

SEPTEMBER 25¢

MAMMOTH ADVENTURE

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GAMBIT

by DWIGHT V. SWAIN





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Front cover painting by Harris Goode, illustrating a scene from "New Guinea Gambit"



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All Stories Complete

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- NEW GUINEA GAMBIT** (Short Novel—35,000) Dwight V. Swain 8
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 New Guinea held more than headhunters—Anita, the fighting Dutch girl was there!
- SWORD OVER ISLAM** (Short Novel—36,000) Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson... 72
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 Josselin, the Frank, allied himself with Genghis Khan, against the hosts of Islam!
- CRAZY CAT** (Short—5300) Frances M. Deegan 132
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 Linda had something to worry about besides her modesty—it was shark versus swim-suit.
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 They say, "Clever, these Chinese," and Mark Fat proved to know all of the tricks—plus!
- THE UNVANQUISHED** (Short—4600) Wilbur S. Peacock 156
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 Devil took a beating—until he learned that a wolf's best friend—and worst—is a man!
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The Editor's Page.....

THE lead story in this issue, "New Guinea Gambit," by Dwight V. Swain, for which our cagy cover was done, is a terrific job. Dwight did a lot of material for us before he got into the Army and even though he hasn't been out too long, he's gotten right back in stride and is turning out some of the best stories of his career, as you make clear. While this is his first appearance in *Mammoth Adventure*, we guarantee it won't be his last! Anyhow, the story is set in the Dutch East Indies, right now one of the numerous trouble spots in a trouble-spotted world. It's modern, packed with action and has an unusual number of angles. Pay particular attention to Anita—she's a cute Dutch girl—who not only has a figure, but a brain to boot! All we can say is, it's a damned good story and every word will fascinate you.

WE'RE willing to bet that the minute you picked up this magazine, you recognized a name that is almost as familiar as your own. Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson is a name to be reckoned with! You've seen his stuff everywhere—now read him at best. The story "Sword Over Islam," is an exceptional example of a first-class, top-notch historical adventure story in the Sabatini tradition. A story of the Crusaders, who left a trail of blood—their own—over Asia, "Sword Over Islam" is jam-packed with thrilling action, accurate down to the last cross-bow bolt. Notice too that it is illustrated by Joe Tillotson. When your editor sent in an illustration order for the story, Joe's face lighted up like a neon sign. There is nothing he'd rather do than a sound historical drawing which gives him a chance to throw in a thousand details. Every link of chain mail, the scimitar, the sword, the helmets, the flagon—all are the real McCoy. Anyway the illustration and the story are superb work. Let's hear what you think of both.

YOU'LL notice in keeping with our policy of bringing you the best in both modern and historical adventure fiction, in this issue we've softened the historical stuff, yet we've included at least one story of that type as we intend to do regularly. Other than "Sword Over Islam," all the stories in this issue are in modern settings because lately we've been over-stressing the historical end. Balance is the thing we're looking for. When you want the best possible load of adventure reading, you know that MAMMOTH ADVENTURE has it, plus everything else!

FOR a change of pace, it would be well worth your while to look into our sister magazines, *Amazing Stories*, *Fantastic Adventures*, both of which live up to their names. *Mammoth Western*, *Mammoth Detective* and *Mammoth Mystery*,

constitute another trio that will keep you wide awake whatever your tastes are. Give them a whirl!

"CRAZY CAT," by Frances M. Deegan, is one of those "off-trail" stories that everybody likes to read now and then—some people, all of the time. We gave you one of that order in the last issue of MA. Remember "Only a Sucker Bites"? Well, this too is about animals, a cat to be exact, who had some ideas of his own. The story is told with such understanding that we sometimes wonder if the author didn't have a cosy little chat with a cat. The funny pitch here is that the cat liked to do a little detecting—oh-oh—that's enough. Any more would give the whole thing away.

J. C. STANLEY who did "Only a Sucker Bites" in the last issue of MA has been taking a merciless ribbing from his friends. As you recall, the story was told from the viewpoint of a fish—that's all his friends needed. The standard opening now in greeting him is, "Hi, sucker!"

"JERK Gets Girl," by V. V. Dredaine, is a short-short of the "surprise" type. We think you'll like the idea tremendously. Anyhow, the girl has a tough problem to solve. In some circumstances you can't afford to be modest. Especially when plenty of wide-jawed shark is interested in your carcass. And this shark was not only interested—he was downright hungry!

RICHARD Dermody's "Mark Fat Ties A Knot," is a whimsical, philosophical story of a wise, wise Chinese, who knew what he wanted and got it—even if he had to do it in an unorthodox manner. And in perfect contrast, Wilbur S. Peacock's "The Unvanquished" gives us a tale of the bitter law of tooth and fang in the frozen North. This is one of those stories that is so real and touching that you can sympathize perfectly with the animal's viewpoint. You almost feel that you *are* Devil, a wolf defending his mate, and not simply a spectator.

WE'VE got another Shaver novelette on the fire and it will be coming soon. Of course it's an historical job—but with a clever pitch. Roger Bacon, famed old scientist and philosopher, was once a student at the University of Paris in medieval times. Well, that is just so much grist for Shaver's mill and he shows that the old boy had something on his mind besides books and retorts. The research for this story was done by Derr.

THAT winds us up for this issue. Be sure to let us know how this one went over and keep your eye peeled for future issues. We've got some great stuff coming up. So long for now . . . RAP

EASTER ISLAND

By PETE BOGGS

Do those huge stone images of the gods
carry the promise of an eternal curse?

EASTER ISLAND, the Island of the Dead, has been a puzzle of the southern ocean since it was first discovered by Captain Davis in 1687. He reported the sandy beach and high, fair island in the Pacific in latitude 27 degrees south and five hundred miles west of the South American coast. It was marked on all the charts and given the name of its discoverer, "Davis Land," and would still have this name today except for one thing . . . it vanished. There were other adventurers and naval explorers who were anxious to fly the flag of their country over this unclaimed island if it could be found. Fifty years after Davis made his discovery, the Dutch admiral Roggeween came through the Strait of Magellan and went west along the twenty-seventh parallel, but unlike his predecessors who were in search of the mysterious island, he failed to turn back after the first thousand miles. As a reward on Easter morning in 1722, the sun came up to reveal the island on the horizon ahead of him. The admiral landed and claimed the island, named it in honor of the day, and thought he had solved one of the most amazing puzzles in the history of man.

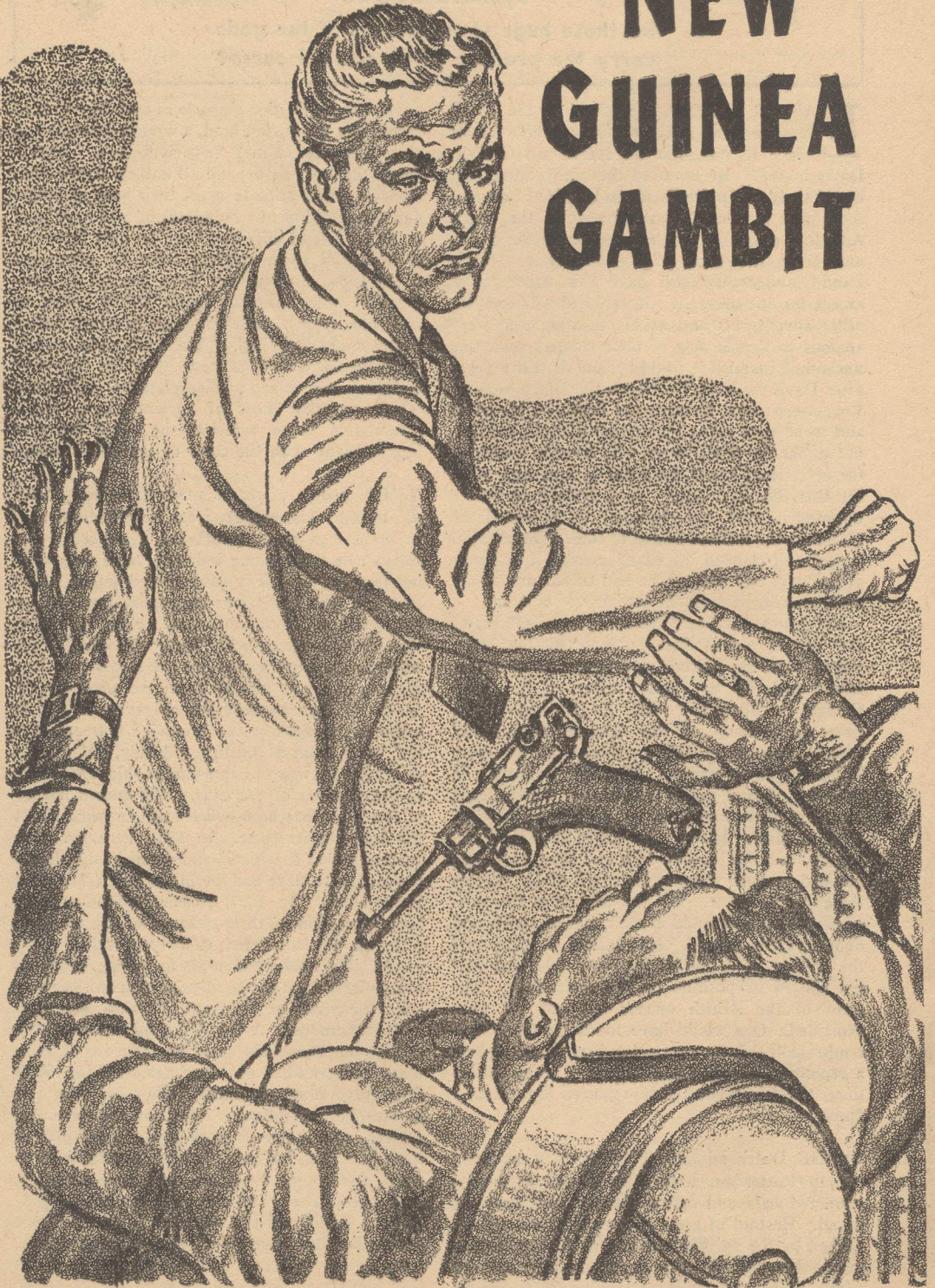
But just a few years ago some naval officers of the British Naval Reserve reported that they passed over the latitude and longitude of Easter Island and did not find a trace of it. They thought the island had sunk. So that ended for a time the history of this strange disappearing island. Some time later a gunboat put out from Valparaiso to investigate. They had no trouble in finding the island just as it had been. By the looks of things there had been no earthquake or tidal wave on Easter Island. The stone gods were still leering from the desolate hills and the natives still huddled in their village and talked of the terrible things yet to come. But the captain of the gunboat was not interested in their talk of ghosts and dooms yet to happen. He checked to make sure the granite spike twelve thousand feet high had not shifted its position on the ocean floor. The error of the British officers has not yet been explained. One would have to charge them with a mistake if this were an isolated case, but this was a repetition of what had happened several times since the island was first reported by Captain Davis.

THE Dutch admiral, Roggeween, went home to Rotterdam with tales of tall gods who wore red hats and cast a gloomy spell over the island. He told of great engineering feats accomplished by the natives who had no tools or equipment. Most of his countrymen doubted him for years till his reports were verified by successive

adventurers. On this pinnacle of rock hundreds of miles from the nearest land, a wretched people had come close to culture and civilization. Monuments that seemed beyond all natural explanation stood in grand pride to mark their hour of power and accomplishment. Hundreds of men have been to Easter Island since and have brought facts and theories and stone carvings from the graveyard of the gods. Survey ships have traveled for hundreds of miles over the South Pacific trying to find some trace of an archipelago in which Easter Island might have had a place. Linguists are still searching for a Rosetta stone by which they may decipher the island's hieroglyphics, characters which resemble those of ancient Crete. Some imaginative people associate the weird altars of Easter Island with the curse of the lost Lemuria.

FEW people of recent years have seen Easter Island. The whalers from New Bedford used to make it a port of call, but even before the collapse of the whaling industry, these calls were not frequent because it was rumored among sailors that bad luck had taken permanent residence on the island, and that somewhere among its craters was the entrance to hell. Today the island is cut off from the world except for one ship a year that anchors as far as possible from the wreck-strewn coast. It may be that the old curse is still in action or it might be that the wind is treacherous and has a habit of shifting suddenly, but terrible things have a way of happening to ships that loiter in the shadows of the cliffs. The known history of the island has been evil enough to bring about the belief in its curse. In 1862, Peruvian slave traders raided the island and carried off half the population to slave and die in the South American guano fields. In 1867, Bornier, an adventurer, took possession of three-quarters of the island in exchange for some red calico and other cheap goods. He established a sheep raising ranch to supply fresh meat to the ships passing on their way from the Strait of Magellan to Tahiti, and then he was murdered. A few of the inhabitants taken off by the Peruvians came to their island after many countries had protested against them. With them they brought smallpox. Only a few were able to survive this plague. Most of the surviving natives sailed away to work in the sugar plantations of Tahiti, but years later, homesick, without spirit, and hoping for death, they came straggling back again. The proud history of the image builders was ended, and the remnants of an intelligent people huddled together in their squalid village, ignoring the difference in breeding and tradition that had for so long kept them in distinct castes.

NEW GUINEA GAMBIT



The punch to the jaw jarred him loose from the Luger he was holding

by Dwight V. Swain

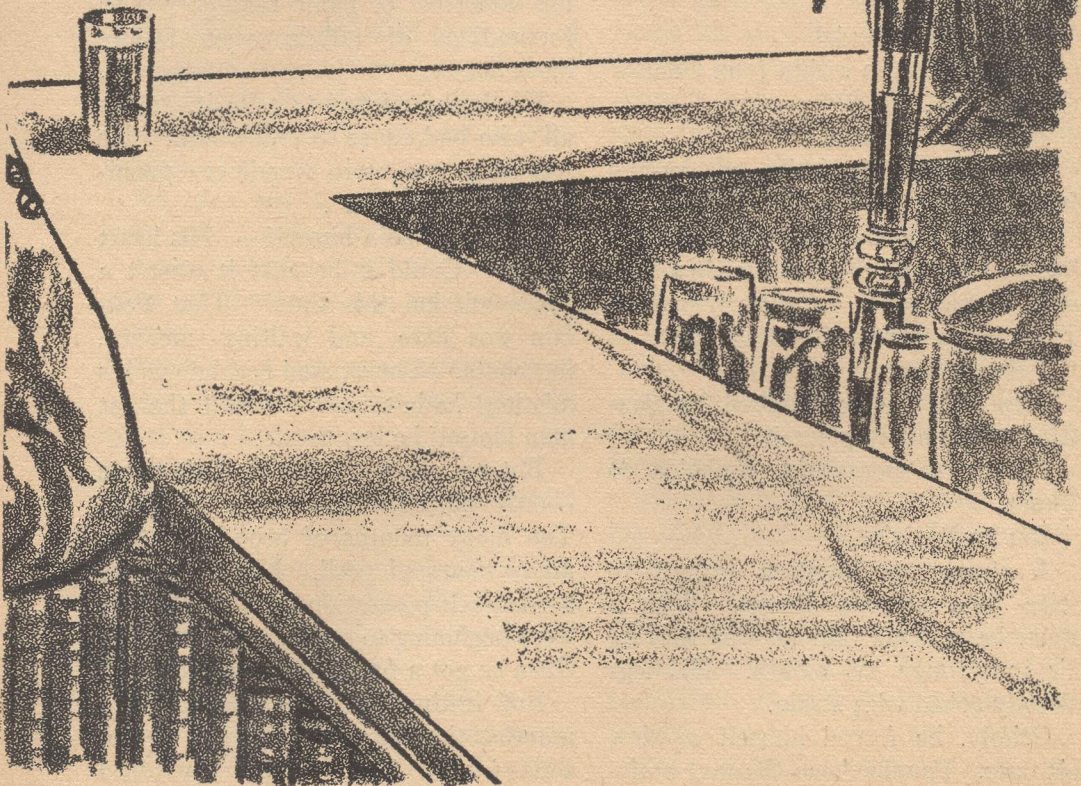
FAKFAK, and footsteps. Footsteps in the night. Footsteps.

Fragments of sound, softly slithering. Intermittent whispers, borne on the fringe of the southeast trades that lazed up past Tanjong Tongerai, across the miles from the Arafura Sea.

Footsteps.

They were only an echo, at first, flicking at the rim of John Daniels' brain. Background music. Like the ceaseless *slap-slap-slapping* of the Arafura's swell those endless days gone by. Or the doleful sound that to the

John Daniels wanted to believe in Anita, but the little Dutch girl seemed a little trigger-happy behind the Luger



black Kanakas passed for song.

He ignored them, as he ignored all things outside his mission. Strode on, heedless. On, away from the rubble of the landing. On, past the bulk of the Netherlands New Guinea Trading Company's warehouse, black-looming against the starless sky. On, toward the town atop the hill, where the sea-breeze blew stronger, away from the fever-festering swamps' miasma.

The lights from the straggled buildings above were like beacons in John Daniels' brain. They blotted out the steaming, pitch-black tropic night; the mildewed taste of moulding hardtack, brackish water; the stink of filth and fish and copra.

The lights, and the memories. Memories of Tom, and of Poulain. Twin portraits, fiery images, seared in the living tissue of his brain.

Tom. His only brother. Dead Tom, now.

Dead, dead, dead.

A sob welled up within John Daniels' throat.

And then, Poulain.

The sob died in futile, paroxysmal fury.

Poulain. The smirking fat man. The human octopus, with tentacles in a hundred tropic ports. Evil, personified. The malign force without a body.

The murderer.

How long had he searched for Poulain? How many places?

Darwin to Soerabaja, Amboina to Timor.

But no Poulain.

A strange anticipation seemed to seize John Daniels' throat. With a start, he realized that he was sucking air in through his mouth. His legs already ached with strain.

Grimly, he forced himself to slow his pace. Fought down the taut anticipation. He couldn't let hope grow.

Not now. Why buck the odds. This was one more fool's mission, doomed from the start.

He unclenched his fists. Stretched the ache from his cramping fingers.

It was then that he heard the steps again.

He was conscious of them now. Suddenly. Acutely. They echoed in his ears like the dull thud of a leaden hammer sealing a coffin's lid.

It was, he told himself, absurd. This was Fakfak. A thousand people lived here, if you counted blacks. Why wouldn't there be footsteps?

Without thinking, hardly realizing, he dragged his pace.

Behind him, those other feet dragged too.

A thin thread of despair ran through him, like the first edge of flame in a bamboo thicket. Not physical fear; that he could master. Rather, the racing undertow of panic that goes with forebodings of failure when failure must not be.

His brain refused to take it. After all, who had cause to follow him? He was only one more wanderer—penniless; unknown. . . .

Unless Poulain himself— His heart leaped. Could it be that it wasn't a fool's mission this time? That Poulain was here, and waiting—menace, incarnate? The woman had known his mission, hadn't she? Would the fat man himself be less astute.

But no. It was absurd. This panic—only nature, exacting her penalty. Too many months of brooding. Too many hours of peril. Now, when he needed self-possession most, his nerves were beginning to crack. That was all. Once he got a firm grip on himself. . . .

But instinct was too strong. The months, the years, all close to death, walked with him. His brain could not control them.

Ever so casually, he stopped, as if to get his breath. That only—it was too dark to see, and any more overt move might rouse suspicion.

Behind him, the footsteps halted.

Still casual, he drew a deep breath, climbed onward.

Those other feet resumed their padding progress.

IN A way, it was a relief. It reassured him, gave him new confidence in his own subconscious. The momentary panic vanished, replaced by a note of lethal competence. He was pursued? He wondered. There were those who'd thought they were pursuing . . . He caught himself grinning wolfishly in the night.

Grimly, he forced himself to reason.

Could this be some straying headhunter, down from the bush, on the trail of grisly trophies for the village *douba* house?

No. That was out. He'd been stalked by natives too many times before. There would be no sound of stealthy footsteps if this were a wandering Mai-Mai warrior.

No, this was a white man. Or at least, a man who wore shoes.

A local footpad, then? Some drunken sailor, on the beach and out to make a stake?

Again, no. He was too obviously poverty-stricken himself to hold the eye of any looter.

That left Poulain.

Not in person, of course. That would be too much to ask.

No. He could expect no more than a flunky. Some hireling hoodlum, as before. A piece-worker, probably: no murder, no pay.

Abruptly, he shrugged. What difference did it make? He was being followed. That was enough. The next move was up to him.

Deliberately, he fumbled a cigarette from the pocket of the tattered old Marine combat jacket that served him as a coat. Paused, while he scratched a light on the sole of his ancient, crackling, Australian-issue boots.

His pursuer paused with him.

John Daniels laughed beneath his breath. Sucked at the cigarette till it became a glowing signal light in the night.

Boldly, then, he veered off to the right. Headed away from the path toward a long, squat shed that showed black against the sky some twenty yards from the main track up the hill.

The steps behind him missed a beat. He could sense his stalker's indecision.

Himself, he did not pause.

Instead, briskly, he strode on, stumbling noisily over rocks and roots and rubble.

It made a good show. He knew it. But with it there came a prickling between his shoulder blades, an icy finger on his spine. He made such a perfect target, bumbling along thus, even in the dark! He'd lost the footsteps in the clatter, too, and that made it worse. Because his pursuer had trailed him this far, he hoped that meant a plan; a time; a place. But he could not be sure. Not sure enough. It would only take one shot. . . .

His breath was coming too fast. He caught himself wishing desperately that he hadn't had to sell his own Army forty-five for passage money.

He made it, after an eternity. Took his stand, in the shed's shallow doorway.

SHADOWS clung here. A sort of semi-concealment. It made him feel better, drained away a little of his tension.

But standing, waiting, was not enough. With a final ostentatious

flourish, he pulled the cigarette from his mouth. Knocked off the ash. Wedged the butt head-high in the crevice between the door and jamb, so that the glowing tip hung visible, as if suspended from his lips.

Then, dropping to his knees, he slid forth again, close to the ground, a shadow among shadows, silent as the smoke that drifted from the smouldering butt.

The hunted, stalking the hunter.

Out from the building. Down his own backtrail. Away, into the blackness that no eye could pierce.

A pandanus clump gave him cover. He waited there, taut and tense, straining his ears for some tell-tale sound.

Ten seconds. Twenty. Thirty.

Still nothing. John breathed through his wide-open mouth, tenser than ever, fearful that even the whisper of air would betray him.

Forty. Fifty. A full minute.

He lay like a corpse, only his eyes moving.

Ten seconds more.

Off down the slope, dry grass momentarily rustled.

It was easy, after that. The pursuer was clumsy, heavy-footed. His pockets jingled, even. It was too dark to see him, save in terms of a vague black bulk, but a child could have followed his progress toward the shed. He made for the far end first, then sidled awkwardly along the wall toward the empty doorway where John's cigarette butt still glowed dimly in the night.

A ghost in the darkness, John oozed away from the pandanus clump. Fell in behind the man who sought him.

He never knew quite what it was that tripped him. A root, maybe. Or a snag of tangled grass.

The result was more important. One instant, he was the aggressor: silent,

deadly; closing in like a hungry tiger on its prey. The next, a sprawling gawk, spread-eagled flat on his back on the ground.

The other spun round. A big man, thick of chest, gorilla-muscled. Light glinted from a Malay *kris* in his right hand. Like lightning, he leaped for John's throat, the wave-edged blade drawn back for the killing blow.

The man was fast—devilishly, disconcertingly fast; the more so in contrast to his clumsy stalking.

Even rolling away, John Daniels knew it. The next instant, an avalanche of flesh and bone smashed down upon him. He felt the *kris* slash through his jacket, sear his ribs.

Desperately, he caught the knife-wrist in both hands. Pinned it with every ounce of strength.

The other rocked back with all his weight. Crushed out John's wind. Drove a gnarled oak fist at his face.

John felt the blood spurt from his nose. His brain exploded in an anguished froth of paralysis and pain. It was all he could do to cling to the other's wrist.

The fist smashed down again.

More by instinct than design, John jerked his head aside. Surged upward, twisting.

His adversary toppled.

A spasm of effort, tearing free. Sobbing, John rolled away.

The big man lurched up in an instant. Charged again, the *kris* drawn back.

JOHN exploded his feet at the other's knees.

His opponent dodged, jumped sideways. Came in fast.

But not quite fast enough. Again, John smashed out with his feet. Drove them square into the other's thick midriff. Felt his knees buckle with the im-

pact.

Even in his own pain, he could hear the wind burst out of the charging knife-man. Saw him lurch and stagger.

He made himself follow through. Stumbled upright. Kicked with all his might for the other's groin.

Shrill agony burst from the knifer's throat. An animal cry, sheer torment, to make the hackles rise and the blood run cold.

John Daniels' pain was fading, his own wind back. A crimson haze of fury robed his brain. Snarling, ruthless, he sprang in close. Straightened the other against the squat shed's wall with a savage left to the jaw. Swung out with his right, fingers stiff, for the final spine-shattering palm-edge blow.

Behind him, a gun roared.

It was close, so close his ears rang with thunder, and the orange of the muzzle-blast blinded him, and the wind of the slug sang a song of death beside his cheek.

Sheer reflex carried him, then. His blow went unstruck. Spasmodically, he flung himself away, flat on the ground where the shadows hung blackest.

Was this the way it was to end—with a bullet in the back in this wilderness of Dutch New Guinea? Were all the months of fruitless search to go in vain?

Silence. Taut, echoing eternities of silence, while his bones ached, and his nerves rang clashing discords, and the dark closed down upon him like a smothering hood.

He thought of that shot in the night, and the man who'd fired it. Of the knifer, and his *kris*. Of dead Tom, and Poulain, and death in the dark.

He wondered if the others, like he, still lay there waiting—waiting for him, John Daniels, to rise and make himself a target.

Off on the pathway, twenty immeasurable yards away, voices rose in drunken mirth. Then, slowly, they faded again, off down the hill toward the landing.

John wondered if he would ever live to reach that path.

Still nothing. No sounds. No movements.

He could stand it no longer. He thrust out an exploring hand, clutched a clod. Tossed it off toward the spot beside the shed where he and the knifer had struggled.

It landed with a thud. So faint a thud he had to strain his ears to catch it.

Frowning to himself, he tossed another.

This time rubble rattled, like a miniature landslide getting under way.

More seconds, ticking by.

Ever so slowly, ever so cautiously, John edged forward. It was an experiment, more than progress. Instinctively, he braced himself against the shot he feared would come.

Nothing.

He drew a deep breath. Came up on one knee.

Still nothing.

He frowned. It seemed incredible that those two, the knifer and the gunman, both could have escaped in that fraction of a second while he leaped for safety.

That first, silent clod!

He frowned again. Rose. Strode over to where they'd fought.

The knifer was still there. John fell across him, sprawled in the dirt, but the *kris*-man made no move.

Again, a match, scratched on the sole of the old Australian-issue boots.

John stared down at the fallen hoodlum by its light. Then, suddenly, in spite of his control, his fingers began to tremble.

There was nothing much outstanding about the man lying there. Just one more burly thug, with thick lips and tattooed arms and a brutal face. They came a guilder a dozen in these tropic ports.

But still, John Daniels' fingers trembled.

Because the man with the *kris* had a bullet-hole in his forehead.

He was very, very dead.

CHAPTER II

Man-Trap

SHE was lovely, ethereally lovely, with an angel's face set off by a halo of spun gold hair. A dangerous loveliness, though, for a body went with the angel face, a body lithely sensual as that of a she-devil straight from hell.

John Daniels recognized that danger. The instant he saw her he recognized it. Instinctively. Without hesitation. She knew that he recognized it, too. He could see it in the lift of her chin, the quirk of her lips, the scorning green depths of her eyes.

It was not good, that knowledge. It gnawed like a flame at his vitals. He could feel the heat climb his cheeks as it speeded his breathing, dried his mouth.

A wafting tendril of hot, musky scent touched his nostrils.

Anger welled up within him. It was so patent, all of it. Her message—"I'll give you Poulain." That, and a rendezvous, and a meaningless name.

For all he'd known, it might have been a hoax, or even a trap.

But Poulain. She'd promised him Poulain. That was enough. Trap or true, he didn't care. It was worth the gamble.

It had brought him across three

hundred miles of tropic sea, that promise. It would have carried him a thousand just as well, he thought, or back from beyond the grave. Hate was that way.

So now he sat here before her, high in this cluttered lodging on Fakfak's hill. A bullet-riddled corpse lay sprawled on the slope below, and a murderer stalked abroad, and he, John Daniels, was down to his last guilder, but he didn't care. Not as long as he got Poulain. That was all that mattered. He hadn't even bothered to report the shooting.

But this—dim lights. Perfume. The scarlet gown that on her was a sheath of flame. As if she were scheming to throw off his judgment, upset his plans.

And she. Eternal woman. Half loveliness, half lust. Smugly ready to set man's loins afire to gain her goal.

The anger welled higher, hotter. Grew to a smouldering spasm of fury that almost choked him.

He hardly heard her when she spoke.

"What?" It came out as a snarl.

"It is late, too late," she said again. Her English had a faintly foreign flavor, the barest hint of accent. "I am sorry. You took too long."

There was something about it. Her voice, maybe, or the way she said the words, or the too-fast rise and fall of breasts beneath their scarlet sheathing.

Slowly, his tide of fury ebbed. He stared at her. Took in the smooth shoulders' barely perceptible sag. The troubled lines that etched the angel face.

Again, her beauty's power swept over him. He caught himself wondering if he could have been wrong about her lure, the studied provocation.

"You might explain," he said at last. Even in his own ears his voice sounded strange—raw; uncertain; husky.

Wordless, she turned away. Crossed like breeze-borne down to the window. Drew back the sleazy drape.

Frowning, he followed. Stared over her shoulder through the starless night, down into the black of the yard below. Silence. Nothing but silence.

"You see?"

He shook his head.

Her fingers were light on his arm, her face close to his.

"There, by the banyan tree. Where the shadows are blackest."

He strained his eyes. Stared off a fraction to one side, with that trick for night sight they had taught him in the Marines a thousand eternities ago.

"You see?" she whispered again.

The shadows. The black shadows, close to the banyan tree.

Even as she spoke, they moved.

Her fingers parted. Let the drape fall back.

"You see? You came too late. Already I am watched. Nothing can help now. Nothing at all."

A shudder ran through her, like the echo of a chill.

JOHN DANIELS' brain seethed, a caldron of tumult. Poulain, and dead Tom, and this woman and the stalker with the *kris*, and the shadow down there by the banyan tree—tossed together, all of them, swirling in a morbid sea that was fear and hate and fury and suspicion rolled in one.

A sort of frenzy seemed to seize the woman beside him, as if his own turmoil were spreading, contagious. Her voice echoed low, atremble with some dark emotion he could not label. Words came in a jumbling rush.

"You were my last hope, John Daniels. Tom, your brother—I knew him. I loved him. But because he helped me, Poulain cut him down. I was only a woman. I could not strike back."

Her voice broke. She buried her face in her hands. A spasm racked her. "So?"

Her shoulders still were shaking, her voice muffled.

"Word came to me you were back in the islands, scouring the ports, with hate in your heart and death in your hands. They said that even Poulain was afraid. I—I needed help. Tom was dead, and I was left alone . . . so all alone. That's why I sent for you."

Slowly, John nodded. When he spoke, it was half to himself.

"I'd wondered. No one seemed to know. Not what the trouble really was. Only that Poulain had done the job."

"And now it is too late." Listless, hollow-eyed, she crossed back to the window. Peered down through the night toward the banyan tree.

He watched her in sullen silence.

"Day after day, I waited, praying you'd come. . . ."

"It took time." He couldn't keep the bitter note from his voice. "I was broke when the message caught me at Amboina. I had to sell my gun for passage money. Even so, all I could get was deck space on a stinking little trader that hit every clearing the master thought might gross a guildler's business."

"Of course." She toyed with a loose thread from the drape.

"And it's not too late. Not if that shadow in the yard is all that's worrying you." He drew his lips to a thin, harsh line. Let the fury he felt come out in words. "I'm hard to kill. Too hard, for the team Poulain's got playing. I've met the reception committee already, and there won't be any more trouble on that score. I doubt that your admirer down below will be tougher."

The woman shook her head, a world of weariness in the gesture.

"Even that—it is not enough. Poulain . . . is gone."

"Where's he gone, we can follow." Impatience lashed at John's nerve-ends. The muscles of his shoulders and neck ached with strain. "We're wasting time now. Come on! Tell me! Let's go!"

"No." It was a whisper, a sigh. "We cannot follow. Not where he has gone."

Panic raced through John Daniels like a forest fire. He hardly dared speak. His world all at once was crashing about him.

"He isn't . . . dead?"

"Dead? Poulain?" The woman laughed aloud. "If only he were! But no. That kind of good fortune cannot be ours."

With an effort, John held his voice level.

"Then what's wrong? You say we can't follow. If he's alive, I say we can."

"But he is already gone. Back into the interior, the wilderness, unexplored, that even the maps show blank. No one knows just where. . . ."

Very softly, John said: "If one can go, another can follow. I've been in the bush. I know it, as well as any man does. If Poulain's there, I can find him. That I promise."

THE woman turned so sharply that her scarlet gown drew taut across the firm, uptilted breasts, and the golden sheen of hair rippled about her shoulders like dancing autumn sunlight. New life leaped to her face. Even in the dimness, John could see the color flood her cheeks. Her voice was suddenly bubbling, vibrant.

"You mean—even now you will help me? We will fight together against

Poulain?"

Something about the way she said it—some off-key note—rang warning bells in John Daniels' brain. He measured his words.

"I'll help you do what?"

Her face mirrored confusion.

"Why . . . the gold. . . . We will find it—"

Black fury burst through the dam of John's control. In two swift strides he was upon her. Gripping her shoulders. Shaking her till her teeth rattled, and the green eyes went wide with fear.

"Go on!" he lashed. "Go on! Tell me about it! How my brother died for you, by your own confession, and how now all you can think of is the loot you didn't get!"

He could see her face go white to the lips. Then her eyes blazed green lightning. Her hand flashed up, struck out in a stinging slap across his face.

He reeled back. Threw up his own arm against the rain of blows, the torrent of slashing hate that poured forth in some tongue he did not understand.

She switched to English:

"You fool! You stupid, brutal fool! Do you think the gold matters to me? Do you think I care one brass cash for it?"

"What the hell would I think?" Again his fury overwhelmed him. "You told me yourself, didn't you? You said you wanted me to help you find 'the gold'. I don't know what gold you're talking about, but off-hand it all sounds to me like you and Poulain were just two more thieves falling out."

"You fool!" Her tongue was dipped in vitriol. And then: "But you do not know. It is true. You do not know."

"What don't I know?"

She shrugged.

"You know nothing. Nothing at all. I must explain." Another pause. "You have heard of the Van Pelts?"

He shook his head.

"I am a Van Pelt. Anita Van Pelt of Djaimalang." She straightened as she said it, cloaked all at once with a dignity almost queenly. "For generations we have been the Van Pelts of Djaimalang. My ancestors claimed the island by right of discovery and exploration, back in the days when the Dutch first came to the Indies. Down through the years, the centuries, we lived there, working and trading and prospering.

"Then came the war. Day after day my father and brothers and I watched the Japs sweeping closer. Day after day, waiting for the inevitable landing. The blood. The looting. The fire and sword. We could not even flee, for our boats were gone, wrecked or stolen by natives running amok with fear."

SHE paused, lips parted and trembling. Stared past John Daniels—through him, almost—as if recreating those terrible days again.

He fought down the instinctive wave of sympathy that surged through him. Knotted his fists. Forced himself to stay cold and hard.

"Well?"

She half turned away. Her tongue moistened her lips.

"Just before . . . the end . . . a plane came. An old tri-motored Junkers, fleeing Java. A break in the fuel line forced them down.

"To us it was an act of providence. We still had petrol, and the three Australians aboard the Junkers told us they would be glad to take us with them. They said the plane originally had been purchased for use in the great Wau goldfields, but that they would go to Darwin instead." She laughed a little, and the sound was bitter as vinegar and gall. "What fools were we! We should have known they were scum

by the very smell of them. Probably they'd stolen the plane. But we were too frantic with fear to see beyond the moment.

"Even then, we might have escaped with our lives. But my brothers were not content with that. Down through the years, the Van Pelts had gathered a great treasure at Djaimalang, all coins and bullion—close to three million *gulden* in gold. They demanded that it go with us.

"The Australians were ever so cooperative. They agreed without question, even thought every wasted moment was dangerous. Carefully, they stowed the gold aboard. And then—"

Her voice broke. Shoulders shaking, she slumped to a chair, sobbing. It had a queer, keening note—high, half hysterical.

John gripped her shoulders.

"Go on!"

The sobs choked off. Face still averted, she spoke.

"They shot my brothers. Shot them down in cold blood as they stood there. They would have murdered my father and me, too, I have no doubt, but we were still in the house." Again her voice broke off.

Then, through tears: "Perhaps it would have been better had they done so."

John stood in silence, without the heart to speak.

"We buried my brothers," she went on finally. "After that we could only wait for the Japs. They came, and we were interned. My father died before the year was out. As for me . . ." She shrugged. "I lived. Finally the war ended. I was freed. That is all."

"And the gold, and Tom?"

"The gold?" Her lips twisted. "I wish to God I had never heard of the gold again." A pause. "It was at Darwin, one of those miracles that are

completely outside the laws of mathematical chance. I passed a man on the street—and it was one of those three Australians who had been in the plane.

"MY FIRST thought was to kill him. Then I realized that if I did, I would lose my best chance of finding those other two." Again the shrug. "It was easy, really. I had changed much since that other time. He did not recognize me. And I had learned things about . . . men. It did not take too long to become acquainted with him in a casual fashion. Because he was ugly and stupid and gross, and I am a woman, not too unattractive, he was flattered by my attention. He confided in me that he would be rich just as soon as he could locate an unscrupulous aviator with a private plane large enough to carry three passengers and a heavy cargo besides the crew. I gathered that the old Junkers—blown off its course in a storm—had crashed somewhere back of the Snow Mountains, deep in Netherlands New Guinea.

"Trusting no one, not even each other, those three bloody-handed murderers had stayed with the plane and the treasure throughout the war. It was not easy, of course. They degenerated into savagery, lived like animals. But to them, anything would do so long as they could retain their loot and dodge military service back in Australia.

"Then, at last, their radio—they had managed to salvage that—told them the war was over. Once more they could think of a life outside.

"Only now they discovered they were trapped. The Junkers was beyond repair, and they were hundreds of miles from the nearest port. The mountains, the jungle, were like prison walls about them, with a hundred untamed savage tribes—head-hunters still; cannibals—between them and civilization as

guards.

"Worst of all, the gold. It was too heavy to carry. Even granted that they might fight their way through to safety themselves, they would have to leave most if not all of it behind.

"Suspicious as they were, half crazed with isolation, they dared not abandon their treasure for fear one would kill the others when they reached the coast, in order that he might return alone to claim it.

"So instead, they decided that two would stay behind on guard, while the other—the man I'd met—trekked through on foot to the coast alone. He then would return for them by plane.

"My man—Carter, he called himself—finally fought his way through. He made it by sheer luck, he said, for the area through which he had to travel was territory of the Ngurus, one of those horrible, fierce tribes still found in the interior. They harassed him every step of the way. Only the Ngurus' belief that the mountain on which the Junkers had crashed was taboo had saved the Australians from massacre before.

"Carter had expected his troubles to end when he reached civilization. Instead, he found they had only begun, for now he had to locate a plane, and he had no money to pay for it. He dared not to go to any legitimate charter service, for they might suspect whatever story he conjured up and turn him in to the authorities. Adventurers, in turn, with such a stake at hand and knowing the scheme to be illegitimate, were all too likely to murder Carter and his friends for the loot, as my brothers had been murdered."

John shifted.

"Poulain," he pressed. "I want to know about Poulain, and Tom."

A wan smile touched Anita Van Pelt's lips.

"There is no hurry now," she answered. "Time now is cheap. And unless I tell you all, you will not understand."

"Then—"

Her hand came up to silence him.

"There is little more to tell. I had my information, but no proof to back it. To the authorities, it would be my word against Carter's. Even worse, Carter would not be specific as to where the Junkers had crashed. Without his aid, I knew I could not find it nor his partners.

"The best I could do, then, was pretend to fall in with his plans, fawning and flattering, worming his confidence. I told him I knew a crooked pilot well, that I would help him negotiate a deal if he would take me along—let me be his woman, share his wealth.

"It was true. I did know a pilot—knew him, and loved him. Your brother, Tom. . . ."

Her face twisted. Spasmodically, she turned, stumbled away. Hid her face in her hands, while once again her shoulders shook with muffled sobs.

OF A sudden, tenderness—a great compassion—engulfed John Daniels. His throat was all at once too full for words. He turned the girl. Put his arms about her. Held her close, till the sobs that racked her ceased.

Face still averted, she went on.

"I told Tom my story, just as I tell it to you now. And because he loved me, understood me, he swore he would help me gain my revenge." She choked. Bit at her own white-clenched knuckles. "My revenge, God have mercy on me! My revenge! I killed him with it!" And then, as John confronted her: "Yes! I did! But you want my story, not my troubles, and you shall have it, though the truth tears my heart

in two.

"Through his contacts, Tom located a plane. Very quietly, we prepared our little expedition, with everyone but Carter playing a twisted role. There were no difficulties, no major problems. I began to relax, almost. It seemed as if my prayers were to be answered, my dreams of vengeance to come true.

"But Carter drank heavily. Somewhere, somehow, he must have let slip some hint of what we planned.

"That hint reached Poulain, I found later, though at the time I would not even have recognized the name." She let go a brief, bitter sigh. "How he must have gloated at the thought of all that loot! But he was Poulain. He gave us no hint. Let us go on like the blind fools we were, making our little preparations, cherishing our little illusions.

"Then, like a cobra, he struck before we could move.

"It was the night before we were to take off. I came home exhausted to the little ground-floor apartment where I lived. Because I was so tired, I went straight to the bedroom and turned on a boudior lamp, then started across the room to pull down the shades.

"I owe my life to the full-length mirror on the closet door. That, and the dim little boudoir lamp.

"As I turned toward the windows, gunfire burst in my face. I screamed and dropped flat on the floor.

"By the time my brain began to function again, I could hear footsteps running away. Inside the building, people were shouting and banging on my door. I knew then that whoever had tried to kill me had lain in wait outside my bedroom window, and that now they were gone, so I got up." Tremulously, she smiled at John, but he saw that her hands were still two

small, tight-knotted fists. "It was a miracle that I lived, of course. Almost beyond belief. In the dim light the gunman had mistaken my reflection in the mirror for me, and fired at it."

"And then?" said John softly.

"Then?" Her mouth drew into bitter lines. "Why, then I fled to Tom—and found him dead already. Carter had disappeared. Kidnapped by Poulain's men, I learned later. As for me"—her hand moved out in a little gesture of hopelessness, defeat—"I survived. I always do." Her smile was wry mockery, the green eyes dark and deep as sombre forest pools. "You see, John Daniels, I am—how do you say it?—a man-trap. Nothing ever really happens to me. It is those who love me that come to harm!"

CHAPTER III

Design for Murder

THEY sat there, then, while the seconds ticked by, and the tension drew tight as a strangler's cord, and the stillness grew to a living thing.

John Daniels rubbed his palms against his knees. Queer; even the friction helped now. As if he were psychologically paralyzed, unable to move, and this tiny gesture his sole remaining hold on reality.

It expressed itself a dozen ways. His lips were cracking dry, but somehow he could not bring himself to lick them. The froth of cottony saliva far back in his mouth half gagged him, yet he dared not clear his throat. When his eyes began to smart, he still stared straight ahead, unable to relax enough to let them close.

Then, slowly, the hate began to rise again—to swell and grow and seize him like a straw within a whirlpool once more.

"After that?" he said. And as he said it, he knew that it was a croak, more than a voice. A harsh, rasping croak, menace-laden as to raise the hair along his neck.

Anita's lips seemed barely to move. She sat very straight, hands in her lap, chin in, eyes almost luminous in the gloom.

"I came here," she said tonelessly. "A sailor I knew told me he'd seen Carter in Fakfak. So I sent you the message and came on myself."

Wordless, he prodded with his eyes. She went on.

"I managed to talk to him once. Even then, he did not want to, but I made him. He was afraid—more afraid than any man I have ever seen. His outlook was that of one dead already. He said that he had been brought here in one of Poulain's schooners, and that he lived by Poulain's sufferance only. That he would be killed as soon as Poulain had the gold and was secure against betrayal. When I asked him why he did not try to escape—for he was unguarded, on the town—he answered that it was no use. That no man could beat Poulain."

"Then Poulain was here?" John grated the words between clenched teeth. Sudden excitement made him breathe too fast. He knew it. He couldn't help it.

Anitta nodded.

"Yes. He arrived early this afternoon, interviewed Carter, then took off again." She laughed without mirth. "Even three-million-gulden enterprises must wait their turn with the great Poulain. Or perhaps he had trouble getting a plane, as we did, and that was what delayed him. Not that it matters. Not now. For he came at last, in a great amphibian. Now he is gone, and our last hope is gone, too." She started at John, and he thought he de-

fect a thin edge in her voice. "If only you had come sooner, John Daniels! As it was, I tried to persuade Carter to hide till he saw you, but he was too afraid." She shrugged. "So now even our lives are forfeit. To save his own miserable carcass, Carter must have told Poulain about us. And so we have moving shadows under the banyan tree."

John Daniels could feel his heart speed up to double time. He clenched and unclenched his fists. Licked at his lips, the paralysis' last remnants flown.

"Forget it!" he rapped harshly. "I said I'd take care of that shadow. I meant it. Other things are more important now."

"You mean—?" Her lips were half parted, her eyes suddenly bright.

"I mean I'm still out to get Poulain." He said it flatly. Coldly. Came to his feet in one smooth flow of motion. "Maybe you want revenge, too. Maybe you want gold. I don't know, or even care too much of a damn. You're still gunning for Poulain. That's all that matters."

"But how—?"

HOW?" He laughed, deep in his throat. The despair was gone now, the power surging back through him. Almost without thinking he flexed his arms. Thrilled to the strength, the tension. "How? How the hell would you think? Poulain came here to interview your chum Carter, you say. Then he went on. For my money, that means he got his directions from Carter, so Carter knows where he went. And Carter's still here." He grinned, wolfishly. Felt a queer, dark undertow of savage satisfaction at the way the girl's eyes widened; the fear that was creeping into them. Let his strength and bitterness and hate run free, exulting. "You want to know what I'm

going to do? All right. I'll tell you. I'm going after Poulain, but first I have to find him. That makes Carter my man. He can tell me what I want to know."

"You are throwing away your time. Your life, too, if he is guarded. He will tell you nothing."

"No?" John laughed again. "I think he will." He brought the heel of his hand down hard on the table by which he stood. "He will, that is, if he wants to live."

He could see her nostrils flare a fraction, but otherwise her face remained impassive.

"If you must, you must. I cannot stop you. But that man down there in the yard. . . ."

"You say you're a man-trap. I'll leave him to you." He chuckled mirthlessly at her blank bewilderment. "What's downstairs, below here?"

She shrugged.

"Another room. Like this one, but vacant. All are the same. I could have had my choice, but after that shooting in Darwin, I insisted on something upstairs."

"Sure. I don't blame you. Though you're safe for the time being—if our friend by the banyan tree was out to kill you he'd have done it long before now." He frowned. "No. My bet is Poulain's just keeping tabs. For now, anyhow. So we'll use you for bait."

She stared at him without speaking, but he could see the fear ripple through her. For an instant it touched him. Made him hesitate, even. Weighing the odds. Wondering if he were justified.

But Tom. . . . Dead Tom. . . .

The thought was enough. It swept away his scruples, hardened his heart.

"Go downstairs. Check the drapes at the window. If they're closed, open

'em. Then turn on the light as if you were just coming in. Stretch a little. Yawn as if you were tired. Then start undressing. Make it a strip-tease, right in front of the window."

Blood flooded Anita's cheeks in a crimson tide. He could see her stiffen. Her lips thinned with anger.

He paid it no heed.

"Stay there by the window for a good long minute, till you're sure our boy by the banyan tree's had a chance to spot you. Make it tempting. Tantalize him. Then move around a little—back and forth across the room; into the closet; over by the mirror.

"After that, stop again. Choose a spot off to one side from the window, so he can't see you unless he leaves that banyan tree and comes close to the building."

"That is all?" Anita's voice was low, razor-edged. Her eyes sparked green fire.

JOHN pretended he did not notice. Brought his shoulders up in a shrug.

"Just keep it interesting enough so he'll stay there. It won't be hard. The show doesn't need to last more than a minute or two."

Even as he watched, she began to tremble. Her hands clenched into fists. Her voice shook.

"I should beat you, John Daniels! What kind of a creature do you think I am? If I were a man—"

"You're not." He made it brutal. "You're a woman. That's why I'm playing it this way. By your own word, you weren't too good to play Carter for a sucker. You told me you'd learned things about men. You came out of a Jap prison camp in one piece. That's good enough for me."

Her flush crept up to her hairline. For an instant, he thought her control would break. That she would spring

at him, claw him.

Then, abruptly, her lips began to quiver. Her chin dropped to the soft hollow of her throat. She twisted her head, so that the rippling waves of spun gold hair fell dancing to hide her face.

"My apologies, *Mijnheer* Daniels. You are right. I shall go."

Swiftly, before he could move or say more, she spun about. Darted through the doorway, with only the faint musk of her perfume, the echo of a sob, to mark her going.

John Daniels stumbled to a chair. Again, as before, he scrubbed his palms along his pant-legs, only this time the palms were slick with icy sweat. He was trembling just a little, and his throat felt dry, and his breath came ragged, uneven.

But only for a few seconds. He could not spare more, not even for heartaches.

Grimly, then, he rose. Turned off the light. Crossed to the window. Drew back the drapes and silently muscled it up as far as it would go.

It was not so dark outside now. Down below him, a faint yellow glow marked the window of that other room, the room where Anita waited. Then the light shimmered, as from a shadow within the place, and he knew the drama had begun.

Silent, tense, he strained his eyes toward the banyan tree.

Nothing, not even a flicker of motion.

Below him, the oblong of light shimmered new movement. He caught the faint creak of a board.

The banyan tree stayed a vague black blur.

He heard the song, then. A weird song, throbbing with an off-key minor rhythm. Melancholy, yet somehow taut and alive with passion.

IT CAME to John faintly, as if it were very far away. So faintly he could not make out the words. But the voice was the voice of Anita, the message a paean of lust.

Over by the banyan tree, something moved.

The song went on, and the yellow light flickered.

A shadow, darker than the rest, detached itself from the banyan tree. Hung motionless, as if still debating.

Downstairs, the quick trip of feet came like a beat through the song.

The shadow in the yard contorted.

More footsteps. More motion. Then the song again, poignant and throbbing. But even more faintly this time. Farther away from the window. The yellow oblong no longer shimmered.

The man by the banyan tree edged into the open. The light from the window caught his face. A lascar, stripped to the waist, slaving with lust.

John Daniels measured his own breaths. Tried to relax, drive the ache from his muscles. Tried vainly—his body stayed taut as a bowstring.

The song faded further.

Cat-like, the lascar slid up to the building. Pressed tight against it, peering in through the window.

John planted one foot on the sill above. Bent double, crowding through the sash.

The lascar below him was fingering a knife. Pausing, irresolute, as if not quite sure what to do.

The song stopped.

It was like a signal. The lascar reached for the sill.

John Daniels sucked in air. Leaped out into space. Hurtled downward, projectile-like.

The scrape of his feet on the sill as he jumped warned the lascar. The man spun about, staring upward. One arm flashed up in a futile, desperate

gesture.

Too late. John smashed down upon him, feet first. The battered Australian-issue boots struck him full in the face. With a scream, he pitched backward. A sharp, brittle *crack*, like a stick snapping, echoed in the night.

Anita's voice came: "John Daniels—!"

He glanced up at her, framed there in the window, her gown hugged about her. Stumbled wearily to his feet from where he had sprawled.

"I'm okay."

"Thank God!" It was half sob, half prayer.

He ignored it.

"Where's Carter?"

Her hand went to her throat.

"You mean—?"

He made his voice rough, surly.

"I mean what I said in the first place. I'm in this game to get Pou-lain's hide. Carter's the first step. Where is he?"

"There—there is a place called Ladino's. . . ." She stumbled over the words.

"Ladino's." He turned on his heel.

"John! Take me with you—!"

AS IF he had not heard, he stalked away. But he was cursing himself at every step. Swirling waves of mixed emotion broke over him. Swamped him. His brain was a froth of love and hate; tenderness, brutality. Again he saw the pale oval of her face. The rippling sheen of her hair. Her body's ripe curves. Those last anguished words rang in his ears, tormenting him, till he writhed like a tortured thing.

He made himself go on. Forced down his weakness. Poured hate into his heart in a savage torrent to drown out every other thought and feeling.

Ladino's. He knew it well. A hole-in-the-wall groggery, run by a half-

caste Portugee from Timor. With women to share your drinks, and rooms upstairs where you could share the women.

That was where this Carter would be. Upstairs. Hiding in one of those stinking, crib-like rooms, with sweat on his face and fear in his heart.

He didn't even bother with the regular entrance. Someone would be on guard there. He could take that for granted.

But around at the back? He wondered.

He clung to the shadows, studying the place, for the space of a cigarette. Soaked up the scent of hyacinths and mangoes, the cool of the night wind, the distant lilt of laughing voices.

It was dark, here at the back of Ladino's. Dark enough for perfect safety. And he could see no guards.

Carefully, he crushed out his cigarette. Drifted toward the place, almost ambling. But his hand was on his captured *kris*.

A clatter of footsteps laid him back tight against the nearest wall while a door opened and a bushy-headed Papuan hurled out a bucket of slops.

John waited till the door slammed shut. Slid forward. Tried the knob.

The door gave, swung open. Light and sound washed over him.

Swiftly, he slipped inside. Dodged up the yawning black back stairs shaft.

A grey tunnel of door-flanked corridor loomed ahead, far end aglow with light from the bar below.

John hesitated. Caught the clink of glassware. Drunken laughter. The crash and clash of *gamelan* gongs.

Footsteps on the front stairs. Voices.

He retreated. Back again, into the shaft's black pit.

Up ahead, a door opened, then slammed. The voices were stilled.

John sucked in air. Felt his heart

step up a beat. The *kris's* hilt was slick within his hand.

Cat-footed, he came up out of the stair-well. Moved like a shadow to the nearest door. Pushed it open.

Silence, and blackness.

Taut as a drumhead, he slipped in. Waited, not breathing.

Still silence.

He brought up one foot. Flicked a match on the bootsole. Glimpsed the room by the flare.

Empty.

Out into the corridor again. On, to the next room.

Again: empty.

Another door. Another darkened room.

But not silence. Not this time.

Shapes, on a white iron bed. A man, surging up, cursing in Tamil. A woman's laugh—low, liquid.

John Dnaiels pulled the door shut. Moved on again. His lips felt dry, his face hot. A tremor touched his hand as he reached for the next knob.

The door swung wide. Almost too silently, he thought. Too easily. Like an invitation to trouble.

To hell with that. It was only his nerves. They were cracking. Trick-ing him, the way they had before, climbing the hill—

INVOLUNTARILY, he stiffened. A drop of icy sweat slid along his backbone like a chill, smooth-honed razor. Damn such analogies! His nerves *hadn't* tricked him, back there by the landing. Warned him, yes. But not trickery.

The darkness mocked him like a beckoning black finger.

He cursed beneath his breath. Shoved forward. Let the door swing closed behind him.

The blackness closed in.

Fingers trembling, he whipped out a

match. Scratched it into flaming life.

If his teeth had not been clenched, he would have gasped aloud.

A man lay sprawled on the bed. A man like the subaltern in Kipling's poem—"with a big blue mark in his forehead and the back blown out of his head."

Only that wasn't the part that counted. John Daniels had seen dead men before. Too many dead men. To him, death itself no longer mattered. Certainly not enough to make him gasp.

No. But this man was different. The very sight of him was enough to rock John back on his heels and set his senses reeling.

Because the man on the bed was the same burly gorilla he'd seen down there on the slope those hours ago. The same sinister knifer whose *kris* he now carried.

Still rocking, he stood there. Stared, until the match burned his fingers and the hair on the back of his neck rose like a frightened dog's hackles. He could feel the sweat start. Taste his own fear, like death in the air. His brain was a whirling kaleidoscope of panic and confusion. He hardly heard the door behind him open.

Then the light pinned him, targeted him in the center of its glaring beam.

Life came back into him with a rush. *Kris* ready, he spun.

Men crowded the doorway. Grim, official-looking men, ramrodded by a gaunt, hungry human hawk in pith helmet and razor-creased whites.

"It is as I said," the hawk rasped in Dutch. "Always the criminal returns to the scene of his crime."

A knot of ice was forming in John Daniels' stomach.

"Maybe that makes sense to you," he muttered, and realized even as he spoke that his voice rang guilt in every note.

The lean man chuckled. The way he did it made it an ugly, unpleasant sound.

"You will drop the *kris*, please. At once. My men have you covered."

The man's smirking self-satisfaction rasped at John's self-control.

"Who the hell are you? What's your business with me?"

The other's hungry features mirrored smug self-righteousness. He straightened, all ego, gloating arrogance. His very manner was at once an insult and a clipped, harsh threat. The menace of it was food and drink and nurture to the knot of ice in John Daniels' stomach.

"I, sir?" The lean man mouthed the words smugly, savoring their effect, their flavor. "I am Hans Vreeland, special assistant to the resident commissioner for Her Majesty's government. And my business at the moment is to arrest you for the murder of that man on the bed, the Australian sailor Rodney Carter!"

CHAPTER IV

The Enemy

THE drone of the amphibian's engines brought John Daniels awake with a start. He came to his feet instinctively—half dazed, every nerve on edge.

For an instant he could not even quite remember where he was. Then, as sleep left him and the ugly reality of walls and bars came clear, he knew. Gloom settled over him like a mantle. His heart plummeted.

He wondered how he had ever managed to fall asleep. Certainly it hadn't seemed possible last night as he lay here tossing in this grimy cell, battling the vermin and cursing his fate. His fate, and Hans Vreeland—

Even the thought set his teeth on edge. Rage flooded through him all over again. That smug, too-immaculate beanpole! That study in supercilious self-confidence! He clenched his fists. Prayed that he would some day be granted one minute—just one!—to settle this score.

The amphibian's drone brought him back.

It was louder, now. Much louder. As if it were coming into the harbor for a landing.

He could not name the emotion that rose in him then. Or dared not. But his brain kept throbbing, echoing: *Poulain. . . . Poulain. . . . Poulain. . . .*

Poulain had come in an amphibian. And now an amphibian was landing in the harbor.

In a frenzy, he paced the floor of the tiny cell. Clenched his fists and stamped his feet, and gnawed his knuckles till the red blood ran.

The amphibian's engines roared momentarily louder, then died.

Silence.

John leaped to the window. Hung by the bars, straining arms and eyes to see.

It was no use. Only the bare rim of the harbor was visible from here.

He dropped back. Crossed to the iron door. Peered through the grating toward the cell-block entrance.

Nothing.

He'd hocked his watch in Sydney, so he couldn't tell the time. Not that it mattered, really. He wasn't going anywhere. Or maybe it was even for the best. After all, to watch those hands creep around. . . It would drive him mad.

Only he was going mad now, that was the trouble. He was counting the seconds by his own pulse. Measuring the minutes with paces back and forth across the cell.

Desperately, he tried to concentrate, to distract his aching brain.

The girl. Anita Van Pelt. He would think of her. He could see her, almost, when he closed his eyes. The angel's face. The she-devil's body. The rippling waves of golden hair.

He swallowed hard, his mouth gone suddenly dry.

What could have happened to her? Had they found the lascar's broken body? Connected her with it—arrested her, maybe? Or had she fled before they got the chance?

And her game—what was it? Vengeance, or gold? Or something else? That story of hers. . . . He shook his head.

But already his mind was wandering, drifting away. Anita's face blurred. Again he was pacing, counting the seconds. . . .

He cursed aloud.

What did he care about her? What did he care about anything—anything, that is, except dead Tom and live Poulain!

Poulain! His fingers ached to clutch the fat man's throat.

He heard the voices, then. Dimly, at first. Faint echoes through the cell-block door.

Then that door opened, and the voices came louder. One he could even recognize: Vreeland, all smiles and sneers and ice.

The other he'd never heard before. He was sure of that, even without glancing through the grating to see the speaker.

A queer voice, that other. Not easily forgotten. A pleasant voice, too—quiet, well-modulated, with a thin thread of humor lilting through it.

And yet, there was something else, too. Something not quite so pleasant. An undertow of caution, as it were, as if the man to whom the voice belonged were just a trifle shrewd and

hard and wary.

Even here, in this cell, it piqued John Daniels. Half sullen, half curious, he turned, just as his cell door clanged open and Vreeland spoke again.

"This is the man, *Mijnheer* Poulain. The murderer, John Daniels."

Poulain!

HOW long that awful, incredible moment lasted John Daniels never knew. An eternity, perhaps, and the fraction of an instant. All the eons of time, and the flashing of an eye. Poulain. A fat man, as the tales had told. A big man, too. But mostly grossly, obscenely fat.

Yet where most fat echoes sloth and weakness, this man showed neither. The glistening baldness of his great round head rose like a polished dome between the buttress shoulders. His movements were quick as a striking cobra, his biceps bulging out his sleeves, his fingers swift, deft pads of flesh around tight cores of cable.

But these were the surface things, the facade that veiled the real Poulain. Only in the eyes did the things that lurked within gleam through.

They were queer eyes, John thought. Queer, as the voice was queer. A mask and a revelation all at once. Dark, deep-sunk, amid their rolls of fat, they yet were darting, restless. Mockery gleamed in them, and menace and implacable, ruthless force. A dozen things, tumbling over one another in two twin mirrors of character that somehow made John's blood run cold.

As from afar, he heard the Dutchman's voice go on:

"He denies all guilt, *Mijnheer* Poulain. Insists that he never saw the man before." A brief, contemptuous laugh. "The fool! He was carrying Carter's *kris* when we caught him as he sneaked back to the scene of his

crime. A dozen witnesses have identified it."

The voice brought John back from that strange, dazed world to which he'd strayed. Involuntarily, he stiffened. Felt his hands clench into fists without his effort.

"Daniels? Daniels? I do not know the man." Poulain was saying in that queer, well-modulated voice. He peered at John. "No, I do not know—" And then: "Yes! I do! There was a petty thief named Daniels who tried to take over one of my minor enterprises by violence. In the process he was killed by my man Carter. No doubt this man is some relative of that other Daniels. He must have killed poor Carter in revenge, *m'sieur*."

John made himself relax. That was the first step. A psychological feint. Convince them of his harmlessness. Throw them off guard.

"Maybe you'd like to try to prove my brother was a thief, or that he tried to muscle in." He let his voice take on a sullen ring. "This is a frame—"

"Of course," came back Poulain. His face was bland, his tongue dipped in oil. "I should be delighted to prove it. With witnesses, brought from Darwin at my own expense in the interests of justice."

Vreeland laughed aloud. He licked his thin lips, as if enjoying the situation's flavor.

"The resident will appreciate your generosity, *Mijnheer* Poulain. Not that it will be necessary to call on you for such a favor, of course, or even desirable. We have ample evidence already." He laughed again. "Enough to hang this man, at least. We have located the scene of the murder—down by one of the sheds on the hill—and this Daniels' footprints were mixed with those of your unfortunate Carter. While we watched from hiding, Dan-

iels later stole into Carter's room at Ladino's. Our theory is that he brought the body there earlier. Then, after leaving, he discovered that he had forgotten some essential piece of evidence, some crucial point . . ."

He talked on, and on, but John Daniels was not listening. What did it matter, all those words? He would be convicted of murder, even if not Carter's murder. He knew it; accepted it.

But Poulain was here now! That was what counted. Here, mere feet away, open and vulnerable!

True, there were guards. They waited outside the cell now, three of them. Two, uniformed Javanese. The other, a powerful brute in rumpled khakis, a white man with cold eyes and a poker face; Poulain's bodyguard, obviously.

HE THOUGHT he could do the job in spite of them. One leap would put him near enough. Then a knee to the groin. A savage hand-edge blow to the back of the fat neck. The old, Australian-issue boots, exploding into the greasy face the instant the fat man hit the floor. Every ounce of his weight, his muscle, behind it. Crushing that dome-like head into the concrete. Smashing it. Pulping out the fat man's unclean life . . .

"You're crazy!" he mumbled. He made a point of thickness, incoherence. Let them think he was a stupid, weak-witted fool! It would all help! And then: "Poulain's been hiding from me for months. He knows why I'm hunting him—"

The fat man laughed aloud.

"Perhaps you won't be able to hang this creature after all *M'sieur* Vreeland. Obviously he's mad."

Ever so casually, John shifted his weight. He had to be careful of his breathing, even, now. One false move

could give him away.

"You think so, *mijnheer*?" Vreeland's gaunt face twisted in a smirk. "He is vicious, surely. Even dangerous. But mad—" He pursed his lips. Drew his eyebrows together in the caricature of a frown.

They were looking at each other now, convulsed with their own saw-toothed humor. Even the guards' eyes were turned away. Attention seemingly had left John Daniels.

It was his moment. Like a tiger, he sprang.

He could not be quite sure what happened then. It came too fast, too unexpectedly.

For one thing, Poulain leaped deftly aside. The agility with which he moved was incredible incongruous. He was a dancer, a contortionist, skipping and sliding, twisting all at once. Like a shadow, he flickered away, out of John's reach.

Beyond him, the bodyguard erupted into synchronized, coordinated motion. His hand flashed under the khaki shirt. Leaped out again, gripping a short-barreled Luger.

A THOUSAND times in that moment, John Daniels died. His mind leaped like his vision. Took in and grasped the whole awful unbelievable scene in one horrid instant. He could see the mockery; the murderous mirth, in Poulain's deep-sunk eyes. The cold, inexorable menace of the gunman. The Javanese' blank bewilderment.

It had been planned, of course. Ever so carefully planned. He could see it now. Could recognize the skill and care and timing that went into it. They had come here to kill him, their minds made up. They had bandied words, ignored him, encouraging him to make the break they knew would come. Not for an instant had he been unobserved.

He cursed himself for a fool. He'd let them play him. Charged down on Poulain, with murder in his own cracked brain, while all the time they'd been waiting: Poulain, a bundle of tight-wound springs, set to a hair trigger; the bodyguard, with his Luger oiled and his gun-palm itching.

And now—

He reeled to one side. Careened against the Dutchman Vreeland. Saw the bodyguard's gun come up. Heard the Luger's roar. Braced himself for the bullet's impact.

It never came.

Instead, Vreeland—off balance—crashed into the gunman as the pistol barked.

The shot went wild. Bodyguard and Dutchman went down together in a cursing jumble of arms and legs. The Luger skidded off across the floor.

Poulain dived for it.

John lashed out with his foot. Sent the gun off, out of reach. Aimed a second kick at Poulain himself.

The fat man rolled clear. Snatched at John's foot.

"*Hahlt! Vlug!*"

It was Vreeland's voice, crackling guttural Dutch in a savage blend of ice and fury.

A rifle butt crashed into John's midriff to back up the commands. He staggered, retching and gasping.

The two Javanese guards held the center of the stage, black eyes aglisten. Rifles ready, taut as bowstrings, they covered John, Poulain, the bodyguard.

Off to one side, where he had fallen, Vreeland stumbled erect. His whites were no longer immaculate, and the gaunt face had taken on an angry scarlet glow.

He spun on the guards.

"Clear this cell! Bar the door!"

John could see the tremor of rage that rippled through Poulain.

"This man attacked me—!"

Vreeland cut him off.

"So he did. That still does not make it my policy to allow Her Majesty's prisoners to be shot in their cells while other means of discipline will still avail."

Poulain's face darkened to match the Hollander's. His voice dropped to an ugly note of menace.

"Am I to understand—?"

"You may take any complaints up with the commissioner." Vreeland's words crackled like splintering ice. "That is all, *Mijnheer!* You may go!"

For a taut moment Poulain hesitated. Then, fat neck still fiery red, he turned and stalked from the cell like a machine.

His bodyguard started to pick up the Luger and follow.

Vreeland thrust out a bony hand.

"I will hold that for you. The commissioner will return it to you should he feel that is desirable for him to do so."

Muttering under his breath, the gunman let the Luger go. Shambled off after his master.

John let go a sigh of relief, tossed the gaunt Hollander a mocking salute.

"Thanks, Vreeland. That was close. Too—"

The other's expression hung between a sneer and anger—a mixture of disdain and hatred.

"Prisoner, you will remember that I am special assistant to the resident commissioner. I expect to be treated with the respect due my rank." And then, to the guards: "Lock this cell with especial care. I shall hold you responsible if this man should get away."

Thin-lipped, eyes blazing, he straightened his now-rumpled coat about his thin shoulders and stiffly walked away.

CHAPTER V

Betrayal

SHE came in the night, long after he'd given her up.

At first she was only a voice—a faint, breathless whisper, wafted through the cell window's grillwork.

John Daniels hardly heard the call. He'd passed listening; passed hope, even. Now he sprawled on his strap-iron cot, wallowing in a stormy sea of fury and self-pity and disillusion.

The call came again, louder.

He stiffened. Frowned. Sat up.

Not that it did any good. Not here, where the darkness clung thick as syrup—hot, sticky, impenetrable. He couldn't see his hand before his face, let alone anything else.

Again, the call.

He knew, now. He hadn't been mistaken. He'd heard a voice. *Her* voice.

A tremor of excitement shook him.

"Anita!"

"John! John Daniels!" And then: "Oh, thank God! I was so afraid. . . ." Her voice was quivering, atremble with emotion. "You are unharmed?" Everything is—how do you say? okay?"

He clambered onto the strap-iron cot. Clung to the window's bars.

"Unharmed, yes. But not okay." Bitterly he laughed. "I'm one hell of a ways from okay, my lady. Lying here in jail while Poulain walks free—or even lives—isn't my idea of right and proper." He hesitated, shifted. "But you? What happened? I thought maybe . . ." A sudden tremor touched his voice, heedless of his efforts to fight it down. He broke off sharply, half angry, half ashamed.

He heard her laugh softly, and when she spoke again, her voice had taken on a warmer, richer timbre.

"I was afraid for you last night. I

followed you. Saw them lead you away a prisoner. After that, I was afraid to go back to my rooms. All day I hid, watching the jail. I saw Poplain and the others come, but I could do nothing, not till it was dark."

"And now?"

A new note of excitement crept into her voice.

"Now you will escape, John Daniels! You will escape and together we shall have our revenge, just as we planned!"

"Escape?" He laughed, curt and harsh and savage. "You paint a pretty picture, Anita, but it's not that easy. There are guards out front, and it's their necks if I get away. They know it. They'll play rough. And sawing through steel bars sounds simpler than it is."

"But with a gun. . . ?"

He stiffened, in spite of himself. Felt new hope, new courage, surge through him.

"A gun!"

"Yes. Put your hand through the bars."

He hung by one hand. Thrust the other arm out through the grillwork as far as it would go. Felt the cold reassurance of a pistol butt shoved against his palm. Taut, careful, he brought it back through the bars. Dropped back to the strap-iron cot. Ran his hand over the weapon; a Luger, the extractor raised to the loaded position above the breech block.

Again Anita's voice drifted through the bars, ragged with excitement even in a whisper.

"Lie down on the floor and fire one shot. That will bring the guards. If you lie in such a position that it appears you have killed yourself, they will come close. Then you can hold them at pistol point and escape." A pause. "I shall wait for you by the sheds down the hill, close to the land-

ing. The Netherlands New Guinea Trading Company warehouse, let us say."

John nodded in the darkness. It was involuntary, unconsidered. His mind knew she could not see him. Not with stones and bars and black night in between. It was only that his brain was racing ahead, too fast for his reflexes to follow. He could think of nothing but the weight of the heavy pistol in his hand, the promise of freedom its slugs carried. The bars were dissolving, and the walls. Again he visualized Poulain. Tried to imagine the expression that would freeze the rolls of fat—the terror that would strike the deep-sunk eyes—the fearful tremors seeping into the voice's modulation.

Anita was speaking.

"John Daniels! You understand! You are all right?"

ONCE more he nodded. A tiny spasm of anticipation ripped through him like a shudder. It was all he could do to keep it from his voice.

"I'm all right. The whole world's all right. Just get going, so that I can take care of this thing!"

And her answer; faint, tremulous: "Yes, John."

A whisper of footsteps, dying away.

John Daniels laughed aloud. Arranged himself carefully on the floor, Luger in hand, directly in front of the cell door. Sighted for the window's faint silhouette against the outer night. Drew in one deep breath.

"A little luck, Tom," he muttered. "That's all I need. Just a little. Then I'll be able to fix things up."

It was almost a prayer.

He squeezed the trigger.

The Luger bucked in his hand. The cell blazed orange with muzzle-flash.

John whipped the gun down, jammed it against his right temple. Rolled his

head to the right on the floor, half covering the gun, so that the lack of blood could not be seen. Brought his left arm up, shielding his eyes, protecting him against any involuntary flicker of the lids.

He heard the cell-block door burst open. Saw scarlet through his tightly-closed lids as light struck them.

A shrill chatter of Market Malay echoed around him.

The guards!

Waiting. An eternity of waiting. Shallow breathing. Taut immobility.

Cautious footsteps, padding on the stone of the cell-block floor. The scrape of a rifle-breech against a belt-plate, over-loud against the other sounds. The sibilant hiss of a tense man's breathing.

Something prodded at his ribs.

He lay still and relaxed as death, holding his breath.

A hand gripped his shoulder. Started to heave him over.

It was now. Now, or never. The man above would be off balance, his weight poorly distributed.

John Daniels erupted into motion. He rolled with the guard's heave, smashing at the shocked brown face with fist and arm and elbow.

But the Malay was quick. He leaped back, away from the blow.

John didn't try to follow through. This was no time for a slug-fest. Not while he had the Luger.

The roll had put him back on his stomach, facing the guards. He came up on one knee in a crouch, the pistol poised and ready.

"*Berhenti!* Stop!"

One of the Malays—he who had gripped John's shoulder—had laid aside his rifle. The other was caught with his weapon's muzzle aimed awkwardly off to one side.

Together, they stared at the pistol's menace, black eyes beady, fascinated.

Slowly, the one who had no gun raised his hands.

HIS companion hesitated only the fraction of a second. Then his fingers opened. His rifle clattered to the floor.

John came up from his crouch. Wordless, a living threat, he sidled out of the cell. Herded the two Javanese into it. Left-handed, locked the door. Backed slowly away.

Brown faces blank and expressionless, now the first shock was over, they watched him go.

He slammed the cell-block door, breathed a sigh of relief. Wondered, for just an instant, what he would have done had the guards tried to stop him. It was one thing to kill for cause, in hate and anger. Another to butcher some harmless flunky who was only trying to do his duty.

He wondered. . . .

But not for long. He had too many other things to do.

The Netherlands New Guinea Trading Company warehouse, that was the rendezvous. Down at the foot of the hill, close to the landing.

He frowned. He hated to waste the time. Now, especially, for he couldn't tell how long he'd have before an alarm was sounded.

And yet, what else could he do? He wanted revenge, but it was Anita, bringing the gun, who'd made it possible. He couldn't betray her after that.

A silent shadow, gun in hand, he slid through the night, every muscle tense, every nerve on edge. When a great night-flying moth nearly a foot across swept down upon him suddenly, he reeled back panting, barely able to fight down the urge to fire on it.

He thought of that other night, bare twenty-four hours ago, as he walked up this hill from the landing. Of the foot-

steps, padding behind him, and of Carter, the knife-man, with his *kris*.

Involuntarily, he shuddered. Caught himself straining his ears as he had before for the stealthy tread of a stalker in the night.

And then he heard them!

The shock stopped him dead in his tracks. He wouldn't believe it. Couldn't.

But there they were just as before, moving when he moved, stopping as he did.

He could feel the sweat flood out of every pore, the hackles rise along his neck. Fear knotted his vitals, closed in on his throat. His mouth went dry as parching sand.

He made himself go on by sheer force of will, clutching the Luger as a drowning man clings to a straw.

Desperately, he tried to analyze, consider.

Footsteps were echoing his. Someone was following him, yet making no effort to catch him.

Yet who was there? Who, save Anita, knew that he was going to escape from that rickety jail? And who cared?

That did it.

Who cared?

And the answer came up: Anita. Hans Vreeland. Poulain.

Anita was out. Those weren't a woman's footsteps.

HANS VREELAND, too. He was the law, the born bureaucrat. In line of duty he might lie in wait for a suspected criminal, as he had last night at Ladino's. But certainly he wouldn't follow an escaped prisoner simply out of idle curiosity. No. Not Vreeland. The kind of action he'd take would be aimed at landing the prisoner back in jail in seconds.

That left Poulain.

John grinned in spite of himself. Of

a sudden the Luger's butt felt solid and comforting against his hand.

Poulain, and him, and a Luger. If only the game could be played out that way. . . .

He was almost down to the beach now. He could distinguish the warehouse where Anita waited far off to the left. Ahead loomed a clump of nipa palms, long leaves waving slowly in the breeze like queer, many-fingered tentacles.

John slowed his pace. In one way, the palms were good. They gave heavy cover close up; would make it hard for his pursuer to see him. On the other hand, they grew from the mud and slime of the tidal flat. Let him once get into that, and the noise of his floundering would echo clear to the resident's house back up there on the hill.

Even as he thought of it, the ground gave under his foot, suddenly spongy. The next step took him into the wet slickness of the mud itself.

The mud made up his mind for him. Swiftly, he dropped to a crouch, breathing a silent prayer that he was close enough to the palms to confuse his pursuer. Spun about and quartered off along his back-trail, up the hill again once more.

Instantly, his stalker's footsteps stopped. But as they did, John caught another whisper of scuffing shoes, this time off to his left.

Chills raced up and down his spine. That sound could mean just one thing: he had not one pursuer, but two. He'd been so intent on the noisier of the pair that he'd failed to hear the other.

The realization made him curse himself for a fool. Why wouldn't there be two? Had he expected Poulain to be such a fool as to track him alone?

He swung right. Ran doubled over along the edge of the tidal flat, toward

the warehouse where Anita waited. After a hundred yards, he stopped to breath. When he'd gained it, he started back up the slope.

A flurry of movement caught his eye, even in the darkness. Flattened him to the ground, aquiver with new panic.

Again, he was cut off! A third stalker had outflanked him.

With all his heart he cursed Poulain. Odds were the fat man wasn't even here. Why should he worry himself with such details as a mere murder? Probably he was up on the hill right now, dining with the Dutch commissioner.

But cursing accomplished nothing. His pursuers were closing in. He had to act.

Again he spun. Raced back toward the fringe of tidal flat where the nipa palms' tentacles waved. Scurried crab-like along the brink of solid ground in the direction of the landing. That was his chance—his only chance, so far as he could see. There were all kinds of craft in the harbor—trading schooners; patrol boats, probably; even a rusting freighter or two. Most important, clusters of native water-bugs—low-lying outrigger canoes—were festooned in a fringe along the beaches. Once off dry land in one of those, still armed with the Luger, he'd be dangerous to close with. Too dangerous, he had a notion.

He made progress—good progress. He wasn't sure just why. Maybe because they knew or suspected he had a gun, and didn't like to get too close. Or maybe he was harder to see, with the background of nipa palms mere yards away.

Then the warehouse loomed ahead, a few rods up the slope, and his heart stood still.

Anita! She was waiting for him, up there, off guard and unsuspecting. If

he went straight on down to the harbor, she'd continue to wait, fair game for Poulain's killers. She might even hear the stir below; accidentally show herself.

YET if he made the dash for the warehouse, there'd probably be shooting, fast. Poulain's three men—and there might even be more—would converge on the building, in a hurry to route him out. They'd be trapped.

He had to decide. Quick. Already the nipa palms' cover was thinning as the tidal flat narrowed. A few yards more and it would disappear altogether, giving way to the deep water of the harbor proper.

For a split-second he debated.

Then, decision.

Anita would have to take her chance alone. It would still be better odds for her than having him rush up that slope. This way, if his stalkers came too close, forced him to shoot, the blaze of gunfire would give her warning, cover her escape. The other, he'd be carrying the fight to her, instead of away. They'd be together, but trapped.

He sucked air into his aching lungs. Sprawled flat for a moment, panting, while he measured the distance to the nearest clump of fuzzy-wuzzy outriggers. Gathered himself for an all-out rush, scrubbing the sweating palm of his gun-hand dry on a scraggy tuft of *wuluhan* grass.

And then Anita screamed.

It was without words, that cry. Without words, without meaning. A single high-pitched shriek of fright and pain.

One scream. No more.

John Daniels moved by reflex. One moment, he'd been ready to sprint for the harbor and—he'd hoped—safety. The next, he was racing toward the warehouse, his other plans forgotten. He couldn't tell that she was there, of

course. Not from one cut-off cry. It might have come from anyplace. But the warehouse had been their rendezvous. He headed there by instinct.

He made it in one mad dash that left him shaking and winded, amazed that he was still alive.

For an instant he rested, pressed flat against the warehouse wall. Then he slid along it, deep in the shadows, his whole weight leaning on the Luger's trigger. He braced his body against a shot. Rounded each corner with every nerve atingle, set to stare death in the eye and face him down.

She wasn't there.

He halted, breathing hard. Leaned close to the wall once more—only this time it was to stop his shoulders' shaking. Again he scrubbed his gun-hand dry.

She wasn't here. He had to repeat it over and over, as if convincing himself.

YET as he considered, he knew it was to be expected. He'd acted too precipitatedly. One broken scream in the night just wasn't enough to go by, not even with the rendezvous to boot. It might not even have been Anita, after all.

But now he was here, endless yards from the landing. . . .

Even as he meditated it, he glimpsed a moving shadow by the harbor. A man, sliding through the night, taking advantage of every wisp of cover.

John laughed aloud. Even in his own ears the sound was harsh, derisory.

He was here, all right. Here—and trapped.

He grinned, then, in spite of himself.

He was trapped—the same way a tiger grasped by the tail is trapped. Because he had the Luger, and the Luger spelled sudden death.

A sort of exhilaration seemed to

seize him at the thought. A reckless lust for battle surged through him.

Grimly, he spread his feet for balance. Sighted the Luger on the man below, using his left forearm for a rest. Of a sudden his nerves were steady as granite slabs, his brain as cold and clear as ice.

The man by the landing lay still, now, sharp-outlined against the level ground. A perfect target.

John sucked in breath. Let out a portion. Ever so slowly, ever so carefully, squeezed the Luger's trigger.

The action clicked dully.

For the fraction of a second John stood as if paralyzed. Then, swiftly fumbled at the breech.

The "*Geladen*"—loaded—indicator on the extractor was down.

Cursing his trembling fingers, he whipped out the pistol's magazine.

Empty.

Slowly, the light began to dawn. John's breath came fast and shallow.

Anita Van Pelt had given him a pistol so he could escape from Fakfak's makeshift jail. She'd even suggested how he should use it, firing one shot to call the guards and convince them he was a suicide.

But Anita had done other things, too, now that he stopped to consider.

She'd told him Carter was hiding at Ladino's—and when he got there, Carter's dead body was there ahead of him, and so were Hans Vreeland and his men; the murder frame neatly arranged.

For that matter, someone had put Carter to following him, *kris* in hand, and then murdered Carter when it appeared that he, John Daniels, might win the fight and wrest some information from the knife-man.

He wondered where Anita might have been at just that time.

She'd helped arrange his escape—

and Poulain's men had known his plans, too; followed him; hemmed him in.

She'd made a rendezvous with him here, at this warehouse. When he'd started to pass it by, she'd screamed—only now she wasn't here.

All that didn't matter. It didn't really count, not any of it. It could be coincidence.

But there was one thing that wasn't inconclusive. One point that couldn't be coincidence.

Anita Van Pelt had given him a pistol, suggested that he fire it once.

And that pistol had only contained one cartridge.

CHAPTER VI

Turn About

OTHER shadows became visible now, other flickers of movement. John Daniels could see them closing in on him, like winter-starved wolves circling a trapped stag.

A sea of wrath welled up in his heart, a swirling, blinding, berserker fury. He snarled aloud. Lunged forward, crouching, down the slope, the Luger still tight-gripped within his hand.

The man below him sprang to his feet. Sprinted across to intercept him.

It was Poulain's bodyguard, the gorilla in rumpled khakis. Brutal face a kill-contorted grimace, pistol in hand, the man closed in.

John crouched lower, ran zig-zag.

The other cut him off the sharper, brought up a Luger, twin to the one in John's own hand.

They were mere yards apart now. Closing the gap fast. John glimpsed the gunman's face, snag teeth bared in a snarl of hate.

The killer's gun blazed fire and sound. John heard the bullet's high-

pitched whine close past his head.

Panic raced through him in an icy wave. The man could shoot. Next time he wouldn't miss.

By reflex, almost, he reacted. Came up from his crouch in a smoking, heel-first slide. Hurlled his own empty, useless weapon with all his might, straight at the gunman's ugly face.

He caught one flash of the man's expression, then, before the hurtling missile landed. Thrilled momentary satisfaction at the fear and shock that hung there.

Then the pistol struck, with a meaty *thunk* that John could hear across the space between them. The man spilled sidewise, backward; lurching, falling, his nose and mouth a broken, bloody smear.

That was all. John raced past him. On, down the slope. On, to the harbor. On, in a headlong dive for the water and safety.

He swam under water as far as he could. Came up, at last, just in time to see the little coastal cutter with which the Dutch patrolled these waters switch on its searchlight. A white knife, the beam sliced over the water, probing, searching.

John dived again. His lungs were bursting, every muscle weighted with a ton of sodden weariness. It took his last ounce of energy to force himself to swim at all.

Bitterly, he cursed the luck that had let the gunman fire his shot.

Before, he'd had only Poulain's thugs to contend with.

Now, the whole harbor was awake. Seamen lined the freighters' rails. Fuzzy-wuzzies squatted on the prows of their outriggers, peering through the darkness. He glimpsed the master of a tacky trader raising night glasses to his eyes.

Twice the searchlight nearly got him.

Once a canoe almost ran him down.

Then interest seemed to wane. The sailors drifted from the rails. The light snapped off. The water-bugs settled back to slumber.

John panted his relief. Turned over, floating. He had no energy for more. Even here, in the tepid water of the harbor, chills of sheer exhaustion shook him, one after another. His teeth were chattering, his whole body a cramping knot of pain and fatigue.

That was how he lay when the searchlight's beam struck him.

It came back on suddenly, without warning. Struck him full in the eyes—dazzling brilliance, beating down on him, pinning him like a moth to a specimen card.

In spite of it he mustered enough strength to dive. Swam under water once again, with feeble, ever-weakening strokes.

He had to rise again in seconds. Again the great beam pinned him down.

"*Hahlt!*" bellowed a thick Dutch voice.

It was then he saw the amphibian.

It rode at anchor not twenty yards away, white hull sleek and glistening in the fringe of the searchlight's rays. A jacob's ladder trailed from its half-open entry port into the water. A small boat hung close at heel beside it, rising and falling with the harbor's gentle swell.

HE NEVER knew quite where the spurt of energy came from. Not from his aching muscles, surely. They were too far gone for that.

Yet somehow, incredibly, find it he did. Wallowing, clumsy, strangling and swallowing water with every stroke, he lunged toward the plane.

The cone of light crept along the surface with him. Again the Dutch voice bellowed.

He paid it no heed.

A rifle bullet spudded water over his face in a stinging spray.

He lunged again.

The light beating down upon him grew brighter. The drone of the patrol boat's engines echoed louder in his ears. He could feel their throb through the water. A ripple of wash lapped over him.

He reached the ladder. Clutched at it. Dragged himself up by sheer will-power.

Overhead, the entry port swung wider. A sullen face scowled down upon him. A foot lashed out for his chin.

He was too tired to dodge. He could only throw up his crossed arms, catch the blow in their scissors. Somehow, more by accident than design, his hands caught the withdrawing ankle.

Off balance already, he let his whole weight go on his adversary's extended leg.

Above him, a curse. The man in the doorway toppled outward, clawing the air wildly.

Barely in time, John let go. Snatched at the ladder again. Stumbled upward, just as a crash of sound and shouting struck him. He glanced back. Realized with blank bewilderment that the Dutch patrol boat had come up. The man he'd thrown had landed on its eager crew as they stretched for John's retreating legs.

Half lurching, half falling, he sprawled through the loading port into the plane. Recovered barely in time to yank the jacob's ladder up out of the irate Dutchmen's reach.

But that was only temporary, and he knew it. In seconds they'd have solved the problem, be swarming through behind him.

Wildly, he glanced about. Spotted a weapons rack along one wall. A Mauser machine pistol, with its wood

stock-holster.

His strength was coming back now. He stumbled through a maze of stacked, gurgling, five-gallon army-type gasoline cans to the rack. Snatched out the pistol.

It already was set at full automatic. John raced back to the loading port. Brought up the weapon. Let go more than half the clip over the heads of the patrol boat crew below.

They scrambled wildly for cover.

HE AIMED the pistol at the sullen-faced man who'd been in the amphibian. Tossed down the jacob's ladder.

"You! Get back aboard! Fast!"

The man turned a sickly green. His mouth worked spasmodically.

"Take your choice," John said. He made his voice alive with menace. "Try jumping overside like your thinking, and get the rest of this clip through the brisket. Or climb aboard in one piece. It's up to you."

The man's Adam's apple jerked. His eyes were so wide with fear the white showed round the iris.

John sighted along the Mauser's barrel.

"Well?"

Trembling, the man stumbled forward. Clambered slowly up the ladder.

John backed away.

"Pull up the ladder. Then close the port."

Still ashiver, the other obeyed.

Only then did John permit himself the luxury of a grin. A tiny spark of triumph deep within him began to glow.

"Now get this crate out of the water and on its way. We've got places to go."

His captive shifted uneasily.

"Can't do it," he muttered sullenly. "Not enough gas. Besides, my crew's

ashore."

John let his grin widen, but his voice stayed hard and deadly, his fingers close to the Mauser's trigger.

"After what happened, you expect me to believe that? Your pals went to a lot of trouble to get me herded down near the waterfront. Maybe it was just for atmosphere, but my bet is that Poulain's smart enough to figure it for an angle instead. He knew something might go wrong and cause shooting, so he planned the play in a spot where his lads could make a quick run for this plane and get away. As for gas, he's even got this cabin loaded with five-gallon cans."

"Wise guy, huh?"

John spoke between clenched teeth.

"Wise enough. At least, enough to know Poulain's in respectable company right now, figuring you can fly out any of his boys who land in trouble. He'll disclaim responsibility. Maybe even put up a reward for the nasty people that stole his plane." A pause. "Don't tell me you're not the pilot, either, or that you can't handle this ship alone in an emergency. That's why you're aboard right now. Poulain wouldn't take chances on his pilot getting shot up by accident." Then, gesturing with the Mauser: "All right. Get it up! Either or!"

Slowly, sullenly, the man moved forward to the controls. Manipulated the amphibian's engines into roaring life.

Outside, rifles cracked. A slug whined through the fuselage wall.

John prodded the pilot with the Mauser, pointed out the jagged hole.

"Get it up damn you! That Dutchman's firing on us. Next thing you know, he'll cut loose with a machine gun, if he's got one!"

THE pilot took one fast look at the puncture. His face went white

again. He bent forward, worked feverishly.

The amphibian's engines roared louder. The whole ship quivered. Slowly, under the pilot's skillful guidance, it wheeled about, began moving into the wind that drifted up from the southeast. Faster. Faster.

A final shudder. The smooth, monotonous drone of flight.

The pilot glowered at John Daniels. "Where now?"

John studied him thoughtfully.

A handsome young devil, this pilot. Big enough to wear his tropical whites with the casual air of one of those explorer-lecturers who leave the ladies starry-eyed in Keokuk. Solid in the spots where ten years would put fat and sagging muscles. Blond hair, smooth-combed with a studied dash that hid the thin spots.

But the pale blue eyes set a trifle too closely together, and the over-full lips were a focal point for not-too-pleasant lines.

Handsome, yes. And completely untrustworthy.

"Well?"

"Moresby," said John. "That's British territory. I'll chance a landing there."

The pilot scowled.

"I don't think we've got gas to make it. That's twelve hundred miles."

John allowed himself a grin.

"And besides, Poulain is a little leary of tangling with John Bull, is that it?" He moved the Mauser in just enough of a gesture to make the pilot conscious of its presence. "Well, I hope we have gas, of course. But if we don't, you can always crash-land this crate in a swamp, and we'll walk the rest of the way." A pause. "One thing, though: I can read a map and compass, too. So if you've got any ideas about charting a course to suit your-

self. . .”

Abruptly, he broke off, stalked back to a seat.

He wondered, a trifle vaguely, just how it would all come out. He'd escaped, of course, but he'd done it the hard way. The Dutch would be hot on his trail from here on. And Poulain—he chuckled aloud in spite of himself. Even from here, he could visualize the fat man's searing wrath.

No, there'd be no quarter from Poulain after this. His killers would be everywhere, his spies seeking John out. Then, somewhere, sometimes—a knife in the back. Or maybe a blazing gun, as with dead Tom. . .

Tom.

John Daniels swallowed hard. Again he saw his brother's carefree, laughing face. Remembered the things Anita Van Pelt had said.

A GREAT sickness rose within him. Tom was dead, yet Poulain walked free. Poulain, and Anita Van Pelt, that lovely, living snare who'd spoiled his vengeance.

He caught himself wondering whether any part of her story had been true. Whether perhaps it wasn't a fraud, and she just one more spy, sent out by Poulain to lure and trap him.

He still was wondering when he heard the pounding. It came from behind him, back toward the tail of the ship, beyond a closed compartment door.

Mauser in hand, John rose. Moved to the doorway.

More pounding. He almost thought he could catch a voice, too.

He reached down, gripped the knob. Turned it, ever so slowly. Pressed with his knee.

The door gave.

John brought up the Mauser, braced himself. Then, in a sudden explosion

of force, drove his foot at the now-unlatched portal with all his might.

The door burst open. Revealed another crowded room, stacked even higher with gas cans than the first.

John was inside almost before the door could hit the bulkhead.

The next instant he stopped short.

Anita Van Pelt stood there before him. Her eyes were shining, her lips half parted.

“John!” Her voice echoed gladness. She was upon him, clinging to him, even while he still reeled wild with shock. “Oh, John, I was so afraid! I thought they had killed you. That now we were flying away, Poulain and I, leaving you dead behind. I thought—”

Her perfume was heady in John's nostrils, the golden halo of her hair soft against his cheek, her body firm and warm on his. All at once his fears and doubts and distrust were nebulous, unreal. Of a sudden he wanted nothing so much as to kiss the tears from her eyes, hold her forever close.

But Tom. Dead Tom. . .

He twisted free. Stabbed at her midriff with the Mauser's muzzle. Made his voice harsh and flat and hate-filled.

“That Luger. It had just one cartridge.”

They were a study in themselves, those emotions that flooded across her face as he stood there watching. Bewilderment, first and panic. That was when she saw the gun. Then, slowly, almost together, hurt and understanding.

“Yes. I know.” The words were low, her eyes suddenly averted. “Even at the cost of my life, I should not have done it. But at the time I was so very much afraid.”

“Your life?” he sneered.

She stiffened visibly. Brought her eyes back. Stared into his.

"My life." She said it with calm dignity. "They came for me at dusk, while I still waited for you. They gave me the gun, told me I must give it to you if I did not want to die." A slow flush crept up her cheeks. "They said they would do . . . other . . . things, too, if I did not obey them. While I talked to you through the bars, saying the things they'd told me to, they were there beside me, their knives at my throat." Her tongue flicked at her lips. "Perhaps I am a coward, John Daniels, but I could see no reason for both of us to die if there was the slightest chance that one might live."

"And later, down there by the warehouse, when you screamed?"

"It was the final touch. They were sure it would lure you to your death. I cooperated, of course." Her ripe lips thinned, twisted. "I frequently scream, John Daniels, when someone suddenly twists my arm till I think the bone will leave its socket."

WORDLESS, John Daniels stood there, staring at her. His heart, his brain, were a sea of futile, fuming turmoil. Suspicion tore at him, and tenderness. Fear, and the yearning to embrace her.

"What more can I say, John?" All at once her eyes were overflowing, her voice a choked appeal. "I had no choice. The pilot, Gilmore, dragged me here. Probably Poulain planned to throw me from the plane miles out at sea. Then I glimpsed you through the port as you came aboard, and I was happier than I had ever been since the murder of my family."

"You could have come out," John said. He knew his voice was bitter, even as he spoke. "I needed help."

"The door." She gestured toward it. "A spring lock. From your side, it was open. But not from in here.

All I could do was pound and shout, and hope that you would hear me."

"I see." John mumbled the words. They sounded inane. They weren't even what he wanted to say. The trouble was, the words he did want to speak couldn't ever be said here. He knew it. They would take time, those words, and moonlight, and the tenderness of a caress.

Anita's face softened to pale radiance. Her eyes were suddenly luminous, her lips ripe invitation. As if she could read his mind, his innermost thoughts. As if she, herself, could create that atmosphere of moonlight and soft words and tenderness, even here in this droning, hurtling plane.

"Then I am forgiven? We shall fly together to where that gold-laden Junkers crashed?"

"The Junkers?"

"Of course. They are there, those men who murdered my brothers. Once we have dealt with them, we can claim the gold." Anita's breath came a fraction faster. Her eyes gleamed brighter. "Think of it, John! Three million *gulden*, all for us!"

In a rush, John's wariness came back. Involuntarily, he stiffened. He held his voice dead level.

"I'm thinking of it, and I don't like it. The answer is no."

The girl stared at him. A tiny, petulant note crept into her tone.

"But John, it will make us rich—"

"To hell with that!" he cut her off, suddenly savage again. "D'you think I'm in this bloody slaughterfest for money—one guilder, or a million, or ten millions?" He laughed harshly. "I'll have you know I value my neck more than that. For my brother's sake, I'm out to get Poulain. That's all. Nothing more."

"Of course, John." She closed the gap between them, all eagerness, all

anticipation. Her fingers touched his shirt-front in a humming bird's caress. "Don't you see? Poulain will follow us, regardless of cost. His first thought will be of vengeance. When he finds we have the gold, also, nothing will hold him. He will close for the kill himself, personally. It will be your chance, your perfect opportunity. . ."

"Sure. I see." John said it between clenched teeth, the Mauser's muzzle lightly laid against her belly. "I see that you're after that gold, no matter what. And I'm not having any." He stared deep into her eyes' green depths. Tried to probe through them to her brain. "What kind of a fool do you take me for, Anita? Or is it just that you're off your base yourself? Sure, Poulain will come. He'll come with enough thugs to lick a regiment, enough armament to fight a war. And there we'd be, trapped and waiting." He snorted. "No, thanks, beautiful! I'll fight, but I'll pick my own field."

The look she threw him was beyond interpretation.

"Then you refuse—?"

"You're damned right I—"

That was as far as he got.

Anita leaped backward, away from him. Her face contorted.

"John! Look out!"

HE REMEMBERED, later a flash of thought that this might be a trick. Then, as quickly, realizing that no actress, however skilled, could ever simulate that look of shock and fear that leaped into her eyes.

He twisted. Dropped.

Something slashed past him, close to his head. He glimpsed the pilot's grimacing face. Realized, suddenly sick, that almost any plane's controls may be locked in a neutral position so that the pilot may leave his seat.

Desperately, John bucked. Snatched

at the other's knees. Jerked a leg out from under him.

The pilot sprawled. His falling body struck John's arm. Sent the Mauser skittering across the narrow space, to land with an ear-jarring jangle amid the stacked gas cans.

John smashed a blow for the handsome face. Missed. Followed through with the elbow.

It was the only blow he had a chance to strike. Before he could launch another, Anita's voice slashed through to him.

"Stop! Cease this brawling before I shoot you both!"

Ice hung from the words. Enough ice to freeze them where they sprawled.

Slowly, John turned.

Anita stood with her back to the racked-up cans, gripping the Mauser. She held it close to her hip, as if she knew how to handle it.

She spoke again.

"Very well, *mijnheren!* You are wise." And then, green eyes dark and unsmiling. "You, Pilot Gilmore! Resume your place at the controls. We shall proceed at once to the crashed plane over which you flew Poulain today!"

CHAPTER VII

The Junkers

THEY saw the mountain first: a wilderness of barren stone, its rugged peak shoved up ten thousand feet into the cloud-fluffed sky, set like a monstrous dam at the end of a great green valley that sparkled emerald facets in the morning sun.

"The Forbidden Mountain!" Anita Van Pelt whispered, half aloud. "It is as Carter said!"

Only the drone of the amphibian's engines answered.

John Daniels eyed her narrowly. Lines of strain now etched the angel face, and her hair's golden halo somehow gleamed not quite so bright. But the green eyes were still steady and watchful, the Mauser deadly, unmoving.

"Closer!" she commanded. "Come in low. The Junkers should be somewhere on the lower slope, just out of the valley. That is why it stayed safe. The mountain is taboo. The Ngurus fear to climb it."

Gilmore, the pilot, shot her one nervous glance.

"I don't like it," he muttered. "There's currents down there—updrafts, and God knows what else. We're liable to pile up the way that Junkers did."

Anita's lips went thin.

"Then move away and let me take the controls. John's brother, Tom, taught me the principles of flight. I can handle a ship in an emergency."

John saw the sweat-beads start on Gilmore's forehead.

"Hell, no, you don't! It's bad enough for me, let alone an amateur."

"Then do as I say. Fly low, so that we may see the Junkers."

Gilmore brought the plane in closer. Other details showed up now. The cliffs and overhangs and sheer rock faces. The murky, silt-laden streams in the valley below, and the neat, geometric patchwork of fields and villages, set off in a hundred different patterns of light and shadow.

"Those large huts," the girl said. "What are they?"

John Daniels laughed without mirth.

"*Douba* houses. Local clubs. The place where the warriors keep their heads." And then: "With luck, ours will be there, too, some day. You said Carter told you these lads were still on the primitive side."

She gave no sign that he could see of even having heard him. Her attention had gone on, on to the bleak, towering heights of the Forbidden Mountain.

Skillfully, Gilmore banked and circled, bringing the amphibian even nearer to those menacing rock faces.

"There! There!" Excitement echoed in Anita's voice. "Do you see it? It lies on the very edge of the valley, down where the undergrowth still grows. It is as Carter said!"

Cautiously, Gilmore maneuvered the amphibian lower.

The Junkers was barely visible, even from this close. Either the brush had grown up around its wreckage, or a first-class camouflage job had been done.

To John, it didn't make much difference.

"Well?" he demanded. He didn't try to keep the irritation from his tone. "We're here. What now?"

"Now?" Anita's face mirrored surprise. "Is it not obvious? We land, of course, and proceed to the Junkers."

"We . . . land . . . ?" whispered Gilmore. Of a sudden, his face was no longer handsome. It had taken on a sickly expression, and there was a rim of white around his mouth.

"We land."

The sweat-beads on the pilot's forehead multiplied and grew. John could see his hands begin to tremble.

"It's suicide! You can't ask me to set a plane down on those rocks! We'll all be killed. Even Poulain decided not to try it without a helicopter—"

Anita Van Pelt gestured with the Mauser.

"It most assuredly will be suicide for you to refuse, *Mijnheer* Gilmore!"

"But I don't dare—"

John's own throat felt a trifle tight. He gazed down at the twisted mass

of metal that had been the Junkers. Swallowing hard. Started to cross the plane.

Anita stabbed out at him with the Mauser.

"Stand back, John! Do not think I will not shoot because I . . . like . . . you."

HE STOPPED, mentally cursing the fate that had made him forget the pilot could set the controls, then move about the ship at will. Save for that one error, he, John Daniels, would still have the Mauser.

But now. . .

"We land!" Anita said again.

Gilmore's face was desperate. John could feel drops of perspiration sliding from his own armpits.

"Make it the nearest river, then," he pleaded. "We can trek up the mountain from there, providing those tribesmen down there don't get us first. But if we crash on that rockpile where the Junkers cracked up, we don't have any chance at all."

"Yes!" Gilmore was almost pathetic in his eagerness. "Let me put it down on the river, for the love of God. Anything but that damned mountain!"

A long, pulse-quickenning pause. Then, slowly, Anita nodded.

"Very well. The river." A gesture with the Mauser. "But no tricks! Not if you want to live!"

Cautiously, Gilmore brought the amphibian down.

They could see even the details of the tribal villages below now. The huts—some round, some oblong, all with thick, grass-thatched roofs. The fields—neat, carefully cultivated, blends of a dozen different shades of green. The people themselves—burly blacks with savage, painted faces, dancing threats and fury. One, atop a queer, pole-like watchtower, even

hurled a spear at the plane.

Gilmore's lips twisted.

"Friendly, aren't they?" But his handsome face was pale beneath its tan.

The streams which from on high had seemed mere trickles down here became broad, swift-flowing rivers, thick-laden with the mud they carried.

One, even larger than the rest, set off the Forbidden Mountain like a great moat, curling in a close embrace against the towering parapets of stone.

"Here goes nothing!" muttered Gilmore.

He manipulated the controls.

The amphibian swooped low. Bucked and spat as it touched the water.

Then, of a sudden, they were down, moving swiftly shoreward on the ship's sleek, boat-like hull.

A tree projected from the mountain bank of the stream—a tall brown *casuarina*.

"Moor there," Anita commanded. And, after the ship had been made fast. "Now out with you both! Up, on the bank, where I can watch you."

John frowned.

"You mean—?"

"I mean I do not trust you. Not either of you." The girl's lips were thin and straight. "Once ashore, I shall be far more at your mercy than here, where I can guard you. So I shall take precautions, *mijn vrienden*. There is a thing I learned to do from your brother"—she nodded at John—"which will help to keep me safe. A trick. By removing one little part in here, I can prevent your flying away until I am ready."

Gilmore glowered at her sullenly.

"Watch your step, baby. You may jimmy things once too often, and then none of us will get out."

Anita's green eyes flashed.

"Out! You heard me! Out!"

Together, John and the pilot backed through the loading port. Clambered precariously ashore.

Behind them, Anita disappeared from the doorway.

"Well, now's our chance."

John eyed him.

"Our chance for what?"

"Our chance to get away from that wack. We can make a run for it, then sneak back later. She can't do anything to a plane I can't fix."

John shook his head.

"You're only half smart, Gilmore. There are ports in that fuselage. My bet is that Anita's watching us through one of them right now. Try to run, and she'll cut you down with that machine pistol before you get ten feet."

"I SUPPOSE so." Gilmore nodded, brows knitted. "All right, then. So we don't run. You stay here so she'll think everything's on the up-and-up. I'll crawl back aboard, up by the engines, and have a little fun with the fuel lines. It's insurance, pure and simple. I'll fix it so the ship will just about get off the river before it stalls. Then we'll tell her about it, and that'll make us even. She won't try taking a run-out powder on us, leaving us here while she beats it with the loot."

John studied him for a moment. Appraised again the shifty, close-set eyes, the weak, unpleasant mouth. He disliked this man instinctively. Distrusted him, too. Pilot he might be; competent, also. But his language and thoughts were those of a Lower East Side sharpy. The fact that he'd been flying for Poulain was proof enough of that.

And yet, he could see the logic of Gilmore's idea, too. At present, they were completely at Anita's mercy. She claimed she could fly. Very well, she could equally take advantage of it to

abandon them here, a thousand miles from civilization.

Reluctantly, he nodded.

"Go to it, Gilmore. I'll be the sucker."

The pilot grinned, leaped back to the amphibian's wing. In a moment he was fumbling at one of the engines, then clambering on across toward the other, out of sight.

John stared after him. He wondered just what kind of a fool he was being, playing it this way. He couldn't even understand just why he did it. It was beyond all sense, all logic, certainly.

A dozen times, he could have taken the Mauser from Anita. He had no illusions about that. He'd faced too many desperate men, too many hopeless situations, to believe that he was incapable of relieving a slim young girl of a pistol.

Yet he'd gone along. Without even a real try for freedom, he'd submitted to her will, allowed her to force Gilmore to fly here.

He wondered why. True, she was lovely. But the world was full of lovely women. Lovely women, even, who hadn't cheated and betrayed him.

Because Anita *had* betrayed him. There could be no doubt in his mind of that, no matter how much she might explain and rationalize and alibi. Willing or not, she'd led him into a death trap. She was leading him into another right now.

He clenched his fists and cursed beneath his breath. What was wrong with him? Why did he let her do it? He'd come back to this island hell for one reason only; to avenge Tom. Now, under her subtle spell, he was forgetting all that, following her lead instead. . . .

Her voice broke in upon him.

"Where is the pilot, Gilmore?"

John stared at her, unspeaking, mar-

veling again at the power she had over him.

SHE stood framed in the loading port, the slim, lithe lines of her firm young body on display, the golden halo of her hair once more smooth and alive as a rippling field of sun-ripened wheat.

A flush spread over the delicate oval of her face as she caught his stare. The red lips quivered. John could see the rise and fall of her breasts quicken beneath the thin blouse she wore.

"Well?" There was the faintest tremors in her tone.

"He's around somewhere. He just stepped away for a minute."

The green eyes narrowed. Instinctively, John looked away. Glanced along the amphibian's wing toward the far engine.

No sign of Gilmore.

"He was on the wing?"

With a start, he realized that she had followed his glance.

"Yes."

Lithely, she leaped ashore. Darted down the bank for a better view. John followed.

There could be no doubt of it now. Gilmore had disappeared.

Anita turned. Eyed John.

"You don't know where he's gone?"

Wordless, he shook his head.

"It is no matter. I have fixed the plane. He cannot leave without me."

There was nothing to say. Silent, John waited.

The sternness left the girl's lips. Once more, as in those earliest hours, she was smiling, radiant.

"But you did not leave me, John? If he could go, so could you, but you did not?"

"No." He felt his own cheeks go hot.

She laughed softly for all the world like a spring breeze among the ferns and violets of the upland forests. The

harsh lines disappeared from her face. Her voice was a caress.

"Dear John! I shall not forget this . . . ever."

But her hand stayed on the Mauser.

A wave of sullen, smouldering anger lapped at the edges of John Daniels' brain.

Was this how it had been with Tom? This woman, with her devil's body and angel's face, luring him on, into that final slaughterfest at Darwin?

She was still smiling.

"Come, John. We shall leave that fool Gilmore behind while we climb to the Junkers."

He tried to hold his own voice steady.

"If you're expecting trouble, hadn't you better let me go back aboard and get a gun? These Aussie killers you talk about sound like rough business to me."

For the fraction of a second she hesitated, surveying him. Then, almost merrily, laughing softly, she shook her head.

"Oh, John I wish I dared. But there are times when I fear you, just a little. If you had a gun—" She broke off. "No, John. We must chance this little trip without such."

HIS anger burst into tiny, darting flames, but he held it under cover, save for the clenching of his doubled fists, the tightening of the muscles along his neck. He managed a noncommittal shrug.

"Have it your way."

"You will lead, please."

Without a word, he swung about. Started through the straggling sedge and *kunai* grass up the slope. Although he did not glance backward, he could tell from the rustle of undergrowth that Anita was following close behind him.

The setting was infinitely strange, a

study in contrasts. On the one hand, patches of flowers—gentians, buttercups, a hundred species he could not name—dotted the way beside his path. Birds, brilliantly plumaged, swooped and pirouetted about him. Tiny monkeys chattered noisily in a grove of trees. A cassowary paraded solemnly past him down the slope. The sun was bright, the air clear and cool. It added up to perfection, exemplified.

Yet the overall effect was something else again. As if this bright, clear land held darkly hideous secrets not too far beneath its pleasant surface.

Perhaps it grew from the Forbidden Mountain, towering high above them, menacing, like some great cemetery monolith. Or perhaps it was only John's own nerves, frayed and ragged from the perilous days gone by.

The cause didn't matter. The effect was what counted.

And the effect was one of menace, incarnate.

Higher he climbed, and higher. Already the last vestiges of vegetation had disappeared from this inhospitable soil. Here stood nothing but barren jaws of rock.

He could hear Anita panting behind him. Grimly, he pressed on the faster. Took a certain sullen satisfaction in the knowledge that she was having difficulty keeping up.

Higher they climbed, and higher. John himself was gasping. He began to wonder if he could have missed the way.

Then, of a sudden, they topped one last rise. Came out on a tiny plateau thick with conifers.

There sat the Junkers.

John turned, just as Anita stumbled over the crest.

Her face convulsed, even as he watched. A sea of greed washed over it. She darted forward, heedless of

the undergrowth. Plunged into the tangled mass of wreckage.

Silent, he followed.

Two men had occupied the Junkers' cabin. More, perhaps. But at least two. They were still here.

One had died in the crash. He sprawled in the pilot's seat, a skeleton, his shattered chest and ribs still pinned in the debris.

The other had survived, apparently. At least for a time.

HIS white-picked bones lay further back, beside a bulkhead door. One hand still gripped a rusting pistol thrust in his belt.

It was a draw he'd never made. A bullet had shattered his skull.

"Your friend Carter was right," John said. Somehow, the words came out a croak. "His buddies are still waiting for him. He killed 'em to make sure they wouldn't wander off."

He saw her green eyes go wide, then turn away.

"I—I did not know," she faltered.

"Of course not. That's why you charged up here without a worry or a care. You figured the boys would welcome you with open arms."

Her face went scarlet.

"So I knew. So he told me. What of it?" Her voice rose, half hysterically. "They murdered my brothers. If they had not been dead, I, myself, would have killed them. Now"—she shrugged—"the gold is ours. All ours. For the taking. It lies back there behind that door. Carter, himself, told me."

John held his face expressionless.

"Get on with it."

"Then you will help me, still—?" She asked it eagerly.

"Get on with it."

She didn't seem to catch his tone. He wondered why. He knew the bit-

ter note was there. Or maybe it was just that the dream of gold had blinded her.

She pivoted. Hand shaking, twisted the knob. Pushed open the door.

Her cry, then, was like an animal in torment. Babbling and screaming, she stumbled into the rear compartment.

Woodenly, John followed. He felt suddenly aloof, apart from all this. As if he were merely a spectator to some not-too-well managed drama on a stage.

Anita's voice shrilled on.

"He lied to me, the dog! He tricked me! It isn't here. . ."

Bleak, detached, John glanced past her over her shoulder, into the compartment.

She was right. No treasure rested here. This room was a rusting, rubble-strewn cell.

Barren.

Completely empty.

CHAPTER VIII

Canibal Covert

IT WAS strange, that trip back down the mountain.

It took time for John even to persuade Anita to leave the Junkers. Like one possessed, she scrambled through the dirt and rubble, eyes wild, face twitching, panting in panicky little gasps clawing at the charred debris as if sheer force and perserverance would wrest its secret from it.

She'd aged ten years in that one brief moment of disillusion. As if the treasure she sought were dearer than sanity, more precious than life itself.

Now the green eyes were smouldering coals of jade, deep-sunk within their dark-ringed sockets. A shadow lay across her face. Her cheeks, her mouth, her throat, sagged loose, a study in bitter lines and broken dreams.

Crow's-feet marred the corners of her eyes. Wrinkles were ironed across the former smooth perfection of her brow. Her lips mouthed meaningless sounds, and her shoulders drew together as with the weight of age. Her steps were stumbling, ill-placed.

Harshly, John laughed.

"So this is how it ends. A trial of corpses, leading to a phantasm. A treasure hunt without the treasure."

"Don't talk about it. I can't stand it."

On he pressed, tasting the flavor of savage satisfaction.

"In the end, Carter wins after all. He murdered his pals so he could have that three million guilders loot to himself. But you came along, and Poulain, each of you out to clip him."

"Stop it! Stop it, John. I can't stand it!"

"Only Carter had his ace in the hole. The one detail he'd held back: before he left, he'd moved that treasure." Again he laughed. "How he must have snickered as all of you closed in on him! You, and Poulain, and God knows who all else. Money-hungry vultures, gathering for the kill. Only Carter didn't care, not even when Poulain took time out to sentence him to death. He knew that in the end the treasure would be his or nobody's. I'll bet he went out laughing."

Anita stopped. Her face was grey. She swayed a trifle, like a slim bamboo against the wind. Jerkily, she raised the Mauser.

"That is enough, John Daniels. I will take no more." Her voice rang harsh and bitter. "You hate me now, as you hate Poulain. You hold me responsible, with him, for your brother's death. You see in me only the love of gold, the lust for wealth. The rest is forgotten, all of it—my brothers, shot down, murdered; my father dying of a

broken heart in that prison camp; those years with my life hanging by a whim of those little yellow beasts. . .”

A shudder ran through her, convulsed her. Her mouth worked, and she licked at her lips with a queer, taut fierceness. Her voice rose, shrilling.

“That is all, John Daniels! I will not have it! You cannot sneer at me, and you can only sneer and loathe, and berate me. What if I did want gold? It was mine! It belonged to me—me, Anita Van Pelt of Djaimalang! I wanted it, the things it would buy. Now even that is gone, lost forever, babble your hate for me—!”

She broke off. Sound only not words, came from her throat—hacking, hysterical sound, half sob, half shriek, all agony.

How long it lasted John never knew. No more than a few seconds, probably, but he could not tell for sure. Too much was going on within him, too many mixed emotions rising in swirling, swelling turmoil.

Of a sudden, the girl before him was beautiful again. Not physically; her face was still contorted, marred with lines, her body cramped and shaking. The golden hair hung streaked and straggling, halo no more; the lips raw, cracking flesh.

Rather, it was as if her very ugliness, her pain, were drawing him to her. His throat was a tight, choked thing, his heart bursting with some queer, off-beat tenderness that twisted in him like a knife.

Involuntarily, without thought or logic, he started forward.

THE racking spasm left her. He could see the muscles along her jaw go rigid as she clamped her teeth. Her tear-streaked face came up, and the Mauser. The green eyes glinted through their welling mist.

“No, John Daniels! No closer! The day for that is past. We shall go back to the river, now, and to the plane. You wanted it so. Now you shall have it.”

He was close to her, too close. The Mauser was his for the taking. One flicker of motion, one swift, sharp twist, would do it. Again he would be in complete command. . .

Without a word he turned away. Slogged stolidly back, on down the mountain.

He could have the gun, yes. He knew it. Only now he didn't want it. Let her keep it, if it helped her. Let her hold it, and with it her fast-dissolving grip on self-respect.

A turmoil of unrest within him, he slid on his heels down the last steep slope. Started back through the mass of scrubby undergrowth toward the gently rippling sea of head-high *kunai* grass that stretched away at an easy incline to where the amphibian hugged the river's bank. He felt angry, ill-natured, depressed. The sparkling sunlight was an irritation, the monkeys and birds of paradise a noisy nuisance.

Then, suddenly, he glimpsed a flicker of motion down by the plane.

He snapped taut in a rush of panic.

Gilmore had claimed he could repair any sabotage Anita might commit. Too, he could handle the amphibian alone.

The very thought sent chills racing up and down John's spine. A thousand times, in that moment, he visualized the plane plowing slowly out into the river. The engines thundering, speeding it through the mud-yellow water to a take-off. Gilmore's sullenly handsome face, mocking and sneering, as he circled over them before he forever left this valley. . .

By reflex, John sprang forward. Sprinted towards the amphibian's mooring.

Ahead of him, a scream split the air—shrill, blood-curdling, alive with pain and terror.

The next instant, a figure loomed in the amphibian's loading port.

John Daniels remembered, afterwards, that he cried out aloud. By instinct, he drove the heels of his old, Australian-issue boots deep into the thin earth in a shock-paralyzed stop so fast it almost threw him.

Yes, a figure was framed in the plane's entry. And what a figure! A burly black, naked body and hate-contorted face made more hideous still by the glistening contrast of weird, red-painted figures. A necklace of teeth ringed his throat, and huge bone ornaments pierced ear-lobes and nasal septum, high on his head he wore a cuscus-fur shako. Fur-and-sennit bands adorned the sinewy arms and legs. In one hand he bore an elliptic body shield, in the other a long, flat-bladed spear, close kin to an assegai.

The black apparently saw John in the same instant that John saw him.

For one racked moment they stood there. Taut. Unmoving. Staring at each other across that intervening sea of head-high grass.

Then Gilmore's fear-contorted face flashed up in the doorway over the black's shoulder. He screamed once, as before. Shrilly. Like an animal in pain.

Only once. With a jerk, his face disappeared.

It broke John's paralysis.

Still staggering from his stop, he spun about. Raced back toward the girl.

Behind him, the black bellowed a blood-curdling warcry.

Fear was in John's heart. A living, breathing fear that lent depth to his lungs and wings to his feet.

"Anita! Quick! That gun—"

He could see the green eyes distend in panic, the lips draw back in a grimace of terror.

"The gun!" he roared again.

Her paralysis seemed to break. She half turned, shielding the Mauser with her body.

"No, John! No! Let Gilmore go! We can climb back. The mountain is taboo to them—"

"Give me that gun, damn you!" In a fury, he leaped for her, hands outstretched to seize the weapon.

"No! They'll kill you! I cannot—"

She broke off. Pivoted sharply. Darted away.

He leaped after her.

Again she twisted, changed her course. Sped into the nearest finger-like copse of *kunai* grass.

Cursing, he followed.

BUT only for a few steps. The grass was a net, a snare. It closed in on him, clung to him, shackled him hand and foot. Dust rolled over him, and imprisoned heat. Smothering him. Dragging him down.

In seconds, he lost her, baffled by her own agility and the blinding, maddening screen of grass.

Sweating, atremble with fear and strain, he raced back. Scrambled up the nearest slope. Stared out across the rippling swale, searching for some hint, some trace.

It was no use. Already the grass had swallowed her up like a corpse flung into the sea.

He winced at the simile.

The wind sweeping up the valley blew hot and cold to him at once. His lips were suddenly cracking dry, his palms a sheen of sweat. Grimly, monotonously, futilely, he cursed his fate, on and on.

The Ngurus no longer were visible about the plane. Neither did they show

any inclination to come out into the open after him.

"For that small favor let me be duly thankful!" he muttered half aloud.

Again he scanned the sea of grass. Still nothing.

Then, deep in the gently-waving head-high prairie, the Mauser sprang to staccato life. A spray of shots, a parabola of sound.

A hundred yards away, the green waves momentarily parted. Swayed in a flurry of spasmodic violence.

Bodies. Black bodies.

Black bodies—lunging, charging, catapulting. Spraying in a shouting, screaming, triumphant human wave over one toppling slim white form.

CHAPTER IX

The Ngurus

THE drums throbbed louder, now that the sun was down, echoing and re-echoing, reverberating from the very walls of the Forbidden Mountain itself.

Somehow, their sullen booming made John Daniels' blood run cold.

It set his nerves on edge, that chilling. Because it shouldn't have been. He knew the bush from years spent in it. Understood it, and its people. Even the workings of the native mind.

These drums? He'd heard their like in a thousand solitary camps. They signified only a primitive fear, a superstitious dread of evil spirits. Their noise kept these people company, helped hold the night at bay. . . .

Yet now he shuddered.

Perhaps it was because this time it wasn't just his own neck that was menaced.

He caught himself wondering if he could ever forget those hellish shouts of triumph as the Ngurus dragged Anita and Gilmore down to the river, load-

ing them into canoes for transport back to this teeming village, with its stench and smoke and throbbing drums.

Never had he felt so futile. Never!

It had been even worse when he reached the plane. Found it empty, save for the gasoline drums. Gutted of arms and ammunition. Reeking of rancid coconut oil and betel and unwashed black bodies.

The thought of the weapons made him frown even now. Had they been taken for ornaments and curios only? Or, by some black chance, did these tribesmen know how to fire them, too?

In spite of it all, he'd followed, drawn on as by a giant magnet. Unarmed, a ghost in the night, he'd swum the yellow river. Wormed his way through the thick-meshed *kunai* grass, snake-like, to the very edge of this village, so close that he could smell it.

Another shudder rippled through him. He could smell the village. Might not these villagers also smell him? Some wild tribes had noses keen as hound-dogs'. They could scent a white man at a mile.

His stomach knotted and he breathed a silent prayer.

Evil excitement seemed to grip the village. Even from here he could catch the tension, the taut-stretched edge of impending doom. Menace hung like a black cloud, so thick, so heavy, he could almost taste it.

Two naked women hurried by, chattering shrilly, young pigs suckling at their pendant breasts. They passed so close John could have touched them. Even through the semi-darkness he caught their glistening faces' taut animation as they scurried toward the center of the town.

Beyond them, fire flickered red on its bed of stones within a deserted hut. The faint fragrance of sago and sweet potatoes, and other, less familiar smells,

drifted out to John. With an unpleasant start, it dawned on him that he hadn't eaten since the night before. A wave of weakness, a painful gnawing, swept over him close on the realization's heels.

Perhaps he could sneak into the hut. Snatch some of the food before its owners returned. . . .

Grimly, he fought the temptation down. Edged forward once more, through the fringes of the village.

Another chattering group passed him, mere yards away, all eagerness, all expectation. They, too were headed toward the center of the clump of huts.

There was something about them. Some sinister undertone of menace.

John twisted. Followed in their wake.

Ahead the *douba* loomed, peaked black monstrosity against the sky. A big one, too. Fifty feet high at the entrance, if he were any judge, and God only knew how long.

The *douba*. Club and church and museum combined. Home of warriors, altar of skulls. Sanctuary of head-hunting's blood-blackened cult.

Here, if anywhere, would be the prisoners.

If the prisoners still lived . . .

John Daniels clenched his fists till the nails gouged the palms.

Cautiously, he wriggled closer. Then stopped short. A thrill of horror gripped him.

A clearing opened before the *douba*, the huts of the village grouped around it.

HERE were the booming drums, set off by flickering firelight. Here were the warriors, hundreds strong, strutting and prancing. Here were voices, rising and falling in an eager, excited jabber.

And here were the prisoners.

They hung by their lashings at two stakes in the clearing's center, exhaustion and panic mirrored in every line. Even by the firelight, John could see the blood that slowly dripped from a wound in Gilmore's forehead. Anita's blouse was a shredded mockery.

John felt his own blood quicken as he stared at her.

It was strange, the effect she had upon him.

Gilmore was worse hurt, certainly. Blond hair a rumped, tangled mass. Sullenly handsome face now terror-straight. That ugly, jagged wound in his forehead.

And here he, John Daniels, lay in the grass. Unarmed. Helpless. Staring death in the face with every breath. Let just one of those berserker Nguru warriors spot him. . .

Yet, strangely, it didn't matter. Gilmore could live, or Gilmore could die. Who cared? As for himself. . . Well, he'd seen tight spots before. Sooner or later, there'd be one too close for him. He wouldn't make it.

He could pass it off with a shrug of his shoulders.

But Anita— The very sight of her set him afire. The lashings, the bared white shoulders—they loosed the kill-lust, sent murder racing through his veins. He wanted to leap up, charge toward her. Tear her free from her bonds. Shield her with his own body from all peril.

Sweat dripped into his eyes. He had to fight to keep from rising, running amok, shouting one last mad challenge as he threw his life away.

Then, while he watched, the tempo of the drums increased. Shrill voices shrieked commands. The fires flared higher, set new scarlet lights dancing on the gleaming black of oil-rubbed bodies. Shadows leaped in a weird rigadon. The warriors began to chant.

He couldn't understand the words, nor was that unusual. Each of these valleys generally had a different dialect.

He hadn't seen this ceremony before, either. Past experience could not guide him through what was coming.

Yet he knew. Instinct, and intelligence, and years in the back bush all screamed the warning.

The details, he didn't know. Nor the reasons. After all, this was an ignorant, backward, superstitious people. A tribe straight from the stone age. Their purpose, their logic, didn't have to make sense to civilized men.

But they were head-hunters. The *douba* told him that; he could catch glimpses of the skull-racks even from here by the leaping firelight.

Cannibals, too, probably. The two so often went together. Odds were that the whole tribe was looking forward to a sampling of tender, savory long pig, skillfully roasted over those roaring fires. The *luluai* would come forward first, as was his right, to take the shin-bone. Then the others, too, would *kai-kai*, choosing their favored delicacies in the order of their own importance. . . .

A wave of nausea swept over John. His imaginings were too vivid, his thoughts too real. He buried his face in the matted grass. Fought to gain control of his twitching, turbulent stomach.

The *kundu* drums boomed louder. Rose to a throbbing, rhythmic thunder, like the beat of a giant heart.

Boom. . . . boom. . . . boom. . . . boom. . . .

The lilt of idle chatter was dying now, the warriors forming into lines, the polished stone and bone of their spears aglinting, their great carved wooden shields hideous in the flickering radiance of the fires. Their chant-

ing voices rose and fell in a cacophony of sound.

The fear on Anita's face was a living thing. Gilmore's lips moved in babbling, incoherent panic.

Taut, desperate, John stared at them. Clawed involuntarily at the sod beneath him in a frenzy of hopelessness and indecision.

The fires leaped higher.

HE SAW it, then: the great, heaped pyre at the far end of the clearing. A pyramid of dry, stacked wood, higher than a tall man's head, bigger around than the largest hut. Beyond the circle of savage dancers.

Inspiration came with it, sharp and clean-cut as the finest etching. In an instant, he knew what he had to do.

Knew, and shook with the fear he could not do it.

He was crawling away even before the fog within his mind had cleared. Wriggling through the high, dry grass, away from the huts and the clearing. Then rising. Darting off at a low-crouched run.

Off, toward the river, and the plane.

He was panting, by the time he reached the log canoes, and his legs were aching, heavy. Yet he dared not pause. Not now. Too much was at stake.

He flung himself into the nearest craft, snatched up a paddle. Drove out from shore with powerful strokes, quartering upstream so that the current would land him by the amphibian.

His arms were aching, too, when he finally beached the awkward shell, and his breath was coming harder.

But back there, in that firelight clearing before the *douba*, the drums were beating louder, faster. Their throb was like a lash across his shoulders, a spur in his flanks—pressing him, pushing him, driving him on.

He stumbled through the amphibian's entry port. Clutched two of the five-gallon army-type gasoline cans. Lurched back again. Tumbled them into the canoe.

He didn't bother to try for more. There wasn't time. He'd do it with these, or he couldn't do it at all.

That was what he was afraid of: that he couldn't do it. Faster, the drums were beating, and faster still. The rhythm rang in his brain with the jolting impact of a jackhammer's blow. Insidiously, treacherously, it seeped into him, through every pore and fibre. Throbbled in his heart and in his bloodstream. Abraded his nerves to jagged frenzy.

He knew it gripped others, too. He could tell it by the distant chanting. Louder, that chanting, now, and faster, too, to match the drums' beat. It had taken on a jangling, half hysterical note, a wail of madness. It drowned out the myriad other sounds of the jungle night. Supplanted them with echoing horror.

Anita was there, amid those screaming, frenzied creatures. Bound. Helpless. Her white skin and rippling waves of hair a lure and a temptation.

Sweat trickled down John Daniels' spine in an icy flow. He hurled himself back into the canoe. Pushed out from shore.

Boom . . . boom . . . boom . . .

He tried to match the beat with his paddle strokes. Forced his aching arms to dig them deep, carry them through.

The throaty chanting rose and fell. Shriller. Wilder. Closer to the edge of madness.

One last, deep stroke. The canoe's bow snaked into the mud.

GASPING, staggering, John stumbled out into the shallow water.

Lurched ashore, tottering under the weight of the gasoline.

The *kundu* drums throbbed on: *boom. . . . boom. . . . boom. . . . boom. . . .*

The trip back became a mad nightmare. Twice he stumbled. Fell. His lungs, his heart, were balls of pain. Every breath a fire-tipped lance.

But he had to go on. He had to. So long as the drums thundered and the warriors chanted, he had to.

The last hundred yards came as a relief. The necessity for safety, if nothing else, made him slow.

Within the firelit clearing, the warriors' chant had turned to screaming. Like madmen, they danced and pranced and shouted. Shook their spears and waved their shields. Leaped high in orgies of release. Their eyes were wild, unreal; the filed-down, needle-pointed fangs of teeth foam-flecked. Witch-doctors in hideous, misshapen masks shrieked slavering imprecations.

But the prisoners were still there—cringing, terror-straight.

But there.

A great red welt now lay across Anita's bare white breast. The lashings' marks showed crimson, too. Strain twitched at her sagging face.

But she lived.

Gilmore, too. He strained at his bonds, casual and debonair no longer. Madness gleamed in his shock-distended eyes, and the sounds that he shrieked were the meaningless babble of sheer terror.

With an effort, John Daniels tore his gaze away. Fumbled at the gas-can caps.

It took him ten minutes to unscrew them. Of a sudden, he was clumsy beyond belief, all thumbs and toes. He could not make his hands behave.

Then the caps were unscrewed, and

he came to his feet. Stumbled off through the blackness beyond the fires to the great woodpile at the far end of the clearing.

He approached it from behind, so that the dancers could not see him. Sloshed gasoline on the hard-packed ground at its base. Poured a gurgling line from it off into the tinder-dry *kunai* grass. Drew it on, through the undergrowth, around the whole left side of the village to the back of the thick-thatched *douba*.

It emptied the can. Hastily, he returned to his base, seized the other. Drew another line, like the first, to the village's right.

The town was encircled. The *douba*. The huts. The warriors. The *kundu* drums.

Especially the drums. They were the voice of madness now. The beat of an evil heart.

Boom — boom — boom — boom — boom — boom —

John raced for the nearest hut. Blew the cook-fire into the flame. Lighted a grass-stuffed bamboo brand.

He hesitated, then. Hesitated, with the torch and their destiny in his hand.

IT WAS queer, quite apart from the danger of the thing he was about to do. He had no illusions about his chances. Odds were he'd die like a dog in minutes, spitted on a broad-blade Nguru spear. In acting, he was merely adding his own life in sacrifice. Putting it forward, alongside those other two already doomed.

Yet he knew he'd go ahead, for no reason he could give a name. He wasn't even sure he wanted to; he'd never felt this way before.

He'd come back to the islands with one thought in his mind.

Avenge Tom. Wipe out Poulain.

Yet here he was. Wagering his life

in a madman's gamble. Forgetting Tom. Forgetting Poulain. Venturing everything.

For what?

To ask that question was to answer it.

For Anita. For Anita Van Pelt of Djaimalang.

She said.

In spite of himself, he laughed aloud. Harshly. Bitterly.

Yes, for Anita. For a woman who'd lied to him, tricked him, played games with his life. Her stories were as many as the fronds of the palm trees. He didn't even know for sure if her name *was* Anita, or Van Pelt.

She'd admitted herself Tom had died for her. She'd helped trap him, John Daniels. Brought him along here at the point of a gun. A dozen times she'd proved she cared only for gold. That he was her tool—and her fool; nothing more.

So now he'd turn the other cheek. Go out there and die on Nguru spears in one last vain effort to save her.

He cursed her.

But he'd do it. He knew it. Even though tomorrow she turned back, betrayed him.

Because the golden vision of her was in his brain, the gnawing hunger for her tight-knotted around his heart.

Because he loved her.

Again he laughed aloud. Only this time it wasn't bitter.

Grim-lipped, torch in hand, he strode out into the night.

CHAPTER X

Escape to Jeopardy

EVEN as he reached the clearing, the great drums stopped. The chant, the screaming, cut off knife-sharp.

Silence echoed like a clap of thunder.

Monstrous gargoyles in masks and rattles, the witch-doctors trooped forward. Slashed at the captives' lashings.

A shudder ran through John Daniels as he glimpsed—recognized—the knife. He'd seen others like it before.

It was carved from a human shoulder blade.

But Anita and Gilmore were free. Sagging, true. Near-broken. Still held by Nguru hands.

But unbound. Free.

John swung back the torch.

Only the rustle of crushed dry grass in the sudden silence warned him. The fires' leaping flames had blinded his eyes. He'd seen nothing in the darkness about him.

Then: this rustle.

Instinctively, he whirled, just as a claw-nailed black hand clutched at his throat.

He caught one brief glimpse of a great stone axe descending. Of a hideous painted face behind it.

Desperately, he leaped sidewise. Stabbed with his torch for the black demon-face.

A scream of anguish burst from the thick, pierced lips. The warrior plunged backward, off balance.

John snatched the axe from his attacker's hand. Hurling it with all his might. Saw it part the other's spine-coiffed topknot.

Too late. Already the circle had exploded into bedlam.

With a curse, John flung the torch at the gas-soaked target circle behind the woodpile. Braced himself to meet the Nguru warriors' charge.

A stray thought flashed through his mind like a prophesy: she-devil's body, angel face; you'll die of them, John Daniels!

Then there was no more time for thinking.

He'd learned the disarming manual well, back there in the Marines. It stood him in good stead now.

One twist gave him the foremost Nguru's spear. Left the warrior a crumpled heap on the ground.

He drove the needle point through the next two painted figures with one thrust.

What happened next was a well-planned miracle, a coincidence of careful timing.

The torch struck its target. Roaring flames leaped high into the air.

Another instant, and a wall of fire was racing through the *kunai* grass, following that devil's trail of petrol stretched round the village.

The Nguru war-cries died in screaming, tumultuous panic. Like fire-frighted animals, the natives fled. Away from the flames. Back toward the *douba* house.

John stood forgotten.

His heart in his throat, he raced after them. He still could hardly believe he was alive.

Anita and Gilmore stood paralyzed, quaking statues amid a racing torrent of black bodies, twin monoliths of fear-fraught flesh.

In seconds John was upon them. Shaking away their palsy. Rushing them back toward that thin line of fire across the hard ground by the woodpile.

Because already that fire was dying. Without sustenance, without fuel, fed only by the trail of gasoline, it fast was flickering out.

They leaped across the line. Sped onward in a headlong dash toward the river. The river, and the plane, and safety.

Behind them, the wall of fire raced faster, ever faster, on round the vil-

lage toward the *douba*. The trapped Ngurus milled and shouted.

The *douba* caught. Flames shot over its thick-thatched roof. Leaped, with a cannon-roar, a hundred feet into the air.

But the warriors had seen John's point of exit. The dying embers across that strip of hard-packed ground.

Screaming vengeance, a black flood of hate, they charged after the whites.

Desperately, John herded his staggering charges on.

THEY were lurching and falling already, their eyes blank, unseeing, with fatigue and panic. A dozen times he had to guide them, lift them, urge them on.

How long could he do it? He wondered. He'd been on the verge of cracking to begin. Now. . .

The Ngurus were an avalanche of savage sound. Screaming blood-lust. Gaining at every stride.

Even Anita caught it, and Gilmore. John could see it in the terror in their eyes. Sheer panic drove them on. They ran the faster.

Still the Ngurus gained. Off to the right, a dozen or more broke at an angle, cutting between the fugitives and the strip of riverfront where the canoes were beached.

John sobbed for breath. Veered away downstream.

Death at their heels, they reached the water. Plunged in. Swam madly through a shower of spears and arrows toward the far shore.

For a while John thought they wouldn't make it. The current picked them up, carried them along, farther and farther downstream. Anita clung to him, choking and sobbing. Gilmore clutched at him, floundering, dragging him down. The black night began to swim before his eyes in a rainbow aure-

ole of lavish color.

And then, of a sudden, it was over. They were in the shallows, staggering ashore. Collapsing on the grassy bank, panting and sobbing.

John never knew how long they lay there. His body was a weak, drained thing, his arms, his legs, limp stumps of pain. The world reeled about him, and the stars swooped down in dazzling spirals to blind him with their brilliance. Even the fear died in him, blotted away for the while by the sheer ecstasy of physical release.

Then a voice was whispering in his ear. Soft hands caressing him.

The words he couldn't understand. He was beyond that. Too far gone with weariness and pain. They came to him only as sound: breath of the night wind; soft murmur of a mountain rill.

But he could understand the other—the fingers' smooth delight; the lips, brushing his; the soft cheek, cool velvet against his own.

At first he couldn't believe it. Or wouldn't. It was too much like paradise, too close to nirvana's bliss. He was afraid to accept it. Aquiver with the panic that day's light would shatter it like a dream.

Then, slowly, the words began to come through. The word, and the voice. Anita's voice.

"My darling, my darling . . . I am yours, John. Forever. If you will have me. I swear it, John Daniels, I swear it. My life . . . it is yours now. To do with as you will. Forever . . ."

IT WAS worse, then. Worse than he had believed possible, worse than hell itself. Because now he heard the words, and they promised incredible ecstasy, an Eden of rapture, transports of bliss beyond endurance.

Only now, his brain would not let

him believe those words.

He wanted to believe them. Wanted to believe them more than he had ever wanted anything in this world.

Only always his brain's cold, bitter logic drew him back. Raised up those other ugly specters to dance and grimace before his aching eyes.

Carter, and murder. The jail, and entrapment. The scream, and an empty Luger.

And over them all, like twin hovering shadows, dead Tom, and Poulain. . . .

Then, again, her lips were on his, chill fire in the desert. Her face—a soft shadow. Her body, pressed close.

She-devil's body. Angel face.

It was more than flesh could bear. Within him, something snapped. He crushed her. Embraced her. Bruised the soft lips, the warm body. Clung to her, half sobbing, sating the hunger, the pain, that she evoked.

Gilmore's voice dragged him back. Ragged. Sneering. Ugly.

"Sure, it's nice, Daniels. Your girlfriend's hot stuff. But it's grey in the east already, and those damn' fuzzy-wuzzies will be hunting for us with a bottle of barbecue sauce."

John Daniels started. Twisted.

His first impulse was to smash that sullen, leering, handsome face. The tone, the sneer, the filthy implication—they sent anger flooding through him in a rush.

But it was true. Already a fog-grey fringe topped the eastern hills. Even while he watched hills. Even while he watched, it crawled up the dark, inverted bowl that was the sky. Pale, luminous finger-tips of dawn crept through the crevice. A thread of sun gleamed scarlet.

He fought down his anger. Forced himself to face the pilot level-eyed.

"You're right. So what do you pro-

pose to do?"

The pilot stared, slack-jawed. His eyes were blood-shot, his face still loose with strain, fatigue.

"Why, the plane—"

"Maybe you think the Ngurus didn't think of that, too?"

Gilmore's face drained whiter still.

"My God! You mean. . ."

"I mean they're there. Now. This minute. You can bet on it." John laughed harshly. "It's not taboo to them, you know. The fact that they came there for you yesterday is proof enough of that. So now they're back there. Waiting. And they've had time to count their dead. . ."

Silence. Taut, echoing seconds of silence.

Then Anita:

"So, John Daniels? What it is you would have us do?"

He shrugged.

"Who knows? Carter got through. That means it can be done. Over the mountain, maybe. That way you wouldn't come out within their country."

As one, the others turned. Stared up at those jagged, towering ramparts that were the Forbidden Mountain. Searched for some rift in the rocky pinacile's lowering brow and sheer, sharp faces.

John stared with them. Took in the crags, the overhangs, the menace. Licked at his lips, although they were not dry.

Anita turned back first. Her eyes were all at once very bright, her lips pale. But her smile and look stayed tender.

"Then . . . that is your suggestion, John? That we try to scale this mountain?"

IT STABBED like a knife in John Daniels' heart. Stabbed, and

twisted. He had to try twice before he could make the words come out, and when they came, they had a queer, choked sound.

"Yes, Anita."

But again Gilmore broke in. His eyes were wild. His voice held a frantic note.

"You're crazy! You're off your nut! What are you trying to do, kill us all? You know we can never scale that pile of rock. And if we could, what good would it do us? There'd be another mountain—a dozen more. Other tribes, too. Swamps. Crocodiles. Snakes. Malaria. Dengue fever. . ." He was almost sobbing, on the ragged edge of hysteria.

"So?"

A distant drone cut short all chance of answer.

They froze, the three of them, as if paralyzed.

The drone came louder, clearer. Far off down the valley, a moving speck, high-up, came shimmering into the morning sun.

"A plane!" Gilmore screamed. He leaped up. Danced wildly, shouting, arms waving.

"You fool!" John roared. "Come back, damn you! Do you want all the Ngurus in the valley here?"

He lunged after the pilot. Clutched at him.

All sanity had left Gilmore's face. He spun. Lashed out at John.

John ducked. Drove through one smashing right.

The pilot dropped like a poleaxed ox.

John caught him beneath the arms. Staggered with him at a crouch toward a thicket of bamboo, Anita close behind him.

The girl spoke first.

"Then . . . we must let them go? Wait here, in hiding, for the end?"

He shook his head.

"Hell, no. The amphibian's in the river, and it's deserted. If that doesn't warn 'em something's wrong, nothing will. They'll land, if they're going to. But we can't chance signaling. By now, the Ngurus probably are spread over every inch of this area. Let them spot us. . ." He trailed off, swallowed hard. No need to go further.

The plane's roar grew louder. He turned. Strained to see it.

No luck. The bamboo was too thick. He could not even glimpse the sky.

Then, of a sudden:

"They will not land," Anita said. Her voice was all at once as dull as a bar of lead.

John went rigid. Stared at her. Followed her gesture.

The plane had passed beyond them—a trim military ship, bomber or transport, branded with the insignia of the Netherlands Air Force.

"Maybe they'll come back," he muttered.

Even as he spoke, he knew she would not believe it, any more than he did.

To his surprise, she shook her head.

"That is not what I mean, John. If you will look below—"

He caught it, then. Caught it, and felt the spirit, the hope, drain out of him.

The ship was a land plane! It could not set down here, on this broken, thick-grown ground, no matter how many times it might come back.

A NUMBNESS crept over him. A dejection, blacker than hell's own pit. Suddenly, he watched the ship disappear into the blue behind the hills.

"It is gone," Anita said tonelessly.

"Gone," John Daniels echoed. He slumped there, staring into the tangled ribbon pattern of meshed bamboo. All at once his world was dull grey, his fire

of hope gone dead.

Here he'd die. Here, in a bamboo thicket, in a back-of-beyond valley, deep in New Guinea's wilds. Here, with a Nguru spear thrust home between his ribs through the tattered fabric of his faithful old Marine combat jacket. If he were lucky. . .

Tom would have to go unavenged. Paulain would live to kill again. Anita. . . He choked. Anita would die here, too. Here, beside him, before they ever had a chance really to live and love together—

He sprawled on his back, tipped sideways, cursing in involuntary shock.

It was Gilmore.

The pilot came up from where John had dropped him like some primeval monster rising from swamp-slimed depths, screaming in rage and panic.

Before John could move, he was hurtling out of the bamboo thicket. Plowing up the valley like a tank, heedless of brush or blacks or *kunai* grass. Rushing straight for the plane on the river, the sleek amphibian still riding lightly at its moorings.

Anita leaped up. Started to follow.

Wearily, John waved her back.

"Let him go. He's done. They'll nail him before he's half-way there. After that. . ."

He saw the fear leap in her eyes.

"They'll come for us?" Her voice was shaking.

Wordless, he nodded.

In silence they watched his progress: a strange, wild figure in tattered whites, blond hair like a yellow crown—running, leaping, cavorting, charging ever onward toward the plane.

Closer he got, and closer. Narrowed the space between him and the amphibian.

A spark glowed in the ashes of the fire John had thought so dead. With a start, he realized that his muscles

were once again tense, his fists clenched.

"John—!"

It was Anita, her fingers tight on his arm, new hope in her face.

On the pilot ran, and on.

Still no Ngurus.

The spark of hope burst into a tiny flame. John sucked in air. He scanned the horizon.

"It could be! Lord save us, it could!"

"You mean—?"

He suggested, off toward the charred far bank of the river. Away, to where a column of smoke still marked the *douba's* ruins.

"It may have been rough. That whole side is black as a burned blanket. Maybe in the end it disorganized 'em. Maybe they've had to retire, back beyond where the fire reached." He drew another deep breath. "Maybe we've even got a chance!"

Her fingers dug deeper.

"Then—?"

Gilmore was still running.

John pulled his arm free.

"Come on! We'll chance it!"

Together, they raced over the broad savannah.

Ahead of them, Gilmore reached the ship. Clambered to the wing. Clawed at the engine.

John bit down hard.

"It'll take him time. He jimmied both engines. We'll make it!"

He prayed it wasn't just wishful thinking.

He had never run so far before. Not in terms of his nerves, at least. The yards stretched off ahead of them like miles. His steps seemed only inches. Vaguely, desperately, he wondered if they would ever reach the ship.

AND then, incredibly, they were over the last knoll. Racing downhill to the river's edge. Stumbling in their

excitement as they finally neared the plane.

Gilmore's head appeared above the further engine cowling. He lumbered back along the wing. Clambered awkwardly down to the loading port. Stood waiting for them, lips queerly twisted, still panting from his run.

But it was the man's eyes that frightened John Daniels. They were shallow as twin mirrors, yet deep as the bottomless pit. Nervous. Darting. Aglow with strange lights.

The thing they mirrored was madness.

"You fools!"

It was a curse, that phrase, and an epithet. It crawled with hate and scorn and loathing.

"Did you think you were fooling me, pulling the wool over my eyes?" Gilmore's voice was keening, shrill. "Did you think I believed your silly talk about those natives?"

He went off into a wild, hysterical peal of laughter.

"Gilmore!" John rapped. Desperately, he tried to catch the other's attention. To grope through the veil of madness to some last shred of sanity. "Gilmore, we've—"

"You fools!"

It was as before, intensified a hundredfold.

"Did you think I didn't see through your clever schemes?" Again, the laughter. "Why, I knew from the beginning you'd try to fly off and leave me here. That's why I fixed the engine. Only now the tables are turned, d'you hear? Turned, turned, turned!"

The pilot was screaming, his face a livid, contorted mask.

Ever so slowly, John edged forward.

"I'll fix you!" shrieked Gilmore. "I'll give you a dose of that medicine. I'll leave you here, just like you wanted to leave me."

John feigned boredom. Took another step.

"Oh, you thought you were smart—"

Another step. John could feel the sweat start out upon him. He tensed for a final lunge, a leap.

"Just one thing more, John Daniels!"

The madman's hand leaped inside his shirt. Flashed out again, gripping an ugly, snub-nosed automatic.

"Stand where you are, Daniels! This is my ace in the hole! I got it yesterday, just before those brush-monkeys jumped me. I didn't have a chance to use it then, but I hung onto it. And now I'm going to kill you!"

John Daniels stopped short. Icy chills walked spider-legged up and down his spine.

"Only first I'll let you in on a secret."

Gilmore's voice dropped to a heavy, mock-conspiratorial tone. He leered down from the entry port, snickering and slavering. But the automatic in his hand was very steady.

"Remember the gold, Daniels? The gold you and that little tramp you travel with were so interested in?" Once more, the high, hysterical laughter. "Well, you found it, all right. You just didn't recognize it." The sullenly handsome face twisted. "So now I'm going to have it all! All, d'you hear? All! Because we landed here, Poulain and I. We found it, all of it, up there on the hill in that wrecked Junkers. We brought it down here, too, and loaded it aboard. It's been here all along, right in front of you, but you were too damn' stupid to know!"

A convulsion, an orgasm of obscene mirth, seemed to seize him. He doubled over. Rocked with laughter.

Only the gun stayed steady.

"Remember those gas cans, Daniels? Remember how you claimed we could go 'most anywhere, because we had all that gas aboard?" A pause. A leer.

"Well, those cans carried gold, not gas! All of them, the ones in the rear compartment. The only ones with gas were the ones up here in front!"

In spite of himself, John stole a glance at Anita.

Her face was twitching, falling apart.

"I thought you'd like to know!" Gilmore cried in triumph.

"I quite agree," a clipped voice from the amphibian's cabin said.

Shock froze the pilot's demented face. His gun-hand jerked. He whirled.

Inside, a gun roared.

Gilmore's kill-crouched body catapulted out the port. Fell in the river with a splash. Lay there, quivering and twitching.

A bulbous, grotesque figure moved up to take his place in the entry.

"Surprised, *M'sieur* Daniels?"

It was Poulain.

CHAPTER XI

Conflict

THE eyes were what held John, the deep-sunk, mocking eyes, gleaming with murderous mirth and menace amid their rolls of fat. As in a dream, he heard the quietly sinister voice lilt on.

"... Or perhaps it is not surprise that stops your tongue, *M'sieur* Daniels. Perhaps it is joy—the stunned delight of seeing a long-lost friend, eh?"

The words were words only—empty, without meaning. John Daniels hardly heard them. His brain was still spinning, his senses reeling. He was shaking, too. Knew it. Could feel the jolting waves of nervous shock pulse through him.

It did no good. He could not stop. Could not even tear his eyes from that fat-rolled, evil-grinning face.

"... It touches me, sir. Indeed it does! I am a sentimental man. . ."

John Daniels could feel his hands begin to twitch. Involuntarily. In spite of him. Every bone, every muscle, every fiber, ached with strain. His eyes were burning balls of fire within their sockets, half blinding him with pain. The world came to him through a scarlet haze. Once more, as in those endless days gone by, his stubborn brain was pulsing, throbbing: *Tom . . . Tom . . . Tom . . .* He longed to hurl himself forward. Clutch at that dew-lapped throat. Crush out the obscene life.

But the gun still peered above the folds of flesh that were the fat man's hand. The plump pink wiener-finger yet lovingly caressed the trigger. The deep-sunk eyes were bright and darting.

And Gilmore lay on his back, unmoving, half in and half out of the water, blond hair aripple in the gently tugging current. . .

John did not move.

And then another crisp, familiar voice was speaking. Heavy with accent; heavy with authority, too. It came from the plane's cabin, behind Paulain, and a thin, angry edge had replaced the usual smugly supercilious tone.

"You will drop your pistol, *Alstublieft Mijnheer* Poulain."

Hans Vreeland!

He appeared behind Poulain in the entry now, gaunt hawk-face white, lips thin with fury.

"Drop it, I say? There was no reason to kill that poor madman. A blow on the head would have been sufficient."

No tremor shook the rolls of fat. No feeling touched the round moon face.

"He was armed, *M'sieur* Vreeland. He started to turn—"

"Drop it!"

The fleshy fingers opened. The pistol plummeted.

It never reached the water.

Like a tiger, John leaped as the weapon left the fat man's hand. Landed feet-first in the mud-yellowed rider, waist-deep, almost touching the amphibian's hull. Snatched for the falling gun. Caught it. Lurched back to the sloping bank.

Wild triumph surged through him. Hoarse, incoherent, he cried aloud.

It was his moment. His final victory. He had the gun, the loaded, full-cocked gun, and Poulain, unarmed, stood here before him.

"Tom!" he choked. "Tom!"

It was strange. Incredibly strange. The whole world seemed warped, distorted, out of plumb. Anita's eyes were wide, her lips aquiver, a queer incredulous disbelief in every line and shadow. Harsh furrows, sharp angles, sculpted Vreeland's gaunt visage. His teeth were clenched. Even the sun seemed suddenly gone awry, touching odd, discordant colors not found in any spectrum.

Strange. All strange.

All but Poulain.

The fat man had not budged. His face was bland, his eyes still steady, his very stance a portrait of malicious, studied arrogance.

Hans Vreeland said, "Put down that gun. I did not parachute down here from that army plane with Poulain to lend a hand to murder."

"He killed my brother!" a voice said. "He murdered Tom!"

Only with an effort could John Daniels realize that voice belonged to him.

Vreeland gaunt hand shoved past Poulain. It, too, gripped a pistol.

"Drop it!" he rasped. "I have you covered, Daniels. I shall shoot you

down like a dog."

"IT WON'T help," the queer, strained voice that was John Daniels' said. "I learned my shooting in the United States Marines, Vreeland. I've done a lot since then. I'm good. No matter how fast you are, I'll still get up this gun and pull the trigger before I die. After I die, if I have to . . ."

"Drop it!"

"Drop yours, Vreeland. You're behind him. When I start, there'll be no stopping. I've got nothing against you, but if you're there, you'll go down with him." Three seconds' pause. "I'm leaning on the trigger, Vreeland."

Seconds, ticking by. Eternities, flying. A world, narrowing to one cramped corridor in space, with a fat man at the other end. A stolid, immobile fat man . . .

Then, suddenly, the blubber lips were moving, the voice of mocking menace speaking.

"He means it, *M'sieur* Vreeland. I see by his eyes that he means it. He will shoot me down like a dog where I stand, and you, too, if you are in the way. Your only chance is to drop your gun, step back away from the line of fire."

The Dutchman's gaunt face was chalky, his lips pale indigo. But the muscles that hinged his jaws drew into stubborn knots.

"No!"

The bulging shoulders rose in a shrug. The brows came up, pale miniatures of the gleaming, hairless dome.

"As you will . . ."

That dull resignation did more than the pleading.

Something seemed to happen to Vreeland's face. All at once he began to tremble. His jaw loosened. His eyes fell away. The bony fingers went limp, released his weapon.

It splashed into the river.

A flicker of motion. The gaunt man vanished. Back. Away. Out of the line of fire.

Ever so slowly, ever so carefully, John Daniels brought up his gun.

It wasn't the way he'd expected it to be. The joy, the triumph, were gone. The vindictive satisfaction, too. The soaring sense of power. Even the picture of himself, Avenger, and the furious, swirling memories of dead Tom.

Gone. All gone.

Of a sudden he was back in the real-life world again. He, John Daniels, with a gun in his hand, and an ache in his heart, and an ugly, dark-brown nausea where his stomach should have been.

With a start, he noticed that his hand was even trembling.

Poulain's lips parted. Drew back in a sneer.

"You dog! You cowardly yellow dog! Why don't you shoot? You're safe. You're armed. You can kill me now without fear."

He laughed aloud. Not wildly. Not hysterically. Only with curling lip and sneering face and tone of loathing.

The fat hands grasped the white shirt, ripped it wide. Bared the blubbery, hairless, pink-white chest.

"Go on! Shoot, damn you, sir! Shoot!"

Ashes were never drier than John Daniels' mouth, no knot drawn tighter than his heart. Sickness and anguish and despair washed over him in eddying waves.

He could not pull the trigger. No matter what Poulain had done, he couldn't. Not here. Not in cold blood. Not with Poulain unarmed.

He cursed aloud. Hurling the gun away.

It was like a signal.

Poulain erupted into motion. Dived

headlong from the doorway, straight for where dead Gilmore lay. Slapped one fat hand over the automatic the corpse still clutched. Twisted in the water like a bulbous bullock, jerking the gun away.

"Stand very still, John Daniels!" The fat face showed suddenly radiant in a sort of evil ecstasy. The lilting voice rang menace.

John froze.

Mirthlessly, the fat man chuckled.

"A TOUCHING scene, indeed, John Daniels. I thought we played it well together." He struggled to his feet. Wallowed heavily ashore. His face twisted in an ugly grimace. "Now, however, it is time that we conferred in earnest."

"There's nothing for us to confer about," John said. But his lips were stiff, and the words didn't sound quite the way he meant them.

Again Poulain chuckled.

"Indeed? But I beg to differ with you." And then: "The problem, *M'sieur* Daniels, is simple. Gilmore is dead, and I am no pilot. Therefore, if we are to save the three million *guilden* in gold I have stored in those petrol cans in the rear compartment, we must compromise."

John stared at him.

"Why?"

"Why?" The fat man's deep-sunk eyes went suddenly chill. "Why, because I have this gun, sir!" He gave the squat automatic one quick, authoritative flick. "You had the advantage and threw it away out of sentiment." A pause. "You will not find *me* a sentimental man."

Slowly, John nodded. Tried to hold his face expressionless.

"I see. And the fact that the gold was stolen from Anita of course makes no difference?"

"Anita? Anita—?" The other's fat face mirrored puzzlement. Then, of a sudden, he seemed to notice the girl for the first time. Rocked in a spasm of convulsive laughter. "Anita, he says! This slut! This scraping from a brothel *lavabo!*"

Color flooded the angel face in a scarlet wave. The girl went rigid. Her small fists clenched. Her nostrils flared. Her voice shook.

"You lie, Poulain—!"

"Silence, you trollop!" The fat man's thick under lip curled. His eyes were beady with contempt.

"It is mine!" the girl spat, heedless. Her lovely face twisted in fury. "It is mine, I tell you! Stolen from my family—"

Three steps, Poulain took. Three swift, sure steps. His left hand flicked out with that incredible deftness he had shown those eons ago, back there in the jail at Fakfak.

The crack of his slap echoed like a pistol-shot.

Anita's head snapped back. A sharp little cry of pain burst from her lips. Moaning, she pitched to the ground, the mark of the fat man's fingers white-and-crimson across her cheek.

Poulain's eyes still held John.

"Surely you were not sucked into this carnival of carnage with the idea that the three million actually belonged to this sainted virgin?"

John stood wordless.

"Of course, the money *was* stolen from her family." Poulain chuckled wryly. "But did she tell you where *they* stole it?"

John dared not speak. He could see the girl's tear-misted eyes upon him.

A far-away look came over Poulain.

"The Van Pelts of Djaimalang!" His lips twisted. "The greatest crew of thieves ever to go unhung! They came as vandals, stayed as pirates, through

half a dozen generations. They looted a Bank of Java branch as their final *coup*, between the flight of the Dutch and the Japs' arrival." A pause. "This is that money, Daniels. Three million *gulden*. My agents did a thorough job. They were instructed to wipe the family out, too, to settle certain old scores, but it seems this she-devil survived."

JOHN said nothing. Again the pain was with him. He thought of dead Tom, and of Carter. Of the smouldering Nguru village, and the lascar with the broken neck. Of Gilmore, and the Junkers, and the white-picked bones.

The sickness welled higher. His stomach swirled.

In spite of himself, his eyes strayed to Anita. Locked with hers. Caught the mute prayer, the silent question.

She-devil's body, angel face. Love and treachery, warm lips and betrayal. Lies and tears and passion.

He wondered what his answer would be.

"She must die, of course," Poulain was saying. "She, and that idiot Dutchman who insisted on using an army plane to hunt for my amphibian, then claimed it was his sacred duty to jump here with me. I had to agree for fear he would drop troops instead and find the loot himself. That I could not have." A pause. Enough. I shall make it well worth your while to fly me out. And not in gold only." He grinned wickedly. "The authorities will accept my word that the Ngurus killed Vreeland, Gilmore and the girl. We can even claim that the girl killed Carter, then seduced Gilmore into stealing my plane so she could escape. You will be painted as the misjudged innocent, fleeing in sheer panic against an unjust charge. You took refuge in the plane only by coincidence." He chuckled, deep in his throat. "A mad

story, Daniels. But backed by my influence it will be accepted. Certainly none of my men who actually had a part in killing Carter or moving his body to Ladino's will ever talk."

It was coming now. Even from where he stood, John could see it.

He would tell Poulain he could not fly.

Poulain would shoot him down.

That would be the end of it.

He wondered, vaguely, if Anita then would fly the fat man out.

Anita. Anita Van Pelt of Djaimalang. One rose, budding on a stem of thorns. Sheer loveliness, from a dung-pile of blood and loot.

Or was she?

Had the surface blinded him, perhaps? Was he seeing only her beauty—her body—her face? Had Poulain been speaking the truth in his mouthings, his epithets?

A chill rippled through him at the thought. A queer desperation.

It was foolish, really. He'd never live to know.

Poulain's smooth voice came. Pleasant. Well-modulated. Lilting as always.

"Well, then, *m'sieur*? It is agreed? You will fly us out?"

The chill passed, replaced by doom-laden calm.

For just the fraction of a second, John let his tongue touch the parched lips. Pressed his hands to his sides, where the cloth could drink up the sweat.

But Anita's voice came before he could speak. Low. Tense. Tremulous. Her face was pale, her nostrils a fraction flared.

"One word, John. Just one." She smiled a wan, wistful smile. "These things Poulain has told you—about me, about my family. They are not true, not any of them. My people were powerful; they made many enemies. But at least

they were honest. The money from the Bank of Java was a trust, held by us at the branch manager's request. It was only a fraction of the three million *gulden* aboard that treasure plane. As for me. . ." Her voice trailed off. Ever so slightly, she shrugged. "I have lived a hard life these last years, John. I have done many things I hated. But believe me, no man has claimed me."

She broke off again. Color climbed in her cheeks. The green eyes pleaded. Beseeched.

"Well, *m'sieur*?" Poulin prodded.

THE knot of ice in John Daniels' stomach seemed to melt away. Of a sudden, a warm glow flowed through him. It came to him that telling Poulain he couldn't fly would be a waste of breath. Why tell him anything—anything but snarling defiance, savage challenge?

He sucked in breath.

"No, Poulain. The answer is no. And you can go to hell!"

It was worth the price. Worth every *gulden*, every *cent*, drop of sweat and blood.

The fat man's face went lax. His jaw dropped. His eyes bulged, frog-like. His mouth fell open. For an instant he was only a bulbous, shock-stunned animal—furious, exploding.

But only for an instant.

Then the control snapped back. The dew-lapped face went blank, expressionless as a carved stone Buddha. The deep-sunk eyes turned obsidian-hard. The thick pink finger tightened on the trigger.

"You—!"

"Furthermore, Poulain, I place you under arrest in the name of Her Majesty's government, for conspiring to murder the Australian sailor Rodney Carter, and for concealing guilty knowledge in order to imperil the American

John Daniels, and for failure to report recovery of property you acknowledge to be stolen from the Bank of Java!"

An odd voice, that. Ragged. Uneven. Cracking.

The voice of a man whose poise has broken. Whose aplomb is gone, shattered by humiliation. Whose only refuge is the pompous condenscension of authority ill-placed.

As one, they turned.

Hans Vreeland, special assistant to the resident commissioner for Fakfak, stood framed in the amphibian's entry port.

Bone showed white through the skin of his thin face. His lips trembled. His eyes gleamed over-bright.

A strange sight, he stood there. Portrait of desperation. Study in pride gone berserk. Unarmed. Empty-handed. Shaking.

"From the beginning you have played me for the fool, *Mijnheer* Poulain! You, with your cleverness and schemes and talk of influence—"

Poulain's beady, deep-sunk eyes flicked out over the man like a snake's darting tongue. He did not speak.

"You mocked me with lies. Turned my head with flattery. Duped me into betraying the sacred trust Her Majesty and the commissioner had placed in me—"

Choking, trembling, the Dutchman broke off. A wave of shamed, furious color swept up his pallid face.

Then, slowly, it ebbed.

HE DREW himself to his full height—clenched fists stiff at his sides, head high, shoulders, back, pale lips a thin, bitter line. Then, jerkily, he thrust out one bony hand.

"I arrest you, Poulain! Give me that pistol!"

The fat man's thick lips twisted.

Without a word, he fired.

He shot three times, so fast the last two blasts were but a rolling echo of the first.

Hans Vreeland's gaunt body jerked in rhythm with the pistol's thunder. Shock and pain and incredulity contorted the thin face. The out-thrust hand leaped in a twitching spasm. Came up, convulsively, to clutch at the scarlet blots grouped round his breast bone. He swayed, as if not knowing quite which way to fall.

As in the horrid fascination of a dream, John watched. His ears were ringing, his brain reeling. Mute anguish welled up in him, a hot, taut bond to this prideful, condescending, bureaucratic fool who yet was not afraid to die.

Vreeland choked. Blood gushed from his mouth. He pitched forward, out of the plane, into the water.

Something snapped in John Daniels' brain like a fiddle's too-taut E-string.

He screamed aloud. Leaped straight for Poulain.

The fat man whirled. His pistol bucked and roared.

Flame seared across John's shoulder, down his back.

Then he was in close. Catching Poulain's gun hand. Levering the automatic's muzzle up with a savage twist.

He caught the faint, sharp *crack* of the fat man's trigger finger breaking.

The gun was his!

Like lightning, Poulain lashed out. His palm-edge struck John's wrist a paralyzing blow.

The automatic flew wide. Splashed into the river, yards from shore.

John leaped back, out of the other's reach. Circled warily.

Of a sudden, he noted anew the fat man's bulging muscles, agile grace. Heeded again the thick-necked, dome-like head, sunk turtle-like between the massive shoulders. Observed the

stance, the skillful guarding.

With something close akin to a chill of fear, he saw that the other was not even breathing hard. No twinge of pain from the broken finger showed on the blubber-puffed face.

Poulain's lips twisted. The deep-sunk eyes gleamed menace.

"So, Daniels! This is how it ends! A fight to the death, with you the loser —"

He lunged.

Barely in time, John leaped aside. Dodged a foot, a vicious elbow. He could feel fear's sweat come.

It brought fury surging through him. He twisted. Charged. Got behind Poulain. Struck a savage blow, straight for the fat man's kidneys—

It never landed.

Lithe as a young girl, as if he had eyes in the back of his hairless head, Poulain swayed aside. Pivoted.

JOHN glimpsed bared teeth, a death's-head grin. Steel-cable fingers clawed at his wrist, jerked him off balance. He hurtled through space, high over a topsy-turvy world, a doll on the end of a stick that was his arm.

The earth rushed toward him.

Impact's shock struck a sledge-hammer blow. A myriad jagged, flame-tipped needles shot through him. His brain exploded like a bursting drum. He plunged into a racking, pitch-black sea.

Through a thousand miles of fog, he heard Poulain's triumphant shout.

John forced his eyes to open.

The very effort almost made him vomit. The lids came up like glaciers of fire.

He glimpsed the charging avalanche of flesh.

He could not move. His body was wood, his mind gone blank. He knew his fingers clawed the grass, but they

seemed like separate entities, no part of him.

He heard the plane, then.

At first he thought it was only the roaring of his own shock-paralyzed brain.

Then it came clearer. Louder.

There could be no mistake. It was a plane.

Hope leaped anew within him. As quickly, died.

Too late. Always, things came too late. He'd be dead before that plane could land. His life crushed out by the fat man's feet and fists and fingers.

He sobbed aloud.

The mad world about him slowed its whirling. His vision cleared.

The river lay before him, just beyond the charging, murderous fat man.

The river. The river, and the amphibian.

And all at once, John Daniels wished that he were dead.

Because he'd been right. He'd heard the amphibian.

Motors roaring, moorings cut, it moved out into the current. Thundered downstream.

Like a child putting a sum together, his brain added it up.

The gold-laden amphibian was taking off.

Anita had come for the gold. Anita could fly a plane.

Anita. She-devil's body, angel-face. Laughter, and lies, and promises of love.

Anita Van Pelt of Djaimalang.

He laughed himself. It was funny, really.

Such a fool. Such a sucker. Just like his brother had been—even more than his brother.

Here he lay, staring death in the face.

But Anita and the gold were gone—gone completely.

CHAPTER XII

The Payoff

JOHN'S body rolled aside without his bidding. It had to be that way, or not at all. His brain would no longer give commands.

He glimpsed the vicious disappointment flick over Poulain's face as the man came down, feet foremost, on the spot from which he'd rolled.

A sullen savagery seemed to seize John Daniels, then. An inner fury, white-hot, all-consuming.

He snatched at the killer's flashing feet. Caught one. Jerked back with all his might.

His adversary sprawled. Tried, both at once, to free his foot and smash John's face with the other heel.

Again, long training told. By reflex, John threw back his head. Felt the bruising slash of the heel slide off his chin.

The inner fury boiled, leaped higher. He jerked the fat man's captive foot. Threw his full weight on it, twisting, turning.

For an instant he thought he'd done it—dislocated the hip, crippled his opponent.

But again, Poulain was too fast. In a perfect frenzy he hurled his whole body over, turning with John's twist, kicking for John's head.

It was too close. John let go, lurched back. Stumbled to his feet.

Sweat drenched him, every inch. His breath came in great, sobbing gasps. His whole body shook till he could hardly stand.

Poulain was his only consolation.

The fat man, too, was sweating, panting, the folds of blubber quivering. The lights in the deep-sunk eyes gleamed not quite so hard and bright.

Yet still he waddled forward.

The sweat oozed anew from John's body. He backed away, tried desperately to make his quaking legs behave.

A root, a snag in the grass, caught the fat man's foot. He tripped. Pitched to one knee.

It was an opening. One small opening, in a spot where such were few.

John lunged.

Wraith-like, Poulain swayed aside. Triumph glinted in the fat-enfolded eyes.

John caught it, read it.

The fall was not a fall. Only a feint to get him within reach.

Desperate, he twisted, tried to stop, to turn.

Too late. The fat man exploded forward, upward. The dome head drove for John's belly, the club fist for his crotch.

The fist John blocked with an up-jerked leg.

That was all he had time for. Against the butt he could do nothing.

The wind belched out of him as from a burst balloon. Helpless, paralyzed, he staggered backwards.

Like a striking snake, Poulain followed. He clutched for the throat, stabbed out for the eyes.

John stumbled. Pitched forward.

He was finished, now. Done for. Broken and beaten. Unless—

He hit the ground with his shoulders. Went forward in a somersault, following through with his feet with all his might. They smashed Poulain's belly, raked at his shinbones.

The fat man gasped, doubled, as John himself had done those brief seconds before.

Only now John was down, on his back, feet in the air.

In a spasm of effort, John exploded those feet into the murderer's midriff again. Again—

Poulain reeled backward, eyes bul-

ging, mouth gaping silent agony.

Lurching near falling, John followed. Charged in.

Feebly, impotently, Poulain launched a countering blow.

JOHN caught the fat wrist. Turned under it. Brought it up in the small of the other's back with every ounce of strength he had.

Poulain screamed like a woman. The snap of breaking bone cut through it like an exclamation point.

John smashed home a rabbit punch at the base of the fat man's brain.

Poulain dropped. Tried to writhe away.

John leaped. Exploded the old, Australian-issue boot straight downward, every ounce of flaming hate and ice-cold fury piled behind them.

The sound they made when they struck the fat man's head was like that of a melon breaking. . .

For a moment John swayed. Stared down at his lifeless adversary. Then he, too, slumped to the ground.

The roar of the amphibian's engines was muted now, drawn to a guttural hum, the plane itself a climbing black bumblebee against the blue mountain sky.

John Daniels could not speak. His world was a weird kaleidoscope of light and shadow. Of love, and hate, and anguish. Surging pain, and a poignancy that welled till it almost closed his throat. He was hardly aware that the great *kundu* drums had begun to throb again, over on the Nguru side.

Off to the left, where the fire had not reached, the head-high *kunai* grass began to ripple gently, although there was no wind. John glimpsed a dark, hideously-painted shadow, with spear and weird-carved shield, gliding up from the river, into the cover.

Another drum joined in, over there

where the *douba's* charred ruins still smouldered, and then another. A rising tide, they filled John's brain, like the rhythmic, menacing thunder of a thousand hate-filled hearts. Out it spread, and around, in a great arc of sound that echoed from the very cliffs of the Forbidden Mountain itself. It enshrouded him, hemmed him in. He felt as if he were being pinned tight to the rocks, like some fugitive caught on a prison wall by encircling searchlights' glare.

Yet still he did not move. He would never move now.

Poulain lay dead. Tom was avenged. But there was no triumph, no jubilation. Only sickness and deep-down pain.

Let the black devils come. They could have him as a peace offering. Use his head to ornament some new sanctuary. What did it matter?

"She-devil's body, angel face," he said aloud. "Anita Van Pelt of Djai-malang."

And a soft voice beside him answered: "You call me, John Daniels?"

He didn't believe it, at first. He couldn't. It was too absurd, too impossible. He found it easier to think his aching brain had finally cracked.

"Yes, John?"

Ever so slowly, ever so painfully, he turned his head.

His ears had not lied. Not unless his eyes, too, deceived him.

SHE was there beside him, gently smiling. Her garments hung in sodden folds about her, and the golden hair dripped water and yellow mud, but her face was still the face of an angel, and the red lips echoed tenderness and promise, and the green eyes were deeper than the distance to the farthest star.

"You're . . . here?"

"I swore I was yours, John. Forever. . ."

"But—"

"You do not understand?" Of a sudden she was close to him, her arms sliding around him, the soft cheek cool velvet on his once again. "Oh, my John! You did not know! You thought I had deserted you, because I took the plane." And then: "I was afraid, John, when you went down. I thought Poulain would kill you." A slow flush spread across her face. "He might have made me fly him out, then, John. He might have schemed some way to live. He had ways of making women do things."

He held her tight.

"So I took the plane. Set the controls, just at the take-off, as Gilmore did when he attacked you. Then I jumped out into the water and returned here. The plane flew on. It will keep on flying until—look!"

He followed her pointing finger.

The amphibian had vanished. But far away, high in the uplands, flame was leaping, smoke rising.

"It got that far," she said.

"And the gold?"

"The gold is there, too," she answered. Her eyes held the calm peace of untroubled waters. "Some things are more important than gold, John Daniels."

"But if Poulain had won—?"

He felt her shoulders lift in a shrug.

"What matter? I would have tried to avenge you, as you avenged your brother, Tom. Perhaps, too, I would have died. But without you, life would not be worth living."

Life. The very word made John tense now. Panic flared in his heart like a jungle fire. He thought of the spears, and the stages in the clearing, and razor-sharp knives made from human bones.

Yet, they were here together, Anita and he.

To what end?

A WAVE of helplessness washed over him. He felt like a dwarf in a land of giants—incredibly old, incredibly weary. His head throbbed louder than the drums, and his eyes were aching balls of fire.

The Ngurus were out in the open now, advancing cautiously, spears held ready. An arrow—murderously barbed with a cassowary claw—slashed at one of John's cracking old Australian-issue boots.

It made his blood run cold. Hastily, he drew Anita back into the shelter of a narrow ridge.

Her eyes still stayed upon him.

"And now, my darling?"

He turned without answering. Gazed up at the vast Forbidden Mountain's towering crags.

"Think it's worth a try?"

The smile never left Anita's face.

"With you, my darling. . . ."

"There'll be other mountains beyond it. Other tribes. Swamps and crocodiles and fever. The quick way might be easier. . ."

The smile faded. She drew herself up and away. Her face took on calm dignity.

"I am Anita Van Pelt of Djaimalang!"

It was queer, John thought. All at once he felt wonderful. The doubts and shadows were resolved, the poignancy and panic gone. He could travel a million miles on the way she said those words; a million years. They made even the Ngurus unimportant.

"Well, John?"

John Daniels laughed aloud.

"After you, *Juffrouw* Van Pelt!"

Together, they started up the mountainside.



THE AFFAIRS OF MARY



MARY was perhaps the most beautiful of any queen with her winning manners and polite accomplishments. She was the daughter of James V. of Scotland and Mary of Lorraine. Her father heard of her birth on his death-bed. He had hoped his heir would be a son. Her early years were passed amid the gaieties and splendors of the French court. When she was only sixteen she was married to the Dauphin whose company she had long enjoyed. They were delighted even to be with each other. In society they would often separate themselves from the rest of the gay throngs around them.

The next year Francis was on the throne and Mary was the happiest queen ever. But the following year the king died, childless, and Mary was compelled to return to Scotland. Mary was a Catholic, and Scotland had adopted the Reform Faith, and treated her with coldness and suspicion.

Mary's life from childhood was a series of romances associated with marriage schemes. Francis had not long been dead before the courts of other countries were planning marriage alliance with the beautiful queen. The kings of France, Sweden, Denmark, Don Carlos of Spain, the Archduke of Austria, and many others of high rank were named as suitable candidates for her hand. Her own choice was her handsome cousin, Lord Darnley, who was a Catholic and one of the nearest heirs to the English crown. He was a weak, corrupt, ambitious man, but he had a winning face and the marriage took place in Holyrood Palace in the summer of 1565. One day, long before this marriage took place, as Mary was coming down the stairs of the palace, she saw a dark, romantic Italian musician standing in the hall. That was the first time she ever saw David Rizzio, who had come to Scotland as an ambassador from Savoy. In a celebrated picture of Mary, she is shown in surprise and horror at the sight of this adventurer, as though the moment were one of evil foreboding. This painter won the confidence of Mary through his art, and used his influence to bring about the marriage with Darnley. But after the marriage, Rizzio drew the affections of the queen away from Darnley, who was determined to assassinate Rizzio. Several Scottish guards united with Darnley to do the deed. One evening when Mary was having dinner with Rizzio, Lord Ruthven

appeared at the door of the room and asked the queen to send him out. She refused Lord Ruthven, saying that she could see danger on his face for Rizzio. Then Ruthven and his followers rushed upon Rizzio and dragged him from the room and stabbed him fifty-six times. You could still see the blood stains in Holyrood Palace where Rizzio was killed. It is said that his body was thrown upon the same divan at the foot of the stairs where Mary had first seen him.

MARY knew that Darnley had caused the murder, and was determined to make his heart as sorrowful as her own. For political reasons, however, she became reconciled to him, and three months after the tragedy, James VI of Scotland and I. of England was born. Twelve months passed. Earl Bothwell, a nobleman, had won the queen's confidence, and the two plotted to end the life of Darnley. The queen went to visit Darnley at Glasgow, where he was ill. She pretended a great deal of affection for him and brought him back to Edinburgh. She left him late one night to attend a marriage feast. As she left, she reminded him that it was about a year ago at that time that David Rizzio was killed. After she left, there was a terrible explosion and Darnley's body was found in a neighbor's garden. Mary had had her revenge. Three months later she married Bothwell who had just divorced his wife.

After all this, Scotland rose up against Mary. She fled to England for the protection of Elizabeth, abdicating her throne to her son James. She was taken as a prisoner, and held at Carlisle, and then to Fotheringhay Castle. She was then tried for conspiracy against the life of Elizabeth, and the sentence of death was put upon her. The last tragedy for her, was in Fotheringhay Castle.

Bothwell died nine years later in exile. He had become a raving madman. They found after her execution, that Mary's hair was as white as a woman's of seventy, under her wig. No wonder. But she had one little friend who remained true to her till the last. It was her little dog. He followed her to the block, and cowered, frightened, under her dress at the fatal moment, and lay down beside her headless body after it was over. Two days later, it died.

Barry Crale.

"GOAT TALES"

IN SOUTHERN Italy one used to meet everywhere the flocks of pretty brown and black goats trudging along the dusty roads, or clamoring over the precipitous hillsides. People are pleased to hear the sounds of their tinkling bells. The pastures of this sunny South are better adapted to these hardy little creatures

than for cows. In Naples they are driven along the streets, stopping here and there as customers for their milk are found. Little children will come out of their houses with a cup to have it filled with the warm, rich milk. A goat has no scruples either about going up and down stairs, and will go up four floors to be milked. *L. King.*

SWORD OVER ISLAM

The threat of Genghis
Khan lay over all of Islam
and only the armored Frank
understood that the Mongol
hordes feared steel alone!

*By Major Malcolm
Wheeler-Nicholson*





Josselin's huge blade swung back for the cut, but the Saracen's scimitar was ready

"SEEK I but oblivion for a day," said the wise man, "so shorten I the stature of my soul!" But men have sought oblivion since time immemorial, from many things, more notably against fear. In the year 1220 A.D., fear hung over Islam like a naked sword—fear of the thunder of the hoof beats of the hordes of Genghis Khan, poised like an avalanche in the passes leading down from High Asia.

And men were seeking oblivion, in the Shah's city of Merv, when the first rays of the morning sun came weakly through the arrow slits of the room, high in the north tower of the citadel. It strove with the murky rays of the lamps, even now guttering.

All night the flutes had whispered lasciviously, the zithers strummed and the heady little drum had throbbed forth, while the dancing girls swayed and twisted with a rhythmic jangle of golden bracelets and turquoise studded anklets, keeping time with smooth, flowing, muscular undulations until men's eyes gleamed. Now the girls were curled up, asleep, exhausted, but the wine still flowed freely, despite the admonitions of the Prophet, for Omar the poet made more wisdom, to the minds of the Governor and his boon companions.

These were awake, save the two delicate-faced and feminine mannered Persian youths from Bokhara, who breathed gently in slumber. The fumes of wine were heavy in the heads of Nas'r, the singer of bawdy songs, and Ferruk, the dissolute son of a holy kaid, and Ayub, whom the dancing girls hated for his cruel hands and his love for the pain they inflicted upon them.

The friend and patron of these boon companions, the magnificently humorous Emir Maudud, Governor, by grace of the Shah Muhammad, of the white walled city of Merv, in the sands, was

furnishing fresh sport for them.

It had to do with the ministrations of Maudud's huge, impassive executioner, who squatted by his brazier, with the tools of his craft spread neatly on a square of linen beside him and expertly drew another groan from the writhing lips of the nomad merchant, bound upon the floor. It was a matter of serious business for Maudud, short in his accounts for the tax moneys he was required to turn over to his public master, the Shah, short, as well, in his annual contribution to the coffers of his secret master, the dread Ala ad-Din Muham-mad, known to the world at large, including the Crusaders, as the "Sheykh el Jabal," the "Old Man of the Mountains," and the Master of the Assassins.

The nomad merchant, bound upon the floor, were he but properly induced, could go far to make up some of those shortages, for the fellow had sold the cargo of his camel caravan in the bazaars of Merv but had refused to pay more than the lawful tax to the rapacious minions of the Governor.

The legal aspects of the matter bothered Maudud not one whit, for was not the nomad an idolater, an infidel, and thereby outside the laws of Islam? and, moreover, being a nomad, from beyond the Gate, there was always the chance that he might be a spy of that strange nomad chieftain, Genghis Khan, now but a small cloud on the horizon of Islam.

It was typical of Maudud, possessing as he did the culture of his Persian mother and the cruelty and rapacity of his Seljuk Turk father, that he should quote the golden verses of a Persian poet as he watched the writhings of the nomad.

Nas'r and Ferruk giggled drunkenly as he recited the stately couplets, the merchant moaned in pain and then fainted suddenly, sighing and going

limp. Maudud raised annoyed eyebrows and dipped his hands in a bowl of water on which floated rose leaves, wiping them on a square of fine linen.

There came a knocking on the door to the anteroom, and the Governor looked up sharply, wondering at the portent of a message so important as to permit any to dare disturb him at his hours of relaxation, but gave command to open.

THE narrow door swung back in its deep aperture and the light of a swing lamp in the anteroom cast into sudden high relief the damascened helmet and silvered coat of mail of a Kankali Turk of the inner guard, his drawn scimitar borne upright, showing that he was on duty. There was, he reported, a messenger with important tidings, who demanded instant admittance, and the sentry waited, his eyes flaring at sight of the sprawled forms of the sleeping dancing girls.

"Admit him!" ordered Maudud. There came then, soft footed dressed in white khalat and red boots, a travel stained young Persian, who showed, half concealed in his hand, a square of greasy Moslem bread. Resting on its surface were two small, crossed sticks. At sight of this, Maudud shook his lassitude from him like a cloak, waved the Seljuk Turk of the Guard out, and went into the anteroom closing the door behind him. Not until they were alone together did the messenger start to speak:

"Peace upon thy house, O most excellent *Dawi!" whispered the stranger softly.

"And upon thee, peace . . ." returned Maudud.

". . . I am sent by One . . ." said the Persian and then paused.

". . . aided by God!" Maudud completed the phrase.

". . . the Master of the World . . ." the Persian continued.

". . . breaks the Chains of the Law!" Maudud made swift response.

". . . Salute to his Name!" they intoned together, completing the ritual greeting of the secret sect of the Chosen Ones.

"Thou hast a message for me?" asked Maudud, his fingers curling and uncurling, striving to keep the anxiety from out of his voice.

"An urgent message . . . from Alamut, the castle of the Master . . . he sends word that passing there, in time to reach Merv tomorrow, was a Nazarene knight, with a small force of men-at-arms, that this Nazarene knight is an ambassador that hath been sent to the Khalif of Baghdad by the nomad chieftain calling himself Genghis Khan, and is now returning to report to the nomad chieftain beyond the Gate. The Master sends thee his greetings and commands, saying that thou wilt halt this Nazarene and exact from him, by torture if need be, the import of the message he hath carried from Genghis Khan to the Khalif of Baghdad!"

Maudud breathed a sigh of relief—he had been expecting the dread summons to render instantly his overdue contribution to the coffers of the Order—or suffer the consequences, which could be swift and terrible.

"Give, O noble Fedawi, my homage to the Master of the World!" said he, "and tell him that to hear is to obey and that in all things I am his slave!"

"There are yet more of the commands of the Master," said the Fedawi tonelessly. Maudud drew in his breath. "It concerns the matter of the overdue payment to the treasury of the Order . . ." went on the relentless voice, "the Master bids me tell thee that he hath

*Prior to the secret order of the Assassins.
—Author's Note.

already suggested to thee the means whereby that contribution can be met and surpassed. . . ."

"I know, I know . . . the seizure of the wealth of the Sheykh Saleh ibn Khalil . . ." fine beads of sweat broke out on the forehead of the Governor of Merv. Such was the discipline of the Order that the young Fedawi before him might very well be judge—and executioner—and even now the young Persian's hand rested within the folds of his khalat where the two sharp daggers of the Fedawi were invariably carried.

"The matter is more difficult than appears on the surface," Maudud spoke rapidly, "tell the Master that I have striven diligently, first, to locate the treasure, for there is considerable doubt whether the old man has it here in Merv, and secondly, to devise means to take it from the Sheykh without too much outcry being made by the rabble of Merv, for the Sheykh is esteemed as an exceedingly holyman, and noted for his charity to the poor. Also," he added hurriedly as the eyes of the young Persian grew bleak, "there is the matter of complaint being made to the Shah Muhammad, at whose court the Sheykh hath powerful connections . . . a matter which requires some circum-spection . . ."

THE young Persian, his face still impassive glanced upward, avoiding Maudud's eyes.

"These things have already been considered by the Master," he stated coldly. "As to the matter of the location of the treasure, he reminds thee that some slight activity of thy torturer could extract this knowledge; as to the rabble of Merv, the Master bids thee depend upon thy force of soldiery to keep it in order; and as for the matter of any possible outcry at the Shah's

court, the Master bids me remind thee that Timur al Molok, the Shah's Wazir, is a *Dawi-el-kirbal* (a Grand Prior), one of the three men of power in the Order, and can be depended upon to forestall any trouble from the Shah's court . . ."

Maudud nodded, moodily, staring at the rug at his feet. The young Persian went on:

"The Master commands me to tell thee that he expects his orders to be carried out in regard to the Sheykh and his wealth before the setting of the new moon of Shawwul, ten days hence . . ." and without further word, the Fedawi turned and was gone, silent and soft footed as he had come.

"Insh' Allah! but they set me hard tasks!" Maudud muttered gloomily in his beard, and then, after some reflection, sent for his major-domo, and ordered that his retinue be moved to his country house, a few hours' ride from the city, and on the road on which the Nazarene knight would appear enroute to Merv.

For it had occurred to Maudud that the seizure of an ambassador was also a serious business and might better be done away from the many prying eyes and wagging tongues of the city.

CHAPTER II

FAR to the south stretched the Black Sands of the Kara-Kum desert, and nestling on its edge, not three hours from the Shah's walled city of Merv, was the tiny village of Karun, in whose inn men also sought oblivion this night. The more respectable of the villagers, Persian artificers, for the most part, from Ispahan, had long since gone to sleep, but light shone from the village tavern, a red gleam of fire from the brazier that underwent intermittent eclipse as the ample form of the Ar-

menian innkeeper revolved about it bent on his tasks.

An ox hide had been laid on the rugs and upon it there were placed such delicacies as roasted almonds, which supported and flanked white cheese and bread and skewers of *kebab*, mutton roasted with laurel leaves, but crowning the feast were the *baggalis*, the glass flasks of brandy, flasks designedly flat, thereby enabling a true believer, mindful of the behests of the Prophet, to hide them under arm and carry them home without exciting the vulgar curiosity of the rabble.

The innkeeper even brought out candles, impelled thereto by the gold dirhem carelessly thrown to him by young Ghulam-Hosain, a personage not ordinarily given to the throwing about of gold dirhems, let alone their lawful possession. In fact up to this evening, the young *louti*, or brave, had been far more noticeable for the avidity with which he shared the bounty of others than for any largesse of his own. Sharing that largesse were two of his boon companions, swaggering young braves like himself; also a *mullah*, of the kind not favorably regarded by the more devout clergy, who could be, with the proper inspiration, induced to issue marriage licenses for a period of twenty-four hours or less; plus two Kurdish tribesmen of evil mien; also a *ferrash-bashi*, a head servant of the Governor of Merv, the Emir Maudud, and therefore a man of high standing in the community, and lastly, a stranger to the village, but not, as was evident a stranger to young Ghulam-Hosain, a high cheek boned, boney faced nomad out of the North, from above the Sun-garian Gate, whence from time immemorial hordes of his nomad ancestors had descended to erupt on the plains.

They had eaten and drunk quietly, and the talk was polite and lofty in tone

as was to be expected from such distinguished company, save for one of the Kurds who sang sad songs through his nose.

It was the *ferrash-bashi* who had broken the momentous news.

"Excellencies, since my eyes are gladdened by beholding so many illustrious faces, I feel impelled to impart to you a secret known only to myself and the head steward . . ." here he paused and looked around the assemblage.

"The magnificence of Your Excellency's condescension fills me with transports of wonder!" exclaimed one of the camel men, dreamy eyed.

"May Allah requite you for your indulgence!" returned the *ferrash-bashi* somewhat acidly, "know you, then, that my illustrious master, the Emir Maudud, the Governor of Merv, upon whose name be praise, arrives today for a sojourn of several days, to rest and recuperate in his country house from the cares of state."

"Ma sha' Allah! Can this be true!" appropriate interjections of wonder went up from the assembled guests, all except Ghulam-Hosain, who assumed a supercilious air. The innkeeper beamed and added two more *baggalis* to replace the emptied ones, rubbing his hands at thought of the trade which would be brought by the large entourage of the Governor.

"May Allah punish me if I deviate a hair's breadth from the truth!" continued the *ferrash-bashi*, "he comes with his favorite wife Zobeide, with musicians and dancers to entertain his officers and guests, and our silent residence will resound once more with merriment and feasting. . . ."

YOUNG Ghulam-Hosain had the effrontery to interrupt at this point.

"Yes, Your Highness, granted all

that, but it will be the village who pays for it . . ." he stated arrogantly. The eyes of the assemblage, all save those of the nomad from beyond the Gate, turned on him in astonishment. The *ferrash-bashi* gasped, and stared haughtily at the forward youth.

"The wisdom of a young man is like a bird without a nest!" the *ferrash-bashi* stated. "The small tax my master exacts from the village protects it from the grasping hand of the Governor of the Province . . . and even that is more than repaid to the village in purchase of food, fruit, and provender for man and beast when he honors us with his presence at the Great House."

"The illustrious *ferrash-bashi* speaks truly," interposed the mullah placatingly, remembering his duty both to distant higher authority and to present host, "we could have a much worse master than his magnificence, the Governor of Merv, upon whose name be praise!"

"New masters are what we need!" Ghulam-Hosain retorted loudly, "Men who will let us be our own masters . . . men like those in the country of my friend Tuyuk the Torgut here, where everything is held in common, horses, women, weapons, money, and every one shares alike and no man goes without . . ."

The *ferrash-bashi* was plainly scandalized to the point of stunned silence. It was the mullah who again attempted to pour oil on the troubled waters, one eye on the unfinished *kebab* and the bottles, foreseeing a quarrel that would inevitably end in the ejection of all by the innkeeper and the ending of the feasting. He spoke in measured tones as befitted his calling:

"It is, of course, well known that all empires are ruled by thorough rascals," admitted the mullah. "To kill them all would be but simple justice but to what

avail? Worse rascals would succeed them. Glory be to God, who for reasons beyond our comprehension hath ordained that the wicked and the stupid should rule the world. "But," he added, "this is a matter wherein we of this village are blessed above all other people in that we have a kind patron such as your illustrious master," he turned to the *ferrash-bashi* who had by this time recovered power of speech, but also looked upon the unfinished meats and drinks and considered his reply carefully:

"The words of your Holiness are illumined with singular truth," he inclined his head to the mullah, "and while your friend, O Ghulam-Hosain, from beyond the Gate, may find happiness in sharing and sharing alike with all, it should be asked . . . what has he to share? a tent, and a horse and a goatskin? It is easy to share and share alike when two beggars have but a crust between them . . . but I ask you, who among us would be willing to share his women with all and sundry?" he looked triumphantly about the circle. This was a staggering thought, which cast each and everyone into deep silence save one of the camel men, who put his head upon his hands and wept bitterly at the very thought.

The *ferrash-bashi* let this grave idea sink in before he moved to switch the conversation to less argumentative channels. Placing his finger on his nose, he leaned forward impressively and spoke:

"But before this disquisition by my learned young friend, Ghulam-Hosain, I had other news of singular potency to impart to this noble company." Everyone looked up, except the camel man who still sobbed.

"Know you then, that my illustrious master, the Governor, comes here for more reasons than a simple rest from

the cares of state—as a matter of fact he comes here on matters of vast moment. This I had from Jamal, the chief steward, who had it from Mahound, his cousin, the *ferrash-bashi* of the Governor's household in Merv, who had it from Safed, the Governor's *pishkedmet* (personal valet), that the Governor, may his name be glorified! comes here to halt no less a personage than an ambassador from Genghis Khan, returning from a mission to the Khalif of Baghdad!"

"Ma sh'Allah!" men exclaimed, a babble of talk broke out at this news.

"And you say, Excellency, that this ambassador is doomed to be halted by your illustrious master, the Governor?"

"Aye, and mayhap doomed to worse than that!" the *ferrash-bashi* hinted at vast mystery, and the guests shivered deliciously, at thus being privy to so great an affair of state. The *ferrash-bashi* waited for the babble a little to subside and then leaned forward, impressively.

"The strange thing," he stated, "concerning this ambassador is the fact that he is no Mongol but a Nazarene knight, born in Al Kuds (Jerusalem), but nevertheless high in the favor of Genghis Khan . . ." but the *ferrash-bashi* could go no further such was the hubbub of talk that broke forth.

ONLY the nomad from beyond the Gate, Tuyuk the Torgut, maintained his impassive calm, bending however to speak low-voiced to young Ghulam-Hosain, who thereafter paid the score to the innkeeper and departed quietly, with his strange friend, leaving his guests almost unaware of his going.

"But," questioned the *ferrash-bashi*, privily removing the last bottle of *raki* from under the questing hand of one of the camel men, and sharing it with the mullah, "the wonder is not where Ghu-

lam-Hosain gets his ideas, which have always been tinged with a touch of madness such as only an afflicted of Allah could surpass, but where he got his gold to pay for this feast?"

The same question had been asked by the young man's parents to whom, like a good son, the young man had given another gold dirhem, which quite obviously had already been spent when he arrived home near daylight.

There he found his worthy parents with the remnants of a bottle of *raki* and broken meats and sweets before them. His father was enraptured, playing the *rebeck*, his mother enthusiastically accompanying him on the tambourine, the two of them singing, loudly:

"My true love, like a vine

My heart and soul entwine . . ." but ended this at last to announce that they were intoxicated with rapture at his return.

"Tell me, my soul! Tell me my darling, whence came this gold that you have so generously given us, tell your mother, my precious!"

Ghulam-Hosain affected an air of world weariness, wiping his brow as one overburdened with affairs of immense import.

"That I cannot do, O my Mother!" he announced, "but there is more gold . . . and today I go to Merv on important State business . . . more I cannot tell!"

His father asked no questions but gratefully took the two gold dirhems handed him. His mother looked at him tenderly.

"You will be appointed an *atabeg*!" she announced with utmost conviction.

"Or the Governor of a Province!" insisted his father.

Ghulam-Hosain thought it not unlikely, but his present task, which had already brought him ten gold dirhems,

would yield another ten once he hied himself to Merv, found out the number of Kankali and Seljuk Turks garrisoning that city, made report to a certain one concerning the reputed arrival of the Nazarene ambassador of Genghis Khan, and returned to the village of Karun.

CHAPTER III

A CLUMP of steel clad men, coming along the road that led from Baghdad, rode steadily toward the village of Karun. Herdsmen and villagers stared at them agape, for they were a strange sight on the borders of Persia, being for the most part fair skinned and blue eyed. Their dark, oiled chain mail was stouter and stronger, if less beautifully made than that of Islam, and they wore upon their surcoats the cross of the Nazarenes.

In the column of Nazarene warriors the men-at-arms, as usual, were grumbling. The desert road was long and hot, their steel caps were hung on the saddle bows but the metal links of their chain mail coifs and shirts were hot to the touch and heavy.

"I'd as lief ha' stayed with John o' Brienne at Damietta, and ta'en my chances with the Mamelukes," growled the heavily thewed, black bearded Thomas Little, so named for the size of him, which was prodigious.

". . . to lead another battle of camp followers against the infidels?" inquired Will the Bowman, referring to what time Thomas, after the siege of Damietta on the Nile was surprised by a Moslem sortie in a house outside the city walls and led the six women camp followers successfully against the attackers.

"*Le roi des putains!*" jibed Pierre, the French man-at-arms, riding on his near side.

"King of the camp followers yourself!" retorted Peter Lacknose, so named because a Moslem scimitar had sheered off that member at the taking of the Tower of the Chains at Damietta, "never yet was a Frenchie who wouldn't rather battle with a bottle of wine and a girl than with the Saracens—I mind me when we finished fighting the Saracens at Damietta we had to fight the Frenchies to get the girls away from them!"

"*Forte en la bataille et forte en l'amour, les Francais!*" insisted Pierre, serene.

"Ho! . . ." the lank, dour faced Wat o' Lincoln made heavy ribald play on the words and a roar of laughter went up, with even harsh Diccon, the Sergeant-at-Arms, chuckling in his beard, and young Brian de Lacey, the slim esquire of the Sieur Josselin, bending over his saddle bow in laughter.

Baldwin de Berg, the stout knight with the black cross of the order of the Hospitallers embroidered on his wool surcoat, who rode at the left of the Sieur Josselin, turned in the saddle to inquire the cause of the laughter, looking like a great tun of wine but forebore a smile when it was repeated to him, by Jock the Jongleur, Baldwin's own man, it being Baldwin's custom to laugh at no joke save of his own making.

The Sieur Josselin's rather grim young face twitched as he heard the joke and turning in the saddle he called back to Pierre:

"Be of good cheer, Pierre, battle and love, love and battle, it takes prowess in both to make the perfect soldier—'tis a pity we could not combine Wat o' Lincoln and Jock into one such type . . ."

A deep chuckle went up from the men, in this allusion to Wat who had married a virago of a Flemish wife who was reputed to beat him with her slip-

per on occasion, and to Jock the Jongleur, adept with song and the cooking pots, and a notorious trifler with women but liable to a certain diffidence in putting himself forward where the sword clash rang most loudly.

They learned this what time the Kurdish marauders galloped down upon them on the borders of the Kara Kum, the Black Sands, not two days since. The little cavalcade looked like easy pickings to the hard faced Kurds, their eyes gleaming with avarice, their yataghans flashing behind their round shields, but the men-at-arms met them with a steady creak and twang of cross-bows, the steel quarrels thudding so emphatically into Kurdish men and horses that the nomads drew back, only to be beset by the Sieur Josselin and the clump of steel-clad men in a grim charge that scattered the interlopers. It was while despatching the wounded, stripping the slain, and recovering the steel quarrels, that Jock had joined them from the sumpter mules. The others had cursed him heartily but he was in no wise abashed. It was the first time they had seen the knight Baldwin de Berg in action and they forgave Jock much because of the prowess of his master who wrought like a veritable Trojan, smiting the foe with his Danish axe to the tune of his ear splitting battle cry.

THEY also forgave Jock when he took charge of the cooking pots and concocted a savory stew out of their usual, tasteless, plain boiled mutton.

It was Jock who told them of his long captivity, with his master, among the Arabs and their escape at last to wander night and hide by day until they espied the Sieur Josselin de Beaufort's small clump of lances and threw themselves on his mercy and his store of

provisioning, electing to cast their lot with him, with little curiosity expressed as to his mission in High Asia.

Sieur Josselin's men themselves knew little of this mission.

For there was dissension in Islam, between the Khalif of Baghdad, still wearing the black veil and the mantle of the Prophet upon him, and the Khalif of Cairo, that Cairo which Moham-medans called "El Kahira," the Guarded. "The Mark of the Beast," said orthodox Moslems, "is upon her," and reviled the Fatimite sect which had its fountain head on the Nile. And here in the west, the Shah Muhammed of Kharesm ruled over ancient Persia and far outer Turkestan, threatening his neighbors to the east. Along the shores of Palestine, the Christian knights held insecure tenure by the grace of the divisions in Islam. And ready to conquer those warring Islamic elements was a power greater than them all, the Mongol Horde, commanded by that shrewd warrior, Genghis Khan, who called himself Master of Men and Kha Khan, Ruler of Rulers.

But the men-at-arms, riding along that dusty road recked little of these affairs. It sufficed for Josselin's men that the young knight was a good leader who cared for man and horse and held them all to account in severe but kindly fashion, and wrought mightily in battle.

"He was the first knight to o'er leap the rampart of the Tower of the Chain at Damietta," explained Thomas Little, "and the first man of all the army up the ladder when Damietta was stormed, clearing the Moslems single handed, out of the gate tower, himself slaying a score of them, which afterwards the jongleurs made into a song and sang around the campfires. 'Twas for this that King John sent him on this mission, to go to High Asia and solicit the aid of Genghis Khan against the Sara-

cens. And for his sagacity that Genghis Khan sent him as ambassador to the Khalif of Baghdad. . . ."

"He is sober of mien and grim visaged, that young knight of thine," commented Jock the Jongleur.

"And so wouldst be thyself had thine eyes seen as he hath seen, his father, a baron of Jerusalem, treacherously slain by the Turks, and his mother die of sorrow, and himself captured and held for ransom by the Arabs when he was yet a lad. It was in part to seek for the slayers of his father that he accepted this mission, being set upon avenging that slaying when he can find the guilty one."

Jock the Jongleur shook his head forebodingly.

"He would do better to have as little to do with the Turks as ever he can encompass—treacherous devils and their memories are as sharp as their daggers."

"The Sieur Josselin is a fit match for them, be they man or devil," stated Thomas confidently, but broke off as he saw a stir at the head of the little column.

Young Brian de Lacey, the esquire, had ridden upon on the Sieur Josselin's left hand, handing him, in turn, steel helmet with its nasal; the ten foot ash spear with its pennon of the three leopards rampant on a field azure; and lastly, the tall, kite-shaped shield. Jock the Jongleur rode rapidly forward, performing like service for Baldwin de Berg and as rapidly rode to the rear of the sumpter train, while the men-at-arms loosened swords in scabbards, lifted their steel caps from saddle bows and donned them, and took the leather coverings off their crossbows, all eyes watching ahead.

A white walled village, set in a grove of olives, lay athwart the road some ten minutes' ride ahead. From the village

gates there appeared horsemen and in a cloud of dust they rode towards the clump of armed men.

WHILE there was a temporary truce in effect between Islam and the Christian knights of Outremer, and they were free to come and go in each other's domain, and while moreover, the Sieur Josselin had the safe conduct ordinarily credited to an ambassador, there was always possibility of combat in these troubled lands.

The weight of his armor hung lightly upon Josselin de Beaufort despite the heat of the day, for the promise of excitement was like a draught of wine.

Suddenly he sat erect in his saddle and shifted his great sword more easily to hand as the cloud of dust came rapidly nearer, with the glitter of steel showing through it.

"'Ware, Diccon!" he called over his shoulder, "These be armed men galloping toward us!"

Diccon barked a command. The horses of the men-at-arms trotted up on either side of him so that a solid wall of mail-clad men blocked the road.

The dust cloud drifted rapidly nearer and slowed in its progress, beginning to settle, showing the outlines of a dozen strange horsemen. There were at least eight armed Seljuk Turk soldiers, wearing high pointed damascened helmets, coats of silvered chain mail and carrying small round shields. But their scimiters were sheathed and it was an unarmed Persian, clad in rich turban and khalat of lamb's wool who rode forward.

The Persian put up his weaponless hand in token of friendship.

"Peace be unto you, O Nazarene!"

"And unto you, peace!" the knight replied, letting his lance swing back on its elbow loop.

"I come in friendship, O Nazarene!"

said the Persian, no less a personage than the *ferrash-bashi* of Maudud's country household, "bearing a message of good will and greetings to your Excellency from my Master, the illustrious excellency, the Emir Maudud, the most noble governor of his Majesty, the Shah's city of Merv and commander of the garrison. His Excellency prays that you and your men will be his guests in his country house above the village. . . ."

CHAPTER IV

GOOD Diccon rode up alongside his leader to grumble his suspicions as they rode behind the Turks and entered the village. The streets were lined with the villagers, among them Bulbul-Hanum, the mother, and Mustapha, the father of young Ghulam-Hosain, already on his way to Merv to earn his ten gold pieces. Also there was the mullah, the innkeeper and the village kaid, along with veiled women and staring men and children and camel men, muleteers, farm laborers and servants, with the seller of sherbet doing a good business and the fruit seller's stand almost denuded of its wares, so long had the crowd awaited this spectacle.

"Look ye, Sieur Josselin!" grumbled Diccon, the Sergeant-at-Arms, "All Turks be treacherous past all seeming. But especially treacherous devils are these Kankali Turks, while this Emir Maudud is said to be supreme in deviltry and treachery . . . so Jock the Jongleur tells me."

"Which is a good reason for seeing this redoubtable Emir Maudud," returned Josselin, composedly. "Devil he may be, but in any case it is doubtful if even he would dare harm an ambassador."

Diccon dropped back, muttering. This young baron of his was just like

his father, undeterred in the face of danger and if he wanted to put his hand in the lion's mouth, Diccon could do no more than bear with it.

They came to an arched gateway, with slender turrets on either side of it, with the usual rabble of beggars about the gates. Three of these came whining up to the young Nazarene knight.

"Alms, for the love of Allah!" they begged.

The Sieur Josselin reached inside his white lamb's wool surtout and drew forth the stout, heavy leather purse. Dangling outside the purse on a leathern cord, was a flat, oblong piece of bronze less than a man's hand in length and scarce three fingers in width. There was a tiger's head, cunningly inlaid in gold set within the bronze, and strange flowing script in an unknown tongue engraved down its length.

The beggars froze at sight of that piece of bronze and grew still.

"*Kai!*" they breathed, deeply respectful.

The Sieur Josselin threw them some silver coins.

"*Ahatou!*" he answered, low voiced, scarce moving his lips.

The three beggars immediately became voluble with loud mouthed gratitude, salaaming deeply as the Sieur Josselin rode on. But the three paid little heed to the coins. They drew together, whispering among themselves as the men-at-arms and the sumpter mules passed by and through the gates.

Stables for the horses abutted from the wall of the compound and were reasonably close to the quarters assigned the men, Josselin noted.

Watching his men at their tasks was the inevitable, curious small boy of some eight or ten years, but this one richly dressed, in white cashmere coat and crimson silk trousers, a heavily jeweled belt about his waist, carrying a

small jewel handled dagger. He came up confidently, fingering the great sword that hung at Josselin's belt.

"It is too heavy, thy great sword," piped the youngster authoritatively, "none but a djinn could wield such a great clumsy weapon!"

"Say you so, O Father of Wisdom?" returned Josselin banteringly, "watch this then!" and he slipped the long blade from its sheath with a steely whir and swung it easily and lightly about his head, returning it to its sheath without effort, "Dost say now that I am a djinn?"

"Nay, but truly it is marvelous!" the youngster was agape until the esquire, Brian de Lacey, swept him up into the saddle of a yet unsaddled mount, the heavy Artois mare, ridden by Baldwin de Berg, from whence he boy peered down, proud and pleased, and one too happy to be removed from his perch.

"'Tis the eldest son of the Emir," said one of the *ferrashe* (groom).

WHEN the fodder for the horses, grain and fresh cut grass was laid down by a squad of *ferrashe* and copper pots of steaming food began to arrive from the Emir's kitchen for the men, Josselin gave a few low voiced instructions to Diccon and then, after washing off the dust of travel, followed the *ferrash-bashi* with Baldwin de Berg and Brian de Lacey to where the lights streamed out from the hospitably opened doorway of the Emir's banquetting hall across the compound, whence the sound of lutes and zithers was already filling the night air with harmonious melody.

The music came to sudden pause as his broad shoulders filled the doorway and he stood for a moment, allowing his eyes to grow accustomed to the light cast by candles and oil lamps in colored glass, sensing many eyes upon him from

around the divans bordered with low tables, heavy with food and drinks.

From the latticed gallery came sounds like the cooing of many doves and Josselin, knowing the customs of Islam from his boyhood, forebore a single glance in that direction, despite the murmurs of admiration and the soft feminine voices "Insh 'a Allah, what shoulders and thighs!" and "Saw you ever such a chest!" and "A veritable Rustem!"

But one among the throng of jeweled and silken khalated men was stepping toward him and he was greeted by his host, the Emir Maudud, lean, with his wolfish face and cold black eyes.

Josselin gravely returned the greetings in the conventional phrases required in Moslem etiquette, confessing to himself, inwardly, that he liked the fellow's eyes not one whit and measuring the distance to the door and the men and weapons that might bar the way.

But there was wine of Shiraz, and heady *raki*, of which he drank sparingly, feeling the need upon him to keep his head clear, and partook of the roast meats and cheeses, the fruits and sweetmeats while the music of rebecks and zithers and flutes throbbed and tinkled and heady little drums droned and pulsed. There came the dancing girls, supple and slim waisted and the flutes kept up a murmured wailing to their slow graceful movements.

The dancing ended of a sudden while Josselin was listening to a half drunken poet at the next table and staring at the two effeminate Persian youths with him, touching their food daintily.

"Largess! Largess!" the girls begged prettily and men threw them coins. Josselin brought forth his leathern purse. One dancing girl of whiter skin and finer features than the others saw that bronze plaque with its golden tiger's head, hanging on its cord. Sud-

denly she was beside him, her hand outstretched. Josselin gave her some silver.

"Take heed, O Bearer of the Tiger Tablet!" she whispered swiftly, speaking in the soft slurring Green of Byzantium, "Otrar hath fallen and the armies of the Kha Khan move against Bokhara! And the Governor, thy host, plans treachery against thee! Move from under his roof quickly ere harm befall thee and thy men! If thou shouldst win through, remember me, Theodosia, the Byzantine dancer, who lodgeth above the shop of Hussein Ali, the merchant of perfumes, in the Street of the Makers of Perfumes, in Merv!" And then, in a louder voice, speaking in Turki, she cried, "May Allah shower his blessings upon thee for thy bounty, O most noble Lord!"

Then she was gone, whirling again among the other dancing girls to the plaintive notes of the flutes and the heady throbbing drone of the drums.

Josselin considered these tidings as he sat outwardly serene. Otrar, that northern outpost of the Shah's territories, had fallen to Genghis Khan—and Bokhara was under siege! Truly the Kha Khan had kept his word, what time the envoys he had sent to the Shah had been treacherously slain by the Shah's Governor of Otrar! And he, Josselin, was in like danger, being an envoy and the guest of another Governor of the Shah. The dancing girl's warning of treachery only confirmed what he had already sensed. Again he measured the distance to the door, a long way against all these guards of the Governor should he have to fight his way out of that place!

It was then that Josselin noted the silence that had descended upon the latticed galleries above, in itself a strange thing, seeing that it passed the bounds of understanding, that women,

in a group, could maintain silence for overlong.

GLANCING at the lattice work without seeming to do so, he saw that the lamps that had heretofore illumined it, were now darkened. There were windows high up in the inner wall, however, through which came moonlight casting some four or five dark shadows against the lattice work of the gallery. One of the shadows moved, ever so slightly and Josselin sensed rather than saw, the glint of moonlight on steel. Then he saw for a second, the gleam of lamplight from the banquet hall, upon a tiny point of steel protruding through the lattice work, an arrow point he reasoned swiftly, nor gave any sign that he saw anything amiss. Now why, in the name of God, he asked himself, should the Emir clear the women's gallery of his harem and station, instead, armed men with arrows on string?

But the Emir turned from talk with Nouredin, the captain of his guard, to Josselin, with some talk of the fighting in Egypt and the taking of Damietta.

"In my youth," said the Emir Maudud, "I fought in the forces of the Khalif of Damascus, winning some small renown in battling against the men of your faith."

"Word has reached me of your renown, wert not at the siege of Acre?" asked Josselin, smoothly.

"Aye, that I was, and it was glorious fighting," the Emir looked gratified. The talk turned to Genghis Khan, that disturbing portent in the north, and the rumours that he contemplated a descent upon Islam. Evidently, reasoned Josselin swiftly, word of the fall of Otrar had not reached him. Maudud was contemptuous of the effrontery of this barbarian nomad, daring to pit himself against the armed might of the Shah

Muhammad.

"But men say that this nomad chieftain hath already sent an embassy to the king of the Nazarenes at Acre," said the Emir, his voice languid and sounding totally disinterested. But his eyes were watchful as he awaited the reply. I am tired of fencing with this fool, considered Josselin, there is now need for quick heaving of him into the pit he has dug for me. But aloud he said:

"There are many ambassadors coming and going to King John at Acre," he said, his voice guiltless, "but whether Genghis Khan hath sent one I do not recall."

The small son of the Emir came into the hall, brave in his white cashmere coat and red silk trousers, to watch some jugglers performing and to munch some sweetmeats taken privily from the nearest table by the door. The jugglers finished and were given back-sheesh and were succeeded by a poet who recited his verses. This bored the young son of the Emir and he departed again into the courtyard, munching cakes sweetened with honey.

Josselin occasionally darted a glance up at the balcony where the shadows of armed bowmen stood grimly watchful and waiting. There was a queer singing elation possessing him, part of the inheritance, perhaps from his Irish mother, which made imminent danger affect him as wine affects some, sharpening rather than dulling the faculties and leading to the taking of seemingly wild but calculated risks.

IT was the entrance of the wrestlers which gave him his lead.

They struggled after the fashion of the Moslem wrestlers, slowly and making more use of weight than of skill. Waiting until the Emir's eye was upon him, he shrugged his shoulders and

turned from the spectacle, as though bored with the sight.

"Our wrestlers do not amuse thee?" asked the Emir.

"Oh, they are good enough, in their way," admitted Josselin indifferently.

"They are not, in thy mind, skilled as the wrestlers of the Nazarenes?" The Emir was taking the bait most marvellously, reflected Josselin. His own problem, as he saw it was to get down the length of that long banquet hall without exciting suspicion, near the door, and away from the menace of those steel tipped arrows above him. Baldwin de Berg was already near the door, where he had seated himself near the greatest roast of mutton he could find. There remained Brian de Lacey seated next him, on his right. He spoke low voiced to young Brian whose eyes betrayed sudden surprise but were quickly veiled, and then turned to the Emir again.

"I was asking my esquire his opinion, it is the same as mine, that the Moslem wrestlers lack swiftness and skill."

"Nay, that cannot be, O Nazarene, the wrestlers of Islam are renowned for their skill. . . ."

"Against the wrestlers of Islam," interrupted Josselin, "hast ever seen one pitted against one of ours? Methinks any ordinary man could down one of these . . ." he pointed to the men heaving and grunting on the floor.

"Or one of our champions?" asked the Emir, softly.

"Or one of your champions, even I," Josselin was bland, "even I, perhaps could last a round or two, until a better man, among my soldiers could prove the point," and waited, tense inwardly but outwardly calm, for the bait to be swallowed. The Emir was thinking, outwardly and visibly, his hand pressed to his brow, as is the custom of many Asiatics. He glanced aloft at the gallery

above them, and then to a ring on his finger, a great carved amethyst, set in gold. It was upon the Emir's left hand and Josselin, seated at his right, had not noted it before. The Emir took the ring off and placed it in the palm of his hand. Josselin gazing upon it, had all he could do to repress a start, but sat tense and silent for a space.

"A most beautiful ring," he announced finally, "of the finest Byzantine craftsmanship . . . may I ask how it came into thy possession, O Emir?" and waited, silent for the answer.

"I had it of the illustrious Timur al Molok who won it fighting against the men of thy faith after Acre. Timur al Molok is now Wazir of the Shah Muhammad, upon whose name be praise! Against it, as wager, I risked two slaves, two very pretty dancing boys of Damascus who found favor in the eyes of Timur, but praise be to Allah, my horse won the course against his on the desert outside Kerak. Once more will I risk it in wager . . . a wager that neither thee nor any of thy men can down my champion wrestler. . . ."

"And as wager against it?"

"If dost not win, that thou, O Nazarene, and thy men, remain as my guests, pledged to my service, for one year from this day. . . ."

Josselin's eyes widened. So that was the catch! His mind probed swiftly at reason for this strange penalty. It was not clear to him, therefore dangerous.

"Methinks, O Emir, that thou esteemest but lightly the worth of two Nazarene knights and my men against you pretty bauble. Let us rather wager like against like," his tone was haughty and offended, showing just the proper degree of pride to create an impression in the mind of a Turk, belonging to a race full of quick pride. The Emir was quick to see wherein he had offended. His eyes flickered in telltale fashion to

that gallery above and it was clear to Josselin that wager or no wager it was not Maudud's plan to have him leave that place alive.

But the Emir's voice was smooth.

"I crave pardon, O Nazarene, it was my desire to have goodly company constrained to remain with me that outran discretion and the weighing of values . . . let it be yon ring of thine against mine."

"So be it," Josselin glanced at his own ring, the heavy gold ring set with a single sapphire that had been his grandsire's, and nodded.

The Emir clapped his hands. There came softly, out of the shadows under the balcony, a great hulk of a man, a Stamboul wrestler, clad only in leather loin cloth and quivering with flesh.

"The wager is that either I or one of my men shall down him," Josselin announced, swiftly, "I will send now for one of my wrestlers, more skilled than I . . . although," he caught the gleam of a smile on the Emir's face, "it is my right to engage this mountain of flesh first. And he spoke to Brian de Lacey who departed on his errand.

A STILLNESS fell upon the banquet hall as Josselin rose and the Emir announced the wager. The Nazarene knight strode around the table.

"You will not remove heavy sword and hampering coat of mail?" asked Maudud, eyebrows raised, astonished.

"There is no need!" Josselin made answer, and strode quietly to the center of the hall.

A murmur went up from the divans at the contrast between these two, the hulking bulk of the Stamboul wrestler outweighing the tall but slim Nazarene knight nearly two-to-one, and it was in this wise that the bets were made around the hall against Josselin's chances of victory.

The great Moslem wrestler crouched, ready and waiting. Josselin circled him once, and then moved back, toward the doorway and down the hall, the Moslem wrestler following, growing more confident, shuffling his great bare feet, his great arms, the thickness of an ordinary man's thighs, beginning to creep forward, his hands hooked.

When he had drawn his man some two-thirds the distance down the hall, Josselin began to pace lightly, moving swiftly to the right and left, with knees crooked and hands advanced.

There came a look of indecision in the Moslem wrestler's eyes. Then Josselin, with a sudden dash, so swift and hawklike that the eye could scarce follow it, flew in upon his man and locked knee and arm, throwing his full weight against his huge antagonist. Between men of equal weight the sudden attack and swift propelment of muscle would have meant a certain fall, but the Moslem wrestler tore him off as one would tear off a hampering cloak, striving to hold him in the grasp of those mighty hands. A shout went up from the crowded room and the Emir Maudud's eyes glowed. Then silence came once more as they watched Josselin slip adroitly out of the great bear trap before ever it could close.

The shout encouraged the Moslem to take the offensive. He sprang after Josselin, with a deep bull-throated roar.

It was the very thing for which Josselin had striven. He laughed.

Then he side-stepped the bull-like rush. The knight's hand came out like a quick darting snake and caught the wrist of the Stamboul wrestler. Josselin's right foot locked swiftly around the thick ankle of the Moslem. He gave a sudden tug and his half-naked antagonist pitched forward on his face like some huge sea beast flung helpless upon the sands of the seashore, and lay,

silent and still, completely out.

"*Bismallah!*" the muttered word went around the crowded tables, astonishment on every face save that of the Emir. His eyes grew hot with anger.

BUT he was not lacking in alternatives. He started to raise his hand. Above him sections of lattice swung outward, disclosing half a dozen *Kankali* Turk archers, their arrows on string. Another signal and they would have loosed them on the Nazarene knight.

"Nay, Maudud, thou father of treachery!" Josselin's voice carried such ring and power of conviction that the Emir, puzzled, halted his signal in mid air.

"Look well, O Maudud, before losing more treachery . . ." Josselin's voice went on, and he stepped aside, disclosing in the open doorway behind him, three of his mailed men-at-arms' steel quarrels set in their crossbows. They were under the gallery where the Turkish arrows could not reach them and their weapons were aimed at Maudud. The Emir paled and sat silent for a space, then made signal to Nouredin, his captain of the guard, who stepped a pace backward, preparatory to leaving the banquet hall. Baldwin de Berg, his mouth full of sweetmeats, moved disconsolately to join Josselin.

"Nay, . . ." Josselin's voice came again, impatient, "make no move against my men at the stables. They hold thy young son hostage against thy treachery. . . ." Maudud paled to a greenish hue, sweating for fear of harm that might befall his only son. He sat still and silent. One could have heard the dropping of a feather in that banquet hall so still it grew.

"Now, I have fairly won the wager and thine amethyst ring is mine . . . send it to my hand, O Maudud, and

add no more chicanery to thy violation of the hospitality of Islam . . ." In this a mutter went up from the hall and black looks were bent upon the hapless Emir, for he had violated the laws of Islam in threatening harm to guests who had eaten his bread and salt.

The Emir slipped the heavy gold ring from his finger and sent it by the hand of a slave who knelt at the feet of the *Sieur Josselin de Beaufort*, presenting it. Josselin slipped it upon his finger, glancing at the skilled Byzantine engraving upon the amethyst, of the three leopards rampant . . . the armorial bearings of the *de Beauforts*.

"We depart now, O Maudud, from under thy ill-omened roof, taking with us as hostage thy son. If there be no more treachery nor any pursuit he will be returned to thee unscathed before moonrise tomorrow!" And with that Josselin turned on his heel and with never a backward glance strode through the doorway, followed by Baldwin de Berg and his men-at-arms, good Thomas Little, Wat o' Lincoln, and the saturnine looking Peter Lack-nose who could not resist thumbing his nose at the assemblage as he filed out.

"A clever coup—well handled, "admitted the fat knight, Baldin de Berg, striding beside Josselin, and then more sadly, "'Twould have been better by far had there been but time to sample that comfit of apricots preserved in honey that was just being served!" and he sighed.

"A murrain upon thee and thy comfits!" Josselin smiled, "but 'twas the manner of coup I like best—wherein one's enemy confounds himself with the measures he hath taken for one's destruction."

"You mean the Turkish wrestler?" asked Baldwin.

"Nay, the Emir Maudud!"

"He meditated thy destruction?"

asked Baldwin astounded.

"Had thy mind not been upon the comfits, wouldst have seen the arrow on string in the gallery above," explained Josselin, "now he will be doubly wroth, seeing that he hath been shamed before his guests and seeing, moreover, that there is report that Genghis Khan hath taken Otrar and that his armies are on the march against the Governor's master, the Shah."

"By the Holy Sepulcher . . . there will be blood spilled now!" growled Baldwin, not seeming in the least dismayed at the prospect, "but we will have to tread warily 'til we get away from that evil-eyed Governor—Maudud!"

THEY were in the courtyard, now striding across it, the banquet hall behind them silent, the guests speechless and the music stilled and no man had dared follow, so implacable had been the resolve writ upon the face of the Nazarene knight. The dancing girls had ceased their chatter and sat huddled, whispering, except one, a girl of fairer skin than the others, who slipped out, quietly, unnoted.

At the stables the *Sieur Josselin* found that, as he had directed, the horses were saddled and the sumpter mules packed and that all was in readiness. Entering the stables to see that there was no piece of gear left behind, he noted above the stable odor, a faint trace of the perfume of attar of roses but gave it little heed, for a voice came to him out of the darkness, the voice of a man, speaking the Mongol tongue.

"*Kai!*" it gave salutation, in deep respect, "we await thy commands, O lord!"

"*Ahatou!*" returned Josselin, mechanically, and then "and who mayest thou be and what is the proof of thy loyalty?"

"I am Tuyuk the Torgut, and here is proof, O lord, that I come from Those Whom We Know!" and there was a rustle of silk in the darkness and an oblong piece of metal was placed in Josselin's hand. It was like his own bronze tablet, save, that, instead of the tiger's head engraved upon it, it carried, as he could well determine by fingering it, the likeness of a falcon's head.

"It is well, then, O Bearer of the Falcon Tablet," acknowledged Josselin, returning the piece of metal, "know ye then that I travel to Him Ye Serve, by way of Bokhara, but before departing on that task I seek one called Timur al Molok, Wazir of the Shah Muhammad and would fain know where he might be found."

"Report hath it that he comes to Merv on the morrow, O lord," returned Tuyuk.

"Now by St. Michael! that is good news!" exclaimed Josselin, in his own tongue, then in Mongol, "Then find us hiding place somewhere near Merv, Tuyuk, for I would see this Timur al Molok before departing to Bokhara."

"It shall be as my lord commands," agreed Tuyuk in the darkness and they moved out to the waiting group of horsemen.

Again Josselin noted that scent of attar of roses as he approached the door but gave it no heed, his mind being on other matters.

CHAPTER V

THE little clump of spears moved out of the gates of the country house of the Emir Maudud, Governor of Merv, and none dared stay them. For the young son of the Emir rode, joyous, on the saddle bow of Wat o' Lincoln, nor knew that he was hostage for the safe passage of his new found friends.

Tuyuk the Torgut sent with them one of those three beggars, no longer dressed in beggars' rags but in rough wool khalat as befitted a servant. This one was to lead them to suitable hiding place.

The night was far advanced and the Sieur Josselin, his men and animals refreshed, led them swiftly through the darkness at a good sharp trot, the sumpter mules in rear wagging their ears in indignation as they were forced to the gallop to keep up, being encouraged thereto by many stout thwacks from the staves of the three Syrian muleteers. These three, intent upon their tasks, did not note the cloaked figure following them until they mounted after the first halt, when the strange rider drew up beside them, riding along easily on a mettlesome bay mare. The lead muleteer put hand on sword.

"Peace be unto you," came the voice of a woman, "I must on to Merv, and, fearing to ride alone, seek but the protection of thy strength on the road. . . ." There came the clink of coins and the muleteer closed his fist on a handful of silver pieces, "say naught of my presence to the Nazarene, I pray thee!"

". . . and peace be unto you!" exclaimed the muleteer, "it shall be as thou hast wished, O Dispenser of Delights," for what mattered it if a woman rode with them, especially if she paid for the privilege. Allah, who sees all and knows all, surely had put this money in his way, intending that he should have it, reasoned the muleteer.

That the dancing girl, for so he determined her to be, did not leave them when they rode around the walls of Merv and came out on the far side, the muleteer put down to her fear of being alone on the road; also, if the truth be known, he had become bemused by the scent of attar of roses that was wafted

to him in the cool air of the night, and hoped for greater reward should he find shelter for her.

Ahead, the man whom Tuyuk had sent as guide rode behind the Sieur Josselin, directing him on the road and bringing them at last, some three hours before dawn, to a white walled village in a grove of poplars, set back of the road that led from Merv to Bokhara. They skirted this, coming at last to a gate set deep within a stone wall.

"It is," said the guide, "the country house of the Sheykh Saleh ibn Khalil, on whose name be praise, now absent in his town house in Merv. The Sheykh, a man of exceeding holiness and good deeds, would give thee shelter were he but here in his absence, his steward, Mustapha, who is my wife's sister's husband's uncle, will gladly shelter thee, seeing especially that thou art in disfavor of the Governor of Merv, may he fry in Gehenna! who hates the Sheykh his master as well. I go now to parley with him!"

They waited then, in the darkness hard by the gates of the country place, nor did Josselin note, when they were bidden to enter, that the cloaked rider who had accompanied them, slipped in likewise, riding hidden among the sumpter mules.

They found themselves in a stone paved courtyard wherein a fountain murmured and splashed. Servants, sleepy-eyed but kindly, took their horses and Josselin's men were quartered behind the kitchens, while the Sieur Josselin, Baldwin de Berg and the esquire young Brian, were led into the cool stone rooms of the lower floor of the house, where they were served with golden pomegranates, sweet melons and honey cakes colored with saffron, along with dates and figs and milk from silver pitchers until their hunger was slaked and they were sleepy-eyed.

They were then shown to their chambers, Josselin being led by a slave to a high cool room deep piled with rugs of Bokhara with a great sleeping divan covered with silken coverlets and the slave brought him basins of water in which rose petals floated, and silken sleeping robe and soft slippers of the leather of Damascus.

Laved and refreshed, he stretched out on the soft divan and was almost instantly sunk into soft slumber.

CHAPTER VI

IT STILL lacked an hour of cock crow when he awakened, nor knew that the white cloaked woman who had entered with his train the night before had already departed, unnoted.

His horse was waiting, saddled and by it stood Diccon, the Sergeant-at-arms, to expostulate against his going.

"The place is full of the spies of Maudud, the Governor, my lord," Diccon's seamed face was even more deeply etched with lines of worry, "Thou'lt be gathered up in a trice and put to torture and death . . ."

Baldwin de Berg added his protests.

"Needless sticking of your head into the lion's mouth . . . alone, without even an esquire in that evil city . . . why run the risk?" asked Baldwin.

Josselin busied himself, testing girth and stirrup and comfortable fit of bridle, bit and curb chain, then this rite finished stood while Brian de Lacey placed over his shoulders the great gray khalat, with its hood hiding the chain mail of his coif and steel helmet, and its voluminous folds concealing his great sword. Then, with a lithe and effortless spring, he was in saddle, gathering reins and spreading his cloak about him.

"I go," he explained, "*primus*, upon my duty, which is to observe this city

of Merv, its walls and garrison, the knowledge whereof may stand us in good stead at some not too far distant day, and *secundus*, to have a look and fix in my memory, if naught more, the face of this Timur al Molok, with whom I have a private score to settle . . . do thou, Baldwin, see that none of our men-at-arms nor servants stray to the village and that none have word of our sojourn here. If I do not return by tomorrow at nightfall, make inquiry concerning me of the shop of the Cathayan seller of silks, hard by the street of the Silversmiths!" and with a wave of farewell, he was gone out of the small rear gate of the garden.

Despite the earliness of the hour, the road, which came from Bokhara, was already crowded with fugitives from that doomed city en route to seek shelter behind the walls of Merv. Theodosia, the Byzantine dancer, had spoken truly, reflected Josselin, as he directed his horse into the press of humanity and of beasts of burden crowding the narrow way.

The road was like a river in flood; men and horses, camels and mules, women in horse litters and camel howdahs swept on, a great fear hanging over them. There were Arabs on slender-legged, desert horses, Jewish merchants in purple *shubas* with their mule carts, grave hooded desert men on camels, wolfish Turkomans, eyes avid at sight of so much loot so near at hand and strange nomads from beyond the barrens, all pressing on to the shelter of Merv, the Jewel City of the Sands.

Josselin rode on, borne by the current of men and animals, like some tree trunk in a flooded stream, when suddenly there came the blast of a trumpet from far back on the road and men stared behind them to see what it might portend. Then their eyes beheld a rolling cloud of dust and faces about

Josselin blanched with fear as the drum beat of innumerable hooves grew steadily louder. Then came a joyful shout as a green banner appeared, the green banner of Islam, and there came the sheen of jeweled head dresses and gold and silver damascened armor. Nearer and nearer came the turmoil and men hastily scrambled off the road, Josselin following and none too soon, for out of the morning mists appeared a veritable torrent of horsemen, in silvered mail and jeweled helmets, with glittering spear points and scimitars, and the ruby and emerald ornaments of *emirs* and *atabegs* . . . silken khalats and white turbans, the green banners of Islam and bronze war trumpets, beautiful desert bred horses and lean-faced desert bred men flung by at the gallop. In the center of the array came several squadrons of heavily armed Kankali Turks. On their nearest flank rode a splendid figure gleaming in scarlet and silvered armor. The arrogant figure was a Seljukian Turk, high chested and domineering, wearing a great ruby of Meshed in the clasp that held a snowy aigrette plume in his scarlet silken turban.

Men around Josselin spoke in awed whispers.

"It is the Grand Wazir himself . . . Timur al Molok!" they said.

Josselin stood upright in his stirrups, the better to see as the man came opposite him. There must have been some overmastering quality in the glance which Josselin bent upon the murderer of his father. Either that or some instinct apprised the Turk of some hatred near at hand. Whatever the cause, Timur al Molok's eyes lighted upon the face of the Christian knight, at the very instant that Josselin, in the intensity of his gaze, let the khalat he wore slip open, exposing the sheen of heavy chain mail underneath. For a second the eyes

of the two men met and locked. Then the Wazir passed on, leaving Josselin tense and white and shaking at this, his first view of the man whose treachery had made his an orphan.

MORE squadrons of Seljuk Turks thundered by and then the baggage trains and the slaves, even more arrogant than their masters, if that were possible, until finally the empty road was filled again with the fugitives, intent on finishing their journey.

The white walls of Merv came in view. The gates were opened to admit that impressive cavalcade of warriors and as quickly closed again with the rabble of fugitives forced to await the regular hour of entry.

Country carts and mules and loaded camels were already there, carrying store of vegetables and fruits and meats, to the markets, awaiting the opening of the Lion Gate in the dim mists of early dawn. The carters and muleteers and camel drivers stared up to where the bowmen of the watch, arrows on string, kept look-out over the desert from the long, narrow, loopholes above.

Studying the great iron gate, Josselin noted a row of small objects that looked not unlike sun dried melons. It was only in the better light afforded by the rays of the rising sun that he saw them to be severed human heads, their sightless eyes staring unseeing, at the dawn.

It was while awaiting the opening of the gates that he took note of the walls, moving along them, noting the thickness and strength of the crenallated towers, jutting out less than a bow shot length apart, with arrow slits covering the glacis of the curtain walls between them. With the keener vision afforded by the rising sun, he noted, at three bow shot lengths from the Lion Gate, a small postern gate set deeply in under

the walls at the base of the third tower from the gate. Curious, he urged his horse nearer.

From somewhere he heard a sudden "Twang" the singing of a bowstring and with the quickness of thought itself, he leaned low on his horse's neck and spurred his mount so that it leaped forward. An arrow whizzed so near him that the wind of its passing fanned his cheek as it went on to bury itself in the ground behind him.

It seemed more discreet to return to the main gate after that exhibition of vigilance and he rode back, keeping safer distance from the walls, to lose himself among the country carts and mules.

As he waited there, there came a chorus of wierd calls from high above and within the walls, from the tall spired minarets that dotted the city, the calls of the iron lunged muezzins, "Allah is Almighty . . . Allah is Almighty . . . I witness that there is no other god but Allah . . . I witness that Muhammad is his prophet . . . come to prayer . . . Come to the house of praise. Allah is Almighty . . . Allah is Mighty . . . There is no god but Allah!"

Shortly thereafter the great gates creaked and clanked, slowly opening and coming to rest with a thudding jar. The waiting crowd, to the tune of loud cries and the crack of whips, began to enter, each pausing by the guard of mail-coated bowmen for a quick inspection and the payment of the tax, while a bald-headed scribe, in snuff-colored khalat, made note of each passing man and animal.

Josselin's turn came in due course. He rode up, impassive enough in outward seeming, but strangely tense within. The chief bowman glanced at him indifferently, Josselin paid the copper coin, and the scribe, with scarce an

upward glance, noted his passing and the payment of the tax with a brief stroke of his reed pen, nor did Josselin note that the two men whispered together looking after him, as he rode, his horse's hooves' clash re-echoing from the masonry on the great tunnel under the walls, two flaring cressets lighting its gloom.

AT LAST he was out in the crowded rabbit warren of the streets, being careful to take a backward glance, however, observing the two great towers that flanked the gate on the inner side.

So far as he could see, he rode unnoticed by the crowd, which thronged the narrow way, ceaselessly flowing underneath the high balconies of the houses on the right and left, latticed balconies that nearly met and touched high above the street. From the babble of the crowd, as he halted at a crowded cross street, he gathered that the Governor of Merv, the Emir Maudud, was expected to arrive within the hour, having cut short his sojourn in his country house. This was not good news . . . the return of all those officers and officials of the Emir's suite, would bring half a hundred pairs of eyes familiar with the appearance and bearing of the Nazarene knight and increase his peril by that much more. But there was naught to do about it, save to find the Street of the Silversmiths, hard by which was the shop of the Cathayan seller of silks to whom he had been directed by Tuyuk the Torgut.

A deepening sense of disquiet was seizing upon him. Too long had he been fighting in a tumultuous land, his good sword and quickness of eye and hand guarding life and limb, to disregard the sixth sense that had been developed thereby.

Beneath the hood of his khalat his

eyes sharply ranged over every passing footman and horseman, sweeping up to range over wall, window, and balcony. It was this last measure that gave him the warning.

For as he entered the Street of the Silversmiths, his eye was caught by the flash of a white silken scarf on the balcony ahead and an answering stirring into life of a group of Seljuk Turk warriors, who came pouring out of an alley ahead, their leader drawing his scimitar and pointing at him with a shouted command.

Josselin drew his horse back on its haunches and swung it about with rein and spur so swiftly as to overturn the stand of a seller of bread and to scatter the brown loaves in the dust of the roadway.

Followed by the execrations of the baker and the ululating howl of the Seljuk Turks, sounding like nothing so much as a pack of wolves in full cry, Josselin, leaning low on his horse's neck, sped his horse through the milling throng about him, scattering everyone in his path.

At the first cross street he turned sharply, his horse slipping on the greasy cobblestones but recovering, as he saw the new group of Seljuks, some ten warriors, barring the way directly ahead. There was no turning back.

With a dry steely whirr, he drew the great sword from beneath his khalat, put spurs to his horse and thundered down upon the flashing scimitars of the waiting Turkish guardsmen.

It was their error to have stood waiting instead of setting their horses in motion against him. For he crashed into them like a thunderbolt, cutting with that great whistling blade, its sharp edge sheering through the flesh and bone of the nearest Turk, to rise again and sweep through shield and shield arm of the second and to knock

still a third from the saddle until he was through and beyond the rearing horses and shouting men, unscathed himself save for a slight cut on the cheek from a glancing scimitar, with a few drops of blood spattered on his khalat.

STILL at full gallop, he turned into the next street and then again into the next, seeking to throw off the pursuers in hue and cry behind him. Like a hare pursued by the hounds, he doubled and twisted, finding quieter streets and at the last coming into a broader avenue that, behind high walls, sheltered the houses of the wealthier inhabitants. Down this he reined his horse to a sedate trot, hoping not to arouse the people of this quarters although the noise of the pursuit raged loudly far in rear.

It would be only a matter of minutes until the pursuit caught up with him, he reasoned, and he sought for sanctuary. At the end of this broader street was a high wall with the roof of a great house behind it. Reaching the wall he rode beneath it to where some overhanging poplar trees betokened the presence of an inner garden.

The noise of the pursuit was growing louder. Halting his horse he stood up in the saddle, reaching for the nearest branch, then prodding his horse with a smart blow of his sword scabbard, he swung himself upward as the startled animal, tail and head high, trotted smartly away, affrighted.

CHAPTER VII

THE garden of the Sheykh Saleh ibn Khalil was redolent of the scent of dew-drenched roses this morning. The song birds trilled ecstatically above the pleasant splash and tinkle of the rills and marble fountains. A pet gazelle,

the silver bell atinkle on its collar, came bounding over a bed of sweet scented hyacinths to a low marble bench whereon sat, cross-legged in voluminous silken trousers and gold embroidered jacket, a slim maiden of some eighteen summers.

A faint frown creased her white forehead as she studied an illuminated Arabic missal—"The Elucidation of al Farisi"—and plainly got no pleasure from the enforced task, for her eyes wandered from time to time and she made effort to return to her studies, with a sigh.

Her head came up quickly as a pebble dropped on the lip of the marble pool before her. Idly following the little wavelets cast up by its sinking into the pool, she gave no thought as to whence the pebble might have come. But she looked up again from her missal as the soft eyed gazelle, which nosed her silken cushion, suddenly sprang quivering away from her and stared up at the branches of a tree hard by the wall of the garden just behind her. Curious, she half turned, only to have her ears smitten with the sound of the clank of metal and the thud of some heavy form striking the earth.

Startled, she flung her silken veil about the lower half of her face and turned, repressing a faint scream at what she saw.

The branches of the poplar were still agitated as she stared at the tall strange figure of a young man wearing a fashion of clothes and armor she had never seen before. Her fright and amaze were such that she could make no sound but her great eyes took in the picture of a tall, lithely built stranger, carrying a khalat thrown over one shoulder, underneath which was a surtout of white lamb's wool upon which was emblazoned a single red cross. From underneath his steel cap and the steel coif of

well-oiled chain mail beneath it, there escaped ringlets of hair that shone reddish gold in the morning sunlight. Even in her fright she noted that he was handsome, with hawklike yet gentle clear-cut features, showing strength in the line of chin and jaw, his skin lighter by far than the swarthy faces of the Turks or the olive tinted skin of the Persians and even lighter than those patricians, the Beni Iskander, those Arab descendants of Alexander the Great, who numbered her father among them. There was a slight cut on the stranger's cheek from which tiny gobs of blood welled forth.

As she continued to stare, her fright lessened as the intruder bowed his head to her in greeting and humility, and she had time to note the great sword he carried, its scabbarded point now resting on the soft earth of the flower bed.

It was not until then that something else obtruded itself upon her ears, a distant clamor and shouting and the piercing note of high-pitched yells, sounds that had nearly been drowned out by the murmur of falling waters in the fountains. At the same instant she noted that the stranger's surcoat had been cut and that there was some dark and sticky substance where his sword hilt entered scabbard.

But his voice fell on her ears, seeming to her wonderfully vibrant and moving her strangely but even more strange was the fact that he was speaking in flawless Arabic:

"I crave pardon for this intrusion," he was saying, "I mean thee no harm, my lady. 'Tis only to seek sanctuary from mine enemies that I so rudely intruded upon thy garden. Wilt thou deign, of your mercy, to show kindness to a stranger who is sore beset?"

Alia, the daughter of the Sheykh Saleh ibn Khalil, had already risen, about her the dignity that became the

daughter of an ancient tribe and of a man renowned in Islam for his learning.

"Thou shalt not seek sanctuary in vain," she answered, and Josselin noted that her voice had the same silvery tinkling quality of the falling waters in the garden or of a brook flowing over pebbles, "but it is fair of me to ask who thou art and whence thou camest."

"My lady, I am the Christian knight Josselin de Beaufort, an ambassador from my king to a ruler of nomad tribes beyond the Gate, wrongfully and discourteously misused by Maudud, the Governor of Merv, and beset by his followers. . ."

"However didst escape from that one!" the girl plainly had no use for Maudud, Josselin reasoned and was encouraged thereby.

"Thanks to a little wit and the sparing use of my good blade, so far I have managed to evade him, but his rabble follow me closely. Hark, even now they clamor at the gates!" the girl clutched hand to throat as she turned her head and listened to the sounds made by the shouting and clamor of many voices coming from beyond the house and the distant gates.

"But they will tear thee to pieces if they come up with thee!" she whispered anxiously, and at the note of concern in her voice the stern face of the young knight relaxed and he nodded.

"Aye, they will that, unless I can find place to hide!" he agreed.

IT WAS probably the first real emergency in her young life, but Alia, daughter of a long line of warriors, rose to the test. She glanced anxiously about the garden, looking for sight of her servants but there were none in view. Rising swiftly, she beckoned to him to follow and turning, fled down a small pathway that wound between rose

arbors. The knight strode after her, seeming to carry weight of sword and chain-mail with no effort. At last they came to a small latticed summer house set in the midst of beds of tall herbage which exhaled a rare fragrance. Seeing this small shelter, the Crusader shook his head and halted at the door.

"Nay," he said, "they would seek it out and find me," but she frowned in annoyed fashion and beckoned him within. Inside, a low seat of cool marble extended around the wall, rising up at the end into a wall fountain which sent a trickle of water down into a basin. She stood before this as if undecided a moment, and then stole a glance at the strong face of the Crusader. Seeming to find reassurance in this, she stepped to one side of the fountain, where the outjutting wall tank formed an angle with the wall of the summer house. Here a copper pipe was sunk into the marble. She did something with this. Josselin could not see what it was but the effect was very startling. For the entire tank and fountain swung silently and smoothly out from the wall and disclosed a small arched doorway and some broad flat stone steps that led downwards into the dark. There was the sound of a voice out in the garden and a shout from the direction of the palace-like building at the far end. Josselin did not wait upon his going but stepped down the stairway, bending his tall frame to avoid the low ceiling.

Once he had descended several steps, the light slowly diminished and he found himself in darkness with the entrance closed behind him. He continued down the steps, feeling his way cautiously until he came to level going and found himself in a small, rock walled room. Air came from somewhere but there was no light. His questing hands came into contact with heavy iron

bound chests and some few bales, but what these were he could not tell in the dark. All was silent down here and it was cool after his exertions and he sat himself on one of the chests, to await that which should happen, with such patience as he could muster. He was helpless for the nonce, totally at the mercy of the girl. But something steadfast about her gaze comforted him. Odd that she should have gray eyes, he reflected.

IN THE meantime there was much excitement above ground. An officer of the Governor's Guard, a swarthy Kankali Turk in khalat of fine wool, conical, steel helmet and gilded coat of mail, was demanding admission to the great gates in front of the house. The swordsman on duty at the gate sent hurried word to his master, meantime eyeing the raging mob outside at the grilled iron portals with some trepidation. Four more household guards appeared, their broad-bladed scimitars in hand, while the Governor's officer became more and more impatient.

Finally with great dignity, a grave, elderly man clad in flowing silk khalat, his keen eyes questioning but his finely cut features impassive, appeared at the gate.

"What means this rioting and clamor at my doors?" he asked in a firm voice.

"Open in the name of the Governor!" shouted the officer in an excited tone, "open, 'ere I order the gates battered down!"

"Idle words are a hollow drum," returned the older man composedly, "let us not pour the oil of threats upon the fire of anger. What seek ye at my gates?"

"Open the gates then, O Sheykh, in the name of Allah the Destroyer, for I come seeking an Infidel dog who was pursued to thy walls and disappeared

therein!"

"Thou shouldst have said so before now, O Hasty One," said the Sheykh, "drive back, then, the rabble with thy soldiers and I will have the gates opened."

"So be it," returned the officer and turning, ordered his men to lay the flat of their scimitars against the backs of the mob. The rabble gave back, howling in fright, as a space was cleared for the gates and the great iron portals were swung open and closed after the officer and his assistants.

"It is in the garden that we should search above all," said the officer, and waved to the guardians of the gate to follow him as he turned towards the entrance to the garden, a small door set within the interior wall.

"But hold a moment!" said the Sheykh, "the garden is used by the women of my house at this hour. Hold until I see that they are within shelter!"

Even an arrogant officer of the Governor's Guard knew better than to force entry to the women's quarters and so he waited while the Sheykh called his major-domo, a huge eunuch, and directed that the garden be cleared of any members of his household. In a few more minutes the eunuch returned, grumbling that all was well and himself opened the small gate, glaring in a none too friendly manner at the swaggering Kankali Turkish officer of the Governor's Guard, as he strode into the garden.

In a few minutes, the officer reappeared, shaking his head.

"Strange," he said, "but the Infidel dog has disappeared! And at least a hundred people saw him lose himself in the direction of thy garden wall," and then he glanced at the house, the huge entrance of which stared at him across the courtyard."

"With thy permission, O Sheykh, I

will search the dwelling. Mayhap the dog of an Unbeliever has hidden himself in one of thy chambers."

"As Allah wills!" said the older man, gravely inclining his head, but he motioned the chief eunuch to accompany the officer. This search was longer and it was twenty minutes at least before the Turkish officer returned, frowning and shaking his head.

"It is the will of Allah that I should not find him now," said the Turk, "but I will set a strong guard about the place and no person will be allowed to enter or leave without being scrutinized by my sentinels. And the wrath of the Governor and of the Shah whose power he represents, be upon any man who harbors the Infidel dog!" With this parting threat, he swaggered to the gates and passed through to the outside, where he issued a storm of orders and covered his chagrin at his failure by berating his men. As he stood there, one amongst them led up a stout war horse which was saddled with a plain, high-cantled, high-pommeled saddle and wore a frontlet of steel mesh upon its chest. A heavy battle mace hung from the saddle bow.

"It is the horse of the infidel," called the officer, "have it put in thy stable, O Sheykh, until such time as I send for it," and this matter thus disposed of, the officer continued his placing of a guard about the walls and grounds of the property.

AS FOR the keen-eyed old Sheykh he returned slowly to the portico of his house where he was joined by a younger man clothed in flowing silken robes. There was something foppish about this younger man. His small, black beard was curled and oiled and his hair was pomaded and an odor of perfume came from his person. His face was unusually pale and two ex-

ceedingly black eyes stared out of it like the eyes of some unquiet animal.

"Another indignity from Maudud, the Governor," said the younger man with an angry toss of his head, "it is high time, O my uncle, that measures were taken against that dog! I tell thee he is envious of thy wealth and would use any excuse to lay hold upon it. Strike back at him 'ere it be too late!"

"If a dog bites my leg," returned the older man quietly, "does it become my dignity that I in turn should bite the leg of the dog?"

"Wise sayings will not turn aside the arrows of envy," retorted the younger man, "nor will a humble spirit spare thee the wrath of the powerful. I tell thee, O my uncle, that it is wrong to permit this upstart dog to heap indignities upon us."

"What wouldst have me do, O son of my adopted Sister?" asked the Sheykh gently.

"Use thy influence at the Shah's court. Call upon relatives and friends, exert your power to have this Kankali dog put out of office!"

"It may be that thou art right, O son of my adopted sister," returned the older man gently and then in a bland voice and with a quick stabbing side glance at the younger man he went on, smoothly, "but whether I take thy advice or not, I am sensible of the interest shown in my affairs and find it very commendable, thy zeal, as the future husband of Alia, in guarding the wealth which will some day be hers."

The sallow face of the young man flushed darkly but he said naught, abruptly turning on his heel instead and reentering the house.

The sun rose to its zenith and sank. Alia, on pretense of wishing to eat, solitary, in the garden, smuggled food to Josselin in the marble crypt beneath

the summer house. Evening came and with it she came again bearing food beneath her cloak and opened the secret wall opening. Josselin came up the steps and they sat above in the darkness. Outside was the tinkle and murmur of falling waters and the rustle of night winds. A low murmur came from beyond the walls where the city rabble still hunted for him, impelled thereto by the price that had been set upon his head. From outside the garden walls came the periodic calls of the Turkish sentries, sworn to capture him on sight. But here, in the cool marble of the summer house was momentary peace, grateful after dust and sweat and fighting.

They talked in whispers, of this and that, of Maudud the Governor and his wickedness and his hatred for her father ". . . and my father is exceedingly wroth because of the shame that Maudud hath put upon him in searching his house and grounds, and," here her voice became grave, "Selim, the son of my father's foster sister, says it is very dangerous for my father, for if Maudud's men should find thee here, Maudud would use it as excuse to throw my father into prison and confiscate all his wealth!"

JOSSELIN paused with a morsel of food half way to his mouth and then slowly placed it back upon the dish.

"Nay, I have been heedless," he stated, "for it is true that I bring much danger upon thy father . . . I had best depart upon the instant!" and he rose, brushing the crumbs from his surtout.

"Nay, nay!" her voice pled with him. "It is impossible. They would tear thee to pieces! Wait until the clamor a little abates, at least, and mayhap the guards will be removed on the morrow."

But as the Koran says so truly, what man can escape his Kismet?

For Selim, the foster nephew of the

Sheykh, found his thoughts unsuitable to slumber and walked abroad in the night air, turning toward the coolness of the garden. To his surprise he found the garden gate unlatched. Wondering a little at this neglect, he strolled along the paths, hands behind him and head on chest thinking his thoughts in secret.

Josselin came at last to an end of his repast and quenched his thirst in the clear cold water of the fountain near at hand, returning quickly to that perfumed presence that was but a shadow in the darkness of the summer house. Not yet had he seen her face, naught but her eyes, but the eyes were brave and steadfast and he felt a warm feeling of comradeship for this girl of Islam, herself as slender and finely tempered as a steel blade of Damascus.

The night drew about them like a sable cloak and deepened the pleasant feeling of intimacy between them.

Surprised himself at the breaking down of his usual reserve in talk to women, he found that he was telling her of his wanderings and battles, of his mission to the court of Genghis Khan, that mysterious ruler out of High Asia, a portent of possible invasion.

"And thou dost not fear him, this Genghis Khan?" asked Alia. "I have heard it said that he is the new Scourge of Islam, come to cleanse us of our evil doing. Many of my father's friends say, that he is naught but a barbarian chifetaïn, swollen with pride of conquest over a few desert mauraunders on the Roof of the World, but others say that he is a fiend, incarnate, commanding hordes of blood thirsty and fanatical warriors who are like to rush down from the mountains like a torrent and overwhelm the Shah and all his mighty empire."

"As to that I know not," returned Josselin. "I know only that he is friendly to men of my race and religion

and hath before this received embassies and treated them with courtesy. I hope that he . . ."

She interrupted with a warning clutch on his arm.

"S-s-h-h!" she warned tensely. "Hark! Was not that someone stirring without the summer house?"

Silent and with bated breath they listened there in the dark, nor heard any further sound save the soft music of falling waters and the sigh of the night winds in the trees and, afar off, the liquid notes of a nightingale singing his evening hymn to the rose.

"'Twas naught but a falling leaf or some such matter," Josselin gave opinion after a moment or two. Reassured, they continued their whispering, drawn together by the darkness of the night and the thrill of danger that hung over them.

"I have heard the servants and slaves," whispered Alia, "say that the Nazarenes eat little children and commit all manner of excesses, but seeing thee, I cannot believe that," she ended, naively.

"Nay, we are as others," protested Josselin.

He drew both her hands toward him, no doubt with the intention of proving it better. But she slipped her hands out of his, gently but with quiet firmness and drew away from him imperceptibly. There was silence for a moment in the summer house.

THAT silence was broken by the ring of steel against stone. A lantern was suddenly flashed out from beneath a cloak and its rays reflected upon steel and shone back with the glitter of harsh and unfriendly eyes. The summer house was crowded with the sword bearers of the Sheykh's household, at their head the portly chief eunuch, equipped with a huge, broad

bladed scimitar.

Josselin de Beaufort's sword had already leaped to his hand and he stood with the girl behind him, her eyes sick with dread.

For a second they stood thus, the opposing swordsmen, and then a querulous, angry but withal triumphant voice came from behind the guards.

"Spoke I not truly, O my Uncle?" it was the voice of Selim, the foster nephew of the Sheykh. "Said I not that she sat here, shameless, alone in the summer house with the infidel dog?"

"Aye, it was truth!" came the weary voice of the Sheykh, and the sword bearers gave aside as he entered the doorway and stood revealed in the lantern's light, white bearded in his silken khalat, in his eyes a great sorrow.

At sight of him, Josselin dropped his sword point to the ground.

"Come ye in friendship or come ye in anger?" asked the knight.

The white bearded Sheykh raised his eyebrows, startled at hearing his own tongue coming from this strange figure in its unfamiliar habiliments.

"I come as a Seeker after Knowledge," returned the Sheykh. "It happens that it is my garden that hath been invaded and that it is my daughter who crouches there behind thee as though needing protection from her own father!"

With a sob, Alia ran to her father and flung herself at his feet, clinging to his knees.

"He was sore beset, O my father!" she cried, "and I did but give him shelter and food."

"Aye, no handsome stranger need fear for lack of food and shelter so long as there are silly girls in the world," returned the old Sheykh dryly. But nevertheless he bent and drew her to her feet, giving her a reassuring pat on the shoulder in all kindness as she clung to

him. "And thou, O Stranger, what of thee?"

"Thy daughter has spoken truly," replied Josselin, his bearing high and proud, for he disliked this being caught alone, as at a forbidden tryst with a maiden. "Out of the great goodness of her heart she gave me shelter when I was sore beset and gave me food when I hungered. I would wish that no blame come to her for her gentle courtesy, no matter what evil may be in store for me."

Josselin's voice was grave as he inclined his head toward the girl and then he looked the old Sheykh full in the eye. "Ye have right to question me, and if it be true, as one of thy poets hath said, that one acquires merit by answering the questions of wisdom, then would I answer thy questions in all honesty."

"Where didst learn to speak our tongue with such fluency?" asked the Sheykh, curious.

"While yet a boy I was taken captive and spent five years under the roof of Mahmoud, lord of Hamah at the time, may he rest in peace . . ."

The old Sheykh's eyes kindled but he interposed a swift question.

"Mayhap thou recalleth the name of his head falconer, then . . ." Josselin smiled.

"Gana'im, he who trained al Yashur, the greatest falcon in Islam, and who trained me in the art of falconry . . ." The Sheykh nodded, well pleased.

"I also have followed Al Yashur with my old friend Mahmoud, peace be on his soul. Thou art then the Nazarene boy, whose father was a baron of Al Kuds (Jerusalem) and was treacherously slain by Timur al Molok, now Wazir."

JOSSELIN'S face grew bleak. "I am that one. Today I am an emissary

of Genghis Khan but have been harshly used by the Emir Maudud, Governor of Merv, and, hunted like a dog, by his rabble, have sought sanctuary in thy garden. The lady, thy daughter, hath hid me away and brought me food, even as I have said." And Josselin de Beaufort stood very straight and very tall and with no sign of fear upon him.

The old Sheykh glanced down at the empty silver dish.

"Ye have eaten my bread and salt, and art in a manner of speaking, the foster son of my dearest friend, who esteemed thee deeply, as I well remember. There is no talk of evil befalling thee while guest under my roof!"

Then, turning to his sword bearers, he commanded them to put away their weapons:

"And let no word of the stranger within our midst go beyond these walls, for if anyone of thee desire to encompass my destruction, he hath only to whisper a word to the Governor's guard at the gate and I am a ruined man!"

"To hear is to obey, O most noble Sheykh!" the sword bearers bowed their heads. The one dissenting voice was that of Selim, the foster nephew of the Sheykh.

"I think it great shame, O my Uncle!" he cried, "that this infidel dog be permitted to remain under thy shelter, risking thy life and property every second that he is within these walls!"

"My life, in any case, hath nearly run its course," returned the Sheykh, "and as for my property it will be disposed of as God wills. In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate, I bid thee welcome, O Nazarene, to my home!"

With that the venerable Sheykh of Islam waved his followers on ahead and with Alia on his arm waited courteously for Josselin de Beaufort to accompany him into the house.

Josselin found his heart touched by this kindly and courteous Moslem, some of which he tried to express as he strode beside him, his sword in sheath upon his arm.

"I had already eaten thy bread and salt before ever coming into thy garden, O Sheykh," he stated and then went on to tell of how he had been led by one he esteemed to be a Mongol agent, to quarter himself and his train of men and animals at the Sheykh's country house outside the walls of Merv.

"Aye, 'tis likely that it was one of the agents of the Mongols who led thee there; I am held in some small esteem by them for my efforts, through the small influence I have at the court of Shah Muhammad, to maintain peace with the Mongols by granting them the little they desire, which is only freedom to trade in the dominions of the Shah . . ."

"So I have heard," nodded Josselin, "but I deem it poor requital of thy hospitality both to me and to my men, to remain longer under thy roof and endanger thy life and goods. Give me but a horse, O Sheykh, and I will cut my way through these guards at the gate and win through to open country."

"Ye speak without knowledge of the difficulties and dangers that beset thee," returned the Sheykh gravely.

"Mayhap it is the will of God that I should suffer misfortune, although I do not believe so, but that gives me no warrant for bringing misfortune upon thee and thine, who have treated me like a very brother and son, so that my heart is nigh to burst with gratitude."

"Rail not at misfortune, my son," advised the Sheykh in kindly fashion. "As the poet hath said, go give thanks that thou ridest not upon a donkey for the moment, thou art yet not a donkey upon which men ride."

CHAPTER VIII

SO SAYING they passed into the house by a secret entrance to avoid being seen by any of the Governor's guardsmen at the gates and here the Sheykh bade good night to his daughter. She departed but paused a second by the door, casting a single glance at Josselin, talking with her father and unaware.

Only one person saw the glance and had either the Sheykh or Josselin seen the flash of jealous rage which contorted the face of Selim, the foster nephew, into a thing dreadful to see, they might have found cause for reflection.

But being deep in talk, the two men did not see and scarce indeed noted when Selim excused himself and withdrew from the room.

And while the two talked, discussing the state of Islam and Christendom and the expected arrival of the Emperor Frederick to take over the Crusade, and of the capture of Otrar and the threat of Genghis Khan, poised like a lightning charged cloud above the highlands of Asia, Selim, the nephew, twisting his perfumed beard, walked back and forth among the fluted columns of the entrance hall, his mind a seething mass.

CHAPTER IX

THE Emir Maudud, Governor Merv, was giving a feast this night in his banqueting hall at the citadel of Merv. The guest of honor was no less a personage than His Excellency, Timur al Molok, Wazir of His Majesty, the Shah Muhammad. It was a magnificent feast, with some fifty guests, including the high officers of Maudud's garrison and the *atabegs* and *emirs* of Timur al Molok's entourage. The lights of the

varicolored lamps glittered on silvered and gilded damascened chain mail, on jewelled sword and dagger hilts, and shone on silk vests and turbans without number. Silver flagons of wine and *raki* stood at every plate and the music of flutes, zithers, rebecks and drums rose and fell and the talk around the divans behind the low tables rose and fell with it, talk of the attack of Genghis Khan and the taking of Otrar. Men feasted nevertheless.

It should have been a scene to gladden the heart of a host. But Maudud did not look joyous. Timur al Molok sat on his right hand.

The cruel, arrogant face of the Wazir gazed about the assemblage, absently. Only once did his greenish eyes light up and that was when the troupe of dancing boys from Samarkand came out before the tables. They were painted and perfumed, were those boys, and their writhings and posturing were not such as to recommend them to the devout.

But of the devout they were few in that banquet hall. Of the forty or so boon companions of Maudud, most of them Seljuk Turks, there was not one who was not hated by the inhabitants of Merv. For they were oppressors of the people, these Kankali Turks, whom the Shah had seen fit to put in power over the city of Merv.

Once the dancing boys had cleared the floor, Timur al Molok leaned over to his host and spoke low-voiced.

"Touching the matters brought to thy attention by the Fedawi messenger from our Master at Alamut, what progress hath been made?" he asked.

"In the matter of the Nazarene ambassador?" asked Maudud.

". . . and the matter of the Sheykh Saleh ibn Khalil!" Timur added dryly.

Now Timur al Molok was one of the three grand priors of the order of the

Assassins, holding the power of life or death over all lesser ranks. Maudud's lips were dry as he made answer.

"May the curse of Allah descend upon that Nazarene knight!" he swore. "Not later than yesternight I had him as a cat holds a mouse, toying with him and his men, my bowmen with arrows on the bowstring ready to overpower him and put him to the torture. . . ."

"And then?" Timur raised his eyebrows.

"He seized my son and held him as hostage and fled with his men, using the form of my little son as shield! Heard you ever of such beastliness?" Timur forbore comment but waited in glacial silence. "And then the fellow hath the temerity to ride alone into Merv, into the face of a trap set for him, and to disappear again after killing two of my men and wounding a third, again escaping my wrath. . . ." Maudud stared moodily at the table before him and then filled his cup with wine and downed it doggedly.

"He must be a djinn so completely to outwit as clever a man as yourself, O Maudud!" Timur's voice was bland, "and to outwit thee not once but twice! Mayhap he is a magician and uses enchantments!" So sunk was Maudud in his dejected thoughts that he missed the irony.

"Nay!" he shook his head, "he is a very devil at stratagems. My men pursued him through the city only to lose him somewhere in the vicinity of the palace of the Sheykh Saleh. . . ."

Timur looked up sharply. "Is there aught of chance that the Sheykh Saleh may have harbored him? If so, it may be that thy task will be eased in separating that old bag of bones from his wealth."

"So I thought, so I hoped. The Nazarene's horse was found running loose in the vicinity but after careful search of

Saleh's palace and garden by the captain of my guard and his men, not a trace could we find of the Nazarene knight, may he eat the bitter wood of the tree Zaqqum throughout eternity!"

Timur tapped on the table with a delicately manicured finger nail. "It did not occur to thee or thy captain of the guard to—ah—leave some bit of evidence about that would give excuse to seize Saleh?"

"Bismallah!" Maudud placed hand to brow and looked heavenwards, "Fool that I was! I tore with confusion the collar of patience in my anxiety to seize him, and gave no thought to such a stratagem. . . . but perhaps it is not too late even now!" Hope crept into his voice, and turning to a servant he gave order that the captain of the guard should attend him at once.

BUT there was no need of the order. The captain of the guard was even now on his way to his master's side. There was one outside, he reported, who demanded audience with the Governor on important affairs.

"Who is this one who holds before his face the buckler of impudence and dares disturb me at a feast?" Maudud demanded, raising himself angrily.

"It is Selim, Most Noble Governor, the nephew of the Sheykh Saleh ibn Khalil—claiming that he has momentous tidings, for thy private ear, concerning the whereabouts of the Nazarene dog who escaped thy wrath today again!"

And suddenly Maudud's dejection dropped from him as a man's khalat drops from his shoulders and he sat bolt upright, his eyes gleaming.

"And what manner of captain of the guard are ye that he was not brought to me immediately?" he stormed. "Go, dog from a nameless kennel and bring this man immediately!"

Thus it was that the revelers who were not too bemused by the wine saw the pale face and burning eyes of Selim, the foster nephew of the Sheykh Saleh ibn Khalil, in close proximity to the ear of the Governor of Merv. That worthy listened, his eyes half closed, nodding now and then in deep satisfaction. At last he clapped his hands in signal to the servant and called again for the captain of the guard.

"It shall be as I have said, O Selim," he assured the Sheykh's nephew, "A full third of the treasure and the Sheykh's daughter to thee in marriage."

But Selim noted not that the eyes of the Governor flickered as he spoke and that there was a derisive smile on the Governor's face as he issued swift orders to the captain of the guard who thereupon silently departed upon his appointed task, the time being half an hour before dawn.

CHAPTER X

MEANWHILE in the luxurious library of the Sheykh's palace Josselin de Beaufort had divested himself of shirt and coif of chain mail and it lay with the steel leg and thigh armor heaped up by his sword and helmet against the divan. He labored under some excitement and no little amazement and disbelief.

"And mine own horse and its housing is stabled here within thy walls?" he asked, incredulous.

"Even so," nodded the Sheykh nibbling on some sugared almonds from a silver platter.

"God and St. Michael!" breathed the knight in his own tongue. "It is a sign from Heaven!"

"I do not understand," remarked the Sheykh politely, and his eyes widened as his guest rose to his feet.

"I said naught," explained Josselin,

"save that God hath sent me a sign and a symbol to make me set about my task." And he moved to his weight of weapons and armor.

"Ye would go from here now . . . at once?" the Sheykh was startled. Josselin nodded as he started to array himself in his body armor and to fasten his gilded spurs.

"But it is reckless and impossible beyond all seeming!" protested the Sheykh; "the gates are beset with guards. There would be no winning through them—one man against twenty!"

"But give me my own horse between my knees and my own sword in hand and I will win through hell and back again," said Josselin simply.

The old Sheykh looked at the great frame of the Nazarene knight and the girth of his chest and the breadth of his shoulders and sighed a little wistfully.

"It may be that Allah will grant thee success!" he admitted. "It lacks but a few minutes to midnight and the guards will have relaxed their watch. But ye would leave my roof and ye must carry with thee a gift!" The Sheykh rose to his feet. "While thou art donning thy armor I will bring some small token for thee!"

And with that he was gone, leaving Josselin alone to finish the buckling on of his war harness. He was engaged in putting on the leather baldric that carried his sword sheath when his ear noted a light step behind him and he turned about quickly and his eyes lighted up at sight of Alia.

Her head, with its gray eyes wide above the silken yashmak that covered her face, was held high, like that of a slender, desert-bred horse.

"Thou art departing?" she asked, her voice low, "is not the danger great?"

"I can no longer remain and en-

danger thee and thy father . . . too much kindness have I had for me to risk harm to thee and thine . . ." he halted lamely, as her eyes sought and held his, something that he could not fathom in their depths.

"But before I depart, I crave one boon, O daughter of Saleh!" he said, gazing at that silk that concealed her features, all save her eyes from his gaze, "I go on my journey afar from here, with many lonely days and nights before me. It would be kind did you let me once behold your face, so that I may carry it on the tablets of my mind, in far journeyings, and keep ever with me, until my dying day, the image of the gracious girl who aided me in my hour of need. Is it asking too much?"

For a space no longer than it might take a feather to eddy from hand to ground did she hesitate, then, with a slight catch in her voice she made answer. "Nay, it is not asking too much," and with a single quick motion she removed the silken scarf and gazed at him, wide eyed and unsmiling, with something questing in her gaze, and a half fear.

Josselin caught his breath and stood silent for a space.

"God and St. Michael!" he whispered and then awkwardly, fumbling for the words, "I am thinking of paintings in the churches at Rome, in Jerusalem and in Bethlehem . . . and the ikons in Byzantium . . . poor and pallid, and lifeless things, it is not among those that I have beheld such loveliness . . . it was on a Greek vase or mayhap a carving in ivory . . . still poor and lifeless things . . . and yet again I bethink me of a slender golden mare . . . desert bred and the treasure of the Nejd . . . save that the mare lacked the beauty of finely carved alabaster, rose tinted, that is thy face. . . ."

The half fear went out of the eyes

of the daughter of Saleh and her face crinkled into laughter. "Thou shouldst have been Arab born," she said, "none but an Arab would think of praising a woman by comparing her to a horse!"

"All the same," he said abashed by her laughter, "she was a beautiful thing—that mare, dainty high bred and fleet as the wind of dawn . . ." but there came a step and Alia quickly replaced the scarf about her face.

"Go with God, Sheykh Josselin! she whispered, "We shall always be friends?" again there was that slight catch in her voice.

"Always!" but then the old Sheykh came in, bearing some object wrapped in silk in his hands, nor showed any surprise at seeing his daughter there.

HE HAD gone, moving surprisingly quickly for a man of his years, first past the stables where he had commanded the groom of the night to saddle the Nazarene's horse and bridle it and hold it in readiness. This done, the Sheykh provided himself with a stable lantern and made his way out to the garden, the light concealed under his robe, until he came to the small summer house.

Entering this, he strode to the jutting wall behind the fountain, moved a certain section of copper pipe, swung open the door and descended to the rock walled room beneath. The flickering rays of the lantern disclosed the walls high piled with many cedar chests but the Sheykh paid no heed to these.

He went to a great iron bound chest and with the keys on his belt, undid the outer lock and successively opened two inner covers and drew aside a covering, whereat the light gleamed back from innumerable jeweled facets and the sheen of gold and reflected back from blood-red rubies, and made pearls glow like frozen moonlight and scintillated

from sapphires and diamonds. Selecting an object from among these things, the Sheykh carefully relocked the box and returned whence he had come.

Josselin was talking to Alia when her father entered the room.

"Behold!" said the old man and began to unwrap the silk from about the package. Uncovering it at last, the light from the hanging lamp shone blood red on a great Badakshan ruby which graced the hilt of a dagger of fine Damascus steel, its gripe studded with star sapphires and its pommel encrusted with diamonds. It was sheathed in a scabbard of gold and ivory, set with gems, and the whole thing a gift fit for an emperor.

Josselin was astounded at the richness of the thing and demurred strongly at taking away with him a present of such great price in addition to all the kindness he had received.

"It is of little moment," the Sheykh shrugged the protestations away, "My years are not long in the land and if there is one thing certain in this vale of uncertainty called Life, it is that one cannot take his wealth with him to the hereafter.

"How can the falcon fly to the sky when the stone of avarice is tied to its wing? Take it, my friend, and go, and Allah be with thee . . . here is a woolen khalat that will cover thy great fame . . . wear it and mayhap it will be possible to pass among the guards unobserved, although there is heavy reward on thy head and it is likely they will lust after that."

THE saddled horse was waiting in the shadows of the courtyard, a slave holding its bridle.

"Heed now what I say," advised the Sheykh, "ride straight to the city's western gate. Its guard is less watchful than that of the main gate. Once out-

side take the road down the river and turn off at the first hamlet and overpass it for so much time as it takes a man to recite the first ten names of Allah and you will come to a little known back road leading to my country house, where are thy men. Remain there throughout the day which is almost upon us. Go, my son, and thank me not. Seldom have I been drawn to a man as I have been to thee!"

"Nor I to thee and thine, O Sheykh," returned Josselin, "so much so that I cannot depart from under the roof of thy country house until I am assured that all is well with thee and that no harm hath befallen thee because of the great kindness thou hast shown to me!"

The servants of the Sheykh had meanwhile brought steaming platters of food to the guards without the gate and enticed them into the gate house where they feasted nor left any man on watch.

Josselin set foot in stirrup and vaulted into the saddle seat from which he bent low, whispering to Alia:

"Farewell, daughter of Saleh, and thank thee for thy kindness and loveliness and may the days be short until again we meet!"

"God be with thee, Sheykh Josselin," she whispered in return, "and keep thee under His care against the day of thy returning!"

The gate opened quietly and Josselin rode forth, feeling it close as silently behind him. Not until then did he hear the trample of hooves near at hand, growing louder as they swept toward him from the direction of the citadel.

CHAPTER XI

SO NEAR as he could determine, the enemy horsemen were still distant, and he swung his horse along under the shadow of the wall. As he passed across

the head of that broad avenue by which he had come to the garden of the Sheykh, the trampling of the approaching horsemen grew louder and Josselin sensed that in the darkness they were coming by that route, whereat he sought a smaller street beyond and started to turn into it, when suddenly he reined in his horse. Voices came to him and the clatter of hooves coming rapidly nearer and he sat silent in the darker shadow of the wall, until three or four horsemen, probably a patrol, he reasoned, passed by, unaware and turned in the direction whence he had come.

Dawn was already beginning to pale the East when he arrived at the West Gate, drifting quietly in amongst the carts and mule trains of merchants ready to take the road so soon as the gate was opened a half hour hence.

There came the wild shrill call of the muezzins, the gate slowly opened and press of horsemen and footmen and carts began to push their way through. Josselin, hooded, and with his khalat draped over his saddle housings, came at last to the sleepy bowmen of the guard, who waved him on with scarce a glance. He passed out through the gate, finding that there was a fine sweat gathered on his forehead, and breathed deep of the air of the open country.

From behind him the muezzins reiterated calls to prayer floated down to him from the topmost minaret of the great mosque, hard by the citadel of Merv.

"There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his Prophet!" spake the voice of the muezzin, and his words drifted down to an iron bound window set in the wall not twenty paces from the main gate of the Governor's stronghold.

In the dark recesses of the cell behind the barred window, a shadow stirred and a voice murmured the morn-

ing devotions, the voice of the Sheykh Salehibn Khalil.

"In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful . . ." whispered the old man as he had made shift to perform his ablutions. Despite the seizure of his person, his family and his property, the old Sheykh was outwardly serene and untroubled.

It was as still and serene and untroubled when, an hour later, there came a clank of steel, the jingle of keys and the tramp of feet in the corridor. The door of his cell was flung open, admitting two guards with drawn scimiters, who stood on either side of the entrance as the form of Maudud, the Governor, entered the door.

"So, my venerable friend, hast become my guest at last!" greeted Maudud, his eyes reddened with the feasting of the night before.

The Sheykh made no reply, regarding his enemy steadfastly. Maudud grew fretful under the calm unimpassioned eyes of the man whom he hated. And then the Sheykh found voice.

"Why hast thou done this to me and mine, O Maudud?" he asked quietly.

"Why! he asks why!" Maudud flung his hands wide and raised his eyes to heaven as if the query transcended earthly understanding. "Thou knowest very well why, O Father of Evil! As if 'twere not enough openly to harbor an enemy to the Shah and to defy my authority, thou hast increased thy crime by conspiring against the peace of the realm!" Maudud's face contorted into an assumption of righteous rage.

"It is not the veins of the neck which stand out in argument—but the proofs—which should be full of meaning. And where, O Maudud, are the proofs?" asked the Sheykh, his voice calm.

"Proofs! the dog asks for proofs! Know then, O Father of Misery, that

it was out of the mouth of thine own kinsman that I have the proofs, aye, even of thy own nephew, Selim!"

"Selim has told thee this thing?" The Sheykh's face was expressionless.

"Aye, Selim and none other. What think thee of that, thou hoary-headed Father of Lies?"

The Sheykh's face was as if carved in stone.

"I think that to do good to the evil is evil; that only a fool plants trees on barren soil and that a grateful dog is better by far than an ungrateful man."

"**E**VEN so," grunted Maudud, "but thou art passing bold in thy evil doing, O Saleh, and prate wise proverbs and show no sign of fear. But wilt thou be brave on that day, soon to come, when the executioner brings out his scimitar like the tongue of a thirsty man, and thy head rolls like an over ripe melon on the floor? Wilt thou not tremble then and plead for mercy?"

"Every man's burden, O Maudud, is suited to his strength, and heavy to the ant is the foot of the locust," returned the Sheykh calmly.

But the Governor's brow was knitted in thought—he had only the ten days allotted him to deliver the Sheykh's treasure and already the ten days were passing swiftly. He broke in on the words of the venerable Sheykh.

"Look thee now, O man of ill omen! as required by the laws of the Shah, I have sequestered thy property and put my seals upon it. But it is reported to me that there is very little treasure to be found and that of thy great wealth, naught but a few dirhems have been seized by my servants. Where, O Saleh, hast thou concealed thy great treasure of gold and jewels?"

"Where i n d e e d?" murmured the Sheykh, and clasped his hands, "Where indeed, but in a place safe from hungry

jackals and prowling dogs!"

"So?" Maudud's eyes flared cruelly. "There are ways of making thee talk, the torture of the bowstring and the hot pincers and the wrack have drawn truth from braver man than thou, O Saleh!"

"Perhaps," admitted the Sheykh and brushed a speck of dust from his khalat, "but by the grace of Allah, O Maudud, here is one that hath no fear of thy tortures. Should I die under the bowstring and the hot steel, I die with my lips sealed."

"And my years are many, O Maudud, and my bones are brittle and Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful, would give me quick release from thy tortures."

Maudud frowned. There was truth in the old man's statement. His aged frame would not long survive the rigors of torture and once dead his secret would perish with him. Maudud raged inwardly at the defiance of the old man. But out of his rage came an idea.

"True, O Saleh, but there are other tortures than those of the flesh . . . thou hast an only daughter, now under lock and key with the negress Fatimah to guard her. What sayest thou, O Unfortunate One, if I threw her to my Kurdish soldiers to do with as they will? Ha! now thy face blancheth and thy hands tremble!"

"Dog! Thou wouldst not dare!" the Sheykh's voice quivered and he threw out a hand as though seeking for support.

"Put not thy trust in my lack of daring, O Saleh . . . know now that shouldst thou remain stubborn concerning the hiding place of the treasure, know that, as thy gray head rolls in the dust, thy daughter is being made the sport and plaything of my Kurdish soldiers!"

And with that Maudud turned and

left the cell, leaving the old man leaning weakly against the walls of his prison.

FOLLOWING along that river road, as the Sheykh had told him, Josselin passed through the hamlet, and so far beyond it as it took to breathe the ten names of Allah, finding the small road winding through the tamarisks at the last.

A few minutes more of galloping brought him to the edge of the village, beyond which lay the country house of the Sheykh. The village he circled, having no mind to be seen by the villagers, and came up in the fields behind the country house. There, one of his men-at-arms at watch on the wall, espied him and quickly admitted him through the small postern gate.

There was joyous greeting from Baldwin de Berg, and Brian his esquire and Diccon the sergeant and the men-at-arms, and the servants of the Sheykh brought forth fruit and eggs and milk. As he munched this fare he told of his journey and the events that had transpired while his listeners marvelled.

Being weary, he sought some sleep but it seemed that he had scarce closed his eyes when a knocking on the bedroom door brought him up with a start and for a moment he stared about him, stupid with sleep, not knowing where he was nor how he had come there . . . But the sight of the man who entered, one of the burly sword bearers of the Sheykh's household brought him to instant wakefulness.

The man was woebegone and showed the signs of great strain and suffering.

"What misfortune brings thee here?" asked Josselin, already sensing that something had gone amiss at the household of the Sheykh.

"Allah's curse on the dog of a Governor of Merv, and may he burn in

Gehenna!" cried the sword bearer, tearing at his beard.

"Quick, tell me what hath happened!" Josselin's voice was impatient and worried.

"Oh, my master!" the man half sobbed, "scarce hadst thou departed from under the roof of my master when the captain of the Governor's guard came with a multitude of swordsmen and forced entry. He dragged forth the Sheykh, and his daughter, whom Allah protect, on excuse that thy glove had been found in one of the chambers! The house was given over to looting and search for my master's treasure and now the Governor hath put his seals upon the doors and no man may enter, and a guard stands before the gates. . . ."

"The Sheykh and his daughter!" Josselin's face grew bleak, "What does the Governor intend doing to them?"

"The Governor has condemned the Sheykh to perish at the hands of the executioner eight days hence at the setting of the first new moon of Shawwul. Until that time his daughter will be held in prison. After the Sheykh's death she will be an orphan and can be disposed of as the Governor may please, in marriage or into his own harem!"

Josselin stood stricken as he realized to the full the terrible punishment inflicted upon his friends. Then he was like some raging animal, calling for sword and horse to ride back and rescue them and die fighting if need be, in defense of the man and the girl who had sheltered him in his hour of danger.

But cooler counsel prevailed, led by the sword bearer, Ayoub, who had brought the grave tidings. Ayoub explained, sensibly enough, that it were better to remain alive and plot the rescue of the Sheykh and his daughter and see that justice was done, than to die, fighting hopeless odds, with noth-

ing gained by his death. There was sense in this and Josselin grew calmer while a plan began to form in his head.

Last word was that Genghis Khan was already at Bokhara with the Horde and had taken that city.

"Look ye!" he told those assembled about him, "I ride to Bokhara. I have some small honor with the Kha Khan . . . it may be that he will give me aid in warriors to return and humble this vile Maudud . . . it is a long chance but the only one, as I see it . . . do thou, Baldwin, hold the men-at-arms here in secret and quiet until my return . . . and do thou, Ayoub, return to the city and do all possible to aid the prisoners and ameliorate their harsh lot, if possible getting word of hope to them of my efforts to save them. . . ."

"But it is six days to Bokhara at the least by fast horse," protested Ayoub, "and six days return . . . and there be but eight days counting this day!" the sword bearer shook his head.

"It is not six days traveling Mongol-wise!" stated Josselin and called for a horse and the guide who had brought them to this house.

"Knowest thou the way to the first post of the Yam?" asked Josselin.

"Aye, lord, 'tis but a half hour's ride from here."

THAT first post of the Yam, that marvellous Mongol horse express, was hidden under the lee of a hill, hard by a desert well, with what seemed only to a casual observer to be a group of nomad Turkomens scattered about.

Men looked up indifferently as Josselin came galloping down the hill in a rattle of gravel and stones and brought his horse to a halt, leaping off.

Flinging open the cloak he showed the Tiger Tablet.

"*Kai!*" the nearest man cried, and bowed low, then leaped to his horse's

head. Others came running, with their leader bowing, hand to mouth, one brought water and another food, curded milk and a piece of mutton, while a fresh horse was brought up, saddled and bridled.

In another minute Josselin was mounted and away, the fresh horse forging sturdily up the gravelly slopes and lengthening out into a tireless steady stride on the level going.

Thereafter the successive halts at one *yam* post after another became a blurred memory of hurrying figures, of stiffly dismounting from one horse and swinging onto the back of another, and of steady and relentless galloping, hour after hour, with the sun dropping out of view and the chill of the desert night coming on, and the stars wheeling in their courses above, while the earth flashed by beneath.

Josselin noted now that the Mongols were no longer disguised but appeared in their lacquered armor and wolf skin coats. Mostly he rode alone but where the way was devious a rider would accompany him to the next post . . . Just before dawn he snatched an hour's deep slumber upon a pile of sheepskins near a fire and then went on.

As he approached the edge of the barrens, the *yam* posts became more commodious affairs, set at the edge of villages and with *darogas*, military governors in charge, but there was no difference in the enormous respect paid to the Tiger Tablet and the quick service its bearer commanded.

In his swift gallop he began to pass compact clumps of Mongol warriors, parties scouting for the armed forces of the Shah, grim and wolf like men, seated high in their Mongol saddles, the horse-hair tufts of their slender lances streaming in the breeze behind them.

Farther along, he passed groups of

prisoners, working under guard on the roads and at the *yam* stations, and other groups being driven in herds along the roads for what destination or purpose he knew not.

SMOKE still rose from the ruins of villages and hamlets as he kept on the road to Bokhara. By now he was riding like a man in a dream, nor scarce knew when he changed from one horse to the other.

It had come to him that eight days was all too short a time to do what he had to do and the time of the coming of the new moon of Shawwul drew nearer with every day. And he still had the long ride back. When his heavy eyelids refused to stay open he swayed in the saddle, snatching what sleep he could as he was borne along.

It was in nearing Bokhara on the third day of travel, that he ran into the first evidence of the power of Genghis Khan, when he saw the hills and plains covered for miles by the black *yurts* the felt tents and the boundless horse herds of the Horde.

They were the Yakka Mongols, and they knew him and hailed him as the "Iron Man" and he began once more to feel among friends.

The number of the captives increased, stoic and fatalistic bands of craftsmen for the most part, carpenters, brick makers, sword-smiths, rug weavers and silver smiths, being collected for the long trip ahead of them into the high uplands of Asia and to Karakoram, the capital of the Kha Khan.

Nearing the *ordu* of the Kha Khan, outside of the walls of Bokhara, Josse-lin passed the heaped-up treasures secured from the sack of the Islamic cities—long rows of stuff piled up carelessly on felts under sheds and scantily guarded, there being no thieving among the Mongols. There were plates and

goblets of silver, there was ivory and gold and crystal and the violet purple of amethysts, and there were finely tempered steel swords and jeweled daggers, damascened armor of chain mail so fine that an entire coat of it could be doubled up in a man's hand, and great store of rubies and pearls. Staring at the heaped up treasure wistfully were some of the captive women, wives and daughters of slain or captive *emirs and atabegs*, silken clad and dainty creatures, some of them weeping.

Somewhere near here he knew that he would find his own men, and he inquired for the *tumen* (the Mongol Division) of Tuli the Orluk, Tuli the Eagle of the Imperial Brood, the youngest son of Genghis Khan, and was directed to a meadow near the great white pavilion of the Kha Khan. The meadow was covered with the black, dome shaped *yurts* of the Mongols and he soon spied a cheerful Mongol face, that of Toukta, one of his own centurions, the commander of a hundred, a squadron commander of the warriors of the heavily armored Yakka, Chosen Ones of the Body Guard. And others of his squadron commanders came forth to give grave Mongol greeting. He was led to his own *yurt* where his servant welcomed him and aided him into changing so that shortly he appeared again: from boots to eagle feather he was a Mongol *gur-khan* again, save that his long blue coat covered the chain mail of a Crusader.

Striding through the *yurts* he found his men busy oiling weapons, repairing quivers, sharpening arrowheads with the file that each of them carried and testing the spare bow strings for each of the two bows that each of them bore. They were members of a shock division and they were equipped with heavy, red lacquered leather armor, both man and horse, and being the heavy cavalry of

the Horde, they were equipped with axe as well as sword.

The squad leaders, the commanders of tens, were checking the arrows, of which each man carried sixty, half of which were light with small sharp points while the other thirty were heavy with larger broader heads, for fighting at close quarters.

His inspection finished Josselin called for a horse, for although the *ordu* of Genghis Khan was not five hundred paces distant it would have been lacking in Mongol dignity to have made his way there on foot.

THE pavilion of Genghis Khan was of white felt, lined with silk and vast enough to have sheltered several hundred men. A silver table stood at the entrance, so that any who came might eat of the mare's milk, meat and fruit that it held. The Captain of the Night Guard, splendid in black lacquered armor and silver wolf cloak, bowed to the tall *gur-khan* and raised hand to lips.

"*Ahatou!*" Josselin greeted him and strode into the great *yurt*. There was a coming and going of officers two of them bearers of the ivory baton, *orkhons* or generals, went out, as Josselin entered and there were other officers seated on benches around the walls. A fire of aromatic woods crackled and glowed in a brazier.

On a dais at the far end of the pavilion, on a low bench sat a squat, heavy set figure dressed in a long sable coat with a girdle of gold plates. The face was seamed and lined, and bronzed by the dust and sun of the Gobi desert but there was an impress of calm power about it, and keen, intelligent eyes that missed no movement of the incoming and outgoing men, nor any word of the decorous conversation that went on about him. Genghis Khan gave one the

impression of being the war-scarred and wise old wolf, the leader of the wolf pack, as he was.

No sooner had Josselin entered the pavilion than he watched his approach and nodded grave greeting as the Crusader bowed before him.

"What of the Khalif of Baghdad, Iron Man?" asked the Khan in a slow deliberate voice, as though each and every word had value and should not be wasted.

"He sends greeting and homage. He desires alliance with thee—against the Shah Muhammad and against a certain one, known as the Master of the Assassins, who hath struck terror into rulers and officials of Islam by his secret murders and exactions."

The Kha Khan thought on this for a space.

"And what is thy opinion of the Khalif of Baghdad, O Iron Man?" he asked at last.

"An old man, weak, and possessing the shadow of power without the substance!" Josselin made curt report. The Kha Khan nodded.

"So I had reasoned," he commented, then, "And this so called Master of Assassins—what of him?"

"A sinister chief of bandits and murderers, having highly placed officials in his secret order—notably Timur al Molok, the Wazir of Shah Muhammad, and Maudud, Governor of Merv . . ."

"The bow afflicted with dry rot is easily broken!" commented the Kha Khan dryly, "And what of Merv?"

Josselin reported the strength of garrison, of walls and provisioning in few words ". . . it hath a plentitude of strongly built towers and a deep dry moat. . . ."

"Walls are no stronger than the hearts of their defenders," interrupted the Kha Khan, "What of the hearts of the defenders?"

"They are fearful, O Khan. . . ."

"And the Governor? What manner of man is he?"

"Avaricious, lacking in faith and honor. A man not to be trusted under any circumstances!" Josselin made curt reply.

"So?" the Kha Khan made no comment. Josselin cleared his throat and broke the silence:

"If the Kha Khan pleases . . . the bad faith and treachery of this Maudud, Governor Merv, hath brought hardship and suffering and will bring death upon a certain inhabitant of Merv—the Sheykh Saleh ibn Khalil, who hath sheltered and protected me against the wrath of the Governor and is now in prison with his family under sentence of death for that same. I would fain return and save that one from the Governor's cruelty. He dies four days from now, at the time of the setting of the new moon of Shawwul, if I fail him."

The Kha Khan gazed straight before him, reflective.

"'Tis well," he said at last, "Tomorrow I am sending Tuli with his *tumen* to pass by the walls of Merv in search of the Shah Muhammad, who hath fled to the westward. If thou canst aid thy friend, with the thousand men of thy regiment, taking not longer than a night and a day, and canst then rejoin the forces of Tuli, ye have my leave. It is highly meritorious to aid those who have aided thee."

Josselin bowed his head, and, seeing the Kha Kahn give sign that the interview was finished, departed from the great *yurt*, his mind a turmoil, thinking of the great walls of Merv with its garrison of twenty thousand Kankali Turks and wondering in what manner he could save the Sheykh and Alia with such small force and in such short time.

IT SEEMED to Josselin that he had scarce touched head to pillowed coat when the long roll of the drums of the dawn muster thundered in his ears. Sarengi, the impassive-faced Mongol soldier who served him, brought a steaming bowl of parched millet flour boiled with mutton, and hot tea while men were already rolling the felt strips from the frame of the *yurt*. Even as he finished donning his mail coat and helmet of steel, the lathe like strips of the frame of the *yurt* were taken down and lashed together, his bed of sheep skins and his chest were carried away for loading upon the pack horses and his first mount saddled and bridled, and his four spare horses galloped up before him.

All about him, as far as his eyes could reach, men and horses were boiling in what seemed to be inextricable confusion, the lean, sharp boned faces of the men covered with grease to protect them against the sun and wind, their squat frames draped with wolf skin cloaks, beneath which glinted the red-lacquered armor worn only by the heavy cavalry of the body guard. Sharp, yelping cries arose from the mass, the muster rolls of the tens and hundred being called and the quick commands of the leaders of the tens and the centurions of the hundreds.

The eddying disorder imperceptibly began to merge into order as clumps of ten men and horses drew together, and these small groups began swiftly to coalesce into greater groups of hundreds and the hundreds grew more solid and massed into heavy columns of a thousand men and horses each, with a breadth of fifty horsemen and a depth of two hundred solid ranks.

Josselin's long triangular shield, and his heavy steel tipped lance had scarcely been handed up to him when his regiment of Yakka Mongols were formed

up, ten squadrons deep.

As he rode to the head of his regiment, a thousand slender lances, which had been held, points to the ground, rose up in silent sweeping motion, their red-dyed, horse-hair, plumes fluttering in the keen, cold, air of the dawn and all down the length of the heavy column the right arms of the centurions, the squadron commanders, shot upward, held rigid to show that all was in order, until his own arm acknowledged the signal and the ten arms were as suddenly lowered.

A clump of fifteen horsemen rode up behind him, one carrying the yak-tailed standard, and the others, two black and white signal flags each, which they broke out for his inspection and returned to their cases when he nodded. In their quivers these men carried whistling arrows as well, and tied to their saddles were the lanterns which would show red and white lights for night signaling. With his sign of dismissal, ten of these men galloped away, dropping off two by two to take place behind the leader of each squadron while four men and the standard bearer remained behind him.

A quiver of expectancy came over the whole mass, extending back, squadron by squadron and regiment by regiment, ten thousand lances and ten thousand armored horsemen and armored horses, the end of the column lost in the half light of early dawn.

There came a jingle and clank and the swift galloping into place of the *orkhun* and his staff, with the yak tails of the standard of Tuli streaming in the breeze. Joselin made a swift upward motion with the palm of his hand to his own standard bearer who immediately raised the shaft with its cross pieces and fluttering yak tails as high as he could reach. Rippling back through the column the standards of the regiments

in rear shot upward in turn until all were poised and waiting.

TULI'S standard was swiftly raised, and then was lowered, quickly, twice. With the last downward motion the other standards dropped down and ten thousand horses moved forward in one great mass.

It was a strange thing, and proof of the training and discipline of the horsemen of Genghis Khan, that after the calling of the rolls of the tens and hundreds, not a single word was spoken and that huge body of cavalry moved out in silence save for the thudding of thousands of hooves and the creak of leather and clink of metal.

In the regiment that preceded Joselin's there was a sudden flurry and five squadrons galloped out ahead, three of them remaining in mass and slowing down to a trot after advancing some two thousand paces, while the two leading squadrons kept on until they were far ahead when they extended out into a great arc, a wide flung semicircle of scouts riding two by two.

And Josselin knew, without looking back, that a flank guard was sent out on either side and that in the rear, behind the great herds of spare led-horses, forty thousand of them, and the pack animals, that there was a rear guard following along behind. It would have taken an extraordinarily alert enemy to have surprised the Mongols on the march.

And thus guarded front, flanks and rear, the Mongol cavalry division settled down and galloped to the southward, pausing only from time to time that men might change to the spare horses, and eating up the miles steadily, hour by hour. Josselin sought for some opportunity to speak to Tuli, riding ahead of him, so that he might acquaint the Mongol prince with the situation

in Merv and his own problem in that city but the ceaseless forward surge of the *tumen* gave him no opportunity. They were galloping now along a river bank fringed by poplars and willows, with white walled villages sheltered among the groves.

The groves thinned out as they climbed the hills back of the river. It was late in the afternoon when Josselin, sensing some stir and movement of the scouts forward, peered through the dusty haze and saw on a hill crest far to the front, the sparkle and flash of sun on naked steel.

Something like a quiver went through the galloping host, the quiver that goes through a pack of hounds at the view halloo.

There was no slackening in the steady gallop but there came a sudden upward motion of the Horned Standard in the lead, followed by a fluttering of black and white battle flags, starting from the head of the column and rippling down its length, and the squadrons which had been galloping in two ranks of fifty horsemen in breadth smoothly narrowed their fronts to a breath of twenty horsemen, five files deep, the battle formation of the Mongol cavalry.

There came then another uplifting of the Horned Standard and a twinkling of the battle signal flags. This time Josselin checked his horse down to a walk, the squadron behind him followed his example, the squadrons in rear kept up the gallop swinging out to right and left until they were up on line, whereas they in turn slowed to a walk and in the space of a few seconds his regiment extended out on either side of him in a long solid line. Behind him he heard the thunder of other regiments closing in, thickening their lines, and galloping in solid masses to the right and left until in a bare few minutes the Mongol host had closed up

from column of route into line of battle, and was moving forward at a walk.

THERE were more flurries up forward and scouts came galloping back, appearing suddenly out of the dust and reining in their horses sharply, to report to the officers under the yak-tailed banner ahead.

Far forward, rounding the base of one of the hills, Josselin caught flashes of sun on steel and the flicker of a green silken banner, the green standard of the Prophet, the battle flag of Islam.

There came a sudden drumming of hooves from behind, and pouring through the interval between Josselin's regiment and the neighboring regiment on the right, came a solid clump of Mongol horsemen, the faces of the men lean and bony, set and tense, with eyes looking neither to the right nor the left, and Josselin raised his ten foot lance aloft in salute as they went by. For they were the *manguidi*, "the God-belonging," the suicide squadron, foredoomed to cast themselves, wolf-like, upon the enemy center and to fight and tear an opening through it without thought of turning back.

And Josselin looked to his own accoutrements, the heavy, ten-foot lance, the long triangular shield, the great long sword, the Mongol bow upon his back with its quiver of arrows, the heavy mesh shirt with its hood, the sleeves, gauntlets and hose of heavy chain mail, and the conical steel cap with its nasal. His horse's head and neck were sheathed in chain mail, with a skirt of light chain mail over lacquered leather extending from the animal's shoulders to its tail and sweeping down to its knees.

He settled into his saddle, twitching his shoulders to bring chain mail more smoothly into place and loosening sword in scabbard as he rode forward,

ahead of the center of his regiment. The Mongol battle line surged forward like a thick, steel tipped wave, rising and falling as it dipped into hollows and breasted hillocks.

It came to him then that if he were to meet death in the ensuing battle, that his word to the Sheykh Saleh would be broken, but then, he reasoned, death is no respecter of pledged words and no man can be held in dishonor if Death intervenes between the time of pledging a word and the time of fulfilment thereof.

To his ears, then, borne faintly down the wind, came a thin, high-pitched sound, like the yelping of many hounds, and his nerves and muscles tightened to the familiar shrill battle ullulation of the Moslems.

"*Allahu akbar Allah il-allahu! Allah il-allah!*" the words came now more clearly, rising out of a great cloud of dust moving towards the Mongol host, a cloud of dust that extended across the plain and rolled down from hillside and swept forward from valley mouth. The flash of sun on steel broke out of it, and as the dust eddied, dimly seen figures of horsemen emerged from it like armed wraiths out of mist.

It was never the Mongol tactics to wait to be attacked and suddenly the *manguidi*, the "God belonging" squadron, was launched at the center of the dust cloud like a swift arrow.

There came now from the dust clouds ahead the heady, exciting throb of battle drums. Above their hollow thunder came the clash of cymbals and the savage blaring of the nakars, the long battle trumpets of Islam, which, blending with the shrill yelping from thousands of throats, made the very air quiver to the savage clamor.

In contrast to the pulsing roar of the hosts of Islam, the Mongols moved in terrible silence. The *manguidi* was

now nearly upon the center of the advancing dust cloud, and in another second it smashed into it and out of sight. From where it had struck, came a sudden savage sound, a sound of screaming and rending, such a sound as is made by the trampling and screaming of fighting stallions.

In response to a silent drop and sudden lift of the Horned Standard, twice repeated, the heavy line of Mongols broke into a trot. Tuli, the commander of the *tumen*, and his staff had dropped back on a line with Josselin and suddenly the Horned Standard was passed between the files and galloped to the rear but Tuli and his staff remained.

THEY were almost up into the dust cloud now. A black and white, battle signal-flag flashed once to the left and once to the right from beside Tuli.

Josselin's right arm swung once in a complete circle and came back to grasp his lance once more. In swift obedience to the signal which flashed right and left along the entire line, the three rear ranks of his regiment galloped through the intervals between troops, the horsemen with reins looped over left elbow and holding the heavy, close-order bow with heavy, broad bladed arrow notched on bowstring and quiver at knee. They rode in loose order, like a mob of runaway horses but they galloped straight at the foe, who could now be seen, emerging from the dust cloud.

The enemy were lithe, wiry men with dark faces gleaming under silvered helmets or white turbans, carrying flashing curved scimitars and round, painted, shields and mounted upon slender spirited horses who danced and reared at the clamor of shouting voices and the roar of drums, cymbals and

horns about them.

The silent, seemingly disorderly, mob of Mongol bowmen flung themselves at the enemy only to check and turn just before the shock of collision. And from those nomad warriors came a sudden vibrant twanging of bow strings, and the silent, wasp-like flight of a multitude of swift arrows that thudded and bit deep into quivering horseflesh and sheared through thin chain mail and *khalat* and quilted cloak until horses screamed and men rocked in the saddles. But the pitiless rain of sharp bladed arrows filled the air and thudded and sank home until the first line of the enemy were thrown into confusion. Wounded and dying men and riderless horses threw confusion into the second line of Moslem warriors. With a final, deadly, flight of arrows the Mongol-bowmen turned and galloped to the flanks of their advancing squadrons, reforming behind the two ranks that now came on at the gallop, lances low at the charge in the first rank and swords at the ready in the second rank.

Josselin laid lance in rest and, his men behind him thundered into the thick of a milling group of Kankali Turks who loosed a few arrows at him, which glanced harmlessly off his chain mail. There was a flash of heavy scimitars, a glancing upward blow of a curved stabbing knife, a *yataghan*, and his lance drove home, overbearing a bearded Turk and driving man and horse against their fellows in rear until he had scattered the group and was through on the other side. From behind him he heard the snarling, screaming, rage of his men, fighting like mad stallions, but there came a sudden rush of a howling mob of Seljuk Turks, with their high, damascened helmets and broad sleeved *khalats* twirling flashing scimitars and battle maces, driving directly at him and he dropped his lance

to earth and drew his great sword, whirling it about his head as he drove at the center of their onset.

"*Dieu lo vult!*" he shouted exultantly, the while he deflected a mace blow on his shield and then sheared off the arm of the mace wielder with one whirring blow and then drove into the press, his great sword biting deep, slashing into chain mail and sheering through light shield and into bone and flesh until the Turks were appalled and gave ground fearfully before that long slashing blade. And suddenly the men of his regiment were up and boiling about him, screaming with rage, stabbing and hewing at the Turks like a pack of starveling wolves and every Turk seemed to have four or five vicious Mongols tearing at him, snarling with blood lust.

BUT there were other dust clouds rolling up from the rear of the Turkish and Persian host and Josselin remembered his Mongol battle training.

Behind him was one of his two signalers, and he motioned to the man, who immediately flashed a black and white flag and emitted a high pitched, long drawn yell, which was taken up by the nearest Mongols and carried from one to the other so that each of them drove a final blow at his nearest antagonist and swung his horse about and followed Josselin back out of the dust and confusion, galloping out in loosely knit tens which swiftly sought and found the three lines of bowmen of their own troops, and wheeling like swallows, in behind the formed ranks and swiftly reformed anew into solid lines.

Again the bowmen launched themselves at the enemy now looming up in masses wearing the white turbans and black burnouses of the desert riders with a thickening of Kankali and Sel-

juk Turks.

There came a sudden twinkling of battle flags in the formed ranks of the Mongols waiting for the charge of the bowmen to spend itself, and Josselin, reading the signal, stared off to the left and rear where a hill rose behind the enemy forces. Standing out clear and defiant, in the lost rays of the setting sun, rose the Horned Standard with a great multitude of lance points gleaming behind it.

That terrible Mongol maneuver, the *tulughma*, or "standard sweep," was about to take place. The nearest men in the enemy ranks noted that standard at the same time and a shout of dismay rose and gathered force in the enemy ranks as the Horned Standard, followed by a torrent of avid lance, hurled itself down that hillside upon undefended flank and rear of the enemy host.

A hail of arrows poured in from the clouds of bowmen that now beset the Islamic host in front, and broke what little fighting spirit remained.

When the mailed ranks of the Mongols galloped in to complete the task, the enemy was in full flight, streaming from the battle field in panic and plying whip and spur in desperation.

The Mongols were as methodical and disciplined in victory as in battle. Before even the pursuit squadrons returned, the *tumen* was reformed under a hill on which stood Tuli and the Horned Standard, and long lines of dismounted men went thoroughly over every inch of the battle field. The enemy wounded were dispatched with bow string or sword, the Mongol wounded were cared for if only lightly wounded. If too gravely injured they stoically accepted the mercifully quick death granted them. Weapons, chain mail, helmets and horse gear were systematically gathered from fallen friend

and foe. Arrows were recovered from the ground and from the bodies of the slain men and horses and every article, from an arrow shaft that had lost its point, to the emerald clasp on the aigret of an *emir* was faithfully turned over to the Cathayan officers in charge of the trains and careful tally made by the Uighrian scribes.

There was a short halt made that night, time for fires to be made and food cooked and horses watered and grazed and for men to snatch a few minutes' slumber.

The long roll of the assembly drums broke forth an hour later and for this Josselin was glad.

BUT there was little time for worry.

The ten thousand men of the *tumen* swiftly rose and shook themselves into marching order and there began again that steady galloping of thousands of horses and the monotonously restful thudding of tens of thousands of hooves, the cadence of which wove itself into a man's thinking and lulled him into short periods of slumber in the saddle, with recurrent periods of day and night and sunlight and starlight and the necessity of halting and dismounting and mounting again on to a fresh horse, as the horsemen of the *tumen* steadily eat up the leagues, making from seventy to eighty miles a day.

It was the afternoon of the tenth day, that day whose night would see the rising and the setting of the new moon of Shawwul, when Tuli, at the head of his *tumen* rode up short of bow-shot distance from the main gate of Merv and sent forward heralds, who demanded whether or not the Shah Muhammad was within the walls.

Upon assurance that the Shah had departed for the West, Tuli led his thousands of horsemen, coiling like a great steel-tipped serpent, around the

walls of Merv, and disappeared in a cloud of dust into the west, nor did any note that regiment of one thousand of the heavily armored Yakka, Chosen Ones of the Imperial Bodyguard, commanded strangely enough by a Nazarene knight, which dropped off, inconspicuously, to lose themselves to sight and sound in the river bottoms and hollows some two leagues outside of the walls of Merv.

That an hour or so later, a score of these Mongol warriors, grazing their horses, strayed too near the walls of Merv and were swooped down upon and captured by a force of Kankali Turks was regrettable but not fatal. Maudud, the Governor of Merv, remembering the fate of Inaljuk, the Governor of Otrar, who put Mongol prisoners to death and was punished by Genghis Khan by having molten silver poured down his throat, prudently decided to hold these Mongol captives in the great cell of the citadel prison rather than slay them outright.

CHAPTER XII

IN THAT same citadel the old Sheykh Saleh ibn Khalil maintained his fortitude until the dusk of the tenth day, whose night would see the rising and the setting of the new moon of Shawwul and mark the ending of his days under the sword of the executioner.

To this was he resigned, it was Kismet, Fate, and what man could escape his fate? But the remembrance of the horror that Maudud, the Governor, had promised for Alia was another matter altogether, and hung over him like a pall.

The old man's iron self-control was near the breaking point, on this the last day of life remaining to him. He sat, huddled, in the corner of his narrow cell, plucking at his beard and anon

wringing his hands in anguish.

Unable to remain huddled on the floor, he paced the cell, drawing nigh the barred window. It was from here that he heard the sound and paused a moment, in his striding, puzzled. He had already made up his mind to disclose the hiding place of his treasure to Maudud, although, knowing the faithlessness of the man, he had little hope that even this would avert the fate that hung over his daughter.

But again that sound from below the walls fell upon his ears, a sound that struck a chord of memory. At last he peered through the bars and listened, intent, peering down at the street below.

Someone sat in the shadows, a cobbler plying his trade and singing.

And, lo! the voice was the voice of Ayoub, his trusted sword bearer! Overwhelmed by this reminder that he was not altogether forgotten, the Sheykh yet managed a trembling cough to let Ayoub know that he listened. But the cobbler seemingly paid no heed but went on with his snatches of song. The old Sheykh, his mind working tumultuously began to pay heed to the words of those snatches of song.

There was nothing to excite comment in the songs, ancient lays of Persia, of ancient days and of Rustem and Sohrab, ancient heroes, but mixed with his snatches of ancient epics were hints of more immediate matters.

"The Nazarene knight hath come, hath come!" sang Ayoub, lustily if not too tunelessly, "and awaits but the coming of darkness to hasten to thy aid . . ." the cobbler changed his song to more ancient matters as he heard the tread of the sentry passing overhead. Once the guard had passed on his rounds, the song resumed its modern note.

"Like a lion is the Nazarene knight

with the courage of Sohrab" sang the cobbler, "and like a lion he fears not to enter the city leading some of thy servants. He comes attired as a holy *kaid*! It is well to be ready, to be ready . . ." sang the cobbler nor noted that one Hashim, the *pishkedmet* of the Emir Maudud, listened from an embrasure in the walls above, attracted by something strange in the song of the cobbler.

But the heart of the Sheykh lifted within him and he coughed again, signifying that he heard and understood.

Now Kashim, the *pishkedmet* of the Governor, was quick to seize upon all things that might advance him in his master's favor from below, and then, full of zeal in his master's service, went straightway to report to Maudud.

A HALF hour before the rising of the new moon of Shawwul, at the changing of the guard, there came word to one Gamber Ali, the captain of the guard at the gate of the citadel, that a holy *kaid* desired speech with him. Gamber Ali pricked up his ears—he had been told to watch out for a Nazarene knight in the guise of a holy man who would ask for the Sheykh Saleh ibn Khalil.

The small wicket gate clanged open and Gamber Ali stared at the face of the venerable *kaid* before him, who was accompanied by a younger man, a *mul-lah*. Certainly there was naught amiss with this *kaid*, Gamber Ali knew his face, the face of Abou Bakir, who preached at the mosque hard by and was well known for his piety and his learning.

"Peace be unto thee, Gamber Ali!" greeted the *kaid*.

"And unto thee, O Father of Holiness," returned Gamber Ali perfunctorily, and then concealing a yawn, "In what way can I serve thee?" These holy men were a nuisance, bobbing up

at all hours of the day and night.

"I come in the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate!" announced the *Kaid*.

"May His name be Praised!" grunted Gamber Ali.

"It hath come to my ears that there are certain unfortunate ones imprisoned in the great cell of the prison, some of them followers of the True Faith, doomed to be sent up to the throne of the Most High by tomorrow's sunrise. I would fain exhort these ones that they shall enter the presence of the Compassionate One with their hearts high and their stomachs strong."

GAMBER Ali cast a cursory glance at the tablet hung on the wall, listing the prisoners in the great cage. On the tablet were recorded, below a group enumeration of some score of nameless Mongols, the names of eight condemned, petty thieves and robbers for the most part, due to die by the scimitar at sunrise of the morning following. It was nothing unusual for the condemned to be visited by a holy man.

"A most worthy and devout task, O Father of Piety!" yawned Gamber Ali, sleepy already from mere thought of the long night of duty still before him, and privately wishing that the old *Kaid* would burn in Gehenna. "Ho! Abdullah! take thou the keys to the great cage and escort these holy ones to the presence of the condemned!"

A stout Kankali Turk, the gaoler, his keys jangling at his leathern belt, and knawing a mutton bone, bade the two holy men to follow him.

Their way led across the courtyard of the citadel, against the walls of which were tethered the saddled horses of the city patrol, munching from their grain bags. Here and there squatted a few knots of Kankali Turks, their shields

and scimitars and helmets near at hand.

High above the court rose the tower of the citadel, light shining from the floor which housed the Emir Maudud and his court.

The gaoler, his keys ajangle, waddled to the door that led to the cells and downward, the broad steps of a curving staircase lighted at intervals by smoking cressets. From the regions below rose a low murmur of sound and a most noisome stench.

At last they arrived at the bottom, where another sentry stood on duty, scimitar in hand, near the door of the great iron-barred cage in the midst of the high arched cellar. The prisoners sat or stretched prone within, their haggard faces lighted by the fitful gleams of the torches about the walls.

But the years of the venerable *kaid* were evidently demanding their toll. He clutched at his throat. "I fear," he murmured, "that the stench and foulness here are too great for my advanced years . . . do thou," he turned to the *mullah* accompanying him, "carry out my task. Sorrowed as I am to leave thee to carry the burden, I must in the outer air, so great is my faintness . . ." The younger man, the *mullah*, solicitously aided him to the stairway's foot whence the *kaid* climbed slowly upward and disappeared from view. The *mullah* returned as the gaoler, selecting a key, unlocked the gate and stood aside as the *mullah* entered. The venerable *kaid* found his way to the postern gate and none remarked that he departed alone, without the *mullah*.

"Peace be unto ye, O ye unfortunate ones!" the *mullah's* voice, down below the prisoners' cage, came in the measured tones of the religious man. But the *mullah's* eyes sought swiftly, hawk-like, among the prisoners as here and there a muttered response came to his greeting. Of a sudden his eyes found

that which they sought. He moved in stately fashion toward the far corner of the cage where sat a group of a score of men, apart, impassive and silent.

"I seek Ladboga," said the *mullah*, low voiced, in Mongol.

A man on the edge of the group, alone, raised his head sharply.

"*Kai*, master," the Mongol under-officer greeted calmly, "It is thou my lord. We had hoped for your coming."

"The time is short, O Ladboga."

JOSSELIN DE BEAUFORT sat down beside the Mongol, speaking quietly. Occasionally, for the benefit of the gaoler he raised his voice in the sing-song intoning of a verse from the Koran. At the last he drew forth from 'neath his robes some three long keen daggers and slid them quietly to the Mongol under-officer.

"It is understood then, O Ladboga?" he asked.

"It is understood, my lord." The Mongol nodded.

Rising, Josselin passed through the groups of prisoners, paying no further heed to the Mongols, but reciting verses from the Koran to the indifferent condemned ones who scarce raised their heads at his passing, being deep sunk in their own misery.

The gaoler, still gnawing at his muton bone, stood idly by the open door of the cage, nor noted that three Mongols had quietly detached themselves from the shadows at the far end and were aimlessly wandering about, drawing, however, nearer and nearer the door.

The *mullah*, as if in deep thought, tarried a moment, half in and half out the door. Then he reached within his robe and drew forth something which made a pleasant, tinkling sound. Clinking the gold pieces together, more loudly, the attention of the sentry at the foot

of the staircase was aroused and he strolled toward the pleasing tinkle.

"In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful!" intoned the *mullah*.

"May his name be praised!" cried the gaoler, dropping his mutton bone and gazing tenderly on the gold pieces glinting in the *mulla's* hands, interrupting this only to cast a baleful glance at the sentry, by now equally rapt in gazing at the pleasing simmer of wealth displayed.

The *mullah* cleared his throat.

"A wealthy and devout follower of the Prophet, a man of the utmost tenderness of heart, ever sensible of the woes of the unfortunate," he stated, "and ever mindful of the sacred words of the Koran, which saith 'Lo! those who give alms, both men and women, and lend unto Allah a goodly loan, it will be doubled for them, and theirs will be a rich reward,' this good man, of his greatness of heart, hath given me this gold for extra food for the unfortunate ones in the prison."

"Verily, the excess of his goodness fills me with transports of amazement!" exclaimed the fat gaoler, eyeing the gold pieces wistfully.

"Such greatness of heart is beyond comprehension!" echoed the sentry, resting his scimitar upon the ground that he might have both hands free to accept any donation that might come his way.

"In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Compassionate, take then, this gold and see that the prisoners received good addition to their meager fare!" directed the *mullah*, stepping forward so that the doorway might be clear behind him.

The *mullah* was somewhat clumsy in handing over the gold pieces, else the gaoler was too avid, for two shining coins dropped and rolled upon the floor.

Both gaoler and sentry scrambled wildly to retrieve them as they rang so sweetly against the stones.

IT WAS then that a dark form hurled itself silently through the cage door, followed by a second and a third.

There came a coughing grunt and a faint moan.

The bodies of the two Turks lay where they had fallen. Ladboga, the Mongol under-officer, seized the scimitar of the fallen sentry and another Mongol the yataghan from the belt of the dead gaoler.

The startled prisoners, only dimly aware of what had occurred, stood rooted for a space and then as comprehension dawned, they began to rush to the open door, only to be halted by the voice of the *mullah*.

"Silence!" he commanded and they obeyed. In the stillness there came the sound of tramping feet, descending the staircase and coming ever nearer. The *mullah* gave quick command that the bodies of the slain be dragged into the cage. "And do ye prisoners seat yourselves within the cage as before. Do thou, Ladboga, and thy men with weapons, range thyself on either side of the foot of the steps overcoming the guards as they enter—'tis naught but the quarter guard, some eight men, making its rounds!"

All things were done as the *mullah* bade, men moving swift but silent to their posts.

The descending footsteps neared the bottom of the stairs, the sound of their voices coming now, clear and strong, as they talked among themselves, all unwitting of the welcome awaiting them in the cellar.

For the bodies of the two slain men had been dragged within the great cage and might have been the bodies of sleeping prisoners.

The prisoners themselves were silent, some seated and some reclining. The door of the cage was closed. Standing by it, the better to carry out the illusion, was one of the Mongols, scimitar drawn and wearing the chain mail and pointed helmet of the dead sentry.

Crouching against the walls on either side of the arched portal at the foot of the stairs, were the remainder of the Mongols, armed and unarmed.

Seeing that all was in readiness, the *mullah* spoke a word to Ladboga, saying, "I go above stairs now—do thou follow when these men are overcome . . ." and he whispered a few more words and went up the staircase, giving to the wall as the Kankali Turks of the quarter-guard brushed pass him.

Scarce had Josselin reached the first turn in the staircase when there came to him muffled by the distance, the sudden snarling voices of the Mongols, quick ended cries, and a clash of steel—followed by silence. And Josselin knew that another eight of the Mongols were provided with weapons.

The door leading to the outside had been left ajar. Pushing it open he stepped forth into the dim lighted courtyard. A new sentry on guard near the door glanced at him incuriously. The small groups of Kankali Turks of the mounted guard, were busy on their own affairs, preparing their evening meals around the cooking fires.

The citadel tower loomed up on the far side of the court. Up there the rooms of Maudud were lighted with the light of many lamps. On the floor above Maudud's quarters, was the cell where the Sheykh Saleh ibn Khalil was confined and at the opposite end of that same floor was the room that held Alia under guard of a huge female slave.

Even now the silvery sickle of the new moon of Shawwul was sinking toward the city walls. Another five

minutes and it would have set. As Josselin stood there, watching, the burly form of the executioner, a huge Nubian, his scimitar under his arm, moved.

JOSSELIN, waiting until men's interest had returned to their own affairs, moved quietly across the courtyard, and through the light of the crescents, thereafter mounting the stairs swiftly to the floor above Maudud's chambers. In doing so he passed by the door of Maudud's chamber, where lights streamed out, and there was the sound of men's voices in the inner room. For Maudud, with the cold eyes of Timur al Molok, the Wazir, upon him, was shortening the stature of his soul by seeking oblivion, his own eyes haggard, straying to watch the descending arc of that new moon of Shawwul so near to its setting. Another ten minutes would see it disappear beneath the horizon, a fateful ten minutes, at the end of which, strict accounting would be demanded of him by the implacable Timur al Molok, a ten minutes in which the old Sheykh would either disclose his secret under the shadow of the sword, or that sword would descend upon Maudud himself.

The old Sheykh was there before them, bound and upon his knees, the executioner laying out the tools of his craft, under the cold green eyes of Timur al Molok, the languid eyes of the two feminine looking Persian youths from Bokhara, the sleepy eyes of Nas'r, the singer of bawdy songs, and the insolent eyes of Ferruk, the dissolute son of the holy kaid, and the cruel eyes of Ayub of the cruel hands, detested of the dancing girls. Even the dancing girls were there, all save Theodosia, the Byzantine, she who had accosted Josselin in the country house of the Governor.

Maudud, if Allah decreed his death, meant to die surrounded by his boon companions, but his face grew more haggard as the minutes passed and the old Sheykh stubbornly refused to divulge his secret. Timur al Molok yawned behind his hand, and idly watched the descending moon, now near the horizon—and the fingers of Timur al Molok crept within his silken khalat as he meditatively studied the pulsing vein in the throat of Maudud.

But there came a slight diversion. A young man in the white khalat and red leather shoes affected by the *Fedawi*, the Faithful Ones, of the secret order of the Assassins, stood for a space in the doorway. Catching the eye of Timur al Molok, the young man showed the palm of his hand in which rested a square of greasy Moslem bread—with two sticks crossed upon it. Timur rose swiftly at that unrefusable summons and went out into the hall leaving Maudud grasping with the hand of desperation, at the straw of hope, and drawing a deep breath of gratitude for the respite.

In the center of the room, where the rugs had been cleared away, was a glowing brazier, surrounded with a variety of grisly tools, pincers and cunningly shaped knives and strange instruments for crushing fingers and cracking ankle bones and all manner of queerly shaped devices whose very queerness was sinister.

In the shadows was a bent and wizened dwarf, huge-headed, the executioner's assistant, holding the broad-bladed scimitar for his master.

Kneeling on the bare floor under the shadow of that sword, was the gray haired Sheykh Saleh ibn Khalil.

Maudud spoke once again to him.

"Ho, thou Father of Stubborness!" he said, "my patience with thee is totally at an end!" Maudud glanced at

the open doorway where Timur al Molok had not yet returned and then cast his eyes through the window at the highest tip of the slender new moon of Shawwul even now disappearing beneath the desert edge. "I have come to believe, O Saleh, that perhaps after all, thy treasure is a myth. The penalty, in any case for thy treason, is death, a death which should be quick and painless for thee, but because of thy stubborn silence concerning the treasure I have decreed that thou shalt suffer the pains of the spirit as well as the flesh. I am sending now for thine only daughter!" and he gave signal to two of his guards who went forth into the hall and turned up the stairs to where Alia was held under guard of the slave woman, Fatimah.

MAUDUD started again to speak when a great outcry broke out in the hall and on the stairway above. There was the rush of many feet and the clash of steel and shouting.

"Seize him! The cursed infidel! The Nazarene spy—profaning the sacred robes of a holy man! . . ." the clamor grew in volume. Gamber Ali, the captain of the guard, followed by a score of men, swarmed up the stairs. Down below in the courtyard the tumult spread and a rabble of soldiers and servants added to the press, all yelling and shouting and swarming up the stairs past the Governor's rooms and up toward the floor above.

Maudud ran out of his chamber, followed by his guests and stood amazed.

On the stairway above him, stood the Nazarene knight, his mullah's robe thrown aside, his oiled chain-mail gleaming in the light of the cressets, with him the shrinking form of a veiled young woman, the daughter of the Sheykh Saleh ibn Khalil, no less!

Maudud let forth a terrific bellow,

demanding silence, as men swarmed up at the Nazarene, attempting to reach him with their scimitars and spears.

The bellowing roar of the Governor brought stillness. In that silence the arrogant tones of Maudud thundered forth:

"Dogs! Would ye slay the Nazarene outright and deny me the pleasure of inflicting a lingering death upon him? Bring him to me, forthwith, that his slaying may make sport! Bring also the maiden and quickly!"

In quick obedience the men about Josselin lowered their weapons and seized him, dragging him down the stairs, with the girl, and thrusting them through the anteroom into the inner chamber. Here the executioner, indifferent to the clamor, kept his brazier flame alight and continued to lay out his tools, with the Sheykh, silent, kneeling on the floor nearby.

Maudud, his own peril forgotten for the nonce, in the joy of the capture of this Nazarene knight, was rubbing his hands. He turned to Josselin, guarded by two Kankali Turks with drawn scimiters.

"So!" gloated Maudud, "So! Ye return, O Nazarene, like an Afhgan hunting hound, coming in at the finish, to the smell of blood and death! But unlike the Afhgan hound, thy fate shall catch up with thee so soon as the old stag," and here he pointed at the bound and kneeling Sheykh, "hath drawn his last breath. I trust, O Nazarene," Maudud spoke in unctuous tone, "that thou'lt await thy turn with becoming patience!" at which sally there came a snicker from the divans where sat the Governor's boon companions.

Maudud turned to the guard nearest the girl. "Unveil me that woman!" he commanded. The old Sheykh looked up with lack luster eyes only to tremble with anger as the guard jerked the veil

from the face of Alia, so that her clear, imperious, beauty shown forth in that room. A murmur went up from the divans and even Maudud was taken aback at the sight of her loveliness. Alia was pale as she gazed upon her father and turned to Josselin, wide-eyed.

BUT then, a sudden thought came to Maudud. He addressed the girl:

"How hath it occurred that this knight brought thee forth from the chamber wherein I had thee under guard of the slave woman, Fatimah?" he asked Alia. She looked at Josselin, who made reply.

"Simple enough, O Maudud, I did but give Fatimah a few gold pieces and she turned over the girl to me, first demanding that I bind and gag her to give the semblance that she hath been overpowered!"

"May she shrivel in Gehenna!" Maudud's face was living with wrath, and the instinct to kill was upon him. "Ho, thou!" he turned to one of the Kurdish soldiers at the door, "Haste thee up to the cell wherein that great sow lieth bound and gagged and plunge thy dagger into her!" The Kurd, nothing loth, slouched out, drawing forth his sharp pointed yataghan. Maudud stood silent, listening and waiting. Josselin listened also. In a matter of three or four minutes, the Kurd returned wiping blood from off his blade and nodded.

"She is even now having converse with Munkar and Nakir, the Questioners of the Dead, O most noble Emir!" said the Kurd, a wolfish grin upon his ill-favored features.

Maudud grunted his satisfaction and turned once more to where Alia stood, steadfast, staring straight to the front.

"I pity thee, O daughter of Saleh," he told her, "for having a father with

heart of such flinty hardness that he would rather see thee thrown to my soldiers for their sport than to divulge the hiding place of a paltry treasure, a treasure which he cannot take with him to Paradise in any case . . ." the girl's head went up proudly.

"Nay, it is the truth I tell thee, O daughter of Saleh," Maudud continued, seeing the disbelief in her eyes, "here, thou, and thou, and thou . . ." he beckoned to the Kurdish soldiers who had crowded into the room, the nearest of them a dissolute faced, depraved specimen of evil, his tongue running over his wet lips at sight of the beauty of the girl, "Take thou this maiden and hold her. So soon as that one's gray head falls from his body, do thou and thy companions take her from here and do with her as pleases thee . . ."

The Kurd slouched forward, reaching his hairy hands to grasp Alia. So swiftly that the eye could scarce follow it, she whipped forth from beneath her robe a gold handled dagger and drove its point sharply into the Kurd's questing hand. The man gave back with a howl of pain.

"A daughter of the Beni Iskander suffers death before dishonor!" she said, low voiced, and placed the dagger point against her breast, ready to drive it into her own heart, her face lit with such quiet resolve that no man could doubt her. Maudud bits his nails, his eyes darting from father to daughter, something of desperation in their depths.

The voice of the Sheykh broke the silence, "Nay, my daughter," his face was twisted with anguish but his voice came firm, "nay, my daughter, if this dog gives security for thy safety and happiness, I will willingly disclose the hiding place of the treasure . . ."

"Sayest thou?" Maudud's eyes gleamed with a quick, wild hope, "I

will have her married here and now to any one whom thou chooseth, O Saleh, the marriage to be performed by the kadi before thy death . . . once thou hast revealed thy secret."

"Nay, before I have revealed my secret!" countered the Sheykh. Maudud frowned and considered this.

"So be it!" he finally gave assent, then "And whom dost choose as husband for thy daughter?"

The old Sheykh looked up and around the cruel faces in that room. His eyes sought and found those of Josselin de Beaufort.

"It is my wish that she shall marry yon Nazarene knight!" he stated quietly.

AN ASTONISHED silence fell upon that room. Alia's eyes widened, startled as she turned her gaze upon Josselin. Men began to mutter. Maudud's face flushed with anger. He spoke heatedly:

"Nay, that cannot be—in the first place he is a dog of an infidel and no daughter of Islam would suffer herself to marriage with such a one—and second, he is under sentence of death for indignities he hath heaped on me and mine—even now the executioner heats the iron to blind him before he dies lingeringly under the torture!" and men looked at the grim tools of the torturer and the fine pointed iron rod he had heated to near whiteness in the brazier. Alia gave a low moan.

For his part Josselin kept silent, standing grave-faced.

But the Sheykh was making reply. "Ye have given promise that I shall choose the one who shall marry my daughter. I have chosen! 'Twere better that she die by her own hand than marry any man of thy cruel and dissolute following, O Maudud. I have made my choice. Do thou abide by thy

promise or my daughter dies and I die, my secret dying with me!"

Maudud, as could plainly be seen, was raging inwardly, squirming in his mind to find some manner in which he could gain his ends, and biting his fingernails for all to see his perturbation of spirit.

None paid heed to Josselin, who stood, face impassive with that look of one listening to far off sounds. None heard his faint indrawing of breath, nor saw the swell of his muscles as he gathered himself. It was only when he moved that men suddenly took note of him.

For he leaped from between his guards, reached swiftly for the wood handle of the pointed, white-hot iron in the brazier. With his other hand he seized Maudud's arm and twisted it behind Maudud's back, rendering the amazed Governor helpless and cringing with the agony of the pain as he was dragged back to where Josselin placed himself against the wall. Maudud was before him as a shield, the white hot iron held a scant finger length from the Governor's eyes.

So swiftly was it done that men stood rooted to the spot, amazed nor scarce knew what had happened, even when Josselin's voice broke on their ears.

"Quiet, dog, and cease thy writhing 'ere I blind thee by mischance!" he spoke to Maudud, shaking him as a cat shakes a rat, until the Governor, bent over awkwardly in front of him, stilled his twistings and stood outwardly submissive. "It is high time to bring end to this farce!" continued Josselin, "with this dog of a Governor strutting about like an unwhipped cock on the dung heap. Hark ye, Maudud! Dost hear what I hear?" and men became silent as they strained to listen. From below stairs on a sudden came a strange commotion, shouts and screams and the

clash of steel, with men again pounding up the staircase.

"Those be the swords of my Mongol warriors, Yakka Mongols, the Chosen Ones of the Kha Khan's bodyguard!" stated Josselin, his voice impatient, like a schoolmaster with stupid pupils. "They will be here anon, I having freed the score of my men ye imprisoned in thy great cell, Maudud, and roused up thy guard to pursue me here so that the way would be clear to open citadel gates—the west gate of the city having already been entered by others of my men in disguise, who hath seized the gate and admitted a horde of my horsemen . . ."

THERE was a running and the clash of steel in the antechamber and a Kankali Turk of the guard, blood streaming from a sword cut, appeared in the doorway and disappeared again to the clash of arms.

Josselin's voice went on quietly.

"Do thou, Alia, use thy dagger to cut thy father's bonds—let any one raise hand to thee and Maudud's eyes shall be blinded on the instant . . . so-o-o, rise, O Sheykh, thou art free, thee and thy daughter, and thy treasure is safe on the backs of sumpter mules and guarded for thee by mine own men—we go now, O Maudud . . ." the doorway suddenly framed the squat, armored figure of Ladboga, the Mongol under-officer, his sword dripping. Behind him were black-armored Yakka Mongols, arrows on string.

"Which of these dost wish slain?" asked Ladboga, unemotionally, pointing to Maudud and the huddled group of his followers.

"None!" Josselin answered flatly.

"At least this dog of a Maudud!" pleaded the old Sheykh, rubbing his wrists whence the bonds had just been cut.

"Nay, O Sheykh, 'twere better to let the dog and his evil companions live against the day when the Mongols return to capture the city—their task will be eased by such a Governor!" Maudud's face flushed darkly at the insult but the arrow points of the Mongols brooked of no reply.

Beside Ladboga there appeared, one, clad in the white khalat and red shoes of the Fedawi, the Chosen Ones of the Order of the Assassins. The Governor, Maudud, tensed, recalled that the Wazir Timur al Molok had departed with this one, and hope began to sing in his heart the hope that aid might be at hand.

But that hope died, like the guttering out of a candle end, leaving the smoke of disappointment in his nostrils, as he saw Josselin put gold pieces in the hands of the young man, nor did Maudud recognize the young *louti*, Ghulam-Hosain, of his own village of Karun. Nor did Maudud know that Ghulam-Hosain was being paid the gold as reward for having inveigled the Wazir Timur al Molok to the floor above, to the room occupied by Alia, where Josselin had overcome the Wazir swiftly and silently.

"Thou hast done well, O Ghulam-Hosain!" Josselin was saying, low voiced, "But remember now that a fair half of this gold is for Theodosia the Byzantine dancer, for having wheedled Fatimah, the slave woman guard of Alia, out of her keys and clothes."

Maudud, silent, but with the shadow of immediate death averted, began again to take heart of grace, so much so that he summoned courage to pose a question to Josselin:

"I would beg favor of thy grace, O Nazarene, to ask what hath become of Timur al Molok, the Wazir?"

Josselin's grave face showed no hint of laughter, "Oh, that one!" he said, as

though in effort to recall, "Remember'st thou the wrestler of Stamboul, and how he defeated himself with but little aid from me, by his own clumsiness? Thou, O Maudud, hast defeated thyself and fallen by thine own clumsiness—in the same fashion—save that in thy fall thou hast incontinently driven home the dagger into the heart of Timur al Molok—the Wazir of the Shah Muhammad what time he lay bound, gagged, and swathed in the robes of Fatimah, thy slave woman!"

THE ghastly import of these tidings began to fill Maudud's comprehension with the black miasma of fear.

But Josselin went on relentless:

"Should the Shah Muhammad overlook thy crime, O Maudud, 'tis unlikely that the Grand Master of thy order will overlook the slaying of his Grand Prior! May thy days be long in the land, O Maudud!" Josselin's voice held no trace of mockery as he turned on his heel.

They left that place, picking their way through the bodies of the slain Kankali Turk guardsmen, down the stairs and then to horse in the courtyard.

"'Twere best we move quickly," Josselin explained, low voiced to the Sheykh, who had thrown aside his years and was like a new man, "I have but a thousand warriors. They can cut their way out before the garrison of the city is assembled but they cannot tarry in the doing of it!"

And so it was. The compact group of Mongol warriors who had forced their way into the citadel, galloped through the streets, and were joined in turn as they came to each cross street by clanking squadrons of armored Yakka Mongols until, like a steel tipped torrent, they overswept the small bands of Kankali Turkish war-

riors who had begun to appear and swept out through the gates and into the open country to the thunder of the hoof beats of a thousand horses.

At the Sheykh's country house there was Josselin's small force of men-at-arms, the sumpter mules carrying the Sheykh's treasure among them, and they were swept up and into the torrent of Mongol warriors which scarce paused on its way, until Josselin had at last put enough leagues between the Sheykh and his daughter and the fear of pursuit.

They came to a white walled village set far back from the road and easily

defended. Here Josselin left his own men-at-arms with the Sheykh and his daughter and the store of treasure.

"I must join my *tumen* but I leave thee in good hands!" he said to Alia. She looked up at him, her head high, her eyes questioning.

"Thou wilt return soon, O Sheykh Josselin?" she asked, grave voiced.

"Nay how could I tarry long in returning?" he asked, leaning down from the saddle, "when my heart, O Alia, is between thy two hands!"

So saying, he rode into the west, to join Tuli the Orluk, in pursuit of the Shah Muhammad.

★ MUTINY AND MURDER ★

By ALICE RICHARDS

THERE is much criminal drama in the history and progress of the commerce that has plied the seven seas. The sea does not wash away the stains of crimes, and justice, as in all other places on the earth, is the winning warrior against the evil doings of all men, be they merchant, mariner or millionaire.

Mutiny and murder are the usual weapons of the criminal mariner and such notorious cases as that which involved the ill-fated and blood-stained adventures of the crew of the "S.S. Veronica" surpass many other crimes in brutality, wickedness and daring.

The disaster which befell the twelve-man crew of this one-thousand ton wooden ship voyaging from Ship Island, in the Gulf of Mexico, to Montevideo with a cargo of timber, seems to have occurred without due cause. As is often the case, it would seem here too that it was the crew's brooding over trivial matters which affected their vanity and lust for personal glory that made them commit enormities so out of proportion to any hope of gain they may have entertained.

The ship's master, Alexander Shaw, was a mature man, of quiet character and an able captain of his twelve-man crew—two mates, a negro cook and eight other men. Upon its departure, the ship was pronounced very seaworthy and well provisioned. There was no obvious cause for alarm, and a safe and profitable voyage seemed to be assured yet, amazingly enough, the "Veronica" was never seen again in port or on sea a few days after it left Ship Island on October 11, 1902, bound for Montevideo.

The first news of the ship's fate was received when one of her lifeboats, manned by five of its

crew, reached Cajueria Island, about 150 miles south of the Equator, on Christmas Day of the year 1902. The five survivors were: Rau, who claimed to be the second officer of the "Veronica," Smith, Morisson, Flohr, and the negro cook. It was Rau who volunteered the story of the "Veronica's" fate and he told a sad but not improbable story of disaster.

RAU related how, while in Florida Straits, one man on board had died of fever and, shortly afterwards, the chief mate was killed by a mysterious accident which also caused injuries to others in the crew. He failed to elaborate upon this "accident." He related further that he was made a second officer by Captain Shaw as a result of the mate's death and that all seemed to go along smoothly again until December 20, when a mysterious fire in the hold forced the captain to order the ship abandoned. The crew collected themselves into two lifeboats but they lost sight of one another in the smoke which billowed over the burning ship.

This story seemed plausible to all those who heard Rau relate the incident; however, it was unfortunate, indeed, that it never occurred to anyone that it was quite strange that the lost boat contained both the master and the first officer, while Rau was in sole command of the surviving boat. Fortunately, impending events threw light upon this strange coincidence and as each new clue and fallacy in the story was unfolded, the full wickedness of the crime was to be seen. No more brutal or purposeless murder would seem to have been committed.

On numerous occasions, the negro cook had con-

fided to several persons that the seven men in the missing lifeboat had been murdered and that the "Veronica" was deliberately fired and sunk by his fellow survivors. This intimation was made to the captain of the "S.S. Brunswick" on which the survivors were given passage to Liverpool. Suspicious of Rau's story and half-believing the cook's accusations of Rau as the treacherous ringleader, the Brunswick's captain handed them over to the Liverpool police immediately upon arriving at that port. Flohr broke down first under questioning and confessed some of the ill doings, while Rau and the others, perceiving that the negro cook had told the entire story to the captain, outwardly accused the cook of the crime.

ACCORDING to Flohr, Rau planned to run away before the "Veronica" put out to sea but changed his mind. Rau was known as a vain, boastful arrogant sailor and often fought with Paddy, another of the crew, who likewise boasted of his abilities as a sailor. About eight weeks out, Rau intimated to Flohr and Morrison that he had heard the mates plotting to throw them overboard. He then suggested that the three band together for a mutiny and throw the officers overboard first. The mutiny was arranged and at midnight on the first Sunday in December, Rau killed Paddy with an iron belaying pin and threw his body overboard, disposed of Johanssen in a similar manner and then proceeded to seek the captain out of his hold. Captain Shaw, whose partial deafness made him totally ignorant of the terrible fracas which was going on below, finally came on deck only to meet a shot from Rau's gun. Wounded and secured he was locked in his cabin

along with another wounded crewman. The negro cook locked himself in his cabin and thereby saved his life. Smith's intercession with Rau finally saved the cook's life and he was ordered to cook for the surviving five men and was also made to provision the lifeboat which they had planned to use after firing the ship.

THE "Veronica" was then made a blazing inferno of dead men and infamous deeds. Although they rehearsed their stories over and over again, there was an unexpected hitch as is the case in all ways of criminals. Two of the survivors, Johanssen and Alec failed to learn the story authored and constantly drilled by Rau, and so they too were murdered. These marked, seven victims, Rau naturally assumed command of the survivors. With all opposition murdered and the Veronica now a burning hulk, the survivors "enjoyed" an uneventful voyage, occupying themselves with rehearsing the story which they thought would allay any and all suspicions as to the real fate of their ship. The other lifeboat was to have been capsized in the story so as to drown the others; and since their boat could not hold seven, Julius was made to die of fever and the first officer of an accident. With land in sight, Rau made sure of last-minute details and threw charts, compasses and remaining food and weapons overboard so as to give verification to their plight.

However, despite all preparation and scheming, Rau and Smith related their stories to the authorities lamely and unconvincingly and the jury, unhesitatingly, returned a verdict of guilty.

So ended one of the strangest episodes in maritime history.

★ CAPTAIN JOHN KIDD ★

By A. GARRISON

CAPTAIN JOHN KIDD was born in Greenock, Scotland in 1650. He went to sea and became a trader out of New York, where he became the owner of a small vessel. He traded among the pirates, and obtained a knowledge of their haunts, and could give a better account of them than any other person. In 1695 he was appointed by the governor of the province of New York to assist in suppressing piracy, and received two commissions from the King, one as privateer against the French, and the other, a roving commission to pursue and capture pirates wherever he might find them.

A vessel was purchased and named the "Adventure Galley," and in this Kidd sailed to the Madeira Islands, Bonavista, St. Jago, and to Madagascar. Then he went to the entrance of the Red Sea, from there to Calicut, and there he took a ship of one hundred fifty tons burden. He sold this prize in Madagascar and then took the "Quedah Merchant," a ship of more than four hundred tons burden, with a Moorish crew. He took the ship to St. Mary's, where he burned the

"Adventure Galley" belonging to his owners, and divided the lading of the "Quedah Merchant" with his crew, taking forty shares for himself. He then sailed for the West Indies where he was refused port. Then he went to a port near Porto Rico, where he obtained provisions and a sloop, in which he stored part of his ill-gotten gains. He purchased this sloop from an Englishman named Bolton. He left the "Quedah Merchant" in Bolton's care and sailed for Boston, disposing of most of his cargo along the way. Bolton sold the "Quedah Merchant" and sailed for Boston, arriving long before Captain Kidd.

When Kidd arrived, he was seized, and all he had to say in his defense was that he thought the "Quedah Merchant" was a lawful prize as she was manned by Moors. He was also charged with murder, having killed a mutinous gunner aboard the "Adventure Galley." He was sent to England and found guilty of murder and piracy. He was condemned and hanged at Execution Dock, London, in 1701, protesting of his innocence to the last.

Instead of smooth fur, his teeth
gripped a hard, scaly surface that
thrashed about like an insane rope



CRAZY CAT

by Frances M. Deegan

*"Curiosity killed the cat" is an oldie
that Tom the "crazy" cat didn't believe in.
He liked hunting—hunting killers, that is!*

LIKE a gray shadow, the cat slipped through the cool meadow grass. His lithe maltese body seemed a part of the shifting sunset mist that clung to the ground.

His rippling movement stopped abruptly, the blunt head turned warily to the left. The damp, earthy sweetness was tainted with dog smell. His neck arched in a swift, fluid curve as he peered over the grass. For a long moment his motionless grace was unbroken, the green eyes blackened with intensity, then the tip of his tail twitched angrily.

The hated hounds were there, eagerly watching the younger of their two masters. He was digging swiftly in the rich black loam, the three hounds circling about him expectantly.

The cat stared thoughtfully, savoring the scent of freshly turned earth. There was a strong gopher smell, which meant a mound of the animals had been disturbed.

A loud explosion blasted the quiet, and the cat flattened himself instinctively. Echoes rolled aimlessly about the meadow and died. Nothing moved for a long time, until a meadow lark soared, dripping notes of wistful regret.

The cat reared his head cautiously. The hounds had vanished, but the older of their two masters stepped from the shelter of the trees bordering the field.

He stooped awkwardly over a dark lump in the grass, straightened with a pair of feet clamped under one arm, and scuttled into the trees. Soon he was back, smoothing and patting the disturbed earth with a shovel. At last he disappeared among the trees.

The melting sun spread a burnished pool behind the trees and sank with a molten splash. The cat licked his chops and crouched in the grass, sniffing at the ground experimentally. After a while he crept toward the tantalizing smell of the scattered gopher mound. Almost at once he pounced on a long striped shape that slid through the grass. He struck expertly behind the head, gave a savage jerk, and experienced a sharp sense of astonishment.

Instead of smooth fur, his teeth gripped a hard, scaly surface, and the thing thrashed about insanely. He clawed at the writhing length with all four feet and twisted the spineless head. His teeth sank deeper, but there was no exhilarating taste of warm blood. He hung on relentlessly until the cold, slippery thing tired and its squirming grew slow and weak. Satisfied, he lifted it in his claws and trotted homeward . . .

The small Dinning cottage was faintly gilded in the afterglow. It looked snug and inviting, nestling there in its old-fashioned flower garden with gay chintz curtains at the windows; but

Greg Dinning sighed wearily as he approached it from the road. He was a tall, lanky young fellow with a sun-burned face and anxious gray eyes. His heavy boots dragged a little, and the battered felt hat sat dejectedly on the back of his head.

THE moment he stepped on the porch there was a scurry of running feet, and Mary was there, breathless and pink-cheeked. The stars in her eyes dimmed at sight of him and she came into his arms slowly. He could feel the ache of understanding in her as he pressed her close and brushed his lips gently across her hair.

"Oh, Greg!" she said in a small muffled voice. "Isn't there anything we can do?"

"Not unless we want to take it to court, honey, and sue Nelson." He patted her shoulder. "That's kind of expensive, and—"

"I know. You'd have to hire a lawyer and all that, and we just haven't got the money. But there must be some way you can make him let you plow up that pasture, it's yours, you rented it and paid for it!"

"We can't blame Henry Nelson too much, hon. He got a raw deal out of it, too, when his brother took the whole year's rental I paid him and skipped out with it."

"I blame him!" she said indignantly. "Those Nelsons—they're all crooks. He should have told you the well water was poisoned before you spent good money for those cows. If you hadn't had to sell them at such a loss, you might have enough money now to hire a lawyer."

"I guess I'm just not very smart," Greg said gloomily. "Maybe I wasn't cut out to be a farmer. I guess maybe we should have stayed in town and saved our money. Now all we've got is

this house, and an empty barn, and ten acres of pasture standing idle."

"Oh, darling, I didn't mean that! It's just that it makes me so mad because it's not fair. What did Sheriff Bergan say when you told him about it?"

"Said it looked like a tough break all around. Said he was surprised at John Nelson lighting out that way, he always thought John was the steady one in the family, and Henry was the lazy no-account. But I suppose if there's bad blood in a family, it's bound to come out one time or another."

"It does seem funny that he'd walk out and leave his own son," said Mary, frowning. "Gavin Nelson seems like a nice enough boy, and I know he doesn't get along with his uncle Henry. It must be kind of hard on him, too."

"Hon!" Greg pinched her cheek. "I thought all the Nelsons were crooks. Especially when their hound dogs chase your cat!"

"They do not!" She stepped back indignantly. "Tom's not scared of those cur dogs. He jumps them every time. You should have seen him this morning, he nearly gouged an eye out of one of them, jumped right for the dog's face when he came snooping around the back yard."

"Now, honey! Any cat that would do that is just plain crazy."

"He did too, do it! I guess I saw him, Greg Dinning. And that old hound let out a yelp and ran, with his tail between his legs and bloody teeth-marks around his eyes."

"Claw marks, honey. Cats don't fight with their teeth."

She looked at him with feminine exasperation. "Tom does," she said firmly. "How else do you suppose he catches all those rabbits and things he brings home?"

"Only very little rabbits," Greg

teased her. "You ought to let me take him with me next time I go hunting. I'd train him to retrieve something his own size."

"Oh, Greg! I know you're only trying to kid me out of the dumps, and you must be hungry, too. Come on, supper's almost ready."

He followed her to the kitchen, and felt a familiar wave of tenderness sweep through him, watching her straight, independent back and the business-like tilt of her blond head, intent on the important job of feeding her man.

He washed up at the sink, and continued to watch her as he dried his hands and face. She was so little, and quick and competent. He felt suddenly like a clumsy, inadequate fool who had clutched at a dream, and muffed it. His jaw moved stubbornly.

"Don't worry, honey," he said harshly. "I'll think of something—figure out some way—"

Tom announced himself with muffled triumph at the kitchen door. Mary turned her bright head from the stove and went to let him in. He deposited his trophy at her feet and gazed up with a bland little thrill of achievement.

Mary leaped away as the thing wriggled feebly, hiked up her skirts and shrieked. Greg galloped across the kitchen and kicked the thing out the back door. Then he sat down and roared with laughter.

"That crazy cat!" he gasped. "He's dragged home everything now but a skunk. I can hardly wait!"

Mary smoothed her skirts down and asked breathlessly: "What was that?"

"Only a little garter snake, but what the dickens did he want with a snake? I tell you that cat's crazy!"

"He's not crazy," Mary declared. "It's because he's not afraid of anything that crawls or walks. That thing could have been a rattlesnake for all he cared. Maybe you'll believe me now when I tell you he jumps Nelson's hound dogs."

"All right, honey. He's some cat, even if he is a little nutty."

"Never mind, Tom," coaxed Mary. "I think you're a wonderful, smart cat, and I'm going to give you some salmon for your supper. Do you want some salmon?"

"M-yeah!" agreed Tom running to her with tail lifted expectantly.

As Mary got down the can and opened it, they continued their odd conversation of words and expressive responses, apparently in complete understanding.

Greg pulled up his chair and sat at the table, grinning a little. "That darn thing almost talks, at that," he admitted gravely. "Ask him how he happened to bring home a snake. That ought to be some cat tale!"

After supper Greg stayed in the kitchen, smoking his pipe and rather wistfully turning the pages of a farm catalogue, as Mary cleared away the supper dishes. She scalded and dried a gallon milk can and called Tom.

"Come, Tommy. Milk time." The cat came instantly, mewing in anticipation of their daily visit to the Coburn farm where he received a shot of warm milk direct from the cow.

Mary leaned over Greg's shoulder and kissed his ear. "We'll have our farm, Greg," she said, "and make enough money to buy all the tractors and farm gadgets you want."

"Sure we will, honey," said Greg, too heartily.

TOM was at the screen door, peering out and sniffing the air, apparently puzzled at the reception given his prize.

followed a path, but Tom knew his way unerringly, and prowled among the tangled growth, his hunter's instinct on the alert.

Jim Coburn was a stocky, red-faced man with a genial grin. He was busy with his milking when Mary entered the barn, and greeted her over his shoulder.

"Evening, Mis' Dinning. Where's that thirsty Tom cat?"

"He'll be along," said Mary. "He wouldn't miss his evening call for anything."

"Reckon not," Coburn agreed, concentrating once more on the frothy streams filling the pail. "How'd Greg make out in town today?"

"Not very well. Sheriff Bergan seems to think the only thing we can do is take it to court."

"Uh-huh. I was afraid of that. It sure does beat me how John Nelson ever came to do a thing like that. Henry claims he never knew nothing about it until you folks moved in, and that was a month, six weeks after John had disappeared. When Henry found out you folks had paid John a whole year's rent, he quit lookin' for him. Says he figured John just got tired of farmin', and took the money and skipped."

"There must have been something else," said Mary. "Some other reason why he wanted to disappear. The money gave him the means to get away, but he must have been in some kind of trouble, or he surely wouldn't have gone away and left his son without a word."

"That reminds me—you see anything of Gavin today?"

"No. Why?"

"His uncle Henry was by here just before supptime, askin' if we'd seen him. Says the kid's been gone all day, and left him with all the chores to do.

Henry ain't much of a hand to do farm chores, so he was pretty sore about it. Likely he's been workin' the kid pretty hard since John left."

"You think Gavin has disappeared too? Maybe he knows where his father is."

"He ain't been actin' like he knew anything," said Coburn thoughtfully. "Gavin was pretty much attached to his pa, and after he disappeared the boy went around like a lost hound dog. Don't seem likely his pa could have got word to him without Henry finding it out."

Tom had entered the barn and placed himself strategically near the foaming milk bucket. Coburn pretended not to notice him until the cat yowled impatiently.

"Oh, you here again?" grinned Coburn. "Here you are—" He directed a stream of milk expertly toward the cat, and Tom as expertly absorbed it, wiped his whiskers with a pink tongue, and yowled for more.

DUSK had thickened when Mary started back toward home. The wild clover seemed taller and thicker, and the white blossoms sent forth a heavier sweetness in the dew. Tom ranged through the jungle-like growth on some trail of his own until a stealthy movement ahead arrested him. His ears flattened as he caught a faint dog scent. There was man scent too. The cat crept nearer and leaped suddenly at a face. For the second time that day he was astonished, his jaws opened as the thing reared up and became a man, and the cat let go his hold and dropped to the ground. There was a wild thrashing as the man beat his way through the thick growth, and the cat dove toward the path and ran home like a streamlined streak.

Mary stood stock still on the path,

terror beating up into her throat, then the man was gone. She gasped and ran, heedless of the thick leafy sprays whipping at her face and hair, the milk sloshing noisily in the heavy gallon can.

Greg heard her running feet and came swiftly out of the kitchen to meet her. He caught her with one arm, and reached for the milk can as she stumbled against him, sobbing and panting.

He held her without speaking until her ragged breathing became easier. "What scared you, honey?" he asked quietly.

"A man!" she gasped. "There was a man there—in the clover."

"Who was it?"

"I don't know. He—he was just there—all of a sudden—in front of me. And then he ran—"

"He didn't touch you?"

"No—no. He just jumped up and ran."

"You come on in the house. I'll go see—"

"No, Greg, don't go!"

"Sh-h. You'll be all right. You can lock the door. I'll take the shotgun and a flashlight. I have to see what he was up to. We don't want any prowlers around here." Greg led her into the kitchen, talking to her all the while he loaded the gun and rummaged in the closet for a flashlight. Slowly the color came back in to her face and her eyes lost their glassy terror.

"Maybe it was Gavin Nelson," she said shakily. "Mr. Coburn told me he's disappeared from home too. Maybe he had a fight with his uncle."

"Wouldn't be at all surprised," said Greg. "But you lock the door anyway. I'll be right back."

He was back in five minutes, beating on the locked door. When Mary opened it the cat scampered in and Greg followed, his face tight with shock.

"Greg! What is it?" she gasped.

He set the shotgun near the door. "It's—pretty bad, honey, he said harshly. "I'll have to call up Sheriff Bergan. It's Gavin Nelson—he's been shot. Whoever it was you saw must have left him there—dragged him from some place else and left him."

SHERIFF BERGAN was a hearty, robust man of sixty. He drove out from town alone in his battered Ford. He said, "Figure we might need a little help here. I phoned Jim Coburn to come over. Phoned Henry Nelson—he's coming, too."

Briefly, Greg told him about the prowler and his discovery of the body.

"And you got no idea who it was you saw, Mrs. Dinning?" His mild blue eyes turned to Mary. They were neither kind nor cold, merely questioning.

"No—no. I couldn't—it was too dark to see," Mary faltered.

"Seems kind of funny," mused the sheriff, "him jumping up that way. If he'd just laid still, you wouldn't have known he was there, would you?"

"You can take a look through that clover," said Greg gruffly. "You ought to be able to find some sign of where he was hiding. Mary can show you about where it was."

"That's okay," said the Sheriff. "And I'm not doubting your word—yours or Mrs. Dinning's. I just want to get it all straight in my mind before I go ahead. I'd like to know where Gavin Nelson was all day. Jim Coburn tells me his uncle was looking for him round about supertime."

"That's right," said Greg. "He mentioned it to Mary—asked her if she'd seen anything of Gavin today."

"And you hadn't?" asked the sheriff.

"Oh, no. I was home here all day," Mary explained. "And he—they, neither one of them came around here

after Greg had that argument with Henry Nelson."

"Yeah." Sheriff Bergan brushed his gray mustache with a hard hand, first to the left and then to the right. "There was quite a bit of bad feeling between you and the Nelsons I expect. Didn't happen you told them to stay away from this place—threatened them maybe?" He eyed Greg with a sharp, still gaze.

"Of course not." Greg threw out a defenseless hand. "What would be the good of that? There's nothing here they want."

"No," said the sheriff, but his bushy brows lifted questioningly as he looked at Mary.

"Maybe you'd better come out and take a look at the body," said Greg roughly. "Coburn ought to be coming by that way soon. We can met him out there."

"He won't be coming that way," said the sheriff. "Told him to drive around by the road. Don't want nobody messing around out there— Guess that'll be him coming now."

A second car turned in from the road and stopped behind the sheriff's Ford. Jim Coburn's round, red face was drawn with gravity when he entered the parlor. He nodded briefly, and said, "Evening."

"Would you mind stepping outside and showing us where you saw this prowler, Mrs. Dinning?" asked the sheriff.

"Of course I don't mind," said Mary stoutly. "It was about half-way through that patch of clover, and the man was hiding off to the left of the path where the body was."

"How'd you know there was a body?"

"I— Why, I didn't!"

"I told her where the body was," said Greg angrily, "after I'd found it. And

if you've got any idea Mary or I had anything to do with this—"

"Now, now," said the sheriff mildly. "Let's not get excited till we know what's what. We'll take a look-around first, and then we'll sit down and talk it over."

The sheriff's "look-around" lasted only half an hour and produced very little additional information. They found the broken trail through the tangled clover where the body had been dragged from a wooded section. There the trail ended. They found the spot indicated by Mary where the clover was crushed as if a man had lain there in hiding, but Sheriff Bergan was not much impressed. It was obvious that he was thinking that Greg could have done it to bolster Mary's story about a prowler.

IN THE glare of the flashlights Mary looked white and nervous, and Greg's jaw was set grimly. Their own predicament almost overshadowed the shock of seeing Gavin Nelson lying there in the dank night, rumpled and grimy, like a carelessly discarded piece of trash. He had been shot in the left side and his blood-soaked body wrapped in a filthy blanket.

Greg and Jim Coburn carried the stiffening body back to the cottage, and Sheriff Bergan telephoned Dr. Bradkin, the coroner. When he turned from the phone, his face was bleak and his voice was flat. He said, "Figure he was shot about sundown, maybe in that patch of woods that runs between here and the Nelson farm." He looked at Greg under shaggy eyebrows. "You left me round about four o'clock," he said. "Did you come straight on home?"

"Yes, I did. But I couldn't get a ride, so I walked. It must have been close to six when I got here."

"It was," said Mary thinly. "Be-

cause I had supper all ready, and we sat right down and ate. Greg didn't go out at all after he came home, until that man scared me, and that was after dark."

Jim Coburn cleared his throat raggedly. "It was coming on dark when Mis' Dinning left my place," said the man unhappily. "We talked a while about Gavin Nelson. About him disappearing like his pa."

"Say, how about that?" Greg lifted his head tensely. "Maybe John Nelson did disappear like his son. Maybe he was put out of the way, too, by somebody that—that—"

"By Henry Nelson you mean, don't you?" said the sheriff heavily. "I don't see as Henry would have any cause to kill off his own relations."

"But maybe he did have!" said Mary sharply. "Maybe they had a fight. You said yourself that John Nelson wasn't the kind to run off and leave his son and his farm."

"Nor he wasn't," said the sheriff. "But that don't signify. Man gets his hands on a hunk of money, and no telling what ideas he'll get in his head."

The cat suddenly left his place beneath Mary's chair and stalked across the parlor, his fur ruffled and tail stiff. A step sounded on the porch and Henry Nelson stood in the door. The dogs ran about the yard nervously, panting and whining, and Tom backed up angrily, a low snarl in his throat.

"Come in, Henry," said the sheriff stiffly. "Took you quite a while to get here."

"I told you I had all the chores to do. Where's Gavin? How'd he get hurt?"

His voice rasped belligerently, and his narrow face sagged loosely in lines of discontent. He entered without removing his hat which was pulled low on his forehead. As he faced the room

Mary made a small choking sound and covered her mouth with her hand. Strips of tape outlined the man's left eye in the shape of a V with the point toward his nose.

"It was you!" gasped Mary. "You were the prowler! You left Gavin's body in the clover patch, you—you killed him!"

"What you hollerin' about?" said Nelson angrily.

"Sheriff!" Mary turned wildly toward her husband. "Greg! Make them listen to me! Don't you see—his eye? Tom jumped him in the clover—that's why he got up and ran! There are teeth marks under that tape—just like the marks on his dog's face. I know it—I just know it!"

GREG looked bewildered and put his arm about her protectingly. "Wait a minute, honey," he said tautly. "That sounds a little crazy. I don't think—"

"You always say that!" cried Mary hysterically. "I tell you it's not crazy!" She left him suddenly and scooped up her cat. "Now call those dogs in here and I'll show you the marks around that hound's eye. Just like the ones on his face—pinched together at one end where Tom sank his teeth, and spreading out as Tom lost his grip."

"Mrs. Dinning, you're a little excited," said the sheriff placatingly. "That don't hardly make sense—what you're saying."

Jim Coburn got up suddenly and brushed past Nelson to open the screen door. "We can soon find out about the hound, anyway," he said brusquely, and strode out to call the dogs. He returned immediately with a dirty brown and white hound in his arms. The cat writhed in Mary's arms, spitting feline curses, and the hound cowered trying to wriggle backward out of Coburn's grasp.

"He's marked up all right," said Coburn, displaying the jagged V around the dog's left eye. "And Henry never had no marks on him when he stopped by my place this evening, so he must've got 'em afterwards."

"Danged rake fell on me when I went out to the barn to milk," growled Nelson. "I had all the chores to do, an' I was rushed."

"That ain't so," said Coburn quietly. "Them cows hadn't been milked when I drove by a little bit ago. They was bawlin' their heads off. An' you ain't had time to milk four cows since then. Chances are, if we went over to your barn right now, we'd find the cows still bawlin' to be milked."

"You got scratches along the side of your jaw, too," said the sheriff thoughtfully. "Couldn't get those off no kind of rake I ever saw."

"What are you tryin' to do?" Nelson's voice was hoarse with fury. "Tryin' to make out I shot my own nephew? Why you— Hey! What you doin'? Leave me go!"

"Shut up!" said Sheriff Bergan coldly. "Nobody told you Gavin was shot. When I rang you up I told you he'd had an accident. If you know how he was killed, you must know a whole lot more than you been lettin' on. Let's have a look at those marks around your eye."

"Leave me go, you—" Nelson cursed viciously as he struggled against the sheriff's grip. Coburn thrust the hound out the door and stepped swiftly to the sheriff's side, securing Nelson's free arm. The man gasped as the sheriff ripped off the tape, revealing a jagged V almost identical to that on the dog's face.

Mary was squeezing Tom so tightly that he let out a sharp wail of protest, breaking the tension in the room. Mary sank limply to the couch and Greg sat

beside her with his arm about her shoulders.

Henry Nelson was trembling with rage and fright as Coburn and the sheriff kept their grip on him. "I guess maybe I'll have to use these," said the sheriff apologetically, bringing out his handcuffs. "I'm holding you, Henry Nelson, as a material witness, until I find out some more about what's been goin' on around here. Greg, I guess you and Mrs. Dinning will be here when I want you?"

"Yes, sir! We certainly will," said Greg loudly. "This means everything to us."

The next morning Greg was out at dawn with a scythe, cutting down the wild tangle of clover. At the far edge of the patch he met Jim Coburn, who was gray-faced and haggard, after being up all night.

"Well, we found most of the cash you paid John Nelson," he told Greg wearily. "Found it in Henry's bedroom, together with a copy of the lease you signed. So he's been lyin' right along. Looks like he might've done away with John and Gavin both."

"He can't be charged with John Nelson's death unless you find the body," said Greg. "And most of the evidence against him in Gavin's death is circumstantial." He grinned crookedly. "We can't very well put Mary's cat on the witness stand."

"DON'T reckon we're gonna need his testimony," said Coburn with solemn humor. "Sheriff recalled what you told him about the well in the pasture bein' poisoned. Said he wondered at the time how a good well could get poisoned all at once, and have to be filled in. Soon as it was daylight we went out and had a look, an' what we saw was mighty suspicious. There'd been somebody diggin' there just re-

cently, an' we found what look to be blood spatters on the grass around it. We figure maybe Gavin got suspicious an' started diggin' up the well to see if anything was buried there. Sheriff's got men workin' on it now."

"If he killed John Nelson and buried him in that well, he must be pretty dumb," protested Greg. "You say he had the lease, so he knew we were moving in here. He'd known I'd want the use of that well. Why would he bury his brother there when he had a whole farm to himself where he could bury any number of bodies without anybody being the wiser?"

"That's just where the catch comes in. County Attorney was out to the Nelson house last night, an' he read the lease over. He says there was a mistake in the description of the land you leased. What you got is not a lease on that ten acre pasture, but on that plowed field the other side of the woods. That's how come Henry might have thought it was safe to pick the pasture well for a buryin' spot."

Greg looked dumfounded. "My gosh!" he said weakly. "My gosh! Maybe I've still got time to plant wheat

if I get right at it. I'll have to— My gosh! I'll have to tell Mary . . ."

Mary met him at the kitchen door, her eyes wide with important news. "Greg! They've found John Nelson's body—and you'll never in the world guess where!"

"In the pasture well that was supposed to be poisoned," said Greg promptly.

"Oh-h!" Mary looked at him reproachfully. "I thought I'd surprise you. How did you know?"

"I was just talking to Jim Coburn, and I've got the darndest surprise for you! Where's that price list from the grain company? You know—the one I sent for when I thought I might plow up the pasture and— What's the matter?"

"Oh, Greg! I—I'm awfully sorry. Tom sort of tore it up, and I— It wasn't much good any more so I burned it up."

Greg's grin was wide and happy. "That's all right, honey. Tom can tear up all my correspondence after this. I take back everything I ever said about him. He's not crazy—he's just a huntin' fool!"

★ A TRIP TO THE MOON ★

By MILDRED MURDOCK

WHAT is it like on the moon? Men have pondered that question for ages past, some using the scientific data available, others letting their imaginations wander unchecked by practical considerations. One of the latter was Bishop Francis Godwin, whose book "The Man in the Moon," published in 1638, certainly does not mirror the scientific knowledge which had been achieved up to the period in which he lived. It was the first story in English literature, however, dealing with interplanetary adventure.

The hero of the book, Domingo Gonzales, finds some swans on St. Helena which he calls gansas, and which he trains to carry weights and to obey orders. He then builds a seat for himself, to which he harnesses a number of gansas, so that they may fly with him through the air. To his surprise, the birds fly straight for the moon, as if

it were the destination of their yearly migration. They fly for twelve days at great speed. The air between the "zones of attraction" of the earth and the moon he finds to be mild and pleasant, neither hot nor cold, and having the miraculous property of preventing the pangs of hunger, no matter how severe.

At length he lands on the moon. It is found to be a perfect paradise, a place without want, unrest, or war. It is inhabited by human beings like those on earth, except that they are of larger size, of better quality, and greater wisdom. The language is a musical one, so much so that it cannot be written in letters; notes must be used.

After spending some time on the moon, the gansas seem eager to fly back, and Domingo returns to the earth in the same pleasant manner in which he made the ascent.



Linda shrank back in terror as the monster slid by thrashing wildly

JERK GETS GIRL

by V. V. Dredaine

WHEN she woke to find herself on the tiny island, she felt no alarm. Her first concern was for her skin; the smiling male clerk in Bermuda's most fashionable store had warned her that a South Sea lava-lava offered very little protection against the white sun. But she wasn't badly burned at all.

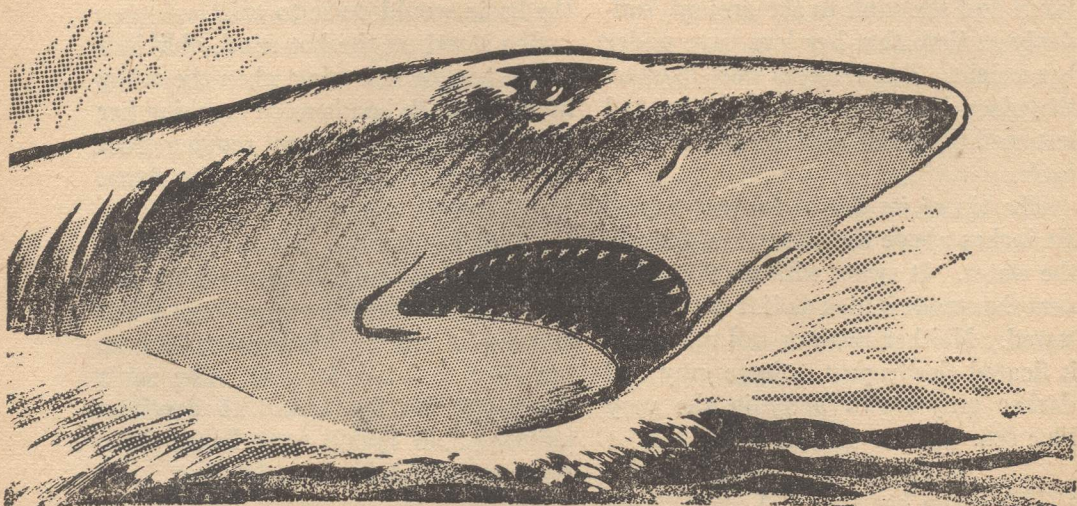
The sun had dropped from its position overhead when she had fallen asleep. That had been three hours or so earlier. While she slept, the tide came in and covered most of the peninsula. She'd seen it stretching away from the rest of the shore like a finger pointing out to sea. Its highest point was at the fingertip, where it formed a little hill, and she'd walked out on the

peninsula to sit there and be alone for a while.

Everything was very much like the tourist brochures had promised: *Bask in the Warmth of a Tropical Sun, Listen to the Whisper of the Surf and Feel the Caress of the Breeze Stealing over You . . .* She rose and stretched. Her skin felt taut where the sun had gotten at it. The sea wasn't as calm as it had been before the tide started coming in. Her hill on the peninsula was now an island some twenty feet square, and the rest of the slender white strip was under water which she estimated was five or six feet deep, right behind her.

She smiled. It meant she would have to swim back to the beach, and while the distance was no more than two hun-

Tom and David kept their eyes on Linda but so did eighteen feet of big, hungry, man-eating shark!



dred and fifty yards, her *lava-lava* was considerably—say, two hundred and forty-eight and a half—less. If a man came by on the beach when she happened to be coming out of the water, or before she'd had a chance to dry, well. . . .

Probably the clerk had been thinking something like that when he spoke to her. She remembered her sense of annoyance when she'd felt herself blushing for no good reason. Hell, she thought, I wish I were the man who came by when I climbed out of the water. That made her think of Tom and she smiled again, trying to imagine how it would be if Tom were the man.

She stuck a toe into the water. It felt cool.

Then she saw the gray belly of a shark at it turned over very easily, swimming in the water between her and the beach.

Her eyes teared and a wave of nausea swept through her. She had never before known so profound a fear. This was fear that came up slowly, and it remained, undiminished, for moment after moment. Her muscles tightened and she opened her mouth and sucked in a long breath. Then her fists relaxed and she sank to the ground, suddenly so limp that her legs gave under her weight. But her eyes were fixed on the place in the water where she had last seen the shark, and she saw it come back.

The tip of its dorsal fin was a bare six inches above the cleaved surface of the water. It swam with an effortless-ness that made it look as if it were being towed. Neither fins nor tail moved as it floated slowly past, a huge gray and darker gray-brown body in the very blue sea.

SHE lay on her back. A wave broke across the tiny island and the sun

made a rainbow in the spray. The shark would leave, she knew. It was unusual for one to have come so near shore at all. The notice at the hotel warned guests not to go swimming in strange or unguarded waters. The shark would go away and then she would quickly swim back to shore. She sat up and looked for the shark.

She had almost decided it was gone when she saw the long shadow sliding across the white sand under water, and the shark reappeared.

The spray caught her again, less delicately this time. When it hit her a third time, she suddenly realized that the island had grown smaller by almost a third. The tide was still coming in. In a little while the whole island would be under water. The shark was swimming more swiftly now. She could see its powerful tail flick as it went by. It was swimming in a circle, and she understood why. The peninsula was sloped, like a bridge that sagged in the middle, and the beach was concave at that point. Now that it was under water, it formed a basin. The shark had entered the basin and was swimming around in it. When the little island would be entirely under water, the basin would cease to exist.

She stood on the hot sand, oblivious to the breeze, shivering when the spray hit her. Both hands were touching her throat, and her eyes kept moving from the water to the horizons of the shore. There was no one in sight.

"Tom'll miss me," she said out loud. She turned toward where she knew the hotel was, perhaps a mile away, but it was out of sight. "He'll come back to the hotel and ask for me. The sun's down too far for David to continue painting, and Tom'll come back. He'll miss me and he'll come looking . . ."

Suddenly she screamed. Her fingers recoiled from the feel of the cords in

her neck, and she was frightened by the sound she'd heard in her voice.

It would be bad for the hotel. "She came here to be married to a Mr. Thomas Forman," a lady under the green awnings on the terrace was saying, "and on this day—three days before her wedding, poor girl—she put on one of those little what-do-you-call-its and went out swimming. Well, when this Mr. Forman came back to the hotel with his painter friend—a Mr. Stephenson who's a resident here; that house up at the point, if you've seen it—well, he just heard the first few words and collapsed. Like a sack of—"

"Tom!" she screamed. "Tom! Tom!"

She wondered whether her screaming had brought the shark so close to the surface. Could fish hear sounds from outside the water? It seemed odd to her that she should be crying. She turned slowly and saw how much smaller the island had become. If fish couldn't hear, why did fishermen insist that loud talking frightened them away? She wondered why she was crying.

It was a lovely day. Where the beach ended, the tall grass began, and beyond it lay a grove of fruit trees with a musical name she couldn't remember. The sky was blue enough to be a reflection of the water, and the afternoon sun had gentled. Just like the advertisements said . . . except that in the water, twenty feet away—

"Tom!"

He'd come then, as she had known he would. He saw her and came running down the beach with David. He had come back and missed her and come looking for her.

"Tom, I'm marooned! There's a shark here!" she called, rising to her toes. Tom and David both waved to her. Then Tom stopped to peel off his white duck trousers and stood in his

swimming trunks. "Tom!" she screamed, and her voice broke.

Tom cupped his hands and shouted through them. The words floated out to her, distorted and hardly audible. "Ohhh-kayy, Linn-da!"

"Shark!" she screamed.

They both waved and Tom went in up to his ankles.

"Shark!"

He was running to meet an oncoming low roller.

Suddenly she swept an arm down and tore the *lava-lava* from her body. Tom saw her and stopped, and the wave broke against his middle and swept on. He stood there for a moment and then turned to David, and then he backed out of the water. He turned to face her again and his hands made the quick slapping motions in midair that he sometimes used to indicate disapproval.

"Shark!" she screamed. She couldn't see him through her tears, but she stiffened her body against the sobs that shook her. She dropped the cloth to her feet. The next wave that hit the island soaked the cloth and made it a small wet ball.

"NOW what the hell does she want to do a thing like that for?" said Tom. "What a damn fool thing to do!"

Stephenson smiled again. "I'm sorry I can't share that reaction to such a lovely nude. Seriously, though, at that distance and with the sun behind her, we can hardly see her—and don't think she doesn't know it. Feeling good, I suppose."

"Listen, Dave, you know more about things like this than I do. About what happens to girls when they get to a place like this. If—"

"Are you kidding?"

"The hell I am! It isn't as if . . . well—"

"As if what, Tom?" said Stephenson,

very quietly. "As if Linda hadn't been one of my models before you met her through me? As if she was flaunting something? Or as if she was what so many people like you stupidly think of all of them?"

"I'm sorry."

"I wonder."

"All right, then wonder."

"Now I'm sorry," said Stephenson, smiling, "My guess is that she wants to stay out there by herself a while longer—maybe until the island disappears. She likes to play games and she knows you'd never go out after her like that. Especially with me around."

"There's a lot of smirking around here," said Tom.

"I'll meet you back at the hotel," said Stephenson.

"Wait. She's putting it on again."

"Before the tide carries it ashore."

"Anyway, I'm glad she tired of this game fast," Tom said as he started to go into the water again. He hadn't taken three steps when Linda tore off the soaked, clinging cloth.

Stephenson laughed. "Can you hear what she's saying?"

"I don't give a damn. What does she think this— Hell, what if someone from the hotel saw this? My whole damn family's coming in tomorrow, and if a breath of this—"

"What your family needs is a breath of fresh air!"

"Like this, huh?"

"Exactly. Couldn't be better. You stink."

"Go die," said Tom. "That's my girl and I'm going out there to get her." He walked down the beach into the water again. As he went in to his knees, he watched the nude form on the island. He saw Linda bend, swing an arm, and a rock splashed into the water fifty yards away from her. He stood there undecided for a moment. Then he

turned, came back up the beach and put on his trousers. "I'm going back to the hotel," he said.

"Why must you be such a jerk?" said Stephenson.

"Because I'm a jerk. Jerk meets girl, jerk loses girl."

"The island won't last much longer. Is it so terrible that she wants to wait? Look at her gathering rocks. She must think you're still coming after her."

"She's wrong," said Tom. "Coming? Or does the spectacle—"

"Oh, shut up."

"You *can* wait, you know," said Tom. "Sure, I'll tell her."

As he cupped his hands in front of his mouth, Stephenson took him by the shoulder and pulled one of his arms down roughly. Tom spun around, a fist coming up. Stephenson caught the hand halfway up, but he was looking past Tom to the island.

"Tom!" he cried. "Look what she's doing!" He grabbed Tom's other hand and turned him around to face the island. "She's got all those rocks in her *lava-lava*. She's going to throw it away!"

The girl had evidently made a bundle of the strip of wet cloth and she was swinging it around her like a hammer thrower. She lost her balance and fell, and the rocks tumbled out of the cloth. On all fours she gathered them again.

"She's gone crazy," Tom said in a low voice.

The two men stood there, neither moving, as if finally both were prepared to let the scene come to what now seemed its inexorable end. They watched her swing the weighted cloth again. When she let it go, a soft, strange sound of hurt escaped through Tom's tight lips. The cloth sailed towards shore, scarcely five feet over the water. It hit, bounced once and sank.

"All right, Tom— *Tom! Look!*"

From out of the quiet water where the cloth had vanished, a gray form rose in a lightning slash of movement. The water was cut as if by a large black triangular blade, then it was quiet again.

SHE sank to the ground again, and for the first time in a quarter of an hour she stopped crying. She watched the figures of the two men disappear as they ran swiftly down the beach. She couldn't think of anything . . . then suddenly she felt warmth returning to her body and the blood hammering in her temples. It hardly seemed to her that it was her own voice laughing, as she began to dig . . .

When the motor launch came roaring

along parallel to the shore, she saw Tom and David standing at the prow with two other men who held rifles. She knew they wouldn't see her until they were very close, because she was lying flat in a shallow pit and her body was covered with mud she had made of the sand. The pit was three feet long and half as wide, and it took up three-fourths of the island.

Thirty yards away they saw her and someone held up a blanket.

"Turn around! Everybody turn around!" she shrieked. "I'll stay here until dark if you don't!"

She never understood why Tom and David almost fell apart laughing at that. After all, it wasn't as if . . .

★ ECUADORIAN INCIDENT ★

By CHARLES REEVES

TO THE people of little Ecuador, one of our many South American good neighbors, the people from the United States still seem a bit on the side of mystery, and it is no wonder. Of all the Americans who visit there, everyone has a different reason for coming, each reason so different from another, and everyone is different in make-up. Take, for instance, Albert B. Franklin, who is a well-known authority on these people in this little country. One afternoon, having found rooms in a quiet little hotel, between planes, he found himself with nothing to do for at least two or three hours, and rang for the montubio porter.

When the servant's face peered around the door,

the young author asked what the native would do if he, himself, were not working. The Ecuadorian promptly supplied the answer by saying that he would be at the *maraton* in the American Parr, which was some distance from the hotel.

So Franklin asked directions to the Parr, and the servant, looking puzzled, asked why the *senor* desire directions, for *certainemente* the taxi driver would be able to find it.

But Franklin explained that he wished to walk, upon which the servant inquired if the *senor* was a *mister*? "Yes," said Franklin, "but what had that to do with it?"

"But *senor*, it is so rare a thing: a person who speaks Christian and yet likes to walk!"

★ MORE VODOO GODS ★

THERE is family life in the ways of the gods, too, and here is the story of some of those little groups. The god of the sea, Agwe Woyo, and he has a son and a daughter, Agweto and Agweta Woyo. They all figure rather importantly along the coastal areas, near the waters, and not as much in spots such as Mirebalais.

For the loss of prestige in Mirebalais, one must understand that this is due to the fact that there is a river near Mirebalais, and the river-gods are high men, particularly the spirits of the Artibonite River, a *loa* named Clairme, who is a Petro deity like his wife and daughter, Mme. Clairme and Clairmezine. This little family groups lives in the deepest part of the stream. All the tributaries and streams of this river flow into the river, which

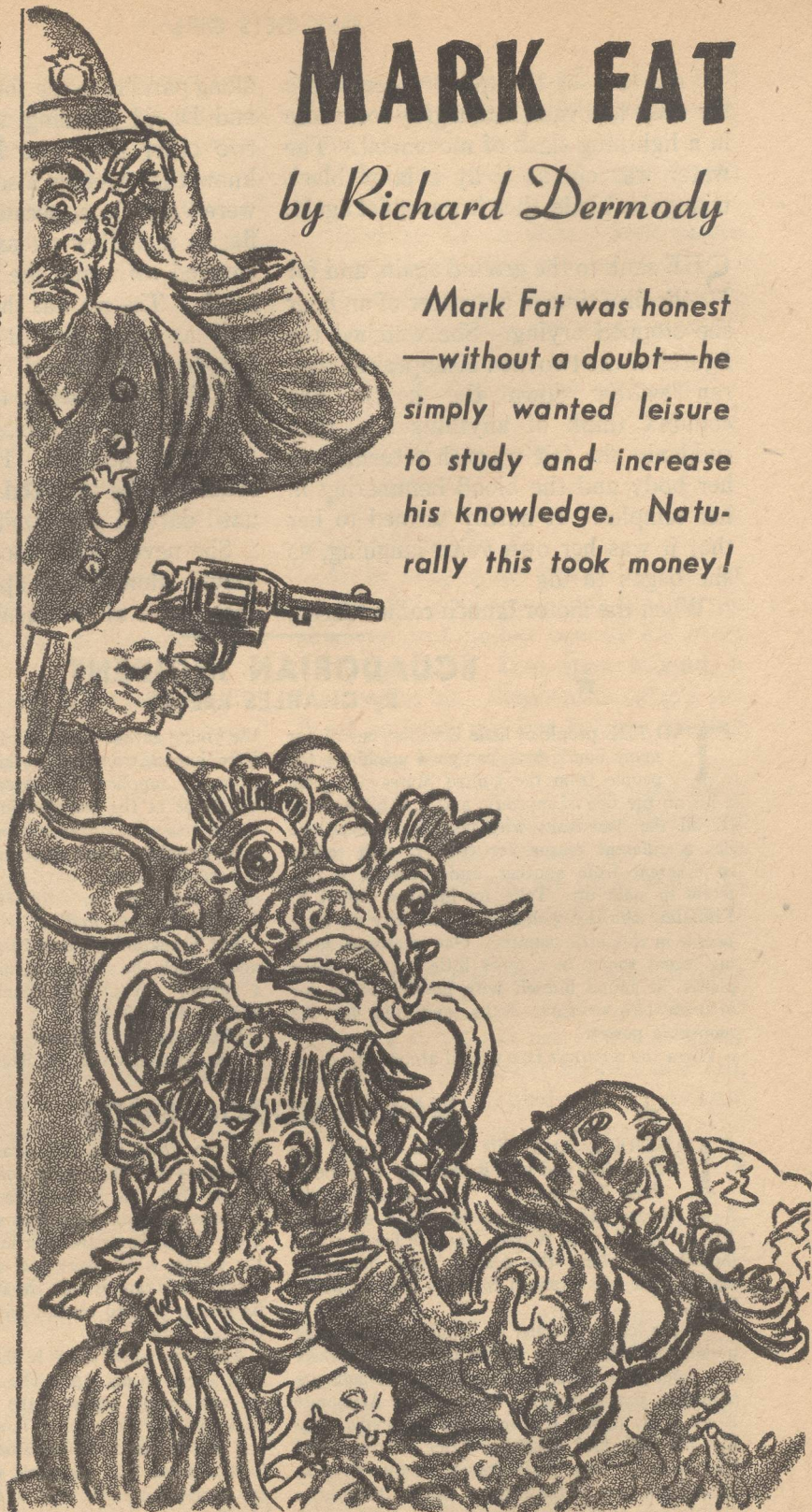
in turn flows into the ocean. When the river overflows and there is a flood, it is said by the people that this is the time when Clairme goes to inspect his disciples, and all his spirits rise to greet him as he passes their mouths. As he passes, the waters which were held up for the great occasion, flow rapidly into the flooded Artibonite, as its master goes to consult with the great ruler of the sea, Agwe.

Actually, when there is the real rainy season, this legend bears up. The force of the light-colored muddy water of the major stream holds back the darker colored flow of its tributaries, and this is just as is explained in the tale. The Tombe River was once held up in this way, and the natives on seeing this, were heard to say that the Tombe was waiting for its master.—by J. Star.

MARK FAT

by Richard Dermody

Mark Fat was honest
—without a doubt—he
simply wanted leisure
to study and increase
his knowledge. Natu-
rally this took money!



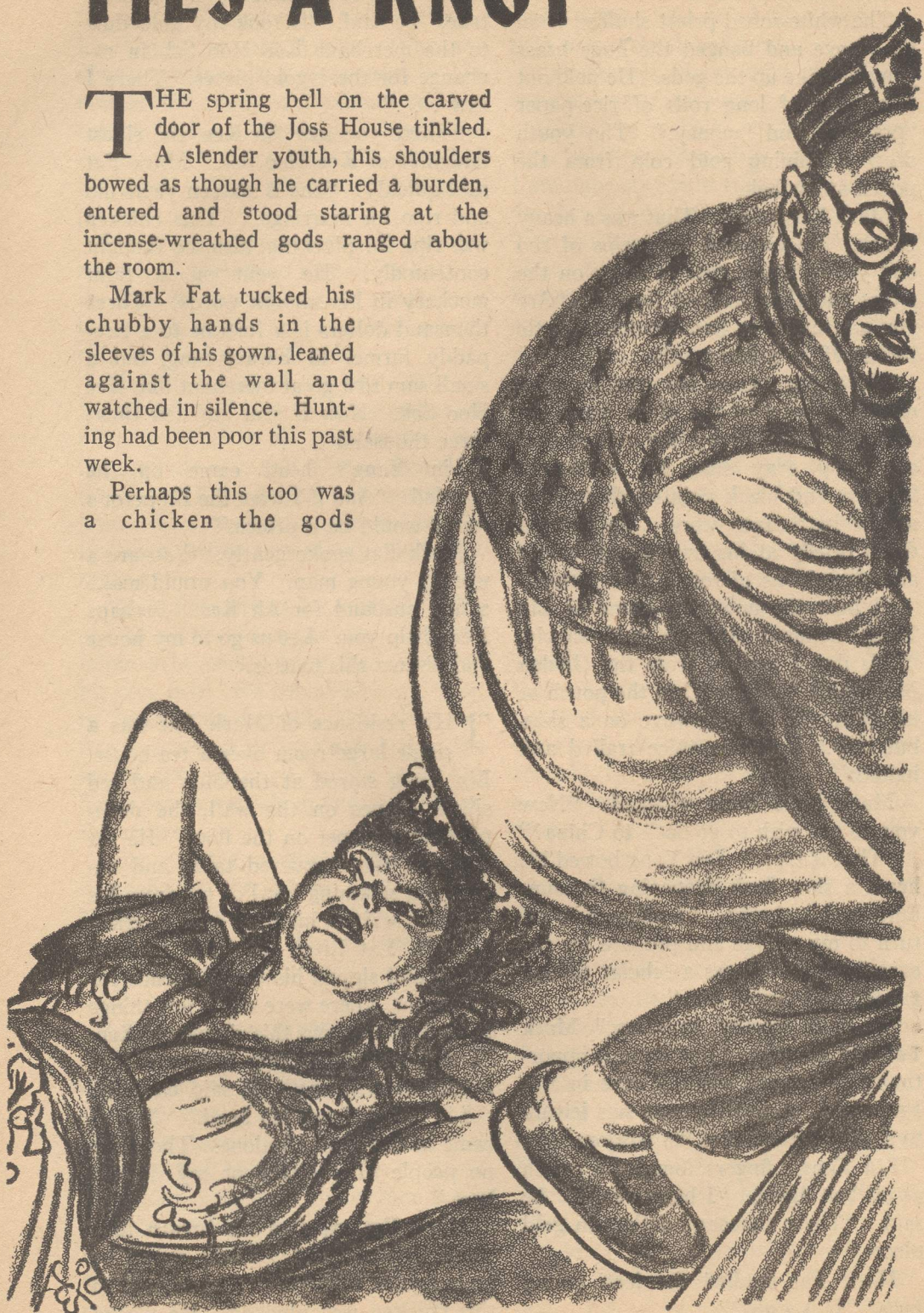
Mark Fat whirled away from the girl and dove through the open window

TIES A KNOT

THE spring bell on the carved door of the Joss House tinkled. A slender youth, his shoulders bowed as though he carried a burden, entered and stood staring at the incense-wreathed gods ranged about the room.

Mark Fat tucked his chubby hands in the sleeves of his gown, leaned against the wall and watched in silence. Hunting had been poor this past week.

Perhaps this too was a chicken the gods



had sent to be plucked.

The white-robed priest shuffled from his alcove and banged the huge brass gong to wake up the gods. He held out a handful of long rolls of rice-paper "prayers" and "money." The youth drew a shining gold coin from the pouch at his belt.

Mark Fat smiled. That was a heavy pouch. He watched the strips of red and yellow paper curl to ashes on the altars and then stepped forward. "Are you a stranger in San Francisco, little brother?" he asked gently.

The youth turned, his eyes lingering on the apparel of the older man: the square-crowned derby, the quilted coat of heavy gray silk, the dove-gray trousers and black pointed shoes such as the barbarians wore. He glanced down briefly at his own baggy blouse and pantaloons of rough blue cotton.

"I bear the unworthy name of Lin Yang, honored sir," he said slowly. "This day I arrived from the Golden Mountains." He touched the pouch at his belt. "I have passage on a ship, but now. . . ." His voice trailed and halted.

Mark Fat's smile widened. "Now you do not wish to go back to China?"

"That is true." Lin Yang bowed his head, a slow flush deepening the sunburn on his cheeks. "I planned to return to my village and prepare for the examinations. I was a scholar though a poor and stupid one."

"A most worthy ambition," Mark Fat said gravely. "But there is opportunity to become wealthy here in San Francisco. A wealthy man has leisure to study and increase his wisdom."

Lin Yang's fingers found the pouch at his belt again. "I have wealth," he said. "Three thousand dollars in gold pieces."

Mark Fat studied the lean young face. "Is it a girl?"

Lin Yang lowered his eyes. "That is true," he said. "I took my gold dust to the merchant Kee Hoo Sek in exchange for these gold pieces. There I saw . . ."

"There you saw Ah Kee, the eldest daughter of Kee Hoo Sek," Mark Fat said quickly. "She is sixteen years old and ripe for marriage." This chicken was ripe for plucking, also, he thought contentedly. He went on, a faint mockery in his smooth words: "Three thousand dollars is a fortune to a rice-paddy farmer in Kwang-tung, but a small sum to a great merchant like Kee Hoo Sek. Now if you had ten times three thousand . . ."

Lin Yang's head came up, he scowled. "And if I were the Emperor's son, I would be a prince."

Mark Fat spoke gently: "You are a worthy young man. You would make a fine husband for Ah Kee. Perhaps I can help you. Let us go to my house and discuss this matter."

THE residence of Mark Fat was a single large room over a tea-house. Lin Yang stared at the blue and red silken drapes on the wall, the deep-piled rose carpet on the floor. He sat down at the lacquered table and accepted a steaming bowl of tea from his host. He waited, his dark eyes puzzled.

Mark Fat lifted his bowl in both hands and sipped his tea in silence for a moment. There were still a few things to be learned about this simple chicken. "I suppose you belong to one of the family associations," he said casually.

Lin Yang shook his head. "No. I came to this land all alone. There are no people of my clan or my district here."

Mark Fat expelled his breath in a small sigh of relief. There would be no indignant relatives to deal with when this chicken was plucked. He placed

his bowl gently on the table and leaned forward. "I must come to a decision, Lin Yang," he said slowly. "You are about to witness a great wonder." He crossed the room to a cabinet and returned, laying a square box of polished rosewood on the table. He extended his hand. "Give me one of your gold pieces."

Lin Yang's eyes moved in puzzlement from the round face of his host to the box on the table. He reached to the pouch at his belt and laid a gold coin in Mark Fat's hand.

Mark Fat opened the box. Gleaming wheels and cogs of brass and steel filled nearly all of the space inside. He dropped the coin into a small funnel at the top of the machine and touched a lever. The mechanism whirred briefly and then settled to a steady, clock-like ticking.

Mark Fat settled back in his chair and closed the lid on the box. In a few minutes he would have that pouch at his own belt. He would take the train to Sacramento tonight. His wife and five sons would all have new coats. He would stay with his family until Lin Yang ceased searching and returned to the mines.

The ticking ceased. Mark Fat reached for the lid of the box and smiled at Lin Yang. "It is finished. Now you will see this wonder." He opened the box and pushed it across the table.

Lin Yang's jaw dropped. He stared at the ten shining gold pieces spread at the bottom of the box. He turned to his host, fear in his dark eyes. "I do not understand."

Mark Fat laughed briefly. "There is nothing to fear. The machine is not evil, but good." He reached into the box and put the gold pieces into Lin Yang's hand. "These are your property." He watched slow comprehen-

sion, excitement dawn on the younger man's face. The hand that held the gold pieces shook suddenly.

"These gold pieces were born from the one I gave to you?"

Mark Fat nodded. "There are but three machines like this in all the world. I am entrusted with this one to use for the benefit of deserving young men. The machine will produce nine gold pieces for every one dropped into it. However, a gold coin may be used but once, and coins made by the machine may not be put back into it. They are sterile and will not produce others."

Lin Yang reached to his belt, his eyes dazed. He placed the heavy pouch on the table. His voice was thick, the words slurring as though he had taken wine. "Then you will produce ten times three thousand dollars for me?"

Mark Fat nodded and rose to his feet. "Return at this time tomorrow, Lin Yang. You will be a man of real wealth, fit to negotiate a marriage with the daughter of Kee Hoo Sek." He watched the youth pass through the curtained doorway, his slim figure straight, his eyes still dazed. He took a nickeled watch from his pocket and smiled. The train for Sacramento departed from the Oakland Pier in three hours. He would have time for a good dinner.

THE restaurant of the Topsy Moon served the finest roast duck in Chinatown. Mark Fat picked his way through the buckets of bones, scraps and entrails on the kitchen floor and entered the dining room. A corner booth was empty, the curtains open. He seated himself and leaned back against the thin partition with a sigh of satisfaction.

A low rumble of voices sounded from the next booth. Mark Fat sat up suddenly, placed his ear against the parti-

tion. The name was spoken again. "Kee Hoo Sek," the speaker said clearly. "That one will pay ten or fifteen thousand dollars for the return of his daughter."

Another voice, harsh and grating, broke in with a question. "The bargain is concluded with Chin Jung?"

The first speaker laughed. "It is arranged. Chin Jung has been commanded to accompany the girl to a feast at the house of her father's brother tonight. Chin Jung will take her to a place we know of. Chin Jung will receive two thousand dollars and then he will be placed on a ship before morning."

Mark Fat got to his feet. He had heard enough. He slid silently out of the booth. In the alley behind the kitchen he stood quietly until the pounding of his heart subsided. He knew those two men in the booth, tong brothers of the swaggering professional bully, Chin Jung, hired by Kee Hoo Sek as a bodyguard for members of his household.

Mark Fat touched the pouch of gold at his belt and smiled. He would not take the train to Sacramento tonight, but when he took the train tomorrow morning, the pouch would be twice as heavy. He started down the alley at a brisk trot. It was of great importance to speak with Chin Jung within the hour. There were also other arrangements to be made.

THE room was damp and cold, almost a dungeon except for the narrow window opening to the alley. Water oozed through the hard-packed clay and lay in thin puddles on the floor. Mark Fat stood quietly in a corner. His palms were damp with cool sweat but he noted with satisfaction that his breath came smoothly and the beat of his heart was steady.

He had waited an hour now and the rats squeaking and scuttling in the walls had grown bold, venturing across the floor and scurrying to safety when he moved a foot. Heavy footsteps sounded in the corridor outside, footsteps that moved in slow cadence. Mark Fat stepped to the door, opened it an inch and then wider.

Chin Jung's thick shoulders filled the doorway. He carried the girl on his hip as easily as if she were a sack of rice. He tossed her into a heavy chair, the only furnishing in the room except the table that held the lamp, and wound rope around her slim body. The girl's eyes were big, frightened in the dim light, her lips flattened by the handkerchief wound around her jaws.

Chin Jung knotted the rope and grunted. "She will be quiet now." He crossed to the table, his breath rasping in his throat. "The gold," he said hoarsely.

Mark Fat opened the pouch and poured the gold pieces on the table. "Three thousand dollars, as we agreed." He kept his voice low. The girl must not know the exact amount.

Chin Jung stacked the coins, his lips moving. He looked up and grinned. "It is correct." He moved to the window and swung a leg over the sill, a metallic clatter betraying the weapons in his belt. "It is a good bargain," he said and laughed. His stocky body disappeared into the night.

Mark Fat waited, listening. There was no sound. He drew his robe across his face and walked to the chair. "You are Ah Kee, the daughter of Kee Hoo Sek?"

The girl nodded. Mark Fat leaned closer. "Listen to me. Chin Jung agreed to sell you to brothers of his tong. They offered him five thousand dollars. I gave him six thousand. I will not harm you and you will be re-

turned to your father's house in a few minutes, but Kee Hoo Sek must repay the money I gave to Chin Jung. Do you understand? Your father must pay me six thousand dollars."

The girl nodded again, vigorously, her dark eyes bright with quick tears. Mark Fat smiled, let the robe drop from his face and reached for the gag binding her jaws. There was sudden, thunderous knocking on the door. A gruff voice shouted.

Mark Fat whirled and dove through the window. He rolled to his feet as the door crashed inside the room. The voice shouted again and two bullets split the night behind him as he turned the corner of the alley. He slowed to a walk and sidled to the center of the throng on Dupont Gai, the street called Grant Avenue by the barbarians. Fifty persons had seen him run from the alleyway, but not an eye turned in his direction.

At the corner, he halted and looked down the street. A knot of blue-clad figures stood in front of the entrance to the building he had just left. The street light glistened on the coats of the bay horses who pulled the patrol-wagon. It was the barbarian police who had broken down the door. Mark Fat walked slowly. This was a matter that was not easy to explain.

THE low tapping at the door was insistent. Mark Fat got to his feet and crossed the room. "Who is there?" A low voice rumbled. He drew the bolt and Chin Jung glided into the room. Mark Fat looked at him coldly. "Why do you come to my house? There is peril for us both in your presence here."

Chin Jung sat on a bench and rested his face in his hands. He spoke slowly, sucking in his breath after each labored word. "I could not get to a ship. The brothers of my tong and the barbarian

police seek to capture me. They are everywhere." He drew knuckles across his sweating forehead, reached to his belt and dropped the pouch on the table. "Wealth is a heavy burden."

Mark Fat studied the hatchet-man in silence. "You were stupid and clumsy, Chin Jung," he said at last. "The barbarian police came to the room and fired bullets at my person."

"I know that. The people are all talking about it." Chin Jung sighed heavily. "The police were led to the room by a young miner named Lin Yang. I have heard that Kee Hoo Sek has taken this young man into his own house. Lin Yang is a great hero today." Chin Jung scowled at the floor. "I swear that I will sink my axe in the skull of this Lin Yang."

Mark Fat snorted. "You will find an axe in your own thick skull if you continue to be stupid." He fell silent. So Lin Yang had followed the girl, like any love-sick swain. Lin Yang had seen Chin Jung drag the girl to the room and then he had called the police. It was all clear now and he, Mark Fat, had been the stupid one. He should have anticipated this.

He glanced from the pouch of gold on the table to the bowed head of Chin Jung. There was but one course to follow. He moved softly across the carpet, lifted the heavy pouch and struck.

THE house of Kee Hoo Sek reflected the wealth and taste of its owner. The room where guests were received was long, with a high ceiling. Delicate paintings panelled the walls and the gilt chairs and heavy teakwood benches were set on rugs of a dozen hues.

Mark Fat stood quietly before the merchant, his round face grave, his eyes steady. Kee Hoo Sek moved in the gilded chair and cast a look at the young

man seated beside him. "Do you believe this story, Lin Yang? Do you think this man speaks the truth?"

Mark Fat shifted his gaze to the face of Lin Yang. This was a different person from the dejected youth who had entered the temple a few short hours ago. The baggy blouse and trousers of cotton had been replaced with a robe of silk as fine as that worn by Kee Hoo Sek himself. Lin Yang's eyes were calm, his bearing confident. The chicken had turned into a rooster with sharp spurs. Lin Yang leaned forward.

"Did you bring my thirty thousand dollars, Mark Fat?"

Mark Fat drew his face into careful lines of sorrow. "It is a sad thing," he said slowly. "The machine was destroyed during my struggle to overcome the wicked Chin Jung." He drew the pouch from his belt. "Here is your money, just as I took it from the person of Chin Jung."

Lin Yang set the pouch on the floor at his feet. "You say that you used my money and another three thousand dollars to buy Ah Kee from Chin Jung. That may be true. But if your intentions were honorable, why did you run away when I arrived with the police?"

"I did not know who was at the door," Mark Fat said. "I thought it might be the tong brothers of Chin Jung."

Lin Yang turned to the merchant. "Ah Kee saw the face of the man in the room. She has told us that the man promised to return her to your house. She also mentioned the sum of six thousand dollars."

Kee Hoo Sek nodded. "My daughter shall look upon this man." He struck the palms of his hands together. A servant appeared in the doorway. "Bring my daughter to this room."

Ah Kee leaned on the arm of the servant, her slender form swaying on the stilted lily shoes. She swept her long

lashes at the youth seated beside her father and halted, her eyes modestly downcast.

Kee Hoo Sek spoke slowly: "This person says that he was in the room with you and that he gave the money to Chin Jung. Is this true?"

The dark lashes flicked upward. Ah Kee studied the face of Mark Fat for a long moment. She lowered her eyes, her voice was soft. "This is the man."

Kee Hoo Sek nodded and lifted a hand in dismissal. He turned to the plump little man standing before him. "You have saved my house from bitter disgrace," he said slowly. "If my daughter had fallen into the hands of the tong brothers of Chin Jung. . . ." He paused for a moment and went on, his lip curling slightly. "Lin Yang has told me of your money-making machine. I am glad it has been destroyed. Such a machine contains the seed of evil."

THE merchant rose to his feet. "You say that you paid six thousand dollars to Chin Jung, and that he has hidden the other three thousand and refuses to tell the place where it is concealed. Very well, I will accept your story. Wait here. I will bring you three thousand dollars." He turned toward the doorway.

Mark Fat looked at Lin Yang, a faint smile on his lips. "The sun of good fortune shines upon you, little brother," he said.

Lin Yang smiled. "I am grateful to you, Mark Fat, but I suspect that you also have prospered beyond your deserts." He leaned forward. "You said that you bound Chin Jung and left him on the floor of your house. What will be his fate?"

Mark Fat's smile broadened. "I sent word to certain tong brothers of Chin Jung. They will take him away. His tong brothers will arrange his fu-

ture."

Lin Yang nodded. Silence fell in the richly furnished room. Mark Fat waited for the footstep of Kee Hoo Sek. He

would have a tale to tell his five sons in Sacramento tonight. He stood quietly, the glow of a virtuous deed warming his veins.

AMERICAN PATRIOTS

By RAY STEBER



"Nat" Bacon was a Tory turned patriot—plus!



OF THE hundreds upon thousands of men who came to these shores in the early and hard years of our colonization, very few of them ever amounted to what one would now consider the type for top billing on the record. This was not entirely due to the lack of ability on the part of the man, or his unwillingness to perform the duties which would have given him ample opportunity and all the credit which was due him. It was more of a case of not having time enough for anything other than working on the hard job of keeping alive. For it is certainly evident in the records that have come down to us that life in early America was not the proper place to develop great individuals. Indeed, and it is a fact, for a time there at the very beginning of our country, it was a hard enough task to develop a great race of men.

The settler who may have developed into another Shakespeare had he remained in his own native land, became instead a farmer in America, who worked hard in the sparse and unbearing hill-land of New England, forsaking all claims to fame in order that he might devote himself to the humbler tasks of making a clearing in the forest for his cabin, his barn, and his fields of growing vegetables and grain. Likewise, the man who may have been a great statesman made instead a great fighter of the Indians, while he raised and cared for his little family on the side. It may be pointed out that although our country was founded through the toil and blood of men such as these, there still came forth men of the stamp of Benjamin Franklin and George Washington. This, however, it must be seen, that it was not until the colonies had acquired wealth, built up a system of schools and colleges and developed a leisure class, that men such as the last two named were brought forth. From the leisure class came men like Washington to do their country service as only they knew how to perform.

Another great man lived at that time, too, but he was branded by another name until not too long ago, when records proved and cleared his name. This great man helped much in the fight the colonies waged for independence, and he was the champion of all freedom-loving people, this Nathaniel Bacon. The greatest figure of the first riotous century of American history was this man who was born on January 2, 1647, in Suffolk,

England. Many historians say that at no other time in our history has the confab of great men appeared as in that first century when our country's need for them was so great.

Such men as Nathaniel Bacon, who, although born in England and resident of the American colonies for only two years, was a true American, spiritually and physically, came not looking for adventure but freedom, and found both. This Bacon was one person who never had any brilliant past to regret giving up for life in the colonies. It has been seen in the records that he rolled up all the important events of his life while he lived as a citizen of Virginia. He showed his willingness to fight for freedom through his love for individual liberty, his self-reliance, and his hatred of oppression. Such attributes as these placed his name alongside his rightful cronies and partners, Benjamin Franklin and George Washington, for surely it showed him akin to the leaders of the Revolution.

ONE very striking point which seems to arise again and again in the case of all workers for freedom, if they are truly and earnestly fighters, is that very seldom does their name come to light, and if it does, it shines lightly from behind some obstacle, so that very few people ever see the whole brightness of the situation. Such is the case of Nathaniel Bacon. This remarkable man died in the midst of all his struggles and so, because he had not the time to clear his name, and those of his trusted aides, his followers went down to defeat and shame, and he, himself, was branded as a traitor to the cause for which he worked so diligently. This has been his role since his untimely death, until quite recently, when records and studies have shown him to be not the traitor of the country, but rather as a patriot, a champion of the weak, and a rebel against all kinds of injustice.

When the records from all sources have finally been rounded up and been brought forward, and given to the light which will reveal more than a shadow of the truth, it will then be truly seen that men such as him, have been wrongly treated, and perhaps hundreds of other Nathaniel Bacons exactly like him, will at last have been justly rewarded with the kind of respect which is long over due them. It is hoped so.

THE UNVANQUISHED

by Wilbur S. Peacock

DEVIL watched the man below. A thin trickle of smoke plumed from the cabin's chimney, rising straight and true into the chill air, and its odor excited Devil as it always did, somehow familiar, as though he had known it in the past.

He watched, sleek fur tight to his great body, and frosty breath slid from his black nostrils and dissipated in the air. A low rumble pulsed in his throat, and he licked his chops, dull hate spreading in his eyes.

This was the hunter, below, the implacable being who had slain most of the pack with his traps and his poisons and his guns; and Devil watched him silently, trying to fathom his purpose in such a slaughter. He was as vicious as Taug, the black wolf, but more deadly, for Taug must fight close at hand while the man killed at a distance.

Devil growled again, and then began to inch backward from the ridge, back down, plume held low. The ringing blows of the hunter's axe lifted high, and each blow was like a deadly warning to the half-wolf.

He stood at last, almost three feet at the shoulders, heavy with the strength of the malemute bitch which had been his mother and deadly fast with the instinctive skill and instincts of the prowling wolf which had sired him. He was sleek and deadly and he walked with the pride of the unvanquished.

He heard the cry then, winging from far away, and dread touched his mind. He began to run, instinct flicking him to speed without thinking, long legs

reaching out in the racing stride which none in the land could match.

He heard the cry again and knew it was from one of his pups. A growl of pure hate surged in his throat, and he flattened in his stride, rippling muscles coiling and knotting within his supple skin. Snow spurted from each driving foot, and the wind whipped the breath from his nostrils even before it could chill.

He went about the copse of snow-clad balsam, and when a rabbit bounced in terror out of concealment, he gave no heed, hunger held in thrall by the danger signal which sounded so eerily in his mind.

He dropped down the side of the mountain, slipping from rock to rock with agile ease, and then fled through the earth-notch toward the place where he and his mate had their hidden den. The muted cries of snarling rage were clearer now, and he knew this was Taug who waited ahead.

He slipped, coming into the second valley, and then caught his balance, and his whine of anger went ahead, flipping Taug about at the den's mouth, mouth still bloody with his slaughter.

Taug looked up and then whirled away, dancing stiffly, taking a final slash at the ruptured body of one pup which lay almost at his feet. Fleeta, Devil's mate, showing white teeth through a crimson-stained muzzle and guarded the whimpering third pup with fierce defiance.

Devil sent his snarling challenge across the snow and then went driving

*The way of the wild wolf
is strange—and almost human.
When Devil saw Taug's vicious
work of killing, he tried for
revenge—the sure and certain
end by fang and claw or trap!*



Skin ripped at Devil's neck
and he went over in a bucking fall
beneath Taug's irresistible weight

in. Twice he had fought Taug, and twice neither had won. Devil was the faster, but Taug was heavy, and neither could upset the balance. But now, with two of his pups dead in the bloody snow, Devil was more than a match for the black wolf, and so Taug turned before they met and raced down the valley toward the trees.

THERE was no fear in him, only caution, and he turned his head to peer back as he ran, pink tongue lolling from his mouth. He was like a black shadow slipping across the blinding-white snow, and when at last he disappeared into the trees, it was as though one shadow had flowed into another.

Devil raced the last few yards to his den, his challenge whipping after the fleeing Taug. Then he came to a plunging stop and the whining in his throat was a keening for the dead.

Two pups were dead, mangled incredibly by Taug's slashing teeth, their baby mouths gaping in crude caricature of defensive rage. They lay as they had fallen, three steps from the den's mouth, their soft bodies torn beyond belief.

Fleeta lay at the den's mouth, still huddling over the last pup. One eye was gone, a socket gleaming redly, and her right foot had been crushed with one terrible backslash of Taug's teeth. She whimpered with pain, and Devil pressed close, nuzzling gently, smelling the blood, while the rage simmered ever hotter in his mind.

He turned away and nuzzled the pups' bodies, trying to lick life back into them, and then stopped his futile efforts, knowing instinctively they would never play again or nurse at Fleeta's teats.

He heard Fleeta's soft whine of agony, and saw then that she had

pushed the third pup from beneath her and that it, too, was dead. Blood still seeped from its torn throat, but it did not move. Fleeta whined again, the sound dissipating into the frosty air like her whitened breath.

Devil prowled about for a moment, stiff-legged with rage, and saw how the attack had been made. Taug had waited above the den, lying at the top of the overhanging rock and then springing in heedless play from the mouth. Only a minute had been necessary for the killing, one moment out of eternity; and then, the bodies of two pups at his feet, he had met Fleeta's charge.

That he had not slain her instantly was an accident. But he had slipped on snow-glazed ground, and then Fleeta was at the den's entrance, her gleaming fangs a barrier even Taug could not rush heedlessly. And then when Devil had swung out of nowhere there was no time to finish what had been started and Taug had fled.

Devil swung about and went to Fleeta's side. He nuzzled her, and then began to lick her grievous wounds. Taug's teeth had slashed deep, but except for the bitch's crushed foot, most of the wounds were more painful than serious.

He caught at her shoulder, teeth clamping on the loose skin and helped her to her feet. Fleeta stood on three legs, swinging her head uncertainly, blind now to half the world. She whined deep in her throat, and Devil forced her away from the den. Soon, the hunter would come, drawn by the wolf cries, and safety lay no longer in the den.

He urged his mate up the slope, following the bare icy rocks instinctively, searching for a new den, a place where Fleeta's wounds could heal in safety.

He stopped at the top of the first ridge and looked back at the pups lying so still in the murder-marked snow. He

keen his grief at the sunlit sky, and the agony in him went winging out over the land. Echoes bounced from mountain walls, dying, diminishing and drifting away.

Then he went on, urging Fleeta ahead with slashing teeth when she would try to stop. There was an urgency in him to get away from the place, a drive that could not be denied, for even greater than his wolf instinct was the malemute reasoning that the hunter would try to pick up the trail as soon as possible.

The hours passed with a dreadful slowness. The sun slid lower toward the horizon and still no sanctuary had been found. The country was almost barren of life, for the winter had been harsh and most animals had fled to the valleys. Never had Devil been this far away from his own territory and it was strange to him. Yet he had a sense that safety might lie here, for he could see for miles should the hunter make a stealthy approach.

HE GAVE no more than a passing thought to Taug; their blood-feud was of two years' standing now, and this had been but the culmination of that fight. A home now was the important thing; and when at last he found a shallow cave beneath a wind-swept ledge, gladness touched his heart.

He sent Fleeta back into its safety and then ranged the land for a thousand yards, satisfying himself that all was well. Returning, he entered the cave and helped Fleeta again to lick clean her crusted wounds. Fever was in her now, and her teeth slashed impatiently at him in peevish anger.

He desisted at last and sat at the cave entrance, watching the blue of the sky tinging with blackness. Night came and still he did not move; and a yellow moon crept higher into the sky, the snow and ice sparkling and glimmering

almost as whitely as it did beneath a noonday sun.

A sound lifted his ears, and he snarled deep in his throat. That was the hunter's gun, sounding as it had those months before when he had first invaded the land. Other wolves had died when that sound came, and the remainder had pushed higher and higher into the mountains in the vain hope that safety lay there. Even now, Devil could remember the ripping shock which had slashed at his back when the sound had come one day from close by, and the long scar still twinged from time to time as though reminding him of that day.

Fleeta whined, and he silenced the cry with a soft growl. He came lithely to his feet, stretching, and blew his breath gustily at the star-pebbled sky before turning and going to his mate's side.

His breath sighed softly in the darkness, and the cave mouth was bright against the blackness of the cave. He circled about, following his tail, and then dropped to the stony floor, his head on his forepaws, and covered his nose with his brush. He lifted his head momentarily, a soft whine in his throat, at the ghostly echoes of a wolf's moon-wailing far away, and then settled again and slept.

He slept with the quiescent power of the wilderness, his nerves extending like febrile tendrils into the world outside. Fleeta slept at his side, whining a bit with pain now and then, waking momentarily and drifting back to slumber. Devil moaned again and again, his dreams troubled, for Taug was there, and the two-legged hunter, and at times he ran with a phantom pack.

He woke at sun-up, the light slanting into the cave. His eyes flickered open and he watched the world outside without moving. Fleeta moved at his side,

and he nuzzled her foot, and she snapped instinctively at his muzzle, almost catching him.

He growled warningly and came slowly to his feet. Fleeta watched out of her single eye, trying to raise and then sinking back, weak with fever and shock.

Devil paused at the entrance, growling a warning, and then went from the cave and down the slope. Instinctively, he found and followed natural cover, pausing now and then to watch his backtrack and to sweep the country with keen eyes. Nothing moved, and satisfied, he went along at last, moving with the graceful speed of his wolf sire.

This was no hours' trip this time, for Fleeta did not hold him back with her lameness, and he ran with ghostly swiftness, flowing from cover to cover, nerves tightening, the closer he came to the den he had left so hurriedly the day before.

He went up the last ridge, crawling on his belly, edging along until he could look over into the shallow valley. The smell of the hunter and Taug was in the air, and his hackles rose, a soundless growl rising in his throat.

HE SAW Taug, but not the hunter, and the huge black wolf was prowling about before the den, studying the small bodies which lay in forlorn heaps. His massive head swung about, cautiously surveying the land, and then he went with dainty steps toward the first pup, sniffing at it.

A rifle cracked and Taug yelped, blasting straight upward from where he stood, whirling and snapping at a streak of blood on his hip. Snow spouted at his feet, and the echo of the second shot sounded like frost-blasted wood. Then Taug had turned and was running, seeming to flow over the ground so great was his speed. There were no

more shots, and then Taug was gone and the hunter had appeared from behind a far rock.

Devil did not move. Movement, he knew, was a sure way to invite death. He froze like a black shadow, only his eyes moving, as the hunter came along the valley. He saw the hunter kick at the pups' bodies and then go further along the floor. The smell of smoke and food and man-odor swung upward on the breeze, and Devil's lips pulled back in a soundless snarl.

The hunter stopped farther on, halting at the place where the valley wall made it almost a natural square. Trees were there, running back into the thicker woods; it was a natural place for a hunter to wait. Devil had hunted there, ready to spring the moment an unwary animal came about the rocky corner.

Then the man shifted his rifle to the crotch of his arm and turned back the way he had come. He stopped at the den, examining the pups' bodies. Steel glistened in the sunlight, and when the man straightened, he held three pairs of ears in his mittened hand. Whistling, he went along the valley, and disappeared through the notch.

Devil lifted to his feet, shaking the snow from his body and then went along the ridge toward the woods. He was chilled and hungry, and his gaze flicked in sweeping arcs, searching for the faintest trace of movement.

He entered the trees, crossing the trail of Taug, and he snarled softly. Then he forgot the black wolf and began his stalk. He made no sound, even on the crusted snow, picking his way daintily like a phantom. His fur had pulled close to his body, stifling his natural scent, and he crouched low, skulking from tree to tree.

He found the upheaval where a ptarmigan had blasted out of cover, and he sniffed eagerly, his belly knotting with

hunger. Then he went on, following the pattern of rabbit tracks that dotted the snow.

Sunlight stippled everything, sifting through the interstices of the branches, and he slipped from shadow to shadow, instinct bringing him downwind from where his dog-mind told him prey might be.

He went motionless, hearing the faintest of sounds, and then went along, placing each foot with stalking care, fangs barely showing in his mouth. He saw the snow-weighted squatty pine and began to circle, eyes feral with the calculation of the hunt.

He sensed the movement within the natural shelter even before he heard the sound. He dropped, hiding behind a ruffle of snow, waiting for silence, and when it came, went ahead, creeping on his belly.

His breath misted whitely, freezing on his muzzle in a rime of powder-frost, and every nerve was tight with the tensivity of the moment. He found the weak spot in the piney barrier and began to bunch the long muscles of his body. He lifted slowly, judging the distance—and a rabbit thumped its instant alarm.

He exploded into the shelter, branches whipping at his head and snow cascading down his back. He made no other sound, and his reflexes dropped him into a perfect striking crouch.

There was movement at his left, and he struck with instinctive precision, blood gouting into his mouth, and in the same movement, plunged forward and caught the second buck before it could burst from the shelter. He broke its neck and dropped it, looking for more. There was none.

And then he fed.

HE GORGED on the hot bloody flesh. Bones cracked beneath the

pressure of his heavy teeth, and his belly filled and he became more content. He snapped up mouthfuls of snow and then rested, somnolent, worrying at a final scrap of food.

Satisfied at last, he rose, catching up the rabbit he had struck first and slipping through the hole he had blasted through the branches. He stood for a moment outside, trying to test the breeze, but unable to catch any scent other than the one of the rabbit in his jaws.

He went through the woods, going a different way now, feeling the warm strength alive in his loose muscles, and at the edge of open country, hesitated for only a brief second before loping out of concealment.

He sped down a tiny valley, working his way higher into the mountains. He ran with a smooth grace, plume cocked high, the weight of the dead rabbit dragging at his head. Feeling free at last from the hunter, he began to race.

Minutes later, he stood guard at the cave mouth, while Fleeta tore at the rabbit's body. She was more easy now, although so stiff she could barely move; and when she had fed, some of the peevishness went from her, and Devil sat at her side, yawning.

He had no fear that the cave would be discovered by the hunter for a time; his trail had come over snow and icy rock. His malemute ancestry had given him a sense about man that was even keener than the wolf instinct; it was as though he knew the limitations of the hunter, and so he felt no fear now.

He licked his jaws, satisfied for the moment. Fleeta whined, and he pressed close to her warm side, dropping to the floor, head outstretched like a dog's. It was strange, not having three pups climbing over his back in play-fighting, but the events of the day before were

becoming more hazy in his mind, for like a wolf, he lived for the day, death no novelty to his existence.

* * *

Two days passed before he hunted again. Snow had come, drifting without sound, and lay like a wooly blanket over everything. He lay at the cave mouth, watching, and behind him Fleeta whined in the pain of healing wounds. He kept away from her as much as possible, for she slashed with teen teeth when he did approach.

And then on the third day he ventured into the silent world. His feet went deep into the fluffy snow, and it filled his nostrils as he breathed; but once out of the hollow before the cave, the ground was more wind-swept and he could move easily.

He went toward the woods again, for this land was barren of life and food lay there. He snatched at snow now and then, quenching his thirst, and his red tongue lolled like a dog's, steaming in the coldness. Hunger was a gnawing ache in his flat belly, and he watched the horizon for sight of any creature who had ventured forth.

He went to his left, circling toward his old den which lay near the hunter's cabin, for his malemute intellect told him he must place the man, before the hunt, if he were to return.

He ran swiftly, a dark shadow on the powdery snow, and when at last he was near his old den, he sneaked upward on the ridge as he had done before. He could see the smoke rising far away at the cabin, and its odor touched his senses, alarming him, ridging the muscles along his shoulders. He crouched over the top of the den for moments, peering into the valley, cold intellect swirling in his half-wild eyes.

Thoughts swirled in his mind, half-forgotten thoughts; and then he swung from the ridge and loped toward the

far woods. He went with easy grace, hugging natural cover, as silent as a phantom.

He came to the timber and followed its edge for half a mile, then came back within its shade, keen nose and eyes alert now. He growled, hackles lifting, at the odor of Taug hanging in the air, and then went on, more slowly now, slipping from tree to tree with an uncanny quiet.

His great head swung from side to side, feral eyes searching for any movement, and when he heard the squeal of agony ahead, he froze motionless, testing the soft breeze with expanded nostrils.

There was the taint of fresh blood in the air and Devil whined, his hunger acute and biting. His feet made no sound as he flitted ahead, and rage began to pulse in his mind as the smell of Taug came heavier with each passing second.

He saw the black wolf at last, feeding on the body of a snowshoe rabbit. He knew then that this was the moment, and he turned to one side, keeping snow-covered brush and trees between him and his prey. Patiently, he stalked the wolf, treading with delicate precision.

And at last he was ready. Thirty yards separated them, and Taug had no knowledge of his presence. The black wolf worried his food, glancing up only now and then, secure in the knowledge of his own strength and size.

Devil made no sound. He gave no warning, all wolf now, and exploded from concealment with a speed nothing in the woods could match. Muscles bunched and he was a streak of hurtling fury as he launched himself at Taug's throat.

The black wolf tried to whirl at the last second, and Devil struck, slashing

with razor-keen teeth. Blood was hot and salty in his mouth, but skin slipped supple on Taug's shoulder, and the black wolf fell away, only a minor wound in his dark hide.

He whirled in a reflexive springing of taut muscles, landing on his side and spinning to his feet. He growled in vicious rage, teeth white against his muzzle.

Then he was coming in, muscles sliding like cables over his great body, and struck with a ponderous smoothness which seemed incredible in a wolf so great. His eyes were smeared with his hate and flaming with the urge to slay, and when he struck, his weight bowled Devil aside, while great canine teeth searched for the pulsing jugular in his throat.

DEVIL went on his back, and his hind legs bunched and straightened, seeking to disembowel Taug. Pain lanced at his throat where Taug's teeth had met through the loose skin; and then he had torn free, and they were circling, breath steaming like thick white smoke.

They flattened slightly, muscles sliding smoothly, and neither was truly hurt as yet. Two years they had waited for this encounter, and each knew that but one could live.

There was a crimson collar at Devil's throat now, and the blood dripped hotly onto the snow, marking where he stood. Taug was almost motionless, a slash ruby-red at his shoulder. They faced and then circled, five feet apart, snarls rumbling and growling in their deep chests.

Taug came first, black lips drawn back from shining teeth. He hurtled in, lancing for a death-stroke, and he was all killer now. And Devil met him fang to fang, giving no ground, their jaws locked for an infinitesimal second

which brought them chest to chest, towering in the air until they toppled to one side.

It was then that Devil had the advantage, for he was a breed, and his malemute brain gave him the way in which to fight. For unlike a fallen wolf, he did not plunge to his feet and dart away, but lay on his side for a moment, and when Taug plunged up, he slashed at the black wolf's belly, teeth locking and ripping while a shrill cry of pain whirled from Taug's straining throat.

Then Devil was up and ten feet away, ready again, cold calculation deadening the black rage that smouldered in his mind.

Taug rushed, slashing with a dreadful calculated cruelty. Skin ripped at Devil's neck and he went over in a bucking fall beneath Taug's weight. His breath streaked whitely from his nostrils, and he growled, almost barking, at the black wolf. Pain spurred at him, and he could feel the tearing slash of Taug's keen teeth, and panic touched him for a second.

He kicked free, sprang to his feet. Snow flurried high when he landed and turned red where blood leaked from his body. Without pausing, he whipped in, cutting and slashing, dancing like a shadow now, flicking with a speed Taug could not match for the moment. He went in and out, and each slash of his powerful jaws sliced skin and flesh.

Taug growled his rage, turning with a ponderous silent smoothness to meet each attack. His green eyes watched Devil, waiting for that split-second when the half-wolf would make a mistake and he could come driving in.

Devil sprang, slipping in for a throat hold. His shoulder struck Taug's and unbalanced him, and then he had the hold and was hanging on with malemute persistence. Taug went berserk in his

rage, lifting to his hind legs, dragging the heavy weight of Devil erect with him.

Then he went to one side, but his throat was free, and Devil had made his one mistake.

Taug spun and his teeth were knives that shredded flesh. He straddled Devil, holding him down by sheer weight, and sought his life. Blood spurted, smoking in the cold, and Devil battled frantically to break free.

The snow was broken and trampled now, spattered with crimson. It flirted upward from driving legs and fell, only to be kicked high again. A bush lay ripped away, skeletal branches brown and sere, and the remains of the snowshoe rabbit was almost covered now by flurried snow.

Devil tore free, growling at the waves of sickening pain, ears flat and enraged against his sleek head.

But Taug gave him no surcease. He lanced in, snarling his challenge, sensing that his victory lay close at hand. He was stronger than Devil and fat with good feeding, and in him was a raging instinct that told him this was one chance to win.

DEVIL met the slashing stroke of Taug's fangs, met it and drove the black wolf aside. Then he went backward, step by slow step, keen eyes watching and waiting for the coming move.

He felt no fear, for there was none in him. Never had Taug been so strong, never so vicious, and he knew the black wolf might win. But still there was no fear.

He watched, and the wolf sheen faded slowly from his eyes. His breath steamed, and he could feel the shaking of his flanks. Only short minutes had vanished during the fight, and except for the pain of his wounds, he felt no

effects.

Taug circled, panting, whining in his hateful eagerness. He, too, was bloody, but he was still a wilderness killer and his strength was far from gone.

And so they circled for a moment, neither gaining an advantage, and a thought came to Devil's brain. He made a slow advance, one step carefully placed in front of the last, and paused. Taug froze, waiting, and the tableaux held.

Devil struck—he struck and whirled away and began to run. Taug spun and followed, a growling note of victory in his throat.

Devil fled ignominiously, rushing through the woods, looking back to see if Taug followed. And the black wolf followed with reckless speed, heedless of all except for the fleeing half-wolf ahead.

Devil sped with all his strength, gaining slowly, leaving Taug farther behind with each hurtling second. Long legs flashed, and snow was spurned high, and he slipped through the brush and trees with uncanny skill.

And then he was in the valley leading to his old den, and Taug was fifty yards behind. He slowed his speed, watching now, and spun about the rocky corner, momentarily out of sight of Taug.

He flipped in midstride, flipped to one side with incredible sureness and burst through a snow-covered bush and out of sight. And even as he sank almost to his shoulders in soft snow, Taug came hurtling around the bend.

He ran, still thinking Devil was ahead. He ran with the plunging instinct of a wolf on spoor, and when his eyes told him the valley was empty ahead, his mind did not register for one interminable second.

And in that second, first warned by Devil's flickering appearance, the hunt-

er rose from concealment from behind his rocky shelter. The rifle gleamed at his shoulder and then spoke its message, and the slug rolled Taug into a kicking berserk heap.

The wolf snapped and snarled at the bullet wound, and then a second slug hammered at him, and he dropped slackly, moving no more, while the hunter climbed from concealment, rifle held at ready.

Devil snuffled softly, backing now, urgency spinning him about and dropping him into a run, even as the hunter came plunging toward the break he had made in the brush.

He ran, dodging for concealment. Pain ripped at his shoulder, and he felt skin and fur rip away. Then the roar of the single shot caught up with him and pressed him on. He fled to one side, hiding in the shelter of a thickening line of trees. He ran for minutes, and stopped at last, hidden, but able to watch the valley below.

His tongue lolled, and his eyes were the intelligent eyes of his malemute mother as he watched the trap into which Taug had rushed so blindly.

Devil turned his muzzle to the sunlit sky and the cry of his wolf song went

stark and clear across the frozen wilderness. He saw the hunter lift his head from where he crouched over the body of a black wolf.

Then Devil slipped away from his vantage point and went more slowly up the mountain. He limped and a dozen wounds ached and throbbed in his great body. But his plume was high and contentment lay broad and swift in his mind.

He came to the cave, and Fleeta was in the mouth, moving silently aside as he sat at her side. Tentatively, she licked at his shoulder wounds, and his tongue nursed a cut on his right foreleg.

His head lifted and he listened. There was no sound. But there would be, he knew that now, and the sound would be made by the man who killed at a distance.

Devil blew his breath. Soon, as soon as possible, Fleeta and he would leave for parts where game was plentiful and dangers scarce. He snarled a bit, thinking that, and he bent his head to tend his wounds.

Fleeta moved at his side and he smelled her warmth. He was content then and unafraid of anything and he pressed closer to his mate.



SPANISH ADVENTURERS



IT IS NOT necessary to have to explain to any great extent to any person today, the great influence the Spanish adventurers of the early centuries had on the people of both the South American countries and Mexico. It is a very well-established fact. These same adventurers and explorers, who came in droves at the offset of the great exploration period in the New World, and conquered the great Hispanic empire in the Southern part of the New Land, brought to these Mexican people more than their language and dress and religion. But it wasn't anything worthwhile or concrete. They carried, along with their guns and clubs, an entirely unshakeable faith in the divinity and omnipotence of all kings. There was a certain something about all kings of all countries, but expressly this was true of the king which ruled the Spanish Empire. The King of Spain was placed before God and the Catholic

Church, and almost unbelievably, before the Matador who was the favorite of the day, too. This great monarch, overlooking the fact that the blood in his veins may have been too closely mixed with relatives in marriages, which probably made him quite simple in the head, was given the honor of being the fountain-head of all right, privilege and property. He was master supreme and unchallenged, and all others counted themselves his humble vassals regardless of their distance from the throne. Their main point on being on earth was to serve their king, whether they lived in Spain, or were forced to live in the New Spain in the New Continent, Mexico.

It has nothing to do whatsoever with this problem now being discussed, that the Spaniards settled in the New World more than a full century earlier than the British began to settle their colonies. This is not the reason for the more in-

tense medievalism of this Spanish belief in the omnipotent King.

BUT the adventurers who came to win the rich and beautiful land for their decayed-mind of a monarch, were in all probability just as wretchedly bad as he, and they pillaged and destroyed the land from which they stole, and took from it only its riches and left it nothing, and gave it nothing in return.

But they were in all probability following the orders of their present leader, men such as Philip II, Philip III, Philip IV, Charles II, Philip V, and Ferdinand VI, the latter always being described as displaying tendencies toward melancholia and even insanity. Such a thing in a king is more than probable. It is taken for granted.

These men arbitrarily ruled the destinies of their vassals in Spain and in the New World, as well as all the conquered millions overseas on this side of the world in the new land, who had

unwittingly become the vassals' vassals. Today, the characters and personalities of these kings are deemed of little importance when reading of the Mexican history. They are only important to biographical writers, and the tendency is for more knowledge about the men who carried out their masters' bidding, and went out for new land and wealth to bring back to Spain, and became the adventurers who made so great an impression on the lives of the Mexicans. This impression has not become dimmer even today in the politics and way of living for the Mexican. But it must be remembered that these monarchs were still the only source of all authority, initiative, and direction in the Hispanic domain, and everything the least bit Spanish must all be directed back to the throne for its beginning and conception. This happens to be the one time that the adventurers who should receive the credit (and the discredit, too, in this case) must of necessity take a back seat.

L. King

THE STORY OF SPECTRAL SHIPS

By VINCENT GADDIS

"Strange ships pass in the night!"

IN THE far-flung ports of the world, from the ice-bound waters of the arctic to the hot and green islands of tropical seas, and on the decks and in the cabins of liners, tramps, and yachts, plowing the swells in the utter loneliness of empty horizons—wherever sailors gather, light pipes, and swap tales, strange stories are told. On the yellow pages of a thousand logbooks are weird accounts. The voyage of man through space and time, conquering the unknown and searching for knowledge, is long and arduous, and his harbor is mysterious and distant.

A ship is not a mere mass of wood and steel and canvas, but a living thing that draws life from the crews that walk her planks and hold her to her course. A ship and her crew are one, each dependent on the other for existence, and united they battle the rage of storms, and the menace of fire, iceberg and hidden reef. No man will die for his automobile, but many a captain has chosen death with a beloved vessel.

And a ship develops a personality. Formed from its voyages and conflicts, its cargoes and passengers, this personality may be warm and friendly, or it may be one of chilling evil, dangerous and accursed. An old salt can instantly sense the soul of a vessel, and like all living things, for good or bad, this soul can become a phantom, a ghost of the watery deep.

There is a classic example. In the *Cruise of the Bacchante*, a work compiled from the journals of Prince Albert Victor and the Duke of York (the late King George V of England), who served as midshipmen on the HMS *Bacchante's* voyage between 1879 and 1882, is reported the sighting

of an eerie vessel. The date was June 11, 1881, and the ship was off the coast of Australia. The log tells of "a strange red light as of a phantom ship all aglow, in the midst of which light, the masts, spars, and sails of a brig, two hundred yards distant, stood out in strong relief as she came up on the port bow." Twelve men saw this strange apparition, and five hours later the lookout man fell from the mast and was instantly killed.

But there are many others. In October, 1929, a fishing boat set sail one night for the usual fall night fishing from Inishborin (Galway), Ireland. All through the hours of darkness, it was later said, a phantom ship of mist clung to the fishing smack in spite of the crew's attempts to hail or lose her. On the following night the crew of this boat refused to leave shore, believing that the specter was a warning, and a little later a terrific gale blew up that caused the loss of seventeen boats and many men. But all of the fishermen who had observed the ghost ship had remained safely ashore.

IN 1930 the death of John Winters, last of the crew of the Gloucester schooner *Charles Haskell*, recalled another famous tale. During a heavy storm in March, 1869, the *Haskell* ran down a Salem schooner on the Newfoundland Banks. The entire crew of the Salem vessel was lost. The following year, at the mouth of Gloucester Harbor, a dim, misty ship was visible which sped out of the harbor at the side of the *Haskell*. A phantom crew could be observed climbing the eerie rigging, and the men said they could hear ghostly shouts.

On the next voyage a new crew was shipped. They, too, returned with the tale of a spectral ship that tormented them constantly, a mystic cloud by day and a weird light by night. When men could no longer be obtained to sail on the ill-fated *Haskell*, it abandoned the sea and became a lowly sand-freighter. The specter did not appear again.

The *Nancy Hanks* was another famous ghost ship, well known to old shippers in Miami, Florida. A phantom cat raised havoc on every trip. For many years it lay idle in Miami, and no sailor would board her. It was destroyed by fire in 1929.

Formerly anchored off the wharves at Bathurst Docks, N. B., Canada, the *Squando*, a Norwegian trading vessel, was another haunted ship. The Norwegian consul at Bathurst hired two watchmen to look after her when she was abandoned by her crew, but after one night spent on her decks they refused to return. They reported that they saw the phantom of a headless man; cold hands had touched them, various articles had been thrown about, while eerie voices ordered them to leave the ship. They did!

NOT only phantom ships but the ghosts of men have appeared from time to time on the high seas, and perhaps the most famous is "Ladylips"—the premonitory specter without a lower jaw. In the older generation of men and ships, over five hundred sailors on board American and British vessels have witnessed his appearance. In the logs of the *USS Colorado*, *SS Stoddart*, *HMS Iron Duke*, *Ramiles*, *Queen Elizabeth I*, and the destroyer *Broke*, the vision Ladylips has been duly recorded. Oddly enough, the origin of Ladylips and the legend surrounding him was a mystery until twenty years ago—when it was explained.

In 1782 the British vanquished the French battle fleet off the island of Dominica. The *Ville de Paris* was a vessel with the French fleet, and when the battle was over it was manned by a British crew and started for England. A terrific typhoon, that destroyed almost all the ships of the recent conflict, blew the *Ville de Paris* off its course and killed many of the crew. What followed was revealed in 1928 when a member of the crew of the *Waulea* found the old log of the ship on a beach on one of the Duke of Gloucester isles—a very revealing story.

Ladylips was captain of the *Ville de Paris*. The vessel drifted to the Straits of Magellan, and her crew then decided to set sail for China. When the ship began leaking, it was abandoned. Taking to the open sea in a longboat, the crew soon ran out of food, and while attempting to stab a large fish with a boathook one day, the handle slipped and tore completely off the lower jaw of Ladylips. Ladylips picked up a knife and slashed his wrists. Grimly, the log ends: "Sighting the island by the month of June, 1783, all survivors of the longboat, excepting the sailing master Ladylips, who was eaten at sea, landed and hoisted English colors."

AND Ladylips, since that long-gone day of suicide and cannibalism, has been a phantom of the storms, appearing only when the waves are high and the winds fierce, standing in places where it would be impossible for a living man to be. It is said that he was observed in 1929 on the *SS Stoddart* while it was wallowing through a storm off the Pacific coast, standing on the deck and later on the bow.

Another curious story of a sea phantom is told by Charles M. Boone, of Galveston, Texas, who was at the wheel of the *SS Brush*, bound for Galveston from Rotterdam, on January 7, 1929. He heard a voice calling, and on looking over the side of the ship, he saw the misty outline of a small boat and figure, and distinctly heard the voice of an old friend call him name. The vision faded, and upon his arrival in Galveston he learned that his friend had drowned on the same day and at the same place (Lat. 24; Long. 83) three years before.

But far more astonishing is the weird story of the phantom heads that followed the *SS Watertown*, and were even photographed. On December, 4, 1924, Michael Meehan and James Courtney, two members of the crew who had died while the ship was off the western coast of Mexico, were buried at sea off the port rail. Then, on January 9, while a heavy sea was running, several members of the crew who were standing near the rear of the port side, saw the faces of the two dead men, apparently swimming in the water and struggling toward the ship. The faces were about forty feet from the vessel and ten feet apart.

THEREAFTER all crew members could see the faces daily. The heads were absolutely clear and vivid in the sunlight. When the ship arrived at New Orleans, the captain decided to get a camera and see if he could photograph the apparitions if they reappeared. And his opportunity came on the ship's return trip to the Pacific as the *Watertown* passed through the Panama Canal. Again, with the water calm, the faces followed the vessel, and a roll of film was exposed, which was then locked in the ship's safe.

The film was developed by a commercial photographer at Colon. Two of the prints distinctly revealed the faces close to the ship in startling detail. The dead men were easily identified. Meehan seemed to be in pain, but Courtney was smiling. All of the facts as here presented have been sworn to by Captain Tracy and all members of his crew, and the story has been investigated and verified by the Burns Detective Agency. Details of a personal investigation made by Dr. Hereward Carrington, famous psychic researcher, will be found in his book *The Invisible World*, and the photographs are in the possession of the Henry L. Doherty Co., of New York City, owners of the vessel.

A WRAITH whose laughter saved a ship five times was the strange story told by Captain

Ortiz Pernubo, of the Argentine electric ship *Tercero*, when he arrived at San Fernandez, in the Falkland Islands, in the summer of 1943. Months before Carmelita Segovia had left her island home to become a bride in far-away Peru, but she had died suddenly on her honeymoon. Now she was coming home—to be buried—and her coffin lay in the hold.

After leaving Peru, the voyage around Cape Horn had been long and harrowing. A storm struck the vessel off Punta Arenas, and suddenly, high above the wail of the wind, came the ringing, unmistakable laughter of a young girl. It seemed to come from the hold. Investigation revealed that the cargo, wrenched by the, storm was shifting dangerously. Another hour, and the ship might have capsized. The laughter continued as the cargo was righted, but as soon as the vessel was safe, it ceased.

Again, on four more occasions, the ghostly laughter of the dead bride warned of danger, and twice she appeared as a misty phantom. Once, her apparition loomed in the night sky just ahead of the ship during a storm and prevented the vessel from running into a derelict schooner; her second similar appearance saved the ship from a dangerous reef. The frightened crew, formerly on the verge of mutiny, actually cheered when the fifth warning echoed through the ship and stopped a fire in the hold from gaining headway or doing any damage.

"Seems funny that she laughed," a British customs official at San Fernandez said, after the captain told his story. "Looks like she would have screamed instead."

"Well," the Captain replied, "Carmelita was said to be the most cheerful girl in the islands. She loved her home and wanted to be buried back here. Maybe she was happy to be of help. She never screamed when she was alive, so why should she start when she was dead?"

BUT not all supernormal manifestations on the high seas serve good purposes; some are evil to an astonishing degree. And there are vessels that seem literally cursed—bearing hoodoos that constantly bring forth death and destruction.

There was the *Hinemoa*, built in 1908 for the London-New Zealand run. Gravel from an old English cemetery was used as ballast on her first voyage, and trouble followed. Four crew members were lost on her maiden voyage, and her first captain went insane. Her second captain became a criminal, her third a hopeless drunkard, her fourth was found dead, her fifth committed suicide. The vessel capsized on her sixth voyage, and was totally wrecked on her seventh.

And there was the *Governor Parr*, a disabled British schooner, to which supernormal power was credited. Abandoned in mid-Atlantic by her crew, with a fortune in Canadian lumber in her hold, sailors believed the derelict could raise a storm at will. Many steamers tried to tow her to shore for salvage, but every attempt was balked

by a sudden gale.

THE famous *Mary Celeste*, found mysteriously abandoned in mid-sea in 1872, seems to have sailed under a star of misfortune. A long series of mishaps preceded and followed the puzzling disappearance of her crew. In 1885 she was wrecked on Rochelois Reef, Haiti, by a dishonest captain who plotted with shipping agents to defraud a marine insurance company. Within six months the three perpetrators of the scheme all died violent deaths.

Of more recent date is the account of a "haunted voyage" made by the British tramp steamer *Stonepool*, which arrived in Boston early in 1940 from Cardiff, Wales. A seaman who had committed suicide in one of the cabins several years previously was blamed by the crew for the series of mishaps. One sailor told of seeing phantom eyes gleaming in the dark, another of having his hands seized by invisible fingers which caused him to fall to the deck and injure himself.

During the voyage two crew members became seriously ill. One, a fireman, was stricken with appendicitis, and with no ice aboard to make packs to relieve his pain, he suffered continual agony until the vessel reached Boston. The other, an engineer, was temporarily blind, deaf and speechless from nervous prostration brought on by overwork in remedying engine-room troubles.

Fourteen times the ship broke down in mid-sea, and on one occasion, when it had hoisted danger lights, it was attacked by a German submarine which fired two torpedoes. However, the *Stonepool*, for some unknown reason, managed to elude the U-boat. During a storm one of the holds had to be flooded to keep the stern, with its propellers, under water in the heavy seas. But the weary, frightened sailors finally made it to port.

For sheer horror, however, the story of the *Ivan Vassili*, a Russian steamer, is almost unbelievable. It was built in 1897, and for five years its marine existence was uneventful. Then, early in 1903, as Russia was preparing for her ill-fated war with Japan, the vessel was sent from the Baltic to Vladivostok with a cargo of military supplies.

In the midst of the voyage "The Thing" struck. What it was, or is, no man can say. Its first effect was a sudden feeling that an invisible being was standing nearby. Then came a shock of chilling terror, cold and paralyzing, that drained away all energy like a ghastly sponge. At times a faintly luminous, misty form, vaguely resembling a human being, was observed.

BUT whatever it was, it was on board. Just before the ship reached Port Arthur, on a calm, clear night, one of the members of the crew, standing on deck, suddenly screamed. Panic followed. For twenty minutes the crew prayed and

shouted and fought, running blindly about through the vessel. Finally one of the seamen, Alec Govinski, jumped overboard into the sea to his death. With this sacrifice of blood to the unknown, unfathomable menace, the hypnotic spell of horror was broken, and the men fell on the decks in physical exhaustion. Three days later there was another outburst of panic. Then, on the following day, the port of Vladivostok was reached.

A number of the men attempted to desert, but they were soon recaptured. With its cargo safely ashore, the ship set sail for Hongkong. It was a terrible, nightmare voyage. Two seamen committed suicide, one died of fright, and shortly before reaching port the captain, Sven Andrist, jumped overboard. After each death "The Thing" seemed satisfied—for a few brief hours—then the waves of panic would start anew.

At Hongkong the entire crew deserted, with the exception of Christ Hanson, the second officer, and five Scandinavian hands. Hanson, a Swede, made himself captain, and with a crew of Chinese and Lascars, he set sail for Sydney. Again "The Thing" struck with tentacles of doom, and before the vessel could reach Australia, Captain Hanson had shot himself.

Once in the harbor of Sydney, the crew dis-

appeared into the city as fast as their legs could carry them. Only one man, Harry Nelson, dared to stay with the ship. A new skipper who didn't believe in ghosts was found, a skeleton crew was finally rounded up, and four months later the *Vassili* was outward bound for San Francisco. And again the terror-panic came—three times—and three men died, leaping overboard. And again a fear-crazed captain, tormented beyond endurance by a hellish, invisible octopus that fed on man's sanity, shot himself.

HARRY NELSON managed to survive the horror. He succeeded in returning the cursed craft to its home port of Vladivostok where it remained. No sailor, no matter how much extra pay or bonuses he was offered, would board her. For years she floated in the harbor, avoided, shunned, feared. Finally it was given the one treatment, the sure remedy, for all objects of evil that exist in this world. It was burned.

But what was this horror from out of the nightmare, realms of the endless unknown? Did it die in the flames that consumed wood and canvas, or did it survive to live on—quietly waiting along the dark border of our world of sun and stars to strike again when conditions permit?

★ PLEASANT DREAMS! ★

By ALICE RICHARDS

"There's more betwixt Heaven and Earth—"

ADVENTURE certainly covers a lot of territory for such a small and compact word. It is a category which probably is the only one covering everything that has ever been known to man. It can concern itself with little everyday things all the way up to lion hunting and escaping from prison. It runs down the whole list, backwards and forwards, and no matter how humdrum a thing may appear from the outside to the nonchalant viewer, there is always some part of its working ability which may inspire someone to consider it a topic for adventure, and cause someone else to invest in making it work.

But just as adventure covers everything about our everyday life, we and everything we do, it also has an ability which we have not as yet perfected. It can escape into another part of our lives which we know very little about, which we have no known control over, and which we can see only when whatever force that controls it, wishes us to see it. This field, over which we ponder so much, is that of dreams, and certainly there is no one alive and reading this, who has not dreamed at one time in his life, who can truthfully say that his dreams have been just as everyday as his waking hours, and that they have been unadventurous and that there has

really never been anything much that has happened. All one need do to disprove this is to take an extra bite of that cheese sandwich just before retiring, and off he is, on the maddest and most unexplainable adventure he has ever encountered, or perhaps, he hopes to high heaven that he never will encounter in broad daylight. Or for that matter, he does not wish to see it again in his dreams.

There are many things about dreams which people have tried to explain away, and which other people have tried to get some meaning out of. The study of the meaning of dreams is a large field, and everyone, it seems, has, at one time or another, tried to interpret his own dream, probably to the way he wants it to be. The field of dreams covers everything from abuse to zulu, and even these subjects are divided into different categories.

As for the meaning of dreams, many people are trying to find out how much dreams actually do mean. They may mean much, and on the other hand, they may mean practically nothing. There's also the middle road of dreams which states that dreams mean very little in proportion to their length and all the subjects that they cover, but this is always a fairly safe stand to take. Surely, after a few dreams, one can understand that

all are not exactly alike, all do not follow the same pattern, and that there definitely are different kinds of dreams, which come under different sets of conditions. This is so obvious that it is hardly necessary to explain that certain tasks or duties performed during the waking hours or just before retiring, either act to stimulate the intensity of the dream or the type of dream one may have. Excitement, or an unusual event, as the easiest things to understand, are two of the main reasons for the vivid dreaming, which we sometimes view with alarm.

SOMETIMES, too, one dreams while under the influence of laughing gas or nitrous oxide, which is given before the performing of a slight operation. This is sleep which occurs not from natural causes, and yet, one dreams, even more vividly than if it was a natural sleep. The effects of this gas sometimes reach astounding heights as far as reactions go. The patient usually witnesses a slight and jumbled dream, and often curious results are produced. It is to be expected that this gas hits the subconscious mind, and releases all the pent-up feelings and emotions an apparently well-behaved person would never think of releasing were he in possession of his own mind.

Of the kinds of dreams which mean absolutely nothing at all, as far as significant forecasting goes, are those which come from over-indulging in too much rich food or drink, or sometimes in too many drugs, too much heavy duty resulting in great fatigue, or mental exhaustion. Too much of the apple pie is liable to induce a dream utterly invalid, as far as prophecy goes, and those who believe in the reliability of dreams maintain that no dream which comes during the first few hours of a night's sleep while digestive processes are still going on, is to be taken seriously. This may also be considered in this light: it is said that the best hours of sleep one receives during a night's time, are the first two hours.

If one has dreamed at all, then certainly one of the dreams which has been prominent is the one which logically has a plot in it, and which builds up to the right moment when from the world about us comes a telephone ring, or a baby's cry, which fits quite perfectly and specifically into the plot of the dream. This type of dream seems to the casual observer, and at first glance, that it is proof enough that dreams can foretell future occurrences, for certainly a dream like that couldn't have been made to fit into a telephone bell's call, or a baby's cry, without someone's knowledge that such things would occur. Nothing has yet come to light to either prove or disprove any theory made about such a dream, but this sort of vision may be nothing more than a simple lightning thought that goes through the mind at the precise moment that the sound occurs from the waking world, but which arrives first at the brain before the other

sound penetrates. Dreams such as these are considered as nothing more than psychological phenomena, and they are also regarded as mechanical rather than spiritually induced dreams. However interesting they may be, as far as the contents of the dreams go, and as far as conversational topic and mulling over in the mind privately, actually, these dreams cannot be considered as having any bearing on future events in life.

NO MATTER how much one meets scoffers in the world about us today, who deny that there is anything to believe in dreams, it still goes without saying that most of us believe in dreams, especially when they hit upon something close to our heart. Ever since Adam and Eve, there has always been a sincere belief in dreams, at least in a partial sense, as to their significance, and there has never been a priority as to which type of person may believe in them. People ranking from bus boy to king, from every station in life, men, women, and children, have been influenced by the visions which come to them while they sleep. And if they do not know what their dreams mean, and feel that they cannot fathom them out themselves because there is more than a half-way significant thought trying to be impressed upon them, people do not stop long in pondering. They go to one who professes to know what is behind the dream itself, who says he can puzzle out the message behind the whole thought. They go to someone who is considered expert in the interpretation of their particular dream. Nowadays, it is not considered a very ethical practice to have, but that is certainly not a drawback, for there are hundreds of persons operating in this field. It does not hold back on the lucrative possibilities of the field, either.

Persons from all over have been known to come miles to consult a person whose fame in correctly translating a dream has been widespread.

Many unexplainable circumstances have been recorded about dreams, which scientists have given up ever trying to fathom out, with the tools they now have at their call. Some day, they will be aided further by new discoveries, but as yet, they do not possess the right knowledge. Certainly, a reputable source of information is the highly regarded writer of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Rudyard Kipling. In a book of his, Mr. Kipling told of a dream he once had, which has been quite puzzling to all searchers for the truth. A reasonable answer has yet to be found.

In this dream, Kipling relates, he found himself in a large and ancient hall, where he was attending some sort of a ceremony. Of all the odd and old fixtures around the great room, the one object which stood out most in his mind, and which he noticed particularly, was the stone floor, and its intricate pattern. While he was in the midst of observing this, the ceremony, whatever one was being performed, came to an end, and he recalled that at this time, someone came up from

behind him, and putting an arm on his shoulder, said, "I want a word with you."

THIS was the dream in its entirety, for immediately afterwards, he awoke, and could not force himself to continue the sleep. However, he still continued to think about the dream, remembering every detail, and recalling it in its entirety. Shortly after this interesting dream, he was invited to Westminster Abbey to witness a ceremony. As Mr. Kipling was sitting and viewing the proceedings, his eye was attracted by something, and looking around to find out what had caused him to avert his attention, his glance fell on the flooring, and to his astonishment, he recognized it as the same pattern which adorned the ancient hall in his dream! He could not forget the dream, for it had been so vivid, and he was positive it was the same pattern. While he was pondering over such a strange circumstance, the ceremony which had been going on, ended, and before he had a chance to rise from his seat and leave, a man walked up to him, put his hand on Kipling's arm, and said, "I want a word with you, please!" Certainly such recorded happenings, from such reliable sources, should be viewed with more than a passing interest.

There is another firm believer in dreams, whose name has been recorded for posterity as one of the wisest presidents and most beloved man, Abraham Lincoln. Throughout his entire life, Abraham Lincoln fervently looked for some hidden meaning to his numerous dreams, and he certainly found what he was looking for. One of his most curious dreams, which is well-known throughout the circles that follow such affairs, and which is pointed to as supporting evidence for the plea that there is such a thing as forecasting of future happenings in dreams, is the one which Mr. Lincoln related to his wife and a few friends one evening after dinner. It has been handed down through the years, and has been a puzzle to as many people who have heard it related. Certainly there is no known scientific reasoning to explain away its facts, at least there is none now.

This particular dream of Mr. Lincoln's took place in the White House. He found himself wandering through the entire house one evening, and as he went from one room to another, he could find no other person occupying any of the rooms other than himself. It was tomblike, and the silence overwhelming, with the exception that occasionally, Mr. Lincoln could hear what he believed to be the sobbing of many people. At last, coming into the East Room, he found himself in a group of soldiers, who were guarding what appeared to be a corpse. Standing around in small groups were a multitude of people, quietly weeping. Pushing his way through the mob, he finally got to the front and asked one of the guards standing near him who had died in the White House. "The president," answered

the soldier, "he was assassinated." Upon this, the entire mob of people broke again into new shouts of grief, and Mr. Lincoln awoke from this foretelling dream of tragedy. The sound of those cries had awakened him, and that dream of tragedy came true not more than four days afterwards when a bullet from an assassin's gun put Abraham Lincoln to sleep forever.

BECAUSE he was such a figure of prominence, many more stories of Abraham Lincoln and those of his dreams have come down to us through the ages. Another one of the dreams he is known to have had, and to have told to more than just one person, took place the night before the last cabinet meeting he ever held. The meeting took place shortly before Lincoln left for Ford's Theatre, in Washington, where John Wilkes Booth killed him on April 14, 1865.

This same dream, which was related at this time to his entire cabinet and to General Ulysses S. Grant, who was also present, was not a new one for Lincoln, for he remarked that he had had this same dream in identical pictures, several times before, the only definite thing about each one was that it had always occurred before an important and decisive battle. When Grant had asked Lincoln if he had received any news from Sherman, who at that time, was still fighting General Johnston's forces near Goldsborough, N. C., Mr. Lincoln said no, but that he believed they would soon hear some news, and that the news they would receive would be good. He knew, he said, because of the dream he had had the previous night. This dream of Lincoln's was that the president found himself in a peculiar and undescrivable vessel, on some kind of lake or river, and that it seemed he was always in this same kind of vessel, and that he was moving in what he termed a great rapidness, toward a dark and indefinite shore.

The dream was always the same, and it always ended at the same time. What never failed was that, shortly afterwards, came the news of some victorious occurrence from somewhere along the front; even though the particular event and results were unimportant, it was a victorious piece of news. General Grant is reported to have scoffed at the idea, but it is also reported that a few days later, General Johnston surrendered his army to General Sherman! Those are the facts, no matter what they may point to.

The last three instances are those which happened to persons just like all the others in this world, human beings, that can be understood. But there is also a kind of dream, and a side to the dream which is hard for many people to comprehend. Dreams are said to have a great influence upon the world. And many of these dreams which come to humans just like ourselves, are claimed to be from another world, given to us for the benefit of ours. Great persons of our times and those before us, have refused to accept the claims

of greatness thrust upon them, saying that the great pieces of literature which they have written, or the great musical compositions which they have mastered, are really not theirs at all, but were given to them from someone in another world, while they slept. It is known that an inventor is considered to be somewhat of a dreamer, but it is probable, under these circumstances, that because of this dreamy attitude, our civilization is being enriched by the dreams which are transferred from his mind to working use for the consumption of all the peoples of this world.

ON THE literary side of this question, to name just a few of those who received their greatness through dreams, Robert Louis Stevenson's weird dream of a man with two natures, gave us the well-known classic of 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.' Certainly, if we were to study it closely, it would appear to many of us that we have witnessed just the same type of thing in a lesser form, probably, during one of our own nocturnal visitations. John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," which has been proclaimed by all the world as one of our great masterpieces of all time, was brought to light by a dream Bunyan once had. And the poem "Kubla Khan," which once in the life of every child must be learned by heart, and which is considered one of the finest in the field of poetry, came to us because its author, Samuel Taylor Coleridge was addicted to drugs, which made him sleep much of the time. During one of these long sleeps of his, the poem came to him.

Although this article has shown that dreams can and do deal with everything and anything, it is also true that for the most part, dreams are intensely personal. Some of them cannot be told without making the person it concerns, a mite foolish-looking.

Most of the dreams which are personal concern the thoughts which are most private and untouch-

able by any other person and which the individual himself does not dwell too long upon during his waking hours. Thus it is that certain dreams are fairly humorous when it is considered who the person is who is dreaming it, for it makes issues out of subjects which one would never dare to dwell upon in the hearing of that certain individual.

It has often been recorded that bald-headed persons who have been quite touchy about the subject, and who steer clear of the subject as much as possible during the waking hours of the day, are known to dream of having permanent waves given them, or marcel, or else, they find themselves being complimented by the beautiful texture or color of their hair! This is not an unusual occurrence, and it is funny, when one thinks about it.

Aside from the value of dreams as predicting what will occur in the future years, dreams also hold a fascination of adventure. In a very humdrum existence of everyday work and nothing out of the ordinary, the release of excess energy is believed to be spent during the dreaming hours, when all our inhibitions are spent. A small department store clerk dreams he is piloting a huge airplane, driving a locomotive, taming a snarling lion, or saving a beautiful lady in distress, and he awakens the following morning, feeling brave and full of life.

No matter how great the adventure, though, or what is the personal opinion concerning the validity of dreams meaning something, it must be understood that dreams are just another part of this life which we have yet to learn all about.

What we believe to be true today may be proved entirely incorrect tomorrow. At any rate, it might be interesting to know if anyone has as yet ever discovered this new angle: have you ever dreamed of waking up? It must be a funny feeling.

WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A SPY

By ROBERT CLAYTON

There's more to espionage than Mata Hari!

OF ALL professions, becoming a spy is one of the hardest of all tasks to accomplish.

It takes more than the desire to serve as such, for it also takes the courage and the willingness to face all kinds of danger, and it takes the more than average intelligence a spy must have in order to keep himself from being apprehended.

Actually, there are four different and distinct classes of spies, and this article will deal with describing all of them. They are classified as such in time of war, and these are the classes roughly described into which they fall: the officers of the regular army, the patriotic volunteers, the mercenaries, and always, the informers.

It can be well appreciated and understood that

during a war, the most effective form of all these classes, is the officer class, which is trained and equipped for the job and the men so occupied are carrying out their duties as part of their war service, only this happens to be in excess of duty. They are well equipped to handle all the different types of work that may fall into their hands. Actually, these officers, for the most part, are in command only of a group of spies, and very rarely is it found that they do the work themselves. They have subordinates who they order to do the work, and who are told exactly what it is they are to look for and where to look for it. But when there is some matter of great importance, these specially trained men do their work, too. Just before the last war, when

no one in this country dreamed of such things happening to them, naval officers in the Japanese Navy, dressed in greasy overalls and heavy sou'westers, sailed aboard the alleged fishing boats of their country, that used to snoop around our Pacific fleet during maneuvers, and these same fishing boats were also found with the crews of the same caliber of men near the Aleutian Islands, where they explored and sounded out the preparations that were being put into effect by our forces stationed there.

The second class of spies are taken from both the amateur side and the semi-amateur side of the profession, and for their work, they are considered almost as valuable as officers during the preliminaries that always occur just before a war. But just exactly what kinds of people volunteer for this work, what makes them want to do such things? These men and women are the ones who volunteer for spy service for patriotic motives, and probably they do so also because of some personal reason, and more than not, the reasons are spiced with a yearning for adventure, which they are more than certain to find in the mildest form of this type of work. Looking at the other side for a while, for definitely there are two sides to a war, we are all familiar however vaguely with the many spying tactics used by the Germans during the armistice which lasted from 1919 to 1939. For their work here in America, which went on right underneath our noses, so to speak, take for instance the office of the Hamburg American Steamship Line in New York, which served as a nerve center for espionage and sabotage during this period and even after, until apprehended by our spies in the government. The men who controlled and ran this type of service for the Germans, along with the men who served as members of the German Tourist Bureau, all were officials of the steamship companies and the Bureau, and they organized all these espionage rings on the side, besides drawing the checks for their official jobs. Also, the people they had working for them in the official line of duty, such as the employees on the steamships, were top notch spies and key men in the whole system. Most of them were actually reserve officers in the German Army, and were being paid by the German Government for "services rendered."

ALSO, the Japanese were busy here, too, during this time, and they worked in planting their men over here to observe and learn the secrets of our government. Due to the fact that Japan, too, was a totalitarian government, the one hundred Japanese individuals who were allowed into this country each year, as agreed years before in a "gentlemen's agreement," were selected on the basis of their willingness to serve the Mikado and the Empire in civilian dress, as spies. Also, besides these one hundred, who were intending to settle in this country and make this their home, there

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SIR JOHN RICHARDSON

By PETE BOGGS

AMONG the men whom England has sent forth to explore the arctic regions, Sir John Richardson holds an honored place, although he did not make any brilliant discoveries. The early years of John Richardson were spent at Dumfries in close companionship with Robert Burns, the poet. In 1800, he was apprenticed to a surgeon in Dumfries, and seven years later, he became an assistant surgeon in the Royal Navy. Those were the times of active service before the enemy, and Richardson's letters home spoke of blockade duty on the Portuguese coast, and horrors of the bombardment of Copenhagen, gallant attempts made by the boats of his ship to cut out vessels, and many other stirring tales.

When peace was once more established all over Europe, the English government began to take measures for extending their knowledge of the Arctic Seas. In 1818, voyages northward were made by Lieutenant John Franklin, Captain John Ross, and others. The next year, a more complete expedition was prepared, and the "Hecla" and "Griper" were commissioned. At the same time Lieutenant Franklin was made leader of an overland expedition to the north coast of America. Dr. John Richardson was appointed to go with him as surgeon and naturalist. This expedition did not end without the lives of most of its members being in danger. A party under Richardson found themselves far from any supplies on the shores of the Arctic sea. Their journey back is a record of continuous suffering, with starvation staring them in the face. A nauseous weed called "tripe de roche" was for a long time their only food. Sometimes they were able to kill a partridge. Privation and hunger were not the only dangers they had to guard against. A Canadian in the party who had at first served them faithfully, under the influence of despair, was after their lives. Watching till the time when the other two Englishmen were at a distance, he shot Mr. Hood, a naval officer, through the head. In order to insure the safety of the others, Dr. Richardson had to shoot the Canadian.

After a long time, the party reached Fort Enterprise, and rejoined Lieutenant Franklin; but for some time their condition was no better. For food, they had to boil up old bones and skin robes. But help came at last and the party returned to England after traveling 5550 miles in America. In spite of the many hardships Dr. Richardson had endured, he made many more trips to America and to the Arctic regions as surgeon and naturalist. During the later years of his life he lived in retirement, devoting much of his time to literature, and earning by his kind manner, the affection of all the country side.

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came to these shores many more loyal Japanese subjects, who entered as students and merchantmen for a short space of time, and they, too, were approached in the same fashion before they left home. It was merely a question of no espionage, no passport, and as we know that each year the quota was filled, we know, too, that they acquired along these lines.

Perhaps that is why, for the most part, that it is so difficult for an honest, clean-moraled American, Briton, or Scandinavian to volunteer his services as a spy for his country, and do as good a job with it without any education leading up to his work. He has been brought up to respect other people's privacy, and the child of the Nazi government, for certainly he is a child of the government rather than of his parents, these children had to and did spy on their parents who were suspected of having dangerous thoughts; these children gave up their own brothers to the Gestapo on evidence they had collected while snooping; they lied, blackmailed, and even murdered, because they had been educated in the state's schools to believe that this was the only right thing to do because they were doing it as a duty for the fatherland.

As to the third class of spies, those who are spies for mercenary reasons alone, it is not surprising to note that they constitute the largest class of all, serving solely for the payment the job rewards. Sometimes, this mercenary trend is combined with a rather perverted enjoyment of dangerous and adventuresome living. For the most part, however, they are the small figures in the army of spies, acting as privates, and with only the menial tasks set before them, and more often than not, they are sheer traitors, who could not make a go out of civilian life, and are in this racket merely for the money angle. Also, the spies in this class are taken from the ranks of people who have come from another country, and have some grievance against their old country's government, and are only too anxious to hurt them in some way. Also, the political dissenters, and those of loose morals make up the body of this type of spy.

THE mercenary is almost the lowest type of spy, and is looked down upon by all in his profession. His job is usually one of being behind the enemy's lines most of the time and procuring information for which he is paid a sum of money. However, the greatest embarrassment in the secret service is said to be the fact that slippery people are the only kinds who are employed for this job, and in this type of work, they are often employed where they cannot be watched. That watching need is so neatly proved by the fact that when the German government hired one of these mercenary characters to spy on the United States' office of Public Information in Switzerland during the armistice, in order to secure valuable information or documents, they paid him twenty-five dollars a week for such services. However, what they did

not know was that the United States government at the same time was paying this same man fifty dollars a week for transmitting documents to the German government that were entirely worthless, or better still, were very misleading to the Germans.

The fourth and last class of spies, the informers, are not spies in the true sense of the word, at all. But no matter what they are called, they are probably the most valuable spies of all, including the officer and the patriotic volunteer. In this class of spy, there falls the category of nationals of a country, on which one is spying, who either are truly idealists and wish to help make a revolution, or else they are greedy individuals who are indistinguishable from the mercenary spies only because they ask a different rate on their remuneration, or to put it more correctly, the amount of bribe, they request for their services. It is usually a piecemeal type of job that they do, and the price is generally high for their work. The nationals are to be found working into this group, but the commonest member of this class is the government worker, ranging from the diplomats or staff officers, all the way down to the filing clerks. Usually there is the reason that a diplomat wishes to promote a republican form of revolution. During the last war, our government secured much valuable information from people who asked nothing in the line of money for their services. They merely wanted a better government for their people. As there are more spies in this world now and were during the last war, than there ever were before this, so there are more informers, in proportion.

THE types of spies were classified into only four groups at the beginning of this article. However, there is one other class, quite small and to date, greatly over-advertised. These are the spies who are in this profession for the sheer adventure of the job. They are the pure adventurers. As is mostly the case, these people, both men and women, are usually exhibitionists or at least have a streak of exhibitionism in them, and during their infrequent jobs for governments, they cannot resist the impulse to relate some of their tales of adventure. It is purely a touched-up job they relate, for they know that the press is just willing to write up such stories only if they are more than exciting. Probably the best-known spy in this class is the German Fritz Duquesne, who was a spy in the Boer War, and served during both World Wars. He is now in prison with enough sentences to keep him there for the rest of his life. However, he was an adventurer and nothing more for all the time of his service. The only true and sincere spot in his twisted psychology was that he truly hated England and all that she stood for and all that was connected with her. But he would have sold out the Germans, too, if he felt there was more adventure the other way around. His last job consisted of forming a spy ring here in

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America, which he did, and which he bogged up so badly that all his cohorts were captured, and it was painfully proved that he did more harm than good for his cause. He violated the cardinal rule that is practised in any spy ring. Everyone in the ring knew that there were other members in the ring, and also they knew who the other members were. If one of them were to get just the least bit talkative about the others, the rest were just as well hung, too. Duquesne was nothing more than a trickster, a boaster, and a pathological liar, and if these are the ingredients needed for an ardent adventurer, then he surely was one of the best.

No matter how many classes of spies there are, any corps of spies is organized just like an army or navy is, with a general staff, and a field commander with a board of strategy for every separate front. But the main difference lies in the secrecy which surrounds the whole army of spies. Naturally, it is quite impossible to have the army of spies familiar with each other, as has been shown so effectively many times. Once one would lose his nerve when arrested, or would turn traitor, the rest of the corps would be at his mercy. It is no secret, too, that the main body of a service of spies is compiled from those who are morally defective, and would not let very much stand in their way to reporting on their own government. Only the heads are of any sort of intelligence. The privates are mere machines who carry out the work.

It has been said time and again that spying is one of the most fabulous and adventure-filled jobs the world has ever known. There is no doubt that it is a flourishing field today, too, and it will continue in this way as long as there are people on earth. No matter how corny a story about the spy may be, when it comes to the risks he must face, and often does, it is mere nursery-room story, and an expurgated one at that, compared to the reality each spy must face, not just occasionally, but always. There is no doubt about it, a spy leads an adventurous life.

DINOSAURS!

By FRANCES YERXA

A FEW million years ago, before the Rocky Mountains came up and the now bare western plains was a land of lakes, rivers, and lush vegetation, the territory was inhabited by a race of strange and mighty reptiles whom science has given the name of dinosaurs, meaning terrible lizards.

In America in 1818, the first dinosaur remains were found in the valley of the Connecticut, but at that time they were not recognized as such. The first dinosaur to be recognized as being a new order of reptile, was the carnivorous Megalosaurus found near Oxford, England, in 1824. There are today no living animals that are closely related

to them, and there hasn't been for some time, for the dinosaurs came to an end in the Cretaceous period. The crocodiles and the ostriches are the nearest existing relatives of these great reptiles. Though different in outward appearance, birds and reptiles are structurally closely allied. The two groups are not far apart, except for the matter of clothes, wherein birds differ from all other animals in having feathers. The dinosaurs were by no means confined to North America, although Western United States seems to have been their headquarters. They ranged all over the world, for their remains have been found in every continent. In their time they ranged from the Trias to the Upper Cretaceous, their golden age, marking the culminating point of reptilian life, being in the Jurassic, when their huge forms stalked by the seashores and browsed in the great swamps. They had their day, a day that lasted many thousand years, and then passed away, giving way to a superior race of mammals which was just springing into being when the dinosaurs were having their heyday. It seems that in the distant past, brains were not an important factor in the struggle for supremacy. Although these reptiles were giants, dominating the earth through brute force, they were dwarfs in intellect. The human brain in a person weighing from 120 to 150 pounds, weighs about two pounds; but in a dinosaur perhaps twenty-five feet long and standing fifteen feet high in his bare feet, you would find a brain no larger than a tiny fist and weighing less than a pound. They certainly couldn't have had much intellect, just about enough to have eaten when they were hungry. The spinal cord, with its supply of nerve-substance, doubtless looked after the mechanical functions of life; and while even the spinal cord is in many cases small, in some places, particularly in the sacral region, it is considerably enlarged. This is true of Stegosaurus, where the enlargement is twenty times the size of the puny brain. The newspapers got hold of this fact and distorted it by saying that a dinosaur had been found with a brain in its pelvis.

THE smallest of the dinosaurs that we know of were no larger than chickens; the largest were distinguished as being the largest quadrupeds that have walked the face of the earth, the giants of all time, before whose frame the bones of a mammoth seem slight. Brontosaurus, the Thunder Lizard, beneath whose mighty feet the earth shook, and his kindred were from 40 to 70 feet long and 15 feet high. The group to which Brontosaurus belongs, is distinguished by a large, rather short body, but a very long neck and tail, and for the overall size of the animal, a tiny head. In fact in the case of Diplodocus, the head was so small and so poorly provided with teeth, that it must have been quite a difficult task or a long

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term pleasure, according to its digestive apparatus, for the animal to have eaten its daily meal. An elephant weighing 5 tons eats a hundred pounds of hay and twenty-five pounds of grain each day. This food being in a concentrated form, he would require at least twice this amount of green fodder. A live Diplodocus or a Brontosaurus weighed approximately twenty-five tons, and would need over seven hundred pounds of leaves, twigs, or plants each day, more if he felt real hungry.

From studying the limb bones, it is thought that these animals were largely aquatic in their habits, and fed on species of water plants. There was the advantage in having a long neck to browse in the vegetation on the bottom of the lakes, while the animal was submerged, or in rearing up to search the surrounding shores for a possible enemy. With the tail as a counterpoise, the entire body could be thrust out of the water and the head raised perhaps thirty feet in the air.

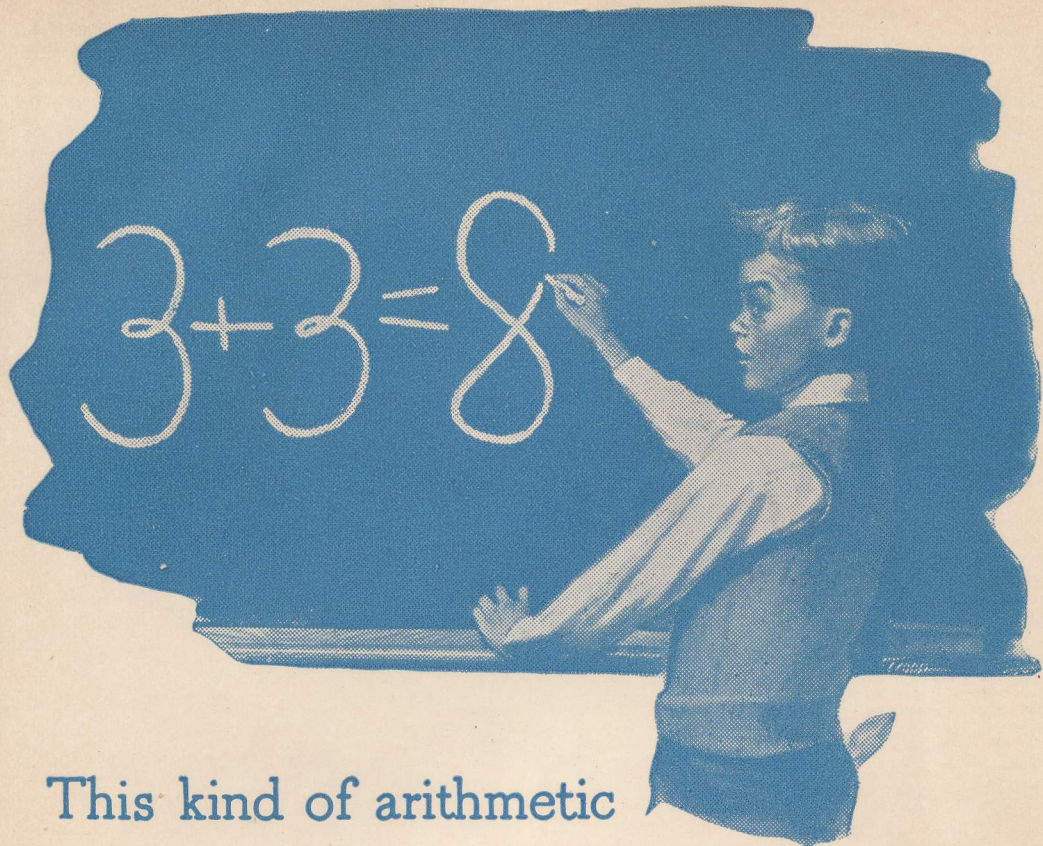
Triceratops, with the three-horned face, had a most peculiar skull that projected back over the neck like a fireman's helmet. He had a horn over each eye and a third horn on the nose. In front of each eye was a thick bone which, although it furnished protection, must have interfered with straight ahead vision. When Triceratops faced an adversary he must have been practically invulnerable, inasmuch as he was the largest animal of his time, excepting Tyrannosaurus; it is probable that his battles were with those of his own kind, over some fair female on whom two suitors had cast longing eyes. It would have been quite a sight to have seen two such enormous brutes in mortal combat charging upon each other with twenty tons of infuriated flesh. A pair of Triceratops horns in the National Museum bears witness to such combats. One is broken off and was broken during life because the stump is healed and rounded over.

UNLIKE man, reptiles and fish do not have a maximum standard of size which is reached at an early age and seldom exceeded, but they continue to grow till the end so that the size of a turtle, crocodile, or dinosaur tells of its age.

Trachodons, though not quite as large, being only twelve feet high, were more abundant and widely distributed. They were in North America during the Cretaceous period what the deer are today. Twenty-nine Inguanodons, a European relative, were found in one spot in mining for coal in Bernissart, Belgium. Like other reptiles, the Trachodon was continually renewing his teeth. As fast as one tooth fell out it was replaced by another, a point where he has an advantage over humans. On the other hand, as he had a reserve of about four hundred teeth in his lower jaw alone, there would be a possibility of having a flock of toothaches.

There are many lesser dinosaurs including species with sharp claws and double-edged teeth.

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