred Maya warriors. We dispersed them, but were unable to follow their trail; and although we saw nothing of Patricia, it seems probable that she had been captured before we met them."

Tarzan took Itzl Cha aside. "Tell me, Itzl Cha," he said, "what your people would probably do with Patricia."

"Nothing, for two, three days, maybe month," replied the girl. "Then they offer her to a god."

"Would they put her in the cage where they had me?"

"I think in the Temple of the Virgins at the top of the sacred pyramid; Temple of the Virgins very sacred place and well guarded."

"I can reach it," said Tarzan, confidently.

"You are not going there?"

"Tonight," said Tarzan.

The girl threw her arms about him. "Please don't go," she begged; "you cannot save her, and they will kill you."

Tarzan gently disengaged the girl's arms. "Come, come, Itzl Cha," he said. "I shall not be killed."

"Don't go," she pleaded, "Oh, Che, Lord of the Forest, I love you. Take me away into the forest with you. I do not like these people."

"They have been very kind to you," Tarzan reminded her.

"I know," said Itzl Cha sullenly, "but I do not want their kindness; I want only you, and you must not go to Chichen Itza this night or ever."

Tarzan smiled and patted her shoulder. "I go tonight," he said.

"You love her," cried Itzl Cha; "that is the reason you are going. You are leaving me for her."

"Silence," said Tarzan firmly. "Say no more." then he left her and joined the others, and Cha, furious with jeal-



ously, went into her hut and threw herself upon the ground, kicking it with her sandaled feet and beating it with her fists.

Presently she arose and looked out through the doorway, in time to see de Groote and his party returning. While the attention of the others was centered upon them, Itzl Cha crept from her hut and ran into the jungle.

Janette came forward and threw her arms about de Groote, tears running down her cheeks. "I thought that you had been killed, Hans," she sobbed. "I thought that you had been killed."

Itzl Cha ran through the jungle. She was terrified, for it was growing dark, and there are demons and the spirits of the dead in the forest at night.

She reached Chichen Itza after dark, and the guard at the gate refused to admit her until she told them who she was, and that she had important word for Chal Yip Xiu, the high priest. She was taken to him then, and she fell on her knees before him.

"So you have come back," he said. "Why?"

"I came to tell you that the man who stole me from the sacrificial altar is coming tonight to take the white girl from the temple."

"For this you deserve much from the gods," said Chal Yip Xiu, "and again you shall be honored by being offered to them." And Itzl Cha was summarily placed in a wooden cage to await sacrifice.

**T**ARZAN MADE his way slowly through the forest to Chichen Itza. He did not want to arrive before midnight, when the city would surely have quieted down and most of its inmates would be asleep. A gentle wind brought to his nostrils a familiar scent-spoor—Tantor, the elephant, was abroad. He had found an easier trail to the plateau than the shorter one which Tarzan used, and he had also found on the plateau a plenteous supply of the tender shoots he loved.

Tarzan did not call him until he had come quite close, and then he spoke in a low voice; and Tantor came and passed his trunk over the ape-man's body.

At a word of command, he lifted Tarzan to his withers, and the Lord of the Jungle rode to the edge of the forest just outside of the city of Chichen Itza.

Slipping from Tantor's head, Tarzan crossed the fields to the city wall. Before he reached it, he broke into a run, and when it loomed before him, he scaled it much as a cat would have done. The city was quiet and the streets were deserted, so that Tarzan reached the foot of the pyramid without encountering anyone.

Just inside the entrance to the Temple of the Virgins, a dozen warriors hid in the shadows as Tarzan climbed the steps to the summit. Outside the temple he stopped and listened; then he walked around to the lee side, so that the breeze that was blowing would carry to his sensitive nostrils the information that he wished.

He stood there for a moment; and then, satisfied, he crept stealthily around to the entrance. At the threshold he stopped again and listened; then he stepped inside. And as he did, a great net was thrown deftly over him and drawn tight; a dozen silent warriors fell upon him. Entangled in the meshes, he was helpless.

A priest stepped from the temple and raised a trumpet to his lips to blow three long blasts. As if by magic, the city roused; lights appeared; and people came streaming towards the temple pyramid.

Tarzan was carried down the long flight of steps, and at the bottom, he was surrounded by priests in long embroidered cloaks and gorgeous headdresses. Then they brought in Patricia. With trumpets and drums preceding them, Cit Coh Xiu, the king, and Chal Yip Xiu, the high

priest, headed a procession that wound through the city and out of the east gate.

Tarzan had been placed on a litter carried by four priests; behind him walked Patricia, under guard; and behind her Itzl Cha was carried in her wooden cage. A full moon cast its soft light on the barbaric procession, which was further illuminated by hundreds of torches carried by the marchers.

The procession wound through the forest to the foot of a mountain, up which it zig-zagged back and forth until it reached the rim of the crater of an extinct volcano at the summit. It was almost dawn, as the procession made its way down a narrow trail to the bottom of the crater and stopped there at the edge of a yawning hole. Priests intoned a chant to the accompaniment of flutes, drums, and trumpets; and just at dawn, the net was cut away from Tarzan and he was hurled head-first into the chasm.

## CHAPTER XIX

### WHITE SHIP

**P**ATRICIA LEIGH stood on the brink of the abyss, her body bent forward; as the sun topped the rim and shed its light down into the crater, she saw Tarzan swimming slowly about in a pond some seventy feet below her.

Instantly her mind leaped to the stories she had read of the sacred *dzonot* of ancient Chichen Itza in Yucatan, and hope showed again in her eyes.

"Tarzan," she called, in a clear, loud voice. He looked up at her. "Listen to me. I know this form of sacrifice well. It was practiced by the Mayans in Central America hundreds and hundreds of years ago. The victim was thrown into the sacred well at Chichen Itza at dawn; and if at noon he still lived, he was taken out and raised to highest rank; he became practically a god on earth. You must keep alive until noon, Tarzan. You must! You must!"

Tarzan nodded up at her and waved. The priests eyed her suspiciously, though they had no idea what she had said.

"Do you think that you can, Tarzan?" she called down. "You must, because you see, I love you."

Tarzan did not answer. He turned over and commenced to swim slowly around the pool, which was about a hundred feet in diameter with perpendicular sides of smooth volcanic glass.

The water was chilly but not icy, and Tarzan swam just strongly enough to keep from becoming numb.

The people had brought food and drink, and as they watched through the long dragging hours, they made a fiesta of the occasion.

As the sun climbed toward its zenith, Chal Yip Xiu commenced to show signs of strain and nervousness, for if the victim lived until noon, he might prove indeed to be Che, Lord of the Forest, which would be most embarrassing for any high priest.

Every eye was upon a crude sundial that stood beside the rim of the *dzonot*; and when it marked noon, a great shout arose, for the victim was still alive.

The high priest sputtered furiously as the crowd acclaimed Tarzan as Che, Lord of the Forest, and demanded that he be raised from the water. A long rope was thrown down to him, with a noose in the end of it by means of which he could be drawn out of the *dzonot*; but Tarzan ignored the noose and clambered up the rope, hand over hand.

When he stepped out upon the rim, the people fell to their knees before him and supplicated him for forgiveness.

The king and the high priest looked most uncomfortable as Tarzan faced them. "I came to earth in the form of a mortal," he said, "to see how you ruled my people of



Chichen Itza. I am not pleased. I shall come again some day to see if you have improved. Now I go, and I take this woman with me," and he placed a hand upon Patricia's arm. "I command you to release Itzl Cha, and to see that neither she nor any others are sacrificed before I return."

He took Patricia by the hand, and together they climbed the steep trail to the rim of the crater and then down the side of the volcano, the people following them, in a long procession, singing as they marched.

As they reached the city, Tarzan turned and held up a hand. "Come no farther," he said to the people and then to Patricia, "Now I'll show them something to add to their legends."

She looked up at him questioningly and smiled. "What are you going to do?"

He voiced a long weird cry, and then, in the language of the great apes, shouted, "Come, Tantor, come!" As he and Patricia crossed the field and approached the forest, a great bull elephant came out of it to meet them. A cry of astonishment and fear rose from the people behind them.

"He is my friend," said Tarzan, laying his hand upon the trunk of the great beast. "Don't be frightened," he said to Patricia. At Tarzan's command, Tantor swung the girl up, then lifted Tarzan beside her.

As he wheeled to go into the forest, Tarzan and Patricia looked back to see the people of Chichen Itza all kneeling, their faces pressed against the ground.

"Their great-great-grandchildren will hear of this," said Patricia.

AT CAMP SAIGON, a nervous, dispirited company, scarcely even daring to hope, waited for Tarzan and Patricia to return. None of them had slept the night before; the morning had been sheer nightmare; dusk was falling and still there was no sign of them.

"He won't return without her," Janette said to Lady Penelope and Sir William; but Lady Penelope refused to be comforted. Even the bright side was dismal.

"She's in love with him," Lady Penelope said, with apparent irrelevance. "And if he does save her, she'll want to marry him. Can you imagine that great creature loping about the lawn at Leigh Hall, with nothing on him but a bit of nasty leopard fur? We shan't be able to keep a maid in the place."

"Whoa, Aunt Pen," said Wright-Smith, "aren't I still in the running?"

Lady Penelope shot him a withering look. "She's fond of you, Brice. Very fond. But what good is that against this crazy infatuation? To think there was a time when I didn't think *you* suitable. Now she's going to marry this gorilla-person."

"Maybe the gentleman won't agree," said Wright-Smith. "I have a hunch he's pretty fond of his jungle."

"Agree? Of course he'll agree. Anyone can see the man's a climber."

Janette turned to Hans de Groote. "Tell her, Hans."

Hans nodded. "You see, Lady Penelope, your climber happens to be John Clayton, Lord Greystoke. Schmidt told me—he got the story from Abdullah."

Lady Penelope gasped, then set her lips firmly together. "I don't believe it!" she said, but very weakly.

"It's true, my dear," her husband told her. "There was quite a to-do about it in the papers several years ago. What de Groote has just said brought it all back to me. And incidentally, here's your viscount now—and Patricia, all safe and sound."

Lady Penelope looked up quickly and fluttered a handkerchief in greeting. "On an elephant," she moaned. She rose and went toward them. "They do make a handsome couple," she conceded.

The next minute Patricia had slid to the ground and was running toward them. "There's a ship," she was crying out. "We could see it from the crest. A ship!"

Tarzan nodded. "It might be the *Naiad*," he said. "You'd better build a fire, de Groote." The party ran down to the edge of the beach, while de Groote and Tibbet built and lit a great beacon fire.

Tarzan and Patricia stood together and watched the incoming ship; soon the slim white lines of the *Naiad* were apparent to the unaided eye. She saw their fire and headed for the cove; everybody cheered madly.

Tarzan drew Patricia a little away from the others. "What you said, back there at the *dzonot*," he began gravely and a little haltingly—"you must forget it, Pat. Pretend you never said it—pretend I didn't hear it."

She lowered eyes that were curiously bright. "Thanks," she said in a shaky voice. "I've never been—spurned so nicely before. I do see that it's—it's impossible, of course. I did mean it, though. I shall always mean it."

He patted her arm. "There's Brice, Pat. He loves you."

"Yes," she said, and smiled gently. "There's Brice. Thanks for being so kind with me." She stood on tiptoe and brushed his cheek with her lips. Then she turned and walked a little way down the beach.

Tarzan stared after her for a moment thoughtfully, then he turned to face Janette and de Groote. The Dutchman was laughing and out of breath while Janette was doing a poor job of hiding the radiance glowing inside of her.

"Tell her, Tarzan," the Dutchman demanded, "tell her that Captain Bolton can marry us once we get aboard the *Naiad*. She says he can't. Tell her that she's wrong."

Tarzan nodded at the girl. "You are wrong, Janette," he said gravely. He glanced over to where Brice was standing with Patricia, her face turned up to his. She was smiling. And Tarzan knew that that, too, would be all right.

From a little further along the beach, he heard Lady Penelope's voice briskly giving orders to everyone within earshot. He smiled. Things were getting back to normal. He waded out into the water and began to swim toward the yacht just coming around the reef, his great arms cleaving the sunset-stained waters with clean, powerful strokes . . .

THE END

He's in! He's out! He's a man; a cigar-store Indian; a camelopard! What we mean is—

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# Argonotes

## The Readers' Viewpoint



ON the morning of April sixth, the H. M. S. *Malaya*, the good luck ship of the British navy, arrived in New York harbor, with a collision mat covering a twenty-six foot gash in the armor plate on her port side. She had been in countless engagements, beginning with the Battle of Jutland in 1916, and this rip was reputed to be her first casualty.

The men from the *Malaya*—bright, alert kids most of them—were instructed to say nothing about the damage. This was their first port in forty-one days; all of them were behind in their beer drinking, and they proceeded to catch up. They were lavishly entertained or shabbily treated, lionized or rolled—depending on which subway station they got off.

When anyone bought them a drink, they felt obligated to tell a story. They told tall stories, with the essence of truth in them, but so mixed up that they couldn't possibly be of any use to the wrong persons. And we're pretty sure that no one of the thirteen hundred men aboard the *Malaya* ever revealed the cause of the rip in her hull.

Several versions were passed around. She was hit while fighting off the Cape Verde Islands. She was torpedoed in mid-Atlantic. She collided with another ship while in convoy duty.

Only two men were said to have been injured: one sustaining a shrapnel-ripped ear, the other a lacerated scalp. But we heard, from a source as reliable as the next, that one bomb killed a hundred and fifty of the *Malaya's* crew. We heard that she came into New York with her guns so twisted and smashed that she couldn't have fought an armed trawler. Things like that.

The mystery of the *Malaya* took hold of us. We never missed a chance to talk to a Royal Navy seaman. But we listened to so many garbled accounts that we almost gave up the idea of ever getting a story that we could pass on to ARGOSY readers.

And then it happened. A member of our staff, himself an ex-seaman, fell into conversation with one of the *Malaya's* crew, gained his confidence, and began to hear what sounded like a pretty straight story. He checked and re-checked; and when he was completely satisfied with the details he asked the British sailor to write his own story for us. The result is an exclusive for ARGOSY—the amazingly vivid shot-by-shot account of two important Mediterranean assaults, which you will find on page six of this issue.

And here is proof enough—if any further proof were needed—that truth can be fully as exciting as fiction.

WHICH brings us to a fascinating letter that came in from a reader this week, illustrating how—particularly in these feverish times—truth and fiction tend to get so mixed that it's hard to tell them apart.

It's one for the book, this letter from our own Ripley,

### DONN HALE MUNSON

I was sprawled in my chair at my rewrite desk on this paper (*Palm Beach Publications*), reading my usual copy of your excellent magazine, and was particularly absorbed in Richard Sale's story about sabotage *et al* in Florida.

The title skips me at the minute (QRR—Ed.) but the yarn was intriguing because Sale laid the scene just a few miles from this city. Right in the middle of the Sale description of sabotage and the resulting airplane crash, my phone rang.

Darned if a plane hadn't cracked up in almost precisely the same country Sale had his characters fall!

Darned if the plane involved in the actual crackup wasn't reported the same as the kind Sale selected for his fictional accident. Later it was learned the plane which in actuality cracked up was of a different type from Sale's manuscript ship.

It took me several hours to work out the details of the accident, which involved Rae Hickock (Hickock belts, jewelry, etc.); and all the while I was busy polishing up the story for my own

paper, the Associated Press, and some Buffalo, N. Y. papers, I was greatly disturbed because I imagined some details of the crash which I couldn't find in any of our correspondent's notes or in any of my own.

After several hours more, I suddenly awoke to realize the shocking similarity between fiction and fact and consequently had to tread carefully lest I inject lots of Sale's corking story into my news yarns.

If Mr. Sale weren't such a damned good writer, I'd suggest to the FBI he be questioned about the real crash; looks like he had the inside track on it.

Congrats on your excellent publication. My only criticism is you use too many Westerns which, if we readers wanted Westerns, we could get in magazines carrying that type of story exclusively.

Oh yes; may I have Sale's address? West Palm Beach, Fla.

OUR thanks to Mr. Munson. As for Richard Sale (who we hope is not yet on the lam from Mr. Whiskers)—authors are often a footloose lot, and keeping readers up to date on their whereabouts would be a pretty breathless business.

But if Mr. Munson (or any other reader) wants to write to Mr. Sale (or any other of our authors) in our care, we'll be glad to see that the letter is forwarded.

LAST week we published a couple of complaints about the illustrations in ARGOSY. Here's another one, catching us up on a rather interesting detail, from

### CHARLES M. HUNTER

The story "Five Aces West" in the July 26 issue was good but the illustrator did not know his subject very well. He shows a woman and a baby and small boy riding a pushcart.

The women were not pampered in those days and they and the children walked alongside. Even nursing mothers had to walk; and many an older tells of being carried by his mother across the plains. It just wasn't the fashion for Mormon women to be soft. Boulder City, Nevada