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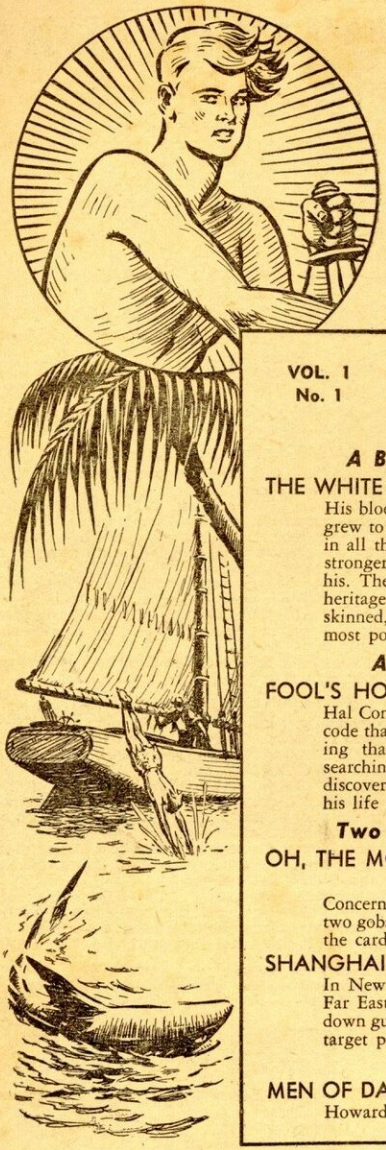

Red Star Adventures

VOL. 1
No. 1

JUNE
1940

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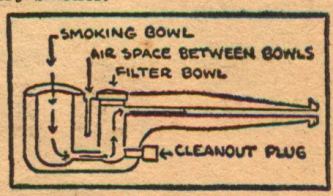

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The White Savage

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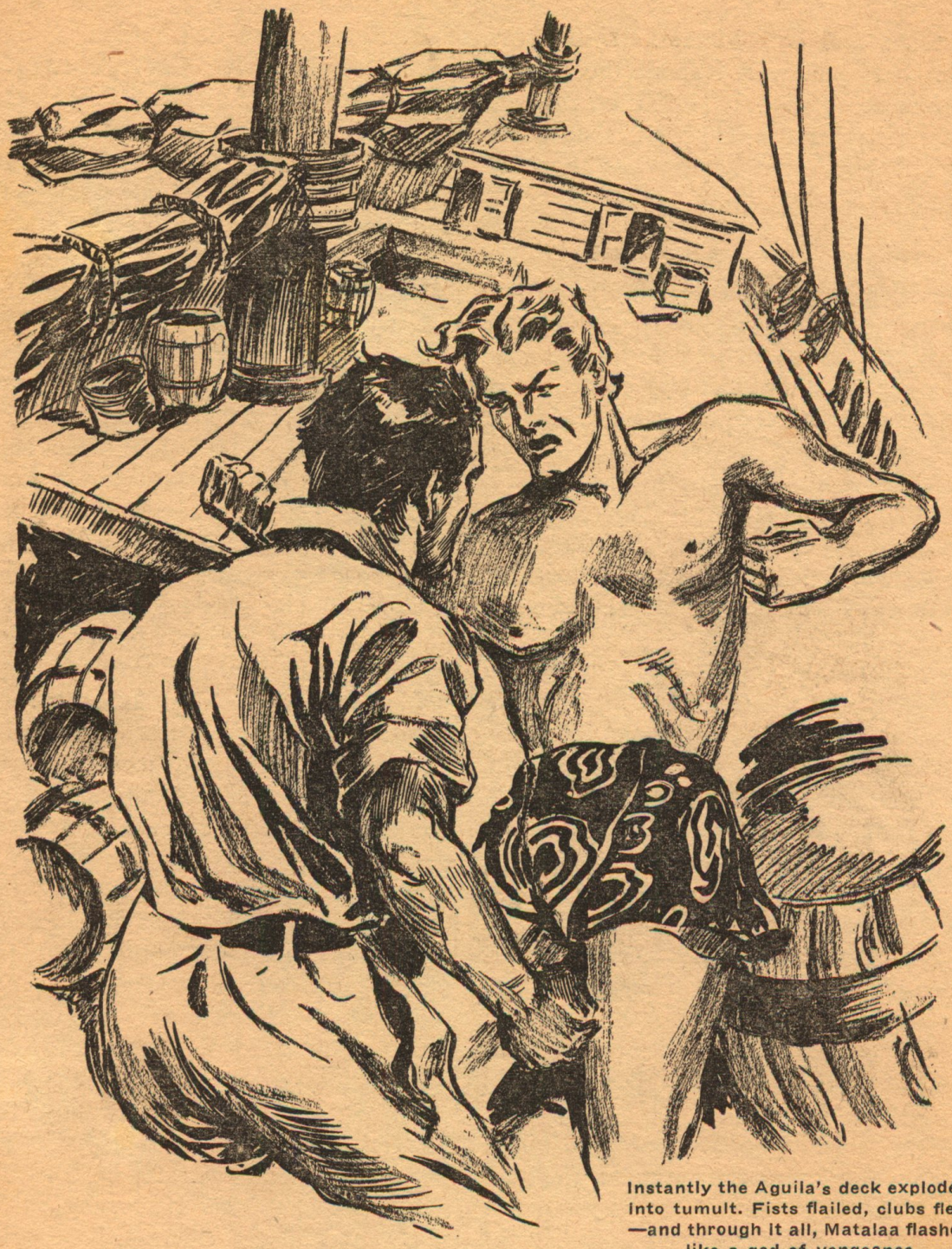
CHAPTER I

SON OF A KING

"DRINK up, Torkusa!" Bull Garvey lolled back in his chair, folded his beefy hand around a tumbler, and grinned at all the bronzed Marquesans in the saloon of the trading schooner *Aguila*. "Drink up and lose the smell of copra."



Instantly the Aguila's deck exploded into tumult. Fists flailed, clubs flew —and through it all, Matalaa flashed like a god of vengeance

Torkusa was already forgetting that a king should be grave and reserved; he grinned back at the red-faced skipper.

Matalaa, the king's adopted son, was restive near the foot of the long, littered table. He whispered to his foster brother, "Nito, I do not like this captain. He is a thief, and it pleases him that Father Pierre is away."

Nito liked the big cigar Bull Garvey had given him and his cheery Poly-

nesian soul was content. "Listen, my brother, you worry about those portholes being shut. It is only because we are noisy and would wake that white girl." Nito eyed his brother thoughtfully. "Do you know, your hair is almost as light as hers?"

Matalaa shrugged. He was not interested in Cornelia van Houten's complexion. Reflections upon the unusual color of his hair could not deflect him from the almost instinctive uneasiness he had felt ever since boarding the *Aguila*. Nor from his equally instinctive hatred of her master.

"I still don't like it. They're going to end up dead drunk. By then, the tide will be right, and this fellow can sail away with a cargo of copra he has not paid for."

Nito slapped his foster brother on the back. "Listen! With all our people ashore? With a dozen war canoes—why we could catch this Garvey before he gets over the bar. And he knows it!"

That was the Polynesian of it; eat and drink and laugh, and never mind thinking things out. But some alien mood had gripped the other. Though Matalaa was as bronzed as any islander, his hair was red gold. They had named him "Eye of the Sun." And he did not think like a native, even though he could sail and swim and spear fish with the best of them.

Matalaa said, "Give me your cigar. The box is empty." Matalaa took the half-smoked cigar. He puffed and pretended to drink Holland gin. Presently, he began wiping his forehead. His face began to twist and twitch. He rose, staggered from his chair. Bull Garvey saw him and boomed, "Look at your number two son, Torkusa! Don't seem to like cigars, huh?"

Garvey did not see the quickly veiled glitter in Matalaa's eyes.

The king laughed stupidly and poured another drink. Garvey shrugged as he watched Matalaa reel toward the passageway. The men on deck did not notice him. No one heard Matalaa go over the side, his big, powerful body knifing the water as cleanly as a spear.

ASHORE, there was laughter and dancing, and beating of drums. The smell of roasting turtle and fish and yams blended with the odor of drying copra, and the reek of gin. Father Pierre, who might have kept things under control, was at Ua Pou, helping out in a flu epidemic. They might have heeded the good priest who had given forty years of his life to the natives of Ua Paepae, but certainly they would not listen to Matalaa. Not when the king liked Bull Garvey.

Matalaa had one other resource: old Poi Utu, the witch doctor. Lithely, he ran up the narrow path to the crest of the hill where a banyan tree shadowed the *paepae*, a platform made of great blocks of stone. In the gloom of the clearing Matalaa could see only the white hair of the withered old man who crouched by the mouth of the pit where skulls were stored.

Matalaa was not sure whether Poi Utu was there to mock the dead enemies of his people, or simply to guard them so that they would not harm the descendants of the men who had slain and eaten them. Quickly, he told the old man what was happening. "My father and all the elders will be prisoners, and when Garvey sails away with all our copra, we will not dare attack his ship, lest he slay them. But no one will heed me."

Poi Utu sat still for some moments before he answered. "Will he listen to me? A witch doctor speaks to the gods in his way. The gods speak to a king

in their way, and what a king does is well."

"So you won't help?"

"Since the gods speak to a king, will they not whisper to a king's son?"

"You won't help me?" Wrath shook Matalaa's voice.

Poi Utu chuckled. "A king leads, and so does his son. His people follow, and I am one of your people, Man-With-Hair-Like-The-Rising-Sun. Do what seems good. That is what kings do, and is not this pit filled with the skulls of the enemies they ate?"

When Matalaa ran down hill, he glanced back and saw that Poi Utu followed, slowly. But when Matalaa went to Father Pierre's little house built of coral blocks, there was no one behind him.

Matalaa seated himself at the priest's desk and began to write as he had been taught. After a moment's thought, he decided on English, instead of French. The note was brief, and addressed to Miss Cornelia van Houten.

He sealed the envelope, got a canoe and paddled back to the *Aguila*.

When Cornelia von Houten heard the discreet tapping at the teak panel of her stateroom, she wondered who aboard was still sober enough for such a nice touch. The Marquesan nobles were singing and smashing glassware.

She was tall and blond, with a straight little nose, and an amiable mouth; though for the moment, she was frowning at the ledger which was on the desk before her.

Cornelia unbolted the door. She recognized the tall and good-looking young man who offered her an envelope, though now Matalaa had put on trousers, a shirt, and the priest's shoes. "Father Pierre asked me to wait for an answer, Miss van Houten."

She was puzzled. He did not look like a native; not with that coppery hair. But neither did he look like a half-caste. So Cornelia compromised, as she read the brief note, by thinking, "Anyway, he's awfully good looking." This thought was reflected in her smile when she looked up and said, "It's very nice of Father Pierre to invite me ashore. With all the riot, I'd not get a wink of sleep. Please tell Captain Garvey. I'll be ready in a minute."

When Matalaa returned, he led the way to the Jacob's ladder. Captain Garvey knew nothing of Cornelia's departure.

Lights gleamed cheerily from the priest's house. "Oh, isn't this charming!" Cornelia glanced about. "I've heard so much about him."

"Father Pierre loves Ua Paepae, and we've done our best to make him comfortable."

Once inside, he pointed to a closet door. "Father Pierre is in there."

He turned the knob. Suddenly he thrust Cornelia forward. The closing door cut off her cry. As he turned the key, Matalaa shook his head, regretfully; then hurried away. Cornelia was kicking and beating the door of the closet into which he had boosted her.

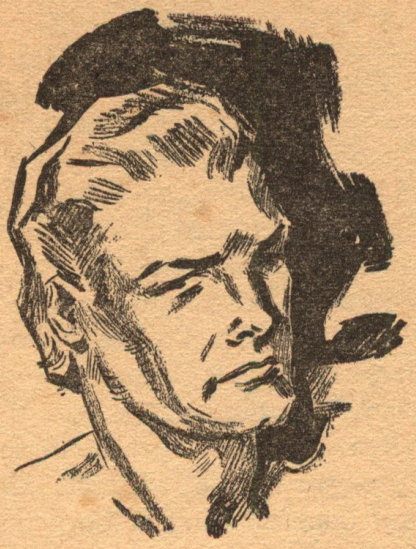
MATALAA ran back to his canoe. The drums were thumping louder. The whole village was drunk and shouting. As he was on the point of shoving off, Poi Utu stepped from behind a clump of pandanus.

"You are wise, Matalaa. If they hold your father as a hostage, we hold the white girl. Now go and tell them."

"How did you guess?"

Poi Utu smiled. "I heard voices at the place of skulls. You heard voices. You did what you were to do, I do what I am to do."

He turned toward the village, and



MATALAA

Matalaa launched his canoe. He had never really understood the grim old witch doctor who always talked in riddles.

Boarding the *Aguila* was easy enough. The crew were in the forecastle, and no one blocked the approach to the saloon. But when Matalaa tried the door, it would not open. It was locked.

That frightened him. He was first cold, then wet with sweat. He dashed to a porthole, and pressed his face against the thick glass pane. The saloon was thick with cigar smoke but he could see Bull Garvey slapping Torkusa on his back. Nito was nearly under the table, but at least half the elders and young nobles were still drinking, and throwing biscuits at each other.

Matalaa was proud of his foster father. Torkusa was still holding his own. Then he saw the little bottle the steward had in his left hand. He poured only a few drops into Torkusa's gin, and then went on to drug the next guest. Harrow, the first mate, took his elbows from the table and sat up straight; Berger, the second, glanced at Garvey and winked. Matalaa was sure now. Torkusa picked up his glass, and Garvey shouted, "Wake up, down there! We'll all drink this one! Bottoms up!"

Matalaa snatched a belaying pin and smashed the porthole cover. Bits of flying glass cut his face. Garvey heard the crash and jumped up. Another blow knocked the pane out. Matalaa shouted, "Don't drink! It's poisonous!"

Torkusa jerked to his feet. He reeled, clutched the table for support, then pulled himself together. "What do you mean?"

"The steward put poison in your drink!"

Matalaa dropped the belaying pin and ran to the door. He flung himself again it. The panel was teak. It would not yield and the impact numbed his shoulder. He recoiled, looked about. He unshipped a fire axe and swung a fierce blow at the door. The tongue of the lock tore loose. He pushed the door open and pounced into the salon.

Bull Garvey's face was purple with fury. Matalaa shouted, "Make that steward drink his little bottle!"

The steward yelled and tried to slip past Matalaa. Matalaa dropped his axe and swung with his open hand. He weighed over two hundred pounds, and all his weight was behind the blow. It knocked the steward off his feet, sent him crashing against the bulkhead.

Bull Garvey bellowed for the boatswain while the first mate drew a pistol. He turned to Torkusa: "Call him off or I'll shoot."

Matalaa hurled a bottle that smashed against the mate's head. He slumped in a corner. Garvey quit shouting and got busy with his fists. He floored Torkusa with one blow. Berger took a chair and knocked two drunken Marquesans down. Matalaa's fury was

spreading. Though his comrades still did not quite know what the trouble was about, they were now all for fighting.

They got into each other's way to get at Garvey and Berger. Harrow, the first mate, had a head like a pile driver: he was bleeding but on his feet again. "You fools," he howled, "why didn't you bring guns like I told you?"

The Marquesans were too groggy for good fighting. Matalaa was hampered by his own comrades. And then the crew came up from the forecastle. They had belaying pins, knives, bottles. While none was too sober, they carried their gin better than the islanders. The saloon spilled its drunken, fighting mob out on deck.

Matalaa turned on the crew. His first swing swept out a man's teeth. A belaying pin struck him a glancing blow, and knocked him to his knees. Half the crew charged over him; but his giant body came up, his arms grabbed a sailor about the knees. The man went down. Matalaa whirled, ducked a blow, smashed home with heavy fists.

Then he heard a fierce yelling. Poi Utu came dancing in with a war club. At his heels were a dozen tall men with wooden swords whose edges were armed with sharks' teeth.

Matalaa bounded toward Garvey. The master of the *Aguila* was bleeding from a dozen cuts. His eyes were half closed, but he charged. With one smashing thrust, Matalaa knocked him into a corner. A club smacked the skipper over the head before he could regain his feet.

That ended the fight. Matalaa shook his head to clear the blood from his eyes, he breathed deeply and stood surveying the aftermath of carnage with proud satisfaction, content that he had acted like the son of a mighty king.

CHAPTER II

THE GHOST OF THE FALCON

MATALAA found the little bottle, still half full. "Look," he said to Torkusa, "and see what happens when you drink of this."

Garvey was able to sit up groggily. Nito laughed delightedly and flung a bucket of water into the skipper's face. Matalaa filled a glass full of gin. Then he poured a spoonful of the drug into the liquor. "Drink, Captain Garvey," he commanded in a voice of thunder.

Bull Garvey, cursing, struggled to his feet. "You bloody niggers, I'll have a French cruiser shell your lousy village! Get off my ship!"

"Drink first."

Garvey spat at him. Nito, standing by, seized one of the saw-edged swords. Matalaa thrust his half brother aside. "Take this glass and pour it into him, while I hold him."

Garvey feinted, then lashed out with a kick. Matalaa twisted, and the heavy boot merely grazed his thigh. Before Garvey could make another trial, Matalaa had him by the throat in a stranglehold, locked from the rear. Garvey's struggles subsided. His face turned red, then purple. His tongue hung out. He decided to give in.

Nita, howling with laughter, made him choke the drink down.

"I'll fix you—I'll—you lousy—"

In a few moments, Garvey was glassy-eyed, and when Matalaa released his hold, the skipper collapsed.

"Do you see, my father? We were all to get this sleeping medicine. We would be helpless, and this thief would sail away with all our copra. If our people tried to board the boat, the skipper would threaten to kill us."

The battle had sobered the brawny Marquesans. Systematically, they

rounded up every weapon on the *Aguila*. Poi Utu said hopefully to Torkusa, "We could eat some of these fellows, and put their skulls in the pit at the *paepae*."

The king slowly shook his gray head. "No, Poi Utu. Father Pierre would be angry. Father Pierre is a nice man, and we have to humor him a little. Anyway, a French warship would come and shoot at the village."

Poi Utu went away, muttering. He was the only man in Ua Paepae who had actually eaten "long pig," and for this reason he held himself even more of a man than Torkusa. Poi Utu paused where Bull Garvey was snoring. He kicked him in the stomach and said, "My father ate your father! Some day I will eat you!"

The men who had followed Poi Utu went into the hold and brought out the unpaid for bags of copra and loaded them into their canoes. Soon all the men of the village turned out with boats whose prows were lighted with candlenut torches. The lagoon swarmed with them.

The crew and officers were locked up. When they heard the Marquesans breaking open the lockers and stealing ship's stores, they could do nothing but curse. Poi Utu brightened a little when he found a case of trade tobacco. "This," he said to Matalaa, "is a good start, but some day, you and I will eat him. That is all you need to become a great fighter!"

The sun was rising when the villagers tired of plundering. Matalaa came ashore with a bolt of calico. Instead of going to the village, he sat for a while on a rock overlooking the lagoon.

Ships mesmerized him; perhaps because Father Pierre had taught him navigation. Perhaps it was the wrecked four-master, out there on the reef, which had been there as long as Matalaa could remember. He had grown up with the corpse of that ship. He wanted a ship of his own, and the *Aguila* fascinated him, so that for a moment he scarcely noticed the lovely native girl who had climbed up from the white sand of the beach.

He greeted her mechanically and her face was sad. But when he roused from his revery and handed her the bolt of calico, she brightened at once. All was right again with Tiaré's world.

TIARÉ'S long hair had a bluish glint; her sleek skin was a delicate brown. Barely sixteen and only three or four years younger than Matalaa, Tiaré was already a grown woman. With a woman's coquetry, she pouted, and her large lustrous eyes became tragic. "No! I don't want it!" She thrust the calico aside. "Sitting here dreaming about that skinny, yellow-haired girl! So absent-minded you forget I'm the only girl in town who didn't receive a present from the boat!"

"Now—look here—I was thinking of the ship." This was true, though now that she had reminded him, he did think it was time to release Cornelia van Houten, for the people of Ua Paepae no longer needed a hostage. "You know, I'm going to own a ship of my own some day. And go sailing over the seas to far, beautiful places." He was boyish in his dreams, and the battle royal of the past hour was utterly forgotten.

Tiaré sniffed, just as a matter of principle; though anyone who had lived by the sea would know that the *Aguila* was beautiful and staunch, and too fine for the scoundrel who sailed her. Matalaa fingered the calico temptingly.

Tiaré looked wanly at her red lava-

lava, faded from sun and salt air. She smiled, leaned close, and kissed Matalaa. Matalaa brushed her away absently and wished Tiaré was not such a little pest.

The girl's quick temper flared and she darted forward angrily, as ready to claw as to kiss. Strong brown arms grabbed her back and she glared around angrily into Nito's grinning face. He released her with a shove.

"Look what I got for you!" He spread the loot on the rock; white shoes, and patent leather pumps, and *lamé* slippers; an evening gown of pale green taffeta, and a blue chiffon nightgown.

Matalaa's nostrils crinkled. These strange and beautiful garments had a familiar smell of perfume. He turned on his foster brother. "See here, you can't give Tiaré those things! They belong to the yellow-haired girl."

Nito's mouth sagged and his eyes widened. "Why, no. I took them, from the ship, for Tiaré."

"*She* didn't try to rob us, it was only Garvey," Matalaa said.

Tiaré's eyes began to gleam with tears; then they narrowed, and she flung the bolt of calico at Matalaa. "I knew you were thinking of that bleached-out white-haired woman!" she screamed, and began to slap him.

Matalaa defended himself clumsily and this time Nito did not interfere.

"Listen—I—wait a minute. I never saw those clothes before. I just recognized her perfume."

That made it worse. Tiaré clawed him, kicked him, and then ran away crying. Nito said ruefully, "Brother, I am sorry. What is wrong with her? I am afraid I do not understand women."

Matalaa frowned. "I'll have to ask Poi Utu. He knows how to talk to ghosts and devils so maybe he'd understand women."

Nito smiled. He was very glad that he had not offended Matalaa. They were closer than sons of the same parents, for the old witch doctor had made them "blood brothers" in a mysterious ritual one night at the *paepae,* after Matalaa had saved Nito from a shark.

"What do you think of that pale girl?"

Matalaa considered. "Well, she's thin." According to his lights, she was, for the Marquesan women, though splendidly formed, were substantial. "But maybe all Dutch girls are."

"Dutch?" Nito frowned. "What's that?"

Matalaa knew that his geography was too advanced for Nito. He glanced out to sea to pick the general direction of the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies. Nito's eyes followed. And they both saw what was happening to the *Aguila.*

"She's adrift! Some fool cut her cable!"

A THIN line of white, sometimes disappearing before it fairly gave its warning, told how dangerous it was at that moment to head for the reef that guarded the entrance to the lagoon. The tide was running out, and the wind was helping.

There were no sailors on deck. The *Aguila's* crew was locked up, helpless. No canvas was spread, but the swiftly running tide would smash her against the reef. Matalaa yelled, "Grab a boat, I have to turn those fellows loose so they can save her!" It was the fine boat he was thinking of; the lives of Garvey and his crew he did not care a snap for.

He bounded down toward the beach. Nito said, "You're crazy! You let

them out and they'll kill you. Come back! Let them drown!"

Matalaa broke loose, thrust Nito back, and pushed a canoe into the water. "I don't care about them, it's the ship!"

So Nito joined him. It made no sense, but Matalaa was his god and his brother, so he took a leaf-shaped paddle and dug in. The current became swifter. Matalaa was sweating, putting all his great strength into the precise and powerful strokes that made scarcely a splash; long sweeps, making the canoe leap like a flying fish.

"You take her!" Matalaa yelled as they pulled alongside.

He rose, leaped for the trailing cable, clung with fingers of iron. The canoe swamped from the force of his take-off, and for a moment Nito was in the racing tide, righting the little boat. He worked around toward the cable. Matalaa understood. "Stay alongside, I won't need any help!"

He clambered over the rail, raced aft, and found the fire axe where he had dropped it. He went to the cabin where he had locked Bull Garvey with his first and second mate. They were kicking and pounding at the door. A porthole was open. The skinny second had tried to get out, but he had failed. The teak panel had resisted their rushes.

Matalaa called, "Watch out! I'll smash the door."

"What's that?" Garvey roared, running to the porthole. Then he saw Matalaa. "Look here, you trouble maker, I'll have you jailed for life—"

"Shut up! I came back to let you out. You're adrift!"

"You figure I didn't know that!" he howled. "You—"

Matalaa smashed home with the axe. Once, twice, three times. Wood splintered. When he had hewn a panel out and broken the lock, he leaped back, his axe caught up short. Bullet-headed Berger piled out. The second followed him, then Garvey, still groggy from the knock-out drops. Matalaa slid the axe across the deck.

"If you haven't got a key, use that—" He gestured. "The crew is in there."

He dove swiftly over the side, and as he swam toward Nito's canoe, he heard Garvey bellowing orders. Some of the crew came on deck. A bit of canvas blossomed out, just in time.

"That Garvey," Nito said, "is a good sailor. Look!"

Matalaa squatted in the canoe, his big body dripping, fists clenched, chin outthrust. His eyes followed every frenzied move of captain and crew. Another tack. The reef was plain now; not quite a solid line of white. The channel was still deep enough, but narrow. More canvas was spread. She went into the wind again.

There was a scraping, a jarring. For a moment she wavered; then she broke clear, and lunged into deep water. Matalaa wiped his forehead and sighed. He was gray-faced. Nito said, "You act as if that ship belonged to you."

"Maybe it will, some day. That's why I was afraid, seeing her in danger and not helping. Bull Garvey is a good sailor, I still don't see how he did it, in so little time. You paddle, Nito."

Nito did so. In a moment, he looked back. "Say, Garvey has gone and left the white girl!" He chuckled. "When he misses her, he'll be crazy."

Matalaa made a wry grimace. "I think Tiaré will, too. She'll claim I did all this on purpose, and what can I say?"

Nito laughed until he could not paddle. "I think you are beginning to

understand women. Now, I must ask Poi Utu about the Dutch."

Matalaa did not at once go to the priest's house. He stayed for a while by the beached canoe, and watched the *Aguila* put out to sea. He had saved her from the doom that the old *Falcon* had found on the reef, years ago. He wondered if a man as skillful as Garvey could have prevented that wreck.

Years ago, white men had come to look at the *Falcon's* corpse, but they had found nothing worth taking away. White men only; for she was *tabu,* and no Marquesan dared board her, despite the certainty of finding tools or useful pieces of metal. Poi Utu had put a *tabu* on the wreck, and that settled it, for everyone but Matalaa; and he wondered why the battered hulk was forbidden. There were *tabus* which even a king had to observe, lest he sicken and die, or ghosts come to haunt him.

Ghosts . . . A ship, Matalaa often fancied, must have a soul. A murdered man, unless controlled by a witch doctor's spells, would prowl and make trouble for the living. But a murdered ship—that made no sense!

Yet as he went to release Cornelia, Matalaa still thought of the *Falcon* and Poi Utu's curse.

CHAPTER III

THE WHITE MAN'S SKULL

WHEN Matalaa went to Father Pierre's house to let Cornelia out of the closet, he found her curled up on the floor, asleep. He had barely opened the door when she sat up, then scrambled to her feet as she recognized him.

"I'm sorry," Matalaa said in unaccented English. "I had to get you off the ship."

"Where's Captain Garvey?" Cornelia stepped out of the closet, and spoke to him as she would have to the lowliest native. "You'd better not let him catch you after an idiotic trick like that."

Matalaa grinned. "He won't. He left in a hurry, just after sunrise."

"Why—you're crazy! He wouldn't."

Matalaa gestured and drew a curtain aside. "Look out at the lagoon."

She did so. There was only the wreck of the old *Falcon.* Far out, she saw the white sails of a schooner. Matalaa found Father Pierre's binoculars and handed them to Cornelia.

She raised the powerful glasses, lowered them. "But— Where's Father Pierre?"

"He's at Ua Pou, helping out with a flu epidemic."

She frowned. "I wish you'd stop your pointless lying. There's nothing wrong at Ua Pou, we passed there on our way here."

Matalaa shrugged.

"But I have to go to Papeete with Captain Garvey."

"Can you sail a war canoe? I thought not. You'll have to wait for the next trader."

"But traders only call here once or twice a year! You've got to get me out of here!" Walls seemed to be closing around her. "Garvey will be back and—"

"No," Matalaa said, with assurance. "Old Poi Utu, the witch doctor, wanted to bake him and eat him, but my father stopped him."

His casual narration of how narrowly Bull Garvey had missed being wrapped up in banana leaves and put into a pit lined with hot rocks made Cornelia turn color and sink into the nearest chair. When he finished telling her what had happened aboard the *Aguila,* she said, "Oh, that's ridiculous!

He wasn't trying to rob and kidnap your father."

"I saw the little bottle, and I saw Garvey lose consciousness after he took a spoonful of it. Is Garvey your man?"

"Of course not!" She snapped to her feet. "I work on the boat, keeping accounts for the owner; but you wouldn't understand." White, half-caste, or native, he was impossible—a nasty, stupid brute.

"I'll make you some coffee." He pointed at the basket on the table. "I brought you some oranges and a papaya. Oh, yes, and I saved some of your clothes. When they looted the ship, my brother took some of your things to give to Tiaré. This is pretty," he said, picking up a blue chiffon nightgown. Cornelia eyed him, and the garment, and then looked at him again. Could he possibly be that naive—or was he merely pretending? She couldn't make him out at all. *"Who* are you, anyway?"

"Matalaa, Torkusa's son."

"With that hair? And blue eyes?" She shook her head, perplexedly,

Her question seemed to embarrass him, as if she had touched upon something that he did not understand himself. "I am Matalaa," he repeated, with slightly less assurance. He turned quickly and left.

VERY few coconuts were husked that day. A crowd of natives soon gathered around the priest's house to stare at Cornelia whenever she showed herself at a door or window. Ua Paepae, well away from the rest of the Marquesas, was rarely visited by white men. And none of them could remember ever seeing a white woman.

Everyone was charmed but Tiaré, and Cornelia herself. Tiaré resentfully eyed the blond girl from white shoes to pale golden hair. Head hig[illegible] and those she brushed [illegible] laughed at what she said [illegible] women.

Nito teased, "Don't wor[illegible] isn't in there!"

Matalaa was at the *paepae*. Th[illegible] were not enough Marquesans on all the island to move one of those blocks of stone which in the old days had been dragged up the hill to make a platform for sacred ceremonies. Smaller platforms showed where Torkusa's grandfather had built a great house with carved wooden pillars. And nearby was a long trench through which witch doctors used to lead barefooted men and women over red hot stones, unharmed. But since Father Pierre had come to the islands, Poi Utu had ceased making magic.

Or so he claimed.

Matalaa was saying to the withered magician, "Poi Utu, could I walk across the stones after a fire has burned on them for a day and a night?"

"Yes, King's Son, if I explained a secret. A white man tried it to show I made no real magic, and he has never since walked. If Nito is to be king, some day, then you must be a magician. Then each can best help the other."

This speech did not seem strange to Matalaa, for he could not remember a time when he had not heard these whispers. Lean old Father Pierre knew what his people thought of magic, and he did not care; he had come first of all to serve them, to protect them from cheating traders, blackbirders, gin and disease. And he had succeeded better than anyone expected.

Matalaa went to the edge of the *paepae*, where he could see through a break in the dense thicket of guavas that screened the clearing. "That wrecked ship, down there—if I learned

a witch doctor, couldn't you
a, and make magic, so I
er off the reef, to sail?"
yes were always small and
Either his art kept him
ng, or else he was not as old as he
imed, though his face was wrinkled like a small prune, and his hair and his straggling beard were white. But now his eyes had a brightness that astonished Matalaa. "Why do you think of that ship, King's Son?" He pointed at the pit where the skulls were. "Have *they* spoken to you?"

Matalaa was half frightened. He shivered, sensing that he was on the very edge of something, and that from that moment, he would never again be the same. Perhaps it was this way one felt when one followed a magician through the "Valley of Fire," walking over red hot stones.

"No, Poi Utu. I have never looked into the pit."

The old man got up. His joints were limber, though his ribs could hide a man's finger between them, and his legs were like bamboo canes. "Wait," he said, and bent over the pit of skulls. He brought one of the collection out. "Possibly this one spoke from a distance, King's Son?"

Poi Utu had often brought these trophies out, and told how each one had been taken; how valiantly its owner had fought, for no coward's head was saved, nor was a coward ever eaten.

"No, Poi Utu. But he has gold in his teeth, like Father Pierre. He is not one of our people?"

"He is not."

"Why did we kill him?"

"We did not kill him." Poi Utu turned the skull around. "See—a steel axe did this. I have seen many wounds, I know their marks."

"He was a coward, he ran and they chased him. Why is his head here?"

"He was not running, Matalaa. His friends did this. He was on that ship you call the *Falcon.* And if you ever want a ship of your own, you must talk to this skull with gold in its teeth."

Matalaa frowned. "Father Pierre says it's dangerous and wrong."

Poi Utu cackled. "It is dangerous, trying to talk to the dead. Particularly here at the place of skulls. But go to the old ship and listen. Go alone. For you there is no more *tabu,* but for the others, there is."

Matalaa pondered. "That would be no more harmful than just sitting anywhere and listening. As you listen to the night when it is silent, and finally you begin to understand. As Father Pierre listens for the voice of God."

"That is right. He is a good man, but there is much he does not know. Much I have taught you, much I will teach, that cannot be untaught by any white man. Now I tell you this: the man with gold teeth will in the way of the dead tell you how to get a ship, a large ship with great wings, with many men. He will whisper to your soul."

The note of prophecy in Poi Utu's voice awed Matalaa. As one in a dream he walked down to the shore and slid lithely into the blue waters of the lagoon. He swam effortlessly and without thought, with long powerful strokes that propelled him with tireless ease through the water. He was like some long, bronze-colored fish. He reached the wreck and pulled himself quickly aboard.

THE *Falcon's* hull was badly battered. Though her masts had not fallen, her stays and shrouds had long since rotted, and her yards had crashed to the deck. The story of the wreck was

almost forgotten. Only the older men knew the details, and they would never discuss them; Poi Utu's *tabu,* while not compelling silence, had made the subject one to be thought of but not brought into conversations.

The outer edge of a hurricane, eighteen years before, had just touched one side of Ua Paepae; it might have run the *Falcon* aground. But that had nothing to do with a white man with gold teeth.

The old magician's story had made Matalaa uneasy and bewildered. *"He was not running, his friends did this."* The sun no longer seemed bright and the water was not friendly: he had never heard of men who strike down a trusting friend. To die so was worse than being eaten by enemies. Matalaa was thinking of these things as he went about the ship, and felt the solid teak deck under his bare feet. He went up on the bridge, and into the master's cabin. Rotting garments lay in a locker. A decanter, still stoppered, was in a corner, empty from evaporation. There were books on navigation. These belonged to J. J. Garvey who had commanded this fine ship, until he ran her on a reef.

Matalaa wondered about Garvey as he went below deck. She had no cargo; at least, none remained intact. And with the tide out, the *Falcon* was almost high and dry. Even with the tide in, it was hard to see how she had run so far up on the reef. It must have been because of a hurricane's tidal wave, raising the sea many feet higher.

Matalaa went into the forecastle. The crew had abandoned ship in good order; there were no signs of panic. He found letters, mildewed but with legible addresses. And when he went above again, he found a cabin containing an alligator-hide bag, a steamer trunk; a man's clothes, and a wom[illegible] were all fouled from ag[illegible] spray that a high sea dro[illegible] an open porthole.

These were people like Corneli[illegible] Houten. The woman had small fe[illegible] Her dainty shoes proved that. She liked gay colors, though the sea had left little enough to show it. Matalaa sat down so that these people could "talk" to him.

He began to understand Poi Utu's strange words, and wondered what had happened to the woman who belonged to the man with gold teeth. Idly, he opened a drawer. In a crumbling case there was a ring set with large red stones. "She won't mind," he thought, and took it. "They'll talk now, wherever I am."

He looked up. A canoe was approaching from the west. Two brown men with gleaming skins were paddling. The third man in it wore black robes and a wide-brimmed straw hat. Father Pierre! Urging the men to paddle faster. Father Pierre, back a week or two ahead of time.

This worried Matalaa. Something was wrong. He could no longer listen to the voices. He stood up, feeling cheated. He went over the side, and swam to meet the priest.

FATHER PIERRE frowned when he came ashore and heard all the laughter near his house, and no sound of husking coconuts. Then he smiled, shook his head, and held his peace. Matalaa had run up, wet from his swim and was asking: "Father, how did you cure an epidemic so quickly! A miracle?"

The priest grimaced. "The message was a very poor joke. There is no sickness, thank God! The natives who came for me disappeared the minute I landed in Ua Pou. These men were kind

CORNELIA

enough to hurry me here back home."

"You have a guest," Matalaa said. "I'm glad you did hurry."

As he went with the priest toward the house which the singing villagers had surrounded, he told about the *Aguila's* visit, the treachery of the skipper, the victory and Garvey's flight. "So we don't need our hostage. She's very nice, and it's not her fault, so we must be very nice to her. She is a little angry, I think. It's not her fault. No one was hurt, Father."

"No, but someone will be hurt! The Governor-general will send a battleship to rescue her. I was away, there is no witness to do justice to my people or tell the truth. And tricking the girl has put you in a bad position."

"But I didn't hurt her. They tried to hurt *us!*"

The priest sighed. "After this, they may send French police to our island. To watch us. To spoil our home. But worst of all, you and your father and others will probably be deported to a penal colony. White men won't see your side of this at all! My only hope is that I can persuade your prisoner to be fair-minded."

Matalaa was thoughtful. "If she knows where the *Aguila* was bound for, we'll put her in a war canoe and outrace the ship. We'll get her there before that thief Garvey can make a complaint at the next port."

The priest halted. He pondered a moment. Then he said, "If that can be done, maybe you can save yourself and your friends. Let us talk to Miss van Houten."

CHAPTER IV

KNOW THYSELF

CORNELIA said to Father Pierre, "The *Aguila* is on her way back to Papeete. But Captain Garvey will come back when he misses me."

"He won't," Matalaa interrupted. "He's afraid."

"No. He's a brave man," Cornelia insisted. "A good sailor."

"Yes, a good sailor," Matalaa admitted. "I saw that. And Poi Utu thinks he is brave, or he'd not have wanted to eat him."

This shocked Father Pierre; after forty years there was talk of eating people the minute his back was turned.

Cornelia went on, "I'm sure he'll be back, Father Pierre."

"I am sure he will not," the priest said. "I was tricked from my people. So that Captain Garvey could take advantage of them in my absence. I do not like to condemn a man, it is wrong to judge, but I cannot help but think that he ordered someone to lie to me."

Cornelia did not believe this, but her respect for the thin-faced priest's sincerity made her change the subject. "But he'll come back, I'm sure. They left in great danger, but soon he'd miss me."

Father Pierre rubbed his long, aquiline nose. His deep-set eyes were worried, and his thin cheeks seemed to draw tighter from the way his mouth was set. "He will miss you, yes. But he will use you against us, Cornelia. If he leaves you here, he can persuade the Governor-general to send marines to punish us; to get us under control so that he may exploit my people."

"Oh, Father Pierre!" Cornelia was losing patience. "You are too suspicious. I know white people once abused the Marquesans and the Tahitians and all the others, but those days are over. Anyway, if he thinks I'm a prisoner during your absence, would he leave me among hostile people?"

"Hostile?" Father Pierre smiled, and pointed at the wreaths of hibiscus and jasmine hanging from Cornelia's neck. "Curiosity may have made them impertinent, but weren't they friendly?"

"But he'd not know that. Not after he had been beaten up!"

"Don't worry. Captain Garvey knows the island and the people. I had trouble with him, twenty years ago, when he was a young man. He is a thief, a bully, and unfortunately, not a cowardly one. He either thought you had fallen overboard, or else he guessed you had gone ashore. In either case, he'll see the Governor and use you against us."

Cornelia was almost convinced. She had been eyeing Matalaa; he became more and more conscious of her curiosity, which was now pointed and personal.

Father Pierre said, "We'll take you to Papeete in a war canoe."

"Oh, I'd be afraid."

"Our men have sailed a thousand miles, paddled a thousand miles, from island to island. You'd be safe from the sea and from them, too."

"No, I won't. I'll stay here."

The priest rose, stepped [illegible] dow, and pointed at the vi[illegible] one was at work again, [illegible] day's quota of coconuts. "W[illegible] like a gunboat to shell these [illegible] Would you like traders to be stat[illegible] here, giving them gin? Would you like that on your conscience?"

"It wouldn't be my fault, Father!" Her eyes flashed, and her chin rose.

The priest smiled. "Let's make it personal, then. This Matalaa, he tricked you. To help his people, yes, but he did kidnap you. He may spend twenty years or more in jail. So will his father and his brother. Would you like to think of that?"

The clock tick-tocked loudly in the silence. Cornelia and Matalaa looked each other eye to eye. He was thinking, "She must be much like the woman who belonged to the man with gold teeth. I am not afraid, but white people have hard hearts. She is willing for me to die in jail."

Matalaa did not know what Cornelia thought during those moments. Father Pierre, however, was guessing. He was not surprised when she impulsively said, "No, I couldn't have that happen to him—I'll risk that war canoe. Matalaa is—white, isn't he?"

Matalaa leaped to his feet, took a pace toward her. "What was that? What'd you say about me? I'm Torkusa's son. And you're like the rest of them! You don't care about a native but—" he caught her arm, and his grip was so hard that she cried out—"but you'd risk it for a white man!"

He realized that his unwitting strength had bruised her arm, and he let go. Cornelia said, "But you *are* a white man. You have red hair, and blue eyes and you look different, somehow,

from these people." His anger per- "Why—what's the matter, said you were white. Like rre. Like me."

Bull Garvey! Like all the ers and cheating traders who d us, who used to sell us into slavery in Peru!" He was trembling, and his voice shook. He had lived with Nito and Torkusa all his life, and he could not imagine himself not being an islander. He turned to the old priest. "Father Pierre, what does she mean? She's lying, it's not true at all! Torkusa adopted me, yes, but that doesn't prove I'm—I'm one of—one of *them!*"

WHEN Cornelia heard his contempt, saw the blaze of his eyes, and the gesture that included her and the ship which had left with its unscrupulous captain, she flared up. "Why—you—you talk as if I'd insulted you! You—a white man? No! You're just a savage. A white, ignorant savage!"

Father Pierre stepped between. "My son," he said, "she is right. You *are* white, born of white parents. She tried to be generous—she was willing to face the sea in an open boat to help one of her own people."

This only infuriated Matalaa. "Generous! . . . It's all right to let natives be jailed or bombarded, but when a white man is concerned it is different! Maybe I am one, but I can't help it, and I'd not admit it—not after those thieving friends of hers—"

The priest saw that things were getting out of hand. He blamed himself for not having told Matalaa the truth before, without dismaying him. But now his fury at Garvey had made him bitter against his own race—and his bitterness was eating his heart.

"Mademoiselle, I might have known, even if you did not, that a revelation of this nature would be shocking and—and difficult. He has little or no cause to want to be white, I am sorry to say—please, *mademoiselle,* do not interrupt me! I did not mean that as a reflection on you; only on your companions. Matalaa, come. I must talk to you now. I blame myself that I have not talked to you sooner."

He beckoned, and the tall, bewildered boy followed him, clenching and unclenching his powerful hands. Once the door closed, Matalaa burst out, "Father, is it really true, or were you just trying to shut her up?"

The priest sighed. "It is true. And—" He smiled a little. "I am white, is it then such a disgrace?"

Matalaa started, flushed; he had not given that enough thought to realize how his wrath at Cornelia had been an unkindness to his old friend and teacher. "I'm sorry, Father Pierre." For a moment he looked it; then his frown came back, and he paced the floor of the study. Abruptly, he whirled with that cattish swiftness which seemed to justify Cornelia's taunt, *white savage.* "I'm sorry for having been rude, but I think you should be sorry for having lied to me! You and Torkusa, you all lied to me."

"We meant well. Listen, my boy. There was a shipwreck. A man and a woman were washed ashore. All the others escaped, as far as we know." He consulted an old black leather diary, one of the forty he had filled during his ministry. "See? In 1922—the very day, the very hour when I found the man, and the white woman who had hair like this Dutch girl's. I gave them Christian burial. Sharp rocks had battered them, though perhaps they drowned. A lifeboat was washed ashore. Their names, as I learned from papers in the man's wallet, for the

water had not entirely blurred the ink of letters and papers—"

"Warren Steele," Matalaa said. "And Dorothy Steele."

"Who told you? You didn't read this book, did you?"

"No, Father. I saw things on the ship. Their names on their things. I swam out. I was there when I saw you returning. But there was no cargo on the ship, nothing I could see in the clear water near her. Did our people loot it?"

He was talking rapidly, his voice was raw, and he was perspiring. He knew that the *Falcon* had not been looted by natives, but he had to chatter, lest the priest cross-examine him and learn all that had led up to the visit to the wreck. He was afraid that he would slip and say that he had seen Warren Steele's skull at the *paepae*. Poi Utu must have dug it from the grave near the little church, so that the murdered man's ghost would not walk at night, causing sickness and fright.

"More than that, my son," the priest went on, "there was a child with light hair. Not more than two years old. Washed ashore in that boat. Somehow, he escaped death on the rocks. Because of his hair, Torkusa called him Eye-of-the-Sun and adopted him."

"So they were my parents?"

The priest gripped the strong shoulders.

"Yes."

This subdued the boy for a moment. He had almost taken in his own hands the skull of his treacherously murdered father. He wondered if his mother's grave had been opened. He hoped it had not. She must have been lovely, like Cornelia. This thought fascinated, terrified, repelled him. Poi Utu might have assumed that a murdered woman was no menace to a village, and thus not have opened her grave.

MATALAA sat staring at his hands. If he had seen the skull of Torkusa, cleft from the rear by a hatchet, there would be war, and he, Matalaa, would lead his people; he would go with his brother, Nito. They would slay and—no, in spite of Poi Utu's teachings, Matalaa would not eat the slayer.

Avenge Torkusa, of course. But he had no such right, if Torkusa were slain. A prime duty to a parent had been blasted out of existence by Father Pierre's story, and Cornelia's impulsive words. Now he did not know who or what he was.

He rose. "And you never told me? Who can I believe? You're white, too! But I have one friend, he isn't white, I can trust him!"

He yelled the last words, cleared the study at a bound, and jerked the door open. Cornelia, startled, leaped to her feet. "Matalaa," she began, "I'm sorry—"

"You—" He snarled, leaped to the outer door, slammed it after him. Glass shattered, and tinkled in pieces to the floor.

Matalaa raced past the fringe of the village. Tiaré was picking big red hibiscus blossoms. She waved and called to him, but her smile froze and the flowers dropped from her fingers when she saw his face.

The steep path swerved to skirt a mass of volcanic pumice. Matalaa cleared it at a leap. He plunged through creepers, and through pandanus, and did not feel the raking thorns that tore him. He crashed back to the path, and when it swung again to follow the lip of a ravine, he bounded down the steep side.

It was a dangerous jump. He landed on a ledge not a foot wide. He swayed an instant, dropped again; then he

into an icy pool, and dripping e scrambled up the steep wall. s tumbled down into the water, but Matalaa never missed a hold. He scarcely realized how insanely he was running, climbing, leaping; his brain was whirling from confusing knowledge that he could neither accept nor deny. He risked his neck in his eagerness to get away from all white people, to talk to the only native he could trust.

His brother, his blood brother, Nito, was not responsible for the deception, but Nito was too young to know the truth. Torkusa had deceived Metalaa. Only Poi Utu, who talked to the dead, was brave enough to tell the truth. He knew now that the old witch doctor had already begun to work up to the truth, so Matalaa trusted him.

Breathless, battered, he leaped up to the platform.

Poi Utu had heard him coming. The old man smiled. "The dead have spoken, but what did they say?"

"Who am I? What am I? They say I am white, that I am not of your people, not even though Nito is my blood brother, with a drop of his blood in my veins, and a drop of mine in his!"

"This is the truth, Matalaa."

The boy recoiled, shook his head. But his fury had burned itself out. "It's hard to believe." He sat down on the *paepae*. "What should I do? Why did they lie to me?"

"White people," Poi Utu explained, "are evil because they do not hear the gods, because they are not taught properly. So when we found you, young and harmless, we said, let us make a man of him, he cannot help how he is born. We did not want you to leave us, so we did not tell you. Is that wrong, Matalaa?"

"Not the way you explain it. But what shall I do?"

"Do whatever the gods give you to do. You have all my wisdom, and you have also that something which the most evil or the most kind white man has—that which makes him finish what he starts, no matter how long it takes. This is one thing the gods never gave our people."

"What should I do first? This dead man was my father, though I do not remember him."

"Then you must do as if yesterday Torkusa had been killed. But the priest will not like that, so pretend to do something else."

"He wants me to take the Dutch girl to Papeete." Matalaa explained the details. "And what are Dutch? Are they like French?"

Poi Utu shook his head. "I do not know. I have never eaten any Dutch man, but I think my grandfather did. Do as the priest says, and I shall go with you. Maybe the gods will point out the man who murdered your father."

So Matalaa went down the hill, this time slowly, looking at each gnarled banyan as at a friend he would soon be leaving.

CHAPTER V

SAIL-HO!

WHEN Matalaa returned to the priest's house, he found Nito and Torkusa there. Cornelia looked apprehensively at him, but he ignored her. He greeted his foster father, and then said to the priest, "I still do not understand why you did not tell me before that these are not my people."

Without hesitation, Father Pierre answered, "I wrote to the United States, and I learned that you had no kinsmen living. It is not as it is in Ua Paepae, where an orphan is wel-

come in every house. They would have caged you in an orphanage. No one would have loved you, and grudging people would grudgingly have fed you, for pay. Was it not better to be Torkusa's son?"

"White people," Matalaa said, thoughtfully, "are worse than I realized. Maybe it is better that you did not tell me until I was man enough to endure the knowledge."

Torkusa smiled. "I am glad that you are not angry with us. We considered you a gift from the sea, and we knew you would grow up to be a strong man. Father Pierre has taught you reading and speaking languages and adding up numbers—things which we find useless, but which make one cunning in the ways of white men. So you see, we did not plan to keep the truth from you forever."

Matalaa sighed, nodded. "I let my temper get the best of me. Poi Utu says he'll go with me when I take the white girl home, if you still want me to do that."

"It is the wisest," Father Pierre answered. "You have the strength of people who live close to nature, but you have also the wits of a white man, and you will need them to make peace with the Governor. Your father must stay with his people. We send you because you are one of his people, and also because you are white. If you fail, if you make one mistake, you will surely die in jail, and your friends will suffer."

Matalaa could feel Cornelia's intent glance. He turned, quickly. She reddened, hastily looked away. He said, "You called me a white savage. Are you afraid?"

Cornelia shook her head. "No, I'm not." She smiled, laid her hand on his arm. "Don't you see, I didn't intend to belittle your friends. I imagine if you wanted to pay me a compliment, you'd probably say I was a great deal like Tiaré?"

NITO

He had to answer her smile. She went on, "So, in just that same way, I meant that since you were one of my people, I'd risk that dangerous trip to help you. Now, am I forgiven?"

"It is hard to get used to the idea, but I see that you tried to be kind, and I'm sorry I shouted at you." He turned to the priest. "Father Pierre, I'll need all the advice you can give me between now and the time we sail. I need your blessing."

He knelt. The priest raised his hand, and pronounced a benediction. It was young Steele who rose—but his heart was the heart of Matalaa. His new identity was a garment that did not quite fit—one perhaps that never would fit him exactly as it should. "Father, my parents were murdered, and I must get justice for them as well as for my kinsmen here."

"Murdered?" Cornelia and the priest exchanged glances. "Good heaven, what do you mean? Why do you think that?"

TORKUSA looked stolidly in front of him, his brown, seamed face rigidly under control. But there was a proud gleam in his eyes. This adopted son who made a point of avenging a parent he no longer remembered would not fail in his duty to him, Torkusa.

Steele answered, "It is hard to say how I know this thing, but I know it." He dared not repeat Poi Utu's words. "I went to the wreck, and a voice spoke to me. To my soul, not to my ear. They were not drowned, they were murdered, and I shall find the man."

"Beware of voices, my son," the priest said. "Some are good, some are evil. Do not judge. You may condemn on suspicion, hastily. Remember, God said, *'Vengeance is mine.'* "

Steele was glad that he had not said more. The importance of his mission had so filled him that he had almost betrayed Poi Utu's confidence. He flashed a wary glance at Cornelia. She was white, and she might warn her people. He was not used to guarding every remark. Except for witch doctors, no one in the Marquesas ever said anything that was not common property.

"You are right, Father Pierre. Maybe I was shaken a little by the sadness of that ship. A ship is like a person, and perhaps its spirit was crying because a clumsy sailor had run it on the reef. As the ghosts of murdered people cry."

But he was not sure that he had convinced Cornelia.

The rest of the day was spent in getting ready for the trip. All the young men of the village turned out to launch the war canoe, which was over sixty feet long carved years ago out of the trunk of a tree. Their brown bodies gleamed as they pushed the long hull down the beach on rollers crudely shaped from hardwood. They laughed and chattered, they wrangled because not everyone could go with Matalaa; there was room for forty men to paddle the war canoe, and twice as many wanted places.

Having no keel, the boat was kept by an outrigger from capsizing when she slid into the water.

The villagers sang and thumped drums. Fires were built in stone-lined pits, and when these crude ovens were hot, joints of pork, pieces of fish, of sea turtle were wrapped in banana leaves and put in to roast. Breadfruit and yams followed. Everyone came with food for the farewell banquet, and with gifts for the adventurers who were going all the way to Papeete. *Aué!* What a long trip!

Matalaa slept little that night. And sometimes, when he paced up and down along the beach, Nito joined him. He was restless, trembling with eagerness. The quest of vengeance, the responsibility of getting Cornelia to Papeete ahead of Bull Garvey; the meeting with white people, pitting his wits against theirs, justifying the faith that sent him to out-maneuver the enemies of his adopted kinsmen; this, and facing eight hundred miles of sea was more than a grown man could have looked forward to calmly.

"I wish we could go right away," Matalaa said to Nito. "This waiting, waiting, waiting!"

"We'll need a lot of cooked breadfruit," Nito answered. "And we had to give the first batch to our guests."

Before dawn, Matalaa was raking the top layer of banana leaves and branches out of the pit. The smell of baking yams and breadfruit and fish made his mouth water. Soon the village was awake, and baskets of cooked food and fresh fruit were passed from hand to hand to provision the war canoe.

Girls with gleaming black hair brought wreaths of hibiscus and ginger flowers which they flung over the necks of the voyagers. Old men brought out their treasures; pipes, and jackknives, sticks of trade tobacco. Everyone was remembered, but Steele was loaded down with presents.

There was a catch in his throat when he saw these tokens of affection, and he wondered if he would ever return to this island. The resentment that excitement had submerged now came up again: white people were responsible for all this, white people who stole and cheated, who would not give an orphan food without pay.

"What did Tiaré bring you?" Nito asked.

Steele shrugged. "Why, nothing, of course. She's still angry because of the yellow-haired one. What did she bring you?"

"She said she was getting me her father's hatchet, but she hasn't come back with it yet." Nito glanced at the growing load of rations, and the rising sun. "Maybe she's changed her mind."

"She has no reason to be angry at you," Steele said.

Another score against Cornelia. She was the cause of Tiaré's sulking. Funny, Tiaré had waved to him, as he ran to the *paepae;* maybe she had wanted to be friends again, and was hurt because he had ignored her. These accursed white people! Their hearts were as pale as their faces, and even without meaning to they caused trouble.

NOW that the long canoe was almost ready to shove off, Steele wished someone else could go in his place. The singing of the girls who had come back from the boat made him blink a little; he was sadder than he had ever been.

Even if he came back victorious, he would be a different person. He would not be the Matalaa these people loved; he would be Steele, a funny name that meant a special and very hard kind of iron. In a way, Matalaa was about to die, and Steele was mourning Matalaa's death and the passing of all his friends and playmates.

Father Pierre came up to the beach with Cornelia. It was odd, a girl with a hat and red jacket and white skirt setting out for an eight-hundred-mile trip in a war canoe. Torkusa stepped forward from among the elders. He wore an old-style *tapa* loincloth, and a necklace of shark's teeth. He carried an ancient wooden sword whose blade was edged with shark's teeth. He had come to bid his two sons goodbye, and he would not wear anything made by white men.

Steele straightened up, his face hardened. He could not let Torkusa think he was afraid, or not old enough to act like a man. Torkusa approached with deliberate pace; he made a formal gesture, and he spoke formally, not as a father to his son. "Matalaa, you do not travel as a man travels, for gain or glory. You go in the name of your friends, to get justice. You also go to take your heritage as a white man."

He paused, and disengaged the catch that held the collar of shark teeth about his neck. He was about to add, "Take this, to bring you luck," when Matalaa broke into the formal farewell.

"I go for my own people, father! My heritage is here, I am proud to be a king's son, and the blood brother of your son!" He knelt and kissed Torkusa's hand, in the way Father Pierre's books showed a man bowing before a king who wore a sword. "If I am white, it is not my fault and I am not glad."

His voice broke, but he went on, "And whatever wrong they have done here, I will take payment from them!"

He caught the priest's hand. He held it only a moment, for he wanted to get into the canoe before he could think further of all that Torkusa's farewell had implied. *"Adieu, mon père!"* he said, then ran to the waiting boat. "Pray for me!"

Cornelia was amidships already, where the rations were stored. The sun gleamed on the water, and on the oiled backs and arms of the forty paddlers. "Shove off!" Steele shouted, almost as loudly as Bull Garvey, for it was hard to keep his voice steady. "Shove off, men!"

He had always called them boys, brothers, fellows. But now he was their leader, and they were his men.

AS THE canoe swooped across the lagoon, Steele worked his way amidships, to join Cornelia; not because he wanted to be near her, but to check up on the calabashes and kerosene cans filled with water. Farewells had made him neglect these details. But he saw in a moment that Nito had forgotten nothing.

Spray broke in Steele's face as the canoe sped over the reef. It splashed Cornelia. She cried out, then laughed and said to him, "This is crazy!" She gestured to the wide expanse of blue. "The canoe looked so big when these men were grunting and sweating to get her into the water, but now—oh, it's terribly small!"

It was difficult to remain angry at Cornelia. She could not help being white. Moreover, there was something in her voice that thrilled him. He could not understand this. And since she was under his protection, he smiled. "The biggest ship is small at sea. Father Pierre says that my people—well, Torkusa's people, though I've not gotten used to that idea yet—came all the way from India in boats like this. After all, we have only eight hundred miles to go."

Not a man of the crew was under six feet three or four; each was stripped to the waist, bronzed and gleaming with coconut oil. Forty paddles with blades shaped like leaves dipped in, swept back, came out gleaming, and ready for another bite. Poi Utu chanted of an old battle, an old song of the eater and the eaten; the men picked up the chant and the long canoe raced through the water.

Later, some rested while others paddled. Sometimes there was so little to be gained on each tack that the sail was lowered, and it was no longer necessary to have several men ride the outrigger when she came about.

Amidships, there was cramped room for Cornelia. The others would sleep at their stations when not paddling. That made the blonde girl realize that the small space she could steal from the heaped up rations was after all comparative luxury. "I still can't decide," she said to Steele, who alternated with Nito as lookout, "whether to sit up or stretch out."

He laughed. "The more we eat, the sooner you'll get room to turn around in."

"But how long will this take, anyway?"

"Better ask Poi Utu, he's a witch doctor. What were you doing aboard the *Aguila?* Bookkeeping, you said."

"And you didn't believe me?"

"I have never heard of a she-supercargo," Steele answered.

"The owner—Borden Pitts—is a great friend of my family, in Java. Father is a district commissioner but

somehow we never could live on his salary, and his investments haven't paid for years. So Mr. Pitts thought I could help him, and help myself too. With a time study, you see? Of how long it takes to get from one island to the other, how much copra we pick up."

"To see whether it's worth going off the route, for, say, Ua Paepae?"

"Of course."

Steele spat. "Then Ua Paepaé was too far from the rest of the Marquesas to pay, unless Bull Garvey could steal the copra."

Cornelia's eyes darkened but she said nothing.

Steele was thinking, "Bull Garvey was startled when he saw me . . . perhaps I look like my father. He wasn't many years older then, than I am now . . ."

He felt Cornelia's intent gaze. Her hair was almost silvery in the moonlight. She smiled and asked, "What were you thinking of?"

"Nothing." The less she knew of his interest in Garvey, the better. "Except I was wondering if Garvey has used his head-start, or whether he's trading on the way back."

IT WAS not until the following night that they found the stowaway. Steele, napping, saw the shift of one of the ration heaps. A girl in a red lava-lava crept out, soundlessly, toward the water cans. She had slim, shapely arms and lovely legs, and her blue black hair gleamed in the rising moon. She heard him rise from his seat; she turned, startled.

"Tiaré," Steele said sharply.

"I thought you were asleep!" She eyed him defiantly. "I wanted to go to Papeete. All my life, I've wondered about Papeete and I knew you'd not let me go, so I stowed away." She smiled like an imp and looked very pleased with herself.

Steele faced her in helpless anger. Cornelia awoke and sat up in her tiny space. Steele thought she was laughing at him. "How sweet," she said. "Maybe your little playmate doesn't trust me."

Tiaré did not understand the words, but she got the meaning. She flared up in Marquesan, "Of course I'm watching him. Keep your hands off or I'll scratch your eyes out!"

"I think," Cornelia said coolly, "that Tiaré dislikes me."

Steele's face reddened. These two girls were making a fool out of him before everyone. "Be quiet—both of you!" he ordered.

Then someone in the prow shouted, *"Vaka mutu!* Sail ho!"

The sleeping paddlers were awakened. The canoe shot forward. There was enough wind for a sail to catch. The canoe dug in under her scanty spread and spray flew. Poi Utu began chanting, setting the beat. But when sunrise pearled the water, Steele saw that the schooner he was overhauling was not the *Aguila.*

"Row in watches again," he said in disappointment. "It's a long way to Papeete!"

CHAPTER VI

LISTEN TO THE VOICES

WHEN halfway through the widely scattered Tuamotu Islands, Steele got word of the *Aguila.* Garvey had stopped to trade, but had not found enough copra to be worth buying. And the following day, the war canoe pulled into a cove he had left only a few hours before.

"How did he pay for his copra?" Steele asked.

BULL GARVEY

"Not well, and his weights were false, but we didn't do badly."

"What did he say?" Cornelia asked; she did not understand the Tuamotan dialect.

Steele grinned and told her. "You're making that up about false weights!" she said. "Why didn't he rob them, if he really tried to rob you?"

"Because this is too close to Papeete. The news would travel, and he'd get into trouble. What's more, the natives would all refuse to bargain with him. Ua Paepae is far enough away for thievery to be profitable. Don't you see your argument is just making him a practical thief, not an honest trader!"

Cornelia did not like that, and Tiaré was very happy. She embarrassed Steele by wedging herself as close to him as she could and giving Cornelia triumphant looks. She realized her error, however, when the blonde girl laughed, good naturedly and convincingly. And what made Steele thoughtful was that Cornelia's amusement piqued him.

Overhauling the *Aguila* was easier than Steele had anticipated, for Garvey, not expecting pursuit, had stopped often to trade.

"What did I tell you? He thinks you are bottled up in Ua Paepae, and all that worries him is having to buy copra instead of stealing it!"

Later, rounding a headland, Steele saw the *Aguila,* picking her way among the scattering of verdant islands. The Tuamotus were spattered over four hundred miles of sea; their southern fringe, now almost in sight, was less than half that distance from Papeete.

In this channel, Steele had the advantage. Jutting headlands deflected the wind, and stole it from the trader's canvas. The channel was tricky, and Garvey had to take it easy. Steele leveled Father Pierre's binoculars.

"Dig in, all of you!" he shouted, and the off-shift joined the others.

Soon they were overhauling the schooner, and as quickly as that became apparent to those on board, a rifle bullet smacked the air just ahead of him, and brought up a little jet of water some yards from the outrigger. Garvey's conscience must have kept him primed for trouble.

"That was one gun you missed when you searched the ship," Nito yelled. Old Poi Utu shook his fist at the *Aguila* and cried, "My father ate your father!"

Distance made that insult a dead loss, but Poi Utu felt better. Apparently there was only that one gun aboard the *Aguila.* Probably Garvey believed that the canoe was armed with the weapons taken from him at Ua Paepae, and wanted to get in the first blow. He must have guessed the identity of the party approaching from the starboard quarter. War boats, moreover, were never launched for fun.

Another shot. A man yelled, stared at his empty hand. A bullet had knocked the paddle from his grasp, and furrowed his knuckles. Cornelia got up and waved her hat. Steele snatched her wrist and

jerked her back behind the pile of rations. "Down, little idiot!" A bullet ploughed into the heaped-up breadfruit and bananas.

Cornelia stayed down. And when another bullet skated over the water, Steele gave way. There was a momentary flicker as of glass mirroring the sun. Presently the *Aguila* put on more sail. Nito laughed. "He saw your red head, Matalaa! He knows you're after him!"

A slug fell short. It glanced from the water, fell and skipped again, whining overhead. Cornelia said, "I am going to wave. If he can see your hair, he can see mine."

"Go ahead. At this range, the colors'll look pretty much alike."

Whatever Bull Garvey could see through his glasses, which probably were more powerful than Steele's, he did nothing but crowd on a bit more sail. So the forty paddlers settled down to the task of beating him to Papeete.

The *Aguila* had to swing wide to avoid the rocks that ringed a small island, just ahead. Steele's canoe kept straight on. He won the lead. Poi Utu danced in the stern, making contemptuous gestures. But with the canvas Garvey spread, it was anyone's race. For some reason, he wanted to get to Papeete first. Steele wondered if the wreck of the *Falcon,* years ago, and the murder of two passengers had anything to do with this haste.

BUT a squall brought Hell from nowhere; and in the hours that followed, Steele had no more thought for Garvey. The blue sea had become dirty-looking, and the sky was dark. Rain pelted, and lightning slashed the daytime gloom. The sail was torn away before anyone could lower it.

The men who paddled managed to keep her headed into the waves, but spray and rain were filling her. Steele took a bucket and began bailing. He chopped a water calabash in half, and gave the pieces to Cornelia and Tiaré. Old Poi Utu used a coconut shell, and Nito had found a pail.

In the gloom and spray, they lost sight of the *Aguila.* Whether Garvey had been swept off his course, or whether he had was beyond being overtaken, no one knew. For hours, the crew plied their paddles, not to race an unseen enemy, but to keep their boat from swamping. The pitching and hammering made Steele wonder when the outrigger would be swept away.

Cornelia's lips were gray. She was drenched, and bailing would not keep her warm. Tiaré screeched above the wind, "Look at her fine clothes now!"

Steele saw that one of the men could not keep his paddle under control. He snatched it up, and paddled with all his might. Soon there was another man to be relieved, and then another. Steele lost all sense of time, driving himself mercilessly, until at last his own shoulders seemed on fire, his elbows full of needles, and his back at the breaking point. His arms began to stiffen, and the swooping waves played tricks with his paddle. One by one, men slumped forward, compelled to rest. But there was no pause for Steele; Torkusa's son had to do more than any other man, and do it better. He had flashing glimpses of Nito, who grinned at him wanly; of Tiaré and Cornelia; but it was like a nightmare.

He knew that Poi Utu was watching him; that the old man would judge without pity. So Steele gritted his teeth, put all his strength, all his skill into the fight with the sea.

Cornelia, meanwhile, had lost all sense of actuality. She had become an

absorbed spectator in the magnificent, perilous combat between the raging sea and the man she had called a white savage.

Night came, and without any stars. But at last the whipping rain ceased and the wind stopped screaming. And before dawn, the sky was clear enough for Steele to see that the stars verified the course he had held with Father Pierre's little compass.

The paddlers were ready to collapse. The danger was over. "Matalaa," they said, "if Garvey has been swept off his course, there is no need for us to kill ourselves, and if he rode with the storm, we cannot beat him. So let us rest."

They were red-eyed, drooping; and when the sun came up, they were caked with salt from the drying sea water. Half the rations had been washed overboard, and some of the calabashes and cans of water. Steele gestured: "Papeete is over that way. Paddle!"

Since the son of a king could not command what he himself could not do, he picked up a paddle and set the pace.

Each stroke made him sorry for his men. He looked back, once, and saw Poi Utu grinning like a brown skull with bright eyes. Then the old man began to chant and thump an empty can; the drumming and the song made the weary men pull together.

The sun blazed down; but the friendly sun could be the enemy of a man worn out. Voices from nowhere joined Poi Utu's chant. Cornelia was speaking to him, and so was Tiaré. They said that the men could not carry on, that half the men should rest. At last Steele was not even sure who spoke, for he had to keep his head to the front. He could no longer look back. At times he thought that Poi Utu had come closer. The old man's chant became shrill; it made Steele shiver, and a curious tingling spread from his stomach and went through his numbed arms and stiffening legs. From somewhere came new life.

There were more voices now. A man spoke in his ear, and in English that sounded unlike Father Pierre's. A sweet-voiced woman joined in, and her speech was not like Cornelia's. He was too dizzy to understand what either said, but they were friendly; they were giving him strength. Perhaps they were urging him to paddle faster. They were eager, but unworried, for they knew that he could not fail. And out of his pain and exhaustion came power, more than he needed; smooth, long strokes, as if he were starting out fresh. . . .

HE HAD no idea how long this went on. The singing voices ceased. He noticed the sunset, and the trees beyond the strange harbor. Some of his men had fallen from their benches, and lay in limp huddles. Some still paddled like dead men who have not yet stopped moving. Poi Utu's drum was silent. The old man said, "Here is Papeete, and no war canoe has ever gone as far in as few days."

"Where's the *Aguila?*" He remembered that much. "Where's Garvey?"

"Behind us, Matalaa!"

"Where? How far?"

"Far enough," the old man said.

When the canoe was beached, and Steele went ashore, he learned that the *Aguila* had not yet come in. He made sure of this at the hotel to which Father Pierre had directed him.

The crew went to a native settlement at the outskirts of Papeete, all, that is, except Poi Utu. "Tell this fat man with the red face," the old witch doctor said, "that I am your servant. I will sleep at the door of your room, guarding you from your enemies."

Poi Utu had no faith in policemen. He was not amazed by the bicycles and cars that crowded the dusty streets of Papeete, or he pretended not to be impressed. But neither did he trust a place that produced such things.

The proprietor sent out for the clothes that Steele would need. And while he waited for the Chinese clerk, Steele said to Poi Utu, "There is much that I cannot understand about that trip. The paddling."

"Much you will never understand. I called the friendly dead to give you strength. And seeing that you never lagged, your men kept paddling long after they should have quit. Your strength gave them strength."

This talk about the friendly dead troubled Steele. Father Pierre condemned such notions. Maybe Poi Utu's music and chanting made muscles move in such even cadence that weariness could not stop them. Maybe the old man had fed the crew strange herbs such as he was always picking. A wizard who could lead barefooted men over red hot stones, could surely give new strength to a crew worked beyond human endurance. There were many explanations; but Steele always came back to those voices. They troubled him deeply.

Before he relaxed enough to feel his fatigue, he had best see the Governor-general; so when the new clothes arrived, Steele dressed. Poi Utu followed him down into the lobby, and except for elaborately incurious glances, he ignored the ceiling fans and the electric lights.

Cornelia was sitting there, waiting.

"You're going to see the Governor, right now?" she said.

"Of course," he answered. "Before Garvey gets in."

"I know how you feel. But I'm sure you're fair-minded." A winning smile accompanied this. "Now, I've telephoned Mr. Pitts and told him about Captain Garvey's methods. You did convince me, you see. And Mr. Pitts is very angry."

"So were we, back home."

"Now, don't be so grim," Cornelia wheedled. "You're as bad as the Governor! I'm sure you don't want to do anyone an injustice."

"No, I wouldn't." Steele was puzzled.

She leaned forward, and a little closer. "It is this way. Mr. Pitts is of course accountable for all that his captain does. You mustn't condemn him by reporting that affair at Ua Paepae. Why don't you see him first, and find out what he'll do. That's fair, isn't it? I'm back safe and sound, and if you're reasonable, he'll be reasonable enough to squelch Captain Garvey."

"Well. . . ."

"Come and see Mr. Pitts. You can't do anything until morning in any case."

Steele was too tired to argue. "Very well. Perhaps you will be kind enough to teach me about this place. It is very strange. I feel a little—lost."

That pleased Cornelia, who knew her way about Surabaya and a number of other places besides Papeete. But Poi Utu looked grim.

CHAPTER VII

RUBIES ARE RED

PAPEETE ran a mile or so along the northern shore of Tahiti. Reefs kept the water afoam; palms rustled along the coral barrier that guarded the harbor. The main street of Papeete skirted the waterfront, and both sides were lined by two-story concrete buildings.

There were Chinese peddlers with

their push carts; they offered poi, coconuts, baked bananas, coconut candy, lichi nuts. Old women in Mother Hubbards strolled down the street smoking cigarettes; girls from Indo-China minced along, spitting betel juice that had blackened their teeth. And there was music along the waterfront.

Sailors from a French battle cruiser went in and out of a dive with laughing girls. Few went into the long building which was on a pier north of town; it reached far into the water. Cornelia dismissed it lightly enough: "A gambling house. French sailors don't get enough pay to go there."

Beyond Papeete, the country was more like home. The cab chugged over a bumpy road for a half a mile or so, then swung into a drive that wound among palms and bananas. Ahead, a white house and its lighted windows winked from the trees.

Borden Pitts, who rose from the deck chair on the veranda to greet them, wore white duck. He was gravely courteous as Cornelia introduced them. "Good evening, Mr. Steele. I appreciate your coming to see me."

Against that smile and that voice, Steele could not keep up his hostility. He had expected to meet another Bull Garvey. But Pitts was pleasant and dark and good humored; wiry, lean and supple. His eyes were sharp, and his features were sharp, a little like Father Pierre's.

A Chinese servant came to offer cigarettes. Another brought brandy, and tulip-shaped snifters, like the one Mr. Pitts nursed in his hands. Steele fumbled his goblet. There was a knack to swishing the brandy around, without spilling any. To Steele it seemed an amusing, if slightly childish game.

"Mr. Pitts, if you have not already heard how we handled your captain, you will soon enough. He is a thief and—"

"I see that you do not like Captain Garvey," Mr. Pitts smiled. "He is rough, I know. And so you raced him, to keep him from getting to the governor with a story of how you kidnapped Cornelia?"

"I did. Father Pierre was afraid that it would grow with the telling. And it was only fair to bring the prisoner home."

"I see." Mr. Pitts took a tongue wetting of brandy, smiled as he lowered the goblet. "But if Captain Garvey does not speak to the Governor, you would have no reason to see him?"

Steele grew a little wary. "I do not know whether I would or would not need to see the Governor. Because I do not know yet what Captain Garvey plans to do, and neither do you."

Steele pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and something dropped to the floor with a little ring. Pitts looked down at it and then swiftly raised his glance. Steele's face was bland but Pitts could have sworn that for a moment Steele's eyes had been brightly hard and alert. Pitts' self-control was perfect as he picked up the ruby ring Steele had dropped and handed it back to him. Steele took it without a word and put it back in his pocket.

Borden Pitts laughed. "Do sit down, Steele. You are the first man in twenty years who has put Bull Garvey into a corner, and you suspect he dislikes you. Of course he would. But do you think he could afford to complain about you?

"Even though Father Pierre wasn't there, his opinion would count heavily against the captain's. Cornelia is well disposed toward you." Pitts spread his hands, palms up. "What can Garvey do to hurt your father?"

Steele's jaw jutted out a little. "It

sounds sensible, but I prefer to stay until I know. And also, I have to make a report. Now that I've seen you, I still have my work to do."

He made a stiff bow which was a throwback to Father Pierre's school days in France. But Steele, for all his jackknifing, caught the glance that Cornelia and Pitts exchanged.

"When you write home, Cornelia, please give my best to your parents." There seemed to be more meaning to his remark than lay in the simple words. "It has been pleasant seeing you. I hope you and the Governor understand each other, Mr. Steele."

WHEN Steele helped Cornelia into the waiting cab, he said, "That man is more dangerous than a dozen Garveys. At first I liked him—now I am not sure. Except I know that he is my enemy."

"What do you mean?"

"Unless you are careful, Pitts makes you believe everything he says. Even when you are sure he is lying."

Cornelia frowned impatiently. "Mr. Pitts is a very able and brilliant man. He has made his way to the top from absolutely nothing. He's shrewd and intelligent. Stupidity is not necessarily a mark of honesty, you know. This is civilization, Mr. Steele. I suggest you learn to understand it, before you judge it."

This dig made him flare up. "Garvey works for Pitts. He is not the sort to hire a man without knowing what kind of a man he hires. I know you think I'm some sort of a savage—"

"Please!" Cornelia laid a soft hand on his arm. "I didn't mean it that way. I meant, a man like Father Pierre would teach you directness, not polish. Torkusa, too. . . . You are different from the islanders, even if you've lived with them so long. That's why Father Pierre sent you, isn't it?"

"You are partly right. A Marquesan would be charmed to death with your Mr. Pitts, and I'm suspicious of him—as I ought to be!"

"If you are not the stubbornest mortal I ever saw!"

"And you're the most gullible. Why do you think you were aboard the *Aguila?*"

"I told you."

"Rot! Pitts is a friend of your family, you like him, you respect him. What you really are is a spy on Garvey."

"What?" She sat up straight.

"Garvey's a thief, I know that, you know that. Would you trust a thief out of your sight, even if you hired him? Of course not. Neither does Pitts, so he sends you. He knowingly hires a thief and sets you to watch him. Why did Garvey leave you ashore? After he knew you weren't aboard?"

"Because your people had stolen all the guns from the *Aguila!* All except one, anyway."

"Well, maybe. But it'd be convenient to abandon a spy who was checking up on all his deals."

Cornelia said to the driver, "Stop right here!" The brakes screeched; the cab was at the outskirts of Papeete. "I'll walk the rest of the way!"

Head high, she went down the sidewalk. The click-click of her high heels told Steele how angry she was. He paid the driver and dismissed him. He did not like the smell of motors, and they moved too fast, and he did not want to go to the hotel. He would be too close to Cornelia and her anger.

HE SWUNG toward the sea, where he heard music and drumming and laughter. This was the settlement where

his boatmen were living. He should be here. Then from one side, he heard shrubbery stirring.

Poi Utu came out, and Nito followed, grinning. "The yellow-haired girl has a temper as sour as Tiaré's. Tiaré is crying and kicking in her hammock, she threw things at us until we went to find you."

. . . Late that night, the *Aguila* crossed the bar and Garvey came ashore. His head bandaged, his temper ugly. He said to Berger, "Don't get too drunk. And keep your ears open."

He took a cab out to Pitts' house. He found Pitts smoking a slim cigar and eyeing the inch of white ash that had accumulated. Pitts looked up. "Hello, Bull. There *was* a chance of trouble, but I hardly expected you coming back in this shape. How much copra did you buy?"

Garvey snorted. "Damn natives—red-headed one, of all things—caught us across a barrel."

"I've already talked to him. He was here."

Garvey blinked. "You talked to *who?*"

"To Warren Steele. The red-headed Marquesan that slugged you and kidnapped Cornelia."

Garvey spat on the floor, hooked his thumbs in his belt. "You know everything, it looks like."

Pitts chuckled, made an airy gesture. "Well, the redhead brought Cornelia back before you could get here to have the Governor send out a cruiser to shell Ua Paepae. She told me about the riot, and about him."

"Yeah, I see. I don't like having that jane hanging around. Just suppose she had been well gone over by those natives, I'd be in a nice fix, explaining how come I couldn't or didn't protect her."

Pitts sat there smiling and looking at his cigar. After a moment, he said, "Since nothing did happen to Cornelia, the less said about the looting of the *Aguila* the better. I hadn't figured on a red-headed Marquesan who isn't a Marquesan at all."

Bull Garvey's eyes narrowed and he lowered his voice when he asked, after a wary squint over his shoulder, "What do you think of Steele?"

"The name is familiar, somehow." Pitts flicked the ash with a long and perfectly manicured nail: "This young devil may be the infant that was supposedly lost in the wreck of the *Falcon*. He had a woman's ring, set with rubies. I think he meant me to see it. It's been a long time, but Dorothy Steele had a ruby ring. She must have been washed ashore."

"That wreck! Shut up." Garvey squirmed, and his weight made the chair creak. "Maybe she left it in the stateroom, and some native got it from the wreck, later on. Damn it—I feel hoodooed—"

Pitts poured brandy; he put the skipper's drink into a slug for fast swallowing. "It is this way, Bull. It is up to you to see that this Steele does not raise hell with you. For he is not stupid and I'm afraid he doesn't like you a bit more than he likes me, which is blasted little."

"What do you mean?"

"Self preservation is the first law of nature, Bull. I think that this young hothead suspects you of killing his father."

"Huh?" Garvey rose, fists clenched. "*Me?* Did he say that?"

"No, he wouldn't. But he knows who he is. And if he just had a little deal in copra on his mind, he'd be ready to go home, now that he is sure his Marquesan friends won't get into trouble

about Cornelia. He's hostile, and he's thinking things. His eyes were a dead giveaway—and when he asks questions—"

"What'd he ask? How'd asking hurt me?"

Mr. Pitts told him, "Too many questions would start people thinking, Bull. And with your reputation, enough thoughts can hurt plenty."

"My reputation—" Bull Garvey stamped to the door, and slammed it after him. "My reputation, huh!"

He looked back, and saw Mr. Pitts smiling in the doorway.

CHAPTER VIII

DEATH WAITS ON THE PIER

TIARÉ was all for embarking for Ua Paepae. "Matalaa," she pleaded, steadfastly ignoring Steele's "white" name, "let's go home. I don't like Papeete." Steele frowned and did not answer. Tiaré went on, "Nito, what do you think?"

"Matalaa is our chief, and he has business in Papeete. After all, he did not ask you to come. But he may see a way to send you home."

Poi Utu said, "Yes, Nito can take the war canoe home. Matalaa has long business in Papeete."

Nito shook his head. "Where Matalaa goes, I follow to guard his back."

Tiaré did not know what to say. She did not want to leave Steele in Papeete, to see more of that yellow-haired girl who lived at the hotel. But she made up her mind, quickly enough. "I look so funny in these clothes from Ua Paepae, can't I get a dress like everyone else wears in Papeete?"

Poi Utu had brought with him all the cash Torkusa had accumulated during years of dealing with trading skippers. The amount was small enough, for only rarely did money change hands. But Poi Utu could spare some for Tiaré's whim.

When she had left for town, the witch doctor shook his head and muttered, "She'll cause trouble, Matalaa. She's jealous of Cornelia, who likes you just enough to keep Tiaré worried. She's rattle-brained enough to talk, and smart enough to have missed nothing."

"What do you mean?" Steele challenged.

"Tiaré knows why you've not headed for home. And Papeete has no more secrets than Ua Paepae. Figure it for yourself. The spirits have been talking to me. I smell trouble."

"I am staying anyway. Nito, get these people home."

"No, Matalaa. Not when Poi Utu smells trouble."

What to do next was not clear to Steele. He was learning about policemen and judges and prisons. He had always known of such things, for Father Pierre had taught him. But now he saw the reality, and the priest's words gained in meaning.

"Poi Utu, I have to prove that Garvey committed a crime. Clubbing him to death is not the way they do things here."

"When you do prove it, how do you know the Governor will hang him?"

"Make the proof strong. But I have to earn a lot of money. To travel and ask people questions. To find out where the *Falcon* had been cruising. To find out about my mother and father, what they did before they came to Papeete. why they went on the cruise to Ua Paepae. To find if there was insurance on the *Falcon*, and who owned the cargo."

"Some of those things, I could not learn even from the spirits," Poi Utu admitted.

Steele said, "If you went with me, you'd meet new spirits. Suppose I had a small trading boat? Suppose I went to one island after another. Asked questions. Somewhere, Garvey got drunk, let us suppose. He talked, and someone remembered, and then tells me. Little pieces of old news, all put together."

"That is right, king's son! Nothing is ever lost, nothing is hidden so well that it cannot finally be found."

A messenger came trotting into the little settlement of thatched huts. "For *Monsieur* Steele, with the red hair. Yes, I wait for the answer."

The note was on hotel stationery and written in the purple ink Steele had admired. It was signed, *"Cornelia"*; there were only a few lines: *"Don't you think it's silly, the way we wrangled the other night? Do come out of hiding. Or better, meet me at Borden Pitts' house, tonight after dinner."*

Steele paid the messenger.

Several hours later, he was again following a Chinese servant into Borden Pitts' house. Cornelia's gown of a black sheer fabric made her shoulders whiter and her hair more lustrous than anything he had ever dreamed. Pitts stood there, cordial and dignified. And then Steele saw Bull Garvey, square-rigged and square-faced, his head still bandaged.

Bull grinned past the edge of his frayed cigar stump. "Hello, kid!" He wedged himself between Cornelia and Pitts, and broke into the greetings. He thrust out his hairy paw. "Let's call it a day. Suppose I was putting over a fast one, that don't mean I was going to hurt Torkusa, does it? You beat me twice in a row, didn't you?"

Pitts cut in, "Steele, he means he nurses no grudges, and that you might cease being hostile, since you did win each time you two met."

Steele smiled. Bull Garvey's candor and rough good humor were more appealing than Pitts' smoothness. Judging people, and condemning them without proof was wrong. And it was wiser to seem amiable than quarrelsome; digging back to the start of an eighteen-year-old mystery took a fine hand. "All right," Steele said, "if you're satisfied, I am."

Gradually, the talk turned to Steele's plans. Somehow, everyone took it for granted that he was not going back to Ua Paepae to live. He was not astonished by his ready acceptance of this assumption. It was not that his loyalty and affection for the friendly Marquesans withered in the glare of Papeete's electric lights; it was rather that a man must, finally, follow the ways of his ancestors.

PITTS sat back, smiling to himself and looking into the golden brown pool of liquor in the bottom of his brandy goblet. Bull Garvey was telling of a cruise to Java, and of the spice islands beyond the Arafura Sea. Cornelia said, "Don't! You're making me homesick, Captain!"

Pitts raised his drooping eyelids and sat up straight. Before anyone realized it, his smooth voice was in command. "Cornelia, I wonder if Steele couldn't work on your father's plantation in Java?"

"Oh, he'd not like *that!*"

"How do you know I wouldn't?" Steele demanded.

Cornelia's brows rose. "Why—you're wild about the sea, always mooning about having a ship of your own."

"Boats cost money. More than I can raise." Steele's eyes gleamed. "There's a little schooner docked not far from your yacht. But I couldn't pay enough."

"The *Carnot?*" Garvey asked.

"Pretty, and sound, too. Look here, how much can you raise?"

Steele's smile solidified. He said, shortly, "Not enough."

"Speak to the owner?"

"No use. I talked to a broker who knew. Though he wasn't handling the boat."

Garvey rose, teetered on the balls of his feet. "Now, look here, buddy. The owner, he needs money, and he can be talked into taking a lot less down than the broker said. You see Raoul Duval."

"Where does Duval live? Give me the address and I'll see him tonight."

"Another island trader is made," Pitts observed.

Cornelia glanced at the wall clock and then called for her cape. A moment later, when Steele settled back against the cushions of the cab, she said, "I'm glad you've cooled down, Warren. It's much pleasanter to be friendly."

He wanted to tell Cornelia everything. She was the only friend he had among his own people, and that made her important. But it is never wise to repeat what witch doctors tell, and so far, Steele had only a glimpse of a skull with several gold teeth; that, and a priest's story of what the storm had washed ashore.

Steele left Cornelia at her hotel, then told the driver to go to Raoul Duval's place. The house was on the waterfront. Boats reeking from fish and bilge water and copra lolled along the piers. From the tin-roofed shack came the smell of kerosene and stale beer. A half-caste woman, fat and frowsy, waddled to a window and squinted out.

"Who you want?"

"*Monsieur* Duval. It's about his boat."

She sniffed. "Go to Pier Casino, see if he's sober, and buy the boat so he can gamble that away!"

She did not acknowledge his thanks. Steele directed his cab to the casino. It was the place Cornelia had pointed out, that first night.

There were lights and music and laughter. Yellow streaks danced on the water that rippled under the piling. But there were dark places, and he remembered hearing two women laughing in the public market: They'd eat no eels, not with all the drunks who fell into the water near the Pier Casino . . . what the sharks left, the eels ate.

Natives, except for employees, were not admitted. Steele stepped into a long alley, all a-glare with lights. Rank tobacco and cheap perfume and the odor of liquor blended with sea-smells. On both sides of the alley were zinc-topped bars where copra traders and plantation owners drank cognac or tall glasses of *Amer Picon*. There was music, and the shuffling of feet, further down. Brown girls in thin dresses danced in the pavilion that occupied half the pier. On the other side, there were booths where games welcomed every gambler.

Roulette wheels whirred, dice rattled; men with green eye shades dealt cards. Somewhere in this whirl of smoke and stench and voices Steele was to find the owner of the *Carnot*.

The first few waiters had never heard of Duval. Finally one pointed to the far end. "Big private game, way down there, in the booth with the green door. Maybe, maybe not, you find him there."

Give a man a ship . . . better not tell Cornelia why, she'd just argue and argue. Better not let her know why; if she did not know, she might let something slip about Garvey's past, or Pitts . . .

Steele knocked at the door. A shutter swung from a loophole the size of a watch. There was a brown face. "*Monsieur* Duval?"

"Oui, monsieur. Be pleased to enter."

A sudden glare blinded Steele, but not before he had seen that there was no game; that there was a man crouching by the jamb with a club. Steele twisted, and the bludgeon that should have knocked him out crashed down on his shoulder. Still dazzled, he lunged in the direction of the two who had risen to watch the slugger's work. His aim was good. He crashed into a corner with them. But the slugger yelled, and there were answering voices.

CHAPTER IX

M. DUVAL, GAMBLER

THE man with the club had to cross the little gaming room to get a second try. He had planned to stun the victim so that there would be no noise; just a splash, under the window, and a rush of sharks. This had failed, and as he ran toward the fracas in the corner, he shouted, "Choke him, you fools! Not so much noise!"

Things moved too fast for him to crack down on Steele's conspicuous red head. Seconds passed before he realized that the cries came from the two assailants; that the victim was too busy to waste breath. Steele's shoulders were braced against the wall. He kicked, and one of his attackers rocketed from the tangle. The human projectile smashed against the man with the club. Both were knocked breathless before they crashed against the opposite wall. And with only one man now trying to hold him down, Steele went into action.

The fellow made another try with the knife. Steele caught his wrist and at the same time rolled over. There was a howl, and a sharp crack. The pain of a fractured arm made the man go limp. Steele scrambled to his feet. He snatched the club, and booted the groggy slugger's chin to keep him from recovering.

But now the alarm had spread. Lean Chinese and burly half-breeds swarmed in from the passageway. They had knives. The music was louder now. It blared and screeched. The riot would not be conspicuous, however much noise it made.

Steele was cornered. Strength, agility, and taking his assailants by surprise had won the first round, but these newcomers were not to be caught off guard. They knew that they had a tough customer, and knew also that they had to silence him.

Steele, crouched there with the club that had narrowly missed braining him, had to work fast. The way he figured it out, Duval must have been robbed, perhaps thrown to the sharks. So anyone looking for the owner of the *Carnot* would be a danger to the keepers of the deadfall. Another guess was that other prospective purchasers had come to the Pier Casino, and that they had been slugged and robbed before they could bargain or make a down payment: that he had fallen into a well-organized trap.

He faced them. For a moment, no one moved, except the three who lay on the floor. One groaned, and stared at the snapped bones of the compound fracture of his forearm. The other two muttered and mumbled in a pool of blood that slowly spread over the floor. Someone in back growled, "Go and get him!"

The pack swayed a little. In another moment, the three who blocked the doorway would have lunged. They held their knives point advanced, for a thrust impossible to dodge or parry. Steele leaped sidewise, tricked them into rushing. He whirled, faster than they anticipated, and cracked down with his club.

A man landed face down, his knife skating across the floor. The others charged at empty space, unable for an instant to follow the change of direction. He had them from the flank until they could wheel.

The club smashed down. It broke across a man's head. Steele retreated as the attackers swung to corner him. He snatched up a heavy chair. The men with knives wanted none of that. They fell over each other retreating. One recovered. He was on the far flank, and he had elbow room. He flipped his knife. The blade zipped, point on, hissing.

The seat of the chair parried it. Steele crouched, sized up the room with quick side glances. He was soaked with sweat, which joined the blood that trickled from his scalp and made his eyes sting. He was out of breath; his swift changes of position and his blows had taken much of his strength. One of the attackers hurled an earthenware jar from the doorway. Steele ducked, but the strain was wearing him down.

He had two chances: a reckless charge, hammering his way through the desperadoes, or a sudden retreat, diving through the window, and into the sea. Spilled blood, trickling into the water, would have drawn many sharks. But with a knife, he could slash his way clear of them.

He ducked another missile, and at the same time, moved a yard nearer the window. He had to sweep out the ceiling lights, then turn his back to the enemy and dive. He had the knife spotted; swing, then stoop, then leap.

A pistol shot cut into the maneuver. A bullet numbed Steele's side. It raced along a rib, glanced, shudded into the wall. The pack yelled, pointed at the thatched ceiling. There was a crash. Two men tumbled through, grappling. One had a pistol; he jerked a second shot. Steele recovered, cracked him across the head. Before he could swing on the other, a familiar voice checked him: "Hold it, Matalaa!"

It was Nito. He scrambled to his feet. Though his face was raked and bleeding, he grinned. "Wait—it's easy," he panted. "Break chair leg. I'll take table—rush 'em—"

THE big Marquesan made a dive for the table in the corner. He tipped it on its side and set it up as a shield. Behind this protection Steele reached out, chair leg ready to swing. Anyone who wanted to clamber over that marching barricade was welcome. There were no takers. The desperadoes wavered in spite of the brave yells of those in the rear.

"Ready?" Nito whispered. "One—two—"

Then a man roared from the central passageway; it was like the booming of the surf. "What's going on?"

Bull Garvey had come to the Pier Casino. That hoarse voice could not be blotted out by music or laughter or shouting. He lunged at the rear of the gang that was beginning to recoil before Steele and Nito bottled up. His big paws reached out. He caught two crouching men by the neck and cracked their heads together.

"Get out!"

The roar from the rear spread panic. Steele and Nito rushed the startled ruffians. When Steele reached the central passage, Garvey stood there, laughing.

The thugs were scattering. The sound of the riot had finally drawn a crowd. Customers and girls and musicians and waiters milled about, chattering and gesturing. Steele's battered face and red head made him the center of interest.

"Let's get out," Garvey said.

"How did you happen along? It was lucky, just at the right time."

Garvey's laugh shook the thatch. "Huh! Lucky, my eye! You two fellows had those chumps whipped to a frazzle. I saved *their* hides, not yours. You'd've clubbed 'em all to death, and from what I could see, you left about four hospital cases behind you."

The manager, a hatchetfaced Frenchman, came out of his office, screeching and gesturing. His spade-shaped beard jittered as he said, "What you do in my place?"

Garvey seized the beard. "Shut up, Alphonse! If this is the way you take care of visitors, I'll take you to pieces some time when I'm not busy!" Then, to Steele, "We better get out while everybody is still surprised. They may make it hot before we get back to the beach."

Steele said to Nito, "And you, Nito . . . How—?"

The big Marquesan chuckled. "Natives not allowed. I saw you go in. I heard it was a bad place. So I borrowed a canoe."

Garvey guffawed. "Haw! *Borrowed* —that's rich!"

"Well, I paddled out, just to get near the middle, that place looked a mile long, and in the middle, I can help out better no matter where trouble starts. Then I heard a shout, I wasn't sure. Then I saw the water get all white, sharks threshing around. Blood—you see—blood spilling into the water, they get excited."

Garvey nodded. "Smart, huh?"

Nito went on, "I thought I heard you say something. So I climbed up the pilings." His pants were all ripped from barnacles. "I almost got in the window, then I saw a fellow on the roof. He was going to shoot through—"

"At me. I was getting ready to dive out, and if I hadn't moved to get a swing with my chair to knock the light out, he'd have killed me."

"Anyway, I got at him, and the roof broke, and the rest was easy."

Once at the beach, Steele looked back at the Pier Casino. "That is a dangerous place." He eyed Garvey. "If I misjudged you, I am sorry."

Garvey thrust out his hairy paw. "Shake, kid! What the hell, I'm not the man to nurse grudges. I like the way you handle your dukes, even if you did try them on me." They shook hands and Garvey went on, "When I left Pitts' place, I thought I'd see Duval about that boat. The old lady said she'd told you he was probably at the Casino. I figured a stranger might get into trouble there, so I followed you."

"If Duval spends much time around a place like that, he'll have to sell his boat. I wonder if I could catch him at his house tomorrow?"

Garvey nodded. "Unless he's drunk in some dive and don't come home. But look here. Even at a bargain sale, it's going to take some money to make a down payment on the *Carnot*. Why don't you work on the *Aguila?* You're pretty smart, and if you aren't a good seaman, I never saw one, beating me to Papeete in a damn canoe. And at the same time, you'd learn a thing or two."

"Maybe," Steele said, after a moment's thought. "But I'd like to have Nito ship with me."

"Oh, sure, why not?" Garvey halted. "Well, you fellows are going to the settlement, huh? I'm heading for town. Goodnight!"

The next day, Steele went down to the waterfront to find Duval. He was a pinch-faced Frenchman with a bald head and bright little eyes. He cocked

his head to one side, squinted at Steele as he listened to the inquiry.

"So, *monsieur,* you wish to buy the *Carnot?* And last night, you are nearly killed looking for me? Well. Me, I was drunk for a change, not gambling. Getting drunk is cheaper, but it leaves the headache, *hein?*"

"I do not know," Steele answered, honestly.

Monsieur Duval rubbed his hands, yelled at his half-breed wife, at the entire three hundred pounds of her, and she brought a bottle of brandy. Once a greasy tumbler of the stuff was in his hand, he went on, "Now, you listen, *monsieur,* I do not want to sell the *Carnot.* I love that boat. I am the man of fine sentiment—"

Steele had his doubts about that last, but a ship was a ship. And even though Bull Garvey had proved himself to be stout ally in a pinch, Steele nonetheless had a mission ahead; the mystery of the *Falcon* had to be cleared up, and sailing from island to island was the best way.

Monsieur Duval went on, "You are young, you are energetic. Me, I am middle-aged, I am tired. So maybe we both make money for each other. *Ecoutez!* We take miners to the gold fields in New Guinea. There is much gold, men are wild to go."

"This interests me. I might find a bit of gold in New Guinea myself."

"To be sure, *monsieur.*" Duval beamed. "That is what I meant."

CHAPTER X

BATTLE OF THE IRON HAT

WHILE waiting for Monsieur Duval to outfit the *Carnot* for the cruise to New Guinea, Steele went from bar to bar, drinking gallons of insipid *Amer Picon,* watching seamen of all races guzzle the brandy he paid for. Some remembered the *Falcon.* More than one said, *"Oui, monsieur.* She was beaten to pieces on the reef at Ua Paepae in 1922, during that hurricane. But of course, the skipper headed out to sea with the boats that weren't swamped. Surely he could not make a landing on that rocky island. Name of a little camel, *monsieur!* But only a seafaring man would understand—"

Steele played the landlubber, getting and swallowing tall yarns of the sea. These old fellows laid it on, but every once in a while, something accurate was dropped. He learned much about the extent of the hurricane, and the hours it lasted; how it circled over a certain belt, then returned to complete whatever devastation it had not finished the first time; how islands on the edge of the zone fared. Father Pierre's exact French made Steele a curiosity in Papeete, where speech was slovenly. They took him for a tanned tourist who had made a good job of stilted French.

"But the passengers? These traders never carry enough lifeboats," he persisted. "Listen, I may as well be frank with you. I am a lawyer, looking for a missing heir. *Garcon!* Another brandy for the captain!—what was I saying? Yes, a missing heir. Anything you tell me that helps, I would know how to be grateful for."

This always opened them up. The one-eyed sea tramp Steele called "captain" was no exception. "Name of a little camel! But what is this heir's name?"

Steele smiled mysteriously. *"Mais non!* If the news got out, and someone else found him—"

"Hey—how the devil—listen, are you crazy, how can you find a man when you won't tell his name?"

"You just answer my questions, I'll

do the worrying, *monsieur.*" He laid out a ten *franc* note. "Maybe I am crazy, but this isn't it, is it?"

"Of a surety, it is not. A thousand pardons, *monsieur.* Possibly I could get a passenger list of the *Falcon.*"

"Don't talk too much or someone else will get it first," Steele said, and went on.

Sometimes he questioned consular clerks. Once he talked to a vice-consul. But inevitably, he made himself conspicuous. Papeete was whispering. Soon those who had heard of the arrival of a war canoe with forty Marquesans and a red-headed "native" began to match observations with those who heard of a red-headed "tourist" who was actually a lawyer interested in the *Falcon.*

"Why," they asked each other, "doesn't he talk to Captain Garvey? *Vraiment,* he knows the captain, does he not?" Then someone said, "Of a certainty, he knows the captain, they are like brothers, he was in a tough spot at the Pier Casino and the captain beat up seven men to help this Monsieur Steele from London. Odd, is it not so?"

"It is indeed so. Seemingly he trusts not his friend the captain."

Naturally, Cornelia's maid at the hotel heard things, and with everyone amiably minding everyone else's business, in true Polynesian fashion, Ruru bubbled over about *mademoiselle's* hard-hitting admirer who looked so handsome even in gauze bandages.

THE next day, the war canoe went back to Ua Paepae. Tiaré remained, and Nito. Old Poi Utu also stayed in the little settlement north of the town.

One night he said, "Do not go to New Guinea. It will bring you evil luck."

"Why, Poi Utu? Have the gods spoken to you?"

The old man frowned. "I am a Marquesan, and this is a strange land. Our gods cannot speak clearly, and the gods of Papeete do not know me. But I see danger. You have forgiven Captain Garvey."

Steele sighed. "But he helped me. Nito was there and saw it."

"I still do not like it. Taking men to the gold fields is too much like blackbirding."

"We have permits, it is legal. We get thirty British pounds—that is a lot of *francs,* Poi Utu!—for each miner we deliver in New Guinea. It is a long trip, and we have to feed him. Also the man gets *pay* from the mine."

"When a man will not listen to the gods," Poi Utu muttered, "his enemies will eat him. You and I came to wipe out an insult against Torkusa, and now you forgive this Garvey."

"Father Pierre—"

"A good man, yes, but is he a witch doctor? Can he walk on fire? Can he talk to the dead? Has he ever eaten an enemy, so as to get the enemy's wisdom and courage and strength?"

Having to answer no so many times in succession irritated Steele. So he flared up: "I've never seen you walk on fire, and I doubt that you've talked to the dead or that they talk to you!"

The old man did not answer. He straightened up, and walked out. When he emerged from his own hut, he had his litle pouch of charms and amulets. Without a backward look, he stalked into the hills. Steele wanted to call him back. Yet he did not want to call off the voyage to New Guinea. Town life, electric lights, Cornelia and the sightseeing trips she had arranged in Borden Pitts' car—all these had teamed up with Father Pierre's teachings, and

Steele had just a little less respect for a witch doctor. This talk of eating enemies began to seem gruesome.

Tiaré's store clothes, though gaudy, played up her colorful beauty. A snugly fitting dress of sunflower yellow, a hat with a broad, floppy brim, and finally, silk hosiery to flatter her shapely legs—she was absolutely right in deciding that Cornelia had cause for envy.

Shoes, however, did handicap Tiaré. She was not used to them. She no longer had that lithe, graceful walk; she did well, but she still gave the effect of stilt walking on those high heels, and she no longer stood straight up from the hips.

But Steele and Nito were too dazzled to note any flaws. They eyed each other, and Nito said, "Who would have thought it? She comes to a big town like Papeete, and looks better than the girls raised here!"

Steele said, "You like Tiaré, don't you?"

"Not at all!" Nito was emphatic about that point. "She's stupid. But she's nice-looking, that's what I meant."

Every time Nito loked at Tiaré, he made a liar of himself. This, Steele thought, was carrying loyalty entirely too far, but he did not know what to do about it. And before he had any chance to think of an answer, it was time to see Monsieur Duval.

The *Carnot* was fitted out. The owner rubbed his hands. "See, *monsieur!* A good crew, a good first and second. Maybe three voyages, and your profits will buy me out. Small, this ship. But good, *monsieur!*"

So the *Carnot* crossed the bar, not long after sunrise, for the long run to New Caledonia.

Looking back, Steele saw Cornelia waving. He leveled his glasses. She seemed almost within arm's length. Garvey was there, and so was Borden Pitts. The latter handed Cornelia his glasses. Steele read her face as well as her gesture. She'd have more than a smile for him when he returned. He wished he had not been such a fool, he could have trusted her. He lowered his glasses, and forgot all about Tiaré, who had to depend on her unaided eyes.

Cornelia did not notice how Garvey and Pitts had stepped to one side. She did not hear Pitts say, "Lucky that lad is out of Papeete . . . he was too interested in the *Falcon.*"

Garvey snorted. "If he gets those black cannibals to New Guinea, he's got to be good."

"That boy has great possibilities. If he has a profitable trip, maybe he'll get the *Falcon* off his single-tracked mind and amount to something. Yes, then he'll come in handy."

"Oh." Garvey shot a side glance at Cornelia. "So *that's* the angle, huh? Like her old man."

Pitts silenced him with a biting glance; Garvey's whispers rumbled. "You're beginning to understand. Whether he's nailed on the way, or whether he is successful, we win either way, Bull. No matter what slips, they can't confiscate the *Carnot.*"

"I wish I could be sure of that," Garvey said. Then he turned to Cornelia, and chuckled. "Don't wear those glasses out; he'll come back!"

STEELE expected to recruit laborers in Raratea, not far west of Tahiti; but Duval's representative, François Corbeau, explained that this was far from practical. *"Monsieur le capitaine,"* the swarthy Frenchman said, "we must get them in British territory."

Corbeau was burly, his face looked as if it had been pounded against a

coral reef; but he still had a mouthful of teeth, all yellow from tobacco juice. A grinning, amiable fellow, and every remark was punctuated with a wink which suggested that a clever person would catch a second meaning. This ceased to amuse Steele. He did not like the peculiar emphasis on British territory.

"Monsieur Duval said nothing about that."

"A thousand pardons, *Monsieur le capitaine*. It is possible that you misunderstood. Monsieur Duval—" That wink. "There are things about which he says nothing—you comprehend, not so? But he would speak with utmost confidence to you."

"See here—do you mean we're to go to the Solomons with ballast?"

Corbeau shrugged. "You are the captain. We go wherever you order, is it not so? Me, I merely represent the owner, and you know what that makes me at sea. A bookkeeper, purely for the formality."

Steele rose, impatiently. Though the fellow talked in circles, there was an uneasy undercurrent. Nito, at first, stretched out on his bunk, asleep, was siting up, alert.

"Let's have the point of it all. You mean we can't get men any nearer?"

"I, François Corbeau, I can get them, a load of them." He winked and for good measure, spat tobacco juice. "Trade goods will do anything."

Steele clenched his teeth, and prayed for patience. This windy comic-mask would drive him crazy before the voyage was over. "Speak out, man. Do you mean that they ask too much for a three-year contract?"

He finally got the truth: The Governor-general was death on labor recruiters. There had been scandals, and from one end of French Oceania to the other, the lid was clamped down tight. The business was honestly run, strictly operated, but for all that, no natives of French possessions were to be recruited for New Guinea mines. New Guinea was dangerous country, so dangerous that the Dutch, who owned a chunk of the island, arrested every prospector and summarily jailed him.

"So New Guinea is dangerous? Why?"

Corbeau was well posted. "The natives, they are always at war with each other. If a man gets a mile from his village, he is clubbed and eaten. Among them, they speak three hundred languages, these black fellows, and each tribe is the enemy of all the others."

"They must be crazy for taking jobs like that!"

Corbeau shrugged. "What would you have, *monsieur?* They get paid well. They go of their own free will. Is it not that we take a chance with the sea?"

That made sense to Steele. And when, finally, he saw the first of the Melanesian tribesmen, he wondered why he had been worried at the thought of taking ignorant savages to hostile New Guinea.

The *Carnot* was hauling toward an island where volcanic peaks rose iron black over dense jungle. Some of these mountains still fumed, though most were cold but still sullen-looking. The houses along the shore were on piers, and the walls were of withes, woven basket-wise.

Slim canoes with outriggers raced across the bay at a clip that made Steele shake his head. Nothing in the Marquesas could approach them for speed. And their crews did not add to his enjoyment of the meeting.

These black fellows had exaggerated muscles; their chests and shoulders and

arms were knotted like the war clubs many of them carried. And through his glasses he could see their beetling brows, thick lips, sullen faces; they scowled at each other as well as at the strangers.

Bark aprons; they wore nothing else, except for one ferocious fellow who had a derby hat jammed down over his shock of kinky hair. His beard reached half way to his waist. Nito said, "A hundred of these *kanakas* aboard, and they'll eat us before we get to New Guinea."

Steele shivered. Brown men seemed more natural to him than white, but these Melanesians were long-armed apes with crafty eyes and surly mouths. Scarcely human; that was his first thought, and then he corrected it. What shocked him was humanity without any frills.

The man with the derby grinned and gestured when his canoe lost way. In addition to carved clubs, his fellows had stone axes and well-worn iron hatchets. Their guttural clucking ceased, and then the chief hailed the *Carnot*. Only Corbeau could understand him.

"He says he wants tobacco, and hatchets," the Frenchman translated. "And some red paint, like the kind you put on your hair."

THE rest of the fleet had come up. Several hundred blacks stared at the strangers. Steele now saw the bows and the bundles of bone-tipped arrows in each canoe. He wondered if these beetle-browed fellows realized that they could not take over a ship whose crew was armed with pistols and rifles. They looked grim enough to try anything, and though they did not succeed, they could do a lot of damage. Any sign of preparedness would then and there put an end to recruiting, while failure to show means of defense might encourage them to make a raid.

"Is that the chief?"

"Yes," Corbeau answered. "Better give him a present. But not too much or there will be no dealing with him."

So Derby-hat got tobacco and a hatchet. Corbeau translated, "He wants you to come ashore and eat pig and yams."

A boat was lowered. Surrounded by the flotilla, Steele and Nito and Corbeau, with four of the crew to man the oars, made for the village.

Steele said to Nito, "As far as I can see, these blacks are tough enough for anything New Guinea can produce!"

"They're not as bad as they look, *monsieur*," Corbeau cut in.

Bushy-haired women in grass skirts stood near a cluster of huts and stared at the newcomers. The blacks beached their canoes, and headed into the jungle as if the women did not exist. Not far from the shore was a long house on stilts. Here old men with curly beards squatted in groups. This was the clubhouse, where no woman nor child dared venture.

Boar tusks hung in festoons from the eaves. At the further edge of the clearing, wooden idols carved from hollowed tree trunks stood like tombstones; the faces were diamond shaped masks. Pigs with curved tusks rooted about.

Women brought baked yams and pork to the edge of the clearing, and black men carried it to the blocks of lava in front of the idols. Finally, trading began, with Corbeau interpreting.

"We want a hundred men to go to New Guinea and work."

The chief grimaced. "We don't want to work."

"You get good pay," Steele said. "Ten shillings a month."

"Money is no good. When my young

men want wives, they buy from me. Five pigs. If you have some pigs, I'll sell you all the girls you want."

He was serious about that. But Steele was not interested. "Let me talk to some of the young men."

The chief clucked. Half a dozen knotty-limbed fellows came forward. Steele gestured to one of his crew, and a pack was opened at his feet. "Look here—" He gestured. "Every week you get ten pounds of rice. A big chunk of pork. A pound of sugar. A box of matches—" He struck one, let it flare up. "And two sticks of tobacco. All this for each man, each week. And money, too!"

They eyed each other. They passed the sugar from hand to hand, and also the meat, which they sniffed and bit. Some grinned. Some scowled. One said, "We have enough to eat at home."

Another asked, "How much of this stuff have you on the ship?"

Corbeau answered before Steeele spoke. Their eyes brightened, and they exchanged sly glances. "What'd you tell him?" Steele demanded.

"That we had the ship loaded up with rations."

"That doesn't sound too bright! They may try to board us and see!"

But Steele had to carry on. After all, Corbeau must know his way about; he proved this by saying, "Only way you can get these fellows signed up is by explaining what they can do with money. They just don't understand it."

"Go ahead, but watch your step. I don't like their faces."

"That is not puzzling," Corbeau admitted; and then he addressed the group.

They showed signs of animation, outright eagerness. "That worked. What did you tell them?"

Corbeau winked. "If they saved their money, they could buy hard hats, like the chief."

The man with the only derby on the island sat there, frowning. "What do I get if I let these boys go with you?"

This led to more bargaining. Each "boy" was the subject of a separate dicker, since none of the blacks could conceive of a number as big as a hundred. Also, there was an extra charge for the huskiest specimens. And some of the young men did not want to leave home. The chief, however, stood for no argument; he gave the order, he raked in axe or tobacco or calico, and the tribesmen joined the next canoe load.

THE bargaining dragged. It was dark now, and fires cast leaping red lights on the tree trunk gods with their diamond-shaped faces. A devil priest beat the hollow idols with a club, and tribesmen came from adjoining settlements. The ship's boat plied back and forth with more trade goods; the chief's wealth rose in a great heap.

"That makes eighty," Steele whispered to Corbeau. "I don't like this delay. If those on board catch the watch off guard, there's no telling what may happen. Each load we send out is taking the news from the village, if anyone here is planning any trick."

"I will not go back!" Corbeau snapped. "If we don't take a hundred, we lose money. You can't let Duval down that way."

"You forget I'm captain."

"You forget you're ashore, *monsieur,*" Corbeau said. "Not at sea. If you are afraid, however—"

Steele's unwillingness to have his courage questioned made him carry on with the business. But the last batch of "boys" had hardly set out for the recruiting ship when there were yells; a cry of wrath, then a savage howling

above the sullen mutter of the surf.

Steele leaped to his feet. Hell was popping aboard the *Carnot*. There was a shot, and a second. And then the festivities opened at the clubhouse. Arrows hissed past. A hurled club caught Steele between the shoulders, almost knocking him off his feet. Corbeau's arm was pinned to his side with an arrow. Nito snatched a club and cracked a kinky head. A seaman drew a revolver.

"Stop it!" Steele yelled. He knocked the weapon aside. The shot went wild. "Run for it! I'll hold 'em!"

He sidestepped as the chief lashed out with a stone axe. He cracked him on the jaw and stiffened him. He snatched the weapon, smashed the flat of it against the chief's head, and held him up as a shield. Corbeau was running, shooting wildly. The seamen followed. Nito stuck with Steele, swinging a club.

The human shield made the archers hold back with their arrows. Once out of the firelight, Steele dropped the chief and ran. He had scarcely caught up with his men when arrows laced the gloom. Howling islanders came running with torches. Some hurled axes.

Battered and bleeding, the shore party tumbled into their boat. Canoes were darting across the bay, but rifle fire from the *Carnot* kept them from closing in. The riot was over when Steele and his companions scrambled over the side.

Every man of the crew and half a dozen of the "boys" were wounded, but there were no fatalities. Steele said to Corbeau, "A pretty mess, that!"

Corbeau's arm was paining him. He had lost all his self-assurance, and his wink also. *"Monsieur,* how did you know? You are a green hand with these black boys."

"I was a fool for letting you persuade me to wait," Steele grumbled. "I might have known that the chief would get nasty at the thought of every man on the island having a hard hat when he comes back from New Guinea!"

CHAPTER XI

WRONG SIDE OF THE LAW

PORT MORESBY welcomed Steele and his cargo. The capital of New Guinea sprawled along a slope and to the saddle between two low hills that overlooked the bay. Tin-roofed warehouses made up most of the entrance to the world's most recently opened frontier. All around Port Moresby were compounds for the natives. These villages were surrounded by barbed wire, and at night, floodlights played down on the guarded enclosures. No one took chances with the blacks.

Steele was in Port Moresby only long enough to see that today's labor recruiting was far different from the vicious blackbirding of the old days.

The labor contractor was a horse-faced Englishman. His frosty eyes widened a little when he inspected the hundred islanders. Then he squinted, cocked his head.

"What's the matter?" Steele asked. "The surgeon inspected them. They're fit for work, aren't they?"

"Oh, quite." But he continued his narrow inspection, as though these fuzzy headed fellows were in some way different from those already in the compound. "They'll do."

He proved this by paying $15,000 in cash, which he counted out, and sealed in a parcel. Steele, looking back, saw that the contractor was staring at him and Corbeau and shaking his head. Something was wrong, but he was not going to say what.

"What's the matter with him?" Steele asked Corbeau.

"Doubtless it is that lime juice leaves a nasty taste in his mouth, *hein?* But he has paid and now we need another cargo."

A day spent in looking at the compounds where the "boys" lived somewhat changed Steele's views on recruiting. There were no cursing taskmasters with whips. They ate well, they had new blankets. They went to a government hospital at the owner's expense when ill or wounded in quarrels with each other. Why not get another black cargo?

"But look here, Corbeau! Next time, I won't have trouble. I don't want to have to shoot in self-defense. They are tricky brutes, but they're human."

"Try talking to them yourself!"

"I can do that!"

So Steele hired a Solomon Islander whose contract had expired.

That night, the *Carnot* made sail. Corbeau had a touch of fever, so he had stayed in his cabin for the remainder of the afternoon.

It was not until the following morning that Steele missed him. They searched the ship from stem to stern. Nito finally said, "Brother, he is gone. It is true, no one liked him too much, but no one disliked him either. There's no use going back to Port Moresby. If he fell overboard, he fell overboard."

This made sense, so Steele entered the mysterious disappearance in the log. And the *Carnot* headed back toward volcanic Melanesia. Steele did not like the idea of having no white man to check up on the "boy" he had picked up to teach him the language, but there was no way out.

"Maybe," the savage said, "devil doctor made him jump overboard. *Puk-puk* eat him."

A few days later, a French cruiser came steaming over the horizon. The answer to Steele's dipped colors was a shot fired over the bow.

"This does not look good," Nito said.

"I wonder what a French cruiser is doing in these waters," Steele muttered, and gave the order to heave to. "Something is wrong."

"Maybe that Corbeau did fall over, near Port Moresby and they found him."

Steele was not too optimistic. Day by day, his premonition had grown. Ever since Corbeau's first quip about not recruiting in French territory, Steele had been uneasy. It was more than the missing man's nervous, meaningless wink; it was not just the curious glances of the contractor in Port Moresby. It was these and a series of other trifles he could no longer name.

WHEN the gig came alongside with the officer from the cruiser, Steele got his first shock. *"Monsieur le capitaine,"* the lieutenant coldly said, "from the smell of this ship, it is plain you have been recruiting. We know you took one hundred boys from Atchin Island."

He gave the date. He cited a confirming radiogram from Port Moresby. The natives delivered there were unhappily in the interior and could not be recalled, but there was no doubt that they spoke the dialect of Atchin Island. Steele said, *"Monsieur,* Atchin Island is British territory and I do not see your interest."

"You are trying to be comical?"

The guard of marines were ready to crack down. Steele said, "Be pleased to look at my charts, *monsieur.* It is strange that an officer of the French navy can learn geography from me."

"Eh bien! One of us is about to learn something."

Steele pointed to the charts. The officer frowned, looked up. He eyed Steele for a moment. "This seems to be many years old, before France and Britain settled a dispute and agreed to hold the New Hebrides jointly. Atchin Island is at the extreme end of the group. So, there is French jurisdiction."

"But—see here—"

"No use, Captain! You did recruit in French territory. You did have a skirmish, which was what called your presence to my attention. The authorities in Port Moresby admitted their suspicions, though they had not enough proof to refuse the laborers." The lieutenant shrugged. "No wonder, they need men! So, *monsieur,* you are under arrest. Please give me your papers, and the price of the recruited natives. These things must all stay in government custody until the case is decided."

The law was backed by marines, and the guns of a cruiser. Steele opened the ship's strong box. The officer broke the seals of the parcel of bills, to count and give the skipper a receipt.

The packet contained wrapping paper cut to the size of Bank of England notes. The lieutenant's eyes blazed.

"So? Is it that you are trying to make a fool of the navy? You thought I'd give you a receipt for scrap paper?"

"Look at my log!" Steele pointed at the record of Corbeau's disappearance. "That scoundrel switched packages on me."

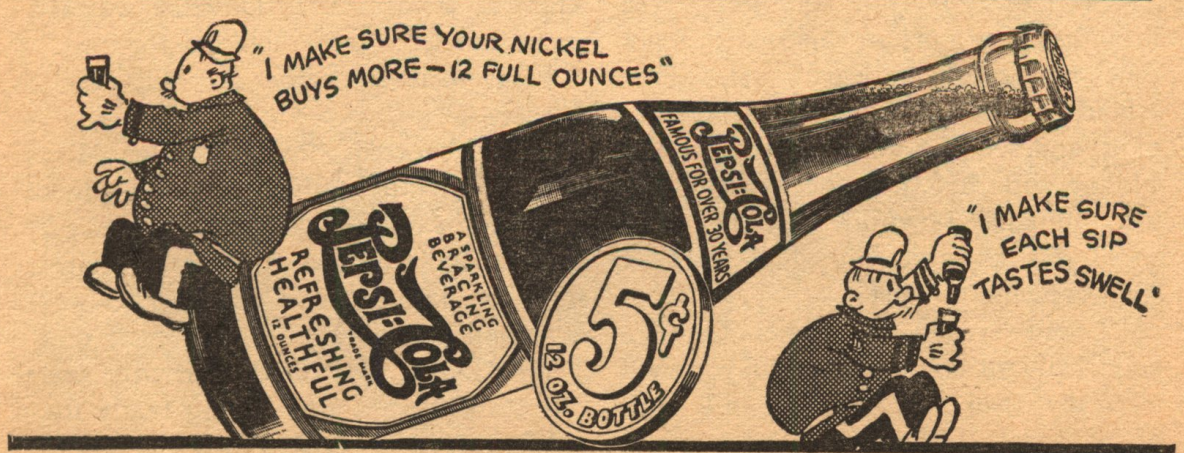
"If you think that hiding the money will get the case thrown out of court for lack of evidence, *monsieur,* you are mistaken. *Au contraire,* this gesture will make the Governor-general more determined than ever to jail you until you are an old man, a very old man."

"So it is like that, *monsieur?"*

"It is. The Governor-general has a grudge against recruiters. Blackbirders, he considers them. I have my orders. Please do not bother explaining the difference between recruiting and blackbirding. I understand it perfectly, but I am not trying this case. Where is the money?"

A platoon of marines searched the *Carnot,* and to no purpose. This convinced the officer that Corbeau and Steele had been shrewd enough to salt down $15,000 before they were caught.

Steele went to Papeete on the cruiser. A naval officer took command of the *Carnot.* Nito, "just another native," had the run of the schooner. They had not considered him worth putting in irons, since the skipper was responsible.



And by now Steele was certain that the owner of the *Carnot* would come out of it with clean hands; clean, but filled with Bank of England notes. Corbeau and Duval had tricked him.

A guard marched Steele from the cruiser and to the jail in Papeete. Then the governor showed his teeth. Marines were stationed to watch the prisoner.

The town turned out when Steele was taken before the governor for a preliminary hearing. A special commission was going to try the criminal. But first his excellency wanted to size up the prisoner.

The governor was a short, fat, amiable man in a wrinkled linen suit. He was bald, and he mopped his forehead and puffed for breath. His blue eyes were bitter.

He listened to Steele's statement and the naval officer's. Finally he spoke. "So you did not know that you had no master's ticket? You did not know that Atchin Island was French territory, that your charts were forty years behind the times? You did not know that you signed false statements in getting clearance papers for the *Carnot?*"

Steele stood there, ready for the worst. This was what came from trying to become a white man! He cursed the whole breed.

"So," the governor went on, "you, brought up by a priest, raised with innocent natives, you learn fast, *hein?* About blackbirding, perjury, kidnapping, and sending your accomplice into hiding with $15,000, the price of fellow humans' servitude? Name of a small red cabbage, you shall learn! I shall convene a court!

"Twenty years, to further improve your brilliant mind. Possibly you will learn by then that you are the kind of malefactor I thought I had run out of these islands. If I could only send you to a leper colony! Lieutenant, take him away!"

CHAPTER XII

FIRE MAGIC

THE new jail was of concrete. It stood on a headland, overlooking the bay. The marine sentry in the corridor trampled any hope Steele had of breaking jail.

The steady pace, the scrape of leather as the sentry made a precise "to the rear march" at each end of his beat, day and night, these reminded Steele that he, one man, had the power of France clamped down solidly on him.

Cornelia was permitted to see him. After all, she was the protègé of Borden Pitts. The sentry was allowed to stand at the end of the corridor, instead of walking his post during the visit.

"You mustn't worry, Warren," she said. "I'm persuading Mr. Pitts to use his influence. By the time the commission meets, the governor may have relented a little."

Steele shook his head. "Pitts is back of this!"

"What?" She let go the bars, and stepped back a pace. "Oh, no!"

"Listen, I'll tell you. Remember that night, I spoke of ships and before I knew it, I was sent to Duval. I was almost murdered while looking for him."

"But Garvey came to help you! Please—"

Steele snorted. *"Helped,* after Nito and I had fought them down. I think he was watching all the time, saw the trap fail because Nito arrived, and then he had to save his face to get a second chance at me! The next day I met Duval. He made me this fine offer, and here I am, getting ready for a lifetime in a penal colony!"

"Oh, Warren, I know it's been awful, but be reasonable. Why, why would Garvey do this, and—"

"Garvey and Pitts want me out of the way. One attempt to murder me, at the Pier Casino, was routine. A second attempt would have been conspicuous. So here they have me, and $15,000—nearly 30,000 *guilders* in your Dutch money—pay for their effort."

"But why? Warren, don't pace up and down life a wolf, you're fretting yourself to death!"

"Why? Because—" But he could not tell her the reason behind his suspicions. "Because I blocked Garvey's theft." He knew it sounded ridiculous.

"But Mr. Pitts *will* help you. You must be mistaken."

"He won't."

"Mr. Pitts has helped my family ever since father lost a big parcel of pearls from the Sulu Sea, and our plantations began to lose money."

Steele sighed. "I can understand loyalty. Even in white people. You were kind, coming to see me. Will you help Tiaré and Nito and Poi Utu go home? Get them deck passage on a trader."

"I have to tell you why I came—" Her eyes were wet, and tears ran down her cheeks. "When I saw how you felt, I wanted to leave without telling. Mr. Pitts asked me to persuade you to confess and maybe he'd get you a lighter sentence, or an early pardon."

A saber rattled. An impersonal voice said, "Your pardon, *mademoiselle,* but the time is up."

Steele laughed, and the sentry's face changed. Cornelia looked back, and shivered.

LATER, Tiaré came and they let her speak to Steele. The sentry stood where he could see that she did not hand the prisoner any tool or weapon. "Poi Utu is making magic," she said in the Marquesan dialect, which the guard would not understand. "Oh, Matalaa, what can we do? Your enemies are too strong!"

"I will some day escape from New Caledonia."

"I'll wait for you, Matalaa, and pray for you, every day."

Tiaré meant this, and Steele was sorry. He said, "Let my brother Nito take care of you. He loves you and he always has, and I will be an old man before I can escape and come back, going from island to island."

"Matalaa! No, I won't!"

"Nito is my blood brother, he is closer to me than if we were sons of the same parents. So he has never spoken to you, but I know how much he loves you. And you will be an old woman before I come back."

"I won't! Didn't I say Poi Utu is making magic, he'll free you. He's going to eat Garvey's heart and arms to get Garvey's courage and strength. Poi Utu isn't mad at you, he made you quarrel with him, weeks ago, so people wouldn't watch him the way they watch all your friends. He goes about cursing you when people listen—"

"Time is up, *mademoiselle,*" the officer said.

He twisted his moustaches, and watched Tiaré go out.

Nito and Poi Utu did not come to see Steele. Perhaps they were hiding, to make it seem that they had left the island. He feared that they were planning a jail delivery, and wished that he could warn them. Any attempt to release him would only end in a fusillade. There was a machine gun on the roof of the prison. It could riddle any boat loaded with fugitives; it could sweep the flat spaces on the land

side, before any prisoner could reach the jungle's fringe. There were floodlights to put a broad band about the prison at night.

Steele was worried. He went through the routine of testing each bar, tugging at it, arching his back and throwing weight and muscle against the metal. Somewhere, there might be a flaw in the concrete. But soon he found that this was not true; that the concrete was not green enough or lean enough for even his hard muscles.

Once a bar "cried" under his wrath; the faint screech of bending. He let go before the sentry arrived on the run, rifle at the ready. Steele grinned at him. The soldier said, "We don't like to laugh at you, my friend. The whole town thinks you've been somebody's fool, and wishes you well, but it is silly, working on that metal."

Then his eyes focused and he saw how two bars were no longer straight. His face changed. "See here! I'd have to shoot you if I saw you leaving. Orders are orders. If I shot you while escaping, the governor would decorate me! Someone who has no use for you has kept him hostile, do you understand?"

"I'm just taking my exercises each day to keep from getting flabby."

The soldier eyed Steele's arms and shoulders. "You, flabby! *Quelle blague!*"

Steele ceased working on the bars. He began studying, and pretended that he had taken the warning to heart. His courage came back. He had felt that bar yield. His hands were cut and crushed from the wrathful tug. Maybe he could never win enough space to squeeze through.

"New prison . . . they say green concrete can't stand shocks. . . ."

When the light was just right, he scanned the sill. He fancied he could see hair line cracks where the metal sank into the concrete.

The following day Cornelia came to see him. She whispered, *"Mr. Pitts fixed it for me to see you without a guard looking on—here, hide this! Now talk to me!"*

She had given him a hacksaw blade and a fine file. He said, "Cornelia, I'm not guilty, but perhaps a confession would help."

He watched her carefully.

"I'm glad you're not so stubborn any more." She whispered, *"Don't confess anything. Pitts says it won't work, so he's bribing the guard, and there'll be a motor boat. Down below. You break out when the tide is just right, so no large boat can follow over the bar—talk to me some more, the officer may be curious."*

"A short term, and then a pardon—certainly Duval and Corbeau tricked me, but I can't prove it. Why not do it your way?"

So whispered bits and full-voiced chatter alternated. When Cornelia left, Steele was all ready to start working for escape.

That night, between inspections by the guard, he sawed at the bar, and muffled the sound with a shirt. Steele smiled, but not pleasantly. He was thinking, "Shot while escaping, and using Cornelia to do the dirty work, because I would trust her. Shot while escaping, and I never could blab about murder."

But he kept on sawing. It was risky. However, with bitter doubts to make him suspicious of Pitts' assistance, he was warned and he might get through a fusillade; whereas an unsuspecting victim would be cut down before he ran a yard. Cornelia had said, "Run toward the sea."

THIS was just what Steele would not do; not until he was out of rifle range. If the soldiers did not kill him, the men in the boat would! Savage intuition told him this; like an animal, he was wary of peril to his life, whereas a civilized man would have blundered to his death without any suspicions. On the other hand, the stupidest white man would not have been so easily tricked into that labor-recruiting swindle.

The day before the time set for Steele's jailbreak, he caught a glimpse of Poi Utu. The old witch doctor was some distance from the prison, and not far from the edge of the clearing. Nito was with him. Other natives soon followed, and began to dig a trench perhaps twenty-five feet long.

While this went on, a few old men went about finding stones. Poi Utu hefted each, patted it, felt its surface, bent down to eye it closely. The rock pile grew, and at the same time, the gathering crowd of spectators began collecting wood from the jungle.

Marines off duty came out to watch the doings. Steele, however, knew what was going on. Poi Utu was making magic! He was preparing for the *umuti,* the fire-walking ceremony. They were lining the trench bottom with smooth, water-worn stones, and now fuel was heaped up. For the rest of the day, the fire blazed.

All that night, the breeze whipped the length of the trench and brought the smell of wood and bits of ash into Steele's cell. The wind became hot, and at last it had the odor of white hot rocks. Against the glare of the pit, Poi Utu bobbed about, gesturing, directing the men who fed the furnace.

Magic! Of all things. People were coming from the hinterland with pigs, bananas, breadfruit; people came from the sea with turtles and fish for the banquet that followed the ritual. Steele's escape would be blocked by a crowd.

All night the drums *thump-thump-thumped.* The eerie chanting made Steele shiver. All day the drumming went on, and it continued after sunset, until Poi Utu decided that the stones were hot enough to make it a miracle if any barefooted man could walk across them.

Sparks showered when Poi Utu's helpers used green branches to brush the coals aside. The greenwood blazed up from the heat.

Officers, civilians, prison employees: there were hundreds of white spectators joining the natives who had come to see the pagan ritual. Police arrived to keep the crowd from getting too close to the trenches. Poi Utu's "magic" had turned out half the city and just when Steele needed a clear field. He wanted solitude, quiet, a prison guarded by sentries bored by routine; sentries lulled by the monotony of their own echoing footsteps, so that he could run many yards before the pre-arranged alarm sounded.

He had to escape now. Now, because his enemies were waiting for him to follow Cornelia's advice, and rush for the water. The moon was rising, and that would help them. Now was the time, before they were ready and waiting for a man running, then swimming; by leaving when they did not expect him, he could win many yards by racing inland. Or he could have, but for Poi Utu's crazy idea of making magic to win the favor of the gods.

"Magic! Good Lord," he groaned. "Blocking me off from the start."

If he delayed, he might be shot in his cell, then dumped out between the bars that someone else would jerk loose. The sawed metal would prove he had been

"shot while escaping." He had to go, and now.

CHAPTER XIII

EXILE FROM VENGEANCE

POI UTU wore a white loincloth, and a white cape. He had a wreath of *ti* leaves on his head, and he carried a *ti* branch as a wand. The old man stood at the edge of the pit. He raised his arms, and chanted the old litany of the gods, who give power for each of the ten steps through Hell.

Then he walked down the path of fire. At the far end, he gestured with his wand, and retraced his course. Steele gripped the bars. Distance made the ritual all the more unreal. He could hear the mutter of exhaled breath, a moment after the old man's march ended.

There was a stirring, as several dozen of the spectators hastily twisted crowns and girdles of *ti* leaves. Poi Utu gestured and led the way. They followed him across. The town people were silent. There was no sound until the last fire-walker reached the end of the march over white hot stones.

The sentry had ceased walking his beat. He must be at the end of the corridor, looking out through the grille. The guards posted on the roof must be watching. At last Steele understood. He almost laughed aloud.

This was his moment.

He pulled the sawed bars out of the way. Below, and many yards away, Poi Utu was gesturing. Bundles of banana leaves and split banana trunks were thrown into the pit; this was preparation for the banquet that was to follow. Dense clouds of white smoke rose, and the wind carried the choking billows toward the jail. The sentry coughed. Steele dropped to the ground. He ran a dozen yards before there was a challenge.

He flung himself headlong, just as the rifle blazed. The slug glanced off the ground and zinged into the air. The white smoke blanketed the earth. The spectators scattered screaming and shouting. A siren blew. Floodlights flared. The dense banana smoke threw the strong light back toward the guards. Steele ran at a crouch. Smoke hid him, and there was no more firing.

With that dense crowd, neither machine gun nor rifle could be used. Hundreds of feet pounded the earth in every direction. No dog could track Steele. He stumbled over men and women, until he was beyond the wall of white smoke. Then he headed for the jungle.

A man was on his heels. "This way, Matalaa!" It was Nito. "We stole the *putt-putt* boat from Pitts' yacht. I know how to run it."

They crashed through the pandanus thickets, but freedom kept Steele from feeling the thorns. In a cove, a sleek little boat was waiting. Tiaré came out of the cabin andd flung both arms about Steele. A moment later, Poi Utu bounded out of a thicket, and Nito pulled the starter. He was proud of himself. As she roared, he said, "It is easy. I spent hours watching Frenchmen use their *putt-putts.*"

Once past the reefs, Steele said, "How did all this happen, Poi Utu? You expected me, but how?"

The old man chuckled. "The spirits finally followed me from Ua Paepae, and so I began to learn things. Pitts and Garvey wanted you killed while escaping. They used the yellow-haired girl to fool you. So I made the *Umuti* ceremony, to draw a big crowd, and with the white smoke that followed, I knew you would have sense enough to break jail then, when no one could

shoot. The spirits told me about the saw to cut iron. *Aué!* Such a saw—whoever heard of one?—but here you are."

Without doubt, Poi Utu had snooped, eavesdropped, tricked people into gossip until he knew all about Cornelia's well-meant aid, and its sinister background.

"Who struck my father?" Steele demanded, hoping that the witch doctor had gotten to the heart of things.

"The spirits do not want to tell. Maybe Garvey, maybe Pitts. Both were on that ship."

"I wish I knew which one."

Poi Utu chuckled. "If we eat them both, then we'll be sure!"

HALF an hour's run brought the fugitives to a small deserted island. Nito said, "Here we stop and hide the *putt-putt* boat in a cave, and get a canoe we have there."

This was shrewd. The governor would be looking for a motor launch, while the fugitives slipped from island to island in a commonplace canoe. As they got under way again, Tiaré said to Steele, "See now why I wouldn't listen to you? I even threw away my yellow dress and shoes and everything, so no one'll know me when we land somewhere."

She wore a lava-lava again. So did Nito. And long before they were out of danger, Steele was back in native dress, and his red hair had been stained black. At times rations ran low, but uncharted atolls contributed their bit. Some of these little islands, well off the steamer lanes, were inhabited by friendly natives whose only contact with French government was the

quarterly inspection made by a gendarme.

"The next island over that way," a tall fisherman said, gesturing southwest, "It does not belong to the white policeman who says *dis-donc*. There is a red-faced king who says *damn-damn* all the time. He is crazy. He walks all over the island hitting a little white ball."

"It is too bad the yellow-haired girl is not here," Poi Utu said. "Imagine, a man walking around clubbing a ball. Maybe she could explain it."

"I think it is safe," Steele concluded. "Father Pierre showed me a picture of a man hitting a ball. It is a British game."

"I still think he is crazy," Poi Utu said. "So no one has eaten him."

And when they reached Pakalafa, he would not land. He insisted on going to a small island nearby, which was too rocky for red-faced men who played golf. So the exiles settled down to making the most of the barren place. It took a lot of fishing to round out the scanty growth of yams and taro and bananas.

As the days wore on, Tiaré and Nito and Poi Utu began to wilt. Steele knew why without asking. They were homesick. They did not with look or word reproach him for the exile into which they had been forced when they helped him escape. Tiaré could no more go back to French territory than the others; she had been one of the party, and the law held her guilty. Steele had finally been forced to explain this fine point, quoting Father Pierre. And from then on, his companions were not the same.

They did not mope. It was merely that their eyes no longer sparkled. Tiaré's glance no longer invited Steele to kiss her. Each look was uncomfortably like a farewell. Poi Utu quit discussing Garvey, either as an article of diet or as an enemy. Nito spent too much time hunched on a rock, and looking northeast, toward the Marquesas he would never see. Steele paced about the little clearing, muttering, "What can I do for them?"

He tried to quarrel, but they had not enough spirit. He tried to arouse them by proposing a return home, and devil take French law; who would notice their final return, in a year, to Ua Paepae?

Poi Utu said, "Who knows if we will be alive then, and who wants to make that long trip?"

Nito sighed and shrugged. Steele jerked him to his feet, knocked him flat, and yelled, "Get up and fight, you good-for-nothing!"

But Nito just looked reproachful, and Steele was ashamed.

It looked as if he had only to wait for his friends to die of that mysterious Polynesian losing-the-will-to-live, and then paddle over to Pakalfa to learn the ways of strangers: that one thing which no Polynesian wants to learn.

The next day, he saw a familiar ship: the *Selene,* Borden Pitts' yacht. Steele had never seen her under sail, but there was no mistaking the rake of her masts, the lines of her hull. Steele said to Poi Utu, "Look, there is our enemy. He had a whole ocean to sail, but the gods brought him to us. Look, he is hauling for Pakalafa, for the bay! It is a sign, Poi Utu!"

FIRE came back to the old man's eyes. His nostrils flared. He got his little drum and began thumping it as he chanted of battle and the ovens for the vanquished. Nito began to brighten. Tiaré came from her hut and put flowers in her hair. Poi Utu's chant had given them the will to live. It was more than vengeance that made Steele go

with his friends to Pakalafa, where the *Selene* was anchored. His impulsive cry, "It is a sign from the gods!" was a promise that he had to keep, else his friends would wilt and perish.

Poi Utu said, as they went toward the settlement where the *Selene* had presumably stopped for water and supplies, "Now I can finally tell you what I heard while you were in jail. The man who killed your father was Borden Pitts. I heard him quarrel with Garvey about the guilt."

"You old idiot, why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"I was afraid you would die of a broken heart," the wizard explained, "if you learned the truth while you ran from Papeete. You would go back and be killed or taken by an enemy, or you would sicken and die of disappointment, having been face to face with your enemy and without having known it surely enough to strike."

That was the Polynesian of it. He had lived with them all his life, yet he could not understand until Poi Utu explained. Had he not lived with them, he would not have understood at all. And this difference, he now knew beyond any doubt, would draw him to Cornelia and from Tiaré.

It was dark when they entered the village, and lights marked the *Selene,* slim and lovely in the bay. "And she belongs to that assassin!" Steele sighed at the injustice. "I wonder if Cornelia is aboard. . . ."

CHAPTER XIV

TRIAL—BY CLUB

CYRIL RANKIN was the only white man on Pakalafa, except for a few beachcombers who did not count. He was the British law, which reached from New Zealand over a two-thousand-mile gap of ocean. Perhaps four times a year a boat came in with mail and supplies.

Mr. Rankin was viceroy, judge, sheriff, police inspector, highway commissioner, notary public, tax collector, customs officer, and public health department. He spent about sixteen hours a day playing golf or sitting on the bungalow veranda drinking whiskey. Cyril Rankin's real work consisted of being responsible; he was the man some far off and high official reprimanded when something went wrong in Pakalafa.

When Borden Pitts came ashore, he was made welcome. Visitors were scarce in Pakalafa. The red-faced Englishman watched the bubbles rising from his whiskey soda. Pitts was saying, "I've been looking for a red-headed Marquesan, his brother, a witch doctor, and an uncommonly nice-looking native girl."

"Haw." Mr. Rankin knocked the ash from his cheroot. "You're not pulling my leg, are you?"

Pitts took some newspaper clippings from the pocket of his white linen coat. He handed them to Rankin and explained, "Notorious blackbirder, jail breaker, and pirate."

"Unusual." Everything was unusual to Rankin until he got into action, and then everything was matter of fact. "You don't happen to have any warrants for this chap? You know, extradition—awfully stuffy business."

Pitts smiled, disarmingly. "I haven't any official connections. This fellow's accomplices stole the launch from my yacht. They hid it in a cave, but it broke loose."

"Haw." Rankin blinked, tasted his whiskey. "Ruse, eh?"

"Yes. Escaped from Papeete in the launch, hid it, then went on in a canoe, expects us to spend months tracing a motorboat."

Rankin's gray eyes brightened. "Clev-

er chap, what? But you have your launch, haven't you?"

Pitts succeeded in not looking impatient. "He's a menace, don't you see? I've been cruising about a little, and I've picked up rumors. He's headed your way."

Rankin yawned. "Thanks awfully, old man. If he harasses shipping around here, I'll have to take him in charge."

"He's desperate."

Rankin glanced about. His cigar box was beyond arm's reach, unless he leaned well over. He clapped his hands, and the tall servant came out. "Boy! A cheroot for Mr. Pitts!"

Outside, dogs began to bark. Natives chattered. Heavy feet clump-clumped up the veranda steps. A brown man six and a half feet tall came in. He wore shoes, a loincloth, and a khaki tunic. He saluted.

Rankin returned the salute. "Now what."

"Ah Sing, Chinese pearl fisher, threatening crew with hatchet, sir. Refuses to surrender to local police."

Rankin rose. "Dash it all! Frightfully sorry, Pitts, do make yourself at home, I'll be back tomorrow, I dare say." His servant brought out a helmet, a flask of whiskey, and a truncheon. "If you've any guests aboard, please have them put up at the house. Be delighted if you would, beastly lonesome here."

This last as the door slammed. Rankin was mounting his bicycle. Pitts shouted, "Wait, you've forgotten your pistol."

"Pistol! Not sporting. Chinaman only has a hatchet."

He pedaled through the gateway, and his helmet became a white blotch in the gloom. Pitts stood there, gritting his teeth. Getting Cyril Rankin excited about Fugitive Steele would take a number of days. So Pitts clapped his hands. When the servant came in, he said, "Boy, go to my yacht and tell Miss van Houten that the British Resident invites her to spend a few days at the house."

PITTS was not sure whether he should or should not include Bull Garvey, who was in command of the *Selene,* now that the trading schooner was laid up for refitting. Pitts felt that Garvey might be poor propaganda for his cause.

Some minutes later the gate creaked. Someone barefooted was approaching, for no crunch of gravel followed. Funny that the native would come to the front door. Pitts understood when he saw who had entered the screened veranda. He leaped to his feet, and snatched the decanter. Then he relaxed. "Hello, Steele. I was just talking about you. The British Resident is interested in your doings. Sit down, he'll be with us in a moment."

Steele's smile was mirthless. "No, he won't. He's gone to quell a riot. A riot I arranged."

"You can't trifle with British law. See here, you'd better take refuge aboard the *Selene.* I don't bear you any grudge for taking my launch. A brilliant feat, escaping from rank injustice in Papeete. It's true, I had a boat waiting for you, and it annoyed me greatly, this business of taking my launch, but—"

Smooth, dignified, Pitts was never more convincing. What shook him was when Steele cut in, "You planned to have me shot while escaping. My native friends overheard you and Garvey."

Pitts' expression changed. His eyes made right and left shifts; he was looking for a friend, and he needed one. "That's silly! Cornelia gave you a saw, and you used it."

"I'd be grateful, if I didn't know exactly what you and Garvey were saying. It was in your library. About half an hour before midnight. You as much as admitted killing my father—and my mother—the night you abandoned—the *Falcon*—at Ua Paepae. I had suspected Garvey, not you."

"You're crazy! You can't prove—"

"No, I cannot prove it in court. But Poi Utu, the witch doctor, showed me my father's skull, split by a hatchet."

Pitts' lips were gray. He stood there, held by the younger man's fierce eyes, his slowly swaying body; that motion, instinctive as the tail-lashing of a leopard about to leap, frightened him, for all his nerve. Steele said, "Poi Utu didn't show what happened to my mother. It wasn't necessary. My father's dental work must be recorded—"

"No court—not even if those gold fillings—could be identified—"

Steele's eyes narrowed. His smile showed his teeth. "Who said they were *gold?* You must have known him very well to remember all these years. I'd be jailed before I could make a case. So I came to hold court tonight. While the British Resident is away quelling a riot arranged by Poi Utu."

"You can't."

"I can. We will fight. Bare handed. Or with weapons."

Steele picked up a chair, by the legs. He spread his forearms apart, and the legs tore loose from the seat and the braces. He kicked the broken chair aside, and offered Pitts a leg. "You can crack my skull, or I can crack yours. You win, then I was just a fugitive resisting arrest. I win, and I'm still a fugitive."

Pitts would not take the weapon. "Your parents were dashed to pieces on the rocks, when a lifeboat capsized, during a hurricane. You lived by a miracle. My God, boy, why would I murder them?"

"I do not know. You as much as admitted your guilt when you were joking to Bull Garvey about my suspicions of him. You said his ugly face made people suspect him of things he'd not done, and warned him against his brutal ways!"

Pitts exhaled a breath that was almost a sob. Some snooping native had overheard; the story must even now be whispered about in Papeete. "Steele, let's reason this out. It is silly, this trial by combat."

"Poi Utu says the gods are just. Father Pierre says that his God is just. I believe them, they are honest men."

This simple statement made Pitts desperate. He peeled off his coat. Steele nodded, and pushed the tables and remaining chairs into a corner. He knew that he was right. Pitts' personal guilt was beyond question.

Father Pierre's teachings had become mixed with Poi Utu's. "Vengeance is mine," the kind priest had so often said, but the witch doctor's answer was convincing: "Vengeance is for the gods, Matalaa, but men are the tools of the gods, therefore strike!"

So Steele crouched with the chair leg held as brown men had held knotted war clubs ever since the first men came from India to find a home across the seas. "Ready, Pitts?"

Pitts did not answer. In his time, he had been a hard man, and he had courage. He was lean and fit, and now that there was no help for it, he would fight, and fight well.

He feinted with his cudgel. Steele shrank back like a swordsman closing his guard. He shifted, and his club flickered out. Pitts parried. The shock stung his hand. He leaned back, and they circled.

Time and again, Steele could have crippled his enemy's arm; but he wanted to finish his man with one stroke. Now that he had his day in court, he could not use a second blow to kill a disabled enemy.

But Pitts was desperate. He had no private rules. And he was quick enough to smash down across Steele's forearm.

Steele danced back, shifted his club to his left hand. "This makes us even!"

CHAPTER XV

WEAPON OF THE GODS

WHEN Cornelia and the servant came to the bungalow, they heard the click-clock of cudgels, saw the two men shifting and dodging in the light of the hurricane lantern. They heard the gasps, the wheezing of breath, the *slip-slip-slip* of feet.

The servant made a rush toward the steps. Cornelia caught his arm. "No! He'll kill you, too! I'll handle this. Get out!"

The servant went. He saw the sense of not meddling in the business of white people. Cornelia bounded up the steps and jerked the screen door open. The panting combatants whirled.

"Stop it, both of you!"

Steele's bruised arm was no longer numb. He swept her to one side. She landed in a heap on the settee, heels and blond curls tangling. "Let's go, Pitts! You or me, before she gets help!"

Pitts retreated before the attack. Steele was battered, his chest and arms were cut from blows that had fallen short and only grazed him. Pitts protected his head. He sensed that his enemy wanted a clean kill.

But his arms were heavy. Sweat poured down his face. His shirt stuck to his body. His legs were stiffening. He barely blocked a blow. He stumbled. And seeing the *back* of Borden's head made Steele think of his father. He snarled, his club licked out.

He heard Cornelia's scream. But he did not feel the blow from behind, or hear the crash of pottery. She had hurled a vase. Steele pitched face forward, the club slipping from his fingers.

Pitts recovered, saw, understood; he caught his club in both hands. Cornelia leaped at him. "Don't you dare! He's mine to settle!"

Pitts started, stared at her, at his weapon, and then reeled to the nearest chair. "Crazy—crazy—my God!" He saw the "boy," who had come back to peep. "You, there! Go get the captain. Hurry! Get Captain Garvey!"

The boy ran. Cornelia knelt beside Steele. She was crying, and pouring water over his head. She rose when the door slammed. "Don't you let Garvey touch him! He was ready to kill you and I saved your neck. If you don't let him alone—I don't care if he did take your boat, you can't send him back to Papeete!"

Pitts began to realize that Cornelia had not heard what had passed between him and Steele. "Oh, all right. He went crazy when he saw me. He decoyed the British Resident—"

There was a crunching of gravel outside. Mr. Rankin was saying, "Boy! Take my cycle!"

Pitts went on, "See? A false alarm, a trick to murder me. British law will deal with him."

But the "boy" did not answer, so Rankin leaned his cycle against the steps and came in. "Oh, hello, hello—" He regarded Steele, who was stirring and muttering; he lifted his helmet and bowed to Cornelia. "Hope no one's hurt. Blasted tire found the only nail in Pakalafa. Fancy, a *nail,* of all things."

Pitts said, "Miss van Houten, may I present our host, Mr. Rankin?"

"Pleasure. Er . . . I don't think I know that person on the floor . . . I rather fancy he's a native. My word, was there trouble?"

"This," Pitts announced, "is Warren Steele, with his hair dyed black. Before he tried to club me to death, he told me that native accomplices had decoyed you with a cock and bull story about a riot."

Rankin brightened. "Then I can wait for my boy to fix that loathesome tire! Well, well—" He regarded the clubs. "Hmmmm . . . assault and battery."

"You mean attempted murder!"

"Oh, not at all," Rankin insisted. "Malicious mischief, assault and battery, and attempting to deceive an officer."

"Do you think he couldn't kill you with one blow of that chair leg?"

Rankin hefted his own truncheon. "My dear fellow, I've bent this over many a head. No fatalities."

"But he *intended* to kill me. Don't you see, he challenged me, said only one of us would leave here alive."

STEELE, groggy, was sitting up. He looked at Cornelia, the shards of pottery, the British Agent; and scowling, he began to understand. Pain and fury twisted his face, but he was still too sick to speak. Rankin was saying, "Eh? *Challenged* you, did he? That's serious. *Dueling,* combat by deliberate arrangement."

Rankin rose, put on his helmet, and said, "Warren Steele, in the name of His Majesty, I arrest you for dueling, malicious mischief, and obstructing justice. Borden Pitts, in the name of His Majesty, I arrest you for duelling."

"What?"

"Takes two to make a duel. Word comes from something Italian, meaning twosome. We English call it single combat. Rather silly, a man simply can't fight himself. Now, Miss van Houten is well within the law. She attempted to stop a crime being enacted in her presence. Jolly well did stop it. Please don't apologize, Miss van Houten. I loathed that vase. My late aunt Mary sent it to me."

Borden Pitts was choking. "But—why—you can't arrest me."

"Frightfully sorry, but I have to enforce the law. You two might have gone out to the golf links, no one'd have seen you at night."

Steele got to his feet, and turned on Cornelia. "I've been a fool about you. Thanks to you, there's no justice. Take me away, Mr. Rankin, before I do attempt murder."

His bitterness made her cry out, "Warren, you'd have been arrested for murder, don't you understand?"

"Let me tell you something about this friend of yours! He murdered my father and mother."

Borden Pitts tried to shout him down, but Mr. Rankin said, "Here, here, let the man speak."

Steele went on, his words tumbling out in bitterness and hurt and anger. Rankin gave him a glass of whiskey, then toyed with his truncheon as he listened. Cornelia's eyes became wider and wider. She looked sick when he got to the place where he told of the skull split with a hatchet. She saw Pitts' change expression, and she began to draw her own conclusions when Steele quoted Poi Utu.

Then Garvey came in.

Steele said, "There's the man who does Pitts' dirty work! But in those days, he did his own."

Garvey rumbled, "Look here, I won't stand for this, claiming a murder was

done on my ship! Why'd anyone want to kill Steele's folks?"

Rankin asked, "Why, Steele?"

"I don't know, sir. It doesn't make sense. They had little enough money."

Cornelia was sitting beside Steele. During a silent crossfire of glances, she whispered, "I thought it was for the best, I didn't realize you'd be arrested. I just didn't want a killing charged to you!"

Then Nito and Tiaré blundered into the house; confident of Matalaa's victory, they made no effort at looking before entering. Pitts persisted in saying, "Rankin, you can't believe these wild yarns. But with two more of this fellow's accomplices, you can believe he's a menace, prowling around."

Rankin's smile was peculiar. "This *Falcon* business, very odd. There has been a bit of gossip. Since you are under arrest, and will be detained here until the next boat for New Zealand arrives you may as well answer a few of my questions. This Steele chap's remarks are—ah—remarkable, so to speak. Big insurance claims paid when the *Falcon* was lost, if I remember rightly."

Pitts said, "I do not propose being held on a charge of dueling when I was defending myself against an admittedly deadly assault."

Rankin rose. "Please do not force me to put you in irons."

Garvey laughed. "Look here, you Limey—! I'm an American citizen." He drew a revolver. "Come on, boss! Steele, come along or I'll blow you all over the wall."

The hammer clicked to full cock. Nito's eyes blazed, his muscles rippled; but Tiaré caught his arm and stopped his reckless lunge. "Don't, he'll kill Matalaa!" she cried.

Rankin took a pace forward.

"Hold it, you! I'm not playing! Get going, boss!"

The revolver shifted enough to cover Rankin. The Britisher took another step. His face did not change. His voice was steady. "In His Majesty's name —"

Garvey was too close to cover every member of the group, but he did not realize it until Steele lunged. Garvey wheeled and fired. But Steele was already inside his reach. He snatched Garvey's wrist. Another shot blasted the wall. Mr. Rankin cracked down with his truncheon, and Bull Garvey buckled.

Cornelia was on her feet, rushing toward Steele and Rankin. Nito whirled and yelled. Pitts was almost at the door. He snatched a chair leg, sidestepped, and then struck. He caught Nito a crushing blow across the temple, and knocked him to his knees. The Marquesan fell face down. Pitts jerked the door open and leaped to the gravel walk.

STEELE had been stunned by the pistol blast. Though the bullet had missed, the close range gush of flame and powder had hammering force. Rankin, over-reaching himself, went down wtih Bull Garvey. Cornelia clung to Steele, crying, "Darling, did he hit you? Did he hit you?"

"Let go! He's getting away, let go!" he yelled.

Steele lost time in breaking away. He had to hurdle Tiaré, who was beside Nito. And Pitts was racing toward the bay, where the *Selene* rode at anchor. Once aboard, he and his crew would repel boarders until he could make sail and get out. That remark about the insurance on the wrecked *Falcon,* years ago, made Pitts anxious to leave British territory. Garvey's gun

play made it worse; Garvey was a fool, a bungler!

The native village, down along the beach, was waking up. And the moon was bright. Drums were thumping. Poi Utu had routed them out, though Pitts did not know this. He knew only that his escape was cut off. He could not run directly to the launch. He would have to swim to the *Selene.*

Steele, still groggy, was sluggish on his feet. But for Pitt's detour, the chase would have been hopeless. As it was, the rise of a rocky headland leveled the odds. The distance was getting Pitts. He knew he could not start clambering down the steep slope without having Steele overtake him long before it was safe to dive into the bay. He still had the chair leg which had struck Nito down.

The hubbub in the village had kept Rankin from following Steele. Pitts wheeled to face his only pursuer. There was still a chance. He lashed out. Steele parried with his forearm. It went numb. Pain staggered him, but he stayed on his feet, and his speed carried him. His fist smashed home. Pitts recoiled, unable to strike in time to crack Steele's head.

Steele followed through. All his weight was behind his fist. Pitts dropped, rolled, went thumping down the steep descent. If he had been conscious, he could have kept to the path that led to the water, the path he had seen from the deck of the *Selene,* the one he had sought as a last resort. But he was senseless when he rolled from the path, and began falling, with only rocky tongues to tear him as they broke the descent.

Steele lay there for minutes. He heard the shouting in the village. Rankin was calling. Natives with torches began spreading about the village. Steele was breathless, exhausted, it was over and he was glad that he had not killed his man with a weapon. This was vengeance, yet Pitts' own guilty panic had made it fatal.

When Steele rose to go down to the village, he was thinking, "Father Pierre says vengeance belongs to God. Poi Utu says the gods use men as weapons. They're both right."

CHAPTER XVI

GIVE A MAN A SHIP

WHEN he returned to Rankin's bungalow, he found Garvey still unconscious. Tiaré was crying over Nito, kissing him and holding his battered head on her knees.

Steele knelt, but only long enough to notice something that escaped Tiaré

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Kidneys may need help the same as bowels, so ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(ADV.)

in her grief and worry. Nito winked and nudged his foster brother, then let out another groan that broke the girl's heart. Tiaré clutched him convulsively.

Cornelia said, "She wouldn't let me touch him! And I always thought she was crazy about *you!*"

Cyril Rankin was giving Garvey whiskey. When he could sit up, the British Resident said: "As I was saying, I arrest you for unlawful use of firearms, obstructing justice, aiding a criminal to escape."

"Huh?" Garvey blinked stupidly.

Steele said, "Pitts deserted you. There is no rescue party. The *Selene* made sail, and here you are."

Rankin nodded gravely.

The next morning, after a night in irons, Garvey was taken out on the veranda. The *Selene* was gone. Rankin said to the prisoner, "Your employer left you to face serious charges. While I promise nothing, there is a chance that if you tell what you know about the wreck of the *Falcon,* I'll not report your drawing a pistol."

"Huh? Listen—"

Steele said, "I told Mr. Rankin every detail I could. He made a good deal out of the fact that there was no cargo in the hold of the *Falcon.* That never meant a thing to me, of course."

"But it does to me," Rankin said. "She left San Francisco with sugar plantation machinery for Samoa. Before she reached her destination, she struck a reef, and the machinery seems to have evaporated. There was also a valuable perishable cargo, all insured. Since the machinery must have disappeared before the *Falcon* was wrecked, we must conclude that the perishable things didn't perish at alll, but were sold."

Steele had begun to get the real point. He said, "If the *Falcon* had not been riding empty, she'd never have landed high and dry. She'd have torn her bottom out on the reef."

"Hurricane tidal wave," Garvey stormed.

Rankin said, "There was a hurricane, yes. But Steele says Father Pierre kept a diary for years. That he has the exact date of the wreck. We'll see whether the *Falcon* was run onto the reef during *a hurricane, or at the tail end of one.* With false entries in your log, you used the hurricane to conceal the sale of your cargo."

"You can't trap me! What do you want to know?"

"You don't have to tell me anything. I'll hold you till the next boat, and in the meanwhile, Pitts will be taking steps to protect himself against these rumors of murder."

Garvey was sweating, for all his defiance. Steele said, "Nobody will believe what you say in your defense. Better save yourself, or you'll end with that murder credited to you. Look how you nearly convicted me through Duval's blackbirding."

"Who says so?"

"Poi Utu listened a lot, Garvey."

Garvey spent a minute looking at Rankin. "All right. We looted the *Falcon.* Warren Steele got wise. That worried me. It worried Pitts. The wreck gave him his chance. I didn't see it done but he as good as admitted it. So the dirty rat is going to let me sweat, huh? I'll sink him—he can't dump on me—I been his stooge for twenty years —I wasn't good enough to come ashore until he got into trouble. All right, Rankin, I'll make a deposition, I'll get that skunk if it takes till judgment day—"

And so he did. He signed the deposition. He flung the pen down, said,

"Okay, Limey. Now where's your British sporting blood? Do I go free, or don't I?"

"There are no charges for drawing a weapon," Rankin said. "Whatever the insurance company wants to do about your fraud is no business of mine."

"I don't care! Murdering a woman —I never could swallow that, and with what Steele says about that witch doctor's skull pile, I'll back you to a finish."

"It is finished," Rankin said. "I had some villagers tow the *Selene* around the headland, out of your sight. Borden Pitts is dead. From resisting arrest."

"Why, you double-dealing—!" Garvey howled, and lunged for the paper he had just signed. "You frame me—"

Steele thrust out his foot. Garvey tripped, sprawled on the floor, and caught a handful of straw matting instead of the deposition. Rankin said, "Here, here! There'll be added charges, attempting to destroy court records." But what cooled Garvey was the truncheon that the British Resident smacked across his head.

THE next day, Rankin and Cornelia and Steele boarded the *Selene*. Native police were in charge. Cornelia said, "This yacht belonged to my father, years ago. He sold it to Pitts, to recoup from the loss of a parcel of pearls. But in spite of that sale, we went from bad to worse, and finally lost our plantation. And I took a position as Pitts' secretary. I've often thought that father was being blackmailed, year after year and never out of debt."

They watched Rankin's methodical search of the yacht. The safe contained records of many of Pitts' transactions. Some went years back. They exposed the hidden details of copra theft, pearl poaching, blackbirding; always some hardy but dull-witted South Sea character had carried the ball, and had let Pitts take most of the profits.

"And to think I worked for him!" Cornelia was aghast. "I never suspected —really, I didn't—I never saw these things before—"

Rankin chuckled. "No wonder he trusted you with all the details of his legitimate enterprises, Miss van Houten. He was working day and night keeping the records of shady deals like these." He ruffled some more papers. "Hello! Look at these, Steele—I dare say this is a disguised account of your little experiment in—er—labor recruiting!"

Apparently, it was a transaction in mining machinery. But the dates and the amounts involved indicated that Pitts had received a cut of the $15,000 which Corbeau had stolen in Port Moresby. Rankin went on, "Garvey was just one of his tools. It will be months before all this can be cleared up."

"What will happen to the *Selene?*" Steele asked. "She's a beauty."

"All Pitts' assets in British territory will be liable to seizure."

His work completed, Rankin left Cornelia and Steele in the saloon. The carved teak, the mellowed leather, the polished brass: it fascinated Steele so that he forgot for a moment that he had dealt justice, that he could now go back to Ua Paepae, that Garvey's statement would clear him with French law.

When he looked up, he saw that her eyes were wet with tears. "Father loved this yacht. If he could only get her back."

Steele rose, and laid a hand on her shoulder. "Do you know, I don't think Rankin found the half of it!"

"What do you mean?"

"Pitts' so-called friendship for your father. It reminds me of the way he was going to 'help' me. If anyone blackmailed your father, it was Pitts. And with everyone else mentioned in the secret files, why isn't he?" He caught her by both arms, lifted her to her feet. "You know this ship! Where else could things be hidden? Now's our chance—"

He stepped to a porthole. Rankin was almost at the pier. Cornelia sighed. "It's been years. How could I remember?"

He paced up and down the saloon. There was a Boukhara rug on the teak deck; mulberry colored, with octagons of blue and white and red.

"If he was being blackmailed, the evidence may fall into someone else's hands, and some other crook will carry on where Pitts left off. Officials lead a dangerous life. A harmless slip is enough to disgrace a man. Look how I was taken in for recruiting labor!"

Cornelia cried out. "Oh! Wait—" She ran to the far corner of the saloon. "There used to be a compartment, built into the bulkhead. A painting concealed it, but the painting's gone, now."

Steele joined her. Minutes of squinting at the seasoned woodwork succeeded. At just the right angle, he could see where a painting had once hung. Cornelia said, "You press something along the moulding. Oh, if I could only get in touch with Father!"

"You'd not have time."

FINALLY he found a knob, the center of one of the flowers in the carved border. A panel swung out. There was a parcel. Steele tore the strings from it.

"No documents in this," he said. "Rattles a bit."

She snatched it, took off the lid. There were pearls bedded in cotton. Large pearls, perfectly matched. Cornelia's color changed. She stared at them, open mouthed. When she could speak, she said, "Look—pinkish, and pear shaped—forty of them—graduated in size—he didn't dare sell them until he found a crooked buyer—"

"What? Who?"

"Pitts couldn't! These must be Father's pearls. Don't you see, selling them one at a time would bring only a tenth as much as selling the matched set—oh, of course, you'd not understand, but I know I'm right! They weren't lost or stolen, they were extorted! Looking back at it all, I see now—our enemy, smiling friend of the family—"

Steele closed the panel. "I've dealt private justice, you'll have to do the same. Establishing a claim on these would take months, it might never be established. Your father might have to explain too much. And we've not yet found evidence of blackmail."

"They were worth a million *guilders,*" she whispered. "But it was worth a lot more, your exposing Pitts, cracking his smooth front."

. . . Months later, Steele was telling Father Pierre of all the things that had happened. Poi Utu was at the place of skulls; the priest had persuaded him that the Christian dead do not haunt people, that it would be better to put the gruesome relics back in the grave he had opened, years ago. Nito and Tiaré had picked a site for their home, and friends helped them build it. Old Torkusa sat listening to his adopted son's story.

Above the laughter and chatter and music of the villagers who were getting ready to celebrate the marriage of a king's son and the loveliest girl on the island, there came a shout: *Vaka mutu!* Sail ho!"

"I wonder who it is this time?"

Father Pierre rose. He got his glasses, and looked out the window. "It's the *Aguila.*"

Steele grimaced, then laughed. "Whoever's in command, he won't make us any trouble, Father. You're here, this time."

Later, they met the skipper. He handed Steele a letter, then stood there, chewing his cigar.

Poi Utu came down from the *paepae.* "Good news, Matalaa! Open it—here, my hands don't shake!"

The letter was from Cornelia. The skipper broke in, saying, "I may as well tell you, Mr. Steele. You're the new owner of the *Aguila.* But read and see what she says!"

Steele read. As they went back to the priest's house, he said, "The investigators cleared up all the details. Bull Garvey got a short sentence. Cornelia's father has bought back the old plantation. The British Resident did find the papers Cornelia and I couldn't, and he destroyed them.

"Everything is all right. Selling the pearls—well, there was plenty left, and when Borden Pitts' estate went up at auction, she bought me the *Aguila.*"

The skipper said, "They tell me you're a good seaman, sir. Won't be long before you have your ticket. I have another berth waiting, so don't lose any time."

Steele took the skipper's hand. "I won't!" Then, to the priest: "Father Pierre, you sent me out to meet my own people. Now that I have a ship, I can sail."

"Where to, Matalaa?" Nito and Tiaré had come running. "When, Matalaa?"

"After the wedding. And you might guess where. To Java, to learn the ways of the Dutch."

THE END

The perilous seas are not yet swept free of rogues and scoundrels, and adventure still confronts the strong and the brave. . . . Another thrillingly colorful exploit of *Steele, The White Savage* will be published in the August issue of Red Star Adventures

Fool's Honor

By Lurton Blassingame

Hal Connor had only one law: Never to break his word. And so it came about that when he found the man he had promised to kill, Connor had to fight at his side to defend him from death

Complete Novelet

I

NO TRAIL leads through the Ser Chen valley. Toward the northern end the thousand-foot sandstone cliffs narrow and the valley is choked with fallen timber. To force its way through, Connor's caravan stretched out, single file, a ribbon of men and mules.

Where the valley is narrowest it was ambushed.

The fragrant smell of juniper was suddenly rancid with the acid bite of black powder; the peaceful sing-song of the Yunnan men was cut off by the roar of matchlocks echoing against the blood-red cliffs. Drivers screamed; mules went down threshing in the underbrush. At the mouth of the valley a covey of black and white Tibetan pheasants rose with a drumming of wings like a cavalry charge.

At the first shot Hal Connor drew his mule to a halt. Even in this crisis his mind did not work rapidly. Given half a chance his boys, former bandits all of them, could fight their way free. But all rifles were strapped to the mules, and the firing was heaviest ahead. Swinging his big sandy head around he saw there was a bare chance of retreating, but the thought of leaving his men did not occur to him. He kicked his mule forward, cursing himself for not having scouted the valley before starting the day's march.

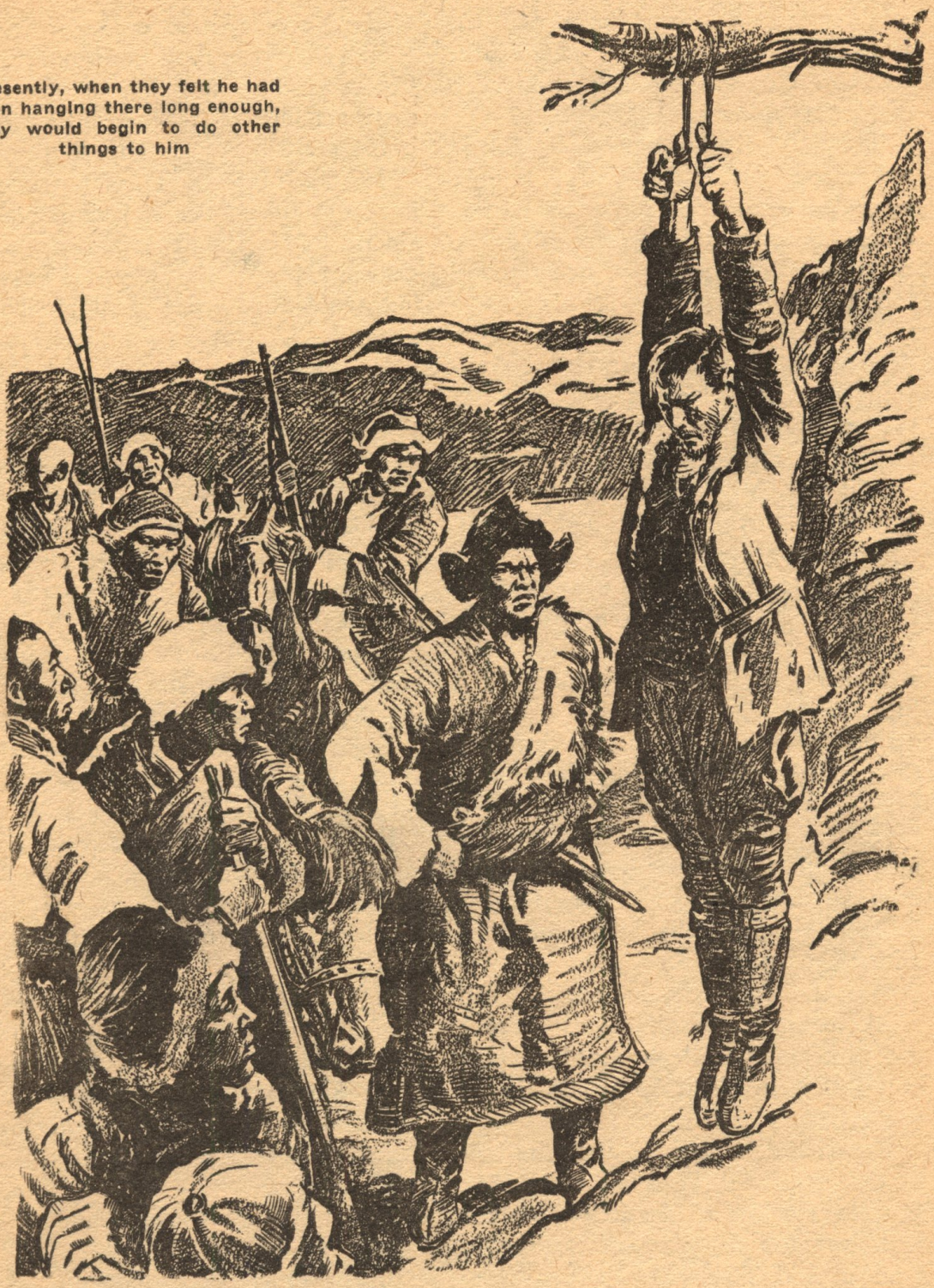
From the pandemonium ahead he knew there was little chance of getting his men free, or of returning. His bearded face became more serious; the left eyelid, which drooped perpetually as if he were solemnly winking at the world, dropped even lower.

A dozen feet away a fox-skin cap appeared over the top of a boulder. Connor drew his forty-four with smooth, ponderous deliberateness and shot the wearer.

"Tsokhar men," he said aloud. And as a yak-skin coated figure stepped from behind a juniper, he fired again.

A puzzled expression came over his face. The heavy Colt dropped as the rider swayed in the saddle. Under him the frightened mule whirled. The heavy figure seemed to shrink as it rolled sideways, fell in an ungainly heap across a rotting log.

CONNOR had an impression of floating through space filled with flying tree branches that struck his head jarringly. Then he was dumped heavily on the ground. Something was



Presently, when they felt he had been hanging there long enough, they would begin to do other things to him

slipped around his thumbs, drawn tight.

He was lifted again; the weight on his thumbs increased until pain, shooting down his arms, brought him back to complete consciousness.

Lifting his head he saw ropes of twisted cane fiber about his thumbs; from these he was suspended from a century-old juniper that leaned out from the western canyon wall. The

sun's rays were creeping down the wall, revealing the scarred side of the red cliff cut into the formation of a castle far above him.

The agony in his hands was almost unbearable now. It felt as if his thumbs were being torn out. Flames burned along his arms and into his shoulders. Stretching his legs down he managed to get a little purchase with his toes.

Twenty men were around him dressed in patched clothes and yak-skinned coats. The stench of their bodies coiled from them with every passing breath of air. The smell alone should have warned him of the trap. But his own men stank to high heaven, and he was none too clean.

The taste of blood was in his mouth. Drops of it trickled from his beard, rolled down his clothes toward his straining toes. His left lid dropped a little lower; but his brown eyes remained gravely placid as he watched three of the Tsokhar bandits build a fire over a bushel of small stones. When the rocks were thoroughly hot the men would disembowel him quite cleverly, so that he would live through it, and then his belly would be filled with the heated rocks.

Well, he would not cry out. He had tried to make the Tibetans respect the white man while he lived, and he hoped that in death he would do no worse.

He wished, of course, that the bullet that grazed his head had killed him. But the shadow of death had walked with him for six years of trading in Yunnan and Tibet where other white men seldom came, and where unnoticed wars swept away whole villages.

He didn't fear death—not too much.

An eagle was lighting on a wind-hewn rock tower across the valley. From far away came the sullen murmur of the Yangtze in its deep gorge. And there were trees. It was more like Colorado than any bit of this wild eastern fringe of Tibet he had seen.

He set himself stolidly to think of Colorado. If he could think hard enough he could forget the sickening tear of sinews in his thumb joints, the dizziness in his head, the red rocks growing hot under the sweet-smelling juniper fire.

THERE was no warning for what happened then. Once more the quiet of the Ser Chen Valley was split by the crash of guns. But this time the crack of rifles was a mere obligato to the continuous, full-throated roar of a shotgun. The last of the six shots was over before the echo of the first had fully mingled with the crash of underbrush and the wild shouts that marked the flight of the Tsokhar bandits.

Eight men lay upon the red shale at the foot of the cliff, three of them very still, the rest rolling in pain.

From a tree fifty yards away a tall man came forward, his lips drawn back in laughter. Behind him were two Tibetans, with modern carbines in their hands.

"Bei Gott!" the white man exclaimed, "the shot gun with the buck-shot load, she is hard to beat, *nein?* Look how many I get—and those others, they carry some pellet with them, you bet! One minute, you. I take you down."

He cut the grass ropes and caught Connor as he stumbled.

"Easy, easy," he cautioned. "I give you yet a drink, then I fix your head." And to his men, "Dunderheads! After those cowards."

Connor wanted to talk, but he found it too difficult. He lay back on the shale and took in the man who had

come to his aid. Tall, and almost skeleton-thin. Long black hair over dark, amused eyes. A fresh scar running across a jutting chin. Long nose, high forehead. Hunting coat, stained and fur-lined, khaki trousers, soft boots.

"It is good, *nein,* that this mountain air carries sound so well?" the stranger said. "I hear shots and later I see a mule running free. The saddle was no Tibetan saddle. I think I am the only white man in this country, but I come quiet and quick. And I collect some more specimen for my museum." He laughed again and gestured toward the dead and wounded Tsokhars.

Hal Connor tried to sit up, but the tall man pushed him back. From his belt he removed a small emergency kit and began to cleanse the wound on Connor's head.

"You keep still now, let me talk. *Ach, Gott,* it has been the long time since I talk to a white man. Later you talk but now you listen while I work.

"I am Professor Gustav Erichson. Leipzig University, she lets me wander for her just so I send back the new specimen." He talked on, laughing occasionally, while he worked. He had been in Mongolia, and from there had worked southeast to secure wapiti. Then he had turned southwest into Tibet to secure blue sheep and other likely specimens. "Vell," he concluded, "your head, it is too thick to be bad hurt. You talk now."

Connor sat up and stuck out his hand. Erichson smiled and waved it aside. "That thumb, he give you trouble for a few days. I will not squeeze him now."

"Just the same," Connor said, his slow drawl intensified by emotion, "I reckon you know I appreciate what you done. I ain't much on talkin', but if there's anything I can do for you now or later, you just let me know. Whatever it is I'll have a try at it."

"But you are American," Erichson interrupted. "Seeing you against the tree grim as the bull dog, it was English I thought you."

"Yeah," Connor said, relieved to have his thanks interrupted. "Yeah, from Montana. Been tradin' in Yunnan an' up this way for six years."

"THEN you are the Hal Connor I I have heard about. Of this country you know more than anyone else. Now I do the offer accept you made me. Some time I may call on you. For what do you trade this time?"

"Nothin'. That is, tradin's a sideline this trip. Down in Saigon the Frenchies asked me to look up a man for them. He was one of their agents, but sort of wild. Never got over the War.

"They sent him to Burma on a ticklish job an' he used his connections to rob a rich rajah of his jewels and fav'rite wife. Naturally that put the Frenchies in bad. The English looked for him, but instead of headin' for the coast he hit northeast into Yunnan—he'd been up there several times from Saigon on vacations. The British found the woman, but he got away. The French can't go into Yunnan official, but they've got to do somethin' about the theft.

"So, since I traded up that way, they asked me to keep an eye open for him. There's money in it if I bring him or the jewels back, or if he dies sudden.

"I picked up the trail in Yunnan, but he'd gone north. I followed along." His tone was as casual as if his month's trip into bandit country, following always the faintest clues and

rumors, was no more than going from one city pool-room to another. To Hal Connor it *was* that simple. He was a simple man who lived by a simple code. If he made a promise, he kept it.

"You haven't heard of him—Claud Varrone? He's stout an' has light brown hair. Uses the expression *'C'est la guerre'* a heap. That's what they call him in Saigon—*'C'est la guerre'* Varrone."

Erichson nodded. "Perhaps I have. There was the rumor of the white man to the north, but it was said to be you."

"No," Connor said. "No. Wasn't me."

He looked at the fire, which was dying down now so that he could see the little curls of heat rising from the rocks that had been intended to take the place of his insides. A slight shudder shook his frame. He wasn't very much *afraid* of death, but God! it was good to be alive.

A wave of gratitude swept over him. "My life's his," he thought; "if I can use it for him, I'll have to do it." He nodded.

"I'm goin' down an' see about my men," he explained to the German. "I let 'em get trapped."

He found his legs weak as a child's when he tried to move away. Once he fell, and again he would have fallen if Erichson, following, had not caught him.

"Fool," the professor laughed, "you are not ready yet to be playing in the woods. They down there are dead already yet. Rest."

"They're my men," Connor said as if that explained everything.

They went then through the brush, the tall man helping the thickset one. But the Tsokhars had been before them. Throats were cut where bullets had not done the work with sufficient swiftness, so that the valley was rich with blood.

Twice Erichson protested the waste of time and effort, but Hal Connor pushed on. At the end he was rewarded, for he found his head boy, Tai Chu-lung, lying on his side and spitting blood. A bullet had gone through his open mouth and out his cheek, and in falling he had hit his head. The Tsokhars, seeing the blood-covered face and the still form, had thought him dead.

They bandaged Tai where he lay, and when the three of them returned to the cliff they found Erichson's boys with several of the Tsokhar ponies and those of Connor's mules that had not been killed. All his baggage was there, for the bandits had stopped for nothing.

"You have had enough of fighting, my friend," Erichson said. 'I now move south toward Yunnan. There will be protection for you, conversation for me, if you go. After resting you can gather more men to search for this *C'est la guerre* Varrone."

Connor's slow brown eyes took in the mass of tumbled mountains to the northwest. Erichson had said, some time back, that he had heard of a white man being there. "I'll push on to Radja," he said slowly.

"If I can be of no further help," the German said with a shrug, "I return to my party. My ponies are down the valley. But I think I waste my time in saving you, Herr Connor. Only a strong party can live in these hills. You have no party, yet you make the search for a man whose name is War. *Auf Wiedersehen.*"

Connor looked at the tall man, then at his hands, swollen and discolored. Once more he was swept by a wave of

gratitude. He wanted somehow to say all he felt, but it was difficult to find words. Erichson, watching him, laughed and swung away, the Browning automatic shotgun cradled in his arm.

"Don't forget," Connor called after him, "if I can help you, let me know."

"I will not forget," Erichson shouted back. He was laughing loudly, as at some huge joke, when the junipers swallowed him from sight.

II

IT WAS not past noon when Connor and Tai began the push on to Radja. The thin, cold air was a tonic to both men. Ridge after ridge they climbed; went down through forests of spruce and, on the higher reaches, rhododendron shrubs covered with a snow of blossoms.

It was June and there had been no snow in three weeks. Elk crashed from thickets and, when they paralleled the gorge of the Yellow River, a blue sheep with a curve of horns that almost reached the ground went bounding down a cliff like a puffball.

In the afternoon they rested long enough to make tea. In the saddle again Connor chewed cold wapiti meat as he rode. He had counted on reaching Radja that night, and he was a methodical man who did not like to change his plans. If Varrone was in the mountains within fifty miles, the Living Buddha of Radja would know. And until the Frenchman's whereabouts and strength were known it was useless to make plans for his capture.

Darkness climbed swiftly to wipe the last of the light from the mountain peaks. But Connor had visited Radja once before. Two hours of steady traveling through the night and his pony's feet clicked sharply on the rocky trail that leads down to the lamasery in the valley of the Yellow River. Like a whisper of wind word of his coming was taken to the Living Buddha, and men were on hand to care for his mules and to show him to the chanting room that had been assigned him.

Tallow lamps sputtered in wall brackets, their flickering light revealing the painting of the God Amnyi Machen riding a white horse across the peaks of the mountain range. Below the God, on a dragon, was the Goddess of Springs; and Amnyi Machen's wife rode a deer through the air.

In the chapel beyond, the semi-precious stones that studded a chorten winked in the shifting light. The thing would sell for a good price in Saigon; but it could not be bought for it supposedly held the enemy of the mother of Tsongkapa, founder of the *Gelugpa* sect of Buddhists. Connor glanced at it, shrugged, and set to work putting a fresh dressing on Tai's face.

He was spreading a sleeping bag when a lama announced that the Living Buddha would have tea with him. For a brief moment Connor's face broke into one of his rare, boyish grins. On his previous trip he had promised to show the Buddha that foreigners did not enter into the bodies of eagles when they flew. And the holy man was too curious to wait until morning.

The willow-wood stairs squeaked under Connor's weight as he followed the yellow robe of his guide. The filth of a hundred years gritted beneath his feet. The wind down-canyon shook the building.

A tinkling greeted him as he approached the reception room. When a door opened the tinkling swelled. Clocks and watches of every size hung

from the ceiling or stood along the walls, ticking, striking, chiming, cuckooing at will, for each had its own time. Across a floor uneven from the droppings from thousands of meals sat the Living Buddha of Radja, a leather miter on his round head. Near the dais stood a short, thick-set Tibetan dressed in gold brocade—Cha Gomba, the Buddha's steward and general.

Connor repeated the universal prayer of the mountain people—*"Om mani padme hum."* There were greetings then and he presented his present, a child's toy aeroplane, the propeller driven by a rubber band. Gutturals of surprise followed its flight across the room and the explanation that Connor's people used much bigger planes that made as much noise as the Yangtze in its canyon.

THE lama interpreter served tea, taking the bowls from a pile of manure in the corner and wiping them with a corner of his dirty robe. When the tea and water were mixed, a box of yak butter was passed around, each man scooping a bit with his fingers and adding it to the tea together with bits of *tsamba* which were in another compartment of the box.

Awkwardly Connor pretended to drink. He was not squeamish but he mistrusted Tibetan hygiene. This time his thumbs gave him an excuse. He put down his cup, exhibited his swollen hand.

"Lha rgellah—The Gods are victorious," he said, and through the interpreter told his story. There was no anger in his drawling tones, no surprise in his audience. Connor understood the psychology of the wild tribes.

"Has an *Urussu* been heard of in the mountains?" he asked. All white men are Russians to the Tibetans. "One who came from the south, many days march?"

The air of the room was suddenly heavy with hostility. The Living Buddha's round face became impassive. The man in gold brocade fingered the dagger at his side. Clocks chimed, wind flickered the light of the butter lamps. Cha Gomba spoke at last.

His voice was low-pitched but it was singularly impressive.

Yes, he admitted, there was an *Urussu* to the west. He had come with modern guns and was with the Rimong clan of the Ngoloks. For years the Rimong had kept his people from making the pilgrimage to the Amnyi Machen Mountains; now with the white man they raided near Radja. Three lamas had been killed, a dozen ponies and fifty yaks stolen. The Rimong had even threatened to raid the monastery. The *Urussu* was a devil. Was Hal Connor his friend?

"I've come to kill him," Connor said simply. "How can I find him?"

"What the Tsokhars maim the Rimong will destroy," Cha Gomba announced.

"Maybe. But I've got to get Varrone —the *Urussu*. Go with me with your men an' we'll open the way to Amnyi Machen."

The steward scowled. He did not want to admit he was afraid, but Connor had no armed men. He looked toward the Living Buddha, but the small man on the dais seemed lost in meditation.

III

THROUGH the ticking of the clocks pounded the distant drum of a horse's feet. Voices called out; feet pattered through the lamasery. The

horse pounded into the courtyard. A monk began a chant and a wail of voices rose in confusion.

The door opened and a wave of sound preceded a man into the room. He flung himself on his face before the impassive Buddha, rose as far as his knees. Words tumbled from his mouth and the Living Buddha of Radja was shaken from his meditation.

"What's happened?" Connor asked the interpreter beside him.

"Om mani padme hum," the man chanted and then broke into a wail of anguish. "The Rimong. A small party led by the *Urussu* attacked a cursing party we had sent out. But our party was in two parts; the rear fell on the Rimong and killed all but the *Urussu.* But the boy Buddha was with the small party in front and his spirit has departed from him. Our men hunt the *Urussu* and this one has come for help."

Connor stirred restlessly, a light in his brown eyes. The end of the trail was close at hand. Varrone was within a few hours of him, a hunted man. By killing the boy Buddha he had done what Rimong raids could not do —inflamed the lamas to action. If Connor could be present when Varrone was captured, and find out where the Frenchman had hidden the rajah's jewels. . . .

In a way Varrone had played right into his hands; his rashness had won for Connor enormously powerful allies. His eyes hardened.

He looked at the Living Buddha's round yellow face marred now by grief and hate. The child Buddha had been his nephew, son of Cha Gomba. The steward's face was unpleasant to see. Through his son he had kept his hold over the Radja people, and perhaps he had loved him too

Connor turned to the interpreter. "Ask Cha Gomba if he's goin' to let him get away with this. Ask him if now he'll go with me tomorrow. Tell him I have good rifles."

Around the room clocks ticked as the Living Buddha made a compact with Hal Connor. Five hundred men would be put in the field by sunup. Connor would go with them and stay until the Rimong had been punished; they would stay until the *Urussu* had been captured or killed.

They parted then, the Living Buddha and Cha Gomba to gather their men. That done, the party would go to the mountain back of the town to burn juniper twigs and pray for success. Connor started for his room to dress his head and get some sleep.

Carrying a small lamp that flared and distorted his shadow along the ancient walls of the lamasery, he made his way back to the chanting room. He pushed open the door, went inside, closed the door after him. The room was dark save for his lamp, though he had left others burning. Slowly he crossed the room, lit one of the wall lamps.

A vague sixth sense troubled him; something was wrong here.

"Tai?" he called softly, and moved toward the Yunnan boy's blankets.

"Tai," he said again as a figure stepped out of the clinging shadows by the chorten in the little room beyond.

"Tai's gone for a time," came the answer in perfect English, and a tall man with a fresh scar on his chin walked into the light.

"Erichson!" Connor boomed. "What the devil are you doin' here?"

"Softly." The tall figure raised a hand. "Those dogs of lamas are on the prowl."

"Yeah," Connor said mechanically. "Yeah. They're goin' up on the mountain to pray. The little Buddha's been killed by Varrone."

He spread his feet wide apart and looked at Erichson, his slow mind going back over all the facts, trying to understand the present situation. He had left the German going south while he had pushed on fast northwest to Radja. And now the man was here with blood blackening on his coat. Despite all the lamas on guard no one had heard him come. It was weird, uncanny. If that scalp wound had made him a little crazy . . .

The tall man chuckled. *"C'est la guerre.* Even Living Buddhas die. Put out that light. I'm not ready for lamas to be putting in here yet."

THE atmosphere of the room suddenly became electric. Connor could feel it at first dimly, then with increasing awareness. A premonition of trouble ran a cold finger along his spine. It was as physical as if sleet had been driven into his collar to trickle down his back. He hunched his big shoulders against it.

The gaunt man looked at him, read the bewilderment in his rugged face, chuckled. He crossed the room and blew out the light hanging against the wall. The room was suddenly filled with shadows, the darkness seeming to fight with the single remaining light, which Connor held.

The big man spoke slowly, doggedly, as if mentally he were working his way upstream against a strong current: *"C'est la guerre.* . . . Varrone. *He* was stout. But you could've lost weight. You could've dyed your hair—*he* did it before when he acted as a Chink spy for the Frenchies. Let's see your right shoulder."

"There's no need. That old bullet wound still shows. You can rest your mind a bit before you wear it out. I'm Claud Varrone."

The two white men faced each other silently. The wail of mourning lamas, the scuffle of men's feet on rocks, the barking of excited dogs beat in upon them through the window. Death, slow and horrible, stalked out there for the white man who had killed the second Living Buddha of Radja.

"That attack on the Buddha—you wasn't in it?" he asked.

The gaunt man squatted on his heels. Behind him his shadow bulked black and dangerous against the wall.

"Oui. I was there. The rear of the boy's column came up too soon. But we would have gotten away all right if those fool Rimong hadn't discovered they'd killed a Buddha. The mountains are thick with Buddhas, but you know how superstitious these fools are. My boys lost their heads, threw away their guns. The lamas rode us down. I had to run for it, this way.

"I knew you would be here, and I slipped in. Tai was sitting outside, almost gave me away. But he brought me in." Varrone chuckled. "Fourteen years ago this month I was a spy, running around Metz. Germans were after me like dachshunds smelling for sausage! *Mon dieu!* I almost had to turn into a pretzel to get away. Believe me, I was a better German then than I was this morning."

HAL CONNOR'S broad face was troubled as he looked at the sardonic figure squatting before him.

"You're Claud Varrone," he said. "I promised the French I'd get the jewels you stole, an' I promised the Buddha an' Cha Gomba I'd help them get you for killing Cha's son. I reckon

there's no need of them goin' up the mountain now."

Varrone looked at him and the Frenchman's voice was soft when he spoke. "I've heard of you in Saigon and Yunnan. Do you think I would have come here if I didn't know you were a man of your word?"

"I try to be, but I promised them . . ."

The Frenchman interrupted. "This morning I saved your life. You said then if I ever needed help, I was to call on you. I'm calling now."

The Frenchman's eyes mocked him; Varrone knew Connor was trapped.

The lamplight flickered in the cold air. The chant of men marching grew farther away as the Buddha led his people up the mountain to burn juniper twigs to Amnyi Machen. Connor listened to the noise, his plain face twisted with his inner struggle. He had always kept his word, and now he was trapped by it. Varrone's shadow was an evil presence in the room.

"Yeah," Connor said. "Yeah, I promised." He drew his revolver, held it out. "I don't know why you saved me this mornin', but you did. Take this an' beat it. Vamoose—*pronto!* It's your best chance. They'll be comin' back soon an' tomorrow they'll start after you."

Varrone shook his head toward the gun, laughed aloud. "I'm going with you in the morning."

Connor started visibly.

'It won't work," he said doggedly. "They know I was the only white man came in an' Tai was the only boy with me. They'll tear us both apart in the mornin'."

Varrone rocked with silent mirth. "Tell me," he begged, "if you weren't a sergeant?"

"Sure." Connor was puzzled. His big hands clenched and unclenched. "I started as a private though with the Sixty-fifth Canadians in 'Fifteen. Corporal in 'Sixteen, sarge in 'Seventeen."

A delighted chuckle greeted his words. "I knew it! You have a typical sergeant's imagination! But you see, *mon ami,* I went in as a lieutenant and came out as a major—served in the Intelligence. And I don't expect your dear Buddha to know me tomorrow when I go hunting for myself. I'll go as your servant, Tai."

"Tai?"

Connor stiffened. That sense of evil pervading the room was stronger now. He had wondered where Tai was, but had put the question aside while he dealt laboriously with the bigger problem that confronted him.

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"Where's Tai?" he asked, his voice thick. Even in the dim light it was evident his face had reddened with anger beneath the blood-stained bandage. "You've sent him away?"

"On a long trip," Varrone admitted. "Sorry to inconvenience you, and all that, but—*C'est la guerre!*—it was Tai or me. His face was bandaged, so it will be very easy."

IV

CONNOR'S face was terrible to see. "By God!" he cried hoarsely. "It's too much!"

Connor swung around to his bed roll, fumbled and brought out out a thirty-eight Savage automatic. His heavier gun he flung at Varrone. The man let the gun strike his body, slide down to the floor, but made no effort to touch it.

In three steps Connor was on him. His left hand swept out and down and there was the thud of flesh on flesh. The force of the open-handed slap knocked Varrone over. He sat up, his eyes like a wolf's; but he made no move toward the gun.

"I hold you to your promise," he said quietly.

"Fight!" Connor commanded. "Fight! Damn you. Why did you save me this mornin'? I wish you hadn't." He struck Varrone again, knocked him over. "Fight!" he sobbed.

Varrone crawled to his feet, leaving the heavy revolver on the floor. "If I killed you, I'd be killed," he said wearily. "I'm not ready to die. Besides, if you kill me now you won't get the jewels you promised those imbecile French in Saignon. I claim the help you promised."

Connor stepped back. His big body seemed to sag as if all the strength had gone out of him. In the stillness his panting was more audible than the far-off chanting of the lamas returning from their prayers.

"All right," he said unevenly. "I'll help you. But get this: When you leave, I've done my part. After that I'm comin' for you. An' I'll get you if it's the last thing I do, so help me!"

Varrone spat blood on the floor. His face was dead-white except for the livid marks of Connor's blows, but when he spoke his voice had all its old mockery.

"You make too many promises for a person as deadly serious about them as you. You're an anachronism, really."

Connor took one step across the room. "Go on!" he pleaded hoarsely. "Go on! You'll make me forget my promise in a minute."

"You'd better turn in," Varrone advised. "I've work to do. I know it's hard having to keep your word, but hot stones in the place of your belly would have been hard too. *Mon dieu!* how that scatter-gun worked on those bandits. As good as a *chauchat.* Some of our spies with the King of Muli had sent word you were looking for me, so I came ahead to see what kind of equipment you had for catching me. And then those Tsokhars tried to spoil everything."

He clicked his teeth, smiled, and crossed the room to blow out the light. Connor recovered his revolver in the darkness and waited, listening to the sounds which came from the small room which held the chorten. A heavy body was shifted on the floor; a grunt came as Varrone lifted a heavy weight; a soft swish of garments followed. Tai's body was being hidden in the holy chorten.

The Frenchman came back into the

room. A match rasped and a tiny flare of light leaped up. Varrone lit the small butter lamp and Connor gasped. Tai seemed to stand before him, his face swathed in bloody bandages, a conical felt hat on his head.

Try as he would to avoid it, Connor's gaze went past the tall man to the dim outlines of the chorten which supposedly held the mummy of Tsongkapa's mother. How long before worshippers would discover its real contents? His fingers hardened around the guns he held and he lifted his fists to his head which ached throbbingly.

WHEN the sun rose next morning half the expedition were across the river. Rafts made of twelve inflated goatskins were used in ferrying over the Radja's men's rifles—flintlocks, old Krags, a few Mausers. Attached to the barrels were the indispensable forked sticks on which the guns were rested for aiming. Men put their clothes into other bags, tied the bags to their bodies, caught the manes of their horses, and were pulled across.

Keeping the red Radja cliffs on their right, the five hundred men rode westward. With a slow, appraising glance, Connor took in the army. In addition to his rifle, each man carried a charm box to protect himself from bullets, and many swung prayer wheels. The mad anger of the night before had worn thin and they were a little afraid of their rashness. Their eyes turned from him to the fifty yellow-robed lamas that rode with them to curse the enemy.

They rode rapidly, hoping to overtake the offending *Urussu* before he made contact with the Rimong. "They'll run away on you." Varrone whispered through the blackened bandages that covered his face. "Your crusaders are a sorry force, *mon corporal* —and the devil rides with the holy men. *C'est la guerre.*"

Connor only grunted in reply. He had not slept at all; his cheeks were slightly shrunken and his brown eyes gleamed above black shadows; but his mouth was firm and there was no hesitation in his shout of encouragement to the men.

Many men thought him stupid, and he was inclinded to agree. But his mind had the trick of tenacity; given time he reached conclusions. He had decided he was the biggest fool in the world, for in giving Varrone his chance to escape, he was breaking with the Living Buddha and with the French.

He was putting his own life in danger again; for Varrone would kill him before he ran, and he would not run until contact had been made with the Rimong. And what those bandits would do to the Radja men, he knew too well. Nevertheless, he had given his word to Varrone, and though he cursed himself, he knew he would keep it. It was his way of playing the game. His other promises he would try to fulfill later, if he lived; Varrone's could not be postponed.

The party worked its way out of the valley and crossed a vast rolling plain, spotted with giant yellow poppies, with primulas and caltha. In the Sher Lung Valley, Connor shot six deer and two elk; the party had meat that night.

The next morning the army marched through Drukh Nang, or Dragon Valley. Swaying in his saddle, apparently somnolent with his drooping eyelids, Connor watched Varrone who rode at his side. He saw the dark eyes watching the cliffs that were barren of trees here and he forced Cha Gomba to keep his men from wandering.

They rode into the Hcha Chen Valley just at dusk, camping in the clear so that they could not be surprised. The valley was alive with game, and Connor killed three wapiti which, with the two sheep he had secured in the hills during the day, helped in feeding the men.

He was far out on the valley floor when he made his last kill and turned back toward the camp. Fires were going and he noticed a heavy column of smoke ascending from one. As he watched it broke off, started again. His horse grunted under the thrust of the spurs; leaving the last wapiti, Connor rode hard for the camp.

Varrone was heating water for tea when Connor threw himself from his saddle. He stalked through the camp and kicked out the smouldering fire that was little better than a smudge. With a backhand blow, he rocked Varrone to his heels, then laughed as he saw hate leap at him from the other's dark eyes.

"Cook on the fire of someone who knows enough to get dry wood," he directed and turned away.

Later he ate with Cha Gomba, leaving Varrone to eat his own cooking. There was no need to take a chance of being poisoned.

V

THE horses and mules were brought in close that night, staked in a square around the close-packed men. Strong sentry posts were thrown out, order was roughly established. Connor was all energy now; in his rough mackinaw he moved ponderously through the camp, the yellow robe of the interpreter and the brocade of Cha Gomba beside him. He sensed that a showdown was coming. It lifted the weight of worry from him; his muscles felt no longer clogged.

The fires died down. Connor made up his bed, rolled in. Fifteen minutes later he slipped out, a bulk of shadow, and took his place with the outpost nearest the mountain pass through which they had come.

. . . As if to herald the sunrise, a rifle barked from the far side of the valley, and echoed clear as a bell among the cliffs. The first ray of light showed gray and brown figures scurrying like rabbits across the green of the valley—the outposts coming in.

When Connor reached it, the camp was an anthill of activity. Prayer wheels whirred; the chant, *"Om mani padme hum"* seemed to hang like invisible smoke above the curses of men as they packed the horses. Rimong were in the hills and the valor of the Radja men was gone. Cha Gomba was raging, but the men, maddened by fear, were out of control.

Connor plowed through the camp like a tractor. Little lights danced in his brown eyes but otherwise his bearded face was expressionless. He had faced panic before in green replacements sent to fill up gaps in his company. What the men needed was another interest, and he provided it. Man after man he knocked down with cold brutality. Twice he kicked flintlock rifles from yellow hands that sought to shoot him in the back.

He halted beside Cha Gomba. "Tell your men," he directed, "that the pass back of us is full of Rimong. Tell 'em I'll shoot the first man makin' a break for it. Get 'em busy! We need all those horses with their feet tied together—make a square with them. Get the baggage in the places where there are no horses. Have a few men make tea."

Turning, he went to his bedroll and

stared down at it. The drooping lid of his left eye fluttered just a little. Stooping, he caught the handle of a knife, the blade of which was buried in the roll. When he stood up, one of his rare smiles illumined his face. Varrone had tried to knife him in the night and now was gone. His promise to Varrone was fulfilled. And now . . .

HE FLUNG up his head, searching the mountains. The Hcha Chen valley was still in shadow but the towering peaks were red and purple in the first rays of the sun. Here and there snow still clung to the crevices, pale pink in the reflected light from the rocks. As he watched, men moved like ants over the boulders. At the edge of the valley, desultory firing started.

Connor turned away, his smile gone. There had been no attack, which meant the Rimong party was small, or that it was waiting until the Radja men began a retreat, stringing out into a long file to get through the pass.

The men were muttering as they worked. Connor went among them again, helping this time, grinning, cursing them on. If the Rimong waited for them to retreat, his preparations would be finished.

To his right, men shouted. A hundred riders, their right shoulders naked to facilitate their use of the thirty-foot spears they carried, debouched from a draw across the valley. The hoofs of the shaggy ponies tramped down caltha and anemones, flung up clods of mud from the boggy land.

"Keep the men workin'," Connor directed the interpreter. "Beat 'em into it if necessary. Those fellows are just inspecting."

He found his rifle, a special Springfield fitted with telescopic sights. His thumbs were still a little sore, he noticed, balancing it. He set the sights at a thousand yards, stepped out between two ponies that had been thrown and tied, and dropped flat on his belly. Carefully he adjusted the straps and then lay waiting.

When the horses were eleven hundred yards away, he came up on his elbows. The rifle stock was cold against his cheek. A rider suddenly leaped at him as his eye lined through the sights; the spear seemed tremendously long. With weapons like this, the Mongols had followed Ghengis Kahn and swept the white man before them. But then the white man had not had repeating rifles.

Connor took a deep breath and began the trigger squeeze.

For a second or two, he hesitated, allowing the rider centered in his sights to cover those last yards to the clump of blue poppies he had estimated as a thousand yards distant. The Rimong rode carelessly, vitally alive, as if he were out for a holiday.

"I've nothin' against him," Hal Connor thought. Without warning there came into his mind Varrone's pet phrase, *"C'est la guerre."*

"That's it," he said, "I've got nothin' against him, but . . ."

The pony's front feet tramped the poppies into the soft earth. The crack of the rifle was sharp as a whip. Through the telescope Connor saw the rider somersault backward over the animal's rump while the whirling spearpoint caught the thin sunlight and flashed like quicksilver.

ACROSS the valley came a shout of surprise from the Rimong. From his own men the shout, *"Lha rgellah! Lha rgellah!"* rose victoriously. Connor worked the bolt of his rifle and waited.

The scouting party swung their horses to the right and, quickening the pace, rode around the camp in a wide circle, stopping when they blocked the entrance to the pass through which the Radja men had descended the night before.

Connor watched them gravely, trying to pick Varrone from the riders without result. The Frenchman had them hemmed in now, could hold them until the rest of the tribe came up if they were not already waiting in the hills. And if they were, he had a party ready for an attack from the rear.

Connor got to his feet and worked his way back through the inadequate barricade. To Cha Gomba he explained his program.

"We'll probably be rushed from the west. Your men are goin' to have to hold their shots 'til I tell 'em. We'll give 'em one dose of lead when they get in good range, but that won't stop 'em. You'll probably have trouble gettin' those flintlocks ready for a second shot in time. What we'll have to do is to have the men on the right take the places of the fellows who fire. We'll leave those in the rear to take care of that bunch that just went by. Tell your men that if any of 'em shoot 'til I tell them, I'll blow their heads off. Now, let's practice that shift."

For half an hour, the square was confusion. Over and over Connor drove the men through the routine.

At his signal those on the west shifted to the north side of the square while those on the north came through and took their places. The Radja men were cringing, spineless. The hand of Cha Gomba and their Living Buddha had been heavy on them, and now there was the added fear of the Rimong spears.

Connor was working with the men on the south and east sides of the square when a cry of fear brought him up short. From the little draw across the valley appeared the spearhead of the Rimong army.

In a long line it swept out into the valley, more than seven hundred men armed with rifles and spears. Fighting men, all of them, fiercest clan of the Ngolok, feared raiders through all the unknown world of eastern Tibet. The spearhead of riders thickened. The columns turned, and charged.

Hal Connor's big shoulders shrugged as he looked over the square. It was not much with which to fight, but it was all he had.

A dozen yards away an excited man fired, though the Rimong were well beyond range. The sound shook Connor out of his reverie. His curses were monotonous, unexcited, as he swung over the man, grasped him by the back of the neck, yanked him to his feet. Tense yellow faces watched him. He knocked the man down, the blow starting the blood from his nose. Yanking him up, he knocked him down again, taking pains to open a cut under his eye. Four times he knocked him down while the earth began to quiver under the thudding beat of Rimong horses.

When he flung the bloody, whimpering creature back into the line no other shot had been fired, though the line of spears was only five hundred yards away.

The leaders of the advancing column swung left then, racing past just beyond effective shooting range. Along the undulating line of riders guns roared in an effort to draw a volley from the square. Skulls dangled from some of the saddles and pennants of woven human hair curled outward from the long spears.

North of the square, the column swerved in again. Glancing toward the east, Connor saw the hundred men racing in from the pass to be in at the kill.

The broad-shouldered white man pushed his way through the square and stood, a dozen yards outside it, rifle butt on the ground. If the Radja men couldn't see him, they would fire too soon; this way one might put a shot in his back, but that was a chance he had to take. He could feel the skin between his shoulders crawl in anticipation, but his face was impassive as he watched the wild charge bear down upon him.

Four hundred yards. Three hundred. Two hundred fifty. Two hundred.

VI

CONNOR pulled his rifle muzzle up, dropped forward. Over him, a hundred and twenty-five rifles roared. Then he was up on his feet again, moving back toward the barricade. His ears were ringing but he could hear the screams of the wounded, the sharp whinnying cry of agonized horses. But the soft earth still quivered under his feet as horses thundered on. The charge was unbroken.

Men scurried away from and into positions at the barricade. Connor's rifle swung along the line.

"Easy!" he shouted, unaware now that he was not understood. "Take your time! Plenty of time! Pick your men!"

Beside him, the yellow-robed interpreter shouted out his orders. To the east, the hundred riders were sweeping down, the drumming of their ponies' feet a distant echo to the main charge.

Like the sputtering discharge of firecrackers, a hundred and twenty-five rifles roared. The range was less than one hundred yards, the target wide and compact. The effect was twice as great as the first volley.

Men and horses in the forefront went down, falling heavily or sliding to a halt. Behind, there was a momentary confusion as horses stumbled or attempted to jump barriers of flesh. Riders were thrown like bags from catapults only to be trampled.

All along his line, Connor saw men throw down their rifles, turn and run. Anger boiled up in him like a flood. He still had one unneeded line. Cha Gomba, his brocaded robe muddy, was already pricking them forward with his sword. And Connor, using his rifle like a club, swung in beside him.

Even then all that saved them was the party of a hundred riders who had circled them and blocked the pass. Seeing that they would reach the barricade too late, they swung to the south to cut off fleeing men, as terriers will work together in a field to cover both ends of a rat hole. And like cornered rats, the Radja men turned and fought.

Six hundred Ngolok horsemen rode the last fifty yards toward the low square, the feet of their horses making a thunder in the valley. But there were two lines that had not fired and some of the first line had reloaded. The Rimong had fifty yards to go and three hundred rifles to face. And at that distance, there was no missing.

Death seemed to stand at the barricade with an invisible but terrible sword. The thick smoke of black powder swirled in the square and through it men fired at the wave of horses and men and spears that was there just beyond. Wild, barbaric, splendid, that wave of horsemen rode up to the barricade and met death, so that the barrier grew higher instant by instant.

Hal Connor, standing stolidly, feet braced apart, saw a wild face above a flowing horse's mane and fired. Saw another and fired again. Emptied his rifle; dropped it; drew his revolver. And there was always a rider and horse before him. When one was gone there was another in the same place or just to the right or left. Spear points appeared, leaped out and took men in the throat or belly. Some half dozen horses leaped all obstacles, gained the center of the square, but went down quickly. Few reached so far.

In all it could not have lasted more than five minutes, but Connor was never sure of the time. Then the wave was broken and four hundred men were riding away across the boggy land where the bodies of horses and men were more conspicuous than the flowers.

CONNOR slipped his revolver into its holster, fed another clip of cartridges into the Springfield. And until the Rimong were out of range, he fired slowly, steadily.

Connor sought out Cha Gomba, who seemed to have increased in size since the victory. "It's time to send a party out for water," he directed. "An' if the men want meat tonight, have 'em cut those Ngolok horses. You better have some others let our horses up for a few minutes but keep 'em close in. Have ten men clean up this camp an' cart off the refuse. Tell the others to get back to their places."

Thus he celebrated his victory. Connor was moody as he tabulated the results of the battle and went about bandaging the wounded. He had fifteen dead and thirty-three badly hurt. He was still left with less men than the Rimong, and even though his army had the confidence of victory, it wasn't to be depended on. Another attack might succeed, or they could be starved out in a week. Cha Gomba, he knew, would want to head back to Radja now, for his desire for vengeance had been sated with blood. Even if they could go unmolested, there was still Claud Varrone.

A man cried out as Connor's rough hands closed down on his shoulder at the thought of the Frenchman. With a muttered curse, he caught himself and went on dressing the fellow's wound.

It was not so much his promise to the French or to the Living Buddha of Radja; it was his promise to himself and to Varrone made in the shadowy chanting room of the lamasery. He or the Frenchman must die.

Dusk crept down from the hills. During the afternoon the Ngoloks had returned. But they were content to circle the square at six hundred yards, keeping up an irregular fire that did little damage. Connor and the two men he had furnished with good rifles more than evened the score and the enemy retired without risking a charge.

The last of the light deserted the big peaks; a chilling wind blew through the Hcha Chen. And in the darkness the Rimong prowled like wolves. The sucking thud of their ponies' feet seemed to surround the camp. Their rifles made the valley seem alive with giant firecrackers; bullets droned overhead like frightened bees or thudded dully into horseflesh or baggage. In the clear sky, the stars were frozen pinpoints of light.

Tireless, Connor circled inside the square, commending here, cursing there. He insisted on no shooting except by his special detail. There would be no general attack, he explained, while the Rimong were scattered. And even in an attack the defenders were not to fire until spears were visible at the barrier. And because of the weight of his fists and his success during the morning, he was obeyed.

NEAR midnight, the firing died down. Connor sat on a dead horse and filled his pipe. He was preparing to slide down behind the animal for a smoke when a voice, clear and mocking, hailed him from the darkness.

"Ha, *mon général,* are you awake?"

Connor stood up. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah, I'm awake. An' I'm glad you're alive, Varrone."

Even across the hundred yards, Varrone's chuckle was audible. "You wish the pleasure of my death to be more personal? Having made your vow, no one must keep you from fulfilling it—and therefore you tricked me and did not sleep in your bed last night. And now you have us beat, you think. But all Frenchmen do not hurl their columns against British squares. I was against it today, but my men held yours in too great contempt. It was good of you to teach them a lesson for me. *C'est la guerre.*

"Now, we'll settle down and starve you out, as I wished to do at first. You really are overweight, *mon général.* But if you prefer something more direct and quicker, I have a proposition to make to you."

"So I reckoned," Connor said as if tired. "Only you had to jaw first."

The voice from the darkness was filled with mock sorrow: "You are anti-social. You are away from white men for months and yet you call my elevating conversation 'jawing.' Too bad."

Connor said nothing.

"So I come to my proposition. Suppose you and I meet privately and settle this affair between us. If you win, you will have satisfied your honorable soul and discharged your obligations. I promise my men will not try to stop your return. If I win, your Radja crowd will just furnish a bit of sport for my lancers."

"You'll bring the jewels?" Connor asked.

"Oh, assuredly."

"Where'll we meet?"

"It would not do for white men to fight before 'lesser breeds.' Suppose we say the little valley beyond this one at sunup? My men will be here where you can see them and know there's no treachery on foot. Don't trouble to bring two guns. I have mine now. And"—the voice was suddenly harsh—"you will not have to slap me this

time to make me fight. All I ask is that you will be there—alone."

"I'll be there," Connor said slowly, "an' I'll come alone."

"Bon!" the voice from the darkness rang triumphantly. "It will be a good meeting, my avenger of the Boy Buddha. And now, since you have no taste for pleasant conversation, *bonne nuit."*

For some time after Varrone's chuckle had died away, Connor stood without moving, staring into the darkness. Then he settled down behind the barricade and lighted his pipe. If he saw men stirring around him or heard the wounded Rimong out on the plain, who cried out shrilly at intervals, he gave no sign.

VII

A PALE mist hung in streamers across the valley. Through it the snow-wrapped mountaintops glowed with the promise of another clear day. To the east, at the foot of the mountain range, the Rimong men and horses huddled together in a blurred mass as lacking in detail as an undeveloped snapshot.

Ten minutes after he had left the square, Connor could hardly distinguish its low outlines. He walked north, his big shoulders hunched forward against the cold. The soft valley earth was torn up by the feet of many horses. Several times he had to shift his course to avoid the stiff bodies of sprawled men and horses.

He came to the little stream that runs through the valley and which, turning right and then doubling back on itself, leads into the valley beyond. Walking was easier beside it, but that way might lead to ambush. He crossed the stream and, wet to the hips, continued to the low ridge that separated the valleys. The cold bit into his legs; the water *squished* monotonously in his boots.

The mist was thinning as he reached the first outcropping of the ridge and he took the last hundred yards at a trot, his expressionless eyes searching every crevice of the ridge, his head turning occasionally to glance at the huddled mass of Rimong a mile away.

Once behind the boulders he was out of view of the valley. For twenty minutes he climbed silently sometimes on all fours. As he reached the crest the diluted rays of the sun tilted down over the higher crests and caught him for a moment before he disappeared into shadow.

He had expected the other side of the ridge to be as barren as the side he climbed, but by one of those freaks of the Tibetan ranges, it was less steep, and was spotted with rhododendron bushes that had found foothold. The trees were in flower, so that he went down from one blaze of white or pale-colored flowers to another. Halfway down he had a clear view of the valley floor. It was not more than a hundred yards wide and boulders from each ridge had rolled down to break the green surface of the grass.

On one of the boulders, Varrone was sitting, the smoke from his pipe shadowing his face. On another boulder, a hundred yards away, his rifle and revolver rested conspicuously. For some time Connor studied the valley and the opposite wall of rock.

Connor came out into the valley fifty yards from Varrone and, without greeting, moved toward him. The Frenchman jumped to his feet, right hand raised in exaggerated Fascist greeting.

"A little late," he mocked. "And I

see you have taken a morning constitutional instead of coming the easy way. Back in Radja, you struck me several times. I had to take it then. But if you'll put aside that gun you offered me before, I'll pay back that old score with interest."

Connor walked slowly to the rock on which Varrone's guns rested. Unbuckling his belt, he laid it and the holstered gun beside the others. He took off his mackinaw, laid it over the guns. His shoulders raised, the muscles rippling under the dirty shirt. When he turned to face Varrone, his features, even his brown beard, seemed hardened, as if cut from stone.

A little breeze came down the valley, rustling the rhododendron as the two men drew together. When they were twenty feet apart Varrone raised his hand for Connor to stop. Mockery was stamped on the Frenchman's thin face and purred in his voice:

"Just a minute, *mon sergent.* I must tell you that, through carelessness, I have left the jewels you wish where they have been since I first saw you. But they are not far. We can reach them easily. We go down this valley, follow the stream around into the one you left. After that, it is but a mile across to my camp.

"No, don't rush me. You are well covered. Look!"

Varrone raised his hand, whistled sharply. Immediately there was a movement behind the boulders. From places of concealment a half dozen men appeared. Four more came out of a small cave. Tall men, all of them naked to the waist. Each face was a replica of every other in its grim anticipatory smile of what would happen to this *Urussu* who yesterday had beaten them.

Varrone laughed, waching Connor, whose expression had not changed, unless his left eyelid dropped imperceptibly lower.

"It is treachery, *mon sergent.* Treachery! But—*c'est la guerre*—what could I do? My men are superstitious. They blame their defeat yesterday not to their bad judgment in attacking, but to the curses of the lamas and to your miraculous power. They were ready to turn tail and run unless I could turn you over to them. They will fight against prayer wheels or against you, but the combination, *mon sergent* . . . And would you have Major Varrone retire when he was opposed by a sergeant with an inferior force? Of course you wouldn't. And so you will come with us."

CONNOR walked forward. "I suppose," he said wearily, "there's nothin' for me to say but that you have superior forces an' to shout—*Lha rgellah!*"

The deep-toned shout seemed to fill the little valley, to bound back and forth across it. And as if by magic everywhere the sound seemed to strike a boulder or a rhododendron, it crystallized into a man. Up and down the surrounding wall of rock appeared men, dirty as the ground against which they had been pressed. There were a score of them on each side, higher up among the boulders than the Rimong men; but even as Varrone watched, they began to close in.

The Frenchman whirled, his body drawn into a bow, his face white and twisted with passion.

"Damn you!" he shouted, "you've tricked me. You promised you'd come alone. You ———!"

"Yeah," Connor admitted. "Yeah, but I figured you was too dirty to do anything straight. So I told Cha

Gomba how you used the chorten back in the chantin' room, an' I reminded him about his son that you killed. So he sent these fellows over ahead of me. They must have got here before your boys as I figgered they would. An' now you an' me have some business to settle."

Connor started forward again, walking slowly. The Frenchman looked at the rigid fixity of the approaching man. With an animal-like snarl his right hand slid under his coat and flashed out with a pistol. Once he fired, and then Connor was on him.

The roar of the explosion filled the big man's ears. Something struck him heavily in the shoulder, almost spun him around, but as he turned his right hand went out, struck something, and the pistol was a dark arc in the air.

He tried to use his left hand. It came up slowly, as if he had little control over it, and then he felt Varrone's fists smash into his face. He let the useless left hand drop, slashed out with the right. It connected and he bored in. His mind was extraordinarily clear, cool. He knew he had superior weight and that he would have to use it quickly.

Varrone was boring in steadily, his fists hammering like pistons driven with incredible power and force, his eyes wicked and glinting with the certainty of his ultimate success. A right-handed smash that caught him square across the nose changed that look a little.

Connor pushed himself forward, trying to follow up that instant of advantage. Blood hammered in his brain.

Blows smashed into his face again. He ducked his head, charged. His shoulder caught Varrone in the chest so that the man stumbled backward. Connor leaped after him, striking out. Varrone tried to clench but Connor threw his weight forward and they went down together.

The Frenchman's thin body was pliant as an eel's. Before they struck the ground he had rolled free so that Connor could not fall on him. With a twist, he was on his knees almost as soon as he hit.

Reaching up, Connor caught Varrone in the collar, yanked him back. Blows caught him in the face, a knee found its way to his stomach, but Connor held to the collar until it tore loose in his hand, leaving the other's thin neck exposed.

His hands reached out murderously.

Before Connor could secure another grip Varrone was again on his knees, but Connor rolled against him, brought him down. Once more he reached for the throat and this time his hand came in contact with a heavy cord such as the Ngoloks wear around their necks to carry charms. Connor caught both ends, twisted them over his hand, drew them taut.

He could feel his strength running from him like water, wetting his shirt, and he saw Varrone through a red haze of blood from his cut face. "I've got to hold on," Connor told himself coolly, "I've got to hold on to this."

Like an eel with a loop over its small head Varrone twisted. His body seemed tireless. He flipped himself over in a complete shoulder roll in an effort to lessen the tension of the cord around his neck. His feet kicked at Connor's body, his fists beat at the man's bearded face or tore at the right hand that held the cord.

CONNOR held on. Once Varrone's face was only inches from his and he saw the man's dark staring eyes almost bursting from their sockets, the thin lips flecked with blood.

"I'm keepin' my promise," Connor said slowly, through cut lips. "I always keep it, Varrone."

The Frenchman seemed not to hear. Then, when Connor felt he could hold on no longer, he was suddenly aware that no more struggle was going on. Varrone lay beside him very still.

Even then, expecting treachery, he did not release his grip until he felt someone lifting him, and, peering through half-closed eyes, saw the anxious face of the interpreter bending over him.

"What happened?" he asked when he was sitting up against the rock.

"Two escaped," the lama said mournfully.

"You mean—" He broke off and looked around. There was no need to ask what had happened. The dead Rimong men were sufficient answer. "An' I thought I was clear-headed," Connor finished ruefully. "But I didn't hear a shot."

He sat up, feeling painfully the terrific exhaustion that was a burning ache in his whole huge frame and in every crying inch of his flesh. A bitter smile came to his lips.

. . . It was some time later, when his shoulder was bandaged and he was ready to leave the valley, that he went over to look at Varrone. The Frenchman was quite dead, but even to the end he had tricked him—he had not brought the jewels.

Connor bent down to look at the charm which the Frenchman wore and which had turned out to be his death. Raising the man's head, he slipped the cord over it and weighed a leather bag in his hand. Slowly, he opened the string, tilted the bag, poured some of the contents into his left hand.

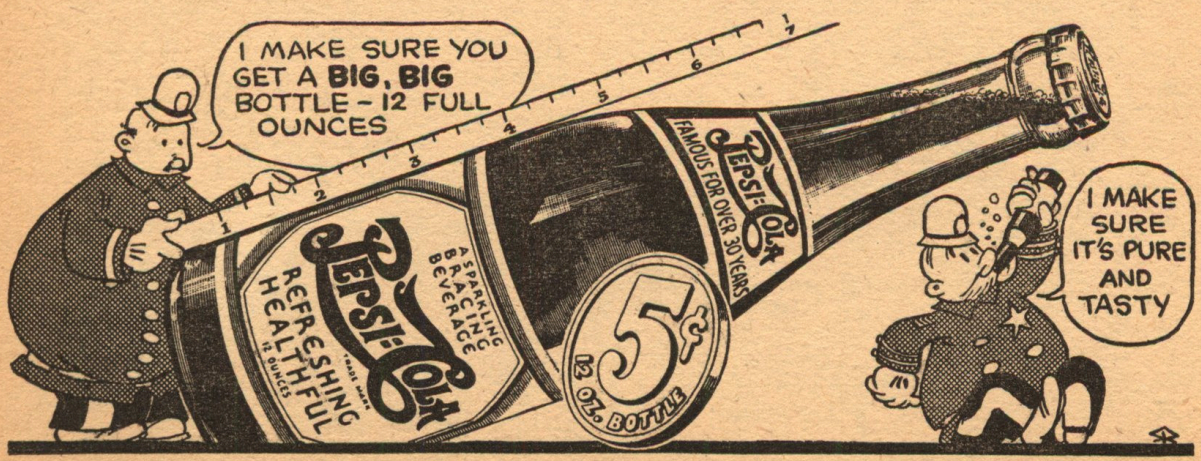
All the thin sunlight in the valley seemed concentrated in his palm, intensified on diamonds, breaking into the colors of the spectrum on rubies and amethyst and emeralds. Awkwardly, because of his injury, Connor returned them to the sack, and dropped it into his pocket.

"An' he had them with him all the time," Connor said aloud. "If I hadn't been such a fool, I'da had them long ago an' missed this bum shoulder."

For a time he stood there frowning, thinking of his stupidity. He did not know it came from a rare, deep sense of honor that held him like a vise.

Shaking his head he came back to a sense of the necessity of action. Here he felt at home.

"Get your boys movin'," he directed the interpreter. "It's late for breakfast, an' I'm hungry."



Oh, the Monkeys Have No Tails

Like oil and water, seamen and Marines do not mix. Tangle one of each with wagers and the captain's furry friend, and you have a mess the like of which even the Nutty *Nebraska* had never beheld

Alan Bosworth

TROPICAL sunlight pointed through the porthole, rising and falling across the white-tiled deck of the operating room as the battleship Nebraska rose and fell with the swells. It was Wednesday afternoon—a rope-yarn Sunday in the Navy—and the air was filled with languor.

Scotty McLeod, the lanky, bespectacled pharmacist's mate, pulled a cork. Immediately the smell of liquor blended with the languor, for the bottle contained medical-department alcohol.

"I got just enough here for four snorts," observed Scotty. "If anybody falls down a hatch, it's just too bad. They ain't supposed to fall down the hatch except at sick call."

He found two glasses, and poured judiciously, while he sang in a monotone:

Oh, the monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga,
Oh, the monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga—

Spud Murphy, who had two tattoos, red hair on poll and chest, and a gunner's mate's rating, looked up from his chair. Spud wore only swimming trunks and sneakers, and the trunks were still damp.

"The Old Man wouldn't let us keep that cat, back in Pedro," he said bitterly. "Not after she had eight kittens, anyway. And now he's got this damned Virgin Islands' monkey, and he's nuts about it."

Scotty handed over a glass. "It ain't a Virgin Islands' monkey," he corrected. "It come from Nicaragua. Seems like a Gyrene major who used to be shipmates with the Old Man spent three years chasin' Sandino. All he caught was this damned monk. Now he's stationed over at St. Thomas, and he give the monk to the Old Man."

Spud reflectively drank. "That accounts for it, then!" he growled. "That Columbus is a Marine, through and through!"

"A Gyrene monkey? Fine thing—insulting an ape, when he can't talk back."

"When I was up swimmin'," Spud explained, "I seen Moe Goldman exercisin' Columbus again. Trying to get himself a drag. He—"

There was a commotion outside. The door knob frantically turned. Scotty hastily slid the two glasses into the steam sterilizer and closed its door. Then he admitted the man who was suffering in the passageway.

The monkey hit the water a split-second before the sailor

IT WAS Moe Goldman, sergeant of Marines. He held up a huge, lacerated hand. "Damn that double-dashed monkey!" the leatherneck said with considerable feeling. "He bit me, Doc —look, he bit me! Maybe I've got rabies!"

"Yeah!" Spud sandwiched sarcasm between his words. "Maybe the monk ain't feelin' so well either!"

Goldman made a threat of his good hand, and Spud was on his feet. But Scotty McLeod moved between. A man can't allow personal feelings to interfere with the performance of his professional duty. Scotty was no more fond of the big, black-browed topkick than was his shipmate: in two years aboard what they called the "Nutty *Nebraska,*" Goldman had got the inseparable pair into more official trouble than even they could accept like little gentlemen.

It was the way Spud said. Moe Goldman had a chip on his shoulder. Moe was duty struck.

"I was exercisin' him on the foc'sle," the sergeant complained. "All I was tryin' to do was keep him from swingin' by his tail from the turret guns. He wants to swing from everything he sees —every time he's on the quarterdeck when the boat booms are rigged, he runs out and hangs from 'em!"

"He's a Gyrene!" sneered Spud. "You're just trying to get a drag with the Old Man, you apple-polisher! You're hanging around the wardroom country, working up to asking special liberty when we hit New York!"

"Well, *I* won't be restricted to the ship, like some birds I know may be!" Goldman's tone was a threat. He winced as Scotty swabbed the wound, and then he sniffed. "Is that alkie you're usin', Doc?"

"No. We're fresh out of alkie."

"Like hell!" Goldman sniffed again. "You're savin' it to drink, that's what!" He licked his lips. "I want alkie on this bite—I don't want to have rabies! You guys are holdin' out on me."

Scotty applied a bandage and gave it a vicious twist. "Look, Moe!" he said sweetly. "I wouldn't raise any stink, if I was you. Not if you want liberty in New York. You know, I could turn you in on the sick list for observation. Suspected rabies cases have to stay under observation for a long time!"

Goldman growled under his breath. "All right, but I still think you're holdin' out. I ain't worried about goin' ashore in New York. In fact, I'd like to lay you a little bet that neither of *you* go ashore in New York."

Spud got on his feet again, and the alcohol was plain on his breath. "Oh, you want to make a bet and then try to get us on the report, eh?" he exclaimed. "All right. I can keep my nose clean, soldier. Put your money where your mouth is. How much?"

HE REACHED for his pocket and discovered he didn't have his pants on at the moment. They were neatly folded on the operating table, and he extracted a wallet from the pocket.

A crafty look came into Goldman's eyes. "Of course, you might *finally* get ashore in New York," he admitted. "But I'll bet you fifty bucks that I hit the beach—*any* beach except here in the Virgin Islands—before you do!"

"I'll take it!" yelled Spud, and Scotty faced the marine.

"Got another fifty that says you beat *me* ashore?" he demanded. The canny pharmacist's mate was already figuring out ways and means. There would be a patient or two to transfer to Brooklyn Naval Hospital—he could go over

with the duty belt, escorting them, before the regular liberty party—

Moe Goldman smiled mysteriously. "You're covered, Doc!" he said. "The bet is that I hit the beach before either of you. Any beach besides the Virgin Islands. Let's find the chief pharmacist's mate and get him to hold stakes. A hundred bucks——just like money in the bank!"

The chief was in the dispensary, and the conditions of the wager were quickly explained to him. Then Goldman, still humming, went into the passageway, and halted at the foot of the ladder.

"Like money in the bank!" he repeated. He added an exceptionally dirty laugh.

Scotty McLeod frowned behind his glasses. "That guy knows something!" he muttered. "He ain't been hangin' around the officers' country for nothing. He ain't out to put us on the report this time—he figures on rookin' us another way. I don't like it."

"I'll bust him in the kisser!" Spud declared, but Scotty caught his shipmate's arm.

"Then you'd sure enough be restricted. He's too smart to fight and take a chance of losin' his stripes. Come on—we got another drink left. If it'd been anybody else but a Gyrene, I'd have used that alkie for the surgical dressing. But alkie is too good for a Gyrene!"

SERGEANT GOLDMAN, it was subsequently proved, had indeed heard inside information. Scuttlebutt rumor became active the following day: it said the Nutty *Nebraska* wasn't going to New York, and the World's Fair, at all. Instead, according to the Navy's grapevine, she had been chosen for a special mission.

The crew fumed and fretted and conjectured. Captain Jesse Jesperson called away his gig and visited the flagship *Pennsylvania* twice. Columbus, his pet monkey, scampered out on the boom and wrapped his tail around it, hanging head down while Moe Goldman called him names. The monkey chattered back: nobody knew what names Columbus was calling Moe Goldman.

The torpedo gang had it straight that the Nutty *Nebraska* was going to transit the Canal and make a full power run for the Asiatics, just to remind Japan that America hadn't forgotten the Pacific while the Fleet was on the East Coast. A radioman said you could hear nothing but Nazi propaganda on the high-frequencies, and that the Nutty *Nebraska* was slated to make a good will tour to Rio and B.A. And a bosun's mate got it directly from the captain's steward that the San Francisco Fair had squawked for a battleship to be tied up at Treasure Island to show visitors.

The Old Man called away his gig again, and Columbus, in high glee, did the Giant Swing from the starboard boom, and Sergeant Goldman invented new cusswords.

Then the straight of it came out. An international situation had reared its ugly head down in Nicaragua, knocking the props out from under the plans of twelve hundred sailors to make a speed run on Sands Street and take in the World's Fair as a side trip. There was a ragged little man named De-Hoya, reared in the Sandino school of revolution, playing fast and loose with the Nicaraguan government and American property. And never mind why a cruiser or a couple of destroyers couldn't handle the job—it took a battleship to throw the fear of God and the United States into some of those *hombres*.

The Nutty *Nebraska* sent her motor sailors alongside a beef boat and loaded provisions. She upped her hook and stood out into the bright, rolling Carib' Sea; she was gray, and the spirits of her crew were a dismal war color. Spud Murphy repaired to the operating room and found Scotty McLeod lower than a whale's abdomen.

"That guy's a slicker!" Scotty swore. "He's rooked us this time!"

Spud stared. Scotty had the brains: if the pharmacist's mate thought everything was lost, it was. And that went for the hundred bucks.

"How come?" Spud asked feebly.

Scotty waved to a pile of gauze dressings he was folding. "I got orders. The Gyrenes may go on an expeditionary force. It looks bad!"

Sergeant Goldman came in to get his hand dressed. Knowing well that Scotty and Spud abhorred the monkey, he had brought Columbus with him.

"Get that damned hairy leatherneck out of here!" yelled Scotty. "This is an operating room—we got to observe absolute sterility and strict asepsis. Monkeys ain't clean!"

"*You* try gettin' him out!" suggested Goldman, wearily. "I can't do anything with him!"

COLUMBUS leaped from the operating table, scattering gauze in his wake, and landed on the instrument sterilizer. He regarded his reflection in the chrome of the lid, chattering gleefully. But when Scotty advanced menacingly, the monkey leaped to the porthole and then to the top of the instrument case. Goldman chuckled as the pharmacist's mate gave up.

"What's so funny?" Spud demanded.

"That bet I've got with you guys. It's in the bag. I'm going to hit the beach first—the beach in Nicaragua! Ever been to Nicaragua? I helped chase Sandino all over that joint."

"Yeah," said Doc. "And you never caught him."

"What makes you think you'll get ashore first?" Spud wanted to know.

The sergeant's grin widened. "The marines got orders to stand by for a landing party, that's why, sailor! You can land marines without a declaration of war, or without it bein' considered intervention, or something like that. It's in international law. I'll turn Columbus over to you guys—you can chase him around the ship while me and my gang are chasin' DeHoya. And I'll win a hundred bucks. Ha-ha!"

Scotty put iodine on the monkey bite, and Goldman howled. "Ha-ha!" echoed the pharmacist's mate. "Oh, the monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga, oh, the monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga! Oh, the monkeys—"

"If I was losin' a hundred bucks, like you birds, I wouldn't feel like singin'!" Goldman got up, and Columbus leaped to his shoulder. "Remember the Marines—first to land, first to fight!"

Scotty sneered. "Yeah, and Kipling said you could leave one at night on a bald man's head—and I figure that puts a Gyrene in the same class with a louse! So long, Sarge!"

He locked the door and reached for the bottle of alcohol.

—Oh the monkeys have no tails,
They were bitten off by whales—
Oh, the monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga!

THE Marines neither landed nor fought upon arrival of the Nutty *Nebraska* off the Nicaraguan coast. Radio messages had been flying back and forth between Captain Jesperson and the Navy Department, and the State Department was at the elbow of

the Bureau of Navigation, telling it what to say. Conditions in Nicaragua had improved, but Juan DeHoya was still at large, hiding somewhere.

Chain rattled through the hawsepipe. The hook splashed and settled; the Nutty *Nebraska* began pitching with the swells again, and a dull monotony descended upon her.

Green hills jumbled down to a strip of white sand and a smother of lacy surf only a quarter of a mile away. Appropriately enough, the spot was in the vicinity of Monkey Point.

"Tomorrow," grumbled Spud as he and Scotty leaned on the port rail of the foc's'le, "is the day when the Fleet shoves off for New York."

Scotty grunted. The green water rolled shoreward, and folded under itself; the surf flounced like the frilled underskirt of a lady grown unaccountably boisterous. Then there was a stir of activity aft: the quarter boom was rigged, and a boat call blew. The captain's gig swung out from the port crane and wet its backsides on a swell.

"Somebody's going ashore," Scotty observed. "But it's the Old Man, and not the Gyrenes—not yet!"

Spud drew a long breath. "Maybe I could get that bowhook to let me take his duty! Maybe I could bribe him—"

"Not a chance," Scotty answered.

They saw the Marines muster on the quarterdeck, with packs and rifles. Just when they feared the worst, the leathernecks were dismissed: it was only a drill. And there was Goldman, still polishing apples, still trying to get Columbus to desist from doing the Giant Swing on the quarter boom, with his head toward the rolling seas.

Scotty McLeod watched the monkey, and looked at Spud, and Spud was about to take affront. But Scotty chuckled, and suggested that they both lay below to the operating room and have a little snort. His nimble brain was beginning to function with a purpose.

The Old Man took an aide ashore with him and conferred with Nicaraguan military leaders. The radio crackled back and forth. The Old Man returned; Scotty was glad that night comes swiftly in the tropics, because it put a halt to any threatened military operations for the day.

They learned that Juan DeHoya, the little ragged man who had upset the plans of so many, was still in hiding.

NEXT day when Sergeant Goldman reported for treatment, he found Scotty still folding gauze pads. Columbus immediately upset a stack of them, but the pharmacist's mate's temper was smooth.

"They'll fix your hand out in the ward, today," Scotty said. "If you guys are going over and get yourselves all full of bandit lead and hacked up with *machetes,* I've got to have a little sterile gauze ready. I might be detailed with the landing party."

The sergeant grinned. "That won't do you no good, sailor! I'll be right up in the bow of that boat—I'll touch land first, see?"

"I guess you're right," Scotty sighed. "Well, a guy has to make up his mind to lose some of the time, if he's going to gamble. It was a good bet."

Goldman left Columbus in the operating room while he went outside to have his hand dressed. Then he headed topside, taking the monkey with him, and Scotty McLeod thoughtfully picked up a first-aid pouch and followed.

Coming out of the foc'sle hatch, Goldman almost stepped on Spud Murphy. The gunner's mate was lying in the sun, clad only in swimming trunks and sneakers.

"Gangway, sailor!" the sergeant called. "I can feel that hundred bucks in my kick, just as plain. What a liberty I'll make!"

Spud snorted and glared. "Go give yourself the deep six, Gyrene!"

The sergeant went on aft, keeping an eye on the acrobatic tendencies of Columbus. Spud waited until he was going down the ladder at the break of the deck, and then he followed, padding along silently in the sneakers, watching the monkey and the marine.

Scotty McLeod idly sauntered aft, too, and he was watching all three of them.

Everything was working out perfectly, Scotty thought. He took note of wind and tide: the wind was negligible, but the tide ran strongly toward shore. Captain Jesse Jesperson was returning aboard; his absentee pennant fluttered down, his gig made the accommodation ladder, and then hauled out and secured to the boom. Its crew left the boat and came aboard with an agility that must have made Columbus jealous.

Scotty waited at the break in the deck until the bosuns' pipes ceased twittering and the sideboys left the gangway. Then he went down the ladder to the quarterdeck.

Goldman's voice disturbed the sanctity of that part of the ship. "Come back here, you hairy devil!" he yelled. "Come back, I said!"

Columbus paid no heed. There was a boom rigged. It had been rigged for him to scamper on, to hook his tail around, to use for a trapeze bar in doing the Giant Swing. He went out on it, gibbering and squeaking; the sergeant stood near the rail with his arms akimbo in an attitude of exasperation. Behind him, Spud Murphy moved stealthily.

The pharmacist's mate was humming softly about the simians of Zamboanga being devoid of caudal appendages. In the middle of his song, he broke off.

THINGS were happening in blurred swiftness. Columbus wrapped his tail around the boom, just as monkeys have wrapped their tails around flagpoles from time immemorial, if we are to believe another song. He chattered, and swung head down—and then he screeched and plummeted toward the heaving water.

"Man—I mean monkey overboard!" Goldman howled.

"Man overboard!" shouted the bosun's mate of the watch, and he was right, too. Spud Murphy cleared the rail and shot down in a clean dive.

Then the tide caught Columbus. Head high out of the water, he screeched and struggled, and the gap widened between him and the ship. The officer of the deck came on the double, barking orders for a lifebuoy to be dropped and for the crew of the motor lifeboat to lay in their boat. But by this time, Spud was swimming strongly toward the beach, and Columbus was only a tail's length ahead of him.

A big Irish hand caught Columbus.

Horrible realization swept over Moe Goldman. He began to swear. A deep voice said: *"Harrumph!"* at his shoulder, and he stiffened and saluted. It was Captain Jesse Jesperson, watching Spud's red head slide through the green water, watching the small, dark head just in front of him.

"Damn that (censored!) monkey!" the Old Man growled, then added as an afterthought: "Well done—damned well done! Who is that man?"

The officer of the deck didn't know. Sergeant Goldman wasn't saying. "It's Murphy, sir!" Scotty spoke up proud-

ly. "Spud Murphy—gunner's mate second."

"Harrumph! There might be sharks in these waters! Don't stand there, Mr. Porter—don't wait for the motor lifeboat! Call away my gig."

Scotty put himself in front of the captain. He could feel Goldman's eyes on him; he knew that the sergeant's heart was black.

"Permission to go in the boat sir, with his first-aid pouch?"

"Granted!" As Scotty went gingerly out on the boom, he heard the Old Man continuing: "That's efficiency—that hospital corpsman was up here on the jump, and with a first-aid pouch! What's his name, Sergeant?"

Then, as the gig breasted the swells, Scotty saw Spud Murphy touch bottom and wade to the beach, with Columbus wet and whimpering in his arms. The gig slowed and came around cautiously, seeking an inlet where the surf was quiet, and Spud ran down the strip of sand to meet them.

He wasn't alone. A little, ragged man plunged out of the green tangle. "Wait!" he cried. *"Alto!* Wait—I am Juan DeHoya! I am wanting for to surrender to *los Americanos!* The government—it would kill me!"

Scotty stared and shook his head, but there was the little man coming to the boat with his hands upraised. He looked starved and beaten; only a flame burned in his eyes. And then Columbus, being a true Nicaraguan, leaped into DeHoya's arms—and bit him.

They all went back to the ship. The Old Man said *"Harrumph!"* and remarked something about meritorious mast, which meant, at the very least, special liberty. The Old Man took DeHoya to the wardroom for questioning, and Scotty took Spud to the operating room for a drink.

The chief pharmacist's mate had come topside in time to see most of it. He called Goldman, and paid off. The marine sergeant's heart was still black.

"I been rooked!" he growled. "I don't know how, but I been rooked! I'll get you birds—see if I don't."

In the privacy of the operating room, Spud shook his head. "I don't know how, either!" he confessed. "What did you do to work it? All I had to do was be ready to dive in after him, like you said. But—"

Scotty measured the alcohol with his eye, and then, not trusting his vision, added a little more. "Easy, my boy, easy!" he said. "All I did was put a little sterile vaseline on Columbus' tail—that's all! Oh, the monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga—"

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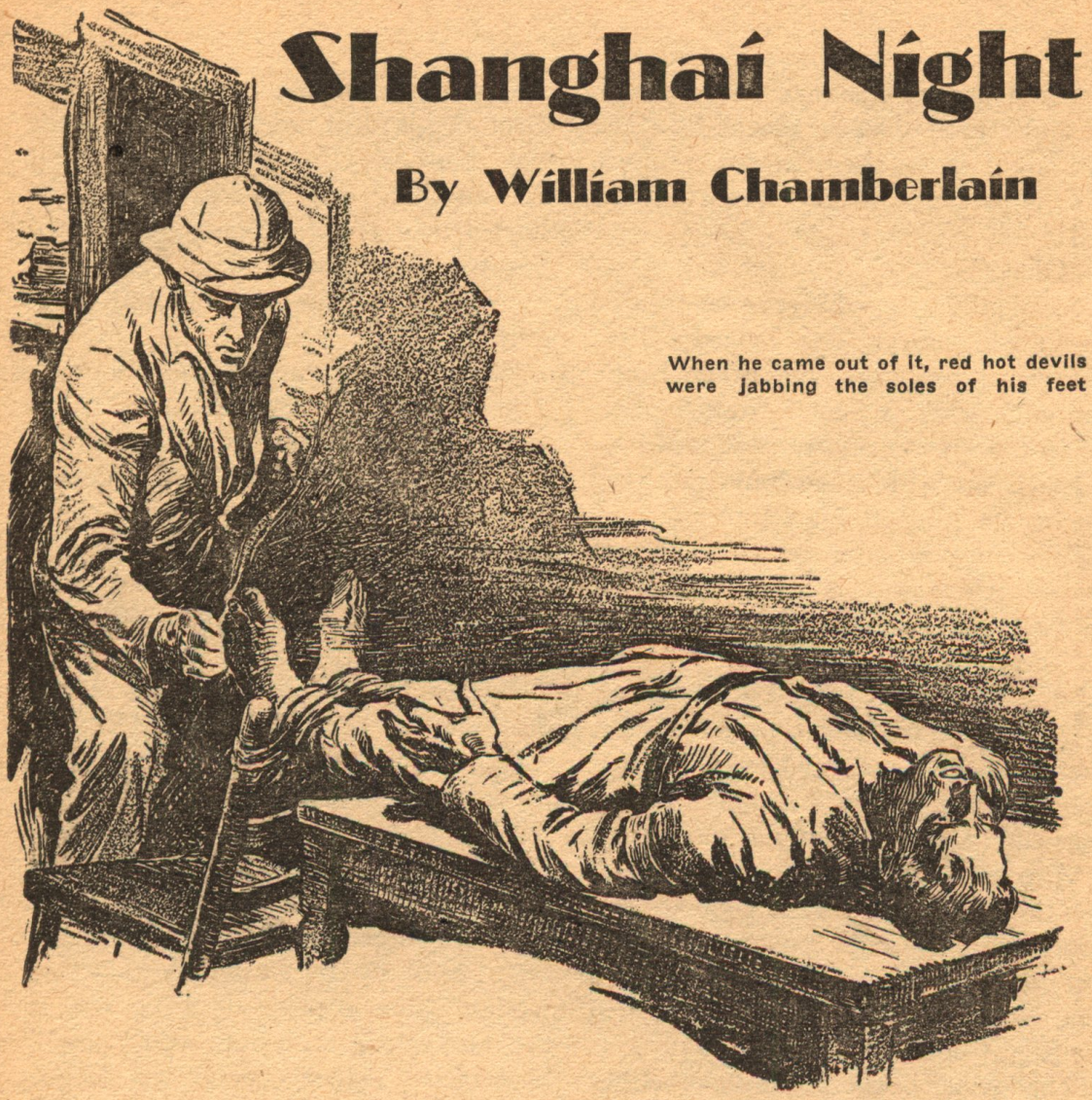
MEN of DARING
by Stookie Allen
DEAD EYE!
AS A BOY IN ALABAMA, HOWARD HILL COULD DUPLICATE ROBIN HOOD'S FEAT OF SPLITTING A WILLOW WAND AT 100 PACES. TODAY HE CAN LOOSE ARROWS WITH THE SPEED OF A REPEATING RIFLE AND NEVER HUNTS BACKED UP BY A GUN.
TRAINED TO STALK BY THE SEMINOLE INDIANS, HE HAS BAGGED BIG GAME ALL OVER AMERICA -- WILD TURKEY, ELK, MOOSE, SHARKS, A DUCK ON THE WING! AFTER SIX HOURS OF STALKING IN THE ROCKIES, HE BECAME THE ONLY WHITE MAN EVER TO KILL A BIGHORN SHEEP WITH A BOW AND ARROW.
Howard HILL
RUSHED BY A WOUNDED BLACK BEAR, HE STOOD HIS GROUND AND DROVE AN ARROW CLEAN THROUGH THE 1000 POUND BEAST! HAS BEEN CHARGED BY A MADDENED WILD BOAR; AND, ONCE, RIDING INTO A BUFFALO HERD, WAS CHARGED SIMULTANEOUSLY BY TWO ENRAGED BULLS. HE NEVER MISSES WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN.
HE HOPES SOON TO TAKE A CRACK AT AFRICAN BIG GAME WITH A BOW AND ARROW OF HIS OWN MAKE.
'AT'S A JOB YOU CAN HAVE. WE DON'T WANT IT!
HE CAN FLICK A CIGARETTE FROM A MAN'S MOUTH AND ONCE SHOT AN APPLE FROM A FRIEND'S HEAD AT 60 FEET! HE HELD THE WORLD'S FLIGHT RECORD OF 410 YARDS. HOWARD DID THE TRICK SHOOTING FOR ERROL FLYNN IN THE FILM "ROBIN HOOD."
S. ALLEN

Shanghai Night

By William Chamberlain



When he came out of it, red hot devils were jabbing the soles of his feet

When gun-running goes sour in the Orient, a smart crook will turn to other pleasant little rackets—like kidnaping. This naturally causes an American correspondent to fight fire with fire, and leads to a shambles that would have turned Kublai Khan pale with shame

MILES FALCON had been on his feet for seventy hours straight. It was four in the afternoon when he had a double brandy at the bar of the Great Eastern and then stumbled upstairs to bed.

The telephone awakened him.

It was dark and he staggered sleepily across to poke at the light button while he swore as the *burrr* of the phone rasped his already frayed nerves. His watch on the dresser said that it was twenty past eight. Bascom's voice came over the wire. "Miles?"

Falcon grunted, detecting the worry in Bascom's voice.

"I'm sending a car for you, Miles. Get out here to the office as soon as you can.

"Nope. I'm in bed and I'm going to stay there. Call me tomorrow."

"I'm sorry," Bascom said and Falcon had known the man long enough to understand that he meant it. "The car ought to be there in ten minutes. It's important, Miles—important as hell!"

"Okay."

Sleep still drugged him as he crawled into a cold shower. That helped a little. He went back into the other room, poured a drink of Scotch from the bottle on the dresser and dressed slowly—a lean man with a sardonic face and patches of gray at his temples.

Ten minutes later he climbed into the car which waited for him in front of the Great Eastern.

BASCOM was trans-Pacific representative of Globe News—a short man with good-humored eyes. He met Falcon at the door of his office. Worry marked the lines about his mouth.

"I'm sorry to rout you out, Miles," he said, "but I can't trust anybody else with this." Bascom pushed a soiled slip of paper across the desk toward him and Falcon bent to squint at it in the bright light.

The paper was common—neither cheap nor expensive. There was no signature.

If Frank de Forrest is worth a hundred thousand dollars to you run this in the Shanghai *Courier* on Thursday.

"Lost:—Brown wallet with papers belonging to J. P. Smith. Reward."

Falcon flipped the paper back across the desk. "He's not, as far as I am concerned," he said.

"He's a nasty young pup," Bascom agreed soberly, "but he's King de Forrest's only son—and King de Forrest owns the Globe News. You can guess what a splash this will make if it hits the front pages."

Falcon nodded.

Bascom went on, running a hand through his thin hair. "Played up the way King de Forrest would play it up—anything can happen. Wars have started over less. The ones who pulled this job know that."

"You can't raise the hundred thousand?"

"Not without cabling the old man. You know what'll happen then. You've seen the mess this corner of the world's in, Miles. Well, I'm just chicken-hearted enough to want my own country to keep out of it. So are you!"

Falcon said: "Yeah," without moving. "What are you going to do about it?"

Bascom placed his hands flat on the desk and stared at the other. His face was old and tired and he was silent for a long moment.

"I've come to depend a lot on you, Miles. It's a tough assignment but . . ." His voice trailed away. Miles Falcon grinned and pitched his cigarette butt at a wastebasket. "You wouldn't like to have me bring you in the moon along with him, would you?" he asked. "You've checked at his hotel?"

"He went out yesterday night and hasn't been back."

"Any leads at all?"

The older man shook his head. "He's been running around with a woman named Polly Vrain for the past week. It probably doesn't mean anything—you know what a louse young de Forrest is."

Falcon rose pulling his hat down over his eyes, and Bascom walked to the door with him.

"I've got a feeling that Jake Lawler is mixed up in this, Miles. The gun-running business hasn't been so good lately and Jake is smart enough to see

the possibilities in grabbing off young de Forrest. It's a tough proposition and you've got to go it alone—if you can. If you can't, call McGregor in the Settlement. I'll tell him as much as I can without giving the show away."

"Who's this Vrain woman?"

"An entertainer at Pete Natado's Chinese Club out on Houghtailing Road."

Miles Falcon nodded and stepped out into the corridor. He made no reply to Bascom's "Good luck!"

IT WAS two o'clock at the Chinese Club. Polly Vrain sang and there was a burst of applause and the lights went up and the orchestra started to play. Miles Falcon scrawled words on a card and crooked a finger at a waiter. He said: "Take this to Miss Vrain."

The music boiled up steadily and laughter was an unpleasant racket in Falcon's ears. He slumped lower in his chair. He wished he was home in bed.

He allowed his mind to run back across the last three hours. He had picked up a thread here and there and they had all led to Pete Natado's Chinese Club. Well, here he was and he would see what he would see.

A short, dapper man came through a side door and stood looking across the smoke with a flat and expressionless gaze. Rack McPhale, Miles knew—one of Jake Lawler's right bowers. McPhale's gaze lingered briefly on Falcon. Then Pete Natado came up and the two of them passed back through the tables and disappeared. Miles yawned and slouched deeper into his chair.

The waiter came back holding Falcon's card between his fingers. "Missy no see nobody. Solly, please."

Miles nodded. He poured a little more whiskey into his glass, sipped it and then stood up. He went toward the dressing rooms. Pete Natado came out with his face a little worried and he teetered back and forth on his high heels while he rubbed his soft hands. He wasn't glad to see Miles but he smiled nicely.

"Hah! Meester Falcon! Thees ees vairy fine, eh? Yess!"

Falcon murmured: "How's the kidnaping racket these days, Pete?" and he saw Natado's eyes darken and his smile freeze.

"W'at you mean, Meester Falcon?"

"I'll draw you a little picture—after Polly Vrain has talked a little."

The alarm deepened in Natado's eyes. He dodged back into the empty passage, which led to the dressing rooms, but Falcon dropped a hand on his arm and went with him. Natado's voice lifted and Falcon hit him just where the half caste's fat neck flowed into his ear.

Pete Natado sagged down against the wall with his chin on his white shirt front—a nasty little heap—and Miles stepped past him and went on to where a cheap sign said *Polly Vrain.* He turned the knob and went in, closing the door.

There were two men there and Polly Vrain, dressed in a street dress and with her face pinched and scared. Rack McPhale stood in front of her with his hands in his pockets and his back to Miles Falcon. The second man shoved clothes into a bag.

Miles said: "Going away, Polly? Tch! Tch! And I wanted to talk to you, too."

The man with the bag looked up, his mouth dropping open a little, and Rack McPhale turned slowly—hands still in his pockets and his face betraying noth-

ing. The terror deepened on Polly Vrain's face.

McPhale said flatly: "Hello, Falcon."

"*Mister* Falcon, Rack."

There was a faint flicker at the back of McPhale's eyes. Then he jerked his shoulders a little. "Okay. *Mister* Falcon."

"That's better, Rack," Miles told him cheerfully. "Now you can take your man Friday and run along. I want to talk to Polly about Frankie de Forrest, Rack. It's funny about Frankie. It seems that some bad men have taken him away and aren't going to give him back unless his papa pays them one hundred thousand dollars. *You* wouldn't know anything about that, Rack?"

"Who would pay a hundred grand for that punk?"

"His papa might, Rack, but I don't like it."

Miles leaned against the door with his hands holding onto the lapels of his crumpled coat while he watched the two men in front of him. Throw out enough lines and you were bound to catch fish, he reflected. He waited impatiently with his perceptions reaching out to catch that first intangible tightening which would warn him that Rack McPhale was going for his gun.

It didn't come.

McPhale was taking his hands out of his pockets with a vast deliberation —reaching for the half-smoked cigar which lay on the dressing table. Polly Vrain stood a little behind him. She was slender, brunette and pretty.

Rack McPhale blew smoke through his thin lips and Miles caught the crafty undertone in his voice. "What you going to do with Polly?"

There were faint shufflings in the hallway outside and Miles guessed what was going on. The man by the suitcase was straightening a little; edging to one side.

Falcon said: "Maybe I'm lonesome, Rack."

He knew that it was coming, then. McPhale's voice lifted as feet thudded against the wood of the door. "Get in here! What do I pay you for?"

Polly Vrain screamed once and her face was the color of old putty. The man by the suitcase dived forward but Falcon caught him with a knee which broke his nose and spun him back to fall against the bed. Rack McPhale shot once, the sound muffled and dull, and then Falcon was behind him with an arm across his throat and the snub nose of an automatic jammed into his ribs. The door crashed open.

THERE were a half a dozen men there — Jake Lawler's gun-runners and a hard lot. Falcon knew some of them by name. Behind them he could see Pete Natado with a dark bruise covering the left side of his face.

Falcon murmured: "Tell them to run away and play, Rack. I'll let a slug into you if you don't."

McPhale's face was a dirty gray and Falcon loosened the chokehold and jerked the heel of his hand up across McPhale's nose hard. Toughness was something that McPhale could understand. Blood trickled down across his mouth and the men in the doorway hesitated.

"Speak your little piece, Rack."

McPhale said in a strangled voice: "Get out, all of you!"

The men in the doorway backed away, leaving the door open and Miles heard the sound of their footsteps die away down the hall. He slid a hand into McPhale's pocket and took the second gun and tossed it beneath the

bed. McPhale was swearing in a low, wicked undertone and Falcon struck him across the mouth.

He said indifferently: "You're small fry, Rack. You go tell Jake Lawler that I'm giving him an hour to turn Frankie de Forrest loose. If he's not back in his hotel by then I'll come looking for him. Understand?"

"You go to Hell, you. . ."

Falcon leaned forward lazily and slapped him into a corner and there was a scared look at the back of McPhale's eyes as he got up. His fingers shook as he tried to button his coat.

"You tell him that, Rack."

Falcon lounged out of the door and into the hallway. Polly Vrain was there and, as she saw him, she turned swiftly and started toward the door which led out onto the dance floor. Miles said: "Wait for me, baby," and closed his fingers over her wrist.

She whimpered: "I haven't done anything. Let me go. . . please."

"Sure. We'll go together. Where do you live?"

She was watching him with scared eyes, and she told him.

Falcon turned her gently toward a door at the end of the passage. They went out into the darkness of an alley which led into Houghtailing Road. The orchestra still blared.

Johnny Nipa was waiting with the car in the spot where Miles had left him an hour ago. They rode in silence, Miles slouched in a corner while his mind went over the things that he had done.

He had stirred things up. If Jake Lawler had young de Forrest things would begin to happen in a little while, Miles thought sourly. The car drew up in front of a dark building and Johnny Nipa climbed out and held the door of the car. Falcon said: "Okay, Johnny. Now you beat it to the office. Tell Bascom to keep in touch with de Forrest's hotel and to call me if he shows up in the next hour."

"Yes sir, Mr. Falcon. What number?"

"What number, sister?" Miles asked.

"Apartment 7-B. Clifton House," she said listlessly.

Johnny Nipa said: "Okay," and the car rolled off into the night.

The girl walked slowly toward the steps and Miles followed. They went through a dim foyer and up carpeted stairs and then turned left down a long corridor. Polly Vrain tried to fit a key into the lock but her fingers were shaking too badly. Miles took it from her and opened the door.

THE warmth made Miles sleepy again. He poured brandy into two glasses and splashed soda on top and carried one of them across to where Polly Vrain sat. Her eyes were still scared. Falcon sat on the edge of the table and wished that he could go to bed.

He said: "Pet, where's Jake Lawler got young Frankie de Forrest hid out?"

"I don't know," she said huskily. "They never told me. Jake said he'd take care. . ."

She stopped suddenly, pressing a palm against her mouth while the terror deepened in her eyes. Falcon grinned at her sardonically and went to stand in front of the fireplace with his glass in his hand while he looked at the faint tracery which the rain made against the window to his left.

He murmured: "Thanks, baby. I was pretty sure that Jake was behind this but I wasn't certain. Now, where's Frankie?"

"I don't know! I didn't say that

Lawler was in on it! I tell you I don't know anything about it!"

She jumped to her feet but Falcon lounged across the room and pushed her back onto the couch.

"Sure, you don't know a thing. But you'll find me easier to talk to than McGregor."

"You can't scare me. I don't know a thing."

Miles Falcon shrugged and went across the room to pick up the telephone. A clock chimed four times and a sudden gust of wind rattled the window. Polly Vrain said in a low and sullen voice: "I'll talk. What choice have I got?"

"None."

"Frankie was making a play for me," she said dully. "I got him drunk and brought him here."

"When?"

"Last night—no, night before last. I don't know."

"Go on."

"Morris Chan and Eddie Greco were up here waiting. They tied Frankie up and took him out in a laundry hamper. The drops I gave Frankie didn't work very well and he came to and yelled and Eddie hit him over the head with a candlestick."

"Where'd they take him?"

"To Jake Lawler's."

"Where's that?"

"On Houghtailing Road—on the left by the bridge."

She stopped and coughed and twisted a button at the throat of her blouse.

He said: "And Jake Lawler wants Frankie's father to pay a hundred grand to get Frankie back—but Frankie isn't ever coming back. Is that right?"

She nodded. "Yes. Frankie knows the inside of Jake's gun-running—he was going to put money into it but he got cold feet. Jake's afraid that Frankie will go to Mr. de Forrest with the story."

Miles Falcon pitched his cigarette at the fireplace. "What did you want to get mixed up with Jake Lawler for?"

She said under her breath: "I wish I never had." She sat there, her hands folded in her lap and her eyes on Miles Falcon. Her mouth was softer all at once and she looked younger and very lonesome and very scared. Falcon felt a little sorry for her.

"How old are you, kid?"

"Twenty-three."

"Where'd you come from?"

"Port Townsend—it's a little town on Puget Sound."

"If you were out of this mess and back in Port Townsend would you stay there?"

"Would I!" She bent forward with her face pale and drawn and the knuckles of her hands showing white in the light. "There's a fellow there—but I guess you understand."

"Sure," Miles Falcon told her.

THE telephone buzzed and Miles lounged against the wall and held the receiver to his ear and wondered if he had figured wrong. A woman's voice came faintly at him over the wire and he scowled a little.

"I want to speak to Miles Falcon."

"Go on."

"How would you like an exclusive story for Globe News, Miles Falcon?"

There was something wrong here but Miles couldn't put his finger on it. He said: "I've got a story, sister—but tell on." He thought that he heard a step in the corridor outside but the woman was talking again and he guessed that it was the wind.

"Here's your story, sucker! How do

like *this* for a headline? *'Miles Falcon, Ace Globe Reporter, Is Taken for a Ride in Shanghai!'* "

Her voice trailed away in harsh laughter and Falcon had guessed the answer even before he heard the swift intake of Polly Vrain's breath. He turned slowly, putting the telephone back into its cradle.

Jake Lawler, a heavy-set and doughy man, was standing at the edge of the light with the muzzle of his gun bearing on Falcon's stomach. Behind him, Morris Chan closed the door and then came forward to range beside Rack McPhale whose bruised face was a flat mask.

"You have had a good talk with Anna, Miles?" Jake Lawler asked heavily.

Falcon said: "Sure, Jake." He reached out deliberately with his left hand and took a cigarette from the box on the table and thrust it unlit into the corner of his mouth. Well, he had busted Jake Lawler out into the open, he thought.

"Anna's a good girl, Miles. We waited out there in the hall until we heard her ring."

"Smart," Falcon agreed with him. "You can remember that when they stretch your neck with a rope."

"They ain't going to stretch my neck, Miles. Morris, maybe you better get his gun—and don't move, Miles. I wouldn't want to have to spill you all over this nice carpet."

Rack McPhale's face was suddenly murderous as he inched forward with his right hand inside his coat. He snarled: "Let *me* work on him Jake!"

"You take it easy, Rack. There's time—lots of time."

There was a flat menace—as dangerous as the strike of a rattlesnake—in Jake Lawler's voice and McPhale dropped his hands. Chan took Falcon's gun.

Jake Lawler said, a faint apology in his voice: "It's a kind of a nasty night for a ride, Miles."

"It's tough about the weather," Falcon told him.

"Yeah. Well, we'll be going."

Morris Chan jerked Polly Vrain up with a rough hand. She didn't cry out but her face had gone a stark and lifeless white.

Miles Falcon flicked flame onto a table lighter and held it to his cigarette; then slammed it hard at Jake Lawler's face. It missed. Falcon dived into Lawler's knees and they went down together with Falcon lifting a left hook to the soft part of the other's neck. He couldn't get his weight behind it and Lawler was squirming away as Falcon rolled to his knees. He saw Rack McPhale coming but he couldn't get out of the way.

His head exploded into a geyser of screeching sparks and then the sparks died away, one by one, and blackness marched over him with a heavy foot.

HIS dreams disturbed him. He was running down the long corridors of Hell and the hot coals spewed up to tumble down in front of his bare feet. He could see them lying there, each one glowing with white heat, and he dodged back and forth to avoid them but his legs wouldn't obey his will and he put his feet down on the coals and felt the pain of it run through his veins.

Then voices began to break into his dreams. One said: "Get a cigar, Rack. Hell, a snipe ain't no good to cook a man's toes with—if he's as hard as that mug!"

"I'll fry him the way it suits me!" *That* was Rack McPhale's voice.

Other voices mumbled indistinctly

and a fat and naked devil jabbed hot prongs at Falcon's toes. He groaned a little. Then someone was saying: "Down front, Morris. Jake wants you. We're going to cram Frankie into his keg and get out of here."

A door slammed a long way off.

Fingers pried Falcon's mouth open and then raw whiskey clawed at his throat. The dreams faded away and he tried to open his eyes but the lids seemed too heavy to lift. His feet hurt with a searing pain. Then he choked on more whiskey and got his eyes open.

There was a bare room with the plaster cracking on the ceiling and there was a single electric light bulb which hung from a long cord and drove spears of light into Falcon's aching head. He tried to sit up but there was a broad leather strap across his chest and presently he understood that he was lying on a table with his feet strapped to the top of a heavy chair. His arms were free from the elbows down.

A board creaked and feet scraped across the floor. Falcon, squinting cautiously, saw Rack McPhale moving in front of him. McPhale said: "Come out of your hop, you red-headed monkey! Time's getting short and I want to hear you squeal plenty before I rub you out!"

He stood there with his legs spraddled and his lips thin and wicked while he puffed a fresh cigarette into a glowing end. Falcon's head was beginning to clear; the whiskey had helped, he thought, and was a little grateful. He braced himself, then, and felt a little sick as McPhale moved forward with the cigarette between a thumb and forefinger.

The pain drove through his right leg like a knife blade.

Falcon screamed and rolled his head from side to side and then went limp. Pain bit at his other leg, then, but he laid the iron of his will onto himself and didn't move. He could hear McPhale swearing with a vicious monotony of sound and then the scraping footsteps came toward the head of the table again.

McPhale bent down and lifted one of Falcon's eyelids and Falcon saw the man's face close above his own. He waited. McPhale bent closer—close enough, now. Falcon stabbed at the man's eyes with the spread fore and second fingers of his right hand and felt the blow go home.

Rack McPhale screamed and spun away, clawing at his blind eyes and stumbling against the corner of the table. He went to his knees and still screamed.

Falcon exhaled deeply and the strap across his chest loosened a little. He caught hold of the sides of the table and wriggled himself down and the strap slid an inch higher on his chest. He rested for a minute and then tried again and the strap slid up a little more —a little more after that.

He was free, presently.

Rack McPhale was on his knees with his hands still pressed against his face and blood came from between his fingers. Falcon sat up on the table; reached out and slowly unfastened the belts which bound his naked ankles to the chair. He touched the soles of his feet and found that they were blistered and raw so he tore up his shirt and bandaged them, sitting on the table while he watched Rack McPhale.

"I gave you a chance to get out once, Rack," he said softly.

McPhale was screaming hoarsely and had pulled one hand away from his face to try and claw the gun out of his

pocket. "You've jabbed my eyes out, damn you! You. . . ."

Falcon limped across on his burned feet and hit Rack McPhale with a full swing. McPhale grunted and toppled over. Falcon took the gun from the other's pocket and went on toward the door. His feet were blazing tortures beneath him.

THERE was a hall with a window at the far end of it which was beginning to gray with the coming morning; nearer, there was a rail and the head of a staircase. Falcon listened and could hear muffled voices below. He found the switch and turned out the light in the hall and then sat down on the top stair to hunch himself down, a step at a time, with McPhale's flat gun in his right hand. He stopped a half a dozen feet from the bottom and sat there looking through the bannister.

It front of him a door made a patch of light and the voices were clearer now. He heard Jake Lawler and he heard Morris Chan laugh and once he thought that he heard Polly Vrain's scared voice. He couldn't be sure. He couldn't see much but there was an upholstered chair with a tommy-gun leaning in it and, beyond, there was a red brick fireplace.

A voice, crazy with stark terror, lifted suddenly: "Jake! Jake, don't do this! I'll pay you a hundred thousand! I'll pay you a *million*!"

Miles Falcon spat on the carpet of the staircase and snarled viciously under his breath. *That* was Frankie de Forrest—big, fat Frankie de Forrest who liked to pose as a tough one and who was as yellow as the inside of a custard pie!

"Choke him off, Morris," Jake Lawler said in his mild voice. "Then maybe you better bring Polly and we'll go down to the cellar and get this over with."

Frankie de Forrest screeched at that and Falson could hear Eddie Greco laugh as he struck him across the mouth. Polly Vrain was crying, he noted sourly; well, at that, she had twice the guts of a Frankie de Forrest. Miles sat still and watched with the flat gun lying across his left arm as he wondered where the cellar was.

Eddie Greco came through the door then, pushing the girl ahead of him with her right elbow doubled behind her back. Frankie de Forrest was out cold and Morris Chan and a man that Miles didn't know dragged the fat boy between them. Jake Lawler came last, wiping his pudgy hands on a silk handkerchief.

Eddie Greco had stopped and was staring suspiciously toward the staircase. He said: "I thought that light was on."

Miles Falcon waited and figured that he would lay his first bullet a handbreadth above Eddie Greco's belt buckle if the little man came toward the stairs.

Then Chan said: "Aw, it's burned out. Come on."

"Sure," Jake Lawler said amiably. "Come on, Eddie."

They went on and presently Falcon heard a door slam and he got up to ease himself painfully down the remaining steps. He hoped that there was no one left in the room across the way. For a moment he stood close against the wall and listened but he could hear nothing but the rain against the windows so he went on, hobbling swiftly into the light and with his gun ready. The room was empty.

There was a square table littered with papers; beyond was another and smaller table with glasses and bottles

and a soda siphon. The tommy-gun still lay in the upholstered chair and there was a telephone on a stand in one corner.

MILES FALCON swore because his feet hurt and watched the door as he picked up the receiver and gave a number. Presently a voice came across the wire at him and he said: "McGregor and make it quick!"

McGregor's voice sounded sleepy and irritable. "Well?"

"Miles Falcon speaking. Get some men and come out to Jake Lawler's house on Houghtailing Road!"

"Why?"

"We'll all have a picnic when you get here," Falcon told him wearily. *"Move!"*

Sudden understanding flowed into McGregor's heavy voice. "We're on our way," he said.

Falcon hung up the receiver and picked up the tommy-gun and slid the automatic into his pocket.

He went across a dining room with dirty dishes still on the table and cigarette butts spilled across the rug. There was a kitchen opening off one end and here there was a heavy door with a brass lock and the key sticking out of the keyhole. He opened the door a little and the draft of air was cool and good against his face as he started down.

He heard Polly Vrain scream.

The stairs turned sharply to the left and a patch of light lay across the concrete floor at the bottom of them. Beyond the turn he could hear voices. He went slowly around that corner and sat looking at them with his feet on the bottom step and the tommy-gun half lifted.

Morris Chan saw him first and turned, his mouth dropping open and his face turning gray. Miles Falcon said: "Don't move—anybody! I'm nervous this morning."

Frankie de Forrest sat on the concrete with his back against the wall—a flabby young man with pouches under his eyes and a sagging lower lip. Polly Vrain was a little to one side. There was a pile of wet cement in the middle of the floor under the light; two barrels stood beyond. Falcon smiled grimly.

Jake Lawler said: "Well, if it ain't Falcon—*Mister* Falcon!" but his eyes were vicious.

"Get over there against that wall, Jake," Miles told him. "The *other* wall—away from Frankie and the girl. Now the rest of you line up with Jake!"

The color had faded out of Eddie Greco's face leaving it pale and thin and a little ghastly. He went for his gun and Falcon had been expecting that. He braced himself a little and pulled hard against the tommy's trigger.

And nothing happened!

The gun clicked emptily and then Eddie Greco's bullets were slamming into the concrete close to Falcon's head. Morris Chan was yelling and Jake Lawler had slid a snakelike hand inside his coat. Falcon swore coldly and slapped at the breech of the gun and pulled the trigger again.

The tommy jumped hard against his hands and the racket boiled across the cellar as Eddie Greco dropped his gun and sagged to his knees. He smiled a little vacantly and then lay down on his face while a thin trickle of blood crawled out to mingle with the water in the puddle behind the wet cement.

Falcon said: "Stand against the wall—you two! I don't feel like playing!"

HE LEANED back so that his elbows were on the steps and he could take the weight off his blistered feet. The others stood a dozen feet away with their faces to the wall and their hands lifted to the level of their shoulders. They were afraid—they had seen Eddie Greco lying there.

Polly Vrain came slowly toward him. Falcon said to her: "Get on up the stairs, sister. The cops will be here pretty quick."

"You promised that you'd help me get away from this town," she said huskily. "You've got to let me go!"

"Go on up the stairs, kid." Falcon's voice was tired. "I haven't forgotten."

She went with her footsteps dragging and finally dying away. Frankie de Forrest sat still with his back against the wall and his fat face mottled with fear. Falcon looked at him and felt tired and a little sick and wished that McGregor and his men would get there.

Jake Lawler said finally and his voice was scared: "Maybe we can make a deal, Miles."

"Mr. Falcon, to you."

"I could lay my hands on fifty grand if I had to, Mr. Falcon. Maybe we could make a deal."

"I'll be seeing you again, Jake—the day they stretch your neck. Ask me then."

Lawler cursed, glared, shut up. For a while Falcon watched him sharply, waiting for some kind of a move. But Lawler was all through for the night.

After a while McGregor came down the steps with a half a dozen cops behind him. They looked and then went across the cellar with bracelets in their hands. McGregor took the tommy-gun and helped Miles back up the steps and through the dirty kitchen and out into the room where the telephone was.

Polly Vrain was there. McGregor said softly: "What a job—what a job!"

"Baby, over there, helped," Miles told him wearily. "Put her on a boat and send her back to the States—I promised her that. Rack McPhale's in a room upstairs. Maybe you'd better send somebody up to get him."

A big cop came into the light bringing Frankie de Forrest with him. The cop shook his head. "There ain't any use worrying about Rack," he announced cheerfully. "He's a dead one—neck's broke."

Frankie de Forrest was taking a big drink and he smacked his lips and wiped his mouth with a soiled handkerchief while he looked around. Dawn was outside and the windows were gray while the rain trickled across them in little rivulets. Inside the room the lights were pale and sickly—a nasty dawn.

Frankie de Forrest came across the room and Miles looked at him with a cold distaste. Frankie recovered quickly, he reflected. He would be loudmouthed all over town as to how he had gotten out of this.

Frankie was saying: "Well, we cleaned up on 'em, didn't we, Miles? We certainly cleaned 'em up!"

"*Mister* Falcon," Miles told him.

Frankie de Forrest's face clouded and he pushed out his fat under lip. He knew that McGregor and Polly Vrain and the cops were looking as he swaggered across to stand in front of Miles with his hands in his pockets.

"There'll be a check in this for you, Miles," he said loudly. "A good fat one! I guess little Frankie knows a friend when he sees one!"

Miles Falcon hit him hard on the point of the chin and Frankie spilled

across the table to drop into the upholstered chair. Beyond, Miles could see McGregor's shocked face. He felt good, all at once, in spite of his blistered feet.

Bascom's voice, as it came to him over the phone, sounded almost hysterical, Miles thought. Well, he didn't blame him much. Bascom said: "You've done a better job of work than you know, Miles."

"Okay," Miles told him tiredly. "Send the car."

They went down Houghtailing Road in the gray drizzle. Johnny Nipa looked back over his shoulder to grin. "Gee, it must have been some night, Mr. Falcon. I wish I could've been with you."

"You tend to your driving, brat," Miles told him. Presently he sang a bar of *Annie Laurie* and thought about the time when he would retire and have a duck farm on Long Island. The Great Eastern Hotel showed up through the rain.

Miles shuffled across the lobby. Beard was dark against his face and his clothes were rumpled and torn—his eyes were red holes in a dirty sheet. A portly man, with a pretty girl beside him, stared distastefully as he passed.

The man said, loud enough so that Miles could hear: "There's the sort of tramp that is hurting the United States out here in the East. The country ought to disown his kind!"

Miles Falcon grinned sardonically and went on toward the stairs.

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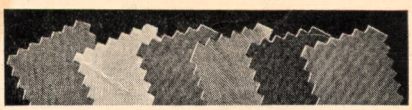

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