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Part I.

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by T. Von Ziekursch

He still wants to kiss her good night

MARRIED eight years . but for them none of that humdrum, take-it-for-granted attitude that creeps into so many marriages. He still wants to kiss her good night. Clever woman . . she has always known the secret of keeping dainty and fresh in all things the breath particularly After all, there's nothing like halitosis (unpleasant breath) to raise a barrier between people.

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For HALITOSIS *use* LISTERINE

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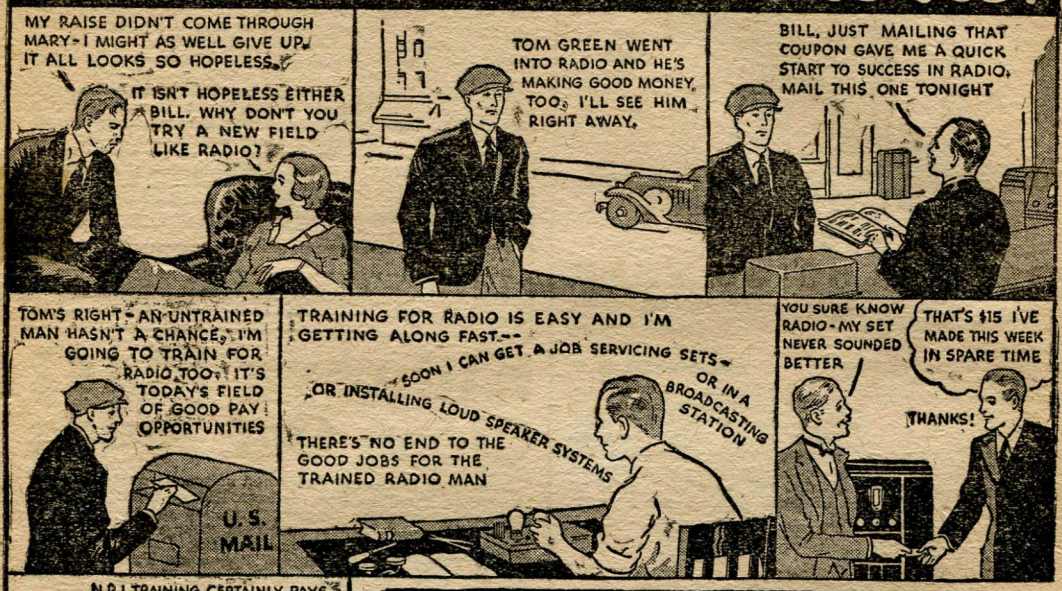
HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED—THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!



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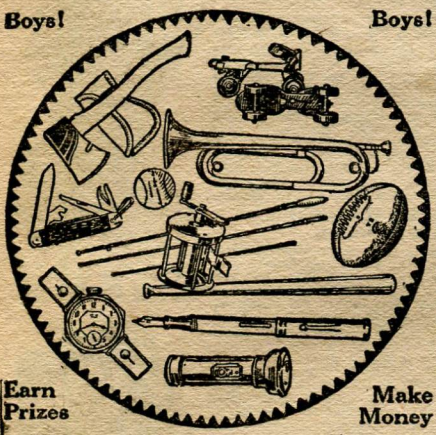

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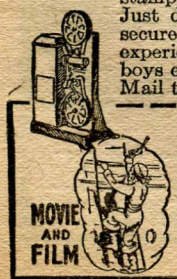

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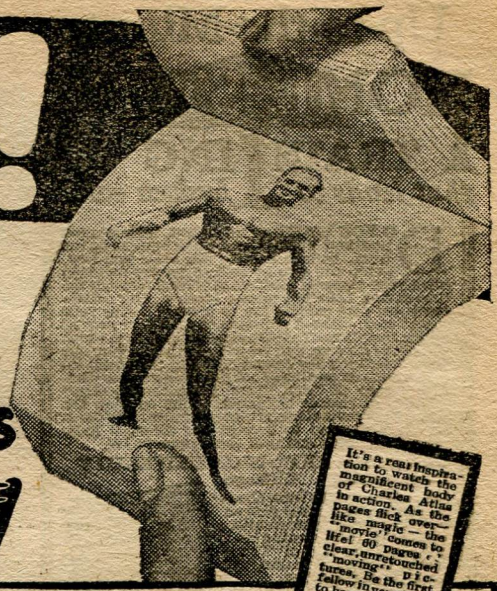

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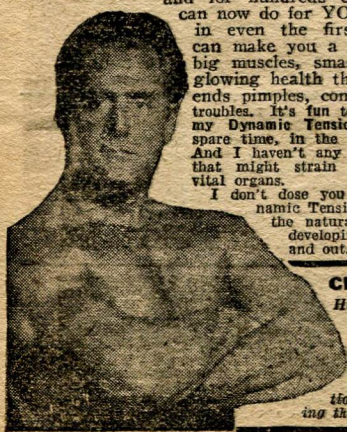

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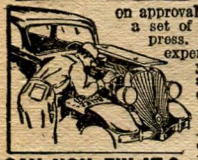

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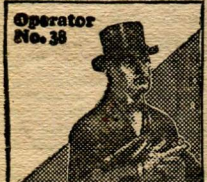

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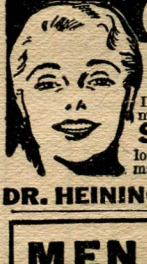

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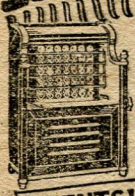

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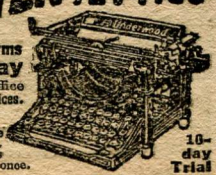

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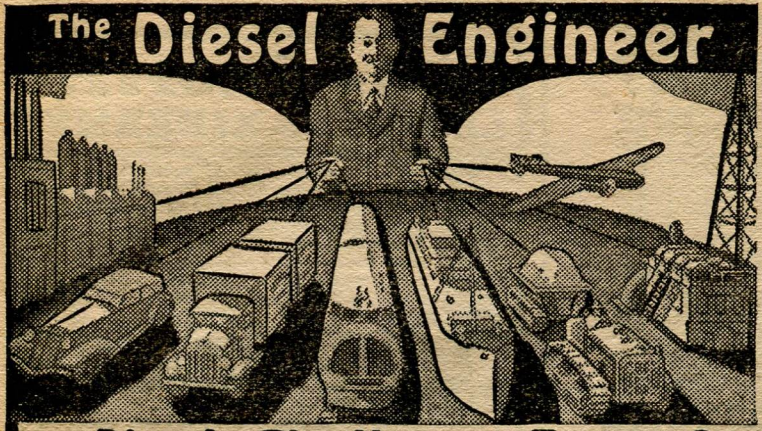

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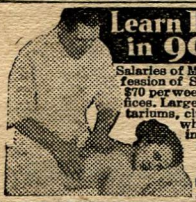

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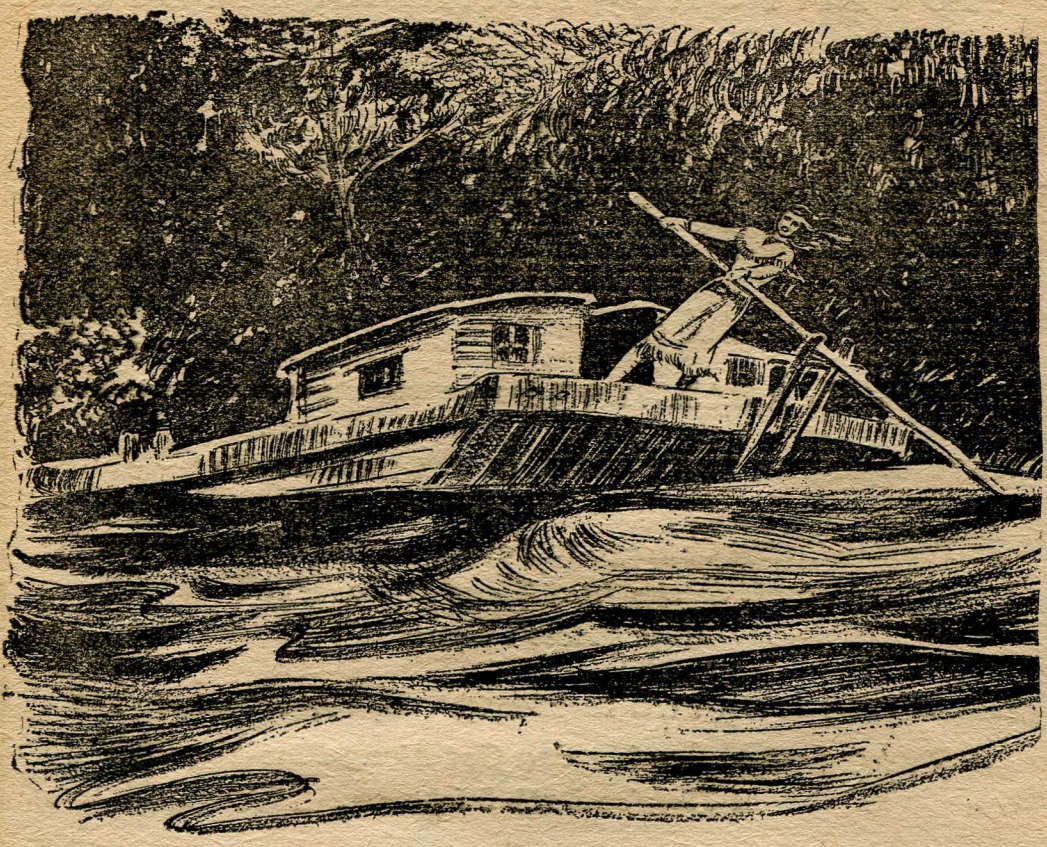
TRAIL OF THE SEIGNEURS



Part I

CHAPTER I

DOWN NORTH

MARSHALL had the feeling—the utterly unaccountable feeling—that somehow he was embarking on his last detail.

He studied Inspector Murnane, who gnawed uneasily at the stem of his pipe. Murnane was a tall man, spare and gray. A mustache fell down over his lips like a weeping mulberry in November, straggling and thin. The keen eyes looking out of his weathered face were a pale blue that could glint like steel on occasion. Behind his back the force called him "Pop". He spoke to the third man, ruddy, thickset.

"Rumors, Sergeant Blake, are the newspapers of the North," he said. "No matter how fantastic they are, the chance is there's truth at the bottom. When you've been up here as long as I have you'll take nothing for granted."

"Yes, sir," said Sergeant Blake.

"You say you heard this same rumor before?" Murnane asked.

"Yes, sir, but I never got head nor tail of it. Something about a fight between two men with long knives and one of them being killed."

"When?"

Marshall saw uncertainty in the sergeant's attitude.

"That wasn't clear, sir," Blake said. "And now these other rumors keep coming in——"

"I've got some of them myself," said

By T. VON ZIEKURSCH

Constable Bob Marshall of the Mounted Starts for Farthest North on a Rumor of Two Men Who Fought with Long Knives—but Finds That Rumor Lives Long Beyond the Barren Lands

Murnane. "Seemed like old wives' tales. What do you make of them?"

"I can't rightly say, sir. It's something you don't get at the bottom of. Strange forces at work, apparently to chase out anybody who comes into that country—some sort of terrorism. Sent one of my Indians from the post clear over to Fort Vermilion last year, after you'd gone out, sir, to see if they knew anything about it. He came back with the same kind of talk. Didn't make sense. Sounded like *wendigo* stuff to me, sir."

Murnane nodded curtly.

"We'd all be crazy if we let these bush superstitions get us," he admitted. "But I don't like rumors, especially from that country. We know too little about it."

Marshall, youngest of the three, leaned forward eagerly. He was as tall as Murnane, with broader, sloping shoulders and the capable, lean-hipped body of youth. About him was something more than the suggestion of physical force. His hair was dark and thick, and frank, inquisitive brown eyes lessened the ruggedness of handsome features. Across one side of his chin was a small scar. A polo mallet had left it there. Sometimes it turned white beneath the tan, and then men knew that Bob Marshall, constable of the Mounted, was not to be trifled with.

Murnane spread some maps on the rough table in the cabin and glanced out through the open doorway. Below, along the bank of the Athabasca, were the few scattered

log houses of Pelican Portage. A hundred miles southward lay Athabasca Landing, the outpost of civilization that was the gateway into the Three Rivers Country, mighty empire of wilderness. The forest came close. A trail led away from the river, toward the west, rising gradually to the plateau through which the deep valley of the river cut its way.

Several canoes were drawn high on the bank. On a sunny outcropping a mongrel dog, part husky, stirred and snarled at a half-naked child as it came poking with a stick. In the shallows two native women shook and rinsed clothing. A small, scow-like bateau was moored at a landing.

By one of the canoes, a large craft, two Indians sat motionless, apparently waiting and little interested in their surroundings.

"One thing's sure," Murnane said. "There's a fire whenever you see smoke—or there's been a fire. I've been thinking for some time we'd better look into that country."

ONCE before Marshall had heard the veteran talk in such terms of the unfathomed wilderness far over to the north and west, above the Peace. Almost completely unknown it extended to the headwaters of the Hay and beyond and west into the rugged mountains where the Peace had cut its channel as it came to join the Mackenzie system. It was a land of mystery where across the flowering valleys, past the muskeg swamps, the forested heights reared their barriers that must have seemed impenetrable as their white waters poured down to daunt the early adventurers carrying the banners of the fur trade into the last frontier.

"Well, I've had enough of rumors," Murnane said. "Now I want the facts. I'm satisfied that beyond these stories we'll find murder actually has been done."

Those who served under Inspector Murnane knew that he gave more than casual attention to many of the vague, strange tales that sifted out from the lonely reaches. Though impatient of superstition, and frankly scoffing at it even in his contacts with primitive people, he never disregarded it. The men of his division knew his ways and knew also that in Murnane's command only a man of parts could hold his place as a wearer of the red jacket—a hunter of men, physician, judge, administrator, courageous as a grizzly, kindly as a woman.

The admiration of Constable Bob Marshall for his chief was deep, but during five of his six years in the Mounted, spent mostly on lonely patrols, he had learned one thing that would have amused the veteran. To show scorn for the beliefs of simple folk was to raise an impassable wall. He got along well with them.

Through the open doorway from which a view of the river's broad shallows was evident, Marshall saw a canoe gliding downstream. In it were three figures: a squat man in the bow, a gigantic steersman and a young woman. It shot in rapidly toward shore. The girl alighted and walked up the bank, waiting as the men unloaded their craft. The sunbeams fired her hair with darts of golden brown. Her body was slender, graceful. The child quit annoying the dog and came running. She knelt and talked to it.

Marshall's attention went to the canoemen. The bowsman was short, thick-chested, evidently crippled in one leg, and old. The other was a colossus and something of a dandy. He wore a red belt about his waist, and the sheath for his knife was either of colored leather or beadwork. But the man's size was the striking thing about him. His proportions were magnificent.

The canoe was emptied of its load, a heavy one, and drawn clear of the water, ready for portaging. The giant walked over to where the two Indians waited by the big canoe Sergeant Blake had brought down from Lake Athabasca to convey Murnane northward. He loaded a pipe, then offered his tobacco and talked. An abrupt change came. He looked sharply toward the cabin where Marshall and Murnane had waited the arrival of Blake. But at that moment the girl arose and beckoned,

and the giant followed her. Loaded with packs and canoe, the two men climbed the portage trail, the girl at their heels.

Marshall's pulse quickened, though not merely at the realization of her beauty. About her was something else, a quality he could not fathom. Her head was held high. She looked to neither side. Yet there was nothing of posed haughtiness in her manner; perhaps she preferred to avoid unnecessary contacts. A child's shrill cry came from the cabins. She turned, and a smile spread over her face. She waved, then resumed her way.

MURNANE pointed to the maps on the table.

"Marshall," he said, "here's where your job begins."

The younger man's eyes lingered on the slender, supple figure following the heavily loaded men up the portage trail. His thoughts remained on her for a moment, but Murnane, bending over the maps, reclaimed his attention.

"I'm fed up with all this," the inspector said. "If somebody is running a tough game up in that region, if there have been killings, I want you to get at the bottom of it. We've never been in there, and as far as I know neither has anyone else, except perhaps the reds."

He traced a route on one of the maps, hesitated.

"That's where you're going. You could travel the Athabasca with us as far as Fort Chipewyan and then cut back up the Peace from its mouth, into that country, but everybody'd know about it. Bad as Africa. Don't have any drums to telegraph their gossip, but it gets around just as fast, somehow."

He indicated the spot marked Pelican Portage on the bank of the Athabasca, where another river entered from the west.

"You're going up the Pelican here to its headwaters. Then you can portage over to the Loon and down to the Peace—sort of going in by the back way so nobody will know it."

Marshall studied the maps, detailed charts of the Three Rivers Country, the Athabasca, the Peace coursing north and east to join it above Lake Athabasca and flow onward into the Mackenzie, the main avenues of travel through the vast northland.

"If he went with us to Chipewyan, we could send one of our own Indians along with him," Blake said.

"They talk too much. Marshall knows how to keep his mouth shut. He may learn things a deal easier if it isn't known he's of

the Mounted. This job may require some tact and patience. I don't want any blundering or hard tactics unless they're necessary."

Murnane pointed to one of the maps.

"You won't find it of much use after you get up north of the Peace." His finger indicated an area where lines told of streams coming out of uncharted regions to join the great river as it cut across the wilderness. Don't place too much dependence on it."

Marshall's glance followed Murnane's finger, and his eyes widened.

"Apwik House!" he said. "That's strange, sir!"

"What's strange?"

Marshall bent closer above the map.

"Here's a place, sir, named Apwik House, on Battle River up near the mountains where it flows into the Peace. Is it a company post or some free trader or what?"

Murnane shook his head and looked at the map. "A deserted post, probably."

"There are a lot of them," Blake said.

"Yes," Murnane agreed, "they were trading and trapping this country before Wolfe and Montcalm had it out at Quebec.

There were more posts then than now."

"But Apwik House!" There was a strained note in Marshall's voice.

"What about Apwik House?" Murnane asked. "What's strange about Apwik House? Why, you couldn't count 'em all—free traders and the Russians and Hudson's Bay and the Revillon Brothers, the old X Y Company and the Red River people—all building posts and forts right through to Alaska and the Arctic, fighting and killing each other and raiding the brigades bringing furs out or taking supplies in. Some of them even had their own warships on the lakes and Hudson Bay, and they worked up the tribes that traded with them to attack the tribes that traded with the others. It was a wild country."

"Yes, sir, I know. But——"

"Well, let's have it. What's biting you about this Apwik House?"

"I've wondered myself," Marshall said. "Never knew what it meant—to what it applied. You see, sir, it's a bit of a shock to run into it up here."

Murnane's keen blue eyes searched him.

"I was at college when my father was killed in South America. He'd gone into mining down there. A derrick collapsed."

As Marshall talked he brought a heavy gold ring from his pocket and held it out. In place of the usual mounting was a wide, flat surface, half of which was quite plain. Engraved on the other half was the semblance of a tree trunk, tilted as if about to fall.

"I never saw much of him—never recall having seen the ring before—but when he went out, he left it with the doctor with a message for me to go to Apwik House and show the ring to Rigaud, but to be careful of the de Montrevilles."

"Who are the de Montrevilles?"

"That I don't know."

Murnane examined the ring.

"I've seen this sort before," he remarked. "It's half of an old seal."

"A seal?"

"Sure. Business houses used 'em. The head of the Montreal or St. Louis branch would stamp a seal on a warrant or order or letter, and it wasn't official or negotiable until the other half of the seal had been stamped on at the home office in London or New York."

He returned the ring.

"Well, you've got two mysteries on your hands," he said. "Maybe you'll get the answers to both. Stick that map in your pack, and the less talking you do the better."

MARSHALL folded the map.

"In the reports that have come in to you, sir, during the years you've been in this district, haven't there ever been any about that country up there—anything about Apwik House or those names I mentioned, Rigaud or de Montreville?"

"None, Marshall. Never had occasion to send a man in before. There's nothing in the records. Am I right, Blake?"

"I believe you are, sir, though Moberly went up that way for the Hudson's Bay people sixty years back. He stuck mostly on the Peace. But there's one thing puzzling me. I've heard that name, de Montreville, before. Can't place it, but I know I heard it years ago."

The others waited, Marshall's attitude one of eagerness.

Sergeant Blake shook his head.

"I'm not sure," he added finally, "but I believe there was a de Montreville brigade that came down to the Landing or to Edmonton with furs, years ago, before I was sent north. It never had no truck with the others, and nobody knew where it came from, if I remember right."

"Ever find out who they traded with?" Murnane asked.

Blake shook his head.

Murnane turned to Marshall.

"You'll finish up there by September," he said, "and come out before the ice makes. Don't flaunt your uniform, but if you find any trouble, settle it. Better load up your pack with plenty of emergency stuff. Meanwhile, you and I'll get going, Blake."

As Marshall worked over the packs, eagerness grew within him. He silently thanked the rugged sire who had encouraged him to find more fun in a boxing-glove than in a one-step, a greater thrill in the feel of a polo pony between his thighs than in bridge and highballs at the country club. Over toward the north and west, up the Pelican and across the watershed and down to the Peace, some intangible thing beckoned, firing his desire to be off.

Chapter II

AT THE PORTAGE

AN HOUR later Marshall stood on the river's bank, looking away toward the north. The craft in which Blake had come down from the post on Athabasca Lake to carry Murnane on his inspection tour up through the country of the Three Rivers was fast disapppearing. The paddle blades of the Indian canoemen flashed in the sunlight. A flock of white birds rose heavily in the distance, the pelican colony that migrated here for their nesting and gave their name to the river entering from the west.

A fleet of five bateaux came riding through the deeper channel near shore, and the shouts of the voluble oarsmen at the sweeps, gay words and laughter, were audible until the waters carried them past on their way into the northland.

Marshall watched until the big canoe was gone from sight. Only the year before he had accompanied Murnane on his inspection trip.

Life did not change greatly on that frontier as generations came and went and the centuries passed. Perhaps one day Marshall would make the trip again; but now he knew no regrets at being left behind. Far over toward the north and west a mission of his own was waiting, to penetrate a land of mystery where perhaps death walked the forest lanes; and Murnane, in characteristic manner, had ordered him to bring death out by the scruff of the neck, in handcuffs if necessary.

His thoughts returned to the girl who had gone off up the portage trail with her two companions. He saw again those flashing points of ruddy gold where the sunlight played on her hair.

A bit impatiently he turned to the small canoe he and Murnane had brought from Athabasca Landing. Apwik House! Strange to find that it, too, lay in the path of his pilgrimage, symbol of both vague promise and foreboding.

With pack and rifle slung from his shoulders, he was about to lift the canoe lengthwise overhead, to rest it on the pack, when another canoe came sweeping downstream and headed toward shore.

There was an air of assurance about the two rivermen who brought it to the bank and held it fast while their passenger, a florid, rather heavy man, stepped out. His boots were new and of expensive make. No riverman would buy whipcord breeches of such cut and fit. His bearing unmistakably was not of the woods. The close-cropped mustache was well kept. There was an arrogance as he came, feet wide apart. He was unused to trails. Everything about him spoke of the cities.

The canoemen, big, capable fellows, followed close behind.

"How long is it since they came through?" the visitor called to Marshall. His voice was commanding.

"Who?"

"I'm Langstone. Does that mean anything to you?"

Marshall straightened.

"Not a damned thing!" he said. "Never heard of you. What about it?"

All three looked at him sharply. One of the rivermen stopped. At a low-spoken word from the other he again fell in step, but turned once to look back, glowering. Nothing more was said, however. A man with a short, pointed beard came to the door of a cabin farther up the bank, where rusted cables and machinery told of an attempt at oil drillings that had failed.

Marshall watched until they had entered the structure, then swung the canoe lengthwise to his shoulders, and set out along the portage trail. He did not observe the sudden reappearance of Langstone at the cabin door, where with his companions he stood looking after the Mounted man.

The light canoe rode easily on pack, rifle and mackinaw, and Marshall strode along at a rapid pace. He fell to wondering about the girl who had preceded him up the trail. She appeared to fit with refreshing assurance into this setting of forest and stream. He thrust her out of his thoughts, but found her image slipping in again—unwanted, for he had a job to do and to think about, and she was disturbing. He circumvented her temporarily by speculating on which of the early adventurers had broken the trail he followed.

Now it was easy. He pictured in a panoply of colors the days of the great companies and of the free traders who struggled and fought for the riches of this land. With brigades of canoes and bateaux they would leave Fort Edmonton and sweep into the North, their banners trailing and the songs of their crews enlivening the rivers, laden with trade goods to be exchanged for bales of furs destined for York Factory, where sailing ships came from Europe through the treacherous waters of Hudson Bay.

PICTURESQUE these brigades undoubtedly had been, with their head steersman not alone the best guide but the best fighting man, as they penetrated the far places under his orders—orders that not even a chief factor could countermand. Picturesque they still were, as he had seen them come out in the spring with the results of the winter's fur harvest.

Now and then he observed evidence of the recent passage of the girl and her companions: a stone, freshly turned, moss crushed. Once he stopped and half turned, peering from beneath the canoe back down the trail. Then he went on, walking more slowly, treading with calculated softness, listening. Crossing a bench where the poplar thinned out he stopped, hesitated a moment, then put the canoe and pack down and stood beside them, waiting as if to rest from the effort of the portage.

Presently three men came up the trail. One toted a canoe. On the shoulders of another, slung from a tump-line, was a large pack. The third carried two rifles and a smaller pack. Their haste was apparent until they saw Marshall. Then their pace became leisurely. Two of them were the canoemen who had accompanied Langstone. The third was the individual who had welcomed them at the cabin near the oil drillings. He was older then the canoemen, shorter, rugged. There was a vague difference. Marshall solved it. He was of the forest, a woodsman; the others were

rivermen. Only one familiar with the bush and its types would have noticed.

A few feet from Marshall they stopped, dropped their loads. Marshall glanced down the trail, expecting the one named Langstone. The two rivermen merely stared. The other nodded, smiled. His short beard was reddish.

"You goin' where, stranger?" he asked.

"North," said Marshall.

THE other came closer. One of the rivermen leaned against a tree slightly behind Marshall and his fixed glance was on the forest, for all the world like some hunting hound uncomfortably held in leash,

but waiting. The second riverman rubbed and examined the stock of a rifle.

"Not many traverse thees portage," the bearded man said. Perhaps the probing insistence was of his manner rather than his words.

"Seem to be quite a few," said Marshall.

"I have nevair see you come through Pelican Portage before."

Marshall studied him. They probably were aware he was of the Mounted, that he had come with Inspector Murnane and been met by Sergeant Blake. It seemed likely that everybody at the tiny cluster of cabins would know it.

"You goin' to the Peace?"

This man spoke with the soft French inflection.

"Possibly," said Marshall. "Why?"

The other's shoulders shrugged.

"I think maybe we travel togethair—make one brigade. There is bad water down the Loon."

"I like to travel alone," said Marshall.

"It is ver' difficult to get through."

His insistence was eager. The riverman leaning against the tree shifted. The other stopped rubbing the rifle and looked at their spokesman impatiently. Marshall sensed a hostility close to the surface, as if, checked in some ordered plan, they would attempt to force it through with little temporizing. He speculated again concerning Langstone. Evidently the man had reasons for keeping in the background. Marshall drew out his pipe, loaded and lit it.

"This is long portage," the spokesman said—"if you wish to get through before night."

"Doesn't matter to me," said Marshall. "No hurry."

The riverman rubbing one of the rifles grunted.

"Not many mans know the portages that cross to the Loon," the spokesman said. His dark, small eyes valued Marshall. "It is bad country to be lost in."

Their determination to travel with him was thinly veiled.

The riverman ceased rubbing his rifle, seized Marshall's pack and started up the trail.

"We'll give you a lift to the Peace," he said. "What use to be wastin' words?"

Marshall was at his side, heard the exclamation of protest from their spokesman, and knew that the second riverman came in menacing strides.

"Drop that pack!"

Perhaps his experience in the handling of men warned Marshall. He saw the flare of mercuric temper through the surliness and stepped quickly to one side as the riverman sought to brush past. There was an instant of bodily contact and the riverman stumbled forward as one of Marshall's feet was thrust out. Pack and the rifle he had been carrying fell as he sprawled and the other riverman closed with Marshall, grappling.

IN SPITE of the onslaught's suddenness, Marshall was keyed to meet it, aroused to readiness by the attitude of this pair since their advent up the trail, their evident impatience with the bearded man's methods. A moment he tested this second opponent's strength in a tugging embrace, heard the angry cry of the French woodsman and realized it was a command to the others.

The riverman was strong. Marshall whirled suddenly, like a boxer spinning out of a clinch, until one arm was free, then drove home a short, quick uppercut to the jaw. The riverman's head snapped back, his arms flew up, his knees buckled and he plunged down on his face.

Again that warning cry came, high, raging. Marshall turned in time to see his first opponent with knife drawn, and the red-bearded man holding him back at rifle's point. There was no pretense about it. The spokesman's attitude was full of menace. His finger tightened on the trigger. Incredibly, he had entered the fight on Marshall's side with an evident deadliness of purpose. Mystified, Marshall waited a moment, ready to meet any new phase of

the attack, and the motive for the strange situation came when the man with the rifle spoke excitedly.

"For what you attack m'sieu? You forget I tell you what to do, *hien?* Who say to you that you do this thing? Go! Get out! Fools!"

Rage, disappointment, perhaps fear were mingled in his expression. Plainly they had precipitated something that completely upset whatever mission they had embarked on.

Swift, conflicting thoughts raced through Marshall's mind. The mere possibility existed that they did not know he was of the Mounted. To place them under arrest would involve taking them down to Athabasca Landing. He could handle them, all three if necessary. Some glimmering of that fact must have got through to them by now. But he was on detail, on specific assignment.

"M'sieu," the leader appealed to him, "they are crazee, thees voyageur." In his excitement his patois became more pronounced. "They are fools. They do not wish to go into the north wit' me—away from the river, the w'iskey, the womans. They are bad. See, I take them back. I fire them for sure, m'sieu. I get odair voyageur to take wit' me. You will forget, m'sieu? I apologize."

Marshall looked at him coldly, knew that he lied, that he had been sent with these others. Yet to be side-tracked to bring in a couple of roustabouts for a personal attack— Perhaps that was the hidden motive behind it all—to draw him off the trail, to hold him back. It might have been a by-play to attain that end.

He nodded.

"You'd better take them back and fire them," he said, "or tell whoever sent you to fire them."

Was that disappointment or relief? The other looked at him, seemed hesitant. Marshall returned to his canoe and pack, picked up his rifle. Sullen glances came his way from the two rivermen. He was aware of subdued words spoken to them by the third man, remonstrances. Loaded with their duffel and canoe, the trio went slowly back down the trail. Marshall wondered how long before they would return, follow after him. Momentarily he expected a rifle shot, stood ready to dive for the protecting curtain of trees and meet them on their own terms despite Murnane's orders against blundering, fighting tactics and to keep his own identity and purpose masked.

Minutes passed. Perhaps it was too close to the river. They might seek more favorable ground, deeper in the bush. Marshall smiled. They were as ready brigands as he had met in the North, and he regretted the necessity of the course he had chosen, letting them off so readily—for the present. Possibly when he returned this way—if he did——

The smile was a bit grim. At least one would not eat in comfort for a day or two.

DELIBERATELY he swung pack and canoe up and continued up the portage trail. At last he came to its ending and launched his canoe in the Pelican above its rapids as the long afternoon waned into the pale evening of the Northland's early summer. Darkness had fallen when he stopped behind a headland and in the dawning was off again. Any who followed would not hold such a pace long.

He came to the Pelican's headwaters, crossed the lake from which it flowed, and found the little-used portage trail to another lake which emptied northward down the Loon to the Peace. Far ahead an unknown wilderness called, and again that feeling came—the unaccountable feeling that this was his last detail.

A third day of paddling, and the twilight was approaching as he saw a bateau ahead, moored to the bank. Below it the figures of men moved about a fire. He drifted on toward it, then suddenly stopped paddling. Was that a stealthy movement in the brush above the bateau? A shout arose from the men by the fire. The bateau had drifted free, caught in the current and was floating down-stream.

Marshall saw the men leave the fire and run along the bank. One, a squat fellow who hobbled grotesquely, waved his arms, and the roar of his voice sounded above the others as he plunged into the water and struggled vainly in his efforts to clutch something, evidently a mooring line.

The Mounted man cut the water with his paddle, and the canoe surged forward under short, feathering strokes. He did not lift the blade, merely drove it back and forth, turning it. The others were left behind as the canoe gained rapidly on the runaway bateau. Then he saw a figure emerge from its cabin and dart toward the sweep—the figure of a girl. For a moment the fading light touched and illuminated the golden brown of her hair.

Marshall was aware that the current had increased its pace as the river entered a long bend. He was conscious of a sound, a vague, flat staccato in the distance. The girl on the bateau was throwing all her power against the heavy sweep, but the force of the waters proved too great. It was torn from her grasp.

The staccato sound increased, deepened. Marshall was on one knee, driving the blade furiously with all the power of sloping shoulders, back and thighs. The full challenge of the rapids came to his ears now. He lunged at something in the water, grasped the tracking line by which the bateau had been moored, and fastened it about the canoe's thwart.

Hand over hand he dragged it close to the bateau and clambered on deck. Fear and pain struggled with a hint of a smile in the widely set gray eyes that met his as he seized the buffeting sweep. At that moment it rose and tossed her against him, and he held her close. The scent of her hair was in his nostrils, and her body sagged, warm and firm, in the cradle of his arm.

Strange fires played through him. For an instant the menace of the rapids with their boulder-strewn maw was forgotten. He glanced down. Her face was white, but the fear had vanished from her eyes, and she drew away.

Beyond the bateau's cabin he could see the turmoil of foaming water and a smoother channel close to shore. It was apparent that this was the route used to lower such craft, with men on the bank holding them in check by tracking lines.

The bateau bobbed and heaved, and he looked back hastily to see his canoe pitching wildly but held upright by the water's drag. The sweep tore free of his grasp and smashed against him, but he held his footing and encircled it with his arms, bracing against it so that its rudder-like action forced the bateau over toward the smoother chute.

His knees bent slowly under the pressure and the muscles of his neck seemed bursting as wild waters tore at the planking and mighty currents sought to wrench the sweep from his grasp.

Tense, hands clenched and thrust forward as if eager to aid, the girl stood watching, fascinated by the struggle between this man and elemental forces. She saw the swelling cords of his neck, the whiteness of his knuckles, heard the gasping intake of his breath, looked on as one spell-bound while his body arched slightly like a band of steel slowly bending, then straightening as he forced the sweep against all the power of the mad waters.

The bateau lurched, swayed, then slipped down into the trough of the chute and raced on beneath a naked, rocky bank to be delivered at the end of the rapids in a swirling eddy. As it left the chute it spun crazily. Again the sweep tore loose, lashed backward, and Marshall fell, face down. Blood trickled from his hair where the sweep had struck.

Chapter III

He Is of the Mounted Mam-selle

DEEP down into the well of Marshall's unconsciousness music came, reed-like notes, ethereal in their beauty. He was floating between worlds, drifting through

a firmament of dreams where colors and sounds mingled and merged with each other. As one carried on a pallet of fleecy clouds he sped along celestial paths and looked downward on a world of beauty where silvered streams ran through emerald forests. The full splendor of June was on an enchanted wilderness and a chorus of song rose to his ears. Then lightnings came and with them thunders, and storm winds blew. He was tossed about, and the fires of the lightnings seared across his brain. The forest below seethed redly and the fleecy clouds on which he struggled were aflame.

At intervals came complete oblivion. His struggles ceased. He lay motionless. So quietly that the wrinkled old half-breed who hobbled on one mis-shapen leg had to kneel

and press his ear to the Mounted man's chest before he could nod reassuringly to the girl who hovered constantly in attendance.

When he tossed and his low moanings began anew, she went to the door and called softly, "Sebanis." Then the old fellow came and held Marshall down with mighty hands that knew how to be gentle, while the girl soothed his head with cloths dipped in cool water.

At other times she sat beside him for long hours and moistened his lips or patiently let broth trickle between his clenched teeth a few drops at a time. When he talked in babbling, disconnected phrases, she answered softly, gently, with reassurance, and urged him to be quiet. Once she bent quickly over him listening as his head rolled from side to side, and he seized her hand in a grip that made her wince. The words were of a girl with golden brown hair, a girl he had seen kneeling to talk to a child above the Athabasca's banks.

Confused, she withdrew her hand, and he groped for it and quieted when her slim, cool fingers closed around his.

Through the long nights, when life ebbed low, she sat there, and sometimes she called in a frightened voice for Sebanis.

Once, as they watched him, the girl spoke.

"I wonder if Langstone could have sent him," she said, as though to herself.

The half-breed shrugged eloquently.

"Zat may be, mam-selle. He ees wan strong man, zat M'sieu Langstone. Maybe zis m'sieu de la po-leece do what he say."

The attitude of the girl changed.

"Police, Sebanis? Is he—how do you know?"

The old fellow grinned and his deep-set eyes were almost hidden.

"Me, I see it on ze rifle we fin' in hees canoe. An' I look in hees pack. M'sieu b'long ze Mounted."

The girl looked toward the pack and rifle on the floor.

"Sebanis," she said, "I do not think we should examine his things."

"*Non,* ma-selle? But mebbe we got to fin' out who he is so bimeby we know who die."

Her face turned white. For an instant she grasped the injured man's hand tightly, as if to hold him against the thing suggested in the old half-breed's words.

Of these things Marshall was not aware, but in some intangible way he responded to her presence. When she was away he pursued her through long rapids where he swam in boiling water that steamed and hissed about him until perspiration bathed his face with the turmoil of his fevered mind.

At last he began to struggle upward, striving to fight his way out of the darkness. The half-thoughts of semi-consciousness came, disconnected. He sensed a weakness, and it was overpowering. He tried to move and could not, and weights

pressed at his eyes and temples. He would have to throw them off, but they were cool, refreshing. A voice reached over unfathomed distances into the depths. It was a voice he fixed and held, and it was softly modulated. It spoke a language strange at first, then perfectly clear, the language of old France. Where had he heard it before? Ah, yes, back in those eastern lands, the Gaspé, Quebec. It was not the patois nor the modern French.

He was aware of motion. The thing on which he lay was moving, had been moving steadily, and sometimes other voices came, roistering voices singing old chansons. He wanted to sing and laugh, too, but the girl at his side shook her head and went out, and then the singing stopped.

Now he was alone and it was quiet for a time. Then voices again:

"Mam-selle, Jean Rigaud ees wan bad man. He, I tell zat to ze Sieur de Montreville. He not listen. Zis time I see hees talk to zat M'sieu Langstone."

"I have believed you, Sebanis, even though the seigneur has not. I did not trust Rigaud, but I simply couldn't believe he would do a thing like that. He meant me to die when he released that tracking line——"

"Ees ver' bad man, mam-selle. Sebanis goin' killum for sure, I t'ink."

"No, Sebanis."

"Zen, me I t'ink ees bes', mam-selle, I tak' zis odair *garçon* for wan bon voyage in ze canoe, an' mebbe ze canoe upset in ze rapide. Zat ees bes' way feex mans w'at b'long M'sieu Langstone."

Was that an exclamation of shocked horror or of anger? She was speaking the strange language again, the old French, and she was commanding, imperiously. She was one who would be obeyed.

IT WAS at this point that Marshall, like a diver rising out of deep waters, regained full consciousness. His eyes opened and he looked about. He was lying in a bunk, and the glare of fresh, clear sunlight was shaded. He half lifted his head, and his vision cleared. He was in a large cabin, divided into two sections. In the other he could see a counter and shelves; a sheet-iron stove, old and rusted. The cabin stood on a slope. Through the open doorway encircling heights were visible beyond a river, spruce and cedar girdled. The afternoon sun silvered the birch with a living touch; a lambent breeze, balsam-scented, stirred the branches. Faintly, from the distance, came the swirl of rapids. There was something faintly troublesome in the sound.

A shadow passed across the light from the doorway. He stared at the girl who came, walking softly as though not to disturb him. She saw he was awake, and smiled. Her face was drawn, tired; her gray eyes impenetrable.

"You are better now," she said.

He knew her voice, was familiar with it as one becomes familiar with something out of recurrent dreams. It had reached down to him in the dark pit of unconsciousness and delirium, soothing and quieting. There was something impelling about it beyond its gentle modulation. She spoke almost as one who had learned a foreign tongue in school and chose the words carefully.

"For a while we thought you might die. You must lie quietly now and try to be a good patient."

She placed a hand beneath his head and raised it slightly as she patted the pillow out, and the touch of her sent a warmth pulsing through him.

"You must not talk. It will be best if you sleep as much as possible. Do not try to think things out. I shall tell you all that has happened."

As she bent over him and lowered his head upon the pillow she looked into his eyes for an instant and finished her task with several deft touches that brushed his dark hair back. She was very beautiful.

"Do you remember?" she asked. "I mean, do you remember what happened before you boarded my bateau?"

Marshall saw the slight flush that started

at her neck and mounted to her cheeks. He nodded.

"Yes, I think I do," he said.

"The bateau had slipped from its mooring," she said, "and was being carried off. Sebanis says you came down the river in your canoe and caught it. Then I saw you, and you took the sweep and steered through the Wabiscaw rapids. It was a very courageous thing to do and I am deeply grateful to you. It is easy to ride the chute of Wabiscaw Rapids in a canoe, but bateaux have to be lowered down by ropes. No bateau has ever gone through as we did. At the end of the chute is a small whirlpool which tore the sweep from your hands and drove it back to strike you on the head. You were badly hurt."

She smiled again, but it was different, almost perfunctory. She turned away.

"I shall send Sebanis."

Marshall's eyes followed her, and his heart quickened as they took in the full length of her slender, rounded gracefulness. She vanished through the doorway.

Presently a man entered the cabin. His shoulders were massive, but the deeply wrinkled face told of encroaching years. One thigh seemed bent, and he walked with a curious, rolling gait, his right arm hanging lower than the left as the mis-shapen leg threw his great body to one side. His eyes squinted and gave his face the appearance of a perpetual grin. He carried a pan of steaming broth.

It was one of the pair who had brought the girl by canoe to Pelican Portage, the one who also had plunged into the river after the runaway bateau, a half-breed or perhaps a little more. He put the pan down on the bunk and said, "Mam-selle say for you eat zis an' zen Sebanis close door for you go sleep."

"Where is she?" Marshall asked.

"*Ma foi*—you talk too much for man w'at got seeck head! She go sleep. She ees sit all night by you lak woman w'at got wan seeck *enfant*. Last night an' night before an' odair night; so many—pouf!"

The gesture was eloquent. Marshall understood. This girl whose presence he had sensed in nights of troubled dreams and fever really had been at his side throughout his ordeal.

And there were other half formed memories of things, of spoken words he thought had been only his own imaginings. Had he really heard them—the conversations, for example, in which she told of a person named Rigaud slipping the mooring line of the bateau?

A change had come over Sebanis. He scowled.

"Me, I t'ink you are wan bad man lak ze M'sieu Langstone," the old half-breed was saying. "Mam-selle, she tell Sebanis zat M'sieu Langstone be glad mebbe if she die. She say M'sieu Langstone ees wan t'ief. You do w'at he say, eh? You come up to zis countree for him, eh? Me, I break your neck. But she say no."

There was no doubt of the old fellow's meaning. In his mind certain problems could be very easily disposed of. The fact of another's helplessness would not disturb him. It was perfectly clear to the Mounted man what his fate would have been but for the girl.

"She ees say you get bettair, zen Sebanis tak' you back. You eat an' go sleep."

The old fellow made himself comfortable, cross-legged by the doorway.

"She say Sebanis watch. Mebbe you try walk aroun' an' get hurt wan time more."

Marshall drank the broth. It brought a gradual flow of reviving strength, a comforting sensation, but he was very tired. He tried to talk, but the half-breed turned upon him with a vehemence almost ferocious..

"She say you sleep—not talk!"

Marshall smiled.

"What she says apparently goes around here. Who is she?"

The wrinkled face turned away.

IF SEBANIS heard any further questions, he pretended not to, and Marshall lay quietly, smiling at the circumstances

that had brought him here from a life nine tenths of the world would have envied and longed for.

He was glad even now, happily grateful for the events that had freed him of the obligations of comparative wealth when the settlement of his father's estate showed only enough remaining to permit him to finish school. He had laughed at the pathetic efforts of friends who tried to sympathize with him, and had walked out on it and known no personal regrets when stories of financial crashes reached him in the bush a long time afterwards, telling of a world in economic chaos.

At last he slept, the calm, refreshing rest that told of vitality returning. At the doorway the half-breed arose and came softly. He studied Marshall, then muttered. "You wait, m'sieu, until she gon'. Zen I feex you for sure. *Nom de Dieu!* Me, I put you in wan canoe an' let you go in ze rapide. I gon send you on wan wild ride, *vous sawez bien!*"

A grin, unpleasantly grotesque as a gargoyle's, spread over his features.

"Me, I gon let ze w'ite water carry you back to zat M'sieu Langstone. Zen I gon shoot zat Rigaud in ze belly."

Completely unaware of the murderous threats, Marshall slept on.

Chapter IV

de montreville! apwik house!

THE hours passed and Marshall stirred, but the dream was vividly pleasant. In it a girl came to look at him and she bent close. Something light and warm as the touch of a nesting bird's down brushed his forehead. It might have been the night wind stealing through the cabin. There was a faint sound but he did not awaken from the depths of his sleep.

At last his eyes opened. The full light of day came through the doorway. He was well rested, refreshed. His pack, rifle, boots were on the floor nearby. His eyes fell upon them, focused there. A curious silence pervaded the place. He lay quietly, waiting. No one came. Nothing happened.

He arose at last and stretched, and it was good to feel the thrill of his body in action again, though it was stiff and his legs a trifle unsteady at first. He drew on the *pac* boots and went to the doorway. He grinned in the sheer joy of living as he looked around outside. Plainly this had been an old trading post, built high on a slope overlooking the river where it came circling down between steep, forested banks. Up-stream, just beyond the cove, he could see the last two foaming overfalls of a rapids, a barrier to any further progress.

There were other cabins. He went toward them, and the sunshine was like a rich wine that crept into his veins and exhilarated him. No one was about, and in the majestic loneliness of the setting one might imagined that man never had set foot here; the post buildings alone were evidence to the contrary. The wilderness pressed close on all sides; hilly ramparts looked down on the secrets of countless ages, challenging, guarding.

His curiosity increased. He walked from cabin to cabin, observed the storehouse, the small forge, the dwellings men

had lived in. All were empty. A heaviness was upon the place, a sense of desolation.

Every indication led to one conclusion: the place had been long deserted. On the shelves in the post building were a few scattered odds and ends, forgotten or discarded when it was abandoned.

The feeling of emptiness, of loneliness was a personal thing. He was disturbed, and then realization came. He was really seeking a pair of gray eyes beneath a head

of wavy hair, golden brown and soft. For an instant he was impatient with himself, but the memory was insistent.

Where was she now, and her companion, the old half-breed, and perhaps others who had accompanied her? It was incredible that they would depart, leaving him no means of transportation, no knowledge of his whereabouts. Fortunately, it would make no great difference, other than a loss of time. All that was necessary was to follow the rivers, and bark canoes could be built by others than the Indians and French voyageurs. Canoe birch was plentiful, and a Mounted man on the northern patrols must be adept at many things. But what could she know of his ability to meet the situation? To anyone else her desertion under such circumstances might mean a sentence of death.

As he walked back toward the post, an opening amid the trees higher up the slope caught his eye, a path that might have gone unnoticed by one whose senses were untrained in the ways of the forest. The path was an old one, hardly discernible, but its width told him that it had been made by the footsteps of man rather than by animals. Ascending, it crossed the hill behind the post, then dropped away. For an instant he caught the shimmer of sun on water from the river circling beyond.

A grouse and her brood went scuttling away, and a huge snowshoe rabbit raced off in an explosive leap from under old branches. After perhaps a quarter of a mile the path turned abruptly down the edge of a bluff. Here the timber opened and he could see the broad calmness of the river above the rapids. He stopped, remained motionless.

A BATEAU nestled against the bank, the same slim, well-built craft he had boarded in its moment of danger. It was perhaps forty feet in length, with a long cabin in the center of its deck, its windows screened and curtained.

On the bank a group of long-bodied, rangy fellows in varied garb waited with a tracking line, ready to bend to their work of dragging the bateau up-stream. They smoked and laughed and chatted volubly among themselves.

At the stern sweep was the colossus Marshall had seen with the half-breed and the girl down at Pelican Portage. The girl herself leaned over the side, talking to Sebanis, who stood close to the river's edge and nodded vigorously at intervals. Suddenly she straightened and held out her right hand in a gesture as of benediction. Sebanis inclined his head, and the giant put his power against the sweep. The bateau swung majestically out, dragged by the trackers against the river's slow current.

The girl stood looking back until the bateau vanished slowly from sight around another long bend. The crippled half-breed waved after them and then pushed out a canoe from behind some brush. It was Marshall's canoe. Sebanis turned it adroitly and sent it back downstream where the river circled toward the rapids and the post below. Evidently an easily navigable chute existed through which the bateau had been tracked.

Marshall re-traced the path across the hill and was emerging from the forest when Sebanis came into sight on the river below. His first impulse was for immediate action, a clearing up of the situation; but he realized again that restraint was perhaps the better course. And he was tired. Too tired to argue. Marshall was aware at last of how completely his injury had drained the deep reserves of his vitality.

Sebanis saw him as he beached the canoe and came forward in his strange gait, for all the world like some heavy-bodied bird unaccustomed to walking on the ground. His wrinkled face and peering eyes were screwed up into what passed for a grin. Marshall wondered at the change in his attitude.

"Ah, m'sieu," Sebanis greeted. "You are bettair. *Tonnere!* Zat ees good—*bien*, no?"

"Yes, I am better," Marshall agreed, "but still a little weak, I'm afraid."

The grin spread. It was ingratiating.

"Zat not matter, m'sieu. Sebanis tak good care you."

Marshall smiled.

"Fine. That's nice of you, Sebanis, but I'll not need anyone to take care of me. I'm capable of doing that little thing myself. You won't have to worry about me."

"Me, I not worry. You do w'at I say or I brak you in two piece."

Marshall's eyes held a good humored twinkle as he looked at the old fellow. Despite the years and his crippled leg, he was unquestionably powerful. The great, thick hands and heavy arms told of enormous strength.

"Where is she—and the others?" Marshall asked.

"She go, m'sieu."

"Where?"

Sebanis waved vaguely off toward the south and east where lay the by-ways of man, cities, railroads, civilization.

"Me, I not know. She say, 'Sebanis, you stay wit' zis Constab' de la Po-leece. He not so seeck now. You tak heem back to At-basca Landing bimeby.' Zat w'at I do, m'sieu, lak she say."

The man was a naïve liar. Marshall took another tack.

"Sebanis, how long have I been out—unconscious, delirious?"

"Two week, m'sieu. You be crazy lak jay-bird. Me, I gon tie you in ze bed, but she say no. Ze blood he come by your ear an' your nose. You mos' die, mebbe. Be good t'ing, I say, but Mam-selle de Montreville say no."

"De Montreville!"

"Oui, m'sieu. Zat w'at she say—we not let you die."

"Sebanis, where are we?"

"Apwik House. Be old trade post, long tam close up, m'sieu."

Marshall looked about as though expecting shadowy figures to appear from the forest, from the decaying buildings. A feeling stirred as of men and events of forgotten days striving to bridge time's gap and live again. The past was not dead.

He looked toward the stream. It was Battle River, the line he had seen as he pored over the maps with Murnane at Pelican Portage. It flowed southward into the Peace out of a land of mystery. Even the Mounted had never penetrated here. He looked toward the plunging overfall where the rapids smoothed out into the cove below. Little wonder the region northward to the Hay and west through the mountains was so imperfectly known. Nature itself had mustered all its defenses to bar man's invasion. In the long ago a few hardy adventurers, who spread the power of the big companies, had broken through to establish posts along the main rivers where the fur harvest was gathered. But now many of these stations on the last frontier had been abandoned, and Nature reigned again in lonely grandeur.

De Montreville! Apwik House!

Chapter V

Sebanis Predicts Sorrow for Marshall

HIS back to the broad expanse of river, legs wide spread, eyes narrowed, Constable Marshall faced the half-breed. His official mission was momentarily forgotten. Only the personal problem remained.

De Montreville! Apwik House! The flavor of the past was in them. He visioned the haughty seigneurs, titled sons of noble lines, who once had ruled in the fastnesses with power as absolute as feudal lords, sending their followers, chief factors and traders, out to find still deeper isolation.

Some of the cabins were beginning to crumble. Logs had fallen out of place. In many spots the chinking was gone from walls and chimneys. One roof had fallen. Clumps of wild currants and alder and balsam had grown on the open slope. Apwik House! He had come to it at last.

Abruptly he turned toward the post, and the old fellow shuffled along at his side.

Marshall reflected on his good fortune in discovering the hidden path, the vanishing bateau. At least, he knew the direction the girl had taken, deeper into the wilderness.

"Sebanis," he said. "tell me why she left and where she is going?"

The heavy shoulders shrugged.

"Me, I not know." The wrinkled face was grotesque in its depthless smile. "Sebanis not know anyt'ing."

Marshall studied him coolly.

"It was nice of her to leave you behind to take care of me," he said. "After all, you might have taken my canoe and skipped. But I'm not returning to Athabasca Landing. Not now, at any rate. When I do, I may take you along."

A calculating note was in the old fellow's voice when he spoke.

"Not? Zen where you goin', m'sieu?"

"I'll tell you when the time comes."

That seemed to require a long while to sink in. Sebanis blinked like some huge bird as they stood facing each other. When he spoke again he was grinning, his wide mouth revealing the brown, evenly worn teeth.

"M'sieu, Sebanis ver' soree. She say tak' heem back an' be much care—heem head

hurt. Sebanis tak' you back all way At-basca Landing. Head be all bettair zen." He held out wide, strong forearms, thick as young trees. "Sebanis peeck you up lak wan enfant. Carry you At-basca Landing an' be mos' care not brak you in two piece. She say if m'sieu not want go, Sebanis not get mad, jus' tak' heem. M'sieu head hurt. Heem not know w'at ees bes' to do."

"Full instructions, eh?" Marshall laughed. Then, like a shot, he fired a direct question: "Who are the de Montrevilles?"

The good-natured grin vanished from the old half-breed's face. His little eyes were cold. There was no mistaking his meaning as he spoke.

"M'sieu head hurt for sartain. M'sieu talk too much."

The two faced each other, one defiant, the other assured. The half-breed broke first.

"M'sieu sleep good zis night. Be strong in mornin'. Sebanis an' m'sieu mak' long travel."

Marshall nodded.

"Yes, tomorrow we travel, though we may differ on direction. But I'll want you along."

The wrinkled face grinned.

"For sartain m'sieu tak' Sebanis wit' heem. Sebanis ready; got ever'ting pack for go on long trail."

Now he seemed to think it all rather funny. His head went back and he laughed.

"For sartain sure m'sieu tak Sebanis wit' heem. Zat ver' fine, m'sieu. We be good fren'—m'sieu an' Sebanis—*bien.*"

The half-breed probably was in his sixties. His sparse, straight hair was gray, his face wrinkled, but his body was one of tremendous power. It was thick and wide, with enormous shoulders and great hands, the fingers bent and strong, those of a man who had held the paddle and the ax handle through a lifetime. But by contrast with the colossus who had accompanied the girl at Pelican Portage, and who only a few hours before had manned the bateau's sweep, Sebanis was dwarfed.

Marshall fell to wondering if the girl and Sebanis actually believed he could be turned back, and what motive lay behind the desire that he should. She was somehow a part of the mystery he had set to unravel. That much had been established, and it disturbed him. Did he merely imagine he had seen things in her eyes that he wanted to see? She was beautiful. She was desirable. There was a majestic lone-

liness in her competent manner. In romantic fancy he saw her as a queen in this wide empire of forest. Imperious she had seemed as she stood on the deck of the bateau, surrounded by her retainers. She had ordered; they had obeyed. Did she believe she could dispose of Marshall with equal ease?

Gradually the long afternoon waned and the soft twilight gave way to deepened shadows. The bird voices ceased. Out of the night across the cove a splashing told of a moose that came to drink. Sebanis stirred. Marshall arose and went to the post cabin. In the darkness he fumbled at the pack, rearranged it, placed the rifle on the counter, and then stretched out on the bunk. His thoughts were tantalizing. He saw her face; her reaching hands in the darkness. He saw the expression of her eyes change from gentleness to austerity and back again. Then quick impatience came. He rolled over; covered his eyes with an outflung arm.

He slept, and the early morning of the northern summer awakened him. A robin was chirruping outside. He arose and went to the cove for a plunge in crystal-clear water where the music of the rapids was like a greeting from the wilderness. As he stretched his long muscled body in the sun and breathed in the fresh coolness of the morning air, life itself seemed to flow from the heights into his veins.

Sebanis was watching as he dressed. The half-breed came down the slope, grinning, carrying his small pack and rifle.

"M'sieu feel bettair today, eh?" he said. "*Bien.* We go."

Marshall nodded grimly, and strode up the slope with vigorous strides. The improvement in his condition was little less than remarkable. He made mental obeisance to the inclinations that had built up so sound a body. He entered the post and examined his pack, then smiled. The cartridge cases were gone. He opened the magazine of his rifle. It was empty.

He slung the pack over one shoulder, picked up the rifle and closed the post door. Sebanis was waiting where the canoe had been drawn up on the bank. A smile was still on the Mounted man's face as he approached, dropped his pack in the canoe and laid the paddle in the stern. Then, quite deliberately, he opened the magazine of his rifle and brought a handful of cartridges from his pocket, slipping them in as the breed watched, wide-eyed.

"Must have lost the cartridges from my pack," Marshall said. "Lucky I have others."

Despite his crippled leg, Sebanis lunged with surprising speed to where his own rifle lay with his pack, but was sent crashing to the ground by the force of the Mounted man's body, for Marshall was the quicker of the two.

"That sort of thing's out from now on, Sebanis. Better not try it."

Marshall's voice held only a casual note. He picked up the other's rifle and rested it against the alders.

"We'll just leave this here. You can pick it up some other time." He shoved the canoe down until its bow was in the water.

"Hop in!"

The half-breed's little eyes were almost closed. His head came forward. Then, ignoring Marshall's rifle, he charged like a bull, great arms flung wide. In one quick thought Marshall found time to admire his raw courage. Perhaps it was born of a desperation he knew nothing about. Whatever the situation, this man was physically brave to a point of utter recklessness.

MARSHALL avoided those thick, grasping arms, leaped to one side and placed his rifle on the ground. He straightened and balanced forward, poised and ready as Sebanis turned and stared at him, doubt, unbelief plain in his face. He looked at the rifle, then at Marshall, and grinned.

"M'sieu," he said, "you are wan gran' fool. Sebanis be ver' soree to hurt you." Suddenly, as though a new thought had

entered, he asked, "M'sieu, you head hurt bad today?" His voice was almost gentle.

Marshall laughed.

"Not today, Sebanis. And I hope yours won't hurt, either."

The half-breed was almost cajoling now.

"M'sieu, where you lak to go? She say Sebanis tak' you an' be mos' care you not be hurt wan time more."

"We're following her, you and I," Marshall said. "We're going to learn who the de Montrevilles are and what's going on up in this country."

Sebanis snorted, a deep-chested roar, and plunged in, grasping with thick arms that flew wide when the Mounted man drew down into a crouch and then straightened forward as he struck.

Marshall knew that no man is impregnable; that no man is so strong that he cannot be hurt if properly hit. He also knew that only those trained to expect and meet the shock of a skilled hitter's punches could hope to weather such a blow as he delivered.

Sebanis was on his back, sprawling. He came up, resting on his elbows and shaking his head slowly from side to side. He looked around as one in a daze. His eyes fastened on Marshall and he stared for a moment. Then he rolled over on his side, got one knee under him and arose weakly. He staggered a few steps but steadied himself.

"M'sieu—Sebanis ver' soree, but she say Sebanis tak' you back to At-basca Landing."

Head bent forward and low, arms groping out in front, he came, advancing carefully, and Marshall circled like a lithe cat, awaiting the onslaught of a powerful but heavy-footed adversary. He knew a moment of regret, a sympathy for this hulking old fellow who understood nothing of the science of fighting. The skill of thrust and blocking was all too plainly a closed book to him. Here he advanced wide open, without even a semblance of defense against that lethal thing called an uppercut. But Bob Marshall did not fool himself. Those great arms might crush his ribs once they encircled him. He weaved in slightly as the older man approached, stepped forward until the thick, bent fingers clutched for him, then brought his right fist looping upward. Sebanis collapsed and lay in a crumpled heap, arms outstretched. Once his legs moved convulsively, then he was still.

Minutes passed. Sebanis stirred, blinked and rolled over. He sat up and felt of his jaw, touching it tenderly and working it from side to side. There was no hatred, merely wonderment and a troubled expression on his face as he stared at Marshall.

"M'sieu, you lak thees loup-garou—thees speeret wolf w'at run in ze night. Man not see heem strike—so queeck, *Sacré Dieu!*"

There was something pathetic about it. The old fellow was badly shaken. Marshall regretted the necessity for his action; but cool judgment had told him that a man with courage sufficient to attack another who held the advantage of a loaded rifle would certainly have accepted any punishment while conscious. He had been compelled to knock the half-breed out.

He grasped Sebanis under the arms and lifted him. Despite his apparent strength the breed was too old to recover rapidly. The vitality of youth was gone. As Marshall held him three men came out of the forest further up near the river bank. Evidently they had seen the fight. In their manner was something hostile, furtive.

A change came over Sebanis at their approach. He straightened and drew away from Marshall, ready again for battle. Grimly, he advanced, a step, another, wary.

In the patois Sebanis taunted them once. At last, he said, the Seigneur had treated them as they deserved, had thrown them out. They were mangy dogs, and let any one of them who dared step forward and deny it. The answer came swiftly. One, a tall hatchet-faced fellow, cast a quick glance at his companions. Then they closed in upon him, the three of them. Marshall

saw a knife drawn. Under the attack Sebanis went down like a bear beneath a pack of fighting hounds, striking terrific blows but overcome by the sheer weight of the onslaught.

As the half-breed fell, Marshall was upon the struggling group. He seized a wrist, twisted and jerked. The hand opened, a knife was released, the owner howled. Marshall swung his fist once, seized one who was gouging at the half-breed's eyes, tore him away and hurled him to the ground.

The swarthy fellow who had attempted to use the knife scrambled away and ran toward Marshall's rifle. Marshall saw him go, surmised the motive and darted in pursuit, gaining in long strides. The other heard, glanced swiftly back over his shoulder, and changed his course, suddenly, racing for the protection of the forest. Marshall reached the rifle, turned and saw the fight was over. Up the slope another of the attackers was vanishing behind the cabins, toward the forest, while the third limped hurriedly after him.

Sebanis groped on his knees and rubbed his eyes. A moment Marshall hesitated, then gave over thoughts of immediate pursuit and went to the old fellow. Sebanis blinked, tried to open his eyes. They watered. One was bloodshot, the lid of the other lacerated. Such were the fighting methods of the rivers when a man went down.

Marshall filled his hat with water at the river, returned and bathed the eyes, the wrinkled face. He questioned the half-breed. Who were they, what reason lay behind the attack? At last Sebanis looked at him, blinking, a strangely questioning look.

"Zey Rigaud's frien's—Langstone's—lak you. Mebbe so, you not help me if you know zat, eh, m'sieu? Lemaire—Seigneur chase zem away at last, I t'ink, lak zey gon chase you out zis countree."

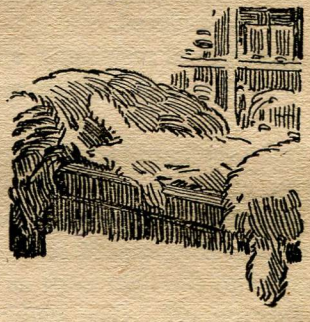
Despite Marshall's questioning Sebanis refused to talk further. Suddenly a canoe sped downstream, in it the three beaten men. Two paddled, the third held a rifle. As the canoe entered the bend that would shut it from sight the rifle came up. The bullet ripped into the earth beside Sebanis. The paddlers bent furiously to their task and the canoe was gone.

Determined, insistent, Marshall questioned his companion again as to who they were, where they were going, the motives behind their attack, and received only an evasive shrug in response. There were ways of compelling a man to talk, but the old fellow had endured enough.

Marshall's impulse was to pursue the others, have it out. But he thought of Murnane's instructions. And they were headed down the rivers toward the settlements. Later there would be time. Now the way must lead on after the bateau—after her.

Sebanis was steadier on his feet now. As they reached the canoe at the water's edge, the half-breed looked up at him. Perhaps the unfathomable thing in his eyes was admiration. He rested one hand on the gunwale.

"M'sieu," he said, and there was no mistaking the genuineness of his plea, "Sebanis say to you wan time more we go



back At-basca Landing. For sure it be bettair for Sebanis—for m'sieu."

Marshall shook his head. "It's no use, Sebanis," he said. "We're going after the bateau."

The old fellow could not restrain his amazement.

"Zis bateau?" he demanded. "You see——?"

He released his hold on the canoe and his

head came forward again. Marshall balanced lightly, his left foot advanced ready. Sebanis wagged his head and smiled.

"*Non,* m'sieu. Eet ees not necessaire. Sebanis fight no more wit' you. Sebanis ver' sorree for you. Sartain ver' sorree. You wan good fightin' man. Sieur de Montreville he keel you for sure, maybe, I t'ink."

Marshall's nostrils quivered. His lips tightened. His words were spoken crisply.

"Sieur de Montreville, eh? So she's——"

He did not observe the light of quickened comprehension, of cunning in the older man's eyes.

Sebanis nodded.

"*Oui*—she b'long Sieur de Montreville. M'sieu, me I t'ink be bettair you go back At-basca Landing lak she say."

Something cold and inflexible found a place in Marshall's mind, something that clamped down and blotted out other thoughts, thoughts that had weakened, that had robbed him of his assurance. Instead of surging fire, it was ice that was spreading, hardening within him. He was again Constable Marshall of the Mounted, sent by Inspector Murnane on a mission out of which anything might come.

He motioned toward the canoe.

"Get in," he ordered.

Sebanis shrugged resignedly, and obeyed.

"Me, I t'ink you be ver sorree, m'sieu," he said.

"That'll be my hard luck," Marshall said. "And you can give me back those cartridges you took out of my pack." He picked up the rifle, placed it in the stern, and leaped into the light craft as his shove sent it floating off. The paddle dipped. The canoe swung around, nosing upstream, toward the north, following the invisible trail of the bateau.

Chapter VI

THE LAW IS NOT ALWAYS HARSH

AS MARSHALL handled the paddle he speculated on what lay ahead. The slopes rose more steeply until the canoe was drifting through wooded valleys where the fir and spruce reared like friendly giants guarding the gateway to a playground of the gods.

Sebanis, squatting in front, seldom stirred. Once he spoke.

"You good man wit' paddle—mos' lak voyageur. Voyageur he wan smart feller. He not hurry. He sing *le chanson.*"

Marshall's only reply was the steady stroke of his paddle.

After an interval the half-breed said, "M'sieu not be too strong yet. Head be hurt tamn bad. W'y m'sieu not let Sebanis paddle?"

Marshall laughed, a deep, hearty laugh that resounded across the water.

"You should have learned this morning that I'm sufficiently recovered, Sebanis," he said. "And my head probably would hurt a lot more if you got behind me with the paddle."

"*Non,* m'sieu," the old fellow protested. "*Non.* Sebanis not do zat." Then with naïve frankness he added, "Me, I been t'ink about zat, but she say I tak' good care you not be hurt wan time more."

"I'll do the paddling," Marshall said.

The wilderness unfolded new splendors with every bend of the stream. It was a region of peace, of an all-pervading calmness, and the miles went by as the ages must have gone, unnoticed. Several times the passing craft disturbed bands of woodland caribou and moose that looked up with great eyes questioning, or snorted uneasily when the air brought the scent of man.

Marshall estimated that the canoe, lighter and more easily navigable, would travel under his constant paddling at two or three times the speed of the bateau, even though the bateliers who handled the sweep and tracking line of the bigger craft were the most expert of northern rivermen. He assumed that Sebanis also had thought of this when the old fellow spoke:

"M'sieu know where hees go? Sebanis not know."

Marshall wondered if the bateau had gone on through the previous night. In

that event it might prove to be a longer chase than he had anticipated. Well, that wouldn't matter. It would merely delay their inevitable second meeting.

Once Marshall let the canoe drift while he searched in his pack and brought out Murnane's map to study. It was the most comprehensive chart obtainable, but the information on which it was based was like that relating to many parts of the vast north country—vague, inaccurate, drawn from the findings of adventurers long since dead.

He bent again to the paddle; contemplated the broad back of the half-breed. It would probably be futile to expect aid from him, yet he decided to attempt it.

"Sebanis, you don't know much about such things as the law, but it happens to be an offense to refuse information or aid to an officer."

The Mounted man's voice was deliberately hard.

Sebanis said nothing.

"Will you guide me to where the bateau is going?"

After a moment of silence, Sebanis answered.

"Me, I not know for sartain," he said. "Zis rivier he go down into Peace rivier. Zat go to Lac At-basca. Zat go to Mackenzie. Zat go bimeby up nort' where not much forest. Me, I not lak' zat countree."

"Okay. But where does it head upstream—where we're going?"

Sebanis shrugged. "To ze Mountain country."

It was the answer Marshall had expected. The old half-breed's evident determination to reveal nothing might have aroused impatience in some. Marshall admired it.

"All right, Sebanis. As long as you won't make it easier for me, I'll take you there."

"You wan smart man, m'sieu."

Marshall laughed again.

"Maybe I'll be able to convince you of that," he said.

He scanned the shore, and his thoughts were of the night to come. He felt fatigue, something he had known but seldom. Evidently the effects of that blow on the head had been considerable. But it was not disturbing. Even though he were compelled to stop and rest, now that the game was on again he was calmly sure of himself.

QUITE suddenly he was aware of the thing for which he had been waiting; a change had come over Sebanis. Perhaps he merely sat forward a little, as though to peer around the curves of the stream. Possibly it was only a greater watchfulness, an increased interest.

The river circled a long bend and widened, and its current slowed. Here was a scene of sheer grandeur. The slopes fell away to low hills where stately trunks rose like the columns of a cathedral, their foliaged tops a canopy through which soft lights played down upon the earth.

Sebanis turned; his gaze searched the right bank; fixed upon it. Marshall's glance followed, then, sensing a trick, swept to the oposite shore. A smile touched his lips. With a native cleverness, the old fellow had attempted valiantly to distract the Mounted man's attention from a cabin set back in a grove of rare enchantment. Abruptly Marshall swerved the canoe toward it.

The half-breed's great body sagged visibly. He had tried his best and failed. Through the shadowy recesses of the forest in the dim light of late afternoon Marshall saw something move, then vanish.

Anywhere in the North an approaching canoe, bateau or scow is eagerly greeted by those who live within hailing distance. The more isolated the region, the more human contacts are welcomed. Marshall could draw but one conclusion. Whoever dwelt here evidently wished to avoid him.

He bent forward, peering among the trees, and drove the paddle hard in one final stroke, then grasped his rifle as the canoe slid up on a flat bank. He was alert, ready. Sebanis sat like a statue in the prow.

"Get out!"

Marshall's order was crisp.

Slowly the half-breed obeyed, a surly look on his wrinkled face. If Sebanis had known the meaning of frustration, of disgusted resignation, his features could not have portrayed it more effectively. They went toward the cabin, which stood on higher ground, fifty yards or more from the river. It was a long building of closely grooved spruce logs, with numerous windows, screened and curtained. Several of the sashes had been raised, and the curtains moved under a faint breeze. Directly in the center was a roofed porch with rustic railings. The door was open, and in the doorway a girl appeared.

At sight of her Marshall was aware of a catching in his throat, a quickening sensation. He despised himself for it.

She stepped out on the porch. In one flash of truth Marshall admitted to himself that, though in order to uphold the power and prestige of the Law he represented he must follow this situation through to whatever harsh or disagreeable ending might be in store, all his instincts rebelled against it—all save one, the instinct for duty. Dimly, soundlessly on far trails and lonely posts the men who wore the red jacket called to him the strict creed of their brotherhood. Duty was impersonal. Duty knew no limitations.

"I thought you might come, but hoped you wouldn't," she smiled.

"Why?"

The smile vanished.

"M'sieu, your jaw told me so. That is why I waited."

"You misinterpret. Why did you hope I wouldn't come?"

"I hoped that after what had happened you would be big enough to return to Langstone and leave us in peace. You, at least, who saved my life anl whom I tried to repay in kind, might have been different."

"Who is Langstone?" Marshall asked.

A cynical smile touched the corners of her mouth.

"But you know quite well, m'sieu."

"I know nothing, except that I saw him at Pelican Portage."

"I regret that you think me so stupid," she said.

"All I can say under the circumstances is to assure you that I never heard of him before and know absolutely nothing about him."

SHE studied his face, a thinly veiled suspicion in her eyes, though it was apparent that she would have preferred to believe him.

She spoke to Sebanis in a patois. Marshall understood this mixture of French-Canadian and tribal words. All who serve long periods in the bush ultimately pick it up. Her orders were to build a fire and prepare food.

The half-breed started to explain. He had done his best to carry out her orders, but this man had in some fashion seen the bateau's departure. Also, he struck like the *loup-garou*, the spirit wolf that runs at night. She interrupted, telling him it did not matter, and turned to Marshall.

"Come," she said, "let me welcome you as a guest."

The hesitancy, disbelief, suspicion were not gone. He saw it in her eyes, though

her words and manner betrayed none of it.

Marshall followed her into the cabin. The doorway opened on a room extending across the full width of the building, with a great stone fireplace set in the opposite wall. At either end of the room doors gave to other rooms. Two of these doors were open. He could see through one into a bedroom, a woman's room. The clatter of pans and dishes came from the rear. She called, "Sebanis, don't forget to wash your hands."

A joyous roar came back:

"*Oui,* mam-selle."

She smiled and motioned Marshall to a comfortable chair beside a table on which lay books, a writing pad and a small jade statue of a dog.

"They are like children—these woodsmen," she explained. "Sebanis is happy because he had already washed before I thought to remind him. I can tell by his voice."

"Not a bad old fellow," Marshall observed. "Plenty of courage."

"Did you have trouble?"

"A little."

"I was afraid, afterwards——"

"You mean——?"

She smiled. "No, I knew he would not hurt you; but I was afraid that you might not understand and perhaps shoot him if he tried to use force."

"Was it necessary that you run away?"

"At the time I thought it the better course."

Sebanis entered and spoke in the patois, asking if she was warm enough. She told him to build a fire; that the house was damp from having been closed so long; and that, with evening coming on, it might be uncomfortable.

The old fellow knelt at the fireplace. A merry crackling arose. Then he came bearing a tray that appeared incongruous in his thick, gnarled hands. It held tea, biscuits and jam.

She saw Marshall's expression.

"I made them this afternoon—the biscuits. Sebanis will prepare dinner later. He is an excellent cook."

Twice Marshall found himself looking at her as she poured the tea and split a biscuit for him, covering its flaky interior with jam, and the thought that came was confusing, for his gaze had focused on her hands, gentle hands that had soothed him in delirium. She looked up quickly and saw what was in his eyes, and a richness of coloring mounted from her throat. Marshall silently cursed himself.

He gave his attention to the tea, then sat back, aware of his growing fatigue. It was strange yet comforting here beside her in this isolated cabin—much like coming home after a far journey. The simile startled him. Home to what? To wage a battle for tragic truth? To rip and destroy the tenuous illusions that had weakened him with their promise of an impossible relationship?

"You said it would have been better for all if I had returned to Athabasca Landing," he ventured, in a low voice.

Through narrowed lids he watched the firelight on her hair.

"You are here," she said. "All that matters now is what may come of it."

"Only one thing can come of it—the truth."

"You are a very determined man, m'sieu."

"It is not always pleasant to be so."

"What is it you wish to know?"

A bantering note had crept into her voice. Marshall wondered if it was intended to camouflage her real emotions, or if her suspicions actually were allayed.

"I hope you will not have occasion to regret my presence."

"You fence, m'sieu."

MARSHALL considered carefully; decided upon a chance shot.

"News travels slowly in the bush, even when it concerns a killing," he said. "A long while ago someone named de Montreville stabbed another up here. That is why I have come."

The color drained from her face. Her lips parted. A darkening terror possessed her. She sat forward, grasping the arms of her chair. Her voice was low, scarcely audible.

"He has sent you. Langstone! That beast!"

"Sorry. I have told you I do not know Langstone."

Her eyes were afire, her hands clenched.

"I have heard of your corps, that its men are most formidable, like bulldogs."

"The harsh side is always the more

spectacular. There are many who have thanked God for the Mounted."

"They are kind?"

"More often than harsh."

"Be kind in this case, then, I beg of you. Go and leave us."

Her pleading tore at him. His face was as white as hers, but he made no reply.

Her head came up proudly.

"I am Germaine de Montreville," she said. "I suppose Langstone has told you everything?"

She arose, splendid, beautiful, calm now. The lids dropped over her eyes as though she were suddenly very tired.

"If the law you stand for must punish, I am ready. What will you do—return me to Edmonton, to prison, m'sieu?"

CHAPTER VII

A LORD OF THE NORTH

TWILIGHT had fallen. Only the faint glow from the fireplace and the soft light of early evening coming through windows and doorway illuminated the room in which Constable Marshall and Germaine de Montreville faced each other.

Neither saw the door to the kitchen move slightly where the half-breed had been standing, listening.

Marshall was silent. He wanted to express his disbelief, but the words froze on his lips. In her pale face he read fear, resignation and the proud courage of one who has come at last to face something long dreaded. Was this to be the end of the trail he had followed since the day at Pelican Portage when Inspector Murnane sent him northward to penetrate an unknown wilderness, to solve mysterious rumors of terrorism and a possible killing?

If the Law he represented must punish, she was ready to answer. Marshall rebelled. He had expected information, not a confession. She looked at him, smiling as though she understood.

"M'sieu, it will do no good to lament what has happened. Langstone—or someone close to Langstone—has told you, and though I do not know much about the Law, I understand that the day for punishment has come. I knew it would. See, I am brave."

Marshall studied her. Unquestionably she was linked with the mystery, but it was impossible to think evil of her. The firelight touched her hair with soft gold. Her gray eyes searched his, and it was their candor that decided him. She moved a step forward. The soft fragrance of her hair was in his senses as it had been when he held her close and fought to manage the bateau's sweep.

"M'sieu," she said, "I am ready."

Marshall smiled at last, and shook his head.

"I have come a long way," he said, "to learn many things, not only as a representative of the Law, but for myself. I shall be patient. When the time comes, I will act."

"You came here not as an agent of the police, m'sieu?"

Her sudden hopefulness was pathetic.

"First, I am an agent of the police, a constable of the Mounted. Nothing takes precedence over that; my own affairs follow. Curiously, in this case, the two appear to be closely linked. But I cannot be sure. I hope you will help by telling me what you know."

Again he saw suspicion welling up. Her lips tightened.

"M'sieu, I shall tell you nothing."

There was no mistaking the determination behind her words. Marshall felt that he was losing ground.

"Germaine," he said, "what if I should tell you of a man to whom the name de Montreville was for years of cryptic significance; who realized, without knowing why, that it was part of a heritage? Then circumstances, duty, whatever you wish, led him into a search for a person of that name suspected of a crime. And in the course of his investigations he encountered certain other names—Apwik House and Rigaud, for example—names he'd heard years before without understanding their

relationship. And he also found a girl he admires who has endeavored to lead him into the belief that she is guilty of the crime—whatever it may be. For, you see, he really knows very little about it."

She waited for him to continue. He signified that he had finished.

"M'sieu," she said, "if you should tell me that, I would not believe it. I do not know who you are. I have merely taken your word that you are an officer of the Mounted Police."

There was the sound of booted heels on the porch, and the girl started, stepped back.

A man of commanding presence stood for an instant in the doorway. He was tall and slender and of erect carriage. Hatless, his white hair cascaded over a noble brow, but his pointed goatee was carefully trimmed. He wore a cloak fringed with velvet that came to his waist, a garment as picturesque as though it had come out of a past century. Where the cloak fell away and one slender-fingered, strong patrician hand rested on his belt, the handle of a dagger protruded from a gold-embossed leather case. Yet with all his unusual characteristics, his eyes were the dominant feature, alert, strong, set wide of a thin, slightly Roman nose.

MARSHALL'S thoughts swept back to the men who had first broken the barriers of the wilderness, the proud seigneurs of France, the grim, hardy Scots. The boldest blood of Europe had sent its sons to a new land to set up what amounted to feudal kingdoms, and this man might have been one of them striding back across history's pages.

Then Marshall saw beyond him into the darkness, and was aware of other figures. One pressed close to the man's shoulder and peered in. It was Sebanis.

"Germaine!" The newcomer's voice was coldly courteous, as hard as a berg floating on Arctic waters, and as he spoke Marshall realized that his words were not in the patois. They were in the purest French of another day, scarcely understandable to modern Frenchmen, the French of the sixteenth century preserved only by those off the beaten track in Canada. Knowledge of the patois made it understandable.

"The men have told me everything," he proceeded, "and Sebanis has informed me of Rigaud's villainy. I have dismissed him."

"Has—has Sebanis——?"

The other inclined his head sharply.

"He has told me of Langstone and his actions toward you, and also of this person who comes posing as an officer of the Mounted, with his threats and —your foolish willingness to accompany him. I cannot believe it of Langstone, who was once our only friend outside."

"I told you long ago, when I first returned——"

The bearded man held up his hand.

"You may retire," he said, "while I deal with this gentleman who has seen fit to interfere in our affairs."

But if others were awed in his presence, the girl was not. Marshall saw again those quick fires lighting her eyes.

"Germaine," the bleakness was gone and his voice was gentler, "I shall speak with you later."

He turned abruptly on Marshall.

"M'sieu, the retreat of a lady is scarcely suitable for a meeting of men."

He stepped aside and bowed toward the doorway, and Marshall saw the shadowy figures on the porch move back.

"We shall go to the cabin of my bateau," he said.

Marshall hesitated. The situation was not without possibilities. He could refuse to accompany this fellow, but to what purpose? By so doing he would instantly place himself on the defensive, suggest fear, suspicion. It might precipitate the very action he hoped to avoid. The time was not ripe. He was not yet certain of his ground. Results often were more readily obtained by permitting them to develop than by forcing issues. Deliberately he ignored his rifle and pack. He

would thus indicate his confidence in the intentions of his host.

Outside, in the semi-darkness, he saw far up the bank the vague outlines of a bateau. He wondered if it were the same craft Germaine had boarded at Apwik House. Six or seven armed men, some barefooted, others wearing moccasins, were on the porch or waiting below, as motley as a

group of brigands, strong-bodied, lithe. Silently they followed their white-bearded chieftain and Marshall.

So, thought the Mounted man as they strode toward the river, Germaine belonged to this patrician of the Northlands, this cold man with the snows of years upon his head and pointed beard. True, he was vigorous, and handsome in the fashion that some elderly men are handsome, and his face was the face of one who has passed through life without the surfeits of debauchery. But he might be sixty or he could be more. And she belonged to him! It was more than incongruous; it was grotesque.

Marshall laughed without mirth.

THEY went aboard the bateau, the men at their heels. Only a hulking Indian and Sebanis followed them into the cabin, however, which was divided into two long compartments. The one they now occupied might have been the study of some fastidious professor. Comfortable chairs, a table with a lamp which Sebanis lighted, a bed of rosewood that was an antique any collector would have cherished, and rows upon rows of books were among its fittings.

The elderly man motioned to a chair, and said in precise English, spoken as the girl had spoken it, with inflections scholarly rather than natural, "You may smoke, m'sieu. I shall return in a moment."

He looked at the Indian significantly, and left. Marshall realized that he was under guard. A few moments later he heard low voices at the end of the bateau, then his host returned. His keen eyes bored into Marshall's, and Marshall was conscious of a sense of rising anger and annoyance.

"M'sieu, I am the Sieur de Montreville," he began. "I know all that has occurred since you bravely intervened to save the young lady on the, ah—the runaway bateau."

He paused as though half expecting Marshall to speak, then went on.

"It is, of course, possible that you are an officer of the police, as you have stated. I have heard of the Mounted, naturally, but until now have been sufficiently fortunate to have avoided contact with them—or perhaps it has been unfortunate, since I understand they are an estimable body of men."

His manner was one of politely concealed skepticism. It seeped through his cold haughtiness, even through the dignified measure of his words.

"Permit me to add that I know of your injury, and deeply regret it. I also know, through one of my men," he indicated Sebanis, "of your conversation with the young lady, in which you spoke of your investigations. You must have frightened her, m'sieu."

"You seem to know everything to date," Marshall said, dryly. "But what are you driving at? I don't get it."

The keen eyes valued him narrowly.

"You will, m'sieu—in due time. May I ask how long and how well you have known M'sieu Langstone?"

"I've had the privilege—if you wish to call it that—of meeting the gentleman once. I know nothing about him; nor does he concern me at the moment."

"Ah, no, M'sieu——?"

"Marshall—Constable Marshall."

The Seigneur de Montreville's hands gripped the arms of his chair. His face whitened, then flushed, and he half arose, but at length sank back into the chair like a weakened old man who has been struck a blow. The keenness was gone from his eyes. His head nodded slowly.

"Yes, m'sieu, I understand. Langstone would have told you to say that."

"I still don't follow you," Marshall said.

In some indefinable way the man had changed. His stiffness had wilted.

"I suppose, if we are to arrive on common ground, I must believe something about you," he said. "I will assume, therefore, that you do not know M'sieu Langstone very well, and will tell you about him. For twenty-five years he has been our—my agent. He handled my business affairs, of which I formerly had many. He also conducted an investigation for me in an effort to discover what had become of someone very dear to me. You have perceived that I am not of the cities. The intrigues of business have held little interest for me over many years. But I have no desire to burden you——"

"It will be well to tell me everything," Marshall said, and the Seigneur de Montreville made a gesture of resignation.

"That will not be necessary, m'sieu. I shall tell you only that three years ago, when Germaine came to me here, beautiful and innocent though she was, she knew more of worldly affairs than I. She took from my hands what were left of my business affairs, and learned soon enough that M'sieu Langstone had been cheating and lying and had grown wealthy at our expense. She told him so, and from the day he saw her we have been helpless. He became enamored of her, but she despises him. He has wanted her, though he could not legally take her. In his persecution he has threatened to reveal certain information."

"About a man who was stabbed?"

The Seigneur de Montreville's lips parted. His eyelids almost closed as he sat studying the younger man.

"M'sieu," he said at last, "Sebanis and others of my men have informed me it was an admirable thing, one requiring courage and great strength, that you did in overtaking and managing the bateau. I should consider it a privilege to show you I am deeply grateful."

"You mean—?" said Marshall, softly.

"I mean that when you return to Edmonton you will find awaiting you in the bank to which I will send you a small token of appreciation. It would please me greatly if you would accept five thousand dollars, no, ten thousand. Had Germaine been injured, I would have been most miserable."

HE MISUNDERSTOOD the Mounted man's silence, and continued:

"Two of my men will accompany you, expert canoemen. They know our portage trails. Little time need be lost." A tired smile spread over his face. "The warrant on the bank will be turned over to you when you arrive in Edmonton, and you will have only to identify yourself."

"I can believe you now, M'sieu de Montreville," Marshall said.

"I do not understand."

"I can believe that you have been fortunate not to have encountered the Mounted."

"Is it possible that you—?" The Seigneur de Montreville arose stiffly; some of the cold hauteur had returned.

Marshall noted the quick glance behind him, and turned in time to see a swarthy face withdrawn from the window in the cabin wall.

"Since you know so many things," he said, "you also should know that I am here on duty, and that your kind—shall I say offer of a reward?—doesn't interest me. And you should have sufficient knowledge of the law to realize that if this Langstone has withheld information of a crime, he is guilty as an accessory. If he has attempted to use such information

against you, it sounds very much like blackmail, and that's another crime. So it appears that he may be in the same pot with you."

Bewilderment was plain on the Seigneur de Montreville's face. He looked about, first at the huge Indian, then at Sebanis, whose dark eyes were intent on the Mounted man like those of a tiger ready to leap. Marshall saw the meaning glances they gave him, and was aware that a word or gesture would launch the attack. He shifted slightly forward on the chair's edge, and his eyes were smiling.

Said the Seigneur de Montreville, "M'sieu, I do not understand your ways nor those of Langstone. But if the time has come to make an issue, we will try to meet it. Tomorrow you and I shall discuss matters further. There are many things for me to think about."

He nodded to Sebanis. The door was opened. A word, and three of the bateliers entered, tall, wiry men, two of them young, the other somewhat older and with a patch over one eye.

Marshall saw at the belt of each the *coteau croche,* the crooked skinning knife of the north. The one-eyed man also carried a rifle.

"M'sieu will be our guest," the Seigneur de Montreville said.

The Indian held his great arms wide.

"M'sieu do lak Sieur de Montreville say or I brak heem in two-t'ree piece."

The old man paused in the open doorway, dignified, aloof.

"Silence, Lemaire!" he said. "No harm is to come to him unless he attempts to leave the bateau."

For an instant the scar on Marshall's jaw turned white. Then he arose, laughing.

"M'sieu de Montreville," he said, "I take it these men are to be my guards."

His host held up a deprecating hand.

"Your attendants, m'sieu."

"And who will protect them if I should tire of their company?"

"You are insolent or a fool," the Seigneur de Montreville said, and went out.

Chatper VIII

M'sieu of the Mounted

MARSHALL was alone in the cabin. As he stood contemplating the situation he was suddenly aware that the bateau was in motion. He went out on the deck. The Indian, Lemaire, was at the sweep. Two shadowy figures holding rifles leaned on the rail at either side of him.

Cool, refreshing, the breeze came, and out ahead where the river's surface shimmered under the radiance of a star-studded heaven were two St. Lawrence skiffs, light-riding, sturdy little craft of cedar, evidently more suited to these waters than the heavier York boats used further to the east and north.

The bateau swayed under its drag, and through the night came loud, joyous song from the rowers in the skiffs. They bent willingly to their task, happy in that effervescence of spirit so characteristic of the French woodsman.

The shore line drifted by in ghostly panorama. It was a region without light,

without dimensions, without sound except for the song of the rowers.

The Indian was watching him.

"Where is Sebanis?" Marshall asked.

"Hees go wit' Sieur de Montreville. Zey come back."

"When?"

"T'morra, m'sieu. Mebbe next day."

"He'd better."

"W'at zat you say, m'sieu?"

"I said it was kind of you to be taking me wherever you're going," Marshall said.

"We go home, m'sieu."

"Where is 'home'?"

"You gon' find out, m'sieu. Me, I t'ink hees be ver' foolish not chase you out zis countree queeck, now."

Marshall laughed and walked to the prow, passing the man with the patch over his eye.

Through the blackness of the valley with its rising ramparts of forest the bateau moved slowly toward the north. Where did it lead, this water trail of the bush? Perhaps its destination was known only by such men as de Montreville's retainers.

Marshall's thoughts were turning again to Germaine's naïve admission of guilt, when the bateau swerved in close to the bank as Lemaire leaned against the sweep. The skiffs were landed and a tracking line thrown out. The rowers marched along the bank in single file now, dragging the bateau as it entered the mouth of a tributary stream. They laughed and bantered at Lemaire's orders as the bateau swung wide, leaving the river.

This entering stream was narrower, the darkness heavier, the banks ascending in forest-garbed slopes. There were many bends.

"La belle rose, du rosier blanc. . . ."

The words of the chanson came from the trackers. Time passed, with Marshall lost in his thoughts. They might be advancing at the rate of a mile an hour. At last Lemaire shouted an order and the progress stopped. The bateau was made fast. Lemaire stretched near the sweep. The other two watchers squatted on the deck, and Marshall could hear their low-voiced talk.

Tired, he entered the cabin and threw himself across the bed. Through the window a fire's glow was reflected from the waters. Perhaps the trackers were sleeping around it. Perhaps it was intended to illuminate any action of Marshall's on the bateau. The Mounted man was faintly amused. He closed his eyes, slept, dreamed, tossed restively, then awoke and saw the shadowy form of Sebanis bending over him.

"M'sieu!" came the low whisper. "M'sieu!"

The light from the fire on shore had died down. Marshall arose, casually enough. His manner did not reveal his surprise. Yet he wondered at the half-breed's presence here; wondered, too, at its import.

"Ah, m'sieu," Sebanis said, and the whisper was lower, as though he feared the possibility of being overheard, "you come."

"Where?" Marshall asked.

"Me, I tak' you," Sebanis answered. "She wait for you. She send me."

MARSHALL's pulse quickened, but for a moment he said nothing. His better judgment warned him not to jump to conclusions. After all, there was more than one aspect to be considered. Perhaps even Sebanis still nurtured a desire for revenge. To strike a man with the hand was the greatest insult his red ancestors had known. And certainly the Seigneur de Montreville had yet to reveal his intentions. Then another thought came: could the Seigneur have inferred the secret, unbidden attachment Marshall felt for Germaine?

He felt a sudden stab of fear. It swept all else aside.

"Is she in trouble?" he asked.

"Oui, m'sieu—she in ze beeg trubble. You be ver' quiet—lak ze mink. Me I tak' you."

He led the way out on the river side of the bateau's deck. The cabin shielded them from those around the dying fire. In the shadows the two guards lay asleep. Marshall could not discern whether the Indian was still stretched by the sweep.

A canoe had been tied in the deep obscurity of the prow. Sebanis motioned toward it. Marshall slid over and down. The half-breed followed. Feathering, without lifting the blade, he drove the canoe directly across the stream in a line with the bateau, then let it drift toward the velvet blackness of the opposite shore, until they had passed the first curve. Safely around it, he bent to the paddle,

and the canoe fairly surged through the water with the swift strength of his strokes. No one, not even the Indians themselves, could handle such craft with the adroitness of those in whom flowed the blood of the old French rivermen.

It was like a voyage along some mythical river in a half-world of forgotten belief. Around bend after bend Sebanis drove the canoe until the broadening waters revealed the river beyond, the river from which the bateau had turned hours before. Sebanis swerved in to a point of land, and Marshall saw a faint glow as of a protected fire, not visible at any great distance.

Sebanis led him toward it. Germaine de Montreville arose from where she had been sitting on a log. On the ground near the fire, which had been built behind some windfalls and down timber, he saw his rifle and kit.

Eagerly, Marshall advanced, and the questioning concern that gave way to relief was evident in his manner.

"M'sieu," she said, "I do not know what you think. I only know that you have brought more trouble upon us and upon yourself. You must not delay. You are in very real danger."

Sebanis shuffled off toward the canoe, leaving them alone. In the firelight beneath the dark canopy of spruce her beauty was compelling. It swept over him until he ached with desire for her. She looked up into his eyes, and he saw the glow in her own, as though words that could not be spoken were seeking other avenues of expression.

Before he could answer, a cry lifted through the forest, eerie, dismal, an anguished wail that rose out of the blackness. Far off the cry of a timber wolf answered.

Marshall was aware of a chilling sensation. He saw the color recede from the girl's face. Her lips parted. Twigs crackled nearby, and Marshall whirled to see Sebanis hurrying toward them. A strange expression was on the old half-breed's face. He stopped within the circle of firelight, as though it offered protection against some intangible but very real terror. He shook his head.

"Zat ees ze wendigo for sure!"

The wendigo! Like all who follow the northland trails into the bush, Marshall had encountered these ancient superstitions. He had heard tales recounted even by white men whose lives in the far places had been too lonely, tales of the *loup-garou* that coincided in amazing detail with old world beliefs in the were-wolf, stories of strange forces at work against those who committed crime or broke the unwritten laws of friendship, but especially against those who violated the sacredness of another man's mate.

A YEAR before, Inspector Murnane had sent him alone into the country of the Cranes to investigate a rumor of a tribal gathering at which a strong-man or priest had killed a wendigo. Memories of that adventure flooded back upon him now. White men knew little or nothing of the thing termed a wendigo. It was supposed to be a horror, a dread being haunting the night and draining the blood from its victims. Weeks of questioning had brought nothing except the belief that some member of the tribe suspected of being an evil spirit had vanished. On such topics the natives were uncommunicative. The white man's Law might be all right, but they had to live in the forest and protect themselves against things the white man's Law could not reach. Even when he brought the strong-man in, with the slight circumstantial evidence obtainable—of a ritual and an old woman vanishing—the judge had been forced to free him, and he returned to his people, wondering at the ways of the whites. The strong-man had refused to talk. The other two Indians, brought along as witnesses, knew only that there had been many deaths among the tribe until the old woman disappeared, and none since then. She was a wendigo. The strong-man had accused her. It was the custom in such cases for the strong-man to

burn the one thus proven to be a wendigo, though he might, if he chose, drive the evil person out into the forest away from the tribe. Perhaps he had done this. They did not know. Once the strong-man had proved his case by ritual, they entered their lodges and left him to deal with the horror.

Marshall knew that these beliefs persisted.

A complete silence had fallen at the ghastly sound, as though it stilled all else, the rustlings of things that walk in the night, even the gentle stirrings of the breeze. Then it came again, rising almost to a scream, not far distant. An uneasiness settled on Marshall and the girl, an avoidance, a questioning, and Marshall saw Sebanis cast quick, sideward glances in his direction. Despite himself, despite his background of civilization, of education, of disbelief, came the surge of something very old, and his hair bristled.

He looked again at the girl. It seemed that all the forces of life and beyond had gathered their powers to intervene, to menace, to forbid what had been in his mind. Marshall's hands clenched. He saw the whiteness of her face. He wanted to hold her close, to press her to him and reassure her, to defy all the strength of man and whatever might exist in the supernatural. But without a word he picked up his rifle, examined the magazine, and walked off into the forest.

He did not observe the scowling resentment on the half-breed's face, aroused perhaps by a conviction that the Mounted man had brought this upon them, nor the girl's quick step after him. She had reached out appealingly. Then the fear in her eyes gave way to pride and admiration. It was as if the centuries had rolled backward, and primitive woman had found security in the wilderness and trust in her man who went forth to drive off danger.

The old half-breed's head fell forward; his deep-set eyes smoldered.

"Go help him, Sebanis," she said.

Sebanis was hesitant.

"Maybe ze wendigo keel zis m'sieu de la po-leece. Zat be good t'ing. Me, I wait an' see."

The girl shook her head and spoke as though to a child.

"Go. Give him what aid he may require, and bring him back. I have not yet finished with m'sieu. Somehow, tonight, I shall find a way to compel him to arrest me, and the Seigneur must know nothing of it until we have gone. Then perhaps all our fears, all the trouble will be ended."

"*Ma belle* Germaine, zey put you in ze prison," the old fellow lamented. "Zey keel you, mebbe. You not go!"

"I am not afraid, Sebanis. The good God knows I have done nothing wrong."

Sebanis crossed himself.

"Do as I say, Sebanis."

WITHOUT eagerness the half-breed followed the Constable into mystic aisles that had suddenly become a place of fear. Minutes passed, slowly, interminably, as the girl waited. Presently crackling sounds came again, and Marshall and the half-breed re-entered the encircling firelight. Under one arm Marshall carried a dog. He clasped its muzzle with his free hand. White foam was at its jaws. Across each front leg above the knee was a raw patch where the flesh stood revealed, sickening, full of hurt.

The beast was heavy despite its emaciated condition. Once it snarled through the strong handclasp over its jaws, but the snarl was weak.

"Here's our wendigo," said Marshall, as he laid the animal down. It looked about, blinking, then its head sagged on to wounded forepaws.

"Found him caught in a trap on a game runway up the ridge. Think it was set for wolverine."

Germaine de Montreville went to the great beast's side and looked down. She would have knelt, but, before Marshall could intervene, Sebanis stopped her.

"*Non,* mam-selle. He got ze w'ite foam. Zat ees bad. S'oot um."

He picked up Marshall's rifle, but the girl stepped quickly in front of him.

"Sebanis! Put down that rifle!"

The dog, perhaps sensing what came of these fire-sticks in the hands of men, had cringed away and pushed weakly toward Marshall.

Meekly enough the half-breed obeyed her orders, but remonstrated.

"Dog w'at got ze w'ite foam ees crazee—ver' bad, mam-selle."

"You or I would be completely mad, too, if we had suffered so," she said. "Whose dog is it? And who leaves traps in the woods unattended? This poor thing has been held for days. Look at its legs!"

Her voice held a throb of pity through which rising anger and indignation flamed.

"Who traps here along the river where I have forbidden it?" she demanded.

"Zis dog ees b'long Jean Rigaud. Jean beatum. He run away las' summer. Ees been wil' dog lak ze wolf, ees fadair."

"And Jean Rigaud has been trapping here?"

"Me, I t'ink ees so mebbe," Sebanis admitted. "I fin' wan odair trap wit' otter dead."

"And he has left the traps out with the season long past, so that even a poor wild

thing caught in them would die as this dog was dying!"

The old fellow nodded.

"He has been setting traps and taking out his own furs," she accused. "Tell me the truth, Sebanis. Why haven't we been told about this?"

The half-breed's head hung forward.

"Me, I not know for sure, mam-selle. I t'ink ees so an' try fin' out two-t'ree time. I say not'ing. Ees bes' fin' out for sure."

She looked down at the dog where it cowered now at Marshall's feet.

"Who is Rigaud?" Marshall was still persistent, still intent on the information he sought.

"You do not know, m'sieu? M'sieu Langstone did not tell you? Well, it does not matter. Whatever Jean Rigaud was to us, he will be no more. He has done enough."

She indicated the dog, and spoke to Sebanis.

"Put him in the canoe. You can tie him near the cabin. The Seigneur is a kind man and will see that he is cared for."

SEBANIS started to obey, but the dog snarled at him. Marshall picked it up and carried it to the canoe despite the weakly rumbling growls.

At a whispered word from the girl, Sebanis followed Marshall.

"*Ma belle* Germaine wait for you by ze fire, m'sieu," he said. "She want mak' talk wit' you."

As he mounted the bank, Marshall wondered if she had sensed the turmoil aroused in him by her presence. He hoped not. He also hoped that she would say no more of her fantastic plan to surrender herself to the law. His second hope was in vain.

"M'sieu," she said, when he stood before her, "I find it difficult to believe that you are an evil man. I am trying to trust you, though your motives are obscure. However, as a policeman you have made a charge, and I am willing to face it. I have prepared to accompany you to Edmonton, where I shall accept punishment for whatever wrong has been done. I shall not complain. No one need know, the Seigneur least of all. First, I challenged you to take me. Then I pleaded with you. Now I beg you. And I promise that I shall not hate you for it. Is not one victim quite as good as another to the Law you represent?"

About her was something so guileless that Marshall felt a sense of shame. He took her hand.

"Germaine," he said, "believe me when I tell you that I am not involved in an intrigue against you or yours. Nor am I interested in a victim. I want only the truth. As for your 'confession,' I couldn't believe it if I would."

He was smiling.

"The Seigneur de Montreville invited me on his bateau—as a guest, I believe. I am afraid I have violated his hospitality. I must return. Tonight he spends in contemplation—tomorrow we resume our deliberations."

He picked up the pack and rifle.

"Return these to your cabin. I shall find my way back to the bateau."

"M'sieu—" she ran after him to where the half-breed had shoved the canoe into the water.

"M'sieu——"

There was a marshy spot, a little rise, brush and a fallen birch, its branches hidden in the darkness. Marshall took her arm as she sought to step across. She slipped, one of the branches tripped her, and she fell against him, into his reaching arms. For a moment he last all sense of restraint and crushed her to him and held her as her firm young body yielded. His lips touched her forehead. He could feel the mad racing of her heart. Briefly she clung to him, then a little gasping sound escaped her, and she had found footing.

Sebanis had backed the canoe a short distance along the bank to where it rose slightly and was free of brush. As lightly as a frightened thing she sped the few steps and was in the prow, facing straight ahead, waiting. Sebanis looked up at the shadowy form of the Constable towering above them.

Marshall picked up the rifle and pack he had dropped, and placed them in the canoe near the half-breed. His throat was dry.

"Good night," he said, softly.

Her hands grasped the canoe's sides.

"You cannot return to the bateau," she said, still looking straight ahead, a tremble in her voice. "You'll be lost."

Her consternation thrilled Marshall in spite of himself.

"I shall follow the river," he replied.

Then, "If you wish to return to your cabin while it is still dark, you have barely enough time."

The implication that she had compromised herself by coming to him was plain.

"That need not concern you," she said defiantly.

There was silence save for the thrust of Sebanis' paddle against the shore. The canoe glided slowly away, the gap widening between them.

Then she turned, and her eyes searched him out from the shadows.

"Good night, M'sieu of the Mounted," she whispered.

Chapter IX

THE PRISONER ON THE BATEAU

ALONE in the night Marshall found peace as he walked beside the silent waters. He recalled that always in the past women had disturbed him. He could not confront them frankly, as he would a man, matching strength for strength and devil take the loser. Thus disarmed, he feared them. Yet he did not fear Germaine de Montreville, even though he knew she would use every power at her command to lead him from the trail he followed.

The paradox baffled but did not anger him. The training of the Mounted taught patience, forbearance, an effort to understand motives. The motive here was inextricably linked with Langstone—a man they had branded a thief, a betrayer of trusts and worse, yet feared to such an extent that they took no steps in retaliation. But what blot was on the escutcheon of the de Montrevilles themselves? If there were nothing to conceal, why, then, her willingness to sacrifice herself merely to divert Marshall from the truth? Obviously there *was* something to conceal, and from that

point on her conduct was understandable, perhaps even admirable. He might not know a great deal about women and their ways, but he did know that on occasions a woman will suffer much to protect someone she loves.

Her presence seemed with him here in the forest. It was warm, alive, strengthening. Somehow it led him easily and naturally into communion with the wilderness. A man of the cities might have known fear, even panic, here where the forest was a wall of mephitic blackness out of which came the sounds of things that walk in the night. To Marshall it was exhilarating. Unarmed, unafraid, knowing the ways of the wild, he was at home. Put to the ultimate test, man schooled and trained and familiar with the ways of nature might even live in its bosom, requiring his most deadly weapons only for defense against man.

Now and then hulking things went scurrying off before his advance, frightened things. The night belonged to them. In it man had no part. They were free of his menace. They could go their ways without dread of the death he carried. The darkness was theirs, and now he invaded it.

Somehow feeling an integral part of this background, he followed close to the bank and looked out upon the water, which shone like a broad band of gun-metal, reflecting dully but with enchanting fidelity the glories of the heavens. The sweep and expanse of the celestial display was inspiring, a crusting of silvered jewels that gleamed with a splendor visible only here in the North. He picked out the fixed stars with which he was familiar; they were old friends, companions of many an isolated camp in the fastnesses.

Then beneath the understanding, the love of this land through which he walked with complete familiarity, an uneasiness crept. It stemmed from a feeling that he had invaded a realm to which he had no right. Invisible bars were up, yet he had crashed through, unheeding. Try as he would, he could not put that entirely out of mind.

He had crushed her to him, held her close, kissed her. Even though the Law he served had sent him here, it had not given him the right to violate another man's domain. Yet she had responded. He knew that she had responded, not by word or overt act, it is true, but by breathless, momentary submission.

Conscious now that he had been blundering on his way, unheeding even the brush that occasionally slapped him across the face, he stopped. A brightening tinged the sky, faint herald of the new day. He must be nearing the bateau. He wondered if she had yet reached the cabin where the Seigneur de Montreville would be waiting. Sebanis was a master with the paddle, and he had seen another blade in the bow where she sat. With the river's current they could set a fast pace. He thought of the dog, also, famished and half-mad with the agony of days in the trap. How would they account for it? Probably Sebanis would see to that; perhaps he would stake the beast out in the woods and feed it heavily, releasing it when it had recovered sufficiently.

HIS thoughts were interrupted by voices. They came from beyond a little rise where the stream circled a headland. The brightening had spread above the ridges, and the pale grayness of early morning was descending the slopes. Marshall advanced to a low ridge and looked down. The bateau was tied to the bank. The de Montreville retainers laughed and talked around a newly kindled fire, where one prepared food.

Marshall walked down the slope. Lemaire was the first to see him. The one with the black patch over his eye also looked up. Both stared, and the others followed their glances. In long strides, his great body swaying as lithely as an animal's, Lemaire advanced suddenly, then stopped and looked toward the bateau, as though doubting the evidence of his senses.

A faint smile was on the Mounted man's face. The entire group stared at him, wide-eyed.

"M'sieu—" Lemaire began.

"I dislike being cooped up, Lemaire," Marshall said. "Went for a walk to stretch my legs. Didn't want to wake you fellows up."

The Indian came, colossal, intent, and Marshall saw the purpose that was in him, the idea of taking hold of this white man and leading, forcing, carrying him if need be, back to the bateau. Marshall turned squarely to face Lemaire, the tantalizing amusement gone from his smile. There could be no mistaking the giant's attitude, the readiness, the supreme confidence.

The man with the black patch laughed.

"M'sieu agent de p'lice wan brav' *garçon,*" he said. "Gon fight Lemaire!"

The Indian was plainly annoyed. He cast a glance of contempt toward the speaker, then addressed Marshall.

"M'sieu, ze Sieur de Montreville order Lemaire not let you go."

He looked toward the bateau again, laboriously pondering the problems. At length he made up his mind.

"M'sieu, you go back on ze bateau."

"What if I refuse?"

A guffaw that was not so much of derision as of crude mirth arose from the others.

"Zen, m'sieu, I peeck you up an' tote you lak I tote ze canoe on portage—so!"

His huge arms lifted high above. Marshall could conceive of this massive creature making play of the thing he demonstrated in pantomine. Once those hands grasped him, Lemaire doubtless could have made good his promise.

He laughed good-naturedly at the Indian.

"You are probably very strong, Lemaire," he said. "Perhaps some time you and I will have a lot of fun."

"You want——?" Lemaire's attitude changed. He shrugged resignedly. "Sieur de Montreville, he say me I not hurt you."

"Hmm. Nice of him. Well, just try to keep me off that bateau and you'll have something to tell the Sieur de Montreville."

Wide-eyed, obviously unable to fathom this man who had been given into his care, the Indian stood watching Marshall as he stepped onto the craft he had quit during the night. He walked casually about its deck, examining the craftsmanship, fully conscious of the eyes that followed him from the shore, the low-spoken words. At the prow he stopped and looked up the narrowing stream flowing between banks of gorgeous beauty as the full light of morning flooded down over the heights. What lay beyond? During this new day he might learn the answer.

(*To be Concluded in the Next* SHORT STORIES)

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HAND DRUMS

By F. V. W. MASON

Author of
"Shanghai Sanctuary,"
"Special Warden," etc.

Honesty Was Always Jake Ahrens' Policy— Even with Crooks

THE sunset glinted briefly on Bill McKechnie's semi-bald head as he shook it before closing the battered tin cash box and carefully locking it in its drawer. Still deliberate of motion, he heaved his shapeless bulk to its feet and stared out of the hut's glassless window at the expanse of sapphire stretching away beyond the surf line.

The copra planter's bruised-looking, red features, indistinct behind a blue-black stubble, were as much in contrast to the alert bronze visage of the man before him as were his spotted and oil-stained trousers to the clean white ducks of his guest who sat uncomfortably perched on the edge of a rickety cane chair.

The man in clean ducks looked up with a poignant, unvoiced appeal in deep-set gray eyes. "I—I suppose that's all you can lend me, Bill?"

"That twenty," stated McKechnie, hitching his trousers higher on a shirt that was food-stained over the belly, "is the last cent I can loan you, Jake, and I've lent you a damned sight too much already. If a company inspector was to look in my till, I'd be fired like that."

His stubby, brown fingers snapped, making a faint incisive report in the stuffy little office with the fly-blown grass curtains and sheet iron walls.

The tall man on the chair's edge nodded vacantly several times, like a mechanical toy. "I know, Bill, but I've got to find five hundred more," he muttered with sudden fierceness. *"Got to*—see?"

"I've loaned you four hundred bucks, and that's a heap more than I'd lend anybody but Jake Ahrens. As it is, I know your word's good."

Ahrens straightened his inadequate shoulders a little beneath the clean white ducks, in a hopeless defiance of unpleasant fact. "Of course I'll pay you back. We Ahrens have always been honest——"

The planter's bloodshot blue eyes flickered up. "So it's five hundred you need, eh? How come?" he demanded curiously.

"What with all yer eternal penny pinchin' you ought to have had enough by now."

"I did have," replied Ahrens in a savage monotone. "But just when I was plannin' to sell my Aztec Steel shares—it—well, it took a drop—a hell of a drop." He made a little helpless gesture with his wide brown hands. "Over a thousand dollars gone in a few hours. Oh, sure—now, I know I was a damned fool to put all the eggs in that one basket. But somehow it ain't right, Bill—I worked hard to save that thousand—you know a cable operator don't get so much."

McKechnie's untidy bulk turned deliberately, passed the window and darkened the room, then sank into a chair that whined softly beneath his body. Finally he fell to regarding the frayed brown stump of his cigar with an elaborate interest.

"I think you're crazy, Jake," he remarked, while the other absently fanned away a fly which persisted in settling on his saddle-coloured forehead. "You're makin' mountains outta mole-hills. 'Thea's all right here on Nanomea."

"She's not," grimly contradicted Ahrens. "She's gettin' pretty and Althea ain't a kid any longer. When she was little it was all right for her to play with old Arorai's and Nonuti's brats. But now she's goin' on fifteen and—well, that big half-breed whelp o' Nukuno's hangin' around the cable station a heap too much lately. What with these full moons and such——No, Bill, she's goin' to leave Nanomea on old man Carlson's *Santa Anna.*"

"She won't," grunted McKechnie, crushing a vivid green spider under the heel of his rope sandal, "there ain't five hundred dollars more on the whole o' Nanomea. Better let her wait until the next boat—that'll give you six months to raise the dough."

The tall man in white got up, his narrow, graying head almost touching the dry brown palm thatch. "That's the hell of it, Bill, I can't," he said, hoarsely. "Althea's entered into a convent that's mighty hard to get into, and they'll look out for her there. They've fixed her up a scholarship this year. Next year somebody else gets it. Girls' schools is expensive, Bill, terrible expensive."

Frowning, Jake Ahrens stared at the scuffed and food-stained mat beneath his feet. "It's her one chance to be a lady like her ma was—not just an island slattern. Don't laugh, Bill; that's what happens to 'em all—I know—I've been out over twenty years now. Johnny Ketram's girl, little Jenny MacPherson and—oh, hell—same old story over and over. Too many lovers, lose their looks—some quicker than others—and then it's death or the China Coast."

"Same thing, Jake—same thing."

"That's what's facing Althea, Bill, and it's driving me loony."

"For her to earn a scholarship you must ha' taught her mighty well," commented the planter, while the cigar stump travelled jerkily from one corner of his mouth to the other. "You must have had a good education yourself—once."

"Yes, once, but it wasn't nothin' much. Oh, I was startin' out well—but somethin' happened. I ain't kickin', Nanomea ain't a bad place—for me. But the Sisters on the mainland will take Althea, teach her, polish her, and then she'll stay with some relations of old man Carlson's and get her a fair chance in life."

BILL McKECHNIE'S food-spotted belly trembled as he squirmed on his chair. "Jake, I'm sorry fer you, but you'd better face facts. There ain't five hundred dollars more on the whole of Nanomea."

"Mebbe and mebbe not," muttered the tall, thin man with obstinacy of one who dares not depart from his fixed purpose. "When I think of her ma—well," Ahrens' voice became terribly intent, "come hell or high tide, Althea's goin' out on the *Santa Anna* to-morrow."

Silently, the copra planter regarded the other with curious reddened eyes. "I suppose, Jake, you know you'll lose her—for good. What'll 'Thea think o' Nanomea

and—us, after she's had her schooling? If——"

"Shut up! Don't you think I know it? Think it's easy to send her away?"

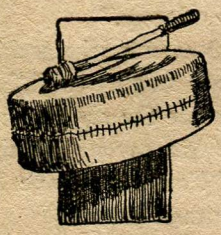
"Well, cheer up, Jake, she ain't gone yet."

"No. But she's goin', if I have to do murder to send her!"

"By God, I believe you would."

Yet when the rust-streaked little *Santa Anna* let go her anchor a hundred yards or so off the end of the oil-stained copra pier, Jake was not a cent nearer the goal.

Quite oblivious to the gulls screaming excitedly overhead, unnoticing of the slow hiss of waves up the beach, Ahrens swung along the worn timbers of the wharf, his



eyes fixed on a dingy little white rowboat which, propelled by long, awkwardly handled oars, was creeping shorewards.

That would be old man Carlson swaying in the stern and boldly outlined against the throbbing blueness of the sea. Ahrens, his spruce white figure standing out among the brown bodies of the natives and the soiled garments of Nanomea's European inhabitants, sharp as a snowdrift on a barn floor, watched the bobbing boat draw near and noted, with faint surprise, the warmth of the greeting which old man Carlson waved at him. Money? Not five hundred more on all Nanomea. But on the *Santa Anna?*

Nearer the *Santa Anna's* dingy whale boat rode the leisurely blue rollers. Now he could see old man Carlson's ratty yellow moustache with its inner fringe dyed brown by eternal tobacco juice.

"Hi, Jake," he called.

"Hello, Hjalmar."

"Vhat's new on Nanomea?"

With a great deal of laughing and flashing of white teeth, native Nanomeans caught the rowboat's painter and fended off the blunt prow when old man Carlson made a bad landing. Ahrens wondered. That landing had been bad because old man Carlson had been looking at him with a queer, searching look in his piggy blue eyes.

Twenty minutes later the *Santa Anna's* jovial blond captain sank on to a green painted rocker on the porch of the cable station and shoved on to the back of his head a cap of rusty blue serge whose gold embroidery was greened by verdigris and badly spotted with salt water.

"My," he remarked, "your little Althea, she ain'dt little no more. Ay am surprised, the last time Ay vass here she vass yet a little girl."

All the time old man Carlson's round blue eyes kept peering from beneath those half-moon eyeglasses of his, but the cable operator seemed too preoccupied to notice it.

FOR several minutes they talked disjointedly of island gossip; of copra prices and of the disastrous Socialist experiment in New Zealand. No, it was not good for shipping. Yes, Carlson thought it would not last long. No, he had not heard about the *Blue Bay's* breaking her back on an uncharted coral reef. Too bad, old Joe McCabe had lost every cent in her.

Steadily, like tired animals climbing a hill the sentences grew briefer, more laboured, until it became inescapable that neither man cared a hoot in hell what they were talking about.

Old man Carlson suddenly heaved his big figure to its feet and crossed to the window, looked out, then opened the door and lastly glanced to the living quarters of the cable station.

"No, Althea ain't here. She's gone swimming," said Ahrens shortly. "What's on your mind, Hjalmar? Get it off your chest in a hurry. I—I've got somethin' I want to ask you."

Deliberately old man Carlson returned to the rocker, pulled out a shapeless black

pipe and, while the office of the cable station became strangely silent, loaded it with preposterous care. This done he stuck the pipe in his mouth, immediately pulled it out again, and leaned forward, his flat red face—he never seemed to tan—out-thrust. Suddenly old man Carlson's lips parted to display a sad array of broken and yellowed teeth, and he began to talk in halting, guarded accents..

"In Vellington last month Ay met a man—he said he knew you. His name vass Leonard—A. J. Leonard."

"Yes, I know him. A. J. Leonard happens to be my boss."

"Yess, yess." Old man Carlson's round head inclined several times and he stared fixedly at the scoured, red-tiled floor. "Yess," he said, "he knows you. Vell, Jake, he vants you should do him a favor."

The cable operator's thin eyebrows met in a single sharp line. Something about old man Carlson's manner made him uneasy.

"I'll be glad to oblige him, provided it's an honest matter. My family's always stood for honesty."

Old man Carlson's bloodshot blue eyes narrowed and the pink tip of his tongue wetted his lips. "Yess, Ay know that, Jake, Ay know that."

A brief silence fell in which the subdued thunder of the surf on the distant barrier reefs sounded monotonously. "You vould like to do Mr. Leonard a favor, no?"

"Of course. Any man likes to stand in with his boss. What is this favor?"

Instead of replying, old man Carlson pulled out a box of matches and, gripping the match stick, which looked very tiny between his stubby, calloused fingers, he struck a light.

"And it's a favor to me, too, Jake," he added. "There's money in it for us both. You know Ay've——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Ahrens. "I'll never forget."

Both men were thinking of one turbulent day some sixteen years gone, when Hjalmar Carlson had risked the boilers of his ship, his job and life, in running through half a typhoon in search of a doctor to help Mariana Ahrens bring Althea into a wind-lashed world.

"Well?" Pulses quickening a little with an unidentified premonition, Ahrens eyed the big man who seemed to overflow even the green rocker's ample seat.

"It ain'dt much, this favor," went on old man Carlson deliberately, "but it means a thousand for me and a thousand for you."

Jake Ahrens went a little pale as he stiffened in the cane-bottomed chair and stared at the speaker. "A—a thousand dollars!" he stammered. "God! A thousand dollars, a thousand dollars!" The words echoed and re-echoed through his brain. No more Nukuno! "I'd do a lot for a thousand dollars now," he said jerkily. "I'll do anything—anything honest, Hjalmar!"

Old man Carlson threw away the stump of his unused match. "Now listen, Jake," he began. "This favor ain'dt much, it'll take you less than a minute and, Jake, Ay need the money—need it bad. Ay got to take up my share in the *Santa Anna* this trip, or else—" Large and blond-haired tattooed hands were flung out with an air of unmistakable finality. "Freights ain'dt so good these days, Jake, not so good."

Small eyes looking very blue in the flat red expanse of face, Captain Hjalmar Carlson looked up anxiously and beheld Ahrens' white-clad figure sitting rigid; how prominently his Indian-like cheek-bones shone in that hot glare beating through the glassless window.

"You need money, too," he hurried on. "Ay know. They told me in Vellington vot happened to your stock shares. You must have lost a lot of money, Jake."

"Yes, I did lose a lot of money."

"And there's the little girl."

"Yes, there's Althea, but I ain't going to do anything crooked."

OLD man Carlson hesitated and blinked, not wholly discouraged. Did Jake Ahrens for once sound as though he did not

mean what he was saying? Carlson suddenly began talking very fast.

"Look here, Jake, here iss the proposition. There iss in the United States vun big man—so you vould understand easy I vill call him Mr. W.—Leonard says Mr. W. iss a very rich man, owns lots of companies, but he ain'dt got no more heart than—than—" Old man Carlson, momentarily at a loss, glanced out of the window and, grunting in satisfaction, pointed to a tiny black triangle cruising smoothly along through the sapphire water a few yards from the surf line—"than that tiger shark out there."

"Well, Hjalmar, get on with it," Jake Ahrens said stonily, as though he didn't want to.

"This Mr. W. vanted to buy still more companies, so Mr. Leonard said, to raise money he give for security ranches he owns in New Zealand. But things yoost now have not gone vell with this Mr. W. and his creditors have cabled out to learn the value of his holdings. If they good—"old man Carlson leaned forward and fixed his host with the well-gnawed rubber mouthpiece of his pipe—"if they good," he repeated, "then they extend his note. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"And if they bad, then they foreclose and Mr. W. and all his companies go into bankruptcy."

"Where does Leonard stand in on this?"

The sea captain in dirty white ducks sighed, pulled out a blue bandanna and mopped the red expanse of his brow.

"He has much moneys in companies that'll clean up if Mr. W. goes broke."

"Oh, I get it. Well, what do you want me to do?"

Old man Carlson sighed. "That's good, Jake, good. Ay had hoped you vould be reasonable."

"I haven't promised yet."

"Vell, here it iss. Mr. Leonard vants you should intercept that report from New Zealand, vhen it iss sent here for relay to America."

"I see. And then?"

Ahrens' gray eyes wandered off to an array of gleaming instruments, bulbs and wire fittings filling the far end of the cable office. Presently they returned to search the sea captain's heavy red features..

"Vhen that message comes through," continued the old man Carlson, and the sweat began to bead his shiny red forehead, "Mr. Leonard vants you should throw it away. Instead you vill send vhat iss in here."

From inside his frayed white uniform coat the *Santa Anna's* captain pulled forth a crisp white envelope which bore no heading nor mark of any kind.

"I see." Ahrens' erect, white figure suddenly seemed to lose its starch and he sagged forward, eyes on his white canvas shoes. "He wants me to send a false message. Is that it?"

"Oh, it ain'dt so bad as all that."

"But it is." Ancestors, long buried on bleak New England hillsides, forbade equivocation.

"It ain'dt much, iss it now, Jake?" How pathetically anxious was old man Carlson.

"It's a lot," cried Ahrens so breathlessly he had to fight to get out his next words.

"I won't do it. We've always been honest in my family——"

A dull flush climbed into the sea captain's wind-reddened features. "Don't be vun big fool," he rumbled. "You don't earn that much in ten months' work. You need that thousand, Jake."

Ahrens' shoulders seemed to sway under invisible blows. "But I won't," he said obstinately. "I won't."

"Vhat iss this Mr. W. to you?" demanded old man Carlson. "He's yoost another rich feller back in the States. He's got plenty of money no matter vhat happens. Come on, Jake, don't be a damn fool—Ay——" Old man Carlson broke off suddenly for there came the light patter of feet, and Althea appeared in the doorway, dripping, laughing, and with her coppery hair floating over her slender shoulders like a lustrous banner.

"Yess, and aboard iss a nice Dutch lady. My cousin said——"

"Well——" cut in Ahrens while the whole white-washed office whirled about his head. "Well, Hjalmar, I—I——"

"You vill?"

"I'll think it over. Come here at quarter of nine—and," he added grimly, "bring the envelope and that thousand dollars."

THE sun had vanished with that abruptness peculiar to the tropics, and, like a relieving sentry, a great throbbing moon appeared over the Pacific. Then Jake Ahrens beheld the white outline of old man Carlson's square figure advancing from the wharf. Beyond him the lights of the *Santa Anna* blinked drowsily.

Funny, mused Jake, Hjalmar always walked with that little rolling motion. He wondered briefly what was going on in Hjalmar's head. Certainly not one fraction of the doubt which still racked him so viciously. By his sides the cable operator's bony brown hands opened and shut convulsively when old man Carlson's cigar came straight towards him, all the time winking like a giant firefly. Now he had passed the clump of cocoa palms standing like graceful pillars to mark the upper edge of the beach, now he had actually put foot to the cable station's walk.

Stifled, Ahrens stepped out of doors, gazed up at the hot diamantine stars and drew several deep breaths. It was a trick he had when seeking to master himself. He had done it that day when he stood up to hear his sentence.

"Hello, Jake. Nice night, ain'dt it? Bill McKechnie vass saying he iss about finished loading. Ve vill pull out at dawn."

The voice sounded entirely calm and untroubled, but when the sea captain drew nearer, Ahrens read the poignant anxiety in those flat, red features. Moreover, old man Carlson was tugging nervously at that tobacco-stained yellow moustache of his. He glanced about in silent inquiry.

"It's all right," Ahrens informed his guest, "I sent Althea over to dance at old Arorai's. She won't be back until ten."

"To pack?" quickly demanded Carlson.

Ahrens only half stifled a groan. "I—I—" he began uncertainly.

Old man Carlson pitched his cigar stub on to the stand. "Look here," he said hoarsely, "fine notions iss all very vell, but don't forget this, Mr. Leonard has only to say a vord and there'll be a new operator on Nanomea. You know that."

"Oh shut up!" snarled the gaunt man in white. "Don't you think I know that?"

"Vell, then, vhat's biting you?"

From beyond the palms floated a sensuous obligato of rhythmically throbbing hand drums mingled with plaintive melodies sung by Arorai's guests. Over there Althea probably was dancing as only Althea could. Paradoxically enough, she, the foreigner, could out-dance any of the laughing brown maidens of Nanomea and, in a certain shamefaced way, Ahrens was proud of her triumphs. But when he thought of Althea's mother, what she would have thought of such dances—his long jaw shut with a click.

"You're right, Hjalmar," he said as though each word were dragged out by a windlass, "I'm a fool, a damned fool."

A penetrating silence followed, then the cable operator turned and walked indoors, his rope-soled shoes scuffing softly over the red-tiled floor. After him stumbled old man Carlson, grinning nervously and tugging at his yellow walrus moustache.

Faster than those hand drums in the distance throbbed Jake Ahrens' heart, He wondered if right now he wasn't feeling some of those sensations experienced by a

felon who leaves the condemned cell for execution.

"Death!" He shuddered. Well, it was death of a sort, death of principles, the death of self respect; yet he felt quite calm when he sat down at the instrument board and threw over various switches. It was good to have made the decision. At his elbow stood old man Carlson with the apparatus lights minutely reflected in his slightly rheumy blue eyes.

With a sudden gesture, Ahrens snapped on the electro magnet dynamo and a gentle humming sound pervaded the cable station. Unseeingly, he studied the little ink-wheel poised ready above a narrow strip of paper which travelled between the instrument's two reels. How often had he seen that ink-wheel whirl and spin, flicking down the dots and dashes. Mechanically, he checked the tape to see that the perforations were squarely over the cogs in the control wheel.

He drew a deep breath. "It's hot," he muttered and glanced up nervously. Old man Carlson was standing over him, sweating also; tiny beads shone bright on his broad red forehead and his eyes looked bluer and rounder than ever.

The mechanism emitted a tiny, premonitory buzz. Jake Ahrens whirled, his eyes riveted on the tape; it had begun to move. The wheel commenced to spin and Ahrens' thin lips fluttered as he silently read the first few letters.

"Iss that it?" growled old man Carlson, one sausage-like forefinger levelled at the busy wheel.

"No, it's only a news item—something about an election in the States."

Save for the steady humming of the dynamo and the throb of those distant hand drums, silence reigned. Then all at once Ahrens leaned forward. "Here it is—'To the Banker's Credit Corporation, New York City.'"

Swiftly the operator's fingers jotted down the message. "Investigation Wanganui ranches completed. Property well above estimated value. Other holdings—" Ahrens' eyes flickered from tape to scratch pad and back again, "excellent condition. Fully recommend Lucius B. Williams' property."

WITH a strangled cry, Ahrens leaped up, his chair crashing noisily to the tiles.

"Vhat's the matter?" cried old man Carlson, flinging up a warding hand.

But Jake Ahrens never heard him; he stood staring with terrible intensity at the blank wall in front of him while the tape, marked with innumerable little black dots, slid smoothly, relentlessly on.

"Lucius B. Williams!" he muttered hoarsely. Before his mind's eye was materialising a scene not dimmed by the passage of twenty years. To the last detail he could see again a dingy little court room, a mere boy, pale and quivering, in the dock and crying in dreadful earnestness—"I had nothing to do with it! Even if the money is missing, I know nothing about it. My family has been honest for two hundred years." He could recall every line on the tired, sympathetic face of old Judge McCormick. But most clearly of all, he could see the hard young features of Lucius B. Williams. Ever so clearly he could hear the accuser's voice, cold as a grinding of an ice floe. So Mr. W. was Lucius Williams!

"The circumstances prove that Ahrens was in the office at that time. Every bit of evidence points to him as the guilty party. I demand that he be made an example!"

At the memory of Williams' savage perseverance in building up his disastrously convincing net of evidence, Ahrens' face flamed a mahogany red. In a word, his conviction had been entirely the work of his implacable employer.

Seemingly from a vast distance came the dull hum of the dynamo and old man Carlson's thick voice. "You gone crazy, Jake?"

Numbly, the cable operator's head swayed. "No," he said, and drew a deep breath. "I had my best chance twenty years ago. Where's that envelope?"

With precise, unimpassioned movements,

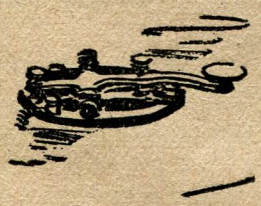
he stooped, righted the chair and sat down again. But for all his assumed calm new, harsh lines travelled from his nostrils to the corners of his mouth, as he briefly transcribed the rest of the report from Wellington.

"Here iss the message you must send instead." Old man Carlson held out that crisp white envelope which contained a death warrant for Lucius B. Williams' fortune.

The ripping paper made a harsh, snarling sound as Ahrens tore off the end of the envelope. He blew into it and plucked forth a single sheet of foolscap.

He inched his chair a foot to the right where the sounding key glistened brazenly. Like a great puzzled bear, the sea captain stood watching. With brisk decisive movements Ahrens snapped-to a number of switches, then flattened the false message and read it over. It said: "Holdings Lucius B. Williams in very poor condition. Find estimated worth much in excess of actual cash value. Giddings and Co."

"You'll send it?" Old man Carlson almost panted the question as he shuffled



forward, his eyes fixed on the black rubber key beneath Ahrens' forefinger.

The cable operator drew a deep breath, raised his colorless head and glanced directly before him; yonder a faded photograph of a young man and a young woman in long out-moded clothes looked forth from a sandalwood frame. How very much the girl's eyes resembled Althea's. Over the key his sunburnt finger hovered uncertainly. In his brain a vast maelstrom of emotions commenced to whirl.

"Vell, Jake," hoarsely demanded the sea captain behind him. "Ain'dt you going to send it?"

Once more Ahrens filled his lungs, then his forefinger commenced to tap out the message.

When he had finished, he slumped forward, rested his elbows on the sending desk and buried his face between long brown fingers that quivered violently. A puff of wind came in through the window and blew the loose sheet of paper to the floor, where it rustled softly; then old man Carlson sighed, picked it up, then reaching forward, patted the bent, white clad figure clumsily.

"Good boy," he rumbled, "Ay knew you vould. Here's the thousand."

He laid ten crisp hundred-dollar bills on the desk beside the instrument, but Jake Ahrens moved not at all.

"Come," the sea captain spoke with forced jocularity, "come on, now ve go get Althea and help her pack."

"Althea!" The word was almost strangled in its enunciation, then Ahrens lifted a blanched and tragic face. "Althea's not going," he said dully.

"Vhat? You changed your mind?"

"No, no, Hjalmar. Take the money, I—I—didn't earn it."

"Vhat?" Old man Carlson staggered as though a bullet had struck him. "Vhat, *you didn't send Mr. Leonard's message?*"

"No," the words were hardly more than a whisper, "I—I sent the right message. We Ahrenses have always been honest——" He broke off, the bewildered reproach in Hjalmar Carlson's blue eyes being quite unbearable. The big man just stood looking, looking at the bent white figure.

"You've lost me my ship, Jake," he muttered, and then without another word turned on his heel and stumbled out.

LOUDER swelled the rumble of those hand drums beyond the palms, higher swung the honey-colored moon and the soft diapason thunder of the surf on the outer beach droned on and on.

At the end of the copra wharf sat old man Carlson, looking with hopeless eyes upon the ship he had lost. In the tile and

coral block cable station, Jake Ahrens was stonily receiving messages from San Francisco, for relay to New Zealand.

His brain buzzed. Stock market reports. Who in hell cared about stock market reports? Damn the stock market anyway! That was what had caused the whole trouble. If Aztec Steel hadn't gone off ten points he wouldn't have lost that thousand dollars.

Mechanically, his eye translated a report. "Credit information from New Zealand just received persuaded creditors to extend Lucius Williams further credit aid. Share values in Williams-controlled companies jumped as follows: American Copper Ore up twenty; Green Bay Smelting up fifteen; Aztec Steel—" Jake Ahrens clutched the edge of the desk and his body swayed as though shaken by invisible blows. "Aztec Steel up *twenty-seven and a half!*"

A moment he stared incredulously at the series of dots and dashes, then whirled, dashed out of the door and pounded headlong down the moonlit beach towards the wharf.

"Hjalmar!" His breath halted. The big sea captain's dejected figure had vanished from the end of the pier. An icy wave of fear engulfed him.

"Hjalmar!" Where was he? Jake shuddered when a streak of phosphorus betrayed the passage of a long gray body and a triangular black fin.

"Hjalmar!" Louder rang Ahrens' cry. Shaken with a strange dread he rushed forward. Voices sounded out of sight below the end of the pier and he heard the dull clunk of oars in their rowlocks.

"Ja?"

An overwhelming wave of relief came to still that frantic fear. "Hjalmar! I—I—Wait! You won't lose the *Santa Anna!* The Aztec Steel's up twenty-seven—I've got money—a lot of money. I just heard."

"Ja?" In the stern of the *Santa Anna's* battered little tender old man Carlson raised a flat, amazed face; the moon caught it and dyed it a deep orange. "Vhat you say?"

"Your Mr. W. owned the Aztec. Come ashore and I'll tell you."

Come ashore old man Carlson did and, when Ahrens had finished, the *Santa Anna's* master only uttered a throaty laugh before turning heavily back towards that boat which bobbed beside the landing stage.

"Hey! Where you going, Hjalmar?"

"Ay think Ay go out and fix up that cabin for you an' Althea," chuckled old man Carlson.

"Me?"

"Sure. You always wanted to go to sea, Ay sell you half interest in the *Santa Anna,* no?"

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FIT GEM AND EVER-READY RAZORS

He Had Rustled a Little, Peddled Some Hides, Rifled the Pockets of a Few Drunks, But a Hold-up Was Something New for Salamander Braley

SLAYTON PASSES JUDGMENT

By G. W. BARRINGTON

Author of
"Prisoners of the Pocket,"
"The Sheriff of Two Buttes," etc.

I

SALAMANDER BRALEY saw old Perkins first. Still a quarter of a mile distant up the shallow rock-wash, the new settler's body was hidden. Only the head and shoulders showed; the face, barely discernible, but easily identified by its wispy white mustache and the thick-lensed glasses shimmering in the bright fall sunshine.

"He's comin'," Salamander grunted, snaking his big body back a little further among the low bushes that fringed the wash. Rolling to one elbow, he laid his battered rifle by his side and drew from his hip pocket a red bandanna handkerchief, slit and stringed to form a mask.

"Never mind," Wolf Shivers rumbled at Salamander's side. "Needn't put on that play-pritty to hide that there ugly mug of your'n. I don't figger it'll take both of us to handle th' ol' clod-hopper. Just ease back a little furder an' stay put. I'll make him drop that mazuma, plumb prompt."

Salamander obeyed, without protest. Wolf Shivers' intimates did that, when he spoke.

Besides, the thing looked ridiculously easy. On the day before, Salamander had been in the Antlers Saloon in the sprawled little cowtown out on the flat to eastward. Old Perkins had bargained with Harvey Slater, the proprietor, for six sections of timber and grass land, agreeing to pay five thousand cash for it at the bank, at noon, today.

Salamander had heard the bargain. He never had seen Perkins before, but discreet inquiries developed the information that the old fellow had settled at the point of the ridge with a few dozen thin cows and a

fairly good outfit of work stock and implements. Nester-farmer-rancher.

Salamander hadn't been in the least interested in Old Perkins' stock or his implements or his plans. It was the word "cash" that caused him to shamble unostentatiously out of the saloon and ride down the valley to carry the news to his side-partner in crime, burly Wolf Shivers, prairie vagrant, hide-thief, rustler and small-time hold-up man.

Salamander's own record was a pallid copy of Wolf's. Where the latter had rustled much, Salamander had rustled only a little. As to hides, Salamander had peddled only a few—by-products of illicit beef killing, when his squatter cabin up on the ridge was empty of meat. As to hold-ups, Salamander never had been quite that ambitious. By way of gathering in cash, he had rifled the pockets of a few snoring drunks in the mow of the feedlot; once he had garnered a rich windfall when Pappy Grimes left his pocketbook containing a thousand on the shelf in front of the postmaster's wicket, and Salamander had happened along and picked it up before the hue and cry started. Dick Slayton, the knife-faced young sheriff, had been a little unpleasant about that affair, but Salamander had managed to brazen it out by spacing his drunks discreetly so as to give no indication of sudden affluence.

One more thing Salamander had learned in town. Perkins always left his horse on the ridge and scrambled down to the flat and traveled the two miles to town, afoot. That was what made the thing so easy. A lonesome dry-wash, a lone old man with five thousand, a cozy sumac clump for cover. Perfect!

THEIR man had dropped into a deeper part of the wash and was out of sight for a half-minute. "Damn ol' dew drinker shore is takin' his good time," Wolf grumbled. "That's th' way it alluz is with them newcomers. Too damn stubborn even to come along on time."

Wolf dropped his bearded cheek to the rifle-stock and inched his big, sweaty body forward a little. The crown of Perkins' battered grey hat was bobbing along the curve of the bushes, a hundred yards up the wash. Then his glasses showed, glistening among the dancing heat devils, then the wispy mustache, the thin, flannel-clad chest and lean, swinging arms. When the wash straightened, Salamander could see the erect body, even hear the tinkling spurs on the low-topped boots.

Disturbed by his approach, a little horned toad scuttled ahead of him for a little way, then took to the only available cover—the underslant of a little flat rock. Old Perkins grinned at the harmless little creature's futile attempt at concealment, and his cracked, but not unpleasant voice carried up to where the two lay: "Hidin', eh?

"Huh! Hell of a job of hidin', but it won't hurt me none to let yuh think yuh done it plumb successful." He crossed to the opposite side of the wash and passed the flat rock casually. A rod further on, he stopped and turned to squirt tobacco juice mischievously at the toad, which had scrambled out of hiding the moment he passed. "Hit 'er up, Ol' Timer! I'm 'bout to chaw yur tail some!"

Having had his little joke, the old man came on, slowed to kick a peculiar pebble with his boot, then glanced at the sun and quickened his pace.

Salamander squirmed uneasily as the tension tightened. Perkins was close in now. Why didn't Wolf poke out the rifle and bellow for the old simpleton to stop and throw it down? If he let him come nearer, there was a chance that he would see them through the brush screen and recognize them if he ever met——

The rifle kicked, roared, belched hot, stinking smoke that spiralled sluggishly upward in the still air. Wolf pumped a fresh cartridge into the chamber, tilted the muzzle toward its target again, then eased it down, chuckling hoarsely.

Old Perkins had jerked up on his toes, clutching at his thin chest with one grop-

ing hand, clawing at his holster with the other. Going through the motions of walking without getting forward an inch, he took a half-dozen jerky, irregular steps, then pitched forward on the rocky floor of the drain, rolled face upward, quivered the length of his lank body, lay still.

"Hell," Salamander gulped, a chill gripping his stomach, "what did yuh up an' do that fur?"

"Told yuh I'd make 'im drop it, didn't I?" Wolf chortled. "I alluz aim to do a little more than I say I will, so I dropped him along with it."

Salamander still felt uncomfortable. "But we coulda got th' cash without beefin' him. Maybe he'd argied a little, but——"

"Well, we'll git it, won't we? I don't believe he'll make us any argyment a-tall. What more do yuh want? C'mon. My fingers is itchin' to ketch hold of some real dinero."

Thirty minutes later they parted at the mouth of the wash. Wolf opened the fat wallet and counted out a hundred dollars for Salamander and a like amount for himself. "I'll cache th' rest of it an' lay out till they find th' ol' cuss an' th' rukus blows over.

"Yuh better go to some other town to have yur drunk. See yuh at th' Antlers, week frum today. We'll divvy up then, if things is quieted down."

SALAMANDER rode westward till he hit the ridge, then northward on a dim bridlepath that meandered along its flattened crest. He was utterly unfearful of immediate pursuit or eventual discovery. He was unrepentant, unpricked by conscience, but somehow vaguely depressed. Old Perkins had looked like a right good feller—akin to some Salamander would drench with liquor when he hit that other cowtown a dozen miles up north there.

He walked the pert little pinto through scattered scrub cedar, the trail swinging around an occasional lordly cottonwood or elm. He now was almost paralleling the wash in which the body lay, and it was not more than a furlong distant. He swung off the path by a short cut that circled an alder thicket and threaded a maze of crumbling brown boulders. As he emerged from among them, he reined in sharply when a horse neighed, close at hand. Walking the pinto forward, he came upon a rangy black gelding, saddled, and tied to a bush.

"Huh! Ol' Perkins' hawse. He left him here when he took to th' washes afoot." Salamander scowled thoughtfully for a time, then dismounted and unbuckled the

throatlatch. After slipping the bridle off, he struck the horse in the face with his hat. As the startled animal plunged away, he rebuckled the strap and allowed the bridle to drop and hang by its reins. "They'll think it crawled outa th' straps itself," he reasoned. "They'd go huntin' fur him all th' quicker if somebody come this way an' found it, tied an' starvin'."

Salamander remounted and was about to start when he chanced to glance down at the flat. Out among the crazy jumble of washes and boulders and rubble, a scintillating point of light caused his scowl to deepen and his frame to squirm uneasily in the saddle. From the elevation he was overlooking the floor of the wash—broad and shallow at the murder spot. The pinpoint of incandescence was sunlight reflected from the slain man's glasses. "Huh! Poor ol' cuss is hard to git away from." Salamander shrugged and roweled the inoffensive pinto to a fast lope.

The rat-a-plan of the loose horse's hoofs came back faintly for a time, dimming steadily as the animal forged ahead. Soon it was heard no more and Salamander be-

came lost in a hopeful dream, the central figure of which was a certain blonde dance-hall girl he would see before sundown, when he heard jogging hoofs ahead. The horse he had turned loose came almost nose to nose with the pinto before Salamander realized that it was being hazed back by a woman on a tackheaded roan. She was frail, grey, slightly stooped, yet somehow oddly youngish and virile. The neat, checked-gingham dress and sunbonnet, the easy, confident way in which she rode a man's saddle, woman style, stirred something within Salamander. Then it came to him suddenly that she was the counterpart of another little grey woman whom he had left in a hill cabin in Tennessee, so many years before that he had lost count of them. Of course, that Tennessee woman had been dead for decades; but this one——

"Good morning." She pushed the sunbonnet back and wiped her flushed face with a corner of her apron.

"Mornin'," Salamander gulped, awkwardly. Then, more by way of making conversation than anything else: "Want me to help yuh ketch that hawse?"

Her shrewd old eyes twinkled beneath the bonnet. "No, thank you. He slipped his bridle off somehow, so I'm taking him back. He's a good horse, but a little unreliable, at times.

"You see, he's my husband's saddler." She jerked her head toward the north. "We're settling up there a little way. We have our stock grazing here on the ridge, temporarily, and I was herding it while Mr. Perkins is in town."

PERKINS! Salamander barely repressed a startled oath. Perkins had a wife—perhaps children, big or small! He'd find that part out. Not that it could make any difference, now.

Well, he just wanted to find out. "Hereabouts, wimmin folks don't do a hull lot of cow-punchin', Ma'm," he suggested, craftily. "Most usual that's a man's job, though children does do it."

Her laugh was flute-like as a girl's. "Dear me! Our children have been grown and scattered for years. They're all back in Kansas, where we came from."

Salamander wanted a little more information. He fished for it, guardedly. "'Scusin' th' remark, Ma'm, ain't yuh two mebbe a little mite old to start out ranchin' down here in deep Texas?

"Course, now, if yuh got plenty cash, an' just wanta kinda take it easy——"

"Oh dear me, no. Mr. Perkins is nearly seventy, but he's active and ener-

getic—unusually so, even if he were middle-aged.

"You see, he's a good woodsman—something rare in this section. He bought that tract of Harry Slater's. It has a lot of cedar on it, and Mr. Perkins had contracted to get out five thousand posts and deliver them in town, at fifteen cents each.

"We'll have eggs and milk and butter and garden stuff; so that seven hundred and fifty dollars will buy our supplies till we get our little ranch established." She laughed again, and shrugged her lean shoulders whimsically: "As to cash, we won't have any till we deliver some of the posts.

"As a matter of fact, we'll have to deliver some, right soon. I don't mind admitting that we have less than ten dollars to our names, after paying for the land."

She readjusted the bonnet and gathered her reins. "Well, I must be going. Have to retie that horse and get back to the cattle."

"Mebbe I better go 'long. Hawse might git snorky an' give yuh a tussle," Sala-

mander offered, gruffly. "I seen a bridle hangin' frum a limb 'bout a mile back there. Reckon that's where he b'longs."

"That's really kind of you," she smiled. "I'll admit that Nig does get rebellious, sometimes—that is, he does with me.

"He never gives Mr. Perkins any trouble. No animal ever does that."

SALAMANDER flicked the pinto undeservedly with his quirt. Mr. Perkins! Mr. Perkins! Mr. Perkins! . . . Hell! Couldn't she talk about somebody or something else?

Less than ten dollars in cash, and *she* couldn't get out any cedar post, even if she had the cedar—which she wouldn't, because that five thousand hadn't reached Slater.

A lean-ribbed old woman, a few thin cows, probably no house and certainly no means of support.

Damn Wolf Shivers, anyway! What did he hafta up an' plug old Perkins for.

She reined in suddenly, almost girlish excitement in her voice as she swept a slender arm out to point a gloved finger toward the flat. "Look! That must be a big diamond! See how it sparkles!"

Jerked away from his somber thoughts, Salamander felt that queer, sickening feeling tug at him again. They were opposite the murder spot once more. The sun still was glinting on those damned glasses. "There's th' bridle," he said, a little hoarsely. "I'll go 'head an' stop that hawse when he gits there!"

The black proved docile. Salamander retied him without trouble. He knew that it was a useless task, of course. Perkins wouldn't come for him. As he remounted, he noted that she was gazing at the flat again. "Mica," he explained. "That stuff shore does cut didoes when th' sun hits it."

Her seamed face registered eager interest. "How remarkable! I simply must go over there and see it at close range."

"Yu'll find plenty of it down th' ridge," Salamander told her, hastily. "Mebbe them cattle need a little lookin' after right now."

"To be sure," she laughed. "Really, it was childish of me to start after that plaything. As Mr. Perkins——"

Salamander's mind almost went blank. . . . Mr. Perkins! Mr. Perkins! Mr. Perkins!

Damn!

They loped down the trail, stirrups cuffing sociably. She bade him a cheery good-bye when they came to where the cattle were lolling among the cedars. A little way beyond, a fresh clearing on his left attracted his attention. There was their tent, a well, a make-shift corral, staked corners for a cabin that was to be made from the logs near-by—the cabin that never would be built.

SALAMANDER swore luridly and started on, halted, turned back, started again, irresolutely.

Then, wafted through a quarter of a mile of clear light air, a voice came—a motherly, "homey" voice, untrained, but steady and true-toned:

The door hing-es are of leath-er; the windows have no glass;
And the roof it lets the how-ling blizzard in.
And I hear the hungry coy-ote as he sneaks up through the grass,
'Round my lit-tle old sod shan-ty on the claim.

The song ended. With its ending, a wall seemed to have been erected, fencing Salamander off from something that belonged in the world—something that he couldn't quite analyze or assess, but which left him lonely when it departed. "Pore game ol' gal," he muttered. "Ain't no coyotes gonna yowl aroun' no shanty on that there claim."

Still muttering, he dismounted where a spring branch tumbled across the path. Loosening the pinto's cinches, he let him graze while his master slouched on a felled

cedar, smoking an endless chain of husk cigarettes in dour silence.

Finally he rummaged in his saddle pocket, producing a thumb-grimed sheet of paper and a stub pencil. Resolutely he wrote:

Sheruf Slaytun:
Wolf Shivers beefed ole Perkins. He's layin out somewheres beyant th ridge. Wolf's plumb yellow bellied. He will talk plenty if you twist his tail. He knows where that coin is cached. Git it an give it to th ole lady. Shee shore needs it. I'm a ole friend of them Perkinses, an I wanta see th pore ol gal git whats comin to her, yurs trooly

Maverick.

That night, Salamander crossed the flat on foot and sneaked into town to slide the note under the door of the sheriff's office. Two hours later, he was galloping toward the red liquor and dancing girls and whirling roulette wheels in that cowtown north of the point of the ridge.

FORTY-EIGHT hours brought Salamander Braley back to the ridge. The cowtown whiskey had been potent as ever; but, somehow, its effect was more depressing than exhilarating. He had broken about even at roulette and in an unexciting game of stud. The blonde dance hall girl had smirked dutifully, but her old charm was gone. So, for once in his adult existence, Salamander was coming back, sober and with money in his pocket—coming back, though he knew he should have kept the pinto's nose pointed northward and spurred him for a thousand miles.

Dusk had inked the swales and purpled the ridges when he came opposite the little tent. The flap was closed, and the canvas walls were pink from a light within. Scarcely conscious that he was doing it, Salamander neck-reined the pinto off the trail, whistling ostentatiously to announce his presence as he neared the tent.

The flap parted and the woman stood outlined in the opening, blinking uncertainly in the half light. "Oh it's you," she said, as he came nearer. "Light and come in. I'm about to have a little supper."

Her voice was weary, strained, but still brave.

"Awready et," Salamander lied, glibly. But he slid down and ground-hitched the pinto. Before going within, he politely removed his belt, tossing it onto the dry-goods box that served as her table, before seating himself on the nail keg she indicated.

Salamander was bent on being subtle. "Thought I'd stop by an' see how yuh folks is makin' it."

She shook her grey head slowly as she removed the coffee pot from the sheet iron

box stove and set it on the table. "I forgot, you've been away, so you wouldn't know.

"Mr. Perkins has been killed. They found his body this forenoon and have taken it to town for burial. So, I'm alone, now."

No tears. Not even a tremble in her smooth voice. Only the motherly eyes reflected the pain and sorrow that was wracking the stanch soul within that frail old body.

SALAMANDER had a question, the answer to which might affect his own destiny. After consoling her awkwardly, he asked it:

"Anybody got a idee who done that killin'?"

"Yes. They have a clue, and are searching for the man."

Salamander felt a little better. She had said man, not men.

She spooned a small quantity of potatoes from the frying pan into a tin plate and set it by Salamander's elbow, then placed biscuits beside it and poured his coffee. "Sheriff Slayton is a very close-mouthed man, but he appears hopeful that he will get the money back. I forgot to tell you that Mr. Perkins was robbed of five thousand dollars."

Salamander managed to display a proper surprise. "Do tell! Five thousan' bucks, eh? Beggin' pardon fur mebbe shootin' outa my turn, Ma'm, wasn't it kinda risky-like fur yur man to be packin' all that dinero?"

Hoofs welted the trail, subsided to a soft padding as they left it to approach the tent. Spurs jingled and boot heels chugged the sandy soil. The woman had started for the flap, when it was thrust open and Sheriff Slayton's tall figure showed in the opening. Looking past him, Salamander saw a half-dozen others still sitting their mounts.

Slayton flicked an eye toward Salamander and dropped a hand to his holster. He relaxed when Salamander jerked his head toward where his belt lay.

Someone had once described Slayton as "a man of long ropes and short words." He proved the aptness of that description. Drawing out a big, thick leather wallet that Salamander recognized, he tossed it on the table before the woman. "Got it," he said, succinctly, then turned to slit his keen eyes at Salamander. "Yuh can ride a ways with us."

Slayton bowed to the old woman, who stared abstractedly at the wallet, as one not particularly interested. Salamander caught up his belt, but hooked his arm through it, instead of buckling it on.

Outside, Salamander mounted the pinto, looping the belt over the horn. The sheriff gave a low-spoken order and one man dismounted, squatting before the tent, rifle across his lap—on guard.

The sheriff took to the trail, turning southward, toward town. Salamander followed, aware that a rider was on either side of him and that two more rode behind.

After a long mile covered at a jog in silence, Slayton turned off the trail by a cowpath that threaded a cedar brake. Seconds later, they emerged from the growing gloom into a circular glade centering which stood a blasted cedar, under which the little party halted. Salamander experienced a feeling of revulsion when his shoulder brushed against the bound feet of a body that dangled grotesquely from a horizontal limb overhead. "Hey, Slayton," he protested, shivering a little. "What did yuh head me in under that damn thing fur?"

"Worryin' yuh?" The sheriff worked his horse nearer.

"No but it—well, it makes me kinda creepy, an' it's skeerin' my hawse!"

"We'll be takin' th' hawse out, after a bit."

There was a short silence. The sheriff took a length of new rope off the horn of his saddle and commenced to uncoil it. "Wolf talked a plenty, onct he got started," someone back of Salamander explained.

"I reckoned he would," Salamander heard himself saying.

Slayton left off fiddling with the rope and jammed his mount against the pinto to lean over and peer into Salamander's face.

"You mean you writ that note?"

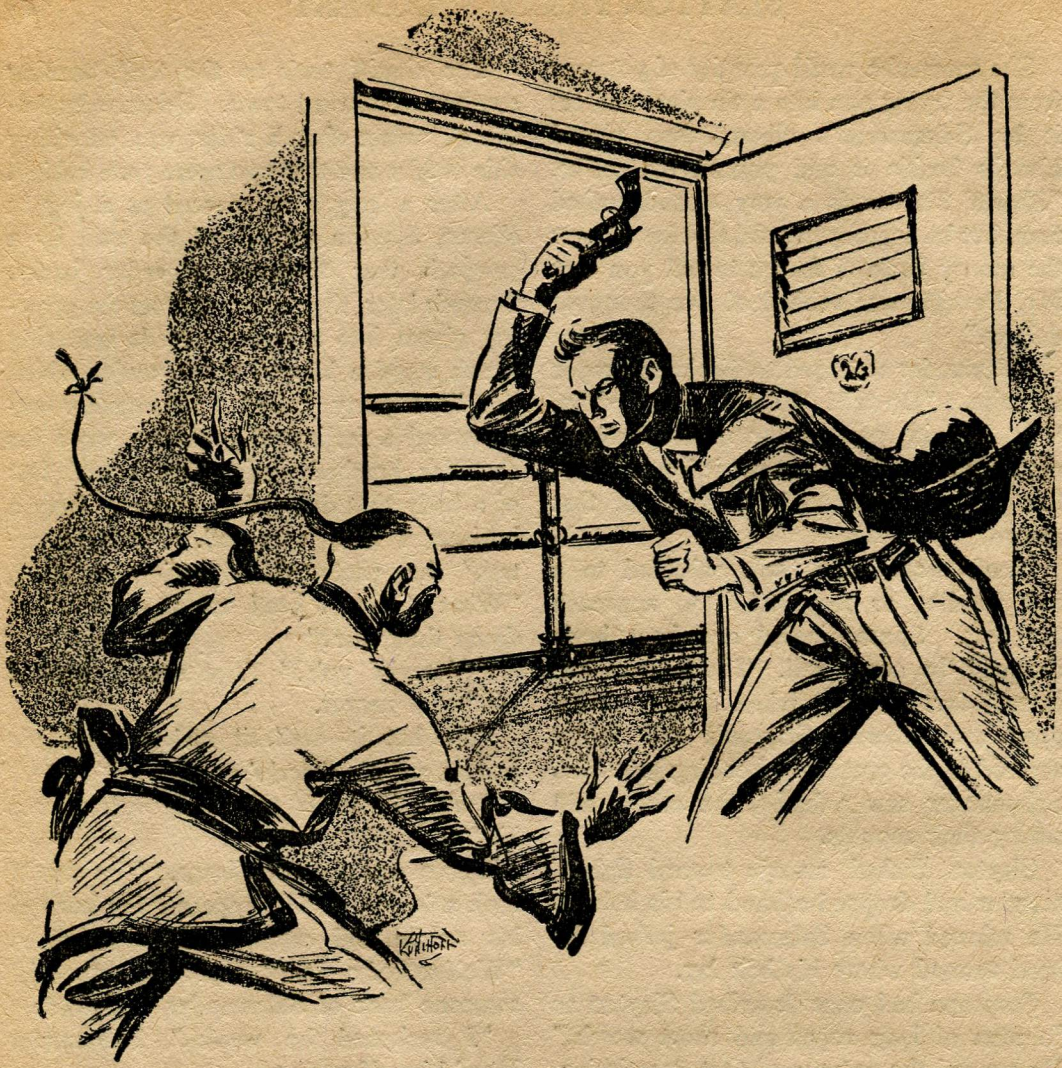
"Yeh."

Slayton reined around and started on the back trail.

"C'mon, boys."

Where the cowpath met the town trail the sheriff worked his horse in among the others and cut the pinto out as a cowman cuts a steer from the herd. Motioning the others townward, he stretched out a long arm to point northward along the silent ridge.

"Ride."



HONGKONG CABIN

YOU would have liked Bill Wilson had you seen him walk into Olsen's Place that night; a quiet sort, with a friendly smile, a cut-steel eye and an air of knowing just what he was about. He gave the barmaid a nod and a smile.

"Looking for a chap named Parker, miss," he said. "Where'll I find him?"

"Back hall room upstairs, farthest on the left," said she, and looked after Wilson as he strode quickly away. A man slouched up to the bar, also looking after Wilson, but with a far different expression.

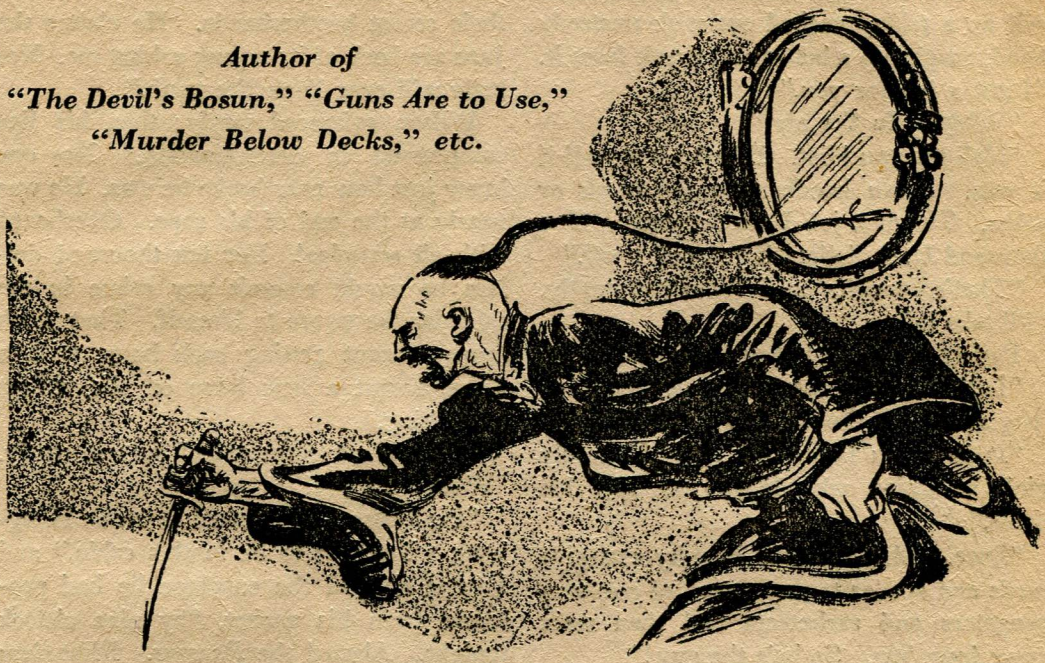
"That blighter," he observed bitterly, "is a bad 'un. American, 'e is. A main bad 'un and no mistake, miss."

"Yes?" The barmaid flashed him a glance. "Worth a dozen of you at that, my lad."

Olsen's Place, in Shanghai, was really a sedate English pub for the better class of seafaring men. The barmaid was an Eurasian, but was treated with great respect, being more of a cashier than a barmaid; some said she was Olsen's daughter, which might account for a barmaid in a land where yellow men served. Olsen was really an Englishmen in spite of his name, or so he claimed.

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of
"The Devil's Bosun," "Guns Are to Use,"
"Murder Below Decks," etc.



A Russian Spy and Two Gangs of Chinese Killers Made a Trip to Hongkong the Queerest Job Bill Wilson ever Tackled

However, Shanghai is Shanghai, even the British settlement; which means that a lot of queer work goes on there. More than anywhere else, it is the focal point where all of Asia and all of Europe and much of America come together; where in an hour's time one may pass through the cities of half a dozen nations and peoples, and still be in Shanghai. Bill Wilson was well aware of this.

In the room designated, he came upon Parker, a sagging wreck of a man. Wilson shut the door and eyed the slumped figure in the chair.

"Well? I got your message. I'm here," he said crisply. "What's up?"

"You needn't look down your nose at me," was Parker's bitter response. "I'm all cracked up and I know it——"

"You are," said Wilson, who seldom minced his words. "You were a damned good pilot once. When you came out here, you had the world by the tail. You went down the string with women and booze and race-horses quicker than any man I ever knew. I don't blame you for it; merely stating facts. If you've got a notion to pull out, I'll stand by you till hell freezes over. Need a loan?"

Parker laughed, wryly, and looked down at his sodden self.

"Yeah. Long time since I was in the Army Air Corps, huh? No, Bill, I'm not whining. I'm done. I'm not pulling out of the spin. You're one square guy, and before I crash I'm doing you a favor. Is it true that you lost your job?"

"True," said Wilson, lighting a cigarette after the other refused his offer. "We've all lost our jobs. The government has taken over the works, upcountry; China for the Chinese. I'm going back home and

get me a job manicuring automobiles at some filling station. Who the hell wants a pilot? Nobody."

"You're wrong." Parker pulled himself up a trifle, reached out with unsteady hand, caught up a bottle and drank from it. "I got a job for you."

"What? In the air?"

"Hell no, you idiot. I'd take it myself if it was. I can handle controls drunk or sober. This is a job I can't manage. Ten thousand U. S. dollars if you pull it off."

"That's enough," said Wilson promptly. "I'll take it."

Parker grinned. "May mean jail."

"I don't give a damn what it means, so long as the ten thousand is in the bank."

"It is. You know Sin Fat. The only gink in China who looks just like his name."

"Sure. That lump of iniquity can give cards and spades to any crowd of our own gangsters and racketeers and then walk away from 'em. So he's the guy!"

"Yep." Parker nodded solemnly. "He propositioned me today. It's a job aboard that lousy little French steamer pulling out at midnight for Hongkong and Saigon. It's no job for me; I couldn't swing it. I told him I'd get you. I've got an advance payment here and tickets."

When Bill Wilson frowned, as he now did, his dark brows drew down into a straight bar that intensified the steely glitter of his eyes. Sin Fat? He had heard plenty about that overlord of the underworld in Shanghai. Entrenched in the old native city, Sin Fat not only had half a dozen gambling places but reached out with fat yellow fingers into the foreign concession cities as well. Dope, women, murder—his name was dark and bloody.

"Something too dirty even for you to touch?" Wilson snapped.

"No, too clean. Needs brains. He wouldn't trust anyone but an American. You know, Sin Fat came from Chinatown in San Francisco. He thinks Americans are hell and repeat." Parker laughed bitterly, harshly. "Honest and reliable—the fat fool! Well, he's all washed up. They're out for his hide and they'll get it."

"Who?" said Wilson.

"Some damned Chinese society. One of their secret brotherhoods. He claims the Japs are back of it; no use asking me. Nobody will ever know the truth."

Wilson grimaced wryly; then his lips compressed in determination. No one knew just how near broke he was. He was nearly at the end of his rope. Overboard with all scruples! For ten thousand dollars he would commit any crime in the calendar, he swore to himself. That much money meant getting back home with a stake, meant a new lease on life, meant everything.

"Well, come to the point," he said curtly. "What's the job?"

"Protection. Bodyguard as far as Hongkong. You got to be in this cabin," and Parker slapped the envelope he had produced from his pocket, "by nine o'clock tonight. Aboard the *Perseus*. First-class cabin and all found. Sin Fat's son will show up then and——"

"His son?" echoed Wilson in astonishment.

"Yeah. You know how these Chinks are about their sons. Old Sin Fat hasn't the ghost of a chance to get away, with his bulk; he's too well known. Somebody's sworn to wipe him out and all his family, especially the son. Sin Lo is the name. If Sin Lo doesn't turn up at Hongkong, all serene, you get bumped off. That's the joker," and Parker cackled amusedly.

"Is that all?" Bill Wilson drew a deep breath of relief. No crime, then!

"All?" Parker blinked up at him. "You fool, why d'ye think I didn't take the job? It means a hell of a mess somewheres, that's why, and I'm in no shape to fight. You are. You do nothing else. You go poking your nose into all the damned joints and raising hell. You got a reputation that would sink a gunboat. Well, it's your kind of a job, and you're welcome. Is that all, huh? You'll——"

"Gimme the tickets and stop croaking,"

said Wilson, reaching out. The other slapped the envelope into his hand.

"There y'are. Five thousand advance payment. Gimme commission. The other half when you land Sin Lo right side up at Hongkong. Sin Fat's word is good."

WILSON grunted assent. The one thing that could be said for Sin Fat was that his word was his bond, and so accepted.

Five thousand dollars—in United States banknotes! It was incredible. And this sorry wreck of a man before him had turned down the job. The fact was eloquent. Wilson peeled off a thousand dollars and extended it.

"Suit you?"

"You're damned generous," said Parker, with a sniffle. "Sorry to see you go, Bill. Won't see you again. Sin Fat allowed as much himself; slim chance, he says. Square shooter, the old dog is. Nobody but an American could make it, according to him."

"Know anything definite?" Wilson tucked away money and ticket.

"Nary a thing. Crooked all along the line." Parker took another drink. He was on the point of becoming maudlin now. "Sin Lo has his own ticket. I never clapped eyes on him; probably a hophead. If you think a French boat is safe, you're a liar, that's all. These here frogs jump backwards or sideways when you poke money at 'em. Don't you trust any Frenchman. You be aboard by nine o'clock sharp. She sails at midnight. He shares your cabin. And you'd better take a gun."

"Gun be hanged," said Wilson. "Look here, is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes." Parker jerked up a little. "Tell that barmaid to send me up a bottle of Holland gin and a bottle of Scotch and a siphon of soda. And lemme know where to tell your folks about it so's they can collect the corpse. You're a worse damned fool than I am——"

Wilson laughed. He felt buoyant, effervescent, fit for anything and everything.

"I mean it, old chap," he said. "Pull yourself together. Come along on this ship, leave everything behind you. By the time we hit Frisco you'll be yourself. I'll lend a hand——"

"No," Parker said flatly. "Bill, to a man like me the world's a bitter small place. I couldn't win back, ever. Forget your platitudes and face facts! You slip down and down until everything inside is rotted out, and you're done for; that's me. And all the world, our world, my world, knows it."

"You might be wrong," Wilson rejoined quietly. "Has it occurred to you?"

"I don't give a damn," Parker said. "You look after your own job. Relatives will meet the boat at Hongkong. If Sin Lo is all right, you'll get the dough; if not, you get bumped off. Now, send up the whiskey and gin, and clear out."

"All right," said Wilson, recognizing finality. "So long!"

Nine o'clock, and it was seven now. Just time to dine, pack and get aboard.

Bill Wilson footed it to his own lodgings, in something of a whirl. Money talked. This much money talked plenty, too. Bodyguard to some vicious, lazy young devil of a Chinese, huh? Well, no matter. Sin Fat was a fat old bloated sinner by all accounts, and if he was in bad with the Chinese secret societies, his goose was cooked for sure. He would sit back and take his medicine, and try like hell to get his son out alive. That was Chinese fashion, all right. Learned his deviltry in San Francisco and had got rich at it over here. Talked English, too, they said; was proud of it.

His things packed and sent off, his bill paid, Wilson went down to the Bund and dropped in at the Army and Navy Club for dinner. He dined alone. As he was lighting a cigar with his coffee, Mathewson came along and paused.

Mathewson was one of these slim, bright-eyed, casual Englishmen who knew everything and served the Intelligence with all they had. Not a bad chap.

"Oh, hello, Wilson!" said the Briton with a nod. "I hear you're pulling out tonight."

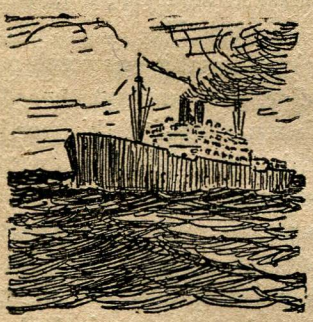
"Eh? Who told you that?" said Wilson, who had mentioned his departure to no one.

"Rumor," and Mathewson shrugged. "*Perseus,* isn't it? Sorry, old chap. Luck!"

He passed on. Wilson bit savagely at his cigar. Mathewson had heard something from the native city, no doubt. The thing had not been kept quiet. Parker must have blabbed, confound him! "Sorry, old chap!" The words rankled. They were significant. Perhaps Mathewson had tried, in his way, to convey a warning in them.

"Warning, hell!" said Bill Wilson.

He paid his chit and departed; just time to get aboard. He was on the alert all the way, watching shadows, hand close to



pocket, ready for anything; but not a thing happened. He came aboard without incident. His luggage had arrived. The chief steward, a fat Frenchman, with beautiful mustaches, beamed on him and winked.

"Monsieur has a charming cabin; monsieur is very lucky, no?"

"No," said Wilson. "But why?"

The steward winked again. "Ah, but this is not your puritan America! This is France, m'sieu; one asks no questions, one enjoys life, one takes what the gods provide—ah!" And he blew a kiss on plump fingers to the air.

Bill Wilson followed his steward to the cabin, scowling. What the devil was it all about? He did not like Frenchmen anyhow. He did not like this ship a particle.

With excuse. The *Perseus* was no liner, but was fairly modern. Second-class passengers were stowed away God knew where; third class, Chinese, behind locked iron gratings forward, to prevent piratical outbreaks. First class was a pleasant upper deck abaft the bridge, where a single long corridor divided some twenty-odd cabins.

Wilson found his luggage stowed, and gave the yellow steward a hundred francs.

"For service," he said in French. "You are French?"

"Certainly, m'soo. From Hanoi," and the yellow man bowed low in thanks. A sharp fellow with a scar across one cheek and eye.

"If you are tempted to kill anyone," said Wilson gravely, "reflect before you act. I am accustomed to killing men, in a very unpleasant fashion," and he touched his slightly bulging pocket. The steward stared at him with luminous dark eyes, without a ghost of a smile; he was being taken seriously. "That's all. Your name?"

"Hwein, m'soo," and with another bow the steward departed.

Wilson laid out a few things. He appropriated the upper bunk to himself, after a glance around the place. A pleasant cabin. Frenchily upholstered, with a large window opening on the deck passage. He would naturally be expected to take the lower berth, so he took the upper; besides, any possible danger could more easily be met from above, and more unexpectedly.

That there would be danger, he was well aware.

Comfortable in pajamas and slippers, Wilson glanced at his watch. Full nine o'clock. His fellow passenger would arrive at any instant, now; these people were prompt. Ah! Steps outside, a thin Chinese voice. A knock.

"Come in," said Wilson.

The door opened. And then he comprehended the wink of the fat steward—but he did not comprehend anything else. In fact, he just sat there blinking. For Hwein

came in, bearing two large suitcases. And behind the steward came a girl.

A girl wearing American clothes, true; but her face was heavily painted in Chinese fashion and her black hair was cut in the usual bang across her forehead. She gave Bill Wilson a pleasant nod, dismissed the steward, and closed the door. Then Wilson awoke.

"My lord!" he exclaimed. "Look here, there's some mistake. You speak English?"

"Plenty good," and the girl uttered a bubbling laugh. "No, there's no mistake. I am Sin Lo. I think you're Captain Wilson?"

"Bill Wilson, sure." Startled, taken all aback, Wilson found himself shaking hands. "But see here! You know, we can't travel like this. I didn't know you were a girl at all, damn it——"

Sin Lo laughed again.

"It is quite all right," she said brightly, as though enjoying his confusion. "We'll discuss it in a moment. Wait until I get out of these clothes. I don't see how American women can wear corsets like this—the things are terrible——"

And she calmly began to remove her garments.

II

BILL WILSON was slowly turning purple when his companion paused and regarded him.

"I forgot to tell you—then you really didn't know?"

"Know what?" gulped Wilson.

"That I'm not a woman at all. I had to pretend to be one. I think I did it pretty well, didn't I? It was just to get aboard here. I'm listed as Miss Sin Lo, but we can tell them in the morning that it was a mistake."

With these words, Sin Lo jerked off the hat and black hair, to reveal the clipped round head of a boy. The garments were flung aside. The shoes, which had very high heels, were kicked off. A different person was revealed, when a towel scraped away the face paint and Sin Lo stood in his underwear, grinning at Wilson.

A boy, a mere stripling of twelve or thirteen, dark eyes aglitter. Bill Wilson fell back in his chair and broke into a roar of laughter at his own expense. Sin Lo joined in the laughter, then sobered abruptly.

"It is not a joke to me," he said.

"Beg pardon, old man." Wilson straightened. "I was laughing at myself, not you. Are you really Sin Fat's son? I expected to see a grown man."

"My honorable father unfortunately has no other sons," the boy rejoined.

"Where'd you learn to speak English so well?"

"In the mission school. And I belong to the Y. M. C. A. and when I get to San Francisco I shall go to college."

"Hey!" Wilson exclaimed sharply. "You can't get into the country, you know."

"I can. I was born there, and have my birth certificate," said the boy calmly. "I am more worried about getting to Hongkong. It is known that I am aboard here, of course. However, I must get into my own clothes. I have plenty in the suitcase."

Wilson lifted one of the grips to the lower bunk, but Sin Lo checked him.

"The other one, please, not this. All the money is in this one."

"Money?" repeated Wilson.

"Yes. A hundred thousand dollars, and much valuable jewelry."

"Good lord! You'd better let the purser take charge——"

"No. It is not the money that is in danger."

With an effort, Bill Wilson got himself adjusted to the boy's viewpoint. After all, a suitcase shoved under the bunk was of no particular interest; it was the life of this boy which was in jeopardy. Sin Lo opened up his grip and began to dress, in an outfit of American clothes, whose labels he proudly displayed.

"My honorable father bought these for

me, Captain Wilson. I shall not see him again, ever."

He choked a little and turned his back.

"Oh, hell!" said Wilson awkwardly. "Look here, I'm just plain Bill Wilson. Lost my job and my title with it. Want to go out and watch the river when we sail?"

Sin Lo turned and gave him a glance.

"If I left this cabin while we're anchored here, I would be dead. Even here I may not be safe."

It was incongruous to hear a boy utter such words, and so calmly.

"Do you know who wants to kill you? What secret society?"

"My father has not mentioned the name; there are many. They are very strong all over China."

No; it was not a joke by any means. Wilson looked at the windows, whose shutters were drawn, with the slats open to admit air and yet hold the room invisible from the deck passage; he looked at the ventilator, at the door.

And he distinctly saw the doorknob move.

Wilson left his chair. In two steps he was at the door; his hand lunged. The knob spun and the door flew inward. With a stifled cry, a young woman came with it. She had been standing outside with the steward, Hwein, who held a suitcase in either hand.

Recovering her balance, the young woman glanced from Sin Lo to Wilson, a flush in her cheeks and swift anger in her eyes. She was remarkably pretty—so pretty, in fact, and so well dressed, that Wilson was speechless, until a torrent of furious French came from her lips. Then he found tongue.

"You're too fast for me, ma'mselle, but it doesn't pay to monkey with the wrong doorknob on this boat——"

"The wrong door?" she said in English, breaking off her torrid speech to stare at him. "But yes. I thought it was my cabin. This boy said it was not."

"The regret is all mine," said Wilson cheerfully.

"What do you mean by those words?"

"My dear lady, I'm apologizing to you," and Wilson's eyes twinkled. "I regret my action very deeply. I took you to be somebody else."

She regarded him for a long moment, and then her deep, dark eyes warmed a trifle. They were lovely eyes; as color stole into her face, its loveliness increased. But Wilson, glancing at the steward outside the open doorway, saw Hwein staring with round eyes at the boy, who was by this time fully dressed. In half an hour word would be all over the ship that the Chinese girl had been changed into a boy.

In his irritation, Wilson paid little attention to the departure of the young woman. When he had closed and locked the door, he turned to Sin Lo.

"Confound it! That was a fool mistake to make——" He broke off sharply. The boy was very white. "Why, what's the matter?"

"I have seen her before," said Sin Lo quietly. "She is Olga Semenoff, the Russian woman."

"Impossible! Why, this girl was lovely as an angel——"

Sin Lo merely laughed. It was the laughter of a race which has more depths of depravity in everyday life than some other races have in a thousand years of imagination. That laugh silenced Wilson.

He lit a cigarette and settled into his chair again. Olga Semenoff, eh? This Russian refugee was famous up and down the China coast, as the most cold-blooded type of adventuress. Wilson had heard fabulous stories about her actions. She had charm and brains, and was supposed to be everything and anything from a secret agent of Japan to the morganatic wife of the late Tsar—which may indicate the absurdity of rumor and China coast gossip.

Anyhow, she was no angel; that fact was certain. No wonder the boy had laughed!

WILSON dismissed the matter entirely and devoted himself to getting acquainted with his charge. He found

Sin Lo was just thirteen, and had been shielded from most of the nefarious environment of Sin Fat. Deep for his age, shrewd, and with a certain charming personality. Wilson liked him famously, liked his politeness, his manliness.

A glance at his wrist-watch, and Wilson rose.

"Shall we turn in? I've left you the lower berth; I prefer the other."

"Thank you. Good night—and good luck!" said Sin Lo, with a slight smile.

Wilson glanced at the suitcase shoved under the berth, shook his head, and climbed to his perch. The boy crawled in beneath, and switched off the lights.

Sounds. Cargo and deck loading going aboard, the trampling of feet, the night-noises of the river, the bells ashore striking eleven o'clock. All these drifted in from outside. In the corridor beyond the locked door, occasional luggage bumped past, voices sounded faintly from time to time. Wilson had no intention of sleeping until the *Perseus* was actually under way down-river. Somehow, he was now acutely impressed with the sense of danger to this boy. And the thought of that suitcase with its incredible treasure—good lord! It was stupefying.

Anybody aboard this craft would kill both of them for that suitcase, were its contents known. Yet it was safer here than in the steamer's strong-room. Reluctantly, Bill Wilson admitted that Sin Fat was a smart rascal. He wondered that the boy would have trusted him with that information. He wondered at his own cool acceptance of it; and cursed himself for a fool because of his pride in the boy's trust.

Wilson lay sleepless and alert. From somewhere a searchlight reached ghostly tendrils of light through the shutters, and was gone again. Winches were banging and rattling. The door was locked and the bolt shot; apparently safe enough.

Where could danger lie, what form would it take? Perhaps by knife or bullet, by naked coolie, and when least expected. Until the ship actually sailed, the danger lay without, would come from ashore; after that, from some emissary planted aboard. Until the ship weighed anchor, then, Wilson knew he must be on the watch. Afterward, he and the boy must sleep by relays.

Laughing voices, gay farewells came from outside. Wilson smiled in the darkness. This was farewell to China, then; for him and for these others whose lilting French voices seemed so happy. Olga Semenoff was aboard, eh? Queer, that the boy should have seemed frightened. She might have made the trip interesting, under other circumstances. Bill Wilson knew that come-hither look when he saw it. No fooling this trip, however; he must remain with this boy every moment.

One good thing about this ship, or this cabin; it was anything but ill-smelling. In fact, the place had a pleasant odor. And that, Wilson thought, was something new for a French coaster. Very pleasant indeed. His head drooped; he was lying with his head to the foot of the bunk. The blankets scratched his face; with a slight start, he roused, sniffing. He tried to move, and to his vague astonishment could not.

What the devil! His brain erupted. His muscles broke their invisible bonds. He rolled over the edge of the bunk and landed on his feet. Again a searchlight flashed down the side of the ship. The interior of the cabin was illumined. Wilson, his head reeling, his senses swimming, grabbed for the shutters. He wanted air. Something burned his hand, and he swore heartily.

With this, he switched on the nearest light. Something was hanging there—a long snaky string, it seemed, put through the slats from outside. A string with a red and smoking tip. A fuse? No, but it burned like a perfumed fuse. The odor made his head reel again. He caught at the thing and jerked it loose, flung open the shutter, and put his head out of the window.

Almost instantly, his brain was clear. He hurriedly opened the other window, then looked at the boy. Sleeping peacefully, head well away from the window. The damp river-air rushed into the cabin, and Wilson drank it in gratefully. He put his foot on the smoking fusee. Perfumed death, and no mistake!

"The devil!" he muttered, as realization grew upon him.

Dragon incense, of course; he had heard of it. The Chinese, who avoided the mention of death by such terms as "ascending the dragon" or "eating gold," called this form of assassination "dragon incense." Wilson had heard stories about it, fantastic tales to which he had never attached belief. Now he believed.

How pleasantly the unseen intangible bonds had grown upon him! A little more and he would have been done for. The spreading fumes had mounted, had reached him first. The boy would have been affected in due course. Not enough air came through the slats to obviate the effects.

Until the steamer was actually under way, Wilson sat in a chair, alert, watching the open windows. Then he drew up the shutters and sought his berth again.

In the morning, Sin Lo looked at the dead fusee and turned pale.

"Dragon incense," he said simply. "Thank you, my friend."

III

SPARKLING sea and sunlight, and danger once more unreal, faraway, illusive.

Seated in the easy Singapore chairs, Wilson and his charge warmed to the morning sunlight. The French breakfast was an informal affair as always; there was little to do now except bask and watch the Yellow Sea churn past. The games, the frenzied pursuits of a liner's crowd did not obtain aboard this little coaster, which had scant room for diversions and was out for business, not for pleasure.

The passenger list was small. A number of French officers, a couple of their wives, the gay Olga, and business travelers—French, Japanese, two Italian reservists going to join their compatriot army in the Abyssinian graveyard. The ship's officers did not bother the passengers; they were too busy. That ominous forward deck, with its cramped Chinese, its armed guards, its padlocked gratings, told the ever-present fear of piracy.

Olga Semenoff tramped past, again and again, vigorous and breezy, on the arm of a resplendent French officer. On each occasion, she flung a gay, vivacious smile and a cheery word at Bill Wilson and the boy.

By noon things had thinned out considerably, for the *Perseus* hit a slow rolling sea that was agonizing. A few brave souls clung to deck chairs. Noon mess was scantily attended. The horizon-blue officers vanished. Sin Lo, wan and gray in the cheeks, stuck it out in his chair, with occasional trips to the lee rail.

Bill Wilson, who was untroubled by either air sickness or sea sickness, eyed the yellow stewards and the white crew and was unable to discern the least point

that might spell peril. Olga Semenoff appeared, alone now but fresh and flaming with vitality. She halted, and Wilson rose.

"What, smoking?" she exclaimed brightly. "You're hardened to the sea? But of course. You are Captain Wilson, the aviator."

"And you're Miss Semenoff, I think?" Wilson met her level look and smiled. "Let me introduce Mr. Sin Lo—no, don't get up, Sin. Invalids are exempt from formality. Perhaps you'll join me in a cigarette, and

a chair, and put the sunlight to shame with your sparkling eyes?"

"All of that," and the Russian woman laughed as she settled herself in a chair. "So you expect to have an interesting trip?"

"Not with you," Wilson said coolly. "You're too dangerous, young lady."

Her eyes flashed. "You are insulting!"

"Suit yourself. Facts are facts. I'm quite a brute, really. If I allowed myself to be affected by your beauty and spirit, I'd be your slave in ten minutes; and I've no such intention."

"I've never been so addressed—never!" she exclaimed frowning. Bill Wilson smiled lazily.

"Forget it, my dear, forget it. You don't waste your time on sea trips. Neither do I. It was no accident that you barged into my cabin last night. Want to put your cards on the table, or be strangers again? You went to enough trouble to get acquainted. I'll meet you halfway if you say the word."

Dark eyes aglow, a flush of anger in her cheeks, the girl studied his lean brown face, met the quick steel of his eyes, and grimaced.

"You—you really think that was done intentionally, Captain Wilson?"

"I know it was. And I'm plain Bill Wilson, thanks. I'm not instructor to the ambitious air force of western China any longer; I'm homeward bound."

"Yes, I know," she said softly.

Wilson felt a swift, sharp pulse-beat at those words. They constituted amazing confession. He had been amusing himself at random, merely having some fun with this lovely creature to see how she would take it. But at these words, his brain snapped alert. What the devil! She took him in earnest—then his amused accusation was really true!

"Yeah? And just how long ago did you know I was coming on this ship?" he asked.

She looked at him and smiled. It was a warm, lovely, eloquent and thoroughly captivating smile, calculated to make a man take full note of her undeniable charm. Wilson realized that she was attired in a golden-yellow tussor silk, wore a necklace of old carven lapis lazuli beads, was glowing with youth and fairly alive with radiant energy. Dark eyes and brows, face like a cameo, figure like nobody's business—what a woman! She seemed little more than a girl.

Bill Wilson took astonished warning from her sudden melting friendliness. But he gave no hint of his very real amazement.

"An hour before I came aboard," she said softly. "That was why I came."

Wilson grinned. He was the very picture of sunny, confiding intimacy.

"That's straight enough, anyhow," he observed whimsically. "Shall I flatter myself that you liked my looks?"

"Well, they might be worse," and her dark eyes twinkled at him. "And your story is romantic. You were one of the officers in charge of that gigantic new airfield the Chinese have been building, far in the west, in the shadow of the Tibetan Mountains."

"Where the Japs can't reach it," Wilson added promptly. "Yes. The Chinese line of ultimate defense against all encroachments—defense by air. A new kind of Great Wall. Staffed by Americans until a few weeks ago."

"And now you are kicked out—pouf! Like that," she said. "Well, it is a pity. Suppose you walk around the deck a few times with me?"

For a brief instant, her glance touched on the supine, wrapped-up figure of the boy, as though suggesting that, relieved of his presence, they might talk more freely.

Bill Wilson's suspicions jumped abruptly. Could it be possible that here was some form of peril fronting Sin Lo? Could this woman, rumored to be an active secret agent for anyone with the requisite price, be part of the designs against the boy? Hardly likely. And yet, who could tell?

Wilson was still astonished by her frank

avowal of seeking him out. He could not fathom her reason; he could see no possible explanation, unless it were because of the boy. And in such case, she would not have admitted it.

"Nope, we don't walk," he said. "If I could show you the China Sea by moonlight, now, that'd be different. If I could tell you the story of my life in a nice dark corner, and make you thrill with admiration for the heroic airman—that'd be great! But it can't be done."

SHE regarded him slowly, unsmiling, probing.

"I do not like sarcasm," she said. "Insults, I do not mind; but sarcasm goes deeper, Mr. Wilson. Just why will you not walk with me?"

"Because I can't leave him," and Wilson nodded toward the boy. "You can see; he's an invalid. I'm acting as his nurse. I have to watch over him very carefully. He may have a heart attack at any moment, and if I'm not on hand, it's just too bad."

Behind his easy words, he was watching her like a hawk. Her dark eyes widened on him, then she glanced again at Sin Lo, who was apparently asleep.

"Yes? I almost believe you," she said. "Who is he, then?"

Wilson shrugged. The boy's name had meant nothing to her, evidently—unless she were doing a bit of acting.

"A mission boy, the son of a friend of mine who's paying expenses," he said lightly. "However, he's to be trusted. You haven't told me why you were interested in me. Not for my money, because I haven't any. Not for my looks, as I know only too well. Come on, give me the low-down!"

She smiled again now, but shook her head.

"No," she said, tossing away her cigarette. "I wish to know you better. Perhaps I shall tell you everything and speak frankly, and meet you halfway; perhaps not. Let us talk of other things. Of China, of America."

"Why not of Russia?"

"If you like," she said indifferently. "Shall we trade stories, my friend?"

As she spoke, she produced a cigarette case. She was evidently set to stay for a while. Across Wilson's brain flashed a possibility that startled him. No, the boy meant nothing to her, he was positive; Sin Lo was safe with her, here in the warm daylight with other people in sight, anyhow.

"With all my heart!" he exclaimed, then sat up and fumbled in his pocket. "Look here, may I ask you to keep your eye on the boy for one moment? I have a radiogram all ready written, and must get it off. Then I'm at your disposal."

"Of course," she assented. "But is it necessary to watch him every moment?"

"Except when he's asleep, yes," said Wilson earnestly. "I'll be back in five minutes. That radio man is on the bridge deck, I think?"

She nodded. "Just behind the bridge."

Wilson rose and departed. He had weighed the gamble as regarded Sin Lo, and found it acceptable. Instead of mounting to the bridge, however, once beyond sight of the deck chairs he darted into the cabin corridor. This was empty at the moment. Coming to his own door, he halted and listened. Someone was inside.

He smiled grimly, caught hold of the doorknob, and cautiously, firmly, opened the door. The steward? Not likely; the cabin had already been cleaned up. Someone who knew that Olga Semenoff was keeping him occupied outside on deck. Someone, perhaps, after that hundred thousand dollars in loot.

In perfect silence, Wilson pressed the door open, and took a look. A man was there, his back to the doorway, stooping over an open grip, busily rummaging through it. Without pausing to see more, Bill Wilson stepped forward and his foot swung out. The stooping man, hit squarely in his bulging hindquarters by that lusty kick, went forward and slammed headlong against the wall.

For a moment, Wilson thought the intruder dead. Then, finding him merely stunned by the impact, Bill Wilson whistled softly. It was one of the Japanese passengers. A squat, rather heavy-set man. And the suitcase lying open was not one of Sin Lo's grips at all. It belonged to Wilson. It held nothing but personal effects.

Since the intruder was certainly not aware who or what had struck him, Bill Wilson stooped and frisked him, obtained an ugly little automatic pistol and a large leather wallet, then dragged the gentleman out into the still empty corridor. Dropping him there to waken at leisure, he went back inside the cabin, closed his suitcase and stowed it away, and then departed again to the deck.

The whole thing caused him the utmost astonishment. He himself had nothing that anybody would desire to steal. His name was printed largely upon his bags, so there could be no mistake regarding the owner's identity. For some reason that was utterly mystifying, this Japanese was searching his luggage while Olga Semenoff kept him and the boy in sight on deck. Well, she had failed miserably there! As a secret agent, she was not such hot stuff after all, Bill Wilson told himself reassuringly.

She looked up with a bright smile as he returned.

"You didn't take long about it!"

"Oh, the message was already written," and Wilson dropped into his chair with a glance at Sin Lo, whose eyes were open. "All right, son?"

"Quite, thank you," responded the boy. "Except where my stomach should be."

"Wait till tomorrow and you'll be worse off," and Wilson chuckled. "The radio man tells me a bit of a blow is coming up the coast."

"Don't be a brute," Olga Semenoff said compassionately, her eyes on the boy. "I know what this sickness means. It is terrible! Poor little chap, I feel sorry for you. If there's anything I can do, you just call me in. Well, Mr. Wilson, what's the story of your life?"

"One damned thing after another," said Wilson cheerfully. "And yours?"

"Do you refuse to be serious?"

"No, I don't. But I refuse to be taken for a gullible ass, because I'm no such thing." His steely eyes bit out at her. "You choose to be an enemy playing the part of a friend; you needn't deny it. If you were a friend, I might do business with you."

"You're so self-sufficient," she said with ominous sweetness, "that you don't seem to want or need friends."

"That's your mistake," said Wilson. "You've gone about your job wrong. I could use a couple of friends very well indeed. If I had anything you really wanted, I'd be tempted to make a bargain with you, because you could be of use to me."

"Have you ever been in love, I wonder?" she asked, her gaze full on him.

"So often, that when it comes to flirtation I can take it or leave it," Wilson said promptly. "Evading the subject, are you?"

"Not exactly," she returned. "I'm trying to appraise you. Here's not the usual type of man, I find. He's a queer fellow."

"You bet he is," Wilson assented. "And you'd better remember it. Right now, he's looking out for number one."

"And suspicious of everybody,'" she murmured. "I wonder why?"

Wilson gave her a sharp glance.

"Not because of you or what you want, anyhow."

She laughed and leaned back in her chair. "Well, suppose we forget all about it. Tell me what you were doing away up in the back end of China. Of course, I know about the gigantic aircraft base there, and all that; but what did you Americans do? How did you get on without speaking the language? What sort of lives did you lead?"

INSENSIBLY, Wilson found himself won over to friendliness, and talked freely. Sin Lo cut in with questions once or twice; the boy wanted to be an aviator, and said so frankly.

"When I get to America and get in college, I'll have an airplane of my own," he stated. "A fast one. I bet I can handle one, too."

"I bet you will, son," and Bill Wilson chuckled. "Olga, where 'd you learn to speak English so perfectly?"

"My mother was English." Her voice was low, restrained. She seemed to check herself, as though she had been about to say too much. One of the officers strode past with a nod and a salute; then, a moment later, one of the two Japanese passengers. Not the man Wilson had surprised in the cabin, but a younger man, who walked with springy step and wore thick-lensed spectacles. He barely glanced at them as he passed with a courteous gesture.

"I must go and get some letters written." The girl rose and smiled down at Wilson. "I'm glad to have met you both. Please let me come again?"

Wilson came to his feet and shook hands. "This chair is yours, my dear Olga, and whenever you want to talk business, just sing out."

She departed gaily. Wilson gave the boy a look.

"Well? You don't seem as scared of her now as you did last night."

"Of her? Oh, I'm not afraid of her. I was just afraid of everything then. I'm all right now, honest," and Sin Lo uttered a thin laugh. "She is very nice. She said that she would bring me some Far Sui ginger in a little while; it will be good for my sickness."

"When did she say that?" Wilson asked quickly.

"Oh, when you were gone. I was awake all the time, but I thought you'd feel better if you thought I was asleep."

Bill Wilson dropped into his chair with a hearty laugh. Then, remembering the wallet in his pocket, he took it out and examined the contents, holding it in his lap with his hat put over it, to avert possible curiosity from anyone who might be interested in his actions.

Money; French and Japanese banknotes, which he transferred to his vest pocket with an appreciative chuckle. A large sum, and perfectly justifiable loot, he felt. A number of letters, all in Japanese and quite incomprehensible. A Japanese passport, to one Hiroya Dan, with the picture of the unfortunate intruder on his privacy. Two canceled checks on the Bank of Taiwan, at which he stared with open-mouthed amazement. These he folded and stowed away in his own pocket. A letter of credit for a huge sum, issued to Hiroya Dan, and several rice-paper documents in Japanese. These he replaced in the wallet.

"Bill, do you think I could go to the cabin?" asked Sin Lo. "You needn't bother. I'd like to turn in and go to sleep. I don't want any dinner."

"Sure thing," Wilson replied. "It's no bother for me, son. If anybody's after you, my sticking right in your company makes it darned hard for them, so I'll stick. Get some sleep now if you can, and tonight you can spell me."

"There may not be any more danger now," the boy said, wanly. "Anyhow, I don't care much. This sickness is awful."

Together they passed around to the forward entrance of the corridor. This was empty. With a flick of his wrist, Wilson sent the wallet to the deck at one side. At their cabin door he paused, fumbling for the key. A door farther down the corridor swung open. The two Japanese appeared, one with a bandaged head. Wilson felt the door.

"Hello, it's unlocked!" he exclaimed as though in surprise, and threw it open. "In with you, my lad, and to bed!"

He nodded cheerfully to the little brown men, who returned the greeting and passed on. Wilson chuckled as he closed his cabin door. That fellow with the bandaged head did not suspect him—yet.

While Sin Lo tumbled in between the blankets, Wilson fell to work. That his cabin door-lock was useless had been made evident. Looking around, he found a hook and eye on the closet door, and unscrewed the eye.

This he screwed into the side frame of the door, six inches away from the knob. Then, going through his effects, he unwrapped several packages and secured from these all the thin, stout cord he needed. Passing one end of this cord through the eye, he tied it firmly to the doorknob. The other end reached up to his berth very nicely. He made it fast, opened the door, and found that the screw-eye served as an excellent pulley for his cord.

"For what?" asked the boy, who had been watching.

"Burglar alarm, my son," said Bill Wilson proudly. "With this cord tied to my finger or wrist, or better still to this large and protuberant ear which you observe on the side of my head——"

A knock sounded. Wilson opened, to find Olga Semenoff outside.

"Well! I came back and you'd gone," she exclaimed. "How is the young man? I brought him this—I promised it, you know. It 'll put an end to his *mal de mer* —I've always found it excellent. No, I'll not come in. See you later!"

Her silvery laugh echoed down the corridor as she went on.

Wilson took the small, heavy package to Sin Lo, who caught eagerly at it.

"Oh! The ginger! And I love ginger. I thought she had forgotten all about it!"

Wilson beamed at the boy's swift happiness, as the package was opened to disclose a gaudily covered box of dried ginger, a favorite delicacy of the shops. The best Cantonese; Sin Lo translated the Chinese on the wrapper, and laughed as he tore open the box. Then he shoved it at Wilson.

"Take some! This *kan kiang* is good; it warms the stomach, Bill."

"Warms the tongue, too," and Wilson laughed. "No thanks. If we—good lord! Here, give me that box, quick!"

He darted forward and snatched the whole thing from the hand of the astonished boy.

IV

SUNSET was approaching. Wilson stood at the ship's rail. Directly behind him were the cabin windows, wide open, the shutters down, the door locked; he had the cabin well under his eye. Sin Lo had dropped off to sleep.

Into the air, Wilson tossed scrap after scrap of bread. Seagulls wheeled on slow wing, flashed down as each bit of crust rose, caught it in midair, gulping, avid, voracious.

The bread was gone now, and had served its purpose. From his pocket, Bill Wilson drew bits of the dried ginger he had cut up. These he tossed up rapidly, one after the other, as high into the air as he could throw them, a dozen pieces in all. They were grabbed on the wing. One or two were let drop, but not the others.

A gull fluttered down. Another, wheeling up high above the ship, suddenly came

falling like a plummet into the water. Astern, two more drifted down and floated, white specks against the ship's wake.

The blood drained out of Wilson's face. His eyes glittered like pin-points of fiery steel; a hot oath fell from his lips.

"It 'll put an end to his seasickness, eh?" he muttered. "I'll say it would—and to him as well! Poisoned. One bite of it enough; a quick, sure poison. By God, I could put a bullet through that lovely devil!"

His access of fury was overwhelming;

it was dangerous. He must keep his head. How glib she had been about it all, how sympathetic for the poor boy! Wilson's fists clenched until the knuckles stood out white.

Going back to the cabin, feeling badly shaken, he encountered Hwein in the corridor, and stopped the steward.

"My friend is eating nothing tonight," he said. "Bring me a tray to the cabin, when dinner is served."

The steward assented. Wilson went in, closed the shutters, locked the door, and stretched out with the string tied to his wrists. He was safe to get a couple of hours' sleep anyway; the French dined late.

A knock aroused him to darkness. He switched on the light, removed the cord and admitted the steward with the tray. Sin Lo wakened and disclaimed any desire for food, but Wilson got some hot tea into him.

"Well? What about that ginger?" asked the boy.

"Poisoned," said Wilson laconically. "It killed some of those seagulls before they hit the water."

Sin Lo drew the blanket about his face and turned to the wall in silence.

Wilson made an excellent meal, polished off the bottle of white wine that came with it, then drew out the two checks looted from the Japanese. If he had needed any proof, he had it here. And yet he was mystified. He carried nothing of any value, intrinsic or otherwise. Why on earth this Hiroya Dan should go to such lengths in order to search his grips, was a puzzle unsolved. And there could be no possible mistake. He pocketed the checks again, grimly.

So the Russian girl had the job of murdering Sin Lo, eh? That made things fairly simple. Those two Japs were in on it also, no doubt.

"Right now, I don't need to worry," Wilson muttered. "They'll try nothing more before morning—they'll wait that long to see whether he's alive or dead. So I can take it easy tonight. Sin Lo!" He lifted his voice. "Awake?"

"Yes, Bill. I can't sleep any more. Have you any American magazines?"

"Good idea, son. Let's see—I have one, sure. And a lot of pictures. I took 'em upcountry; mean to mount 'em up in an album some day. Maybe they'd interest you. Mostly of ships and pilots. Each one's labeled in the back. I'll rout 'em out and take a turn on deck. I guess you're safe enough for a while. How about having a neat pistol to tuck away?"

"I have one already," said the boy. "But I left it in the cabin when we went on deck, and haven't thought about it since. It's in the wash-stand drawer."

Wilson pulled open the drawer and found the pistol, a small automatic. He examined it, then laughed.

"This popgun wouldn't do you much good. No cartridges."

"What?" exclaimed Sin Lo. "But it was loaded! My honorable father loaded it when he gave it to me!"

"That so? Interesting," said Wilson. He had not told Sin Lo of the intruder, not wishing to cause the boy too great alarm. So the Jap had found the pistol and had emptied it! But he had found no loose cartridges when he frisked the man. Probably had overlooked them. Now he got out the ugly little pistol he had obtained.

"Here's another one, and it's loaded," he said. "We'll leave yours in the drawer again. Now I'll see about the reading matter."

He hauled out his suitcase, secured an old copy of an American magazine and tossed it to the lower berth. He followed this with a large package of kodak pictures he had taken in and around the new airdrome—that gigantic airdrome which China had built in the very shadow of the Tibetan Mountains, at the back of beyond.

"Enjoy yourself," he said. "I'll go out and have a smoke, and I'll lock the door to be on the safe side. Better put out the tray, too. If anyone busts in, you throw

off the safety catch of that pistol and shoot into the ceiling. Know how to work it?"

"Sure. Thanks a lot!"

Sin Lo switched on his berth-light. He was feeling better, although the *Perseus* was still cavorting with the rolling seas in nimble fashion. Wilson opened one of the shutters wide so that he could see into the room from outside, extinguished the upper light, and departed.

He made his way around to the deck passage, outside the dimly lighted window, lit a cigarette, and leaned on the rail, watching the play of phosphorescent water alongside. No stars. An occasional chill breath of wind. Weather was coming up, as he had said it would, to make his prophecy true. Almost none of the passengers were up and around now, and next day would see even these few laid out.

"Including the Japs, I trust," he muttered.

Some of the crew came past; two engineers, jabbering in rapid French; dinner was long since over. Then a swift, light step, a breath of perfume, a presence.

"Star-gazing," she said, snuggling beside him at the rail.

"No stars," Wilson rejoined. "A blow's coming up, like I told you this afternoon."

"But the radio man didn't tell you so."

Wilson turned toward her at this shot. Checking up on him, eh?

"Meaning what?"

"I'm not certain—yet," she rejoined. "You sent no message. By the way, how is the little boy?"

"Well," answered Wilson slowly, "he tucked into that ginger you gave him, and went to sleep. Still asleep, I guess."

"Oh, I'm so glad! I think he's a darling," she said in a low, soft voice. "He looks something like a little brother of mine—who died. And he's such a man, too. He's a dear little fellow."

BILL WILSON clenched his fists, hard.

"By damn, I could pretty near think you mean it!" he said savagely.

"I do mean it. Tell me, please," and her voice caressed him with its touch of intimacy. "Do you need money?"

"Not your money."

"What do you mean?" She stiffened a little; her voice changed. "Why should you seem so—well, so cold and bitter, as though you hated me?"

"Several reasons, maybe," said Bill Wilson. He was no diplomat, and knew it. Might as well give her a shot. "You have very pretty writing, Olga. I don't need money as bad as you do, or did, anyhow."

"What on earth are you talking about?" she demanded.

"Two checks of yours—rather, checks made out to you. Got me now, sister?"

Yes; the shot went home. The shot all but drew blood. She caught her breath, and then uttered a low, quick cry whose intense emotion drove through Wilson like a knife. Her fingers caught at his arm.

"Then—then it was you!"

"Yeah, it was me," said Bill Wilson, delighted that he had switched the subject from what was uppermost in his mind. "I'm the guy who kicked your friend Hiroya Dan in the pants—and I'm sorry I didn't kick him a blamed sight harder and break his blasted neck! If I'd known then what I know now about you three imps of hell, I'd have slung him clear overboard."

"You talk as though you'd like to—to sling me overboard right now."

"I would," said Bill Wilson grimly. She uttered a shaky little laugh.

"But why? You've not been harmed—oh, please, please, listen to me!" Her fingers tightened on his arm. Her voice quivered with agitation. It broke. "Those checks! You don't understand. Give them to me. You don't know what they mean, what's behind it all. Give them to me. I'll do anything for you, anything you say—only put them in my hands, give them——"

Her words died away in a fluttering moan.

Bill Wilson, despite his cold hatred of her, was puzzled and interested. She was not acting; her voice rang true. Its poignant emotion pierced him. Somehow, somewhere he had chanced on the highway into her soul. Her words told him as much —unless he was a fool.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded. "You can't deny you're tied up with those birds. I've got the proof——"

"That's just it." Her face turned to him. In the soft, dim glow from the window behind, he found a glitter of tears on her cheeks. "That's just it. The proof. That's what those checks are. That's why he's been keeping them for the past year."

She paused to conquer herself. Wilson started slightly. True enough; those two checks were a year old. He had noticed it.

"Listen to me!" she went on pleadingly. "I've tried to play straight, to do without them and their money. I can't. He had those checks. He forced me to do just as he said. Don't you see? Can't you understand? I took the money at first; I had to have it—desperately! After that, he made me do whatever he wanted, spy for him, get information for him, make love, do everything! I could not refuse. He threatened to make those checks public. It would brand me everywhere as his agent, as a tool of his country. And worse. Oh, can't you understand, can't you see?"

Bill Wilson swallowed hard.

"Listen here," he said. "I don't get it. Blackmail?"

"Yes; worse than that." Her words came low, broken, agonized. "Information—for him. He's a secret agent for Japan. I've had to do as he said, work for him with everyone. With you."

"Me?" said Wilson. "Japan?"

"Oh, don't pretend to be so dumb about it," she said bitterly. "I almost believed you this afternoon——"

Wilson shook off her hand, caught her clutching fingers and flung them away.

"Almost believed me, eh? Well, you'd better believe me now, and get it straight," he said. "I don't know what you're driving at or talking about. I have nothing to do with him or with you; I've nothing you want. But I know your racket—get it? I'm on to you——" he checked himself abruptly. He must not let her know that Sin Lo was alive and safe.

"Never mind all that," she returned. "Please! Give me those checks! They mean everything to me. If he has them, he could put me in prison. They're nothing to you. To me, they mean a clean life, a new future, everything!"

Wilson was shaken by her voice despite himself. The glimpse of her wet cheeks pierced him. She was the loveliest thing he had ever seen.

"By gad, you could wind anybody around your little finger!" he said hoarsely. "But not me. You black-hearted little devil! After what you did today——"

She drew back. "What? But it was not so bad. Merely to keep you talking out here? You should not use such words. You should not say such things. Please give me those two checks, let me tear them up, throw them away! It is so little to you, so big to me—it is everything! It means I am free, means I can defy him for ever——"

"Spill it," said Wilson curtly. "What's your game?"

"My game? But you know already."

"Oh, dry up! Forget all that stuff. Let's come down to brass tacks," he said roughly. "Come on, let's see how good a liar you are. You can't pull any feminine sex stuff on me, sister. What are you after? Spill it!"

His words seemed to paralyze her.

"But you know! What he wanted. What I—what I want to get. Information. And those pictures."

"My gosh! Are you crazy or ām I?" demanded Wilson. He shot a glance at the open window. The cabin door had remained closed. All was well. "Pictures? Of what?"

She drooped beside him, a broken, futile thing.

"The Chinese air base," she said, almost

in a whisper. "You know all about it. You have pictures of it. We—they want to know. If you need money, you can have it. I am in your power. Don't give those checks back to him—oh, believe me! Believe me!"

The agony in her voice was heart-wrenching. Then Bill Wilson thought of those sea-gulls, of the boy lying there in the cabin.

For a moment this creature had been a girl crying for assistance, a melting, frightened woman appealing to him with all her heart and soul. Now, as he steeled himself against her, as the fresh shock of surprise reached into him, as he comprehended her words, he stifled an oath.

"Air base!" he repeated blankly.

"Yes. You were one of the American pilots there. You helped lay it out, design it. Now they've cast you off, fired you. And Japan wants all you know, wants the pictures you took."

So that was it! Everything rushed upon him, the explanation of the mystery, the reason for Hiroya Dan's presence in his cabin.

"The pictures? There's nothing secret about 'em," he said slowly. "If you'd told me that today, you could have seen them. But what I've got in my head—that's different entirely. I'm not a yellow dog. Whether they kicked me out or not, I'm not going around snitching. Anybody who'd do that would feed poison to a child."

She caught at his hand.

"Your pictures, then," she said softly, pleadingly. "Let me tell them that it's all arranged——"

"So that's what you're after, is it?" Angry revulsion seized him. "Not content with what you've done, you want to wheedle 'em out of me? Be damned if I will. They're innocent enough, they can be shown to the world—but you and your gang won't see 'em."

"Oh, please, please!" She was broken again. Her words were heart-hurried, torn with emotion. "How can you be so hard? I've told you what those checks mean to me. Won't you give them to me? I beg of you. I'll go on my knees to you—it means all of life, everything——"

Bill Wilson laughed harshly.

"Yeah? All right. Tell you what I'll do, Olga. I'll give 'em to Sin Lo—to the boy. If he wants to give 'em back to you in the morning, he can. You can ask him for them. Understand?"

"I don't understand how you can be so cruel," she said almost under her breath. "But—very well. I'll ask him in the morning."

Bill Wilson turned away from her. For one flashing instant, these words of hers ran through his brain; they brought him the startling suggestion, the first amazing possibility, that she might be no murderess—but it passed swiftly.

For, as he swung around, he glanced through the one open window of his cabin. And there, in the dim light from the berth-lamp, he saw the cabin door move slightly.

V

THE girl was saying something, was catching at him as though in some frantic appeal. It wakened new fury in Wilson. The same old trick! She was trying to hold him here again while somebody slipped in to make sure of the boy!

He thrust her violently away, saw her go slithering to the deck, heard her faint little cry—and forgot her. For that cabin door was actually swinging open now. A figure showed there.

In two steps, Bill Wilson was at the open window. His hand jerked something from his pocket and leveled it; the heavy, powerful air-pistol of German make, that worked from a spring and not from compression.

The cabin door was full open now. The figure advanced. A Chinese, clad in black silk garments, slipping into the cabin. A strange face, set and tense. Glittering oblique eyes. Those eyes moved suddenly. They slid up. They saw Wilson at the window, they widened——

Plock!

The Chinese went backward. A sharp cry broke from Sin Lo.

"All right, son; I'm here," Wilson exclaimed. "Get up and shut the door. Draw up this shutter. I'll be around in a jiffy."

He broke the pistol. Another slug was in place. The boy closed the cabin door and came to the window. He smiled up at Bill Wilson, then closed the shutter.

Wilson turned and broke into a run. He had forgotten Olga Semenoff now. What the devil was that Chinese doing in this part of the ship? Either a passenger, which was not likely, or a member of the crew.

When Wilson came around to the corridor between the passenger cabins, it was empty.

A medley of gay voices came to him from the smoking-room, a little forward. Some of the passengers, at least, were up and around. He hesitated. He had aimed for the body, yes; that air-pistol could kill, but padded Chinese garments would stop the slug, or check its impact.

Hunt the fellow down? Better not. The less publicity he gained here, the better for all concerned. He would know

that yellow face if he saw it again. Hardly one of the stewards, either; not with that black silk suit. That snarling, cold, implacable face—yes, he would know it again.

He came to his cabin door, knocked and spoke, then entered. The Chinese visitor must have unlocked it silently. Anyone, it appeared, could walk through these door locks! As he stepped in, Wilson's foot struck something. He looked down, kicked the object inside, then closed the door and picked it up. A knife, very ordinary, very sharp.

"You were just in time." Sin Lo was staring at him, eyes wide in white face. "I looked up and saw him there. I was too frightened to move or speak."

Wilson grinned and tossed the knife under the bunk.

"A little memento for you, son. No wonder you were scared! Did you know him?"

"No."

"Feeling better, huh? Well, listen here, now." Wilson sat down and endeavored to make the boy forget about this visit. "You know Miss Semenoff; you know that she gave you that poisoned ginger. Well, take these and keep 'em safe." He handed Sin Lo the two folded checks.

He went on to tell the boy what the Russian woman's plea had been. He explained in detail, told about catching Hiroya Dan in the cabin, related all that had happened. He touched the pile of photographs, emphasized his own share in the matter.

Here was something new, something Sin Lo could comprehend fully. The terror died out of his face. His little black eyes snapped alert with eager interest as he heard all about it.

"Now," concluded Wilson, "I dunno what it's all about or what it's worth, but she's not the only one aboard here who's after your hide. She and her Jap friends are after mine as well, looks like. They'll get nothing out of me, either information or photographs, after what's happened. If she has the infernal gall to ask you for those two checks, after trying to poison you——"

"She did not," said the boy suddenly. Wilson stared at him.

"Huh? She gave you the ginger, didn't she?"

Sin Lo shook his head, frowning slightly.

"That does not matter, Bill. She meant no harm; she wanted to be kind."

Bill Wilson regarded him for a moment in stupefaction, then emitted a cynical grunt, and shook his head.

"So you've fallen for her soft stuff and her good looks, huh? All right; let it pass. I never could savvy the Chinese brain anyhow. We know that she and her Japanese friends mean to get you. We know there's another gent out for the same trick—this Chinese in black silk. I'll scout around in the morning and see if I can learn who or what he is."

"When do we reach Hong Kong?" asked Sin Lo.

"Let's see—this is Tuesday. About Friday morning we'll be there. Maybe."

Arranging his string to the doorknob, Wilson turned in. He did not sleep at once, however. His thoughts could not escape the vision of that broken-voiced girl on the deck, the glimpse of wet cheeks, the touch of her hand, the subtle perfume of her garments; above all, the lingering reach of heavy-lidded Japanese eyes upon her.

"Damn it, she's good!" he muttered, and pounded his pillow soft. "She's too good!"

He wakened to morning sunlight, found everything undisturbed, the steward knocking at the door with breakfast. Wilson sent him away, and finding Sin Lo awake, summoned him to arise and shine.

"Down to mess, son!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "We'll take our meals below after this; I'll trust nobody, and the common mess should be safe enough. Feeling better?"

"Much," said the boy. "I'm all right now; there's no more rolling."

No more rolling, true; but the *Perseus* was bucking a stiff sea and a quartering wind that gave her a twisting pitch and drew endless groans from her tortured bowels. If Sin Lo was all right, few others would be, Wilson thought grimly.

He was correct in that. The French "little breakfast" was attended by a couple of the ship's officers, by the younger Japanese with thick spectacles, who was introduced as a Mr. Genro, and by a French army officer and his wife. No one else.

BILL WILSON was conscious of a good deal of interest taken in himself and his companion; he could well imagine there had been a lot of talk about the change from Miss Sin Lo to Mr. Sin Lo. He shrugged and ignored it, and made himself agreeable. The purser came in and sat down beside Wilson for his chocolate and rolls, and entered into brisk conversation about the voyage, and the effects of seasickness in general.

"I suppose Chinese don't travel first-class?" Wilson asked.

"But yes, m'sieu! We have an elderly merchant and his wife in one of our de luxe cabins, and two other gentlemen of the yellow robe." The purser laughed, and pinched the cheek of Sin Lo. "Not to mention your companion. So you're not ill, *mon brave?*"

"I was, but I'm all right now," said the boy. "Is there going to be a storm?"

"No; merely a bit of a blow. It won't bother us." The purser turned to Wilson. The three of them were alone now, the others having drifted out. "By the way, m'sieu. I was requested at Shanghai to place myself wholly at your disposal. If you desire any sort of special attention, I shall be greatly honored."

Wilson nodded. "Thank you. Beyond two attempts at murder, we've been quite comfortable."

"Eh? Murder—you are not jesting, m'sieu?" The purser's eyes widened. Wilson regarded him narrowly.

"I don't joke about murder. You've had no complaints about anyone getting hurt?"

"But no. Heavens and earth, m'sieu! Name of a little black dog——"

Wilson cut short the flow of Gallic excitement. "Nothing to get worried over," he said coolly. "If I need any help, I'll ask for it. But you're liable to have some

casualties before we reach Hong Kong, so make up your mind to it. Ready, Sin? Then let's hit the deck."

He departed, leaving the purser gaping after them, slack-jawed and uncertain. So there had been no complaints; naturally, there would be none, but Bill Wilson felt it just as well to pave the way for possible casualties. If he had to use that German air-pistol again, he did not intend to shoot for the body.

Gray sky, gray, tossing sea; and the *Perseus* dipping her nose into it. The Chinese up forward had been herded away somewhere below. Wilson wrapped Sin Lo in a steamer rug and talked with the boy about America, about aircraft, about anything except dried ginger. Then Mr. Genro came along, blinking through his thick spectacles, and stopped with a very polite greeting and a deprecatory inclination of his head.

"And how's Mr. Hiroya Dan this fine morning?" asked Wilson, looking up and meeting the glittering gaze behind those thick lenses. He was in no mind to evade the issue or to do any pretending.

"He has a very unhappy headache," said Mr. Genro seriously. His English was admirable and fluent, though at times he used rather odd expressions. "I am so sorry to intrude, Captain Wilson, on your amiable conversation, but may I have a slight talk to you in private?"

"Sure." Wilson sat up. "We have the deck to ourselves—suppose we move down a few chairs? See you later, Sin."

Mr. Genro accompanied him twenty feet down the deck, where Sin Lo remained in sight but beyond earshot. Wilson settled himself in a chair, lit a cigarette, and eyed his companion sharply.

"All right. Out with it."

"Thank you. My friend Mr. Hiroya Dan was so unfortunate yesterday as to lose his pocketbook. Later it was found; but two canceled checks which had been receptacled within its covers were missing."

Mr. Genro paused. He was not so indelicate as to mention the missing money.

"You think I know anything about it?" Wilson asked. The other nodded.

"Everything."

"Well, what about it?" demanded Wilson with deliberate challenge.

"An apology is essential," Mr. Genro said. His entire aplomb was really quite remarkable. "I make it to you gladly. Mr. Hiroya Dan acted hastily and against my advice. I most assiduously desire the return of those two checks."

The young man began to bulk more important in Wilson's eyes. Here was the real brains of the duo, then; the chief. The other fellow was merely an operative. There was a subtle hint of steel in this man's words and air.

The broken voice of Olga Semenoff drifted back across Wilson's memory.

"That," he rejoined slowly, "would be only the beginning of our acquaintance, Mr. Genro. Apparently those two bits of paper are worth something to somebody. And I might make a guess what your subordinate was trying to obtain yesterday."

Mr. Genro inclined his head slightly.

"You are extremely sagacious gentlemen, sir. Those two checks are worth medium-sized amount of money to me; let us say, one thousand American dollars cash in hand. The other matter may be equally grateful to your ear. You may pleasantly hit back at those very foolish people who employed you and then kicked you out, and simultaneously make another thousand American dollars for yourself, by turning over to me the large number of photographs which are in your possession."

Bill Wilson squinted out at the gray, tossing sea, and puffed at his cigarette.

The pertinacity of these secret agents in trying to get those photographs was amusing. There was no earthly reason why he should not turn over the snapshots. None of them revealed any Chinese secrets. He had taken them openly, without pretense, and might well profit by the matter.

But the box of ginger stuck in his craw.

"Is that all weighing down your mind, Mr. Genro?" he asked drily.

"That is all," was the solemn reply.

Bill Wilson snapped away his cigarette.

"All right," he said with decision. "If you'd come straight to me yesterday about those photos, you could have had 'em and welcome. But you didn't. And that isn't all, by a long shot. You chaps needn't try to hide your business from me. You want to kill two birds with one stone, more or less literally. Maybe you want those photos, but you have another job as well. And when you tried to kill that boy there," Wilson jerked his thumb toward Sin Lo, "you overstepped the limit. For checks, photos or anything else, you can go plumb to hell."

Pained surprise flitted into the brown features of Mr. Genro.

"I do not understand," he said with a puzzled air.

"Don't lie to me," and Wilson exploded suddenly, came up out of his chair, and his gray eyes drove into the other's face with unleashed anger. "Don't lie to me, d'ye hear? I'm up to your tricks, and next time you try anything you'll get a lead slug where it 'll do damage. That goes for your Chinese friend, for your Russian girl, or for you yourself. And if you succeeded in murdering that boy, then by God I'll kill the lot of you before you can leave this boat! So stick that in your pipe and be damned to you."

He turned away.

"But I know nothing about this boy, Captain Wilson!" floated the plaintive voice of Mr. Genro after him.

Wilson merely snorted and went his way, back to Sin Lo. So far as he was concerned the matter was closed. Mr. Genro was still peering after him when he dropped into his chair again; then the Japanese slowly went away.

WILSON said nothing to Sin Lo in regard to the matter. A thousand dollars for those two checks, eh? If the girl's story really had any truth in it, those two signatures held her in the power of these secret agents, made her their tool, made her obey them.

He was still thinking of this, when he saw Olga Semenoff coming along the deck. He watched her with grudging admiration; so light, so firm and sure a step! Her heavy English plaid coat was whipped about her by the wind. She must be used to the sea; despite the tossing deck, she never faltered. A lovely creature; far too lovely to be in the power of those dark, secretive, polite Japanese.

She came straight to the two of them, waved her hand to Wilson as though nothing had happened, gave the boy a gay and cordial greeting.

"Well?" she said, looking from one to the other. "What happened last night? I didn't have any chance to ask."

"Another intruder," said Wilson. "Merely a knife this time."

She looked at him for a moment, frowning.

"Merely a knife? You mean, a man in the cabin?"

"Precisely. Aiming to correct your failure, no doubt."

Scarlet flamed up in her cheeks as she met his steely, undeviating gaze.

"Mr. Wilson, you seem to like riddles; I don't," she said, and her tone was angry. She turned her back on him and swung around to Sin Lo, with a sudden bright smile.

"You're all right again, I can see. Well, am I to ask you for something, or was that another of your friend's riddles?"

The boy laughed. "Yes, I have something for you, if that's what you mean. And he isn't so bad, really. He just thinks that you did something. I know you didn't. Do you want those two checks, or whatever they are?"

She caught her breath. "Do I want them? Oh, my dear!" Her voice was full, throaty with swift wonder and emotion. "I want them more than anything in my life!"

"Look out, son," said Bill Wilson cyn-

ically. "That chap who was talking to me just now, offered a thousand dollars for those two checks."

"He what?" exclaimed the boy. "A thousand dollars? What did you tell him?"

"Told him to go to hell," said Wilson, and chuckled. Olga Semenoff gave him a sharp look, then glanced again at the boy.

"I can't offer you that much——"

"Don't be silly, please, Miss Semenoff." Sin Lo was out of his chair, and extended the folded checks. "Here you are."

She took them, glanced down at them, and for a moment Wilson's gaze found fully devealed the deep agitation of her whole heart and soul. In this instant, her loveliness was a miracle to look upon. There was no hard, harsh exultation in her face or air; a little gasp broke from her, then she tore the checks across and across, made a dart to the rail, and flung the scraps out fluttering on the wind. She watched them go, and suddenly swung around facing the two of them.

"Oh, God bless you!" she cried out in rapt joy. "I still can't believe it—my boy! What was it I had done, or hadn't done?"

"Well, by damn! If you're an actress, you're a good one!" Wilson exclaimed. "Let me tip you off to something. Next time you try the Borgia stuff, don't overplay your hand, sister. If you'd been content to use just enough poison in that ginger, you might have won out. But you were too anxious about it. One bite would have killed my friend here—and that sort of stuff lacks finesse."

She stared at him, at Sin Lo, with the color draining from her face.

"Poison!" she exclaimed. "Ginger—why, you don't mean——"

"I knew all the time you didn't do it," Sin Lo broke out. Wilson checked him.

"All right, Olga; never mind putting on any act. You slipped him the poisoned ginger very neatly, and I found out about it in time, and that's that. You weren't any better on your end of the game than Hiroya Dan was on his; you both fell down."

"Poison!" she said again. Her eyes were glowing. "But you can't think—why, nobody could think such a thing of me! Poison! Was that ginger poisoned?"

"Was it? Ask me another," and Wilson chuckled. "So you didn't fix it up, eh?"

She caught at the rail and clung to it.

"Why, I got that from the steward!" she said in a low voice. "I had him get it for me—I brought it from him to give to this boy—the steward Hwein——"

And as he met her tragic eyes, Bill Wilson knew she was telling the truth.

VI

THE steward Hwein.

The words kicked at Bill Wilson's brain, again and again. He thought back. He remembered his jocular warning to that man, and the full-eyed startled stare that Hwein had given him. He thought of Sin Lo's petty little pistol, and the cartridges gone from it. Fool that he had been!

Brows drawn down into a straight dark bar over his steely eyes, Bill Wilson stared at the tossing gray waters. After one look at his tensed, drawn features, Olga Semenoff had gone away, with a little gesture to Sin Lo. Wilson was unaware of her departure. It was a bitter moment for him.

Everything had suddenly gone to smash, and he had to readjust himself. What a blithering idiot he had been! Those two Japs were not after the boy at all; no wonder Mr. Genro had blinked at him as at a madman. He had now turned them into very positive enemies.

And about Olga Semenoff—well, he grimaced uneasily as he recalled some of his words to her. He had been horribly unjust. Even at the time, it had gone against the grain. But it was done. And it hurt, most unpleasantly.

The actual factors of danger to the boy, then, were Hwein the steward and that unknown Chinaman who had come into the cabin with a knife. This much resolved,

the thing to do was to carry the fight to them, and do it at once. Bill Wilson did not believe in waiting to be hit. He stirred in his chair, and was aware that Sin Lo had been speaking.

"Bill!"

"Huh?" He swung around. "Yeah?"

"Bill, I think perhaps you should apologize to Miss Semenoff. Or don't Americans apologize to women?"

"Huh? Oh, you bet they do!" Wilson broke into a sudden laugh, as he comprehended the boy's uncertain viewpoint of American customs. "You bet they do, son, and you're dead right about it. I'll do it right now. Come along. I'll stow you away in the cabin, then see her, and clean up one or two other matters as well."

The weight of that awkward air pistol, more cumbersome than any automatic,

sagged his pocket. He had no intention of leaving Sin Lo here alone; the boy was better off in the cabin. Bill Wilson meant to settle this affair once and for all.

It did not occur to him that Olga Semenoff, with those checks destroyed, might have gone to settle her own affair with those concerned. Nor, had he thought of it, would he have paid this any heed.

The morning was well advanced by this time.

"Got your pistol, son?" Wilson asked as they came around to the entrance of the cabin corridor.

"You bet," said the boy, "And next time I won't be too scared to use it."

Wilson chuckled. "You never can tell. I'm sort of scared to use a real pistol my own self, and that's why I have this air pistol of mine. It's durned easy to do some killing by mistake, if you monkey with firearms. And mistakes don't pay, as I've certainly learned this trip."

The ship was pitching badly, so that walking was difficult, and they had to use the hand-rail. The corridor showed empty before them; groans came from one of the staterooms, and Sin Lo laughed a little at the sound, rejoicing at his own present immunity from sickness.

Wilson gave him the key of their cabin, and halted.

"Go ahead. I'll look up the purser and find where Olga's located. You sit tight and wait for me. Hello! What's that?"

He swung sharply around. From somewhere down the obscure corridor came a low, piercing cry; it was the voice of Olga Semenoff. Then a cabin door flew open, and the girl's voice came again, more clearly now.

"Don't you dare—oh, you brutes! Take your hands off me——"

The door slammed shut, but Bill Wilson was already on his way toward it, had marked it down; he ran lightly, swiftly, the heavy air-pistol in his hand, Sin Lo standing staring after him. When he came to the door in question, only a low murmur of voices reached him from within. He hammered with the pistol-butt, finding the door to be locked.

"Who is it?" called Mr. Genro in French.

"Wilson. Open up or I'll smash your door in. Quick!"

Silence reached him. He drew back and flung himself at the door. It creaked, groaned, did not quite give. Shrill, swift voices, then the key was turned. The door was flung open by Mr. Hiroya Dan, who stood pistol in hand.

All in the flash of an instant. Wilson had a glimpse of Olga Semenoff, with Mr. Genro holding her by one arm; she was white, terrorized, shrinking. *Plock!* The metallic crack of his weapon smashed out. The man in the doorway dropped his pistol and put both hands to his face. Blood

spurted between his fingers. Wilson was into him with a shoulder-thrust that sent him careening away and past him.

Mr. Genro was reaching for a pocket, letting the girl go, when Wilson's heavy barrel hit him over the eyes. It was all done with such incredible swiftness that the girl had not moved, when Genro went back in a heap and lay quiet, stunned.

"Out of here!" Wilson snapped at her; he broke his weapon, and it was ready to use again. "Move fast! They're not hurt to mention——"

He caught her, drew her out into the corridor, and slammed the door shut.

"You!" she gasped. "They—they wanted to force me——"

"Never mind now," and Wilson put his arm about her shoulders, fearing that she would go to pieces. "Come along out of this. You're safe enough."

"Bill!"

Wilson swung around at the word. Sin Lo! His own cabin door was open. A tall black-clad shape was there. A shot crashed. Wilson saw the boy collapse and fall full length. The tall figure started toward Wilson, then turned and darted back. Another cabin door had opened at the sound of the shot. The steward, Hwein, was framed in the opening.

Sin Lo—they had got him after all!

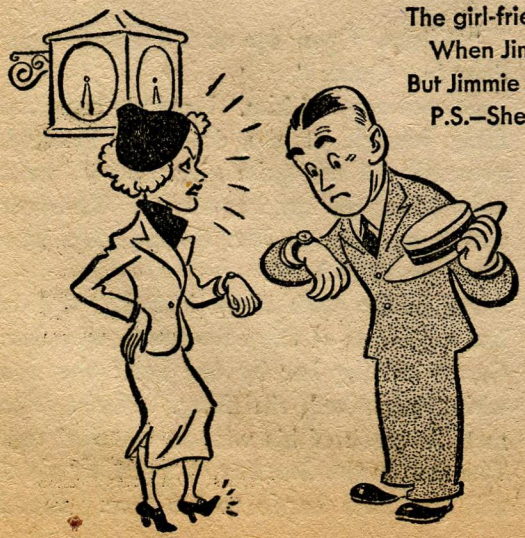
An oath burst from Wilson. He fired; to the hollow crack, Hwein fell backward. The black-clad Chinese was leaping for that open cabin doorway. Wilson hurled himself forward, breaking his weapon as he ran. Pure luck that he had hit the steward. Cries were resounding, doors were opening, passengers appearing. A pistol roared, and Wilson felt the wind of the bullet on his cheek.

The black-clad man was inside, was turning to shut the cabin door, when Wilson fired. He had a glimpse of that deadly, implacable countenance, saw the blood spring, saw the man stagger back. Then he was at the door, smashing it open, throwing himself in upon the two Chinese there.

A shot rang out almost in his face. He felt nothing; he saw the features of Hwein over the pistol, and smashed home with his weapon, smashed home again. He felt the man's skull go smash under the impact. Then the black-clad Chinese was into him with a knife.

Wilson kicked viciously upward. That blood-springing face fell away. The knife flamed and stung again. Then the air-pistol, more deadly as a club than as a weapon, fell home squarely between those oblique eyes.

"You damned murdering devils!" panted



The girl-friend made an awful fuss
When Jimmie turned up late,
But Jimmie brought her Beech-Nut Gum . . .
P.S.—She kept the date!

Keep calm with

BEECH-NUT
PEPPERMINT GUM
∴ is so good it's the most popular flavor of any gum sold in the United States.

10

Wilson, looking down at the two of them. He started, leaned forward, touched the black-clad man. That man was dead, like Hwein.

Pandemonium broke loose. Men were shoving, women shrieking. Through the sudden press came bursting the ship's purser, with the whiskered captain behind him. At sight of Wilson, they halted.

"Mon Dieu!" cried out the purser, looking past Wilson into the cabin. "It is that passenger—and the steward——"

"They've murdered Sin Lo," said Wilson. He was unconscious of the blood that ran from him, that bespattered his clothes. "Murdered him, understand? By God, I gave you warning! And those two Japs——"

"Bill! Bill!"

Wilson started. It was the voice of Sin Lo from down the corridor. He shoved the purser aside, broke through the ring of passengers, saw the boy coming to his feet with Olga Semenoff helping him.

"Bill! I did shoot the pistol after all!" shrilled the boy excitedly. "I shot it when he jumped out of the cabin at me—his knife missed me—only he knocked me down and——"

"For gosh sake!" exclaimed Bill Wilson, staring at the two of them. The girl's eyes met his. They widened in sharp fear.

"You're hurt!" Sin Lo cried. "Bill they've hurt you——"

"Forget it," said Bill Wilson grimly. "Son, I guess you're safe now. Olga, tell these damned fools to quit yelling, will you? I've got a thing or two I want to say to you——"

He stumbled and dropped his air-pistol. His eyes filmed, and his head drooped forward. But his will held on. He felt himself caught and upheld, felt the soft hands of Olga at his face, heard her voice at his ear. Then his gaze cleared for a moment.

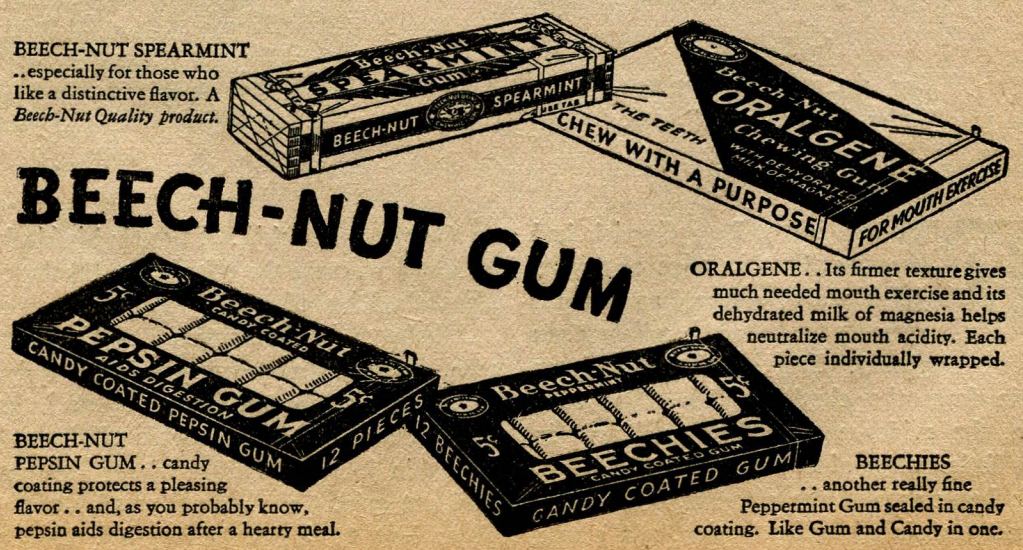
"If those Japs make any trouble," he said, "we'll prefer charges against 'em. But they won't. They're not hurt. They're too smart to holler about it—and, Olga! Listen to me, will you? I've got an apology to make——"

"Make it at Hongkong, then," she murmured at his ear.

"O. K.," said Bill Wilson, and pitched forward in her arms.

And at Hongkong, his job done, his pay collected, he made full apology—and then some. There was nothing small about Bill Wilson. When he did a thing, he did it right up to the queen's taste; he admitted as much himself.

And Olga Semenoff, her dark luminous eyes like stars, fully agreed with him.



With Death in the Treetops Rushing at You at Ninety Miles an Hour—It is a Time to Know Whether You Have Nerve or Not

WASHED OUT

By H. S. M. KEMP

Author of
"The Apostle of Chance,"
"The Fur Game," etc.

FOR two years, Lew Garrick had been on the thin edge of things. Jobs were scarce, and there seemed to be more pilots than planes. Lew watched the bloom fade from the cheeks of his wife; saw, too, the evidence of undernourishment in the little bodies of Lew Junior and Madge. He hung around the airports, took on as night-man in a service station, ran a taxi on the graveyard shift. Then, in his blackest moment, came the offer from Athabasca Minerals, Limited.

Athabasca Minerals was a mining concern, operating a stamp-mill and a string of holdings on far-northern Cariboo Lake. They also maintained a couple of planes—big cabin jobs—to freight in supplies and haul out gold. The men they selected for pilots had to know their stuff. More,

they needed nerve. Shoving a plane over civilized air-routes with landing fields and beacons was one thing; flying in any old weather over muskegs, swamps and long stretches of dry hops was something else. But Lew did not reckon the dangers. All he knew was that a job had come his way; that two-fifty a month and bonus would make Dorothy smile again, and that little Lew and Madge could get the chance so long denied them.

The job, as he expected, was plenty tough. He flew long hours and took big chances. And although he had heard that Athabasca Minerals was a soulless corporation, he had no complaints to make. Until his second crash.

It was ill luck; nothing less. Taking off from Spruceville for the north, a cross-wind had caught his heavily-loaded Peronne and flung her to the river ice. Broken struts and undercarriage and a bent prop were the main damages; and when repairs came in, he took her up again. This time the fates were no more kind, though just what happened Lew never knew. He had her clear of the ice when he felt her slipping. He pulled back on the stick, gunned her—then the plane hit nose first and rolled onto her back.

Lew found himself on the carpet. Old "Dutchy" Holz, the local manager of the concern, and Jerry Bradman, in charge of transport, tried to give him the benefit of the doubt, but they themselves had a job to fill.

"It iss too bad," puffed Dutchy Holz. "You are all right as a pilot, but that first crash vos too much for you. You have—what they say?—lost yore nerve."

"Nerve, hell!" stormed Lew. "My nerve is as good as it ever was! The first spill was an accident; the second, the result of the first. The ship was strained in some way. The defect might not show up in a light test flight, but under a load she weakened."

Jerry Bradman frowned. "You may be right, Lew, but we can't take a chance. Ships cost money, and a pilot who piles up five thousand dollars in a couple of crashes needs to show us. Sorry, but I guess you're washed out."

Lew frowned, licking his dry lips. He was thinking of Dorothy, and the kids. "But damn it, I need the job!" he managed to say. "Getting on my feet as I am——"

Dutchy Holz polished his thick-lensed glasses and sighed heavily. "The job you will have for two months, but not as the pilot. Bill Kelly he is quitting; you may go on as mechanic on ARH. Nerve need not a mechanic worry. All you do is ride with Jack Hays."

Lew Garrick was frowning again. A job was to be found for him—for two months. Mechanic to Jack Hays. And after the two months were up, what then? Back on the sidewalk once more.

Hot words came to his lips. Did these saps think he was yellow? Nerve all shot? Think his was only fit for a nut-twister's job? To hell with them, and the two-month job! Jack Hays was a good guy, but Lew himself had forgotten more about flying than Jack would ever know. Jack with his fifteen hundred hours; Lew with his four thousand. But then—the face of Dorothy, the eager faces of young Lew and Madge. Lew swallowed hard; took it on the chin, and smiled.

"You boys are all right, and thanks a lot. But don't fool yourselves. My nerve'll stand the weather. We'll wait and see."

But that night, an imp of doubt sat on his pillow beside him. He thought of that second crash, thought of what Dutchy and Jerry had said. Was it, after all, his nerve and not a weakened ship that was to blame for the crash? Was he slipping like other good men had slipped before him? The imp said, "Yes;" Lew said "No!" He went back over his recollections of the happening. He had left the ice all right and clawed his way into the air. True, he had experienced vague doubts of the stability of the ship and the strength of the repairs, but of himself he had been sure. And then—there had been that sickening lurch, identical with the one before. He had

eased back on the stick, gunned her—but had he done right? Was this where his nerve had failed him? Would he, at any other time, have allowed the ship to pull herself out of it, knowing that all was natural and well? Would he—should he have——?

"Your nerve's all shot!" exulted the imp. "You're lucky to be getting out with your neck in one piece!"

The clock was striking three before Lew fell into uneasy sleep.

SO, FOR TWO MONTHS, Lew Garrick rode the sky-lanes with Jack Hays. Jack, sympathetic and understanding, offered time and again to turn the controls over to Lew.

"Those office dubs've got you wrong, old-timer. But don't go stale."

Lew shook his head. He was afraid—of himself. Afraid of proving beyond argument that his nerve was going.

"No, thanks," he refused, shortly. "Hoodoo may be riding me yet. Be too bad if I crashed this kite of yours."

But there was a hurt to it—a hurt that Lew kept in his heart. In Spruceville, in the office and at the workings on far-off Cariboo Lake, he knew men regarded him with pitying concern. To them, he was a pilot who was done. He could almost hear them: "Good guy, one of the best. But when they go, they go quick. Too bad, but there y'are."

They were coming south one afternoon in the late spring, Dutchy Holz with them. This was Lew's last trip. To-morrow the new mechanic would arrive from Winnipeg to take over Lew's job; to-morrow, Lew would face the open road.

C-ARH snored along monotonously at five thousand feet. Beneath her roaring exhaust lay the green mantle of virgin bush, fringed and traced with the emerald of lake and river. At the controls, Jack Hays seemed more asleep than awake, but Dutchy was enthusiastic over what he had found at the workings. His talk became technical—ores, concentrates, pay hours and loads.

"And when we get the new Boeing transport, Jack, your bonus goes up with it."

Lew turned suddenly away. This talk of the Company's expansion and the purchase of new planes meant nothing to him. Resentful, almost begrudging Jack Hays his luck, he let his glance drop to the panorama below. He frowned, looked again, and nudged Jack in the ribs.

Jack peered through his window; suddenly rolled the plane onto one wing for better visibility. Beneath were the ruins of the one-time Hudson's Bay Marten Lake Post. In front of the buildings two pigmy figures ran this way and that, and an old white washed fence was laid out in crude lettering. The lettering was: "S O S."

Jack Hays grunted. "Someone in a jackpot. Let's go-see."

The nose of the Peronne canted; the earth spun in a widening circle. Soon the pontoons touched water, and the plane roared into shore. There, Jack, Dutchy and Lew got out.

They were met by two men in prospectors' whipcords and high boots. One was heavy-built with a bull neck; the other was wiry, with a hairline mustache. The bigger man spoke.

"Too bad to bother you fellers, but we've got a hospital case on our hands."

Hays offered cigarettes all round. "Just what's up?"

The big man introduced himself. "Name of Heap, Mike Heap. Partner here is Charlie Doane." They shook hands, and Heap went on. "We got a camp three miles west of here in some likely lookin' copper showin's. Yesterday, we let off a blast, and the other feller, Joe Hunt, got in the way. Hit in the back. And goin' on like he is, we figure he's hurt considerable."

Hays grunted in sympathy. "And you want us to go over there and fly him out?" He raised an enquiring eyebrow to Dutchy Holz. Dutchy nodded. "We do that, sure."

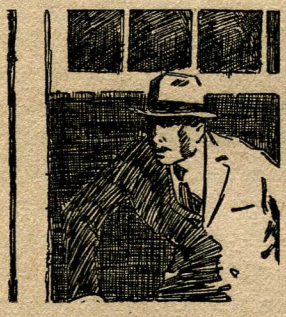
"No need to go to the camp," explained Mike Heap. "We hauled him here on a stretcher, figurin' it was on your line of route." He indicated the tumble-down house that had been the Hudson's Bay dwelling. "Come and look him over."

He led the way, the others at his heels. "In here," he directed.

The building was windowless and dust-covered. A wide hallway opened onto three rooms. Heap stood to one side, allowing the others to pass in front of him—then Lew Garrick thought the roof had collapsed.

He saw stars, whirling constellations of them; a numbing pain seemed to paralyze his head. And a moment of consciousness told him he had been struck a savage blow from behind.

He felt himself slip, but made a desperate effort to hold his reason. His hands shot out, grabbed the clothing of wiry Charlie Doane and hung on. From somewhere he heard the bull-roaring voice of Jack Hays, and he knew that Jack was putting



up a terrific fight. Dutchy Holz lay slumped in the dust, either senseless or dead.

There was the scuffle of feet, and the filth of the place rose in a choking cloud. But a fair measure of consciousness had returned to Lew and he entered the fight with whole-hearted savagery.

He grabbed Doane towards him, smashed him in the face and tried for the knockout blow. But Doane was wiry and as hard to hold as an eel. He ducked, broke away; drove a wallop into Lew's teeth. Then came Jack Hays' voice:

"Get 'em, the double-crossin' swine."

Suddenly, there was the coughing blast of an automatic, a short-clipped scream. And for a second time something thudded onto Lew's unprotected skull.

Later, he awoke. He found himself outside and caught the smell of wood smoke. A slight turn of the head showed him a fire burning a few yards from where he lay. There came the rattle of a pot; and in his numbed state the past returned slowly. He decided that Jack had managed to drag him from the building and was preparing a meal from their emergency rations. But when he looked around him, a sickening fear clutched at his heart. Jack Hays was not in sight. He saw only Mike Heap on one side of the fire and Charlie Doane frying bacon on the other.

Law swallowed hard as more complete remembrance rushed in. There had been a shot, and the choking scream. Jack had a gun, but it was kept in the pilot's compartment of the plane. Could it be that Jack was the author of that scream? The victim of the shot? Gripped by horror, he slumped into unconsciousness again.

When next he came to his senses, the sun was westering. His head felt a lot clearer, and he looked around. Heap and Doane were still at the fire, and Dutchy, a mussy red handkerchief around his forehead, sat nearby. Turning, Lew found Mike, the bull-necked one, staring stonily in his direction.

"Back to earth, eh?" grunted Mike Heap. "You're tough. So was your partner."

Lew remembered. "Where is he?" he demanded.

Heap shrugged. "Dunno. He passed outa here—on the end of a hot bullet. Sorta lucky for you I only shot once."

A choking sense of loss swept over Lew. This bull-necked ape spoke of the murder of Hays as he might of the death of a rat. Curiously enough, Lew's next thought was that there'd be no bonus for Jack when the new Boeing came in. Jack wouldn't be on hand to see it, let alone have the thrill of yanking her into the air. Lew recalled

his grudging resentment of Jack's good fortune; then he made a lunge to his feet.

The lunge petered out. His hands were lashed behind him and his ankles bound together.

"You dirty buzzards!" he snarled. "You'd gun a man who tried to help you!" Bitterly, witheringly he cursed them till Mike Heap cut him off.

"More of that yap, and I'll bust your mouth down your throat! Get this, and get her straight; from now on, I'm runnin' things. You can be half decent, or take a nosedive into hell. Please yourself."

NOW, past his first shock, Lew held himself in. Mike Heap had spoken the truth. Trussed up like Lew was, he was in no position to argue. These gorillas held the whip hand, and the sooner he recognized it the better. But, he asked himself, what was the meaning of the attack? Immediately the answer came—the eighty thousand in gold that lay in the cabin of ARH.

He caught his breath; glanced at Dutchy Holz. Dutchy's hands were tied behind behind him, though his feet were free. Little could be expected in the way of help from this quarter. Dutchy was glaring at Heap through his spectacles, his jaw hard, fat German face set in stubborn lines.

"Don't get the notion we got anything against you, personal," went on Heap. "If that partner of yours had acted right, he'd have been here now. All we're worryin' about is the gold you got aboard. That, and gettin' to hell outa here."

So, decided Lew, he had read Heap's intent correctly.

"We know pretty well what you fellers haul to a load," went on Heap, "and we were figurin' to grab her. Even had a plane bring us in. But when it come to a showdown, the pilot couldn't see eye to eye with us in the play. He got mean, so——" Heap hesitated; and Lew finished the sentence.

"So you bumped him off."

"Well, hell!" argued Mike Heap. "Fellers got to look out for himself. This bird yanked a gun on us!"

Lew sickened in revolt. To Mike Heap, human life was the cheapest thing in the world. The pilot of the second plane and Jack Hays could both testify to this.

"And where are you keeping this ship?" demanded Lew.

"Back where I said; three miles from here. Covered with branches so's you couldn't see her. But that plane needn't worry you. You're flyin' your own—south, and right now."

So that was it.

"Then you're plumb out of luck," snarled Lew. "I'm not the pilot; you shot him. I'm just the lad that makes the wheels go round."

Heap gave a knowing smile. "And you're a pilot—or was. A pilot who lost his nerve." His smile tightened. "But your nerve don't want to bother you none on this trip. You're booked for a flight to the States. Yeah; to some place in Montana. We got her all doped out. You'll follow your reg'lar route to the Churchill, then swing southeast to a gas-cache we got on Fisher Lake."

Lew digested this. "And after we get to this place in Montana? What then?"

Mike Heap shrugged. "Play the game like we want you to, and you get the ship and a piece of change. Get tough—and there'll be a stranger in hell for supper."

Lew Garrick could tell the promise was a lie. He could tell it by the cruel line of the man's mouth and the craftiness of his eye. Heap should have said that once the trip was ended Lew Garrick would be shot down in cold blood.

Lew gave another glance at Dutchy Holz. Whatever he might have thought of old Dutchy, he had to admit there was no weakness in him. Although he said nothing, his jaw was as firm as ever.

"And him?" Lew indicated Dutchy.

There was a fractional pause. Lew read its meaning. He answered his own question.

"He comes along. No argument about it."

Heap gave a snarl. "You runnin things?"

"This, yeah. And it's your choice. We both go—or we both stay."

Craftiness flashed into Heap's eyes again, but he passed it off with a shrug.

"All right. Let him come along."

Lew tried to think he had gained a point. But he was doubtful of it. For none knew better than Lew just what he was facing. Boiled down, these thugs had him cold. If he refused to go ahead and fly the plane south, Dutchy and he would pass out of the picture here and now. If, on the other hand, he did make the trip, he now knew Heap well enough to expect nothing from the man's promises.

Lew suddenly faced the desperate situation. As he had admitted, nothing could be gained by bucking Heap here. The only loophole was that something might turn up on the way south. But that was slim enough hope. Men who had schemed so far could be depended on to leave nothing to chance. They'd be watching him, hawk-eyed for trickery.

But then, he asked himself, just how far would they go? Supposing he took the air, headed for Spruceville and told them to do their worst, what could they do about it? Gun him—and take the crash? It wasn't likely. And the more Lew pondered the matter the more convinced he became that Mike Heap had overlooked an ace.

Then, suddenly, Heap blasted Lew Garrick's hopes.

"Any time you're ready, we'll start. Oh, I know," said Heap with a coarse chuckle, "you ain't long on nerve; but we'll look after that. And just in case you got any funny notions, lemme tell you this; we brought parachutes along. I got one, and Charlie's got the other."

Heap, still grinning, waited to see how Lew would take the information. Lew took it, with heightened color and a fighting name for Heap.

It stung Heap, but he managed to grin.

"That's all right. Names never hurt me none." He nodded to Charlie Doane. "Go and get them 'chutes."

UNDER the threat of Heap's gun, Lew and Dutchy Holz stood by while their captors slipped into their harness. Still covered, they were escorted to the plane and forced into their chairs. From behind, Lew heard Heap's final instructions.

"South, to the Churchill; then east to Fisher Lake. I know a bit about planes and I got a gun. One bum move, and out goes your light."

Tense, feeling definitely doomed, Lew gave the motor a warming up. He flicked a glance to his instrument board, listened to the roar of the seven-radial engine. Ironically, his mind went back a few days—back to the last time Jack Hays had offered him the controls. That imp of doubt had been very near him then. And if Lew had not been sure of himself a week ago, what of to-day? Two cold-eyed killers in the cabin, ready for his first false move. His nerves would need to be steel-hard.

"That's o. k.!" Mike Heap's snarling voice in his ear. "Let's go!"

Three hundred horsepower broke into a thundering roar. Lew Garrick never made a smoother take-off than that from Marten Lake. Had he been in the mood for it, Lew could have marvelled at the glory of the dying day. Below and to the right, the sun was sinking into a bath of gold. Islands of rock and spruce lifted their tasselled heads. The sky was cloudless, the air like wine.

But Lew was thinking of other things. This glorious evening might be the last he'd see. He would make Fisher Lake and the gas-cache in less than an hour. Probably they would camp there, and a few hours more would see them over the Montana line. There, likely, a truck would be waiting. And after that, a bullet in the brain for Lew Garrick and Dutchy Holz. Dead men told no tales.

They came to the Churchill, spread out beneath them like a mighty chain of lakes.

Heap's voice again: "East now, towards the gas-cache."

Lew obeyed, but after a few moments began to swing onto his earlier course. He did it gradually, trusting that the killers behind him might not be aware of his plan. If he could make Stoney Lake and the detachment of Corporal Red Bullar of the Mounted.

But there came an agonizing jab in his ribs. Heap spoke in a voice that was full of menace.

"Last call, feller. Fisher Lake, I said!"

Despite the pain of the sudden jab, Lew paid tribute to Heap's sense of direction. Hardly a point he had swung, but the gunman recognized it.

He was banking when the motor gave a coughing grunt. A few beats she missed, then kicked in again. The miss was immediately detected by Heap.

"What's that?" he demanded. "Something up?"

To Lew, the explanation was simple. Tank Number One was running low; the gasoline indicator showed it. Had Lew had nothing more on his mind than actual navigation, he would have been aware of the fact before. But Heap did not know this. Lew had caught the sudden note of anxiety in his voice. Heap may have known his bit about planes, but his voice showed a hint of fear. Lew seized on it.

"Dunno," he answered. "Don't sound good."

The motor roared on for a moment or so; then once again came that hiccupping miss. It was more pronounced; more sinister to unused ears.

"'S'matter?" demanded Heap. "You'd better make for water!"

Over the cowling and through the whirling prop, Lew looked down. Below was virgin forest—lodgepole pine, spruce, birch. Five miles to the right a tiny lake was showing. All Lew had to do was to switch to the second tank and the danger would cease to exist. But why, he suddenly asked himself, should he? What was the difference between a bullet and a crash?

The motor was skipping increasingly. Dutchy Holz fidgeted in his chair. Mike Heap clawed at Lew's arm.

"Damn it, we're fallin! Hit for water!"

In his fear, Heap had no faith in his parachute. Again he clawed at Lew's arm.

But Lew, isolated with his thoughts and his skipping motor, was offered a chance. Here was what he had been praying for. It was a gamble, a rolling of the dice with death. He might hit the trees, pile up, and live. In the ensuing crash, Heap's gun advantage would be wiped out. On the other hand, a crash might well kill the four of them. And if it did—what then? Dutchy was a single man with only himself to think about, and the Company insured their pilots. Thirty thousand dollars would put Dorothy and the kids on easy street. Dorothy and the kids—Lew swallowed hard and tried to face the issue in his lurching plane.

Since he had married her, Dorothy had had a pretty rough time. Work for a week; out of work for a month. Dorothy had taken it all, though, with that plucky smile of hers. "We'll get the breaks, Lew, one of these days."

Was this the break, the thirty thousand bucks?

Idly, like all bush-pilots will, Lew had often speculated on what a crash in the trees might mean. He had it all doped out—take her down gently, skim the tips, then set her back on her tail. She might shove through the trees and settle like a meadow-lark in the grass. On the other hand, something might go wrong. Instead of settling peacefully, she might catch her floats and nose-dive at the last. Ragged tips of spruce piercing the belly of the ship—coming in like blunt-nosed rapiers—impaling him in his chair. Lew wriggled. Yeah; that took nerve—guts.

All this but a split second. The motor had gone dead. The spruce were rushing up. Death, in the tree tops—at ninety miles an hour.

THERE was a cursing and a yelling behind him. Heap and Doane were fighting between themselves. If both men bailed out, there might even yet be time to cut in on that second tank. Five hundred feet—and mad thoughts raced through Lew's mind. A voice was yelling in his brain: "Number Two tank, you cursed fool! You'll kill yourself—can't help it!" And the thoughts? Thirty thousand dollars for Dorothy and the kids; Dorothy, with that smile of hers. Young Lew. Curly-haired Madge.

The door of the cabin slammed. At three hundred feet, Lew saw the wiry Charlie Doane pinwheel out. He couldn't see the finish, but he knew what it would be. And Mike Heap, gun forgotten, was grovelling on the cabin floor.

Too late, now; the choice had been made. Propeller whining, wind whistling through the rigging, C-ARH rushed to her doom. Lew yelled at Dutchy Holz, "Down in the bottom and cover up your face!" Then, following the idly-hatched plans of another day, Lew flattened her out. He felt the ninety-mile-an-hour slap of the first of the

trees; pulled her back on her tail. Hands over face, bloodless lips set in a hard, tight line, he flung himself back in his chair.

Would he *feel* the crash? What was it like to be dead? But in that last half-second, while framework ripped, fabric split and glass shattered, Lew Garrick knew there was nothing wrong with his nerve.

Followed hours and days of endless night; then at last Lew opened his eyes. It was only for a moment; it scarce gave him time to recognize his surroundings as a hospital room. But he saw Dorothy; heard her voice.

The periods of consciousness became longer. He identified his hands, wrapped in splints; knew that the weight on his shoulders was his bandaged head. And the day came when he could speak coherently and realize that life was sweet.

On one side of the bed was Dorothy, radiant-faced despite the hollows beneath her eyes; on the other Jerry Bradman and Dutchy Holz, the latter with plaster and bandages from the ears up. Said Jerry:

"Dunno what happened, old son, but we're mighty glad to have you with us again."

Lew tried to grin. "And now that I'm down, when do I go up again?"

A shadow crossed Jerry Bradman's honest face. Covertly he regarded Holz. Lew frowned.

"Whatsa matter with you ducks? Still think I can't fly?"

Instead of answering the question, Jerry Bradman asked another.

"What happened—plug in the feed-line, dirty mag?"

Lew told them. "Neither. I just ran out of gas. Suppose you, Jerry, had a killer at your back with a gun and eighty thousand dollars of Company gold in the ship, what would you do?"

Jerry didn't know.

"You'd do what I did," Lew told him. "Take a dive for the trees and to hell with results." He suddenly shot a glance at his wife, and smiled in apology. "Sorry, old kid. Forgot you were around." To Jerry and Dutchy, he went on again. "Sure; I ran out of gas. But it was lucky for me that my friend the gunman didn't know I had another fifty gallons in the other tank."

Jerry Bradman frowned at Dutchy Holz; looked back at Lew again.

"You crashed deliberately—in cold blood?"

"Why not? There was a bullet waiting

for me at one end of the trip and an insurance policy at the other. No; I'm no hero," grinned Lew. "Just another hog!"

Jerry Bradman got up, beckoned to Dutchy Holz and with him walked to the window. Later, they came back to where Lew was trying to hold Dorothy's hand.

"It looks to me," puffed Dutchy, "that fools of us you have made. You tried to break me my dam' neck, but maybe we were a little bit rough with you. Anyway," and Dutchy squinted through his glasses awkwardly, "this job of yours—the mechanic's job that was through——"

"What he means," grinned Jerry Bradman, "is that you can keep the job if you like, or go back on your old ship."

"Or," expanded Dutchy, "any other dam' job you want!"

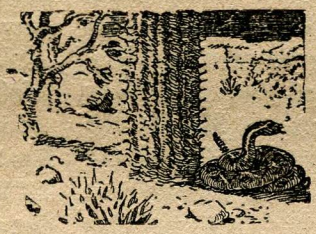
"Thasso?" Lew Garrick's face drew into thoughtful lines. "Any job at all—Tell you," he said at last; "you've got a new plane coming up—a Boeing transport. I'll take the pilot's job on her."

Dutchy Holz stiffened. He turned sharply to Jerry Bradman. Hands spread, and shrugging, he said:

"I give him the mechanic's job. No; he don't want it. Pilot's job on his old ship. He don't want that. He only wants the new plane that yet isn't in!" Dutchy peered at Lew Garrick; at Dorothy; back at Lew again. "You've got the hell of a nerve with you, huh?"

"Have I?" grinned Lew. "Then the Lord be praised! I've been trying to make you believe it for the last two months!"

Adventurers All



NO MORE SNAKES

BETWEEN Vancouver and Seattle my wife and I bought some acreage in a recently opened tract of logged off land among the tall firs in Clark County. After flying a canvas supported by long rails for our cook stove, we pitched tent and spread moss for our bed. My next duty was to dig a well for water, for we were five miles from the nearest neighbor. It was the driest season ever known in the county. The ground was so dry I could only dig a shallow well, but I got sufficient water for the wife and I, and the necessary cooking. I tried to busy myself at clearing brush and digging stumps, all to no great success, for it was too hot. My well was beginning to run short of water. Every morning I would go to the well and find, and kill, many snakes, large and small, that crawled to the well for a drink and fell in, and could not get out. It was becoming alarming, for there was not, it seemed, enough water for all. The snakes were beginning to smell where I had desposited the ones I had killed. My wife and I were already packed, when a neighbor from the city came to visit us along with her fifteen year old daughter, who insisted on spending a week with us. So as not to disappoint her, we said nothing of our latest decision to move away. Eunice, the sweet little thing, proved to be a lover of most snakes and was afraid of none. She would holler plenty loud when I would kill a snake. She would catch them alive and play with them. She slept on the moss bed with me and the wife as we had no other bed or room. She would get a snake I had killed during the day and place it in my trousers, or on my

pillow, or chase me with it. Of course all in fun. But all to my discomfort and her pleasure. At noon, she sat at the side of the table, my wife and I at either end. When we were all settled to have lunch under our canvas arbor, I discovered to my discomfort and high fever, that I had no fork to eat lunch with. "Well," said Eunice, with a twinkle in her eye, "I placed one for you. Maybe it fell off on the ground." I tilted back the chair, looking on the ground, and naturally, I looked under the table. Wow! at my feet all coiled and ready to spring was the biggest rattler I ever seen. I let out a yelp you could hear in the next county. In my mad scramble I upset the lunch and both my wife and our dear little snake lover, much to their amusement. Eunice had killed the rattler that morning and detached the rattles and coiled the snake for my misfortune. After supper that night, ready for bed, I chanced to look at the well for snakes and get a fresh pail of water. Eunice produced the detached rattles from the big snake and I almost jumped into the well when she shook them at my back. I could not get mad at her, she was such a sweet kid. She carried the rattles to bed with her, and before we could go to sleep, she would rattle them to scare and excite me. As I am no lover of snakes, I admit it certainly didn't set well with my unstrung nerves. It was so hot we had raised the sides of the tent and tied back the front. Several times during the night I thought I heard the girl move the rattles, so I was not going to be fooled by her. I paid no attention to them. Just at day-break I rolled over on my pillow, wondering how Eunice had slept with her innocent piece of mind, and as I looked over my wife, the most startling thing confronted me! Eunice was laying there as wide awake as ever a human being could be. Lying as still as if dead. All coiled up on her chest was a big rattler, and it was looking at me! My heart was in my mouth; I was afraid to move. I looked at Eunice and saw she was as white as a sheet, but she would not take her eyes off the big snake. If ever a man thought of God and prayer I'm sure I multiplied those thoughts a thousand times. Here I was partially suspended, head and shoulder in the air, and afraid to relax my nerve tension. I thought Eunice was sure gone this time, or maybe me if I made a move. There was nothing I could reach with which to kill the snake. It was darting its tongue; a fair sign I thought, of uneasiness or fright. To my disgust, the snake continued to lie coiled on Eunice. All at once something broke loose in me; I could not stand the suspense any longer; I spat at the snake! and, of course, I missed. As it passed his head he struck, and after uncoiling he crawled off. I jumped out of bed and before I could deride or admonish the poor child, I had killed the big snake. Eunice said the snake probably heard the detached rattles as it had been on her for about two hours. With a sigh she vowed: "No more snakes!"

Roy B. James

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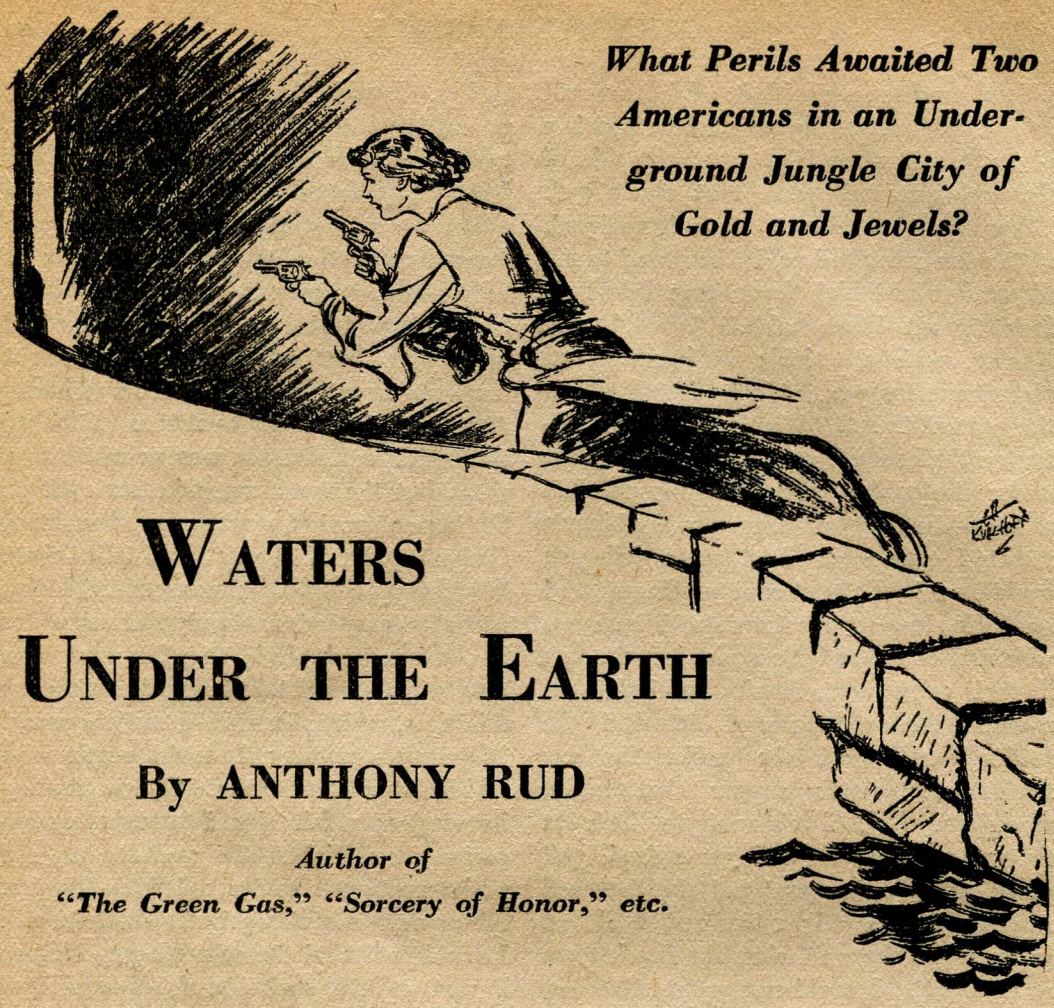


What Perils Awaited Two Americans in an Underground Jungle City of Gold and Jewels?

WATERS UNDER THE EARTH

By ANTHONY RUD

Author of
"The Green Gas," "Sorcery of Honor," etc.

I

THE OBSIDIAN KNIFE

THE rude pellet of lead from a gaspipe gun had done something queer to the kneecap of his left leg. Though the wound had healed, Lawrence Gorman still limped.

He could do his share of ordinary work. But Gorman's work in Yucatan and Quintana Roo had been of the most special nature. When real stress came, the confounded patella slipped out of place. Then Gorman could do nothing but sit and swear.

In the bleak manner of this strange Americano, he made his decision. Monte and jungle had brought him all men ask of adventuring, then taken almost all away —leaving only vengeance, which was bitter in his mouth. That and moderate wealth, for which he had little use.

The Mayas, who worked the great cane and corn plantation around Chichen Itza, now leased by the Carnegie Foundation, respected and loved Gorman as a brother. The Spanish *haciendados,* who had been forced to give up the peonage systems on their great jeniquen plantations, respected —and hated him. Archaeologists, digging out more than sixty buried cities, fairly swarmed on his trail. Maya Gorman knew more about the old ruins than some of these men ever would learn. But he decided to leave Yucatan, and try American surgery on his injured left leg.

Maya Gorman had no white comrade now. He was lonely. There were scores of chicle-gatherers and untamed Sublevado Mayas sworn to kill him; and alone he

could not face the weight of that undying hatred without deeper and deeper gloom of the spirit. He loved this strange, harsh land, centering about the Lake of Bitter Waters, but it seemed that his work was done. The proposal from a wise man in Mexico City that he take Mexican citizenship, and stay on to rule a province, made no appeal at all to a man as thoroughly American as Maya Gorman.

"At forty I feel old and useless," he quietly told the sorrowing Mayas of the Sh'Tol Brothers Lodge—the almost prehistoric secret society to which he belonged. "That may change. I may come back, provided my leg heals satisfactorily—and if I find a young and hopeful comrade with the world before him."

He did not speak the last part aloud.

"Remember us, O wise brother!" said Pedro Ek with husky emotion. Pedro raised the ritual mask from his face, the serpent mask which denoted his rank as commander of the chapter. His seamed face worked, but he said no more. He clasped the tall man's hand in the fashion Gorman had taught them. And that was farewell.

Perhaps the American, who had not set foot in the United States since a few weeks after that spring day of 1919 when he had returned to Pensacola and resigned from the Naval Air Service, grew a little careless when the low, marshy shore of Yucatan faded away from him to southward. He kept his eyes forward, over the yellow, green, blue waters of the Gulf. He put his cartridge belt, his arm-pit sling, Colt revolver and Colt automatic pistol away in the battered tin trunk, and felt almost as light as a puffball—after fifteen years of wearing weapons constantly.

He was clad now in worn boots, a suit of buff pongee silk, white silk shirt, blue bow tie, and helmet of sola pith. His craggy features were clean shaven. His hair was well cut, though worn long to his ears, Indian fashion. It was streaked with gray if one examined closely, though at a few yards it still looked coal black.

With the deep-layered tan which never would fade, and the black eyes deep-set and narrowed from much looking at far horizons in a parched and sun-drenched land, he could have passed for a real Maya, except for his six feet of height and solid one hundred ninety pounds of bone and muscle. Most Mayas scarcely reached his shoulder.

Leaving Progreso for New Orleans suddenly and secretly, Gorman had not been able to obtain passenger accommodations. He found one tub loaded below and on deck with sisal fiber in bales, and named El Tigrillo. That was satire. The little tiger-cat of Yucatan, who lives mostly in the tree-tops, is the jumpiest and most restless creature of the tropics. The freight tub pitched, tossed and seemingly leaped about when there was the slightest ripple on the Gulf.

Gorman was not a good sailor. He slept on deck, even through a two-day rainstorm. The weather did not matter, but his *mal de mer* was troublesome. He knew, of course, that several of the crew were Yucatan Indians, but paid them no attention. Huddled in his slicker, he concentrated on simply existing, until Louisiana was reached.

Tin trunk on one shoulder, limping a little, Gorman went ashore at the first moment he could descend the gangplank. The sights and smells and sounds of the river, and of the city beyond the levees, held his attention. He did not see the swarthy, stocky little man who lurked behind.

After a short walk he got a cab, stood his trunk on the running board, and directed the taximan to the best hotel. In due course the driver deposited him at the St. Charles, where Gorman registered. After bath, shave, and change of clothing, he was ready to explore the old city which he had known sixteen years before.

That evening he decided on a meal in the old French quarter, after a walk for appetite. He wondered if Papa Antoine's still did business; the old man, of course, being dead now. He was not to find out for several weeks.

On Cartridge Street a big yellow street car bumbled noisily past. Behind Gorman a squat figure flitted from shadow to shadow—and came swiftly while the noise of the car still blunted the quarry's jungle senses. Gorman kept on toward Canal Street, unsuspecting.

"Kukil Kan!" came the hoarse cry of triumphant vengeance, the name of the Serpent god, as the Sublevado Indian priest struck.

Gorman was conscious of searing agony at his left shoulder blade, an overpowering horror of pain that bore him down and smothered his senses as a poncho smothers a fire in grass. He pitched forward to the grass beside the sidewalk, twitched once, and lay still. From his back protruded the strange, wire-wound hilt of a knife.

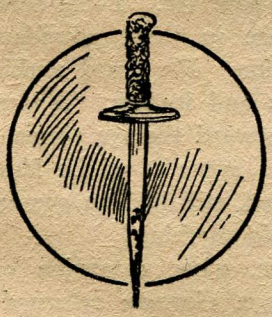
IN THE infirmary they discovered some odd things about Lawrence Gorman. In the first place, he had been stabbed through the lung with a long, keen, tapering blade apparently of glass.

In reality the blade was what Mayans call *isltlé*, which is a sort of volcanic glass, obsidian. The blade was an ancient sacrificial knife of the Toltec Chanes (ancestors of the Sublevado Mayas). It had been used by one of the ignorant but vengeful priests of these modern Ishmaels, the only branch of the Mayas unconquered by the Spaniards and the Mexicans in the great revolt of 1847.

Gorman's shoulderblade had diverted the knife from its straight course to his heart. The first four inches of the ten-inch weapon had broken off in the wound, and had to be removed by a surgeon. They saved the knife to show him, in case he fooled them all and recovered.

Around the waist of this bronzed, hard muscled stranger, they found a money belt —and fifty thousand dollars in American bills! The doctors whistled at that, and immediately moved Gorman from the charity ward to the best private room they had. They would treat him skillfully and honestly, but he might as well pay for good accommodations as long as he lasted.

As long as quoted odds against a man are honest odds, the man has a chance.



Perhaps it is only one in one hundred, but it is there to be taken. Gorman took his. He grimly refused to die, and he showed them how a tough human body the consistency of *caoutchouc* could respond to the will to live.

Not that Gorman feared death any more. Not that he foresaw the adventure that awaited him. It was just sheer virility and inability to surrender.

In three weeks time he was sitting up, propped by pillows, and handling the broken glass knife which so nearly had reached his heart.

The fourth week he demanded a joint specialist, and told that eminent medico about his undependable patella. That meant an operation, but only local anaesthetic. Gorman smoked his own hand-rolled jacoosh—corn husk cigarettes—and watched, giving no sign that he felt the half-dulled pain.

Three weeks more and he was hobbling. Another week and he moved back to a hotel. And there he got to work on a discovery that thrilled him to the marrow. A discovery he had made in the infirmary, but which he had guarded and left unsolved while there. Probably no one in all the United States but himself could read the secret he had come upon, but he did not wish to take a chance.

With his room door locked and a chair under the knob, shades drawn at the windows, and electric light blazing, he took up the handle of the knife which so nearly had killed him. Six inches of the obsidian blade remained attached to the hilt and handle.

This latter portion was all in one, shaped almost like a spool, with room for a small hand to clasp its fingers between the butt and the hilt proper. On the butt end was a worn and half-effaced mask in yellow—the conventional representation of the Snake-god which appears everywhere in Mayan carving. The material of the mask was gold, of course, since that was commonest metal the Old Ones possessed.

The entire handle and hilt were built up of gold wire tightly wound. As Gorman had discovered, the outside layer of wire was hammered flat, and stained dark —no doubt with blood of ancient victims— so a casual glance did not reveal the nature of the metal.

Gorman carefully pried up the end, with the blade of a jackknife, and then slowly unwound the flattened wire.

Beneath was wire totally different in appearance. Red-yellow it gleamed under the light. After some searching and probing

the American found the hidden end, and using far greater care now, slowly unwound the endless strand.

At irregular intervals, but averaging about six to the inch of fine gold wire, were tight drawn knots like fine nodules. Even hard-bitten Maya Gorman showed excitement in the tenseness of his body. This was the ancient Quiché knot writing, the historical and secret records made by the priests of the Old Ones!

Gorman knew that this would be something of supreme importance; and a hasty study of the first few inches revealed on the outside of the inner layer, without unwinding, had made him gasp. He did not know the whole intricate scheme of the knot-writing, but there were many of its arrangerments he had studied out. And if he was not mistaken badly, this was the record of a succession of high priests, locating an *inhli* (a cenote, or underground pool of fresh water) used not for drinking purposes, but for the hiding of temple treasures!

It was two in the morning before Gorman coiled the precious wire, and wrapped it in a handkerchief, placing the wad in a pouch of his money belt.

"In the possession of the damned Sublevados—and they don't even suspect it!" he whispered grimly. "Now, if I can find me a partner——"

He stripped to the skin, donned the money belt, then pajamas, snicked out the light and climbed into bed. A second later he was up to throw high the window shade and open the window for air. But then he climbed back, to lie through another hour with open eyes, before the excitement faded sufficiently to let him sleep. Treasure! He did not feel so antiquated, after all!

II

SEMI-FINAL

GORMAN did not hurry. Down in Yucatan and Quintana Roo these months from March to June were lurid hell on earth. Ships one hundred miles at sea saw the glow in the sky at night, as though a whole continent was burning.

This was caused by the burning off of the corn and bean plantations of the north part of the peninsula, and then the burning of the thousands of square miles of jeniquen plantations past their bearing period. (The fiber is harvested the third and fifth years, and then the fields are burned.)

Added to the normal tropical heat, these fires raise the temperature of the whole country to a figure unbearable to white men. The archaeologists and consuls flee to the seashore.

Gorman went to Chicago, then New York. He allowed himself time for easy convalescence, seeing shows, eating well of almost forgotten foods, looking up a few men he had known in the Service.

They had all grown old, fat and settled. They remembered him with some difficulty; and the chat of old times, the course in navigation at Boston Tech, the gaining of wings at Pensacola, the convoy service later, all seemed far away and unreal now.

Gorman met no young men who even made him consider. There seemed to be a difference in them nowadays. They lacked vision. He heard nothing except relief jobs and loafing. Where had the old urge toward the far places vanished? These boys, some of whose families were in dire need, still had no genuine idea of trying to *do* anything!

Gloomier, more saturnine of countenance, Maya Gorman returned to New Orleans. He did not feel at home in the North, and thought possibly he might get himself a little citrus plot in Florida. One thing was certain: he would not return to Yucatan alone, even if his breath-taking discovery did fit in with an urge he had felt for years—the search for the hidden, unknown city from which the raiding Sublevado Indians came.

Then one night he found himself at the Arena. There was a mediocre card of three preliminary fights, a semi-final, and

then a final between heavies—a second-rater going down, and a second-rater coming up.

Gorman sat unmoved through one four-round loving match, a bloody and earnest, if unskilled, decision bout of lightweights, then a one-sided technical kayo of a middleweight.

It seemed remarkable to Maya Gorman how hard men could try to damage each other with fists, and how little real impression they made. Even that one bout that was stopped because the poorer fighter was groggy and badly cut across his eyebrow, meant nothing. The loser would get a strip of court plaster, a rub-down, and be all ready to dive again inside a week.

Then in thirty seconds after the ring was cleared for the semi-final bout, announced as an eight-rounder to a decision between the Pride of Peoria, Illinois, one Billy Grecco, and Kid Chastang of Montgomery, Alabama, Maya Gorman was to lose for good and all both his gloom and his boredom.

He looked dull-eyed at Billy Grecco, 178 pounds, a swarthy, wide-smiling, well muscled light-heavy, probably experienced to judge by his rather battered features. Then——

Maya Gorman sat suddenly straighter. He stared. The name of Chastang had rung with ghostly familiarity in his ears. Now he knew why! Climbing through the ropes, straightening, rubbing his shoes in resin, smiling quietly out at the crowd in a momentary glance, was the reincarnation of a dead man!

Chastang! Here was blue-eyed, fair-haired Jack Chastang just as he had been at Pensacola! Just as he had been when he taught Gorman to fly! Just as probably had been when he crashed and sank, trying to straf a sub off Queenstown!

Of course old Jack—let's see, he would have been about forty-eight now, if he'd lived—was dead long ago, and his bones lost among the wreckage of torpedoed ships and bombed German U-boats . . . *but could this be his son?*

Gorman did not know whether or not his instructor had been married, or where he had lived. This extraordinary resemblance, though, could not be missed. When the name was the same, and unusual, it could mean nothing in the world but relationship.

All of a sudden Maya Gorman was a violent partisan. "Know anything about these scrappers?" he asked a red-nosed, bald-headed fat man next on his right.

"Oh, jest a couple dawgs, I reckon, suh," responded the latter with a grimace. "Grecco there done licked Tommy Loughran once. But that was a long time back. He ain't so good now. Good enough to take this ham-an'-beaner one-handed though."

"How much have you got that says so?" asked Gorman flatly. He held out a small roll of bills with a rubber band about them.

"Oh hell, I ain't much of a bettin man . . . uh, but I'll risk twenty," decided the red-nosed individual, reaching for a billcase. His rheumy eyes glinted with sudden greed.

"Want to make it fifty? The man next you can hold the stakes."

"Awright—but you got a bum hoss, strangeh."

"I'll back him," said Gorman tersely. He handed over the fifty, and promptly forgot all about the bet.

THE gong rang. Almost unnoticed, to judge by the noise and shuffling about in the audience, the two boxers came abruptly from their corners. They stopped, feinted, circled warily. Out came a jab, another—smack! smack! from Billy Grecco. Nothing but leather on leather.

Whizz! An overhand right, not a good punch. Kid Chastang missed, skipped back as a counter came, just missing his nose.

The audience was settling down now, though obviously they counted this bout in the bag from the start, and looked only for some blood-spilling and the savage at-

tack from Billy Grecco which would bring the call for curtains. Hoots and derisive advice came from the loud-mouths.

Maya Gorman was oblivious. He was seeing a blond, smiling youth he had known and loved with that hero-worship novice airmen gave to their aces, detailed back from the convoy lanes to teach dozens more. This was Jack Chastang—a younger Jack than even Gorman had known. He showed spirit, a willingness to trade punches when the still wary Billy Grecco bored in for a quick rib-tattoo followed by an almost instant clinch.

Chastang was fast. He lacked finish. At long range he broke even or better than that with the chunkier Grecco, but when the latter ducked and came in, the younger fighter took it in midsection. His own blows over Grecco's shoulder, smacking down on the kidneys, might mean something in a fifteen-rounder, but never could win a fight at eight rounds.

First round. There were two red patches the size of a man's palm on Chastang's ribs, as he came back to his corner and sank on the stool, arms along the ropes. No doubt about it; that had been Billy Grecco's round.

Clang! The fighters leaped up—but for several seconds Maya Gorman could not watch.

"You-u!" a man just in front of him was snarling. It was one of the reporters in the press row, and he had hold of Gorman's tense wrist. A fist was clenched at the end of that wrist, and it had been slogging the unoffending reporter between the shoulders. Something about the bleak concentration of this bronzed big man behind him, however, had kept the reporter from physical retaliation.

Gorman hastily apologized. The reporter shrugged, murmuring something about a guy who had to scrap the whole battle he watched, like poor, half-nuts Bat Nelson. . . . And then a minute later the reporter let out a yip, grabbed his portable, and hastily squeezed in farther down the row, leaving the seat in front of Maya Gorman vacant.

Sometime during the next round Gorman must have noticed the empty seat and climbed over, for he found himself between two growling men who hammered on their chatterboxes and scowled at him. He paid them no attention at all. He was concentrating all his strength of will—insisting telepathically and hypnotically that a slightly inferior fighter rise to the occasion and *win!*

A knockdown with a four-second count had given Grecco the second round by an even more definite margin. That had been an uppercut on the break-away from clinch, and it jarred Chastang. He looked dazed when he came back to his corner, and there was a trickle of blood from one corner of his mouth. A second emptied a bottle of water over his head, while another smacked a sponge into his mouth.

The minute of rest seemed to help. Chastang met his rushing opponent in the center of the ring, and sent in a straight left to the forehead. His right glove stopped Grecco's counter for the heart. There was a quick, furious rally, with Grecco boring in, and Chastang flinging four glancing uppercuts at the heavy-set fighter's lowered face.

But Grecco had a plan. He was herding the younger man back to a corner, and Chastang touched the ropes before he realized. Then he ducked this way, then in the opposite direction, and charged behind a barrage of rights and lefts. He fought his way out, getting in a jolting right to the forehead and two lefts to the midriff, as Grecco looked up to measure his man.

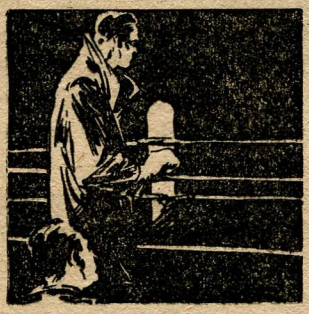
The intended haymaker slid by, just tipping Chastang's left cheek. And that split second the latter got home his first real marker of the fight. It was a right hook which started the claret from Grecco's left cheekbone and staggered him for an instant.

"They's resin on his gloves!" shouted Grecco distinctly above the growing tu-

mult in the audience. That was untrue of course, just an alibi for the wallop. Resin takes off the skin, especially when a glove is twisted in landing. The referee paid no attention, save to snap something and make the two break from a clinch.

They broke, but now Grecco, possibly believing that he was being fouled, pulled one of the dirty tricks taught in most gyms. Momentarily he got his opponent between himself and the referee, then deliberately shot in two low blows which made Chastang wince and give ground.

Out there Maya Gorman cried out, a snarling, savage cry. And even the press line, on the side that could see, booed.



But the referee could do no more than guess. The fight went on, with Chastang giving ground, and palpably in trouble.

Clang! The gong saved him from a knockdown, possibly a kayo. He limped back to his corner, cheeks drawn with suffering. One of his seconds was vociferously claiming a foul, and the crowd booed. But the referee just looked bored, and waited.

"Stall him next round! Take your time!" came the free advice to Chastang from a press section suddenly friendly. But the young scrapper probably did not hear. He sat totally relaxed until the warning ten-second whistle which heralded the gong.

HE SHOWED good recuperative power, and a shell defense which was a new one on Grecco. Half the round went by, clinch, break, duck, flurry, clinch, before the more experienced man could tap as much as a straight left past that turtle shell of gloves, elbows and arms.

Then the guard shifted, and Chastang led—only to miss and receive two counters in the mouth that shook him. He went back into the shell, but was battered back twice to the ropes. It looked like the end was coming now.

The excellent recuperative power of twenty-two showed itself. Chastang, after giving ground, clinching, and generally acting for thirty seconds like a beaten, wabbling man, snapped out of it and launched a furious *attack!*

It nearly succeeded in overwhelming the astonished Grecco, who took a thunking right to the midriff and a left hook to the jaw followed by three short punches to the middle, before he could untangle his ideas, guard, and get away from this fellow he had thought ripe for the quietus.

But then it was a ding-dong battle to the gong, with Chastang fading toward the last six seconds. His nose was bleeding when he came back to the corner. Over on the other side Billy Grecco glowered through a right eye swollen and angry, and spat forth something white—a tooth. He looked hurt and infuriated, and was just that. If he could do it, he'd kill Chastang next round!

For ten or twelve seconds, though, that fifth round was an example of anger thwarting ability. Grecco missed and missed, and began to breathe gustily. Then a bit of sense came back to him, and the next minute had almost no action. A lull had come, with Chastang looking arm-weary, ready to clinch, and Grecco deciding to wait for the next round for his kayo bid.

Decisions like that always are subject to change, though. Chastang tried a flurry of infighting, and came out second best. It was guessed by many in the audience to be his last bid for victory. Maya Gorman frowned as he saw the lad's shoulders droop, his whole attitude seeming to say, "I've done my best. Now I'll just hold him off the rest of the way." Which is just acknowledgment of defeat.

Grecco sensed that immediately. He waded in, but more craftily now, and Chastang found immediately that the chunkier fighter was not going to be balked again by mere turtle-shell covering up. Even to keep from sudden demolition, he had to fight.

Grecco came, a hurtling mass of hate. He charged in, boring deep with staccato punches that traveled only inches but held all the strength and snap of trained forearms and wrists.

Chastang evaded, sidestepping as if he had been a matador and Grecco a maddened bull. But the bull in this case could turn as swiftly, and fight with a mad lust of unleashed passion—still controlled by an experienced brain, however. Maya Gorman crowded forward until his eyes were level with the floor of the ring. His man—Jack's son—was not quite good enough, unless a miracle happened. He was being outgeneraled and outfought, though he had shown a willing spirit and considerable ability.

"Slip one through, Kid!" gritted Gorman, but no one could hear the words in that tone, of course.

Chastang threw a wild haymaker which missed by a foot. Grecco came in. He heeled a forbidden rabbit punch to the back of the younger fighter's neck, rammed Chastang's cheek with his elbow, and then brought up his knee in a clinch.

If the referee saw these fouls he made no sign, but the audience went crazy. Booing, yelling, they were all for Chastang—but it did not seem he could come up to scratch. Covering up, he was buffeted back, back, until the ropes touched him and went taut under the weight of the solid punches Grecco was serving into gloves, elbows and parts of the intervening body.

The ropes began to close on Chastang, to slip up on his shoulders, to break the muscles tension of his knees at the back.

It all happened in a split second. He ducked, and tried to charge through out of danger. A short hook found his chin and he spun sidewise, falling with one arm over the second rope. The referee herded Grecco toward a netural corner. One . . . two . . . three . . .

Clang! The gong saved Chastang, but for what? His seconds had to lift him by the armpits and drag him to his chair. Once there he shivered, and seemed to catch hold of his dazed senses somewhat. But could he revive sufficiently in one short minute, so he could weather the burst of punches with which Grecco was sure to greet him in the next round?

While the seconds worked furiously, and Billy Grecco glared across from his battered countenance, impatient of every second given his beaten opponent, Maya Gorman worked his way toward Chastang's corner. Reporters tried to stop him, but he threw aside their hands with a brusque impatience that boded ill for any man who seriously interfered.

The warning ten-second whistle blew just as Gorman reached the corner. A flurry of seconds lifting chairs and climbing through the ropes. Gorman pushed them out of his way.

"Chastang!" he called in a half-shout which made the dazed fighter turn his head a little.

"Lieutenant Jack Chastang died fighting!"

That was all. No comparisons. But a shiver went through the young pugilist. He straightened. Now he got to his feet, and took three strides forward as a cannonball of muscled determination hurtled across the roped arena to meet and destroy him.

They met with exploding impacts of gloves on flesh. The crowd gasped. Chastang, instead of covering up, clinching, and trying to stall, had gone crazy and was wading in, slamming straight rights and lefts to Grecco's middle, forehead, jaw—and miraculously landing some of them as the older fighter was halted, and forced to employ his craft against the unexpected.

Grecco snarled. He suddenly bored in, arms working like trip-hammers, endeavor-

ing to do again what he had done the previous round—only earlier, so there could be no question of the bell interrupting.

Then in a flash it happened. Chastang stepped back, then suddenly forward. His right fist came up almost from the floor. The uppercut smashed into Grecco's damaged face, lifted him three inches from the canvas—and set him down on the small of his back with a crash that shook the Arena!

Reeling, Chastang found the ropes in a neutral corner, and managed to hang on. Grecco slumped over sidewise as the referee began counting—and was still down there when the fatal ten sounded.

"Good boy, Chastang!" yelled Maya Gorman, his voice breaking.

The fair-haired youth turned a one-sided grin in the direction of the voice. "See you—afterward—" he choked. Then as the referee caught hold of his right glove, holding it up momentarily, Chastang slipped to a heap on the canvas, unconscious.

The first man to reach him was Maya Gorman. He had found his new partner and meant to let no one interfere.

III

TERROR LAND

"YOU knew my Dad?" That was the first sentence from the swollen lips of young Jack Chastang. No mention of the unexpected victory, which had driven an audience so wild that it had scarcely calmed down enough to take an interest in the slugging finale of heavyweights.

"I did," said Gorman quietly. "He taught me to fly—and we all looked up to him as a man and a gentleman. I want to talk to you after your rub-down, and when you feel up to it. Here's my room number at the St. Charles. Come right along, and have midnight dinner with me ——"

"Wait! I won't be long!" promised Jack. He grabbed Gorman's hand and squeezed it, then turned and flung himself on the table where he would get the ministrations of the negro swipe.

An hour later, compromising on a snack of sandwiches and beer sent to the hotel room, Gorman ate a little and then quietly told the blue-eyed battler all about his father the air fighter, whom Jack had not seen since he was five years of age.

It had turned out that the lad was motherless as well, having been put through high school by an aunt who now herself had suffered reverses and illness. Jack had been sending half his earnings from a dozen preliminary fights—of which he had won ten by kayos—to this aunt. The sums had been pitifully small.

"She'll faint when she gets two-fifty this time!" said Jack, and his bruised features cracked in a smile. "I'd only have got two hundred if I'd lost. *You* made me win! I——"

"And I hope to make you win a thousand times as much!" broke in Gorman. "I'm going to ask you to hang up your gloves, lad. I need a partner—and I'm prepared to do all the staking on a risky venture. If you say yes, you'll gamble six months to a year of time, perhaps much less. And you'll gamble your life in a wild country——"

A gleam had flashed into the blue eyes, but then Jack shook his head in regretful decision. "I just couldn't," he said sadly. "My aunt, you see. She's in bad health. Hell, you might as well know. The doc told me it was—cancer! No hope. But I've got to see that she wants nothing for the next few months, and——"

"And if you go with me," said Gorman, knots of muscle showing along his lean jaws, "a money order for five thousand will go tomorrow to your aunt! That will take care of her, won't it?"

"Lord yes!" breathed Jack Chastang. "But—but what am *I* to do for any important money like that? I've never been a crook, and don't aim to start now!"

There was an apologetic grin that went with that, which robbed the words of of-

fense. The blue eyes stayed serious, though.

"The truth is, I hate the ring—not for the scrapping, but because every fight card seems to be crooked," he went on hastily. "My manager hasn't been here to congratulate me. I—I think he bet on Billy Grecco!"

"Well, that wouldn't be exactly crooked."

"No-o, but—well, let's talk about some-p'n else. What can *I* do to be worth five grand? I spent two years peddling vegetables!" he ended with a likeable chuckle. "Anything at all to eat during the depression, you know."

Gorman nodded. Then, wasting no words, he spread the panorama of Yucatan before Jack Chastang, showing how that wild land was being brought into cultivation again after a lapse of centuries, and subdued to the welfare and will of man.

"The only remaining menaces are the Sublevado Indians," he went on. "They never have been tamed—simply because no one has been able to track down the hidden city or cities in which they dwell. Of course most of the ancient ruins, which easily could hide the few thousand Sublevados there probably are, are silted under and then overgrown with jungle. Men found only a few temple tops and pillars projecting at Chichen Itza, for instance, and that once was a metropolis of half a million souls! It would mean everything to Yucatan if a white man could find a way to the Sublevado city—and return alive!"

"You mean then a modern Mexican army would march in and crush them—like Italy's doing in Africa now? I don't know as I care a hell of a lot for that!" objected Jack slowly.

Gorman's features grew harsh. "The other Mayas were conquered," he said stonily. "Now they're prosperous, and ten times as contented as they ever were before. And besides—the Sublevados raided my ranch, burned it, killed twelve of my servants, *and murdered my wife and baby!*"

"Oh my Lord!" breathed Jack in quick sympathy.

"Oh, I took toll," said Gorman, his face paling beneath the tan. "It's not vengeance I'm after now, it's security for others, both Maya and white. And then there's one more thing. This will appeal to you. The Sublevados are ignorant now. They have in their possession an immense treasure of emeralds, sapphires, jade and gold—*and they do not even know of this treasure!*

"I intend to go with you and get it. Half will be yours!"

Jack was on his feet impulsively. "You really mean there's a chance for treasure?" he cried.

"I do. Look at this," said Gorman, and brought forth the knotted gold wire. Briefly he told the story of the Quiché knot writing, and how he had discovered this record of an unnamed temple of Kukil Kan and Tonatiuh (the sun god), the twin divinities of the ancient Mayas.

"The knots are a sort of shorthand, not an alphabet. That's why white men have had so much trouble reading them. I have got a good part of it, though there are some blanks. Just for you to read once, Jack Chastang, I've made a rather free translation. Here it is!" And he held forth a sheet of paper which Jack took, reading rapidly aloud:

In the shrine of the Serpent and the Sun God, (symbolized as the Eagle), follow the river of blood from the cuauhxicalli (gourd cup of the eagle) eighteen paces. Lift rocking stone. Descend (probably a stairway) to sacred inhli (now called a cenote: an underground pool of fresh water) where in the black waters are hidden the treasures of our priesthood, to wit:

Jack looked up rather blankly. "It doesn't say what the treasures are!" he objected.

"The knots tell. I didn't write that

down, with the record of what each priest added," said Gorman, "but it's all there in the knots. As near as I can come, translating old measures into those we use, there are about eight quarts of precious stones, chiefly emeralds and sapphires, with some large opals; many pieces of carved jade which may or may not be valuable; and something like half a ton of gold bullion and golden ornaments!"

Jack whistled, but then an objection came instantly to him.

"It doesn't say anything about where this is. Do the knots tell that?"

"Not a word," answered Gorman grimly. "It was a secret handed from one high priest to the next, I think. Then probably one of them died before he could

tell, and no one ever thought to examine the hilt of the knife. Naturally there was no need to specify latitude and longitude."

"Then—how?" queried Jack, considerably deflated. "You said this was a secret city, and that nobody had found it."

"I think one rather eccentric white man knows. He and his family are paleontologists rather than archaeologists, and live the lives of hermits. I'll find out—if old Severn really does know. If not—well, we'll keep going till we find it ourselves, or lose interest."

"Huh! The only way I'd lose interest in a thing like that, would be if I was good and dead!"

"Exactly!" said Maya Gorman grimly.

TEN days later, dressed in the seersucker suits and straws of casual tourists, they disembarked with bulging telescope bags at Progreso. Gorman knew the Mexican customs officials, and immediately pledged them to secrecy. No one was to know of Gorman's return. As soon as they were released, the bronzed man led the way by back streets to a part of the thriving port into which he had not penetrated. Of course there was always some risk of encountering an Indian who would recognize Gorman and spread the news, but that chance had to be taken.

Gorman procured mules, arms, ammunition and a pack of necessary provisions. The one pack mule would be heavily loaded at first, but time would lighten the burden.

Of necessity they stayed one night in the louse-ridden *cuartel*. Jack Chastang, who had never been away from the southeastern part of the United States, was spellbound at the throngs of native women crowding the narrow streets, scarflike *rebozos* thrown about their shoulders, each bearing upon her upturned palm a shallow basket, going barefoot to market; at the strident-voiced water-sellers, delivering rainwater to their customers from hogsheads mounted on two wheels and drawn by mules; at the city bells which rang each evening (and any other time at all), clashing and clanging as though a thousand apes were banging together cymbals and dented dishpans; at the overdressed, gallant caballeros who admired and ogled the señoritas; and at the scents of flowers banked in cultivated profusion beneath the blossoming trees at each of the thatched cottages of the native Indians.

Jack was breathing deeply. His blue eyes shone with the excitement of a first venture unhampered by money lack or the care of dependents. He knew that his dying aunt would get the best attention possible in such a case, from her old doctor and the black maid who had been with her for thirty years—staying even when not only wages but food itself was lacking.

Maya Gorman naturally looked upon the blue-eyed youngster as a courageous and willing, but still callow reincarnation of

Lieutenant Jack Chastang; but before they had reached the second night's camp in the monte, young Jack began to emerge from his out-of-focus, inherited personality, as a distinct individual in his own right.

He proved a curious mixture of bigot and happy-go-lucky adventurer. He played an enormous Hohner harmonica, which he carried in one hip pocket; and Gorman heard some excellently rendered jazz for the first time from such an instrument. The harmonica would have to be muted soon, but Jack understood that.

He could tell stories, particularly of Alabama negroes, with excellent mimicry and a sharp but tolerant sense of humor. Except for one thing, Jack was wholly likeable—the material from which a good comrade for the long trail is made.

His glaring defect was a fault of his narrow upbringing, and the feeling of superiority almost invariably found in every blood-pure Alabama family able to trace ancestry back to the gory days of Sam Dale, William Weatherford, Andrew Jackson, and the massacres at Forts Mims and Sinquefield. He had a withering contempt for all Mexicans, lumping Indians, Spaniards, *cholos* and *mestizos* under the one derogatory term of Spiggoties.

The first time or two such a contemptuous reference came up, Gorman was shocked and disturbed. He knew only too well that Mexico holds all sorts, and Yucatan probably a huge percentage of the actual outlaw population; but he had learned that even the worst of them were not to be underrated either as enemies or friends. Maya Gorman was perhaps the best-loved and best-hated white man who ever had lived in Yucatan.

"Look here, Jack," he said, while they smoked jacoosh about their evening campfire of the third evening. "I want to show you something. First, I'll say that some Gormans of my particular tribe were early settlers at Old Hadley. I tell you that just because I know you, a Southerner, are proud of your lineage."

"Why, I wasn't——" began Jack, puzzled.

"No, you weren't snowing on me," nodded Gorman rather grimly, "but in a way you were without realizing it. Mexico is full of real men, and I don't want you to forget it. Look here!"

With that he opened his shirt at the neck, pulled down the cotton undershirt, and showed a curious crimson tattoo on his chest. It was somewhat different from the ordinary snake masks of temple carving, in that this serpent was two-headed. This was about four inches in length, as coiled, a bright red, and stood out in sharp contrast to white skin here little touched by sun.

"This is the emblem of the Sh'Tol Brothers Society, which dates back surely seven hundred years—probably much more. I am an elder, and certain of the Mayas are my friends and brothers."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" said Jack with instant contrition. "I—well, I've got a lot to learn—about infighting, I reckon!" He grinned and proffered his hand rather shamefacedly. Gorman took it, with no more words. From that moment dated their better mutual understanding, based upon themselves, rather than upon a tragedy of seventeen years before.

GORMAN, in mapping their southward course, aimed to reach Suchun, a deserted ruin, partially unearthed, of what once had been a great city. Here they could find water readily available from the ancient wells and cenotes; and over the parched, calcareous soil of Yucaton, where there are no rushing rivers and few lakes, water remains the great problem of travel or residence.

"We'll make a long circuit around Merida, which is getting to be a cosmopolitan city now," said Gorman, starting next morning after breakfast, which ended with a deep draught of the sweet liquor they carried for drink en route. The two cans of this mixture of slightly fermented corn-honey-water beverage, which the

Mexicans call *posole,* assuaged thirst far better than rain water—or than the extremely hard water to be found in most of the wells.

"A city out here!" exclaimed Jack, and shrugged. He gazed at the stunted mahoganies and umbrella oaks through which the tireless mules were starting.

"Merida was once called T'Ho. It always has been the capital of Yucatan. More than six hundred hot and palpitating Spanish hearts were fed in one week to the Sun God there."

"Ugh!" shivered Jack. "They were cruel. Are the Sublevados that sort now?"

"Yes, and it isn't cruelty, exactly," said Gorman soberly. "It's fanaticism mixed with religion. They have the deep-rooted notion that their gods have to be fed and that human hearts, torn fresh from victims, are the most acceptable victuals.

"That so-called calendar stone, which created such a furore a few years ago, was not a calendar at all. It was the mouth of Tonatiuh, the Sun god, sometimes called the "cup of god" by the Mayas. That was where the human hearts were placed at each sacrifice. I think you'll see more than one of 'em. But when we locate *the* one mentioned in those Quiché knots——"

"The end of the rainbow!" chuckled Jack. "Oh well, I kinda hope we don't discover it too darned soon. D'you know, this is the first time I've ever felt real free in my whole life?"

All the while they had been traveling—by easy stages at first, so that Jack could get accustomed to one of the least comfortable inventions of man, a mule saddle—the peninsula was shuddering in the grip of a new terror. At Progreso it had not been much in evidence, though Gorman must have learned the tale in short order had he not chosen to remain incognito, and seem a mere tourist from the North.

The story was to reach them now, and with tragic force. They followed what probably was a deer trail through grass high enough to reach the eyes of the mules, a barren plateau with few trees, when at last they came to a downslope much like the rimrock cliff in western North America. And there below lay ruins, and a haze of smoke which looked as though it might have come from a campfire of Indians.

"Watch this. It may not be what it looks like," said Gorman. "Stay behind, and have your gun loose. . . ."

With that he urged his mule to a shamble, and went to investigate. Because of the luxurious brakes, high grass and other scrub vegetation which covers everything, neither white man burdened himself with a rifle. An automatic for fast shooting, and a revolver for greater dependability in a pinch, were Maya Gorman's weapons. He was no trick shot with either, but at the snapshot distances of the monte he never missed a target the size of a man.

Now, with all senses alert, he rode slowly toward the source of smoke. Feet were disentangled from the stirrups, and he was ready to leap to the ground on either side. But the place was still—too still. He saw at once that here had been a village, probably Ulmeca Mayans, since here at the border of a small clearing, planted in maize, was a prayer stone of Hunal Ku—the deity placed above even the eagle and snake gods by this one tribe.

A shuttering of heavy, horrible wings came suddenly, and at least fifty black, fringe-winged turkey buzzards beat their way into the air. A half dozen scattered and mutilated native corpses lying near the ashes of the nás told of the interrupted, grisly feast.

"Gorman!" came the excited call of Jack Chastang, who had fallen forty yards in the rear, and could see nothing save the horrible scavengers beating their heavy bodies into the air.

"It's all right, come on. Nobody here—" answered Gorman, swinging to the ground.

That second he knew better. A bush moved, revealing a squat brown body naked to the waist. A bow twanged! The arrow

sped straight and head-high in a flat trajectory, striking the wooden crupper of the mule saddle and glancing upward, narrowly missing Gorman's head!

In a flash he ducked, scrambled forward through the legs of the stolid mule, and came up like an acrobat, both short guns spouting flame!

The Indian in the bush, with a second arrow ready, let it go with a puerile force that sent it looping slowly to Gorman's feet. A red hole had appeared at the very center of his flat nose, and he sank back soundless into the grass.

GORMAN leapt to cover, and to intercept Jack. But then, though they exercised the greatest caution, stalking the whole vicinity of the ruined village, they found no more hostile Indians. Jack, his eyes wide with awe at sight of his first enemy killed in action, was silent—anxious only to anticipate the orders or suggestions of Maya Gorman.

The latter, once they were sure no more arrows would come winging from ambush, knelt down and made a careful examination of the dead brown man. The black eyes grew steadily more serious.

"This is incredible, Jack!" said Gorman at length. He shook his head. "Here we are, a good hundred and fifty miles from—well, from the place which I figured on making our headquarters in the search—and here is a Sublevado Indian, *who belongs way down across the line of Quintana Roo!*"

"Means little to me, except it's south somewhere," said Jack. "What happened? Was it a raid?"

Gorman nodded. He moved over to the other bodies, examining the pitiful fragments left by the scavenger birds and jaguars. Nothing much could be told from them, save that the dead were all males, and they had died with knives or other weapons in their hands. In the whole gutted village there was no sign of women or children.

"When the raid started, they took to the bush," said Gorman. "Come on. There's nothing we can do here."

A short distance further, and his guess was confirmed. The bodies of two native women and no less than fourteen brown children lay in a glade, providing the buzzards with another banquet. Jack turned green at the mouth corners and had to keep his eyes away.

Gorman made no comment, but he saw that the other mothers and young girls had been carried away by the Sublevados, who must have come in considerable force. He failed to understand such daring on the part of the tribe whose movements always had been so completely veiled in secrecy that not even scouting airplanes had been able to discover their headquarters.

They went on; and that evening Gorman made for a bare knoll, from which he took a long survey of the surrounding country before descending to make camp. From now on he and Jack would not sleep near their camp-fires, but wait until dark and then hide their beds in the bush.

Next morning they broke camp, Gorman taciturn and Jack whistling thoughtfully to himself. They had ridden no more than half a mile south when an exclamation burst from the younger man's lips, and he pointed. There, dashing through the brush was a brown woman loaded down with two naked babies!

Gorman dismounted running, and left his mule for Jack to tend. Here was a chance to learn something first hand from an Indian, concerning the Sublevados and what had happened at the village!

Of course the tall American gained swiftly in the pursuit. The burdened squaw, seeing that she could not escape, hurriedly thrust her two babies into a bush, then turned and ran a short distance. When Gorman reached her, though, she had seated herself on the ground, face stoical, prepared for death.

"Amigo! Friend!" was his first word, with the accompaniment of uplifted palm. Then he spoke swiftly, first in Spanish; then, seeing she did not comprehend

readily, in Mayan. He told her that he did not wish her harm; that her babies were safe, and that all he wanted to know was something about what had happened at her village.

It took time for the simplest thing to get across. Then the woman's face began to work strangely. She shrieked, beat her breast, and suddenly leapt up to waddle as fast as she could go to the spot where she had flung the little ones. Even then

she crouched over them, unable to believe even when Gorman offered her food from the mule pack, and spoke soothingly.

In time Gorman did persuade her, but he got little for his pains. The woman knew there had been a sudden attack by the fierce Sublevados—led by someone they called the "dreaded Fire Priest"—but she had fled with the other women, then taken to her heels again when the raiders found the group of women and children. She thought that she alone had escaped, which possibly was the truth.

A half hour later Gorman returned, with a heavy pack on his shoulders, and without his mule. "I can walk just as fast, or straddle the pack mule once in a while," he said gruffly, when Jack asked him wonderingly what had become of the moth-eaten mount.

Jack blinked. A little later, looking down upon the heavily laden back of the tall man who now led the pack mule by hand, the blue-eyed ex-pugilist smiled a little and shook his head. In the sordid, flashy world of the ring in which he had moved for many months, there were few men indeed who would give up their means of locomotion in the wilderness to a fat, greasy Indian squaw with a couple of babies . . . just so she could reach the Merida mission. . . .

It was an odd fact, but just then Gorman swore angrily aloud. He had just remembered a fifty dollar bet on a fight that he had failed utterly to collect!

IV

RED RUIN

FIVE days of slow travel passed. Jack Chastang moved in wonderland, insatiably asking questions. And Gorman, steeped in the lore of the ancients, could tell him tales of the old civilization which had long passed its prime and which decayed and fell to the ground half a century before the coming of the avaricious Spaniards.

The stories ranged all the way from the work of the old Mayan botanists, who developed maize from the seeds of wild grasses, to the architecture of the almost fearsome ruins—such as those the Rockefeller Foundation had uncovered at Loltun—which were the archetypes of the modern set-back skyscraper.

"Anywhere we go throughout the peninsula," said Gorman, "there are splendid roads in an excellent state of preservation."

"Roads? I haven't seen any!" grinned Jack.

"Only a few of them have been uncovered. There is a layer of about six feet of sand and silt on top of them now, and all the jungle growths, of course. But the roads are there. They linked every square league in Yucatan and Quintana Roo. They are exactly the same binding material, foundation and surface as John L. McAdam invented for the white race something like seven hundred years later!"

"Huh! And they've slipped so far they just use knives and bows and arrows now, and live in those grass houses?" queried Jack. "The Mayas, I mean."

Gorman grimaced slightly, flexing his

knee which still held a certain amount of stiffness—and probably always would.

"Some of the Sublevados have guns," he said. "Didn't you notice that two of those dead Ulmecas had been shot in the head?"

"No, I—I didn't look that close."

"They've slipped, all right. No one knows too much about the Sublevados, unless it's Professor Severn whom we're going to visit. He has hinted a couple of times to me that he made friends with that tribe. He's a crazy paleontologist—fossil-hunter—who brought his wife and three girl children out to live alone in the monte. They've taken over a building they dug out themselves, one that used to be a nunnery."

"Girls? Out here?" cried Jack.

"Yep. Oldest about twelve. Teaches them himself. I think it's terrible, but what can you do with a professor? His wife helped him, until she got yellow fever. Lost all her hair, and nearly died. I haven't seen them for about . . . hm . . . eight years, but I heard last summer they were still at the old place."

Jack looked dubious—and he would have been even more put out had he guessed the natural human mistake Gorman had made. He had neglected to add the eight years to the age of the children he had met long before; and even girls reared and educated in the monte do have a way of becoming women, given sufficient time. . . .

"I don't hold much with girls. They just seem to make a lot of trouble," he said.

Gorman smiled sadly. At times now he could forget the hideous tragedy of his own life and love; but his whole attitude toward the Sublevado tribe was colored an uncompromising crimson by it. As far as he was concerned, even the Sublevados who had not been in that raid upon the Gorman rancho, were criminal fanatics all ready to repeat just such offenses whenever they got the opportunity.

One tale got a hearty laugh out of Jack. Gorman had been away from the North too long, and had not attended any motion pictures on his one trip. Thus when he started speculating aloud over the Fire Priest, he said the whole tribe of magicians were dangerous nuisances, if not worse. They had charge of the annual invocation to the rain god, as well as other rites, and exercised the power of life and death—usually death, with trimmings.

"They are known as H-men," said Gorman innocently.

"Wha-at? Oh, that's a joke, of course!" But when Jack found himself required to explain G-men to a companion who had never heard of such creatures, the younger man saw the ludicrous comparison, and could not stop chuckling for half an hour.

Every thought of humor left them then. They reached Pootun, which Gorman had visited twice. It consisted of ruins around which a Mexican family named Chablé had established a plantation, raising corn of course, but rotating with other crops, modern fashion.

The hacienda was a gutted ruin, only part of its plaster walls still standing. Of the village of Mayas who had worked the fields, not a *ná* remained. Complete desolation everywhere. Only a few whitened bones, picked by scavengers, suggested the fate of the *haciendados* and their forty or more employees.

"This is a sort of crusade," said Gorman grimly. "Just for loot they never would have come so far from home. And judging by the fact they visited this place earlier, they were going north at the time they struck that other village. That means they may be anywhere along our trail right now!"

"How about this Severn family?" queried Jack soberly.

Gorman could only shake his head. Friendship with the Sublevados would mean mighty little when some fanatic soaked them in balché liquor, and urged them to kill all white men and Mayas who worked for them.

For three more days they struck southward, seeing no recent sign of the marauders. Two small villages lay in ruins, but after an examination, Gorman said these had been destroyed months earlier.

Conversation had died. In truth Gorman was wondering if he should not abandon the quest and place himself at the service of the Mexican authorities. He could not imagine why rurales had not come out with planes, and intercepted the Sublevados before they had achieved this country-wide waste of life and property.

Jack Chastang was an extremely thoughtful youth. He had said briefly once that it is one thing to look toward a venture, weighing chances and accepting them, and entirely another to wade through death and destruction where other adventurers in the wilderness had failed.

THEY reached the Lake of Bitter Waters. It is an interesting phenomenon, a lake of Epsom and other salts, but with a geyser of fresh water rising in the middle. A man may swim out and fill canteens or other receptacles, and suffer no ill effects from drinking. Save for using it to replenish their drinking supply, however, they paid it little attention. Beyond here, just a dozen miles lay the ruins where Professor Vernon Severn had made his home; and here they would encounter the first real test of luck.

Gorman could not wait. "This will be headquarters. Keep out of sight," he told his companion. "I'll be back in thirty-six hours at the latest. If I'm not—streak it for Merida."

"Meaning if you go alone and get killed, I'm to give up? The hell with you! I'm going along—*all* the way!" was Jack's firm retort. "So far I've had a nice ride; but if we're going to start something, believe me I intend to be in it!"

After a second of somber reflection Gorman's harsh features cracked in a smile. "I was kinda hoping you'd say that, Jack," he admitted. "I oughtn't ever have brought you here—but now you are in the middle of it——"

"I'm taking my chances, compadre!" grinned Jack. He was immensely more cheerful when they started out on foot at nightfall, carrying only water, charqui and firearms. The other parts of equipment they cached carefully, leaving the mules to forage free. Since these intelligent animals had learned long ago to follow their noses to fresh water, one sight of them swimming out in the lake for a drink relieved any worry regarding their safety.

Bright moonlight and a refreshing breeze made this added travel bearable. Maya Gorman was less sure of directions, however, for night in the monte makes all objects and even directions seem strange.

"I could swear we'd turned around and were going north again," Jack whispered once.

Gorman at once halted, and took a careful sight by the moon—which was difficult now, since it was almost overhead. Then he shook his head. "I think we're still right. In another two miles we'll know, for beside the nunnery at Severn's city there's a pyramid which shows for quite a distance."

Before that sight could meet their eyes, though, Gorman suddenly caught his companion's arm. "Look!" he said in an almost inaudible voice.

They were at the edge of one of the treeless glades which occur constantly through the monte, patches where the calcareous soil thins out and bedrock comes to the surface, refusing the roots of all vegetation. Following Maya Gorman's pointing finger, Jack saw a charred skeleton of something hanging in the burnt treetops straight across the open glade.

"An airplane—crashed!" whispered Jack.

"Yes, the rurales *were* on the job," said Gorman grimly. "No chance, of course, but let's see. Oh my heavens!"

With a feeling of sickness rising in his throat he saw a dozen or more black things in front of him. They were dead buzzards!

"Stay back! I think I know what this must be!" commanded the elder sternly. And this time Jack was only too glad to obey. Pistol in hand, he waited, listening but not caring to look any closer.

Gorman found what he suspected. A sort of trail led from the other side of the

glade; and lying there were three partially dismembered corpses. Through the brush on either side were more—he did not care to find out how many.

With the greatest care he entered the trail, examining every trailer and vine. Then he exclaimed grimly, cutting off a length of dead fiber, to which was attached a small thorn. He took it back to show Jack.

"Those were rurales, to judge by the remnants of their uniforms," he said. "For some reason they were in distress, or the plane was. It tried to land, and found that glade too small.

"When it fell, they all rushed into that trail, probably to try to save their comrade. And that too-plain path was a Sublevado thorn trap. Look at this, but handle it with extreme care. They kill several foxes, hang them up to decay, and then stud every inch of their bodies with these thorns, like ticks.

"After a few days they remove the thorns, and then fix them with springy saplings and fiber everywhere along a path which their enemies may be induced to follow. Well—one prick, which a man will scarcely notice, will kill him horribly in about twenty minutes!

"Not only that. His whole body will bloat and be poisoned. Therefore the dead buzzards."

"I—don't wonder any more—why you hate them," said Jack slowly. He flung the thorn from him into the brush. "Is there any way forward where—we won't encounter thorns?"

"Yes, only it won't be a path or trail, from now on."

Gorman made Jack follow in single file. With greatest care he pushed a way through the thickets of the monte, wishing now for a machete such as is carried by every chiclero.

IT WAS slow travel, though an occasional glade helped. And Gorman heard a faint, mellow sound which he had to call to Jack's attention. When they had stopped stock-still they both heard it thrice more.

"It's the *tunkul*. Temple gong. That means we're right near—and that the rurales are not bothering. Probably all dead. I don't like it. Don't like it at all. How can their place be so damn near Severn's?"

"Maybe they've moved in there," Jack suggested.

Another quarter hour, and above the trees of the monte they could see the flat-topped pyramid of which Gorman had spoken. In the moonlight it would have passed unnoted save for the searching scrutiny they maintained.

The intervening half mile they covered as stealthily as Indians, but there was no alarm, and they saw no signs of the Sublevados. Also, when they reached cover some eighty yards from the small white building which Gorman knew to be the excavated nunnery in which Severn and his family lived, there was no light anywhere, no sound. Only moonlight shining brightly on the piles of ancient ruins. Gorman noted that several more queer bits of

architecture had been recovered from the monte, which must have been a herculean job for one man.

The nunnery was at the bottom of a shallow gulch, the gulch being the excavation. It was a building about fifty feet long by thirty wide. Eight years before when Gorman had first entered it there had been one door, several air vents in the roof, but no windows. Now one of the heavy blocks of stone had been removed from each of

the four walls to make a window; but there were no frames and no glass.

Gorman felt a disheartened certainty that he was not going to find the Severn family alive in their home. Of course they might have finished their work during the year that had elapsed since hearing they were still in the nunnery; but a crankish hermit like Vernon Severn was not apt to consider his job done while there yet was a breath in his lungs.

Taking a chance in the open moonlight, Gorman led the way to the doorless doorway, pistol in hand. But a whispered exclamation left his lips as he hustled Jack inside.

"Listen!" he whispered.

For ten minutes they stood there in the dark, able to hear or see nothing save the pale oblong of doorway through which they had entered. The place smelled of charred wood, however.

Clicking a new battery into his tiny flashlight, Gorman chanced a view of the interior. There once had been rude partitions of saplings and thatch, dividing the interior into four rooms. There had been home-made furniture of a rude sort.

Now there was nothing but ashes and char—and at one side the reconstructed skeleton of some prehistoric beast like a baby dinosaur, raising his long neck and sightless skull to peer at them.

The Sublevados had turned upon their old friend, and destroyed his workshop and home. Severn had worked for many years as a combined archaeologist and paleontologist—the latter science being his chief interest—attempting to establish some queer theory in respect to a similarity in fossil remains and culture between Yucatan and the Azores Islands. He had called the Azores "the last mountain tops of Atlantis." Gorman had just smiled at him; for the Mayans had stirring historical legends of their own, showing a vast immigration southward from what is now Florida. Gorman believed, without going into the matter as a student, that the Mayas (or Chanes) had a common ancestry with the Seminole and other Muskogee Indians of the southern part of North America.

"Can't keep a light going. Nothing we can do till morning," whispered Gorman. "Let's make ourselves comfortable as possible over here in a corner. Now you sleep a while, and I'll waken you for your watch."

With an exhausted sigh Jack sank down on the cold stone floor, pillowing his head on his arms. In three minutes he slept. Gorman sat with his back to the wall, somberly pondering the vengeance he hoped to bring upon this tribe of murderers. Jack and he, Gorman, had no right to pursue their quest of treasure. Let them once determine the hideout of the Sublevados, and it was plain duty to take the information to the Mexican authorities.

"They're right close here somewhere," he reflected. "More than likely in the underground workings of this very city. Maybe Severn uncovered too much. We'll have to be able to say how to get at 'em, though. Ten thousand rurales could never break down into these piles of masonry, unless they had at least one passage in."

At that moment came the mellow, all-pervasive sound of the *tunkul*—one stroke this time to herald the first streaking of dawn in the east. Gorman held his breath and his heart thudded. That gong was not very near. The sound came to his ears through the masonry; he was sure of that.

"That settles it; they're underground *here!* I won't sleep now."

Oddly enough the quivering sound had not awakened Jack. So after a moment Gorman arose, stretched his cramped legs, and tiptoed over to the doorway, but he could not see any sign of dawn as yet, and realized that the Sublevado priest who had given the signal for that stroke of the *tunkul* must have been stationed on some high place—probably the flat-topped pyramid.

An hour passed. Gray light came, then a tinge of orange red. Gorman had not sat down, but gradually had receded from the open doorway. Now he could see his way about the char-strewn floor of the

ancient nunnery, and made a preliminary examination.

Over in one corner where probably there had been a bed, lay the charred, headless body of a woman. No doubt Mrs. Severn.

"So old and withered by illness she didn't appeal to them. She was lucky," said Gorman hoarsely, half-aloud.

"Eh? What's that? Is it time for me —oh hell!" came Jack's hurried whisper as he aroused. "You didn't sleep!"

"An old codger doesn't need much sleep," Gorman whispered back. "Get up, but make no noise." He went on, looking for the bodies of Professor Severn and his three daughters, but they were not in sight.

Jack was silent, his young spirits depressed by this smiling land of horror into which he had come so happily. He watched as Maya Gorman reached a square of stone floor which had been back in the primitive kitchen.

Everywhere else but here, the fire which had consumed the interior of the nunnery had left ashes and litter. Here was none of that—but something else even more shivery. Over a space more than a yard square, there appeared to be a covering of smooth, brown-red linoleum. Gorman said as much, and added:

"Only, it isn't linoleum, or thick varnish. It's human blood. Now, *why* would it be spilled there in the exact form of a square? Quite as though someone had applied it with a brush?"

V

THE SACRED CENOTES

JACK had nothing to offer, except scraping away some of the hard-dried blood with his knife. There appeared to be nothing more than plain stone blocks underneath.

Gorman shrugged and turned away, peering cautiously from one of the open windows, then another. He saw nothing, heard nothing. Somewhere underground here must be a considerable number of Sublevado Mayas. He could think of no plan that offered a chance of success—none greater than hiding here, watching, until such time as another raiding party left or returned. Then, a swift trip to tell the authorities. Later, perhaps, the treasure search——

"Chief!" whispered Jack, who had been scraping away with his knife, and now had it vertical with an inch of its blade in a crack. "You were telling me about these underground cisterns, these cenotes——"

Something like a smothered groan burst from Gorman. "Kid, you've hit it! What a dumbbell I was!" he whispered, tiptoeing hastily back. "Mrs. Severn had to get drinking, cooking, and washing water *somewhere!* I didn't notice, the time I was here—except I remember now they *didn't* haul it from a distance.

"And there would be no reason to paint this part of the floor with blood, unless this kitchen well or cenote—which once served the nunnery, of course—had *some* connection with the main workings!"

Commanding Jack again, and asking him to keep cautious watch, Gorman went down on his knees. The younger man looked a trifle disappointed, but Gorman explained that from his work in Sh'Tol he had learned a good deal about Mayan glyphs—the carvings and mosaics—pictures and intricate geometrical figures—by which they recorded history or gave directions for entering chambers, and the like.

"Even the stone door to a temple bath at Atl, for instance," he explained, "one used by even the commonest of some sixty priests, had glyphs to tell how it opened."

As he was whispering, he ran his fingers over the entire surface. Of course the Sublevados would have puttied in any revealing sunken carvings, but now he had the hint he expected to find the secret soon. This, of course, was a well in common use by the ancient nuns—and by Mrs. Severn, too. It could not be really difficult.

Except for the blood, hardened like thick paint, it was not. Gorman dug out one curious hole with his knife, saw what it was—the open mouth of a snake, with

bifurcated tongue broken off at the ends, and hollows on each side of the tongue where a man could put thumb and one finger.

Then he was supposed to lift; and Gorman did just that, after he had knifed through the dried film, around the irregular outline of the snake mask.

There was nothing at all mysterious here—though he expected to encounter mystery later. There were three masks, the outer one squared to fit the other blocks of the floor. Instead of being anything from two feet to five feet thick, like the other blocks of the floor probably were, these concentric masks came out finally and showed themselves a mere three inches thick. Even at that, the outer one would have made too great a weight for a woman to lift.

Listening intently, then cautiously flashing the small beam of flashlight, they saw that this was not a well, but an exceedingly steep flight of steps carved out of the bedrock. Each step, intended for feet much smaller than those of Jack or Maya Gorman, was no more than eight inches deep.

In the center, the steps were worn rounded, until they were half that depth. And the flight descended at an angle of sixty degrees into blackness!

Gorman went first, descending sidewise. It was not hard, and would have been simplicity itself for anyone barefoot. He counted the steps . . . twenty-eight . . . thirty . . . thirty-two . . . and up to thirty-six. Then he halted, listened, heard nothing but a faint murmuring sound which he recognized as water flowing. He flashed the tiny light.

There were about twelve more steps, and then what looked to be a chamber of whitish rock, with a black pool or flume of water at one side. Jack was coming down now, so Gorman hastened. At the bottom he waited, straining his ears. But no sound other than the faint swish of water moving against rock, came to him.

"Now we've got just this to do," whispered Gorman, when Jack was at his side. "We'll try to explore far enough to be sure of a way into the subterranean city. I'm sure now that at least some of the Sublevados are there—though they may have another city somewhere. Probably have. But we can't fight a whole tribe single-handed. Once we've got the way in, we go hotfoot for the *rurales!*"

"I suppose," agreed Jack in a disappointed tone. "Oh-h!" he added, clenching Gorman's arm in a fierce grip.

There was no need for words. Above them came the clattering sound of a thin stone settling into place. The square hole of pale light above the stairway suddenly was reduced to a fraction of its size, and in the irregular outline of a snake mask!

Impulsively Gorman started for the stairs, but he was too late. The second stone was fitted, and immediately the third and last. They were in blank darkness! Some of the Sublevados had found the stairway well open, and had closed it—no doubt would seal it again!

The two adventurers were bottled up in the tunnels and mysterious mazes of this underground city of the Mayas!

COME!" whispered Gorman, flashing his feeble light. There was no need of explanation now. Only one thing mattered—to get a possible hiding place somewhere. There was certain to be a search for the man or men who had cut through the blood seal and used this stairway, probably in defiance of the orders of the priests.

The water ran in a sort of flume which curved sharply. They took a hasty drink, then followed the rather narrow manway at the side. Above them the rock ceiling arched low, making them crouch. They went upstream, and the ascent was slight. They travelled as silently as possible, hugging the incurving wall, and as yet heard no sound of searchers. Then suddenly came a noise of slapping waters that brought them both to a halt, pistols ready.

Nothing happened! Yet when Gorman snapped on the flash which he had instinctively extinguished, the flow of water

in the flume had halted. It was just as deep as before, but stationary. Somewhere one of those flood gates had been closed!

Cold perspiration was on the foreheads of both men as they went on. Gorman, knowing a good deal about the water systems of these ancient cities, wondered if they simply were going to be caught where they were, and drowned by rising water.

He hurried along perhaps twenty paces further, then came to an abrupt halt. The passage apparently ended, with the flume disappearing in solid rock, and a narrow white partition facing them—a partition covered with queer glyphs, and bearing in its center a beautifully carved snake mask with jade eyes which glinted horrible mockery at them!

"It's a door—if I can open it!" said Gorman hoarsely.

He dropped to his knees, to read the glyphs. Unlike any other Oriental or Occidental writing, these do not begin in any stated place, and are not read backward, left to right, or vertically. Often a fish in low relief is the "akchek" or guide,

in front of its nose being a geometrical figure as simple as a triangle or spiral, or as complicated as the maze of the Minotaur. The reader uses this as a sort of mental stencil, and follows the highly colored pictures in this fashion.

"The water—is rising!" said Jack in a stifled voice. A moment more and it was not necessary to say anything. It came to wet the soles of their boots.

Gorman wiped the perspiration out of his eyes. He had found the fish, and followed the simple diagram. Some of it eluded him, and he seemed unable to think. Certainly one of these symbols, that of a lurid red stork, was right. And could this thing probably meant for a jaguar be the other half of the combination?

Desperately he pressed both of them. The stork grated inward a matter of four inches! But nothing happened!

Hastily he went back over the glyphs, those whose meaning he could decipher. The water came up steadily, impassively.

"Oh, the deer!" he ground out.

This tiny glyph had one slightly projecting horn. He pressed it. No go. And then, fumbling away, he happened to pull it in his own direction. Silently the white panel or door started downward into the floor.

"Jump it quick!" bade Gorman huskily. "It will come back!"

Jack obeyed, when the barrier reached a yard from the floor. Then Gorman followed. But the door went no further either up or down. Something seemed to have gone wrong with the counterweights or hydraulic mechanism which controlled it!

On the other side the water had risen almost to the top of the white rock panel. Gorman tugged fiercely, almost unreasoningly, to raise it. Why he should save the rest of these workings from flood was not clear even in his own mind, so terrific had been the strain of the past ten minutes.

Then in desperation he shoved *down!*

The heavy white panel went a distance of a foot, and water splashed over. But then with a magnificent disdain of the flood rising and clamoring to break through, the panel went swiftly up to its original position, closing the section of tunnel!

It was not completely water-tight, perhaps. Thin trickles came through near the base. But it attested the almost unbelievable skill of the ancients who, working with chisels of nephrite only, could fashion such masonry for the ages.

Gorman turned, and blinked in complete astonishment. There was a vast pool here, a cenote, with carved images seated about the rim. Before each image was what

looked to be a small, flickering fire, a *teocalli* or votive fire, always tended day and night.

THIS was not what caused Gorman's astonishment. On the stone floor of the tunnel corridor, which broadened here, was a squat, wizened Maya clad only in loin cloth. Jack Chastang bent over him, feeling the back of the unconscious Indian's head.

"He came at us with that thing," said Jack, pointing at a spear which lay ahead of the body. "I dodged and got him on the button. When he went down I'm afraid he cracked his skull on the rock."

"Good lad! No regrets for that!" whispered Gorman, shivering at the thought of that spear coming at his back while he was engaged in wrestling with the panel.

He picked up the spear and the body of the Maya, thinking him likely enough the keeper of the votive fires, and carried him over to the rim of the cenote. There, placing him in a sitting position with the spear across his knees, he looked as though he had just dozed off for a moment.

The manner in which water reached this reservoir, which was about half an acre in extent, showed that it was by no means the uppermost of the cenotes. There was no drip of seepage water from the rock roof —at least none right now. Instead, a sizeable flume on the far side discharged water steadily, without appearing to alter the level of the big tank.

As a matter of fact this was one of seven cenotes, of which three were higher, two at the same level, and one some fifty feet lower. These supplied the vast subterranean city of Suchun. The last-named, lowest cenote was the final reservoir for a great drought, and corresponded to the well of the Keep in an old English castle.

One up-slanting tunnel and three which appeared to descend, left the circular platform or corridor which surrounded the cenote. In front of each opening sat one of the carved deities.

Gorman and Jack, hoping now to hide and find a way of escape, chose the tunnel which inclined upward. So far there had been no sort of hiding place, and all was plain rock, unornamented—save for the one flood-gate of glyphs through which they had passed. Gorman imagined that in the old days that door probably had been kept closed, making a well for the nunnery out of the space behind it.

Now as they went forward swiftly, they came to the first of the chambers. It was unlighted, but chancing a few quick darts of his flashlight Gorman saw that the walls here were either plaster or stucco over the rock, and ornamented with a frieze of glyphs in colored paints. Though they must have been made hundreds of years before, most of the colors retained a startling freshness.

The important feature of the moment was that in this chamber, evidently unused, was an enormous stone bench—looking as uncomfortable as any piece of furniture ever could look.

But it had a high back, behind which two desperate men could crouch. And there in a cup of the floor a tiny spurt of fountain played upward the distance of six inches, then drained back.

"We can drink!" whispered Jack. "Let's have a bite to eat, too. I c'n fight a lot better if I'm not thinking about chow."

Gorman acceded. One after the other they knelt and drank the slightly alkaline water of the fountain—a jet which no doubt had been playing there untended for hundreds of years. Then they sat with their backs to the back of the bench and chewed *charqui.*

"D'you know, Chief," sighed Jack, after ten minutes, "luck's been with us so far? That old codger I hit too hard, hasn't got a mark on him—'cept that soft spot in the back of his head. More'n likely they think we're in there, drowned!"

"I can believe that. Only—" and here Gorman hesitated—"it wouldn't take long to fill that place. Then I think they'll let it drain right away, to find out what they caught in their trap. We've got to go on

and take our chances. If we keep climbing, we'll come to the surface—or into one of those pyramids, perhaps.

"In one of these cities, all the priests and members of the Governing Council—they didn't go in much for kings—lived in the uppermost apartments. When the humbler members of the tribe came up from below, it was either to worship or to go out into the fields to work."

"Like pent-house apartments now," said Jack, with the wraith of a chuckle. "They cost the most. But Chief, how many of these Sublevados d'you s'pose there are?"

That had been a problem Gorman had been cogitating. Throughout Yucatan it had been believed that there were some five or six thousand of the unconquered tribe, but that he could no longer believe.

"Not very many. They must subsist almost entirely on loot from their raids," he answered. "We didn't see a sign of any tilled field near here!

"But only a couple or three hundred will be enough to do for us!" he concluded grimly, rising. "Let's go now, and keep your belt and holsters from squeaking if you can."

That second they froze. Two bellowing strokes of the *tunkul* agitated every fiber of their minds and bodies, the vibration of the great gong seeming to jell the very marrow of their bones. It was much nearer and seemed now to be straight ahead.

"High noon!" whispered Maya Gorman.

Chapter VI

THE TEMPLE OF SACRIFICE

FOR a reason which they would discover later, this part of Suchun (as Professor had named it to Gorman) was quiet and unpopulated. That much could be credited to luck.

Venturing out of the chamber into the first of a rabbit-warren of corridors with their transverse connections, with here and there another chamber—these guessed by Gorman to have been private apartments of old-time priests—they instantly had to retire to the refuge for a space of minutes. In the distance along the main corridor or tunnel, a light flickered. Then voices sounded in high-pitched excitement. Bare feet padded on the stone of the downslant.

Crouching behind the stone bench, peering out with utmost caution, they glimpsed a confused party of nine or ten priests, with two loin-clothed warriors bearing spears and knives, pass down in the direction of the cenote. Four of the number carried rushlights.

Jack squeezed his companion's arm. It was not necessary to guess aloud that these were bound down to find out what prey the water trap had caught. With only two warriors in the party, it was likely the presence of white men was not even suspected!

"Now's our best chance, I think!" whispered Gorman. "Keep touching my shoulders—we can't use a light."

Twice in a short distance they had to dodge hastily into one or another of the dark side tunnels, as two more priests wearing short robes of figured cloth and bearing lights came hurrying down to join those at the water trap. And from that direction already sounded a hubbub of voices. Evidently they had found to their amazement that the trap was empty, and that the keeper of the votive fires was unaccountably dead.

Now they chanced one of the side passages, only to have Gorman pause abruptly and drag Jack down to hands and knees. This tunnel led into a small bubble chamber, possibly natural in a volcanic formation, into which flickering light played.

And just beyond the ascending tunnel gradually closed, until a man just could go along on all-fours. Ahead was a widening, which revealed itself as another, smaller cenote. In here the rock ceiling was no more than two feet from the surface of the water, and a steady drip of seepage showed that the top of the ground was not far overhead.

From the mouth of this tunnel corridor, however, stone steps led down into a low

gallery. The cenote itself was up on their level, but in a circle at the sides the rock had been hollowed away—except in three places.

Gigantic stone figures, the eagle, the coiled serpent, and another heroic sized figure entirely garbed in beautifully worked feathers (Hunal Ku) were there to guard the cenote. Maya Gorman thrilled until his fingers trembled, but he did not reveal to Jack just then what he guessed.

Over there beyond the statue of Tonatiuh was a wide, lighted space in the wall, much larger than any of the other corridors they had encountered. If over there was the temple, with the sacrificial stone and the "Cup of God," then——

This was the sacred cenote, the holy of holies, and near it somewhere would be the treasure of the Old Ones!

But instantly Gorman shook his head, recalling the wording of the knot writing. It was not as simple as that.

"What's wrong?" whispered Jack, his lips against Gorman's ear as the latter half-turned, intending to turn back in the cramped space.

"No way out here. Another cenote—and over on the other side a keeper of the fires who'd give the alarm," was the almost inaudible answer.

They started to crawl back. Gorman knew that they were high now, very near the bedrock rim, above which was nothing save the four to eight feet of dry, porous earth which covers Yucatan. Then the sunshine of early afternoon! Would he and Jack Chastang ever find a way out to it?

The sudden reverberation of booming drum—a section of tree trunk hollowed and covered with tight-drawn deer hide—made them pause. Murmuring echoes of voices came, and the sounds of men rushing to some central point.

"The alarm," said Gorman from between clenched teeth. "They don't know what's wrong, but they'll proceed to find out."

A few seconds later and he inched back. "There's a side corridor, a branch. Take it. Feel on the left." They hurriedly got into this black corner; for the refuge they had sought was no more than a dozen feet long and ended in a wall. A door, really, for Gorman could feel the glyphs upon it. Without a light, however, he could do nothing toward deciphering them.

"I see a lot now, Jack," he whispered. "They've got chicleros—chicle-gatherers, Mayas who have worked for white men—out there with them. I heard some shouts in Spanish!"

Jack did not answer. The blackness had borne in the peril heavily upon him, it seemed. Together the two men crouched, while outside somewhere the drum throbbed a full twenty minutes, then ceased. Gorman could feel it go on throbbing in his temples.

FLICKERS of passing torches showed that a systematic search was being made. No less than three times a priest in flowered robe and carrying a light, came crouching through the low passage to the cenote. But none of the three even looked into the dead end passage, which seemingly was not in use. Gorman and Jack lay prone, their weapons ready to spout death. But if that necessity came it could mean nothing but the end.

The sounds, however, lessened, grew faint.

"Will they hunt from roof to basement?" whispered Jack.

Gorman started. "Good egg!" he said. "Let's try it now. But one second." He flashed his light upon the door which had blocked their progress, and then he reached forward a hand, only to stay it.

"This is simple," said he wonderingly. "A door which opens only one way. A prison? Well, never mind now."

Silent parts of the darkness, they felt a way out, taking the turn of corridor away from the high cenote, then turning sharply left along a passage which was dimly lighted at the end.

The light brightened. The corridor widened. They emerged cautiously on a

six-foot gallery which spiraled about an immense domed chamber, eighty or more feet across, and probably a full hundred feet from the ceiling—just a short distance above their heads—to the floor far below.

"The temple! Look!" whispered Gorman almost in awe.

Across from them was a stone god—the ox, Hunal Ku—though it would be hard for one uninitiated to guess what beast was meant. The great figure, with forelegs and shoulders and lowered head carved out of the rock wall, stood on the

floor. His horns curved upward almost to their level! His hindquarters still were part of the rock; and the entire expanse of that great carving was covered with multi-colored feather work!

The Snake god and the Eagle, neither of these feather-coated, completed the awesome trinity. At the feet of each burned an immense, almost smokeless votive fire. And there between the latter two, on a sort of ledge, reposed a great stone which Gorman with a thrill knew was the combined sacrificial stone and "cup of god!"

Here was the real shrine! Here was the temple, and there across this empty dome of temple, between the Snake and the Eagle, would be the river of blood leading away from the sacrifice.

And the treasure must lie just beyond!

Jack was breathing audibly, gazing down spellbound. Gorman took him by the arm, and started around the spiral ramp, which here at the top flattened out to its final level just under the rock ceiling. Gorman's objective was the great stone snake; for from his own experience at Palenque and Chichen Itza, he knew that these images invariably were hollowed out—in order to give the priests a chance to light up the eyes, blow out puffs of smoke from the mouths, and perform other mechanical miracles to impress the worshippers below.

Gorman deliberately said nothing of the treasure search. He hustled Jack around the ramp—and just then at the second loop of the spiral below them a squad of the armed searchers came out of one of the cave mouths and descended a short distance, to disappear again in another.

The small number of denizens puzzled Gorman, but he was thankful for the fact. Three of that squad had been chicleros, to judge by their boots and other clothing. These, even more than the Sublevados, were his enemies till death.

They had almost reached the Snake, with its great stone arch of neck thrust outward and down, when a horrified sound came from Jack Chastang. Narrow stone steps led down steeply toward the coils of the Snake, and up these now came a screaming girl!

She wore tatters of a flowered robe, and was bare-legged. A sort of yellow sandal was on one foot, and the other was bare. She held her right hand to her left shoulder, and blood showed between her small fingers!

Gorman was stiffened by surprise. This girl or woman was yellow-haired! And she was pursued now by a Sublevado priest who came jigging up the stairs, slashing vindictively with a knife that showed red all the way to the hilt!

Jack Chastang leapt—unseen by the priest. With a startled cry of different timbre, the girl passed him, to turn swiftly, catching Gorman by the arm. As in a dream the latter saw that this was indeed a white woman. Could she be the eldest of Severn's girls?

Jack was not worried by any considerations save one. As the robed Maya came, intent on sinking his stained blade into his

quarry for some unguessed, vengeful reason, Jack caught that upraised arm. With his other fist he slugged once, catching the surprised priest flush on the side of the jaw.

The latter staggered away, and Jack made his mistake. He let the man go, knowing he would fall.

The priest teetered back three steps, and then his heel caught the low stone coping. He seemed to deflate all at once. He fell, and both Jack and Gorman leapt forward vainly to catch him.

They caught the flowered fiber cloth of his robe, and it tore. Over he went! He turned slowly in the air, seemed just to kiss the shiny side of the great snake neck there below, and then rebounded enough to clear the right side of the lower coils of rock.

WITH faces suddenly pale they heard the *thunk*—soft and horrifying—as the body struck the rock floor far below.

"Oh! Oh! You are both white men! You—oh, you'll be *caught!*"

"Yes. You're Miss Severn?" whispered Gorman, again in control of himself. "Where can we hide? In the Snake?"

"No. Never mind, he didn't more than scratch me." This to Jack, who was clumsily endeavoring to bind a handkerchief about the girl's arm just at the shoulder, where a cut an inch long bled.

"Come!" she breathed. "This—this hide-out isn't permanent, but it's the best I know!"

Light-footed she turned and sped past the stair leading down to the Snake god statue. Jack ran after her, and Gorman was only a step behind.

She raced around almost to the Eagle, and then turned sharply to a narrow door on the inner wall.

"Stairs! You'll have to take my hand!" she whispered excitedly from the darkness.

Jack took her hand and passed his other back to Gorman. Then they plunged rather awkwardly down a dark flight, across a short flat space where the walls brushed their shoulders, and finally were halted.

"Inside Tonatiuh! The right wing of the Eagle! This is where I——"

"Is it all right to light a match?" Jack asked.

"Not yet. Wait! You will have to stay here in the dark. If—if they saw a light here they would come in. I must hurry now. They will find Pahna—the priest who fell—and I must explain!"

"One second!" whispered Gorman imperatively. "Your other sisters?"

"Up North in school, thank heaven!"

"Your father?"

A small sound of misery came from the unseen girl. "I—don't know," she confessed. "They don't let me leave the temple. Dad is a prisoner somewhere. They can't kill him; that is, Croszchen, the Fire Priest doesn't dare, because Dad was one of them. They've got him a prisoner in some room with a 'one-way door.' I hope to find it sometime. But now—oh, I hope they don't catch you. You—one of you was named Gorman, is that right?"

"Still is," said Maya Gorman grimly. "All right, go ahead, Miss Severn. We'll take care of ourselves, and be ready to get you out of this as soon as you say the word."

"I—can't go without—Dad!" she said, her voice breaking a little. Then she was gone, just faint sounds of her steps receding and disappearing.

"My Lord, Chief, that's a *girl!*" breathed Jack Chastang.

"Yes. Now you hold the fort here, and be ready to help her when she comes back," directed Gorman shrewdly. "I'm going out for a little while."

"Out? Where?" Jack caught his arm in the darkness.

"She can't leave without her father. I've got a strong hunch I know where they've got him. Take care of her if I don't get back, partner!"

And Gorman squeezed Jack's hand an instant. Then he flashed his tiny light twice, and was gone.

CHAPTER VII

THE MAD PRIEST

TURMOIL had started, down on the temple floor. One of the parties of searchers, scanning every inch of the downward way, had chanced to look below the coils of the Snake, where a ten-foot circle of fire burned with almost even flame rising a few inches and vanishing almost without smoke.

There lay a crumpled body, less than a yard from the flame, with a hunched, misshapen figure bending over it, then raising his arms to gesture wildly. This was the Keeper of the Fires at the great temple shrine; he was a hunchback mute.

When Gorman came speedily around the ramp, retracing his steps after puzzling a way up from the Severn girl's refuge, others had joined the hunchback; and they were shouting hoarsely, demanding that someone tell them how this priest had died.

Just as Gorman reached the dark corridor leading back and down, the one from which they had first viewed the temple, he saw a flying figure in a tattered robe come out across the temple floor. It was Miss Severn, and from that height she looked like a child running, with her yellow hair streaming behind. She went straight toward the group surrounding the body; and Gorman waited to see no more. She was some sort of priestess, and they probably would not harm her at once, no matter if she claimed to have killed the priest.

Twenty seconds later and he reached the blind-end passage just short of the 'cenote. He snicked the flashlight—and the little bulb was dim. Shrugging, he reached for his last refill, clicked it in place, and then looked carefully at the door or panel which confronted him.

Just the fish glyph, the motif found everywhere in the ancient Mayan cities. Just that one, without any complications. But below it the carrot-figure one, called Atla, and across it the two bevelled parallel lines which conventionalized a road or way. Then below this a square, with a mosaic which gave a queer, cubistic effect of a man bowed forward in hopeless dejection.

Shaking his head, Gorman pressed the fish glyph. Slowly, solemnly the panel raised a foot, two feet from the bottom. . . .

Then swiftly it dropped back into the original position! It had come down again like the blade of a guillotine!

Staring, Gorman was aware only of a breath of fetid, much-breathed air which had come from within the cell. For cell it was, he now was certain.

What a trap for any intending rescuer! The stone panel no doubt weighed half a ton. It would encourage entry, and instantly cut off retreat. But why had Severn, if he really was there, failed to take advantage of the chance to slide his thin frame under and gain freedom?

Speculations were useless. Gorman again depressed the fish glyph, throwing himself prone as the panel started to rise.

"Severn, are you there?" he whispered hoarsely, the moment six inches of space showed between the heavy white stone and the slot at floor level.

A muttered exclamation and a sinister clanking came in answer. Gorman's heart sank. Whoever was inside was chained —and it did not seem possible that it could be the scientist!

While he thought desperately of expedients, Gorman again started the panel. This time he started calling as soon as there was an inch of open space.

"Professor Severn! Are you there? Speak!"

The answer, accompanied by a low-pitched, cracked laugh, chilled his blood.

"You accursed race! You could not learn even the wheel! Fools! Ignoramuses! How could you dream to support yourselves when you refuse even the alms of science? Your forefathers perished because——"

The descending panel cut short the crazed Philippic. Gorman breathed deeply and brushed the cold perspiration from his

forehead. He had learned what he had come to discover. Severn was there, but his mind had cracked under the strain of solitary confinement.

Out of the blind alley, feeling his way. A right turn, and ahead of him the low opening to the cenote where watched the three smaller stone figures reproduced in such giant proportions in the temple itself.

Gorman slithered in on his stomach, finding there a flight of steps down to the manway around the cenote, which now towered in the center of the chamber. The rock was slimy. The smaller fires here smoked somewhat, and gave less light. Gorman, hoping to be able to overcome the Keeper of the Fires without shooting him, stared both ways without seeing anyone. Choosing the left way, he went quickly on tiptoe. No one was in evidence!

Stopping precious seconds to listen intently, Gorman heard queer, staccato rappings or jars, brought to him through the rock. Yes, he could hear them more distinctly when he put his ear against the cold surface.

It sounded for all the world like firearms, muffled and flattened!

Gorman shook his head grimly. If there was shooting going on, Jack probably was making a last ditch fight. Well, the kid had ammunition enough to hold off the whole city for a time, in one of these narrow passages. Gorman would be with him just as soon——

HE CIRCLED the *teocalli* fire which burned between the claws of the Eagle. Just as he passed the light curtain of smoke, brushing it from his eyes, a blood-curdling screech smote his ears. Up from stone seats there in a niche leapt a Sublevado with a spear!

This one was middle aged, no more. He yelled at the top of his lungs and threw the spear—just as Gorman dropped flat. Other men leapt out of the niche—two men in boots and rough costumes, chicleros! One of them snatched a pistol from his belt, while the other seized the back of his neck and jerked out a wicked knife, ducking and running straight for Maya Gorman!

There was no choice. Gorman shot. The chiclero with the naked knife leapt up in the air as a frog leaps and fell flat, groaning.

Whamm! The pistol thundered, pouring out black smoke from the point where the second chiclero stood.

Gorman felt a terrific and agonizing smash at the outside of his left hip, and spun around—not before pouring two more shots from the automatic. These did for the man with the pistol.

The second shot, let go just as the slug from that big pistol tore at Gorman's hip, was a wide miss. Unharmed, the Keeper of the Fires, a broad-chested Sublevado with long black hair stringing down his flat forehead into his eyes, came running to grapple with this hated intruder.

Gorman had no chance to fire again. He let go the pistol, which clattered underfoot. He managed to seize the muscular arms outstretched for his own body. The impetus of the attacker bore him back, however. Two steps . . . three . . .

Then suddenly Gorman dropped flat to his back, his right foot going to the pit of the naked brown stomach. Jerking his arms, throwing his foot straight back over his own head, Gorman hurtled the startled Indian a yard from the ground and head-first into the rock wall of the cenote!

Instantly the American was on his feet, retrieving the pistol, ready to send in a finishing shot. But none was necessary. Completely fooled by that old jiu-jitsu trick, the native had been either knocked unconscious or killed. Gorman could not wait to find out which.

Striding to the niche where the three had been gathered, at the same time he stuffed his handkerchief against the tear and splintered bone at the side of his thigh, Gorman saw three round-topped stone stools of the sort the Indians back against a wall and use for what they deem solid comfort.

Gorman lifted one of the stools, stagger-

ing under the weight as he made for the stairs back toward that prison cell. At the top of the stairs, however, he set down his burden and hurried down. That ancient horse pistol—a muzzle loader, much like ancient highwaymen on the London Road used to present to the heads of coach drivers, one hundred years ago—was no use as a weapon. But it weighed about seven pounds, and might do excellently for another purpose—one which worried Maya Gorman. He thrust it into his belt, then hurried up to take his burden again.

Back at the one-way prison cell door he depressed the fish glyph. Then this time as the panel slid upward, Gorman put the eighteen-inch-high stone stool under one side. The panel clunked down—and

held! For several seconds there was a suffling sound of air escaping, proving the pneumatic-hydraulic nature of the apparatus. But this ended. The panel stayed fixed, and all Gorman's strength, in trial, was insufficient to yank the stone stool out in his own direction.

From inside came that muttering and chuckling. Gorman, feeling that this probably was precious time wasted, still was unwilling to leave his old acquaintance. Bellying to the floor, he wriggled under the end of the panel, repressing nausea at the smells which assailed him.

Then he flashed his light. Description of that cell may well be scamped. It was six by eight feet, but the ceiling was fairly high. Clad in tatters, with a scraggly three-week growth of white hair sprouted from his seamed cheeks, the wreck of Professor Vernon Severn squatted there on a pile of rushes.

He was held by a single golden anklet, to which was attached a heavy iron chain —no doubt brought as loot to Suchun by the Sublevados, since they had no iron of their own. The chain was anchored to something behind a hole in the back wall.

Shutting his mind to the old man's babbling, Gorman grimly seized the foot above which was the anklet. Yanking off the broken shoe, Gorman pressed the anklet down against stone. Reversing the heavy pistol he had captured from the chiclero, using it as a hammer, he struck thrice with all his muscle, "ovalling" the iron in the manner convicts of old days used to know.

Then, despite squeals of pain from Severn, he practically dislocated the ankle, and pulled the foot through. Immediately then he did his best to knock the joint back into shape, and put on the shoe for the oldster.

All the time he had been working Gorman had been repeating, "I'm Gorman! I'm Gorman! I've come to get you away from here!" in the faint hope that this might penetrate the mists befogging Severn's mind.

It had the effect of quieting Severn. Gorman shoved him to the entrance, pushed him through, and followed. Once outside he straightened, breathing in with vast relief the comparatively clean air of the tunnels.

"We must hurry. Your daughter is back there," said Gorman, taking the arm of his charge and hustling him as fast as possible out to the main tunnel, then left toward the temple ramp. There were no sounds of firing now that Gorman could distinguish, and he feared greatly for the Severn girl and Jack Chastang.

SEVERN began to mumble, and to try to hang back. It seemed that perversely he wanted to go in the opposite direction, but Gorman bore him along until they came to the tunnel opening out into the temple. There Gorman took a chance and went

ahead, cautioning Severn to wait while he looked down.

The old man did wait, though Gorman sensed something peculiar in his attitude—something shifty and oddly triumphant. He was muttering some words about "flood gates" in a low voice, but Gorman left him and had a look down.

Then he yanked himself back, standing half paralyzed for an instant. A whole army of Sublevados and chicleros had come in to seat themselves there on the floor of the temple! They were almost silent, too, which was strange. It seemed as though some personage were awaited, or some awesome rite about to begin.

Then came the ear-burdening, quivering, overpowering sound of the *tunkul* struck thrice. It was sunset, the time when worship of the Eagle god ceases, and that of the Snake god begins.

Gorman got back and started to draw Old Severn with him in a quick, crouching trip around the ramp to the hiding place Miss Severn had showed them.

That was the moment the crazed old man had been awaiting, it seemed. As Maya Gorman took his left arm, whispering a crisp admonition for silence, Severn suddenly screeched at the top of his lungs! He swung about, before the astonished American could throw up a guard, and struck Gorman squarely in the forehead with a flat stone he must have secreted somewhere in his tatters of garments!

Gorman went down as if pole-axed, completely unconscious. Still screeching some of his crazy nonsense about flood gates, the old fellow turned and bolted into the dark tunnel corridor he had just quitted.

From the crowd below arose a questioning clamor, but it was stilled in another moment. Out on the broad ledge there between the Snake and the Eagle, the ledge which held the sacrificial stone and the "cup of god," walked a tall figure clad in flame colored fiber cloth, with feathered head-dress and featherwork girdle, both arms uplifted in the direction of the outthrust head of the Snake!

Back of him came four Sublevados, bearing two prisoners for the sacrifice to Kukil Kan. One was a blue-eyed youth from America, and the other was a girl with streaming yellow hair—from whom the figured robe of a priestess had been torn.

"We come, bringing Fire and Food to the Kingdom of Dark, O wise and generous Kukil Kan!" began the sepulchral voice of Croszchen, whom his tribesmen called the Fire Priest.

It was the ritual which would end only when Croszchen snatched forth the knife of obsidian and fed two quivering human hearts to the horrid maw known as the "cup of god."

Chapter VIII

TREASURE OF THE OLD ONES

LYING hidden there behind the low stone coping of the circular ramp, almost directly across from the statue of the Eagle, Maya Gorman was completely unconscious only for the matter of about one minute. He awoke to hear the echoing resonance of the Fire Priest, and for a space of seconds could not imagine where he was.

Down below were some three hundred Indians, half of them Sublevados, who were curious to know what the screeching had meant. But they would wait to find out until this horrible ceremony was completed. Doubtless they imagined that the sounds had been caused by or with the knowledge of Croszchen and the other H-Men—wizard priests—but the facts were otherwise. For all his assumption of omniscience, Croszchen himself was unaware of the disturbance which had diminished and died just at the moment he appeared.

Filled with the blood lust of his religion, and the fanaticism of the crusader who intended to rid Yucatan and Quintana Roo forever of the white man, he was putting all his soul into this plea to Kukil Kan.

Gorman halted himself, just as he reached hands and knees, frowning and

listening—then looking swiftly about for old Severn, who had vanished.

From below came a confused murmur, a sort of pagan litany. And just as it died, there came a single piercing shout in the voice of a man:

"Maya Gorman, can't you save her?"

It was Jack Chastang's last appeal. Hands were clamped over his mouth, so that he could not interrupt again the rite of sacrifice before the knife stilled his tongue forever.

Gorman raised himself cautiously, looking over the coping. His eyes suddenly bulged. There across the sacrificial stone, face upward, lay the golden-haired Severn girl! And Crozchen the Fire Priest had unsheathed the obsidian knife.

With a bitten-off groan, Gorman grabbed both his weapons. For the shot downward and slanting straight across the temple, he chose the Colt revolver in preference to the automatic. He rested it on the coping to still his shaking hand. The Fire Priest whirled about, lifting the obsidian blade on high——

Crash!

The shot thundered, but for a second or two it seemed that nothing had happened or would happen. A vast hush hung on the air. The Fire Priest seemed turned to stone like one of his own demi-gods. Gorman fired again, and knew he had missed!

Yet the spell was broken. Crozchen slowly leaned backward, toward the unseeing eye of Kukil Kan. He went backward stiffly, as a tree falls. He struck the coping with the small of his back and went on over, his feet sliding over reluctantly. He fell forty feet as the crowd below groaned, struck the lowest coil of the Snake, and was bounced sidewise somewhere into the worshippers.

Gorman had not waited to see. Limping, reeling a little from his head wound and the loss of blood from his thigh, he ran as fast as he was able around the ramp—and there saw himself balked, unless he could find a way through the maze of corridors and stairs on the inner wall!

The ledge with the sacrificial stone was a good twenty feet below him, a sheer drop. And now one of the attendants of the Fire Priest had picked up the knife dropped by Crozchen as he fell back, and was turning to plunge it into the living sacrifice!

Two guns leapt and spat orange fire in Gorman's hands. The assistant crumpled, with three heavy slugs through his chest. Then Gorman took one forward step and leapt, straight down at the three other brown men there who had been stricken with a sort of palsy, looking upward at this unexpected avenger.

The rock ledge and two bodies of living men seemed to fly up and smite Gorman. The cushion of flesh and bone broke his fall somewhat, but sent him spinning toward the coping. One of the Sublevado priests fell, his back broken, but the other two, yelling fury and surprise, leapt forward at Gorman.

He just managed to get up one gun, the automatic. And he shot as fast as he could aim, while the world spun round and round, and he knew this would be his last effort, unless——

Yes, he had to do one thing more. The priests fell, twitching out their lives. Gorman made the supreme effort, and oddly found that his head rather cleared when he raised it. He was broken—ribs and maybe more—but he could do what he had to do. He crawled over, took out his own jackknife, and cut the bonds on both Miss Severn and Jack Chastang.

"Save one shot for her . . . boy," gasped Gorman, and fainted.

"Oh look, there's Daddy!" cried the girl, pointing down.

Jack, gripping the two partly-emptied guns, followed her pointing hand. And he saw the strangest sight, probably, which ever occurred in all the centuries of Suchun history.

Out of a black corridor on the lowest slant of the ramp, danced a tattered, wild figure! It screeched and leapt up and down, shouting something frenzied about flood gates!

And then the flood came! Straight out of the corridor at the back of the mad professor-priest belched a solid cylinder of water—like the spurt of a fire hose a thousand times magnified!

It caught and bore Severn out over the throng on the floor of the temple, oddly suspending him in midair for several seconds, before letting him fall and vanish!

With a thunderous roar the water of all the cenotes poured out and down into the temple, and into all the subterranean workings of the ancient city of Suchun!

"Oh Daddy!" cried the girl. But then she wiped her streaming eyes quickly and turned to Jack Chastang.

"Come! I don't know—it may fill with water—even this far! Can you carry him?" And she touched Maya Gorman's limp figure.

"I sure can! Is there a way out? Can you shoot?" cried Jack joyously, thrusting both weapons into her hands and squatting down to lift Gorman over his shoulders.

"Through the top of the pyramid!" she cried, and led the way.

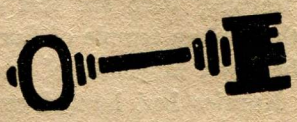
HIS Excellency, General Eduardo José Mendel Juan Diego Rosillo y Campostella, in charge of the punitive expedition of rurales encamped to westward of the pyramid of Suchun, had forty-odd Sublevado captives who would lead him into this and the other single stronghold of the outlaw Indians.

His Excellency was very happy. This was an unexpected stroke of luck, this flooding out of Suchun, a city he had been trying to enter for some weeks. The fact that most of the Sublevados and chicleros who had used this as a base for forays were drowned saved just that many executions in front of a wall.

When word was brought that a white girl, very lovely, and two white men—one of them wounded—had been rescued from the accursed Sublevados, the General stroked his mustachios, smiled, and went to see the Norte Americano girl.

The General had something of a shock. He found the girl, of whom they had heard because of her father, Professor Severn, and she came up to advance notices—yes, even if she wore now the scarlet *rebozo* of a native woman instead of her robe of priestess.

The young lady, however, was installed as nurse for a man whom Rosillo y Campostella recognized with a jerk and a sudden straightening of the back. Señor Gorman! The man to whom the Mexican Government had given its highest honors, and to whom it had offered the Governor-



Generalship of Yucatan with only the proviso that he become a Mexican citizen!

Lawrence Gorman was conscious. He grinned at the officer, and accepted a handshake. But from that moment both Lois Severn and Jack Chastang were more than safe; they were honored guests. The general heard their stories, and decided that he would be very happy to help them and Maya Gorman. For himself was there not the conquest of the Sublevados and the chicleros who had taken refuge with this outlaw tribe?

Jack's blue eyes grew round with wonder when he learned a little of the manner in which his beloved "Chief" was regarded by official Mexico.

"I knew he was a *man,* Lois!" he whispered privately to the nurse. "But they seem to think he's a sort of tin god on wheels! Do you know what he did to make 'em that way?"

Lois Severn shook her head. "I was North at Vassar until last summer," she said. "Dad mentioned Maya Gorman two or three times as the only man beside himself who understood the Indians. I think there was something in regard to reforming the peonage system on the great haciendas. But that was long ago."

"I'm going to ask him!" declared Jack.

"Not for at least a week!" smiled the nurse, but her voice was firm.

The week passed. But Maya Gorman did not wish to talk of the old, painful times. His eyes were wistfully happy as he saw the close friendship growing between these two youngsters. If things broke right, as soon as his ribs healed and the somewhat festered wound in his thigh could be dressed for the last time, he meant to try for a stake for both of them, a stake which would allow them to go back to the United States, marry, and have whatever happiness a secure fortune could bring.

He talked at length with the Mexican general, learning that six feet of water stood in the Mayan temple of Suchun, and that all the lower labyrinth of tunnels was flooded. Rurales had hunted every nook and cranny of the place above water level, and there were no more Indians in the place.

The original city of the Sublevados, the one in which they had taken refuge prior to forming a union with the outlaw chicleros, was Akchimook. This had been entered, and the small garrison captured or destroyed. To all intents and purposes there were no more Sublevado Mayas.

The Fire Priest, leader of their insane crusade, had driven them to raids for two purposes—immediate ones, which had to be accomplished before the whites could be driven from Yucatan and Quintana Roo.

First, they had to lay in huge stores of supplies, since they grew very little corn or other field products. Secondly, they had to capture women for mates, in order to insure a growth of the tribe in the future. These raids had been sent further and further afield, but had been disappointing. Ravaged fields were not planted again. It had looked as though the Sublevados eventually would starve themselves to death through their own ferocity. It was much more satisfactory to the Mexican general, however, to get the public kudos for conquering them. He was very pleased with himself.

Gorman mentioned a wish to get permission to hunt for possible treasure in the old city. The General smiled skeptically. He assured Gorman that whatever he found he could have, but the American wanted specific assurance from Mexico City. So the General sent a mounted messenger to the nearest telegraph line, with order to wait for an answer. The General put in the wire that Gorman's illustrious services to the cause of subduing revolution were well worth all the old relics he could find in Suchun. . . .

WHILE they awaited reply, Gorman got the story of the tragedy at the nunnery, bit by bit, from Lois Severn. It was not quite as horrible as he had thought. Mrs. Severn had been dying of a heart ailment, coronary thrombosis, and had actually been dead for a matter of twelve hours prior to the raid of the Indians.

Even then Professor Severn had not regarded their plight as serious. When Gorman had been there, eight years earlier, Severn had penetrated only to the white door or flood-gate, which Gorman had opened by means of the glyphs. There had been no Sublevados in possession then, though they sent emissaries to the great shrine of the temple at regular intervals.

In the interim Severn succeeded in penetrating the hidden city, and explored it from top to bottom. When the Sublevados came, he induced them to initiate him into their priesthood and thenceforth had the run of the place.

When his eldest daughter, Lois, returned finally from college, it pleased them both to have her ordained as a priestess. And she rather enjoyed the weird life—until the time came that two of the priests began to behave toward her in a most unsanctified manner.

The first time, her father assaulted the one called Pahna. For that offense Severn was thrown into the cell, chained. He did not emerge until Gorman freed him.

The second time, another priest named Akbatl invaded the room or boudoir which Lois had in the breast of the Eagle statue. She eluded him and fled over to the Snake, where she expected to find other priests.

There was only Pahna, however. He knifed Akbatl, killing him, but then thought the time propitious for his own advances. Lois had been trying to escape him—he was suddenly blood-crazed, it seemed, when repulsed—at the time Jack Chastang intervened to save her.

"And—I think that's all," Lois said, color high in her cheeks. "Poor Daddy saved us at the last, but you gave him the chance! I—well, I can't thank you two, of course. I—hope you'll both be my friends always. They say the water probably won't drain out of these for years, so—well, I can't hope to get Daddy's body for burial."

Here tears came swiftly to the blue eyes.

"What are you planning, back home in the States?" asked Gorman quickly, to get her mind in another channel. He had said nothing about his plans for a treasure hunt to either of the young people as yet.

"I can get a place with either the Rockefeller or Carnegie Foundation," she replied. "You see, I learned a lot about glyphs, and the Mayan civilization. . . ."

"Hmph," said Jack disparagingly. "Well, that may be all right, for a time." He put weighty significance on the last phrase. "Me, I'm going back in the ring, until I have a good stake. Then—" he paused, and further words seemed to shrivel up and disappear as he met the blue eyes, quickly dropped from his intent gaze.

"I'm getting up this afternoon," announced Maya Gorman dryly. "Then in a day or two, I'll let you young colts escort the old man up to the top of the pyramid—the way, I understand, that we all escaped from Suchun."

"You mean—?" cried Jack, starting up, eyes alight. He had not wanted to bring up the subject of the treasure again, for fear Gorman preferred to drop the whole idea.

That second there came a scratching at the tent flap, and a mounted messenger leaned over, extending a blue flimsy of Army telegraph. "For Meester Lawrence Gor-rman!" he announced.

Silently Gorman spread it on the blanket over his knees, inviting them to read.

Lois and Jack leaped to the sides of his cot. The message:

> YOU MAY TAKE AS YOUR OWN ANYTHING FROM SUCHUN WHICH YOU CAN CARRY ON SIX MULES STOP FIESTA ARRANGED FOR YOUR ARRIVAL WITH COMPANIONS AT MEXICO CITY STOP KINDLY ADVISE US OF THE DATE
>
> (Signed) *Hererra*
> *Secy to the Pres.*

"Now you go out, Jack, and find the six strongest mules there are in Yucatan!" grinned Gorman.

FOUR days later, with Gorman able to climb slowly with time out for rest now and then, they reached the flat top of the pyramid, from which a priest at sunrise and sunset gave the signal for the sounding of the *tunkul.*

The way down through the pyramid, thence into the temple of Suchun, was masked well against ignorant ones; but Maya Gorman knew the story of most of the glyphs. In ten minutes he had a swinging stone ajar, and their lights played into the descending stairway.

The great temple was chill, dank and silent, the votive fires forever quenched. All of the trio felt shivers along their spines when they stood again on the ledge beside the sacrificial stone. Their flashlights, new ones secured from the rurales, just would illuminate the open mouth of the Snake god, if played outward and upward. They would not show more than what looked like a black curtain over the bottom of the temple—the water which had flooded from the cenotes.

"Oh-h, I never saw the place like this! It's horrible!" breathed Lois. "I—I never will come back!"

"Steady, sweet!" said Jack reassuringly, placing a protecting arm over her shoulders. She turned, burying her face for an instant against his shoulder.

"I'll read the directions I got from the knots," said Gorman prosaically. If there had been any romantic thought in him regarding this lovely young woman, he gave no sign. Too well he realized that the wounds and batterings of fate, as well as the passing years, had left him a scarred old man, ready to take his years of recuperation and ease.

This time in reading he omitted the parenthetical explanations which Jack Chastang remembered:

"In the shrine of the Serpent and the Sun god, follow the River of Blood from the *cuauhxicalli,* eighteen paces. Lift rocking stone. Descend to sacred *inhli* where in the black waters are hidden treasures of our priesthood."

"That sounds easy—now," shivered Jack, and held the girl still closer. "I'll never forget lying here, though . . ."

Down the slanted trough where in past ages the steaming lifeblood of thousands of sacrificial victims had flowed, Gorman slowly paced off eighteen steps. Lois and Jack followed.

"This is all new to me," she said in a hushed voice. "I never heard of any rocking stone, or any other cenote. I—don't see where one can be."

Gorman did not reply. He had bent down, looking for glyphs but finding none. About a yard further—perhaps his paces had been short—however, there was an unpromising upthrust of rock shaped something like a ship's capstan. On hands and knees, turning his flashlight all about the base, Gorman found what he sought. It was a join, an irregular suture in the masonry which must have gone undetected for a thousand years, unless someone knew enough to search for it exactly at the right spot.

"Come here, Jack," bade Gorman, and the young man leaped to obey. "Push this!" and he indicated the rock upthrust.

Impetuously Jack bucked into it, like a football back hitting an opposing line. And the stone *did* rock, though only Gorman actually saw it raise part of an inch at the point of jointure below! Jack grunted, thinking he had failed.

"It will move," said Gorman quietly. "Put on steady pressure. Here, I'll help as well as I can. You can shove, too, Lois, if you'd like . . ."

With the three straining, the stone gave, complaining with the disuse of centuries.

One whiff of the dead air which smote his nostrils and Gorman cried a warning. "Give it a chance to air!" he said. "I don't think the Sublevados ever guessed this. It was a secret of the Old Ones!"

He made them wait a full hour; but then they descended a curving flight of stairs, went thirty feet outward through a narrow passage, and entered a circular chamber.

"Inside the coils of the Snake! There is the cenote!" said Maya Gorman, indicating with his flashlight a circular bowl about twenty feet in diameter, and looking to be about fifteen feet in depth. It was filled with black water to the brim.

"But—how?" queried Jack, puzzled. "I thought all the floot-gates were opened!"

"Not this one," Gorman chuckled grimly. "See around the walls? Those jars?" and he swung the flash at a good hundred pottery receptacles about the size of funerary urns. "I'll bet the priests of the Old Ones had grain stored there. This water was their own private supply, to be used in drouth. *They* weren't going thirsty or hungry, no matter what happened to their subjects!"

So it proved. But when Jack wanted to strip down to shorts and try a dive for treasure in the small cenote, Gorman would not permit it.

"Wait," he bade. "I've heard of snakes, alligators, and other such guardians of treasure," he said. "There must be a tap somewhere. They'd have to clean this cenote once in a long while, if the water was to stay drinkable . . ."

AFTER study, Gorman selected a place where there was a gap between coils of the serpent. "The tap is here," he said, turning in to the bottom wall of the cenote.

Barely discernible there were glyphs, partially covered with a moss which had grown on the moisture sweated through the rock bowl. Gorman scraped away with his knife.

Then he nodded to himself. A simple triangle of glyphs, with a snake mask, a fish, and blunted horns of a deer. He experimented, since the directions were far from clear. The deer horns grated in as he pressed. He reached over to press or turn the fish. . . .

Splash! A rock plug of masonry came out into his lap, followed by water under pressure. He got hastily out of the way, watching the water seek the outlet there between coils of the Snake. They all heard it fall into the water which covered the floor of the temple sixty feet below.

"As soon as that's down, Jack, take a careful look—for monsters! If there are none, you can slide in and try for treasure. You brought a rope, I think."

Before all the water had drained, however, the three knew that there was something in the bottom of the cenote. Stacked piles of bars or boxes, covered with green slime. Then at last four squat jars appeared.

"Get one of those, Jack!" bade Gorman. "There are no monsters, it seems." He braced himself with the rope, as Jack slid eagerly down.

Three minutes later they all were gathered close, while Gorman pried off the lid of the half-gallon jug. Crash! it flew off, and rattled on the stone floor.

Under the rays of the flashlight red and green and blue stones winked up at them! The jar was filled chiefly with uncut emeralds and turquoises, with a few Oriental rubies of the sort which are found in corundum matrix!

"The treasure!" croaked Jack from a throat suddenly dry. "No diamonds, though. I——"

"Hm," said Gorman, holding up one green stone the size of an English walnut. "This looks to be a perfect emerald. If it is—and this size—it will outprice any diamond you ever saw or heard of!"

Breathlessly they got the other three jars. One was filled completely with opals—less valuable, but marvelous in fire and pearly texture. The other two jars matched the first.

The piled stuff they first had glimpsed was bar gold and silver. This they did not touch for the moment. The jewels they poured carefully into a mule pack they had brought, and strapped it together tightly to prevent rattling.

Two weeks later the three were in Mexico City. They had come away without the gold or silver, letting General Rosillo y Campostella smile at Gorman from behind his hand. That was all right with the bronzed adventurer. He knew well that he, Lois, and Jack all were millionaires. He would take train for New York. They would journey more slowly by boat, after the President's reception for Gorman, and their marriage—on their honeymoon.

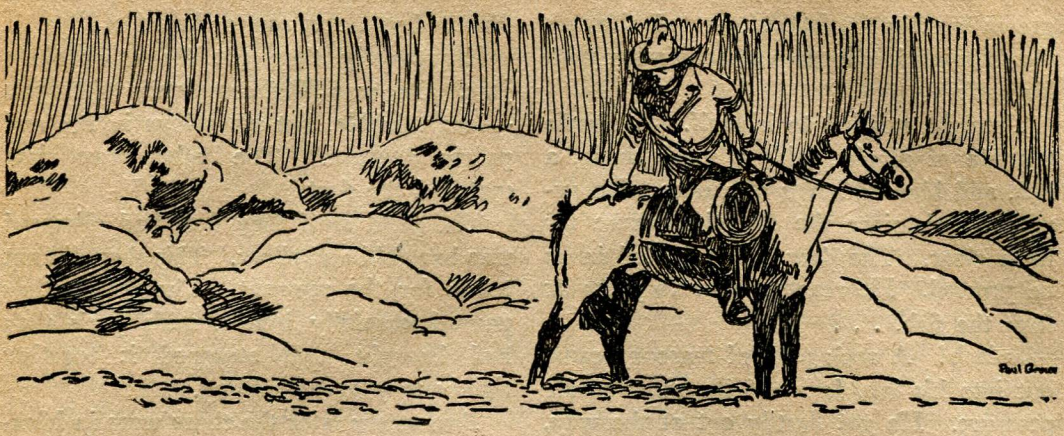
Gorman bade them farewell, kissing Lois for the second time. There was no regret, and no wistfulness in his smile now. These young people were suited to each other. He, Gorman, would spend a year at least in the North, getting back his strength and resilience. Then—who could know? There might be love and happiness still waiting for a forty-year-old veteran of the adventure trail.

At the very least there could be more adventure!

Some eight weeks later General Rosillo y Campostella, with an Indian guide and one trusted lieutenant, stood gazing down into the cenote where still were stacked the bars of gold and silver. The letter in the officer's hand was Gorman's letter, telling him how to reach the stuff.

"Valgame Dios!" breathed the General, a little stertorously. "And he left with six unloaded mules! In truth these gringos are as crazy as I thought!"

Big John Dillon Might Have Escaped the Law, but He Was a Man Before He Was an Outlaw



THERE WAS ONCE TWO IRISHMEN

By S. OMAR BARKER

Author of "King of the Plenty Forks," "Señor No-Savvy," etc.

WHEN he finally glimpsed the cabin, its windowless west wall no more than a shape of shadow through the white lace curtain of falling snow, Deputy McGrath stepped swiftly behind a big spruce trunk to blow the snow from his rifle sights. He eased the pack thongs from his stiffened shoulders, set the pack in the shelter of the tree, careful not to jar their chill burden from the drooping, snow-weighted branches. He blew warm breath through the rifle's barrel to rid it of any possible lodgment of snow. He unbuckled the weather flap of his sixgun holster and checked the loaded .45.

He forgot for the moment the aching tug of tired tendons in his legs. His whole mind focussed alertly upon the business that had brought him here, the grim business of arresting a murderer—or of killing him in the attempt. It was all one to Bill McGrath. He had come to get Big John Dillon, dead or alive. No hate about it, no personal grudge. But no foolishness of sentimental distaste, either. And certainly no fear. Bill McGrath had never named it to himself, that strange, strong compulsion we sometimes speak of as "duty to the law," but it was as much a part of him as the born Irishness of his ruddy face.

"You ain't obliged to undertake it, Bill," Sheriff Warner had said when they picked up the tip that Big John Dillon was hiding out, probably holed up for the winter, in an abandoned prospector's cabin somewhere far up in the rock ribbed, timber tangled wilderness of the Peñasco Mountains. "It's been over three months, y'know, since this *borreguero* seen him up there. An' the Mex was drunk when he let it slip. It mighty easy be jest a wild goose chase, Bill."

"It might—an' it might not, Sheriff. You want me to tackle it?"

"I want Dillon—if it's possible to get him. He's the only uncaught murderer on my record since I been sheriff of this here county! But that ain't no country to bust

into in the winter. I figger I couldn't stand up to it my own self, gittin' old like I am. Damn good chance of a man gittin' snow-bogged an' freezin' to death if it takes to blizzardin'; an' I never was much on sendin' a deputy where I wouldn't go my own self, Bill."

"Sure an' what else is a deputy good for?" Bill McGrath had grinned, reaching for his hat. "I'll be rustlin' up a pair of snowshoes, Sheriff. They're a scarce article around these parts."

When he came back in, Sheriff Warner had his rifle freshly cleaned and oiled for him.

"You don't know Dillon, Bill. I do. He ain't no outlaw by habit, but he's bull-headed—an' he's done a murder. He's let it be known that he don't aim to be taken alive. The law ain't got but one answer to that. You better go fixed for him. Who you figgerin' to take with you?"

"Sure an' I'll come nearer makin' it unhampered, Sheriff."

"You might, at that." Sheriff Warner had nodded gravely then, with a worried sigh. "The law's kinder of a hard master, son."

When Deputy McGrath was ready to leave, the sheriff had laid a brown hand on his shoulder, and issued his final orders.

"Dead or alive, son—an' don't you take no unneedful chances to make it alive. You ain't jest Bill McGrath,, remember, you're the law—an' luck to you."

McGRATH could not make out, through the swirling snow, whether there was smoke curling from the cabin chimney or not. But no matter. He would find out soon enough whether his man was there. The early storm-dusk of winter was not many minutes away. No time for delay, for prowling, for careful reconnoitering. Time now to get going, close in for the showdown while there was yet fair light for shooting.

Behind him lay five days of cruel climbing, of baffling, muscle-torturing toil, harder than he had ever known before. For McGrath was a horseback man, a novice with snowshoes, and the deep drifted snow of these southwestern mountains was soggy and thin-crusted with treachery. Five nights of sweat-chilled, bedless camping since he had left his horse at the last high valley *ranchito*. A leg-aching eternity of toiling up over trailless crags, of snow-clogged plodding to detour long cliff-boxed reaches of impassable canyons. And now, for two days and nights the snow-weighted whip of blizzard to blind and baffle him.

But yonder now was the cabin he sought. McGrath eased a shell into the rifle chamber and moved up the gentle slant toward it, lifting, it seemed to him, a ton with every forward movement of his snow-clogged webs. No detour, no canny circling, no stealth, no caution but keen-eyed watching and the ready rifle in his hands. In his weariness, Deputy McGrath half hoped for the spat of a rifle, for the stimulating breath of bullets and battle.

Fifty yards from the cabin, now—and nothing stirred. No smoke from the squatty chimney, but its rough stone masonry was free of snow, obviously still warm enough to melt the swirling flakes as they clung.

Twenty-five yards. The closed door loomed in utter silence. Ten yards. A faint, indeterminate sound from within the cabin.

"Waitin' to pot me point blank, eh?"

With tightened jaw Deputy McGrath lunged floundering to the door. Without pause he yanked the latch and shouldered it open, side-stepped quickly inside. His eyes strained at the dimness of gray light. From across the cabin came a faint creaking sound.

"All right, Dillon," McGrath spoke in a tone of hard, quiet authority. "Put 'em up!"

No answer but the raspy gasp of labored breathing.

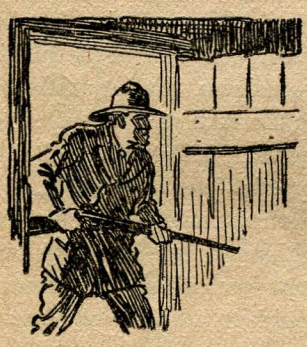
Then the shadows dissolved as his pupils adjusted themselves to the dimness. Across

the cabin, in a shaft of muggy light from a skin-paned window a man stirred on a tousled spruce-pole bunk. Eyes like dull coals of fire stared from sunken sockets. A hand like so many bones wrapped in yellow, shrunken paper dragged itself forth from the covers, its shaky, claw-like fingers clutching a heavy six-shooter. Dry sounds that vaguely resembled words came from the gruesome, bearded thing that was Big John Dillon's face. A second bony hand dragged to the aid of the first to raise the pistol.

Deputy McGrath felt his own cocked .45 tremble in his grasp.

"Dead or alive," the sheriff had said. "It's the law—not you, Bill."

The man on the bed groaned. With a pity that swept through him like a nausea,



Bill McGrath saw that there was not enough strength in both those bony hands even to raise the heavy six-gun barrel.

His glance swept over the emptiness of table and shelf in comprehension. Often enough at the cruel end of winter he had seen poor Mexican ponies turned out to starve along the grassless roads, had even courted trouble for himself by putting some of them out of their misery with the mercy of a bullet. Always the sight had sickened him. Hunger . . . starvation; something about it had reached down into a strong man's very guts to grip and stir him with a brotherhood of pity that was primitive, fundamental.

It was Bill McGrath, the man, not the law, that holstered his gun and clumped quickly to the side of that spruce pole bunk. His fingers, taking the gun from John Dillon's weak grasp, were as gentle as a woman's.

"Good God!" he said, and the sound of it was not profane. "Lay back an' take it easy, feller! I've got some grub out yonder in my pack!"

It was already nearly night when he floundered back with the pack. Muscle ache, weariness were forgotten as he hewed kindling from a dry logside of the cabin with Dillon's dull-edged ax.

He tried to keep his eyes off of that hairy, cadaverous face as the fireplace blaze rosied the room with light, but the very meat—the strong, unstarved meat—of his back seemed to feel the gaze of the starving man's sunken eyes following his every movement.

"Easy, feller," he kept saying. "Sure an' we'll get some hot tea into you in a jiffy. Easy feller."

He had never seen snow melt so stubbornly or water so slow to boil in a frying pan snugged down close in flame. But presently Deputy McGrath's arm was gently supporting the head of the man he had come to get, dead or alive, his other hand spooning hot tea into his mouth at slow, judicious intervals.

FOR four long, stormbound days and nights Deputy McGrath nursed John Dillon back from starvation. He had traveled light, and the food supply in his pack was scant enough for one man, let alone two. Two or three times Dillon raved a little in the fevered half sleep that tossed him midway between life and death—incoherencies calling upon McGrath to "go for his gun," groping for his own, taunting McGrath with half-rational bitterness to "go ahead an' shoot me." Groaning that he would not be taken alive—to hang.

At such times McGrath soothed him as best he could. But he felt a torment of troubled questioning within himself, tearing like a wolf at his vitals. "Dead or alive" . . . well, why not? Bill McGrath was young, hearty, in his prime. Big John

Dillon's scraggy beard was gray with the salt of years. He had killed a man. McGrath knew little of the murder, except that a ditch-line feud was the supposed motive, that it had been committed in a flare of Irish anger, that there had been eye-witnesses whose testimony would hang John Dillon high as a hawkroost if he took him back. If? McGrath tried to reason it out: here had been an old man, a wanted man, on the verge of death from starvation. "Dead or alive". . . . The sensible thing, of course, would have been—might still be—to let him die, take that scanty food supply and get back down out of this wilderness himself before short rations—soon no rations at all—should weaken and trap him here as well. Sheriff Warner had ordered him to take no chances. . . .

"Dillon!" He would lift the bony shoulders again, gently. "Time for another swig of soup, feller!"

On the fourth day Big John was able to get up, gaunt, ravenous for solid food. He wolfed the dry salt pork and grease gravy McGrath cooked for him like a starved dog gulps raw meat. McGrath sat by, without eating, and watched him. As he finished he grinned widely.

"God, man, that was good!" he wheezed. "First real eatin' since I took down with the tizick, might' nigh a month ago. Seem like—" the grin suddenly vanished, a bitter look claimed his eyes. "Look here! How the hell did you find me, up here, anyhow? How——"

"Don't matter how, does it, as long as I did? Feelin' better, now, ain't you?"

On the sixth day the storm broke. A cobalt sky, incomparably blue and deep, domed the white world. Dillon was able to walk pretty spryly around inside the cabin. He eyed the dwindling handful of food on the table.

"Look here, lad!" he spoke fiercely, impulsively. "I been watchin' you. You ain't eatin' hardly a bite! You take this grub, damn it, an' travel! It'll git you back to the settlements—if you ration it right!"

McGrath did not answer. He was lashing on his snowshoes. But when he climbed the drift outside the door, rifle in hand, six-gun snugly holstered at his hip, he carried no pack.

"Take it easy, feller," he said back over his shoulder, "till I get back."

The drifts were deeper, the top snow less crusted even than it had been when he came. His leg muscles no longer ached, but they seemed somehow to lack their normal strength.

It was dusk again when he floundered, sweating and exhausted, back to the cabin. His eyeballs ached from the glare of sun on snow. But there were half a dozen less cartridges in his pocket, and over his shoulder he lugged two snowshoe rabbits.

That night the two men feasted on rabbit stew, and afterwards Deputy Bill McGrath shared his scant remaining tobacco with a murderer. They sat before the fire in silence, pulling slowly on fragrant pipes.

"See lots o' rabbits?" Dillon asked it thoughtfully. He knew too well how scarce they were—and how many precious cartridges a man would waste on chance running shots to get one.

McGrath shrugged.

"I'll work out farther tomorrow, into those cliffs. Oughta be plenty there."

Dillon said nothing. He had tried those cliffs himself, without any luck. And of other game there seemed to be none at all where there had been in the fall. Driven down by the snow. Presently he cocked his spruce pole chair back, resting one hand on the rough table.

"It seems," he said, "that there was once two Irishmen, and one of them——"

With a sudden, swift movement his hand reached, grasped the butcher knife lying on the table. McGrath saw the blade of it gleam in the firelight. Then his big hand swung out, yanked it from the other's grasp, flung it into the fire.

Neither man said a word.

When Bill McGrath left again the next day to hunt rabbits, after a sweating two hours of chopping wood that Dillon car-

ried into the cabin, he left Big John Dillon securely bound to his bunk.

IT WAS the glare of the snow that did it. Running, reckless of cliff edge and chasm, to come in sight again of a rabbit he had jumped down in the rocks, Bill McGrath suddenly ceased to see. It was only for a moment, but that was long enough for the one misstep that sent him crashing over a low ledge of jagged rock.

Bruised, stunned, he got to his feet. Pain like fire gripped his right ankle, shot hotly up his leg. The foot would not hold his weight. Grimly Bill McGrath sat down and felt of leg and ankle. There was no mistaking it—the ankle was broken.

McGrath got out his knife, ripped the leather of his jacket into wide, strong strips, wet them with sun-sogged snow. The sweat of pain rolled from his face as he bound sticks from a trade-rat's cache around his ankle to stiffen it. His rifle was gone, flung by his fall on down and down over the succeeding ledges.

With a sour, unconvincing grin he saw that the one rabbit he had killed was still

there. He lashed it to his belt. Then slowly, fighting the dizziness of pain, he began to crawl around the narrow ledge. Two hours later he was floundering up a narrow, snow-packed split of rock to the cliff rim.

The sharp, snow-whitened gray of the next morning's dawn had begun to foretell the sunrise when he sighted the cabin, a hundred yards away. No use to call for help. He remembered he had left Dillon bound, lest he—but what matter all that now?

The sun was up when he crawled in through the cabin door. He still had the rabbit. He managed somehow to loosen his prisoner's bonds before he fainted.

When he came to, Big John Dillon was spooning hot broth into his mouth. The aroma of rabbit stew filled the little cabin. Wood was stacked high against the wall. Dillon's still gaunt figure bent over him, a strange gleam in his eyes. Then he saw that the man's boots were laced into the thongs of his snowshoes, his gaunt frame coated, ready for the outdoors. It dawned on him then that the man was leaving him, his prisoner was escaping.

He started to speak, then bit it back. Dillon was setting tin bucket kettles of rabbit stew in a row on the table, pulling the table over close to his bunk. On the same table lay McGrath's six-shooter, and beside it a little pile of cartridges.

Dillon was speaking now, gruffly.

"Lucky our guns was the same caliber, McGrath. I've divided the cattridges, see? An' there's most of two rabbits in them kettles. Plenty wood. Water done melted in that bucket. Take it as easy as you can, feller."

McGrath saw that what little was left of his own grub—salt, a little tea, a thin slice of sowbelly, a little sugar—lay within reach of his hand, on the table.

"You see I ain't forgettin' you saved *me* from starvin', McGrath." Big John Dillon's voice was wheezy.

Sledge hammers of pain pounded in Bill McGrath's head. His body felt stiff, moveless as a log. Somehow he forced himself up on an elbow.

"Wait, Dillon! You aren't able to——"

But already the door had closed behind Big John Dillon.

Bill McGrath struggled out of the bunk, but he could not stand.

"Luck to him, the damned Irishman!" he muttered, and crawled back into the bunk.

SNOWSHOE rabbits are sizable animals. The meat and stew of something less than two of them, carefully rationed, will keep a man alive ten days —two weeks, maybe longer with a little tea and sugar and sowbelly to help. The hard thing was harboring strength enough to keep the fire going for the chill of the nights. But sheer pain and hunger do things to a man—even a young one like McGrath.

On the tenth day he threw the six-gun and cartridges out into the sloppy, swift melting snow. He had found himself looking at them as a handy way out of pain and hunger.

It lacked a day of two weeks when Sheriff Warner and four men came. Bill McGrath heard them coming and tried to hobble to the door, but they burst in before he got there.

Sheriff Warner looked at McGrath and said "Good God! You still alive, Bill? We set out as quick as Big John brought the word, but——"

"Big John?" McGrath sank back weakly on the bunk. "You mean he—he didn't get away?"

"Seems like," said the sheriff as he held a whisky flask to his deputy's lips while one of the men began unrolling a first aid kit for Bill's swollen leg, "seems like he kinder halfways figgered on a gitaway when he pulled out from here. But he said he got to thinkin' how you'd nursed him when he was starvin', an' risked starvin' yourself to share the chuck with him, an' got yourself busted up huntin' rabbits fer the pot, an' how you yanked that butcher knife out of his hand, an' tied him up when he was figgerin' to suicide—an' even if you was the law, maybe savin' his life only to take him back an' hang, still you'd treated him thisaway when it would have been so damn easy jest to let him kick off like he deserved—well, he claimed he'd be damned if he could jest go off an' leave you up here to starve. So—how he done it, the shape he was in, I don't savvy, but he made it in to Gomez's an' sent me word frum there. But ——"

"Good God!" said Bill McGrath softly, and there was no hint of profanity in it. "Give himself up on my account! Sheriff, you can't hang a man like that! Law or no law, I'll——"

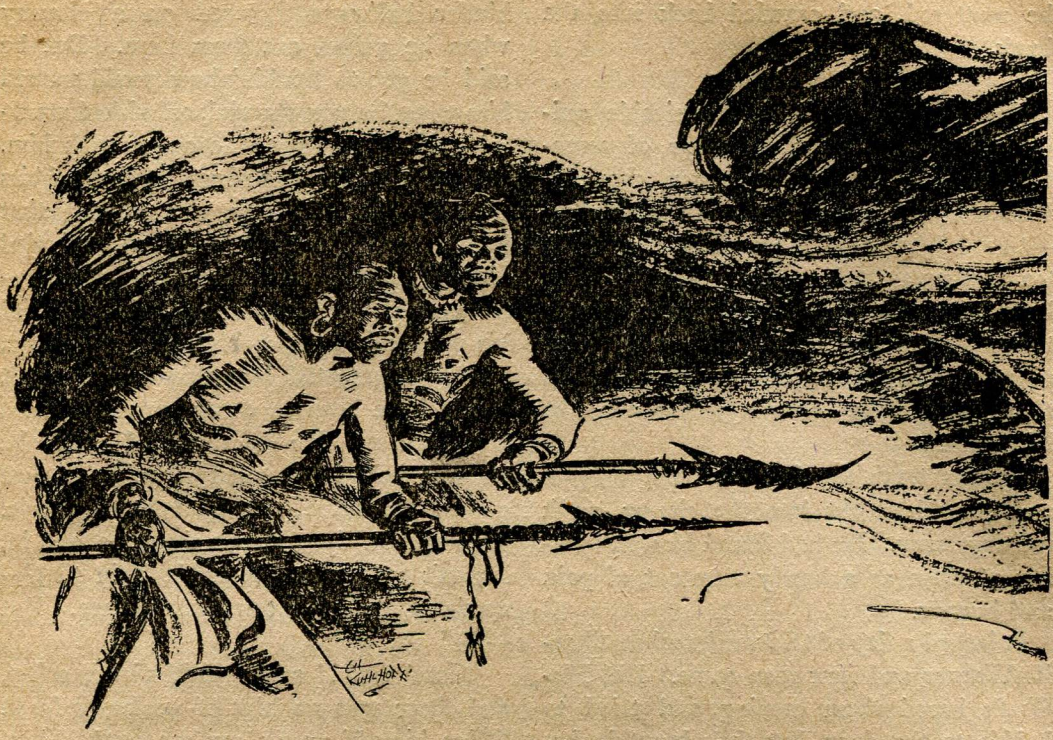
"No," broke in Sheriff Warner quietly. "I reckon we cain't. Right smart of guts to battle his way outa these mountains, the shape he was in, Bill, an' it was jest too much for him. Big John Dillon died at Gomez's right soon after we got there Tuesday mornin'. Said to tell you that it seems there was once two Irishmen—an' jest passed out then, kinder grinnin'."

CHINESE CENSUS TAKERS

Kenneth P. Wood

IN CHINA an odd way of taking the census prevails. The cities and towns are so arranged in groups that they are divided into groups of ten houses. The oldest man in each group visits the nine houses which, with his own, makes up the group, counts the members of every family, and sends his report to the Government Census Bureau.

The Major Receives a Mysterious Message and Goes out into the Fog by Night



Fog Bound

A COLD heavy fog hid from sight the gigantic rollers which break upon the rocky strip of the South African coast, just north of Durban. The fog was so thick, palpable, like a material blanket, that it muffled the roaring of the surf. It distorted the raised voices of angry men; a wild shout for help was lost amongst the plaintive cries of sea birds. The report of the revolver which followed the cry for help sounded no louder than the snapping of a twig underfoot.

And yet, though the angry voices, the cry, and the shot had seemed to be a part of the fog's mystery, the silence which ensued at their passing was uncanny and terrifyingly savage in its implications.

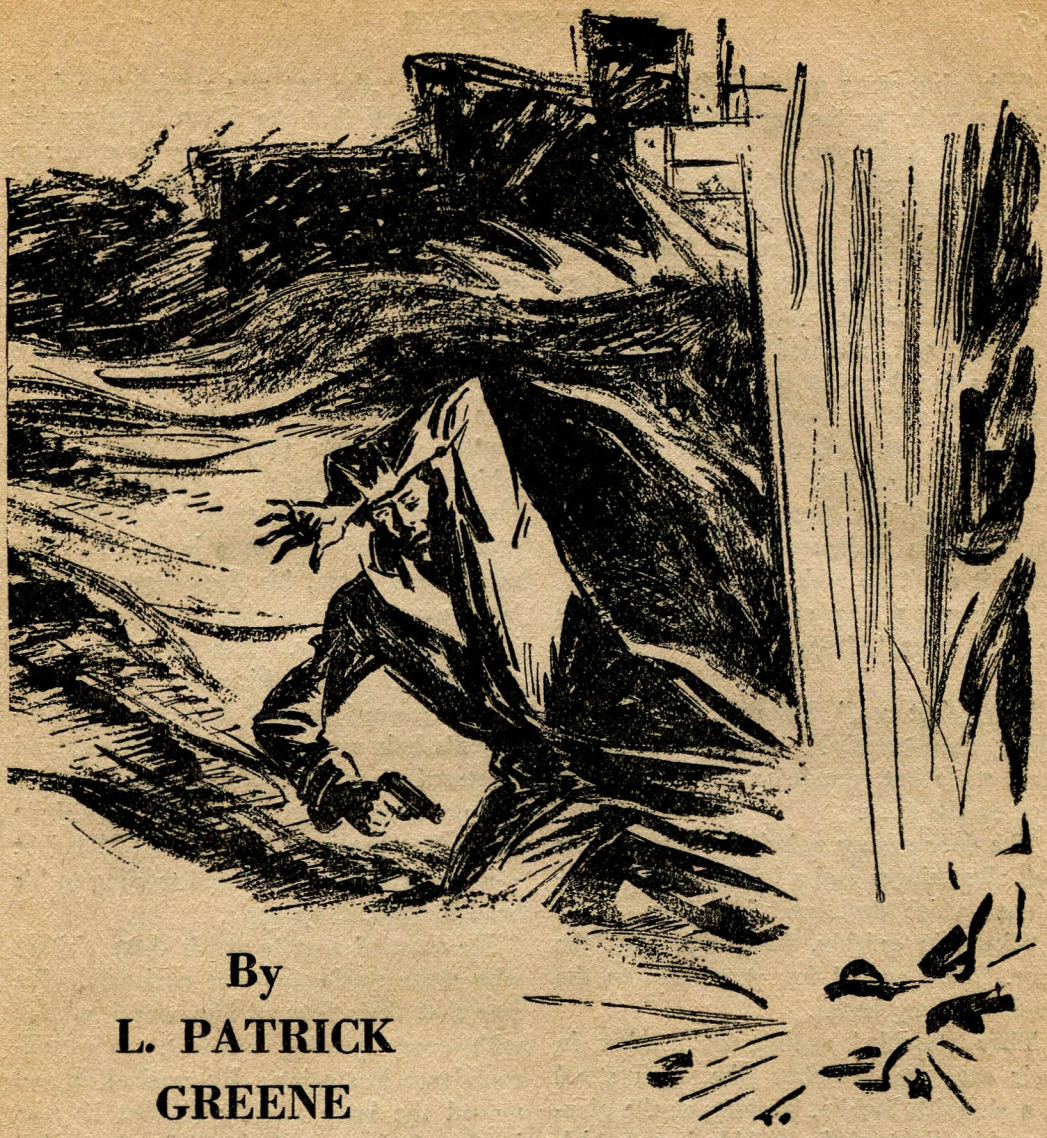
Three men came walking through the fog. They came from the headland overlooking the sea. They headed for the small native kraal which was built in a hollow protected from the winds. The huts of that kraal loomed up mysteriously before them, looking like thicker patches of the swirling yellow fog.

The three men walked in single file and in silence. Their footsteps were uncertain: they walked like blind men groping for their bearings in a strange environment.

Their approach to the kraal was announced by the savage snarling of several half-starved curs, otherwise the kraal seemed to be deserted: but the voices of men and women sounded within the huts, behind the closed doors: voices which whispered as if in fear.

One of the men laughed shortly.

"Paven plays safe," he said. "He keeps his niggers indoors when we come to call on him."



By
L. PATRICK
GREENE

Author of "Crooked Barrels," "A Major Masquerade," and Other Stories of the Major and Jim, the Hottentot

"Don't see that it matters to us, Deemper," the man behind him grumbled. "Even if these niggers did see us and recognize us—what of it? They don't dare talk. Paven's got 'em eating out of his hand. And he's got us eating out of his hand too—and I, for one, am getting fed up with the diet."

"Tell Paven that, Martin," the third man mocked in a soft, suave voice.

"I would for two pins, Hope," Martin said blusteringly. "I'm not afraid of the red-headed swine——"

"Ach sis! You talk big," Deemper said. "But talk's cheap. Paven, on the other hand, pays well for what we do. I'm content. If he likes to play he's Napoleon, Nero, and Julius Caesar rolled into one, what do we care as long as his money's good? Well, here we are. And if you're wise, Martin, you'll sing small tonight. He'll be in a temper when he hears our news."

"Chances are," Martin said glumly, "that he knows it already. He's a devil. He's got spies everywhere. He——"

"Oh, shut your mouth," Deemper said with an oath, "or the fog 'll get down your throat and choke you."

The three men halted before a hut set by itself at the far end of the stockade which surrounded the kraal. Save for the door, the hut seemed to be no better than the others. But the door was a massive affair of oak, studded with iron nails, whereas the doors of the other huts were make-shift affairs constructed of pieces of drift wood, patched with tin cans which had been beaten flat.

"That door's a give-away, in my opinion," Martin whispered. "Any fool 'ud know it don't go with a nigger's hut."

"He's got a way of disguising it when he ain't here," Hope replied. "Besides ——"

"Oh, shut up," Deemper said again. "Now then—ready?" He did not wait for a reply but sounded a coded series of raps on the door.

The door swung noiselessly open on its well-oiled hinges and a harsh, rather high-pitched voice exclaimed irritably:

"Come in quickly, fools, and shut the door. This cursed fog penetrates to the marrow of my bones."

They stumbled against each other in their eagerness to obey him, then stood in a sheepish huddle, blinking at the glaring white light of the carbide lamp which dispelled the gloom of the fog-filled night.

The interior of the hut was decorated in a manner suggesting the soft ease of the East. The walls and ceiling were draped with silk, the floor was covered with a rich, thick-piled carpet. The furnishings matched the decorations and were as incongruous, compared to the solidity of the door, as they were to the outer appearance of the hut. But the three men knew that the softness was only a veneer—as the mud walls and thatched roof were also a veneer. They knew that between the silken hangings and the mud outer walls was a wall of steel; they knew that the carpet covered a floor of cement and that the thatched roof was supported by one of sheet iron. They *knew* the hut was a miniature fort; they *guessed* that the silken hangings hid yet other things contrived by its owner to protect himself from observation or attack. But they did not give voice to their imaginings: Paven had a way of discouraging undue curiosity.

HE WAS reclining on a soft, luxurious divan, and despite the fact that he was covered with rugs he shivered constantly and his teeth chattered. The whites of his eyes were muddied by the fever which had ravaged him; his thin, hollow-cheeked face was jaundiced. His mouth was large, his lips—almost bloodless—were overlarge, his nose was broad, its nostrils flaring. His sallowness was accentuated by the thick crop of red hair which crowned his oval-shaped head. Usually his hair was parted in the center and plastered down smoothly. But now—it had not been dressed during the past three days when the fever had been at its height—it was ruffled and seemed to cling to his head in tight, crisp curls.

He scowled angrily at his three visitors who were staring at him curiously. He saw that their fear of him was lessening with every passing moment, their self-confidence increasing. He reached up and moved the lamp slightly so that he was in the shadows and the light shone full in their faces.

"Well!" he demanded sharply. "Seen me before, haven't you?"

"Yes," Martin stammered. "But never like this. I never knew you—I mean——"

He looked at his companions as if for encouragement. But their eyes were riveted on Paven, and Deemper's lips were twisted into a sneer of contempt.

"I mean," Martin stumbled to a conclusion, his flow of confidence was on the ebb, fear was once again with him, "I mean, I have never seen you when you had fever before, Mr. Paven."

"I don't often have it," Paven replied tersely. "But when I do feel I'm due for an attack, I come out here if that is pos-

sible. Old Mopo—" he indicated an age-yellowed native who squatted on his haunches against the door—"is a good doctor. His women are fine nurses. And if I talk when I'm delirious—it doesn't matter." He hesitated a moment, then added:

"Fever changes a man's apearance, doesn't it?"

Hope, the third man, a sanctimonious-looking individual dressed in clerical black, laughed softly.

"More often than not," he observed, "it strips a man of his make-believe and shows him as he really is."

Paven looked at him steadily, then said:

"If that is so, what an unpleasant sight you must be when you have fever, Hope. However, now that you have exhausted your expressions of sympathy, we will turn to matters of more importance than the state of my health. I suppose, gentlemen, that you have come to tell me that I must debit you with yet another failure?"

"Put it that way if you like, Paven," Deemper began carelessly.

"Mr. Paven," the other interrupted.

"Mister!" the big Dutchman laughed. I'll not 'mister' you any more, Paven. Why you——" He broke off suddenly, intimidated by the expression on Paven's face. He cleared his throat and continued: *"Ach sis!* This is one failure you cannot blame us with. Almighty! Are we the captains of the English ships? Are we the men who order the comings and goings of their dirty gun-boats? Is it our fault that the one patrolling out there now got suspicious of the stinking old freighter which was going to discharge part of her cargo where nosey customs men could not interfere? *Vrachtig!* You can't blame us for that."

"No," Paven said thoughtfully. "I can't blame you for that—and I don't. That is the fortune of war. But I do not think the gunboat will catch that stinking old freighter. She is much faster than she looks. Besides—her captain is clever—she will quickly lose the gunboat in this accursed fog. And even if she were caught, I do not think anything incriminating would be discovered aboard her. I have said her captain is clever—he is also the soul of discretion. No. I am not so unjust as to blame you gentlemen for the failure to land a consignment of rifles. There will be other fog-filled nights and yet other consignments. But I am curious: was it but by chance that the gunboat interrupted our plans tonight or is there a traitor amongst us?" He held up his long, slender hands, silencing their protests. "Oh, I'm not suggesting one of you gentlemen betrayed our plans—you wouldn't dare do that: even if you turned King's Evidence your crimes—of which I have ample proof—would carry a punishment of at least twenty years hard labour. And you could not face that, could you?"

He laughed as they preserved a sulky silence, then continued.

"No. I do not accuse you of treachery. But suppose it was some one of your subordinates, eh? Some one of your friends or your women folk? Some one who put an unguarded statement together with another unguarded statement and from the addition made a damaging deduction. Or perhaps it was some one who has access to your private papers, eh?"

He looked at them searchingly, apparently heedless of their fervent assurances that they had been guilty of no indiscretions of speech or of carelessness in respect of their private papers. At last he nodded. His fluttering hands once again silenced them.

"Very well," he concluded. "It was the fortune of war. But remember, gentlemen: I regard careless indiscretions as seriously as I do treachery."

AGAIN he paused and looked at Mopo as if seeking inspiration in that man's sunken eyes.

"There was a cry," he then said casually. "A little while before you came, Mopo heard a cry and a shot. I am curious about that, too."

"I was nervous in the fog," Martin said glibly. "I thought I saw some beast—so I fired at it."

"And the cry?" Paven questioned.

"Some sea-bird mewling," Hope said.

Paven laughed.

"There are strange birds in Africa," he said. "But I only know one that speaks English—and it says, 'Go-a-way.' It does not shout 'Help!' "

"You've got keen ears, Mr. Paven," Martin said desperately.

"Very keen, Martin," Paven mocked. "Keen enough to hear you call me 'a red-headed swine.' Keen enough to hear you boast that you were not afraid of me. But you are, you know. So-a! And now Hope, suppose you tell me the true story of the cry and the shot."

Hope shrugged his shoulders.

"When we were out there on the bluff a police trooper stumbled into us. He said that he had been thrown from his horse and had lost himself in the fog. His story didn't sound true and we came to the conclusion he had been spying on us."

"What if he had?" Paven asked curtly. "There was nothing for him to see, was there?"

"He saw us—and recognized us," Hope retorted.

"And so?" Paven prompted.

"And so," Hope said coolly, "we decided that he had been on his last patrol; we intended to throw him over the bluff but he suspected our intentions and tried to fight his way clear. So I shot him. That silenced his shout for help and finished him."

Paven frowned.

"Perhaps it was the only thing to do," he said slowly. "But I hope for your sakes that the trooper's death does not focus suspicion on the activities of the people of this kraal."

"Of that there is no fear, *vrachtig*," Deemper said swiftly. "Who will know how he died or, for that matter, if he is dead? We threw his body into the sea where there is a swift current to take it far out from the land. And there are sharks. . . ."

Paven nodded.

"I had not forgotten the sharks," he said in a weary voice. "And now——"

He stopped abruptly as Mopo held his hand up in a warning gesture.

"Some one comes," the old man said in the Zulu tongue. "Someone comes in great haste."

There was silence in the hut. Deemper and Hope looked at each other dubiously, their hands resting on their revolvers. Martin—he alone had not understood the native's warning—exclaimed:

"What's up?"

"Silence!" Paven ordered curtly. "Listen!"

And then they heard the sound of a man running.

"Au!" the old Zulu said. "His feet are unshod. There is nothing to fear."

"It may be a trap—" Deemper began.

"If it is," Paven interrupted, "we will take care not to walk into it."

The running footsteps came to a halt outside the hut; then the coded signal was rapped out on the door.

The tension within the hut relaxed.

"It is only one of my men," Paven said with a smile. "Open the door to him, Mopo."

The aged Zulu obeyed and a native entered. He wore the uniform of a government messenger. He saluted Paven and then, breathing heavily, stood blinking in the glare of the lamp waiting for permission to speak.

"Well?" Paven demanded sharply in the vernacular. "What brings you here at this time of night?"

"This, *inkosi*." The native took a piece of paper from his tunic pocket and handed

it to Paven. "It is a copy of a message which came today to the white *inkosi* whose servant I am."

Paven flattened out the piece of paper and read the message it contained. Then, with a convulsive gesture, he crumpled the paper up in his hands. Apart from that he gave no indication as to whether the message was disturbing or otherwise.

"You did well," he said in a flat, even voice, "to bring this to me without delay. That shall not be forgotten. You are a fool to have come here wearing the uniform of the white man's service; that shall not be forgotten, either. You have my leave to go."

"Inkosi!" the native saluted. A moment later the door closed behind him.

PAVEN looked at the three men who stood before him.

"It is nothing," he said, answering the questions they dared not put to him regarding the message he had received. "And now—the fever has left me weak—I will come to the reason I sent for you and then hasten your departure. I am pleased with the work you are doing and intend asking for authority to increase your—er—salaries."

"Ach sis!" Deemper exclaimed. "It was in my mind to ask you that. It is no easy task, let me tell you, to get men who are willing to distribute guns to niggers. Almighty! They must be *schelms* and at the same time trustworthy. They——"

"I am not interested in your troubles," Paven broke in coldly. "For what you do, you are well paid. If you fail—you will also be well paid."

"Even if you doubled my pay," Martin said desperately, "I'd still want to quit this game. I don't like it, Paven. It's rotten. All of it. Like killing that poor devil of a trooper tonight. Can't you let me go? I'll give you my word of honour I'll not betray you in any way. I——"

"Your word of honour!" Paven sneered. "You have no honour, Martin. You lost it long before you accepted the pay I offered for your services. And how can you betray me? You know so little. You can only betray yourself—and these two friends of yours. No. I can not let you go as long as you prove useful to me—and when your usefulness fails, I will, perhaps, send a wreath to be placed on your coffin. No. Your reputation is unsullied. You are respected by the good people of Durban. Your warehouses are above suspicion. But I know you better than the citizens of Durban—and you sicken me with your hypocritical whining.

"And now get out—all of you. Word will be sent to you in the usual way when I want to speak to you again. In the meantime, you'll carry on as usual."

Mopo opened the door and Martin—head bent, his face greyed by fear and hopelessness—passed out into the night. Deemper hesitated a moment, looking as if he intended to make a heated protest, thought better of it and silently followed Martin. Hope winked knowingly at Paven and turned to follow.

Paven stopped him with a gesture.

"Tell those two fools not to wait for you, Hope," he said. "There's a few things I want to discuss with you over a bottle of whiskey."

Hope grinned.

"Right, Paven," he smirked. "Won't be a minute."

He hastened after the other two, gave them Paven's message and returned to the hut.

"You'll have to watch those two," he said easily as he sat down in a chair close to the divan and poured out a liberal drink of whiskey which Mopo brought to him on a tray.

"You think so?" Paven queried.

Hope nodded.

"No doubt about it. They'd give you away tomorrow if they thought they could do it without implicating themselves."

"Then I don't have to worry," Paven said easily. "Help yourself to the whiskey."

"I was just going to have the 'other

half,'" Hope replied. "But about them two: I wouldn't trust 'em too far—specially Deemper."

"I should have thought Martin was the more uncertain of the two. He's beginning to get qualms of conscience. That's always dangerous."

"Martin's safe enough," Hope laughed contemptuously. "He's too fond of soft living to do anything that's likely to put

him behind bars. But Deemper now—he's a fool and a bully. He's apt to run amok. He'll resent taking orders from you now and——"

"I can handle Deemper," Paven said harshly.

"Well, I'm warning you," Hope said complacently. "Deemper's a Boer, and being such, he's a man of violent prejudices. You were a fool to let him see you like this. Now me, I'm broad-minded. I——"

"That's enough of that," Paven interrupted.

"All right. Have it your own way. I was only warning you for your own good." He drank again to hide a growing uneasiness. "What was it you wanted to talk to me about?"

"You are a very valuable man to me, Hope," Paven said slowly.

"You couldn't have found another man to do what I've done, Paven," Hope boasted. "Me and my niggers—we are your missionaries. We prepared the way for you. We find the places where the guns can be hidden against 'the day' you're always talking about. We find the niggers who'll guard the secret of the hiding places. We——"

"I know what you have done, there is no need to tell me. I repeat: you have been a very valuable man. I shall be sorry to lose you."

"What do you mean?" Hope stammered, the blood draining from his flabby face, leaving it an unhealthy, pasty colour.

Paven deliberately smoothed the paper the messenger had brought him and handed it to Hope, who read:

"ARREST HOPE. HOLD UNTIL I COME." It was signed "THE MAJOR."

"God!" Hope exclaimed in a fear-filled voice. "Does that mean *the* Major? The monocled dude? The——"

"I'm afraid so," Paven replied gravely.

"But—but last time I saw you you said he was dead. You said he had been captured and shot by some Boers who mistook him for one of your men. You said——"

"What I told you was reported to me by a man I trusted. It appears that he was mistaken. He will be dealt with in good time." He added almost wistfully, "And yet, perhaps I should not be too hard on him. He was tricked by the Major. And the Major is very clever. He has made fools of so many men, hasn't he. He looks such a guileless fool that men who should know better have underrated him. I myself have made that mistake in that I have trusted underlings to deal with him."

"But you don't *know* this Major—the one who sent this telegram—is *the* Major," Hope said desperately. "It can't be. That one's dead, shot like you said. This one—hell! He's probably a Major in the Mounted Police."

"He'd hardly sign himself 'the Major' if that were so," Paven pointed out. "And even if that were true, the message still demands your arrest. And what should an unknown Major of the police know about you to warrant the sending of this telegram. What major of the police would dare to send this message to a man—a man who *gives* orders to mere majors—ordering him to hold you until he arrives on the scene. Besides, I don't think you have noticed that the telegram was sent from a

station in Basutuland. What is more, that station is the nearest one to the mission where your native teacher, Peter, has recently gone to work. No. I'm afraid it's *the* Major. What's more, I'm afraid that he has succeeded in obtaining information which implicates you in this matter of gun-running."

Hope nervously licked his flaccid lips.

"He can't prove anything against me," he said.

"He might," Paven retorted. "But of still greater importance is this: once they had you under arrest they would, I think, have no difficulty in persuading you to talk."

"Not they," Hope boasted, but there was no real conviction in his voice. He added swiftly, "But they haven't arrested me, yet. I can hide somewhere where they'll never find me. You can help me there, can't you, Paven?"

"Of course. You have been very useful to me and I shall be sorry to lose your services. But, obviously, I can't permit you to be arrested."

"That's all right then," Hope said with a sigh of relief. "Here's looking at you."

HE DRANK again, and then for a little while they talked of the plot to supply firearms to all the natives of South Africa. And when Paven spoke of the rebellion which would follow the successful conclusion of the work he directed, aided by degenerate white men who betrayed their color for gold, a note of exultation strengthened his voice, a gleam of fanatical fervor lighted his eyes.

Presently Hope swayed in his chair like a man who is overcome by the desire for sleep. The light seemed to have dimmed and Paven's voice came to him as if from a great distance. He tried to pull himself together but could not shake off the lethargy which possessed him. A moment's consciousness of what was happening was given him.

"You swine!" he screamed. "You've poisoned me. You——"

His hand groped for his revolver, but before his fingers could close on the butt he slipped sideways from his chair to the ground.

Mopo, chuckling softly, came forward and bent over him.

"It is finished," he said. "He will not talk."

"And he would have, Mopo," Paven said in a dreary voice. "In the hope of lessening his own punishment, he would have told the little he knows. But"—he sighed—"this is a bloody path I tread."

"My grandsire, Chaka, trod that same path," Mopo said, "and so made the Zulu people a strong nation. *Wu!* None could stand before us. The tread of our *impis* shook the earth. The warriors were men amongst men. And then the white men came—that was the beginning of the end. But it was not the white men who defeated us. Man for man, we were stronger than they. But it was their weapons which destroyed us. *Au-a!* One man, a weak, puling white man, armed with the sticks whose voice was thunder and death, could end the lives of many warriors before the *impis* could get at him with their assegais. And when we were beaten, the white men made us their slaves. They forced us to work beneath the ground, digging for gold. They practised all manner of indignities upon us, taking away our laws which bred men and giving us the soft laws of a woman. And in that way they conquered us yet again. *Wu!* Their second victory was a more bloody one than that of the battlefields.

"Au-a! Truly! Yours is a bloody path. But along it you must tread in order to lift a people from slavery. You must not fall by the way."

"Nor will not, Mopo," Paven exclaimed. "And now—make arrangements for the disposal of this carrion. The sea waits. The tide runs out. And there are sharks! Take him, that he may keep an assignation with the man he killed. Have this done quickly, for I must sleep. Tomorrow I leave this place."

"No," Mopo protested. "The fever weakness is still with you."

"In the morning I leave," Paven said flatly. "See that I am awakened before the sun paints the eastern sky. I go to plant my feet firmly in the path I have to follow. I go to remove the thorns which would trip me up. I go to fill in the pitfalls which would embog me. Now pay heed while I tell you the things you must do when I have gone. . . ."

PAVEN arose at the hour of sunrise the following morning. The fog was still heavy and the sun's rising did little to dispel the fog's cold gloom; moisture dripped from the eaves of the huts, pitpatting with a monotonous regularity, like the beating of a man's heart, upon the red earth beneath.

After he had eaten the frugal meal brought to him by one of Mopo's granddaughters—and she conducted herself before him as if she were in the presence of a great chief—Mopo and four age-withered old crones came into the hut. The women carried calabashes containing pungent smelling liquids. They giggled in a senile way when Paven jested with them, calling them his beautiful handmaidens. But when Mopo, eying them contemptuously, gave them a curt order they obeyed him promptly and squatted in a meek silence upon the floor of the hut.

"And are you still of the same mind?" Mopo asked. "Is it still your will to leave this place today?"

Paven nodded.

"The fever has quite gone," he said. "In a little while my strength will have returned to me." And to the women, he said, "Come, sisters. It is time for you to work your arts upon me."

Giggling, exchanging ribald jests which by reason of the jesters' age were strangely innocent, the women stripped him and painted him carefully from head to foot with the liquid from one of the calabashes. This they did under Mopo's careful direction and when he had expressed his satisfaction they rubbed the contents of a second calabash into Paven's body. It was an oily lotion which counteracted the dryness of the first application.

That done, they shampooed his head then dyed it—scalp and hair—with the contents of a third calabash; it was a dye which dried very quickly, and three applications were necessary before Mopo signified his approval with a grunt.

"That is all, beautiful maidens," Paven said wryly as he examined himself in a hand mirror. "You have my leave to go."

"And remember," Mopo added as he opened the door for them, "to keep knowledge of what you have done shut tight in your hearts. Forget, and death will come to you slowly and very painfully."

"Au-a!" one of the women answered scornfully. "You are in some things a fool, Wise One. What need to threaten us? The path this one treads is also our path. Think you then that we would strew it with the thorns of carelessly spoken words?"

After the women had gone Paven dressed himself in clothes which he took from a tin uniform trunk, greased and brushed his hair, parting it carefully in the centre, then turned slowly around for Mopo's final inspection.

"It is well done," that man said slowly. "And now where do you go?"

"To Durban first. After that I do not know. I——"

"The voice is wrong," Mopo interrupted quickly. "It does not belong to the man you are."

"What matter?" Paven demanded irritably. "We are alone. There is no need to play the part——"

"There is need," Mopo interrupted again. "Forget now, when it seems to be a matter of little importance and you will forget, may be, when to forget means death."

Paven shrugged his shoulders.

"I go, Mopo," he said, and now his voice was that of a Cape Boy, "to Durban. After that I do not know. If luck is with

me I will enter the service of the white man called 'the Major.' "

"He is a dangerous man," Mopo warned gravely. "He is dangerous because he knows us and because he is in all things strong and just. *Wo-we!* If all white men were as he, I do not think I would now be risking the death which comes to those who plot against the white man's rule."

"You say he is just," Paven said bitterly, "and yet he works against us."

"Perhaps he sees further than we do," Mopo replied sadly. "Or perhaps his duty to his color blinds him in this matter. I do not know. But he is a man. He is wise. He is dangerous. Walk softly when you deal with him or you will find him a thorn in your foot that will lame you so that you cannot walk."

"I go to destroy that thorn, Mopo," Paven said confidently.

"Be advised," Mopo urged. "There is only one way to deal with such a man. Kill him! Yes. And kill, too, the Hottentot who is his shadow and his shield."

"What I will do I cannot say. But when the time comes, I will act. Now let me

go quickly. But first—what was done with the body of the white man who died here last night?"

Mopo brushed the palms of his hands lightly together.

"The killers of the sea have by this time feasted on it. And the spoor of the men who came here yesterday, as well as the spoor of the man they killed, has been hidden."

"Good," Paven commended. "And now I go."

The two men left the hut. They closed the door and before it affixed a false door which was as ramshackle a contrivance as any which closed the other huts. This they secured with a rusty chain and a cheap padlock.

"Have no fear," Mopo said as Paven thoughtfully inspected the hut. "The *nonquai* never come to this kraal. Or, if they come, they stay but a little while. They are fools. They believe what they see —or think they see."

"True," Paven agreed. "Nor would it matter very much if they did discover what the hut hides.

"And now—remain at peace!"

"Aye." Mopo raised his right hand in salutation. *"Hamba gaghle, inkosi."*

Paven turned on his heel and with a mincing tread left the kraal, heading for Durban.

A youth, peering through a crack in the wall of his father's hut, watched his departure and wondered—but he spoke to no one of his wondering. He knew that the one he saw was the red-headed, soberly dressed man who had come to the kraal, sick with fever, several days previously. He knew that. Yet he wondered if his eyes betrayed him for the man who now departed wore a too-small bowler hat perched precariously on his crisp, jet black hair; his skin was an almost muddy yellow color. His ill-fitting clothes were gaudy and his lemon-colored shoes had long, pointed toes.

The lips of the spying youth curled with the contempt which—in Africa—a pure-bred white or black has for the "breed!"

IT IS as true of high government officials as it is of big business executives: many seek an audience with them on matters which they—the seekers—regard of great importance but which, in the majority of cases, prove to be time wasting and beyond the province of the man they seek to interview. In attempt to reduce this strain on their time, big business men and government officials—especially govern-

ment officials—are guarded by a host of secretaries whose business it is to sidetrack the time wasters and to permit only those who have genuine business to transact to filter through their guard to the office of their chief.

Especially was this true in the case of Sir Percival Vrayne, who was not only a big business executive but a government official as well.

If the citizens of Durban were to be believed, it was harder to get an interview with Sir Percival than it was to enter the Kingdom of Heaven; for whereas the gates of the greatly-to-be-desired state were guarded by only one St. Peter, Sir Percival's private office was guarded by a cohort of St. Peters in the shape of Commissionaires, reception clerks, under-secretaries, secretaries, and the like.

Consequently, the arrival at the outer portals of a monocled dude, who looked as if he were incapable of carrying a thought in his head beyond the cut of his clothes, created no disturbance in the minds of Sir Percy's watch-dogs. A commissionaire ushered him into a luxurious waiting room and winked at the reception clerk.

"Gent want to see Sir Percy, Miss," he said. "Says it's on urgent business—something to do with a compass."

"What is your name, please?" the receptionist asked.

"Major, dear old miss. Aubrey St. John Major," the caller drawled. "And I am in a most frightful hurry."

The receptionist smiled at him. Now there is this to be said about that smile: it commenced as a smile of derision, it concluded as a smile of friendly admiration. The receptionist had keen eyes and, perhaps, more than her share of intelligence. The monocle did not entirely mask to her the light in the dude's eyes. She liked the firm set of his chin and envied his white, even teeth. His sun-tanned hands were strong and capable. "He must be frightfully strong," she thought.

"If you will take a seat," she said quickly, embarrassed by a sudden consciousness that she had been staring at him somewhat fixedly, "I will see if Sir Percy is in. But I am afraid——" And for once her conventional expression of regret was sincere.

"Oh, the old boy's in," the Major said lightly. "And he'll see me. Just tell him that 'the Major's here'—and don't forget to say '*the* Major'—and he'll rush out to greet me like a long lost brother. I mean, he'll act as if I were a long lost brother. 'Pon my word, yes. He'll probably kill the fatted calf an' all that."

The girl smiled.

"I'm afraid I can't picture Sir Percy acting like that." She became very efficient as she continued. "And your business? Something about a compass?"

"Just that. It's about a *gold* compass, tell him."

She juggled with the keys of her switchboard, spoke into the mouthpiece then once again asked the Major to take a seat, adding,

"Mr. Moll will be out to see you in a moment."

"But I don't want to see Mr.—er—Moll," the Major protested. "I want to see Sir Percival——"

"I am afraid that is impossible. Sir Percival is in conference."

The Major turned toward the speaker who had just entered. He was a pompous little man, with an irritating air of superiority.

"I have come from Basutuland," the Major said quietly, "in order to see Sir Percival."

"Have you an appointment?"

"By Jove—no. I never thought——"

"No," the other interrupted sarcastically. "People never do. Every Tom, Dick, and Harry comes here demanding to see Sir Percy and waste our time——"

"But I am not Tom, Dick, *or* Harry," the Major interrupted blandly. "So now if you will show me to——"

"It is impossible," Moll said irritably. "And what is this urgent business you wish

to discuss? Something about a compass, I believe."

"Yes—a gold compass."

Moll smiled contemptuously.

"I am afraid," he said, "that your long journey—you have come from Basutuland, you say?—has been wasted. Sir Percival is not in need of a compass—gold or otherwise. That's all, I think, Mr. Major. Good morning."

"Really," the Major drawled, "you tempt me to profanity and that, under the circumstances,"—he bowed to the girl—"would be very disgraceful. Quite. And so——"

THE next moment he had picked Moll up and held him easily with one hand, while with the other he stifled the struggling man's attempts to shout for help.

"Poisonous little blighter, isn't he?" the Major said lightly to the girl, who was wondering whether she ought to call for aid or give way to a paroxysm of mirth. "I'm sorry," the Major continued, "but it's quite all right. Give you my word. Sir Percy would be no end annoyed if he knew I had been kept waiting on his jolly old threshold. Mr. Moll, here, realises that and so he is going to escort me into the dear old knight's presence."

As he spoke he passed through the door way leading to the suite of offices.

"I believe he will succeed in seeing Mr. Percy," the girl mused. "I hope he sells him a lot of compasses, too. . . . I wonder if his eyes are grey or blue. They looked as blue and as innocent as a baby's at first, but they seemed to change when he talked to Mr. Moll."

And then remembering her duty, she called the commissionaire and sent him in pursuit of the Major. But by that time that man had come to a door on which was enscribed the legend:

SIR PERCIVAL VRAYNE
PRIVATE

Here the Major set Moll on his feet, thanked him gravely for his courtesy, and quickly entered the room, closing the door behind him.

The two men who were seated about a mahogany table looked up in surprise as he entered.

"Major!"

The two men spoke as one and there was no questioning the warmth of their greeting. Before they could say anything further the door burst open, admitting Moll and the Commissionaire.

"What's the meaning of this intrusion, Moll?" the man at the head of the table demanded angrily. He was an elderly, grey-haired man.

"I'm sorry, Sir Percy," Moll stammered, "but this mad man forced his way——"

"I am in conference with this—er—mad man," Sir Percy interrupted. "See that we are not disturbed again." As the bewildered secretary and the Commissionaire hastily retired, Sir Percy continued: "You've arrived just in time, Major. Grayson, of course you know our estimable C. O. of police?"

"I have that pleasure," the Major murmured. "He has often sought my company in the past, but I'm afraid I have not been quite so eager to meet him."

"Quite, quite!" Sir Percy exclaimed and he cleared his throat with a raucous cough. "However that's all in the past and now you and he are on the same side, what?"

The Major winked at Grayson.

"Good old team-mate," he said. "Play up the school—and all that." Then, taking a seat at the table, he said seriously,

"I may be upsetting the order of things to be discussed, but this seems to me of vital importance: you have, I hope,—er—Hope safely under lock and key?"

Grayson sighed heavily.

"We were just about to discuss Hope's strange disappearance."

"'Pon my sacred aunt," the Major exclaimed angrily. "Don't tell me that you police Johnnies have let the oily blighter slip through your fingers?"

"I'm afraid that *is* the case," Colonel Grayson admitted. "And yet—I don't be-

lieve that is the explanation of his disappearance. I mean, he couldn't have known we were looking for him. Of course we've always suspected him of indictable offences but we've never had any proof to justify his arrest—and he's known that. He's a very smooth customer. Well, Sir Percival received your message Tuesday evening—that's three days ago. He got in touch with me at once and I promised I'd have Hope under lock and key within twenty four hours. As a matter of fact, I confidently anticipated that I'd have him safe in a cell before midnight."

"Hope was in Durban, then, at the time?" the Major asked.

"Yes. He has been here some time, spending money like a millionaire. I actually spoke to him that morning at the

Royal Hotel. He invited me to split a bottle of champagne with him. Well, as soon as I heard from Sir Percy that you wanted Hope arrested I sent out two of my best plain clothes men to pick up the swipe. They made the round of his usual haunts without success; they were unable to get any trace of him or his movements since noon—shortly after I had seen him, in fact. They went to his hotel—he lives in style; has a suite at the Grand—and he wasn't there and hasn't been there since."

THE Major whistled softly.

"It almost looks," he said, "as if Mr. Hope was—er—tipped off, doesn't it?"

"But that's impossible, Major," Sir Percy snorted indignantly. "There is no traitor in *my* office."

"Or in mine," Colonel Grayson added. "But as I've already hinted, I don't think that Hope disappeared because he had got word we were after him."

"And how do you arrive at that masterly conclusion?" the Major asked ironically. "Hope's vanished, hasn't he?"

"Yes," Grayson admitted thoughtfully. "But there's nothing about his rooms to suggest hasty flight. His trunks are there. The wardrobes are full of clothes. In one drawer we found quite a large sum of money and—"Grayson made a wry face—"a bundle of 'love' letters. And finally, the hotel manager informed me that he is keeping a 'parcel' of jewels for Hope in the hotel safe."

Again the Major whistled; his face was very grave.

"By jove," he said. "I'm beginning to think you're right, Grayson. Hope hasn't skipped. And yet—he's skipped us."

"You talk in riddles, Major," Sir Percy began testily, "and I am a plain man——"

"Oh, come now," the Major bantered. "Hardly that. My word, no. You're too modest. But seriously. I think this is what Grayson suspects:

"Someone knew Hope was wanted and knew *why* he was wanted. And that someone, fearing that Hope would talk, took great pains to see that he would never talk again. Is that it, Grayson?"

Colonel Grayson nodded.

"That's what I suspect—but, of course, I have no proof."

"You mean," Sir Percival exclaimed wonderingly, "that he has been murdered?"

The two men nodded.

"Oh—but that's monstrous, Grayson. Do you mean to tell me that a man has been murdered and that you have no idea as to the identity of the murderer."

"I doubt if it would help us much if he had," the Major said. "But 'pon my soul—this is a blow in the eye and a slap in the face."

"Just what did you expect to find out from Hope?" Grayson asked.

"A very pertinent question," Sir Percival applauded.

The Major shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know. Perhaps nothing. Perhaps something that would have given us a little ray of hope. But any light at all on this business would be like a searchlight compared to the darkness I've been working in. As you know, I have been taking it for granted that there is a plot to arm the natives and that the plotters have had a great many successes. I've had the amazin' good luck to be able to—er—side track one or two shipments of rifles and I've also managed to put the wind up the jolly old natives here and there to such an extent that they won't listen next time a chappy goes to them preaching the downfall of the white man. But, as a matter of fact, that wasn't exactly what I was after. Stopping isolated cases of gun-running is down your—er—street, Grayson, and it is not my intention to spend the rest of my life running over Africa in chasing that will-o'-the wisp. No. What I'm after is to get a line which will lead me to where the poisonous blighters breed. I wanted a line that would take me to the men who are immediately behind the gun-runners and so, through them, to the leaders of the organization.

"Well, a native teacher at a mission up in Basutuland overstepped his instructions. He was supposed to prepare the people of the district, organize their headmen and find a safe-hiding place for a shipment of rifles. Fortunately for us, he was a born orator, and the people, fired by a speech he made—and it *was* a grand piece of work; I heard it!—thought the day of rebellion he spoke of was on the very immediate morrow. The poor fools came out in rebellion and, give you my word, there was all the makings of a very nasty mess. However, Jim did some magic work with dynamite, a white trader made a splendid cross country run for help, and two Zulu women—mother and daughter—believing that they were indebted to me for something they fancied I'd done years previously, played their part. The old woman got in the way of a knife meant for me. Anyway, as a result of all this the people listened while I spoke to them—an' that was the end of the rebellion. That was the end, also, of the native teacher. But before he died, he confessed that Hope was the man back of his activities.

"Now you see why I wanted Hope arrested. I meant to make him tell me who *his* paymaster was. Instead—dash it all!—we're as much in the dark as ever."

He turned swiftly on Sir Percy. "Who saw my telegram to you except yourself?"

SIR PERCIVAL'S hands fluttered in a helpless gesture.

"It went through the usual channels," he said. "I mean, it wasn't in code. Practically every one on my staff may have known about it. Why do you ask? You don't suspect any one of my people, surely?"

"We're fighting a clever and wealthy organization," the Major said wearily. "I'm beginning to suspect everybody."

"At least, we're making some progress, Major," Colonel Grayson said briskly. "We've been wondering what Hope's new game was. He has posed in the past as the head of a Missionary Society and collected money to support it from the gullible rich. We were never able to do anything about it because he was careful to keep within the law. He did run a mission, of sorts, for the purpose of training selected natives in the tenets of the peculiar creed he affected. Well now, we know most of the natives who passed through his mission school and, as the chances are they're all following the same course as this man you've just told us about, I'll have 'em rounded up and put where they can't do any more harm."

"Good idea," the Major agreed. "And you'd better have the districts in which they've been working heavily patrolled. Yes. Things are looking a little brighter. And here's another thing. Bally glad I thought of this. With whom has Hope been associating?"

Grayson laughed wryly.

"Nothing to go on there, Major. Hope's *slim*—or was *slim*. He carefully avoided the criminal element of Durban and made a point of being seen only in the company of our highly respected—and respectable—citizens."

"And of these—were there some who were more friendly with Hope than others?"

"Yes," Grayson said after a moment's thoughtful consideration. "That is so. There were two men he specially seemed to favor with his company—Deemper and Martin."

"And their business?"

"Deemper owns a string of kaffir stores. A successful man in his way. He's a typical *slim* Boer. His business methods, though legal, are not always strictly ethical. He's a big chap, really unlettered, and a bit of a bully."

"Thanks. That's a splendid word picture. He sounds worth investigating. An' this other chappy—what's his name?"

"Martin? He's an importer in a big way. Specializes in mining and agricultural machinery. Owns several large warehouses. He's a quiet, unassuming chap. I've often wondered what he could have in common with Deemper and Hope."

"That's something you must find out," the Major said quietly.

"But Major," Sir Percy said, "I know Mr. Martin very well indeed. He's a member of my club. He—he—why, damn it, man, you can't class Martin with Deemper and Hope. He's a horse of quite a different color."

"Perhaps you're right, Sir Percy," the Major said. "On the other hand, Grayson says that Martin was often in the company of those two gentlemen—and evil companions corrupt good manners and birds of a feather, an' all that, you know."

"Consequently, I want Deemper and Martin very carefully investigated and watched——"

"Preposterous!" Sir Percival snapped. "Might as well investigate me as Martin——"

"Quite!" the Major murmured. "We might then discover if there *is* a leak in your office."

Sir Percival went purple with wrath but before he could give vent to his ire the Major asked:

"Know anything discreditable in Martin's past, Grayson?"

"He sailed very close to bankruptcy a few years back. And I happen to know that had he failed he would also have had to face a charge of misappropriation of funds. However, he weathered the storm. Some one came to his rescue with a big loan, and he's prospered ever since."

"It would be interesting to discover the identity of his friend in need," the Major drawled.

"By gad! You'll have me feeling guilty next," Sir Percival said.

Just then the telephone rang. It was for Grayson. His part of the ensuing telephonic conversation was confined to inarticulate grunts. At last he hung up and turned gravely to the Major.

"That was a call from my office," he said. "What I have just learned may have a bearing on this other problem. I don't know. Four days ago Trooper Crawford—a smart, ambitious youngster—reported that he believed he had a line on a smuggling scheme——"

"Smuggling what?" the Major interrupted sharply.

"That I don't know. I don't think Crawford knew either. He admitted that his deductions were based on fantastically slender clues. Anyway, I had faith in the youngster and when he asked permission to be relieved of routine duty in order to carry on with his investigations, I consented.

"His riderless horse was found next day on the commonage just beyond the town. His body, terribly mutilated—there are sharks in these waters—was found washed up on the beach a few miles north of here a few hours ago. The police surgeon estimates that the body had been in the sea several days and the wonder is that the

sharks left anything of him—but they are chancey feeders, luckily for us, if there is any luck in this beastly business. The surgeon also reports that Crawford was killed by a revolver bullet before he fell, or was thrown, into the sea."

AND you think Hope's disappearance and Crawford's murder are connected in some way?" Sir Percival asked.

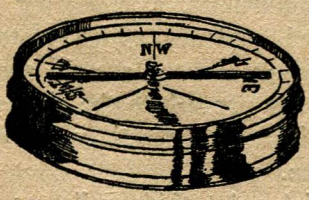
"It's more than possible," the Major said quietly. "Oh, dash it! I know I'm being wise after the event, but why, Grayson, didn't you insist on Crawford giving you a full report of what and who he suspected?" He drew a deep breath. "Oh, well. You didn't. So now for your orders."

"My orders!" Grayson echoed.

"My orders, to be exact," the Major amended. "My orders to you."

"But really," Grayson began, with just a touch of offended dignity in his voice.

"Yes, but really," the Major retorted. "You will have Deemper and Martin—'specially Martin—thoroughly investigated, but in a way that will not give them cause for suspicion. I want a constant watch kept on them. And whatever your men learn they are to take no action until I have been consulted. In regard to Crawford's murder, you will do nothing. In



fact, I want you to suppress the news that he was murdered. Call it accidental death. Better still—post him as a deserter."

"A brave man deserves something better than that," Grayson objected. "Besides ——"

"He will not have died in vain," the Major interrupted, "if through his death I can get on the track of the men I want. We can give him full justice when this affair is finished. If possible, I'll send a messenger to you at intervals to get your reports and to give you further orders. 'Compass' will be my messenger's password. It all sounds frightfully dramatic, doesn't it? As for you—" he turned to Sir Percy—"I have a much harder task for you. You will do nothing and say nothing. You must not, by word or deed, by letter or telephone, show any interest in this business. You must not hold any communication with Grayson—in fact, as far as you are concerned, the problem which confronts us does not exist." He smiled. "I hope I have not asked the impossible?"

Apparently he had, for both men began to expostulate very heatedly, Grayson objecting to having a civilian—and one withal whose activities in the past had given the police no little anxiety—tell him how to run his department, and Sir Percival pompously refusing to be muffled. He considered, he said, the Major's order a personal insult.

The Major listened to them for a little while and then he took a small gold compass from his pocket and placed it on the table.

"Bow, gentlemen," he said in the silence which followed. "This charm was given to me by Jacobs, in the presence of three other men, equally well known to you, as a sign that I was the head of the unofficial secret service they had formed to combat this menace to the country. They put their resources of wealth and men at my disposal, assuring me that my orders would be obeyed unquestioningly by all the members of that service. Up to now I have found that they did not exaggerate. A little Jew trader, who called himself a coward, faced death like a hero in order that my work could go on. Young backveldt Boers, a grey-haired woman, and a *pukka sahib*—'thank-God-I-am-British' type of man—have done incredible things at my request. It remains for you two—from whom I had reason to expect co-operation—to raise futile objections because what I ask seems to touch your pride."

The two men fidgeted uneasily.

"But perhaps," the Major continued remorselessly, "I have made a mistake. Perhaps you are not members of the service. There is a pass word which goes with the compass and because I am so bally embarrassed when I use it I neglected to do so when I first came in here. I mean—it is so frightfully cheap novelish, 'penny plain and tuppence colored' an' all that. Still—

" 'A man should never be lost if he carries a compass.' "

As one man Sir Percy and Grayson replied:

"That's true. The needle will always show him the way home!"

And they solemnly produced compasses similar to the Major's save that they were of silver.

The Major laughed softly.

"Bally silly, isn't it? But—well gentlemen?"

They hastily assured him of their cooperation and apologized for having raised objections to his orders.

He sighed with relief.

"Then I'll be on my way—don't know where it'll land me. But obviously things are happening hereabouts. As a sop to your injured dignity, Sir Percy, it is not that I underestimate the value of your services but that I am afraid there *is* a leak in your office. And we haven't time to search for it. It is easier to have nothing to leak.

"S'long."

The door closed behind him and, it seemed, his wits and seriousness of purpose; for when he stopped to exchange a few bantering sentences with the reception clerk he was once again the brainless-looking dude; so much so, indeed, that she was conscious of a feeling of disappointment.

THE progress of the Major from Sir Percy's office building to the hotel where he had reserved rooms was a proof of his wide range of acquaintances and his unquestioned popularity. And this was all the more remarkable by reason of the fact that he seldom honored the big towns of South Africa with his presence. Still, his past exploits, the Puckish tricks he had played upon the police forces of the country, and the part he had so often played in defending the under dog had become part, almost, of South Africa's folk lore and were as well known as was his picture which had so frequently appeared under the ominous heading "WANTED" on police circulars.

Rickshaw boys jumped up and down in genuine excitement at the sight of him—they knew his worth even better than the white inhabitants of Durban did. A Chinese laundryman bowed almost to the ground before him. Men and women, rich and poor, those in authority and bedraggled down-and-outs all paid him their measure of homage.

His poise was excellent during the ordeal of his walk to the hotel. And it was an ordeal. He had spent so much of his life in South Africa's vast solitudes that he was inwardly bewildered by the noise and confusion. Besides, he was genuinely modest and diffident about his achievements. But the expression of his smooth shaven face did not change and his monocle helped to conceal his embarrassment as he acknowledged—by a salute, a wave of the hand, a doffed sun-helmet, a disarming smile, a low-voiced sentence which matched the laundryman's flowery speech, and a particularly apt proverb to the rickshaw boys—the diversified greetings which were given him.

The high point of his walk was, perhaps, at its end when the policeman on duty outside his hotel held up the traffic and, beaming happily, stood at the salute while the Major crossed the street.

Jim, the Hottentot, awaited his Baas in the drawing room of the hotel suite.

"Wo-we, Baas!" he exclaimed. "A little while ago we were *voetgangers*—men so poor that we had to go on foot instead of riding. And now!" He looked wonderingly about the well-appointed

room. "Do all white men live in huts like this?"

"You know they do not, Jim," the Major said briefly.

He looked keenly at the Hottentot who was dressed in a white suit which was the livery Jim adopted when serving his Baas in the *dorps*. But though the suit was of good material and well-fitting, it did not make Jim look smart or, for the matter of that, like the typical native 'house-servant.' There was too much of the savage in Jim for him to be changed by the simple act of donning the clothes of civilization. His ugly, yellow-skinned and wound-scarred face looked incongruous above his white tunic coat, and nothing could disguise the strength of his tremendous chest and of his abnormally long arms. His naked feet were enormous and almost as useful to him as an extra pair of hands.

"Is it well, Baas?" he asked.

The Major sighed and dropped down wearily in a chair.

"No, Jim," he said. "All we have done has to be done again. The man we wanted has gone—perhaps he is dead."

The Hottentot *clicked* sympathetically. Then he said with a grin:

"So we leave the *dorp*, Baas? I am content. *Au!* I do not like this place. Here live too many men who call me 'dog' and mean it. Here too lives one who called me 'friend'—and did not mean it."

"So, Jim?" the Major questioned.

"He was a strange man, Baas. Neither white nor black. A Cape Boy. *Au!* And he had much money—more than a Cape Boy should have. He came to me when I was in the quarters where the servants of this house live. Many of the 'boys' knew him. And—" Jim scratched his head thoughtfully—"I thought at first that I knew him too. Truly, there was much about him that seemed to belong to a man I once knew or, at least, had seen in some other place. But I could not be sure. He said he knew me, Baas, and so I pretended to know him. In our memories we lived again the places we had been and tasted—also in our memories—the beer which we had drunk in those places."

Jim shook with silent laughter.

"Such talk made me thirsty, Baas," he continued, "for we spoke of places I had never been and of beer which I had never drunk. So we went to a place where they sell drink and this friend of mine—he said his name was Fritz Ness—tried to make me drunk. But I remembered my Baas would want me to help him unpack so I came away. Fritz Ness gave me this to give you. He said it was given to him by a stranger white man to give to you."

JIM took an envelope from his pocket and gave it to the Major who, opening it, found that it contained a single sheet of note paper on which was printed in childish capitals:

"MAJOR:

YOU'RE IN DANGER. DON'T PLAY THE NOSEY PARKER IN THIS *DORP*. IT AIN'T SAFE. IF YOU'RE WISE YOU'LL LEAVE BEFORE YOU GET WHAT OTHER NOSEY PARKER'S GOT.

A FRIEND."

"'Pon my word, Jim," the Major drawled in English, "I think you're right. A friend who isn't a friend.

"Well, do I act on the warning or not? Definitely not, I think. Do I ignore it and its sender completely? Ah! There's the rub—eh, what, Jim?"

"Yah, Baas," Jim replied promptly, though he had understood but one word in four of the Major's query.

"Trust you to give the right advice, Jim," the Major continued. "And you are right. You always are—or nearly always." He read the warning message again. "Puts me in the deuce an' all of a quand'ry. So many things to be considered. Is the writer a friend? Rather a candid one if he is, my word, yes. Call me a Nosey Parker and I—I resent that. No. He's not a friend. Then did he write this note expecting me to act on his warning.

The answer there, I think, is definitely in the negative. What do you think, Jim?"

"No, yes," Jim replied glibly, determined to demonstrate the extent of his English vocabulary. "If I don't see you, s'long——"

"Hullo," the Major concluded swiftly. "But returning to our—er—muttons: if this bloke did not expect me to act on his warning, what did he expect me to do? Go to the police? I don't think so. That couldn't possibly be any profit to him. And shall I?" The Major shrugged his broad shoulders and gave the question a few moments' serious thought. "No," he finally decided. "That wouldn't help matters at all. Besides, I don't like being laughed at. And the police chappies would laugh at me if I went to them with this. And what could they do? Nothing. They might arrest and question this half-caste friend of Jim's and question him, but the chances are he knows nothing. Come to think of it, he's in greater danger than I am. These plotters we are fighting object to their underlings being questioned an' kill 'em to avoid it. No. I keep away from the police. All that remains then is to attempt to get at the writer of this capital letter—ah! Good joke there. Pity Jim doesn't understand—through Master Fritz.

"I'll have to be very very careful, though. Don't want to die yet and it'll be as dangerous as goin' unarmed into the swamps after a wounded buffalo."

At that moment a siren sounded dismally and Jim gave an exclamation of surprised alarm.

"It is the big horn which the white men sound when fog hides the sea, Jim," the Major explained. "Look!" He went to the window with the Hottentot and showed him the yellow swirl of fog which was rolling in from the sea.

The Hottentot shivered.

"Will it eat up the land as well as the sea, Baas? *Au!* I like it not. And its voice is the voice of a thousand evil spirits."

"When the wind changes the fog will go, Jim," the Major said. "But the land and the sea will remain."

"And so it is with this game we now play," Jim said philosophically. "Even if we lose now and the black tide flows over the land, the day will come when that tide must ebb again."

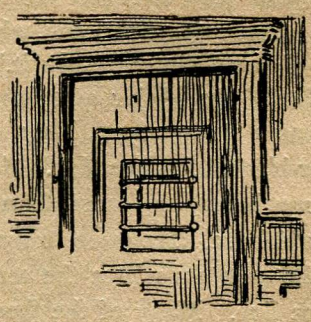
"It must not flow over the land, Jim. We must not lose."

"And with our two bodies will you dam that tide, Baas?" Jim asked pessimistically.

"If we can find its source—yes, Jim," the Major replied. "Now listen carefully, for there is a game to be played."

THAT night the town of Durban was blotted out by the thick fog which masked the street lights and kept the citizens indoors and made the wealthy holiday makers from the Rand long for the windy delights of Jo'burg. Consequently, the Major's departure from his hotel by a side door not usually used by the guests was practically unnoticed.

A light overcoat hid his gleaming shirt front. The collar of the coat was turned up and he wore beside a white silk muffler, but his monocle was conspicuous by its absence. He had pocketed it as soon as he had emerged from the hotel, for the



condensation of the fog upon it obscured his vision.

He made his way unhesitatingly toward the less respectable quarter of the town, although on two occasions when patrolling police accosted him, he pretended to be mildly intoxicated and very indignant when the policeman advised him to return to his

hotel, even offering to escort him there. That they did not recognize him for the man he really was is possibly explained by the fact that he was without his monocle and wore his opera hat tilted low over his eyes.

As he emerged from one alley he was attacked by two sneak thieves who had judged him to be an easy prey. In discussing it afterwards, neither man was able to explain exactly what happened. Both were of the opinion that the supposed "easy mark" wore brass knuckles—and that was an insult to the Major's hands, and the force of his punch.

He paused at last at a low hovel of a building in a mean narrow street. Keeping his hands buried deep in the pockets of his overcoat he kicked at the door. It was opened so quickly that it was apparent that his arrival was expected.

"Who are you? What do you want," a grossly fat slut of a woman asked roughly, shielding the lamp she carried so that its rays shone full in his face. "This ain't no place for a white man, mister. You go away."

She commenced to close the door but the Major's foot blocked her intention.

"I'm warning you, mister," she said, raising her voice. "You'll be putting trouble on yourself if you don't go away."

"I can take care of myself," the Major replied curtly. "I want my servant, Jim. I was informed that he came to this place."

"Don't know him—never heard of him," the woman began surlily when she was interrupted by a high-pitched voice, calling,

"Who is it, Rachel?"

"A white man, Fritz," the woman shouted back. "He won't go away. Says he's come here for his 'boy,' Jim."

There was a laugh.

"That's the Hottentot, Rachel." A tall, gawky Cape Boy came to the door. He looked cautiously up and down the street, listened, then grinned impudently at the Major. His breath reeked of cheap liquor and he swayed unsteadily.

"*Ach sis,* man sir," he exclaimed excitedly in the queer sing-song of his caste. "It is the Hottentot, Jim, you have come for, not? You are his Baas. He told me much about you. You are a good Baas. He would do anything for you. He——"

"Never mind all that," the Major interrupted curtly. "Where is Jim? Who are you?"

"I am Fritz—Fritz Ness. I know Jim a long time ago. We are very good friends. Yes. We not see each other for many years. So, tonight we celebrate. Yes, man, sir, we celebrate." He laughed, then shook his head dolefully. "That Jim," he said, "he has a great thirst. He drank and he drank."

"I know his capacity," the Major said grimly. "Where is he?"

"That is what I now tell you. Jim—he was very drunk. *Ach sis!* And he wanted to fight. He did fight. The policemans come—so he fight with them. Then more policemen came, and they took Jim away. That is where he is now—in *trunk.*"

The Major took his right hand from his coat pocket. In it was a large revolver.

"Are you telling the truth?" he demanded.

"Yes, man, sir," the other stammered, falling back in alarm. "Do not shoot, mister. I am a good 'boy.' I tell the truth. Is it not the truth, Rachel?"

The woman nodded.

"Yah. It is the truth, mister. Now go away before the police come again—which is bad for business."

"I go when I am ready," the Major said. "I am not sure that you are telling me the truth."

"If you do not believe me, mister," Fritz said readily, "you take me with you to the police station. There they will tell if I have told you true or not. If I do not speak true, then you do with me what you like. Beat me. Put me in *trunk.* Yes? We go?"

"No," the Major said after a slight hesitation. "We do not go. I believe you."

"But you will go, mister, sir. The police—they perhaps treat my friend Jim very

bad. But they will listen to you. Maybe they will, if you ask it, let my friend Jim out of *trunk*."

"He can stay there," the Major replied briefly, again after a hesitation. "He will be sober in the morning—then I will deal with him.

AND now—" he appeared to hold the revolver very carelessly, but it was aimed steadily at the stomach of Fritz—"I want to talk with you. Who gave you that message to give to me?"

"I do not know boss, sir," Fritz Ness protested. "A strange man stopped me and told me to give it to you."

"Who was it?" the Major demanded threateningly.

"I do not know, boss. His name I do not know. I only know the place where he lives—or, at least, the place where he was when he gave the note to me."

"You shall take me to that place, Fritz."

"Yah, boss," the man replied glibly. "In the morning——"

"No. Now."

"But it is dark, boss, and the fog is thick."

"No matter. We will go now."

"It is a long way, boss."

"Then get rickshaws. And hurry."

"Yah, boss. I go get them."

"No. Give the woman the order. You will stay here with me."

"Yah, boss." And Fritz Ness gave an order in Afrikaans to the woman, who handed him the lamp and waddled obediently away upon the errand he had given her.

In a very short time two rickshaws raced up to the door, materializing, it seemed, out of the fog.

"Didn't take her long to get 'em," the Major grunted suspiciously as he inspected the "boys" who pulled the vehicles. There were two to each—one in the shafts, the other pushing behind. They were big fellows, wearing bullock horns fixed to the sides of their heads and otherwise decorated in the fantastic manner which, they have discovered, pleases the tourist.

"Get in," the Major ordered curtly. "One rickshaw will do. And, if it is a long journey, as you say, we can use the four boys—two to pull and two to push. Now tell them where to go——"

"Yah, boss," Fritz said nervously. "But it is not right that I should sit beside you."

"In this fog no one will see us," the Major replied. "And if they do, they'll probably think you're a white man. That's what you hope you look like in the get-up, isn't it?"

"Yah, boss," Fritz replied somewhat sulkily.

He climbed diffidently into the rickshaw beside the Major and gave an order to the "boys."

"They do not know the way, boss," he said. "I will give them orders as we go."

"Very well," the Major replied. "But don't try any tricks. I shall have my revolver pressed against your ribs all the time."

"Why should I try tricks, boss?" Fritz protested.

Two boys picked up the shafts of the rickshaw, the other two stood in readiness behind. A moment later they were speeding through the night, avoiding the main streets, heading toward the town's outskirts.

It was a strange journey. The rickshaw ran smoothly and at times it seemed to the Major that he and the man who sat so stiffly beside him were alone in the world. There was no sound other than the shuffling bare-footed patter of the "boys" and their rapid breathing. He could not see them.

Occasionally Fritz spoke, giving the "boys" directions.

The Major had an abnormally keen sense of direction, but within ten minutes after the commencement of this journey he was completely lost. He knew that they had left the main part of the town behind; the dull glow which indicated the location of a lamp post was now rarely seen.

After a time he heard the dull boom of surf and wondered if the fate which had been mapped out for him was that which had befallen young Trooper Crawford.

"If it is," he mused silently, "I'll take jolly good care that Fate is disappointed for once. Somehow I don't like the thought of providing a meal for a shark. Sounds a beastly way to go out. Silly of me, though, to take that attitude. A feller can only die once. But 'pon my word, this won't do. I'm getting positively maudlin. It's this blindin' fog. Makes me feel cold to the marrow of my bones. By Jove! These boys are splendid runners—and what a stupid civilization to turn them into beasts of burden. They'd make the long-distance running chappies at home sit up and take notice. 'Pon my word they would."

Aloud, he asked:

"How much further?"

"We are nearly there, boss," Fritz replied.

As he spoke the boys holding the shafts suddenly released their hold and the rickshaw tipped over backward. The move was so unexpected that there was nothing the Major could do. He felt strong hands close about his throat and something struck his head with a stunning force; then the fog seemed to thicken, clouding through his brain, bringing with it the blackness of unconsciousness. . . .

IT WAS about this time that the young policeman who was on night duty at the Charge and Inquiry office, welcomed the entrance of a plain clothes man.

"Rotten night," that man growled. "Ain't fit for a dog to be out."

"Suppose that's why you came in, eh, Brown?"

Brown shook his head.

"None of your lip, youngster. Anything happening?"

"No. Dull as ditchwater. We had a bit of excitement a couple of hours ago, though. A drunk nigger—fighting mad he was, too. He'd been kicking up a row at Fat Emma's place. It took four of the native police to bring him here. And yet, he seemed sober enough to me. He talked wild though when I put him in the cell. Kept wanting me to see the colonel *inkosi*. I suppose he meant Grayson. He said I must send for him. And he kept repeating a word in English I couldn't get at first. I made it out after a time: it was 'Compass.' What do you make of that, Sherlock?"

"That you're a damned fool," Brown said curtly.

"Hi, what are you——"

But Brown did not stop to reply. He was hurrying along the passage way leading to the detention cell. He was back again in a few moments.

"You haven't got brains to keep yourself dry," he snapped. "Your so-called drunk is Jim, the Hottentot—the Major's boy. And if that don't remind you of anything—he said 'compass,' didn't he, you half-wit."

"Oh lord," the other groaned, belatedly remembering something which the day sergeant had told him.

"Oh lord!" the plainclothes man mimicked. "You'll say more than that before this *indaba's* over. Now get hold of Colonel Grayson——"

But the young policeman was already busy at the telephone. . . .

WHEN the Major struggled back to consciousness, his first thought was that he was drowning. He gasped and spluttered as a wave broke over him then shook his head and chuckled softly. Struggling to a sitting position, groaning at the effort,—for his head ached, his feet were bound, his hands lashed behind his back—he looked about him. He could not see much, for the only light was that of a candle lantern on the ground not far from where he sat. He was, he thought, in some sort of warehouse; he was almost surrounded by large wooden crates. He managed to hotch along so that he was able to rest his back against one of the crates.

He could not see the man whose bucket-of-water treatment had brought him to consciousness. Indeed, if the evidence of his eyes was to be believed, he was alone in the place.

He listened intently and presently detected the sound of shoeless men moving cautiously amongst the crates.

"Wonder what they're up to?" he mused as he worked at his wrists, attempting to free his hands. But the man who had bound them had done his job well; the stout cord he had used cut into the Major's wrists.

He called in a loud voice:

"Hi, Fritz! What game are you playing? I'll make you pay for this. I'll thrash you within an inch of your life——"

He almost jumped with surprise at a low chuckle which sounded just behind him.

"I don't think you would, Major, even if you lived to have the chance. Even if you ever saw Fritz again. And that, I think is very doubtful. He has gone. I have no further use for him."

"You have killed him, you mean," the Major accused as he twisted round in a

vain endeavor to see the owner of the harsh, unmusical voice. "That is your way, isn't it?"

"Is it? Perhaps so. But do not speak so loudly or I shall be compelled to have you gagged. Yes. Perhaps you are right. It is my way to kill men who cease to be of service to me. I must do that for my own protection and, of greater importance, for the success of my work."

The Major laughed, very loudly. He had discovered a jagged bit of tin which had been used to reinforce the crate against which he was leaning and he was sawing the rope which bound his wrists against it. He laughed, and resolved to keep the man talking, in order to cover what noise his movements made.

"Why do you laugh?" the voice asked suspiciously.

"Because you are so melodramatic," the Major replied. "Your work! What is it but gun-running? Come round to the front so that I can see you. Or are you preparing to stab me in the back?"

"No," the other said coldly. "You shall see your death coming, Major."

"That's deuced comforting," the Major drawled. "And you have the advantage of me. I do not know your name—I can hardly call you 'friend,' though I suppose you are the Johnny who wrote me that childish warning. Your handwriting is atrocious, my good man."

"What do names matter? I have answered to many. You can call me Black or White or anything you like."

"Black, I think suits you, Black."

"I am disappointed in you, Major," the voice continued. "I have heard much of your cleverness—but you walked into the first simple trap I set for you."

"I must admit," the Major said thoughtfully, "that I am deserving of censure in permitting myself to be captured so easily. But that rickshaw scheme was deuced clever and very unexpected. It took me completely by surprise. As for the rest—I did exactly what you expected me to do, because I knew that was what you expected. In fact, if I'm not getting too involved for you, we both bluffed and double-bluffed and knew each other was so doing. But, if I may say so, dear old Black, you took a frightful risk in using a man like Fritz."

"I think not. I do not take risks. You are suggesting that you might have refused to play the bluffing game with me and have had Fritz arrested and very severely questioned. But even had you done that, it would have profited nothing. Fritz knew no more than I wanted him to know. And—I am not without influence—

I could have had him released very quickly."

"Very well," the Major said calmly. "We'll agree that you have the upper hand of me for the moment——"

"For ever," the voice interrupted.

"Ever's a deuce an' all of a long time."

"What do you know of my work, Major?"

"Enough to know," the Major replied tersely, "that you deserve to be hanged after being flogged from one end of the country to the other."

"You overlook the fact that there are two sides to the question."

"No. I overlook nothing. I'll admit there are two sides—a black man's and a white man's. We—you and I—can only work for one side."

"And there I am disposed to agree with you."

THE Major was genuinely surprised at this and said so.

"I wonder who you are," he added. "You're not Martin, of course, though I imagine this is his warehouse. And I don't think you're the head of this gun-running business. Who's back of you, Mr. Black?"

"Black" laughed coldly.

"No, Major. We are not acting a scene from a romantic novel of impossible adventure. I have no intention of making the mistake of 'confessing all'—not even to a helpless prisoner who has but a very short time to live."

The Major half suppressed a groan of pain as he tore his flesh badly on the jagged piece of tin against which he was fraying his bonds.

"There is a way out for you, Major," the voice said, its owner evidently thinking that the Major's groan was an expression of dismay at the imminence of death.

"How?"

"Join my organization. I can promise you all the adventure, money, and position you desire. Add to that the knowledge that you will be helping the under dog. That ought to appeal to you."

"It's an interesting offer," the Major drawled. "And if I said I accepted it—I suppose you would take my word and give orders for me to be set free at once?"

"No. Not quite that. There is something you would have to do first to prove your loyalty to me—and, incidentally, make it very difficult for you to be disloyal. My servants, some of them, are now bringing Martin here. Because he is a fool and is beginning to suffer from a guilty conscience, he has outlived his usefulness to me. Therefore he must die. If you wish to live, Major, you will act as his executioner and——"

"You *are* a cold-blooded devil," the Major exclaimed. "I am afraid I must refuse your offer. You know, I'm beginning to think you are not quite—er—normal. Have you got delusions of grandeur or something of that sort? I mean to say——"

At that moment there was a noise at the further end of the warehouse which distracted his attention. He looked toward it, trying to pierce the darkness. And presently two men came into his range of vision. They walked very slowly, like mourners at a funeral; they were bent under the load they carried. In obedience to an order given in the vernacular they placed their burden on the ground just in front of the Major and returned noiselessly to the cover of darkness.

"If you agree, Major," the voice said, "your right hand shall be freed and a knife put into it. One stroke—and you will have preserved your own life. If you refuse—you have not helped Martin. He is to die—by your hand or another's. Then what fault to you if you kill him?"

"That's a black man's reasoning," the Major replied curtly. "No, I tell you. I won't do it." There was horror in his voice, but inwardly he was conscious of a feeling of great relief. He could laugh at the offer to free one hand when both were now free.

He looked down at the trussed and gagged man the natives had brought in and

tried to dispel the look of stark horror which showed in the man's eyes by "mouthing" a message of hope. But Martin was incapable of understanding; the fear of death, and the ill-treatment to which he had been subjected, had stolen his senses, making of him an unreasoning idiot.

"So you will not work with me," the voice broke the silence. "Well, I promised you should see death coming to you—and so you shall." While the voice was talking, the Major made a quick survey of his immediate surroundings and decided on his course of action. His hands were still behind his back, but he knew that when the time came his hands could move with the speed and sureness of a lightning prestidigitator. And in a holster under his armpit was a revolver. As he had guessed would happen—it had happened before—the men who had searched him had been content at the discovery of the two revolvers he carried in his coat pocket. They had not even considered the possibility that he might be carrying yet another. In his left-hand trouser pocket he carried a knife. There would be no waste of time putting that to work. He had only to press a spring and the keen blade would shoot out ready for work.

"Yes, Major," the voice continued. "You shall see how death will come to you. Martin shall go first. He's a weak-gutted swine. The money I gave him saved him from jail, made him rich, and kept him rich. And now he no longer needs my pay, his conscience troubles him! He is a swine." The speaker continued in the Zulu tongue: "It is time to make an end of these two—the one who would turn a traitor and the man who works against us, seeking to deprive you of what is justly yours. So now hasten. The guns must be taken away from this place before the sun rises.

"Umbopo!"

"Yes, *inkosi.*" A powerful Zulu came slowly forward. He carried a short stabbing assegai. His eyes were fixed on Martin from whose gag-filled mouth sounded inarticulate, animal-like appeals for mercy.

AS THE Zulu's arm went back for the killing thrust, the Major went into action. His first shot dropped Umbopo. His second, sounding like an echo of the first, shattered the glass of the lamp and extinguished the candle. Almost coinciding with his second shot, the Major rolled quickly into the passageway between two rows of crates; a few seconds later he had cut through the rope which lashed his feet together.

And now the place was in an uproar. The voice was shouting orders to the natives, ordering them to search out and kill the white man. The Major fired in the direction of the voice—and fear, or a bullet, silenced it.

Here and there a match flared spasmodically in the darkness as attempts were made to light other lanterns, but when it was seen that they served only to focus the Major's shots—and his shooting was very accurate—these attempts were given up; and encouraged by the voice of the man the Major had called "Black," the hunt for the escaped man was continued in the abysmal darkness. The din was tremendous, for the natives—and there were at least a score of them, the Major judged—shouted the war cries of their people. Some had revolvers which they fired indiscriminately.

The Major continually shifted his position, moving down the passageways between the goods which were stored in the place. He groped his way very cautiously, his left hand outstretched before him, his right hand, holding the revolver, held close to his ribs. Presently his groping hand closed on the naked shoulder of a native. The man's first reaction was a gasp of surprise—so, for that matter, was the Major's. But the white man was the first to recover, and before the native could give a rallying cry the Major, judging his distance carefully, brought down the barrel of his revolver on the native's head. The

man dropped like a stone and the Major, realizing that the next chance encounter of that sort might end disastrously for him, climbed on to the top of a pile of crates and lay there full length, listening to the din of the natives.

Hearing the voice shouting above the cries of the natives, he was tempted to make his way in that direction but finally decided against it.

"This is no time to play the giddy ass," he told himself. "We'll get him this time. All I've got to do now is emulate Brer Fox—lie low an' say nothin'. My word yes."

And then he was conscious of a sinking feeling of failure. The plan he had mapped out with Jim must have failed. Jim's drunken orgy had been carefully planned in order to force his arrest. Only in that way had the Major been sure he could get a message to Colonel Grayson unsuspected by Fritz Ness and that man's employer. It was arranged that once Jim was safe in the police station he should demand to see Colonel Grayson, using the password which had been agreed upon. And Grayson, if Jim had given him the instructions correctly, would have had the Major followed from the moment he left the hotel. The rickshaw would have been followed, the warehouse surrounded and raided as soon as the Major had passed inside.

"This is a mess," the Major groaned. "Something's gone wrong. Can't think why I didn't think about it before. That knock on the head must have interfered with my thinking abilities. Wonder what's happened. Did Fritz and his pals suspect Jim's game and, as seems to be the unpleasant habit of these gentry, kill him? Or did Jim get drunk, really drunk, and forget his message? Or perhaps Grayson remembered his dignity and refused to act on orders transmitted through Jim. Or perhaps the police laddies got lost in the fog. There's every excuse for them. By Jove, I'm lost myself."

"Well, as I can't count on the support of the police force, I'll have to substitute for them. Now the laddie I want to get is the Lord High Muck-a-Muck. The others don't count—at least, not if I get him first. Wonder where he is. Haven't heard his dulcet voice lately."

He listened intently, smiling grimly at the sounds which came to him; sounds which told him the search was now being conducted in a somewhat orderly manner.

"And with a greater chance of success," he told himself.

A ball of flame rose up through the darkness. It was followed by another and another. Some of the searchers, protected

from revolver shot by the crates behind which they crouched, were lighting balls of packing waste and throwing them into the air. One landed on a pile of crates opposite the Major just as he had risen to his feet to move to a new position. There was a savage roar as his position was marked and the place echoed to the din of revolver shots. But the aim of the natives was poor and the Major did not present them with a stationary target. He dropped down from the pile of crates and found shelter in one of the narrow passage ways.

And now the place was well lighted by the glare of many fire balls, some of which were setting fire to the crates on which they had landed.

Frequently as he darted down the maze of passageways the Major had glimpses of the men who were searching for him, but he held his fire. His quarrel was not with the natives but with the man, Black, who led them. But he was a wise general. He directed them, and cleverly, from behind good cover. The Major frequently

heard his voice but not once was able to get sight of him.

As the fires increased in fury, blending into one, the Major realized that he was being driven into the arms of the natives. He was nearing the end of his tether. The blow he had received had hurt him more than he had supposed. He put his hand up to his head, it came away sticky with congealed blood. He was half blinded by the smoke and suffocated by the pungent fumes. A pile of blazing crates toppled over almost on top of him. His coat caught fire and as he pulled it off two natives rushed at him, yelling exultantly. He fired. One native dropped. The other came on, brandishing a stabbing assegai. The Major fired again. His shot missed, but, for some incredible reason, the man stopped dead in his tracks, turned and fled in the opposite direction. . . .

And then the Major understood. He heard excited voices shouting:

"The *Nonquai* come, *inkosi*. Run! They are many!"

The shouting and shooting died. There was a silence, intensified by the crackling of spreading flames.

"That Black laddie was wrong," the Major muttered. "We are living a romantic adventure novel with help arriving to support the hero at the eleventh hour. But who's the bloomin' hero?"

He heard firing outside, and shrill whistles and shouting.

He made his way painfully to the place where Martin was. He bent over him and took the gag from his mouth.

"It's all over now," he said encouragingly.

"It's all over for me," Martin said faintly. "That red-headed swine shot me before he made his escape. He—he—watch out for a red——"

"Damn it, man," the Major exclaimed hoarsely. "You must tell me. You must speak, or all this has been for nothin'."

But Martin's lips were sealed. His eyes were closed.

NOT until the following day did the Major hear the explanation of the police delay.

"Blame it all on a young trooper, Major," Colonel Grayson said. "He thought Jim was mad—and he was when he found he couldn't get word to me. And when someone did have sense to know what it was all about and send for me and we got on the job, it was to discover you had already left with Fritz Ness. And it took us a long time to get your destination from the woman; we didn't use parlor tactics, either, I can tell you. Well, once we knew you were being taken to one of Martin's warehouses it didn't take us long to get on your track. But we were afraid we would arrive too late. And we nearly did. Jim found you unconscious across Martin's dead body."

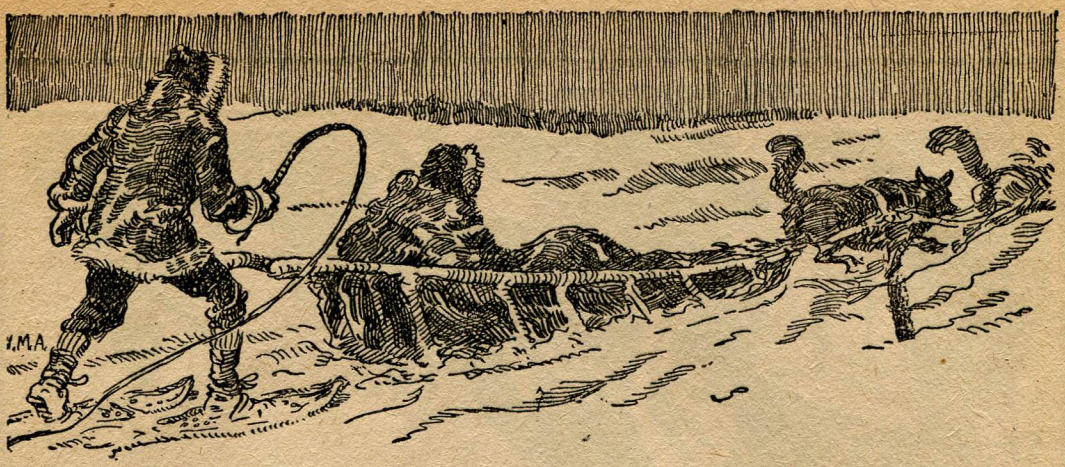
"And so we've failed again," the Major said bitterly.

"Oh, I don't think I'd say that," Sir Percival said. "We—I should say 'you'—have accomplished a great deal. You have closed a big source of supply to the plotters. I mean, that warehouse and the other two owned by Martin were full of rifles and so on. And Martin's dead, so they'll have to find another importer to take his place—and that won't be easy.

"Furthermore, Deemper has disappeared. He has either been killed or has taken flight—either from fear of us or of the men he has been working for. That means one of their big distributors is lost to them.

"And, finally, you know you have to look for a red headed man. That should be easy."

"You're an optimist, Sir Percy," the Major said ruefully. "But I think you have cause to be. The fog is beginning to lighten."



The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

Trail of the Seigneurs

THE epic struggles of the fur traders of the North and Northwest have been the subject of many thrilling tales for many generations. To understand the survival of old traditions which greeted Bob Marshall of the Mounted in the Von Ziekursch story in this issue of SHORT STORIES, it might be necessary to go back some two hundred and fifty years to the beginning of an ancient organization about which the early history of Western Canada principally revolves.

About the end of the first decade of the seventeenth century, Henry Hudson, the intrepid navigator who was looking for a Northwest Passage by water through the North American Continent to the Western Sea, discovered the great Bay which bears his name to this day. Marooned by a mutinous crew, he paid for the discovery with his life, after the manner of many pathfinders, but he had unlocked a new Empire for the human family.

Away in the East, following the early explorations along the banks of the St. Lawrence in old Canada, adventurous hunters and trappers began to push their way westward and northward, past the Great Lakes to the prairie land beyond. About half a century after Hudson's time two French adventurers, Radisson and Groseilliers, reaching out from the St. Lawrence to the wide Northwest, came into contact with Indian tribes who told about the great bay to the north and the vast riches of the region in furs and skins. These adventurers went to see for themselves, found that the half had not been told, and speedily returned to the East to endeavor to organize a trading company from amongst their French compatriots. But the enthusiasm of the men who had seen could not awaken response in the men who had not seen. Nevertheless, the zeal of Radisson and Groseilliers was unquenchable; they tried Boston in vain, and then betook themselves to France, where they were not any more successful, except that they got a letter of introduction to some men of leading in England. The Englishman generally loves a sporting chance for exploration and discovery, and so Prince Rupert, more or less a soldier of fortune who had lent his name and his sword to almost anything that offered a possibility of adventure or substance, took up the matter of the fur trade and was instrumental in sending out vessels with Radisson and Groseilliers to prospect on the shores of Hudson Bay. Once again the men who went and saw came back, not only with tales of an El Dorado in fur, but with the furs themselves, and the dashing Prince forthwith secured from the easy-going Charles II a monopolistic charter to trade and generally to control

All in the next issue——

Sergeant Rocky Stone of the Chinatown squad scents trouble

Tai Fu and the Devil Mark

A complete novel by **WALTER C. BROWN**

Sandals of Sheba
ROBERT H. ROHDE

Men Without Mountains
WILLIAM E. BARRETT

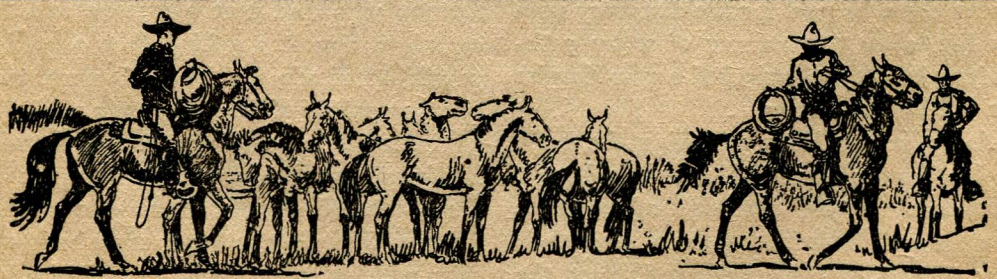
Trail of the Seigneurs *(Conclusion)*
T. VON ZIEKURSCH

And many others

Two rovin' cow hands get——

Two Tickets to Hell

A novelette by **BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR**



SHORT STORIES *for October 25th*

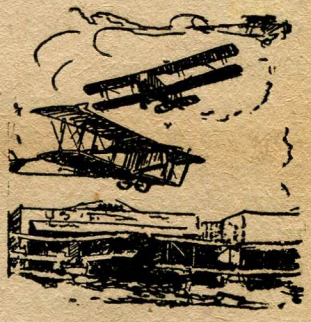
the whole vast region drained by rivers that emptied into Hudson Bay. The territory thus granted, with more added later by licenses, extended generally speaking from the Great Lakes to the Pacific and from mid-continent to the North Pole. It was as large as half a dozen European kingdoms, but King Charles did not know nor care much more about it than the French king who later on gave up Canada with a light heart, saying it was only "a few hundred acres of snow."

"The Governor and Company of the Adventurers of England trading into Hudson Bay" as the Royal Charter described this little band of less than a score of men to whom had been handed over the control of half a continent, popularly shortened into the Hudson's Bay Company, held this vast region for two whole centuries. During that time the immense resources of the country tempted others to disregard the monopolistic provisions of the Royal Charter and to venture in upon forbidden ground. Companies such as the North-West Fur Company, formed by the Scottish merchants of Montreal, rushed to secure part of the rich harvest in trade that was being reaped by the English Company, whose employees, it may be said, were largely the hardy Scots from the Highlands and Islands. But the leaders of the Hudson's Bay Company held their ground and extended their operations till they by degrees absorbed all opponents and became in 1821 monarchs of all they surveyed.

In the tradition of this era had grown up the Seigneur of Von Ziekursch's story and when a member of the modern and efficient Mounted Police penetrated to his fastnesses—well, no wonder a thrilling story emerged. It is in two parts, the first one in this issue.

OUTLANDS AND AIRWAYS

Strange facts about far places and perilous air trails. Send in yours.



Lighthouses for the Sahara

A CHAIN of "lighthouses" is being erected to cover the flying route across the Sahara Desert. Airmen can cross the desert only at night because of the danger of sudden sandstorms during the daytime. The heat, too, is almost unendurable.

Night flying has, of course, its own risks, and the lighthouses—really just beacons—are designed to minimize these hazards. They will be quite small and simple—visibility in the Sahara is such that the light of an ordinary candle has a sixteen-mile range. Each beacon will have a reservoir of fuel and will stay lit two years without attention.

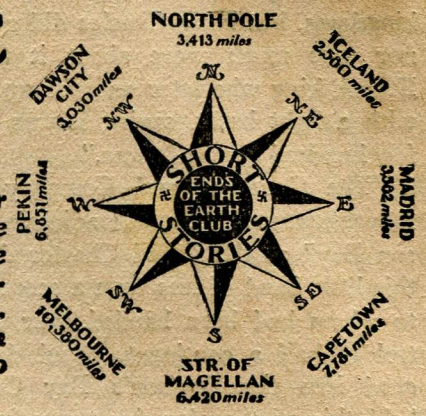
At present there are filling stations dotted along the trans-Sahara road. One of these was the scene of a tragedy of greed not long ago. The Arab in charge was expecting a fresh supply of water. A string of cars arrived in the meantime badly in need of water, and the native sold what he had at about two dollars a gallon.

The lorry, bringing in fresh supplies, was held up by a sandstorm for some time. When it finally arrived at the station, the Arab was dead of thirst.

Eagle in Coyote Trap

AN EAGLE measuring seven feet from tip to tip of extended wings was captured by a party of oil workers some miles outside of Fresno, California. The huge bird had been caught in a steel spring trap which had been set for coyotes by workers on an oil lease. Only one claw had been caught and the eagle was taken captive after a fierce battle. It was donated by Lyman Bush, one of is captors, to the zoo in Fresno.

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB



HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, % Short Stories, Garden City, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.

Not much fun to stay in bed twenty hours a day and think of all the places you might have seen, but perhaps a lot of interesting letters will make the next year pass quickly for this unfortunate chap.

Dear Secretary:

As a constant reader of SHORT STORIES, I wish to apply for membership in the Ends of the Earth Club. I am twenty-seven years old and will be glad to correspond with anyone, anywhere, whose interests are similar to mine.

I have traveled the entire United States, Canada and Mexico, and also made one trip to Hawaii but had to return home due to illness. Since that time I have taken up correspondence and stamp collecting as a hobby.

As I have to spend about twenty hours a day in bed, I have plenty of time to answer letters from anyone who will be kind enough to write to a shut-in. The doctors say I will be in bed for another year at which time I hope to resume my interrupted trip around the world.

Sincerely,
Floyd K. Pugh

150 Anderson Avenue,
Atlanta, Georgia

In recent years there's been a decided increase in skiing and mountain climbing, so it probably won't be difficult to find some enthusiastic pen pals.

Dear Secretary:

Since buying the first copy of SHORT STORIES a few months ago, I have been a steady reader of it and will continue to be. I should like to be enrolled as a member of the Ends of the Earth Club.

I am twenty-two years old, Chilean born of Spanish ancestry. I speak, read and write English quite well, and also a little French, besides my native language which is Spanish. I am an enthusiastic skier and mountaineer and belong to, and am secretary of, the Club Andino of Santiago.

I would very much like to hear from skiers and mountaineers of all countries of the world. I don't mind their age, race, nationality, customs, etc., if they are fond of skiing and mountain climbing. If they are not, it will be just the same because I would like to correspond with anybody who would care to write. I'll also be glad to exchange snapshots, magazines, etc.

Yours truly,
Guillermo Sanz C

Casilla 3758, Santiago,
Chile, South America